

Prologue

Charlene Noble glared at the man on the other side of the mahogany desk. Outside the window behind him was an expanse of sky. Blue turned to orange and pink as the sun set in a summer south Louisiana sky. The offices of Gulfco, Inc. were designed to impress, even intimidate. Two things John Mandeville, influential in Louisiana politics, was good at doing. He'd taken over the family business started by his great-grandfather and made his old money family even richer. His gaze was steady, his bearing straight as he faced his former lover. At the moment Charlene was neither impressed nor intimidated. Her copper colored eyes narrowed as she stared him down.

"It's the least you can do for your daughter!" she said.

"It's been four years since I've seen you and you come in swinging. There's nobody else like you, Charlie." His lips curved up in a slightly flirtatious smile.

"Cut the crap, John. I'm serious."

"I can't just tell the board who to hire."

Charlene wore a tight smile. "Bull! You run this town the same way your father did."

"I'm just part of the advisory council," John said mildly.

Charlene leaned forward. "John Mandeville, you haven't done nearly enough for Andrea."

"I did what I could given the circumstances," he said in a taut voice. John clenched one hand into a fist.

"What circumstances? The fact that you didn't have the guts to stand up to your mommy and daddy?" Charlene tossed back.

John blew out a gust of air. "Oh hell, here we go again."

"I'm not going to dredge up ancient history so relax."

John's dark brows came together. "What kind of life would we have had thirty years ago, Charlene? An interracial couple in south Louisiana with no money. None. My father would have seen to that."

"Heaven forbid you would have had to get a job. Too high a price to be with the girl you claimed you

loved more than life." Charlene pressed her lips together

John's face flushed pink. When he spoke his voice was low and husky. "It was more complicated than that and you know it. Sometimes... I wish we could just go back."

Charlene stared into John's eyes without flinching. "But we can't."

"No. We can't," John said, regret making his voice deeper. "So, now what?"

"The clinic needs a new director," Charlene answered firmly.

"What makes you think—"

Charlene waved a hand, her crimson fingernails polished to perfection. "I have my sources. I know Bob Billings the current director accepted a position in Baton Rouge."

John gave a grunt of exasperation. He did not bother to deny what she obviously knew. "The bum."

"Andrea has the qualifications. She's been the assistant director of a county clinic in Chicago for the past year."

"Really?" John rubbed his chin.

"You've gone through two directors in the last four years, three now," Charlene said.

"Each one was worst the one before." John frowned.

"Andrea wants to come home." Charlene looked down at the purse in her lap. "If only to be close to her grandmother."

John studied her for a time. "And you want a chance to fix your relationship."

"I'm getting—," Charlene said.

"Older?" John's eyebrows went up.

She ignored him. "The point is I want her home, too."

"I understand, Charlie. Really I do." John's voice was sympathetic. He glanced away from her stony gaze.

"Don't give me some phony excuse," Charlene said.

"The clinic is going through a rough patch. We need someone seasoned, someone who can stand firm."

"And?"

"I can't push anyone on them. It's got to be done carefully." John toyed with the Mont Blanc ink pen on his desk.

"You mean having our daughter put in charge.

Don't tell me you're worried about your reputation, or what's left of it after thirty years of raising hell." Charlene's lovely mouth curved up in a sardonic smile.

"Damn it, Charlene, I'm thinking how rough it could be on her." John's fingers raked his black hair.

"Andrea is strong-willed. She inherited that on both sides," Charlene said promptly. Her expression softened. "Please, John. Do this for me and for her."

The speakerphone on his desk buzzed. John pressed a button. "Yes, Norma?"

"Your appointment is here, Mr. Mandeville." His secretary's voice came through clearly.

"Give me ten minutes." John gazed at Charlene. "Okay, Charlie. Andrea can have the job."

"Good." Charlene sighed.

"You're welcome," John said dryly.

"You're not doing me a favor you know." Charlene stood.

John shook his head in amazement as he stood. He lifted a hand to touch her hair but Charlene moved away. "God, you're such a lovely woman. When will I see you again?"

He followed her to the private elevator that would take her from his office to the first floor lobby without anyone seeing her.

Charlene got on the elevator and punched the button. "Goodbye, John," she said.

Suddenly there was a knock on the door and it opened. Norma entered. "Are you available now?"

"Send him on in." John stood in front of the elevator to block the view when he realized the doors were not completely closed.

