Getaway

One Wild Wedding Night 1
Getaway
(One Wild Wedding Night Part 1)
Scheduling a January wedding in Chicago probably hadn't been among the world's best ideas. Especially since the Windy City had been humped all week by a meteorological snow monster that seemed to want to stick around for the entire winter.

Somehow, though, despite the thick, white flakes that had swirled down around the church, everything had gone as planned. And now a winter wonderland surrounded the hotel where the afternoon reception had been held.

In Izzie Santori's opinion, the day had been perfect.

"Happy, Cookie?" her new husband, Nick, asked as he kicked the door to their room shut. His hands were too full to do the job. Full of Izzie, still clad in her long-trained wedding gown.

"Deliriously."

He pressed a kiss on her throat as he lowered her onto her own feet. “Only you could make a white wedding gown look sinful.”

“I'm a natural at sin.”

“Don’t I know it. I work with you, remember?”

Arching toward him, she twined her fingers in his black hair, which had grown out from its military cut since he’d left the marines. The length suited him, especially when he pulled the silky strands back into a ponytail at Leather and Lace, the upscale strip club where they both worked. “I’m so glad we had an early wedding so everyone from work could come.”

“Me, too. I doubt that church has held so many strippers, cocktail waitresses and bouncers at one time before.”

He kissed his way to her earlobe. “You were so beautiful today, Iz. Like always, you made every other woman fade into insignificance.”

“I did have some very pretty bridesmaids,” she pointed out.

He nodded, lifting her hand to start unbuttoning the long row of tiny buttons at her wrist. “You did, not that they looked anything alike. Talk about variety.”

That was true. Izzie’s bridesmaids had certainly run the gamut. Her maid of honor—and cousin—Bridget, was a quiet, sweet-faced brunette who never had a harsh word for anyone. She’d been Izzie’s best friend since childhood.

Bridget was nothing like Leah, a feisty stripper who worked with Izzie at the club. The girl was young and sweeter than anyone would suspect, given her rough background. Blond and bouncy Leah was definitely the antithesis of Izzie’s sister Mia, with her short, jet-black hair and hard edge.

Mia’s years as an attorney, prosecuting some pretty awful crimes, had made her even tougher than she’d been growing up. A fighter and a tomboy, Mia had eschewed big sister Gloria’s good-girl desire to be a housewife and little sister Izzie’s bad-girl desire to be a dancer. Frankly, Izzie had held her breath after asking Mia to be in the wedding, knowing it was not her sister’s thing. But family was family. She’d come through.

Then there was Vanessa. While, like Mia, she had some serious attitude, Vanessa also oozed sex appeal and warmth. The stunning African American was a good friend of Izzie’s from her Radio City days.

Finally came Gloria, the oldest Natale girl. Married, thirtysomething. Pretty in an Italian housewifey way. Gloria was bossy and old-school, which was why Izzie had both a maid and a matron of honor. Gloria would have been mortally offended if Izzie hadn’t asked her.

Definitely a varied menu of bridesmaids. All of whom had looked stunningly beautiful in their dark red velvet gowns. All of whom were women she adored, for their strengths and their kindness, their intelligence and their loyalty. “They were so wonderful and supportive,” she murmured.

“Well, hopefully some of my single cousins are keeping them company downstairs in the hotel lounge this evening.”

“Sorry to disappoint your cousins, but Leah just led a group of them to a bar up the street.”

Nick frowned for the first time in days. “In this weather?”

“It’s stopped snowing and I’m sure the roads are slowly being cleared.” Nibbling her lip Izzie added, “It’s only a couple of blocks away and I paid the limo driver to make sure they got safely back here to their rooms tonight.”

“Look out, Chicago, horny bridesmaids are on the prowl.”

“I don’t imagine too much can happen since Gloria’s with them.” Gloria was happily married to Nick’s oldest brother. The mother of three had seemed relieved when her husband had offered to take their boys home so she could enjoy the night on the town with the rest of the bridesmaids. “She’ll play chaperone.”

“Oh, right. Chaperone to a lawyer, a bookkeeper, a stripper and a Rockette.”

“You got something against strippers and Rockettes?” she asked, cocking a challenging brow.

He had finished working her sleeves open and slid around behind her to start on the long row of tiny buttons up the back of the dress. As he slid each one free, he kissed the tiny bit of skin revealed, sliding his lips over each of her
vertebrae with heart-pounding restraint and sensuality.

“Uh-uh, Cookie. Some of my favorite people are strippers and Rockettes.”

She dropped her head forward, sighing as he continued to undress her. Conversation was the last thing she wanted. Thoughts of her bridesmaids began to fade.

But before thrusting the whole subject out of her head altogether, she reassured them both. “They’ll be fine. They’re grown women, they’re not driving, and they’re in a group. What could possibly happen?”
Chapter 1

Throughout the excitement of the past week, Bridget Donahue had managed to keep a happy expression on her face. It hadn’t been easy. Because while she was genuinely happy that her cousin Izzie had landed the guy she’d loved for years, Bridget had two big worries on her mind almost constantly.

First, she had to testify in a criminal trial against her former boss in two days. And second, her own experience with love had left her a little sour.

Not love, she reminded herself. She hadn’t been in love with the guy who’d broken her heart. Damn it, she hadn’t. She hadn’t even gone on a real date with him.

But they’d kissed. Oh, that one day last August, they’d kissed wildly, passionately, right in her own office. And his kisses had left her weak in the knees. So, she supposed she had cared about him, maybe even more than she wanted to acknowledge. Dean Willis had snuck into her heart back when she’d thought him a simple used car salesman. That he’d done it intentionally was what made it so hard now.

Done it as part of his job. The bastard.

“Whatcha thinkin’ about?” asked her cousin Gloria, Izzie’s oldest sister. Though they sat at a table with the other bridesmaids, surrounded by the loud patrons of a trendy Chicago bar, Gloria had obviously noticed Bridget’s pensive mood. “Sweating the trial?”

“A little. I’ve been dreading it. It looks like the defense has run out of motions and I have to testify this week.”

The petite brunette, a mother of three who managed to pull off sexy and maternal, waved an airy hand. “They’ve got this guy cold. He was slime, laundering drug money through the car lot while pretending to be so nice.” She frowned. “To think I liked his ‘Come down to the most honest guy in town’ commercials.”

“Which just proves you have questionable taste,” said the black-haired woman to Gloria’s right, a slight grin on her lips.

Gloria smirked at her sister, Mia, who was the middle Natale sister. Wagging her left hand in the younger woman’s face, she quipped, “A married woman with bad taste.” Mia’s single status was apparently especially rankling now that both her sisters had tied the knot.

“It’s a good thing you’re doing,” Gloria said to Bridget. “More people need to get involved, step up and do what’s right.”

Mia jumped in. “I wish there were more people like you. Would sure have made my last job easier.” Mia had, until recently, been a prosecutor in Pittsburgh. Now she was back in Chicago, though honestly, Bridget didn’t see her cousin much more than she had before. Mia was a private one.

Bridget didn’t doubt she was doing the right thing in testifying against Marty, her former boss at Honest Marty’s Used Cars. But the trial, which started Monday, could also bring her face-to-face with him. Dean Willis. The FBI agent who’d used Bridget to get the evidence he needed against her boss.

“That doesn’t look like an ‘I’m nervous,’ expression. Looks more like a ‘who was that guy who knocked me on my ass’ one.” This came from Vanessa McKee, a friend of Izzie’s from her days with the Rockettes. The striking woman wagged her eyebrows. “Come on, we’ve been sharing man tales.”

“Not Mia,” said Gloria, her tone saccharine sweet.

Her sister made a rude gesture, which Gloria ignored.

The last of their group, Leah, a sweet-faced young woman who worked with Izzie at a local strip club, tapped her fingers on the table and frowned. She was so cute, trying to look fierce when she resembled, more than anything, a Kewpie doll, with her blond curls, pink cheeks and full lips. “Ignore them. You don’t have to tell us anything you don’t want to, Bridget.”

The others appeared to follow her lead and fell silent. Good. Bridget truly didn’t want to talk about it. Only Izzie knew the full details—the way Dean Willis had feigned interest in her, then backed off the minute he’d realized she was not involved in her boss’s illegal activities.

He’d made a fool of her. And there was no way Bridget was going to talk about that. Especially not to a bunch of tipsy bridesmaids who’d just come from a gloriously romantic wedding.

Fortunately, the subject quickly changed, everyone distracted from Bridget’s problems by the sight of a tall, rock-solid hottie walking by their table. The distraction was a good time for her to take her leave. “I really am tired. I think I’ll head out now. I’ll send the car right back for the rest of you.”

A chorus of nos followed, but she didn’t relent. She’d had a long few weeks. As Izzie’s maid of honor, she’d been planning showers and bachelorette parties. All while worrying herself to almost physical sickness over the trial.

Besides, she’d never been into the bar scene. She preferred quiet evenings with someone special. Not that there’d been anyone special in a long time. And considering how hard it had been to get over Dean, she didn’t see that changing soon.
To her surprise, Leah rose, as well. “I have to nap off those mai tais in case I decide to go in to work tonight,” she said with a yawn.

After hugs good-night, Bridget led the way to the exit. The place was packed and she and Leah got a lot of looks. It was probably due to their lovely red gowns...though, Leah, at least, was sexy in a girlish way, with a body to die for.

Bridget, on the other hand, was no inspiration for lust. She was a bookkeeper, with boring, straight brown hair and an average figure. Still, the looks she got said the men in this place were too far gone on twenty-dollar martinis to notice.

Once outside, Bridget spied their stretch limousine. Then she saw another one, very similar, parked just beyond it. “Which one is ours?” she mumbled with a frown.

Hoping Gloria would know, she decided to give her cousin a call rather than go back through the club. But when she opened her tiny purse, she realized she couldn’t. “Oh, no. I lost my cell phone.” While in the ladies’ room earlier, she’d dropped her bag, spilling its contents. She must have lost the phone then.

