

BETTER THAN A
SNOW JOB

Snow

PLOW

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

FRANKIE LOVE

SNOW PLOW

THE MOUNTAIN MEN OF LINESWORTH

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FRANKIE LOVE

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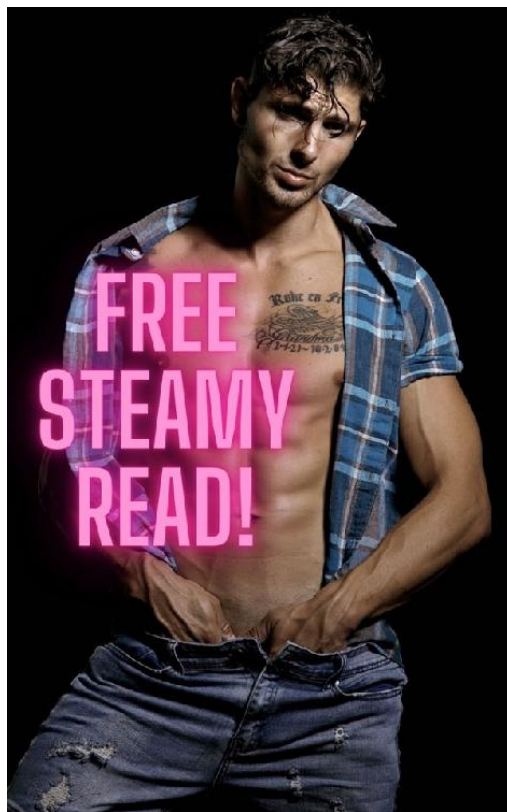
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ABOUT

SNOW PLOW

By Frankie Love

A snowstorm.

A virgin.

A Christmas miracle.

Quinn has never been in love, let alone experienced a real orgasm. Her battery-operated boy toys have taught her a few things, but not everything.

When she gets snowed in with Nicholas, he is determined to show her what it means to get off, all while falling head over heels for this small-town girl of Linesworth, WA.

This holiday is about more than mistletoe. It's about to get plowed!

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NICHOLAS

IT'S EVEN MORE PERFECT THAN I IMAGINED IT WOULD BE. THE moment I saw the A-frame cabins nestled in the snow-capped mountainsides of Linesworth, WA, in the travel magazine I knew it was where I was going to spend Christmas.

And after this fall's harvest, I'm craving solitude. Distance from my family is what I need. After a decade as a partner in the family business, I'm finally ready to call it quits with my mother and stepfather. The feud has finished me. I don't need their money, I don't need their drama, and I certainly don't need their meddling.

This whole plan of theirs to marry me off to Veronica was the straw that broke the camel's back, and no matter how many times I've made it crystal clear, they still think an engagement party is happening on Christmas morning. Over my dead body.

So I booked a ticket to Linesworth and got myself a little cabin for one. Yes, me, myself and I. That's how I'm spending this Christmas and, damn, it's even better than the magazine predicted. We're talking a stone fireplace, flannel sheets, and a snow-covered view out the front windows. There's a hot tub on the porch, a king-size bed so I can catch up on much-needed rest, and a gas range to make myself some dinner, but I'm not going to require much. Maybe a few cans of chili, I don't need anything fancy.

However, as my stomach grumbles, I realize I'm going to need *something* to eat before it gets dark. Remembering the

number to the local grocery store on the refrigerator, I pull out my phone and call the number listed.

“Hello,” a warm, cheery voice answers. “This is Quinn at the Linesworth Market. How can I help you?”

“Hey,” I say running a hand over my beard. “This is Nicholas. I’m up at one of the A-frame cabins, number six. I was wondering if I could place a grocery delivery order. This advertisement here in the cabin says you make daily deliveries.”

“Well, of course we do. Do you know what you’d like or would you like some suggestions?” she asks. Her voice, well, hell, it’s buttery soft and could melt the snow around me. I find myself smiling as she speaks, realizing Veronica, the woman who I’m usually around, is shrill to the point of grating. I’m not trying to put any woman down per se, but Veronica has gotten under every last nerve of mine so just the mere thought of a woman who sounds sweet instead of sharp has me soothed.

“Suggestions?” I perk up, appreciating her help. “I’d fucking love suggestions.”

She laughs. “Okay, well, let me tell you what we’ve got. I’ve put together a few packages this winter, just to make it a little easier for our guests. We have big, bigger, and biggest. What do you think you’d like?”

“Biggest,” I say, thinking now is not the time to scrimp and save. I want to enjoy myself during my time away.