"Evening, Mr. Mandeville." The tall muscular man strode into the office. He extended a large dark brown hand even as his gaze flickered to the elevator.

"Mr. Matthews, nice to meet you. What's your first name? We're used to being informal down here," John said.

"LeRoyce, but call me Lee." He let a beat pass. "Good meeting you, John." The newcomer did not intend to let the Mandeville mystique affect him either.

John's smile faltered. "Yes, well sit down." He pointed to the seating area of two chairs and a small sofa near another window. "Would you like a drink?"

"Seven-up, thanks," Lee said. He folded his six foot four frame into the leather wingback.

John walked over to the small built-in bar. He poured himself a finger of scotch then poured the soft drink into another glass. "I was sure a two-fisted private eye would want a strong belt."

Lee scanned the office carefully taking in each detail. "Only in old movies. And you wouldn't want to hire a private investigator who drinks."

"Good point," John said as he walked over to his desk and sat down. He handed Lee the glass of soda and sipped from his drink. "You've read our report about the problems. What do you think?"

"It's tricky." Lee stretched one long leg out.

"What do you suggest?"

"If I worked at the clinic for a few months it would help." Lee looked at him directly for the first time. "I'm pretty good on a computer and a darn good receptionist."

"Put you inside the clinic." John rocked his chair and wore a thoughtful expression.

"The one they've got now needs a career change. One in a string of bad hiring decisions."

John's scowled. "I've heard about her!"

"It's an opening and won't seem strange." Lee sat back as though waiting for John to process his proposal.

"A receptionist built like a line-backer. You don't think that would look strange?"

"With the characters in and out of that place, some of the patients might welcome it," Lee retorted.

John laughed out loud. "Damn it, I like you!" He shook his head. "I'll get that woman out of there and you can start immediately?"

Lee stood. "Give me a week to wrap up some other work with my partner, Vince."

"Excellent." John walked him to the door. "Er, we've hired a new director by the way," said in a tone meant to be casual.

Lee studied him. "Something special I should know about him?" His full eyebrows went up as John avoided his gaze.

"Her. Andrea Noble. And no, I just wanted you to be fully informed."

Lee's eyes narrowed as he glanced at John.

"Alright," he said in a voice that implied he'd find out eventually.

John watched the tall man stride off. "Damn place. More trouble than it's worth," he muttered.

Chapter 1

"Good Lord. What have I gotten myself into?"

Andrea turned around in a circle. A layer of dust filmed every surface. Faded blue plastic chairs were scattered across the floor in an uneven pattern. Patients waiting to be seen looked just as forlorn as the waiting room of the Bayou Blue Public Health Clinic. Her grandmother and Cousin Pam had warned her it might need "a bit of sprucing up." What an understatement.

"Hey, you!" a gruff female voice called out.

A woman with a hair piled high and stiff with styling gel looked at her from behind a Plexiglas partition with a small opening. She sat in an office that faced the waiting room. A plastic tag pinned to her chest had the name Shonda etched in white letters. Her wide light brown face was bored. Her jaws moved as she worked on a lump of chewing gum.

"Are you talking to me, ma'am?" Andrea asked, her tone deliberately measured and polite.

"Yeah. You need to sign in before you sit down. Come here."

Immediately Andrea decided to go with the flow. She walked over to the window. "I left my Medicaid card at home. And I don't have an appointment."

Shonda rolled her eyes and threw down the pencil she was holding. "Then you can't see the doctor."

"They told me you accepted walk-ins." Andrea could see Shonda was losing what little patience she had.

"Well they told you wrong. Dr. Hayes ain't even here. Them people waitin' to see the nurse." Shonda waved a hand at the twelve or so people sitting in faded blue plastic chairs.

"I thought the doctor was in Thursdays." Andrea grimaced and put a hand to her stomach. "I've got a pain that's killing me."

"Look, he ain't here, okay?" Shonda snapped. "How many ways I hafta say it?"

There were a few snickers from several of the women nearby. Andrea ground her teeth. Sally Ranger, the registered nurse who'd recruited her, would definitely get a phone call. So would her mother. To think she'd left Chicago to come home to this.

"Now what's your name?" Shonda slapped a clipboard down on the desk. A form faded from too much copying had two columns with times, dates and names.

Andrea ignored her question. "Will the doctor be in at all today?"

"Well I'll be--" Shonda bit off as she shoved her chair back and stomped through the door.

