

Chapter One

Luc leaned back in his chair and gave Hayden an assessing stare. “What’s the matter, Hayden? You’ve barely touched your dinner. Is the salmon not to your liking? I’ll have the server return it to the kitchen.”

Hayden moved a stalk of asparagus across her plate, her appetite long gone. She put her fork down and pushed her dish away, giving up all pretense of eating. “The food is fine. I guess I’m not as hungry as I thought.”

Luc raised a dark blond brow. “Are you sure? You haven’t eaten enough to sustain a bird. You know what happens if you don’t eat properly.”

As a Type 1 diabetic, she was diligent about her diet, but she couldn’t force herself to eat when she wasn’t hungry. “The soup was plenty. Besides I had a large lunch.” She offered him a small smile. “Really, I’m fine.”

A slate-gray gaze roamed her face, seeming not to miss a single nuance. Luc had a way of looking at her that made Hayden squirm in her seat, just as she was doing now. Damn if her panties didn’t get wet whenever he turned that penetrating stare on her. “Perhaps you’d like to leave? We can have coffee at my place.”

She grinned. “Only coffee? When was the last time we went to your penthouse for just coffee?”

He threw back his head and released a throaty laugh, a wonderfully rich sound that made her heart do flip-flops. “What can I say? I can’t help myself whenever I’m

around you. And perhaps one day I can convince you to make our relationship more permanent.”

Hayden turned her head away, unable to meet his gaze anymore. This was the one topic between them that was a constant bone of contention. They’d only officially been dating for four months and already, Luc had brought up the subject of marriage more than once. Her best friends Shayna and Julia thought she was crazy for not jumping at the chance to be Mrs. Lucien Montgomery-Lambert III—after all, not only was Luc filthy rich, he was drop-dead gorgeous.

“Luc...” She couldn’t finish her statement. Maybe her friends were right about her being a fool for not taking the opportunity presented to her.

“I’ve heard all the arguments before, your biggest concerning the amount of time we’ve been dating. We’ve been friends longer though, and it doesn’t matter if we dated a week or even ten years, I’d still feel the same. Furthermore I believe my feelings are reciprocated.”

Hayden nibbled on the inside of her bottom lip, still not making eye contact. If she told him what was really holding her back, it would only hurt him. She did have strong feelings for him, but how could she explain what was going on inside her mind when she barely understood it herself? “Luc, any woman would be lucky to have you as a husband, but I’m just not ready to take that step. Please try and understand.”

Luc reached across the table and grasped her hand. “Look at me, Hayden.” Despite the softly spoken words there was no doubt in her mind it was a command. He could be autocratic when he wanted to.

With a sigh she raised her lids to meet his stony gaze.

“It’s him, isn’t it? You’re still not over him, are you?”

Hayden didn't bother insulting his intelligence by pretending she didn't know what he was talking about. "That was nearly a year ago. I'm with you now."

"That isn't what I asked. You still think about him, don't you?"

"Why are you bringing this up?"

"Because I think I have a right to know what I'm up against if I'm to win you heart, body and soul."

There was so much passion in his voice and touch, her insides churned out of control. Something just felt right being here with him like this, yet she couldn't bring herself to say the words. More than anything she wanted to tell him that he already had her heart, but the words remained stuck in her throat.

He narrowed his eyes. "Say something, dammit."

She touched her stomach as it tightened in knots. Her heart pounded a tattoo within her chest. Hayden opened her mouth, then closed it again, stalling to find the right thing to say without further exacerbating the situation. "I don't know what you want me to tell you. I'm happy when I'm with you, and I think we feel right together."

One brow flew up. "I sense a 'but' in there somewhere."

"There is no but. That's it."

His lips tightened to a thin white line, and his nostrils flared. "I see." Luc released her hand and signaled to their server who must have been hovering nearby because he appeared seemingly out of nowhere.

"Yes, Mr. Montgomery?"

"I'd like the check, please."

"Right away, sir." The server bowed his head in acknowledgement before hurrying off.

