

# Break the Rules

The Flanagan Sisters #1

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# DEDICATION

*To my sister, Jane*

## Chapter 1

Bridget Flanagan's head thumped in time to the booming dance music. She shouldn't have let her best friend Tanya convince her to go clubbing.

She sighed. Who was she kidding? Tanya could convince her to do almost anything, and the promise of a girls' night to dance, drink, and forget her troubles sounded like just what she'd needed.

But her head had begun to throb almost immediately and Tanya had found a new friend. It was a shame Sally and Trish hadn't been able to come out tonight. At least then she'd have someone to talk with. Bridget scanned the dance floor, spotting Tanya dancing with the guy she'd picked up. So much for the girls' night.

She shouldn't be surprised. Tanya did tend to forget everything when a cute guy walked by. Knowing better than to try to drag her out of the club, Bridget headed for the bar and ordered a glass of water. When it arrived, she moved away, taking a sip and willing her headache away. Tanya looked like she was going to dance all night.

"Is that your friend dancing with my brother?" The male voice was loud but sexy and his breath tickled her ear.

Bridget jumped and turned so she was face to face with a

man who did not slow her pulse rate at all. He was slightly taller than she was, with thick brown hair and dark eyes that smiled. Yum.

He pointed toward Tanya and leaned closer to be heard over the music. "Is your friend the blonde in the red dress?"

Bridget nodded. "That's Tanya."

"I don't suppose she'll turn into a pumpkin by midnight?" He had a hopeful look on his face.

Bridget grimaced. "Not a chance. I wish she would." She put the glass up to her forehead and sighed at the coolness. "What about your brother?"

"His motto is 'all night long.'" He frowned. "Perhaps we can convince them to go somewhere quieter at least, somewhere with some seating."

She was intrigued. Why had he come out if he didn't want to dance? "You don't feel like partying?"

"I moved back to Houston from Australia two days ago. My body hasn't quite adjusted yet."

The mention of his body had Bridget checking it out again. It looked perfectly fine to her. His blue jeans fit in all the right places and the button-down black shirt clung to his well-defined chest. She cleared her throat. "There's a bar around the corner. The music is quieter but they can still dance if they want."

"Shall we give it a go?"

"Sure." Bridget put her glass on the bar and followed him to where Tanya and his brother were dancing. She couldn't hear what he said but they nodded in response. As he turned back to her, Tanya gave her a very unsubtle thumbs up. Bridget ignored her. All she wanted to do was find some quiet and get rid of her headache.

Outside the club, her ears adjusted to the blissful reduction in noise and she took a deep breath.

"Bridge, this is Hal," Tanya chirped.

Hal was slightly taller than his brother, maybe six foot two, with the same thick brown hair and dark eyes.

Bridget forced a smile. "Nice to meet you."

Tanya raised her eyebrows, waiting expectantly. "Who's this?" she nodded to Hal's brother.

Bridget shrugged apologetically. "We didn't swap names. I'm

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Bridget.”

“Jack.” He smiled at her and she forgot her pounding head for a moment. It was some smile, lighting up his eyes and sending a lovely warmth through her body.

“Great. Now let’s find something to drink,” Tanya said, and keeping her hand tightly in Hal’s, she led the way to the bar. Hal didn’t seem to mind.

Bridget walked alongside Jack, not sure what to say. Now she was out of the noise she realized she’d effectively been picked up. Was this some kind of scam the brothers had going? Find two girls and take them somewhere quieter?

She snuck a look at Jack. No, he really did look as tired as she felt.

They walked past a drugstore. “Wait a second, I’ve got to grab something.” Bridget dashed inside, found the painkillers and bought a packet. When she went back outside, Jack was the only one waiting for her.

“Where’s Tanya?”

“They went on ahead. I thought I’d wait.”

Bridget tamped down her annoyance. They’d only just met these guys, and while they seemed nice, they could be anyone. Tanya should be more careful. “Thanks.”

Inside the bar, they found a table away from the music. It was quieter than the nightclub and they could talk without shouting. Bridget ordered a glass of water and a coffee, and took two pills. Hopefully they would kick in quickly.

Tanya put her drink on the table and grabbed Hal’s hand. “I love this song.” She pulled him away to the small dance floor.

