Runaway

One Wild Wedding Night 2
Runaway
(One Wild Wedding Night Part 2)
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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
verte-brae 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

Leah Muldoon hadn’t known the other members of the wedding party until a few days ago, but she knew she liked them. Which wasn’t too much of a surprise—Leah liked everybody.

That was a rarity in her business, considering every pretty woman was a potential rival on the stage, but she didn’t care. Stripping was merely a way to pay the bills while she went to school to get her nursing degree. Just an easy way to sock away the cash by exploiting the only asset she had: her body.

It sure as hell beat using that body for the kinds of games her stepfather had asked her to play when she was sixteen. Well, he’d asked her once. Then she’d stabbed him and taken off, becoming a teenage runaway…another statistic.

That probably sounded worse than it was. She’d only stabbed him in the wrist. And it had been with a fork. But the pig had definitely deserved it, if only for destroying her few remaining decent feelings about the home she’d grown up in.

“You’re all lucky to be part of such a great family,” she said, offering a loopy smile to Izzie’s sister Gloria, a petite brunette with a big mouth and a lot of hair. The woman sat on the other side of the table at the crowded Chicago pub.

Vanessa, one of Izzie’s friends from New York—a tall, gorgeous black woman with the longest legs Leah had ever seen—cleared her throat and lowered her rum and Coke. “Hello?”

“Okay, we’re both outsiders. Want to be my sister?”

“Sisters can be a pain in the ass. Let’s stick to friends.”

Friends. Sounded great. Exactly what she needed most.

Well, almost. Lovers would be a big plus, too. It had been a long time since she’d had a man in her bed.

Gloria took offense. “Hey, not all sisters are pains in the ass.” She glanced at her own sister, Mia, the attorney.

Mia stared at her glass, a grin tickling her full lips. “I’ll plead the fifth.”

When the laughter died down, Bridget rose, saying she was ready to leave. Leah glanced at her watch and decided to leave, too. “I have to nap off those mai tais in case I decide to go in to work tonight.” She yawned, having worked until two last night.

“I dance better when I’ve had a drink or two,” said Gloria.

“You think you do,” muttered her sister.

“Watch it or I’ll pluck the little hair ya have left.”

Smiling, Mia shook her head. Her short black hair gleamed. “Uh-huh, sure. I’d like to see you try, old lady.”

Gloria had been getting ribbed all week about being the only married bridesmaid and had endured lots of mother-of-three-never-gets-laid comments.

Leah wished she could stay and enjoy more of the friendly bickering, as well as the typical men-suck griping among single women, but she figured she ought to at least think about going to work. She wasn’t on the schedule, but even a short Saturday night beat any other night of the week at the club. And her bank account was singing the blues this month after paying for her spring tuition, plus buying wedding and shower gifts.

So saying goodbye, she followed Bridget to the door. They wove through the crowd of people cruising between tipsy and tanked. Leah hadn’t gone that far…but two drinks on top of no food or sleep had affected her. She ignored the come-ons…Leah was used to those. She usually had a bouncer watching her back, however, and was not used to dealing with actual gropes. So when a third guy accidentally bumped into her, she just as accidentally impaled his foot with the spiked heel of her shoe.

Reaching the door, she slipped into her ratty coat, regretting having to cover the stunning gown. Unlike most bridesmaid dresses, this one wasn’t painfully ugly. The soft, red velvet sheath was something Leah could use again.

“Button up.” Bridget sounded motherly, which was funny since she was probably only a couple of years older than Leah.

The command was easier said than done since half of Leah’s buttons were missing. Leah pulled the coat around her body, crossing her arms. Hopefully the position would prevent Bridget from seeing the frayed sleeves or uneven hem. She’d love to replace it. But the money she’d spend on a new one was better spent on trivial things like food and rent.

Her gloves were even worse, with holes in the tips of two fingers. Those she could afford to replace…she just hadn’t had the time. But they were better than nothing.

Stepping outside, she burrowed her face into her collar, her skin prickling under the assault of the wind. Spying the stretch limo parked across the lot, she put her head down and headed for it. She hadn’t gone far when she heard Bridget.

“Oh, no, I left my cell phone inside.” Bridget waved her on. “Go on. No sense in both of us going back.”
Bridget didn’t even wait. She spun around and hurried inside, leaving Leah to either go after her and brave the crowd of fast-fingered guys or crawl into the warm, private car.

No contest. Yanking the back door open, she slid inside, hearing the driver talking on the phone up front. She was immediately enfolded in warmth and comfort. Luxury, even.

Sinking back against the cushiony seat, she let her body absorb the heat and her nostrils inhale the unfamiliar odors of fine leather, good whiskey and a spicy, masculine scent reminiscent of the sea. She closed her eyes to enjoy it, idly wondering why the car seemed so much more luxurious—not to mention masculine smelling—than it had earlier in the evening.

Mai tais. That explained it. Everything seemed better looking after a few drinks, which was one reason Leah rarely drank. She’d hate to be tipsy enough to look out in the audience one night, think she saw Prince Charming and wake up in the arms of a fat, hairy guy named Rocco the next day.

Rocco definitely wouldn’t have a car like this. The Prince Charming of her dreams would, though. She’d been fantasizing about him since she was a kid, waiting for him to whisk her away from her lousy life. Only, he’d never come. She’d whisked herself and done a damn fine job of it, if she did say so herself. With or without her clothes.

Smiling and letting just a tiny bit of princely fantasy slip into her brain, Leah yawned, curled deeper in the seat. And fell asleep.

* * *

“Let me get this straight. You have no idea who this woman sleeping in my car is or how she got here?”

Slone Kincaid kept his voice low as he talked to his driver through the open partition between the front and passenger areas of the limo. He didn’t know why. He should be shaking the irresistible blonde awake and kicking her out of his car, which she’d either mistaken as her own or stumbled into drunk. But something made him whisper as he kept his eyes on his unexpected guest.

Curled up in the corner of the backseat, she was a petite package with bright blond curls and pouty lips. He’d stared at the lips and the creamy cheeks for a minute when he’d gotten in, unable to tear his gaze away. She looked young—vulnerable—and while pretty, she wasn’t stop-your-heart gorgeous, as some women he’d dated were. So why she’d stopped his, he had no idea.

Unexpected, that was all. He just hadn’t pictured his evening going like this—with him forced to leave a bar he’d stopped at on a whim due to a fire alarm, then stumbling over a sexy, unconscious girl in his own car.

He’d pointed her out to his oblivious driver. Richie—who’d been fighting with his girlfriend every other hour since Slone had hired him—wasn’t the most observant sort when not driving. As proven by the blonde in the torn coat.

The coat. It looked old, like something out of a rag bag. So did the gloves covering her small hands. He couldn’t see what else she had on as she was curled into a ball in the corner, her legs tucked under her on the seat. And suddenly Slone thought of a third reason for her presence: she could be homeless. Cold. Desperate.

