



*Twelfth Night:  
Wicked Resolutions*

*By Karen Erickson*

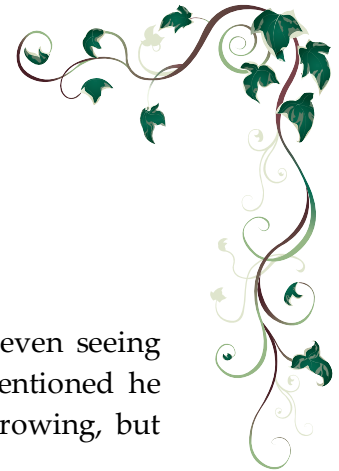


# *Twelfth Night: Wicked Resolutions*

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Twelfth Night: Wicked Resolutions  
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## Chapter One

*Yearning.*

It hit her hard and fast, and Carly knew without even seeing him that he was close by. Her best friend, Michaela, mentioned he might show up at the New Year's Eve party she was throwing, but Carly hadn't believed her. He rarely showed up at parties.

He was too busy doing...other things.

But then she heard his voice, and her lids drifted closed of their own volition as she savored the sound. A deep, velvety baritone that slithered over her skin, burned through her veins, throbbed in the very heart of her.

Her eyes flashed open as she heard Michaela squeal of surprise, most likely lunging for him, wrapping him in a bear hug. Carly should be jealous...really, she should, because when had she ever felt confident enough, brave enough to wrap her arms around him? She couldn't be jealous, though. Not when she knew Michaela didn't care for Brendon Walker like *that*.

She had a boyfriend. Austin was madly in love with her and the feeling was mutual. Carly was definitely jealous of that.

That's all she ever wanted. A man who lusted for her, a man who wanted her above all else. Devotion, passion, laughter, a friend, a lover...was that too much to ask for?

Carly didn't think so. Yet it proved near impossible to obtain—at least for her.

"Hey." A warm, broad hand landed upon her bare shoulder, and she turned to find Brendon standing before her, a slight smile curving his luscious lips. His hand still rested on her shoulder, his fingers giving her flesh a little squeeze, and she felt the slightest bit lightheaded at his closeness, at his touch.

"Hi," she breathed, her voice barely above a whisper. A miracle he could even hear her what with all the noise the crowd made as they anticipated the twelve o'clock hour.

"What are you doing here?" His hand dropped away, almost reluctantly, she thought and then immediately dismissed the idea. She

wanted to believe that. No way could it be true.

He didn't care about her. He cared about all sorts of people, showered his attention upon them, flaunted them right in front of her, but he never behaved as if she was anything special. As if she meant anything to him.

How she wished...

"Um, I was invited?" she finally answered, letting the statement sound more like a question because why would he ask something like that? He knew she and Michaela were best friends. Austin was one of his oldest and dearest friends; Brendon had hung out with them as a group more than a few times. Just enough to tempt her, to drive her crazy with wanting him, then disappointing her because she knew her feelings were impossible.

He laughed, a wonderfully happy sound that warmed her insides. "Well, I figured that. I just assumed you'd have a hot date and wouldn't want to waste your time on a simple party like this."

Her mouth dropped open. If anything, he would be the one on a hot date, the one who wouldn't waste his time at a simple party such as this. And it was a simple party, held at Michaela and Austin's apartment, crowded to the hilt with people, good friends. Chips and dip and cheap booze flowed, lots of laughter and music and the New Year's Rockin' Eve special played on the flat screen, the sound muted.

This party was just her style. And so not Brendon's.

"You're the one who rarely makes any of our get-togethers," she accused, her tone pointed, her expression hopefully neutral. She didn't mean to be confrontational, but what the hell did he mean by his statement?

Shrugging, he shoved his hands into the front pockets of his jeans. "I've been meaning to change that."

"Oh?" She arched a brow.

Brendon nodded, his rich brown gaze never leaving hers. "New Year's resolutions and all that stuff, right?"

"You make resolutions?"

"Well yeah, doesn't everyone?"

"Not really." She nibbled on her lower lip. "Every time I try I always end up breaking them. I'm tired of setting myself up for failure."

"I used to be the same way." His expression was solemn as he

stared at her. "I'm trying to change that."