A half smile tugged the corner of Hayden's lips. It was amusing to see how people scurried to do Luc's bidding. Not very long ago she wouldn't have thought about stepping foot in a restaurant like Mirabella's, where there were no prices on the menu. It was far too expensive a place to afford on her salary. She especially never envisioned being on the arm of Lucien Montgomery-Lambert III, one of the most eligible bachelors in D.C. But he'd chosen her. She was never sure what it was about her that had caught his eye, but he'd pursued her with a relentlessness that took her breath away.

It wasn't that she suffered from low self-esteem, but men like Luc usually dated women from their own backgrounds and race who had more money than sense, or at the very least looked like supermodels. She was a social worker who'd been told on several occasions that she was cute—never beautiful, except by Luc and her ex.

She flinched for a moment as her ex-lover crossed her mind. She was happy with Luc, so why did Sawyer still invade her thoughts?

"You're doing it again." The low timbre in his voice brought her head up. His eyes darkened as he shot her a narrow-eyed glare.

She lowered her head, shame eating at her. The night was officially ruined. "Maybe I should take a rain check on that coffee."

His mouth thinned briefly but he didn't say anything else as he helped Hayden out of her chair. The car ride back to her place was silent and tense. She wanted to say something to assure him he was the one she wanted to be with. Something told her he wouldn't be in the mood to listen.

Expecting him to drop her off in front of her house, she was surprised when he parked his car in her extra parking space and shut off the engine.

She moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue. “You’re coming in?”

The muscle in his jaw flexed. “I think we need to get a few things out in the open, don’t you?”

Her heart plummeted. Maybe he planned on breaking up with her. He didn’t say anything to indicate one way or the other and frankly, it frightened her a bit. She’d never seen him this way: calm on the surface but simmering with fury beneath it. And what was worse, there probably wasn’t a thing she could say to soothe him.

As she attempted to unlock her front door, her fingers trembling, Luc took the keys from her and completed the task in smooth, fluid motions. He placed his hand on the small of her back and gently guided her inside.

The door had barely been closed and locked before he turned and took her by the forearm with more force than she was used to. “I know I came in to talk, but I’m not really sure words will do when action is probably best.”

Hayden didn’t get the opportunity to ask him what the hell he was going on about before he yanked her against him to cover her mouth in a bruising kiss.

Luc always had a bit of a rough edge whenever they made love, which she secretly enjoyed but felt embarrassed to admit. This time, however, was different. He seemed hell-bent on possessing her as if to teach her a lesson of some sort. She should have fought the brutal possession he’d taken of her mouth but instead, Hayden found herself melting into him.

She sighed into his mouth, making way for the forceful entrance of his tongue. Luc dug his fingers through her hair, holding her head still as he dominated her. Pressing his body flush with hers, he grinded his cock against the juncture of her thighs.

Hayden managed to turn her head away, breaking the tight seal of their lips, finally making it possible for her to breathe. After one sweet gulp of air, his mouth latched on to hers again, this kiss no less powerful. To her utter shame, her nipples pebbled beneath the satiny material of her dress. She wasn't wearing a bra, something her lover took full advantage of. Luc cupped her breasts, squeezing and shaping them in his palms, sending her closer to the edge of insanity.

Moisture pooled between her legs, soaking her panties. Her pussy contracted in her arousal. She was as hot and horny for him as he was for her. Nothing mattered right now except how he made her feel. When she attempted to wrap her arms around his neck, Luc grabbed her wrists in one muscular hand and pinned them above her head, all while his tongue explored the recesses of her mouth.

With his free hand he continued to play with her breasts through her dress, pinching her nipples in turn until they were so tight and sensitive, Hayden thought she would scream. The musky scent of his cologne tickled her nostrils, making her senses reel and strengthening her need for him. Luc was an animal, nipping her tongue and bottom lip between his strong white teeth—hurting her almost. Just when it seemed he'd never end the kiss, he raised his head to stare at her with a lust and intensity that sent a shiver of desire and fear racing through her body, like a dull ache that left her wanting more. Her pulse

raced out of control, and her breath came out in short huffs.

“Do you love me?” His voice was soft and steady, but there was an underlying layer of steel telling her this wasn’t a rhetorical question.