Bridget slid on to a chair next to Jack who was nursing his cup of coffee. She had to say something, otherwise this was going to get awkward fast.

“So you’ve just moved back from Australia?” she asked. “How long were you there?”

“Three years. I was ready to come home and the perfect job opportunity came up.”

Bridget did *not* want to talk about work. She wasn’t sure she’d be able to keep the frustration out of her voice if she spoke about her job. “What did you do for fun?”

“I did a lot of surfing, a bit of diving, and was roped in to

play cricket and Aussie rules football.”

“Is their football much different from ours?”

He laughed, a warm, rich sound. “Yeah, completely different. It took a bit of getting used to.”

Bridget couldn’t help smiling back at him. He had one of those laughs that made her want to laugh as well, made her want to make him laugh so she could hear it again.

“Have you ever been to Australia?” he asked.

“No. I was born in El Salvador, but since I moved here I haven’t done a lot of traveling. I’ve been focused on work.” Which had turned out to be a waste of time.

“When did you move here?”

A stray curl floated in front of her face and she brushed it back impatiently. Her hair did its own thing when she left it out. “I was five.”

“It must have been hard, moving somewhere you didn’t speak the language.”

“My father was Irish so he used to speak English to us at home.” She remembered it was like a secret language because her mother couldn’t speak English. She’d always thought it was her special thing with her father. “I was lucky because I was starting school and it didn’t take long for me to pick it up.”

“Do you still speak Spanish?”

“Sí. My family still speaks a lot of Spanish at home.”

“I only know high school Spanish and I’m not going to embarrass myself by attempting it now. Do you have any siblings?”

“Two sisters – one older, one younger. What about you? Is it just you and Hal?”

Jack glanced over at the dance floor where Tanya and Hal were still dancing. “Yeah.”

“You must be close to go out clubbing together.”

He shrugged. “I’m staying with him until I find my own place. He lives closest to where I’ll be working from Monday. He said we had to celebrate my return to Houston.”

She smiled. “I see he’s pleased about your homecoming.”

Hal was bumping and grinding behind Tanya.

Jack laughed again. “What about you and Tanya? Having a girls’ night?”

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“Supposedly.” Bridget sighed. “Tanya said I needed to dance my worries away.” At his raised eyebrow she added, “I got passed over for a promotion yesterday.”

“That’s rough. What happened?”

She shook her head. “I don’t want to talk about it. I’ll get all bitter and you’ll think I’m a scary shrew.”

“That’s not likely to happen.” His gaze sent warm tingles through her body. “How’s your head?”

She blinked. “It’s dulled to an ache.”

“It’s a start.”

It was. If she made no sudden movements she could mostly ignore it. She was enjoying talking to Jack. It wasn’t the usual slightly sleazy pickup she was used to. She felt she could actually get to know him. When was the last time she’d been able to do that? She frowned as she tried to remember. There’d been no one since Lionel. She was still recovering from *those* burns and had thrown herself into her work to prove herself. Then in the last six months she’d been temporarily reassigned to a managerial role which came with even more responsibility and a greater workload. When her boss had finally retired, she was sure she’d get the role permanently – he’d recommended her.

Someone obviously hadn’t agreed with him.

Bridget pushed the thought aside. She wasn’t going to let work mess up her evening. She wouldn’t think about it until Monday, when she met her new boss. In the meantime she was going to enjoy the night.

“So no work talk. What do you do for fun?” Jack asked.

It was a good question. She’d been so busy at work she hadn’t had time for fun. Sometimes Tanya would convince her to go out dancing, or they’d go for drinks with a couple of girls from work, but more often than not it ended with her friend finding a guy and Bridget hanging in a corner, waiting until Tanya had had enough. Bridget wasn’t willing to leave her by herself. Often Tanya drank too much and didn’t make the best choices. At least Bridget could keep her from doing anything too silly.

“I read when I get the time,” she said in answer to Jack’s question. “I go to the movies, have drinks with friends, you know the usual stuff.”

“What do you read?”

She hesitated. She was always getting ribbed by the guys at work for her choice of reading material. “Romance.” She loved the happy endings.

“Can’t say I’ve read much of that,” Jack admitted. “I’m more into action and suspense.”