Andrea heard muffled voices, one of which was Shonda's. After a few moments, a heavysset white woman came out. Nurse Cresson appeared to be in her fifties. Her brunette hair was pulled back. She had on a green scrub suit.

"I'm Nurse Cresson. What's wrong with you, baby?"

"I told her Dr. Hayes ain't here," Shonda muttered over Nurse Cresson's shoulder.

"I'm in pain." Andrea held her stomach again.

"Well, you need to go to the emergency room over in Houma," Nurse Cresson said in a crisp tone. She did not even look at where Andrea.

"But I thought Thursday was the day the doctor would handle small emergencies. I don't have a car and—"

"He's not here and he's not coming," Nurse Cresson cut her off sharply. "You can make an appointment for follow-up. But if you in that much pain, go to the hospital."

"Let me tell you—"

"I don't need to hear it." Nurse Cresson turned away from Andrea. "Shonda, give her an appointment. She can't be too bad off if she can stand here arguing."

With furious frown, Andrea walked around the corner of the office and down the hall that led to examination rooms. As she passed the public restrooms, the smell told her they had not been cleaned for some time.

"Hey! You can't come back here without bein' called," Shonda yelled.

Nurse Cresson rushed out into the hall and held up a hand. "You go right back the way you came."

Shonda joined her looking fierce. "Some people got more nerve than sense!"

"You wanted to know my name earlier. Well I'm Andrea Noble. Your new clinic director," Andrea said, her voice like a razor. She wore a hard smile and nodded as their expressions on their faces transform from outrage to shock.

"But you ain't supposed to be here until next week."
Shonda's mouth was slack with dismay.

Nurse Cresson's dark eyes flashed with suspicion.
"Sally Ranger is supposed to come that day along with some
of the Health Clinic board members for a tour."

"I can show you my driver's license if you don't
believe me." Andrea held up her purse.

"No. I'm sorry," Nurse Cresson said forcing a smile
onto her crinkled face. "You just caught us off guard."

"Exactly," Andrea tossed back. "I got home yesterday
morning and decided not to wait for the official tour."

"Home?" Shonda blinked at her. "You're from around
here?"

"I grew up in Bayou Blue. I've lived in Chicago for
nine years." Andrea looked at her. Shonda was no more than
twenty and she did not recognize her. "What's your last
name?"

Shonda hesitated. "LaMotte. I'm from down on Sweet
Road."

Andrea remembered the LaMotte brood. They were a rowdy
bunch. She knew several of them. The women liked a good

fistfight as much as the men did. "I know Raleene and Wyvonne. Are they your sisters?"

"Cousins."

"The Crazy Dog Bar still there?" Andrea walked past them. She glanced in several rooms as she talked.

"Yeah." Shonda shot a worried glance at Nurse Cresson.

"Uh-huh." Andrea knew she had established herself as a native. No outsider would know about the LaMottes and the Crazy Dog.

"I can see we've got a lot of work to do. We might as well start now." Andrea turned around to face them abruptly. Both women jumped back.

"We was gonna clean up. . . I mean we always keep it clean. But the janitor been sick." Nurse Cresson's gaze darted around the hall.

"Really?" Andrea let skepticism lace her tone. "Well, let's just do a walk through and see what we have."

For the next two hours she put Nurse Cresson through the wringer. Andrea suspected Thelma Cresson was nurse with little real skill beyond first aid and not much ambition. She made a mental note to find out what relative had gotten her this job. Equipment at the fledgling clinic was in poor

condition. There were no real health education programs to help the largely poor, welfare patients. Andrea made it clear to Nurse Cresson and Shonda that things would change. Their morose expressions told her just what they thought. After making a long list of things she wanted done, Andrea headed for home. Once outside she paused to glance around.

It was glorious sunny day. The sky was still bright blue, but turning darker with touches of orange as the sun set. Cottony white clouds floated along. Bayou Blue was surrounded by lush prairies and bayous. Her grandmother's house, the house she'd grown up in, was three miles from town. Andrea had not really paid attention to the area on previous visits home. But Gran had told her that a group of businessmen were trying to revive downtown. Having the clinic improved and under new management was part of the initiative.

Being home again was part of Andrea's own five-year plan after her divorce. She'd been eager to come. The concrete and fast pace of Chicago only served to make her feel more disconnected. After a while, Gran's urging that she come back to her roots did not seem like a bad idea. Andrea wanted to get her life on a even keel. The fact that crime and decay threatened Bayou Blue angered her.

