



Her Bossy

SCROOGE

SCROOGES OF PLEASURE VALLEY

LILAH HART

HER BOSSY SCROOGE

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Scrooges of Pleasure Valley, Book 2

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Epilogue

The enemy was standing right in front of me.

He was on the other side of my desk, looking all evil with his smoldering green eyes and lips. Lips that looked like they could control a woman with just a slight brush over her skin.

“Jonah McStay, here to see Dr. Maloney,” he said.

I knew Jonah McStay’s type. I might work in a medical office, but I lived right in the heart of Pleasure Valley’s tech district. Both of my roommates worked for wealthy tech guys, and one of those roommates was the daughter of one.

But I wasn’t intimidated by those types. I knew they cared about nothing other than money. And themselves.

“I’ll let her know you’re here,” I said, my voice oozing sugary sweetness. “Have a seat.”

Ordering this guy around gave me a thrill I didn’t want to think about. I lifted the phone receiver and pressed the button for Dr. Maloney. She had patients scheduled all day, but she’d blocked off a half-hour between appointments to talk to this guy.

Problem was, her eleven-o’clock appointment hadn’t walked out yet.

“Your eleven-thirty’s here,” I said.

“Send him back,” Dr. Maloney replied.

This was where I could demonstrate to this man that a computer could never replace a human receptionist. Not for this part of things, anyway.

“Come with me, Mr. McStay.”

I pushed myself to my feet and turned, but a few seconds before I broke eye contact with him, I noticed his gaze had lowered and was taking in my curves. That just proved no matter how much success a man had, there was no replacement for the love of a good woman.

Where had that come from? It was a ridiculous thought. Jonah McStay had his pick of women. If he was like all the other tech entrepreneurs in Pleasure Valley, he'd forget all about me once he got a look at Dr. Maloney, anyway. She was gorgeous and much closer to his age.

But he'd be disappointed when he got a look at that gigantic diamond on her left ring finger. She was happily married. Had been for the better part of a decade.

“Thank you,” Jonah said as I stepped back, gesturing for him to enter Dr. Maloney's office.

As he breezed past, his gaze lingered on me, our eyes locking in a stare that I felt all the way to the tips of my toes. Oh yeah, this guy was good. He was the kind of guy that could make me forget he was there to replace my job with computer software.

“Taylor?”

I was pulling the door shut when Dr. Maloney's voice halted my movements. Mr. McStay stopped, halfway across the room, a smile frozen on his face as he turned in my direction.

“The lobster truck just arrived. You know what that means.”

Dr. Maloney gave me her big smile—the one that had made her one of the most popular therapists in Northern California. She was regularly interviewed on TV, thanks in part to her good looks. I was pretty sure that was why Jonah had targeted her for his software. Not only was she beautiful,

but a high-profile customer like her would give him bragging rights.

“I’m on it,” I said, moving to close the door. But again, Dr. Maloney’s voice stopped me.

“Grab Mr. McStay one too,” she said. “Hot or cold?”

“Hot.”

He said that word while still staring at me. Suddenly, I had a hard time making my body move. He had one of the most gorgeous women in the country in front of him, and he’d turned around to look at me.

There was a game here. I just wasn’t sure what it was.

Still, my legs were shaking as I grabbed my phone and headed out the door. I was already putting in my order on the app, knowing I’d probably be at the truck before the confirmation screen finally popped up.

How long would it take to erase Jonah McStay’s eyes from my memory? The heat in them as he stared at me. The strength that seemed to emerge from every pore. That was the type of guy who could take care of a woman. That was the type of guy who knew how to make a woman feel secure.

Shaking that thought off, I pulled up our last order and added a hot lobster roll to the reorder. This truck stopped through here the second and fourth Friday of each month, and Dr. Maloney always bought mine if I stood in line for her. That was no small favor, either. Each roll cost twenty-five dollars.

It was a full twenty minutes before I breezed through the door, bag holding three lobster rolls in hand. The plan was to drop mine off at the desk and take their rolls to them. They could eat and have their meeting at the same time. But what I saw as soon as I stepped through the door stopped me cold.

The two of them were standing at the reception desk, backs to me. They were staring at an unfamiliar tablet in front of them.

“Perfect,” Dr. Maloney said, stepping back and turning to look at me. “Taylor is back. Come take a look at this.”

I pasted a smile on my face and walked toward them, shifting the bag from my right to my left hand. My only solace was that the food would get cold, so they wouldn't draw this out too long. But I didn't want to participate in their plans to replace me with a robot.

"Pretend you're a guest," Mr. McStay said.

He'd already caught on to our lingo. We didn't call our customers patients, we called them guests.

"Check in," Mr. McStay said.

They stepped aside and watched as I hesitantly approached the tablet. Dr. Maloney wore a big smile. She was excited about this. I thought she was on my side.

A welcome screen read, *I'm Veronica, your virtual receptionist. Tap here to start.*

I tried not to roll my eyes, instead tapping on the screen with my right forefinger. A screen popped up asking me to state or type my name.

"Taylor Gibson," I said.

That wouldn't be disruptive at all. I could see it now. I'd be taking a phone call while customers yelled at the screen. Right now, though, a little wheel spun, and finally the text from earlier reappeared on the screen. *Please state or type your name.*

"She's not in the database," Mr. McStay said. "Tell it you're Jane Doe."

I glanced at him, trying to ignore how my knees weakened every time I looked into those intense green eyes. Then I said, "Jane Doe."

Sure enough, a screen popped up that read, *Your appointment is at 9:30. Is that correct?*

I glanced over at Jonah, who nodded. I tapped *Yes*, at which point it went to a screen where it asked questions like the ones on the form we had returning patients fill out.