Leah, a few steps ahead, swung around. Bridget waved her on. “Go on. No sense in both of us going back.” Without waiting to see if Leah obeyed, she hurried inside. The bouncer offered her a smile. “Back so soon?”

“I think I lost my cell phone in the ladies’ room.”

The guy took pity on her, obviously seeing her distress. “There’s a back way, if you don’t want to go through the club.” He opened a door marked Employees Only. “Go to the end of this hallway. The last door on the right comes out by the bathrooms.”

Smiling her thanks, she followed his directions. The long, narrow passageway seemed far removed from the bright neon beer signs and loud patrons next door. Her own footsteps echoed loudly, reiterating with every tap that she was entirely alone.

Following the directions, she found the ladies’ room easily. “Oh, please be here,” she whispered as she went inside.

As far as public restrooms went, this one wasn’t too nasty. Still, she hid a grimace as she bent down and felt around on the dingy, tiled floor where she’d dropped the purse. Her fingers touched moisture. Ick. Then…

“Yes!” Pay dirt. Tucking the phone into her purse, she hurried out, heading back into the dark, private hallway.

It was so dark that Bridget didn’t even see the man until she almost ran right into him. He stood in the shadows, silent and still, tall and broad. Maybe even dangerous. Why she should think that, she didn’t know. He could very well be hanging around outside the ladies’ room waiting for his date.

The Employees Only side of the empty ladies’ room.

Uh-huh. Bridget’s breath sped up. Her entire body went on instant fight-or-flight alert.

Don’t be ridiculous, you’re in a public place. Right. There were a hundred people in the next room. So why was her heart racing just because she’d almost walked right into a very tall, very broad, black-clothed man who emanated heat and hinted of danger? One who seemed to be intentionally clinging to the shadows. One who smelled like…

“Oh, God,” she whispered, instinctively reacting to that warm aftershave she’d only ever smelled on one other man before.

The heart that had been racing before stopped for a full second before bursting into a rapid thud hard enough to be heard in the next room. Her thoughts racing, she strove for calm…but could find none. Anger, fear, regret, they all fought for control of her emotions.

She tried to spin around, to hurry back the way she’d come. But his firm hand on her arm stopped her, squeezing and keeping her still. “Stay here.”

“Let go of me.”

“You have to come with me. Now.”

“I’m not going anywhere with you,” she snapped. “Get your hands off me.”

“We don’t have time for this.” He pulled her tightly against him, though, judging by the way he kept his attention fixed on the distant end of the hallway, where Bridget had come past the bouncer, that was where his true interest lay.

Good. Because toward the big, burly bouncer was exactly where Bridget intended to go. He could deal with this overbearing man whose distraction had caused him to finally loosen his grip. She took advantage of it, trying to spin away. Seeing a sliver of light emerge as the door at that end of the hallway opened, she prepared to shout for help.

But she couldn’t. Because before she could make a sound, she was hauled up against a big, rock-hard body. And a firm, hot mouth was descending onto hers. Gasping, she inadvertently parted her lips and he took full advantage, plunging his tongue against hers, stealing her breath and every bit of her brainpower. Bridget just hung there like a rag doll, too shocked to pull away and punch his face off.
To be honest, she also didn’t pull away because she was starting to like it. But as she began to mentally admit that—and to contemplate fully participating in the kiss—he let her go.

“They’re gone.”

He was cold, determined, not at all breathless or shaky the way Bridget felt. Which infuriated her further. She opened her mouth to tell him that, but before she could, his strong hand came up to cover it. “Don’t make a sound.”

Her intelligence had returned, along with her anger and she was done taking orders or being distracted. She tried to scream, biting at his fingers.

“Damn it,” he muttered, lifting her off the floor as if she weighed nothing. He reached for a fire alarm on the wall. “I’ll explain later. Right now, we just have to get out of here.”

Without another word, he yanked the handle down. A piercing siren wailed overhead. And before Bridget had even time to acknowledge the fact that he really had set off the fire alarm in this crowded club, she found herself tossed completely over his shoulder. She emitted an oomph as her stomach hit those flexing muscles. Scorching heat enveloped her, every inch of her body curled against the man, touching him—though not in a typical man-woman position.

With his hand cupping her bottom and her palms pressed flat against his back, she could hardly process everything that had happened in the last few minutes. It didn’t help that the achingly sensual scent of his skin filled her head and rattled her thoughts. Or that she could feel his warm breath against her hip, through her coat and dress.

From the sound of it, loud patrons of the club were heading for the front door. But she couldn’t focus on that. Couldn’t focus on anything except the feel of him. And without saying another word, he pushed through a rear emergency door and carried her out into the cold night.

It was really happening. Bridget was being kidnapped, right out of a public place.

By Dean Willis. The FBI agent she’d spent the past several months loathing.

* * *

Special Agent Dean Willis had been following Bridget Donahue for three days. Long, painful days during which he’d mentally kicked himself a hundred times for ever letting this happen. Any of it.


Oh, she’d never believe it, especially because of the way she’d found out that he was working undercover. She’d known him as nice, solid, boring car salesman Dean Willis, with the ill-fitting suits, the shaggy hair and the crooked glasses.

He’d wanted her to know him like that. To like him, to trust him. And he’d played on that like and trust, needing to know—to be sure—that Bridget had not been involved with her employer’s financial games. Her boss had been cleaning up some filthy money for a couple of local drug-dealing thugs.

Bridget Donahue had been his bookkeeper.

Everyone—including Dean, at first—had assumed she was an accomplice. It was only after he’d met her that he’d begun to suspect everyone was wrong. He’d become determined to prove it, and he had—but only after he’d gotten close to her. Close enough to make her trust him. Close enough to make her care about him. Close enough to care too much himself.

She had been—still was—the loveliest woman he’d ever met. Sweet and funny. Good-natured and intelligent. Everything he’d always wanted in a woman…but he’d had to use her.

So she had a right to hate him when the truth came out, when she’d walked into the dealership one morning and found him there, with his team, tearing the place apart and taking Honest Marty into custody. She hadn’t wanted to hear a thing he had to say. She’d brushed him off, not sparing him a second thought,

She wouldn’t have trusted him now if he’d come to her to tell her she was in danger.

So he hadn’t come to her. He’d stayed out of sight, certain she hadn’t spotted him. But oh, he’d definitely kept his eyes glued to her. Sometimes walking close enough behind her to breathe in the remnants of her soft, flowery perfume lingering in the air after she’d passed through it. He’d kept his hawkish gaze on her slim, vulnerable back, the long, light brown hair falling in a curtain over her shoulders. He’d caught tantalizing glimpses of her creamy cheek and her full lips when she smiled and heard the echo of her laughter more than once as she’d participated in her cousin’s wedding.

All the while knowing someone wanted to kill her.

“Damn it, put me down,” she snapped.

He complied, lowering her to stand on her own feet, though he kept one arm around her waist to prevent her from making a run for it. With the other, he unlocked the door of his SUV. It was parked out back, behind a Dumpster, near a few cars in private employee spaces. Unimpeded by the crowd probably gathering out front…with easy access to a rear alley. He’d left it here when he’d followed Bridget’s limo earlier this evening, anticipating the
possible need for a fast getaway.
“Let me go!”
“Shut up, Bridget, we’re getting out of here. I’ll explain everything later.”
She wriggled and kicked, seeming to suddenly have eight arms and legs, all of which were battering at him, demanding her freedom. “I swear I’ll scream.”
“Nobody’ll hear you over the emergency alarm,” he replied, not a bit fazed by her threat. “Now get in and stay down...This is serious.” He pushed her into the backseat. Knowing he couldn’t trust her not to make a break for it the moment he moved to the driver’s seat, he took her chin in his hands. Staring into her blazing eyes, he said, “Someone’s been following you.”
“You,” she spat.
“No,” he replied, crouching down behind the open door. “Someone doesn’t want you to testify next week and they’re going to try to make sure that you don’t.”
Her mouth opened, then quickly snapped closed. Bridget’s eyes narrowed and her brow scrunched as she tried to make sense of his words. To process the idea that someone might actually want to hurt her.
He still hadn’t quite processed it. Because since the moment he’d found out—after being called in by the Bureau chief three days ago—he’d been operating on pure anger and adrenaline.
God help the bastard sent to harm her. When Dean found him, the guy was going to wish he hadn’t been born.
“Trust me, Bridget,” he asked, his voice low and resolute. He needed her to cooperate. Now. “I know you hate me, and that’s understandable. But I swear to you, I’m trying to protect you.”
She glared and he knew she was planning a sarcastic response. That sarcasm and strength were two of the things he liked about her, especially because they were so unexpected given her quiet demeanor and beauty.
Whatever she’d been about to say was cut off by the sound of sirens approaching. She glanced toward the building and the driveway leading to the front lot as if contemplating taking refuge among the crowd with the rescue workers. Then she looked back at Dean. The frown faded. And though the anger remained, the distrust disappeared from her expression.
The woman was furious, all right. But she was not stupid. She might hate him, but she knew he could protect her.
“All right. What is it you want me to do?”
Chapter 2

Dean had proved himself a liar several months ago when they’d met. But now, tonight, Bridget knew he was telling the truth. His tension and barely controlled fury spoke volumes about his genuine worry. For her. The star witness.

That was the only reason he was here, she knew enough about him to realize that much. It certainly wasn’t out of any personal regard. The kiss he’d just laid on her had rocked her world as much as the ones they’d shared in her office last August. But they hadn’t so much as caused him a tremor. She meant nothing to him—he’d made it clear that day when he’d let her be interrogated for hours by his other FBI buddies, who thought she had something to do with Marty’s not-so-honest dealings.

Letting her be interrogated had been the least of his crimes. Letting her care about him…that was the one she couldn’t forgive.