He understood the feeling. At least, the desperate part. And some people would probably describe him as cold.

Homeless, however, he was not. In fact, avoiding his home, where he would have to play host to his pushy family tomorrow, was why he’d had Richie cruise around Chicago for a while tonight, rather than heading right to his penthouse. And the resulting pit stop at a downtown bar to kill some more time—and wait for the snowplows to get ahead of them—had left him with this unexpected stowaway.

“I swear, boss, I didn’t hear her get in, didn’t even see her back there. She musta been real silent. Sneaky-like.”

Slone doubted that. More likely Richie had been trying to out shout his girlfriend.

“You want I should roust her outta there?”

Glancing at his watch, Slone gave it some thought. It was only nine-thirty, he had nowhere to go and nothing special to do until the Bossy Women’s Brigade, in the form of his family, descended tomorrow afternoon for lunch. The bar was closed and fire trucks with sirens blaring—not that his guest noticed—were now pulling into the parking lot.

This woman could provide a nice diversion. “Let’s drive around for a little while.”

His driver gaped. “You mean…with her?”

Slone nodded. “Yes. With her.”

“Are you going to wake her up?”

“That isn’t my intention.”

His employee slowly shook his head but didn’t say a word. Instead, he turned around in his seat. Slone watched the woman, wondering if the car’s shift from a slow idling rumble into Drive would awaken her. But it didn’t.

Not thinking about it, he reached for the switch and closed the privacy panel. It wasn’t as if he was planning anything private. He’d never had sex back here—though there had been one occasion when a singer he’d dated had been determined to give him a so long blow job before she moved out of state. Now, though, nothing could happen
with an unconscious stranger. But he wanted to watch her…without Richie watching him.

He slid down the long side seat until he sat across from the blonde. Close enough to feel her warmth and to smell the subtly exotic perfume rising from her skin.

Who are you? Shrugging out of his coat and jacket, he loosened his tie, which he’d had on for a dinner meeting, then unbuttoned the top few buttons of his shirt. He sprawled back in his seat, pouring himself a drink from a glittering decanter in the limo’s bar. Bringing the crystal glass to his lips, he slowly sipped from it, never taking his eyes off his slumbering companion.

The car was warm, yet her arms were wrapped tightly around her waist. It was as if in her dreams she was still outside and needed more protection than her ragged coat could provide against the bitter winter air. The way she hugged her body pushed the curves of her full breasts high—high enough to put the taste buds in Slone’s mouth on high alert.

She was much more voluptuous than he’d first realized.

With her chin tucked into her collar, her golden hair had fallen across her face. Long, curly strands hung well down the front of her, draping the curves of her breasts. An image swept through his brain of her wearing nothing but that hair, with her rosy, hard nipples thrusting through in invitation.

Slone obviously couldn’t determine what color her closed eyes were. But he had a perfect view of that full lower lip pushed out in a tiny pout. Not to mention the high curve of her cheek and the delicate length of her neck.

She’d seen him inside. Recognized him from one of the articles the local papers and even some national tabloids had done on him. He was, after all, the bachelor heir to a multi-million-dollar real-estate empire right here in Chicago. So the blonde had seen her chance with him and had climbed into his car to make him an offer she hoped he wouldn’t refuse.

None of which matched his homeless theory.

But Slone wasn’t a stupid man. It didn’t take long for him to put it all together. The ragged coat and gloves told one story—the face, hair and dramatic makeup another. Even her presence in the car now made much more sense.

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He sipped before continuing his visual survey.

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Shifting as a hot flow of sensual interest washed through him, he took back his earlier determination. She was beautiful. And perfectly made-up, wearing women’s armor designed to bring a man to his knees. From the thick mass of curls surrounding her face to the gleam of glittering shadow on her eyelids and the trace of pink on her cheeks, she looked ready for a night out at someplace much more exclusive than the bar they’d just left.

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The stranger didn’t live on the streets. She worked them.

He was still mulling on that realization—what he felt about it…what he would do about it—when he saw the woman begin to move. Still slumbering, she stretched slowly, sighing deep in her throat and tilting her head side to side.

The hair fell back from her face, the arms released the tight clench on the coat. It fell open even further, exposing not only the long line of her neck, the hollow of her throat, the creamy skin of her chest and that mouthwatering cleavage, but more…the shapely midriff, small waist and the long line of upraised thigh pressed hard against her bloodred dress.

Slone’s body reacted. Every ounce of blood not required to move oxygen from here to there roared to his groin. His cock sprang from lazy interest to full, raging want. And there was no longer any question of what he was going to do about it.

Though they’d been riding in steady silence for several long minutes, Slone was forcibly reminded of the condition of the roads when the limo swerved sharply to the left. He flattened one hand on the leather seat next to him, feeling the car go into a slide, but it quickly straightened out. Richie’s voice came over the intercom. “Sorry, boss, some jackass in a black SUV is coming up way too fast behind me.”

Before Slone could respond, the car slid again, harder now, with a long screech of brakes and a strident beep of the horn. This time, his hand wasn’t enough to stop him from sliding to the edge of his seat…and to keep the sweet package in the red dress safely in hers.

She bounced and tumbled, falling from her curled-up position in the corner…and landing right on his lap.

“Well, hello,” he murmured, hardly noticing as the driver righted the car and things got back to normal. Because now that this sexy, sweet-smelling, incredibly soft female was in his arms, he didn’t know if anything would be normal again.

Her lids didn’t rise immediately. It seems as if even the jostling of the car wasn’t enough to rouse her out of her pleasurable dreams…but the warmth of his embrace was. Because she suddenly went from sleep to full consciousness, taking everything in on a quick, quiet inhalation.

Confronted with the bluest set of eyes he’d ever seen, he couldn’t help smiling down at her and sweeping a long strand of blond hair off her face. Nor could he prevent himself from saying what had most been on his mind
since he'd figured out who she was. And what she most likely did for a living.
“So...how much?”
Chapter 2

Leah was dreaming. She had to be. She’d dozed off thinking of her Prince Charming. Her subconscious brain had conjured him up and gifted her with the fantasy that he was sprawled right beneath her, warm and solid against her hip and thighs. Asking her…how much?

“What?” she murmured, shaking her head to clear it even as she blinked once, then again, trying to figure out if she was awake or not. Because if this wasn’t a dream, then she really was half lying across the lap of an incredibly sexy man eyeing her with speculation and visible hunger.

He appeared tall, broad in the shoulders, with thick arms that flexed beneath the rolled-up sleeves of his pristine white dress shirt. His light brown hair had streaks of gold that caught the low amber light in the car, reflecting it back in a series of dazzling glints. Those intense eyes, locked solidly on her, were a vivid green, widely spaced and heavily lashed. Seeing everything. Revealing nothing.

Sporting a light five o’clock shadow, his square jaw was slightly swarthy, but perfectly matched his tousled hair, loosened tie and open collar. And the cords of muscle in his neck hinted at the power of the rest of his body, made so obvious by the firm thighs beneath her.

