

A
HOLLY HILLS
CHRISTMAS



Holiday's
COOKIES

C.M. STEELE

Holiday's Cookies

A Holly Hills Christmas

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James Snow just came to get some peace and quiet in a small town away from New York City so he could finish his latest novel and make his deadline. What he didn't expect to find was Christmas Town, USA. Holly Hills should have given it away, but it's like the North Pole's twin sister, and he just doesn't have time for it.

At least, that is, until he opens the ever-chiming door to find a special greeting.

Holiday Belle just loves Christmas and cookies. It's why she owns the town's only bakery. Holiday's new neighbor has just moved in, and according to the word around town, he's grumpy. She just wanted to spread her Christmas cheer with some of her famous cookies. To her surprise, Mr. Crankypants was cranky, but he wasn't wearing pants...just a towel...a small towel...that she couldn't stop staring at until he took the cookies and slammed the door in her face.

Wanting the ground to swallow her up from embarrassment, she hopes to never see him again, but how can she be that lucky? They're neighbors.

Chapter One

Holiday

It's the perfect weather to start baking, but then again, it's always perfect up north where the snow starts just before October and continues until early spring. I love it here, and I can't wait for Christmas to come.

I stretch while getting into my favorite yoga pose early in the morning. The sun isn't up and won't be for another two hours, but I have to get a move on soon or I won't be able to open on time. One more good stretch with a sun salutation, and then a deep breath before wrapping up and hitting the shower.

It's going to be a long day, but I'll finally get to put up my Christmas decorations. I'm practically giddy with excitement at the prospect of doing it. If I could leave them up all year without looking like an absolute weirdo, I would, but then again, I love other holidays too. I suppose my name is quite fitting: Holiday Belle. My parents thought it was adorable, and so does everyone that meets me. My bubbly personality and blonde curls don't help with the cuteness overload either, but I don't mind since I love the business it brings to the bakery.

I have cookies for every holiday, but my favorite are Christmas cookies. We have so many to choose from, and the lines never seem to end as everyone waits for my goodies. I'm nearly out the door when I see a car pull up next door.

The house has been for sale for about three months. Most people don't want to buy it because it belonged to a grumpy old man who hated everyone in town. His granddaughter is a total sweetheart, and she spent a great deal of effort getting the house ready for sale. After grabbing my things, including my snowbrush from the front door, I walk out and make it to my car in time to see the realtor putting up a sticker on the old Manchester property.

I can't help but smile. Today is going to be a fabulous day.

"Hi, Mr. Sanders, how's it going?" I asked him as I remove last night's snowfall off my car.

He smiles widely. "Great, pretty lady. Aren't you ever going to call me Andrew?"

"Sorry. You are my former math teacher. Force of habit," I say with a shrug.

"You're all grown up now," he says in a way that's too intimate for my liking and the reason I've always kept the formality. Smiling politely, I create a greater distance between us, tuck my snowbrush in my backseat, and open my driver's side door.

"That I am, and I'm running late to my business. Excuse me."

"I can't wait to get some of your delicious cookies." Goodness—something tells me he's not talking about my baked food. I pull out of the driveway in a slight rush and completely forget to ask about the new neighbor. It's not worth

it at this point. The small family will probably be here within the next week or two.

My shop isn't far from home, so I arrive in fifteen minutes and park in the back. I have four employees, and we're only open from seven to six Monday through Saturday. I'm the first to get in and unlock the back entrance. Turning on the kitchen lights, it's nice to see a clean shop. We have a lot to bake today.

Twenty-five dozen chocolate cookies for special orders are up first. Then, we have to fill the slots full of gingerbread cookies, iced cookies, Almond cookies, and several varieties of brownies in Christmas shapes.

Turning on the ovens and the machines, I pull out my things and get to work. My team will be here within the next half hour, so we'll be in full swing soon. The next thing to get flipped on is the Christmas music. Dancing around the room, I mix my ingredients and enjoy my morning.

"Someone's chipper," Bethany says.

Shimmying my shoulders, I grin and say, "Yep. Christmas is coming, business is doing well, and the place next to me has finally sold."

She jumps up and down, nearly dropping her bag on the floor. "Oh, that's great news. Celeste's probably doing cartwheels."

"Well, not in her condition," I say. Celeste just found out she's pregnant and is really starting to show with her twins.

“No. Definitely not in her condition, but she could use the money from the sale.” The house was left to her since she’s the only one left her family, which made her quite sad. They never got to know each other.

“Absolutely. Girl, any news on who the baby daddy is?”

“No. Unfortunately it was one of those drunken one-night stand things after her grandfather died, or at least that’s what she said.”

“Do you think there’s more to her story?”

“I don’t know, but she’s not that kind of a girl.”

“You never know. Maybe he’s fine as hell. I know I might fall into a hot guy’s arms if I was drunk and sad.”

“True. Well, we don’t have time to think about it. Let’s get to baking, girl.”

“Let’s do this.”

“So, where’s Glen?”

“Right here.” He comes in with his gear on. “I’m ready to get this baking on. My wife is ready for an entire house full of treats for her kitchen when her family stops by next week, so I need to get some each day.”

“Oh, goodness. Your house is going to be overflowing again.”

“Tell me about it, but maybe it will keep my mother-in-law’s mouth so stuffed she’ll be quiet.” We laugh and get to work. She can be a real pain in the neck. Glen and his wife

have been married for nearly twenty years, and she's still telling them how to do things as a married couple.

“So, guess what, Glen? The Manchester place has finally sold.” I'm equally excited and nervous about getting new neighbors.

“I know. My wife told me this morning.”

“What? How did she find out?”

“That's what took me so long. Sheila saw Sanders on the way there while she was grabbing the newspaper.”

“Oh, yeah. You're his neighbor, right? Totally forgot,” I say. He's one neighbor I'm glad doesn't live next door. If he did, I'd sell and move upstairs in the apartment above the bakery. Right now, it's used for storage and a temporary bed when it gets too crazy and driving through a blizzard seems too much to handle.

The oven's preheat setting goes off, letting me know it's ready. “Time to get these in the oven.”

“I got them.” Glen grabs the trays while I open the doors, and we load the first two batches of cookies into the oven.

We work like a well-oiled machine, and by the time the doors open for business, we're ready with fresh baked goods and hot drinks.

My morning and afternoon pass by in a blur. I grab the marker for my dry-erase calendar on the wall and swipe another day off. We have two weeks until Christmas. A smile spreads across my face.

A clicking sound comes from the side, and I turn to see Bethany standing there with her phone. “What? You should see your face. So cute.” I smile, and she snaps another.

“Quit it.” I swat at her from a distance, missing her by a mile, but it did stop her and she tucks her camera away.

“These are going up in the shop. You could be a model. Seriously. Gorgeous. Maybe we can find you a husband.” I roll my eyes and pout because she’s no better than I am. At least I have the excuse of being the owner of the bakery. She chooses to hang around and come back after her shift and classes end.

“I’m not looking for one.”

“Stop lying.” She’s right. I want a husband and a family to share the holidays with, but I haven’t found the right guy. Still, I won’t admit it. “Now go home and get ready because I’m sure there’s a team of people waiting to help you set up your decorations.” So many people have been waiting for me to get my decorations up. I’m one of the last individuals, and I’ve been sad. Work has left me so busy that I haven’t had a chance.

“I’m leaving now. Are you sure you have it all for tomorrow?”

“Absolutely. Now go.” I rush out the door and into my car. And just like Beth says, the second I get home, I have several of the town’s most eligible men there to help. I feel guilty using them for their brawn when I’ve turned them all down for dates, some as most recently as today.

“Thanks, fellas, but I totally got this.”

“We know you do, Holiday, but why not have help?”
Heath asks, giving me smirk.

I feel like a jerk after they’ve all taken time out of their day to come here, and maybe their motives are just to be nice. I can’t assume everyone wants me to go out with them.
“Okay.”

“So are you going to the Christmas party?” Sanders asks.

“No.” They all know I hate these things, but they insist. I have someone drop off the desserts and leave before the party even starts.

“Why not?” Heath asks.

“I don’t want to go.”

“You’re the prettiest girl in town. You have to go.”

“Thanks. Maybe I’ll consider it.” He smiles, gives me a wink, and then gets back to work.

I close my eyes because yes, Heath’s handsome and twenty-four, but he’s not ready to grow up. I’m only twenty-three, but I bought the old bakery from Mrs. Green four years ago with the remainder of my parents’ life insurance money and my savings from working two jobs. One of my jobs had included working at the bakery with Mrs. Green. So, I need someone with ambition, with plans to keep us afloat even if he isn’t wealthy.

My father was a screwup. The only smart thing he ever did was get life insurance, so when they went out to a party and got into a car accident, I wasn’t left completely hopeless.

We get it all done in three hours, and my house looks like Christmas threw up all over. It's beautiful: four trees decorated in my home as well as my entire porch.

Chapter Two

James

Snow comes cascading in billowy puffs as I drive toward my new cottage from my home in the city. According to my GPS, it's only another ten minutes to my destination, which is a breath of fresh air after sitting for two hours in traffic. I take the exit off the expressway leading into Holly Hills, and I'm immediately greeted with holiday lights and wreaths every few feet.

How the hell did I end up in Christmas Town, USA? I could kill my assistant as I drive through the throng of children with their parents, playing in the freshly fallen snow as they cross the street like this isn't the main road. I scrub my hand over my face as they cross the street in slow fucking motion. A couple of the women wave at me, and I politely give a short wrist flick wave even though I'd rather not draw any attention to myself.

I press the video call button, dialing her number.
"Sarah, what were you thinking?"

"You wanted a quiet place away from the city."

"Quiet? This is like I stepped into the North Pole in full swing." I flip on my camera and turn my phone around so she can see the bullshit she got me in.

"Aw, that's so beautiful," she gushes.

"Damn it, I didn't ask for beauty. I asked for privacy." I turn off the camera and anchor the phone back on its stand as

the crowds finally move and I can drive by.

“That’s what the cottage you bought said you’d get. You’re just passing through town, right?”

“Yes,” I grumble.

“You should go to the place and relax. Leave the happy townspeople to their own devices, and you can be grumpy all by yourself.”

“Fine. I want you to find another place tomorrow. I have to finish this book by the new year.”

“Most people take the Christmas holiday off.”

“I’m not most people.” Why would I take it off? I don’t have any family. All of my friends are married, including Brett, who married my assistant. The damn jerk took her away from her duties for too long.