Are you on any new medications?

Are you experiencing a cough?

Has anything about your health situation changed?

Is this your correct address?

I went through all of it, shifting my weight from my right to left foot, craving the lobster rolls in the bag that dangled from my left hand. Finally, I got the message that seemed to make the two people on either side of me happy. The app was happy too.

You're checked in. Please have a seat.

That was the part of my job this machine would replace. Worse—technology like this was popping up all over Northern California. Pretty soon, I won't be able to get a job anywhere.

Damn it. I should have gone to college instead of assuming I could always get work doing this.

"It also accepts payment," Mr. McStay said. "I can show you."

A *whoosh* behind me cut him off midsentence. The door to the office had just opened. That meant Dr. Maloney's noon appointment was here.

"I'm so sorry," my boss said. "I'm going to have to go. Give me about five minutes alone with that lobster roll, then send my patient back."

She said that last part quietly enough, but the patient no doubt overheard. This reception area wasn't that big. I handed Dr. Maloney her cardboard container and turned to smile at our guest.

"If you could sign in on the sheet." I pointed to the old-fashioned clipboard with paper on top of it, then I turned back to Mr. McStay. "Thank you so much for showing us this. Do you want me to reschedule you for next week sometime?"

He was staring at me again. The guest had moved up to the counter behind him and was signing in, seemingly oblivious to whatever was happening right next to him. The people who visited these offices had their own issues to deal with. They didn't care about my inevitable unemployment.

“Why don’t we have a chat?” he said. “I’d love to get your thoughts on things.”

He gestured to the area behind the reception desk, then reached over and took the bag dangling from my left hand. In the process, his fingers brushed my skin, sending shock waves through me.

“I don’t—” I started.

My voice sounded different. Shaky. Not like me at all.

If he noticed, though, he didn’t show it. He just took the bag and walked around to the area behind the reception desk.

Interesting that the brief touch seemed to have done nothing to him. I wasn’t sure I’d ever be the same.

This had never happened before. I was known for being a professional, always keeping work and personal separate. I'd never once gotten romantically involved with a client, coworker, or colleague. In fact, I was a firm believer in the saying "don't shit where you eat." Crude, but it kept me on track.

But I'd never met anyone like the receptionist at one of the top psychiatric offices in Northern California. This woman was doing things to me. I just couldn't seem to think about anything but the pressure her breasts were putting on the pearl buttons of her white silky blouse.

By the time Taylor returned from walking the patient back to Dr. Maloney's office, I had lunch on the desk in front of us. I'd shoved my tablet off to the side—didn't want to get food on it—and put a napkin and plastic fork at each of our place settings. It was a slightly romantic move if I had to say so myself. I was setting the table for this woman I'd just met.

"I hope water is okay," Taylor said. "If not, I could run to the vending machine..."

I shook my head. "Water's perfect. Thank you."

It hit me as she slid onto the seat that Taylor would have actually gone to fetch a drink for me if I'd requested it. I didn't like that. I wanted to be the one taking care of her. She deserved to be pampered.

I shook off that thought and popped open the box. Inside was a generous helping of lobster chunks on a top-split hot

dog bun. It looked identical to the lobster rolls I'd had in New England.

"There are three doctors here, right?" I asked.

Taylor nodded. She'd opened her box as well and now was settling a napkin on her lap.

"Dr. Maloney owns the practice," she said. "But we also have a marriage and family therapist and child psychologist. Dr. Maloney is the prescribing physician."

I knew all that already. I'd researched this place thoroughly last night. I always prepared for my meetings even if what I prepared would never come up in conversation. I liked to be as informed as possible about the potential clients I was pitching.

"And how long have you worked here?" I asked.

That question jerked her head up. She looked at me, eyes wide. She hadn't expected questions about herself, no doubt. The interesting thing was, I was far more curious about her than any of the rest of this practice.

Everything about Taylor Gibson intrigued me, from the fire in her eyes as she watched us talk about Veronica to the hunger in her expression as she eyed her lobster roll. What would it take for her to eye me with that same level of hunger? I'd love to find out.

"Two years," she said. "Three years next summer."

She turned her attention back to the food. I watched as she lifted the lobster roll and took a bite, wrapping her mouth around the generously-stuffed bun. I could clearly picture what those lips would look like wrapped around my cock. I felt bad for sexualizing something like that, but I couldn't help it. In fact, I was having a hard time not picturing her naked, riding me as I gripped her hips, sinking my fingers into her smooth, soft skin.

Jesus, I was an asshole.

"I love it here," she said. "I feel like I'm helping people."

"Veronica is not here to replace you," I blurted.

It was the elephant in the room. Well, that and the intense sexual attraction I felt for her. I was hoping she didn't notice that, though.

She stopped chewing to stare at me, reminding me I hadn't bitten into my own roll yet. I took the opportunity to do just that while she finished chewing and swallowed. She then set her roll down and reached for her water, uncapping it as she spoke.

"My roommates work for guys like you," she said. "I live in Reboot."

My eyebrows arched. Reboot was one of the top condo options in downtown Pleasure Valley. It was a multipurpose building, complete with office spaces and shopping on the bottom floors. I'd love to live there, but it was tough to get in. She'd said she had roommates, so that might explain it. But even split, the rent had to be pricey.

"Guys like me?" I asked.

"Guys who promise to automate mundane tasks so people like me can concentrate on what's important," she said. "Next thing we know, we're being laid off due to restructuring."

She rolled her eyes and resumed eating, like what she'd said wasn't bothering her. Like she wasn't talking about her very livelihood.