Wow. One of the things she liked best about Brendon was all of that moody intensity he had going on. Dark and brooding, the typical rebel every good girl wanted to secretly bang, that was Brendon. Tonight he dressed the part, as usual. In worn jeans, aged black leather jacket, and a plain gray T-shirt, he looked like the typical bad boy.

A bad boy she desperately, desperately wanted.

"Well, good for you," she said. "I hope you find what you're looking for."

"I think I already have."

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Brendon wondered if he spoke too soon. She blinked up at him, this pretty little thing he'd wanted for what felt like ages. Those pale hazel eyes wide, her pink lips pursed in a way that made him want to kiss her. Just lean in and press his lips against hers, delve his tongue into the hot recesses of her mouth.

Would she be shocked and shove him away? Or would she slip her arms around him and give in to it?

Carly felt the attraction between them, he knew she did. He'd ignored it for so long he'd been afraid it was gone. He would have only himself to blame. After months and months of denying his feelings, he was finally ready to embrace them, embrace everything in his life he'd denied.

She was the beginning. Carly. And his nerves had been for nothing. The moment he saw her, touched her, held her gaze, he knew.

The attraction was still there. Strong and hot and crackling between them like a raging fire. A fire he didn't want to extinguish. No, he wanted to stoke it, to throw a couple of more logs on and get those flames burning bright between them.

He shook his head, running a hand along the raspy stubble growing on his jaw. He was thinking like a damn poetic fool all over a woman.

"Wh—what did you just say?"

Her question knocked him from his reverie, and his gaze met hers once more, drinking in her delicate beauty, the little crease between her brows that always formed when she was confused.

Damn it, he didn't want to confuse her. He wanted to confess his feelings for her. Ask her if she felt the same way about him.

"Listen, you want to go outside for a minute? I need some fresh air." It wasn't a lie. Yeah, he was trying to get her alone, but damn if he wasn't burning up. Felt a little claustrophobic what with all the people milling about.

"It's freezing out there." She rubbed her hands along her exposed upper arms, drawing his attention yet again to what she wore. Some sort of sparkly, black-sequined sleeveless top that clung to the rounded curve of her breasts and a simple little black skirt that showed off the length of her legs.

A sexy little package he wanted to unwrap. Like some sort of delayed Christmas present he'd anticipated for what felt like ages.

"Real quick, I promise." He flashed his most charming smile. The one he practiced and used for years. But this time, this very moment, it was actually sincere. "Please?"

"Well, how can I resist that?" she muttered. "Let's go then."

Brendon took her by the arm, unable to resist the excuse to touch her again. Her skin was warm, smooth, and silky soft. Her sweet scent made his cock jerk behind the fly of his jeans, and he wished he could cut the bullshit and tell her he wanted her. Wanted her as more than just a friend or a quick lay.

He wanted her in a serious way. And he normally didn't do serious.

But he wanted to be serious with her.

Maybe, just maybe, she'd feel the same way...

## Chapter Two

"Oh, my God," Carly yelped as Brendon pulled the sliding glass door closed, cutting off all warmth, all the friendly chatter and loud music. The cold winter night air smacked her right in the face with a heavy gust of wind, setting her teeth to chattering, and she rubbed her arms briskly as if that might help warm her.

It didn't.

This went to show she'd follow this man to the ends of the earth just to be near him.

"Come here," he murmured, his husky voice sending another kind of chill along her nerve endings, and then he yanked her into his arms, her hands braced against the firm expanse of his chest.

She gazed up at him in surprise, wondering why he was doing this. Had he finally realized the mad crush she'd had on him for what felt like forever? And now maybe he took advantage of it because, well, he was that kind of guy?

One part of her really hoped not and another part just wanted this chance. A single chance at finding out exactly what sort of magic Brendon could weave upon her.

"Better?" He smoothed his hands up and down her back, along her bare arms, his touch warm, assured and so very, very slow. His gaze lingered upon hers, lids heavy, eyes smoldering with unspoken messages. She could only stare up at him in mute wonder, wishing she could read his mind, desperate to find out what would happen next.

Prepared for him to release his hold on her and act as if he never touched her, looked at her like that.