“Well, on that note, I have more Christmas shopping to do, so enjoy your getaway. Who knows? You might actually meet someone.” She ends the call, and I want to fire her but I know I can’t because I’d be completely useless without her.

I pulled up to the house, which is larger than I expected. There is a home next door to me, another unexpected sight. It’s not as large, but it’s well-kept and fully decorated for Christmas.

I roll my eyes because that probably means there’s a houseful of kids living there that will be making noise all day while I’m trying to work. I don’t need the sounds of laughter and fighting in the snow before the tears come and disrupt my busy schedule. It’s the reason I left the overly crowded city. The noise can be deafening.

I quickly usher myself inside before someone sees me and stops to say hello. It's almost four o'clock, and I'm sure they'll all be rushing home from work. With the sun setting at four, it's almost completely pitch-black in the house, so I reach for the light switch next to the door and illuminate the entire living room area.

The place is well furnished, as advertised, which I'm pleased about. The home has been remodeled to a more modern feel, with whites and grays lining all the walls and trim, although my biggest interest is the office; it had been one hell of a selling point and the reason I agreed with Sarah to make the purchase. I slide my computer bag off my shoulder and set it on the nice mahogany desk.

As long as it's quiet and I'm left alone, I'll be able to knock out my book by the deadline.

It's almost six when the doorbell rings. Fury simmers in my bones because there shouldn't be a soul coming to my door. I'd only just gotten situated, comfortable with a hot cup of coffee and my notes.

It rings again, and I'm seething. Standing up, I throw open the front door and find a young man waiting with bags in his hands. "What the hell do you want?"

"I have your special grocery delivery for you, Mr. Snow."

"Thank you. Next time just leave them at the door as requested on the order."

"Sorry, sir." He sets them down at my feet and rushes down the stairs to his vehicle.

I take them inside and refuse to feel guilty about people who can't follow simple instructions. After putting them away, I return to my coffee, which is now lukewarm and disgusting, so I toss it out and pour a fresh cup. I'm just getting to typing when the damn bell rings again. It's the realtor this time. Fuck, I expected this asshole to come, but that doesn't mean I want him here.

I shoot Sarah a message. *Find me a new place.*

Chapter Three

Holiday

“Who are those for?” Bethany says, staring at the wrapped box of cookies. I hoped I could get away unnoticed before I closed up for the day, but she was always watching.

“These are for my new neighbor. I wanted to welcome him to the area.” He arrived yesterday, and I hadn’t wanted to bother him because he’d only just arrived.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” she warns me, shaking her head.

Does he have a jealous wife that’s going to lose it or something? “Why not?”

“Grant said he’s a real piece of work who prefers to be left alone. Yesterday, he had his groceries delivered and barked at the kid just to leave them at the door.” Oh, goodness. I can’t believe that’s my new neighbor. He can’t be just like old Mr. Manchester. Still, I have to be friendly.

“Oh my. I’ll just drop the cookies off and not bother him. It’s almost Christmas time, and I can’t help myself.”

“I know. You have a heart of gold and sugar.” She rolls her eyes and shakes her head. I leave my bakery and pop in my car with my baked cookies.

On the short drive, I grow more and more nervous about dropping these off. Maybe I should just keep them at home or wait until I see him outside.

I park in my garage and then close the door. Once I've gotten everything out of my car and into the house to work on my latest creation, I grab the cookies and head over to the neighbor's door. Gathering my nerve, I ring his doorbell. Accidentally, my finger slips and I hit it more than once. Oops. Not the nicest way to greet your new neighbor.

A snarling, annoyed, "What the fuck?" comes from the other side with hurried steps. "I didn't order anything today," he says before opening the door.

"I just wanted to drop off some cookies as a welcome gift." He opens the door, and I'm shocked to see the man before me in nothing but a towel around his waist, water dripping down his toned chest. No one mentioned that the surly neighbor was hot and extremely built.

I can't stop gawking at his impressive thighs through the towel and so much more. My eyes don't move from the large nether region that the frigid temperature has no effect on. Instinctively I mouth a "wow," which I immediately regret.

"Thank you. Goodbye." I dart my head up just as he takes the cookies and closes the door on me.

"Oh my God, what in the world is wrong with me?" I mutter, dashing down his porch in quick-like fashion.

Needing to return to my house and never show my face again, I lock the door and hide away. I can't believe I stood there like a simpering fool, staring right at his penis like it would pop out of the towel at any second. He must think I'm some horny pervert just trying to jump his bones.

I hide away for the rest of the night, forgetting all about trying a new recipe because I'm so mortified.

Chapter Four

James

The second the door closes, I set the cookies by the door and run up to my room to put some clothes on before I do something stupid, like take my dick in hand and stroke the fucker. Who the hell was that little blonde flirt with her eyes on my towel like they were glued there?

Peeking out the front window, I look at the neighbor's house next door, and I doubt it's her home because no one's there. All the lights are still off. The nearest neighbors are about half a mile up the road, so I just drop the matter because I'll find her soon. There's no way I'm driving up there to knock at the five other houses and confront them and ask if one of their wives or daughters was around.

My cock is getting hard again just thinking about running into her again. Her beautiful blue eyes were wide with shock and embarrassment. Her cheeks, pink from the cold, were round and adorable. I should have dragged her inside and gave her a better look.

I'm almost jealous of my cock because I barely got a glimpse of her gorgeous face and he got all the damn attention. Yes, I suppose the fact that I opened the door with my cock and balls practically on display in the middle of winter might draw anyone's attention, but that was intense.

By the time I'm dressed, I finally go back to the front door and look at the cookie box. She didn't bother to bake them. They're from a shop in town called Holiday's Cookies.

“How original,” I mutter. Still, they smell fantastic. I wonder if the pretty little pervert smells just as good. Probably not, but I’m itching to find out. Maybe I’ll make her pay for seeing me nearly naked and demand to stare at her pretty kitty.

The timer on my phone goes off, reminding me to get back to work. Snatching up my cookies, I head off to write. Opening up the box, I take a long whiff, and they’re potent so I take a bite of one of the heavenly cookies. The first one goes down so fast that I don’t realize that I’ve managed to eat half the box.

By the end of the night, I have only one thought in my head—to find my little pervert, and that’s going to happen by heading to this bake shop. Hopefully they’ll know who I’m talking about. Then, I’m going to take her home and spank her ass for making me break my routine and diet. Shit, I’m going to need a run and some push-ups after all these cookies.

My mind goes to the cute blonde, and I wonder where she came from. I look outside and the lights next door are still not on, so I’m assuming that family must be out of town. That’s good for me because I haven’t heard anyone making noise while I work, except for all the damn doorbell ringing.

I go back to writing, but all I can think about is finding my little cookie surprise and giving her a proper greeting. Fuck, I’ve never been so horny and angry in my life. I have only so many days to write, and I’m struggling. How the fuck am I supposed to write the rest of this novel when all I can think about is how I want to fuck, and fuck hard?

Maybe I can channel that anger. It works, and I spend the next four hours writing until my eyes get too blurry to stay

awake. Shutting down my computer, I head to the bedroom and let my fatigue take me to sleep, or at least try, but those gorgeous blue eyes come to mind. Before I know it, I find my hand in my sleep pants, pulling out my length and fucking my hand. After I clean myself up, I finally close my eyes and let today slip away.

Chapter Five

Holiday

I wake up at four to get to the bakery on time for the rush. Waking up is more like an exaggeration because I never went to sleep. In fact, I tossed and turned, did yoga, baked the new recipe, taste-tested half of them, wrote an apology, and then made little hearts around the letter so I tossed it out. Seriously, I'm running on nothing but coffee and utter embarrassment this morning. What does he think of me?

Thankfully, the neighbor probably kept normal hours and tried to avoid the crazy girl next door, who was salivating over his naked form. God, he's got to think I'm some horny slut ready to pounce, which couldn't be further from the truth. Well, not completely. Only the slut part could be taken away. I've never gone all the way with a guy before, but for him, I'd make the exception.

When I pull up, of course I'm the first one here, but it won't be too long before they all arrive. So, I start my routine and get everything together. I move around without saying a word, dashing from one oven to the other and then to the cooling racks repeatedly all morning. I didn't even notice when the team came in.

Bethany stares at me as I pull the next round of cookies from the oven and set them on the rack. I turn around to set the oven mitts down when she stops in front of me so I can't move. "What is up with you?" she asks.

“What do you mean?” I reply, looking at her with surprise.

“You are frantic today.”

“I don’t know what you mean. We’re busy.”

“Did that asshole give you a hard time when you dropped off the cookies?” The word *hard* pounds in my brain. He was getting hard, all right.

“No. I dropped off the cookies. I didn’t sleep well,” I confess.

“You are a terrible liar. What happened? I can go beat down his door and kick him in the nuts.” A sudden rush of jealousy shoots up through my chest. What if he’s not dressed when she comes to the door and he lets her in?

“Oh, God, don’t do that. I dropped off the cookies, and I must have interrupted his shower. He was in just a towel.” I turn my head around and slam it down on the counter, avoiding the obvious jokes. I spent the entire night thinking about how mortified I was and what he must think of me.

“It’s not that big of a deal. He wouldn’t have answered the door if he didn’t want you to see it,” she says.

“It’s worse. I couldn’t stop staring, so he slammed the door in my face.” Bethany laughs so hard that I swat her.

“What’s so funny?”

“You were staring at his face or.... something else?” she says with a laugh stuck in her throat.

“The something else,” I answer and then throw my head back on the steel counter.

“You better bake some extra cookies to apologize. Is he at least good looking?” she asks.

“That would be an understatement. Hotter than these ovens.”

She laughs so hard. The door chime rings behind us, saving me for the moment. “Customers, but this conversation isn’t over.”

She steps out front while I finish sliding the cooled cookies off the sheet and into the display holder. Once they’re neatly done, I push the door to the storefront open to stock the display cases. Except standing in line is none other than the new grump neighbor, fully clothed, and he’s still so sexy. He smiles and then winks.

I blush instantly. “Let me get these before you drop them,” Bethany says, taking them from my hands. “Go handle Miles.” I walk up to the cash register and ask, “What can I get you this morning?”

“A brownie, and a date to the Christmas party at the center,” Miles answers.

I’m about to tell him no for the twentieth time this month because I never go with anyone.

“Take the brownie and move on,” that deep voice rumbles. He moves to stand in front of Miles and won’t take his eyes off me. His large frame is bigger than I remember, and his eyes are brighter green and brown, making a perfect hazel like a pistachio.

