

BELLA'S Bliss

BABES IN TOYLAND

BRYNN HALE

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LAST CHAPTER PRESS LLC



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BELLA'S BLISS INFO

Bella

My sisters thought they'd surprise me with a trip to see my friend for Christmas.

Little did I know, it was a set up for an intervention.

They all think I'm cynical about love...well, who wouldn't after what I've been through?!

A gift exchange has me considering finding a new friend, and when the gift slips from my hands and out the window onto the handsome neighbor's lap below, I'm mortified.

The amusing mishap does lead to a date. And maybe an intervention of love.

Cam is take-charge, ask questions later, and makes me feel more than I've ever felt.

But my bliss is shattered when Cam's past comes knocking on the door.

Can I trust that he's truly ready for love again...and more importantly, am I?

Bella's Bliss is the fourth in the Babes in Toyland series of heartwarming, humorous, instalove stories. No cheating. No cliffhangers. Always a happily ever after.

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LAST WEEK...

KRITI

You can tell it's the holidays, a store like this is packed with a menagerie of dutiful spouses looking to spice things up and singles looking to be a little less lonely with themselves.

Red, orange, green, purple—*doesn't anything come flesh colored?* My head is on a swivel, trying to spot the perfect one. There's big ones. There's short fat ones. There's ones with fifteen different settings. Gizmos and vajayjay gadgets galore!

This store certainly has plenty of thingamabobs and thingamajills, and a person could spend hours looking for just the right... one.

But I'm not shopping for myself. I'm on the lookout for a gift for my best mate, Bella Hanes. You might be wondering what type of store I'm in—

Ooh, there's skin tones!

I bolt away from the wall of rainbow rubber to the more natural looking toys. This isn't a place for kiddos though. This is as adult as it gets and admittedly my first time in a store like this. I've browsed online but it doesn't quite compare to being face to face with so many fictitious phallic fantasies.

It's almost overwhelming the number of choices. Who comes up with all these designs? Who tests these designs?

I grip a particularly girthy one and giggle.

Who models for these designs?

I'm not too ashamed to ask for help. I grab twelve at random and approach the check-out desk. The young man behind it pales as I slam them all on the counter.

"Which do you think is the best?" I ask simply. It's really the only thing I need to know.

His cheeks flush as I've laid out a dozen dinglehoppers before him. His eyes flicker to his zipper and he grows redder in the face. All the random items I've brought to the counter are above average and impressive in their... circumference.

"I just work here!" He panics, stepping back, holding up his hands. "I—I—I don't use this stuff. My section is over there!" He points over my shoulder to lingerie and life-like dolls.

Smooth, girl, real smooth.

I could buy all twelve, give Bella a sexy advent calendar to remember the holidays. She could use the gift of giving. Her love life certainly hasn't been doing that for her. Bella's been through more guys than toys on the counter and not a single one has stuck around. And it's definitely not Bella, she's a doll. One of my favorite friends in the whole world. It's them.

Men. They're why I have a sex vlog—video blog—and podcast. I gotta keep my ladies informed and on their toes when it comes to men and their wicked ways.

But being singles makes the holidays a bitter time for Bella. With her sisters married with stellar husbands and parents still happily married, it's a sore point. And now they've decided to drop Bella off on my doorstep this year like an orphan on Christmas while they all take a couples' holiday cruise for ten days around the Caribbean.

She'll be flying in in a few hours, and I don't have much time to look up reviews on these bad boys.

There's a gentle tap on my shoulder.

"Here." A smaller package is slid into my hands when I turn around. I'm more stunned by the visage of a gorgeous

man in front of me than the fact that he's put a Polly-pocket rocket in my hands.

"This one?" I ask him, nibbling my bottom lip. I haven't even looked at his suggestion, a little caught up by the way his mouth moves into an easy smile. Does he even work here?

"My recommendation," he coolly responds. He has a few purchases of his own under his arm and I'm curious.

"It's a gift. Not for me," I point out, my skin tingling and my brain numbing by his beauty.

"Maybe you should buy two? My *ex*-girlfriend—" he makes a point to say *ex* with emphasis "—loved it. Really hit the spot. If you know what I mean." He winks.

He's confident in the pick and himself. He's sex on two long legs. And frankly, that's all the raving review I need.

I twirl back around to the clerk, still mortified at the collection on the counter.

"I'll take this one, please." Looking back over my shoulder I wink back. "And I'll take your number."

Picking up a guy my first time in an adult store, now that's a story



BELLA

It was nice of my sisters, Becky and Brittany, to ship me off to Denver like an expelled child sent to boarding school. My southern California mild winter weather is replaced with biting cold, and my nose has been red like Rudolph's ever since we landed.

"It could be colder," Kriti told me when I first arrived, so I guess I need to count my blessings, but this trip isn't exactly how I expected to be spending my holiday.

With the sky barren of clouds, the sun even makes it tolerable to be sitting outside on her small deck enjoying a hot cocktail as I shake off the propeller lag for the tiny ass plane my sister's ticketed me on. Kriti's got her little outdoor gas-lit fireplace going for extra warmth and my sweatshirt is helping.

My sisters and parents are in marriage bliss on a boat while I sour and wrinkle from the long line of repeated bad choices in men I've made over the years. While the rest of my family are cruising in the Caribbean waters, I am on a deck in Colorado.

There are plusses...

There's Kriti, my bestie with the best humor ever, and there are no ex-boyfriends in Colorado.

I smile at that, sipping my peppermint espresso martini with satisfaction.

A girl's trip, no men, it's perfect...

It just should be on a beach, and this should be a Mai Tai or pina colada.

As Kriti joins me on the deck, refreshing my martini, she settles into the lawn chair beside me, throwing sunglasses on. With her here, the sun does seem friendlier, and her bronze skin adds to the idea that I might get a tan and I can pretend I'm on a destination island...

Albeit Kriti's tan is far more natural than mine.

"I got you something," Kriti starts vaguely and keeping her nose to the sun.

I roll onto my side to look at her, trying to guess what it could be. I never ask for anything so it's always a surprise what Kriti comes up with. We're often apart during holidays and birthdays so a package is always at my door or sent to my law firm when she sends me something.

"Are you going to make me guess?" I try to spot a glimpse of wrapping paper or a hidden bag.

Her full lips crack into a wide grin and a giggle slips out. "No, I don't think in a million years you'd guess right."

She grabs a small box out from under her chair, bright silver and purple wrapping paper is reflective in the sun. I've been too busy brooding in my own world to even notice it. She wordlessly hands it over to me though the giggles slip out every other breath.

"What the fuck?" The color on the wrapping is fitting because the gift inside is bright purple with silver buttons.

Kriti's giggles settle as she takes on a serious demeanor. "I know it's hard to be alone, especially during this time of year. I hope this helps you realize you can control your own destiny."

I blink. She's not seriously insinuating I try this, here at her home?!

"I'm sorry, my destiny? What does the purple people eater have to do with my destiny? Are you Gandalfing me right now?"

“It’s not the one ring to rule them all...but you could let it rule you for a night.”

My eyes roll but whether she’s pulling my leg or not, it isn’t the worst gift I’ve received. “So you think my destiny is to be alone? And it’s not safe to go alone, right?”

“Hopefully not. But I’m encouraging you to be healthy and happy while you swear off men.”

After my last break up I did swear them off. All the men I thought would be Mr. Right, all thought of me as Miss Right Now. And the last one I even bragged to my friends Zena and Zeek about and then the guy was gone faster than a California rain.

“Will you swear off men with me?” I ask, flipping the package over. “Shit, Kriti, twelve settings?! How many different ways can something vibe?”

Kriti ignores my request, sliding off her chair to sit beside me. “Dang, twelve? I didn’t really read it. I mostly got a recommendation and went with it...even if the reviewer turned out to be a total asshat.”