He was utter male perfection. A man right off a movie screen or a magazine page…masculine, devastatingly handsome, overpoweringly male.

And she had absolutely no idea who he was.

A dream. Just a dream. But I don’t really want to wake up. “Well? Are you going to name a price?”

Those words convinced Leah she was not dreaming. Jerking straight up and scrambling off his lap to her own seat, she stared at him. Her jaw hung open, her heart pounding so loud he could probably hear it.

“I never do this, but your ploy worked. I’m hooked.” The man straightened in his seat. Dropping his elbows onto his knees, he leaned forward—close enough that she could feel the warmth of his breath on her cheek and inhale the most deliciously masculine scent she’d ever experienced.

“I want you,” he said, his voice soft but unwavering.

Leah continued to stare, too shocked to even think right. Her pulse beat wildly in her throat, she could feel it, and her audible breath provided the only sound in the otherwise silent car. The car. Whose car? “Where are we? Whose car is this?”

Where was Bridget? “Come on, you don’t have to pretend. Your plan worked—you climbed in here and waited for me, laying yourself out like an irresistible appetizer on a banquet table.” He almost growled as he added, “And it worked. You’ve aroused my…appetite.”

Leah gulped. The man was devouring her with his eyes. As if knowing he was looking at her like a wolf eyeing a sheep, he glanced away. “You looked so peaceful in your sleep that I told my driver to cruise around for a while.” He smiled, his teeth glittering in the semidarkness. “While I figured out what to do with you.”

Do with her? His tone said he wanted to do everything with her. While she should have immediately panicked, wondered if he was a serial killer who wanted to do crazy, psycho things to her, she knew what he really meant.

He wanted to have sex with her. Wild, uncontrolled, body-rocking sex. And he thought that was what she was offering by stowing away in his car.

Everything suddenly made sense. She’d been so focused on getting out of the cold that she’d assumed this limo was the correct one. What were the chances of two black stretches being parked outside a raucous club on a dark, snowy night? Though she’d sensed something was wrong at first, her fatigue and the drinks hadn’t let her think too much about it.

“Uh, listen…” she began to explain, not even sure what she was going to say. Then, suddenly, his original question returned to mind, bringing with it new implications as she reevaluated the situation. “How much?”

He thought she was a prostitute?

“How much do you want for the night?” he murmured. He reached for her, lifting a hand to her hair and pushing it back, the tips of his fingers brushing against the pulse in her temple. Leah shivered a little, though not from cold. She was suddenly hot…absolutely on fire. Though she got naked in front of men every night of the week, it had been months since one had touched her intimately. Seductively. Wickedly.

“The night,” she repeated, probably sounding brainless. That was appropriate. She was brainless, weak, devoid of thought or will. At this moment, she was capable only of sensation.

He frowned forbiddingly. “I want the whole night.” He continued to touch her, as if he liked the feel of her hair against his skin. She liked it, too. And she did not want it to end. Though she had turned down dozens of men ever since she started taking off her clothes for a living, this one, she wanted to take. To savor. To indulge.

She had one last moment of hesitation. “Are you single?”

He laughed softly, as if amused to have met a hooker with a conscience. Then he nodded and Leah didn’t care
what he thought of her. She only thought of the many long nights she’d spent alone since moving to this big, cold, impersonal city. And of the pleasure he could give her.

He was obviously wealthy—this was no rented limo and the thing practically wrapped around him like a cloak around its owner. A guy so far out of her league she’d probably never have laid eyes on him if not for this strange series of events tonight. One who wanted her on his terms: professional ones only. “Well, uh…”

His eyes narrowed. She suspected this man wasn’t used to bogged-down negotiations. “Name your price.”

He was a high-powered businessman, making a deal. Wanting a service and willing to pay for it.

Would he refuse that service if it were offered for free? If he felt there were strings attached because she was not what he thought she was?

“Do you want my driver to let you off somewhere?” he asked, his tone growing cool, as if he’d read a rejection in her pause.

Leah shook her head hard, making her decision fast. There was really no other decision to be made. She didn’t have to go to work and she was being presented with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity: to spend an erotic night with the kind of man she’d only ever dreamed about meeting. One who already had her heart in hyperdrive and her panties damp.

The situation was a definite no-brainer.

“No. I don’t want to get out.” Clearing her throat, she added, “You can have the whole night.”

His eyes glimmered in satisfaction and a tiny smile widened those sensuous lips. “Your price?”

She might be allowing him to think she was a professional, at least for a little while—long enough to get what they were both, she suspected, dying for. But she couldn’t outright lie. So she didn’t. “Nothing. I don’t want your money.”

His brow furrowed and he opened his mouth as if to argue. Leah didn’t give him a chance. Putting her fingers against his lips, and gasping as he nipped at them with his teeth, she used her free hand to unfasten the few buttons on her coat. The man’s green eyes widened as he watched her push the thing to the edge of her shoulders to display the entire glittery bodice of the low-cut velvet gown beneath. The neckline revealed a large amount of her more-than-ample cleavage.

and his attention zoned in there and there it stayed.

“My God, you’re incredible,” he muttered.

Liking the pure avarice in his voice, she leaned over, letting the gown gape further, knowing exactly how to give a man a few glimpses to whet his appetite. This particular man looked like he was starving.

Leah found herself getting caught up in the fantasy. It was like being part of a sultry game played by two lovers—hooker and rich john. But she was the only one who realized it was just an act.

“Lose the coat,” he ordered, sounding demanding and powerful. The intensity made her shiver, because it illustrated his pure, unadulterated desire for her.

Letting the coat fall away, she slid her dress up, revealing her legs an inch at a time. His gaze shifted to them, his body stiffening when the red fabric reached the top of her thighs to reveal the hem of her silky stockings. “I don’t know what I want to do with you first,” he muttered as he stared at her legs.

“You have the whole night to find out,” she whispered. Climbing onto him, she spread her thighs to straddle his lap, shivering at the feel of his heat and the massive erection that brushed against her moist panties. She didn’t settle in for a hot ride through their clothes, though, instead pulling herself slightly off him…to heighten the anticipation.

She’d waited a long time for a night like this with a man like this. No way did she want it to end too soon.

“The whole night?” he confirmed, back to bargaining.

“Oh-huh.” Twining her fingers in his hair, she pushed his head back and murmured, “And all you’ll have to pay me is pleasure.”

* * *

The incredibly sensual young woman was playing some kind of game with him, but right now, with her long hair brushing his face and her delicious body right above him, Slone didn’t really care. She was no street-corner hooker, he realized. The blonde was, judging by her sensual-yet-elegant dress, a highly paid professional. Despite the coat.

So this game she played was obviously part of her routine. She was holding out to ask for more later—a sort of money-back guarantee based on how much she pleased him.

Slone was a businessman, he could understand and respect that. But she was taking a risk that he’d not be satisfied. So she must be very confident of her…abilities.