“Hello. You must be our newest resident,” Bethany says, interrupting the stare-down between us.

“Yes, James Snow.” He brings his attention back to me.
“When do you get off?”

“I was ordering,” Miles complains, dipping his head around the counter, but he’s no match for the size of James and has to step back or he’ll fall. Bethany grabs a brownie and packs it.

“Here you go... on the house.” She shoves it at Miles.
“Have a good day, Miles.” She leans on the counter next to me with her hands on her elbows and stares at James. With a big old grin, she asks, “Do you have a brother, cousin, or maybe an equally hot friend?”

He ignores her. “You didn’t answer my question.”

“Seven,” Bethany answers for me.

“I’ll be back.” He wags his finger to tell me to move closer. Unable to resist the pull, I lean over the counter slightly, and then he leans in. He cups the back of my head, and his mouth is on mine in the briefest kiss. In a low whisper against my cheek, he says, “Don’t say yes to anyone, or I’ll have to break their legs. See you later, my beautiful little pervert.” Can you come from words and just a peck?

He leaves without another word. Bethany pulls me into the back room. “Give us a minute.”

As soon as we enter the kitchen, she says, “Girl, what just happened?”

“I don’t know.”

“I think you just got claimed.”

“Maybe he really liked the cookies,” I say.

“Holiday, dear. Those aren’t the cookies he wants,”
Glen says.

“Glen, you’re a dirty old man.”

“I’ve been married a long time. That man wants your cookie served up to him to eat, and he’s single, wealthy, and your neighbor. Go for it.”

“I don’t know.”

“Girl, you know. Stop lying,” Bethany says.

“He’s probably just trying to get back at me for seeing him in his towel.”

“Honey, that man was jealous of Miles. He hasn’t even seen Heath.”

“Oh, shit. Yes. Our hot, young delivery driver,” Glen adds. “He has eyes for you.”

“I know, but I’ve made it clear that I’m not interested.”

“Hey, so what’s going on?” Heath says, coming up to us. “We have a lot of people waiting for service.”

“Holiday’s got a boyfriend now, so we need to keep all the other guys away because he’s not the kind of guy that likes men flirting with his woman.”

“You have a man?” he asks.

“Um... It’s new.”

“Well, I have a few deliveries to run and then I’m done for the day.”

He leaves Bethany and Glen standing there with their mouths open. “He took that better than I thought,” I say.

“Girl, that man didn’t take it well.”

“What do you mean?”

“He’s not happy.”

“Nope. I’m worried he’s going to snap. I’ll check on him.” Glen leaves us.

“Let’s deal with the crowd.” We head back out to the storefront to a massive line, and it takes us all afternoon to get it down. All the while, I can’t stop thinking about James and his beautiful eyes and strong mouth on me.

It’s nearly evening, and my nerves are on edge. Heath disappeared after his last delivery, saying he couldn’t hang around because he had a hot date. Glen gave me a knowing look, and the guilt inside my chest only grows. It’s Christmas, and I hurt my friend. Even if I don’t want to be with him and he knows it, I still feel terrible.

Maybe that’s why I never dated. There were so many guys in town asking me out, and I didn’t want to say yes to one and not the other, but James just demanded I make time for him. Hell, we weren’t even dating either. Frankly, he just kissed me and said he’d be here; that’s it. Perhaps I’m making a bigger deal out of it than it is.

I get to work prepping for tomorrow’s baking while Bethany stares at me.

“What?”

“Nothing. You’re just a sweetheart, that’s all.” I don’t feel like one.

Chapter Six

James

I don't know what happened back there, but I swear the second that fucker dared to ask my woman out, I was about to slam his head into the counter. Then I remembered I didn't even know her name. I read her name tag, and it reads Holiday. The cookies she brought me were from Holiday's Cookies Bakery. My girl was not only beautiful, but she was also talented. I ate almost every damn cookie she gave me last night, something I wouldn't have done before. I don't eat sweets because they ruin my body that I take good care of.

Stuffing my hands in my pockets so I don't find something to punch, I head to the nearby hardware store to pick up the printer I ordered.

"Hello, you must be our new resident of Holly Hills. I'm Cat. My dad owns the hardware store."

"I came to get the printer I ordered," I grumble. My eyes keep darting toward the window as if I could see into the bakery down the street. It's bullshit how busy she is. I wonder if she works hard all the time.

"Okay. No prob. It's right here." There is a small stack of boxes, and then my large one. She lifts it up with a little extra effort, so I quickly take the bulky box from her. I might be an asshole to most people, but not when people do what they should, and this girl is young and doing her job.

"I'll need some copy paper as well." It comes with free starter ink, so I don't purchase more.

“How many reams?” she asks with politeness that doesn’t give off any signs of flirting, which I appreciate for a change. She nods and walks around the counter to get the materials.

“Two will be good.” I pay for the paper and take everything to my SUV. My eyes return back down the street to the bakery where my future wife is, and I look away because a large crowd has just formed a line to get inside. Unless I feel like going to jail, it’s best I stay away from the men in the group. I’ll never get to know her that way, not to mention finish my book.

By the time I get back to the house, I’m unable to write again. Last night when she came over, I nearly embarrassed myself when my towel was stretched thin by the growing arousal. It was twenty degrees out, and I was sporting wood for the pretty little perverted cookie girl.

Who was that asshole after my little sugarplum?

I shoot Sarah a message. *Forget about the other place; I’m not leaving yet.*

What if she was going to say yes to that asshole? I should have waited for her response. No, I would have snapped his neck. Rage builds up in me like I’ve never felt before, even more when the girl at the coffee shop in town had spilled my hot coffee all over my manuscript after I’d made fifty pages of notes on it. I had to stifle the anger because it could damage my career, but I’d wanted to have her fired on the spot. She became the next victim in my novel, and I made it count.

Suddenly, I picture my newest nemesis and make him a part of the story. Miles would have a gruesome death. As I write this novel, my killer becomes more vengeful. The words flow wildly when I think about that pencil dick after my woman. Didn't he see that I was there, madly insane with jealousy? He couldn't tell that she belonged to someone else? Those sexy, icy-blue-colored eyes stayed glued to my cock as I stood there dumbfounded by the prettiest little woman in the world. She staked her claim, and so I staked mine.

My eyes move to my phone, checking the time every few minutes, unable to wait to see her again. I wonder how many men ask her out. Probably every eligible man in the area with a damn pulse. Anger simmers, and I use it to fuel the next three chapters.

It's well past dark when I look at the time. I have an hour until she's done, so I get changed and head down to the bakery in the center of town. When I get there, the doors are locked. The sign is flipped to closed for the day. I pound on the door, drawing attention from the locals walking around.

Then I see her pop out of the kitchen with a mop in her hand. She shouldn't be working so damn hard. Setting the mop down, she comes to the door and unlocks it.

"I didn't think you'd come...." My mouth is on hers before she can finish whatever she was going to say. There is no need for words at the moment. I've missed those lips all damn day.

"Get it, girl." The woman from this morning appears and my woman pulls back instantly, like she's embarrassed to be caught kissing her future husband.

“How was work, beautiful?”

“It was nice,” she says with a dazed expression in her eyes.

Her buddy, with a rolling pin in hand, glares at me and says, “So, I’m just going to give you a quick warning. Hurt her, and there will be a host of people ready to run you out of town.”

“I’m not going to leave or hurt her. In fact, I need to apologize for being so rude. I’m James Snow,” I tell my woman directly, formally introducing myself.

“I’m Holiday Belle.” Fuck, could she be any more adorable?

“Good. Now that we got that out of the way, let’s get back to where we left off.” I kiss her again in the picture window, wanting everyone to see me claim her for my own.

“What did you put in those cookies? I need the recipe,” her smartass friend says. I like her, but right now, I want to get Holiday alone and away from all these men in town.

“It’s time to go, Holiday.”

“I don’t even know you.”

“We’ll get to know each other. Besides, we both know you know me better than I know you.”

I pull her into my arms and kiss her wildly, needing again to lay claim to her in front of the large picture window. “Holiday, I’m losing my mind.” When I pull away, I don’t miss the handsome fucker who is watching us. He gives me a dirty look, and I smirk.

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry. I don’t want to this to end, beautiful.”

“Does it have to?”

“I’m only renting the cottage for the month.”

“Then perhaps we should stop this before we go further, Mr. Snow. I should go.”

“Don’t go.”

“Look, I think I gave you the wrong impression. I’m not that kind of girl. You caught me off guard that day—and let’s just say I was more than impressed. But, that doesn’t mean I’m just going to sleep with you, so if you’ll excuse me, I have to go home.” She pushes past me and to her car.

“Holiday, wait. Please.”

“What?”

“I’m not saying that. I really want to get to know you. Hell, I’ve just spent the entire day waiting on pins and needles, and I got carried away. Forgive me. After that asshole was flirting with you, I kind of spent the day imagining all these guys doing the same thing.” Her eyes lift toward the sky, and she bites down on her bottom lip. “So how many guys was it?”

“Well, it’s not like that.” Holiday bounces from one foot to the other. “Hey, why does it matter? I told them I had a boyfriend, and you’re not even my boyfriend, anyway.”

“You did?”

“Yes, so can you drop it?”

“I suppose. Can we start again? How about dinner?”

“I’d love that. I’m starving.”

“Good. I’m running on your cookies and a sandwich I made this afternoon.”

“Same. I couldn’t even eat after making a fool of myself.”

“You? I nearly showed you how excited I was to see you.”

“You didn’t seem excited to see me.”

“Anyone else, and they wouldn’t have gotten a word out.”

“Well, I take that as a compliment.”

“Will this place do?”

“Yes, it’s perfect.” We step inside, and I get funny looks of interest. The hostess smiles and gives Holiday a thumbs up. She seats us at the nicest diner booth they have. Honestly, these are my favorite places. They have the best people working for them.

“Wow, they love Christmas,” I say, looking at the décor that screams North Pole.

“So do I. You don’t?”

“I haven’t, really, since I was a kid.”

“I have a feeling there’s a whole story there.”

“The usual tragic back story. Parents died, I was alone in foster care, and it was shitty.” I worked hard to get myself out of that nightmare, living in a home and locking up my things when I wasn’t in school or working, but some things

she didn't need to know. The sweet girl didn't need to share my pain. I only wanted to see her happy.

"I'm so sorry." Her beautiful eyes fall with sadness and I don't like it.

"Don't be. I just found my new favorite Holiday." She smiles, and I can't imagine going without that smile for the rest of my life. I swallow hard.

"Thank you."