"Yes," she answered, nodding her head. Her hair came loose from the clip she pulled it back with and fell across her cheek. She reached to brush the lock away but he beat her to the punch, his fingers slowly tucking it behind her ear before their blunt tips drifted across her cheek.

Tingles scattered all over her body, and she stood rigid within his embrace, her breath lodged in her chest. She waited for his next move, her head spinning from lack of oxygen, and she licked at her

suddenly dry mouth.

He groaned, so low she almost didn't hear it, and she leaned in closer, tilting her head back in subtle invitation.

"Carly." Brendon whispered her name, and her eyes slid closed when she felt his breath feather across her lips. "I've wanted this for so long."

Yes. Despite the frigid cold, despite the location, she wanted this, had waited for it for far too long. His mouth hovered just above hers for a fraction of a second, but it felt like hours, days. Years. Her lips parted, her breath hitched, and then he was kissing her. Softly, sweetly and his tongue darted across her upper lip.

The kiss went on and on, an endless, a delicious meeting of lips she didn't want to stop. She heard the sliding glass door open, heard someone's startled "Oh, sorry," but she didn't open her eyes, didn't so much as move an inch away from this man who held her as if he cherished her. Who kissed her as if he never wanted to kiss another woman again.

She didn't want this moment to end.

But she couldn't stop shaking and though it was partially because of him, it was also because of the freezing temperature. If they wanted to continue this further—and she most definitely wanted to—they really couldn't do anything about it on her best friend's balcony.

"We should go inside," he whispered against her lips and she nodded.

"We should," she agreed.

His mouth curved into a smile. "Do you want to stay until midnight?"

No, no, no, she wanted to shout. Instead, she gave a little shrug as he moved away from her. "I guess so."

Brendon studied her, his gaze careful, assessing. His mouth even fuller than normal, his hair mussed, all because of her. Her mouth on his, her hands in his hair... When had they slipped into his hair?

"Want to go back to my place?" The invitation was there. She knew if she took up on it, what she'd wanted for so long would finally happen.

Brendon naked, in bed, inside of her. A shiver shot down her spine at the image.

"Yes," she said through chattering teeth, and he pushed the



sliding glass door open with extra force, his other hand clasping around hers as he led her into the warm, crowded apartment.

"Then let's go," he said over his shoulder.

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*Fucking finally.*

Relief flooded Brendon, made his mind race onto the next moment. As in, getting Carly back to his apartment and into his bed. Nerves jumped in his stomach, a sensation he hadn't experienced just before sex in so long. Not since he was a kid and worried he didn't know what the hell to do.

She meant something to him, that's why the nerves. Just looking at her made his heart leap into his throat, his pulse throb like a jackhammer. She smiled up at him now, warm and trusting, her hand clasped loosely in his as he tugged her through the crowded apartment. He glanced about, looking for Austin or even Michaela to say goodbye, but they were nowhere to be found.

He'd have to offer his apologies later. For now, he couldn't stop himself.

He heard her laugh as he tugged harder on her arm, his steps quicker as they headed toward the door. He couldn't wait, he could hardly stand it he wanted her so bad and the thought that in moments he would have her all alone for an entire night had a lusty heat coursing through him. Overwhelming him with its intensity.

"Anxious?" she asked just before he opened the front door.

Brendon didn't answer. Didn't want to admit that hell yes, he was anxious. Excited. Nervous. "You need your coat?"

"Yes and my purse." She nibbled on her lower lip again, and he wanted to kiss her right then and there. Run his tongue along the pillowy soft flesh and taste her. "Do you mind waiting a minute?"

"Not at all." He shook his head and slouched against the wall as she took off down the hall toward a bedroom with hurried steps.

"Bailing already?"

Brendon looked to his left to see his friend and host of the party, Austin, approaching him, a big and very knowing smile on his face.

"Hey, man. Yeah, I gotta go."

"Uh huh. Who's the unlucky victim now?" Austin stopped just

before him, a red cup of foamy beer in his hand.

Brendon sagged against the wall. All of his friends thought he was a player because...well, he had been a player. But tonight, that was all going to change. His first resolution was to become a better guy, a more respectful person.

His second resolution? To tell Carly how he felt about her. And then show her in every conceivable, wicked way possible.

