



Kathryn Guilford

Nick felt a hand in the center of his back shoving him toward the screen door. He tried to reach down for the handle but there wasn't time to stop; he hit the door headlong and the door burst open and slammed back against the house. The hand kept shoving him forward, over the narrow porch, down the single step, and across the gravel drive until they were out of earshot of the house.

Nick turned and looked at Kathryn. "Is something wrong?"

She planted her fists on her hips and stared at him in disbelief. "What in the world is wrong with you?"

"We could be here all day. Can you be more specific?"

"You just proposed to me in front of another woman—in front of Alena."

"So?"

"What were you thinking?"

"I was thinking I wanted to marry you. Weren't you listening?"

"Nick, a proposal is a very personal thing. It's supposed to be a private thing."

“People propose in front of other people all the time. At restaurants, at parties—even in stadiums.”

“It would have been better in a stadium.”

“Be reasonable. Where would I find a stadium around here?”

“You don’t get it, do you?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Nick—Alena loves you too. When you said yes to me, you were saying no to her. Can you imagine how that made her feel?”

“That didn’t occur to me.”

“How could that possibly not occur to you?”

“I get asked that a lot.”

“It’s not fair. I should be happy right now, but I just feel bad for her.”

“Sorry. I guess I was in kind of a hurry.”

“What was the big rush?”

“Donovan told me the longer I waited the harder it would be.”

“Nathan Donovan gave you romantic advice?”

He nodded.

“Nick, he’s an FBI agent—he shoots people for a living.”

“He knows how to get things done. He told me I should ask before I lost my nerve.”

“What were you so worried about?”

“I don’t have a lot of experience in this area, okay?”

“Is this the first time you ever proposed to a woman?”

“If I’d proposed before, wouldn’t I be married now?” He paused. “Don’t answer that.”

“Is that it? Were you afraid I’d say no?”

“Well, you haven’t exactly said yes yet.”

“I’m getting around to it.”

Nick shoved his hands into his pockets and looked at the ground. “There’s another reason I was in a hurry,” he said. “I should have asked you years ago. I didn’t know it then—I didn’t realize it until I saw you again. I think it was actually Callie who first tipped me off; I kept looking at her and thinking, ‘That little girl should be mine.’ I let you get away the first time, Kath, and I think that was a big mistake. I had to ask you fast before you got away again.”

Kathryn smiled at him.

“Look, I know I’m no bargain. I know I’m not like most men.”

“I don’t want you to be like most men, Nick. I want you to be different.”

“Then you’re in luck.”

Kathryn stepped closer and looked up into his eyes. “Are you sure you’re ready for this, Nick? Are you sure you’re ready for commitment? Are you ready for a wife and a daughter?”

“I don’t know the first thing about kids,” he mumbled.

“So? You don’t know the first thing about women either.”

“Thanks.”

“Kids are very forgiving, Nick. The most important thing is to love them.”

“Great. My specialty.”

“You can do it. I know you can. You think you don’t know anything about love, but you do. You’re a faithful man, and you always try to do the right thing, and once you start something you don’t quit until it’s finished. Love is a lot like that. That’s what I love about you, Nick—and that’s why I’ll marry you.”

“No kidding?”

“No kidding.”

“Sorry about the proposal,” Nick said. “If you want we could call a do-over and I could ask you again. I could write ‘Will you marry me?’ across a billboard. I could write it on a banner and have it towed behind an airplane. One guy even shaved the words into the hair on his back.”

Kathryn squinted at him.

“I have cable,” Nick said. “I was channel surfing.”

Kathryn reached up and wrapped her arms around his neck. “You know what? That first proposal was just fine.”