"Can I get you folks anything to drink? Or are you ready to order?"

"Um. I'll have a cheeseburger and Coke please, Jess," I answer.

"Same, please."

"What's wrong?" I ask her.

"Christmas is my favorite," she confesses, biting down on her bottom lip. "I mean, you've seen my house, right?"

"Your house?"

"Yes, it's next door to yours."

My brows shoot up. "Wait? You live right next door. What the hell? I could have come banging down your door last night. Where were you?"

"Um..."

She wasn't home that night. The lights were completely off on the inside and there was no car in the driveway. "Please tell me you weren't with someone else."

Chapter Seven

Holiday

I pull my hands away from his strong ones. “I told you I wasn’t like that.”

He shakes his head and grabs my hands again. “Fuck. I didn’t mean...The lights were off and I didn’t see a car, so if you weren’t home. I just meant...were you on a date?”

“No. I was hiding from you, dying from embarrassment.” My face turns pinker than it did that day.

He chuckles so deeply my pussy responds by weeping with need between my thighs. “I was inside trying to write with a massive hard-on all night thinking about getting my pretty little pervert alone.”

“I told you I’m not a pervert.” I blush, fighting indignation and embarrassment at the same time.

“Sweetheart, if I was straight staring at your tits while you were talking to me when we just met, what would you think?” His brows lift up with a cocky smirk and I want to kick him in the shins for besting me, and I probably could from under the table and nobody would be any bit the wiser, but he’s too damn cute.

He only adds insult to injury by staring directly at my breasts, licking his lips, and that goes straight to clit like he’s ringing the bell. Match is over, and he freaking won.

“Fair point. I should have looked away, but let’s just say you’re quite impressive in that area.” Yep, this blush is

probably forever stained on my face.

“Holiday—I didn’t expect to see you here.” I look up and see Heath with Sandy. She’s cute. Now, they’d make a great couple because they’re both in school and the same age.

“James, this my employee, Heath. This my date and my new neighbor, James Snow.”

“Oh, the rich new guy in town. That makes sense.” My mouth falls open and my chest pounds hard. Did he just insult me? I stare at my supposed friend and employee and then look around; we clearly have garnered the attention of the tables around us.

“Excuse me. What’s that supposed to mean?” James snarls, leaning forward, flexing his fists on the table.

“She wouldn’t give any other guy in town a chance, but bring a rich guy around, and she throws herself at him.”

“Heath, I think it’s best if you don’t come into work for a while.” The words come out shaky as my lips quiver from sadness and shock.

“I’ll do you one better, Santa’s little slut. I quit.” I can feel the tears filling up, ready to spill over.

“You better leave now before I make you leave, *boy*.”

“Sure thing, *old man*.” Neither connotation was missed. There was about to be a fight if they continued to speak to each other, and I can’t handle this. All these years of not dating and then the first time, this happens. I just can’t do it.

“I have to go,” I mutter, standing up and leaving the restaurant in a hurry. Blinded by my tears, I run straight into Glen. It must be time for him eat with Sheila before they go home.

“Sweetie, what’s wrong?” he asks, pulling me in for a hug.

“Nothing. I need to go home.” I try to pull away, but he’s not going to let that happen. He’s the only father figure I’ve had over the past few years, and it’s made a huge difference in my life. My rock when things were hard.

“I’ll give you a ride. I’ll message Sheila that I’ll be back,” he explained.

“No, it’s okay. I don’t want you to go through that trouble. My car’s right here.”

“No. I’ll take you home.”

“The hell you will,” James says, coming out of the diner, wrapping my coat around me and dragging me to him. “What’s with every man in this town?”

“Is being a gentleman too difficult for you, Mr. Snow?” Shit, Glen’s a big man, but he’s much older than James and I don’t want them to fight and for him to get hurt.

“It wasn’t him,” I sob, attempting to explain he’s not the reason for my tears.

The restaurant door pops open again, and I’m afraid it’s Heath, but then I hear her sweet voice and I feel better. “Glen, you’re here early. I’ll be out in a bit—they were my last customers. I’ve wrapped up their food.” Sheila turns to James.

“Take it and feed her, or she won’t eat. She’s extremely softhearted.” She rubs my arm. “I need to clock out.”

“Thank you. I ought to break his fucking face,” James snarls, pressing his forehead onto mine.

“Just leave it alone,” I plead.

“Who?” Glen insists.

“Some asshole who works for her,” James answers before I can.

“Heath?”

“Yeah. That’s the prick.”

He shakes his head and breathes through his nose. “Damn it, sweetie. I knew we were going to have a problem after this morning.”

James wraps his arms around me and tips my chin so our eyes meet. “Sugarplum, stop crying. I don’t like seeing tears falling from those pretty eyes.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t apologize for being upset.” He caresses my cheek.

“I can’t help it. The things he said in there. Everyone heard, and they’re going to think you’re going to...”

“I know it’s not my money you’re after. It’s my big cock,” he teases, and I giggle with my boogers dripping down my face. He pulls out a handkerchief. “Here.”

I take it. “Thank you.”

Looking up at Glen, James adds, “Excuse me, but I need to get her home.”

“Holiday, maybe you should stay home tomorrow.”

“I can’t. With Heath not there, we’re already shorthanded. I’m not going to let my company be ruined because I wouldn’t go out with him. He moved on pretty quickly, didn’t he?”

“He was with some other chick just now,” James explains.

Glen looks at James with his chin down, eyes up, and shaking his head. “She doesn’t understand relationships. You better be good to her, or leave her alone.”

“I’m not going anywhere.” I don’t know if he truly means it, but having him around makes me feel better.

He leads me to his insanely expensive-looking vehicle and opens the passenger door. It’s too dark to determine the model, but it’s obviously way out of my budget. Maybe to Heath it does look like I’m just a gold-digging bitch, but he should know me better than that. I’ve worked hard for everything I have. “Here, climb inside.”

“Thanks.” Once I’m inside, he closes the door and moves to the driver’s side and climbs inside.

“Sorry that our dinner got ruined, but we still have our meal here.” He lifts it up before setting it in the back.

“I’m sure the burgers are good,” I say, giving him a crooked smile.

“They smell fantastic. Almost as delicious as you. So what made you want to become a baker? A natural gift?”

“Yes, something like that. When I was fourteen, I started helping out at the bakery because my family kind of needed the money. The former owner, Mrs. Green, let me help and I worked under the table until I could get a worker’s permit, and then I was baking daily. I fell in love with it. I studied with some books and watched baking shows, but I don’t actually have a specialty degree.”

“Wow, so you’re a natural.”

“I guess.” I shrug, blushing again. Luckily, it’s dark and he can’t see how embarrassed I really am.

“What happened to Mrs. Green?”

“She retired about four years ago, sold me the property, and moved to Florida with her husband.”

“How old are you?”

“Twenty-three. You?”

He pauses like he has to think about it for a minute. It’s clear he’s older than me, but I can’t imagine he’s that much older. “Thirty. Is that too old for you, sugarplum?” He reaches out and tucks a few stray hairs behind my ear.

I haven’t dated, so I can’t say what age is a good cut-off for me, but I like him, so I just give him a simple, “No.”

“So where do you want to eat?”

“Your place. I want to see if Christmas exploded on the inside or just on the outside.”

“Oh, it’s just as bad on the inside.”

“Good.” He pulls into the driveway.

“What about my car?” I ask as I undo my seatbelt.

“I’ll drive you to work tomorrow.”

“I start really early,” I warn him, because it’s not for the faint of heart.

He takes my hand and brings it to his lips before I can leave the vehicle and kisses it. “Don’t worry, sugarplum. I promise I’ll get you there on time.”

“Okay.” He lets it go, and we both exit the car.

“It really is beautiful,” he admits, staring at my decorations. I leave out that I had several guys helping, including Heath.

“Be careful—you’re going to be shocked.”

Chapter Eight

James

I walk into a winter wonderland, and I'm surprised that I don't hate it. It feels like home. Every little piece is meant to be there; warm, inviting, and I tell her so. "Holiday, it's perfect."

"Are you just trying to butter me up?"

"No, it's sweet—like you. I braced myself for something outrageous, but it's like walking into a classy magazine spread of what Christmas is. Home meets Holiday. It's perfect." A rumble comes from her belly. "Enough talking. You need to eat."

"I guess you're right. We can eat over here." She leads me to the small dining room where there's a cute Christmas display on the table with a round napkin holder and snowmen salt and pepper shakers. "Do you have a special gathering for the holidays?" I'm a little jealous about all the people who got to spend the holidays with her.

"I lost my parents when I was nineteen, so I have Glen and Sheila as my surrogates. They stop by on Christmas Day for a special lunch before seeing their grandkids."

"I'm sorry about your parents, but that's very sweet that you have that tradition."

"It's been nice." We both take a bite of our burgers, and they're cold. "Um...maybe I should warm these up. Would you like something to drink?"

“Sounds good. Let me help.” I follow her into the kitchen, which is similar to mine but just a tad smaller.

“I have some wine, a couple of diet sodas, and milk.”

“I’ll take the wine.” I grab it and pop the bottle open. I look at it and laugh. “Sugarplum. Did you look at the bottle? This isn’t wine. This is sparkling grape juice.”

“Oh, my goodness,” she giggles. I pour us a glass each and laugh.

“I’m going to kick Glen in the shins. He said he bought me my favorite bottle of wine and chilled it for me.”

“He still thinks of you as a child,” I accuse. She’s still young, but she’s not a child obviously.

“No, but he says I’m pretty naïve.” I nod.

“He’s not wrong.” Her gaze drops and I’ve hit a sore spot. Fuck.

“Come here.” I pull her into my arms and hold her close. “I find it unbelievably beautiful and refreshing how sweet you are. You work hard, but you have a very kind heart that’s extremely trusting. Let’s eat, and then I’m taking you to bed before I go home.”

“You don’t want to sleep with me, do you?” She bites down on that bottom lip and I’m tempted to take over for her, biting it and then taste her puffy lips.

“Sleep with you? Sugarplum, one day I’m going to marry you, but for tonight, I just want to care for you.” I take our kid juice and reheated cheeseburgers back to the table, and we talk and talk.

“So you’re a crime novelist. I’m sorry I’m not that type of reader and it’s not often I get to read these days. I’ve heard of you, but I couldn’t say I know anything about your books.”

“Don’t be sorry. My books are crime thrillers and yes I’ve sold millions of copies since I’ve started my career over the past ten years.”

“Wow, that’s insane. How did you get started?”

