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Model Mom

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Dedication

There's no way I could do any of the things that I do without the support I receive from my husband, Rob. I can't say enough about what you do for me. Thank you.

To my dad, who continues to answer when I call for help.
I appreciate all the time you give me.

To my mom, who inspires me every day, by the way she acts and the love she offers. Thank you for everything.

To Nana, who left us in 2007. I love you and miss you.

Chapter One

II

D.J. sat silently at his family's dining room table. It was Sunday evening and for once, the entire family was gathered around for a traditional family dinner. They had grown over the past year, for which he was extremely pleased. His eldest sister, Jordan, was now sitting next to her new husband, Jack, both of whom worked for the family's fashion business. The next born child, Alison, sat with her husband Marc and their dark-haired infant daughter, Kayte. That poor child, he thought, was bound to be spoiled by her maternal grandparents, Joy and Dean Devereaux. Sitting across from Ali and her crew was his younger sister, Karen, and *her* new husband, J.D. Together they ran a youth center in the downtown area. He sat next to the loving newlyweds, with the baby of the Devereaux siblings, Taylor, on his left.

As usual, he was the quiet one of the group. Even seventeen-year-old Taylor had multitudes of things to talk about when they all got together. Looking around the table again, he grinned. It was obvious that the majority of them were related as the children resembled either mother or father quite strikingly. He felt lucky to have taken after his mother...lively yet laid back with a wicked

sense of humor and strong features. There was no question why Dean had fallen for Joy over thirty years ago, but he occasionally wondered why the vivacious woman had gone for his father. Dean was a strong, loyal, family-oriented man, but he also had a tendency to work a lot and require perfection and obedience from those around him, including his family.

Leaning back in his chair, D.J. refocused his attention on the conversation flowing around him.

“I want to approve every model, Jordan,” Dean demanded, speaking in his boss-to-employee voice.

Rolling her eyes, Jordan didn’t bother to try and change his mind. “That’s fine, Dad, but I’m not going to let you steamroll over our decisions. You are not the expert in this particular field.”

“What are you talking about? I’ve been intimately involved in Devereaux Designs for over twenty-five years! I know practically everything there is to know in the fashion industry,” he said huffily.

“But picking models for the fashion lines was really never in your job description. So while I understand you want to be involved in picking the new models, I think you’re being overly concerned,” Jordan shot back. Dean was notorious for over-reacting to things, including rumors of espionage last year.

“The women coming in to apply a models are professionals,” Karen joined in. “Just because you’re not looking at size zero models doesn’t mean they’re going to be unattractive. I don’t understand why you’re concerned.”

“It’s an entirely new venture for Devereaux, and a little risky, so I want to be involved all the way,” Dean stated, crossing his arms over his chest, a mulish jut to his chin. “And I expect my opinions to be taken into consideration.”

D.J. snorted softly but did not comment otherwise.

“Hey, can I come watch the interviews?” Taylor asked, flashing a grin at Jordan. “I bet there are going to be some fine looking women coming in to see you.”

“Forget it,” Jordan told her youngest brother. “We don’t need the women being distracted by your rugged good looks.”

When there was a movement at the other end of the table, D.J. looked up. Ali and Marc were hovering over their daughter, twin

mirrors of love on their faces. An unknown feeling pressed against his heart and he abruptly got to his feet.

Joy stood as well and began clearing plates off the table. Though it was obvious she wanted to catch her elder son alone, she had her family too well trained because the moment she started picking up dishes, so did they. So she could only watch, concern etched on her face, as D.J. helped clean up, kissed her goodbye, and left the house without any further conversation.

“Moooooom!”

Heather Warren cringed as she attempted to put on her mascara. Maybe if she didn’t respond to the insistent screech, her children would learn to walk up the stairs to seek her out.

“Moooooomeeeee!”

And maybe not. With a sigh, she strode out of her bathroom, through her soft green bedroom, and into the doorway. Poking her head out into the hall, she looked down the stairs and spotted what she called her half-a-pair. “Lucy, would you *please* stopping yelling.”

Seven year old Lucy looked up at her mother and smiled sheepishly. “Sorry.”

Arching an eyebrow, Heather said, “What do you need?”

“When are we leaving for day camp?”

“You screamed like that to ask what time we’re leaving?” She should have been surprised, but wasn’t. Lucy was always gung-ho about everything, even a bowl of plain cornflakes.

“I want to know if I have enough time to go out back and—”

“No!” Heather said sharply before her jean-clad daughter could finish her question. If Lucy went outside it would take an army to get her into the car for day camp. “Did you finish your breakfast?”