She walked halfway down one block and stopped within a few yards of a store. Downtown Bayou Blue needed a facelift for sure. The shabbiness of abandoned storefronts contrasted with the beautiful rural setting. Still, the Improvement Committee's efforts did show in a few places. Several historic buildings had been attractively restored. Andrea had fond childhood memories of skipping to keep up with her father's long stride as they walked downtown. Andrea mentally identified the old dress shop where her father had bought her first party outfit. Around the corner had been a combination shoe store and shoe repair shop. It wasn't much of a town by big city standards, but it was well worth saving. The sound of footsteps brought her back to the present. Andrea realized she'd wandered a good two blocks from where her car was parked outside the clinic. The area was scattered with shabby vacant storefronts. Trash and weeds filled two empty lots to her left.

"Yeah, man. Them dudes crazy. I— Whoa, looka that." A male voice went from conversational to provocative.

Three men wearing low-slung jeans strolled toward her. They seemed to have appeared out of nowhere. Young and lanky, their conversation was filled with profanity. Andrea looked around hoping to see someone else on the street. But

GOTTA GET NEXT TO YOU/EMERY-1

what few businesses remained was closed and no one was in sight. She turned around and started back to her car.

"Evenin'," a different male voice called out.

"What's up?" A tall man wearing a tank top and jeans trotted up beside her. His buddies soon joined him.

Andrea increased her pace to reach the clinic. "Hi," she said over her shoulder.

"Hey, baby. How ya doin'?" A young man grinned revealing three gold teeth.

"I'm fine," Andrea said without breaking her stride.

"That ain't no lie." The young man rubbed his chin with one hand.

Andrea glanced at him briefly. She'd worked in a Chicago clinic that saw a lot of troubled kids and adults, even gang members. This young man was more bluster than real menace, but the two men with him were another matter. One had a scar along his left cheek that he rubbed as though proud of it. The other, shorter and the color of ebony, wore a red kerchief around his neck. His muscle shirt was hiked up on one side.

They jumped ahead of her on the sidewalk blocking her progress forcing Andrea had to stop as well.

The one with the scar spoke first. "My name's Javon, an' I got what you need," he said with a smack of his lips.

Andrea's throat tightened with fear. "Excuse me, but I'm going to my car."

"You outta your league. Classy lady ain't got time for kiddie stuff. I'm Bo, baby." He let his gaze trail over her body suggestively.

"Hi," Andrea said. She tried once more to continue on, but Bo did not move to let her pass.

"You must be new in town cause I know all the pretty ladies. And they know me." His buddies guffawed and his grin widened.

Andrea decided to make this her first community outreach effort. She allowed the snickering and sassy comments to die down.

"I'm from here, just been gone a long time. I'm Andrea Noble, the new health clinic director." She pointed toward the Bayou Blue Health Clinic.

"I'm in good health. Strong as can be, baby. Wanna feel?" Bo slapped his chest.

"No thanks. But we'll have information on good nutrition and exercise, like weight lifting." Andrea made a stab at what might interest them.

"I see something I wanna pick up right here," Bo wet his lips, his eyes narrowed to slits as he stared at her breast. He took a step close to her. "Yes, indeed."

Andrea frowned in distaste realizing suddenly that this was a bad idea. "Excuse me." She made another attempt to go around him. When he didn't move, she tried to push her way through.

Bo stopped smiling, his expression turning hard. He glared at his laughing friends and they grew quiet. When he turned back to Andrea, she felt a trickle of fear at the look in his eyes. But she was determined not to let it show. She stared back at him, chin raised.

"Why you in such a hurry? Be friendly." Bo moved closer, until he towered over her. He made a grab for her arm.

Andrea jerked back avoiding his grasp. "Leave me alone."

Bo grabbed for her again. "That ain't the way to—"

Andrea knocked his hand aside and kicked his shin hard. Bo yelped at the glancing blow then lunged for her. In a panic, she turned to run and collided with a man's hard chest.

"We gotta problem out here?" A deep voice spoke.