“Biggest, huh?”

I hear a little tease in her voice and I wonder what she looks like. If she’s as sweet as she sounds, because voice like that could mean trouble. I’d like to know. In fact, I’d like to *really* know.

“Yeah. Biggest would be good. And can you throw in a couple of bottles of wine?”

“Of course. Now when it comes to wine, are we on a budget or are we—”

“No budget,” I say. “I work on a vineyard,” I tell her.

“Okay, duly noted. So you have good taste when it comes to wine.”

“I have great taste when it comes to all sorts of things,” I say, my cock growing hard as I listen to her voice, wondering what she looks like. If she’s as easy on the eyes as she is on the ears.

“Mmm, a man who knows what he likes.”

“Yes,” I say, “I certainly do.”

“So you know what you like, you’re not on a budget. What else should I know when I’m putting the *biggest box* together?” she asks.

Is she flirting with me? I think she is.

“How about you add in something sweet. Something only you would think to bring.”

“Like something super sweet?” she says. “Are we talking whipped cream and hot fudge? Or are we thinking...”

“Yes,” I say, cutting her off. “That sounds fucking perfect.”

“Wow. You say ‘fuck’ a lot considering you’ve never met me.”

“Are you offended?” I ask.

She laughs. “No, it’s just my granddad is about, you know, 10 feet away from me.”

“You work with your grandpa?”

“Yeah, I work with my granddad. This is actually his grocery store. He raised me so I’ve pretty much been working here since I could walk. I keep trying to talk him into retiring, but he says over his dead body, which is a little crass, but you know, you’ve got to meet him to understand.”

“Well, maybe I will,” I tell her. “So who will be making this delivery?” I ask. “Because that’s kind of important.”

“Is it?” she asks. “And why is that?”

“Because,” I tell her, “if I’m getting some big package I want to know who I’m tipping.”

“Me,” she says, “I’m going to be the one bringing you your package.”

“Hmmm,” I say. “Maybe you’ll be the one receiving it.”

She gasps.

“Are you shocked?” I say.

“Maybe,” she says, “a little.”

“You’re the one who suggested chocolate sauce and whipped cream.”

“Hey, you were the one who said you wanted something sweet.”

“I did. But you’re the one who suggested something so seductive.”

“Those are sundae toppings. Nothing sexual about that.”

I chuckle. “I guess you never had me make you a sundae.”

“I guess I haven’t, Nicholas.”

“You know, when you come and bring me my *big* package, we could always have sundaes by the fire.”

“Are you asking me to add ice cream to this order?” she asks and now I *know* she’s flirting.

“No, Quinn. You’re the sundae. And the hot fudge, honey, it goes all over you.”

QUINN

I GET OFF THE PHONE AND I FEEL MY FACE AFLAME. LIKE bright red. My cheeks are on fire and my pussy is wet and I am in trouble. I'm downright burning up.

I put the phone on the receiver. I swallow. Tell myself to get a grip.

It's just some random guy who is probably a freakazoid or some loner in the woods. Most likely both.

He is not some hot mountain man like I read about in my romance novels. He's just some guy who's bored in the mountains at Christmas. I don't need my fantasies to be running wild. Not now. Not when a blizzard is ready to burst into Linesworth. Everybody's been talking about it all day. Granddad's worried, which is why we're closing up shop early, and this delivery to Nicholas at cabin number six is going to be my last delivery before I call it quits for Christmas.

"You okay, Pumpkin?" Granddad asks.

I smile extra big, a grin pasted on my face, which I'm hoping suppresses my true emotions, which are all sorts of inappropriate. You know, not the kind of things you discuss with your grandfather. Things like *that voice*.

That guy on the phone... his voice was all low and growly. *You're the sundae*.

I swallow. "Oh, I'm fine. I just have an order to get all packaged up."

"Which package did they want?" Granddad asks.

I swallow again. “The biggest,” I say. I’m practically drooling in my mind. I can only imagine what his biggest might entail. I mean, I’ve imagined plenty of times what the biggest package might be like, but imagining is as far as I’ve gotten, because I’ve never had the actual luxury of doing any more than imagining.

I’m 22 years old, and I’m living in Linesworth, and I am a virgin, and it’s Christmas, and I am single as ever.

So actually, I shouldn’t be judging some lonely man in the woods, because I’m pretty much the same. Only instead of a man, I am a woman, and instead of the woods, I am living in my granddad’s attic.