“You selected one at random?” I whisper after hearing a neighbor’s sliding door.

Oh dear Saint Nicholas, if people knew what we were talking about.

“Not entirely. Like I said it *came* recommended to make you... well, *come*.” Kriti doesn’t keep her voice down.

“Shhh, people can hear you,” I hiss.

The neighbor beside us glances our way before closing her sliding door behind her with a shake of her head.

“Ignore her. That’s Mrs. Stanford and she’d be nosy if we were talking about knitting.” Kriti goes on, lost in thought and unashamed. “Maybe I should swear off men and get one too? Please tell me we thought along the same lines, and you bought me a pocket rocket too?”

I’ll take the break in embarrassment.

“No dice.” I slip the envelope out of my back pocket and hand it to her.

There are squeals and giggles and hugs after she’s realized I’ve given her tickets to her favorite band.

“These are totally sold out!” She squeezes me tightly.

“I know, I’m the best gift giver,” I smug point out. If only the men I’ve been with appreciated my sense of giving as much as Kriti does.

My stomach hollows out with sadness. I can’t keep being upsets. It’s not good for digestion or stomach acid. Ulcers hurt, I’ve heard.

She leans back onto her chair, arching a brow at me. “Is that a subtle jab at your gift?”

“No! Thank you. It’s very...” I chew my lip for the right word. “Weird.”

Kriti pouts.

I reach out and squeeze her arm. “But it’s also thoughtful for you to want to make me happier than most of the men in my bed ever have. That’s true friendship.”

She smiles smugly. “I got earplugs too, so enjoy the holidays!” She cheers me with her glass and settles back in a sunbathing position.

“True friendship,” I mumble with a shake of my head.

I take my time opening the packaging, cursing as I struggle with the hard plastic.

Man, they don’t want people to get into these things. What if there’s an orgasm emergency?

Eventually, with a tear and a jerk of my arms it rips open, and like a tiny seagull made of silicone and batteries it goes flying through the air.

Slamming onto the deck, the toy does the worst thing I can imagine. It turns on. Vibrating in a jerking and rocking way, it starts to bounce and travel across the wood.

“Fuck!” I scramble out of my chair and onto all fours, chasing after the toy that’s sprouted a mind of its own. “Come here. Come back here!” I call it like it’s some sentient being.

Kriti shouts encouragement as I lunge for the little purple monster. I near the edge of the deck, the black railing a warning sign.

I use my long arms to reach it.

Almost...

Got...

It...

But it slips past my fingernails, desperately reaching for the toy as it nears the edge.

My shoulders slam into the deck railing as I thrust my head and arms through the gaps. But I’m too slow and far too clumsy, and it descends out of my reach, falling to the patio below.

A patio that I hope is unoccupied.

I peek over the edge. My hopes are crushed as the gift lands in lap of the neighbor below and ocean blue eyes flash up to meet mine.

Oh Crap!

If I just pull back now I can feign ignorance, or that it came from the third floor. And never return to this deck again. If he tries to return it, I can just exclaim how odd it is that the sky is raining clam ticklers.

Except, when I go to make my quick escape, I’m not Houdini. My ears turn red as I pull and push and twist... but I am stuck.

Maybe he’ll look away and ignore me.

But he doesn’t. *Of course.*

Gingerly, he picks the toy off his lap and waves it at me, half of his lips lifting into a smile.

“Drop this?” he asks, voice filled with a deep, dark dangerous timbre that would make a lumberjack weak in the knees. His eyes are the color of turquoise and his dark brows lift with humor.

Losing the little bugger was embarrassing enough, but this is mortifying.

Can I just die? Is this fence also a guillotine?

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**CAM**

My hand might go numb if I hold on to this buzzing nugget for too long. I push a button and the tempo changes.

Whoa. Impressive.

“Nope, not mine,” the woman above me squeaks.

Her caramel hair is a mane around her head, shaking wildly as she struggles in the position. I think she’s actually stuck. She reminds me of the stray cats we get sometimes called for at the fire station, the ones with heads tuck in jars. From the way her slate-gray eyes are wide and her cheeks beet red, I imagine she’s as soft and fierce as those cats are.

“Funny, weatherman didn’t say anything about it raining clam ticklers tonight.”

She stills and looks down at me with recognition and surprise in her eyes. A million thoughts must be racing through her head before she finally huffs.

“Okay, so maybe, it is mine.” She grunts, once more trying to pry herself free. “Kriti!” She shouts at someone behind her. “It’s not funny. I’m stuck!”

“Hold on...” I chuckle. “Well, I guess you’re not going anywhere... I’ll be right up.”

“What?! No. No! Stay there! Please. This is...” She’s really scrambling now, out of breath, flushed, and making some moaning and grunting noises that are doing a thing or two to me.

I manage to finally hit the selection button the right number of times and the buzzing ceases. I pocket the little fella and run inside. I grab the needed life-saving equipment from my bedroom end table and pop back outside. She's still there, struggling away and cursing under her breath. I climb onto the fence of my patio before leaping up and grabbing onto the railing above me.

The woman stares at me like I've grown two heads, stopping her efforts to do what I know isn't going to work. I grin as I pull myself up, showing off more than I need to. It's only one story above. Sure, I could've taken the stairs, but where's the fun in that?

Climbing over the railing I find the damsel in distress isn't alone. Her friend who I recognize as my neighbor, is on the floor laughing, clutching her stomach. She's either quite sadistic or having some sort of physical fit and will need medical attention.

"This isn't funny!" the one stuck shouts, whimpering a little as she loses the fight in her.

While my neighbor is laughing—*definitely laughing*—I find the situation pleasant for whole other reason. With her head between the two posts, it's left her on her knees.

Which leaves her ass in the air.

Her jeans look squeezed into, her backside round and meaty.

Damn. I swear the new friend in my pocket buzzes in agreement, but I'm thinking it's the part of me inside the pants.

I kneel next to her, placing my hand on her lower back.

"I'm Cam," I speak softly, handling this like I'm at work. "I'm a firefighter. What's your name?"

"Bella. I'm an attorney," she mimics my introduction and I smile.

"It's nice to meet you, Bella. Now, I've helped kids with bigger heads get out of smaller spaces," I reassure her as she whimpers. "Do you trust me?"

I don't know why I ask. She doesn't know me. I don't know her. But I need to know. She's so scared that something in me kicks into high gear and I notice how my heart is pounding faster than normal. I'm trained to keep my shit together, but I'm actually... alarmed.

Bella nods with a soft whimper.

"Great, because I need to lubricate your head." From my pack pocket I produce what I retrieved from my bedside table. Not quite what we use at the firehouse, but it'll have to do.

"Ooh, it's even for *her* pleasure," my neighbor giggles, watching us closely.

"What?! What is it?" Bella panics and struggles for a few seconds. "What are you putting on my head?"

"It's okay, Bella. I've got some lube here. I need it to get you free."

"Oh, God. Like *sex* lube?" her voice is tight.

I clear my throat. "Just like sex lube."

She whines but nods once more. "Fine, just get me out of here... please."

"That's the right attitude," I praise, and her friend keeps smiling wide like she's enjoying this scene.

I wish I could warm the liquid up for Bella as I dump the entire bottle on her head in strategic placement. She yelps at the initial slime and chill of the goop. I'm not afraid to admit I've used the bottle more by myself than with a woman. As a matter of fact, Bella's the first in a long time.

Just wish it was being used in a different way.

"I can't believe this is happening," she whines, clamping her eyes shut.

I rub the lube into her hair, down the sides of her head, and over as much as the railing as I can.

"Don't worry I have another bottle if we need it."

I hear behind us, “A man clearly in his element, working the lube with expertise. Always be sure you and your partner know how to properly lube up for maximum fun!”

