



## Smooth Sailing (Stop the Wedding! Book 2)

By Lori Wilde

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*Sex and the sea...*

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R.N. Haley French is furious. For one night, she lets go of her usual boring routine, and the next she knows she's accidentally off to Florida with Mr. Sexy Superficiality, and desperately trying to forget the steamy encounter they almost shared.

And in the boat, there's no escape from each other...or the unfurling lust that threatens to send their self-control overboard!

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## **Editorial Review**

### **About the Author**

Lori Wilde is a New York Times and USA Today bestselling author of 64 books. She is a former registered nurse and lives in Texas with her husband, Bill.

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A peacock couldn't have strutted more gloriously than Jeb Whitcomb taking the outdoor makeshift stage. A self-satisfied grin graced his tanned handsome face, his blue eyes crinkled seductively at the corners as he joined the governor at the podium. The sleeves of his white work shirt were rolled up to his elbows, revealing powerful forearms dotted with hair a shade darker than the milk-chocolate locks swept rakishly off his forehead.

"In appreciation of your hard work, dedication and monetary contribution to rebuilding the island of St. Michael's, we are bestowing you with the first Jeb Whitcomb humanitarian award," Governor Freemont announced and passed the gilded trophy to Whitcomb.

From the audience, Haley French, R.N., rolled her eyes. Whitcomb might have everyone else on the island snowed, but Haley saw through the charming smile and sexy swagger. He hadn't really come here to help the residents of St. Michael's; his visit had all been about plumping up his ego. Whenever there was a camera about, Whitcomb was in front of it.

Cameras flashed. Reporters tossed questions. The crowd applauded.

Haley's best friend, Ahmaya Reddy, poked her in the ribs with her elbow. "Don't be rude. Clap."

Halfheartedly, Haley joined in the applause, but she frowned. "He's grandstanding."

Whitcomb launched into what was clearly an off-the-cuff speech.

"He's a bona fide hero," Ahmaya argued. "St. Michael's couldn't have recovered as quickly without him."

"He's self-centered."

"Oh, yes, self-centered people give up a year of their life to rebuild islands they have no connection to."

"That's precisely my point. He has no connection to St. Michael's. Who anointed him our savior? I question his motives. Ever notice how he always has hangers-on following him?"

Ahmaya shrugged. "He's handsome, rich and fun to be around. Who wouldn't want to hang on?"

"Rebuilding an entire island wiped out by a hurricane shouldn't be fun."

"You'd think not, but somehow he managed to get everyone to pull together. That's why he's getting the attention, not to mention the award. His ability to get people to work in harmony."

"He's just doing it for the attention. It strokes his ego."

"So what if he is?" Ahmaya asked. Okay, Haley was being a bit harsh, which was not like her, but Whitcomb seemed to bring out the worst in her. "The results are the same. People have homes again and essential services have been restored because of Jeb's generosity."

"He's impulsive."

"Oh." A sly smile crossed Ahmaya's face. "I get it."

"Get what?"

"The reason why he rubs you the wrong way." Haley crossed her arms over her chest, canted her head. "Care to enlighten me?"

"He doesn't live up to your expectations."

"I have no expectations of him."

"No?"

"He's nothing to me."

"I thought you two—"

"We certainly did not." Haley bristled.

"But almost."

Haley's cheeks heated. Yes, she'd almost had sex with Jeb Whitcomb several months back when they'd both served on the hospital rebuilding committee. Thankfully, she had not gone through with it.

"Wait a minute." Ahmaya snapped her fingers. "It's not Jeb who didn't live up to your expectations. It was you. You're mad at him because you violated your own code of ethics when you—"

"Let's stop talking about him, okay?" To get Ahmaya to shut up, she purposefully fixed her attention on the stage.

Jeb had a microphone in his hand. He paced the length of the stage, whipping up the audience with his passionate vision of what St. Michael's could become. Haley knew how dangerous his passion was. He'd had her under his spell, however briefly. He paused in midstride, peered out at the audience and his gaze landed on her.

For one heart-stopping second, their eyes locked and Haley's throat tightened. Darn it, she could not glance away.

Jeb held her pinned to the spot, his eyelids lowered slightly, and his voice took on a seductive quality. Or maybe she had merely imagined it. "Since this is my last day on St. Michael's, I'm having a party on my yacht and everyone is invited," he announced.