Not that that is a depressing situation. I love my granddad, and I love Linesworth, and I love the attic. I’ve lived there all my life, ever since I was a four-year-old little girl, orphaned.

And my granddad is, well, the best man in the whole damn world, and right now he’s looking at me all sorts of worried. Probably because I never have hot pink cheeks when I get off the phone with a customer.

“You okay there?” he asks.

“Totally,” I say, overcompensating for all the ways in which I am totally *not okay*. I am imagining large packages and hot fudge all over my body, whipped cream in places I’ve never been *creamed*... well, I have been creamed, but just by my own hand. Not by some growly, bearded man who has a big package, and... focus, Quinn. Get the groceries, get in the car, do the delivery, get back home. Be safe. Be sensible. There is a blizzard coming into Linesworth.

I do what I need to do. I grab a shopping cart and set to work. I start packaging up all the things that need to be packaged. The word *package* is on repeat in my mind. I keep thinking of packages. Big, thick, meaty packages. Long girth. Crammed full. Stuffed to the brim.

Oh my God, am I seriously getting off as I walk down this aisle? Screw it, in the cart I add the whipped cream, the hot fudge.

I gather the meats and cheeses, the Christmas ham, some Brussels sprouts, dinner rolls, pancake mix and maple syrup for good measure. I grab all of the holiday goodies that I have curated for all our visitors in Linesworth, and I add them to the cart. Then I ring them up for Nicholas in cabin six, and I give my granddad a kiss on the cheek.

“You’ve got to be safe, Quinn. I know you love the mountains, but this is not the day to be reckless. You promise?”

“I promise,” I say. “The last thing I want to do is get stranded in the woods. I know there’s a blizzard coming.”

“Okay. You don’t want your granddad to worry.”

“I won’t worry you.”

“All right. Just be safe.”

“As soon as these last customers are gone you close up shop, all right? You promise?”

Granddad nods. “Will do. Just going to ring these last few people up, and then I’m going to close and I’m going to walk home, okay?”

“All right,” I say. “I love you to pieces.”

“I love you more.”

“Christmas is in just a few days. We’ll have our traditions, like always. Just us, you and me.”

“You know it, Pumpkin.”

The clerk that we hired for winter season, Matt, an 18-year-old senior at the local high school, helps load the groceries into my car, and he asks if I’m going to be okay up on the roads. “I’m going to be fine,” I tell him, trusting my four-wheel drive. He tells me he’ll make sure my grandpa gets home okay.

“Hey Matt,” I tell him, “thank you for looking out for my granddad.”

“Of course,” he says. “You’re the one who’s always looking out for me, giving us a second chance, and a third.”

I smile. Matt's had a hard time, but I can relate. I've had my fair share of hard times too, growing up. It's not always easy, not having a traditional family unit, and Matt and I can relate to that. But I am the kind of person who believes in second and third chances, and that family doesn't have to be perfect to be family.

I get in the car and I turn on the radio, loving the Christmas music as it blares through. With the heat cranked up and the music blasting, I drive up the mountain. I know these mountain roads well. They're the only place I've ever called home.

When I turn on the road to cabin number six, I immediately realize that the snow is not just falling. It is falling in buckets. This is a snowstorm, and it is not going to be easing up any time soon. In fact, every inch I drive I swear there's another foot of snow. I'm not quite sure it's possible, this much snow this fast.

The windshield wipers move as fast as they can go, but my tires get stuck before I make it to the driveway of cabin six.

"Come on, girl," I say, hoping my SUV can make it just a little bit further up the road.

When I realize I'm stuck, like really, really stuck, I groan, my head dropping to my steering wheel. I see cabin number six just up ahead, but still, if I'm stuck this deep, there's no way I'm getting home tonight.

The sun is coming down. My car is stuck, and I'm in the middle of nowhere. Crap.

In the trunk, I determine to make the best of this with a smile and grab the first bottle of wine I can find. With a flashlight on, I begin to trudge toward the cabin.

But the closer I get, I begin to mentally prepare for the worst. Maybe this guy just had a super sexy voice and I was in la-la land. Maybe this guy is just some creepo who's going to... well, my worst-case scenarios end right here, right now, because the door to cabin number six swings open, and a man appears.

He's not a creepo, and he's not some weirdo or a loner in the woods.

He is the epitome of a mountain man.

A hulk of a guy.

My knight in shining armor, only better.

He's wearing a flannel shirt. He's got a beard. His hair is all ruffled up. His eyes are dark brown. His smile— it's dazzling.

He looks like he's from the cover of a romance novel I would devour up in my attic right now if I could, only I don't need to, because I've got the real thing right here in front of me.

