

Chapter 1

“I really love being married,” Rickie said. He stretched his weary body and tried to relieve a cramp in his sore side that felt like the aftermath of a shark attack. He hated getting shot at and he hated getting beat up. It’s a rare occasion where you can hate two things that happened at the same time.

Roxy propped herself up on the bed and looked at the man she had, with absolutely no reservations, married three months earlier. “That’s just because for the past forty-five minutes your eyes were bugging out of your head until they finally bounced off your cheeks, rolled across the floor, and disappeared under the refrigerator.”

Rickie swiveled his head and grabbed at the air, feigning the surprise of a blind man. “My God, you mean we’re in the kitchen? Tell me we’re not on the counter by the toaster!”

In her favorite move, she punched him on the tip of his chin. His eyes popped open.

“Get those kinky thoughts out of your head, Cuba boy,” she warned, “and start working on what you’re going to fix for breakfast.”

He looked at his new bride. Her smooth, youthful, chocolate skin contrasted with the light aqua of the sheets; the thin scars on her wrists, caused over a year before by her abduction and captivity, were barely visible. “You’re giving me a rest?” he said, a double edge of hope and disappointment in his voice.

She pushed the pillow up and shamelessly leaned back against the rattan headboard with her arms over her head. To say that Roxy Ciprian was attractive was like saying South Florida weather was good. Sure, the sun shines three hundred days a year. But every now and then it'll get mean and nasty and reach out to hurt you. You had to respect Florida weather, take nothing for granted. It was the same with Roxy, with the added benefit of when Roxy loved you, it was probably better than anything you've ever experienced.

By leaning back against the headboard displayed that she'd been a volleyball player at Florida State, continued to lift weights regularly, do aerobics and yoga. She was, in a word, healthy. Damned healthy.

"I'm after that unique combination of quantity and quality few couples ever achieve," she said, muscles in her arms flexing like steel bands, her pectorals doing things that Sir Isaac Newton would have found gravity-defying.

She saw his eyes take in the scenery. Grabbing a loose pillow, she sailed it over his head. "Hey, bud," she said, "get going on that breakfast. I'm hungry."

He swung his legs over the edge of the bed, twisted sideways, stretched the shoulder. He'd love to soak it in the bathtub but that was a girl thing. Maybe they could get a Jacuzzi for the back yard. He thought about that for a moment. Roxy? Hot tub? Warm, fragrant South Florida nights?

"What are you thinking about?" she asked, rolling over next to him, looking up from the bed.

He caught her fragrance, the sharp tang of their recent, and protracted, lovemaking. He kissed the top of each breast.

“I’m thinking about what I’m going to fix us for breakfast,” he lied, standing and bravely padding to the bathroom with a body that stubbornly refused to cooperate.

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Rickie and Roxy Ciprian lived in an unpretentious '50s ranch home in the Miami suburb of Plantation. Rickie had lived there with his first wife, Amanda, in a previous life as a Miami Beach police detective. There were those who considered him a failure, principally, his former captain, Amanda’s uncle. But for Rickie, there was only so much bull shit a man could take. So he’d quit. He used to blame himself for not sticking it out, but not any more.

Roxy believed in Rickie, believed in him enough to resign as a Miami Beach police officer herself, join his struggling detective agency, get married, take care of Cuba boy. She’d made it clear: This was for keeps. She’d love him, respect him, be his best friend; she’d never use sex as a tool, a weapon, as reward or punishment. He’d love and protect her, respect her. Both thought it was an even trade.

After his divorce, after years of not being able to commit to any woman, Rickie knew that was the best offer any woman had ever made a man, and he took it.

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By the time Roxy was out of the shower Rickie had breakfast well under control. Both shared common Cuban heritage, but from decidedly different directions. Rickie's parents had been born there, had left in 1958 just as the revolution swept their Caribbean island. Rickie's brother and sister had both been born on the island. He'd been the first native-born American in the newly-naturalized Ciprian family. Roxy, on the other hand, had a Cuban mother and a black American father. So, where Rickie's blood ran mocha and Castilian, Roxy's coursed chocolate and voodoo mulatto. They were different, yet made a striking couple. Physically, Roxy was nearly Rickie's equal. He had a few inches and about ten pounds on her. He looked like a golfer; she looked like a big, muscular beach volleyball player. He was all flat planes and angles. She was compound curves and hard roundness.