“Yeah.”

“And is your backpack ready to go?”

“Umm...” Lucy toed the floor with her sneaker.

“Take care of it; we’re leaving in ten minutes.” On that note, she hurried back into the bathroom to finish putting on her makeup. She needed to look great for her interview today. If she landed this prime job with Devereaux Designs, it meant less traveling

for her and more freedom for her own mother. At the moment her mother, Donna Charles, was living in an apartment nearby, but when Heather traveled for work, Donna moved into the house with her grandchildren. Heather was extremely grateful for her mother's support after Heather's husband Scott has passed away suddenly. While he had left her life insurance to tide her over for a while, he had also left her alone to care for two young children. Her mother had been a God-send then and now.

"Mommy?"

Heather blinked and turned her head toward the doorway between the bathroom and the bedroom. There stood the other half-a-pair-Lucy's biological twin but polar opposite. "Yes, sweetie?"

April gave her a sweet smile and said, "You look beautiful."

Smiling back, Heather fluffed her short blonde hair before turning to finish applying her lipstick. "Thank you, honey. Are you ready for camp?"

The thin blonde child smoothed her purple jumper dress and nodded. "I tried to get Lucy to braid my hair for me but..." She shrugged.

"Well, we're running late today but I promise I'll French braid your hair for you tomorrow, okay?"

April smiled widely. "Are you nervous for today? Do you have to," she shuddered delicately, "stand up and talk?"

"I don't think I'll have to give a speech, but I am a little nervous. This would be a very good job to get." Finished now, she turned and ran a hand over her daughter's baby-fine blonde hair. "We had better get going."

"Okay, I'll get Lucy and meet you at the car," April offered.

"That's a deal, sunshine." As April skipped happily out of the room, Heather grabbed her purse and portfolio then slipped her feet into waiting high heel shoes. This wasn't just a "very good" job, it was an awesome job and landing it would be a real coup.

Jordan muttered obscenities as she stalked into her office. "If I had known how much of a pain he was going to be, I would never have allowed him to sit in on the interviews." She practically threw herself into the chair behind her desk.

“It can’t be that bad, it’s barely eleven.”

She whipped the chair around to where D.J. lounging on the couch that was pushed against one wall of her office. “I’m going to kill him.”

He dropped the newspaper he had been reading onto the stylish coffee table and studied her flushed face. “Having a problem?”

“Your father is an annoying, arrogant, sexist pig!” she muttered.

“Hey, he was your father before he was *my* father,” D.J. retorted, scratching at his cheek. “So I take it the interviews are not going well?”

“Not only has he been a complete cretin, but he has thrown us totally off schedule. We’re over an hour behind. Do you have any idea how rude that is to the models?”

“If they want the damn job, they’ll wait,” Dean snapped from the doorway.

Jordan didn’t even flinch, just rolled her eyes and crossed her arms over her generous chest.

“What are you doing here?” Dean asked his namesake, not responding to the frown on his daughter’s face.

“Karen asked me to drop off some paperwork with accounting and I stopped by to see if Jordan wanted to take an early lunch,” Dean Junior answered, totally unaffected by his father’s brutish attitude.

“We’re so far behind I’m going to have to skip lunch,” she told him, her distress radiating off her.

“Well then, I’ll just be on my way—”

“No.” Dean stopped his son before he had a chance to stand. “I need to leave for a few hours and I want you to sit in on the interviews.”

“What?” D.J. and Jordan chorused.

“Your mother called,” he addressed Jordan. “She needs me to take her to an appointment.”

Jordan sat up, her body tense. “Is she all right?”

“She pulled a muscle in her back and wants to get to the doctor right away. Meanwhile, I want D.J. to take my place in the model interviews.”

“But Dad,” Jordan protested, “we don’t need you or D.J. in

on those interviews. You can always review pictures and notes later.”

Knowing his sister, and their father, D.J. was sure that was what she had hoped he would do in the first place.

“No, I want an impartial person in there asking question and looking those girls over,” he said shortly. “You’re too emotional about this, Jordan. This is *business* and we need the perfect all-around representative, not just any woman!”

D.J. could almost see her bristle at his accusation that she was not being completely professional about this.

“That’s ridiculous!”

“Either D.J. stays or we reschedule the rest of the interviews,” Dean said stubbornly.

Groaning, she said, “Think of all the trouble it would take to reschedule all the models we have waiting.”

When Dean made no response, she turned to D.J. “Fine. D.J., are you available to sit in for Dad?”

He quirked an eyebrow. “Do I get paid for this service?”