I lift up the bottle of wine. "You ordered a package?"

He chuckles. "I ordered a *big* package. And it looks like you've delivered."

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NICHOLAS

THE MOMENT I SEE HER, I FEEL LIKE I'VE GOTTEN MY OWN goddamn Christmas miracle. How I got so fucking lucky is beyond me. But, after the shitshow that I encountered this fall, I'm taking any win I can get, and hell, she's a goddamn win.

Quinn is cute as a button, like a sugarplum fairy, some sort of present wrapped up just for me. She's wearing a bright red coat. She has long blonde hair, eyes somehow lit up from the snow, even though the sky is turning dark. She looks like an angel dropped down from heaven and, hell, I'm not one to get down on my knees and pray, but I'll thank God for her.

In fact, I'll thank God for drumming up this snowstorm and bringing her to my doorstep right when He did. She's everything I didn't know I needed right now. Right here. Tonight.

"I see you brought the wine," I say, stepping closer to her. She laughs.

"Yeah, I did. The rest of the food is in the car. I was hoping you might be able to help me carry it up? I couldn't drive any closer because of the snow," she said. "It's crazy out there."

I look around us, the whirling white a blanket. "I'm glad you made it up here safe." The snow is falling hard, and I reach out toward her, taking her hand. "I don't want you to blow away."

"I've got on boots, it's you I'm worried about. You don't even have on any shoes."

I chuckle. “Sorry, I got caught off guard. I saw you walking toward the cabin and I thought it was some sort of figment of my imagination. You look like an angel.”

“I swear to God, I’m not an angel,” she says, wiggling her eyebrows.

“No, more like a devil?”

“Let’s not get crazy. I’m a good girl,” she says. “Now, you need to put on some shoes and then you need to get the food.”

“And you,” I say, smacking her ass, taking some liberties, “need to get inside and warm yourself up. I’m not going to have you freezing your ass off out here.”

She giggles. “My, a little handsy, are you?”

“Do you mind?” I ask her.

She widens her eyes. “Honestly? No.” Then she licks her lips as she steps inside my cabin.

My feet, I admit, are freaking frozen. But I’m not going to tell her that. Hell no, I’m not going to say anything that brings my attention anywhere but between us. I want these sparks to keep on flying, because I feel something real right now.

“Girl, you need to warm yourself up. How about I open that wine before I go get the groceries?”

She shakes her head. “I think you’re crazy. I should probably try and get back down that mountain before it gets too dark.”

I growl, running a hand over my beard. “You’re not going down that mountain right now. You see the weather out there? That’s fucking crazy.”

“So? I can’t stay here. Tomorrow’s Christmas Eve, and—”

“Exactly. You can’t get stuck in a snowstorm in the middle of the night, in the dead of winter. I’m not going to have that on my conscience. What will your granddad say?”

“My granddad? Oh no. Shoot! He’ll be so worried if I don’t come home.”

I smile. “So you’re already considering staying over? I like this,” I say. I walk to the kitchen and grab a corkscrew and a glass for her wine. I open the bottle as I walk back to the living room. She’s already sitting down on the couch and she’s pulled out her phone.

“Hey, Granddad,” she says. “I made it to the cabin okay, but the snowstorm’s crazy. Are you home? Oh good. Thank God Matt helped you back. He’s such a good kid. Yeah. Well, anyways, there’s no way I can get back down the mountain tonight. I know, it was probably stupid of me to come up here, but the last thing I wanted was someone to be without any food, especially with it being Christmas. I know. I know.”

I’m doing my best not to eavesdrop, but the cabin’s small, and damn, she’s sitting right here. Honestly, she’s looking at me the whole damn time, watching as I pour her wine. I give her a nice liberal pour and then I hand her the glass. She accepts it and smiles.

“I’ll be safe. Nicholas seems like a real nice gentleman,” she says matter-of-factly. “Yes. He’s about my age, maybe a few years older, and he seems pretty responsible,” she says slowly, taking me in, twisting her lips as she speaks. “He has a vineyard in...”

“California,” I mouth.

“California,” she tells her grandfather. “Yes. Mm-hmm. I’ll call you if anything changes. And I’m sure I’ll be fine. I’m just going to sleep on the couch and as soon as the snow passes, I’ll come straight home.”

In my head I’m thinking *Like hell is she sleeping on this couch*, but we’ll discuss that later. She ends the call and I tell her to drink her wine while I go get the food. “You haven’t even put on boots,” she says.