Shaking with fear that she was surrounded, Andrea looked up and up. He was at least six feet four with smooth skin like fine milk. His eyes were a deep brown, like strong Louisiana dark roast coffee as he gazed at them calmly. He wore a light blue cotton Henley shirt and blue jeans that hugged narrow hips. He looked powerful even standing still. Andrea was caught between the aura of masculine strength, palpable as the musky scent of cologne he wore, and the feeling of fear that made her pulse race. Or was it fear? She stared at the strong line of his jaw. This man inspired something more, exhilaration. He surveyed the group of men calmly and Andrea felt as though the cavalry had just galloped across the horizon.

"Nah, we just gettin' introduced," Bo said. He glared at Andrea. "Awright?"

"Funny. Looks like the lady is trying to get away. What about it, ma'am?" He glanced at Andrea.

Bo's whole body was tensed for battle. "Stay outta my business."

"I know y'all can't read, so I'll help you out." Wearing a mild expression, the handsome newcomer pointed to a rectangular sign attached to the stone wall of the clinic. "'No loitering near entrance'," he read.

Javon's mouth flapped open as he decided to join in. "You can't tell us nothin'—"

"Come on, ma'am. Let's go inside. The air is cooler and better smelling," he said with derision. The man put a hand under her elbow and guided her inside the clinic.

Andrea was through the door before she could protest but for some reason she did not feel alarmed. This man had a solid, reassuring presence. He radiated confidence with a dash of boldness. She looked at him and felt a shock of warmth travel up her spine. When he fully turned to look at her, warmth turned to a full-blown fire. His full brown lips pulled back in a dazzling smile, revealed gleaming white teeth. This man was more than handsome. The knit shirt seemed to strain across his chest. His muscular arms were even more defined when he put both hands on his waist. His gaze went over her head briefly, checking to make sure the thugs were gone, then back to her face. He was

stunning. A dimple in one cheek made the delectable creature near perfect. He glanced around the waiting room.

"Looks like the roaches scattered." He turned around in a half circle.

Andrea said nothing, still taking him in. His dark brown hair was cut short and the tight curls looked like soft wool loops. She had a crazy urge to reach up and touch them. When he faced her again, Andrea blinked rapidly. She must be losing her mind. She looked away, sure that she was gaping at him like an idiot.

Andrea recovered. "Thanks," she said in a restrained tone.

"You're welcome, I guess."

"I do appreciate your help," Andrea said. "But I've been in tough situations before."

"Sure." Disdain dripped from his voice. He continued to look around.

"I worked in Chicago and dealt with lots of people." Andrea's gratitude was being tested by his know-it-all manner.

"This may not be Chicago, but you obviously don't know how much has changed."

"Thanks, again. But I think I do."

"Is that right?" he said.

"Yes, that's right." She decided that what she'd mistaken for charisma was really plain old-fashioned arrogance.

"Well, I'd advise you stay out of this part of town."

"Decent people should be able to go anywhere they want," Andrea said. "We can't let hoodlums dictate what we do."

"Look, lady, use common sense. Unless you want something to happen, don't strut your stuff around here." He eyed her from head to toe.

"If being free to walk in town is 'strutting my stuff' as you so crudely put it, then I've got a right to strut my stuff where I please, when I please." Andrea spoke the words rapid fire like bullets and waved a forefinger at him. "You hear me?"

"Yes, ma'am. Folks for miles around heard you." He swept both arms in an arc.

Two patients, apparently the last for the day, stood staring at them in amusement. Several women were nodding.

One woman wearing large hoop earrings that touched her shoulders bobbed her head from side to side.

"Tell him 'bout it baby, that's right."

Andrea lowered her hand quickly. What was wrong with her? Causing big scenes, especially in public, horrified her. And here she was, the instigator. She'd spent years trying not to be like her emotional mother. Charlene could create high drama over a broken fingernail.

"Maybe you could have taken care of yourself out there," he said, dark eyebrows raised almost to his hairline. A twinkle of amusement lit his eyes.

Something about this man set off strong reactions in her, first attraction then wrath. Every hair on her body seemed raised. And worse she felt strangely elated.

"Just don't make a simple walk into something it's not," she managed to stammer out.

"I was out of line, okay? I'm sorry." His baritone voice was soft.

His apology and the hint of tenderness in his deep voice was like fuel to an already smoldering flame. Andrea gazed up at him. "I owe you an apology, too. Here you help me out and I jump on you with both feet."

He smiled at her warmly. "Now that we've said our pardons, maybe you could tell me your name?"