“Stay down,” he barked as he started the vehicle, gunning the engine hard.

She did as he ordered, crouched in a ball on the backseat. The SUV jerked and swayed, angling sharply to the right, almost knocking her to the floor. Dean’s big hand appeared out of nowhere, blocking her fall with a firm grip on her shoulder.

God, she hated her own weakness for immediately sucking in a breath of pure excitement at the rough touch of his hand. “I’m fine,” she managed to say between clenched teeth.

“Don’t move.”

As if she could.

“And don’t pop your head up.”

“I’m not a jackrabbit. Just pay attention to the road.”

He didn’t respond, but he removed his hand, putting it back on the wheel. He obviously needed it because he intentionally maneuvered in jerks and swerves as he tore off down the street, as if physically trying to shake off pursuit. He drove like it was a sunny, warm day with miles of dry blacktop in front of them. Not as though there’d been a blizzard up until this afternoon and patches of slick ice were lurking beneath snowdrifts, anxious to send a car into a deadly spin.

He drove that way for a good five minutes. Bridget watched him from between the front seats, seeing the way he leaned forward, his chest almost against the steering wheel. He stared out, his gaze constantly moving from side to side. But even that rapt attention couldn’t keep him from almost fishtailing into the path of a long, black stretch limo.

“Watch out!” she yelled.

“You’re supposed to be staying down.”

“You’re supposed to be preventing me from getting killed.”

“I’m the one driving.”

“Seems to me like you’re the one almost wrecking,” she muttered under her breath, even as he brought the SUV back under control and the limo driver honked his horn wildly.

Oh, did she wish she was in one just like it, preparing to go back to her hotel and her nice, plush bed. Rather than here. With him. The guy who messed with her head and filled her senses up with the musky smell of him and the big, strong sight of him and oh, Lord, his heat.

The Dean she’d known had been cute and endearing. Good-looking but usually appearing self-deprecating. Boyish.

There was nothing boyish about the man whose whole body was tense with adrenaline as they tried to outrun danger.

Danger. To her.

“Does someone really want to kill me?” she whispered.

Even in the low lighting from the dashboard, she saw the way his jaw jutted out and his eyes narrowed. “Yes.” It was almost too much to believe. Bridget was a big fan of crime shows and mystery novels, but the idea that she could be a target was so crazy she had trouble grasping it. “Is it Marty?”

He appeared to hear the note of hurt in her voice, which she just couldn’t hide. She’d known Honest Marty since she was a kid growing up in the neighborhood. He’d been a nice, paternal, if slightly overbearing, boss. And he wanted her to die?

“Not Marty,” Dean finally replied, sounding loathe to admit it. “His…former colleagues.”

She didn’t know why it relieved her that a bunch of drug dealers wanted her dead but one pudgy, blustery car dealer did not. But it was true. A little, anyway. “You’re sure?”

He nodded. “He was the one who came forward with the information about the hit.”
“The hit?” she yelped. “As in hit man?”

He reached back, seeming to want to calm her down with a hand on her shoulder. But he didn’t touch her
shoulder. Instead, those strong, rough fingertips of his brushed her cheek. Lightly, carefully.

Bridget felt the touch clear down to the bottoms of her aching-in-spiked-heels feet.

He’d touched her only a few times in the past. And, like the passionate encounter they’d shared in her office,
his touch had imprinted itself on her memory. The thoughts sometimes eased out of her subconscious to torment her
during long, sleepless nights when she wondered why she couldn’t get over him. Why the fully clothed kisses they’d
shared had seemed much more intimate and erotic than the sex she’d had with other men.

Dean’s fingers traced a delicate path on her cheek, but when his thumb dropped to her bottom lip, scraping
across it in a sensual caress, he obviously realized what he was doing. He pulled his hand away quickly.

He cleared his throat. “You’ll be fine.”

Swallowing hard, Bridget rubbed the back of her hand against her cheek, which felt so cold again now. Trying
to keep her thoughts strictly on the crisis that had made him haul her into his car, she asked, “What exactly did
Marty say?”

“He had been keeping his mouth shut about his accomplices, until he got word that they were going to try to
remove some of the evidence against him. Starting with you.”

“I don’t know anything!” she insisted, as she’d tried to explain to the other FBI agents and the prosecutor. “I
never saw any drugs, never handled anything suspicious.”

“It’s not what you know, it’s the context you can provide about his business. How much money should have
been coming in versus how much did. Accounts you saw open and close.” He lowered his voice, as if not liking
what he had to say. “You are important to the case and Marty’s former associates know it.”

Yes. That’s what the prosecutor had said.

The full implication of Dean’s words finally washed over her and she sucked in a quick, hopeful breath. “So
Marty’s cooperating now?” Meaning maybe she wouldn’t have to testify!

“No exactly.”

She sighed.

“He’s not naming names, he’s trying to score points by being cooperative only as it pertains to you. I think he’s
hoping whoever is after you will get caught and turn on his bosses so Marty doesn’t have to.”

“What a guy.”

“Yeah, I’d really like to thank him one of these days.”

Dean’s tone suggested his “thank yous” would be punctuated with his fists.

She shivered a little, not only because of his audible rage, but because she still couldn’t get over the strength
and power of the man. She hadn’t seen this side of him, not ever. He’d been the cute guy she worked with, then the
cold investigator. She had never seen the powerful, enraged man.

“I think it’s safe for you to sit up now.”

Bridget did so, slowly rising, keeping her hands on the backs of the two front seats. She remained forward on
the seat, her butt perched on the edge, her face leaning close to his shoulder. Close enough to smell him. To see the
tiny hairs at the nape of his neck, with the hint of curl she’d loved in his much-less formal, used-car-salesman look.
Her fingers almost throbbed with the need to slide against that thick, blond hair and mess it up, push away the
conservative agent and bring back the nice guy she’d once laughed with.

Why did her body not remember that she hated him? But it didn’t. She was obviously still very susceptible to
the man, at least physically. Despite being scared out of her mind that someone could have blown her away in front
of her family and friends at the bar just now; despite being furious at having been kidnapped for her own good the
overwhelming feeling flooding through Bridget was awareness. Physical awareness. Her thighs were clenched, her
fingers shaking. Her heart was racing out of control; her breaths were ragged and irregular.

And her most feminine parts were running a foot race trying to be the first to remind Bridget that it had been a
long time since she’d had sex. As if she could forget. Between her nipples scraping hard against the soft fabric of her
dress and the warmth gathering between her thighs, there was no mistaking her physical response to Special Agent
Willis.

If he pulled over and invited her to climb into the front seat and get on his lap, her legs would be scrambling
forward even as her brain told them to stay put. She knew it just as she knew she’d hate herself for it afterward,
when she got her hopes up about Dean again, only to watch him cruise back out of her life once his job was done.

Which meant one thing. She had to get away from him at the very first possible moment.

* * *

Dean drove. He wasn’t entirely conscious of where. Not where he was going or of his final destination. He just
drove away from any danger to the slim young woman in the backseat. The one who’d probably been glaring
fireballs at the back of his head from the minute he’d shoved her inside. "Where are we going?" she eventually asked. “Are you taking me to your office?”

He shook his head. “Somewhere else.”

No point telling her that the local field office was the last place he could take her. Considering Dean hadn’t exactly been authorized to snatch her off the streets, he didn’t imagine his boss would be happy if they showed up there.

He might end up unemployed after this. But damned if he could bring himself to regret it. The rest of the Bureau might not care about putting a young woman’s life on the line in an effort to nab a bigger suspect, but Dean wasn’t about to go along. Definitely not when the woman in question had not given her permission to be used as bait.

And especially not when the woman was Bridget Donahue.

“Where else is there?” she insisted, leaning closer between the front seats. So close her long, smooth hair brushed his arm. He wore not only a jacket but also a long-sleeved shirt, yet something in him swore he’d felt the contact. Maybe because he’d imagined it. Imagined sinking his hands into her hair, wrapping it around his fingers, holding her still as he explored the depths of her mouth…then every inch of the rest of her.

“Hello? Are you taking me home now?”

“Absolutely not. We’re going someplace safe and you’re staying there until we eliminate this threat.” And he suddenly thought of the perfect place. It might be difficult to reach in this weather, but the SUV had four-wheel drive. They should be able to make it. Or at least get close enough to hike in.

Not with her in that dress, an internal voice reminded him. He ignored it. He’d deal with that issue when he had to.

“Is it a safe house?”

“No.”

She met his stare in the rearview mirror, her eyes narrowing in suspicion. “Please don’t tell me you’re taking me back to your place for my own good. Because I might have been Miss Naive a few months ago when I fell for your routine, but I’m not that girl anymore. And if you kidnapped me for any personal reasons, I’ll have you thrown into jail.”

Dean couldn’t help barking a laugh at her fierce expression and threatening tone. The woman was not the quiet bookkeeper he’d first met last summer, which wasn’t a bad thing. In fact, the fiery, feisty Bridget was the one he’d most missed after he’d had to cut ties with her because of the case.

“We’re going to a place right outside the city.” He watched her expression as she absorbed that news, not missing the way her lips parted on a quick, inhaled breath, or the slight widening of her glittering eyes.

He’d bet money it wasn’t fear he saw in her face. It was excitement. Because though Bridget might want to deny it, they’d had intense chemistry. That had been proven one afternoon in her office. Dean had found one of the other salesman making an aggressive move on her and had tossed the other guy out on his ass. Pure anger and the sexual awareness that had been sizzling between them for weeks had come to a head and he’d ended up with his tongue down her throat and her legs wrapped around his hips. He could have had her right there, on top of her desk, and he’d wanted that more than he’d wanted to see another morning.

He hadn’t done it. Both because of the job…and because she’d have hated him even more once she found out who he was.