My neighbor has her phone out, filming the scene unfolding and narrating. It’s hard not to laugh.

“Kriti *stop* filming!” Bella starts trying to pull free before I’ve finished. A wild cat indeed.

“Easy, Bella, ignore her... and the others,” I whisper the last few words, trying to get her to focus and calm down.

“Others?!” she yelps, realizing down below on the sidewalk a small gathering of onlookers has formed.

I shouldn’t have mentioned them.

“Bella, just focus on me—”

“How can I not?! Cam, you’re lubing me up!” she huffs. It’s all starts to exhaust her and though tense, she’s no longer thrashing.

The way she says my name goes straight to my gut. It’s a zinger of a one-syllable, but the way she says it, it’s topped in frosting and coated with sprinkles. It’s almost like I’m eating it up.

I lean down close to her ear, “I promise the next time I’m using lube with you, it’ll be a far better experience.”

My words work in my favor. Bella gasps in and in her moment of pause, I grip and pull. The lube works and with a sloppy wrestling, she’s free. The unexpected momentum sends us both flying backwards. I wrap my arms around her instinctively, wanting to protect her as much as I was wanting to save her.

The commentary continues behind us. “Let this be a warning to you ladies, dangerous things happen if you don’t take your own pleasure seriously. This is Kriti signing off. Oh, and happy holidays!”

I sit us both up, arms protectively wrapped around Bella. She’s soft and fits snugly against me. This is nice... despite the circumstances.

“I got you.” I brush some of the lube-soaked hair from her face.

“I think you do.”

“You okay?” I ask as she moves in my lap and I will my cock to remain flaccid.

“Well, I need a shower and my face is probably permanently red from the shame, but I’m sure I’ll live.”

I chuckle. “I’ve seen worse... I’d love to tell you about some amusing rescues over dinner.”

My heart beats fast, but I might as well shoot my shot. When purple rain falls into your lap, you shouldn’t let it pass you by.

“I believe this is yours.” I dig out the toy from my pocket and hand it to her, one arm still around her as she sits on my lap.

Bella cringes as she takes the toy. I help her to her feet as she answers me, “So wait, even after this...” She waves the toy towards the railing and to herself, wiping lube from her cheek. “And this... you’re asking me out?”

“Now that this isn’t an emergency. Let me properly introduced myself. Hi, I’m Cameron Green and I enjoy a good laugh.”

“And I’m mortified.”

“Well, Morty,” I tease. “Let’s help you shake off this debacle, eh?”

In spite of herself, Bella smiles. “Alright, funny man, you win. But no small spaces, I’ve had enough of those.”

“You got it Morty. Test assured nothing is small about me,” I says as I grab ahold of the railing and lean back to jump back down. Might as well go out the same way I came in. “Tonight for that date?”

“Sounds good.” Bella’s eyes flutter.

To both of our surprise, Kriti doesn’t stop vlogging. “P.S. *this* is how you get a date for the holidays.”

“Kriti!” Bella shouts, diving at her friend as I fall back down to my patio.

“See you at six, Bella!”

And it’s another save for Green.

My buddies down at the station aren’t going to believe this one.

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**BELLA**

This is a mistake. I'm here to celebrate the holidays with Kriti. For goodness sake we were talking about swearing off men just before the debacle of me happened. Now I have a date on Christmas Eve?! Do I even have anything date appropriate to wear?

"I don't know, maybe... maybe I should cancel?" I consult with Kriti while the contents of my suitcase are all over the spare room. She sits on the bed with her festive margarita, acting as my fashion consultant and confidant.

"Why would you do that?" She takes a sip, looking as cool as even. "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth, especially when they're likely hung like one."

I try to ignore her comment, but when I was seated in Cam's lap, I'm pretty sure that wasn't a banana in his pants.

"But it's Christmas Eve, who goes out with a stranger on this day? Doesn't he have family to go see?" I press a top and pants against me, modeling in the mirror and rolling my eyes. Everything I brought is either for chilling out or sleeping.

Kriti shrugs, "He's a firefighter. He's probably on call or something and has to stay here. You're not with your family, are you?"

Okay, she has a point.

I huff and throw the clothes back on the bed. It isn't just concern... it's nerves. I've never been so nervous for a first

date, a first date that also could double as our only date.

“I’m going to feign a headache, or maybe you should become sick? As a good person and friend I would naturally have to take care for you.”

Kriti gives me a judgmental look—she *hates* lying. I pout and plop beside her, taking a sip when she offers me her cranberry infused margarita.

“I live in California, Kriti, this doesn’t seem worth it.”

“Oh, if that’s the case, maybe I should go on the date. If *you* don’t want him, I’ll set my britches on fire for him to put out the flames.”

My blood pressure skyrockets as soon as she suggests the option. I’m actually jealous. I bite the inside of my cheek hard to keep from crying out in protest. He saved *me* not her.

But does that give me a claim over him?

“Bella, come on, he seems on the up and up. He’s a great neighbor, quiet and helpful. He’s a profession that saves—legit runs *into* fires, not away—people.” Her emphasis on words is not needed, now I’m worried about him! “He saves tiny kittens and helpless children and people who have been to wars eight decades ago on the daily. He has to be a good guy, right?”

I take a long drink. “And randy women too,” I mumble, remembering how many shampoos it took me to get lube out of my hair.

Five.

Kriti laughs. “Now, that’s the spirit! Get *randy*, baby.”

“You’re awful.”

“And you love it.”

The doorbell rings and Kriti grins. “I’ll stall. Get dressed or I’ll be the one out and snuggling with the hottie.” Her threat hits me as she slips out of the room. That’s not happening.

The purple plastic present on my bedside stares at me. A night alone with it or with Cam? I revisit my suitcase and groan. I can do this. Plus, it’s just one date. I live in Cali, he

lives mountain side, not like we're next going to end up in forever.

To keep from second guessing myself I grab things at random and settle on them. I tug on a knit sweater, flowy pants in hope of being effortlessly practical and sexy. It's much easier dressing for a courtroom, but I don't think a pantsuit will work for a date here. And I didn't bring one.

When I'm ready—or as ready as I'll be—I step into the hallway and stop when I see them interacting. Maybe he is meant to be hers. Guy next door thing...

“Do you smell my food downstairs?” I hear Kriti asking Cam.

He chuckles. “I do, but I like it. You should just invite Mrs. Stanford over for dinner, she'll change her mind once she gets a taste and she's actually lived a full life. She dated Bruce Springsteen in high school, and she still sees him occasionally as friends. She tells great stories. In fact, invite me too. I'd kill for some good Indian food.”

“I knew I liked you,” Kriti grins and that spike of jealousy drives into me once more.

That's my fireman, get your own.

Clearing my throat, it makes Cam look past Kriti to spot me, timidly making my entrance like it's my first prom date.

“You look fantastic.” He stands quickly, eyeing me from head to toe.

Despite his compliment I begin to doubt my choices. Will he think my shoes are too much? Will they make me taller than him? I recall one of my previous ex's hating when I wore any type of heels, height being my blessing in my eyes, but not in his. I divert from the compliment and try to break the mood early. Maybe I don't need to fake a headache if he bails first.

“You know I'm just visiting right? I live in California.” I fold my arms bracing for him to jump ship at the news.

“Should I start packing my bags? Do we move in together tonight, Morty?” He shakes off the initial stiffness from my

disclosure. He's quicker than me. "Bella, it's okay. I figured you were visiting."

"But I'm only here a few days," I add. "Maybe this isn't such a good idea?"

Kriti frowns at me, sipping her cocktail. Is this when she'll jump in and take my date? Or will she start vlogging and shaming me for turning down her smoke show of a neighbor?

"Can't we go out just to have a nice night? I'm not saying we have to be together forever, just give me a chance and let's have a good time."

