

Chapter 13

After leaving his grandmother's house, John felt renewed. But he also understood that his newfound comfort was only a temporary state because it came wrapped in a sense of uncertainty about what was on the horizon. He sighed deeply as he steadied himself and made a sharp turn into the Holiday Inn parking lot.

So many things were going through his mind, making his head swim with questions he couldn't answer. He parked his car, then sat with the engine running. He took two deep breaths and reflected on the events of the last twenty-four hours.

He was grateful for the advice his Grandma Allene had given him. Her words of wisdom had been like a heaping dose of medicine that lifted his ailing spirit. "Grandma's always right," he whispered to himself. "Madeline might not be the one for me."

"Why didn't I see this side of her before now?" John whispered to himself. But if he was really honest about things, he knew the reason, and it was because he'd chosen to see what he wanted. Given his busy work schedule, which included twelve-hour days, and Madeline's hectic calendar, the only real time they spent together was on weekends, and most of those hours centered around his bed or hers, enjoying each other's bodies as a physical release from their long, power-packed weeks.

He realized that although they'd been seeing each other for a year, their limited contact was almost like being in a long distant relationship. And now, for reasons he couldn't explain, Madeline suddenly wanted more.

After a few more minutes of reflective thought, John finally decided to turn off the engine, head inside, and brace himself for whatever awaited him once he entered his hotel room.

When John walked into the room, he found Madeline stretched out across the bed. The South Carolina heat outside was brutal, but the air in the room was unbelievably frigid, just the way Madeline liked it.

"It's freezing in here," John said, still standing near the door, not moving a muscle.

"You're back." Madeline smiled, purring with seduction. "I adjusted the air conditioner just slightly, but I can turn it off if you like." Madeline rose from the bed and walked over to adjust the air-conditioning unit. Slowly she strutted and swayed her way back across the room, reclaiming her spot on the king-size mattress.

John noticed that Madeline's sultry waltz seemed intentional, meant to get him hot and bothered. But instead of feeling turned on he felt slightly on edge. He looked at her through new eyes, trying to determine what was real and what was an act. He'd let her seduce him more times than he now cared to admit; all because of the physical pleasure she was able to give him.

"I'm so sorry about our little spat," Madeline said. "I didn't want you to leave the room upset with me. What if you had gotten into an accident while you were out? Our last words would have been bitter ones."

John walked over to the bed and sat on the edge, opposite of where Madeline was perched. "You've never worried about things like that when we're back in New York, and the streets and roads there are much more dangerous than here in Nedine."

"Danger lurks everywhere, John."

"Yes, I guess it does."

Madeline lowered her eyes. "Do you forgive me?"

"What's done is done. Let's just try to get through what's left of this weekend."

Madeline scooted over to where John sat. "C'mon, baby," she purred again. "I said I was sorry. I know I shouldn't have overreacted. Now forgive me and don't make me beg."

"Sure, uh, let's just drop it, Madeline."

"I want us to talk about this, honey. You have to understand . . . I really wanted this trip to be perfect. When you said your parents didn't like me, well, I felt absolutely awful. I guess I took it out on you. Forgive me . . . please?"

John looked into Madeline's eyes, noting the brightness they carried. But he knew he had to be careful with her, especially after she'd shown him how she could go from sugar to venom faster than his Mustang could go from zero to sixty. And as he looked even closer, he noticed that it wasn't necessarily brightness he saw. Rather, it was a wild, almost erratic stare. He knew she hadn't been drinking, because her breath didn't smell of alcohol. *Is she doing drugs?* he wondered, quickly glancing around the room. He was going to question her, but then he thought better of it. He didn't want to chance what her answer or reaction might be. So to avoid any further drama, he acquiesced. "Okay, Madeline. I forgive you."

"I missed you while you were gone," she said wantonly, wrapping her long arms around his shoulders. "And regardless of what you think, I was worried about you while you were out."

John felt uncomfortable being so close to her. The feel of her body next to his usually excited him so much that he had a hard time controlling his sexual urges. But now, he had little interest in feeling her flesh pressed next to his. He loosened her grip, releasing himself from her embrace.

He stared at Madeline and could see that although she was pissed, she was trying her hardest to hide it. If it weren't for the vein pulsating on the side of her temple and the deep breaths he could see her taking in an effort to control her anger, he would have sworn she was as happy as a birthday girl. He watched as her eyes suddenly darted

across the room, landing on a magazine sitting on the desk. She lingered there for a brief moment before returning her stare to him. When she did, he saw what looked like a hint of sadness rimming her lids.

He didn't doubt that she probably felt a little down because he'd left her in the room by herself, and the "Southern gentleman" side of him hated to see a woman in any type of distress. The thought that he was in any way the cause of Madeline's present state made him feel bad about leaving her all alone in a strange city with no one to turn to. His compassion and guilt took over. "I didn't mean to cause you any worry, Madeline."

"I know. And I didn't mean to upset you."

"I guess we both did a good job of upsetting each other."

Madeline took a deep breath and slowly scooted her body even closer to John's. "Yes, we did. But I'm glad we're back on track, because this is supposed to be a fun weekend for us. I feel terrible about our little lovers' quarrel. I'm glad we can move beyond it."

Although John was remorseful about the way he had treated Madeline, he knew what had happened between them was more than just a simple lovers' quarrel. She'd shown him a side of herself that he was beginning to think only touched the surface of the kind of person she could be.