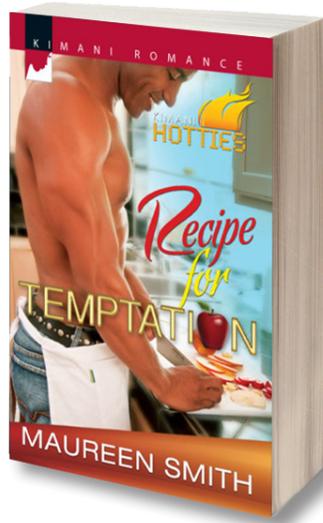


MAUREEN SMITH



AN EXCERPT FROM RECIPE FOR TEMPTATION

Sensing Reese's nervousness, Michael reached over and touched her hand, a subtle stroke that sent her pulse jumping. Their eyes met and held in the shadowy interior of the car.

"Thank you for the ride," Reese said softly.

"My pleasure. I'm glad you enjoyed your dinner tonight."

"Oh, I did. Very much." She smiled demurely. "Your company made it even better. I must have been the envy of every woman in the restaurant."

Michael smiled wryly. "I'm the one who was getting dirty looks from all the guys who'd been trying to work up the nerve to approach your table."

Reese laughed. "If that's true, I'm glad you beat them to it."

“Me, too,” he murmured, his eyes roaming appreciatively across her face.

Reese’s heart was hammering. Never before had she been so powerfully aware of a man. But this wasn’t just *any* man. This was Michael Wolf, who, for the past three years, had had a starring role in her steamiest fantasies.

But this wasn’t one of her fantasies. Tonight she didn’t have to settle for daydreaming about Michael after watching an episode of *Howlin’ Good*. Tonight she could make her dreams a reality.

So what are you waiting for?

Drawing a deep breath to summon her courage, Reese gave Michael what she hoped was her most alluring smile. “Would you like to come inside for a cup of coffee?”

His eyes glinted wickedly. They both knew what she was really offering, and it had nothing to do with the dark roast blend stashed in the kitchen cupboard.

But Michael played along. “I’d love some coffee.”

Reese waited as he got out of the car and came around to her side. “Thank you,” she said as he helped her out of the Maybach.

The night air was thick and sultry. Even the clouds drifted sluggishly across the moon.

“Is it always this hot during the summer?” Reese asked as they started up the walk.

Michael smiled lazily. “They don’t call it Hotlanta for nothing.”

“Right. Of course.”

“Being from Houston,” Michael drawled, “I would think you’d be used to this kind of heat.”

“Oh, I am.” *I’m just making inane small talk to hide the fact that I’m nervous as hell!*

“Is that your friend’s car?” Michael asked as they passed a silver Lexus parked in the driveway.

“No, her car’s in the garage,” Reese replied. “That’s mine. I took a cab to the restaurant tonight.”

“Hoping you’d meet me and talk me into giving you a ride home?” Michael teased.

She laughed. “Not quite.”

Once they were inside the house, she set her handbag on the console table and turned on the small lamp. The soft amber glow spilled through the foyer and into the living room.

“Layla will be sorry she missed you,” Reese told Michael. “She’s eaten at your restaurant several times, but she’s never had the pleasure of meeting you.”

“How long will she be gone?” Michael asked.

“Two months.”

“So we’ve got the place to ourselves...all night long.”

Reese felt a quiver of anticipation at his words. Holding his gaze, she murmured, “All night long.”

That was all the invitation Michael needed.