All the Way

One Wild Wedding Night 5
All The Way
(One Wild Wedding Night Part 5)
Prologue

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

Being married had its advantages.

Gloria Santori could list a dozen of them right off the top of her head. The list included such things as never having to worry about changing the oil in her car, not sweating what she was going to do every Saturday night, not having a freaking heart attack because she’d gained ten pounds over the last few years. It also meant never competing with other women over men.

Getting laid every so often wasn’t bad, either.

Though, since she’d given birth to James, her third son, last spring, getting laid wasn’t exactly the way to describe it. More like getting rubbed against between bouts of fatigue and breast-feeding. And kind of enjoying it, even while wondering if the twenty minutes would have been better spent paying the bills or washing the kitchen floor.

Frankly, with the baby, the two older boys and Tony working his ass off at his family pizzeria, Gloria was just as likely to have a sexual experience from eating a pint of Ben & Jerry’s as she was from getting naked with her hubby.

That, she supposed, was one of the disadvantages of being a nice, thirtysomthing Italian housewife.

As was this. “You sure you can’t come hang out a little while longer?” said Vanessa, one of the other bridesmaids. The striking woman was only in town for one more night and obviously wanted company.

“I can’t. Tony and the brats are waiting.”

Brats being meant in only the most affectionate sense, of course. Though, if little Anthony got into her lipstick and drew one more battle map for his dragon warriors on the wall of his room, she was, at least mentally, going to call him worse than that. Like demon child sent to torment her.

“Yeah, she has to make sure the big lug didn’t stop to pick up milk and forget one of them in the store,” Mia said with a deep chuckle.

Gloria responded in her typical fashion. She gave her sister the finger. Oh, not the middle one, the ring one. On her left hand.

“Yeah, yeah, bite me,” Mia mumbled.

“So sad, you need your sister to bite you. If only you had a man.”

“Bite me twice.”

Her caustic younger sister smiled as she said it. A little. So did Gloria. The exchange was a typical one between them. Outsiders might think they didn’t even like each other, but that wasn’t true at all. They loved each other… they just had nothing in common.

While there were moments when Gloria wondered what it would have been like to go to college and be out in the workplace, she wouldn’t trade her life for Mia’s. Especially knowing tonight her sister would, once again, sleep alone. Mia hadn’t dated since she’d returned to Chicago and she would wake up tomorrow morning having spent yet another night all by herself.

Gloria, on the other hand, would probably wake up with four males in her bed. Three of whom had come out of her vagina and one of whom had put them there.

One of these days, she was going to tell the older boys that she’d installed a motion alarm in the house so they’d stop sneaking out of their own rooms and into hers. Their midnight adventures creeping in to sleep with her and Tony were another reason she’d had almost no sex in months. The one time little Anthony’s head had popped up beside the bed, asking Tony why he was “playing leapfrog” with Mommy in the middle of the night had been quite enough. So it was pretty much quick up-against-the-wall shower sex or nothing these days.

Man, what she wouldn’t give to play a nice long game of leapfrog. Or even traditional, conservative, face-to-face boy on girl wrestling. Anything.

“Well, good night, then,” Vanessa said after Mia had left, heading for her suite. “You be careful.”

“I’ll be fine,” Gloria insisted. “I’m going up to the room to change before heading home.”

It had seemed a waste to keep the hotel suite another night when nobody would be sleeping in it, but at least she didn’t have to drive home in this gown. She only wished she and Tony could have gotten somebody to take the boys for the night—God, wouldn’t she love a full night out with her husband in a lovely hotel. But since both her family and his were involved in this big wedding, there’d been nobody to do it.

Upstairs in her suite, she reached for her jeans—still one size bigger than she’d like, even though she’d lost much of the baby weight—and headed toward the bathroom. But she hadn’t taken two steps when her cell phone rang. “Hello?”

“Hey, babe.”