"It's different tonight," Brendon muttered. "Not just some random chick."

"Really?" The surprised expression on his friend's face said it all. "Who is it, then? Somebody we know?"

Brendon nodded, his mouth tight, his expression surely grim. He really didn't want to confess this, not yet. Austin would tell Michaela and then Michaela would freak because Brendon Walker the love 'em and leave 'em guy was about to use and abuse her friend.

But he wasn't damn it. That wasn't his intention. He wanted her. He wanted to be with her.

Any way he could get her.

"Who is it?" The curiosity was written all over Austin's face now, and Brendon couldn't help himself. He blurted Carly's name before he could think it through.

Austin's mouth dropped open and he shook his head. "If you fuck her once and dump her, Michaela will kill you."

"It's not like that," Brendon said, pushing himself away from the wall. "I really like her."

"Really? You?" Austin's voice was incredulous.

"Yeah, me. What's wrong with that?"

"Well, she doesn't seem like your type. I mean, she's cute and sweet and Michaela thinks the world of her, but she's too, uh...normal for you."

"Normal? What do you mean normal?" Brendon glanced down the hall, wishing he caught a glimpse of her so he could tell Austin he had to go and then blow the hell out of here.

But the hall remained empty.

"I don't know." Austin shrugged. "I look at Carly, and I see a sweet woman who's looking for the real deal. Marriage, kids, and a steady husband she can count on. She's not the type to fool around with, you know what I mean?"

Funny Austin mentioned that because when he looked at Carly, Brendon saw the same exact thing. Steadiness. A woman he could make a life with. A woman he wanted to give his everything to, even a white picket fence if that's what she wanted.

He'd always mocked the idealized white picket fence. Now he wanted it. With Carly.

"I know exactly what you mean," Brendon said slowly, wishing like hell Carly would make an appearance. "If she'll have me, I wouldn't mind providing all of that for her."

"Shut the hell up." Austin shoved at his shoulder.

Brendon stood tall and gave him a friendly shove back. "I'm not lyin'."

"You want all that?"

"I think so. With her."

She magically appeared, the sequins of her shirt sparkling, her smile just as bright. A bright red wool coat lay draped over her forearm and a small purse was clutched in her hand. "Hey Austin."

"Hi, Carly. You two taking off?" Again there went Austin's knowing tone.

"Um, yeah." Her cheeks colored the slightest bit, and Brendon slipped an arm around her shoulders, yanking her close.

"Want me to help you put on your coat?" He dipped his head close to her ear to whisper the question.

Her cheeks darkened. "Um, okay."

"Turn around." Withdrawing from her, he held his hand out, and she offered her coat, which he slipped about her proffered shoulders. He couldn't resist flipping her hair out from beneath the collar and smoothing it back, his fingers lingering in the silky tresses.

He couldn't wait to see her pretty brown hair strewn about his pillow as he rose above her, poised and ready to take her. Make her his.

"Well, have fun you two." Austin smirked. "Happy New Year."

### Chapter Three

They practically ran into Brendon's condo the second he got the door unlocked. Brendon let the door slam so hard it rattled the windows. He went for her like a man starved, shoving her against the wall as his mouth met hers in a ferocious kiss.

The cold, slightly rough drywall pressed into Carly's back, even through her coat as she melted into Brendon's kiss. His mouth was insistent, his lips soft, working a magic spell upon her she couldn't stop even if she tried. The lick of his tongue, the heat of his touch, the little groan she heard from low in his throat, all of it made her clutch him close, her hands desperately moving over him.

As if he knew what she wanted, he withdrew slightly, a faint smile on his face as he shoved his leather jacket off. It fell to the floor as he reached for her, his hands cupping her face, tilting her head up so their eyes met. He stared at her with a reverence she'd never seen before shining in his eyes and she could only gape at him.

"You're beautiful," he whispered, his mouth descending brushing the gentlest kiss to the tip of her nose. "Sweet." He kissed first one cheek, then the other. "Sexy."

She rested her hands upon the solid wall of his chest, her hands caressing lightly, pleased at his words. "Where's your bedroom?" She decided to cut right to the chase, let him know exactly what she wanted.