Not that it mattered. She hated him enough already. Except…that little flare in her eyes and the way her tongue now flicked across her lips to moisten them said her hatred hadn’t stopped the other feeling she’d had for him.

Desire.

“I can’t go stay in some hotel with you. I don’t have so much as a toothbrush with me, much less any…” Her words trailed off, her eyes dropping, no longer meeting his in the mirror. And he knew her mind had instantly gone to other, more personal items she might be missing.

Like spare panties.

His teeth almost breaking as he clenched them together, Dean cleared his throat. “We’ll make do.”

“I am not going to wear this bridesmaid dress until I testify Monday.”

She had a point.

Apparently getting over her embarrassment, she tossed her head back in visual challenge, she added, “And you can absolutely forget about me wearing nothing but what’s under this bridesmaid dress until then, either.”

Damn, there she went reminding him of the panties. And not only that, her words had sounded almost like a challenge. The thought of accepting it—of seeing how long he could hold out if he saw her wearing nothing but silk and lace, maybe in the same sexy shade of red as her dress—made Dean shift in the driver’s seat. A litany of images flashed in his brain as he pictured her in her strappy high heels…with nothing else on her but him.
“Stop somewhere so I can get some clothes.”
“It’s ten o’clock on a Saturday night after a blizzard.” His voice sounded gruff, even to his own ears. The tone was caused not by irritation with her for the demands, but rather at himself…for being unprofessional enough to get a hard-on for a woman he was supposed to be protecting.
“Then take me back to my hotel so I can grab my suitcase.”
“Your hotel room was compromised.”
Bridget’s mouth fell open and she sagged back into her seat. “What?”
He began to explain, assuming she’d have questions. But when he caught sight of her reflection, the words disappeared. Bridget’s eyes were closed, her lips sucked into her mouth. She was shaking her head back and forth in silent denial. And she was trembling, long shudders racking her body.
But not, he suspected, from the cold.
She’d been strong, holding it together, not asking too many unnecessary questions and trusting him enough to come with him. Now everything was obviously sinking in. Reality was washing over her, cold and unrelenting. And terrifying.
“I won’t let anything happen to you,” he whispered harshly, talking as much to himself as to her.
She opened her eyes and met his stare for a long, pregnant moment. Then, finally, she nodded once. The shudders finally ceased and she drew in a few deep breaths. “I’m sorry. That just hit me hard. Made it all real, you know?”
He knew.
“I’m okay now.” Pure strength…she was the picture of it.
Dean wanted to pull over, tug her out of the backseat and into his arms to offer comfort. Just that. To let her know she didn’t have to be strong alone.
But they needed to push on to make sure nobody could locate them—not the man following her. Not even his own coworkers. Then, when he knew they wouldn’t be found, he’d get her out of the car and keep her secure.
Warm. Safe.
Or die trying.
Chapter 3

Though she badgered him, it was another hour before Bridget could get Dean to even consider stopping for supplies. God, how she wanted a toothbrush, at least. But he refused, saying he wouldn’t risk it until they were clear of the city.

Clear of the city…as in, he was removing her from Chicago, far from her home and her family and her friends. She had not a stitch of extra clothes, no one knew where she was and he’d essentially kidnapped her.

Why am I not terrified? Maybe it was because of the calmness of his tone, his certainty that she would be fine. Or the way he’d said those seven words: I won’t let anything happen to you.

He’d meant it…It had been more than a promise, it had been a vow. Physically, he would not let her be harmed. Emotionally, however, was another story. It had taken months for her to get over what he’d done to her…and if she were to be truly honest, she still wasn’t over it. So she had to get away from him. As soon as possible.

In the meantime, though, she figured she ought to find out what she could. She listened in silence as Dean told her what he knew, then finally said, “So if Marty hadn’t come forward with the information, I could have walked into my hotel room tonight or my apartment tomorrow and found a gun pointed at me.”

“It won’t happen, Bridge.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“Because you won’t be there,” he replied, his tone even and unhesitating. “And after you testify, it all becomes moot. There’s no gain in removing you from the equation.”

“So whoever’s been following me just gets away with it because he doesn’t have to kill me anymore?” she asked, her anger rising. It had been growing with every word Dean had said. Especially when those words included contract killer and gunning you down.

“He won’t get away with it.” Dean didn’t so much speak the words as growl them. She instinctively knew he meant it—whatever he felt about her personally, Dean had sounded almost vengeful.

“So if you don’t know who is after me, how did you know he’d followed me to the club?”

Dean glanced at her in the near darkness of the car. From the glow of the dashboard, she could see the way his brow was furrowed into a deep frown. “We’ve been running plates on cars that have been near your home and office in the past forty-eight hours. One turned up at your hotel—right before a guest reported a man acting suspiciously outside your door.”

Her stomach rolled. “He broke into my room?”

Dean nodded once.

“My cousins…”

“They’re no threat and wouldn’t be on this guy’s radar.” Dean’s voice grew deeper—slow and tense. “He’s only after you.”

Great.

Her stomach rolled. “He broke into my room?”

Dean nodded once.

“My cousins…”

“Then the local PD called in a sighting of it…in the area of the club.”

“Okay, God,” she whispered.

“I followed you outside, but stayed out of sight when you came back in. Not knowing for sure who was after you, I couldn’t just let you stay there—or go back to the hotel—when you had no idea what was going on.”

Still trying to find a way to comprehend it all, she whispered, “So you grabbed me.”

“I grabbed you.”

Before she could continue, he surprised her by flipping on his turn signal and heading for an exit. Fortunately, the plows had done a good job of clearing the main roads and exits…but the side one they ended up on was still dusted with white.

“We’ll be okay, it’s a four-wheel drive.”

It was as if he’d read her mind.

“Are we going to stop now?”

“Yes. We’ll need some food. We’re going to be roughing it.”

Roughing it. In a velvet bridesmaid gown and skimpy lingerie. Wonderful.

Then Bridget thought about it and realized she wouldn’t have to. Because he was stopping in a public place, where she could get help from someone else. Someone who wasn’t Dean, who didn’t arouse her even as he infuriated her.

She owed him for getting her out of danger this evening. That didn’t mean he was the one who had to keep her out of danger from now on. She had friends, she had family. Heck, her cousin Mia knew the law inside and out. She was as tough as any criminal and had prosecuted dozens of them.

Bridget made her decision quickly. She was going to ditch Dean at the first opportunity.
He headed for the only well-lit area near the exit, a small gas station with a convenience store. Parking out front, he said, “Wait a second. It’s too snowy.”

She didn’t have any idea what he meant to do about that until he opened the back door, reached in and picked her up off the seat. “You’d break your neck on this ice, even if you weren’t wearing those ridiculous things on your feet.”

Those ridiculous things had cost her half a week’s paycheck. But she couldn’t even open her mouth to argue it because all the air had been sucked from her lungs when he’d swung her into his arms. He held her close, tight against his warm, powerful body, picking his way across the ice and snow.

The contact was electrifying. His arms cradled her, his breath falling on her cheek and her hair. Bridget lost all sense of time and place, not even noticing the cold until he carefully set her down on the cleared sidewalk.

Finally, with the gift of distance, she could breathe again, think again. Calling herself a fool, she yanked the door open and strode inside.

He was right behind her. “Where are you going?”

“Where does it look like I’m going?” She nodded toward the ladies’ room door in the back corner of the dusty old store, empty but for a dozing man behind the counter.

He frowned, offering a brief nod. “Be quick.”

Oh, she’d be quick all right. Quick to make a phone call to Mia—anybody—to get her out of this mess.

Because while she appreciated Dean getting her to safety, there was no way she was spending the next day and a half alone with him.

A tiny voice of doubt told her she’d be smart to go along. Smart and safe. But she knew that little voice meant safety in the physical sense. Emotionally, she would not be safe being closed up with Dean for thirty-six seconds, let alone hours.

As soon as she’d shut the ladies’ room door behind her, she grabbed her cell phone out of her purse and dialed Mia’s number. Mia was not only a lawyer, she was a serious, no-nonsense woman. She wouldn’t go nuts like Gloria might and she wouldn’t worry herself into a heart attack like Bridget’s parents would.

But after three rings, Mia’s cell phone was answered by a voice that was much deeper than her beautiful cousin’s. “Hello?”

“I’m sorry…I think I might have dialed the wrong number,” Bridget admitted, knowing her cousin hadn’t been seeing anyone since she’d moved back to Chicago just before Christmas. “I was trying to reach my cousin, Mia Natale?”

“You’ve got the right number,” the smooth, deep voice said.

Whoa. Mia had picked up a man for the night. A sexy man, judging by the deep, slow voice. “Can I speak with her, please?”

“Sorry,” he replied, “Mia’s in the…middle of something.”

Oh, great. She was having sex with a stranger when Bridget needed her to come bail her out of her predicament. Though she hated to do it, she was going to have to play the it’s-an-emergency card. But before she could do it, before she could say another word, in fact, the connection ended.

The jerk had hung up on her.

A knocking on the ladies’ room door told her Dean was growing impatient. “Come on, we need to hit the road.”

Damn. She hit redial and got Mia’s voice mail. “It’s Bridget. I’m in trouble. Call me the minute you get this.”

“What are you talking to?”

“Nobody,” she called, turning on the faucet and letting the water run loudly. That was the first time she caught sight of herself in the mirror. Bridget was shocked to see the wide-eyed, pale-faced, wild-haired woman staring back at her.

She was a mess. The hair nightmare had probably been caused by being dangled upside down over Dean’s big shoulder. Her makeup was smeary, her eye shadow gone and her mascara runny because of the few tears she’d allowed herself to shed over the thought that somebody wanted to kill her.

And her lipstick…had been kissed off.

Well kissed off.

She kept staring at her lips, her moist, parted lips. Then she focused on her eyes, which sparkled in the dim lighting cast by the bare overhead bulb. There was something in them, even she could see it. It wasn’t exactly fear—though she was, in fact, afraid. Rather, she realized, it was excitement.

