

Chapter One

Vanessa

Now that Tommy Wright has his niece, Miranda, settled in at home with her fiancé, maybe he can get his head back in the game enough to notice me.

I don't blame him, though, because Tommy's nearing the middle of the season, and if his team keeps going the way they have been, then it's quite possible they'll win the pennant this year. I give Jason Weed, their assistant pitching coach (and Miranda's fiancé) a lot of the credit for that, because even though I've only been around here since the beginning of the season, I listen to the people in the front office when they talk. They say ever since he's been on board, the pitching staff has improved markedly. They say he has a real knack for talking to those guys and showing them how a little twist of the wrist can make all the difference between striking their opponents out or giving up a home run instead.

I don't want to give him all the credit, though, because it's a team effort, and Tommy's a big part of the team. He's one of the team's big bats, and his batting average so far this year is .318.

But enough about baseball right now. It's Tommy's personal life I'm interested in.

We meet at work, of course. Where else would a sports reporter meet an athlete? I interview him for the post-game and, just after his teammates dump a cooler full of Crocodile Juice on him, he wipes his face and gives me a long look and a boyish grin. We wrap up the interview, and Tommy sticks around after and talks to me for a couple of minutes.

"So, look," he says. "Would you like to go out tomorrow after the game?"

I swallow hard, because he's so devastatingly cute, and say, "Okay."

"Cool. Give me your number and I'll pick you up afterwards."

"I'll be *here*, remember?"

"Oh, yeah. Duh. Well, let's go have a drink or two after, all right?"

"Sure."

He starts away, but I reach out and touch him. He turns around and smiles again.

"Yeah?"

"Congrats on the grand slam."

"Thanks."

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For our date, Tommy takes me out to a cozy little place near his house. He opens the door for me and guides me over to the bar with a hand in the small of my back. The light pressure sends a chill down my spine, but I suppress it, because a couple of guys from the organization are here. Everyone notices when we come in, of course, but to my surprise, no one comes to bother us.

Tommy looks good. He's wearing a grey sports jacket and a pink shirt, and I like the way those colors work to bring out the sky-blue of his eyes. I'm wearing a black knit dress with a deep V in the back. I know if he says something perverted, like I have it on backwards, that I'll cringe and find some way to cut the date short, but he does nothing of the kind. He's sweet and

gentlemanly throughout the date, and if he asks me out again, I'm definitely going. He orders me a drink and I tease him a little.

"I hear you're a heartless womanizer," I tell him.

"Who's telling you such lies? I haven't been on a date in weeks."

"They say you're self-absorbed and unromantic is why, and all you care about is your niece and baseball."

"They're right about that part. Baseball and Miranda are everything to me. They're my whole world."

"So there's no room left for dating a girl?"

"I didn't say that. That's just what *they* say, because a lot of them are jealous of the time I spend with her. But hell, what do they want? She's my kid."

"They say she's an adult now."

"She is, but that doesn't mean she doesn't need me. Besides, it's hard to get romantic when you work all the time."

And I know what he means, because I work a lot, too, so I just take a sip of my drink and smile. The drink's a little too strong, but it still tastes all right, so I drink up. Better than coming across as one of those bitchy girls who sends everything back. Tommy keeps an eye on me to see if I'm going to bust his chops some more or not, so I set my drink back down on the bar and smile.

"I need your advice, Tommy."

"Sure. About what?"

"How does a girl worm her way into your heart?"

He eyes me for a moment with a slow smile, and then he leans over and favors me with a short but somehow very erotic kiss. When he's done, he straightens up and says, "Keep being a good kisser, for one."

"No. For real."

"That is for real."

"Then what do I do after that?"

"You come home with me and meet my family."

"Isn't it a little early to meet your family?"

"It's not that kind of family. It's just Miranda and her fiancé, my housekeeper and his boyfriend."

"They all live with you?" I ask.

"Yep."

"You've got a strange family, Tommy Wright."

