**Chapter 1**

Nobody ever said being carried by your knight in shining armor wasn’t sexy. Yet, here was Noel Franks-Holiday being carried by the fine, Hendrix Belford, Jr. It was definitely not a sexy look. Her makeup was smeared. Her tears were dried and frozen, and she was sure she had that nasty looking crust in her eyes from crying so much. It had been ten years since Noel visited Mistletoe Farms, North Carolina, her family’s hometown. She returned a few days ago after being summoned to her grandmother’s, Ophelia “Big Mama” Franks, death bed.

Now, here she was dazed and confused, being carried away from her grandmother’s final resting place by her childhood crush and former neighbor, Hendrix Belford, Jr. He was cradling her in his arms. Concern and fear etched in his handsome features. His pace quickened as he headed towards the funeral cars.

Who?

What?

When?

How?

She didn’t know what came over her. One moment, she was standing upright watching the person she loved most in the world’s casket being lowered into the ground and the next moment, she felt a sudden flash of heat take over her body, followed by white blotches and blurry vision. Her legs began to get weak. She remembered Hendrix asking her if she was alright. At the time, she couldn’t answer. As the pallbearers threw dirt on the casket, it took the breath out of her. The black and white blotches took over. The last thing she remembered was the choir singing the Hallelujah song from Shrek. Shrek had been her and Big Mama’s favorite movie. They sung that song again and again as the family threw green roses onto the casket. She thought to herself, *who in the hell would choose a song from Shrek and order green roses?* It was strange for a burial, but it was the type of excitement Big Mama would have enjoyed.

The icy, cold breeze from the bitterly cold winter day froze her tears. Her body was slowly returning to its normal state. It seemed like it was taking Hendrix forever to reach the cars. His pace was frantic, but it did not seem fast enough. She could hear her aunts on his trail. Mary, Martha, and Magdalene were shouting something she could not make out.

“Open the door,” Hendrix instructed the driver as they finally made it to the family car. He carefully placed her inside before joining her and pulling her head down on his broad shoulders. His cologne smelt good, but it was wreaking havoc on her pounding headache.

“It’s going to be okay, Noel.” he assured her.

“Hendrix!”

“Hendrix!”

“Hendrix!” Martha, her over-the-top aunt, yelled. “Boy, I know you heard us calling you!”

Hendrix did not acknowledge her. Instead, Noel watched as he opened a bottle of water, putting it to her lips as she took a sip. It was as if she was having an out-of-body experience.

“Martha, stop all that damn yelling,” Mary, the oldest Franks sister stated. “She probably passed out because of all of that dramatic screaming and hollering you were doing. It was enough to make anyone faint.”

“And, who in the hell shows up at their mama’s funeral looking like a smurf?” Magdalene, the middle sister, asked.

“Please just calm down,” Hendrix, Sr. said. He is affectionately known by the residents of Mistletoe, North Carolina as Henny.

“Calm down!” Mary repeated.

“I can’t calm down when I just watched my niece pass out!” Martha yelled.

“She’s going to faint again if y’all don’t stop all that yelling,” Hendrix, Jr. replied.

“Maybe, if you stop holding her so tight she can get some air,” Martha replied. “Don’t think you're going to be hanging on my niece while she is in town.”

The Franks sisters got into the car and the driver pulled away from the cemetery to head back to the Franks Estate at Mistletoe Farms.

Noel laughed as they passed through Main Street. All the Christmas decorations and snow men made the place stand out. Mistletoe, North Carolina was the best place to spend Christmas. There, Christmas lasted three hundred sixty-five days of the year. Yet, during the month of December, things in the small town went into overdrive. The tree farms her family owned experience the most business during that time. So much business that they often hired anyone who was unemployed during the holiday season. Her Big Mama believed in giving back to her community.

“Big Mama,” she cried, a tear falling from her eyes. Hendrix reached over to wipe the tears from her face. God, the man was handsome.

“Mm hmm,” Martha mumbled as she watched the exchange.

A loud screeching laugh came over Noel as she looked at Martha. She did look like an old smurf. Her aunts hadn’t changed over the years. They were still the loud Franks sisters. The life of the party, even at their mama’s funeral.

“Is that child alright?” Mary asked as Noel laughed and cried.

“Hendrix probably put something in that water bottle. He thinks he’s going to get some of that Franks stuff before she leaves, but that isn’t happening.”

Noel continued laughing hysterically as she thought about the choir. One of them, probably Martha, had chosen that song and those damn green roses. The pastor’s face when the choir began singing was priceless. Noel laughed until she fell against Hendrix’s body, sleeping. She was exhausted.