"You do more than just greet people and check them in, though," I said. "You pull files, handle billing, that sort of thing, I'm sure. There's more to being a medical receptionist than checking in patients."

"I do what I can legally, but I'm not certified for billing and coding." She took a deep breath. "Dr. Maloney has said she'll pay for my classes, and I can even do a lot of it online. I just—"

I mulled that over as I enjoyed the smooth buttery flavor of the bite of roll I'd just taken. She wasn't lazy or irresponsible. I could tell that by looking at her. If she wasn't interested in furthering her education, there was a good reason for it.

“I have serious test anxiety,” she said, turning to look at me. “There. I said it out loud. I can study for days, weeks even. But when I get that pen and piece of paper in front of me on the desk, I freeze up. Online is worse since it’s usually timed. I know it’s to keep people from cheating, but I just can’t operate under that kind of pressure.”

“Have you thought about talking to someone?” I asked.

“You mean mentioning it to the people I work with every day who are experts on dealing with something like this?” She laughed. “They could even prescribe medication, I’m sure. I’ve never told anyone. Not even my roommates.”

But she was telling me. It should make me all nervous, having her confide in me like this. I usually ran at the first hint a woman might want me for anything more than fun.

Now I got it. I understood for the first time in my life why men gave up their single lives for a woman.

“I can help you,” I said.

What was I talking about? I knew nothing about test anxiety, and I’d been out of college more than a decade. Sometimes I thought about returning to school for my masters, but the idea of going through all that again turned me off immediately.

“You can?” Taylor’s eyes were wide as she stared at me. “You would?”

She’d just taken the last bite of her roll, again reminding me that I’d neglected mine. It was probably cold by now. I didn’t care. This was more important.

“How do you feel about Christmas parties?” he asked.

Her eyes were still wide as she looked at me again. Yeah, the question surprised me as much as her. I’d dreaded tonight for weeks. The thought of having her by my side suddenly had me looking forward to it.

“Ultra Bright Technologies is having a Christmas party,” I said. “The owner’s a good friend of mine.”

“Harley Baxter’s dad is a good friend of yours?” she asked.

Harley Baxter? Oh yeah, that was the woman who had shown up at the restaurant when I was having lunch with Reed last week.

“We went to college together,” I said.

“His daughter’s one of my closest friends.”

Crap, this woman was young. She was the same age as Reed’s daughter. Not that I had anything against dating women in their early twenties. I wasn’t all that picky when it came to the women I dated. If they were hot, had somewhat of a brain, and were into me, I could work with it.

Taylor wasn’t those women, though. No way could I just sleep with her and forget her. I wasn’t even sure I could *not* sleep with her and forget her. That was an unfamiliar feeling for me these days.

“Then you’ll know someone at the party,” I said. “What do you say?”

I was surprisingly invested in her response. If she said no, tonight would be miserable. I’d spend the entire time thinking about how she wasn’t by my side. If she said yes, I’d spend the rest of the afternoon trying to focus on work and forgetting I had a date with the most intriguing woman I’d ever seen. A woman with tempting curves and beautiful green eyes that I could get lost in for days.

“I’d love to,” she said. “What time do you want me to meet you there?”

Why had I insisted on meeting him at the party? I'd told myself it would be easier to come separately. But now, as I entered Ultra Bright Technologies alone, I wondered if arriving solo had been the best idea. I'd hopped a rideshare here, no problem. It was entering this place unaccompanied that was the tough part.

Ultra Bright Technologies was a small company with just a couple dozen employees. Most worked out in the field, but the office was packed now. I didn't know if these were employees or clients or a combination of both. All I knew was I was standing awkwardly by the tree.

"Taylor!" Harley called out. As she continued toward me, though, she tilted her head. "What are you doing here?"

I'd headed home after work, fully prepared to face my roommates, but neither of them had been home. That had given me the extra space I needed to get ready. It also kept me from having to explain to either of them where I was going.

But I should have prepared an explanation, anyway. I'd known all along Harley would be here. This was her dad's party. I'd been so anxious about getting changed and grabbing a rideshare here that I'd shoved thoughts of my roommates out of my mind. But now it became clear as day that I'd have been far better off telling her what was up at home than running into her at her dad's party...with a date.

"What are you doing here?" Harley asked.

She stopped a few steps in front of me. She looked beautiful in her bright red slinky dress and matching red shoes. She'd upped her fashion game lately after falling in love with her dad's rival, a guy who owned a competing company called Holly Day Lights. She was also going to work for that rival starting Monday morning.

"It's a long story," I said. Wasn't that the truth? "I was invited by one of your dad's associates."

"Who?"

She turned to look behind her, and that was when I saw him. He was standing, talking to a group of guys, but his eyes were on me, that intense stare melting my heart.

"That guy?" Harley turned back around. "The one staring at you? He's a friend of my dad's."

"So I heard."

Her eyes narrowed as she stared at me. She was waiting for an explanation.

"He's trying to replace my job with his stupid tablet," I said.

That probably wouldn't make much sense to her either, but it wasn't like I had a lot of time to explain. Jonah had disengaged from his group and was walking this way.

"Is there somewhere to hang my coat?" I reached for my lapels with trembling fingers and awkwardly started pulling off my coat.

"I'll take it." Harley gave me another look before rushing off, coat in hand.

That left me standing there alone, feeling like I was under a giant spotlight, as Jonah walked straight toward me. Harley had done that on purpose—giving me alone time with him rather than waiting around to greet him. That matchmaker-ish move told me she knew there was more to this than business.

"You're beautiful," he said.