“Hey, Tone. Kids okay?”
“They’re fine. Mikey’s down for the night. James is ready to go, too.”
“He did okay with the bottle?”
“Yep.”
“Good.” She’d been trying to wean him for weeks. That child had been as stubborn about staying stuck to her boobs as his father used to be.
“You made it back to the hotel okay?”
“Uh-huh. Just getting ready to change and head home now.”
He mumbled something.
“What?”
“Nothing, Anthony wanted a glass of milk.”
She glanced at the clock on the table by the bed. “No milk. Just water. It’s too late.”
“It’s too late,” he repeated, and she assumed he was talking to their son.
Then she registered the apologetic tone and realized he’d been talking to her. “Oh, great, you know how he is. Welcome to a midnight visit from the My Tummy Hurts, Can I Sleep with You? monster.” She ran a weary hand over her eyes, rubbing them in the corners. Another sleepless night ahead. Oh, joy.
She glanced at the big, king-size bed in the suite. It had proved incredibly comfortable the night before, even with Tony in it beside her and the boys eventually leaving the foldout in the next room and crowding in between them. The whole family would have stayed here again tonight if not for the baby’s fussiness in the port-a-crib.
Oh, how she would love to just fall into this bed and sleep for twelve hours straight. Or maybe have hot, wild monkey sex and then sleep for eight hours straight.
“Listen, Glo, things are covered here. Why don’t you stay there for the night.”
Sucking in a surprised breath, she instantly demurred. “I can’t do that…”
“Yes, you can,” he insisted. “You’ve had a hell of a week.”
Hell of a winter.
“And I don’t want you out driving in this weather, anyway. So just stay, okay? Get a good night’s sleep for a change, enjoy yourself.” He chuckled, that warm, deep chuckle that had told her from their first date that the mountainous, rock-hard guy had a gentle nature. “It’s not like I gotta worry that you’re gonna be down in the bar picking up some stranger for a hot, wild night, right?”
Gloria laughed, too. Because the idea that she, a harried mom and wife and hippy thirty-four-year-old would have a one-night stand with a stranger was so utterly ridiculous. Then she glanced at the bed, that big, wasted bed, and sighed. Because while it was ridiculous, it was also just a tiny bit titillating. What, she wondered, would it be like to feel like a desirable woman again, rather than the maternal, exhausted, sexless being she’d been lately? To be Gloria, the sexy brunette who still had a great ass, rather than mommy of Anthony, Michael and James and wife of that guy who ran the pizzeria?
She’d never know. Never. Which on most days was okay. But right now was feeling just a little bit like a prison sentence.
“Not that you couldn’t,” he quickly added, as if fearing he’d insulted her. “You are about the hottest mom I’ve ever seen. My number one MILF.”
“What’s a milf?” came a little voice, talking to Tony in the kitchen of their townhouse.
Gloria snorted, wondering how her lunkhead husband was going to answer that one. Because she knew the slang, knew exactly what the acronym stood for.
“It stands for Mother I’d Like to…have Fun with,” he replied, stumbling over the last words.
“Good save,” she murmured when he returned his attention to their call. She only hoped her precocious five-year-old didn’t start repeating the expression to all his pals at kindergarten.
“Jeez, that kid’s as quiet as a cat. I thought he went back to bed.”
“Tell me about it.”
“Now, where were we…”
She smiled in anticipation. Talking about me being a mother you’d like to f—
“Oh, yeah. Talking about you staying there, having fun and enjoying one night of freedom.”
That, too.
“I couldn’t do that. Baby James is cutting a tooth, he’ll drive you nuts tonight.”
“Worrying about you making it home in this weather will drive me more nuts,” he insisted. “Besides, he’s sitting right here in his high chair, gnawing on a frozen bagel, loving life.”
“Oh, great, my baby’s first word is going to be milf.”
He chuckled deeply. “Everybody’ll think he’s saying milk. Besides, he wouldn’t be the first of our kids to spit out unexpected first words. Remember Anthony…”
She did. Her eldest son had spent a lot of time in the kitchen of the restaurant as a baby. The kitchen where her father-in-law, a blustery little old Italian man, often used colorful language. “Madone,” she muttered. Just as her son had every other minute until he was three.

“Exactly. Now, don’t sweat the baby. I’m watching every second and won’t let him keep the bagel once it starts getting soft.”

Gloria sighed and shook her head, but knew better than to criticize. Tony might not be the most textbook father, but he adored their boys and would never let anything happen to them. She had to let him parent in his own way. And she kind of wished she’d thought of the bagel idea last month when the first two teeth broke through!

“Do it,” he insisted. “Stay there. Take a night for yourself. You know you need it.”

She had to admit it, the idea was very tempting. But she still felt guilty about it and tried to refuse. At least until Tony cajoled her a little more. Convincing her with every word he said.

Until, finally, with a smile on her face, Gloria very happily agreed. She’d stay the night at the hotel and come home to her family—and her real life as wife and mommy—in the morning. But for tonight?

Tonight she was entirely free to be the woman she’d once been.

* * *

The hotel had two bars, one crowded with chatty late-night patrons, the other a small piano lounge off the restaurant, nearly empty. Though there were more people—probably more single women—in the first one, he went to the piano lounge instead. It was more private, more intimate. A better fit for his mood tonight. After the evening he’d had, he could use a quiet place to get his brain functioning again.

Not to mention getting his full-throttle libido aimed in the right direction. Because right now, it was revved up and had had no release in far too long. And he was dying for release.

When he entered the room and saw the woman sitting alone at one of the small, round tables, he realized he’d made the right choice. His body reacted with predictable excitement as he noted the thick, shiny dark hair—his favorite. If she had big, brown eyes with long, thick lashes, he was going to think he’d died and gone to heaven.

One thing was sure, even from here—this was not one of those on-the-prowl single females probably lining the walls in the other, more crowded bar. This woman appeared introspective. Almost lonely as she listened to the soft background music provided by the bored-looking guy at the piano. There was a sadness in her posture, a weary slump in her shoulders that said she didn’t often escape her regular world and didn’t quite know what to do with herself now that she had.

His heart twisted in his chest. No woman that lovely should ever have such a lost look on her face, as if she truly didn’t know what to do with her life. And any man who left her feeling as unsure about herself as this one looked didn’t deserve to be called a man.

She wasn’t too young, probably, in fact, around his age, in her mid-thirties. He counted that as a good thing. In his job, he met a lot of women. Young, vapid girls hanging with their girlfriends or hanging on their dates. Older, jaded women looking for a thrill even if they had to pay for it.

The young ones had no conversation, no allure. Nothing but white smiles and loud laughs. And the older ones had no emotions at all. Just entitlement.

This woman, though, had some substance. Real depth.

Sipping a creamy-looking chic drink, she wore an aura of aloofness that said she wasn’t interested in any attempts at conversation from a stranger. Especially a male stranger.

That very attitude posed a challenge that would intrigue any man. Especially one like him.

He didn’t approach her right away, instead watching from the doorway. She sipped slowly, then lowered her drink to the table. Running the tip of one finger around the rim of her glass, she looked neither left nor right, oblivious to the few other people around her. Sad, almost, with the tiniest downturn of her full lips and a small frown on her brow.

Despite the somber mood, she had a beautiful profile—pretty nose, high cheekbones, beautiful olive-toned skin. Her dark hair was pulled up onto her head in a complicated mass of curls, like she’d gone somewhere special today.

