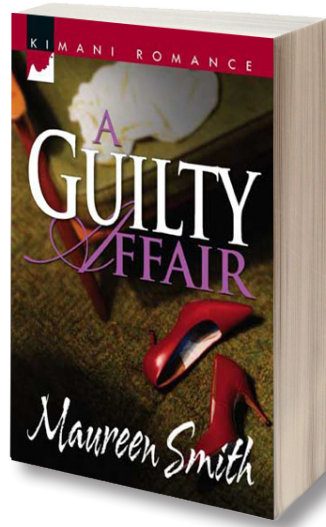


MAUREEN SMITH



AN EXCERPT FROM A GUILTY AFFAIR

Noah appeared in the doorway just as Riley was logging off the computer. He wore a thunderous scowl. “You mind telling me what that was all about?” he demanded.

Riley drew her bag slowly onto her shoulder. “I was out of line,” she admitted, not looking at him.

“Damn straight you were,” he growled.

Her eyes snapped to his face. “If you hadn’t been flirting shamelessly with that woman in the first place, I wouldn’t have felt it necessary to say anything.”

His expression turned incredulous. “How was I flirting shamelessly with her?”

“Oh, give me a break, Noah! ‘Let’s play it by ear’? How about this for a response: ‘No, thank you, Mrs. Stanton. You’re a married woman who also happens to be my client, so a date with you would be out of the question.’ Oh, and let’s not forget the way you stood at the window ogling her while she walked to her car.”

“Ogling?”

“Yes, ogling,” she snapped.

Noah fell silent for a moment, his dark eyes narrowed on hers in silent appraisal. “If I didn’t know better,” he said mildly, “I would think you were jealous, Riley.”

She gave a mirthless laugh. “Yeah, right, Noah. I’d have to actually like you to be jealous, now wouldn’t I?”

He stepped into the office, causing it to shrink even more by the sheer breadth of his wide shoulders. He gazed down at her with an unreadable expression. “You don’t like me, Riley?”

“No, that would be you who doesn’t like me!”

Something dark and dangerous flashed in his eyes. “I don’t like you?” he echoed flatly.

“That’s what I said.”

He came forward, a slow and predatory advance. “You think I don’t like you, Riley?”

Her breath snagged in her throat. The air between them was charged with a tension that was almost suffocating in its intensity. Suddenly Riley wanted to run, get away from him as fast as possible. Instead she lifted her chin and defiantly stood her ground, even as Noah stopped

directly in front of her, standing so close she could practically count the number of his thick, spiky eyelashes.

Her heart beat a wild tattoo in her chest. Her attaché case fell, unnoticed, to the floor. “Noah—”

Before she knew what was happening, he cupped her face in his big hands and slanted his mouth over hers. The first touch of his lips to hers was electrifying, scorching through her body like a live wire. She gasped, and he took her breath and gave it back to her in a searing, possessive kiss that demanded her surrender. And she gave it, wreathing her arms around his neck, helpless to do anything but surrender as every part of her body sizzled with awareness and ached with desire.

“Does this feel like I don’t like you?” he whispered huskily.