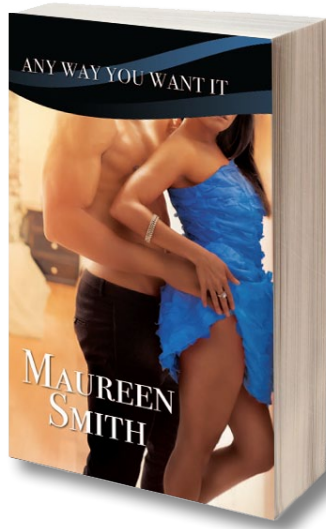


MAUREEN SMITH



AN EXCERPT FROM *ANY WAY YOU WANT IT*

Excerpt from Chapter One

Zandra Kennedy reclined on a chaise lounge along a stretch of white sand beach sheltered by swaying palms. She'd gone out there to relax with a fruity cocktail and catch up on her summer reading. But her Mai Tai sat untouched, her novel completely forgotten.

She'd found something better to stimulate her imagination.

And she wasn't alone, judging by the riveted gazes of several other women lounging on the beach.

From behind a pair of dark sunglasses, Zandra watched as Remington Brand swam toward the shore, his strong limbs slicing cleanly through the shimmering turquoise waters. Though he'd been discharged from the navy three years ago, the rigorous training regimen he'd undergone as a SEAL had given him a body to rival any classic Grecian statue.

As Zandra watched, pulse thudding, his head broke the surface of the water. And then came the rest of him, rising slowly from the waves like some mythical sea god. Massive shoulders, abs ripped with muscle, powerful thighs and sculpted calves.

His body was, indeed, a work of art. A Rembrandt. So that's what Zandra called him. Privately, of course. She'd never give Remy Brand the satisfaction of thinking he was the hottest guy she'd ever met.

Which he was. Hands down.

He smoothed water off his face, oblivious to the predatory stares of every female on the beach, many of whom would fantasize about him when they made love to their partners tonight. Their hungry eyes followed him as he sauntered across the sugary sand, brown skin glistening in the tropical sun, testosterone seeping from every pore.

Zandra realized she was gawking and quickly dropped her gaze.

Moments later Remy reached the palm-thatched hut where she lay in the shade, pretending to be absorbed in her book.

"Man, that water feels good." The deep, smoky timbre of his voice made Zandra shiver as her nipples hardened. "You don't know what you're missing, Z."

Oh, but she did. Every time she looked at him, she knew exactly what she was missing. Which was why she tried not to look at him very often. But it was hard not to, considering how ridiculously gorgeous he was. With sharp cheekbones, a square jaw and chin, and dark, electrifying eyes shaded by thick black brows, his face was perfect for a military recruitment poster. But it was his lush, sensual lips framed by a trim goatee that drove a woman's thoughts straight to cunnilingus. The kind of back-arching, thigh-shaking, toe-curling cunnilingus that enslaved you for life.

And therein lay the problem.

Zandra and Remy had known each other for twenty-five years, and for most of that time, she'd never seen him as more than just a friend. But something had changed over the past several months, and now she couldn't be anywhere near Remy without wanting to do all sorts of raunchy things to him. She'd tried to keep her distance from him, but he wasn't cooperating. He'd started showing up unannounced at her office to commandeer her into having lunch with him. Three weeks ago, he'd invited himself to a small dinner party she was hosting for some professional associates. He'd claimed that he was interested in networking, but he'd spent most of the night watching Zandra as she mingled with her guests.

At the end of the evening, one of her friends had pulled her aside and gushed, "You are so damn lucky! I'd forfeit my inheritance to have a gorgeous hunk like that completely under my spell!"

Zandra had laughed at the absurdity of the remark. Remy Brand had never fallen under any woman's spell. When it came to matters of seduction, he was the sorcerer.

And she'd do well to remember that while she was stuck on an island with him for two more days.

Grabbing a towel from the lounge chair beside hers, Remy rubbed his face and arms. "Why don't you put that book down and go for a swim?" he suggested.

"I will. Later." Unable to resist, Zandra peeked over the top of her novel to watch as lucky rivulets of water trickled down his chest, inching over the hard, sinewy muscles before disappearing into his dark swim trunks. The wet material clung to his powerful thighs, drawing her gaze unerringly to the thick bulge at his groin.

Gulping hard, she jerked her gaze back to her book, trying to ignore her throbbing breasts and pulsing clit. No such luck.

Remy finished drying himself off, then stretched out on the lounge chair next to hers with his hands clasped behind his head. She felt him studying her, felt the heat of his eyes slowly roaming down her bare legs. She wished the coverup she wore was longer, though something told her Remy's scorching gaze would make her feel naked even in an Eskimo suit.

"It must not be very good," he drawled.

"What?"

"Your book. Must be a snoozer."

Zandra frowned. "What makes you say that?"

"You're practically on the same page you were on when I left you over an hour ago."

Her face flushed. "How do you know that?"

Remy chuckled. "I noticed."

Of course he had. He'd always been sharply observant, a trait that had served him well as a SEAL commando. So well, in fact, that his Teammates had often teased him about having eyes in the back of his head. Nothing escaped his detection.

Unnerved by the thought—and annoyed with herself for not owning a damn ereader—Zandra shifted uncomfortably on her chair. "The book's great. I'm just reading slow, savoring every word."

“Uh-huh.” Remy wore a small, lazy smile that made her wonder whether he’d caught her watching him while he swam.

“I’ve also been enjoying the scenery,” she hastened to add.

His smile deepened, but all he said was, “It is beautiful.”

For a moment they gazed across the shimmering expanse of the Caribbean Sea, which was rimmed by lush, palm-fringed bays and towering emerald mountains. A distant sailboat drifted lazily across the horizon, and bright sunlight glinted off the frothy waves lapping the shore. To their right, perched on a cliff overlooking the water, was the luxury resort where Zandra and Remy were staying, along with several members of his family.

“Man, it feels like paradise out here,” Remy murmured.

“Mmm,” Zandra agreed, thinking of how she’d had to be coerced into coming on the trip.

Three weeks ago she’d been a bridesmaid for her friend, Lena, who’d married Remy’s twin brother, Roderick. The couple had surprised everyone by inviting their families to join them in St. Lucia at the end of their Caribbean honeymoon. The invitation had included Zandra, who’d been excited at the prospect of spending five relaxing days on a gorgeous tropical island. That is, until she realized that she would be in close quarters with Remy—the very thing she’d been trying to avoid.

She’d regretfully told Lena and Roderick that she couldn’t make it, blaming her busy workload. But Roderick, like his twin, had never learned to take no for an answer. He’d badgered Zandra for days, reminding her that she’d always accompanied his family on vacations when they were growing up. Though she’d tried to resist, he’d made her nostalgic for those boisterously chaotic road trips aboard the

Brands' Winnebago. When he sensed her resolve weakening, Roderick had gone for the kill by enlisting his grandmother's help, because he knew that Zandra could never refuse the beloved family matriarch.

So there she was lounging on a sun-drenched beach beside a man who'd gone from being her childhood playmate to the star of her most illicitly erotic fantasies.