The tingle of desire was pleasurable, and terrifying. She stuck out her hand in a business-like gesture in an attempt to keep their meeting from becoming too personal.

"Andrea Noble. I'm the new director here."

He shook her hand. "Glad to meet you. I hear they've got plans to fix the place up."

Andrea liked the firm pressure of his handshake. She pulled her hand away quickly, but the warmth of his hand lingered on the soft skin of her palm. She took a deep breath and steadied herself.

"Ahem. Yes, we certainly do," she said.

"Think it could use the improvement."

"The clinic and downtown, too." Andrea nodded. "Lot's of shady characters hanging around."

"Hmm."

The man's gaze drifted around again, scanning every inch of the place. He sauntered off and looked down the hall toward the back of the clinic. Andrea's wariness kicked in. Her reaction to his good looks had temporarily blinded her. Something that had led her to ruin before, she

thought sourly. Now she really looked at this man. He seemed to be sizing up his surroundings. Andrea thought about the drugs stored in the small clinic pharmacy. She noted every detail of his appearance, in case she had to pick him out of a line up.

"I didn't get your name," she said.

"Jamal Turner." He spun around and strode to her.

"Pleased to meet you."

Andrea fought off the sudden spike of desire when that tall, fine frame loomed over her again. "Mr. Turner."

"Call me Jamal. And I'll call you—"

"Ms. Noble," Andrea cut in. She moved farther from him to avoid more tingling than she needed. "Well, Mr. Turner, what brings you downtown at this hour?"

He smiled at her formality. "Went to pick up my dry-cleaning and got there five minutes too late," he said smoothly.

Too smoothly, Andrea thought. "Mr. Norman has closed his store at four on Fridays for twenty years. You must not be from around here."

"Actually I am new to the area. But I'm learning fast." His dazzling smile came back, all charm and sex appeal.

This time Andrea was ready for him and his dimple. His explanation had holes in it, smooth or not. "What were you doing on this street? Clotier's is two blocks around the corner."

"I was at the bank and decided to just walk over. Wouldn't make sense to drive such a short distance. Good legs." Jamal slapped his thighs.

Andrea's gaze settled on the well-developed limbs in question. Her gaze drifted a little higher then she blushed and turned away. Her knees felt shaky. So this is what the phrase temporary insanity meant. She had to get control of herself. Jamal Turner's presence spelled trouble for her.

"Thighs— I mean, thanks for helping me." Andrea wanted to sink into the floor. She prayed he hadn't heard the slip. Good God, she was behaving like a sex-starved idiot!

"No problem," he said in a cheerful voice. "Next time you decide to stroll in a high crime area, I'm your man."

Andrea whirled around to set him straight with a sour reply. "Very funny, Mr..." Her voice trailed off and she

couldn't think of what to say. Instead of being annoyed, she noticed the delicious curve of his top lip.

"Cease fire," he quipped. "Just be careful, okay?" He tilted his handsome head to one side.

"Okay," was all she could manage to murmur.

"See ya, ma'am." Jamal flipped a wave at her and pushed through the glass door of the clinic.

Andrea stared after him, hypnotized by the graceful, loping stride of impossibly long legs covered by dark blue denim. Despite his size, his body flowed like liquid.

"We lockin' up," Shonda's voice broke into her rather rampant fantasies. Shonda popped her gum three times as though to emphasize her statement.

Andrea snapped out of her daze and back to reality. "Right. I, uh, I'm leaving now. My first full day is a week from Monday, but I'll drop in again for a few hours tomorrow to check on your progress."

"Great," was Shonda's sarcastic response. She clumped over and stood at the front door jingling the large ring of keys impatiently.

"I look forward to it as much as you," Andrea replied with a tight smile. "Goodbye."

She left and heard the click of door locks behind her. Andrea walked the short distance to her car, keys in her hand. When she turned for one last look at the clinic, Shonda and Thelma Cresson stood staring at her with rancorous expressions. She looked forward to setting those two straight.

She sighed. It was obvious she had a lot of work ahead of her. She was living with Gran until she could find an apartment of her own. Between clearing up the problems at the clinic and apartment hunting, she had no time to fantasize about a handsome player like Jamal Turner. She'd had her fill of that kind of trouble.

Andrea needed to feel success if only professionally. Her marriage ended with a bang and work in the inner-city clinic had overwhelmed her. Here she could make a difference. She would put her focus on the clinic and no smiling tower of testosterone would distract her.