"Yeah, Bella, go have a good time," Kriti encourages me.

"Hasn't a man ever just taken you out because you both deserve it?" he asks.

I try to think of a time where I went out just for the hell of it... or when a man like Cam just wanted to spend time with me without a motive? I've always had a motive. Looking, searching, hoping, begging for *The One* to come along.

My parents live the traditional love story and are still together, and my sisters found their soulmates early in life—one in high school and one in college, and I've been trying hard to keep up and the failure has been downright exhausting. It might still count as swearing off men if I have no motive of my own and that worries me. I want love. I want to find *The One*. But I get his point.

"Uhm, no, they haven't," I admit when the silence has gone on too long.

Cam smiles, shoving his hands into his coat pockets. "Then I'll keep my hands to myself and we can have a good time."

"You don't have to be hands off," Kriti mutters. I kick her calf and she coughs, quickly correcting herself. "I mean, have fun!"

She hops off her chair and grabs both of us by the arm, steering us out the door. It slams behind us and whether I want to abandon this date or not, I doubt Kriti would let me back in.

If you've never played miniature golf in the winter, I highly recommend it. All the holes are decorated to the nines with lights and themes that make this place a Christmas paradise. I don't mean to brag but I'm kicking Cam's ass.

"How are you so good at this?" he asks as I putt through the snowman and my ball circles the hole, nearly going in.

His ball is still sitting in front of the snowman, after it bounced off for the tenth time and the teenagers behind him mumble with irritation. I straighten up, prideful and more relaxed than I was early. I skip my way to my ball as he takes two more swings to get closer to the hole.

"I think every birthday in my family was spent mini golfing. It helps that I also golf." I address my ball with a good stance and gingerly knock my ball with a tap into the hole.

"You golf?" He's not doubting but surprised.

"I'm a lawyer. It's almost part of my job. You schmooze clients, attorneys, judges, other firms, coworkers. Heck, my gyno was on the course one day and we ended up doing Sex on the Beach shots together. We call it Green Combat."

I give Cam a few pointers on his stance, and he manages to make it through the Erzgebirge windmills, blades spinning with blinking Christmas lights. He's so thrilled that he drops his putter and picks me up, swinging me around.

"I did it!" He quickly sets me down. But not before I feel how hard his broad chest is. "Sorry, I'm supposed to keep my hands to myself."

I chew on my lip, smiling. "It's fine, you don't have to."

It's much nicer having his hands on me when they're not digging my head out of a railing.

We finish the first half the holes and make our way into the snow tunnel ahead, the second half of the course starting with a snow globe. A snow machine kicks on as we step into the tunnel, dotting us with cool flakes and making the scene perfect of a postcard.

“Can I do something I’ve wanted to all night?” Cam stops us as he asks me, his hand slipping into mine and squeezing.

I swallow and nod, staring into his stunning blue eyes. Inside of here, they glow.

His arm loops around me and he brushes a snowflake off my cheek. “You are so beautiful, Bella,” he whispers, and my stomach rides a quick and rousing roller coaster.

Cam kisses me, as lightly as the snowfall around us. My heart flutters and my body floats lighter than air. I close my eyes and sink into him, the kiss deepening, turning more intense as our tongues roll like a snowball down a hill.

We’re interrupted by the pleasant sounds of dry heaving. Teenagers run past us, gagging and complaining about old people.

“I am not that old,” I huff as Cam breaks away laughing.

“They’re getting coal in their stockings for sure,” he tells me. “Merry Christmas,” he yells out and they flip him off.

Nice.

Here I thought I’d be the one getting coal for all the naughty things going through my head after that kiss.

It’d be worth it. *Totally.*

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**BELLA**

We finished the course and ended the night with pizza and beers. I'm usually more of a Chinese food before Christmas girl but it's hard to beat the company. A fireman has a lot of good stories...and we might have had some hand holding. Scandalous, I know.

Cam walks me to Kriti's door, pausing there, fingers laced with mine. I'm glad I didn't cancel. I don't think I've had a better date than this.

Should I tell him that? Does his ego need that kind of boost? Do I need to keep some distance to protect myself?

He opens his mouth to speak, but stops, craning his head and chuckling. I'm about to ask what's so funny when I hear why.

Kriti is vlogging... *again!*

"Will there be a kiss? Who will initiate? These burning questions and more will be answered, stay tuned," she narrates.

"Mhmm, well, I'd hate to disappoint such a captivated audience," Cam says softly.

"Yes, I'd hate to jeopardize the blog," I nervously giggle.

This time, he claims me through a kiss. It's a surprise, but I'm eager for more in seconds. The way his lips meld with mine, the tickle of his beard scruff, not to mention his strong hands cradling me like a fragile ornament, but still in a

possessive and declaring way. He's turning me inside out and I don't know if I want to be righted again.

I thought the snow tunnel kiss was everything. I was wrong. Look at that a lawyer admitting error. This! This is a kiss!

Cam's fingers curl around the base of my neck, pulling me in as his lips capture mine. It's slow and sensual and everything blood cell in my body sizzles from the heat. No wonder the man is a fireman, he he's going to have to put out the fire in my panties out.

Reluctantly, we part, and I step back to press into the door. If I was home, I'd without question invite him in but I'm a guest, and I won't subject Kriti to the types of noise I'm certain this man would provoke from me. But it's also a good thing that I can't. We aren't supposed to be more than a night of good fun, almost innocent fun. No expectations. No future.

Then why do I want more? So much more?

And it kills me to think that I won't get it.

"Wow, now *that's* a kiss," Kriti remarks, watching us through her peephole.

Cam agrees. "Would I'd love to take you out again?"

I put out my own fire, like a cold thunderstorm over a raging wildfire. "I don't know, Cam... I'm not here much longer. Do you think it's a good idea?"

"Well, I've only got tomorrow off and then I'm back on duty, so—"

"But tomorrow's Christmas," I point out, probably needlessly, but I figured he had plans. "Don't you have family to visit?"

"They're in Iowa. No one could visit—married with kids—and I have to work the day after tomorrow so no time to fly there and back. Besides, I can't think of anyone else I'd rather be with on Christmas, than you Bella." Cam tucks one of my

curls behind my ear and looks ready to plant another hot, slippery kiss on me.

Gulping at his smoldering, I say, “My sisters and parents ditched me too. They’re all on a couple’s cruise.”

His leans in, caging me against the door and I want to melt right back into him. “Then you should have dinner with me. My place. I’m a great cook,” he adds to sweeten an already delicious pot.

“Okay,” I exhale, not letting my overly analytical brain make it any harder to decide.

“Good, sweetheart.” Cam closes the distance, kissing me again. It lingers longer, softer, his fingers tickling my hip, itching for more of me.

We hear behind the door. “O.M.G! He called her sweetheart. This is getting good.”

Having your life narrated, isn’t as bad as you might think. It’s like a quick replay of the best of the best.

I have to open the door behind me to make my escape or I’m going to start begging for other parts of him.

“Tomorrowkaybye!” I say quickly and close the door shut behind me.

Kriti is grinning wide, staring at me then shifting her attention to the camera. “There you have it my Kriti Kitties, a second date *and* a kiss!”

“Kisses,” I correct softly, bolting for my guest room to avoid being more on the vlog than I’ve already been. My stuffed shirt bosses probably wouldn’t like it and although I’m not hating it, I’m sure I’m rotating the deepest shades of red.

I throw myself onto the bed, squealing into my pillow at the excitement bubbling in me. How could I have wanted to cancel? How could I have considered skipping a second date?

Cam is sweet and funny... and the kisses! Holy melting snowflakes! I’m falling like a blizzard is inside of me! He’s the whole package in bright red truck. A tense pulse travels

from my tingling lips and settles between my thighs. He certainly left an impression.

I could kiss him for forever.