“Right,” I chuckle. “I was a little distracted.”

“By what?” she asks, taking a sip of the wine.

“By you.”

“By me?” she repeats in disbelief.

“Yeah, by you. I mean, hell, girl, you’re looking pretty damn cute and it’s distracting as hell.”

“I’m distracting? I’m a small-town girl from a mountain village.”

“You really have no idea how sexy you are?”

“None,” she says.

“Well, I’m going to get those sundae toppings from your car and then I’ll show you just how sexy you are. I think you’re going to taste sexy too.”

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QUINN

I'VE NEVER BEEN A HIGH MAINTENANCE KIND OF GIRL, BUT THE moment Nicholas leaves the cabin, I make a beeline for the bathroom. Once the door's locked behind me, I take a good hard look at myself in the mirror.

The snow's made my hair wet and frizzy, my cheeks are extra pink, and it's not just because it's freezing outside, it's because I'm all spun up from the conversation I've had with Nicholas.

He is handsome in ways I was not prepared for. I unzip my parka and consider what I'm wearing, a simple long-sleeve black T-shirt that says Linesworth Marketplace. Not exactly cozy-by-the-fire attire. My jeans are form-fitting and I know they make my ass look good, so there's that. But I pull my T-shirt out from my chest and examine my underclothes. At least I wore a good bra today. I unzip my jeans and look at my panties. Black lace thong. I smirk. Well, I guess some higher power was looking out for me when I got dressed.

Feeling slightly more confident, I run a hand over my hair and give myself a pep talk.

You got this, Quinn, this is the night you've been waiting for your whole damn life. You're here alone with a man who actually gets you excited. Enjoy yourself, be happy. Lean into the life you've been waiting for.

I hear a noise in the cabin and I realize Nicholas is already back. "Where did you go?" I hear him say. The timbre of his voice is low and sexy and it melts me in ways that normally

would embarrass me, but I'm not embarrassed right now, I'm energized. I'm perked up in a way that feels like I've just had a double espresso, or two double espressos. I'm hopped up on energy and I feel good. I feel on fire.

I open the door and I practically run right into him, forgetting how small this little cabin is. Good, I want it to be cozy, intimate, just the two of us.

"Everything okay in there?" he asks.

"Yeah," I say. "I was just..." I lick my lips.

"What?" he asks. He sets his hands on either side of the doorway, blocking my ability to dart past him. Not that I want to, I like being trapped by him. It's not creepy, it's alluring, like there's nowhere for me to run and hide, there's only one option for me to stand right where I am, face to face with this man.

"I was making sure I didn't wear anything too embarrassing under this puffer jacket."

"I don't think you could be wearing anything embarrassing considering your ass looks pretty fine in those jeans. I'd say you're looking okay."

I laugh tightly. "Right, well, I've actually never spent the night at a guy's house, so I was just slightly nervous that I wasn't going to be, you know, presentable." I smile coyly.

"Really?" he says. "You've never spent the night with a man?"

I shake my head. "Nope, never, not once."

"And your granddad, he's okay with you staying here?"

"Well, considering there's a blizzard outside and my car is stuck in the snow, I don't think I have much choice." Wanting to change the subject, I ask, "Did you get the groceries?"

He nods. "Yep, they're all in the kitchen. It's a pretty big package, but I managed to carry it in."

"Yeah, probably because you have such big hands." The moment I say it my face flushes. Could I be more on the nose?

He grins. “I have other things that are big too. You want to see?”

I laugh. “Wow, coming on strong considering I just told you I’ve never even slept over at a man’s house.”

“Well, just because you’ve never slept over at a man’s house doesn’t mean you’re not comfortable being with men.”

“Well, for the record, I’m not. I’m a virgin, if you want to know.”

He eyes me more seriously. “You telling me the truth, Quinn?”

I nod. “Nothing but the truth, so help me God. Though I’m not sure what God has to do with this situation.” I smirk. “Well, you did say I look like an angel.”

“That’s true.”

“So what happens next?” I ask. “I thought you said you were going to make me a sundae?”

He shakes his head. “I’m not making you a sundae, I’m making you *into* a sundae.”

Once again, the space between my thighs burns with need. My core tightens and my heart pounds. “So you’re not scared of the fact that I just told you I was a virgin and have never slept over at a man’s house?”

He shakes his head. “No,” he says. “It just makes me want you all the more.”

NICHOLAS

THIS SEXY LITTLE THING IS A VIRGIN. *A VIRGIN*. AND SHE CAME right out and told me.