Hayden had never said the words, never thought she’d had the right to under the circumstances, but in this moment she couldn’t deny him even if she wanted to. Finally, moistening her lips with the tip of her tongue, she nodded. “Yes.”

“Say it,” he growled. “Tell me you love me.”

“I...I love you.”

“Say, ‘I love you, Luc.’”

“I do.”

His eyes narrowed, and he caught her chin between his thumb and bent index finger. “Say the words. I want to hear them.”

She sensed a desperation within him. Guilt assailed her. She’d driven him to this; it hadn’t been intentional. Hayden had warned him, but he wouldn’t let things be. Now she realized she’d have to make a choice. Could she finally let go of the past and give her heart truly and deeply to someone new—risk getting hurt all over again?

Closing her eyes and taking a deep breath, she hesitated for a moment to listen to her heart. Was this the right thing? Hayden opened her eyes again to see him staring still, his features pinched as if nerves were starting to get the better of him. She’d never seen him like this before—nervous. It wasn’t an emotion she would associate with such a powerful man. That she could bring him to such a pass frightened her a little. This was it. She could no longer keep him hanging.

“I love you, Luc. With all my heart.”

He released a breath. Something that looked a lot like relief entered his intimidating gaze. And while he relaxed his stance some, Luc didn't release her hands, keeping them imprisoned above her head. “Oh, baby.” He lowered his head again but this time, instead of kissing her mouth, he grazed her jaw line with his lips. Hayden tilted her head back, sighing with contentment. She'd meant it and was glad she'd said it. It was like a big weight had been lifted off her shoulders and now all was right with the world again.

Luc showered kisses on her face and moved to her neck, pausing long enough to suck on her skin—hard. She knew exactly what he was trying to do, leave his mark. It was an act of possession that should have made her angry, but damn if that didn't turn her on even more. Thankfully her skin was dark enough that it wouldn't be that evident unless someone was really examining her.

“Easy,” she said with a laugh, trying to soothe whatever demon had taken hold of him.

“No.” He nipped and licked her flesh as if he couldn't get enough. “Not until there's no doubt in your mind who you belong to. You're mine,” he murmured against her heated skin.

“I belong to you,” she moaned.

“And don't you forget it.” He caught her earlobe between his teeth.

A gasp at the sharp little bite escaped from her lips, bringing heat to her sensitive tissue. But he immediately soothed it by running his tongue along its curve. Luc grabbed the front of her dress and before she knew what he was up to, he ripped it down the front.

“Luc!” This was her best dress from one of her favorite designers. People didn’t get rich in Hayden’s line of work, so she was careful with her money. She’d saved for weeks and still was only able to purchase it when it had gone on sale at a sizable discount.

“I’ll buy you a dozen more.”

She would have protested—after all she was quite capable of taking care of herself—but his mouth had already clamped on one of her nipples, cutting off all train of thought. It was hard to stay angry with him when he was doing the most incredible things to her body.

Licking, laving and sucking on the turgid peak until Hayden didn’t think she could take anymore, Luc continued to hold her and her hands captive. She wanted so badly to touch him, run her fingers through his silky blond tresses and hold his head against her breasts, but he wouldn’t let her. Hayden instinctively knew Luc wouldn’t easily relinquish any control he had over her in the midst of his savage seduction.

He slid his hand down the center of her body, not stopping until he reached her hot wet core. The tiny black thong she wore was drenched, and her juices wet her thighs. He touched her body in ways no decent girl should want, but she did. She desperately wanted those roaming fingers inside of her. Craved it!

Sensing that need, Luc raised his head, a mischievous grin curving his lips. “You want it bad, don’t you, baby?”

She panted. “Yes. You know I do.”

Luc gripped the edge of her panties and pushed them down her hips until they pooled at her feet. “Step out of them.”

Hayden obeyed without hesitation. She would do anything to feel him inside of her.