Staring down into his face, she began to smile, sweet and sensual. She was kneading a heartbeat above him, her body held a scant inch above his. Slone reflexively jerked up, needing to feel her heat, to lose himself in that feminine moisture that raised his appetite every time he breathed it in. But she remained just out of reach. Teasing,
tantalizing, arousing him until he was holding his breath in pure expectation of something very good to come.

Snagging her bottom lip between her teeth and closing her eyes, she swayed—slowly, gracefully—then leaned closer. Her upper body brushed against his, her puckered nipples scraping him through her gown and his shirt.

“You’re so warm.”

And she was so incredibly hot. “Let me taste you.”

Unable to stand it, Slone lifted his hands to her hair and tangled his fingers in her long curls. He needed more. He needed to experience every bit of her.

He’d never been with a professional, but he remembered from the movies that they didn’t want to be kissed on the mouth.

Tough. He had to kiss her or die.

Tugging her closer, he held her tight, not letting her refuse him as his lips met hers and parted. She didn’t even try to resist, welcoming him into her mouth, tilting her head to the side so their tongues could play and mate more deeply.

Lowering one hand to her zipper, he slowly tugged it down, traipsing his fingers across her spine, savoring each tiny bump and curve as it was revealed. She was so soft, her skin as pliant and smooth as the velvet of her dress.

Releasing her hair, he reached for the top of the loosened dress, slowly pushing it to the edges of her shoulders. His senses reeling, he finally drew his mouth away from hers, hauling in a deep ragged breath as he reminded himself to slow down. Savor. Enjoy.

Kissing his way down her cheek and jaw, he nuzzled into her sweet-smelling throat, then tasted a path along the shoulder he’d just uncovered. “What’s your name?” he murmured.

Quivering—arching toward his mouth every time he moved it—she replied, “Leah Muldoon. Yours?”

He suspected she knew but played her game anyway. “Slone Kincaid.”

“And Slone,” she repeated, her voice throaty, almost a purr. “I like the way that tastes.”

“My name?”

She nodded. “Some words taste good when you say them. Like…serendipitous.”

He got that. Especially on a night like this one.

“You taste good,” he replied, tugging on both sleeves now, watching the dress drift down her arms. It didn’t fall away completely, however, hanging on the tops of the full breasts he’d been coveting since he’d spotted her.

“Use your mouth on me,” she ordered, as if knowing he was dying to do just that.

He lowered his face to the generous cleavage, breathing her in, rubbing his cheeks against the plump curves. Nudging the dress out of the way, he groaned at the sight of her strapless pink bra, which pushed her up invitingly.

He did as she asked—tasting her—running the tip of his tongue across the seam of the fabric, feeling her jerk in reaction.

She arched back, wanting more, and he gave it to her. Tugging the lacy bra away, he swiped his tongue across her puckered nipple. She jerked in response, grinding against him, finally removing that last inch of space between them.

The heat of her eliminated any remaining patience Slone had. Thrusting against her, he mimicked the way he’d soon be pounding into her tight, wet channel. She gasped and rode him, gliding up and down his rock-hard erection, making mewling little sounds of pleasure as she took what she needed.

“Get out of this,” he ordered, pushing the bra down. He barely noticed her complying as she reached around to unfasten the bra. He was much too busy catching the lush curves in his hands, squeezing them and bringing them to his lips. Sucking hard on one nipple, he was rewarded by one more spasmodic jerk and then an audible cry.

Slone looked up, shocked to see the blonde’s head thrown back, her face flushed, her mouth opening on several tiny gasps. If he didn’t know better, he’d think she’d just...

“Oh, how I needed that,” she muttered, finally opening her eyes and staring down at him. Her breathing remained ragged, her pulse fluttering visibly in her throat. Finally, she smiled. “A few more of those and you will absolutely have paid in full.”

God. She had just…. Either that, or she was good at faking it. Of course, she would be, given her profession. Slone thrust that thought away. He knew how to pleasure a woman. Just because she had sex a lot didn’t mean she couldn’t enjoy it.

Leah would enjoy it. He’d make damn sure of it.

Knowing now that she was capable of gaining real pleasure and feeling almost challenged to ensure she continued to, Slone forced himself to slow down. His frantic caresses and strokes became slow ones. He teased her nipples, kissing his way around them but not giving her the hard suction he knew she wanted. And all the while she squirmed on his lap, trying to push her dress—now gathered at her waist—off her body.

Finally, as if knowing he wouldn’t relent, she went to work on him. “You don’t look very comfortable,” she
murmured. She tugged his tie free, then undid the remaining buttons of his shirt. When she pushed it off his shoulders, she leaned back and stared at him. “Good Lord, you are amazing.”

He almost smiled at her candor, unused to such openness. She seemed to genuinely delight in touching him, kissing his neck, wrapping her hands in his hair. Finally, when she reached for his belt and worked it open, then unbuttoned his trousers, Slone knew they were both ready for a much deeper connection. If she kept her hands down there, he’d lose precious minutes of having his cock where he most wanted it to be.

“Undress.” He scooted her back to help her.

“About time. I was beginning to wonder if you were going to just slide into me through the velvet.”

“That sounds… interesting,” he murmured, watching her intently as she moved off his lap and pushed the dress down over her curvy hips, then past a set of pale, slender thighs encased in those silky, thigh-high stockings, until she wore just a tiny pair of lacy pink panties.

The car rocked. Or at least his insides did.

“But I think latex would probably be more appropriate,” she said, reaching for her handbag. She plucked a condom from it.

Obviously, the professional came prepared.

The sight of it in her hands—and the knowledge that soon it would be the only thing separating his sex from hers—made him even harder, his cock swelling out of his unbuttoned pants.

She noticed. Hell, a blind nun would have noticed. Widening her eyes, she licked her lips. “Oh, my goodness,” she murmured, sounding adorably innocent. And suddenly looking very young.

That gave him pause. “How old are you?”

Her eyes glued to his crotch, she replied, “Twenty-two.”

Old enough. Not quite his twenty-seven, but old enough.

Leah slid off him completely, moving to the other seat. With the skill of a temptress, she caressed her body in a slow stroke until her fingertips rested on the hem of one stocking.

“Leave them on,” he ordered.

Nodding, she reached for the lacy edge of her panties.

“Leave those on, too.”

Quirking a brow in confusion, Slone made his intentions clear. He reached for her, tracing the elastic of her panties, from hip down to the juncture of her thighs. The fabric was moist there. Leah moaned as he slipped his finger around the barrier, tangling it in her soft curls, then sliding it into her slick crevice. She was sweet and hot and incredibly wet. There was no mistaking pure, genuine arousal. Whatever the reason she’d wound up in his car, she wanted him now, that was certain.

Using his thumb, he found her taut little clit and played it like a tiny, beautiful instrument while continuing to make love to her with one finger, then two. But her cries of pleasure soon turned into pleas for more. And Slone gave up any effort to draw this out. He needed her…needed to be in her. Now.

