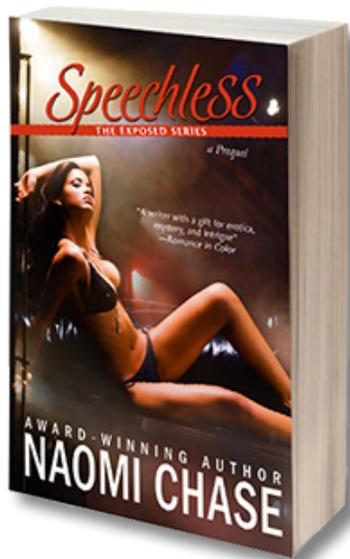


MAUREEN SMITH



AN EXCERPT FROM **SPEECHLESS**

Chapter 21

Tamia

“YOUR TURN, BIG Daddy. Show me what you got.”

Brandon chuckled, shaking his head at Tamia. “You already know what I got,” he drawled, pointing to the electronic scoreboard behind him. Despite the impressive points she’d just earned, he was still kicking her ass.

“See, why you gotta rub it in?” she complained.

“Aww,” he teased, grinning down at her. “Did I hurt your feelings?”

“Yes,” she pouted, sliding her arms around his neck. “You know you have an unfair advantage. You learned how to play golf when you were in diapers. And you play with your father every month.”

“So what’re you saying?” Brandon murmured, his eyes twinkling as he nibbled on her lips. “Want me to go easy on you?”

She smiled sweetly. “Could you?”

“Hmm...nah. Take your beating like a woman.”

When she sputtered indignantly, he laughed and gave her a smacking kiss on the mouth, then pulled back and winked at her.

“Watch the master at work.”

“Whatever.” But Tamia was smiling as she watched him retrieve his golf club and saunter up to the platform to take his turn.

It was Thursday evening and they were hanging out at Topgolf, an upscale sports entertainment facility. After having dinner and drinks in one of the upper level bays, they'd teed up for a round of Topgolf, a game in which each player scored points by hitting balls across a landscaped outfield marked with targets.

Two hours ago, Brandon had called Tamia at work to tell her that he was sneaking out early. He'd had a stressful day and wanted to hit some golf balls to blow off steam. When he asked her to join him, she was so delighted and eager to spend time with him that she'd agreed without hesitation—despite the mountain of paperwork staring her in the face.

She'd left work and rushed home to shower and squeeze into a red bandage dress with a plunging neckline. After grabbing a pair of fuck-me heels, she'd hurried out the door, making it over to Shanell's house just minutes before Brandon arrived to pick her up.

When he saw her, the look on his face was all the reward she'd needed.

She smiled at the memory as she strolled back to their private seating area and sat down on a plush chair. Meeting Brandon's dark gaze, she slowly crossed her legs, her dress riding high on her thighs.

He stared at her, their game momentarily forgotten.

When she picked up her martini, a drop of condensation rolled off the bottom of the glass and landed on her leg. Mesmerized, Brandon watched as the bead of water trickled downward to disappear between her thighs.

When he bit his bottom lip, she purred seductively, “Bet you wish you were that water droplet.”

His eyes narrowed.

“You better stop playing,” he warned, turning away.

Tamia laughed wickedly.

Brandon moved into position, planting his feet firmly and gripping the golf club like a pro. After dinner he'd removed his suit jacket and tie, loosened the top three buttons of his shirt, unfastened his cuff links, and rolled up his sleeves—a semi striptease Tamia always enjoyed.

“Looking good, baby,” she called out.

She saw the flash of his dimple. “Your distraction tactics won't work,” he told her.

Undeterred, she whistled appreciatively. “Nice ass.”

Fighting the tug of a grin, Brandon untucked his shirt to cover his butt.

Tamia laughed. “Don't stop there, sexy. Take it off, take it off.”

“Hush, woman.” Brandon surveyed the outfield, then looked down at the small white ball on the tee in front of him. Just as he was about to take a swing, his cell phone went off.

Frowning, he dug into his pants pocket, pulled out the phone, and checked the screen.

“Is it the office?” Tamia asked.

He nodded and held up a finger before turning away to answer the call.

Tamia sipped her martini, her lazy gaze roaming over him as he stood with the phone to his ear, one hand thrust into his pocket, long legs braced apart.

