

Sample Chapter from *The Deception* by Marina Martindale

Carrie Daniels closed her eyes and took a deep breath as she tried to quell her growing anxiety. She heard the loud clicking sound of the big metal chain pulling her up higher and higher. Her breaths grew shorter and tighter as she opened her eyes. The last thing she saw before the first big drop was the stark, clear blue sky. She heard herself let out a loud scream as the roller coaster plunged and whipped along the track. The butterflies roiled in her stomach as she held tight while the car zoomed around another hairpin turn before taking one last, final plunge. As the ride slowed to a stop she reached up to pull a loose strand of her long, dark hair away from her face before leaning over to give Doug a kiss.

“Happy anniversary.”

“I don’t know why you insist on calling it that.” He climbed out and began walking away.

“Calling it what?” She climbed out, picking up her pace to catch up with him.

“Our anniversary. Anniversaries are supposed to commemorate a specific date. Neither of us can recall the exact date anymore.”

“I can to,” she flirtatiously argued. “How could I forget our very first date? You took me to the opening day of the Arizona State Fair, and every year for the past ten years we’ve come back on opening day to celebrate.”

This year, however, Doug didn’t seem to feel like celebrating. He’d been acting strange for some time. Carrie kept asking him what was wrong but he kept brushing her off, claiming he had a heavier than usual workload at the office. She couldn’t shake the nagging feeling that there was more to it. They walked in silence as they wandered into the carnival gaming area. Finally, she tapped him on the shoulder.

“Aren’t you going to try to win a big teddy bear for me?”

He stopped and turned, rolling his eyes. “Carrie, you know these games are rigged.”

“That never stopped you before. Every year you try to win the big teddy bear for me, so that makes it a tradition for us. And remember what you said to me the year before last? You said if you ever won it you’d propose to me.”

“You know I never meant that literally.”

“What’s gotten into you, Doug? You’ve haven’t been yourself for weeks and it’s scaring me.”

“I’m stressed out with work. You know that. And on top of that all I’m hearing out of you lately is that your biological clock is ticking. All these years and you’ve been telling me you weren’t in any hurry for us to get married. Now all of a sudden, you’re in a big rush.”

“Well, if you recall, we celebrated my thirtieth birthday last month. I’ve finally come to realize I can’t wait another ten or fifteen years to start a family. I want to have a baby, Doug, and I want to have it with you.” Carrie noticed some of the people walking by were giving them strange looks. “Look, this isn’t the time or place, okay. Let’s just try to enjoy what’s left of the day. We’ll talk more about it later.”

She walked up to one of the games, opened her purse and handed the man a twenty-dollar bill. He gave her some large plastic rings, which she began to toss. Much to her surprise, a few landed around the pegs. Once she finished the game operator presented her with a fluffy white teddy bear.

“Well,” she said, beaming, “it may not have been the big bear, but at least I won something.”

“Carrie, would you mind taking a seat?” Doug pointed to a nearby bench. “We need to have a little talk.”

Her heart dropped like a ball of lead. Nothing good was ever said after those words were spoken. She sat down on the bench. As Doug sat next to her, he let out a sigh.

“Carrie, I want you to know that the last ten years have been really great, and for a long time I really thought you were the one.”

“What are you saying, Doug?”

He let out another sigh, glancing around the midway before turning his gaze back to her.

“It’s like I just told you. Back in college, when we first met, I really, truly thought you were the one. I figured someday, you know, when the time was right, we’d take it to next level and get married, but lately things have changed.”

“Look, Doug, I know things haven’t exactly gone the way we planned.” A hint of desperation wavered in her voice. “We didn’t expect my mother to have a stroke and end up in a nursing home. We didn’t expect for her insurance to run out, and that I’d have to deplete my life savings in order to pay her medical bills, but things are going to get better, I know it. I know it’s been a strain on you having to pick up the slack, but my photography business is starting to pick up. It

really is. I've landed two new clients in the past month. If you'll just be patient with me and hang on for a little while longer, I know I'll be able to start paying more of the bills. Things are going to get better soon, just wait and see."

"That's not it." He paused for a moment, squeezing his lips tightly together. "Carrie, the reason why I brought you here today is because I wanted us to go full circle."

"What does that mean?"

He let out another sigh. "It means, Carrie, that this is goodbye." He paused another moment, allowing it to sink in. "I want you to know that the past ten years have been some of the happiest of my life, but now the time has come for me to move on."

"Have I done something wrong, Doug?" The tears were rolling down her cheeks, as he took her by the hand.