It would look better down around her face. Curling beside one delicate cheek, draping over those slender shoulders, across those full breasts. Oh, she definitely had some curves. The black dress she wore was low cut enough to reveal a hint of mouthwatering cleavage, yet not enough to say she was looking for company.

He wondered if she’d want some, anyway.

It was certainly worth a shot. So, with a nod toward the cocktail waitress, he picked his way around the empty tables and went straight to the brunet’s. “Hello.”

She looked up quickly, startled from her thoughts, and her pretty lips parted on a gasp.

“Sorry to bother you, miss. But do you mind if I join you?”
Those eyes—yes, brown, heavily lashed, big and sparkling, God help him—widened even more. As if she had no idea she was beautiful and exotic looking. Was it really possible, he wondered, his heart twisting again, that she did not?

He’d remedy that. Damned if he wouldn’t.

“I, uh…”

“Look, I know I’m a complete stranger. I’m not going to try some sleazy line on you. I just thought you looked a little down and might like somebody to talk to.”

Her lashes half lowered over those eyes and she tilted her head away, as if thinking about it. Trying to decide.

It was at that moment he realized she was probably married. A lonely wife drinking alone in a hotel bar. While her husband was…where? Traveling? Working? In the arms of a mistress?


She nibbled on her full bottom lip for a second, then nodded. Clearing her throat, she said, “Suit yourself. It’s a free country.”

That wasn’t exactly a rousing welcome, but he’d take what he could get. Sitting in a low, plush leather chair across the small table from her, he caught a whiff of her perfume. It was light but not flowery. Spicy. Unusual. He sensed it would only be the first unusual experience he’d have tonight.

“I’m…” He hesitated for a second, then came up with a name. “I’m Tom.”

One brow went up in a fine arch, as if she knew damn well he was lying. Her lips twitched a tiny bit, her first hint of a smile. Then she replied. “Jennifer.”

False, as well. He knew that. Just as sure as he knew she was not as aloof as she’d been trying to portray herself to be when he’d first come in.

The woman was interested in being a little wild tonight. She was just unsure, as if this was her first time even thinking about doing something as reckless as picking up a stranger in a bar. Not that he could be sure that’s what she had planned…at least, not until he glanced at her left hand and saw the pale line of untanned skin on her ring finger.

Yes. That pale skin told him she was, indeed, considering a one-night stand. It also told him she was a first timer.

She’d taken off her wedding ring. Not because any guy in a bar with an ounce of testosterone would give a damn that she was married. But because she was already feeling guilty.

Well, she didn’t have anything to feel guilty about. They were just having a friendly drink; she’d done absolutely nothing wrong. Not yet, anyway.

As for the rest of the night? Well, that remained to be seen.
Chapter 2

Gloria Santori knew the incredibly handsome, black-haired man’s name wasn’t Tom. Not any more than hers was really Jennifer.
She also knew she should be feeling a whole lot more nervous than she was. Nervous, guilty, afraid, guilty, self-conscious, guilty. But she didn’t feel anything except excited.
How could she not? She was sitting in a hotel bar, late at night, chatting with a sexy man who’d given her a fake name and who couldn’t take his hot, hungry eyes off her. Oh, yes, she’d seen the look in his dark eyes. He was definitely interested in her. She hadn’t been married and procreating so long that she didn’t recognize pure lust when she saw it.
Lust. She, the harried mommy who was the homeroom mom of her son’s kindergarten class, had inspired heated desire in this big, tall, broad-shouldered hunk.
Nothing would come of it, she knew. She would never have the courage to act on the attraction. But oh, was it nice to feel like a desirable woman again. To be looked at in that way, to almost feel the man’s stare on her face, her throat, the curves of her breasts.
To think, she’d almost missed out on this. She hadn’t planned on coming back downstairs. In fact, she should probably have gone straight to bed to luxuriate in an uninterrupted night’s sleep for a change.
But she hadn’t. Instead, she’d slipped out of her red bridesmaid gown and put on the black dress she’d worn to the rehearsal dinner the night before. She’d come downstairs, heading not for the loud bar she’d seen Vanessa go into earlier, but for the more quiet one.
She’d just wanted one drink. One solitary, grown-up drink in a grown-up place. Wanted to be anonymous and unattached. Wanted to pretend, for just a while, that she wasn’t going to have to express the milk out of her breasts and throw it away to make sure the baby didn’t get himself a little Kahlúa and cream buzz tomorrow.
Then he’d sat down. And drinking alone had no longer been an acceptable option.
“So are you in town on business?” he asked after he’d ordered himself a drink from the waitress.
He’d offered her another one, but she’d refused. The mommy in her might be hiding, shoved out of sight for now, but she was still shouting from deep inside, protesting the thought of wasting all that breast milk.
“No. A wedding,” she admitted, wondering what to be truthful about and when to lie. She was so not good at this game. But she was not ready to give it up yet. Because no matter what else, it was exciting. Her pulse was pounding wildly in her veins, her heart thumping in her chest.
She hadn’t experienced anything like it in a very long time. “What about you?”
“Business. I travel around the world a lot.”
She’d noticed the slight accent in his voice and almost asked if he was European. But she wasn’t sure she wanted to know. This was just anonymous chitchat. It didn’t have to get any more personal than that—no last names, no phone numbers, no background information.
“So, why didn’t your husband come with you to this wedding?”
Gloria sucked in a surprised breath, immediately clenching her left hand. It felt so bare, so empty without her wedding ring. And she almost instinctively reached for it, on her right hand, to put it back where it belonged. But the warmth in the stranger’s eyes kept her from doing it.
“Is it that obvious? That I’m married?”
“Only to someone with some experience.”
“You have a lot of experience with women?”
He smiled a little, his lips curling up only on one side, flashing the tiniest dimple in his cheek. It made him look more boyish, less tough, not a bit dangerous. “I know a few things.”
“Then you tell me why I’m sitting here in a hotel bar without my husband,” she challenged.
He leaned forward in his chair, dropping his arms onto the table between them. Gloria couldn’t help focusing on his hands, his big, strong hands. There was such power there and she shivered at the very thought of being stroked by him. Being touched, massaged, caressed.
It was wicked. It was also irresistible.
“You slipped out of your room, leaving him there, asleep and oblivious. Once again, he fell into bed, brushed a lazy kiss good-night on your forehead, then rolled over and went to sleep.”
She blinked, realizing he’d just described many of her recent nights.
“And you couldn’t stand yet another night of lying there, unfulfilled beside him, your body aching to be touched, needing wild passion, sweet caresses and decadent pleasures.”
“Oh, my God,” she whispered, fascinated, even if against her own will.
“You love him…but you miss the excitement, the thrill. Life has become too normal. And while it’s good, there
are times when you long for something more.”