“There are some great romantic suspense books out there. You should give it a try.”

“I might.”

“So what about you? Now you’re back in Texas, there’ll be no cricket or Australian football.”

“I heard about a cricket league around Houston, but I didn’t love the game that much. I’d like to check out local dive sites though. But the first thing I need to do is find somewhere to live. As much as I love my brother, he’s not the tidiest of roommates.”

She grinned, thinking of Tanya. “I’ve always wanted to learn to scuba dive. It must be amazing to stay underwater for so long.”

“It is. You should definitely try it.” His eyes lit up and his enthusiasm was palpable. “Once you’ve dived you’ll be hooked. I know I was.”

“Maybe I will.” She should have a bit of free time now she was going back to her old job. She deserved to do something for herself.

Tanya and Hal came back to the table and Tanya flopped on the chair next to her. She took a deep swig from her cider. “You two should dance. Get your bodies moving.” She raised her eyebrows up and down.

Bridget suppressed a groan. Tanya was in her “I’ve had enough to drink to think I’m being subtle but I’m not” mode. Next she’d start making sexual innuendo, because she’d decided the solution to Bridget’s worries was to get laid.

“You two are doing enough moving for the both of us,” Jack said.

“Tanya knows how to dance.” Hal grinned.

Tanya beamed at him. “You’ve got some moves yourself.” She took another sip of her drink and sighed. “You guys have the most glorious hair. I’d love to have you in the shop.”

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They exchanged a confused glance.

“She’s a hairdresser,” Bridget explained.

“Well, you can run your fingers through my hair any time you want,” Hal told her.

“Oh, good. Turn around.” When he did, Tanya dug her fingers into his hair.

Bridget turned to Jack. “Tell me more about diving. Did you go to the Great Barrier Reef?”

“No, I was on the west coast, but the Ningaloo Reef is an amazing dive. In places you don’t even need scuba gear, you can walk straight off the beach with goggles and snorkel and see fish and coral with the most amazing colors.”

Bridget didn’t even know how to use a snorkel. The only swimming they had done as children was at the municipal pools, when their mother could afford to pay, which wasn’t often. These days she liked to swim to keep fit, but she didn’t get a chance very often.

“There were also a number of shipwrecks to dive,” Jack was saying. “The ocean takes over the man-made structures so quickly. The fish and eels move right in and make themselves at home. When you swim by they watch you as much as you watch them.”

Tanya giggled at whatever Hal whispered in her ear. “It’s getting late. We should probably head home.”

Bridget’s headache had disappeared and she was enjoying talking to Jack. Wasn’t that just typical?

“Bridge, Hal’s offered to show me his place. Are you all right getting home on your own?”

So that was the real reason. Not sure whether to be amused or annoyed she simply said, “Sure.”

\* \* \*

The cab pulled up in front of Bridget’s house and nerves tickled her stomach. “This is me,” she said and paid the driver.

“I’ll walk you to your door,” Jack said, before asking the driver to wait.

After Tanya had left with Hal, he’d insisted on accompanying her home, saying he wanted to delay his return so he didn’t cramp Hal and Tanya’s style. Bridget could totally

understand that and it gave her an opportunity to decide what she wanted to do about him.

“Nice place,” he said as he followed her up the path to the front door.

“Yeah.” The front light came on and she turned to face him, her hands clasped together. She was tempted to invite him in, but that was against her dating rules.

He took hold of her hands. “I had a nice time tonight.”

“Me too.” Her body tingled in response to his thumb lazily brushing the back of her hand.

He pulled her closer and she tilted her head, her lips parting slightly. Something in her chest fluttered. He was going to kiss her and she wanted him to. He bent his head and his lips met hers. The fluttering stopped as her senses took control. His lips were firm and he tasted like coffee. When his tongue flicked over hers she couldn’t suppress a quiet moan. It had been a long time since she’d been kissed like this, since her body had reacted like this. She had to stop this now before it went too far.

Bridget broke the kiss and took a step back, her breath unsteady. She swallowed. “I have two rules to dating,” she said. “And one is never to sleep with someone on the first date.”

“What’s your second rule?” His tone was light and he was smiling.

Her lips twitched in response. “I don’t date people I work with.” She wasn’t going to make *that* mistake again.