I glance to my bedside and decide to pull the trigger on my gifted bullet. It vibrates wildly in my hand and I have to play with the settings to find the lowest setting. Best to start off light and work my way up.

Tease me and then please me.

I'm cautious about being with me, but I haven't sworn off thinking about them.

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**CAM**

I don't linger outside Kriti's for long. I have a dinner to plan. I can't waste time fantasizing about her damn lips any more than I already have.

Laying back on my bed, I scroll through recipes online. She's not a vegetarian but a California lawyer like her is probably used to five-star meals. I will need to impress—

I go still and turn off my radio quickly.

What is that noise/

Straining my neck to hear soft footfalls above me. I heard them earlier today. I rarely do, which makes me believe that Kriti has one of the two-bedroom layouts. Whereas I'm in a one-bedroom, which can only mean the rarity of the noise above is Bella in the guest room.

I rest my phone on my chest and listen. I can picture her stripping out of her date-night clothes for comfortable pjs. No doubt a classy matching set with silky shorts and a button up that's almost professional. A buttery yellow color that warms her skin and compliments her gunmetal-colored eyes.

My dick throbs, demanding my attention.

I'd just gotten my libido distracted with food and then thinking of Bella in her pjs gets me going again.

It sounds like a bed creaking and then I hear her muttering softly to herself... and then a buzzing. A very familiar

buzzing. I remember the sound like the bang from a starting line pistol and the prize at the end of the race is Bella.

I sit upright, as though it might put me closer to the sounds. Either she's getting louder or the move works, I can hear every second of the action. The buzzing tempo changes, and I get harder. Bella's fighting to let herself go, trying to be quiet but she's failing. The bed creaks and she moans. She's panting and I'm dying to see what she looks like while she plays with that toy. There's nothing sexier than a woman who controls her own destiny in bed. I love helping, but I love seeing her get herself revved up, too.

Not able to resist, I rock my cock through my boxers, grunting at the sensitivity. I'm already so hard just from my imagination and her filtered sounds. I close my eyes, focusing on the sounds above me. I slip inside my underwear and grip what's painfully hard. I could come at any second, but I'm waiting, edging myself to listen for her peak. Her panting intensifies and she's murmuring something I can't quite make out. Her moans pitch higher and the bed creaks.

She releases a groan. I bet she's so pretty thrashing on the bed as she comes.

The images push me to the edge, and I work my cock faster, breathing hard as I take in her delicious cries of ecstasy. And in seconds, my boxers are ruined, but it's fine, I can sleep nude.

We both grow quiet. We have good timing, even if she doesn't know it and she thinks that time and space will keep us apart. Distance makes the heart grow fonder, is the saying, but at this moment, I don't think I can be apart from her for anything longer than hours.

I toss my phone aside and turn off the lights.

Goodnight, my Bella.

Everything is perfect if I do say so myself. She might have the upper hand with golf but I'm a champion in the kitchen. The prime rib is in the oven, the potatoes mashed, the green

beans blanched, and the dessert chilling—chocolate covered strawberries. It's a scene for seduction, but all I really want to know is this won't be our last date.

I know I told Bella I have no intentions, but I'm going to have to work with Kriti on convincing her that Colorado is a way better state than California. I also may have looked to see if Cal Fire was hiring too. They are, so there is a possibility, but if we're here we're both between our families so it's a westward bound plane or east one, but it'll only take us less than two to be there.

As I pop the cork on the champagne there's a timid knock on my door. I fill a flute before I bolt over to the door.

"Merry Christmas!" I shout jovially.

Bella's wide-eyed and smiling. That smile has got to be brighter than the California sun that everyone raves about. She laughs and takes the champagne I offer. She's got her hair pinned up with a few loose curls. I want to kiss every inch of her exposed neck but I'm going to have to pace myself. I offer to take her sweater which reveals the strappy silk top underneath.

She's killing me with her curve caressing dress. Combine this vision with the memory of the noises I heard last night, it's more than hard to keep my dick in line. He's a wily as that toy she has. And ready to please.

"You look exquisite." I drop a chaste kiss to her cheek to curb my appetite for her. "I hope you're hungry."

"Kriti starved me all day to make sure I ate," she answers me with a frown.

"She isn't filming us through the floor, is she?" I add, peering down the hallway before closing the door behind Bella.

She laughs, light and airy. "No, but she hopes you walk me back to her door again."

I grin, "I'm a gentleman. I'm doomed to do so."

We sip champagne as I finish the last steps of dinner. I shut Bella down when she tries to help me, she's on vacation and doesn't need to lift a finger. I plate the food and settle us at the bar of the kitchen island. I don't have a dining room table, besides sitting next to her like this is far more intimate.

Halfway through the meal my hand winds up on her knee and never leaves, stroking it with my thumb and happily eating my prime rib as I do. We've talked family, friends, future plans, heartache—well, more her than me, hobbies, likes, dislikes. Topics that I normally save for a third or tenth date because this is the only other date, I might get with her.

And it's starting to sink in.

“And that was my twelfth boyfriend of the year,” she finishes, washing out the sour taste of the topic from her mouth with her champagne. I asked to be sure there was no boyfriend in California waiting for her at home. “I guess I'm just always choosing the wrong man.”

I cock my head. “What do you mean by ‘wrong?’”

She shrugs, pushing her green beans around on her plate. “They've all been... not *The One*.”

Now there's a fated love idea that's hard to measure up to. “Do you believe in that? That there's a single one out there for you? Like... like *soulmates*?”

She gets a blissful look on her face. “Yes, like soulmates. My parents are soulmates. I'm pretty sure from what I witnessed at Thanksgiving my sisters probably found theirs too. Leaving me all alone.”

I hum. “I'm sorry. I'm not sure I can believe in that sort of thing.”

“Oh.” She moves the food around her plate.

I might as well have stomped on her dreams. I feel like a giant ass.

I try to salvage the cynical idea. “I'm not saying it can't happen. I...I just...” Time to be honest and lay it out there. “I was with someone who made me believe that once, but it

turned out she wasn't *my* soulmate but apparently, best friend's 'one.'”

Bella's hand rests over mine on her knee and she doesn't look at me with pity but with hope. “I'm sorry, Cam.” She leans in, holding her breath as she says, “Then she wasn't your *One*. That person is still out there.”

A tight laugh escapes me. “I wish I believed you.”

She's chewing on her lip, opening and closing her mouth debating her next words, searching my face for them. “You know they just might not be in Colorado...”

I sit up straight and my heart hammers away in my chest. *Does she feel the same way as I do?* “I wish you were.”

She didn't quite say that person was her, but I'm not beating around the bush if there's any chance here.

She's quiet for a moment before whispering, “Me too, Cam.”

The music in the background changes, the festive music slowing down and moody “I'll Be Home for Christmas.” I set my fork aside and hop off my stool. I take her hands into mine, leading her out of her seat as well.

“Dance with me.”

Bella doesn't hesitate, letting me lead her to the makeshift dance floor that is the stretch of space between kitchen and living room. She rests her head on my chest, where she can surely hear the speedy pounding of my heart, as I cradle her hand in mine, my other on her middle back. Slowly we sway around and enjoy the moment of just the two of us being here in Colorado with one another. What's on the other side of this day can wait.

“You know these walls are thinner than you think,” I break the silence, moving my hand lower to the curve of her back.

“Kriti told me, I think that's why her neighbor complains about the cooking smells.”

“I can't complain.” The conversation's moving in the direction I'm intending it.

“About the Indian food?” Bella lifts her head off my chest with a quirked eyebrow.

“While I don’t mind that, smells delicious, but no, not that. It’s more what I can hear through the walls...and floors.” I clear my throat, trying not to come off too excited as I mention it. “I heard you last night, Bella.”

