

# MAUREEN SMITH



## AN EXCERPT FROM **TOUCH OF HEAVEN**

If Raina thought she'd be able to escape from the restaurant without having to deal with Warrick Mayne, she soon discovered otherwise.

She was standing in the foyer waiting for Bradford to retrieve his car from the parking garage when a deep, rumbling voice drawled, "How was dinner?"

Raina spun around, startled to find Warrick directly behind her. He stood so close she could smell him, soap mingled with the subtle fragrance of a very expensive cologne. So close that she could feel his heat and the masculine energy that surrounded him like a crackling force field, electrifying her senses. Blindsiding her.

She took a hasty step backward, her face flushing when those sensuous lips twitched. She started to tell him it was rude to invade other people's personal spaces, but she didn't want to sound uptight, nor did she want to give him the satisfaction of knowing he'd rattled her. Because he had, damn him.

“Dinner was fine,” she said curtly.

A faintly mocking smile curved his mouth. “Yeah, I could tell.”

Bristling, Raina glared up at him. “What’s that supposed to mean? Were you spying on me or something?”

“Maybe.”

Raina didn’t know how to respond to that. Really, how could she respond? “Where’s your date?” she asked instead.

“In the ladies room. Yours?”

“He went to get the car.”

Warrick raised one thick black brow, an amused gleam in his eyes. “Too cheap to pay for valet parking?”

“No!” Raina said vehemently, incensed because the same thought had occurred to her. Especially in light of what had happened a few minutes ago. When the bill arrived, Bradford had suggested offhandedly that he and Raina split the tab. She’d been too stunned to protest, nodding mutely and reaching for her purse. She’d have to process her feelings later, after the shock wore off.

And speaking of Bradford, she thought, what on earth was taking him so long?

“How long have you been dating that pretty boy?”

Raina was so startled by the question that it took her a moment to recover and respond. “None of your damn business,” she snapped.

Warrick chuckled softly, and Raina realized that he was deliberately baiting her, trying to get a rise out of her. And she was playing right into his hands.

Deciding to fight fire with fire, she made an exaggerated show of glancing around the elegant foyer and saying sweetly, “Gee, I wonder what’s taking Deniece so long? Maybe you should go check up on her. You know, to make sure she’s not bent over a toilet puking up that enormous salad she had for dinner.”

Warrick inclined his head, his eyes glinting with amusement and a trace of grudging respect. “Touché.”

Raina felt a perverse twinge of satisfaction.

It didn’t last long.

“I find it interesting,” Warrick said very casually, “that you noticed what my date was eating from all the way across the room. Were you spying on us or something?”

Raina blinked, heat crawling up her neck and spreading across her cheeks.

Warrick’s mouth curved in a slow, triumphant grin.

Raina pivoted abruptly and walked to the opposite end of the foyer, looking out the window at the circular driveway bustling with the arrival and departure of luxury vehicles. Well-dressed men and women swept through the doors of the restaurant and were ceremoniously ushered to the dining room by the maître d’.

Where the hell was Bradford?

Raina stiffened as Warrick came up beside her at the window. What did the infuriating man want?

“I have to say, Raina,” he murmured, his deep, dark voice brushing across her skin like a whispered caress, “you’ve really come into your own. I can’t get over how beautiful you look.”

Raina’s stomach bottomed out.

She turned her head and found Warrick staring down at her, his hooded dark eyes roaming across her face in a way that did dangerous things to her pulse. There was a time she would have given anything to have him look at her the way he was looking at her now, to hear him say the things he was saying to her now. But it had never happened, and over time she’d been forced to relinquish the fantasy to hard, cold reality. And the reality was that Warrick Mayne despised her and blamed her for his sister’s downfall. And now he wanted to punish her by putting her out of business.

She must never, ever forget that. If she let down her guard even for one second, this man could—and would—destroy her.