

Engaged to Deception

By La'Nique Stephens

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You're never too old to refer to your Mother as Mommy.
This book is for her! Whether it's my first novel or my last,
my work is always dedicated to my biggest fan.

Love you, Mommy!

Acknowledgments

This part always drives me crazy. There are always a dozen people in your ear saying you should thank them. Many can give pretty good reasons for wanting a shout out; others just want to see their name printed. When I sit to think about it, the “Thank You” list actually grows smaller. I could write an unnecessary thank you to cousins and aunts who might have been around in the past. But I’ve learned to ignore the noise of other people. I have to write for myself and praise those who truly matter. I’m not going to apologize for leaving a name out. As long as I’m satisfied with my writing, no one else’s opinion matters.

Life could not exist without the Creator of All. He is the first person I will always thank. There were many hard times in my life. Each time I thought I couldn’t move on. But waiting patiently and having faith has gotten me through those moments. I couldn’t be happier with my life right now. I thank Him for that.

My mom is my rock and mirror. I’ve never admitted it, but I am like her in so many ways. Opinionated and a bit stubborn. Loud at the wrong moments. She doesn’t think so, but we’re pretty bad dancers. And our laugh. Don’t get me started on that *Lion King* chuckle. My mom – and my sister – is the most important person in my life. Instead of writing three pages thanking the world for little things, my acknowledgment is entirely for my mother. The single mother of two has done anything and everything for her daughters.

As a teenager, I've never really thanked my mom. Out of anger, I may have blamed her for a million things. She didn't deserve that. I've hit low moments in my life. Her mix of tough love and nurturing has definitely pushed me along. She's crazy and blunt. We bump heads more than ten times a day, but we always find ways to forgive. Thank you and I love you.

Amber. What can be said about my tall baby sister? There has always been a silent competition between us. One succeeds then the other fails. It's the ultimate sibling rivalry. We fight – as much of our mom hates it – but I honestly wouldn't know how to talk to you without arguing. At the end of the day, we always find a way back to each other. Love you crazy girl.

A general thank you to my family: They are always honest with me; never a fake one in the bunch. You are all important to me in your own special ways. I've made it so far in life because of all your support. Each one of you has given me inspiration and that is where I got my creativity. All your love is what gave me the will to write it down and share it with the world.

Best Wishes,

La'Nique Stephens!

Prologue

She moved gracefully to the prosecution table and took her seat. The eyes of Doctor Mathew Knight had been locked on her since she walked into the courtroom. But Remedy kept a grin on her face. Her eyes were focused on the judge's stand. She did not even know the verdict, and yet she was still proud of herself. There was a slight chance the jury could rule in his favor. Even if they did, Remedy was glad she went on with the fight.

The jury entered the room as everyone was put to silence.

“All rise; the honorable Judge Hilary P. Moore presiding.” The bailiff spoke, and everyone rose to their feet.

Judge P. Moore came out of her chambers and quickly took her seat high on the podium. “You may be seated. Jury, have you come to a verdict?”

An elderly man stood and put on a pair of reading glasses. Clearing his throat, the older man announced, “We have your honor.”

“Will the defense please rise.” At the judge's command, Doctor Knight and his two lawyers rose to their feet.

Remedy looked over at Mathew. His hands did not shake like she thought they would. He was staring death straight in the face with a smile. She shook her head and crossed her fingers.

Judge P. Moore turned back to the jury. “Who say you?”

“On the account of Rape in the First Degree we, the jury, find the defendant, Doctor Mathew Knight...” He paused as if for dramatic effect. “Guilty!”

Remedy Washington held on to her excitement as the jury member finished reading off his piece of paper.

“On the account of Aggravated Assault we, the jury, find Doctor Mathew Knight... Guilty! On the account of Attempted Murder we, the jury, find Doctor Mathew Knight... Guilty!”

The courtroom roared with commotion as the news set in for everyone. The judge pounded her gavel to silence the courtroom. Mathew leaned in to speak to his lawyer as two guards came to place handcuffs on the guilty man.

Remedy wanted to quickly get away from the courthouse. The media was waiting outside to attack with questions. She did not want to be blinded by flashing cameras. Making her way around the table, she was stopped when the guards and Mathew stopped in front of her.

“I still love you.” He said. “And I’m not going to let you go that easy.”

“It looks like you have to.” As the words flowed from her mouth, a giant weight lifted from her shoulders. “I’m not burning in hell with you.”

The guards took Mathew through a back door and led him to a waiting police car.

He was finally going to be out of her life. Was it really that simple? All she had to do was tell someone else what he did to her. She waited so long for nothing. Mathew could have been a distant memory a long time ago. Once the shock wore off she disappeared into the crowd to leave the room.