“How did you…”

He smiled gently. “It’s easy to see in your face. And it’s a damn tragedy. You are too beautiful to feel that way about your life.”

“Thank you,” she whispered.

“It’s not easy being misunderstood.”

She frowned. Her husband understood her, all right. He just didn’t do anything about it. As if realizing he’d misstepped, he clarified. “I mean, being underappreciated.”

Her frown faded.

“You’re overworked and you have a lot of responsibilities.”

“That’s true,” she murmured, reaching for her glass.

“You don’t get enough help and you feel like you’re on autopilot all the time. Struggling to get everything done for everybody else, without ever having one minute to do anything for yourself.”

Gloria’s mouth opened in surprise. Because that had been one incredibly intuitive comment. One she wouldn’t have expected to come out of this man’s mouth.

“You don’t feel like a beautiful, desirable woman. You feel like a boring housewife.”

The open mouth now fell far enough that she could almost feel her chin on her chest. The handsome man—Tom—laughed softly, then reached across the table. Touching her face lightly, with just the tips of his fingers, he pushed her jaw closed. Her whole body tingled at the contact, as if he’d done something much more intimate than that quick brush of skin on skin.

“When was the last time your husband came up behind you, kissed the nape of your neck and whispered that you were the sexiest, most beautiful woman he’d ever seen?”

She shook her head slowly, swallowing at the very thought of something like that. If Tony did such a thing, one of the boys would invariably stick his little head between them, demanding a hug from Daddy, too.

“When did you last spend an entire day in bed, being worshipped and adored?”

“He works so hard,” she whispered.

Tsking, he shook his head. “No man should ever work so hard that he can’t take some time to show his wife how much he wants her.” His hand slid across the table, until the tips of his fingers touched her bare forearm. Just that, yet she trembled at the contact. “Having an incredible woman in your life comes with a lot of responsibility and some men just aren’t up to the task.”

Swallowing hard, she asked, “Responsibility?”

He nodded. Those fingers moved, sliding up her arm, leaving sizzling heat and tension along the way. “Every woman needs to be touched.”

Oh, God, yes, she did.

“Needs to be stroked, needs to have her soft skin appreciated and her sweet scent inhaled.”

This time, when Gloria reached for the glass, she gulped a big mouthful of her creamy drink.

“Her thick, shiny hair needs to be wrapped around a man’s hands, or draped across his chest so he can go out of his mind at how soft it is, how good it feels.”

Her breaths were hitching in her throat. She used to love the way Tony would brush her hair, back when they were first married and alone. They would sometimes shower and he’d love to wash it for her, letting the soap slide down her body and his, so that when they rubbed against one another, there was no friction, only delicious slickness.

They had shower sex once in a while now, but only the fast someone-could-knock-at-any-moment kind. And he hadn’t washed her hair in years.

“Her body must be caressed…every inch of it touched, every spot tasted.”

Closing her eyes, she just sat there, letting the words—the possibilities—wash over her. She licked her lips, unable to help it, wanting to at least pretend she might end up in the arms of a handsome, worldly stranger who was seducing her with his every word.

“A woman who’s loved should be kissed for hours. Everywhere. In every way. Sweetly, on the soft, full lips. Hotly in the hollow of her throat.”

“Where else?” she whispered, unable to help it. Her whole body was warm with arousal, languid and awash with sensations. Just those whispered words—the sound of his voice and that maddeningly light touch on her arm—had her picturing the sorts of things she hadn’t even thought about in months. Not with her husband…not with anyone.

Her nipples were thrust hard against her dress, her panties tight and uncomfortable against her moist sex. She was inching closer, her bare leg brushing his pants beneath the table, her face now close enough to feel the warmth of his breath falling on her hair. All because she wanted more. More whispers. More fantasy. More possibility…
even if that possibility would be absolutely impossible to fulfill.

He finally answered her. “There are so many delicious places on a woman’s body. I love the collarbone—
delicate and fragile, leading from the soft shoulder to the vulnerable throat.”

Lifting one hand, her elbow on the table, Gloria casually traced the tips of her fingers across her own
 collarbone, then let them rest at the base of her neck.

“The fingertips should be sampled, one at a time,” he murmured. “The soft hands should be appreciated for
everything she does.”

That was all wonderful, but Gloria couldn’t help holding her breath, as if he was actually kissing her—tasting
all those places—rather than just talking about doing it. And there were a few other places in particular that would
especially benefit from some in-depth kissing.

“The breasts.”

That’d be two of them.

“Kissing a woman’s breasts is one of the most perfect things in the world. The skin is so soft on the tongue, the
nipples so amazing when they get hard against the lips. They beg for attention, thrusting up, demanding gentle and
rough, sweet kisses and deep sucking.”