“You need to get paid to sit around and talk to beautiful women?” Jordan snapped.

“Hey, relax, I was only joking.” He held out in hands in surrender. “Why don’t we get to it and see if we can’t catch up a little.”

“Not likely,” she muttered under her breath as father and son conversed briefly in her doorway. “All right, let’s go already.”

D.J. followed her down the hall into the conference room. Once she had closed the door, she turned to face him with a stormy look on her face. “What?”

“We have two objectives here,” she told him, visibly trying to get her temper under control. “We’re looking for a number of models, but we’re also looking for a spokeswoman for our line. She’ll be the one out front in the pictures, the main woman on the runways. So we need to keep our eyes open for someone with charisma, with presence, with a joy for life.”

He nodded and folded himself into a chair at the table.

“Are you sure you want to stay? There’s no question that Dad has left the building by now so I’m sure you can sneak out,” she offered hopefully.

“You’re joking! You know Dad is going to rake me over the coals about each and every woman we see today. Besides,” he gave her a toothy grin, “why would I want to miss the chance to ogle all those beautiful ladies?”

“Crap.” She dropped into a chair and rested her forehead on the table.

Laughing, he patted her back. “I’m just kidding, I’ll be good.”

“I’m going to introduce you by name and not say anything else about you.”

“Okay. Is it only going to be the two of us?” he asked.

“Well, there was a woman from marketing in here earlier but she got so flustered at Dad’s interrogations that I sent her back to her desk,” she said wryly.

“What about the designers?”

Standing, she crossed to the phone sitting on a side table. “They only need to see pictures and stats; personality doesn’t mean squat to them.” She pressed a button, then instructed her secretary to show in the next model.

He waited until she returned to her chair before patting her hand. “I’ll be good, I promise,” he repeated.

The secretary knocked once and opened the door. “Heather Warren,” she announced before stepping aside to let a tall blonde enter the room.

Jordan stood to greet her as the secretary closed the door after her. “Ms. Warren, thank you so much for your patience. We had some unanticipated delays this morning that could not have been avoided.”

“Oh, please, call me Heather. And I completely understand. There are always delays when you’re trying to do a thorough job,” she said graciously.

D.J. had meant to stand out of common courtesy but for some reason he was glued to his chair. He was suddenly afraid the model would want to shake hands with him, which would reveal that his palm was clammy with sweat. The woman standing in front of them was one of the most striking people he had ever seen. She was tall and broad in both hip and shoulder, with long legs under a knee-length black skirt. Her blouse was cherry red and dipped to a

low vee that showed appreciable cleavage and creamy skin.

“Please, have a seat.” Jordan gestured to a chair across from her. “My name is Jordan Devereaux and I’m chief operating officer here. And this,” she waved toward D.J., “is my brother, D.J. Devereaux.”

Before sitting, Heather shook hands with Jordan, then reached across the table to shake his.

He quickly wiped his hand on his jeans, then gripped her proffered hand, giving a start at the pulse of energy that struck him. Studying her features as she settled into her chair and crossed her legs, he let Jordan take the lead.

“Here is my head shot and resume.” Heather passed it across the table to Jordan.

Jordan took a moment to look over her stats before passing the picture over to D.J. “Tell me a little about your career. When did you start modeling?”

Smiling, Heather leaned back in her chair. “I started modeling about four years ago. Before that there wasn’t *any* call for models my size. I’ve done mostly print, though I do have training in runway shows.”

D.J. listened absently as he studied the black and white likeness of the woman across from him. The one-dimensional image did not do her justice at all. It did not show her wide, stunning blue eyes or her full, pouty red lips. Her face was surrounded by chin-length blonde hair and her eyes were framed by perfectly arched, though slightly darker blonde, eyebrows. As she spoke, he heard the pleasant lilt of her voice although he didn’t really digest her words.

“Did you bring a portfolio?” Jordan asked her.

“Of course.” She lifted the flat black case and unzipped it. Spreading it open, she pushed it across to Jordan.

“Excellent.” Jordan flipped through a few pages before speaking again. “We’re actually looking for several models today, Heather. But in addition, we’re looking for someone to be a sort of spokeswoman for Devereaux Designs’ plus size fashion line. We want someone to represent our new clothing both as a lead model in advertising as well as in runway shows and in promotions.”

“Oh, okay. And what kind of restrictions would there be in the

spokeswoman's contract?" she asked.

"Well, basically we would want an exclusive fashion contract, though you would be able to take modeling positions outside the fashion industry. That is, as long as they don't interfere with our schedule," Jordan added, sliding the portfolio over to D.J.