“Are you comfortable?” Only the bright shade of red on her lips was visible through the shadows. Her face remained concealed by the darkness. She held the phone close to her ear and mouth, letting her soft voice flow into the retro handset. Even as she whispered, he could see her moving lips through the bullet proof glass dividing them.

“As comfortable as a man can be in prison.” Mathew declared

“I wish I could help you,” Bringing her folded legs into the light, her skirt hitched up her thighs a few centimeters. “But my heart belongs to someone else.”

“Does he feel that same way?”

“He will.” Her red lips curled up.

“Why are you here?”

“I want to help you get what you want.”

“And in return...”

“I get what I want. That’s all that matters.”

“How do you plan on doing all of this?”

“Why does any of that matter to you?”

Mathew frown as his eyes went narrow. “Do not hurt her.”

“Me? I would never hurt your beloved Remedy.” Her hand came into the light as she swore. “I understand only you can hit her.”

“Your mouth is going to get you in trouble one day.”

“So I’ve been told.” Her tongue ran over her lips. “Jeremy cannot be faithful. It’s just who he is. I only intend to help Remedy see that.”

Mathew chuckled. “Not to offend you, but don’t you think he knows all of your tricks?”

“Mine. Of course.” Leaning in closer to rest her elbows on the desk, Nina let the light touch her entire face. “But my sister will be a pleasant surprise for him. He simply cannot resist a fresh, young body.”

“Can any of us?” Mathew’s fingers clenched the phone tighter. It’s had only been two days, but he urged to touch a woman. “You’re okay with you sister seducing him?”

“We have an understanding. As long as things go no further than sex, everything will be fine.” Nina grinned. “Affairs only become messy when feelings are involved.”

Summer vacation came and went with too many family visits to count. Remedy had no idea how many sisters her fiancé actually had. Half of them did not like her while the others warmly welcomed her to the family. Jeremy’s mother even took Remedy

out on several occasions. The couple hadn't even said their vows yet, but everyone was asking about grandchildren.

Classes are starting back up and she was definitely stepping into her classes with a new attitude. Without Doctor Knight hovering over her shoulders, Remedy felt safe out in public. She was able to transfer without consequences. She no longer felt eyes watching her every move. Nor did she hear creepy sounds coming from closets in her new apartment. Her actions were limitless, and she took full advantage of the newly restored freedom.

Stepping off the elevator, Remedy flipped through the mail in her hands. The beeping phone in her purse grabbed her attention. She left the letters alone to search through the bag for the device and her keys. Remedy stood in front of her door pulling the two items out her purse. Sliding the key in its lock with one hand, Remedy punched in the pass code to her voicemail with the other.

“You have one unheard voice message.” She mocked the robotic voice speaking to her through the phone. “First unheard voice message.”

Remedy crossed the threshold and tossed her keys on the coffee table. She barely heard the news as she went back to the mail in her hand. Piece by piece, the envelopes fell to the coffee table as she read her fiancé's name. The pile in her hand shrunk until only one note remained. There was no envelope nor was there any information from a sender. Remedy deleted the first message on her phone and hardly listened to the second one.

She undid the unnecessary folds of paper. She took notice of the familiar handwriting. Her hands started to shake as her palms became sweaty. Her shoulders dropped, letting go of the phone. The device fell to the ground as her hands released the note.

This was not over. It was far from it.

To Whom It May Concern:

Congratulation on your new engagement!

Let his love keep you safe for as long as it can

because I am coming back for you.

Never will I rest until you are resting beside me.

You will be mine; till death do us part.

Love Mathew Knight!

Chapter One

Sensual...peaceful...and she was standing nearly naked in the kitchen. It was the perfect start for a Monday. The music echoed from the surround sound speakers and filled the apartment. Each wall vibrated with the noise. It was an annoyance to the neighbor yet soothing to her ears. Remedy let the calming music control her body. The melody sank into her flesh and awakened her soul. The young woman lowered her eyelashes until each gracefully rested on top of her cheeks. Her mind blocked out the textbook she held in her hands. Steady moving hips swayed to the rhythmic sounds filling the apartment. Rising up on her nude toes Remedy glided over the cold kitchen tiles. Dressed in her fiancé's *Eagles*' jersey, her bare flesh tingled at the breeze whipping under the fabric.