The words weren't what got to me, though. No, it was the way he was looking at me. That was what went straight to my heart. It was as though no one else in the world mattered.

But these types were good at that. Pleasure Valley Playboys, my roommates and I jokingly called them. Carly had come up with that term. She was the most cynical of the three of us, while Harley was the biggest romantic. I fell somewhere in between the two extremes. But even I knew not to fall for the charms of a guy like Jonah McStay.

"I'll grab you a drink," Jonah said. "What would you like?"

A Cosmopolitan was my favorite, but I knew at events like this, drink options were usually limited. "A sweet white wine would be great."

With a nod, he headed over to the bar, leaving me to stand awkwardly at the tree. Was I supposed to follow him? Start mingling alone? I only knew two people here, and one had disappeared with my coat. I spotted her father talking to some guy who looked really important. Standing awkwardly at the tree was far preferable to forcing my way into conversations, but I made my way into the room, trying to look at home as I passed empty desks.

I felt eyes on me and glanced over at a group of four guys dressed way too casually for a party like this. I was guessing they were on the tech team—the type who only socialized when it was absolutely necessary.

"Zinfandel's the sweetest they had," Jonah said, walking up to me with a plastic cup. "Is that okay?"

I nodded and happily took the cup. A little alcohol was just what the doctor would order for my nervousness. Dr. Maloney would recommend it if I asked.

"This party sucks." He looked around and turned back to me. Then he closed the remaining distance between us, moving his mouth close to my ear. "What do you say we blow this popsicle stand?"

Popsicle stand. Those two words stuck in my head, mostly because I was in such shock over what was happening. All I could do was nod as he reached out and grabbed my hand, pulling me through the door and straight to the elevator.

“I left my coat,” I said, glancing back at the now-closed door.

“You won’t need that where we’re going,” he said.

Sure enough, he pressed the up button. We weren’t leaving the building.

“Where are we going?” I asked.

Ding.

“My office.”

The elevator doors slid open and he grabbed my hand again, pulling me inside. He worked in this building? I didn’t know that.

But when I turned to ask, he was standing close. All the air left my lungs. It wasn’t just his nearness, though. It was that intensity again—an intensity that I’d first noticed before I’d gone to get the lobster rolls. It hadn’t let up since.

Suddenly, his arms went around me, his hands pulling me against him. As our mouths met in a long, soul-searing kiss, I felt alive for the first time in years. Was this the feeling that had my friends giving up their virginity in high school? Not me, though. I’d never had a problem holding out.

But I’d never had this feeling before. Nothing like it.

The kiss had barely started when the elevator moved. We split apart, both of us seeming to realize at once that we hadn’t pressed any of the buttons. We were going down, the elevator probably having been summoned by someone on the first floor.

We were both facing forward by the time the doors slid open and a couple stepped in. I didn’t recognize them. If Jonah did, there was no indication. He simply gave them a nod and waited as the car crawled to the second floor.

Once the couple departed, Jonas leaned forward and pressed the “three” button. Then he stepped back and waited, not making another move on me. I felt embarrassingly disappointed at the lack of contact. I should be ashamed of myself. Not only had I been making out with a work colleague in an elevator, but I desperately wanted it to continue.

When the elevator doors finally slid open on the third floor, I was relieved. The pressure to kiss or not to kiss was resolved at that point. But one question remained. Where were we going? His office. He’d said that downstairs. His office was in this building?

He rushed off the elevator, and I followed, heading down a hallway. We kept going until we reached the very end, and once again, I found myself thinking about that kiss.

He had his keycard out as we approached and he waved it over the reader and waited until the click and beep indicated we were clear to enter. It made me wonder what Harley’s dad had done to the door to make it unlock without a key or passcode tonight.

“This is where I spend most of my life,” Jonah said once we were inside the office, door closed behind us.

I was once again battling disappointment that he hadn’t started kissing me immediately. Had I imagined the kiss in the elevator? That could have very well been one of my fantasies that just seemed incredibly realistic.

“I didn’t bring you up here to take advantage of you,” he said, turning to face me.

We were standing in the center of an open-plan office similar to the one downstairs. This one had fewer desks, though, and a lot more open space. There were also more seating areas with comfortable furniture and what looked like a pool table in the corner.

“You didn’t?” I crossed my arms over my chest. This was where I could flirt if I were a more experienced woman. I was as awkward as it came in situations like this. “Why did you bring me up here, then?”

“To help you with your test anxiety. Sit.”

He gestured toward a desk close by. It had a small Christmas tree on it, and I battled the urge to turn it on as I slid onto the chair in front of it. This little Christmas tree was the only decoration I saw among the otherwise minimalist décor.

“Pretend this is your desk at home,” he said as he moved to stand behind me. “Do you trust me?”

I nodded and stared at the dark tree. He was close. So close. I was surprised how much I craved his nearness when he stepped away from me.

“There’s a computer monitor in front of you,” he said.

I looked around. “No, there’s not.”

“Pretend,” he said. “Imagine it. I’m sure you have a good imagination.”

The baritone of his voice went straight through me. Was it possible for a man to make a woman wet by merely standing a few inches behind her and talking? That was exactly what was happening right now.

“Yes,” I said. “My imagination is too good sometimes.”

Would he get the hint I was dropping? My imagination was pretty vivid right now. I had a clear image in my mind of him stripping off those clothes and making love to me right here on this desk.

“A test page pops up in front of you,” Jonah said, still speaking in that same deep, hypnotic voice. “You’re told you only have a limited time. Describe what you see on the screen.”