“Heard me?” She seems confused for a second, but then her eyes widen and her voice cracks in realization, “You *heard* me?”

“Mhmm, heard you playing a little toy story.”

“Oh God, not that...”

“I definitely heard buzz come alive.” I lower my voice, “And I was the one that ended up with the woody.”

A pretty bright pink flush brightens her face, and she tries to pull away. I press into her tighter with my hand on her back and tip her chin up with the other one.

“Bella, it’s okay. I only wish I’d been in the same room. You make the sweetest fucking noises I’ve ever heard. I got so hard. While you were playing with yourself, I had to work my cock as well. I couldn’t help but get off to your little pants and moans.”

Holding her chin up, I lean down and capture her mouth. I’m devouring her with everything inside of me. A sweet and savory flavor on her tongue as I slip mine past her lips for a taste. Her tension from embarrassment slips away and I cradle her as we join together.

It grows hotter and heavier. The kiss turns into multiple and dancing ceases all together, replaced with heavy petting. My fingers find the zipper of her dress just as she’s tugging on the buttons of my shirt.

In pops in the strange commentary of Kriti in the back of my mind, *Will he seal the deal folks? Can his cock convince her to move to Colorado? Or will this be the one-night where The One got away?*

Everything is riding on this. A date, a dinner, and now a night to leave her wanting more. Maybe we can make long distance work, I have long gaps between work. I can commute it's not unheard of for fireman or police officers.

Focus. Focus on her, the here and now. Don't let this slip by thinking of the future. She's here. I'm here. We're here. Let's just enjoy.

I lift her and carry her into the bedroom, my shirt long gone and cock straining against my jeans. Bella's dress is pushed up and half-undone as I struggled to figure out which way to remove it while never wanting to take my hands off her.

I set her feet to the floor and we part briefly, each of us hastily stripping and laughing nervously when we stand before one another naked and vulnerable.

"You're the best present I could've ever hoped for, Bella," I whisper. My fingers trail down the curve of her neck, her shoulder, and then to her breast.

She moans as I tease her nipples, taking my time drawing each one to a stiff peak. She bites her lip watching my dick throb between my legs as I touch every inch of her body. I will worship her like the gift that she is to me.

My hands are quickly followed by my mouth, lips and teeth tasting her where my fingerprints can be found. Until I'm cupping between her thighs and grinding my palm into her. Her breath hitches, shuddering as I do.

"Did you bring your toy?" I whisper, nipping at her ear as my thumb circles her pearl of nerves.

"My toy?" she squeaks, glancing to her pile of clothes and I know.

She wants this as much as I do.

"I want to watch you use it, sweetheart."

And to my surprise, despite my desire for it, Bella produces the purple item in question from the pocket of her dress. I get why women love pockets on dresses now.

Bella lays back on the bed. I spread her legs for her, groaning at the sight of her. This might be a new Christmas tradition for me. I almost think to go grab ribbon to tie her legs wide for me but then I'd have to leave this view and I can't imagine such a thing.

I kiss the insides of her thighs as she brings the buzzing delight to her pussy. I moan as her body twitches at the initial contact. Her noises are even sweeter in person, no walls to muffle them. Bella moans and bucks her hips into the toy as it provides a pleasure she justly deserves.

"Bella, you are a vision, keep playing with yourself," I encourage.

I stroke my cock as I watch her, licking her thighs before inching closer and closer to her. I settle between her thighs, propping her legs on top of my hips. While one hand keeps the toy in its rightful place, her other is gripping my headboard, knuckles white as her brow crinkles. Her pitch intensifies, short whimpers mixed with breathy moans. It's just like last night, she's close.

This is all mine, I think, as I plunge deep inside of her with a single thrust.

Bella

I was already so close when Cam slams the full length of his magnificent cock inside of me. I clamp down around him, walls and legs clinging tightly as my body erupts and fireworks explode inside of me. I drop the bullet, tingles rock me from the sensitivity as I enjoy the peak of existence. The utter euphoria is twisted and elongated as he thrusts in and out of me.

"Cam!" I cry out, just as I did last night.

"Bella," he groans in response, bucking hard and fast.

He's so deep, it hits every part of me that sends me reeling. I have no clue where I end and he begins but I'm looking forward to exploring the mystery over and over. Looking up at him I see intense blue eyes never leaving me. It felt so

shamelessly good to have him watch me, to want my pleasure. Kudos to Kriti on the gift that keeps on giving. I grabbed it mostly as a joke, but this is no joke. It sparked me and I don't think I'm going to come down.

“Is that how you come? Will you do it again? I want to feel it again around my cock when I come.” Cam gasps, picking up the singing small bean blessing.

He circles my clit with the vibrations and my toes curl and my back arches. I pant, reinvigorated by the targeted pleasure in my apex. My hips are meeting his as I buck and twist, body both urging me to never stop and pull away from the intensity. I'm tortured with extreme pleasure and I never want it to stop.

“That's it. That's my girl!” He leans in, somehow filling me more with his impressive length.

“Cam, I'm—” I gasp, whimpering. “Oh fuck...”

“I know, baby, hold it a second longer, I'm almost there. Fuck, you're so beautiful.” He captures my mouth with an intense kiss, burying himself deep inside of me. The toy is trapped between us as he barely moves out, grinding the vibrations into my core as I writhe.

Shallow pumps from him have us both spiraling. I let go of the bed to grasp at his back, crying out into his mouth as my world shatters. Cam reaches the peak with me, grunting and biting my bottom lip as he whispers my name over and over again between noisy breaths.

We collapse together in a sweaty jovial mess. The toy is on the floor, but I can tell that's going to be its permanent place in my life.

Kriti, I owe you one. Hell, I owe you a dozen!

“Are you ready for dessert?” Cam asks me when we're both breathing normally, and we both laugh. *What can top this?*

“I suppose we did work off dinner...”

“I'd like to feed you tiramisu and then eat some off of you,” he admits, rolling back on top of me, licking and nipping

at my stomach as if he were already cleaning his plate.

My sisters are going to lord over me how right they were in sending me to Colorado for my best Christmas yet.

But then the thought of leaving Colorado hits me and instantly, I'm torn... sad... and maybe even a little upset.

Am I your One, Cam?

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**BELLA**

The day feels so empty without Cam. We said out goodbyes this morning. I haven't cried, but my chest is constantly tight. I have a flight to catch later today, and he has work to go to. It's bittersweet the final kiss we shared outside Kriti's door. We both laughed as we heard her dreamlike narration of the moment.

She said, "And in the brisk morning air, the prince escorts Cinderella back to my door. They stare into each other's eyes, and the fires burning. Her hair is a mess, her dress is wrinkled, there's no doubt that this wasn't a sleepover to watch movies, my Kitties. This looks like the muffin stuffer was deployed and the muffin is buttered."

"Kriti, stop!" we both said in unison and she quickly closed the vlog.

My fingers still burn with the last bit of touches from him. I stood at the door until he was gone from view, down the stairs and out of my life just like that. I could call and text him, and I'll visit Kriti again... and who knows he might visit California, a lot of people vacation there.

I shake my head, being too hopeful when I'm supposed to be swearing off hope like this. Or was it men? I'm supposed to be swearing off men.

But there's no man like Cam.

"I don't see why you need to leave today. Stay through the New Year." Kriti follows me around the guest room as I pack.

“So I can grow more attached? I’m already in deeper than I should be!” I throw my clothes at my suitcase with a newfound aggression.

“Then get in deeper! Forget everything I said about destiny and being alone, and whatever. Christmas magic literally brought you two together,” she implores.

“A freak accident with a little muffin monster brought us together,” I remind her.

“Who cares how! What if he’s... *The One.*” Kriti knows all about my take on love and shoves it back in my face. But I deserve it. It’s been my mantra for years.

“And what if he is?!” I bite my lip to hold in a sob.