She whimpered a little. Or a lot. Part of her wondered if she was a complete fool to have started this game,
because it was going to be nearly impossible for her to get back to her room after this. Her legs were already
quivering and weak; if she tried to stand now, she’d probably fall on her face.

Or right onto this sexy, dangerous man’s lap.

“The stomach…I love to bury my face in her stomach, not only to savor the softness of her skin against my
cheek, but also to drive myself mad with the warm scent of her building arousal.”

She slammed her hand down on the table, unable to take another second of this verbal—very public—
 seduction. “That’s enough.”

His tiny half smile told her he knew exactly why she’d stopped him. “Something wrong?”

“I shouldn’t have come down here. In fact, I should have gone home and not stayed here alone tonight at all.”
The smile widened. “You’re alone here tonight? Your husband’s not upstairs?”

Oh, that had been stupid. A big tactical error. “Th-thanks for the company,” she mumbled. “But I really should
go.”

He stood and at first she thought he was merely being a gentleman, rising as a lady exited the room. But instead
of remaining behind and watching her go, he fell into step beside her, taking her arm.

“What are you…”

“You do know you invited me up to your room with every tiny sigh, every little gasp, every hungry stare, every
lick of your lips.”

If she was really a lady, she would have slapped his face and told him he’d imagined it.

But Gloria couldn’t lie. Couldn’t pretend. She had, indeed, done exactly what he accused her of.

She only wondered what in the name of heaven she was going to do about it.
Chapter 3

As they walked through the hotel lobby toward the elevators, he could feel the trembling of her body. The beautiful woman at his side was nervous—uncertain. But the trembling was not caused by that nervousness. Pure excitement poured off her. He could almost taste it in the warm, musky scent of excitement oozing out of her every pore. She might be the loving, dutiful housewife in her other life. But right now, she was the beautiful seductress whose uncertainty only made her more attractive.

“I can’t…what if someone sees…”

“That makes it more exciting, doesn’t it?” he whispered back, keeping his hand firmly on her elbow. Not controlling her, just lending her moral support for the battle that had to be raging inside her. “I’m just escorting you to your room,” he added. “Giving you a chance to think about what you want to do when we get to your door.”

Though, if he had his way, it wouldn’t take that long. Because he was ready for her now—right now. And he knew by the tautness in her body, the way her nipples pressed against her dress and her skin was prickled with excitement, that she was ready, too.

At least her body was. Only her mind needed to fully engage…or else get out of the equation altogether. Honestly, he didn’t care which way it happened. It just had to happen.

“I love my husband,” she whispered.

“Never said you didn’t.”

“I don’t do this kind of thing.”

“Never said you did.”

Another couple approached. Probably about the same age as they were, walking slowly, not touching. Their low voices hinted at a comfortable conversation, which matched the comfortable aura between them.

He knew for sure they were a married couple. Relaxed with each other, most of the sparks and excitement gone. He almost felt sorry for the guy, wondering if he had any idea his wife was probably having fantasies much like the brown-haired beauty beside him was having. That she wanted to be touched. Desired.

If the guy had any sense he’d have draped his arm over the woman’s shoulders, have tucked in close beside her when they walked. Would have let their legs brush and their hips touch. Would have fingered her curls and leaned in close to laugh at something she said, letting her know he liked the way she smiled, liked the way she felt, liked everything about her.

He sensed the lesson would be wasted. Especially when the husband lifted a hand to his mouth and yawned loudly. He went on to complain about the prices in the bar and gripe over the maid service in the hotel, never once noticing the downward tilt of his wife’s mouth and the slight slump in her shoulders. Clueless.

And if they were on the same elevator, he was going to shoot himself.

“Good evening,” the wife said, smiling impersonally at him and the beautiful brunette by his side. Jennifer. That beautiful brunette stiffened, and he’d lay money she was about to erupt in a panic, as if everyone could look in her face and know she was planning a wild night of raucous sex.

He put a hand against the small of her back, lightly stroking her with his fingers, then he leaned close, brushing his cheek against her hair.

The other man’s wife watched them closely and slowly flushed. She knew what they were doing and was excited by it. It was just a damn shame her husband hadn’t figured it out.

As the elevator arrived, he held his breath, then blew it out, relieved, when the other couple stepped to the opposite side of the vestibule. They were apparently on a higher floor and were taking an express.

Meaning he and his beautiful stranger were completely alone.

Once inside, she lifted her hand and pushed the button for her floor, visibly trembling. He reached for it, brought it to his mouth and kissed the tips of her fingers.

Progress. She didn’t yank her hand away.

“The sixty-ninth floor,” he murmured, seeing the number she’d depressed. “How very…prophetic.”

She groaned, long and low.

“We never got to that part of the conversation. Because if there’s one thing a sexy, beautiful woman needs to make sure she knows she’s wanted, it’s some thorough tongue-work.”

“Oh, enough already,” she snapped, as if simply unable to take another second. He almost laughed at it, loving the way he’d pushed her buttons until she’d finally reacted exactly as he’d expected her to.

