

Chapter One

Addison St. Claire hurried through the restaurant, hating that she was late. Punctuality wasn't usually a problem for her, but she'd been so busy arguing with one of her high-maintenance clients that she'd completely lost track of time.

If she could just convince Sarah Roberts to lower her standards a little, Addison was sure the woman would find happiness. But for Sarah, the perfect man seemed to equal dollar signs, so they'd been butting heads constantly over the choices in dates she'd made.

But that was neither here nor there. For the first time in what felt like months, she had a lunch appointment that was strictly pleasure and had nothing to do with interviewing potential clients of Connected at the Lips.

She nodded at the maitre d' and moved deeper into the restaurant. The large windows overlooking the street let in plenty of sunlight and the white and beige coloring only opened the small space up further. Even in a place filled with beautiful women and prominent New Yorkers, there was no mistaking Regan Wakefield. She was in a league all her own.

Regan smiled as she took the seat across the table. She looked as put-together as usual, her dark hair done up on an effortless professional style and her makeup without a single smudge. Happiness looked good on her. "Busy putting out fires?"

"As usual." Addison let out a pent up breath she hadn't been aware she was holding. Of course Regan would understand her being late. The woman defined workaholic—or at least she had until she met her husband and had her twin girls. Speaking of... "How are things in paradise?"

"Oh, you know, the usual—the man is constantly rearranging our place just to screw with me, and he's nearly as busy as I am these days. And the girls are mobile. Every time I turn my

back, Lizzie is climbing something and Jackie is finger-painting with her lunch.” A dreamy look came into her dark eyes, one Addison recognized all too well. “But it’s more than worth it, especially when Brock goes and does something sweet that sweeps me off my feet all over again. I never knew dads could be so damn sexy.”

“Young love.”

“Please. I’m three months younger than you.” Regan leaned forward and studied her.

“You’ve got circles the size of Utah under your eyes. What’s up with that?”

Addison shifted and immediately held herself still. She’d known Regan would pick up on everything she didn’t want to say. The woman was her very own Sherlock Holmes when it came to reading people. “Just working a lot.”

“And not taking care of yourself.” She smiled at the waitress as she took their drink order, and then turned that laser look back on Addison the moment the woman was gone. “You need a vacation.”

“Probably.” But who would she go with? Even if she was willing to leave her clients in the care of her team, the thought of traveling alone didn’t do a single thing for her. If anything, it only compounded the loneliness that had seemed to get worse over time.

It used to be that helping other people find love was enough to fulfill her. Watching those first feelings evolve, listening to her clients tell her how excited they were about their dates with each other, helping them get to a point where they moved on without her assistance... It was enough to keep her warm at night.

Now it only seemed to remind her of what she’d lost.

Regan sipped her water. “I have the perfect solution.”

She’d been pleasantly surprised when her friend called her up out of the blue. Now she

wasn't so sure. "This isn't an intervention, is it?"

"Hardly." She laughed. "I happen to know a man in desperate need of a matchmaker, and you're the best there is."

Pleasure at the compliment wasn't nearly enough to banish her suspicion. "Why can't he call me himself?"

"Probably because he has no idea how in need he is."

She saw where this was going and shook her head. "I'm not going to ambush some poor guy because you've taken it into your head that he needs a wife."

"One, this so-called poor guy is my brother-in-law, so I'm entitled to meddle. Two, he's been dating—or failing to date—on his own for years now." She gave a wicked grin. "And, three, when have you ever known me to be wrong?"

That was the problem. Regan never was. Not when it came to people. As a headhunter, she could get a good read on someone within two minutes of meeting them—usually less. That didn't mean Addison had to take the job, though. She nibbled on a breadstick, considering. What could a lunch hurt? She'd get a read on the man and decide if she wanted to take him on. After all Regan had done to help her out over the years, it was the least she could do. "I have a few free days next week. I could set up a consult."

"That's the thing. He's in Tennessee."

"*What?*" It was official. Her friend had gone round the bend. It was the only explanation for thinking Addison would do this.

"Look at it this way—you need a vacation. The South is nice this time of year and a hell of a lot warmer than New York. Just meet Caine. If it's a no-go, then you still have a few days to hang out and take in the *scenery*." The way she said the last word left nothing to the imagination.

Regan seemed to take it almost personally that Addison hadn't been with anyone in years. She didn't understand that after having such a deep and amazing connection with Aiden, sex with anyone else was lukewarm at best.

And Addison *had* tried. It just wasn't in the cards for her.

But she knew a losing battle when she saw one. Plus, Regan was right—as usual. She couldn't remember the last time she'd slept through the night, and work just didn't hold the attraction it used to.

Maybe some time off would be exactly what she needed...

She took a drink of her water. “One meeting. If I don't like what I see or he's too difficult, then I'm off the hook.”

Regan's smile sent a trickle of unease through her. “Oh, sweetie, I can almost guarantee you'll be taking this one on.”