Fuck. I thought I was in trouble before, but now, I'm a goner.

She unzips her jacket and follows me into the living room. When she sets it down on the couch, I get a good look at her in her tight black T-shirt with the logo from the grocery store where she works printed on the front. She's got a good, ample rack.

I shake my head. "How old are you, Quinn?"

"I'm 22. How old are you?"

"28."

She smiles. "Good."

"Why is that good?" I ask her.

"It just sounds like we're both completely clear-headed adults. We're both sober, of sound mind. We both know what we're doing."

"Pretty confident, huh?"

She nods. "Very."

I shake my head, walking into the kitchen. "Let's get these groceries put away."

"All right," she says. "Do you mind if I take off my boots first?"

“Not at all,” I say, doing the same. Both of us in stocking feet and blue jeans, we head into the kitchen and begin unpacking the big package that I brought in from the cold. “This is enough food for an army,” I tell her.

“Well, how long are you staying?” she asks.

“Just for three days.”

She clucks her tongue. “Long enough to avoid a family holiday somewhere,” she says, side eyeing me as she pulls open the refrigerator and places a ham inside.

“Something like that,” I tell her.

“So you do have a family?” she asks. “Or just one you’re avoiding?”

“My family and I, right now, we’re on rocky territory. Let’s put it that way.”

“But it’s not your fault?”

“Not exactly.”

She bites her lip. “Is this a red flag I should be leery of?”

I put some packaged crackers in a cupboard and turn to her. “My family thinks that money trumps all and I don’t exactly agree with that,” I tell her plainly. “I think that some of the people we’ve been partners with for a long time, some of the local farmers, well, those relationships mean more than the bottom line. And my mom and stepdad and his daughter Veronica, they don’t agree with me. It’s caused problems.”

She nods slowly. “Okay. Well, that doesn’t seem like a red flag.”

“No,” I say. “It’s not.”

She smiles. “It actually makes me like you quite a bit more. See, I’ve already told you I’m a small-town girl, but I’m also the granddaughter of a small-town business owner.”

She runs her fingers across Linesworth Market, the letters on her shirt. “This little market means the world to me and my granddad. He’s been running his place since he was 23 years old, just a year older than me. And I keep trying to convince

him to retire. He needs to enjoy some time off, enjoy some of the fruits of his labor. He feels bad, thinking it's too much for me to carry on my own, to take over by myself. But the relationships that he's built with some of the vendors, I wouldn't want those to change for the world. Some of the farmers and the small businesses that we buy from, they rely on grocery stores and markets like ours to keep their family businesses alive. That's why when I'm working at the market, I keep trying to find more small business, small and unique items to stock at the grocery store, to help prop up small and up-and-coming businesses, to give them a chance."

She shrugs. "Sorry. I'm rambling. Maybe none of this matters, but—"

"No," I tell her. "I love hearing what you have to say. I love this kind of stuff. It matters to me too. I keep trying to get my mom and stepdad to buy and invest in smaller businesses, but we don't see eye to eye. There's something special about keeping things local, but the family business that I'm a part of has just gotten so massive that it's kind of hard to stick to our roots."

She reaches out and takes my hand, squeezing it. "Thanks for sharing that with me," she says. "For being honest. I know families can be kind of tricky."

"They can. So it's just you and your granddad?"

Quinn nods. "Yeah. My parents died in a car crash when I was just four years old, and my grandma died when I was a teenager. She was a really good lady. And my granddad loved her more than the moon and the stars. They had a good love story."

"So sorry for all that you've lost." I reach out for her hand, and when our fingers lace together, it is heated. I know she must feel it, the sensation is more than warmth, it's fire.

"What happened to your dad?" she asks.

"Heart attack. He worked himself to death."

"I'm so sorry," she says.

“Yeah, and I’m fucking terrified it’s going to happen to me if I don’t do something, something drastic.”

Quinn smiles, stepping closer. “Well, good thing you came to Linesworth when you did. You got away from the drama of the family and came somewhere quiet, somewhere you can clear your mind and focus on what’s really important. Think about what you really want.”

I let out a soft groan, wrapping my arms around her. “What I really want? Damn, Quinn. I came out here lonely as hell and not an hour later, you showed up. What I really want, I think I fucking found her.”

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QUINN

HE LEANS IN AND KISSES ME, HIS ARMS WRAPPED AROUND ME, his palms on my hips, holding me firm at my waist.

And I feel steady, safe, his.

Like this is right where I belong.

I've never been a shy girl. That's not why I've never had sex. I've just never been in the right place at the right time.