“Not at being chased,” she murmured, knowing it was true, “but at being rescued.” By a man she’d once wanted desperately.

That excitement—anticipation—made her stop and really think for the first time since Dean had grabbed her at the club. She had the chance to spend the rest of the weekend alone with a guy who was like sex in a jar. Far from
home, with no possible future between them after he made sure she got safely to the courthouse on Monday. Which meant she couldn’t get her schoolgirl hopes raised as she had last August. She knew this was a one weekend event and would go nowhere else.

Hmm. How would they spend their time?

As always, when faced with a dilemma, Bridget played the What Would Izzie Do? game. And without a doubt she knew what her gutsy cousin would do. She’d seduce Dean and get the most fabulous sex she could. Further, she’d keep her heart out of the equation so there’d be no false expectations. Then walk away next week with some incredible memories and absolutely no ties.

“I can take him and get him out of my system once and for all,” she whispered, wanting so much to do it. To stop hurting, to stop wondering. To stop fantasizing in her bed late at night when she thought she’d die from the hollow emptiness between her legs, knowing he was the only one who could fill it.

He’d wanted her once. He might have kissed her only to shut her up tonight, but there had been no denying his physical response when he’d kissed her at work that day. If someone hadn’t come into the dealership, he might very well have taken her right on her desk. Being honest, she’d pushed him to that point, wearing provocative clothes, flaunting herself, letting him know what she wanted.

What would happen if she did so again?

She didn’t know...she only knew she wanted to find out. And luck seemed to be smiling on her, because beside the sink was one of those bathroom vending machines. And it carried condoms.

She bought six. That seemed like a good number, one for every six hours they’d be together. Optimistic, but not slutty.

“Open the door,” he growled with another hard knock, “or I’m breaking the lock. And if I find you climbing out a window I’ll tie you up for the rest of the ride.”

Well, that did it. Because instead of feeling threatened by Dean’s words, a sharp stab of excitement shot through her. With one last look at the almost unfamiliar, hungry-looking woman reflected in the mirror, Bridget grabbed for the knob. Flicking the lock, she swung the door open. She met Dean’s surprised stare, quirking a brow.

“Kinky,” she forced herself to say.

He gaped. “What did you call me?”

Channel Izzie, she reminded herself, squashing her instinct to pretend she’d been asking for a Twinkie. “I wasn’t calling you that,” Bridget cleared her throat, plunging forward. “Just saying bondage is pretty kinky. Especially for you FBI types.” Tapping her fingertip against her cheek and ignoring his shocked expression, she continued. “Though, I suppose you guys are probably good at using handcuffs.”

Dean’s jaw clenched into something that resembled granite and Bridget could see the pulse raging in the side of his throat. It was just below a tiny, errant curl of blond hair…one small reminder of the friendly, laid-back guy she’d fallen so hard for.

She didn’t want those reminders or that guy who’d hurt her so badly. She wanted the one she could have for the next thirty-six hours, then walk away from and completely forget. So she tore her attention from the curl and onto the jutting jaw, the blazing blue eyes, the slashing line of his full lips.

Better. Much better.

“I think you’d better stop talking now.” He shifted closer, until his foot brushed the bottom hem of her gown.

“Oh what?” she asked with a sweet smile. “Going to get out the chains and whips to go along with the cuffs and rope?”

Towering over her, he opened his mouth as if to retort, but quickly snapped it shut. His eyes flashed, his breath audible between his lips. Awareness and heat erupted off him.

He was angry. He was worried. And he was interested. No matter what his silence said, his body language made it clear.

Yes, this was definitely better. This angry, wildly sexy man would take what he wanted and not plan to give anything more than a few hours pleasure. Which was all she’d expect.

Now she could forget all about the nice, smiling guy she’d fallen for. And focus on the sexy, dangerous man she was going to be getting to know much better before the night was out.

* * *

He might have made a very serious mistake.

Dean hadn’t planned on physically hauling Bridget out of danger tonight, he’d acted on instinct. He’d seen red when she’d come sauntering back into the club, heading down a dark, silent hallway where anything could have happened. And when the surveillance team had radioed that her room at the hotel had been broken into and the suspect’s car was in the vicinity, he hadn’t given a moment’s thought to what he was doing.

He’d taken her and run
Still high on adrenaline, as well as fury that she might have walked into her hotel room and into the arms of a killer, he'd headed out of Chicago, aiming for anywhere that took her out of the line of fire. Eventually, he realized that anywhere was a small, old fishing cabin a buddy of his owned. It was off the main road and had little in the way of amenities. Though he remembered there being adequate plumbing, he wasn’t even sure it had heat. But it had a woodstove and firewood. And they had the food he’d just picked up at the convenience store. Most importantly, nobody could connect either of them with the cabin so there was no way anybody could track them—her—down.

They could rough it until Monday. At that time he’d deliver Bridget to the courthouse, then go back to the office to lay his head on the chopping block.

Sounded like a plan. A bad one, maybe, but better than leaving Bridget in the city and giving some armed scumbag an extra thirty-six hours to get to her. So he’d stick with it.

But he’d known by the glint in Bridget’s eyes when she’d exited the ladies’ room that she was going to do something to screw with that plan. And to screw with his head.

When she climbed into the front seat of his SUV and took off her coat, he knew he was in trouble. She claimed it was too warm—as if their breath wasn’t fogging up the interior, which had grown frigid in the brief time they’d been in the store. Dean, however, knew what she was really doing.

The woman was tormenting him. Laying herself out like a rich, delectable dessert in front of a diabetic, just daring him to take a bite. And she’d be just as dangerous to him as a deadly overdose of something sweet.

He couldn’t be sure about her motives. She was almost certainly trying to drive him crazy with lust as she crossed her legs, the red fabric of her dress parting at the slit to reveal her long, slim thighs. She didn’t relent, leaning over to adjust the radio, coming close enough for him to feel her body’s warmth and see the soft line of cleavage revealed by her low-cut gown. Yeah, it was definitely intentional.

But why she was doing it was another matter. It could be that she already knew he couldn’t act on that lust and she wanted him to sit with an uncomfortably full lap. Or she hoped he would act on it so she could shoot him down as some kind of revenge for what had happened between them four months ago.

Either way spelled trouble for Dean.

“Are we almost there?” she asked.

“Mmm-hmm.”

“Where exactly is ‘there’?”

“A friend of mine owns a fishing cabin near here and I know where he keeps a spare key.” The place wasn’t far at all, if he remembered correctly. He kept his eyes front, watching for the small side road. Not just because he was afraid he’d miss it, but also for pure self-preservation.

“Does your friend stock warm women’s clothing?”

He couldn’t help casting a quick, corner-of-the-eye glance at her. Bridget smoothed her hand over her gown, trailing her fingers across the deep V-neck then lower, over her midriff and down to her hips. Dean glanced at her, as she’d obviously wanted him to. She caught him looking and smiled.

Yeah. He was definitely in trouble.

“I remember there being some old clothes there.”

“Size eight?” she asked sweetly.

“A throbbing started in his temple.

“And 34 C?”

It turned into a pounding.

“I can’t very well go around in this tiny little red bra I have on. It was meant to push up, not really cover anything.”

Give me strength. “And the thigh-high stockings I’m wearing won’t do a thing to keep my legs warm.”

The woman intended to torture him. She knew he wanted her—had wanted her for a long time. Playing sexual games she had no intention of following through on would make him uncomfortable physically and would test the limits of his control.

Because if she pushed him too far, he might just push back. As he had that day in her office when he’d almost banged her brains out right on top of her desk.

“And it’s not like I can just wear my wool coat. It’d be much too rough against my bare skin.”

“Knock it off,” he muttered.

She ignored him. “I certainly can’t be expected to walk around naked for the next day and a half, now can I?”

“Enough, Bridget,” he snapped.

“Enough what?”

“Enough of the sexy come-ons.”

“I don’t know what you mean.” The glittering eyes and self-satisfied expression made a lie of that statement.
“Yeah, you do. Look, I know you’re angry because I used you to get information on Marty….”
“Don’t forget the kidnapping part.”
He sighed heavily. “I know. But you can get even with me another time, after this is all over, okay?”
Swallowing, he added in a low voice, “Don’t do it like this.” Don’t.
“Like what?” she asked softly, her smile fading, like she really wanted him to answer.
So he did. “Don’t throw yourself out as sexual bait with no intention of being caught.”
She said nothing for a long moment, but she didn’t look away. Then, finally, she licked her lips and slowly smiled. “But Dean…I do intend to be caught.”
Chapter 4

Dean had remembered correctly—there were some clothes in a trunk in the small, remote cabin, which they reached about thirty minutes after leaving the store. But Bridget didn’t grab the neatly stacked sweatshirts or pants when they arrived. Nor did she go for any socks, though her feet were freezing. Dean had carried her through the snow from the SUV to the door, but her toes still felt numb.

Being in his arms had warmed at least the rest of her up, especially since steam had practically been rolling off the man ever since she’d flat-out said she planned to let him catch her. He’d barely said a word since and Bridget had been too busy wondering how to get caught to force him into any more conversation.

Now, however, they were alone, inside, with nothing between them but some cold stale air that smelled of pine and earth…and Dean’s own stubborn, protective nature.

Not for long. He would not be resisting her for long.

The cabin might be a half hour from the nearest telephone and lacking electricity, but it was no shack in the woods. Clean and comfortable, this was a wealthy man’s idea of roughing it. The pine floors sparkled, the butcher-block table gleamed, and the leather furniture looked like it’d stepped off the pages of an Ethan Allen catalog. She’d bet there was a generator and probably a portable heater. But she didn’t mention that to Dean.

She wanted low lighting and an excuse to demand body heat.

“I’ll get a fire going.” Dean lifted some logs from a pile by the hearth and put them in the woodstove. “You hanging in?”