“Can’t you move? Or he can move? Hell both of you move somewhere together! They need lawyers and firemen in every state, I’m sure!”

It’s not the worst idea. The cold of Colorado in the winter isn’t so bad if Cam’s there to warm me up.

“But... but my family,” I scramble for an excuse, fears still attached to me from my past.

“Can absolutely visit you. They have their lives. You need to live yours.”

Damn it, does she have to make perfect sense all the time?

“It’s not like I know where he works.”

“The fire station!”

“Which one, Kriti!” I gasp, flopping onto the bed.

“He might still be home... but if not, I think it’s the one on 22nd Street?” She seems pretty sure of herself and I’m willing to take the chance. “If not, they might be able to point you in the right direction. You can take my car.” She throws her keys at me. She already had her keys on her? Did she know I’d cave? *The woman is a fortune teller.*

I gulp and nod, throwing a sweater over my T-shirt as I bolt from her apartment.

As I jog down the stairwell exit, taking the stairs to the first level instead of waiting for the elevator. I'll check his apartment first, just in case. I run into a woman headed toward for Cam's door.

"Sorry," I gasp, my adrenaline on full tilt has me going a mile a minute.

"It's fine," she corrects herself and continues towards Cam's door.

I stand there, dumbfounded, as she pulls out a key, not a purple rabbit, from her pocket. She slips it into the door, and it works.

A woman has a key to Cam's apartment? I almost can't comprehend what's happening and I look around to make sure I'm at the right apartment. I am.

She must feel my eyes on her as she opens the door. Her head swivels and she looks at me. "Can I help you?"

"Who are you?" I ask.

"Excuse me? Who are *you*?"

I start to back up, panicking. "No one."

And not the only one.

"Okay, then you can leave." She steps inside and closes the door in my face.

No wonder he didn't believe in soulmates. He didn't want me to think he could be mine.

Adrenaline rips from me in an instant. I take a quiet ride in the elevator to the floor above me. Kriti is shocked to see me and has a million reasons for me to keep trying on her lips until I explain what happened.

"That fucking bastard!" she shouts, gearing towards her door with long strides.

"Kriti! Don't! He's just not *The One*. We both went out with the intention of a good time. I should've seen this one coming. He gave signs and warned me that I was temporary."

The airport and all its strangers sounds pretty nice right about now.

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CAM

I bolt upright on my cot, my phone alight with an alert. I'm not expecting a visitor or a package. My doorbell camera notifies me of someone at my door.

I watch in horror as the one person who left my life, lets herself back into my apartment and my life in one turn of a lock. I cuss and kick as I watch Bella go from excitedly flushed to pale and downtrodden. And here I am at work unable to clear anything up and I don't think a phone call is worthy of cleaning up this mess.

Shit, shit, shit.

“Chief!” I shout, can't hurt to ask. “Chief?!”

“What's up? Where's the fire?” he jokes.

“At home. I mean, there's no actual fire, but I've got an emergency. There's this girl and I have to tell her she's the one. She's my one. The only one. And she thinks—”

He holds up his hand to quiet me. “Be back in an hour. We got it covered. If I need you on a call though I expect you to be there.”

“You got it!” I sprint out the door. “Thanks!”

“Good luck!”

“Georgia!” I shout as I barrel into my apartment. One problem at a time. And this one is the probably one that will

take the least time.

“Baby!” I dodge her outstretch arms as she comes for me.

“You need to leave and leave my key.”

“But baby, I’m here for—”

“I don’t care. We’re over. We’ve been over for two months—you moved out, Georgia! From the moment you slept with my friend, and maybe even before that, you checked out and I don’t want you checking back in. I’m done. You are *not* the one for me. Bella is.”

“Bella? Who the fu—”

“I said get out.”

She glowers, grabbing her purse and marching to the door.

“My key, Georgia,” I growl.

She huffs and throws the key to the floor, kicking it towards me like a lethal weapon. “Merry Christmas, asshole.”

That went about as well as I imagined.

One problem solved. I listen for elevator before I wrangle my way up the stairs. I run smack dab into Bella as I practically leap out the exit door.

“Bella!” I shout in surprise, wrapping my arms around her as we crash to the wall.

Out in the hallway, I cradle her to me, searching her wide gray eyes for the words I need to reassure her, to convince her this is it.

“Why are you out here? Why aren’t you inside?” I ask instead of professing my love as I should be doing.

“Thin walls, remember?” she says softly.

“They’re the best.” I clear my throat, pressing my forehead to hers. “I love you, Bella. You’re *my* One. At first I thought this would just be a nice holiday fling, but the thing is, it can’t be. I need to be with you. The whole forever thing. I get you—how you work, how you’re a little scared of love, and how

you're questioning how this will work, but I'm not. We can figure out it out. We can make it all fit."

Her lips are splitting into a wide smile, and she closes her eyes. We share a breath before she speaks.

"Think we have enough lube to make it fit?"

"I'll buy out the state's supply, if I have to, baby."

"California might have a bigger supply," she giggles. "When you saved me on the deck you more than lubed up my head, you definitely got my heart just as free from its stuck place."

Our lips press. I think about taking her there in the hallway as I deepen it further, every emotion and feeling coursing through us. But Kriti is peaking through her door, whispering her to vlog, mindful of our moment but ever the love guru online, and I have no intention of sharing Bella.

"I love you," I repeat, still enrapt in one another's arms on the floor.

"I love you," she whispers back.

"And there you have it, ladies and gentlemen!" Kriti announces boldly. "The gift that keeps on giving. Buy yourself or a loved one a pleasure product and you too can find love." She snuffles, fighting tears and failing. "Well shoot, now I need to go shopping because I want to find my *One*, too! #TheOne my KritiKittens. Let's find him. Wishing you all a Happy Holidays and much love!"

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EPILOGUE



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8 MONTHS LATER...

BELLA

“Yes, I understand and I’m on it.” I hit the End button and drop my phone to my desk with a huff. “Now I’m a life fixer? Guess I’ll need new business cards.”

I hold up my hand as if I’m writing the words in the skyline outside of my fourteenth-floor office in downtown Denver. “Bella Hanes, attorney at law, girlfriend to man who rocks her world nightly—well, almost, he does have sleepovers at work, but we make up for it when he’s home, and... personal life-issues fixer for bad boy hockey players who are in trouble with the law, in the news for their behaviors, and need a new rep by being associated with someone who is clean laced. Seems a lot for a business card, but apparently, it fits.”

And saying the words kicks in my logical side and I sit up straight. I know someone who might be able to do that. *And* she has a voice to hundreds of thousands of people.

I pick up my phone again.

Bella: You still meeting Cam and me at the restaurant for dinner or you have some hot date?

Kriti: I wouldn’t miss it for the world.

That’s weird. It’s just dinner.

Bella: What would you say to helping me out with a client? You’d get paid handsomely and you might actually get more followers.

Kriti: I'd do anything for you, Bella.

Yeah, one should never say that.

Bella: Like bringing Red Playfair onto your ultra-successful and highly influential podcast and helping to change his persona?

There's a really long silence.

Kriti: No.

Bella: Wow.

Kriti: Hard NO.

Bella: Why?

Kriti: My followers aren't going to go for it. He's too far gone. He's too much of a rebel. His rep is like the Titanic, going down and he's going with it.

Bella: But you are the queen of resuscitation. You resuscitated my love life and look at me! I'm living the dream.

Kriti: Fine. I'll consider it, but if you're still at the office, you better get to the restaurant. Don't want to be late for your important date.

Bella: It's just dinner!

Kriti: GO!

“Jeez. Not like we don't have dinner together three nights a week!”

My stomach rides a weird wave, but I shake it off. It's bound to happen with how I'm feeling. I check my list of to dos and check them all off, stopping at one and smiling.