I closed my eyes, trying to shut out the fantasy that had overtaken my mind. The last online test I took was two and a half years ago. It was right after I started at the practice, and I’d planned to get my billing and coding certification. I breezed through the early weeks of classes and studied my ass off, but then the day had come. I sat down at the tiny desk in the corner of my bedroom, input my login information, pulled up the test, and froze.

“There’s a button at the top,” I said. “The timer will begin as soon as I click it.”

It all came back to me now. That was what froze me. I knew once I hit that button, it was like someone at the other end was watching me, waiting. I couldn’t think of anything but that.

“I want you to reach up and hit that button,” he said. “Tell me what you feel.”

What I *felt* was the chair behind me move slightly. That was when I realized he’d set both hands on it. He wasn’t touching me, just the chair, but I was comforted by his presence.

I clicked the button, and panic filled me. I couldn’t breathe. I couldn’t think. I felt like the world might end if I didn’t get it together.

“Take a deep breath,” he said.

I realized when he said those words that I’d tensed up. I was breathing far too deeply and far too quickly. But I followed his instructions and breathed slowly in and out. After a couple of minutes, I felt his hands on my shoulders.

“Perfect,” he said. “Now what do you see in front of you on the screen? Describe it.”

“Questions, answers bubbles, and form fields,” I said.

There was no screen, though, and certainly nothing for me to click or type. Still, I had a feeling I couldn’t take the test with him behind me any more than I could alone. I was too distracted by naughty thoughts.

“Can I just have you behind me while I take all my tests?” I joked, smiling at the tree. I was afraid to turn around.

“Is that what you want?” he asked.

I squeezed my eyes closed and took a deep breath, just as he’d instructed before. I savored the feel of his hands on my shoulders, and then his right hand crept toward my neck a little, landing on bare skin above the neckline of the dress.

“We probably should go,” he said. “If that’s what you want.”

I didn’t dare open my eyes. That was the only way I found the courage to say my next words.

“That’s not what I want,” I said. “I want to stay here. With you.”

C onsent.

That was my number one concern as Taylor sat in front of me. I'd never wanted a woman as much as I wanted this one. But I would turn around and walk out of here right now if she didn't want me too.

I want to stay here. With you.

Those words were like fuel to a flame. They gave me the permission I needed to unzip her dress. I started at the top, slowly lowering it while she stayed seated, still facing a desk that held nothing but a small Christmas tree.

I slid my hands under the fabric on either side and pushed the gown down her arms. She helped, sliding out of it and letting the top land on her lap. That was when I stepped back and spun her around in the chair. Her eyes met mine, and I saw it—desire mixed with innocence. It was a combination I'd never seen before, and it turned me on in ways I couldn't explain.

As I was taking in the way her generous breasts strained the flimsy black cloth of her bra, Taylor reached up and pressed a hand to my bulge. She kept her eyes on mine, though, as her hand moved over my shaft until I couldn't keep my eyes open anymore. A moan escaped. I wanted to feel her fingers on my bare cock. I wanted to feel her skin against mine.

I undid my belt and then unbuttoned, pulling down my zipper. I was prepared to do the rest, but she reached up and

tugged my pants and underwear down. It was the hottest moment of my life so far. This woman was so eager to touch me that she'd hurriedly removed all barriers.

And then she was touching me, and all thoughts fled. Her hand ran the length of my shaft, slowly and smoothly. One, then two pumps, and then she leaned forward and slid her mouth over me, exploring with both her hand and her tongue.

I threaded my hands through her hair, letting the silky strands slide over my skin. I wanted to feel them on my chest as she rode me. I wanted to be inside her. I *had* to be inside her.

Pulling away, I lifted her to her feet, then cupped her face with one hand and lowered my mouth to hers. The gown fell partway down on its own, but I helped move it even farther, running my hand over her back and shoving the fabric downward.

When I finally broke the kiss, I spun her around, facing her away from me. I unclasped her bra, pushing it over her shoulders and letting her handle tossing it aside. I was too busy moving her hair out of the way so I could trail kisses down her neck while I cupped her breasts. Far more than a handful. I groaned as my thumbs ran over her nipples, bringing tiny gasps from her.

My cock throbbing against her body, I kept my left hand on her breast while running my right down her belly. "This is another great way to relax," I said into her ear just as my fingers slid under the band of her skimpy panties.

Had she worn those for me? Had she gotten dressed tonight, hoping this would happen, or did she always wear skimpy panties? I wasn't sure which turned me on more.

She cried out as my index finger found her clit. "You're so wet," I murmured against her ear.

She arched her back, her bare butt coming into contact with my throbbing erection. I squeeze my eyes closed, summoning all the control I could muster. I had to hold out. This had to be about her first.

I slid a second finger inside her as I continued to massage her clit—a little trick I'd learned over the years. It didn't always work. Every woman's body was different. But the way she threw her head back against me and sighed told me I'd found the right combination.

Focusing on her pleasure made it easy to slow my body's reaction to the feel of her nipple beneath my fingers, the way she cried out as I teased it in tune with my what I was doing to her pussy. When she reached up and grabbed my shoulder, I knew it was time.

Taylor let out a soft cry as her body trembled, and I knew if we were completely alone, she'd be louder. But we were in a publicly accessible office building. After hours or not, she couldn't know that almost all of my employees worked from home these days, and nobody ever came in on weekends. Nobody but me.

When she turned around, seduction was clear in her eyes. She briefly broke eye contact to pull down her panties and step out of them, kicking that and her dress to the side. Then she jumped up on the tiny desk, her butt settling against the tabletop as if it was actually comfortable.