For a variety of reasons Rickie and Roxy had both neglected their Cuban heritage but recently decided to reconnect with their roots. Take for example the breakfast Rickie finished putting on the table as Roxy gave him a kiss and sat down.

He'd prepared a classic Cuban breakfast of *tostadas* and *café con leche*. The mixing of aromas from buttered and toasted Cuban bread and the dark, strong, espresso coffee with warm milk, made *cucina de Ciprian* smell like a coffee shop in Little Havana.

They broke the bread into bite-sized pieces, then dunked them into the *café con leche*.

“You trying to spoil me here?” Roxy asked.

“I’m just trying to get my strength back,” he answered between bites, winking at her.

“Ready for round two?”

“It’s Sunday, Roxy,” he pleaded without genuine conviction. His body ached a good ache and he didn’t particularly want to add to the pain. “Haven’t you heard of Sunday being a day of rest?”

She expertly dunked a piece of bread into her coffee and brought it to her lips, sucking the liquid out and swallowing so slowly that Rickie could see her throat working. He moaned.

She didn’t say anything more. She didn’t have to.

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Back in the kitchen, Rickie cleaned the breakfast dishes while Roxy went out to the driveway to retrieve the Sunday *Miami Herald*. Big thunderheads swept across the threatening July sky from the Gulf of Mexico heavy with moisture, sagging, ready to release a deluge. Occasional shafts of sunlight pierced the gloom like celestial laser beams while in the distance a deep booming signaled that their little slice of paradise was going to get dumped on, and soon.

Ma and Pa from Des Moines would be pissed; the kids would be bouncing around the motel room like free radicals in an uncontrolled chemical reaction. But for

natives like Rickie and Roxy, the rain would be a welcome respite from the blistering sun, the smothering heat.

She sat at the table as Rickie finished the dishes, separating the three-inch stack of dead trees into four piles. Pile one contained the actual news; pile two, the classifieds; pile three, the coupons; and pile four, the trash. Pile four was by far the thickest.

Roxy amazed him. First, he'd never guessed that she was a coupon-clipper. But in the short time they'd been married she'd already saved them a small fortune. Seeing that their entire client list could be written on the back of one of their new business cards, saving money was paramount. More importantly, she religiously scanned both the news and the classifieds for potential investigative leads. Their most recent case had actually come right off the front page of the paper.

The *Herald* reported earlier that summer that the largest retail pharmacy in the state had evidently employed a pharmacist who believed he was the second coming of Timothy Leary. Over a period of eighteen months the guy had written enough narcotic scripts to keep most of South Florida on a permanent opium derivative buzz. It looked bad for the company. Until, that was, the state licensing board discovered that the guy wasn't a pharmacist at all, only the result of a computer glitch that inadvertently switched the records of a legitimate, but recently deceased pill-pusher, with those of a part-time but highly entrepreneurial college drop-out.

Roxy figured if this could happen to one drug store chain it might happen to others. These pharmacies, if convinced of the potential financial shit storm should it

happen to them, just might hire Ciprian Investigations to run surety checks on their employees. So far, three companies had signed on for “The Ciprian Touch,” and billing was starting to look up.

Rickie finished with his domestic chores, sat across from his wife and said, “What are you doing today?” Sunday at the Ciprian house was unplanned—including the sex. But then they had already crossed that off the list, more than once.

“I thought I’d take the last pieces of furniture down to my brother,” she said. She was deep in the business section, circling interesting tidbits with a red marker.

Roxy’s former apartment had replaced nearly all of Rickie’s battered and shoddy bachelor furnishings and gone a long way in making their Miami Avenue office look semi-professional. Several pieces remained that she thought her brother, living in South Miami with his rapidly expanding family, could use. “How about you?” she asked, circling another article and underlining the heading several times. Could be juicy.

