

A LOVE IN THE SPOTLIGHT NOVEL



*the*  
LOVE  
SCRIPT

*Toni Shiloh*

LOVE IN THE SPOTLIGHT • 1

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**BETHANYHOUSE**  
*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

The Love Script • Toni Shiloh

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Published by Bethany House Publishers  
Minneapolis, Minnesota  
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of  
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Shiloh, Toni, author.

Title: The love script / Toni Shiloh.

Description: Minneapolis, Minnesota : Bethany House Publishers, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2023] | Series: Love in the Spotlight ; 1

Identifiers: LCCN 2023002263 | ISBN 9780764241505 (trade paper) | ISBN 9780764241857 (casebound) | ISBN 9781493442164 (ebook)

Subjects: LCGFT: Christian fiction. | Romance fiction. | Novels.

Classification: LCC PS3619.H548 L68 2023 | DDC 813/.6—dc23/eng/20230202

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023002263>

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Cover art and design by Jena Holliday

Author is represented by the Rachel McMillan Agency

Baker Publishing Group publications use paper produced from sustainable forestry practices and post-consumer waste whenever possible.

23 24 25 26 27 28 29      7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To the Author and Finisher of my faith.

# One

The wind whipped through the car's sunroof, the sound competing with a serenade by H.E.R. on the R&B station as I drove down Coldwater Canyon. Privacy hedges created lush scenery against the clear sky peeking through the trees. Today's weather reminded me of the Southern California often portrayed in movies—abundant sunshine, not too hot and not too cold. The perfect temps made traveling across metro Los Angeles a dream.

My next client appointment was with Ms. Rosie Booker, one of the sweetest women I'd ever met. She'd overcome breast cancer while keeping her eyes on God, making her my hero and an inspiration all in one. As her personal hair stylist, I'd had the honor of keeping her hair healthy as it grew back into its former glory. She always imparted wisdom throughout our sessions, leaving me encouraged and ready to face whatever came my way. Working with her in the comfort of her home was a lot different from when I worked on set as a film hair stylist. Unfortunately, my last position working on a streaming show was about six months ago.

I'd been applying for more jobs in the film industry, but the rejections had me hustling to book freelance positions

as a personal stylist and showing up to my part-time salon position at The Mane Do. Maybe one day I'd be able to tack on *key hair stylist* next to my name, Nevaeh Richards. Be the one who turned a normal actor into the next Carrie Fisher, known for her iconic hairstyles in the *Star Wars* franchise. Or maybe I could even be a part of the next blockbuster movie that had fierce warriors like the Dora Milaje in *Black Panther*. And I certainly wouldn't sneeze at an Academy Award win either.

I'd actually stumbled onto the job with Ms. Rosie. Lamont Booker—yes, *the Sexiest Man Alive* (SMA)—had been one of the actors on a Netflix show I'd worked on set with last year. Back then his mother, Ms. Rosie, had just shaved her head to combat the copious amounts of hair loss from chemo treatments. Lamont Booker overheard me talking about wigs, hair care, and the importance of a skin-care regime to one of the supporting actresses. Shortly after, he'd offered me the position of his mother's personal hair stylist. Now I came by their place once a week to style her curly tresses and pamper her as the locks grew back in. I didn't know a lot about the Sexiest Man Alive, but he sure did love his mom. Then again, she was an easy person to love.

The road curved, and I grinned as Lamont Booker's multimillion-dollar home came into view. The white structure gleamed in the California sunlight, the black trim adding a masculine touch. Though Lamont Booker—sorry, I can only say and think both his first and last names—lived with his mother. Well, *he* didn't live with his mother. He'd insisted Ms. Rosie move in to his home after learning of the treatment plan to target her particular type of cancer. From what she'd shared with me, she'd been wrecked by the chemo and was very grateful for her one and only child's devotion to help her.