“Shut up and put your money where your mouth is.” Thrusting aside her last bit of inhibition, she grabbed the front of his shirt in two fists. She shoved him back against the wall of the elevator, falling against his body to pin him there, one long, slim leg sliding between his.
His eyes widening in surprise, he could only savor the pleasure of it as the beautiful woman with the dark,
flashing eyes covered his mouth with hers and thrust her tongue deep.
He dropped his hands lower, wrapping his arms around her. Easily managing her weight, he hoisted her up until
their bodies lined up perfectly. She whimpered against his mouth at the feel of his cock pressed hard at the juncture
of her thighs. And even through their clothes, he could feel her wetness and knew she was ready.
“Can’t wait,” she muttered against his lips. “I can’t.”
God, he wanted her. The excitement was catching—electric. So he took control, turning her around so she was
the one with her back pressed against the wall. “I can’t wait, either.”
She reached frantically for his shirt, tugging it out of his waistband, then hesitated. Her face flushed, she
glanced up. “Do you think there are security cameras?”
He followed her gaze and saw what he knew had to be a lens. His jaw tight, he thought quickly. “Only the
one.” Smiling, he pushed her into the corner directly beneath it. “And it can’t look straight down.”
That seemed to eliminate her last fear. “Thank heaven.”
Her fingers moved quickly, his even more so. She undid his belt and trousers, he pulled up her dress.
“Oh, yes,” she groaned when she reached into his shorts and grabbed his thick, hard cock with her cool, soft
fingers. “I want that. I want it so bad.”
The elevator continued to move, the floors passing by in a series of slow dings, and at any time it could stop to
let on more passengers.
He didn’t give a damn. He just had to feel her. Shoving her panties to the side, he slid his fingers into her
creamy sex, noting how ready she was—at how hot she was—all for him.
“I want so much more than this,” he said hoarsely as he sunk one finger inside her, mimicking what he’d soon
be doing with his cock. “I want to do everything I said to you downstairs.”
Her thighs clenched. “Later. This first.”
She didn’t have to ask him again. Even though they were now passing the fortieth floor, he freed himself from
his clothes. She was whimpering, her eyes closed, her hair falling from its pins. He planned to wrap his fingers in
that hair…to feel it on his hands, on his chest, on his balls.
But, as she said, it would have to be later. For now, he had about a minute to grab a taste of heaven and he
wasn’t going to pass it up.
“Just a taste,” he whispered. Then he lifted her up, holding her thighs, which she quickly wrapped around his
hips. She bucked toward him, pleading and whimpering, and he plunged into her, driving hard and deep. She
screamed a little, holding on tight as he drove her into the wall, fucking her wildly for a few incredible seconds.
Wrapped in her warm, tight channel, he almost lost it like some inexperienced kid. He gave himself over to it for as
long as he could. Then he felt the elevator begin to slow.
“Hell,” he muttered, immediately pulling out and lowering her to the floor, even though it nearly killed him to
do it. He stuck his dick back into his pants, yanking the zipper up as his beautiful lover shifted and twisted to fix her
panties and her dress.
He was just buttoning his pants when the door opened. Thankfully, they’d arrived at their own destination and
hadn’t stopped for passengers on another floor. Because there was no way anyone could have stepped into that
elevator and not smelled the rich, unmistakable scent of raw, primal sex.
The thought that it was just the beginning was the only thing that enabled him to follow her out into the
corridor, rather than pushing the button to close the door and driving right back into her.
But he hadn’t been kidding about what he wanted to do to her. What he had in mind would require privacy.
And a whole lot of time.
* * *
Anybody could have been waiting on the other side of that elevator door. A knowing stranger, a curious kid…
God, even one of her sisters!
Funny. Gloria couldn’t bring herself to care. She was too wound up, too excited, too frenzied to give it anymore
thought.
She’d just had wild, completely irresponsible sex in a public elevator and her whole body was still shaking
from the pleasure of it. He’d been huge and rock hard, thrusting into her like he had to take her or die.
She’d never in her life done something as provocative, as reckless, and she didn’t know that she ever would
again. But for tonight…well, for one night, she was going to be crazy and selfish and utterly insane.
“Give me the key. Your hand’s shaking so much you’ll probably drop it,” he said.
The demanding tone in his voice thrilled her and she immediately did what he said. He strode to the door of her
room. Pushing it open, he tugged her into the room with him.
They were on each other immediately. It was as if there’d been just a brief intermission and now they both
needed to finish what they’d started in the elevator. They would get to the slow and steady stuff they’d talked about downstairs. But first... oh, first there was this.

“I’ve got to feel you. Gotta be in you, now,” he muttered hoarsely as he kissed her neck and filled his hands with her breasts. He hadn’t even bothered fastening his belt and quickly worked himself free of his trousers, pushing them down around his lean hips and taut butt.

Gloria lifted her dress, pushing her panties down with the tips of her fingers, letting them fall to the floor. She kicked them out of the way.

The bed was only a few feet away, but she didn’t want it on the bed. Not yet. She wanted that wild, raw, sex-with-a-stranger feeling she’d had in the elevator.

“Finish it,” she ordered, grabbing him by the hair, pulling his face to hers for a deep, thorough kiss. “Take me.”

He didn’t hesitate, lifting her again, positioning her just right, then thrusting up into her.

Gloria threw her head back and cried out. His possession was undeniable, complete. He filled her, stretched her, completely owned her at that moment.

She could only hold on to the thick shoulders, marveling over the power of his huge chest and the strength in those amazing arms. He held her like she weighed nothing, thrusting into her again and again until she was sobbing against his neck. When his groans signaled his climax, she milked him inside, squeezing him, urging him on.

She wasn’t there yet, but she didn’t care. She wanted him completely out of control, unable to stop himself from exploding in her, filling her with his essence. Afterward, she knew, they’d slow down and she’d get whatever she needed from him. After all, they had all night.

“I’m going to...”

“Do it,” she ordered, covering his mouth with hers again, thrusting her tongue hard, thrusting her body harder.

He finally did, groaning loudly as he finished with a few long, shuddering strokes. Then, with his powerful sex still inside her and her legs still wrapped around his waist, he carried her to the bed. He lowered them both onto it, keeping his arms wrapped around her, pressing kiss after kiss into her hair. “You’re so beautiful. You’re so beautiful,” he murmured, saying it over and over again.