A burst of feminine laughter drew Tamia’s attention to a group of friends in the next bay. The women comprised different racial backgrounds—black, white, Latina, even a token Indian. They were huddled around their table, sipping cocktails and chattering to one another as they shamelessly eye-fucked Brandon.

Tamia’s hackles went up.

When she caught the words “push that ho off the roof so we can kidnap his fine ass,” she wanted to jump out of her chair, grab her golf club and start swinging on the thirsty bitches.

“I wish one of you would,” she said loud enough for the women to hear. When they looked at her in surprise, she pointed to Brandon. “I get it. He’s fine as hell. But you know what else he is? *Mine*. So fall the hell back before I come over there.”

When the heffas scowled and cut their eyes away, Tamia raised her glass to her lips and took a satisfying swig of her drink.

A few minutes later, Brandon ended his call and shoved the phone back into his pocket.

“Are you in trouble?” Tamia called out teasingly.

He chuckled. “Not quite.”

“You’d better not be. You work sixteen hours a day. They shouldn’t penalize you for leaving at five every now and then.”

Brandon grunted noncommittally, then swung his club downward. The golf ball soared through the air, sailing down the fairway before landing in the farthest target.

“*Yes*,” Brandon celebrated, pumping his fist.

Tamia groaned protestingly as his new score appeared on the screen, putting his lead even further out of reach.

He grinned broadly at her. “Come on, baby. Come take your last shot.”

“At your head?”

He laughed. “Now, now. Don’t be a sore loser.”

“I haven’t lost—*yet*.” As Tamia stood and sashayed up to the platform, she could feel the other women’s envious stares. She knew how good her body looked in her tight dress, knew that her stilettos made her legs look even longer and sexier.

That’s right, bitches. Hate on me.

When Brandon handed her golf club to her, the hungry look in his eyes was the icing on the cake. As she stepped onto the platform, she wasn’t surprised when he positioned himself behind her.

“Let me give you some pointers,” he murmured close to her ear. The warmth of his breath tickled her cheek, sending shivers through her body.

“Let’s start with your stance. Your feet should be shoulder width apart. So you need to spread your legs a little wider.”

She did as he told her, feeling her dress slide up her thighs. “How’s that?”

“Mmm. Better.” He moved closer and placed his hands on her hips, the heat of his big body making hers tingle. “I noticed when you take a swing, your arms are tight.”

“Tight?” Tamia repeated in a throaty whisper.

“Yeah.” His voice was a low rasp. “Keep them nice and loose.”

“Nice and loose, huh?” She adjusted her grip on the club and took a small practice swing. “Better?”

“Much.” She could feel Brandon’s hard dick pressed against her buttocks. It made her pussy hot and slick.

“Now stick your back out a little and flex your knees,” he instructed.

“Like this?” Tamia arched her back, wiggling her ass against his bulging crotch. His sharp intake of breath aroused and emboldened her.

She began bouncing up and down, making her ass clap like a stripper. “Is this good?”

“Jesus, Tamia.”

When she laughed and turned her face toward Brandon’s, he kissed her voraciously, thrusting his tongue between her lips. She moaned with pleasure as her nipples hardened and her pussy pumped.

“Tamia?”

Startled, she pulled her mouth from Brandon’s and looked in the direction of the familiar male voice.

An attractive light-skinned man stood a few yards away, staring at her in surprise. He was average height, lean, and clean-cut in a blue polo shirt and khaki slacks.

Tamia blinked, the haze of lust clearing from her brain. “Lance?”

His face broke into a broad smile. “Hello, there.”

As he came forward, Brandon’s arms tightened around Tamia. She gave him a questioning glance, but he was frowning at her approaching ex, a muscle working in his jaw.

“It’s good to see you, Tamia,” Lance said warmly. “It’s been a while.”

“Yes, it has.” She smiled, stepping out of Brandon’s arms. He released her with obvious reluctance. “How have you been, Lance?”

“Good, good.” He gave her an admiring perusal, his eyes lingering on her cleavage a second too long. “You look amazing.”

“Thank you.” Tamia turned to Brandon. “Baby, this is Lance Tolson. Lance, this is my boyfriend, Brandon Chambers.”

She didn’t miss the flicker of recognition in Lance’s eyes as he and Brandon shook hands, coolly sizing each other up.

“So how are you and Tamia acquainted?” Brandon asked with deceptive casualness.