“Fair enough.” He shuffled his feet. “Want to be a rule-breaker tonight?”

The hopeful look on his face was sweet. She grinned at him. “Yes,” she admitted. She kissed him again needing one more taste before he left. He gathered her close, and ran his hand down her back to her butt. Her body heated and she leaned closer. Damn she wanted him. She broke the kiss. What the heck, she deserved some fun. Playing by the rules hadn’t got her anywhere. “Want to come in?”

“Hell yes.”

She laughed as she unlocked the door and Jack dashed back to tell the driver he wasn’t needed.

Anticipation stirring, she led him down the hall to her bedroom. It was way past time she did something spontaneous,

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and Jack was the perfect guy for it. She turned, drew him into her arms and claimed his lips.

It had been too long for Bridget to take things slowly. Her body was on fire and she wanted him naked. Her fingers worked busily on the buttons of his shirt, while his hands snuck under her top. She shoved the shirt off his shoulders and then lifted her arms so he could rid her of her own top. Her brown hands contrasted against his lighter skin as she ran them over his chest, enjoying his muscle tone. She needed more. She wanted to forget her responsibilities and just feel. And damn he felt good.

Quickly she unclasped her black cotton bra and threw it to the floor. His thumbs brushed her nipples and she threw her head back as glorious sensations flooded her and pooled between her legs. They had to get to the bed.

She moved backwards, her hands tugging on his jeans to draw him along with her as she undid his button and zipper, pushing his pants and underwear down. He was sexy as hell. She couldn't stop running her hands over him, and the sound that came out of her mouth as she stroked his manhood sounded like a purr. She wanted him inside her now.

His eyes darkened as he pushed her on to the bed. She fell willingly back onto the mattress, and then fumbled with her own jeans until he grabbed the waistband and pulled them off.

She couldn't get any hornier. Her mound pulsed with desire, and when he brushed his fingertips lightly over her belly and down between her legs she had to have him, now. Lifting herself onto one elbow, she reached into the drawer of her bedside table and handed him a condom. "Jack, now," she panted.

He quickly sheathed himself and then his body covered hers. It wasn't enough. His hardness pressed against her and she kissed him, needing to taste him.

Slowly he entered her, filling her, and her brain short-circuited. All she could do was move and feel, moaning his name.

Sensation built quickly like a tidal wave. She was on the edge, and then they both went over, calling out each other's names.

\* \* \*

Bridget lay on her back, her arms outstretched, and a huge grin on her face. That had been incredible.

“Wow,” Jack breathed.

Wow didn’t really begin to cover it. She just nodded, not able to form a coherent word.

He leaned over and kissed her long and deeply. “I’m glad you broke your rule.”

Bridget gazed up at him. “So am I.” It was past time that she had some fun, that she lived a little and tonight she’d lived a *lot*.

“Got any plans tomorrow?”

Shoot. She did. “I’ve got lunch at my mom’s.”

“That sounds nice.”

“Yeah, we get together every other week.”

He stretched and glanced at her. “Should I call a cab then?”

Bridget hesitated. As much as she would have liked him to stay, it could get awkward in the morning. She sighed. “Yeah, my sister is picking me up early.”

He reached to the floor, pulled his phone out of his jeans pocket, and ordered a cab. She couldn’t resist running her hand over his back and down to his luscious bottom.

He glanced over his shoulder and grinned. “Can I see you again?”

“I’d like that.” She rattled off her mobile number and he saved it in his phone.

“What about dinner tomorrow?”

Her chest squeezed. He was as keen as she was. “I won’t get back until late. How about later in the week?”

“Sure. I’ll call.”

She was a little disappointed that he didn’t offer an alternative, until she remembered he was starting a new job on Monday.

Jack got up and pulled on his pants and shirt. It was a shame to see him cover up that gorgeous body.

Outside a horn tooted. “That’ll be my ride,” he said.

Bridget stood up, threw on a T-shirt, and followed him to the door. She kissed him again, not really wanting him to leave.

“I’ll call,” he promised.

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“You’d better get going, otherwise the cab might leave.” She stepped inside and put a hand on the door. “I’ll look forward to your call.”

She shut the door and grinned.

She’d have to thank Tanya for making her go out.

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