Pushing his clothes out of the way and sheathing himself, he tore her panties off and tugged her back onto his lap. This time, there was no teasing, no holding herself away. Leah wrapped her hands in his hair, pressing her mouth to his in a hot kiss, then impaled herself on him in one deep, hard stroke.

Bliss. It was pure, physical perfection. She was so damn hot, wrapped around him like a glove, bathing him in sensation. Slone pushed up harder and Leah groaned as she took everything he had to give her, gasping at the intensity of it.

“Beautiful,” he muttered hoarsely as they began to rock and sway. She met every upward movement and answered it with a hard plunge down, and they found a perfect syncopation.

They thrust hard, kissing and stroking in almost violent need. “You’re so damn tight,” he muttered. He caught her hips to hold her still so he could pound into her so deep she’d never be able to forget he’d been inside her.

“It’s been a long time,” she replied, her words choppy. Her head was back, her eyes closed as she silently urged him onward.

Hot sensation roared through him, every nerve ending coming alive to join in the final race to the finish. Heat sluiced through his veins, gathering in his groin with a demanding throbbing that wouldn’t wait any longer.

He couldn’t stop, not for anything. Not even when the strange words she’d said sunk into his head, bouncing around but not making any sense to his lust-drenched brain. Until finally, with his hands twined in her hair as he ravously kissed her willing mouth, he let his climax come and emptied himself inside her.
Chapter 3

There were worse places to fall asleep than in the arms of a supersexy, naked rich guy. Leah could think of a lot of them. A whole lot.
But she couldn’t think of many better ones.
So when she did wake up from the brief, satiated sleep she’d tumbled into after their wild lovemaking, she wasn’t too quick to move away. He’d shifted her around, so they were both lying on the long bench seat, and tucked her in front of him with a possessive arm around her waist. Settled in against him, as comfortable as if they’d known each other for months rather than an hour, Leah yawned.

Though she thought he might have dozed off, too, his voice told her otherwise. “You’re not a prostitute, are you?”
Not even turning in his arms to look at him, Leah chuckled and shook her head. “Uh, that’d be a no.”
“Hell.”
“You’re disappointed that I’m not a prostitute?”
She wondered why his answer mattered so much to her. What difference did it make? She’d gotten what she wanted: some great sex. Who cared what someone she’d never see again after tonight thought?

He ran the tips of his fingers up and down her bare arm, the contact sending little trills of delight through her.
“Not disappointed, just feeling like shit for assuming it.”
His answer pleased her, which was when she realized she definitely did care what someone she’d never see again after tonight thought.

“Has it really been…a long time?”
Men. So territorial. She answered truthfully. “Yes. Quite a while.”
She’d swear she could feel his chest puff out. Again. Men. So territorial. “It’s not like I prefer celibacy,” she retorted.
“Why do you carry condoms in your purse if you’re not having sex?”
She snorted. “Who better to carry condoms than someone who isn’t getting it…but really wants it?” Blowing out a harsh breath, she added, “Imagine if I hadn’t had any on me tonight, now wouldn’t I be frustrated?”

“True.”
Wanting to see the laugh lines beside his eyes, Leah shifted in his arms until she was lying flat on her back. Looking up at him as he continued to recline on his side next to her, she couldn’t help but notice again just how handsome the man was. Shockingly handsome—much too suave and sexy for a small-town runaway, a high-school dropout who’d just taken her GED a year ago and wasn’t likely to finish college until she was thirty at the rate she was going.

But maybe not too out of reach for the siren she played when she danced at Leather and Lace. Men of all classes wanted that woman. And she—Leah’s alter ego—was worthy of a night in the arms of a man like this one.

“Okay, so we were both easy. But why did you assume what you did about me even before I woke up?”
“Jaded, I guess. I figured you recognized me and saw the chance to make a buck by stowing away in my car....”
“I got in the wrong limo,” she explained. “I rode down to the bar with a group of women in a rental limo, which
looked a lot like this one in the dark.” Shaking her head, she added, “Do you assume every woman you bump into is
a hooker?”

He glanced toward her pretty velvet gown, now lying in a rumpled heap on the other seat. “The dress was a
little…provocative and not exactly neighborhood-bar appropriate.”

Leah couldn’t help snorting a laugh. “Wait till I tell Izzie somebody mistook her bridesmaid gowns for hooker
getups.”

He sighed. “Bridesmaid?”

She nodded.

“Sorry. I just thought the rich-looking gown and the, uh, worn coat didn’t quite fit together.”

“You’re right. They don’t. I need to replace the coat, just haven’t had the bucks.” Before he even asked for an
explanation, she added, “I’m working nights to put myself through school to become a nurse.”

She didn’t mention what she did on those nights…admitting she was a stripper might have him rethinking his
initial suppositions about her. Some people couldn’t separate exotic dancer from paid whore, as she knew from the
occasional nasty client at the club.

Not that this guy was nasty, not in the least. He was sexy and hot and gentlemanly. Especially now when he
was looking at her with tenderness and even a hint of sheepishness. “A nursing student. Well, I couldn’t have fouled
that up much more, could I?” Lifting a hand to her hair, he tenderly smoothed a long, blond strand away from her
face. “Forgive me?”

“Don’t sweat it. I’m not the type of woman to go all crazy, whacked-out, vengeful virgin because some guy
made an incorrect assumption.”

That smile widened. “Crazy, whacked-out, vengeful virgin, huh? Guess I should count myself lucky.”

“Guess you should.”

He slid his hand down her arm again, this time not stopping there, but continuing on so he could brush his
fingertips over her hip. Then closer to the junction of her thighs. Leah quivered, arching toward his touch. “You’re
ready to count yourself lucky again, hmm?”

He nodded, bending down to cover her mouth with his, kissing her deeply, slowly, so thoroughly she felt as if
he was memorizing the inside of her mouth for all eternity. No breath reached her lungs that hadn’t crossed his lips
first and by the time he lifted away from her, she was absolutely on fire for him again.

“You know, I’d like to slow things down. Why don’t we take this someplace a little more comfortable,” he
whispered.

Leah opened her mouth to protest—she was fine right where she was—but before she could, Slone had reached
for a small button on the wall and depressed it. “Time to head home now, Richie.”

Leah immediately scanned the car, looking for a camera or something, praying the driver couldn’t see back
here. Why she should care about another man seeing her naked, she didn’t know. But it probably had something
to do with the fact that she was not standing on a stage in a darkened room, writhing to music, removed from the
men watching her. Instead she was lying sated in the arms of a naked man, her whole body flushed with pleasure,
her legs casually parted, her sex still swollen from his possession and slick with her renewed arousal.

Yeah, that’d be quite an eyeful.

“He can’t see us,” Slone murmured, reading her thoughts. Gently sliding her off his lap he reached for his shirt.

“We making any stops first, boss?” the voice from the intercom said.