“Yes.”

And she was. Remarkably, she really was. If anybody had told her twenty-four hours ago that she’d be spending the night in a rustic cabin in the middle of nowhere with Dean Willis, she’d have asked what they’d been smoking. But it was true, she was here…for the next thirty-six hours, at least.

The question returned: what shall we do to fill our time?

Those condoms were singing a siren’s song from her purse.

“Why don’t you just go to bed?” Dean asked, not looking up at her. “There’s a futon in the loft. I can take the sofa.”

Bridget shook her head. “I’m not leaving this woodstove.”

“Heat rises, it’ll be fine up there in a half hour.”

Lowering herself to the edge of the plush, dark leather sofa, she smiled sweetly. “Then I’ll wait a half hour.”

He mumbled something under his breath but she ignored him. Bridget watched his every move, knowing he had to feel her hot stare on him but not really giving a damn. The man was so powerful, the thick muscles in his arms and chest flexing and rippling beneath his long-sleeved black shirt as he worked. He was also so obviously uncomfortable around her. All because she’d made her intentions clear.

In Bridget’s opinion, it was about time someone did. Because Dean certainly hadn’t. Not when he’d been pretending to be Mr. Nice. And not tonight, when he’d grabbed her and bolted.

“So what is it you plan to do with me?” she asked, both because she wanted to know and because she liked the way the tips of his ears turned red when she said something outrageous. Asking him what he planned to do with her—with the emphasis on the word do—probably sounded outrageous to his strict FBI ears.

“I’m going to sit on you here until Monday morning, deliver you to the courthouse, watch you testify, then let you go.”

She knew what he meant but played dumb. Smiling as she leaned over from the couch, knowing her red gown gapped away from her chest, she murmured, “Sit on me? Sounds uncomfortable.”

Dean, who’d been squatting as he stuck bits of kindling into the woodstove, jerked his head up and stared at her. His eyes blazed with more intensity than the struggling flames and his mouth pulled taut. “Just what is it you’re trying to do here, Bridget?” he asked, sounding not only angry but intensely curious. As if he truly didn’t know.

How could he not know? Was he really ignorant to the fact that she was absolutely dying for him? Would give anything to have him, if only for a few hours?

Maybe. And if so, she really ought not to keep him in the dark any longer. So without another word, Bridget rose to her feet. She reached around to the back of her dress, slowly drawing the zipper down, letting the sleeves loosen and slip off her shoulders until the tops of her breasts were gradually revealed.

With a gulp of air for courage, she let the gown go, until it dropped to the floor at her feet.

“I’m trying,” she finally replied, “to finish what you started that day last August.”

* * *

Though the air hadn’t changed and he hadn’t moved a muscle, Dean began to sink down under an almost tangible weight on his entire body. He couldn’t speak, couldn’t think, could only sit in shocked silence while Bridget
let her wicked red dress fall away. Beneath it she wore even more wicked lingerie. Skimpy, tiny panties, wickedly seductive stockings and a red demibra that, as she’d threatened in the car, plumped her luscious breasts up rather than making any effort to cover them.

His hands clenched into fists and his mouth went dry. The heat blazing every inch of him had nothing to do with the fire he’d just started in the woodstove. And everything to do with her. How she looked. How she smelled. How she stared down at him with pure hunger in her eyes.

How he’d felt around her since the day he’d met her. Off balance, breathless, confused. Captivated.

“I know you’re doing your job,” she whispered, “and I know there’s nothing personal about it and after Monday, we go our separate ways again. But we’re adults, we’re alone. We’re here for the next day and a half…and you wanted me once.”

He shook his head, denying that last part. “I have always wanted you, Bridget.”

He could have said more. Could have told her that he’d been attracted to her since the first time he’d gone into the dealership last summer. Or that he’d become addicted to her smile, intoxicated by her laugh as every day had passed. That on the day he’d kissed her, he’d been so out of his mind with desire for her that he’d walked around with a hard-on for two days.

And more…that it had infuriated him when his colleagues had badgered her for hours after Marty’s arrest. That it had killed him to stay away from her since.

But none of that needed to be said now. Not while Bridget was watching him with glittering wide eyes and moist, parted lips. Offering herself. “You are the most beautiful thing I have ever seen,” he murmured, watching her from below, sitting on the faux bearskin rug in front of the stove. He devoured her with his gaze, coveting the delicate curves of her breasts, dying for a taste of the dark nipples peeking through her bra.

She shook her head. “I’m not beautiful.”

He rose to his knees. Lowering his hands to her ankles, he fingered the straps of her high-heeled sandals, then moved his palms up her stocking-clad legs. “No, you’re stunning.”

She didn’t deny it this time, merely hissed in a breath as he reached the top hem of her sultry, thigh-high stockings. The breath was released with a tiny whimper when his fingertips transitioned from silky nylon to the silkier skin of her thighs.

“So soft,” he murmured. The skin was creamy and delicate, the limb slender and supple. He couldn’t wait to feel those legs wrapped around his hips as he finally plunged inside her the way he’d wanted to for so long. “I love the way you feel.”

She swayed on her feet. The movement brought her hip close to his mouth and Dean leaned forward to brush his lips against the lacy edge of her panties. “I’ll love the way you taste.”

“Oh, my,” she whispered, dropping her hands onto his shoulders, as if needing his support to stay up.

“I’ve got you,” he muttered, spreading his fingers around to grip her hips. Then he rocked her close to his mouth again until he was breathing directly onto the silky triangle of fabric covering that intoxicating spot between her legs.

“Dean…”

“Shh. Let me experience you. I’ve waited a long time and I want you in every way I can get you.”

She said nothing else, but sighed and lifted her fingers to tangle in his hair. Dean leaned into her again, brushing his lips over the elastic edge of her panties, then tugging at it with his teeth. Pushing them down to fall at her feet with the dress, he stared for a long moment, admiring her femininity, his mouth watering for more.

When he grazed his lips across her soft curls, he felt her quake in response. “I’ve still got you,” he whispered, seeing the way her skin quivered and flushed beneath the heat of his breath, the contrast from the cold air of the cabin.

“Good. I won’t be able to stay on my feet if you—”

He cut her off by opening his mouth on her, covering her mound and licking deep into her sweet, wet crevice. Fortunately, he had a good grip on the delectable curves of her ass because Bridget’s legs did give out. She cried out in stunned delight, collapsing back toward the sofa, Dean helping her down.

He remained on the floor. Kneeling between her spread legs.

“Perhaps…perhaps…perhaps…perhaps…”

He laughed softly. Staring at her soft body, cast in pools of light and shadow from the flames in the woodstove, he murmured, “Oh, Bridge, we started months ago.”

She glanced down at him and nodded. “I know.” Tangling her hands in his hair, she tugged him. “Come up here and kiss me.”

“I was kissing you,” he teased, dropping his mouth to the V of her thighs again. He flicked his tongue out to
sample her pert clit, rewarded with her delighted gasp and the thrust of her hips toward his hungry mouth.

Dean devoured her, knowing there was so much more to be done but not ready to give up this particularly intimate pleasure until, hearing her frenzied cries and seeing the tensing of her muscles, he realized she was close to climaxing. “Come on, beautiful,” he murmured, wanting to take her there.

And suddenly he did. She arched hard, crying out in delight as tremors ran throughout her body.

Dean gradually worked his way up her body. Every taste whetted his appetite. Every brush of his lips sent fresh quivers through her. She was slender—not too curvaceous but so feminine she could illustrate the word. Soft everywhere. With smooth lines of creamy skin and delicate curves, every one of which he simply had to taste and stroke and adore.

Finally, when he thought Bridget was going to sob if he didn’t finish his leisurely journey northward, he moved over her and stared into her eyes. “I’m glad you let me catch you.”

“I think I caught you,” she murmured.

“You’re absolutely sure?” he asked, already past the point of no return but figuring he ought to pretend to be a gentleman.

She nodded. “Very sure.”

“Thank God. Because there’s no way I’m stopping.”

“I’d never forgive you if you did.” Tugging him close, she brushed her lips against his, then parted them and slid her tongue out to play with his.

Dean groaned, turned his head so he could get even closer, and explored her warm mouth. Their tongues danced wildly, as she began to push his clothes off him. He lifted himself away long enough to lose the shirt, but when she reached for his belt, he pushed her hand aside. “Better let me do that. I have about as much control as a horny kid where you’re concerned.”

Her eyes glittered, as if she liked that she drove him crazy. Hell, he liked that she drove him crazy. He went especially crazy when Bridget reached for the front clasp of her skimpy bra and flicked it open with her thumb. The lacy fabric fell away, revealing perfectly proportioned breasts.

She nibbled her bottom lip, as if uncertain of his reaction. “Not quite centerfold material…” she whispered. “I might have been, uh, exaggerating about the 34 C.”

“You are perfect, Bridget Donahue,” he said, his voice throaty as he studied the perfection of her, the soft skin, the dark puckered nipples that begged to be tasted.

He tasted.

“Dean!” she groaned when he covered one nipple and sucked it hard, while tweaking the other between his fingers.

“So sensitive,” he mumbled as he played with her breasts, moving back and forth to nibble and suck. As he did so, her silky, stocking-covered thighs lifted and encircled his hips. She arched against him, rubbing that hot, wet center against the rock-hard erection straining against his pants.

“I need to touch you.” She was reaching for his belt again, not to be denied this time. When her slender hands brushed against the front of his trousers, his cock lurched toward it. Dean waited for more of that touch, needing it desperately.

She rapidly unfastened his belt, tugging at his zipper, almost shaking in her want. She pushed them down just far enough to reach inside, then encircled as much of him as she could take with her cool hand. “Oh, heavens,” she whispered, sounding the tiniest bit intimidated for the first time all night. Clearing her throat, she added, “I want that. I want it now.”