“Well, I was good at school. It was the one thing that allowed me to focus my frustrations and pain and my teachers recognized it. When I got a job, I would save up until I the money to buy a computer, a desk, and the works. For months, if I wasn’t in school or working, I hid in my small room and typed up my stories. Finally, I submitted the first one to an agent when I turned eighteen. It took a little time, but it was picked up by a major press, and it took off.”

“That is so amazing. You’re amazing, James.”

“You’re no different, Holiday. I stare at your Christmas wonderland and I’ve wonder what the hell I’ve been missing my entire life.”

“Thank you. I’m not sure what it is about Christmas, but I love it so much. Is it the cinnamon in the air, the shiny colors, the decorative trees, and I’m in heaven.”

“So am I,” I whisper.

The more she speaks about Christmas, the brighter the light in her eyes shines. Holiday is making the icy part of me thaw.

All my life, I never let people get close because people were cruel and used you, but my woman is the opposite. She’s

the person who does the best she can, knows danger is out there, but can't help herself when it comes to being too nice to people.

I bet she would have caved eventually to one of these guys, but she couldn't figure out how to say yes to one without hurting the other's feelings. I took the choice away from her and therefore, made it easy. Even now, I bet she still feels guilty about that fucker at the diner.

“Sugarplum, I'm having a wonderful night, but it's getting late and you need rest. So, take your pretty little bottom to bed, and then I'll be next door, dreaming dirty dreams of you. When you're ready, I'll be eating more than the cookies you make.”

“How am I supposed to sleep now?” she huffs, standing and planting her hands on her hips.

“Come here.” She pouts and shakes her head. “I said come here, my pretty little pervert.”

“I'm not a pervert.”

“You're my little pervert.” I kiss her nose and add, “Walk me to the door and lock it before I change my mind and follow you to bed.”

“Okay. Good night, James.” She follows me to the door, and then I pull her in for one last kiss goodnight. It was the best night of my life.

“See you at four.” My eyes shoot open and my mouth falls open.

“Four in the morning? Shit,” I say, tossing my head back and stomping my foot. Then I look back down at her and

smile. “Just kidding, sugarplum. I’ll be ready for you. Please get some sleep.” I walk away before I can’t will my feet to leave. She leans against the doorjamb and waits for me to reach my porch before she closes the door, and then I safely enter. Tomorrow can’t come soon enough. Fuck, it looks like another night of restless sleep.

Grateful for the icy cold temps out, my cock simmers down for a bit. So I made a pot of coffee and I hit my computer. While it’s brewing, I search the records for the Holiday Hills, and Heath in particular. A few searches come up for names. I pay the fee and pull up the record that matches the age. I have info on the fucking prick after my woman, and I see there’s more to this guy than she’s even aware of.

I’m glad she didn’t give him a shot. He has a criminal history of stalking. Instead of going to bed tonight, I’ll be writing right beside the window that faces her house just in case that fucker decides to drive up here.

All night I wait and watch, but I don’t see any vehicles.

Chapter Nine

Holiday

The door closes, but I'm standing on the other side, hoping that he'll come rushing back over and change his mind about seducing me. What am I thinking? I'm not ready. "Okay, your body is more than ready. Your pussy's throbbing like a cat in heat." At twenty-three, I might be a virgin, but that doesn't mean I don't have experience with pleasing myself. I've read my fair share of smut to become good at making myself come fast and hard. Tonight I won't need much because all my thoughts rest on the man across the way.

James has me panting, lust rushing straight to the little bundle of nerves at the apex of my thighs. I rush to my bedroom, strip out of my clothes, slide under my covers and dig into my drawer for my special toy.

It touches my outer lips and I cry out, already too wound up. "Shit, I hope the noise can't be heard across the way," I wonder aloud. It's so quiet at this hour. I listen to the night, and there's nothing. Still, I turn on my television to drown out the sounds coming from my voice as I think about my new neighbor, his rock-solid body, and the way his lips feel on me. I wish I hadn't sent him away because he could take care of my needs so easily, and I'm sure more than once. Never in my life have I wanted someone the way I want him.

Pressing the vibrator against my clit, I picture him sliding his large hand down to my pussy, strumming it while whispering how much he wants me. "I need you, sugarplum.

You're going to come for me, and I'm going to enjoy watching you soak my fucking fingers before I fuck that pretty little cunt." I lose myself and come too fast. My orgasm shakes my body, and I'm finished before I really get started.

Falling back on the bed, completely worn out, but for the first time I'm not sated. I just relax and think about James. He's kind, smart, handsome, commanding, and a bit domineering. We don't know each other that well, and yet I feel as though I've known him all my life. He's right to call me naïve, but he doesn't see it as a fault. To him, my sweetness is an adorable quirk.

Chapter Ten

James

“Fuck.” I must have dozed off because my alarm goes off at three-thirty, jolting me out of a daze, sending my ass onto the floor next to the desk. Jumping up, I look out the window and nothing looks amiss. My car is still in her driveway. I’m glad I left it there. Maybe he saw it there and took it as a sign that I was inside and stayed away.

I hurry to wash up and run down to her doorway just before four, only to see her pop out front with a beautiful smile on her face that nearly stops my heart. “Just in time.”

I take the steps up and kiss her until we’re both breathless. “Good morning, sugarplum.”

“Good morning, James. Are you ready?”

“I’m not ready to spend the day away from you, but if I must, then let’s get it over it with so we can have a real dinner together.”

“I like that idea, but it’s Christmas Eve.”

“Do you have plans?”

“Well, it’s the Christmas party in the Town Hall Center building.” She bites down on her bottom lip. I find that so sexy.

“Would you like to be my date, Holiday?” I ask, hoping she’ll say yes because I want everyone in town to know she’s mine.

“Yes.”

“Good. What time should I pick you up?”

“I’ll be ready at six. I close up at four today and leave by four-thirty.”

“Wonderful.” We make the short trip to her bakery, and she tells me to pull around to the back.

I walk her to the door and say, “I’m going to wait until you’re inside, okay?”

“That’s fine.” She pauses and bites down on her bottom lip. Damn the woman is too tempting and it’s killing me to leave her, but I know she has her own responsibilities.

“I’ll see you later, sugarplum.” I bend down and kiss her like we both need.

“Fuck, six seems so far away. I might have to stop by and get a cookie fix.” Her eyes light up, letting me know I’m not the only one who doesn’t want to let this moment end.

“I’ll keep some waiting.” She goes inside with a pretty blush on her face.

Once she’s inside, I head back to my car and to the house so I can get some stuff done. There’s a lot to do in the few hours today. The deliveries will be arriving in the next couple of hours. I have time to take a nap. Last night, I managed to get two more chapters done. Since I met her, I’ve gotten more done than I had in two weeks back home. I’ll actually meet my deadline in two weeks. Instead of hitting my bed, I pop on the sofa and pass out quickly.

The sound of my doorbell wakes me up and I grumble, then I remember my ass needs this. So, I rushed to the door. It's the kid from the first day. The look on his face is filled with panic and he takes a step back. "Hey, I've got eight boxes for you. It says to sign for them." He sticks out the little tablet.

"Come on in with them, please," I answer, darting my head outside, hoping that Holiday doesn't stop at home for any reason. The boxes are a dead giveaway of what some of them are since the damn box has a Christmas tree on the side. Others have the ornaments and lights on them.

"She's not home. She's at the shop right now. Holiday never takes time off especially during this time of year."

I let out a heavy sigh. "Oh, okay. Thanks."

"This is a lot of stuff to overnight. We have a store in town," he says.

"Yeah, but I didn't want anyone to tell Holiday about it. I want to surprise her, understand?" A smile spreads over his face.

"Absolutely. This is cool. She's going to love this. You're my last delivery. Do you need any help setting it up?"

"That would be great." There's something I need to say before we get started first. "I was a real dick to you the other day."

"Yeah, but this is for Holiday, and she's a treasure around here. Making her happy is pretty cool in my book. Besides, Bethany at the bakery told me that you're a writer, looking for peace and quiet, so I get it."

“So what’s with everyone being in love with Holiday?”
I grumble, like I’m one to talk.

“Isn’t it obvious? She’s the hot girl next door with her life together, and she’s sweet as pie, not to mention she’s single.” I stare at him like he better stop talking before I boot his ass out my door. He puts his hands up and sputters, “I’m personally not interested in her. I’m happily dating someone, but she’s cool to me and always gives me a treat when I drop off her deliveries.”

“Good. Now, let’s get this done before it gets any later, and I’ll toss you an awesome tip.”

“Sounds cool to me. I’ve got a lot of textbooks to pay for next semester. Med school is going to be expensive.” Med school?

“Congrats.”

He helps me set up the Christmas tree in the corner of my living room near the fireplace. It’s perfect for a night with Holiday in my arms. It takes about two hours to do it all, so I toss him two hundred bucks.

“Wow, thanks, man. You didn’t need to do all that.”

“Your help is huge. Just remember—don’t tell her because I want it to be a massive surprise.”

“Not a problem. She’s going to love it.”

“I hope so.” I ordered her a present or two as well, but now I wanted to go into town and do some shopping too. Maybe there are some other trinkets I can find her. We both walk out together, so I can head into town.

I drive through the hustle and bustle of the Christmas town with a different perspective, and I feel lighter. I call my assistant, needing her to make some arrangements for me. She takes forever to answer, but I'm still in a great mood. "Hello, Sarah."

"What's with that voice? Someone's cheerful. Are you actually getting some writing done?"

"Yes, but that's not why. I need you to look into making this my permanent home."

"What?"

"Yes. I'm making it my permanent home, and if I get my way, I'll be getting married."

"So, I should say congratulations are in order."

"Damn right. Merry Christmas, Sarah. Tell that asshole you married that I guess he's all right, and I hope he has a good one too."

"I heard that."

"Does he always listen in on your calls?" I ask, chuckling.

"No, but—never mind." Her voice is different than normal.

"We were having sex, thank you. Is there anything that you need that can't wait until my wife is thoroughly fucked?" he says with grunt.

"Call me later." I end the call and laugh. He's a dick, but I can't say I blame him. If I was balls deep in Holiday and her phone rang, I'd toss that fucker across the room.

I pull into a parking spot across from the bakery and walk into a mad house. I can't see Holiday because she's so small, but Glen spots me standing at the doorway. He waves me over and I come around to the front.

"Come on to the back. She's in the kitchen and waiting for you."

I step inside and see my pretty girl with her hair up in a bun, dancing around the room to Feliz Navidad while mixing a bowl of frosting.