She reached for my shirt, bunching it in her fist and pulling me toward her. I lowered my mouth to kiss her again, reaching for her to pull her closer. She had other plans, though. As she kissed me, she was unbuttoning my shirt.

This turned me on more than anything. Taylor taking charge. There was something innocent about her that combined with this seductive side. It made me feel...

Special.

I kicked my pants and underwear off to the side and parted her legs, moving toward her. That was when everything changed. Her body stiffened, her eyes darkened, and she looked at me like she was about to deliver bad news.

My heart sank. I'd step away from this now if it wasn't what she wanted. But I would be heartbroken.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

I was afraid to hear the answer. But no, I had to hear the answer. We couldn't continue until I did.

“I'm a virgin,” she said. “I've never done this before.”

I watched Jonah's expression change, but it didn't go the way I thought. Several times over the past few minutes, I'd tried to work up the nerve to tell him. My mind had screamed at me to tell him. The longer I waited, the more it would seem like a deception.

But he didn't get angry. His eyes didn't widen in fear. Instead, he looked a little relieved.

"I thought you were going to say you didn't want this," he said. "If you don't want this, we'll stop now. If you do... If you're one hundred percent sure—"

I nodded, interrupting him. "I just thought you might want to know. You know, it's a big deal to some men."

"It's a big deal to anyone," he said. "It's a huge responsibility. I want it to be special for you. We should go back to my place. You deserve a big, comfortable bed for your first time."

"I want it here," she insisted. "I want it to be hot. We can do it on a bed later if that's what you want. *This* is what I want."

The intensity in his stare returned, and I reached between us, wrapping my hand around his cock. I could do this all night. It wasn't just the feel of his of him against my palm. It was the way his breath quickened and his pupils dilated as my strokes grew bolder.

"Hold on," he finally said. "Don't move."

He pulled away from me and leaned over, snatching up his pants and reaching into the pocket. When he extracted his wallet, I knew exactly what he was going for. Had he brought that in preparation? Had he planned this? For some reason, that thought sent heat rushing straight through me. I liked the idea of a man like him plotting to get me into bed.

He tossed the pants to the ground and ripped the packet open. He had it on and was positioning himself between my legs again within seconds.

This was happening. This was really happening.

I watched as he slid his tip along my opening, my eyes widening at the sight. Then I tightened my legs around him, nudging him toward me. When I lifted my head and met his eyes, he was staring right at me, his lids heavy with desire. No doubt he was turned on by the way I was watching our two bodies come together.

“Now,” I breathed, pulling him deeper inside me.

Our mouths met as our bodies fused. It hurt, but I knew we just had to push past it. I continued to urge him toward me every time he started to withdraw, and soon, I had to pull away from the kiss. What he was doing made it harder to catch my breath, and I needed to breathe.

I was aware of everything all at once. The feel of him inside me, my nipples brushing against the hard wall of his chest every time he moved... I gripped his arms, holding onto him like he was my lifeline.

When I finally pulled back a little and glimpsed his face, that was all it took to send me over the edge. His eyes were closed, his jaw clenched. He was holding on with everything he had. He wanted to make sure I came first.

I had to close my eyes as the waves overtook me—a feeling more intense than anything I’d ever known. It couldn’t even compare to what I’d felt earlier when his fingers brought me to orgasm. As his thrusts increased in speed and he cried out, I understood. The difference was this connectedness I felt. We were becoming one.

I just hoped when this was over, Jonah McStay wouldn't break my heart.

6

JONAH

There was something very intimate about the way Taylor and I helped each other get dressed to go back downstairs. She smoothed out some of the wrinkles on my shirt, and I helped zip her up and rubbed the lipstick off her chin.

In the end, we both had to stop by the separate restrooms on my floor before climbing onto the elevator to head downstairs. I couldn't stop touching her. If I wasn't holding her hand, I had my hand on her back, guiding her into the party. I didn't want to lose this connection to her, even for a second.

"I'll go grab my coat," she said, separating from me just inside the door. The plan was to stop by to say hi to the host and head back to my place, where we'd pick up where we ended things upstairs.

"Jonah!" Reed called out, walking toward me. "I haven't gotten a chance to talk to you. I saw you earlier, but you disappeared."

"I had to step out for a second," I said as Reed and I did the usual clap on the back in greeting. "How's it going?"

Reed launched into a story about a deal he was working on, and I tried to focus on what he was saying. All I could think about was Taylor and what had just happened upstairs. If Reed noticed something was off about me, though, he didn't show it.

Suddenly, Reed stepped back and looked to his left. “Have you met my daughter, Harley?”

In that direction was Taylor, returning with her coat looped over her arm. She had a strange look on her face. There was a woman walking next to her. I recognized her as Reed’s daughter...and Taylor’s friend.

“I can take her home,” Harley said, staring directly at me.

There was something accusatory in her tone. I didn’t like it. I would never do anything to hurt this woman.

But I couldn’t fault her friend for protecting her. In fact, I’d want her to look out for Taylor. I cared about her.

I might even be falling in love with her.

“Right now?” Reed asked, looking from Harley to Taylor as though trying to make sense of it. “I have a few people I want to introduce you to.”

“It’s okay,” Taylor said.

Harley’s eyes widened slightly as she stared her dad down. “I’ll be back...maybe. This is more important.”

“Seriously, it’s fine,” Taylor said. “I’ll just take a rideshare. All three of you stay here.”

I opened my mouth to protest, but what was I going to say? If she wanted to leave, I had no right to stop her. It would be wrong to try to stop her.

But how could I just let her run out of my life without knowing exactly what I’d done to chase her off?