He's going to be so happy. He's going to be thrilled.

I repeat the mantras, hoping to believe them. Things happen when you least expect, surprises are kind of our thing so I'm pretty sure there's hope.

Kriti's helped me to pack on a few pounds with her delicious Chicken Makhani, Aloo Gobi, and Naan that I can't get enough of. And Mrs. Stanford has even taught Kriti and I

how to knit after our dinners together. She's quite the cool octogenarian and she didn't date Bruce Springsteen, she dated his cousin, Vinny. *Big difference, Cam.*

I grab my bag and keys, locking up.

The restaurant is just around the corner, probably strategic on their part so I didn't have to drive as they know how late I can be just walking somewhere, but I also hate driving, so this eliminates my procrastination.

I look up at the sign. It's a new addition to Denver. *Sip Happens Neighborhood Pub.*

I've only been here once, but it's laid back and chill, and the kind of place that Cam and his buddies like to unwind in after a long shift.

I walk in and I don't see anyone I know. I keep walking and I see Kriti in the back in front of the party room, double doors closed behind her back. When I get to her, I see her eyes are glossy and she has a tissue in her hand, dabbing at her cheeks.

"What's going on?" I ask. "You okay?"

She nods her head. "Nothing. Just happy to see you."

"Are *you* pregnant? You've been so moody lately?"

She stills and her head tips. "Interesting."

And I know that I've just given her the hint that she needs. The woman is a bloodhound and probably why her vlog and podcast have zoomed to the top of the charts. She gets the dirt.

She shakes her head. "Nope, not pregnant—that would be a miracle. Probably lack of sleep from having to hear my downstairs neighbors going at it like wild animals," she deadpans.

I decide to own it. "You have earplugs."

She chuckles. "Right."

"So where's Cam?"

She smiles. "I love you, my friend and you deserve this."

My heart starts beating fast as she opens the doors and there are fifty-plus people inside the room, including my mother and father, my sisters and their husbands, his parents, my friends Zena and Zeek from California, and several of Cam's coworkers and their wives and girlfriends.

"Cam?" I call out as I walk in and the people part to show him at the front in a dark gray suit, with the neckline open. No tie because that's just not him. He's Mr. Comfortable. If it's not jeans, it's gray sweatpants and I can't stop staring at him in those damn grey sweatpants. He knows they're my womannip, like catnip but making me more randy than a feline in heat.

He reaches for my hands as I approach and turns us so everyone can see us.

"Bella Hanes, you're *my* one, *the* one, and the *only* one, for me. This last eight months have been nothing but non-stop amazing and I want to make the next seventy-plus of years of our lives the same." He drops to one knee and pulls out a box from his pocket. "Will you marry me?"

The box opens and a stunning two carat—at least—diamond solitaire sparkles up at me. I suggested we buy a house a couple months ago, and he said he had a couple of big bills to pay off first, I guess I know what one was now.

"I thought maybe I didn't get to have my one, my soulmate, my best friend—"

"Hey!" Kriti calls out and the crowd chuckles.

"Let me finish!" I retort. "My best friend, other than Kriti, and partner in life who makes me ridiculously happy, but I do. You are *everything* to me, Cam. And of course I'll marry you."

The crowd erupts in cheers and clapping as he slips the ring on my finger and his lips hit mine. My body melts into his.

"Nice surprise," I say quietly as he backs away.

He brushes my curls over my shoulder and cups my back low, rocking us. "Well, that is how you came into my life," his mouth slides to my ear, "a surprise clam tickler from heaven."

I throw my head back with laughter. “I love you.”

“I love you, Bella.”

Kriti comes up beside us, her camera in full use. “And there you...” she sobs, “have it. Love happens. Even the most cynical of hearts and those who have sworn off love can find it. Here’s to *you* finding your *one*, too. Congratulations to Cam and Bella. Later, Kittens.”

She turns to me and wails, “Congratulations!”

Cam and I wrap her up.

I look to my fiancé, my heart bursting from my chest. “You’re going to find love, Kriti.”

“I can talk, talk, talk about it, but it’s never mine. I only have my collection of cooter shooters to make me happy.”

Cam laughs and I glare at him, mumbling, “Not helpful.”

I rub her back. “I promise, the person for you is out there.”

She slows her crying. “I love you both so much.”

“Love you, too,” we say in unison.

“Okay, enough of that. I can’t wait to be Auntie Kriti!”

“Whoa,” Cam says. “One event at a time.”

But little does he know more surprises are on the horizon.

Zena and Zeek come over with glasses of Champagne.

I wave one off. “Been a long day.”

Cam’s head tip. “You haven’t had your evening glass of wine lately either. You okay?”

I go to my tiptoes. “You’re going to be a daddy.” I lean back and his eyes go wide, white showing all around his irises. “Surprise?” I say cringing and wondering if this is just too much.

He hands the flute back to Zeek and lifts me into the air. “Really?”

And every worry fades away.

“Found out this morning. I was going to tell you at our private dinner, but *you* had different plans.”

“Can I tell people?”

“Let’s just keep it to ourselves for right now.”

“Kriti knows?”

“I don’t think so.”

We both look over at her and she smiles, knowingly, lifting her flute and patting her stomach.

“Oh, she knows,” Cam mumbles.

“She won’t say anything.”

She opens her phone and starts to vlog from across the room.

“Or maybe she will...” Doesn’t matter, I’m too happy to worry about it. I clear my throat. “Plus, I’m going to have Kriti very busy soon with someone who’s going to keep her on her toes.”

“Oh, really?”

I smirk, wrapping my arms around my soon-to-be hubby. “She needs a challenge.”

“She *is* a challenge... in a good way.”

He isn’t wrong.

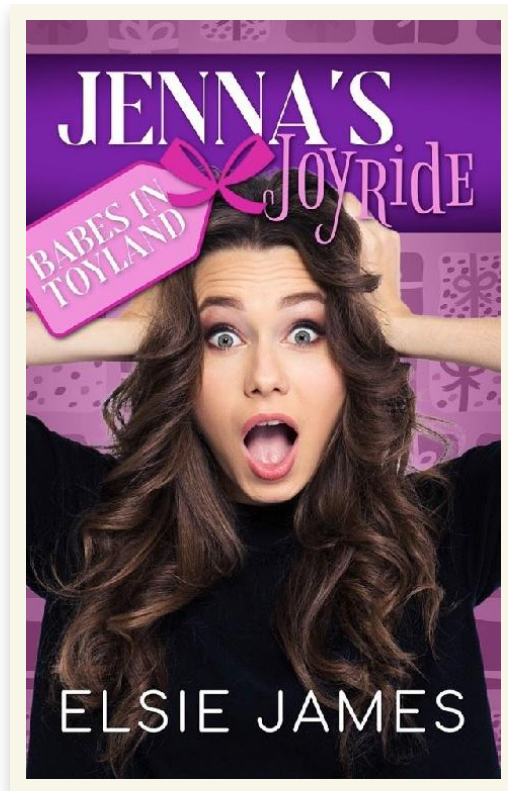
People start filling in to give their congratulations.

Finding *The One* isn’t easy, I know that. But when it happens, it’s complete and utter...bliss

Thank you for reading. We’d love to hear what you thought in a review! [Bella’s Bliss](#).

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Jenna

Walking away from the altar isn't something I planned on, but being real instead of perfect has its perks.

I'm finding myself in the ashes of the life I thought I'd have.

But when my sister mails me a happy annulment gift, the toy inside isn't nearly as surprising as the man holding the package.

Walker steps back into my heart without missing a beat.

But can I convince him that this time I'm ready to take a chance on love?

Jenna's Joyride is the fifth in the Babes in Toyland series of heartwarming, humorous, instalove stories. No cheating. No cliffhangers. Always a happily ever after.

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