“We dated two years ago,” Lance said, looking pleased.

Brandon nodded. “Where’d you meet?”

“At Ikea,” Tamia answered. “I was shopping for a new bookcase. Lance worked there, so he helped me find the perfect one.”

“And she repaid me with a date,” Lance added with a smile.

“Yeah?” Brandon drawled. “Your commission wasn’t enough?”

Tamia shot him a look, but Lance merely laughed. “Bruh, I would have given up a year’s worth of commissions for just one date with Tamia.”

“Aww, that’s so sweet,” she cooed, ignoring Brandon’s dark expression. “I haven’t been to Ikea in a while. Do you still work there?”

"Sure do. Just got promoted to sales manager."

"Really? That's wonderful, Lance. Congratulations."

"Thanks, Tamia." He grinned. "My salary pretty much doubled, so I definitely have no complaints."

She smiled. "I'm really happy for you, Lance."

Brandon curved an arm around her waist, his palm resting on her hip in a subtly possessive gesture.

Lance nodded to him. "I've seen you on the news. You're a defense attorney, right? And your father's the lieutenant governor."

"Right," Brandon murmured.

Lance smiled at Tamia. "You're really moving up in the world, aren't you?" The teasing words held a trace of bitterness.

Tamia wisely changed the subject. "How's your mother doing?"

"She's doing well. She still asks about you."

Tamia was surprised. "She does?"

"Of course. You know how much she liked you."

Tamia smiled. "Give her my best, will you?"

"Absolutely. Of course, if I tell her that I ran into you," Lance added humorously, "she'll probably want to invite you over for Sunday dinner."

Tamia chuckled. When Brandon's hand flexed on her hip, she cleared her throat. "Well, um, we were just wrapping up our game before we head out—"

"No problem," Lance said easily. "I'm meeting some friends, so I should get down there."

Tamia smiled. "It was nice seeing you again."

"You too, Tamia." Lance winked. "If things don't work out between you and..." Seeing Brandon's menacing scowl, he stepped back with a nervous laugh. "Just kidding. Take care, Tamia."

Brandon watched Lance go, eyes narrowed. "He doesn't seem like your type."

Tamia gave him an amused look. "Why do you say that?"

"He's light skinned, for one. And he's corny as hell."

She laughed. "He's not *that* corny."

Brandon cocked a brow in challenge.

"Okay, maybe he is." She grinned. "You jealous?"

He snorted. "Of that simp?"

"Negro, please," Tamia said with a laugh. "Why you tryna front? Your ass is so jealous right now you can't even see straight."

Brandon grinned, gathering her into his arms and kissing her forehead. "You know I don't like thinking about you with other dudes."

She smiled into his eyes. "Now you know how *I* feel every time we run into one of your exes."

"That's only happened twice."

"Isn't that enough?" she retorted.

He smiled, gently caressing her cheek as he searched her eyes. "So how long did you go out with ol' boy?"

“Long enough to know he could never be right for me.”
Brandon’s smile deepened. “Good answer.”

AN HOUR LATER, they were parked outside Shanell’s house, steaming up the car windows as they made out like horny teenagers.

“Why are you teasing me?” Brandon whispered.

“What do you mean?” Tamia whispered back, smiling against his mouth as she straddled his lap in the front seat of his Maybach. “How am I teasing you?”

“You know damn well how,” he growled softly. “You’ve been teasing and torturing me from the moment you walked out the door wearing this short ass dress.”

Tamia laughed, nipping his bottom lip. “I thought you liked my dress.”

“I do. It’s sexy as hell. But I’ve been dying to get you out of it all night.”

“All night, huh?”

“Hell, yeah. Especially when we were playing the game. Every time you swung that club...damn.” Twirling his tongue around hers, Brandon slid his hands under her dress and cupped her bare ass cheeks.

She shivered, her clit throbbing beneath her silk thong as he kneaded her buttocks.

“Why don’t you just let me come inside?” he cajoled.

“Because I still have work to do—which I put off to hang out with *you*. Not that I’m complaining,” she purred, grinding her hips against his rock-hard erection. “I definitely appreciated the spontaneity of our date, Mr. Chambers. Dinner was delicious, and I thoroughly enjoyed your company.”

“You can enjoy it even more after we take this inside the house,” he whispered.