His fingers bit into her thighs, making her gasp. “You’re so fucking sexy. Do you know that? I knew I had to have you when I first saw you. I bided my time and waited to make my move. And now that you’re mine, I have no intention of letting you go. You belong to me!” Luc practically growled his last words before wedging his hand between her legs. “Spread those thighs for me—yeah just like that.” Hayden slid her feet apart, granting him the access he sought. “That’s it, baby, let me see that pretty pussy.” He slid his finger along her damp lips and chuckled. “You’re already wet for me.”

She looked down to see what he was doing, and a whimper escaped her throat. Hayden knew it was a trivial thing, but the sight of his pale hand against her dark skin created such an erotic contrast a shiver raced up her spine.

Luc brushed her clit with his thumb and circled it. “So beautiful, so juicy. Mine. This is all mine. Tell me who this pussy belongs to.”

His constant need to establish ownership over her body should have annoyed Hayden but instead, it turned her into a quivering mass when he went all alpha on her. “Yours. It’s your pussy.”

“Damn right,” he muttered, releasing her wrists and falling to his knees. Without warning he pressed his mouth against her pussy, giving it a deep kiss. He captured her clit between his teeth and nibbled the blood-engorged nubbin, sending concurrent waves of pain and pleasure through her body. As he teased her clit with his mouth, Luc slipped another finger inside her channel.

She dug her fingers through his blond locks, shaking her head from side to side. He was going to drive her

insane with his masterful mouth and fingers. Knots formed in her stomach, and her knees threatened to buckle when her climax hit. Her grip tightened in his hair. “Luc, I’m coming!” An explosion tore through her body as waves of pleasure pulsed in her pussy.

Luc lapped at the fluids, seeming to relish every single drop. “You’re delicious.” Running his tongue along her slit, he teased her highly sensitized flesh until she could barely think.

Just when Hayden didn’t think she could take anymore, he rose and unbuckled his pants. As he slid them and his boxers down muscled thighs, Luc revealed his cock. It was beautiful. His length was longer than average, with the right amount of thickness to make her mouth water in anticipation. Unable to help herself, she reached out and ran her fingers along his rigid dick.

His shoulders shook. “Keep that up, and I can’t promise to be gentle.”

She slowly ran her tongue along her top lip. “Maybe I don’t want you to be.”

A groan broke from his lips. “Damn, you’re going to be the death of me, woman.”

Cupping her ass, he lifted her into his arms. “Wrap your legs around me and hold on, sweetheart, because I don’t intend to let go.” There was something in the way he’d said it that made Hayden realize he wasn’t simply talking about a sexual position.

Wanting nothing more than to have him inside of her, she obeyed his command as he fitted her over his cock. Eager to be fucked, she wiggled her hips at the feel of his dick at her entrance.

With one powerful surge, he slammed into her so deeply, Hayden could have wept. The sensation of being stretched by his thickness sent shudders of delight rippling along every single nerve in her body. Her eyes rolled in the back of her head as she savored the feel of him pressed so tightly against her, their bodies joined as one. Burying her face against his neck, she moaned. “Luc, please.”

“Oh, yeah, baby, that’s exactly what I intend on doing.” Anchoring her against the wall, he moved deeper still then pulled back and shoved into her again. Hayden attempted to move with him, their rhythm awkward at first, but after a few strokes they moved together in perfect sync.

They were one, and nothing felt more right in that moment. This was how things were meant to be. Hayden and Luc. Luc and Hayden. So why in the back of her mind did she get this nagging sensation? Quickly shoving it away, she concentrated on the need to be taken by him and the wicked sensations coursing through her being. Grinding against him, she dug her nails into his flesh. “More!”

Giving in to her demands, Luc increased the pace, driving into her harder and faster. With each thrust, her back hit the wall. She’d be sore in the morning, but she didn’t care. Hayden needed this so badly; it would be tantamount to torture if she didn’t get it. Squeezing her eyes tight, Hayden gave in to the hunger and the passion burning deep inside of her. When Luc stopped moving, she opened her eyes. “Why...why did you stop?”

His slate-gray gaze contained something feral and raw, making her gasp. “Tell me you want me.”

“I want you.”

He shoved his dick into her so hard Hayden gripped him tighter so as not to lose her balance. “Tell me you need me.”