“No,” Harley said. “I’m taking—”

But it was too late. Taylor was speeding out the door, not waiting for her friend. She didn’t even toss a glance in my direction. I’d apparently done something to upset her, and I couldn’t even ask her what it was.

As soon as the door slammed behind Taylor, her roommate glanced at me, then turned to her father, forcing a smile to her face. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to talk to Mr. McStay for a moment.”

Reed looked conflicted. He no doubt felt the same protectiveness toward Harley as she did toward Taylor, but his daughter was a grown woman now. So, he gave a nod, shrugged at me, and turned to walk back into the room. He beelined for Blake Kincaid, who owned one of the top coworking space franchises in the country.

Turning back to face me, Harley narrowed her eyes at me and crossed her arms over her chest. “What, exactly, do you want from my friend?”

“Want?” I asked. “I don’t want anything from Taylor.”

That wasn’t true. I wanted *everything*. Her heart, her time, maybe her hand in marriage, assuming things worked out. But that wasn’t looking all that likely right now.

“Pleasure Valley’s a small town,” she said. “I’m friends with Colleen Gilliam.”

Colleen Gilliam. My mind was drawing a blank. I probably had just a few seconds to come up with it, though, unless I wanted to look like an even bigger jerk.

“Last year’s Christmas party,” Harley prompted. “She said you went home with her.”

Oh, Lord. Colleen Gilliam. Now it clicked into place. We both had a little too much to drink, and she’d been all over me. Not that it was an excuse, but I hadn’t gotten the impression she’d thought the two of us were forming a lifelong bond by having sex. She’d come across as a woman who knew what she wanted and had no problem taking it.

She knew what she wanted, alright. And what she wanted was me. For a solid two months, I dealt with relentless texts and calls, starting as flirty and escalating to hostile. Finally, when she showed up in my lobby on a workday, sobbing and demanding to speak to me, I had my attorney send a cease and desist.

“I’m not that guy,” I said. “Colleen...”

I hesitated. Was what? A mistake? That would sound just as heartless as she was accusing me of being.

No, I had to take a different route. I had to make her understand that what I felt for Taylor was different.

“I just met Taylor,” I said. “But I want to get to know her better. I will do right by her, I promise. I know I’ve been a heartless son of a bitch most of my life, but I think of myself as a screwup more than anything when it comes to relationships.”

I thought about that a moment, and she seemed to sense I needed that space to think through things. She just watched me, her expression not judgmental at all.

“I’m just like anyone else when it comes down to it,” I finally said. “I’ve been searching for the right fit all my life. I never could voice what was missing...I just knew something was, you know?”

“And you think my roommate’s the right fit?” she asked.

“I think she is, yes.” I nodded. “I’ve never felt this way with anyone. I know that sounds crazy since I’ve known her all of twelve hours.”

Harley’s expression had softened a little. I was speaking from the heart. That was all I knew to do.

“I fell in love with my father’s biggest rival,” she said. “Everyone—my friends, my dad, my coworkers—they all said the same things I said about you to Taylor just now. I can see it in your eyes, though. Plus, Taylor’s pretty awesome.”

I smiled. “You can say that again.”

She glanced at the door, then back at me. “What are you waiting for? Go get her. And Mr. McStay?”

I’d started to head around her toward the coat check room, which was basically coats piled on chairs in the break room, but her words stopped me. I turned to look at her.

“You break her heart, I’ll cut your balls off.”

I stared down at my phone. The rideshare driver hadn't budged in at least five minutes, and he was a good eight minutes away. Even if he started moving now, eight minutes was far too long to stand out here in this chilly night air.

An SUV breezed by, strains of "Winter Wonderland" blasting. It was so loud, I could even hear it with all the windows up. It joined the surrounding lights and garland to taunt me with the fact that it was my favorite time of the year and I was miserable.

The door opened behind me and I turned, expecting to see Harley, demanding I let her give me a ride home. I probably would take her up on it. Her car would be in the parking garage, which meant it would be significantly warmer than where I stood right now.

But I suddenly found myself looking into the eyes of Jonah McStay.

"Taylor," he said, his voice gruff.

He was looking at me like that again. The intensity in his eyes almost made me believe he truly had feelings for me.

I couldn't fall for it. Harley told me this was a repeat of last Christmas. He'd taken some sales executive home, slept with her, then snuck out in the middle of the night, never calling or speaking to her again. He'd no doubt do the same with me. It was a pattern with this guy.

“It’s fine,” I said.

I turned back to stare at the strip of road in front of me. I knew there wasn’t a chance in hell that the rideshare driver would show up right now. It would be too perfect if he did.

“I just met you twelve hours ago, and I know it’s crazy.” He stepped a little closer to me. “If you tell me to fuck off, I’ll leave you alone, but I want you to hear me out first.”

My eyebrows arched, but I continued to stare straight ahead. If this was supposed to be some sort of grand gesture, he had an interesting way of wording it. Fuck off?

“I know I have a reputation around town, as do a lot of my colleagues,” he said. “Some of it’s deserved. Some of it’s not. But no man I know is going to marry every woman he sleeps with. Same with most women. That means some hearts are going to get broken and some feelings are going to get hurt. Some pride is going to be wounded. You get my point.”

I looked over at him. “I’m not sure I do.”

“I’ve never in my thirty-six years met a woman who made me feel the things you do. Everything about you just feels right to me somehow. I don’t want to scare you off, but I also don’t want you to run because you think I’m just in this for sex. I’d be fine spending time with you, talking and getting to know you. Maybe holding hands.”

I turned to fully face him, but I crossed my arms over my chest. It was a protective measure.