A wicked smile curved his too beautiful lips. He took her by the hand and led her down a narrow, darkened hall to the last door on the left. They went into the darkened bedroom, the cool air making her shiver as she shrugged out of her coat and tossed it onto an overstuffed chair. He went to the bedside table and turned a lamp on, the large room filling with soft light and she immediately shook her head.

"What's wrong?"

Carly shrugged, embarrassed. "I'd rather keep the lights off."

Brendon rested his hands on his slim hips. "Why?"

"I don't know. I'm just...shy. I guess."

He went to her, wrapped his arms about her waist and pulled her close. "You have no reason to be, Carly. You're so beautiful, I want

to see you.”

His words sent a thrill shooting through her yet she couldn't help but still be nervous. She'd never been comfortable having sex with the lights on. But the idea of seeing Brendon in all his naked glory made it awfully tempting.

She knew his body would be a sight to behold. She could tell just by having her hands on him, even with the layers of clothing he wore. Muscular and firm, broad and tall, built like a man in his prime should be.

And Brendon was most definitely in his prime.

He kissed her again, fizzing out brain cells, heating her bones to liquid, and she sagged against him, unable to resist. His hands wandered over her back, slipping beneath her sequined shirt to touch bare skin, and she moaned at the contact.

“Let's take this off,” he murmured, his fingers curling around the hem of her shirt and giving it a gentle tug. She withdrew from him and lifted her arms, letting him pull the garment over her head. The scratchy sequins brushed against her face as he yanked it off.

Exposed in just her bra and skirt, she couldn't help but flush with pleasure at the trip his eyes took as they roamed over her. Interest, desire, and appreciation all flashed in the dark brown depths, making her stand taller, thrust her chest out. She reached for the front clasp of her bra, her fingers flicking it open with ease and the cups fell away, completely exposing her breasts.

Heat flared bright in his eyes, and they narrowed as he stared directly at her chest. She shrugged out of the bra, letting the delicate scrap of fabric flutter to the floor and then reached behind her, fumbling for the zipper at the back of her skirt.

“I thought you wanted the lights off.” The humor lacing his voice made her smile.

“Your approval gave me confidence.” She found the zipper and slid it down, the skirt falling from her hips to a puddle about her feet.

Brendon cocked a dark brow. “And how do you know I've given my approval?”

“I can see it in your eyes.” She was glad she wore a sexy pair of panties of simple black lace. The fabric clung low to her hips, emphasizing the length of her legs.

“I can't deny I like what I see.” He approached her, his steps

slow, almost predatory, and delicious anticipation ran through her veins. Her heart rate kicked up and she jerked in a breath, waiting for the moment when he would touch her, really touch her for the first time. He tore off his T-shirt, tossing it away with an almost violent motion, and all the breath whooshed from her lungs.

Just as she expected, he was beautiful, all chiseled muscle with the lightest patch of dark curling hairs in the center of his chest. His stomach was flat, the jeans he wore riding low on his hips, and she wondered idly if he had any underwear on.

And then she couldn't think anymore because he was upon her, holding her close, his mouth fused with hers. Her hands clung to his shoulders, slipped up his neck to burrow in his hair and he slipped a hand between them, cupping one breast with his palm.

"I've waited for this for so long," he said between kisses, his other hand sliding beneath the lace of her panties to cup her butt.

"You have?" She couldn't believe it. He'd wanted her all along?

"Hell, yeah." He pressed his lips against her neck, licking and nibbling, making her giggle, making her groan. "You're all I've thought about for months."

"Oh." She didn't know what to say, could hardly string together two sentences what with the way he touched her. He tugged on her nipple, pulling and teasing the tender flesh as his other hand moved to the front of her panties, cupping the very center of her. His fingers tangled briefly in the scant curling hair covering her mound and then they slid down to tease her folds.

"Ah God, you're so wet." His fingers searched, circled teasingly around her clit and she trembled, already close to orgasm. After wanting to be with Brendon for so long, she was primed, ready for him and she could hardly control herself.

"I want you inside me," she said boldly, her hips moving against his fingers. She reached for the waistband of his jeans, her fingers nimbly undoing the button fly. Her hand delved inside, encountering bare hot flesh, the hard length of his cock.