I've never been here.

I give into the kiss because this is the kind of kiss I have been waiting for my whole damn life. And I find myself whimpering against his mouth. Our lips part, and his tongue finds mine, and I breathe him in, and he smells like cinnamon and pine, like Christmas.

He's not from Linesworth, but I can feel in my bones that this is where he belongs.

That's not something I'm going to say during our first kiss, but I'm letting myself believe in the magic of this holiday season. I'm letting myself sink into the magic of this moment.

When our lips part and he steps back, his eyes are locked with mine. "Quinn," he says, "That kiss, that kiss was something else."

I lick my lips and I nod. "Better than a sundae?"

He laughs. "Not even close, but it gave me a taste, a tease of what's to come."

“So you’re still hungry for something sweet?”

“More than hungry,” he says.

“Good,” I say, “but you know, I haven’t had my supper yet.”

“You telling me you want me to cook you dinner before I lick hot fudge off your tits?”

I laugh, covering my face with my hands, embarrassed and indulgent and incredulous and excited.

“Maybe,” I say, “I mean that kiss got me all hot and bothered, but also I am a little nervous,” I admit, “a little... I don’t know. Nicholas, I’ve never had a man do anything like that to me, anything so erotic.”

“Have you ever had a man undress you?” he asks. “Touch you?” He runs his fingers over my breasts. They’re covered in a cotton T-shirt, but my nipples are hard and he can feel them. “Have you ever had a man slide his hands down your belly, past your panties, between your legs, cup your pussy, touch you there?” he asks, his hands moving lower, mimicking his words.

I shake my head. “Never,” I whisper. “Not once.”

“Oh, baby,” he tells me. “You’re more than a virgin. You’re so innocent. You sure you want a man like me, a man you’ve just met, to take all your firsts?”

At this point, though, my body is on fire. His fingers between my legs are massaging my pussy, and my panties are soaked. I know he feels it. He’s grinding his hand against the fabric of my jeans, and I have to step backwards, bracing myself against the counter. I close my eyes. “You’re going to have to stop,” I tell him, “or you’re going to have to do a hell of a lot more.”

He groans. “Fuck,” he says, “you know I want to do more, but I want to make sure this is what you really want. You’ve just met me. I’ve just met you, and yes, I want to lick your pussy. I want to do more to it, too, but...”

I open my eyes. I run my hand through his hair, drawing him to me, pulling him close. I hop up on the counter and I wrap my legs around his waist. I see his cock is bulging in his jeans. He looks so handsome in his flannel shirt, his muscles pulling at the seams. I wrap my arm around his neck. I've never done this.

"I've never been properly kissed, and I've certainly never been fucked, not by a stranger and not by a man I've known, but I want it to be done by you. The moment I heard your voice on the phone, I had this feeling, this desire, this need. I wanted you, Nicholas."

His eyes widen. "Really?" he says. "Because, Quinn, I thought the same fucking thing. I heard your voice on the phone and I thought, damn, now that's a voice I could get used to. That's a sound I want to hear every damn day of my life."

"Stop it," I say. "You didn't."

He groans. "No, girl, I did. Now. I'm not making you dinner right now. I promised you dessert, and I'm a man of my goddamn word." He opens the fridge and he grabs the whipped cream and the jar of fudge. "It's time for that sundae." He scoops me off the counter, laughing, and carries me to the living room.

NICHOLAS

IN THE LIVING ROOM, I TAKE MY TIME. STANDING IN FRONT OF her, I begin to undress her ever so slowly. Thankfully, the lights are low. The fire is burning and there's Christmas music on. The scene is set as if I planned this, but I haven't. It's all unfolding naturally as if it's already been fated to happen. And maybe it has. Maybe my whole life has led me to this moment, to this one day, to her, to Quinn. Considering how fucking perfect she is in every damn way, I wouldn't be surprised. There are crazier things that have happened after all, aren't there? Crazier things than a man finding a girl who seems to be his perfect match.

"Why are you smiling so big?" she asks as I tease the hem of her T-shirt up over her head, letting it fall to the floor while I marvel at the majestic sight in front of me.

"For starters, you got some pretty big tits."

She laughs, throwing her head back. "Okay. Well, good thing I got big tits, considering you got a big cock."

"How do you know the size of my cock?"

"Well, one of the first things you ever said to me is that you got a big package. In fact, I remember you telling me you had the *biggest* package."

"It's true," I say. "I do."

I take her hand and I place it over my rigid shaft, hard beneath the fabric of my jeans. "You feel that, girl?"