“Mmm.” Tamia closed her eyes as he ran his fingertips up and down the narrow strip of cloth between the crack of her ass. Her pussy lips swelled, moisture trickling out to dampen the inside of her thighs. She wanted nothing more than to let him slide her panties to the side and bury himself deep. She wanted to ride him right there in the driveway.

But she couldn’t. Shanell would be home from choir practice any minute, and she expected Tamia to be long gone.

But Brandon wasn’t making it easy for her to get out of the car. When he reached under her thong to stroke her hard clit, she moaned against his mouth. Her thighs moved further apart, as if by their own will.

Brandon groaned deep in his throat, his erection throbbing against her. “Damn, baby. You’re so wet.”

“I know. That’s what you do to me.”

They shared an openmouthed kiss, tongues stroking as they feverishly gyrated against each other, generating enough friction and heat to burn their clothes off.

“You’re so bad for my productivity,” Tamia breathed.

Brandon’s lips curved beneath hers. “Now you know how I feel. Just thinking about you at work makes my dick so hard I can’t concentrate worth shit.”

“Oh my,” Tamia murmured. “Hope that doesn’t happen when you’re in court,

counselor.”

He chuckled. “You and me both.”

When the headlights from a passing car shone through the windows, Tamia sighed, then pulled back and looked into Brandon’s heavy-lidded eyes.

“Baby?”

“Hmm?”

She stroked his jaw. “When are you going to introduce me to your parents?”

He tensed beneath her. “What?”

She gave him a look. “I think you heard me the first time.”

“I did. I just...It was such a random question.” He frowned at her.

“We’ve been dating for almost seven months now,” she said, keeping her tone light. “I’m just wondering when I’ll get to meet your family.”

His frown deepened. “I really don’t think this is—”

“Never mind.” She climbed off his lap and dropped into the passenger seat, tugging down her dress.

Brandon pushed out a deep, heavy breath. “Come on, baby, don’t be mad,” he implored her. “We were having such a good time—”

“I’m not mad.”

“Yes, you are. I can tell.”

“No, I’m not.” She plastered on a smile for him. “You’re right. My timing was bad.”

Brandon reached over, brushing the pad of his thumb across her bottom lip. “I don’t want you worrying about why you haven’t met my parents—”

“I’m not worried,” Tamia assured him.

She was, of course. She’d met Lance’s mother two weeks after they started dating. So Brandon’s unwillingness to introduce her to his family was more than troubling. But she didn’t want to pressure him and risk pushing him away. Not when she’d come this far. She just had to continue being patient, continue biding her time.

Which was getting harder and harder to do.

She picked up her purse from the car floor. “I really need to get home and get some work done.”

Brandon gave her an odd look and then glanced out the window. “You *are* home.”

Shit. What did I say?

She forced a laugh. “I know I’m home. What I meant is that I need to go inside and get to work.”

Brandon nodded slowly.

When she reached for the door handle, he murmured, “Hold on.”

She looked at him.

“I’ll walk you to the door.”

“Okay.” She grinned. “But you’re still not coming inside.”

He snapped his fingers. “Damn.”

They both laughed.

Chapter 22

Dominic

SITTING INSIDE A Phantom parked down the street, Dominic watched Brandon escort Tamia to the front door of the one-story house.

Hidden by the darkness and a row of other cars parked along the street, he toked on a blunt while observing the couple through a pair of binoculars. As Tamia walked, the short hem of her dress rode up the back of her shapely thighs.

Dominic trained the binoculars on her ass, adjusting the knob for maximum magnification. The sight of her round buttocks jiggling beneath the dress had his dick pushing against his zipper.

At the front door, Chambers leaned in for a goodnight kiss. But Tamia turned her head away, giving him her cheek instead.

Well, well, well, Dominic mused, blowing out a curl of smoke. *Looks like there's trouble in paradise.*

He watched the couple exchange a few more words before Tamia smiled and went inside the house, closing the door behind her. Chambers stood there for a long moment with his hands shoved into his pockets, looking less confident than he'd looked a few hours ago when he'd arrived to pick Tamia up.

"What did you do, Loverboy?" Dominic whispered tauntingly. "You must have fucked up pretty bad if she ain't giving you no pussy tonight."

Chambers rubbed his jaw, then walked back slowly to his car and slid behind the wheel, the tinted windows obscuring him from view.

Suddenly Dominic's phone rang.