Her demand for that suddenly made his whole body stiffen as much as his dick. “Oh, God, please tell me you’re on the pill.”

She shook her head and Dean’s stomach fell out of his body.

“But check my purse. I, uh, made a purchase from the vending machine at the service station.”

“So you were planning to seduce me.”

She licked her lips. “It didn’t take much.”

No, it hadn’t. But Dean simply didn’t care. He reached for her red bag, opened it and saw a half-dozen condom packets resting inside. “Ambitious.”

“But not slutty.”

As if. The woman had lady written all over her and had since the day they’d met, which was why he’d suspected from the beginning that she wasn’t involved in her boss’s dirty dealings.

He thrust that thought away, not wanting anything to interfere with what they were doing. Grabbing one of the square packets, he studied it doubtfully. “I wonder if these things have an expiration date.” The plastic was dry and crinkly, the label smeared.
She writhed up against him. “Just put it on!”

Dean almost chuckled at her desperation. But when he opened the condom and tried rolling it on, he stopped laughing. “Shit.”

She glanced down, then groaned. “No.”

“Yeah. It broke.” When he reached for the next the packet didn’t look to be in much better shape and his attempt to sheathe himself ended with the same result.

“Just shoot me now,” she mumbled when she saw yet another one break just as he began to unroll it over himself.

“Remind me to stop at that gas station Monday and throttle that guy. He’s a damned sadist.”

When he reached for the fourth and fifth and got the same dried up, useless condoms, he felt like throwing himself in front of a train. Anything to put himself out of the misery of having everything he wanted in his grasp…and being unable to reach out and take it.

Bridget looked on the verge of tears. “Can you put two of them on? Just double up? They can’t be torn in the same places.”

He choked out a laugh, almost desperate enough to do it. “I don’t think they’d hold up, even if I put all six on over top of each other and cut my circulation off completely.” Though, to be honest, at this moment, he believed the temporary release would be worth it, even if his dick fell off afterward.

She grabbed the remaining packet. “This one doesn’t look too bad.” The hopefulness in her voice was so damned adorable he had to bend down and kiss her again, slow and sweet.

But she wasn’t satisfied with that for long. She arched up again, spreading her legs wider, looking utterly wanton and irresistible. “Don’t you dare give up on me now.”

“I’m sure the last one is just as—”

“I need it, Dean. I have to feel you inside me or I’ll explode.” She arched toward him, rubbing her hot core against the length of his erection, wetting him with her body’s luscious juices. Inviting him to utter insanity.

“Bridget…”

“I’m healthy and I know you wouldn’t have gone even this far if you weren’t.”

That was true and, despite the gravity of the moment, he appreciated her faith in him.

She rubbed harder, wrapping her legs around him. The silkiness against his back drove him crazy and he knew it would be matched by the silky smoothness inside her. It would be amazing to dive into her with no impediment, skin to skin.

She seemed desperate for him to do it, arching her back so she could tease the tip of his cock, the creamy lips of her sex offering the ultimate pleasure. “Give me a taste,” she begged. “You can come all over me when it gets to be too much, but please, take me just a little.”

The please—and the tremble in her voice when she begged him to take her just a little—shattered the last remnants of his control. He didn’t want to take her just a little, he wanted to drive her into oblivion. So with one last curse at his own weakness, he thrust hard, driving home inside her.

She sobbed in relief. “Oh, yes.”

It was amazing, feeling her wrapped around him, her muscles tugging at him, gobbling him up with sensual greed.

“This is insane,” he muttered as his body wrested control from his mind. “Reckless.” But so incredibly good.

She clenched her arms around him, digging her nails into his back, thrusting up against him. “I don’t care.”

And honestly, at that moment, neither did he. Pregnancy wasn’t on his radar…but a future with Bridget most definitely was. The idea of having her and a child to come home to didn’t make him shrivel up and pull away, it only drove him to thrust harder into her, imprinting himself on her, deep inside.

She probably wouldn’t believe it, but he’d fallen in love with her long before this night. And there was nothing he’d like more than to claim her. Claim them. A future. All of it.

But it might not be what she wanted. So while they were being reckless, going all the way to the shattering climax he knew was waiting for him would be out of the question. While he wanted more than anything to explode inside her, he couldn’t force Bridget into something she wasn’t ready for.

The pressure grew exponentially, being unsheathed ratcheted up the intensity and he knew he wasn’t going to last for long. And while on one level it sounded sexy as hell, he didn’t want their first time to end with him coming all over her stomach like they were starring in some porn movie.

With almost frenzied desperation, he pulled out of her and grabbed for the final condom. As he tore it open, he made mental deals with whatever entity was listening to do all the nice-guy crap he knew he should do, if only the thing stayed intact.

It did.
“Please, Dean,” she begged, reaching for him the very second he’d unrolled the rubber to the base of his shaft. He was back inside her a second later, mournful of the loss of that blissful skin-to-skin sensation, but quickly losing himself in the renewed pleasure of their connection. Kissing her frantically, he gave himself over to it, to physical bliss and emotional satisfaction. Within moments, he allowed himself to reach his explosive climax. Her loud cries told him she was right there with him. Again. The very second it was over, he scooped her in his arms and rolled her onto his chest, lying on the thick rug. And surrounded by a sea of broken condoms and all their clothes, they quickly fell asleep in front of the fire.
Chapter 5

They ate doughnuts for breakfast the next morning. Naked. On the bearskin rug. And it was the best meal Bridget had ever had. There was one problem with eating sticky-sweet doughnuts naked: the crumbs and smears of sugar left on their bodies invited tasting.

“You taste so sweet,” Dean murmured as he kissed a bit of powdered sugar off her nipple. It hadn’t landed there by accident—he’d scraped his doughnut across it. About a dozen times.

Bridget’s doughnut had been coated with cinnamon sugar. Now Dean’s chest…and his lap…were covered with tiny bits of the spice, all of which she intended to lick off him. “So do you.”

“You know we can’t do this again, right?” he mumbled as he kissed his way across her chest. He pushed her onto her back on the rug, looking down at her with rueful sorrow. In the morning light, with his shaggy hair and the lazy, well-satisfied expression in his eyes, he looked every bit like the guy she’d cared so much for a few months ago. As well as the lover she’d fallen head over heels for the previous night.

“Maybe not that. But I think we already did this,” she mumbled, moving her mouth down his body in search of cinnamon.

And they definitely had. During the night, when they’d awakened, warm and relaxed in front of the fire, they’d both instinctively wanted more. Without protection, they’d found other ways to pleasure each other. Amazing ways.

But she wanted him inside her again. “Don’t you think…”

“No.” He pulled away and rose to his feet, as if not trusting himself. “Once was reckless, twice is stupid.”

Bridget couldn’t help sucking in a breath at the sight of him, big and male, fully erect. Yum.

“I’m going to get dressed, drive back to that store and buy a fresh box of condoms off the shelves.”

Anticipating her next comment, he added, “And I’ve gotten over my urge to punch the clerk.” He smiled wickedly. “I have to admit I liked what we were forced to do last night.”

Oh, yes, so had she. But she still frowned. “That’ll take an hour. And they might be as stale as the ones in the machine.”

He smiled as he pulled his trousers over his naked form, zipping them carefully over his engorged sex. “Then I’ll drive to the next town.” Reaching down to cup her cheek, he added, “Just be waiting right here, like that, when I get back.”

And she was. She didn’t remain in that exact spot during the ninety minutes he was gone. Taking advantage of the privacy, she washed up and brushed her teeth, then laid herself back down like some virgin being offered up to a ravenous sex God.

But the ravenous sex God wasn’t the one who walked through the door a short time later. As soon as she saw the tightness of his shoulders and the frown on his handsome face, Bridget knew who’d returned. Not the nice salesman. Not the erotic lover.

She was once again in the company of SpecialAgentWillis.

“What happened?” she asked, sitting up. She grabbed the blanket they’d used during the night and covered herself, feeling awkward when before she’d felt completely free and uninhibited.

“I got within cell phone range of my partner.”

Bridget closed her eyes and began to shake her head.

“It looks like everything’s fine.”

That wasn’t what she’d expected to hear. “What?”

“When they realized you weren’t going to be that easy a target, Marty’s former drug buddies made a move on Marty’s wife, figuring that would shut him up for good.”

Meaning…”I don’t have to testify.”

Bridget gasped. Marty’s wife was a nice lady. Stupid to stick with an icky criminal with a bad toupee, but nice.

“She’s okay. They caught the guy. He’s talking, as is Marty. He was so angry they went after his family, he offered to cooperate fully.”

Bridget held her eyes and began to shake her head.

“That wasn’t what she’d expected to hear. “What?”

“Nothing. They weren’t going to be that easy a target, Marty’s former drug buddies made a move on Marty’s wife, figuring that would shut him up for good.”

Bridget gasped. Marty’s wife was a nice lady. Stupid to stick with an icky criminal with a bad toupee, but nice.

“She’s okay. They caught the guy. He’s talking, as is Marty. He was so angry they went after his family, he offered to cooperate fully.”

Meaning…”I don’t have to testify.”

He met her eye and shook his head slowly. “I don’t think so.” Walking across the room, he squatted down beside her and lifted a hand to her cheek. “Thank God.”

He looked truly relieved about that—yet his mood remained somber. When he spoke again, she understood why. “So there’s no need to remain here. You can go back to your life.” Cocking a brow and sighing, he added, “And I should get to the office.”

“Why?” Then understanding washed over her. “You weren’t supposed to grab me, were you.” It wasn’t a question.

“No.”