A cheer went up from the assembly.

He tossed the microphone to the governor and stalked offstage with a jaunty spring to his step, his entourage of sycophants trailing after him. The crowd gathered around, patting him on the back, trying to shake his hand, but he seemed a man on a mission.

It took Haley a few seconds to realize he was headed toward her. Oh, hell, no.

She spun on her heel. Should be easy enough to disappear in this throng. She rushed forward. Her toe caught on a power cord snaking across the ground and she tripped. *Way to watch where you 're going, French.* She put out her palms to catch herself and ended up sprawled on the ground. Oh, she hated being vulnerable.

From behind her came a familiar chuckle. He was already upon her. Before she could scramble up, Jeb's hand went around her waist, his citrusy scent enveloping her as he helped her gently to her feet.

"Easy there, baby," he crooned, bending down to dust the dirt from the knees of her scrubs.

She wrenched away from him, stepped back, breathless and despising herself for it. *Hands off the goods, buster.* Worst of all, she couldn't help meeting his eyes.

There he was standing so close to her in his white shirt, pressed khaki shorts, yachting cap and boat shoes, looking every inch the wealthy windblown yachtsman. Everyone else faded away and it was just the two of them.

His light blue eyes regarded her with a lively sense of humor. It was that sense of humor that had been her undoing. She wasn't going to fall for it. Not twice. No way. No how. He was finally leaving the island. Yay! She'd never have to see him again.

"You're coming to my party, right?" His fingers lightly stroked her upper arm.

No way.

"It wouldn't be a party without you," he went on.

"I've got to wash my hair," she lied. On second thought, why lie? Maybe she would wash her hair. Wash that man right out of it.

"All you need is to lose a few of these pins." His fingers went from her shoulder to her hair, which was pulled up into a tight bun. It was far too intimate of a gesture. He plucked bobby pins from her hair, one by one, and the locks fell loosely to her shoulders. "There, much better."

Haley jerked back, pulse thumping hard. *Oh, no. Do not like this. You are not allowed to like this.*

The expression in his eyes was one of total amusement. He knew he'd made her uncomfortable and he was enjoying himself.

"I'm a stickler for clean hair. I make it a policy to wash it every day." She stuck her chin in the air.

"I know," he murmured, his voice warm and cozy. "You do love your rules."

Who was he to act as if he knew her? Just because they'd almost— Well, never mind what they'd almost

done—she was determined to forget it. What really chafed was that *he'd* been the one to pull the plug on their encounter.

"Gotta go." She pointed her feet away from him, but for some unfathomable reason, she did not move.

"I should have known you wouldn't come to my party," he said. "Little Miss Straitlaced."

"Just because I don't want to attend your bacchanal doesn't mean I'm straitlaced."

"Bacchanal?" He sounded amused.

"It's a word. Look it up."

"You're chicken."

She straightened. "I'm not afraid of a thing." *Watch out. Noses grow when lies are told.*

"I disagree. You're terrified of having a good time."

She sniffed. "My idea of a good time and your idea of a good time are two very different things."

"I know. Beating myself up is not my favorite pastime."

She curled her upper lip, determined not to smile back at him. "Well, have a nice party and a safe trip." He'd nailed her, but good. Well, not nailed her in the sexual regard. *Pegged her*—that was better terminology. He'd pegged her. Must hate him for that if nothing else.

"Are you going to miss me when I'm gone?" He leaned down, his grin widening. *All night long.* "Not in the least."

"I suppose I asked for that."

"You did."

He batted his eyes at her. "I'm going to miss you."

"Whatever for?"

"You're the only one on this island who keeps me on my toes."

No, sir. She would not let this man turn her into mush. She was better than that. "You want to be on your toes? Wear high heels."

He threw back his head and laughed heartily. "I also love your sense of humor."

"I wasn't trying to be funny." She folded her arms over her chest.

"You're also the only one who doesn't like me, and I can't figure out why."

Haley scoffed. "Not everyone has to like you. Why do you care whether I like you or not?"

"Because I like *you*."

"You like everyone."

"True," he said, taking a step closer. "But not as much as I like you."

She put up her hand like a stop sign. "You don't like me. You like a challenge."

His crystal-blue eyes glittered. "I have to admit, I do enjoy a challenge. The more you resist, the more I want you..." There was a long pause that set her heart to rocking, before he added, "At my party."