As forceful as his command was, she could still hear the hint of uncertainty underlying his words she’d caught earlier, breaking her heart just a little. She wanted nothing more than to ease his mind and assure him of how much he meant to her. “I need you.”

Luc drove into her even harder than the first time, making it hurt a bit, but something shameless within her loved his roughness.

“Tell me you love me.”

“I do. I love you.”

“And don’t you fucking forget it. I want you to keep your eyes open and know that it’s me making your pussy pulse and tighten around my cock—me who will never desert you.” And with that, he continued on his quest of dominance, leaving no doubt in her mind exactly what he was up to. Plowing into her like a man on a mission, he sent her crashing into another powerful climax.

“Luc! Yes! Baby, yes!”

His hold on her tightened. “Shit!” His body shook while he ejaculated in her. “Mine!”

After a few moments to catch her breath, Hayden unwrapped her legs from around his waist, letting them fall limply, his semi-erect cock slipping out of her pussy in the process. Luc swiftly hooked his arm beneath her knees and carried her down the hallway to her bedroom.

Once he gently laid Hayden down in the center, he slid next to her and positioned her on her side so her back was curved against his chest and his cock nestled against her ass. He stroked her hip with his fingertips. They remained

silent for several moments before Hayden broke the comfortable quiet.

“That was pretty intense.”

He kissed her shoulder. “I’m sorry. Did I hurt you?”

“Not really. I...I kind of liked it, but is this what I’ll have to go through every time you feel insecure?”

He stiffened. “What are you talking about?”

“You were rough tonight, which I don’t mind so much as the reason behind it. Not only that, you demanded I tell you I love you. I’ve never given you reason to doubt me.”

“Oh? So you mean when you get that far-off look in those big brown eyes of yours, you’re not thinking of him?”

“I’m with you now, Luc, and I love you.” She rolled over to face him and stroked the side of his face. He really was gorgeous. It was hard to believe this big blond hunk who was a catch by most women’s standards wanted her. Hayden pressed a kiss against his lips. “Don’t doubt it, okay?” She snuggled against him as a delicious drowsiness flowed through her. “You’ll be leaving for Paris in a few days, so let’s just enjoy our time together until then, all right?”

He grunted in answer, but Hayden was too tired to analyze his response.

Long after Hayden had gone to sleep Luc remained awake, stroking her back. God, he loved this woman. It scared the shit out of him that he could care for one person as much as he did her. For so long he believed love was as fictitious as the Loch Ness Monster—something written about in silly romance books for bored housewives. Yet here he was, with one woman who had

quickly become the center of his universe. It was difficult letting go and admitting his love for anyone, considering the emotion wasn't something he had much experience with. But Hayden made it easier.

Had he been asked a couple years ago if he could see himself with someone like her, the answer would have been a resounding no. He lived in a world where all things superficial mattered and for a while, he'd gone along with the status quo. Not because he was a follower, but because he was resigned. Everyone had a price and as long as a person had the proper connections and enough money, nothing was off limits. And he had plenty of both, more than enough to make his mundane existence bearable.

Luc's faith in people wasn't particularly high, and his trust wasn't given lightly. It wasn't because he was necessarily unhappy with the way things were going with his life, it was simply how things worked in his circle—until Hayden came along. She was everything a man in his position would never consider for a long-term commitment. Hayden didn't have the right pedigree, hadn't gone to the right schools, or was even the right color, yet none of it mattered.

He grazed her skin with his fingertips, reveling in its softness. Luc nuzzled his face against the crook of Hayden's neck, inhaling deeply. He could easily get high off her sweet scent, mixed so enticingly with his.

From the moment she'd crossed his path, he'd thought of nothing more than possessing her. To be fair, at first he had only wanted a quick, no-strings affair, but the more he'd gotten to know her, Luc realized she was the kind of woman who made a man want to do and be better. She

inspired and supported him and loved with all her heart. Hayden was definitely a keeper, and he intended to hold on to her for dear life.

Molding his body against her back, he held her close, listening to her breathe. Nothing felt more right than having her in his arms, and he fully planned to keep it that way.