“I’m not like a lot of women,” I said. “I can’t just sleep with a guy for fun. My feelings get involved.”

It was almost laughable, considering I’d never slept with a guy before tonight. But I’d known all along that this would happen. I couldn’t even kiss a man unless I was seriously attracted to him. There was no such thing as a purely physical relationship for me.

“I’m just scared of getting hurt,” I said.

I was surprised how easy it was to open up to him about this. With any other guy, I would have hidden my feelings and

talked to my friends about it. So why was it different this time?

Maybe it was because this was the real deal.

“That makes two of us,” he said. “There’s a reason it’s been years since I’ve been in a serious relationship. I got hurt. It was the last time I let myself be vulnerable to anyone. I swore I’d never let a woman that close to my heart again. And then I met you.”

His words were working their way into my heart. It was more than what he was saying. It was the look in his eyes. The intensity was gone, replaced by a warmth and sincerity that hadn’t been there before.

This wasn’t about lust or attraction. This wasn’t about him thinking I was beautiful or wanting to take my clothes off. This was about a connection. And it was a connection I felt when he turned to look at me in Dr. Maloney’s office.

“Don’t break my heart,” I said, looking him in the eye. “And I won’t break yours. Deal?”

He smiled. “Deal. Now, it’s freezing out here. What do you say we go inside and hang out for a little while?”

I smiled and put my hand in his. He led me into the building.

Once we got inside, I canceled the rideshare. I had someone who would give me a lift home now...and for the rest of my life.

EPILOGUE

JONAH

“Is this everything?” I asked as I hoisted the box full of gift bags and refreshments from the trunk of our SUV.

Next to me, Taylor nodded. “One gift for each employee, plus the cookies we baked yesterday.”

She reached up to close the trunk door, but I beat her to it. I gave her a look, balancing the box on my knee and pressing the button myself.

“I can close trunks,” she said. “I’m pregnant, not a delicate piece of china.”

“To me, you’re more valuable than any delicate piece of china...or anything else. As long as I’m around, you don’t have to lift a finger. Even if a finger is all that’s needed to close this trunk.”

She was seven months pregnant with our first child. The first of many, I hoped. We both wanted a big family. There was nothing riskier than usual about her pregnancy, but I still worried. If anything happened to her or the baby, I didn’t know what I’d do.

“You can press the elevator button,” Taylor joked as she led me to the elevator in the parking garage.

We’d moved to this new building when we signed a deal with a national chain of coworking suites. Veronica was now in place in office suites in almost every major city across the country. We’d also landed deals in Asia and Europe. The future was looking bright.

“Dr. Mahoney said thank you for the gift,” Taylor said, stepping back to look at me as we waited for the elevator. “She wants to meet with you about some upgrades to Veronica. After the holidays, of course.”

“Of course.” I nodded.

Dr. Mahoney signed on as a client not long after that first meeting. As promised, Veronica hadn’t displaced Taylor from her job. It did take some of the pressure off of her, though, as she moved into more of a billing and coding role.

She’d managed to overcome her test anxiety, with Dr. Maloney’s help, of course. My relaxation techniques proved not to be so scientific.

“Remember our first elevator ride together?” Taylor whispered as we stepped inside.

Why she was whispering was beyond me. We had the elevator to ourselves. Maybe she felt like it was more intimate. Funny, but as uninhibited as she could be behind closed doors, she was still very shy when it came to talking about sex.

“Our first kiss,” I said, shifting the box and leaning against the wall. “How could I forget it? Did I tell you I thought about hitting the stop button both before and after that other couple got in?”

“Why didn’t you?”

“Making love standing up is not the easiest thing,” I said. “I needed something to hold you while I had my way with you. The desk was the perfect location for our first time. I still get riled up thinking about it.”

She looked around self-consciously. Then she whispered, “We seem to do okay in the shower.”

“Good point,” he said. “But I had plans for you I didn’t quite make it to before... I wanted to set you on the desk and —” I lowered my voice to a whisper. “—lick you until you came. That would not have been easy to do in an elevator.”

She took a deep breath. “Careful. You’re getting me all hot and bothered before we have to face your entire team.”

Nothing could throw a bucket of ice water on my arousal like the mention of my team, especially considering they were waiting for us to arrive. If she weren't pregnant and we didn't have a Christmas party ahead of us, I definitely would take full advantage of her in the elevator.

"That was the best day of my life," I said. Then I thought for a second. "Actually, the second best day."

"What was the first?"

She looked a little concerned. Maybe she thought I wouldn't say something having to do with her.

"Our wedding day," I said. "The day I locked you in for life."

"Who locked *you* in, though?" She tilted her head and gave me a teasing smile. "I think I'm the one who won the real prize here."

I shook my head. "No way."

The elevator slowed to a stop, then a ding signified the doors were about to open. Too late to hit the stop button.

Only as I followed her out did I realize this particular elevator didn't have a stop button. I had to do something about that. We might need this elevator for a quick tryst someday in the not-too-distant future.

For now, though, we were free to have sex in every room of our condo. Until the baby was here, that was exactly what we were going to continue doing.

My team was waiting in the conference room, big smiles both for me and my wife. Yes, everything had come together perfectly—career, love, and now our family.

I was the luckiest man alive, and it was all thanks to this little invention I had to show off to Taylor's boss. Without that, I might have never met her.



CARLY FINDS LOVE with Blake Kincaid in *Her Hunky Scrooge*.
It's Book 3 in the Scrooges of Pleasure Valley series!

And don't miss Reed and Whitney's story, *Her Brainy Scrooge*. It's FREE with newsletter signup!