The driver obviously wanted to know if they were taking Leah home. Considering she’d intended to go in to
work tonight, she supposed she should be responsible about it. But she had promised this amazingly sexy man a
whole night.

And she was selfish enough to want to give it to him.

He obviously wasn’t even considering anything else. “No. Straight home.” He flicked the switch off and smiled
at Leah as he handed her gown. “You’re going to like my place. And you’re really going to like my bed.”

Though Slone wished the ride home would take its usual few minutes, the roads were still not in the best shape.
So they picked their way through Chicago, Richie going easy on the curves and following the plows where possible.
They could have spent the time making love again, but something about the anticipation of having her in a bed
made him wait. They’d jumped right into wild, backseat sex when they’d met. Now they were going back for a slow
buildup before the next time.

He liked slow buildups…anticipating things. From a fine meal to a long-planned journey to the successful
culmination of a hard-fought business venture, the trip itself was one of Slone’s genuine pleasures.

Which made it pretty unusual that his hands were itching to stroke every inch of that luscious body now
covered again in red velvet. To plunge into her and lose himself inside her and do her fast and furious until neither one of them were even capable of moving.

If she hadn’t just put that dress back on and were still lying naked in his arms, he’d have said to hell with it. There’d be lots of buildup in his big, comfortable bed later tonight. After all, she had promised him the whole night.

Of course, she had promised it when he’d thought he was paying for it. But it didn’t matter…he still intended to pay her, in exactly the currency she’d requested. Pleasure.

“So, you’re rich, huh?” the adorable blonde asked as she moved to the seat opposite him. He wondered if she, too, was feeling some of the desperation in the air, and was also trying to prove—to both of them—that she could wait.

“I suppose.”

She rolled her eyes. “It’s not a question you can hedge on like that. If I’d asked you if you knew you were a total stud-muffin and you wanted to pretend to be modest you could say ‘I suppose’ or ‘others might say so,’ which would be total bullshit but at least understandable if you had a single modest bone in your body, which you don’t.”

Slone shook his head, not sure whether to laugh or be offended. “That was a mouthful.”

She ignored him. “But rich is rich, it’s not in the eye of the beholder.”

“Unless you’re some decently paid TV personality beholding Oprah Winfrey’s bank account.”

Frowning, she grudgingly admitted, “Okay, there’s wealthy, rich and filthy rich. Where do you fall in there?”

If he sensed she had a greedy, selfish bone in her body, he might have been concerned about the questions. But she didn’t. He knew it, for some reason. Slone was a damn fine judge of character and he’d already pegged hers: ruthlessly honest, blunt and a whole lot more vulnerable than she’d ever want anyone to realize.

Her mouth confirmed the honest part. Her fingerless gloves the vulnerable part.

He’d put her in cashmere, if he had his way.

“Well?” she prompted.

“Put me closer to the I-won-the-lottery-in-a-small-state than the Bill Gates side of the scale, okay?”

“Gotcha.” She shot him a thumbs-up. “And just to be fair so I don’t seem rude for asking, I’ll share, too. I am so not rich. Put me somewhere between the I-won-ten-bucks-on-a-scratch-off-ticket and the at-least-I’m-not-on-unemployment side of the scale.”

Slone threw his head back and laughed, so damned charmed by her. She made him feel…young. Carefree.

In years, he was, indeed, pretty young. But carefree? Well, that he was not. Not nearly as much as some of his detractors might think.

Some would suspect that since he’d taken over a successful real-estate empire from his late father at the young age of twenty-two, he could be lazy and carefree, living off someone else’s money. But Slone had been fighting for five years to keep that empire solvent. And to keep the world—and his own mother and sisters—from finding out just how far his father had let that business go in his final years.

It had taken Slone every ounce of energy and determination he had to get the Kincaid fortune back to where it had once been. There had been no time to be young and carefree. Or even to be involved in any kind of serious relationship with a woman.

Frankly, that had always seemed okay to Slone—especially given the determination of his mother and sisters to see him settled. He didn’t mind dating many women and getting close to absolutely none, didn’t mind bedding a woman, then going home alone. That was what he preferred.

Until tonight. He couldn’t even be sure what had prompted him to demand a full night from Leah, nor what had caused him to suggest that they retreat to his place. He never brought a woman there if he could avoid it. But with Leah, he’d actually sought out that invasion of his personal life.

Bad move, Kincaid. Perhaps. But at this moment, watching her, feeling smile after smile break out on his normally stern face, he couldn’t bring himself to regret it.

One thing was sure, now that he’d met Leah he knew he’d been missing out on one thing: absolutely the best sex of his life. He’d had his fair share of women…but he’d never been as out of his mind insane with desire as he’d been with this stranger an hour ago.

“This is so much better than the L,” Leah said, interrupting his musings.

She wiggled around in the seat, as if testing the cushionness against her bottom. Opening the minifridge, she helped herself to a bottle of spring water. Not content to sit still long enough to drink it, she got on her knees and turned around to peer out the window as they passed through the city.

Lord have mercy, he thought as he stared at her, kneeling, her curvy, gorgeous ass tilted right at him.

Slone reached for his nearly forgotten drink and took a deep sip from it, determined to remain strong and in control for at least the brief length of time it took them to get home.
She hardly seemed to notice. She kept fidgeting, pushing buttons—though, thankfully, not the one that operated the privacy screen. She flicked her nail against a crystal wine-glass to listen to the ping and turned the radio on so loud his eardrums yelped.

She was, in every respect, delightful. And she most definitely delighted him. So much so that he wondered whether one night with her could possibly be enough.
Chapter 4

Slone Kincaid had predicted she’d like his place, but it wasn’t until they reached his building, a glass-and-steel high-rise overlooking Lake Michigan, that she fully appreciated his prediction. She was awed when she walked—openmouthered—into the penthouse apartment. Not only because it was loaded with artwork that looked like it should be in a museum and furniture so warm and rich that she was afraid to sit on it, but also because the place was about as big as a football field.

But that wasn’t all. He’d predicted she’d like his bed. When she saw the enormous plush monstrosity dominating the master bedroom and realized the man slept on something that could double as an aircraft carrier, she announced, “Like it? I freakin’ love it!”

“I thought you might.”
“And you own it?”

He nodded, crossing to the other side of the room to close the drapes overlooking the sparkling lake—christened with dollops of white ice—in the distance. “Yes.”

Suddenly struck by something, Leah threw her arms akimbo and said, “This is so Pretty Woman.”

“But she was a prostitute.”

“Yeah, yeah. Come on, did you ever really buy her as a working girl?”

“Let’s not use me as the gauge, considering how our evening started.”

Laughing, Leah spun around, kicking off her shoes so her feet could sink into the plush carpeting. She’d seen places like this in movies, but couldn’t believe people actually lived in them. “You live here all by yourself?”

“Some of the help comes by, but for the most part, yes.”

