
Chapter 1

I Have Not Been Myself with You

STANDING IN FRONT of the kitchen window, her fingers curved around a light cup of coffee, Tessa Morrison let her mind drift back nine months, to the first time that Memphis Easton, a 42-year-old hunk, made love to her. His thrusts were urgent, and he burrowed deep inside of her; and caused her to have multiple orgasms. A smile graced her face, and memory infused her womanhood with thrilling sensations.

“Oh, Memphis—” she heard herself say distraughtly, and then turned away from the window. Notwithstanding the daydream, she couldn’t avoid a nagging feeling of uncertainty that was frequently plaguing her. She was not unaware that the novelty was waning, still, but for the life of her she couldn’t understand why or how it had come to be that way. The dating game was all so new to her, for Memphis was the first man she’d dated since her husband, Drew, died ten years ago.

And when she had married Drew she was in her junior year of college and still a virgin. He was a shy senior, and very caring; and he didn’t turn it into an issue when she stressed to him that she intended to remain so until she was married; because he initially knew that he wanted her for his soul mate.

Suddenly startled by a knock on the door, she jerked and spilled coffee on the hem of her robe. Quickly grabbing a paper towel, she dabbed at the stain; and tossed the towel into the bin and quickly moved to answer the door.

“Who is it?” she asked.

“It’s Memphis.”

Her heart bounded upward in her chest. She wasn’t expecting him until around six o’clock this evening, when they planned to go out to the movies. Butterflies danced in her stomach while she opened the door.

“Hi! Come in!” she said.

“Gooood morning,” he replied, and bent and planted a soft kiss on her lips and followed her into the kitchen. “I brought you something,” he announced then brought his hands from behind him and handed her a small, fruit basket that was wrapped in yellow cellophane and tied with a purple ribbon.

“Oh, Memphis, thank you!” she remarked and then stood on tiptoe and kissed him on the jaw.

He liked the twinkle that he saw in her eye as she took it. “You’re welcome,” he replied and pulled a chair out from the table and sat down. “I wanted you to have it last night. But, of course, you know that I’m still trying to finish up my project.” He shook his head so as to impress her.

“So when do you think you’ll be finished?” she asked, and then turned and faced him.

But then he dropped his eyes and just stared down at the table. So she didn’t press, because she knew that as soon as he was done painting one mural or portrait that he’d go right ahead and take on another assignment. O how she wished he would have time for her the way he used to. She turned back around and stowed the basket of fruit in the fridge then turned gazing at him. He was still looking down. Something seemed to be pressing on his mind.

Then he sighed heavily and looked up at her. He appeared to be uncomfortable when he said, “I ah — I know you don’t want to hear me say this, but we’re going to have to postpone the movie.”

Instantly, a jet of anger welled in, because he was still putting her last. It began with him taking on a project only on Friday evenings. And now his Friday evening’s projects were often stretching deep into Saturday nights.

“Oh, come on, Memphis,” she shrieked. “Enough is enough! You know that I have been looking forward all week to seeing this movie! You’re neglecting me too much. We’ve talked about this before. Or have you conveniently forgotten?” He just sat there staring at the table. His avoidance frustrated her to no end.

She went and stood in front of the window. He lifted his eyes gazing at her back. “No, I haven’t forgotten,” he finally said. “Come sit down. Please. In the past when we’ve discussed this,” he said, “I basically let you talk over me, in order to avoid fighting with you. It’s time you hear what I have to say.” He reached and pulled a chair out from the table for her to sit.

Tension in the air was thicker than morning mist. Dropping her arms beside her, she came forward. She gazed angrily at him. Ironically, only minutes before he knocked on her door, she’d been standing daydreaming about the first time he made love to her; and now he was knocking the soft wind out of her sail. She couldn’t imagine how what he would say to her now could be any different than what he’d been saying to her in the past. The expression on his face had her shaking on the inside, but she made herself appear calm on the outside. She sat down in the chair and dropped her eyes, because she couldn’t bear to look at him any longer.

“Look at me,” he ordered mildly.

She had already steeled herself when she slowly lifted her eyes and met his.

He changed position in his seat and said, “This is something I’ve wanted to say to you for a long while now. And the only reason I’ve been procrastinating is because I know how you like living inside a bubble; and I haven’t wanted to hurt you.” He paused. “The truth is I haven’t been myself with you, Tessa. All this time I’ve only been who you want me to be—and I—I just can’t do it anymore,” he told her gesturing.

Tessa’s expression grew dim. His astounding confession shook her to the core. She’d known all along that those nagging feelings had meant something. Her eyes were loathing looking at him and thinking, how dare you blame me for something that has nothing to do with me! “Do come again,” she demanded, jumping up out of her chair.

“I said,” he accentuated, “that I haven’t been myself with you. Dammit! Tessa! I have only been who you want me to be. And I can’t do it anymore. I just can’t. But, of course, I still love you, because you are a strong individual, and you’re a beautiful woman. But I can no longer pretend to be who I’m not!” He pressed the tip of the fingers of both hands in his chest.

Tessa was reeling and speechless when she dropped back down in her chair. She finally found her voice to speak. “I—” She swallowed her words. Then started over. “I can’t believe that you had the gall to repeat that shit to me, knowing that I heard you the first freakin’ time. I have never, ever asked you to pretend to be anybody! All this time, I thought you were being yourself. And now you come to me with this bullshit, Memphis?!”