Tears rose in her eyes. Tears of pleasure. Tears even of appreciation. Because he’d done it. He’d made her feel beautiful—absolutely irresistible, sexy, desirable. All the things she hadn’t felt about herself for such a very long time.

“So beautiful,” he whispered. “And I love you so much.”

Smiling, keeping her arms around his shoulders and her legs around his waist, she kissed him back and replied, “I love you, too, Tony.”
Chapter 4

So much for making slow, sweet, erotic love to his wife for hours. They were finally alone, finally had some privacy and a great big bed to do it in, and he’d taken her up against a wall.

That wasn’t what Tony Santori had planned to do tonight. He’d intended a slow fantasy, a slower seduction.

When his parents had showed up at his door this evening, demanding the right to babysit the boys so he and Gloria could have one night alone together at the hotel, he’d been ready to kiss their feet. Because God knew, he and Gloria needed it.

He might be a lunkhead, as she affectionately called him sometimes. But he wasn’t stupid. It didn’t take a genius to know that his sweet, sassy wife was unhappy. That she’d lost a bit of her sparkle and some of her self-confidence.

What he hadn’t realized, until recently, was that she missed their sex life as much as he did.

“You know, I’ve been telling myself for a couple of months that I was a pig for wanting to jump on you every time we were out of the boys’ sight,” he admitted a short time later, as they lay, still entwined, on the hotel bed.

“There you were being mother of the year to my three hellion sons and all I wanted to do was rip your clothes off and screw your brains out.”

She tightened her arms around his neck, lightly kissing his nose. “That’s one of the nicest things you’ve ever said to me.”

He laughed and so did she. Because she was probably right. He wasn’t exactly the poetic sort.

“It wasn’t until I heard you cry last week, after we had a fast grope-and-go under the covers, that I realized you might not be any happier about the situation than I was.”

“I haven’t been,” she admitted, confirming what he’d finally begun to figure out. “I’ve been feeling so disconnected. So…asexual, almost. Not to mention just plain horny.”

He looked down at her, slowly unbuttoning her dress, uncovering the beautiful breasts, the soft curves of her body. “You are the most sexy, sexual woman I’ve ever laid eyes on. And I will take care of your every need, whenever you need me.”

She lifted her shoulder, then a hip, to help him ease her clothes off her body. Reaching for his, she helped him, as well, until neither of them wore a thing. Except each other.

He reached up and touched her shoulder, running the tip of his finger across her collarbone, loving the softness of her skin.

“Those things you said downstairs…”

“They were easy to say,” he admitted. “Because they were all true. Every damn one of them.”

He meant it. A poet he was not, yet when clearing the air with his wife, who’d seemed so distant lately, everything he’d been thinking had come rushing out. From what he felt about her, to what he saw when he looked into her sad eyes and her weary smile, to how much he had taken her for granted…and oh, God, to what he wanted to do to her.

All of it true.

“And yet, with all of that, the first chance I got, I jumped on you,” he said, hearing his own self-disgust.

She arched toward him, as if unable to help it. “That’s what made it so…mmm…good. Do you know how much I needed to feel like you were absolutely out of control over me?”

He moved his hand, replacing it with his mouth, kissing her as he’d said he wanted to. “I was. I am.” When he reached the hollow of her throat, he licked the skin there, tasting a tiny bit of sweat from their wild, sexual exertions.

“Oh, Tony,” she groaned, tilting her head back, silently asking for more. He gave it to her, nibbling his way down her body so he could kiss the top slopes of her full breasts.

She twined her hands in his hair. “I couldn’t believe it when you said on the phone that your parents were taking the kids, and you were coming here tonight.”

“I wanted to surprise you, but I was afraid you’d head home.”

“I probably would have.” She giggled. “I also couldn’t believe that you told me to wait for you downstairs in the lounge with no ring…or panties.”

He chuckled softly against her skin. “You didn’t obey that one, wife.”

“No, I most certainly did not. What if someone had seen?”

That turned his chuckle into a belly laugh and he pulled away to look at her. “You mean like the guards monitoring the elevator security cameras?”

She jerked. “You said it was safe.”

“I’m kidding. I’m sure they didn’t see…much. Just a desperate man kissing a gorgeous woman.”

And, perhaps, him slipping his hand under her dress before pushing her out of sight.
She seemed mollified. “Of all the things I pictured tonight, it was not you showing up with a sexy, fake accent, pretending to be a complete stranger who was trying to pick me up in a bar.”

He had to admit, he was kind of proud of himself for that one. Even if he had gotten the initial idea from a men’s magazine, not every guy in the world would actually do it. And he’d found himself really getting into the spirit of the thing, probably because his wife was still the sexiest woman he’d ever seen and she drove him crazy with want every time he laid eyes on her.

“You were very smooth. Like you had a lot of practice.”

“You were very unsure. Like you didn’t.”

“Really? I thought I was too easy.”

She sounded like she felt a little guilty, which made him laugh harder. “Don’t worry, you’re only easy for me.”

And he liked it. A whole lot. That he had been her only lover…ever, and she his, was one of the foundations of their relationship. They’d loved each other forever—since high school. Neither of them had ever even dreamed of being with anyone else.

No other woman existed, as far as Tony Santori was concerned.

Returning his attention to the full breasts he loved, Tony rubbed his rough cheek against her skin, getting an excited hiss in response. Gloria had been beast-feeding their son for months, and part of him had felt like there had been a big Hands Off sign above these things of beauty. But now that he knew she wanted him just as much as he wanted her, he couldn’t prevent himself from kissing, tasting, nibbling.