"So damn sexy," I growl. She gasps and nearly sends the bowl tumbling, but I'm quick to catch it and set it on the counter.

"My hero." She throws her arms around my neck and jumps up, clamping her thighs to my hips. "That deserves a sweet kiss."

We share a deep, tongue-twirling kiss until there's a beeping going off, and then she jumps back. "Sorry, the oven."

"Do you need help?"

"No, just super busy. Sorry, it's crazy today with the last-minute shoppers stopping in for treats, and of course the treats for the party."

"Oh, I didn't know you supply them."

"Yes. I bake all the cookies and cakes. Others bring desserts, but these are my Christmas gift to the town. A little party thing I do every year."

"You're so cute."

“I have some running around to do. Are you sure there’s nothing you need me to do for you?”

“Um... Well, I need to make two deliveries, and I don’t have a guy for that anymore.”

“Come on, sweetheart. Give it to me and I’ll make it happen.”

It takes twenty minutes for us to load the truck with the desserts for the party as well as the other drop-off, and then I give her a kiss before taking off to make them. I have the addresses, and the first one is easy. It takes me ten minutes, but since the party one has five hundred cookies and two large Christmas cakes, I carefully handle them, and the director meets me outside. “Wow, who are you?”

“I’m James, and I’ll be helping Holiday out today.”

“Oh, okay. Thank you. I was worried when they weren’t here yet. I figured she was busy, but we like to have everything set up, and we need it safely delivered. You’re a doll.”

“How long have you been doing this tradition?”

“Since nineteen ten.”

“Wow, it’s an amazing tradition.”

“Will you be joining us this evening?”

“Yes, Holiday and I will be coming.”

“Holiday’s actually coming?” the director’s eyes opened wide.

“Yes.”

“She never....”

“Why doesn’t she come to the parties?” My brows furrow. She mentioned the Christmas event to me.

“Since her parents died in a car accident. They died coming from a party in the city. Completely intoxicated, they drove back because that’s the kind of people they were. They crashed halfway home. She hasn’t been to a party since.” I don’t believe that’s why she hasn’t been to a party, but it could be one of the reasons.

“Well, it’s been a pleasure, but I have to get back before she panics about her truck. See you later.” I take my leave, load the empty rolling cart into the back of the truck, and head back to the bakery. The trip took longer than I expected, and it’s nearly four. I drop off the truck in the back and then walk in. Bethany’s in the process of washing dishes.

“She’s clearing up front. The store’s almost closed. We have pretty much nothing left. I don’t know how she does it, but she manages to bake just the right amount.”

“What do you do here?” I ask.

“A bit of everything: bake, register, paperwork, inventory. Bestie extraordinaire.”

“Beth, has James... you’re back.” Her smile grows wide.

“I just got back. I spoke to the director for a few minutes after unloading.” I raise my brows at her.

“Uh oh, any embarrassing stories?”

“No, just a curious one.”

“Curious? The whole not going to the Christmas party thing?”

“Yes. Any reason in particular?”

“A couple, actually. At first it was my parents’ death, then it was my busy schedule, then it was the perpetual guys asking me out, and now I’m going with someone I want to go with.”

“That’s an answer I can get behind.” I pull her into my arms and kiss her flowery face until I’m groaning and ready to toss her onto the steel tables. Unable to contain myself, I tug my lips away and trail them down her neck. “Let me know if you need anything else from me.” I slowly release her, sliding her down my body so she can feel just what that kiss did to me.

“Just to be ready later. I can’t thank you enough for doing the deliveries.”

“Seeing you smile is enough for me. I’ve got to run, but I’ll see you at six, sugarplum.” I kiss her hard and walk out.

Chapter Eleven

Holiday

It's six, and the doorbell rings. I open it in my pretty, fluffy, blue-with-glittery-silver-sparkles party dress that Bethany picked up for me today. She's a godsend and absolutely amazing. "Wow, I can't wait to show you off."

"Do I look nice?"

"So enchanting." The look in his eyes says more than his words. A low rumble comes from his chest. "I don't know how I'm going to make it through the party." We drive there and I try to make conversation, but my nerves are higher than ever.

"It's a perfect night out, Holiday," James says. "I can't wait to twirl you on the dance floor." I smile, knowing that I only want to be in his arms and it's the only reason I'm here. We park, and he helps me out of the car. As soon as the doors open, the crowds part like the Red Sea and stare at us like a strange exhibit, but James probably just assumes it's because he's new in town and not that I'm some freak that hasn't been to a party since my parents died.

"I'm so glad you made it," Bethany says, pulling me into her arms.

"Hey, get your own date," James snarls, smiling at her while tugging me back into his arms.

We're quickly met with the director for the center, who thanks me for the treats. "I was so surprised you came tonight.

When he said you were coming, I just couldn't believe it."

"Ta-da. I'm here."

"Well, it's good to see you again, but I came to twirl my woman around the dance floor before we go home and celebrate my favorite Holiday." James winks and leads me over to the middle of the floor where only a handful of couples have started dancing.

He spins me in close and then slides his hand down to the small of my waist just above my ass before firmly pulling me flush against his strong, taut body. "Holiday, shall we dance?"

"We shall." I find myself being under his control so effortlessly, and then his lips come down to mine just as the song comes to an end. "Take me home and make love to me."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes." We hurry back to the car before anyone can stop us, waving bye to our two cohorts, Bethany and Glen, who just laugh.

"At least I got my dance." We lasted a whole seven minutes at the party, but that was all I needed. The trip home is almost perfect, until I see my front porch up in flames.

James is quick to call the fire department while pulling out the hose from the side of his house because mine has been cut. It's close enough to reach, but my car is in the garage. He grabs my keys and quickly reverses my car out so it doesn't catch fire and explode, but I can't do anything but watch my life go up in a blaze on Christmas Eve.

The fire department arrives, some still in their tuxes from the party and others who were on duty getting to work. Luckily, most of my house didn't catch fire. It was only half the house, but so much of it has water damage. "Holiday, we're so sorry, but you can't stay here."

"I don't understand what happened."

"Where's the fire chief?" he snarls.

"I'm right here, Mr. Snow. I can see you're upset, and I appreciate your efforts because you saved both of your homes by moving the vehicle, but what can I help you with?"

"Was this arson?"

"We won't know until morning."

"If it is, it's more than likely Heath Jones. He's got a track record for stalking, and he about to be fired and quit after he insulted Holiday in public at the diner."

"Yes, we all heard about it. It's a small town. Honestly, no one has seen him since, so we'll be looking for him. However, it's common for fires to happen at Christmas time."

"James, can I stay with you tonight?"

"Sugarplum, I planned to have you stay with me anyway. I had a special surprise planned for tonight."

"You did?" I ask through my sobs.

"Sweet girl, I have wiped away more of your tears in the past week than I care to for a lifetime. You shouldn't have to be sad." He kisses my forehead. Looking over my head, he says, "Chief, please call us when you have news, and thank you for putting out the fire."

“Merry Christmas, eh?”

“Merry Christmas.”

James leads me inside and once the door opens, so does my mouth. In the corner of his living room is a gorgeous six-foot Christmas tree all lit up. “James, you did this?”

“Yes, Holiday.”

I turn around and ask, “Why?”

“Because for the first time in forever, I wanted to have a real Christmas, and you make me want that. You make things better. I can see why everyone adores you. In the few days that I’ve known you, I’ve been mesmerized, and I don’t want to let you go. You’re my greatest gift. My truly favorite Holiday.”

“Let’s get comfortable.” We take off our shoes by the door so we don’t track water all over the house. Then he slides behind me and slowly slips my coat off my shoulders, peppering kisses down my neck onto my collarbone. “You can stop me at any time.”

I turn around and face him, brushing my hands over his broad chest to find he’s taken off his coat and suit jacket. During the blaze, he’d already freed his tie, and damn, did he look so hot being my hero. “I don’t want you to stop until we’re both screaming,” I answer, unashamed of my feelings.

Nodding, he pulls the blanket off the back of the sofa and onto the floor. Taking my hand, he leads me over there. Our kisses only deepen and I’m shaking with need, tugging his shirt loose from his dress pants. I can’t handle the pressure building inside of me as I touch the bare skin of his taut,

muscular abs. James is all I want. All these years I've waited for him, and now's the time.

He slowly lowers my zipper, fingers teasing my heated flesh, lightly touching the edge of my breast, and I gasp from the sensual pleasure. My dress falls into a puddle of tulle and satin around my feet.

"I need you now." His words are shaky, hungry.

"I'm yours."

He spins me and quickly we're on the sofa, his body over mine, kissing me with his hands sliding up and down my sides, caressing my ass and bringing my leg up around his waist as he grinds his hips into me. Oh, goodness, I can feel every inch of him.

Lazily he plays with my breasts, pushing them together as he sucks on one and then the other. Pleasure shoots through me, and I want to cry out. His fingers slide lower, dipping into my panties.

"Oh, James. Please. Yes." He sucks on my nipple and pushes one finger inside. My head falls back off the sofa, and I nearly fall apart.

"Yes, sugarplum, tell me. Do you like that?"

"Yes. I need more."

"Good girl. So damn good. You're not going to come yet. I want you to come on my tongue first." He pulls his finger from my panties, and I'm devastated. Grabbing the edge of his shirt, he lifts it off. Popping off the sofa, he spins me so I'm sitting on it with my ass barely on the edge. Gripping my

panties, he yanks them off, and then he tosses my legs over his shoulders.

“I want to taste something else so sweet.” Dipping his head down, he slices my pussy wide with the broadside of his tongue. Like a magic tool, the man works my clit, and I’m screaming and coming when he pushes two fingers into my tight hole.

“So tight, my little pervert. Are you…” I blush and duck my head. In a blur of frenzied movements, James strips out of his clothes, returning down onto me completely naked. He doesn’t need the answer because it’s obvious. We move to the middle of the floor just next to the Christmas tree and the fireplace. It’s lit up beautifully, but it’s the man in front of me that couldn’t be more beautiful.

If I thought he was hot with his towel on; without it, he’s a perfect male specimen. From his dark hair to his nicely trimmed stubble on his chiseled jaw, down to his broad shoulders, well-defined chest and abs, killer calves and thighs—but that damn monster in the middle is a whole other thing.

His cock is just insane the way it defies gravity and yet it’s huge, pointing right at me, warning me that I’m next and going to be in trouble. My pussy is going to be demolished by that beast. Still, I want it—I want to touch it, taste it, feel it on me, in me. I’m so horny that every single nerve ending in my body is demanding the need for release.

