

# Chapter One

Atlanta, Georgia – Spring 2020

Dr. Madison Rutherford jiggled her foot impatiently and tried not to breathe down Dr. Dean Chamber's neck as he read. Instead she utilized the welcome distraction of the lab to help her rein in the impulse to grab her colleague by the shoulders and urge him to hurry. It was a quiet, well organized space, filled with all of the usual accoutrements. Bunsen burners, test tubes and other such traditional items sat alongside state of the art features such as a sleep lab, the latest computers and their software.

“Well?” she finally inquired, unable to help herself and quite unequipped to endure another moment of suspense. Dean's only response was a raised hand to say, ‘give me a moment’. Utterly beside herself, Madison could no longer contain her impatience. “Don't play with me, Dean. What do you think?”

He was 6 feet tall, 200 lbs with a well-muscled build which clearly stated he spent time in the gym as well as the lab. He had dark hair that he was always running his fingers through while working and a perfect, golden skin tone. Madison found him incredibly sexy, not just because of his looks but because one could sense that he was powerful, physically and mentally. In short, he was gorgeous.

Piercing green eyes looked directly at her for a long moment, his solemn expression belying the joy which dawned in those same eyes. “I think,” he began contemplatively, “I think with this drug, sleep will largely be a thing of the past. I think it bloody well works!” Letting his irrepressible grin materialize, he grabbed Madison, picked her up and spun her around. Caught up in the moment, he ended by giving her a very brief but enthusiastic kiss.

Her lips burned where they touched his and that heat shot straight through her, sending a delicious shiver down her spine. Was it her imagination or did he quiver in response? Before she could wonder further, too soon, all too soon, he pulled away, leaving her strangely bereft. Startled as much by the gesture as by her own rapid fire response to a mere brush of lips, she stood gazing at him for a moment while her world tilted back onto its accustomed axis. He had never so much as touched her hand until now and it had seemed to her that her desire would forever remain unrequited, nor had that belief truly changed. It was just a kiss after all, an obviously impulsive gesture made in the exuberance of the moment. Yet at least she would have this one memory to look back on. All this swept through her in the instant before she looked up into his eyes, eyes gone sharp and hot with speculation and an entirely new awareness. For one blissful moment she allowed herself to be captivated, all but mesmerized, then, corralling her wayward wits into order and giving herself a stern mental shake, she drew back a step. After clearing her parched throat, she began, "Well, we should tell Baxter."

For one fraught instant, she thought he might well refuse but he shut his mouth on what he had been about to say and allowed her to lead him from the room.

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Baxter studied the research in front of him, a slight frown marring his handsome features. After several minutes, some of the longest of Dean's life thus far, he deigned to look up. "And these results can be duplicated?"

"They can and have been," Dean answered promptly.

Baxter set the papers aside. "In that case, congratulations. You two have just made us all rich."

Madison suppressed a very un-scientist like squeal with difficulty but could do nothing

about the grin covering her features. When her hand reached for his, Dean let his envelope hers.

Ever practical where his career was concerned, he managed to hold his elation at bay long enough to ask, “What’s the next step then?”

“I begin marketing this drug and touting its attributes to the best of the pharmaceutical companies available.”

“And when will the public be able to receive this wonder we’ve created? Will it be ready for distribution by the first of the year?”

Baxter shook his head. “Nope. No more details. You two leave everything to me. After three years hard effort, you are going to be rich. Go. Celebrate. Take the rest of the day off. Hell, take the rest of the week. I insist.” He spoke over Baxter’s protests but eventually, Dean found himself summarily kicked out of the office leaving him alone in the hallway with Madison.

“Oh my gosh, I think Baxter’s right. We’re going to be rich!” This was said on an excited squeal Madison simply could not contain any longer.

“Damn right we are,” Dean agreed, with a cocky grin the size of Texas.

Remembering herself and drawing the shreds of her dignity about her, she continued, “What’s more important is that we have created a drug that will make this world a better place. It’s going to provide endless opportunity for creativity, study, emotional development and who knows what else.” Her prim tone melted into a warm enthusiasm of its own volition.

“Uh-huh. Let’s celebrate.”

“What?”

“You are absolutely right, we have done the world a great service but it was a lot of hard work. If anyone deserves a break, it’s us. So, let’s do what the man said, let’s celebrate,” he repeated. “Are you up for it?”

For an instant, Madison found herself caught up in his eyes and could only admit, at least to herself, that she was up for anything so long as it involved Dean. “Alright,” she acquiesced.

“Good. I’ll pick you up at your place at nine,” he told her and started down the nearest corridor.

“Wait.” Laughing, breathless and just a little panicked, she tugged at his arm. “Where we are going?”

“The Ace of Clubs. So dress the part, okay?”

Before she could respond, he was gone.

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Standing in the open doorway, it took every bit of Dean’s considerable self control not to gape. When he had said look the part, she had taken him at his word. Attired in a black dress of some soft, satiny, shimmery material which clung to every curve and made the most of her petite figure, she looked amazing. Blue eyes accented by smoky grey eyeliner completed the stunning picture. He said as much as he stepped inside. “Wow. You look absolutely exquisite.”

She grimaced. “You don’t have to sound so surprised.”

Offering her an apologetic grin, he hastened to explain. “I’m just not used to it that’s all. You truly look fabulous. Except…” Moving close to her, he reached for her dark hair, done up in an elegant but slightly severe knot. He pulled it down and running his hands through the raw silk of her hair, he arranged it artfully then tilted his head to admire the effect. “There. Perfect.” Charmed by the blush on her cheeks and even more so by her flustered expression, he was beyond captivated.

“Uhhh,” she stammered, “maybe we should go.”

For one fraught second he considered suggesting staying in but dismissed the notion. Too

soon for that, he reasoned. Besides, they had partying to do.

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As they entered the crowded bar, Madison wondered briefly if letting her partner choose the venue for their impromptu celebration had been a good idea. Normally she avoided places like the Ace of Clubs. Too much noise, choking smoke, and an excess of intoxicated people made the experience unpleasant to her. Generally, it just wasn't her idea of fun but she sighed inwardly and decided to make an exception.

Dean spied a small high-top table and led her toward it. She sank onto the padded stool gratefully. To her surprise, her companion did not join her but instead leaned into her and spoke over the music.

“Let me get you a drink. What would you like?”

Distracted by his nearness and the enticing smell of cologne and healthy male, she blinked and ordered herself to pay attention. “Oh, I'll have a soda please.”

The look he gave her was one of amused exasperation. “Madison, you're not driving; we've basically won the lottery. Have a drink. Please.”

She bit her lip as a strong wave of temptation rolled over her not for a drink but for him. “Okay, one drink,” she relented.

With a grin, he turned to the bar. “Great. Then we'll dance.”

Pure panic shot through her. “Wait. What? I don't dance ...” she began but he was already halfway to the bar.

Indignant, nervous and trying not to be, she waited for him to return with their beverages.

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