“I haven’t been out to see the family in nearly a year,” he said. “They probably wonder what’s happened to me.”

It sounded odd but Roxy understood. Rickie’s father, mother, sister, and brother were buried together in Shady Gardens, west of Miami Lakes. Rickie still held family meetings at the cemetery when he needed advice.

“You want me to come with you?” she asked, putting down the paper, putting down her plans.

Rickie rose and circled his arms around her from behind. “No, babe,” he said, nuzzling into her freshly shampooed hair. She wore it short, tight, like an athlete. “But that’s nice. They’ll probably yell at me, anyway.”

She returned his embrace. To most people, being married to a man who conversed with his dead relatives might seem a bit odd, possibly certifiable.

But then, they didn’t know Rickie.

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“Did you order something that would be delivered FedEx?” Roxy asked.

She peered out the front window early Monday morning as a very young and very buff delivery boy dashed up the walk toward their house carrying a package under his arm. Yesterday’s thunderstorms had been a bust but Monday’s weather forecast was for rain, all day. As he got nearer, she noticed the kid had on tight little uniform shorts and was carrying a more personal package that was particularly difficult to hide.

“You know me,” Rickie yelled from the bathroom where he was working a razor blade around his moustache, hoping for as little bloodletting as possible. “I only buy things for my cars.”

That’s right, Roxy thought, opening the door in anticipation. *Rickie Ciprian, super shopper.*

She signed for the package, the one the delivery man was carrying under his arm. She felt a good measure of lascivious guilt watching his tight buns as he ran back to his truck. Married woman! Married woman! Married woman! she easily reminded herself.

She glanced at the return address on the air bill and yelled at Rickie again. “It’s from Buddy Adams,” she said as Rickie emerged from the bathroom with a single fleck of bloody toilet paper adorning his chin.

“What’s Buddy sending us?” he asked.

Buddy Adams, Hollywood agent to lesser stars, had played a significant role in Ciprian Investigation’s first major job after Roxy had married Rickie and joined the firm. Unfortunately, that case had ended up being a freebie. They’d helped Buddy, made a bunch of friends in the Hoosier state, nearly contracted frostbite, and returned home with Visa and MasterCard slips they were still trying to pay off.

The case had returned Rickie to the frozen tundra of Central Indiana for the second time in twelve months. The first time he’d found the body of a little girl, buried beneath the Indiana prairie. The second time, he’d narrowly escaped the same fate.

For a Florida boy, two Midwestern winters in a row had just about frozen his oranges. He hoped to never see the south side of sixty degrees ever again.

“It’s heavy,” Roxy said, pulling the zip tab on a box the size and shape of a good-sized book.

She lifted a note from the top of a healthy stack of letter-sized sheets.
Scanning the note, she put the pages on the coffee table.

“Buddy’s written a book!” she exclaimed. She read the note aloud.

July 3rd

Hollywood, California

Rickie and Roxy:

I’m sorry for missing your wedding. Of course, it would have been helpful had you told someone you were getting hitched. But hey, it was your call. I phoned Boomer Falcone but he was as much in the dark as I was. I know you two must be deliriously happy, as Suzanne and I are. The house is just about done so I’ll be splitting my time between the farm and the office for a while. Of course, you two are invited to come up to Indiana for a visit any time. I suggest September or May. Otherwise, well, you know, Indiana weather.

Enclosed is a manuscript I’m circulating among the usual literary agencies. Both of you will find yourselves in the pages. It’s the story of what we went through. I hope you enjoy it.

Buddy

Roxy turned the first page over. “Look Rickie,” she exclaimed. “He’s called it *The Whole Enchilada!* How perfect!”

“You think he made most of it up?” Rickie asked, remembering the bizarre circumstances that had transpired the previous year on Indiana’s snowy fallow fields. If anyone ever asked him, they’d never believe his explanation.

The Whole Enchilada
Raul Roqué

Roxy handed him the thick manuscript. “Let’s read it and find out,” she said.

And they did.