Lately, she'd been making comments about finding her own place again, but the housing market in LA was absurd. I'd know. I shared a two-bedroom, one-bath apartment with my old college roommate because neither one of us could afford to live on our own income alone. Nora wanted to be an actress, and I wanted to make sure no actress got caught in a wig that looked more like roadkill than a million-dollar coiffure. Somehow our relationship continued to survive our nine-hundred-square-foot living space. But if she left an empty food package in the cabinets one more time instead of throwing it away, I'd need to pray the Holy Spirit intervened.

I punched the speaker button on the security box in front of the iron gate.

"Hey, Ms. Richards. Back so soon?" Kyle's voice sounded through the intercom.

"You know it," I called out.

Lamont Booker's security guard was a shameless flirt but completely harmless. He asked for my number every time I came by despite my assurances that I'd never fall for his charms. He was good-natured about being put in the friend zone—though could it be called that if I didn't actually consider us friends? More like work acquaintances?

The gate slid back into the stone wall, so I pulled forward onto the driveway, then waited for the gate to close behind my ancient MINI Cooper. Okay, not ancient, but a car made in 2010 might as well be. My parents gifted me the red hatchback as a high school graduation present. Since it still ran and the sunroof worked, I continued to drive it. And I would drive right on up to my high school reunion in it. But that was in a few weeks at the end of June and not my main concern.

After putting the car in park, I closed the sunroof. Sometimes my intense focus on the job caused me to forget to close the roof. I'd learned the hard way that seagull waste wasn't

all that easy to get out of upholstery. Satisfied of its closure, I walked toward the hatchback to retrieve my supplies situated in my rolling stylist case. The all-black storage container looked like the old toy chests I'd seen in posts about the 1980s. My professional look, a nod to the '90s, came complete with a uniform consisting of black bib overalls that could perfectly hold hair clips and other various accessories. My dark blue tee would also conceal any water splashes.

I pulled my case behind me, heading for the lower-level garage entrance, where most of the help came in. After I pressed the buzzer, the door immediately swung open, and Kyle grinned at me. "Afternoon, beautiful." His gravelly voice held as much humor as the twinkle in his eyes.

"Hey, Kyle."

"Hey? That's it? Not, 'I missed you'?"

I placed a hand on my hip and a smirk on my lips. "Should I miss someone who doesn't sign my paychecks?"

"Ouch, girl." He clutched his muscled chest. "I thought we were better friends than that."

I laughed. "Not yet." I tossed a wave over my shoulder.

My rubber clogs fell silently on the light-colored wood floors as I traversed the hallway. The floor-to-ceiling windows let in copious amounts of sunshine. I sighed, thankful for the abundant light. I couldn't imagine living anywhere else in the world. Southern California held my heart.

The elevator entrance beckoned me. On my first day, Lamont Booker had taken one look at my styling case and shown me the boxed convenience. I'm not sure if he was concerned for his wood floors or genuinely worried that I couldn't lift the monstrosity up the stairs. Either way, I quickly became a fan of having an elevator in a house, as well as a tad bit envious, considering my entire apartment could fit into one of the rooms in this house, maybe even Ms. Rosie's closet.

Exiting the elevator, I made a right toward the mother-in-law suite. I rapped my knuckles on the door and heard a voice telling me to “Come in.” Only darkness greeted me. Ms. Rosie lay in bed, her form hard to make out since the blackout blinds concealed all sources of natural light.

“Ms. Rosie?” I called softly.

Her face turned toward me, showing a furrowed brow and grimacing lips. “I’m so sorry, Nevaeh. I meant to cancel our appointment.”

Her voice sounded thready to my ears. My stomach churned. “Are you okay? Should I go find your son?”

“No, please don’t bother him.” She tried to raise her arm, but it dropped limply onto her duvet cover.

“Does he know you’re sick?” Was it the cancer? Had she relapsed? Did she need to go to the doctor? Get a scan or whatever it was medical professionals did to ensure cancer hadn’t returned?