And what an impressive length it was.

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Her skin was soft, like the finest silk, and she was so responsive.

She moved against him as Brendon continued to touch her pussy, her hips thrusting, her legs spreading the slightest bit and giving him better access. Her hand fell away from his cock which was good as he felt ready to explode. She was close, too, and he plucked at her swollen clit, thrummed it with his thumb until her body stilled. Her breath suddenly leaving her in an accelerated rush as her body trembled with her climax.

She slumped against him, her limbs weak, and he lifted her off her feet, taking her to the bed where he laid her down. She watched with sparkling eyes as he shucked his jeans completely and joined her, pressing himself against her sweet, curvy body.

"Brendon." The sound of his name from her lips was almost his undoing. He reached for the bedside table, tugged the drawer open to search for a condom. Withdrawing the little foil package, he tore it open, sheathed his aching cock with trembling fingers.

She did this to him, unnerved him, made him clumsy. Her eyes shone with such trust in them, and her arms slipped about his waist. She touched his ass with gentle fingers, and he surged against her, letting her know how ready he was. He didn't want to rush this, wanted to take his time searching her body, learning what she liked but he didn't think he could.

He wanted her too damn much.

"I can't wait," he confessed, feeling like a damn fool but unable to stop it. "I need to be inside you."

"Yes," she urged, arching against him, her legs spreading wide.

Brendon settled in between her thighs, his cock searching for her wet entry, and he closed his eyes as he slowly entered her tight pussy. She sighed with pleasure, and he clenched his jaw, afraid to move, afraid if he did he'd come like an out of control teenager. Her every restless movement tested his patience and when her long legs wrapped about his waist, anchoring her to him, he thought he'd lose it.

"Please," she whispered close to his ear, and he couldn't take it any longer.

He moved within her, his thrusts sure, growing more rapid with his every entry and retreat. She followed his lead, her moans growing louder, more frantic, and they both fell apart within seconds, the orgasm that overtook him so strong he thought he might pass out.

"Oh, my God." She sounded as shocked, as exhausted as he felt,

and he fell upon her in a boneless heap. "That was amazing."

"I'm sorry." He felt like a jackass. Withdrawing from her, he rolled to the edge of the bed and stood, heading toward the bathroom to dispose of the condom.

He couldn't believe he came that fast, with hardly any foreplay, like some sort of lackluster lover who didn't know how to properly treat a woman. It was so unlike him. He prided himself on his control, on his ability to spend hours unselfishly pleasing a woman, leaving her completely satisfied.

When he came back into the bedroom, she watched him with wary eyes. "Why did you say you were sorry?"

Brendon climbed back into bed, laying flat on his back so he stared up at the ceiling. "It was kind of...quick."

"Yeah?" Her soft, sweet voice wafted over him and he turned to find her watching him, a smile curving her pretty lips.

"I lost control." He sighed. "And I'm sorry."

"I'm not."

"You're not?" He figured he'd blown it. Maybe not...

"I like the fact that I made you lose control." Her smile grew bigger. "A lot."

Realization struck him. Maybe he lost control because this woman made him feel so...much so fast. "So you like that you make me feel this way?"

"I do." She nodded, her long hair rustling against the pillow. "Because I feel the same."

They stared at each other in silence and he didn't want to say a word, didn't want to break the spell. He reached for her, hauling her close and his cock stirred to life having her so close. "Maybe I should start all over and show you just how good it can be between us."

"Maybe you should." She kissed him, stealing his breath, stealing his heart.

"It's going to take all night."

"The perfect way to ring in the New Year, I say."

They both glanced at the clock on the bedside table and saw it was just past midnight. "You're my New Year resolution, you know," he confessed.

Her lips parted. "Really?"

Brendon nodded. "I wanted to be a better man for you."



"I already think you're the perfect man for me," she whispered, her eyes shining with unshed tears.

"Let me prove it to you then." *For the rest of my life.*

The End

### **Author Bio**

After leaving the working world to become a stay at home mom/slave, Karen Erickson realized she needed to get crackin' and pursue her lifelong dream of being a published writer. A busy mother of three, she fits her precious writing time in between chasing her children, taking care of her wonderful husband and pretending she has a maid. She lives in California.

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