“Oh, babe,” she groaned, tightening her fingers in his hair.

“I’ve missed this,” he mumbled, licking her nipple while plumping the other breast in his hand. He teased her, sliding his lips back and forth, knowing by the way she arched toward his mouth that she needed a deeper caress.

“Please, Tony.”

He gave her what she begged for, covering her nipple and sucking, not giving a damn that her body gave him a taste of the life-sustaining fluid his sons had so often consumed.

“Oh, Lord,” she cried, writhing beneath him.

“I’ve been starving for you,” he murmured as he continued to play with one breast, then moved to the other. He tweaked her nipple with his fingers, knowing exactly how much pressure she needed. He was entirely familiar with her likes and dislikes after sharing her bed for so many years. And yet, it was so good, so exciting. Like they really were strangers.

When they were on their game, he and Gloria had always been like this. There’d been a few bumps in the road, particularly after the birth of each baby. But they always found their way back to each other, back to the excitement and the passion that had drawn them together in the first place.

He couldn’t get enough of her. Aside from loving her beyond all reason, he simply craved the physical pleasure he’d only ever found in her arms.

“Love you,” she whispered, lying back in the bed, taking all the delights he desperately wanted to give her. He moved down from her breasts, tasting her stomach, breathing in her skin and her arousal, just as he said he wanted to when they’d been playing their sexy game.

He kept right on going, tenderly kissing the slight bulge in her belly where his sons had grown. Then farther, until he nuzzled into her curls, finding her sensitive clit and focusing all his efforts there.

She panted and gasped, rising up toward his mouth. Holding her hips, he kept her where he wanted her, knowing from experience that as she drew closer and closer to the highest peak, her body would helplessly try to twist away from the incredible intensity.

He wouldn’t allow that. He held her steady until she was sobbing, not letting her go until she came in his mouth.

She was still whispering his name as he slid up her body, following the same familiar, well-loved trail he’d descended. “Amazing,” she whispered when they were face-to-face. Then she couldn’t say anything else because he was sliding into her, filling her.

He buried his face in her neck, smelling her hair, feeling her arms wrap around his shoulders. They were completely entwined, totally joined, blissfully alone. Just Tony and Gloria, the passionate couple they’d been at the beginning of their relationship, the adoring couple they would, please God, be at the end of it on his last day on this earth.

“Love you, babe,” he whispered as he drew up to watch her face. “Thank you for marrying me. For being everything I ever wanted in a wife and in the mother of my kids.”

She kissed him sweetly, moisture rising in her eyes. The emotion didn’t diminish the physical pleasure, it only enhanced it. She was crying and laughing as they rocked together, each of his tender thrusts met with a welcoming one of her own.
“I love you, too, Tony,” she whispered, touching his face, rubbing her thumb across his lips. “Thank you for reminding me that I’m more than your wife and the mother of your kids.”
“Your lover. Tonight…and forever.”

Checkout time was at noon, but they got up to get ready to go by nine. Gloria would have loved to stay longer, to spend an entire blissful day in bed with her passionate husband. But her in-laws weren’t getting any younger. And her sons were, as Tony had called them last night, little hellions.

They did linger over a long shower. She almost melted with pleasure when Tony insisted on washing her hair, gently massaging her scalp, delicately covering each long strand with shampoo. The shower was bigger than the one at home and this time the sex wasn’t quick, frantic and furtive. It was slow, sultry. And very slippery.

Afterward, they left their room, heading for the elevator. One came right away, but her husband didn’t step into it.

“Tony?”
“Let’s wait,” he murmured, glancing toward the next one down the line.
She laughed softly. “It’s 11:00 a.m., not p.m. I don’t think we’re going to get away with that in the light of day.”

“Guy can always hope,” he said with a big grin.

Of course, the elevator wasn’t empty. But that didn’t stop her sexy man from copping a feel as they eased into one corner, pushed there by the crowd that grew with every stop on every floor. Gloria couldn’t help casting a quick glance at the camera, wondering if Tony had been right about just how much of a show they’d given the security guard.

Then she smiled up toward it. A cocky smile. Not really giving a damn.

“I saw that,” he murmured, glancing toward the next one down the line.
She feigned innocence. “Saw what?”
“You’re a wicked woman, Gloria Santori.”

Her chin went up, as did one brow. “I can’t imagine what you’re talking about. I’m a respectable wife and mother. A homeroom mom. A library volunteer.”

He dropped the bags, right there in the lobby, and turned to face her. Sinking his hands in her hair to cup her head, he drew her close and pressed a long, openmouthed kiss on her mouth. Gloria gave herself one second to be shocked and worried about an audience before wrapping her arms around his neck and kissing him back with every ounce of love she felt for the man.

“And you’re my woman,” he reminded her when he finally let her go, both of them a little out of breath.
She couldn’t get rid of the silly grin on her face as Tony picked up the bags with one hand, dropping his other arm across her shoulders to tug her against him. He might annoy her when he went all he-man on her sometimes, thinking he could actually boss her around or win an argument. But, oh, she liked it when he went a little he-man on her sexually.

“Tony?” she said as he led her out into the cold Chicago morning. The sky was bright blue, the ground blazingly white. Fresh and crisp and heartbreakingly beautiful.

“Yeah, babe?”

“Next time… I won’t wear the panties.”
Throwing his head back and laughing, he replied, “You better believe I’m gonna hold you to that.”

“Anything you want, love,” he replied as they walked down the street. “Anything you want.”

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.
Epilogue

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“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.

“She’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.
Table of Contents

Prologue
Chapter 1
Chapter 2
Chapter 3
Chapter 4
Epilogue