“Then why on earth were you in that crummy bar? If I lived in a place like this, I’d never leave.”

“That might get lonely,” he murmured.

She snapped her fingers. “I’d just summon people here if I needed them.”

Beginning to unbutton the dress shirt he’d just put back on in the car, he chuckled. “Summon? That sounds a little…arrogant.” Leah offered him a wry stare. He immediately got the point and tilted his chin up, in mock offense.

“What makes you think I’m arrogant?”

“You did accuse me of being a hooker who was trying to trap you by stowing away in your car.”

He shrugged…a mere trifle, obviously. “Other than that.”

“You take whatever you want.” Including her.

“And?”

“You certainly aren’t used to being told no.”

“Funny, I don’t recall that word coming out of your mouth tonight,” he said with a tiny, wicked smile. He stepped closer, shirtless, his lean, muscled body absolutely amazing in the full light of the room.

The man obviously didn’t sit behind a desk all day.

Unable to contain a shaky sigh, she murmured, “Wow, you have got it going on.”

He quirked a brow. “Is that a good thing or a bad one?”

“Good. Definitely good.”

“Then thank you. Now, are you going to take that dress off or are we going to try it…through the fabric?”

Leah gasped, remembering the way she’d taunted him earlier. It was very wicked. And very tempting. But also very out of the question. “Uh-uh. This dress cost me a whole week’s pay.”

He reached for her sleeve, trailing his fingers along it. “I’ll buy you another one.”

The playful, teasing tone said she should take no offense, but Leah stiffened, anyway. “Do we need to go back over that whole ‘I’m not a prostitute’ thing?”

His hand fell away and he stared at her in shock. “What?”

She may have overreacted. Guys like Kincaid were probably used to buying stuff for their spoiled girlfriends. But she wasn’t one of them—she was a one-night diversion. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to be so touchy. Just want to make sure we’re clear: I’m here because I want to be here.” She stepped closer, lifting a hand to his bare chest, stroking her fingertips across one flat nipple, then lightly raking her nails down his side. “Because I want you. For the rest of the night.”

“And in the morning?”

“We say goodbye.”

He frowned, as if not liking that, but didn’t argue. Even as wildly attracted to one another as they were, he had to realize—as Leah did—that they were, in every other way, completely incompatible.

* * *

Wrapped in the naked embrace of the lush-bodied woman with whom he’d spent so many incredible hours
during the night, Slone slowly awoke the next morning to the sound of voices. Women’s voices. Women’s voices inside his apartment.

Glancing at the clock, he realized it was nearly noon. They had stayed up until late in the night, making love, raiding the kitchen, making love, taking a bath in his two-person tub. It was no wonder they’d slept so late. Late enough that it was almost time for the arrival of his mother and two sisters, doing their monthly let’s-remind-Slone-he-is-a-member-of-a-family thing.

God how he hoped his housekeeper had forgotten something and come back in. But since it was Sunday morning and she was about as Catholic as one could be without actually being called Father, he doubted it.

“Hell-oo?”

Shit. He recognized that laughing, lilting tone. His little sister, Jess, had tormented him with it throughout their childhood. And because the woman had absolutely no respect for anybody else’s privacy, he felt sure she was the one who’d used an emergencies-only key to let the gaggle in when he hadn’t answered the door.

“Where are you?”

He had time to do one thing—yank a sheet across his lap and Leah’s naked body—before the door flew open.

“Don’t tell me you’re still in…” Jess’s jaw dropped and her eyes widened as she saw the bright blond hair strewn across Slone’s pillow. “Whoops!”

“Would you shut the damn door,” he bit out from between clenched teeth.

Leah shifted and sighed heavily in her sleep. Putting a possessive hand on her shoulder, he glared at his sister.

“I’ll be out in a minute. Keep the others from coming—”

“Morning sleepyhead!” said another woman’s voice.

Oh, brilliant. His other sister. Fortunately, Jess reacted in a cooperative way for once—rather than a mischievous one. She kept their older sister Katherine from coming in, saying, “He’s not quite decent.”

“I’ll be out in five minutes. Shut the door before Mother walks in, would you please?”

Jess did, without another word, though her shoulders shook with laughter.

Running a frustrated hand through his hair, he gently shook Leah’s shoulder. The woman was a sound sleeper—she didn’t even budge. He couldn’t resist bending down to nibble on her earlobe and her throat, whispering, “We’ve got company.”

“Delivery man from Dunkin’ Donuts?” she mumbled.

“Not quite. It’s my family.”

She remained still for a second, then, going from zonked-out sleep to wakefulness, she shot up in the bed. The covers fell off her, puddling in her lap, revealing those beautiful breasts, still slightly reddened from his kisses and the brush of his grizzled jaw against them. “Your family? Now?” As he nodded, she leapt out of the bed, grabbing her dress and underclothes and raced into the bathroom. “Oh, my God, do you have a back door? A fire escape?”

Laughing softly, Slone followed her. “It’s fine. I’m a grown man and my mother and sisters know that. I’ll introduce you to them, you can stay for lunch.” The words had left his mouth without him giving them a thought, but once they were out there, Slone didn’t regret them.

He’d asked her for a night. Now he knew he wanted more. How much more he couldn’t say. All he knew was that he couldn’t—simply could not—give up the feeling of pure delight she’d inspired in him from the moment he’d first seen her.

She stared at him, those wide blue eyes sparkling and sapphirelike in the bright light of morning. “I’m not the type of girl you introduce to the rich mama.”

He took her chin in his hand, leaned down and pressed a hard, possessive kiss on her mouth. “Don’t sell yourself short. You’re a lovely, innocent young woman.”

She rolled her eyes and blew out a disbeliefing breath. “No, I’m—”

“Leah, I could tell you didn’t have a lot of experience before last night…and hadn’t had sex in a long time.”

She nibbled her bottom lip, as if wondering if he were being critical.

He wasn’t. Not at all. In fact, he’d found her relative inexperience absolutely heady. Because it had left her very…very curious. And willing to try absolutely anything. “It was still so good I’m not sure how long my legs will hold me up today,” he told her, wanting that concern out of her head.

That got a smile out of her. Before she could say anything, he continued. “I’m a very good judge of character. And they’re going to love you.” Knowing he needed to go deal with his family. “Now, take your time, I’m going to pull on some clothes and go out there to lay the groundwork.”

She opened her mouth to protest, but Slone didn’t listen. Instead, he went back into the bedroom, pulled on clothes, then went into his living room, where the three women in his life sat whispering. He had absolutely no doubt about what.

Not the least bit embarrassed, since, after all, they hadn’t even bothered to knock, he greeted his mother, smiled
at his pregnant older sister and glared at his smirking younger one. Since they were all “civilized” no one so much as blinked when he mentioned that a friend would be joining them. But just to ensure nobody got the wrong idea, he added, “She’s a lovely young woman. A hardworking nursing student.” He didn’t really have a way to explain the gown, so he left it at that.

“Psst.”