"No, Carrie, you haven't done anything wrong. You've been great. It's me." He paused and took another deep breath. "I've met someone else."

"What!" She snatched her hand back, as she began to recoil.

"A few months ago the company hired a new receptionist. Her name is Jennifer Logan. She's twenty-five, she's cute and she's single, and I've been attracted to her since the very first time I saw her."

"So what am I? Chopped liver? I've never allowed myself to get fat and lazy, nor have I ever taken you for granted."

"I know that, Carrie. You're still a beautiful woman. You've hardly changed since the first day I saw you, and don't think I haven't noticed other men looking at you."

"I've never encouraged it, Doug. I've never so much as flirted with another man."

"I know you haven't. You've always treated me right and I've never had to worry about you cheating on me. Please understand that I tried, very hard, to ignore my feelings for Jennifer. I really did. But over time, as I got to know her better, I just haven't been able to stop myself."

She did some mental calculations, while he was talking.

"Wait a second...it was right after the Fourth of July when you were suddenly having to work longer hours, wasn't it?"

"You're right. I haven't exactly been honest with you. I've felt bad about it, so I guess it's time to come clean. I wasn't working late. I was out with Jennifer."

"Doing what? Taking her to dinner? Going to the movies with her?"

He nodded.

“And what else were you doing with her, Doug? We’re you sleeping with her too?”

“At first, no. I honestly thought she and I could just be friends. I really believed that if I gave it a chance to get it out of my system my feelings for her would change, but they didn’t. You remember when I went up to Flagstaff last month for that weekend training seminar?”

She nodded, as she could no longer hold back and began weeping openly.

“I lied to you, Carrie. There was no seminar that weekend. Jennifer and I went up there for a romantic getaway. Yes, we paid for separate rooms, just in case you called the hotel, but we only used my room. I don’t know how else to say it. I’m head-over-heels in love with her. I guess the reason why I never asked you to marry me after all these years is because deep down something was holding me back, but I don’t feel that way with Jennifer. When I’m with her, everything just feels right, you know. I’m so sorry, Carrie. I never meant to hurt you.”

She reached into her purse for a tissue. She continued to weep, unaware of the looks people were giving her as they passed by.

“Well, thank you very much, Doug.” The sarcasm was heavy in her voice. “Not only have you cheated on me, you’ve added insult to injury by dumping me at a place that holds special memories for me.”

“Now, Carrie, that’s not what I meant to--”

“Shut up, Doug! Please don’t insult my intelligence by trying to deny it. You brought me here, thinking you could do your dirty work and I wouldn’t cause a scene. Well, guess what? You thought wrong.”

“Carrie, let me take you home, okay.”

“Home? Did you just say ‘home?’ Now that’s ironic, isn’t it? Because, as of right now, I don’t have a home.”

“Carrie, look, I know—”

“Didn’t I just tell you to shut up, Doug?” She looked him squarely in the eye. “We both know full well that the only reason we bought the house in your name was because of my mother’s creditors, so I guess I’m out of luck, huh?”

Doug remained silent.

“So I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. I’m going to walk away from you, right now. I’m going to call a cab, and then I’m going back to your house to pack. Once I have all my things out

I'll leave my key on the kitchen counter. After that, you'll never see or hear from me again. I just need ask one little favor."

"What's that?"

"Tonight I want you to spend the night with your whore, because I don't want you coming back until after I've left."

"Okay." There was a tentative tone in Doug's voice.

"Oh, don't worry. I won't be begging you to come back. Would you like to know why?" She leaned over to whisper in his ear. "It's because I don't put up with liars and cheaters, and that's what you are, Doug. You're a liar and a cheater, and I can't believe I was such a poor judge of character. You really had me fooled."

"All right, I probably deserve that, but what about you? Do you have a place to stay?"

"Does it matter?"

She stood and began to walk away. He got up and began to follow her.

"Carrie, wait!"

She stopped and spun around. "Leave me alone, Doug! You stop following me, right now, or else I'm calling the cops. Got it?"

He froze in his tracks. He watched her approach a young couple pushing a baby stroller. She stopped to talk to them for a moment before handing the stuffed bear to the baby. He heard them shouting thank you to her as she walked away. She soon disappeared into the crowd. He sat back down on the bench and watched the people going by. A short time later his phone rang. Jennifer was calling.

"So, did you finally dump her?"

"Yes."

"Good. I just got here. I'm waiting for you in front of the Ferris Wheel."

Doug returned home the following afternoon. By then, all of Carrie's belongings were gone. He found her key on the kitchen counter.