Distractions appeared left and right. She couldn't refuse the chance to give each obstacle her attention – if simply for a brief second. An empty pan rested on the stove – gradually becoming warmer – waiting to prepare her fiancé's breakfast. Remedy opened her eyes to scan over highlighted passages in her medical textbook. Her brain drummed against her skull as she reread the same line. The young woman wanted every word of her textbook glued into her memory. The enchanting music filling her ears was all Remedy needed to stop and just feel the beat. Remedy soon abandoned her goal of trying to multitask. The music was too good to ignore. She let go of everything, and her body spun through the

space. Remedy needed this little break; even if it was just to dance barefoot in her kitchen.

She was in the midst of two big countdowns. The two major events to change her life for the better: college graduation and her wedding. *Hopefully!* The stress of obtaining a doctorate made Remedy want to abandon college. She thought being a full time student might help the process go faster; *it did not*. There were days when she questioned if she could handle two more years of studying and exams. Part of her wanted to ignore the degree altogether. She had her Bachelor's of Science in Nursing. Sadly, it was not enough. Life as an RN could be fun, but it wasn't her desired profession. With her wedding around the corner, all the pressure was finally setting in. She wished she could focus on one event at a time. Maybe then everything could peacefully fit together.

The last song on the CD came to an end; the apartment went silent. Her nose tingled as a foul stench invaded her nose. Her brown peepers fluttered open to a dark cloud of smoke. The smoldering puff made her eyes well up. Fresh breath left her lungs and became smothered by the intense smoke. Her attention rushed back to the stove and the empty skillet.

“Damn!” She shouted pushing the frying pan off the burner and into the sink.

The fire alarm echoed through the apartment when Remedy's fiancé pulled back the shower curtain. She resembled a

chicken without its head when she ran past the open bathroom. Remedy stopped to admire the naked man when his bare feet touched the bathmat outside the shower. Her flailing arms fanned the space over her head as she blew a kiss to her wet fiancé.

“Everything is fine.” Frantically waving her textbook in the air, Remedy did her best to clean the apartment of dark smoke. “I’m just cooking breakfast.”

Jeremy let the drops of water roll off his body and onto the mat. “Do you need help?”

The alarm began to overpower their conversation.

“No. I can handle it.” Remedy pulled her eyes off her fiancé and turned to finish her walk down the hall.

Behind her, Jeremy strolled out the bathroom. A flood of smoke rushed to his face. Jeremy stepped back into the bathroom to save his eyes from the fog. Retrieving his towel off of the rack, Jeremy covered his mouth and nose with the fabric.

“Are you sure you do not need help?”

“You just have to give it a minute.”

The smoke detector was mounted on the wall – above the kitchen cabinets. The young woman struggled to reach and turn it off. The jersey covering her curvy physique inched up her thighs as her extended arm reached for the detector on the wall. Remedy glanced over her shoulder when she heard Jeremy chuckle.

“Are you laughing at me?”

Jeremy shook his head before walking over to open the two windows in the living room. The smoke rapidly faded as the chilled November air invaded the apartment. The loud siren, however, continued echoing through the apartment. He leisurely walked up behind her. She turned around and wrapped her arms around his neck. Remedy's entire body trembled when his thick arms slithered around her waist.

"Are you going to turn that off?" His raspy tone resembled a whisper when his words touched her ears.

"I can't reach it." Her lower lip pouted out.

Jeremy's hands roamed underneath the jersey to find her hips. Remedy was lifted off her feet until her butt touched on the rim of the sink. Stepping between her spread legs, Jeremy reached up over her head to turn off the smoke detector.

Remedy's lips touched his wet chest. "I always feel short around you."

"You feel short?" Jeremy brought his hands to her legs. "You are short."

"No. I'm average height." Her ankles locked together behind his back. "You are just freakishly tall."

Jeremy kissed her forehead. "What you burning?"

"It was only the frying pan. The eggs didn't make it in."

"Let me take you out to breakfast."

“I have class...just like I do every day.” She shook her head. “I feel like we’re repeating the same conversation every morning?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “You are too busy.”

“I’m a grad student. That happens.”

“You should empty your schedule and spend the day with me.”

“After April you can lock me in the house forever.”

Remedy joked referring to the date of their wedding.

“I’m going to hold you to that.”

She sighed. “You have your degree. Why can’t I get mine?”

Remedy let her legs fall to the ground. She could feel the building tension from the tiresome topic.

“You will get it. But you need to take a break every once in awhile.”

The house phone rang.

Remedy grabbed her books before walking toward their bedroom. She knew the mention of her degree drove Jeremy crazy. Remedy simply could not understand what the big issue was. The two met in undergrad school. Remedy hoped he’d identify with her struggle to graduate. After all, Jeremy was a year ahead with his law school courses when Remedy began medical school. Every day Remedy questioned this new change of heart Jeremy had toward her degree.

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