"Yep. A regular Addams Family. If you come home with me and you're real nice, I'll even show you my mad dope robot skills."

I laugh. "What?"

"Yeah. I can do the robot."

"You're lying."

"No, really. I made Miranda take dancing lessons when she was a kid, but she wouldn't do them without me, so I took the classes, too. I have to admit it was pretty fun. We learned how to tango and krump, too."

"In the same class?"

"No. The tango was later, in a different class."

Improbable as it sounds, he looks so sincere I have to believe him. He picks up his drink and takes a healthy slug off it.

“Come over after this drink and see.”

“Okay.”

We finish our drinks and Tommy asks if I’m ready to go. I say okay, excited. When we get to the house, a young lady in pigtails, who can only be Miranda, is in the kitchen with Jason Weed and a couple of other guys, who Tommy introduces as their housekeeper and his boyfriend.

“What’s wrong?” asks Miranda, darting a glance toward the clock on the wall. “Why are you back so early? Didn’t you have a good time on your date?”

“Calm down. It was fine,” he tells her. Then he explains what we’re here for, and she squeals and claps her hands.

“That’s an excellent idea.”

“You got the speaker for your phone?” Tommy asks her.

“Yes, of course. Let me go get it.”

Miranda hops down from her bar stool and goes hurrying off, returning a minute or two later with the speaker. They hook it up and we all sit down, except for Tommy. He finds a song he likes and starts.

He does a very creditable version of the robot that gets us all laughing, and then he starts krumping. Miranda jumps up and joins in, and when the song ends, he turns to her.

“Ready to show them the tango?” he asks.

“Sure. I’m a little rusty, but I’ll give it a try. Here, let me take my shoes off.”

She removes her shoes, leaving her socks on, and Ignatius, the housekeeper, pulls up a tango song and holds it until they’re ready. Miranda raises her arms and walks into Tommy’s wide embrace, and then they take up their dance positions. Ignatius starts the music and they begin dancing, Tommy moving his niece around the big oak floor in time to the music.

They both have a natural grace that makes them fun to watch, and at the end of the dance, they sit down, slightly out of breath.

“You’d better start learning, Jason,” says Tommy. “She’ll want to tango at your wedding.”

“Yes, I will.”

“When am I supposed to find the time to learn how to tango?” Jason asks her.

“You’ll have almost a month, even if you *do* go to the World Series. And anyway, we can practice when you’re not busy.”

“Told you,” says Tommy.

“What other pain in the ass things will I have to do for this wedding?” Jason asks, throwing me a wink so I know he’s only playing.

“It won’t be a pain in the ass,” she tells him. “It’ll be fun. Now come on. I’ll show you the beginning.”

Jason glances around at all of us, and then he says, “Don’t laugh, guys. I’m not much of a dancer.”

“No, man, we won’t laugh,” Tommy tells him. “Just go stand over there by your sweetheart while we get the next song.”

Jason does his best to obey, but he doesn’t place his arms right.

“Come help Jason get into the correct position,” Miranda tells her uncle.

When Tommy’s done placing Jason’s arms where they ought to be, he sits down on the stool beside me. “What do you think?”

“You guys have a lot of fun around here, don’t you?”

“We try. Do *you* know how to tango?”

“No.”

“Want to join in? I’ll get Ignatius to run the music.”

“Okay.”

We wait until the song ends and then we join Jason and Miranda out on the floor.

“Give me a sec,” Tommy tells Ignatius. “Let me get Vanessa hooked up.”

Finally, the music starts and they show us the steps. It’s not as hard as I expected, although I kick Tommy’s shins several times by accident. Even so, Jason’s not finding it as easy as I am. They decide after a couple of minutes to pair me up with Jason while they dance alongside us to show us the steps.

While Tommy’s busy instructing Jason how to lead a woman, Ignatius and Kevin watch carefully. Miranda beckons Kevin out to the floor to give him a chance to try it out. He chuckles nervously, but he does come out.