"You can want in one hand and spit in the other and see which fills up first."

Jeb laughed long and loud, showing off a row of straight white teeth. That was the problem with the man. He was too perfect and every woman wanted him. Just like the blonde who was sidling up to his elbow and fluttering her false eyelashes at him.

"Your adoring public awaits."

"What?"

She nodded at the woman.

Jeb barely cast the platinum blonde a glance and quickly swung his gaze back to Haley. "Come to my party."

"I don't think so. It takes my hair a really long time to dry," she quipped.

She could not let him know how much he got under her skin. If he knew that he was a major star in her sexual fantasies, she would never hear the end of it. She refused to be like all the other women simpering at his feet.

Yes, he was good-looking. Yes, he was rich. Yes, he had personality and charisma oozing from his pores. Those were exactly the reasons she was not interested. Jeb Whitcomb was a very superficial man.

"It's the last time you'll ever see me." A hangdog expression crawled over his face. "Don't you want to say goodbye?"

"Goodbye." She wriggled her fingers at him.

"The party won't be the same without you."

"You won't miss me."

He canted his head, his eyes drilling into her like lasers. "Ah, see, but that's where you're wrong."

"It's not going to happen, Whitcomb."

He shrugged. "A guy can always dream, can't he?"

"As long as it stays a dream."

He reached out, touched the back of her hand. A shiver ran straight through the middle of her. "I am going to miss you, Haley."

"That makes one of us."

"Ouch." The grin was back as he clutched a hand to his chest. "You play for keeps."

"Don't ever forget it."

The blonde at his elbow edged closer, cleared her throat. "Mr. Whitcomb, I'm from *Metropolitan Magazine* and I want to do a story on you."

Jeb turned to the woman. "Yes?"

With her hand still tingling from his touch, Haley took advantage of his distraction and slipped off into the crowd. Great. She felt like a James Bond martini, shaken and not— Oh, who was she kidding?

She was both shaken *and* stirred.

Haley stalked off with a purposeful bounce, her honey-colored hair flowing around her shoulders, those blue scrubs stretching across her sexy rump as she marched away.

Jeb grinned, put a palm to the nape of his neck and licked his lips. *Wow, you can park that swing in my backyard anytime.* He tilted his head, honed in on her narrow waist and curvy hips.

His pulse pounded and his body stiffened. In spite of the cool ocean breeze swaying the palm trees, a simmering heat moved through him. He chuffed out a breath, struggling to regain his equilibrium. Truth was, he really would miss her. He enjoyed their sparring matches. She was sassy and saucy and didn't take anything off anyone.

The last person who'd challenged him that same way was his ex-girlfriend, Jackie Birchard. Out of the dozens of girlfriends he'd had, Jackie was the only one to dump him. It made her stand out in the crowd. The one woman he couldn't charm.

That was, until he met Haley. Too bad they'd never hooked up, although they'd come pretty damn close.

Jeb smiled, remembering. He could have gotten her into bed if he'd wanted. When they'd made out on the beach at sunset a few months back, sparks had ignited unlike anything he'd ever felt before, and that was saying something. Haley had wanted him as much as he'd wanted her, maybe even more so, although chances were good that she would never admit it.

But, surprise, surprise, he'd been the one to put a stop to things before they'd completely lost control.

He'd stopped for two reasons. One, he knew Haley would have regretted it the morning after. She was such a stickler for protocol, held herself and others to high standards. Two, he'd been trying to prove to Jackie that

she was wrong about him. He wasn't a self-absorbed playboy with no depth of character. He could restrain himself.

No matter how difficult it had been to break that kiss and send Haley home with their desires unfulfilled.

Ah, well, you couldn't win them all, right? It was time to move on. His work on St. Michael's was done. He'd achieved what he'd set out to achieve. He'd helped rebuild the island. He could return home with his head held high.

"About that interview, Mr. Whitcomb," said the blond reporter with a smile that sparkled like prisms.

Matching her smile, Jeb turned and led her away, but he couldn't resist one last glance over his shoulder at Haley.

She paused and looked back.

Their eyes met.

*Gotcha! Protest all you want, sweetheart—you do want me.* Boldly, he winked.

Her cheeks reddened and her eyes narrowed in a scowl. She ducked her head and flounced from his view, leaving Jeb sorely regretting the night that they'd never had.

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