“And you’re in trouble?”
“As I told my boss when I called in, I don’t care.”
She nibbled her bottom lip. “How did he respond?”
Another shrug. “We had words.”
“Serious ones?”
“I told him to go screw himself.”
“Oh, boy,” Bridget mumbled, lifting a hand to her brow.
“I did say with all due respect first,” he added, as if that made everything better. “It’ll be fine,” he said. “He
didn’t handle this thing by the book, either, using you for bait. And if my head rolls, so does his.” As if he’d said as
much as he was going to say on the matter, he reached for her dress and handed it to her. “Now, we should get
ready. I’m sure your family’s worried.”
“You mean you want to leave? Now?” she asked, so startled she didn’t dwell on the using-you-for-bait
comment.
He thrust a hand through his hair. “It’s time to leave. You said yourself this was a one-shot thing, a physical
escape from reality by two people stuck together for a few days.”
Bridget blinked rapidly, shocked that he was so ready to end their incredible interlude. Then again, that
interlude had only happened because he’d been protecting her—even against his own self-interests. Now that the
danger was apparently finished, he was ready to return her to her real world and go back to his. With no looking
back at the few hours they’d shared here.
“I kidnapped you. You had no choice.”
Oh, she’d had a choice, at least as far as their lovemaking went. How could he not see that? Because she
certainly did.
And she wanted more. Was it possible he didn’t feel the same way, even after the incredible things they’d
shared?
She wanted to ask him, but the words wouldn’t come. Dean was already loading up their few things and
carrying them out to his SUV, as if not trusting himself to continue the conversation. The quieter he got, the heavier
her heart grew. He meant it. He was taking her home, whether she liked it or not.
Finally, when he handed her her coat and said it was time to leave—again, so aloof, so impersonal—it felt like
her heart cracked completely. Like one of the icicles falling off the roof of the cabin to the ground below.
It was the sudden, unexpected crash of one of those icicles that snapped her out of her self-pity. She’d been in a
fog since he got back, now she burst out of it. Not because it was what Izzie would do. But because it was what
Bridget had to do if she wanted Dean to remain a part of her life.
And she did. Oh, she truly did.
So as Dean came out of the cabin for the last time, his keys in his hand, Bridget didn’t think. She acted.
Plucking the keys away, she threw them as far as she could, shocking even herself with the spontaneous action. He's
going to kill me.
He gaped, looking stunned. “What the hell are you doing?”
“I want the rest of our weekend,” she said. Lifting her hand, she thrust an index finger into his chest. “I have
until tomorrow morning, damn it, and I want it.”
His mouth fell open, as if he didn’t know what to say.
“And if you think you’re going to drive me back to Chicago, dump me on my doorstep, then disappear out of
my life again, you’d better think twice, Dean Willis. We started something last night and we’re going to finish it.”
She was prepared for a frown, even a yell that she’d tossed his keys into the snow, possibly stranding them
here. The one thing she absolutely did not expect was what she got.
“What if it takes a lifetime to finish it?”
His voice was soft, his tone so unexpectedly tender, that at first the words didn’t sink in. Once they did, her
heart started beating again, the world started turning again. This was the lover speaking…quiet, introspective. And
very, very serious. “If we take a lifetime, you mean?”
He slid his hands around her waist, beneath her coat, so she felt the warm possession of the touch. Tugging her
close against him, he stared down at her, his eyes sparkling beneath the brilliant rays of morning sun. “Yes. Us,
together. Bridget, I am in love with you and I have been for a long time.”
She sucked in a shocked breath. “You love me?”
He nodded, then, with a regretful frown, released her from his embrace. “Enough to take you back to the city,
let you get back to your real life and decide if you want me to be a part of it.” Clearing his throat, he added, “With
no forced proximity—no kidnappings—to mess with your head.”
His words finally helped her figure things out. Why he’d come back looking so dejected, why he’d been so
determined to take her home. Back to reality.
He wanted her to choose him…not be stuck with him.

Funny. She’d chosen him months ago, even before she knew who he really was. “I love you, Dean. I’ve loved you for a long time, too.” His smile dazzled and Bridget reached up to cup a tender hand around his rough cheek. “If you hadn’t kidnapped me last night, I would have eventually pounded down your door to see if there really was something between us.”

“But you were so mad after Marty’s arrest….”

“I was. Mainly because I was heartbroken. I thought you’d used me, that you’d felt nothing.”

“You were wrong. I felt everything.” He turned his face to kiss her palm. “I’m so sorry.”

Bridget rose on tiptoe, twining her arms around his neck. Pulling him down, she gave him a sweet, tender kiss, offering forgiveness. And a lot more. “Can we please stay?”

His eyes twinkled. “I think we’re going to have to, at least until the snow melts.”

Chuckling, Bridget tugged him back toward the door. But suddenly remembering why he’d gone out, she gasped. “Please tell me you finished your shopping before your cell phone rang.”

He knew exactly what she meant. Because with a smile that was pure sin, he reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a shiny, new-looking box of condoms. Two dozen.

Laughing in sheer happiness, she said, “Ambitious.”

“But not slutty,” he replied, a twinkle in his eye.

As he put an arm across her shoulders and led her back inside their secluded hideaway, Bridget considered how different the world looked on this bright winter morning. Was it really possible that a life could change completely in one short night?

Watching as Dean closed the door behind them, then pushed her coat off her shoulders to draw her into his arms, she knew it was most definitely possible.

Anything was.
Epilogue

They nearly missed their flight.

After a long, full night of eroticism and tenderness, Izzie and Nick both overslept. By the time Izzie glanced at the clock through nearly lowered lashes, awakened by the slant of sunlight peeking through the slit in the heavy drapes, it was nearly ten. Their flight to Aruba left O’Hare at noon.

The two of them threw their things in their suitcases, washed and dressed frantically, and raced out of their room. The whole way down in the elevator, Izzie snuck glances at her watch, nibbling her lip in concern.

“There are other flights, if we miss it we’ll catch the next one,” Nick said, obviously noticing. Then he smiled slowly, that sexy, insatiable glimmer in his eyes. “We could always come back here. I sure wouldn’t mind spending another night like the last one.”

Oh, goodness, neither would she. Though she and Nick had been lovers for several months, nothing had prepared her for the intensity of being married lovers. It had taken all the physical pleasure and catapulted it beyond anything she’d ever known. She’d never suspected, never dreamed how much better things could get with the exchange of two rings and some vows.

“Wait, is that Gloria?” Nick said as they got off the elevator and strode toward the lobby.

Izzie glanced at the main hotel doors, seeing a dark-haired woman walk out them. Shaking her head, she replied, “I doubt it. She was going home last night. Lots of little boys to take care of.”

Nick must have heard something in her voice. Because even though they were running terribly late, he stopped and put a hand on her shoulder. “We’re not having kids for a long time, remember?”

She nodded. While she wanted Nick’s babies, she didn’t want them anytime soon. She and her new husband were having too much fun by themselves. “I know. But when we do? Promise we won’t be like Gloria and Tony, doing nothing that doesn’t involve the kids, never sparing a private moment for each other.”

He put an arm across her shoulder and started walking again. “I promise.”

Feeling better, since Nick would never break a promise, Izzie murmured, “I feel a little sorry for her. I know she loves your brother, but she’s just so…maternal. Unadventurous.”

“I think you got all the adventurous genes in your family,” Nick said as he led her out the door into the cold Chicago morning. He slipped the doorman a big bill and the man stepped right out in traffic to hail them the next passing cab.

“Mia’s tough, but you’re right, she’s not exactly adventurous when it comes to her personal life,” Izzie admitted. “She never lets herself go, never takes chances. It’s a shame.” Thinking more about the topic, she added, “It seems as if none of my bridesmaids are terribly lucky in the romance department.”

“Gloria and Tony love each other….,”

She waved a hand. “Oh, of course they do, I’m not talking about that. I’m talking about wild, romantic, fun relationships.” Her jaw tightening, she muttered, “I wish Bridget could get over that jerk FBI agent who strung her along last year. And that Leah would meet some rich doctor while she’s going to nursing school, someone who’ll pamper her and treat her right after all the garbage she went through in her childhood.”

“I’m sure there are lots of rich doctors at the club,” he offered, a tiny smile on his lips. “Just none who are looking for a wife.”

She smirked. “You found one there.”

“No, I think you found me on a table full of cookies at Gloria and Tony’s wedding.”

Izzie responded by swatting her new husband’s arm. She’d long heard the snickers about how she’d fallen on top of Nick when she’d been a chubby teenager and he a sexy young Marine. He’d called her Cookie ever since.

“You want to continue this honeymoon, don’t mention that again.”

He made a lips-zipped motion over his mouth.

But even the light banter with her sexy hubby couldn’t distract Izzie from her thoughts of her sisters…and her friends. “Even Vanessa, as beautiful as she is, has no one special in her life and hasn’t for as long as I’ve known her.”

“That’s a shame,” Nick said, slipping an arm around her waist. “But it’ll happen. Would you have pictured us being like this six months ago?”

Izzie shook her head. She most definitely had not envisioned this day even as recently as last summer. “You’re right. Something wonderful could happen to any of them.”

“Maybe it already did. Who’s to say they didn’t have as spectacular a night last night as we did?”

They looked into each other’s eyes, both remembering the night before. And both of them burst into peals of laughter at the exact same moment.

Because that was absolutely impossible.
When the laughter faded, Izzie put her head on her husband’s strong shoulder, noting the way he had turned his back to the wind to shield her from the cold. So protective. God, how she loved him.

The doorman quickly got them a cab and they hurried over to it, hopping into the backseat as the driver tossed their bags in the trunk.

“You okay?” Nick asked, once they were under way. “Not worried about your bridesmaids anymore?”

She shook her head. “No. Like you said, it’ll happen, maybe even today. Who knows? This could be the first day of the rest of their lives.”

Her new husband brushed his lips across her forehead, then her cheek. “Just like it is ours,” he whispered.

Meeting his mouth for a tender kiss, Izzie could do nothing but agree. Because a lifetime of loving Nick Santori was all she’d ever dreamed of…and everything she’d ever wanted.

She only hoped that someday her bridesmaids would be equally as happy.