“Ignatius,” Tommy says, when he’s satisfied with Jason’s progress. “Another song, please. I’ve got to get a sound system put in here.”

“Yeah, you do. I’ll look some up tomorrow.”

“Cool.”

Tommy stands by as Ignatius strikes up the music, and Jason and I put into practice what we’ve just learned. It’s fun, but tiring, as is learning anything you’re not used to. We stick it out, though, and pretty soon Jason’s leading me around our makeshift dance floor. Miranda’s leading Kevin, presumably so she can teach him, but I have a strong feeling she tries to lead all the time. We go through the dance twice more before Tommy tells us to switch partners.

“I’ll start the music if you want to dance with Kevin,” he tells Ignatius, and Ignatius agrees. Tommy starts the music again, and then he rushes over and grabs me. “You’re looking good out here,” he tells me. “Maybe we should go out dancing sometime.”

“Okay. Maybe a couple more lessons first, though.”

“Anything you say.”

All that pressing close and focusing on our partners has aroused every one of us. Miranda and Jason find an excuse to go up to their room, and Kevin and Ignatius head home, leaving me and Tommy to fend for ourselves.

“That was fun,” I tell Tommy. “We should do stuff like that more often.”

He looks down into my eyes and says, “What? You want to go out with me again?”

“I wouldn’t mind.”

Tommy looks so touched, I can’t help but reach up and kiss him. After a moment or two, he breaks it off and asks me if I want to go upstairs. This surprises me, since rumor has it that getting into his bedroom is like getting into Fort Knox. He might be a lady-killer, but apparently he slays them at their own homes.

“Okay,” I tell him.

“Just let me lock up first.”

“Okay.”

So Tommy goes around and checks all the doors and windows, and then he comes back to me.

“All’s well. Let’s go.”

For some reason, my mind flashes to my parents. They’d had me late, so they were older than my classmates’ parents. I try to picture them dancing in the kitchen (or anywhere else, for that matter) and I laugh.

“What?” Tommy asks.

I tell him what I'm laughing about, and he laughs, too. Then I try to imagine being part of this fun, crazy family. I run up the stairs ahead of Tommy, swaying my hips as I go, ready to use all my skills of seduction to keep me in the game.

When we get to the top of the stairs, he leads the way down to the end of the hall and opens his door. His bedroom's done up in shades of beige and brown, and the headboard of his bed combines both colors in suede. His bed is big and comfortable-looking, and I can hardly wait to sink between what I know are going to be soft, expensive sheets.

Tommy kicks the door shut behind him and wraps me up in his arms. He feels so good and solid pressed against me, I throw my arms around his neck and kiss him again. He lifts me off my feet and I twine my legs around him as he carries me over to the dresser. He lets go of me with his right hand and sweeps everything off the top of it, and then he plops me down and gives me a long, deep, mind-blowing kiss.

"Wait a second," I tell him. "What if Miranda hears?"

"She can't. We're both soundproofed. Now shut up and kiss me again."

I do as he asks while he pulls up my dress and starts to yank off my panties. I've always wanted to be with such a passionate lover, so I lift up for him. He takes both my panties and dress off and drops them to the floor like they don't matter, and then he undoes his fly. He pulls out his cock and impales me on it, I wrap my legs around him again, but loosely, to give him room to move.

Tommy proceeds to ravage me, pulling my breasts out of my bra and not missing a beat while he does it. My head lolls back and I moan. This just fuels his fire and he fucks me fast and hard. All I can do is try to hold off so we both come together, an experience I've never had before.

"You're so goddamned beautiful," he tells me.

By then, I'm so out of breath I can barely speak, but I whisper in his ear how hot he makes me. Something about the combination of being excited and having my breath tickle his ear gets him off, and I'm able to let myself go, too. We come in a sobbing, violent heap and I hold onto him until we both recover.

"That was awesome," he tells me, and I smile.

"Yeah, but I never sleep with a guy on the first date."

"No, I know that. Now hold on and let me get you off this dresser. You want to spend the night?"