“Time to tell me to stop,” James says with his cock pressing at my entrance. I don’t say anything. My reply consists of my hips rolling onto his tip, sending it inside. “Fuck, you’re playing dirty, little girl. Be careful. We’re going

to take it slow so I don't hurt you." His mouth latches onto my throat, sucking and kissing me until I feel him rocking in and out, each stroke pushing deeper and deeper.

"Wow. Oh, shit." Damn, the towel hid a lot.

"Relax, my sweet little Holiday."

"You're so big."

"You can take it. Just breathe." He doesn't stop and I don't want him to because I need this. God, do I need this.

"Yes, James." I cling to his biceps and tip my head back. He grunts and dips his head, pressing his mouth against the column of my throat. Slowly he bites and licks my skin while his hips thrust into me.

"Fuck, you're so sexy. Every little moan, every whimper has me on edge." How did he take away the pain so easily? I'm almost there, and then he slips his hand in between us and finds my clit, strumming it until I can't catch my breath and my orgasm rips through my body. The feeling is completely different than when I'm alone. There is something about all his strength surrounding my small frame that adds to the intensity, bottling up pressure between my legs until I explode.

"James," I scream, finding my air and sound. "Shit. I'm coming, so good." I can feel my pussy dripping all over him.

"That's my girl. Come so prettily. There you go. Fuck, I'm going to fill you up." He grips my hips harder than before and I smile. James lets out several deep grunts and moans while drills into me as I fall into a blissful haze, pussy

throbbing out the last shivers, and then I feel him jerk inside of me, filling me with his seed.

“Fuck, you’re so perfect.” He kisses me so hard with a possessiveness while pumping into me as if he’s making sure his filling stays where he put it. “You’re mine.” He wraps me up in his arms, and we cuddle next to the tree.

Chapter Twelve

James

The sun is up, and Holiday stares out my window at her home in her panties and my dress shirt from last night. The morning light shines like a halo around her, making her glow, and I bask in her beauty for a moment and try to avoid that moment of sadness. Still, I take a picture on my phone because she looks ethereal.

I figure this is the time to cheer her up a bit, so I run over to the tree and grab one of the gifts from under it. Sidling up behind her, I slip my arms around her waist with my present in hand. “Merry Christmas, sugarplum.”

“You got me something?”

“A few little somethings,” I say with a subtle shrug. She opens up the box, and it’s a beautifully handcrafted ornament I found in town that reads *Our First Christmas 2023*.

She spins around, and tears spring from her eyes. “This is perfect, James. I love it. Does this mean we’re going to have more?”

“All of them from here on out, sugarplum. I don’t want another one without you. I love you, Holiday.”

“I’m naïve, but that doesn’t change the way I feel about you. I love you too. You came into town and accidentally stole my heart.”

“I believe you were saving it for me. How about you call your friends and have them stop by here and we can make

some turkey sandwiches for lunch, so you can keep your Christmas traditions. I'm sure they're all worried about you."

"Really?"

"Yes. I have to call the chief and see if he has any more information and when we can enter the house again."

"Oh, goodness. I don't have any clothes."

"Can your friend bring some over? Until then, you look pretty sexy in mine," I growl.

Her phone rings. "I guess I don't need to call them."

I reach for her phone and hand it over. "It's Bethany," I whisper, handing it over.

"Hey, girl," she shouts. "Please tell me you're okay. I didn't hear about the damn fire until I got up this morning. Why didn't you call me?"

"I'm good. My house isn't, but I'm next door. I was just going to call you and Glen. I don't have any clothes."

"I'll be right over, girl. You know the stores are closed, but I got some of your things here and I got some stuff that should fit. I don't have any shoes, though. You have smaller feet."

"That's okay. I won't go out until tomorrow I guess."

My doorbell rings, and I head over to see who it is with the fireplace poker. For all I know, it could be that asshole stalker. "It's the police and the fire chief." I open the door.

"Mr. Snow, may we come in?"

“Sure. I’m sorry to see you both today. You should be with your families.”

“Yes, but we will be shortly. We wanted to give you an update.”

“Beth, I have to go.” Holiday ends her call and comes to my side. I grab the blanket and wrap it over her shoulders, giving her a little more coverage to my satisfaction.

“So what’s the news, Officers?”

“It was definitely arson, and Mr. Jones has already been apprehended. He accidentally caught himself on fire in the process. Mr. Snow, when you removed the vehicle from the garage, you apparently saved his life. He’d gotten himself caught in the blaze he created and didn’t have an escape route. He used the open garage as an exit, allowing him to run into the woods behind the house. We found the foot tracks through the snow. He’s in the hospital in stable condition and will make it.”

“What about Holiday’s home?”

“Well, there’s a lot of damage, so it’s going to need massive repairs. I can’t say what’s salvageable, but the back entrance didn’t receive any damage, and we were able to contain the fire to the front of the home. Holiday, you will not be able to enter the home wearing clothes like that. There is a lot of messy debris and dangerous fumes in the air from the melted plastic and other objects, plus any water damage that could cause mold.”

“I recommend you hire a team to come in here and clean it up.”

“I have to be back at work.”

“So where is your bedroom?”

“It’s toward the back of the house upstairs.”

“That area wouldn’t have seen too much damage.”

“Do you have any gear in your vehicle I can borrow to gather some of her work clothes that I can wash for her?”

“Yes, I do, Mr. Snow. I’ll take you in there right now.”

“I’ll get my statement from you, then, Holiday.”

We head on over and I’m glad that her place isn’t completely destroyed, but the charred smell in the air is definitely going to take a while to clear. “We turned off the gas lines, so it’s going to be freezing in there.”

“Fun. Let’s just grab what she needs and hope it’s not a total disaster.”

We head inside and upstairs. I find her bedroom, and thankfully there’s only a hint of icy water on the ground. It cracks into shards. Damn, the damage is going to be extensive.

“Okay.” I open her bedroom and the floor thankfully is dry, but the smell is still in here. Looking in her closet, I find a suitcase, so I fill it up with clothes from her underwear drawers, and then I look for her baking-type clothes, including the suit jacket I saw her wear yesterday. I’m grateful my place has a washer and dryer.

“Don’t forget some bathroom essentials for women. A brush, deodorant, and female products,” the fire chief says.

“Smart.”

He nods. "I've been through this with many victims over the years. Her room seems the least affected, so that's really great."

"Thanks again for this. For now, this should be good."

"What about shoes? Are there some in here? Everyone said she was at the party last night. I bet she's never going to want to go to one of those again." I groan, thinking about that shit, but I'll make sure she does because we can't live our lives in fear.

"She will. A better background on employees is a must for her. I'll demand it." We head back to my house, and her friends are already there.

Glen comes out to meet us. "You need any help?"

"No, we got it."

He points at the house, shaking his head. "They are having a girl chat in there."

"The sheriff left?"

"Yes. He got his report and said he would like to get back to his family."

"Good. I'll be heading out now as well."

I handed the fire marshal back the hard hat and gloves. "Thanks again."

"We'll be in touch with more information." He leaves after shaking our hands.

"You just stumbled into the thick of things," Glen says.

I sigh because it's not quite like that. "I caused this. The little psycho stalker didn't have a problem when she was refusing everyone, but since I claimed her, he lost his shit."

"Still, the bastard is paying for it, and she's safe." He claps my shoulder in understanding. "Things hopefully will get better and at least Holiday seems happy given everything."

I smile. "She really does."

I'm almost to the door when I see another car pull up. I stop, and it's my assistant. "Sarah, Brett, what are you two doing here?"

"Well, you told us you were getting married and moving here, and we just couldn't wait, so we decided to surprise you."

"This is a new development." They stare at Glen.

"He's kinky," Glen teases, giving them a wink.

"Be quiet, or I'll kick you out on Christmas."

"Fine, but Holiday didn't say you proposed."

"Because he didn't," Holiday says from the doorway.

"Please tell me you have clothes on." I turn around, and she's in a cute outfit with a puffy blue coat. I take the last two steps and slip my arms around her and plant a kiss on her lips before saying, "Merry Christmas, sugarplum. Let me introduce you to my lousy assistant and her asshole husband. They used to be my friends, but since they ruined my surprise..."

"Hey, I was an asshole before I ruined your surprise," Brett says, sounding offended.

“Well, it wasn’t a surprise since you said you wanted to spend all our Christmases together.”

“I suppose it’s not.” I kiss her temple and then turn to my unexpected but very welcome guests despite my bullshit. “Well, do you want to come in? We’re having an impromptu gathering. There’s not much to eat.”

“Actually, Glen, Sheila, and Beth brought food over.”

“Wow, I guess they’re cool.”

“Oh, my goodness—that’s so terrible that happened to someone’s house right before Christmas.”

“It’s mine,” Holiday answers with a sheepish frown. “It’s a long story.”

“Well, we haven’t met officially, but I’m Sarah, like the sister James never wanted. Come on and introduce me to everyone.” She hugs Holiday’s shoulders and heads inside.

We all go into the house and celebrate until two o’clock when everyone has to leave, and then it’s just Holiday and me. “I love you, James. You made today fabulous.”

“Hardly—our friends did that.”

“You still are pretty wonderful.”

“Thank you, my future wife. Now, let us celebrate by getting you naked, worshipped, and then into bed because you head back to work in the morning and so am I.”

“You’re right. Are you always going to take care of me?” she asks, patting her hand on my chest.

“I’m willing to try.” I pat her ass and then flip her into my arms and carry her into the bedroom. “First thing on my

agenda is to eat that sweet pussy of yours until you're screaming my name."

"That's the kind of care I could get used to." I kiss her soft lips and then lay her down onto the bed, pinning her body between the mattress and myself. Hovering over her, I stare into her trusting eyes. Sliding down her supple frame to lift the edge of her top up, I rub my face over her flat tummy. She giggles when my stubble tickles her soft skin.

I swipe my tongue around her belly button and blow on her wet skin. She giggles softly again, pushing my head away. "James." I take her scolding with pride and move down, gripping the edge of her cute pink sweatpants. She has to go commando until the laundry's done, but I'm not one to complain. Her sweet treat is completely at my disposal. She helps me tug them off, one leg and then the other, losing them on the floor before moving back into position nestled between her thighs.

Greedy with the need to please, I toss her legs over my shoulders and place my fingertips on her mound while my thumbs and pointer fingers part her little cunt open. So sweet and delicious, just like her cookies. It's like she bathes her cookie in vanilla cream. I can't get enough of her, and I push my finger into her wetness while I tongue the fuck out of her. She rocks her hips, rolling them side to side on the bed, clinging to the sheets.