In all my time pampering Ms. Rosie, I’d never seen her look so bad. Then again, she’d canceled appointments before. Maybe moments like this had been the reason why.

“He does. It’s just a stomach bug. I don’t want you to get sick, too, so go.” She turned her head the other way, a low moan filling the room.

I bit my lip. “I can make you some soup if he’s not around. Is he on set?”

She nodded, groaning at the movement.

That was it. I couldn’t leave her alone. “I’m making you some soup.” From my understanding, Lamont Booker didn’t have a personal chef. I think Ms. Rosie did most of the cooking, and she was in no position to make any meals today.

“You don’t have to. I’ll be fine,” she murmured weakly.

Yeah, and I was the leading lady in the hottest new romantic comedy. Wait, no, it was Sandra Bullock. I had to

give her two thumbs up for proving women in their fifties still had it. #Girlpower

“It’ll be no trouble. Promise.” I slid a hand on my hip, trying to show my sass instead of the worry snaking through me.

“Thank you, Nevaeh.”

“Anything for you, Ms. Rosie.” I closed her door quietly, leaving my suitcase outside the entrance.

Ever since I’d first seen Lamont Booker’s gorgeous kitchen with its white marble counters and double oven, I’d wanted to create a meal fit for a queen. And since the Sexiest Man Alive was a prince in Hollywood, his mom surely fit the bill.

I slid my hands along the ridiculously large island that could seat five people comfortably before opening the stainless-steel fridge. Organic fresh fruits and vegetables gleamed in their open containers while sparkling water and choice cuts of meat filled the shelves. Of course Mr. A-Lister wouldn’t have anything highly processed. After walking through his huge pantry, I had a better idea of what I had to work with. Now to find the perfect recipe.

After perusing BonAPPetit on my phone, I found the perfect chicken-and-noodle soup that called for enough ginger and garlic to evict any germs from one’s body. This kitchen had every appliance, but it was the gas range stove I wanted to get my hands on. I washed my hands, then got to laying out the ingredients.

Before long, a fragrant aroma filled the kitchen. While the soup simmered, I brought an herbal tea to Ms. Rosie’s room. The thermometer confirmed she was fever-free, but she still looked pitiful in her dark room.

“Do you want me to open the blinds?”

“Please don’t.”

I wanted to argue, but who was I to dictate her environ-

ment when she was obviously under the weather? Back in the kitchen, I stirred the large pot with a wooden spoon. I reached for the egg noodles and—

“What are you doing?”

I yelped, and noodles flew everywhere.

Lamont Booker folded his arms over his impressive chest, glaring at the pasta scattered across his marble countertops.

“Why are you cooking in my house?” He glowered at the mess, as if the spilled food would have the answers to his questions.

“Ms. Rosie’s sick, and she forgot to cancel our appointment. I couldn’t just leave her here all alone, so I made soup.” My words rushed out as I struggled for air.

His gaze rose to meet mine, and I drew in a ragged breath. Whew, I could see why *People* had dropped the coveted title on him.

“What do you mean she’s sick?” Every word was elongated, making the question more pronounced.

I blinked. “You don’t know? She told me you knew.” She’d hoodwinked me!

“How sick?” he demanded.

I took a half step back. Lamont Booker intimidated me by just being *Lamont Booker*. This brooding, towering version made me want to hide behind the pantry door until he turned back into the swoony version I was used to seeing. But I wasn’t one to cower, so I tilted my chin up. “She said it’s just a stomach bug, but her blinds are closed, and she’s lying in bed, obviously in pain.”

He flew out of the kitchen, his footfalls pounding against the steps. I winced, then looked at the messy countertops. I found a dishrag and wiped up the pasta, then found a broom to take care of the pieces that had landed on the hardwood floor.

A few minutes later, he stalked back into the kitchen. I froze midsweep.

He stopped in front of the farmhouse sink and ran a hand over his bald head. “I’m sorry for startling you earlier.”