He cast an unconcerned glance at the screen, saw his wife's number, and let the call go to voice mail.

Seconds later the phone buzzed with a text.

Where are you???

Dominic let out a dark chuckle. "I'm where I need to be, bitch."

As the black Maybach started down the street toward him, he lowered the binoculars and took a deep drag on his blunt. As Chambers neared his parked car, Dominic rolled down his window halfway and blew out a long stream of smoke.

When the Maybach slowed down, he turned his head away with a devious grin.

After Chambers drove past, Dominic lifted his eyes to the rearview mirror, watching the Maybach's red taillights grow smaller before the car disappeared around the street corner.

"Till we meet again, Loverboy," Dominic promised in a menacingly soft voice.

Toking on his blunt, he returned his attention to the silent house, waiting... anticipating.

Moments later the front door opened a crack.

Dominic grinned, lifting the binoculars to his eyes to watch as Tamia peered out cautiously.

Satisfied that the coast was clear, she stepped outside.

Suddenly she froze, her eyes scanning the dark street.

Dominic held his breath, pulse pounding in his ears. Could she see him? Sense him lurking in the darkness?

He sat perfectly still, staring at her through the binoculars.

Finally she closed and locked the door behind her, then quickly made her way to the red Honda Accord parked in the driveway.

Dominic lowered the binoculars, a slow smile curving his lips.

"You've been a naughty little girl, Tamia Luke," he whispered into the shadows. "You need to be punished."

He watched as she backed out of the driveway and headed down the street toward him. It seemed an eternity before she was close enough for him to see her face without using the binoculars. And what a beautiful face it was.

He stared right at her as she drove past his parked car. She was on her cell phone, oblivious to his presence. Oblivious to the imminent threat he posed.

His phone rang again.

He glanced down at the screen, then calmly brought the phone to his ear.

"I need a decision from you," a gruff male voice spoke without preamble.

Dominic leaned back in his seat. "I'm not ready to give you one."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"It means I need more time."

"For what?" Yarbrough demanded. "Where the hell are you?"

"Just out doing some reconnaissance," Dominic drawled.

"Reconnaissance?" Yarbrough repeated as if he'd never heard the word before.

"It's an old military term," Dominic humorously explained. "Before undertaking a special mission, you have to scope out the target, learn their routine, identify their weaknesses."

"I know what reconnaissance means," Yarbrough snapped. "I was serving in the army before you were a twinkle in your mother's eye, you West Indian son of a bitch. I gave you a fucking job to do—"

"You told me to blackmail Miss Luke," Dominic calmly interrupted. "Before I approach her, I need to know how receptive she'll be to my...offer."

"So what do you plan to do? Stalk her around town?"

"Not stalk," Dominic corrected. "Gather intel."

This drew a rude snort. "You're full of shit, Archer."

"Am I?" Dominic smiled narrowly. "I've fucked enough frustrated housewives to know when a woman's at her most vulnerable. I know when to make my move."

"That's all well and good, Don Juan, but we're not talking about a fed-up housewife here. We're talking about a gold-digging whore who needs to be dealt with in the only language she understands. Tamia Luke is a goddamn fraud and you have the proof to expose her. So do it."

“Ah, but what if she calls my bluff?” Dominic countered smoothly. “What if she’s so in love with Chambers that she refuses to do anything that would jeopardize their relationship? What if she decides to come clean about her past rather than cheat on him?”

The bishop was silent, pondering Dominic’s words.

He waited.

“How much more time do you need?”

“Depends.” Dominic took a hit on his weed, savoring the aroma.

“Depends on what?”

Dominic smiled lazily. “Depends on how much fun I’m having doing reconnaissance.”

There was a long silence.

“Don’t try my patience, Archer,” Yarbrough warned. “You know what’s at stake here. I wasn’t bluffing when I told you I would turn you in to the feds. I can destroy you with one phone call. Do what I told you to do, or suffer the consequences.”

Dominic took another drag on the blunt, then blew a smooth stream of smoke through his nostrils and sighed. “Are you finished?”

“*What?* Who the hell do you think—”

“I’ll be in touch.” Dominic disconnected the call, then leaned back against the headrest and closed his eyes. As an image of Tamia Luke’s voluptuous body filled his mind, he licked his lips in anticipation.

He would do the job.

And he’d enjoy every fucking moment of it.