"Oh, oh." Her whimpers turn into moans and then into a crescendo of cries. Her body shakes and pulses around my tongue, coming so intensely that she freezes, clenching her slender thighs. "James, make love to me."

“Baby, aren’t you sore?”

“No, I need you inside me. I need to feel your strength.”

“For you? Anything.” Kissing her thighs, I set her legs down on the mattress to give her a little break, and then I stand to strip out of my clothes. She smiles and stares with hazy, satisfied eyes as I pull my shirt over my head.

Lifting up onto her elbow to get a better view, she raises an eyebrow and smirks. “Enjoying the show?”

“Yes, I am. You are one handsome man.”

“That’s my little pervert. Come here and touch what you really want.” A sexy moan comes from her as she lifts up onto all fours and moves toward the edge of the bed. Fuck, my dick throbs as I undo my zipper and lower my pants. Holiday’s little pink tongue peeks from between her lovely lips.

“So sexy, Mr. Snow.”

“What do you want, Ms. Belle?”

“Can I…”

“Can you what, sugarplum? Do you want to touch it?” She nods her pretty little head, curls bouncing. “Go ahead.”

She reaches out a tentative hand, gripping my thick length, feeling the girth before stroking it slowly. Her tongue slides across her lips back and forth, tempting me.

“Sweetheart, your tongue would be much better on me.”

Leaning in, she takes her first lick. “Like that?” she asks, looking up at me with her submissive, trusting eyes.

“Yes, now slide it over that tongue and into that hot mouth. Suck it.” I’m so fucking hard at the mixture of innocent seduction that Holiday brings. The velvety feel of her tongue along the underside of my cock nearly undoes me, but I have to take control. Fisting those blonde curls, I pump my hips, gently fucking her face. She chokes so I ease up and pull back, but my sexy woman grumbles and pulls my thick rod back into her mouth. Fuck, she’s going to make me nut.

“No, baby.” I pull out. “This cum is for that pussy of yours. I need to put our baby in you. You want that, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Next year, I want to be holding our son or daughter around the Christmas tree. Lie back and spread them thighs so you can make me a daddy.” Holiday turns around on the bed and gets into position.

She opens her legs and presses her fingers into her slit, moaning. “Fuck, my pussy is so wet.”

“Give me those fingers.” She pulls them out and feeds them to me. “So damn good.”

I climb in between her legs and slide into her entrance. “Time to leave another gift for both of us.” My palms flatten on the mattress, framing her face, and then I lower myself to kiss my woman. “You’re mine, Holiday. Forever.” We fuck until we can’t see straight, and I fill her up with her name falling from my lips.

“Christmas is forever going to be my favorite holiday,” she says.

I kiss her lips and whisper as we both drift off, “You’ll always be mine.”

Epilogue

Holiday

I'm standing in front of our mini mansion and smiling. After the fire destroyed the front half, the water and cold had done damage to a majority of the back. Not many of my belongings were salvageable, but James had a wonderful idea. As a wedding present, he decided to expand this home and demolish my old one to make ours one massive house.

Now, it's covered in Christmas lights artfully put on by a company that James hired out of New York. They came in and certified that all the work was safe and up to code, which made me feel reassured as I held my three-month-old son.

"How do you like it, sugarplum?" James asks, sliding up behind me with his arms wrapping around my waist.

"I love it, and I think he does too."

"I bet you do, son, don't you? You're going to have lots of fun when we give you a little sibling to play with soon."

"What?" I gasp, pretending we aren't playing a dangerous game because I'm not on any birth control and I haven't even tried to get on any.

"My sweet little wife, I've been trying to get you pregnant the second he came out."

"Yes, but I have a bakery to run."

"I'm home with the baby most of the day, remember?"

“Yes. You’re a wonderful dad.”

“We can use protection any time you want. I’ll get some today.”

“No. No. We tried, and I didn’t like it.”

“Well, then, you can talk to the doctor about getting you some sort of birth control for now.”

“Maybe one more baby before then.”

“Okay. Sounds wonderful to me. So how about we get out of the cold so you can show me how to bake some cookies and I read to you the little Christmas story I wrote for our baby boy Simon?”

“I’d love that.”

His latest novel hit all the bestsellers’ lists, and he’s been offered a movie contract on it. It’s going to be an amazing thriller. I’m sure this isn’t anything like that. He loves to make up silly little innocent tales to tell our son. I wonder if he’s going to turn them into children’s novels one day. James has an amazing mind, and I hope that any children we have inherit that gift.

James

An additional child turned into four more. Getting on birth control seemed to always slip our minds until it was too late and we had another baby on the way. I have all four home today.

Our oldest, Simon, is seven and enjoying the Christmas break. Nothing like hanging out with Dad while he writes his latest novel, which is due to my editor by the fifth. Thankfully, I'm almost done. With so many children and Holiday still being the queen of the town baking her heart out at Holiday's Cookies, I'm lucky I have time, but I find my rhythm. My family gives me the peace I never had before I drove my grumpy ass into town all those years ago.

"Dad," Colin shouts.

"Daddy," Katie Bear squeals.

"Daddy," Dean calls.

"What, kids?"

"Mom's home," they shout simultaneously as if I didn't know. I've had trackers on her car, her phone, her diamond ring, and one in her purse after that shit with Jones. Her safety means everything to me. She knows all about it and doesn't mind one bit, but I have to make sure she's okay because she's my reason for breathing every single day and her heart is still made of gold.

I walk out of my office with Simon trailing and trying to keep up with my long strides.

“Sugarplum, it’s so good to see you home.” I pull her in for a long, deep kiss that lifts her off her feet and into my arms.

“What’s with the specially wrapped cookies?” I ask after she slides down my body and onto her feet again.

She pats me on the chest. “We have a new neighbor. I was going to go take some cookies over and greet him.”

“The hell you are,” I snarl, picking her up around the waist and carrying her back inside the house.

“You know you were an anomaly. I’ve greeted many people in town before, and never have they ever been naked before.”

“I don’t give a fuck. End of story, Mrs. Snow. You’re not doing it. Kids, your mother and I need some alone time.” I carry her up to our bedroom and strip her out of her work uniform, tossing her face down on the mattress. “Ass up, wife.” I slap her pale cheeks, watching them jiggle and pinken with my handprint.

I undo my pants and test her entrance, which is already fucking wet. Holy shit. “You’re mine,” I grunt and slam into her hole. One hand tugs roughly on her hair, and the other presses on the small of her back. “This is what you need. You need to be reminded that you’re mine. This is what I would have done to you if I had known you were just next door. I would have snuck inside and pinned you down and punished you for staring at my cock like you wanted it so bad.”

“Fuck, James. I was such a bad girl. I wanted to see it. I don’t know what came over me. I wanted the towel to slip.”

“You’re my little pervert. Only mine until we die. Wife, you better remember that.” My hand comes down again.

She bites down on her hand, coming fast and hard, pussy clenching like a fist around my cock. I pump violently and unload into her.

Leaning down over her, I whisper, “You’ll always be mine and mine alone.”

“Happy Anniversary, James.”

I pulled out of her and start at her words. “There’s no fucking new neighbor.”

“Nope. I figured you couldn’t come to the door in a towel, so I improvised.”

“Fucking hell, wife. I love you too much. It made me insane.”

“I know, and I love it, so I think if you get downstairs fast enough, there might actually be cookies left for you.”

“With those cookie monsters?”

We both answer, “Never.”

“Happy Anniversary, Holiday.” I kiss her temple.

Twenty years later

Life has been good. Katie has taken over for Holiday, running the baker full time, so I have my bride of over thirty years to myself these days. Our kids are grown and all out of the house with families of their own. My career hasn't ended, but I've slowed down, releasing only one book a year at the most.

What I prefer to do is chase around my sexy wife and see if I can get her naked as often as I can.

"Sugarplum, where are you?" I call from the top of the steps.

"In the living room," she calls out in a sing-song voice. I scurry down after my shower in just my towel. The room is scented with cinnamon and fresh pine. As always it embodies Christmas, but none of the many decorations catch my attention. I'm drawn to the beautiful blonde near the middle of the room who has lit some of the scented candles.

She turns the second she hears me enter the room. "Wow, Mr. Snow. I don't have any cookies for you at the moment..."

"Don't worry, you have something else I'd much rather eat." I'm on her in a flash, grabbing her ass and lifting her into my arms, kissing her soft lips. "Wife, I need you."

"I need you always." She uses her foot and nudges the towel off my ass, sending it to the floor. Growling, I lift up her sexy dinner party dress and slide her panties to the side.

“Good, because you’re mine.” Pinning her against the living room wall and knocking down a picture frame, I shove my cock into her hole. “Fuck, you feel incredible, sugar.”

“My lover, I can never get enough. Take me.” Her fingers dig into my now salt and pepper hair, tugging on it, reminding me that I need a cut.

I press my face in the crease between her neck and shoulder, fucking her roughly. The years have only intensified our lovemaking, and with no kids around I’ll do her on any spot I can find.

“Fuck, baby. I’m about to come,” I growl against her pulse.

“Yes, I’m coming too.” That’s when the sound of the tires against the snow hits our ears. “Fuck, they’re here.” I unload my release into my wife, rutting a few more times before hurriedly setting her onto her feet. She tosses me the towel and then I dash off to the bedroom chuckling all the way there.

The sound of my son and his wife with their three boys greeting my wife can be heard and I make my change as fast as possible. “Where’s Dad?”

“He’s changing. He was busy digging deep today and got a late start.”

“Wow, so when is the new book coming.”

“Not until next fall, but I just to get in a good shot today. Sorry about the delay,” I say, walking down the stairs in my cable-knit sweater and khaki slacks with my black glasses,

looking ever the grandpa not the horny husband hunting down his beautiful wife.

“What happened here?” my daughter-in-law asks, picking up the picture frame I knocked down.

“Oh I bumped it on my way to get the door. Clumsy,” Holiday says.

“Our First Christmas. 2023,” my grandson says, checking out the ornaments.

“It’s my favorite one.”

“Why? It’s pretty old.”

“It’s because it’s the first time I met your grandmother and she stole my heart and made me fall in love with the holiday.”

“I can’t imagine not loving Christmas.”

“That’s because your grandpa and grandma always make it so,” Simon explains.

“Come on, kids. It looks like the rest of the family has arrived.”

Every day gets better and better with Holiday. I’m hoping for another thirty Christmases.

THE END

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