Hearing something, he glanced toward the hallway leading to his bedroom, seeing Leah there, twisting her hands. She looked about as ready to walk in and join them as Marie Antoinette must have felt when she’d walked up the steps to the guillotine.

Smiling, he murmured, “Excuse me,” and strode to her side. “Come on, they’re dying to meet you.”

“No.”

He took her arm. “It’ll be fine. It’s just lunch, Leah, not a big deal.”

“It is a big deal to me,” she snapped, trying to pull her arm away. “I don’t belong here.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I’m not a snob and neither is anyone in my family. There’s no shame in being a struggling student.”

“No, Slone…”

He slid an arm around her waist, wondering if he was going to have to pick up the amusingly stubborn young woman. Which was when she wriggled out of his embrace. “Will you listen to me?” Her voice grew louder, now she wasn’t just embarrassed, she was getting annoyed. At him, for not paying attention.

Slone immediately shut up and didn’t try to touch her again. But she was already on a tangent and barely noticed. Her voice continued to rise as she said, “It was one night, okay? That’s it. You will not be introducing me to your rich, high-class family because I’m just not the girl you bring around the folks. Especially not the Magnificent Mile type folks.”

“You’re wrong, Leah. You’re adorable and honest and—”

“And a stripper!” she snapped.

Slone froze, just watching her. Looking miserably toward the trio in the living room—who had to have heard—then back at him, she added, “I strip at a club called Leather and Lace. So you see, I’m not exactly one of the ladies-who-lunch crowd.”

Stepping back, his body rigid, he stared at her, hard. “The nursing school business…”

“That’s true. I am going to school. But I pay for it by taking off my clothes in front of strange men.”

And on that note, with her words echoing in the penthouse, Leah tugged her ragged coat over her shoulders and hurried to the front door, slamming it as she left.

* * *

Leah usually had a smile on her face when she danced. But as she got off the train and walked toward the club on Sunday evening, she was not smiling. In fact, anyone who looked at her closely would see her red-rimmed eyes and realize the truth: she’d been crying much of the day. Crying over a guy she’d known less than twenty-four hours.

She didn’t cry because she was heartbroken—hell, it wasn’t like they’d had a real Pretty Woman romance and fallen in love or anything. But she’d liked him. Oh, had she liked him. And she’d sensed she could fall for him very easily, even if he’d been just a blue-collar guy she’d met in a bar, rather than a business magnate who lived in a penthouse.

They’d had amazing chemistry and they’d laughed and she’d seen a lightness in his smile when they were together that hadn’t been there at first. Despite having what most people would consider everything, she knew from some of the things he’d shared with her during the night that his life was not an easy one. And was, in fact, lonely.

Somehow, deep inside, she almost felt that he needed her.

“Forget it,” she mumbled. “He needs you like he needs one of those ten-dollar scratch-off tickets.”

Bringing her curled hands close to her face, she blew on them, trying to stay warm. Another lovely day in Chi-Town. Man, she might have to break down and get that coat.

Keeping her head down as she walked, she almost didn’t see the big, dark car pulled directly in front of the crosswalk until she almost walked right into it. “Hey, loser, ever heard of stopping for pedestrians?” she yelled before thinking better of it. That was when she noticed the length of the car. It was a limo. “Oh, perfect.” Yet another reminder of the crazy night before and the way it had ended.

About to stride around behind it, she shifted to the left, but was stopped when the back door opened. And that was when her heart just stopped.

“Kincaid?” she whispered.

“Hello, Leah.”

She sucked her bottom lip into her mouth, not sure what this meant. Coincidences this big just didn’t happen.
“No surprise. I was on my way to try to find you at your club when I spotted you.”
He’d been seeking her out…and had been prepared to do it at Leather and Lace? “Why?”
Slone stepped out from behind the door, pushing it shut behind him. “I wanted to see you, to apologize.”
“For what?”
“For being such an ass about you staying for lunch. Honestly, I dread those things and was really hoping you’d
liven it up.” With a sheepish shrug he added, “And get the women in my family to realize I can choose my own
women.”
She snorted. “Oh, right. I’m sure they’re feeling real good right about now, you choosing to bring a stripper
home and all.”
“Not that I would give a damn, but the truth is, they’re not snobs. My mother was a waitress, we weren’t raised
to feel entitled to anything. Working your way through school is damned hard and you’re doing the best you can.
Nobody can think worse of you for that.”
He sounded like he meant it. And the look in his eyes underscored the sentiment. “Okay…apology accepted.”
Knowing she owed him one, too, she added, “And I’m sorry I didn’t tell you right up front what my job was.”
“Considering I’d already mistaken you for a hooker, I think I can understand why you didn’t.” Reaching for her
hands, which were still clasped in front of her face, he wrapped them in his own. “You need some new gloves.”
She shrugged.
He pulled her closer. “And a new coat.”
“I know.” She stiffened, wondering if he was going to offer to replace them, as he had last night with her gown.
“But until you can afford them,” he added, his tone quiet and gentle, “feel free to use me to keep you warm.”
Leah tilted her head back, looking into his handsome face. The man wasn’t just flirting—making a come-on
about getting naked to stay warm. He was doing so much more. Accepting who she was, conceding her right to be
independent.
And actually blocking the cold Chicago wind with his back to protect her in the warm shelter of his embrace.
Nobody had ever protected her. Not her father who’d bailed when she was ten. Certainly not her drunk mother
or her scumbag stepfather. Nobody.
Tears rose to her eyes again. “I appreciate that offer.”
“Good.”
Lifting a leather-gloved hand to her cheek, he cupped it, then leaned down to brush a sweet, soft kiss across her
lips. “Leah?”
“Yes?”
“Does that mean you’ll go out with me sometime?”
Go out…on a date. Pretty hilarious given the wild sensual games they’d played in his bed last night. Yet
absolutely right for this new phase they were entering.
She sensed this phase could be very important indeed. One that could lead to much more laughter and
happiness. And perhaps even the kind of love she’d only ever dreamed about.
And it would start with a date.
“Yes, Slone,” she replied, twining her arms around his neck and smiling up at him. “I will most definitely go
out with you.”
He covered her mouth with his, kissing her with the passion he’d displayed the night before. Yet there was
something more—something achingly sweet and patient, so tender it brought tears to her eyes.
When the kiss ended, he wiped them away with the tip of one gloved finger. “Will you let me give you a lift to
work?”
She glanced at the limo, so similar to the one she was supposed to get in the night before. How different might
her life be right now if Bridget hadn’t forgotten her phone, if Leah had paid more attention to where she was going.
There was only one word to describe all the tiny events that could have gone another way, but hadn’t…leaving
her here, in the arms of a glorious man.
“Serendipitous,” she whispered.
Obviously hearing her, Slone nodded. “More. I think last night might have been the luckiest one of my life.”
Wrapped against him, Leah couldn’t help thinking it might well have been the luckiest of hers, too.
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.