"Will there be a lot of traveling for this spokeswoman position?"

He caught Heather's eyes flicking over him just before he looked at the first photo in her portfolio. Not paying attention to Jordan's answer, D.J. felt his pulse jump at the picture of Heather in front of him. These photos were in color and as he flipped through the book, he saw she was wearing outfits that ranged from sleek bathing suits to jeans to business attire to—*gulp*—lingerie. Suddenly his hands felt sweaty again and parts of his body flushed hot.

"Would you mind if we took some videos and stills of you?" Jordan asked.

"Sure, no problem. Where do you want me to stand?"

D.J. looked up just as Jordan was instructing Heather where to stand for a couple of still shots. He blinked in surprise at the change that came over her. She looked polished and professional, and much less approachable than when she had been sitting across the table from him.

"Okay, now if you'll walk around the room a little so we can get a feel for your fluidity and gracefulness," Jordan directed.

Watching Heather move, he caught his breath at the natural flow of her hips and the strength in her legs. Without any trouble he could picture those long legs wrapped around his waist as he thrust deeply into her. He nearly choked when she rounded the table, trailing her fingers along the cherry top. As she made her way toward him, his breathing slowed until he thought it was going to stop altogether.

She approached him and with a smile for the camera that watched her every move, she let her fingers move from the tabletop to the hot flesh of his arm. Up she trailed, her fingers leaving a path of fire as they made their way along his biceps.

"Okay," Jordan announced, "that was perfect." Her lips quirked as she turned to her brother. "D.J., you have any questions for Heather before we let her go?"

He blinked and cleared his throat. “What attracted you to this particular job?”

Heather continued around the table until she faced him again. “I’m very familiar with Devereaux Designs reputation in the fashion industry. When I heard they, you, were going to expand your lines to offer clothes for plus size women, I was not only ecstatic but impressed. It takes guts and courage to try and make a change in this industry, and Devereaux deserves a model with the same guts and courage to represent them.”

“And you think that’s you?” he wanted to know.

She gave him a dazzling smile. “Don’t you?”

Jordan made a choking sound, then cleared her throat before speaking again. “Well, Heather, as the woman who pushed for the new plus size clothing line, I thank you for your compliments. My sister and I, who are both full-figured, kept wondering why we couldn’t wear the clothes that our family’s company created. I decided it was time to change that and I fought tooth and nail for this new line.”

“Whether or not I have the opportunity to model for Devereaux, I look forward to seeing the clothes,” Heather told them both, sincerity ringing in her voice.

As she shook hands with his sister, D.J. zipped up Heather’s portfolio and held it out to her. “It was a pleasure meeting you, Heather.”

She accepted the black case from him and smiled. “The pleasure was mine. I look forward to hearing from you.”

Releasing the folio, he nodded and slipped his hands into the front pockets of his jeans.

Jordan closed the conference room door behind Heather, then turned back to her brother. “Well, that was...interesting.”

“You didn’t like her?” he asked, surprised.

“Oh, I liked her...”

“Then why was it ‘interesting’?”

She just grinned at him before slipping Heather’s resume and picture into a folder. “Let’s move along, shall we?”

Glaring at her, he crossed his arms over his chest. “Yes, let’s.”

Heather settled her portfolio and purse onto the passenger seat of her car before giving in to the trembling. It had been a good interview and she had been impressed with Jordan Devereaux. She had also felt somewhat relieved to see that an executive at Devereaux Designs was also a full-figured woman.

But it was the COO's brother's good looks and presence that lingered in her mind. She had intended to use him only as a prop for the video camera, but as soon as she had touched him, electricity had shot through her, almost making her stumble. Fortunately, she had recovered herself with hardly a misstep.

D.J. looked nothing at all like her first love and now departed husband, Scott, so why was she so intrigued by him? Scott had been tall too, but very blond and what she would call...slender. So far her twin girls had taken after him, their bodies slight and trim. Along with his fair hair and skin, Scott has sported bright blue eyes that often twinkled with humor. D.J. Devereaux, on the other hand, was dark-haired, dark-eyed, dark-skinned, and more intense than cheerful. He was a big man with a wide chest and arms that looked like sturdy tree trunks. Without looking closely, she had seen the resemblance between him and his sister, although he showed no signs of the womanly features his sister carried. How could a man so completely opposite of her one true love make her blood run hot? And did the silent, almost stoic man appreciate a big beautiful woman like herself?

Blowing out a breath of air, she started the car and headed for home not sure of the answers.