“No problem. I was in my own world anyway.” Dreaming of owning a place so luxurious. Wouldn’t that show my parents that Nevaeh Richards wasn’t *just* a stylist? They thought my career beneath me and the education they’d provided. Newsflash: I loved what I did. Even if it didn’t live up to their standards or pay enough to get me a kitchen like Lamont Booker’s.

“I appreciate you taking care of her. She said you’ve been checking in on her since you arrived.”

“Of course.” I dumped the food into the stainless-steel trash can, then put the broom back in the supply closet I’d rummaged through and rinsed out the rag I’d found to clean with.

“I added the noodles, so the soup will be ready in about five minutes. After that, you can pour her a bowl.”

He opened his wallet, but I held up a hand. “I didn’t do her hair, so you don’t owe me anything.”

“But you cooked. Cleaned too.” He pointed to the gleaming countertops to emphasize his point.

“I don’t charge people for helping them. That’s just wrong.” I blew out a breath. “Besides, the whole point of helping is doing without expecting something in return.” I slid my hands into my pockets, wishing Lamont Booker had come home a little later—so late I could’ve given Ms. Rosie her soup and left unnoticed.

Other than the day he’d hired me and the time we spoke to discuss my fees, our conversations weren’t the lengthy types. A greeting here or there. A nod in passing if he looked busy. We didn’t normally just stand in his gorgeous kitchen

and chat about his mother's health, unless it was hair-care related.

Now he stood before me in a white tee and gray joggers, and I wanted to swoon. Well, just a little. Okay, maybe enough to have a fangirl moment and ask if he'd sign something. Though what I didn't know. It's not like I carried paper around for such a thing. Although, living near Hollywood certainly afforded me opportunities for star sightings. But if I wanted to be taken seriously in this business, I couldn't go up to a celebrity and act uncouth.

"Then thank you very much for taking time to look after her." He smiled.

"Anytime." I walked out of the kitchen before I lost my composure. Surely, I had some kind of paper in my styling case that had space for a Lamont Booker signature.

"Oh, I saw your case upstairs. Let me grab that for you."

*Right.* I nodded. As soon as he was out of sight, I internalized a scream and fanned my face. Thank the Lord I didn't have to talk to that man on a regular basis. I was better than this. I saw A-list actors and celebrities all the time. Just the other day, I was behind one at a stop sign. I probably wouldn't have even realized it if it hadn't been for the vanity plate on his BMW.

The sound of pattering steps greeted my ears, and I blew out a breath. "Thanks for grabbing that." Time to exit stage left while my inner fan's mouth remained sealed with duct tape.

"Sure. I'll walk you out."

I barely kept my brow from rising. Since when did he walk me out? Was this when he'd lean in close and tell me never to step foot in his kitchen again? To leave his glorious gas range stove to him?

Instead, we walked in silence until he opened the front door. "Thanks again, Nevaeh."

“Of course. I hope Ms. Rosie feels better.” Would it be impertinent for me to ask him to text me an update on her?

“Me too.” For a moment, his mouth drew down and deep grooves appeared, and my earlier thoughts on cancer returned, flooding my brain.

“She’ll be okay, right?” I asked softly.

His gaze met mine, and he nodded. “She will.”

I gulped and turned away. My foot slipped off the step that had existed since the house was built, but apparently my brain had forgotten, despite the many times I’d stepped down before. My mouth opened to let out a panicked squeal, only a strong arm swooped around my stomach and tugged me close.

“You okay?” he murmured.

“Yeah,” I breathed, heart hammering against my overalls.

He let me go, and my face heated as he lowered the suitcase. Obviously if I couldn’t see a step, I couldn’t drag a rolling suitcase behind me. Instead of thanking him for keeping my face from kissing the pavement, I pulled the handle up and walked away in embarrassment.

No wonder he was the Sexiest Man Alive. Even my pulse had reacted on instinct, and my stomach felt branded by his touch. Once again, I thanked God that I didn’t have to see him on a daily basis. I’d be an absolute wreck.