

## CHAPTER 1

Maebelle Hawkins, a 5' 4" dark-skinned beauty--divorced with mouths to feed--moves her children to Derriene Crossing, seeking for a perfect husband--a man with money, power, and prestige--her definition of the perfect husband.

Upon her arrival, a night out on the town is what she needs. She struts up in a juke house, owned by Rufus Poygoode, a tall, handsome man, who is anything but a gentleman, who some folks says is one of the wealthiest landowners in Derriene Crossing, Mississippi. He is a man whose wedding vows are about as important to him as a half-hearted promise that he never intended to keep.

Maebelle's heart shivers when he asks her for a dance. It's love at first sight, but Rufus is a rare creature. When he first lays eyes on her, believing she is the daughter of the aunt who abused him, she awakens sleeping demons deep inside him. Before long, he would give her more than she dared to get. Maebelle has no idea she's endangered.

Over the years, Rufus carried a grueling vendetta against his mother-Aunt Olga Berry. She had been cruel and abusive. He often vowed the day would come when he would get even with Olga, or her daughters, if it were the last thing he did on earth. So when he first noticed Maebelle, and got to know her a bit more, she became his ideal target to pay back Olga. He knew Maebelle wanted his money; and she could have it because she had something he wanted something from her, too...