She nods. "I do. It is big. And it is hard."

“Hard for you,” I tell her.

She unbuttons my jeans carefully, and I watch her as she does. Her tits look so good in her black lacy bra, and I reach behind her, unclasping it.

She gasps as I do, her breasts untethered. Pressed together. Fuck, they look good. They’re huge too, big round titties, and she stands up straighter as I press them together, dipping my mouth to her nipples, twirling my tongue around the hard brown areolas.

She whimpers as I do, her hand reaching down beneath my boxers, stroking me. Fuck, that feels good. I look up into her eyes, massaging her breasts as she strokes me up and down. “This is going to be a good fucking night,” I tell her.

“Thank God for blizzards,” she says.

“I’ve always had a thing for snowstorms,” I tell her back.

She laughs. “I’ve always had a thing for mountain men.”

“I’ve never been called a mountain man before. You know that? I’ve always been more of a farmer.”

She nods slowly. “I guess I can see that. But you know, they are kind of the same thing. Bearded, blue-jean-wearing, flannel shirts, rugged. They know how to use their hands,” she says with a coy smile, as I continue to massage her perfect tits.

“Fuck, your tits look good,” I tell her.

“Yeah?” she asks, as I pluck one nipple, then the other. “Why don’t you tell me what my pussy looks like?”

“You want to know what I think of your pussy?” I ask her.

She nods ever so slowly. She pushes down my jeans and boxers in one fell swoop. She’s an eager little thing. And fuck, I find that sexy. Truth is, I’m pretty eager too.

I take off her jeans, taking in the view of her in this black lace thong. “You had plans for something tonight if you put this on this morning.”

“I don’t know what got into me. I guess I always had fantasies playing in my mind.”

“Really?” I say. “So you had some kinky thoughts going on, even though you were a virgin?”

She nods as I run my hand over her bare ass, smacking it playfully. “Yeah. It’s these romance novels I read up in my attic bedroom. They put crazy thoughts in my mind.”

“I see. Well, that’s good. That means you have a good working understanding of the female anatomy.”

“The male anatomy too,” she says. “But you know, sometimes romance novels might give a girl unrealistic expectations. That’s what I’ve heard anyways,” she says with a smile.

I shake my head. “That won’t be a problem for us though,” I tell her, taking her hand and placing it on my big, thick cock, “because this, honey, is better than any dick you’re going to read about in a romance novel.”

She licks her lips, and so I keep on talking, “This thick cock is going to make you come, over and over again. And I may not be the hero in the novel you read on your Kindle at night when you touch yourself, trying to get off under the covers, hoping your granddad’s not going to hear you while you moan in pleasure, but I’m going to do it better and I’m going to do it harder and I’m going to do it faster and I’m going to do it longer.”

“What else?” she asks in the tiniest of whispers.

“You know all the snow outside? You know what it needs?”

She smiles, her eyes a question, “A snow plow?”

“Yep, but you know what I am gonna plow? You.”

“Me?” her words a faint but I can tell she I squirming with desire.

“Yes, you. I’m going to make you moan and I’m going to make you come in a way you never have before, because maybe you’ve used your fingers in the past, Quinn, and maybe you’ve used a battery-operated boy toy. And that’s great. In fact, that’s fucking fine. The truth is, I’m glad you’ve been

having fun, teaching yourself what it means to please and pleasure. But baby,” I tell her, pressing my hand between her thighs, cupping her pussy the way it needs, the way it deserves.

She’s wet. Her panties, fuck, they’ve been ruined hours ago. I can tell she’s creamed them over and over again, probably since the first time she heard my voice on the phone. “I’m ruining you for all romance novels, and more than that. Tonight, I plan on ruining you for all other men.”

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QUINN

NICHOLAS BEGINS TO TAKE CONTROL OF ME IN A WAY I'VE always dreamt about, at least read about. He pulls me to the ground, spreading my legs.

His head moves between my legs, his mouth finds my pussy, his tongue licks me up and down. He flicks expertly.

“You like that, baby?” he asks, growling against me, and I purr like a kitten. He knows that I like it, need it, want it.

My back arches as he teases me. My thong has been discarded. My nipples are hard. My body his. He says he's going to make me a sundae, but I've already melted. I'm a mess. I am his, of that I am certain.

“Oh my God,” I mutter, moaning in pleasure as he deep dives to my pussy in a way I didn't know was necessarily possible. I couldn't make this happen with my fingers, try as I might. A dildo had its purposes, but it could never give me this amount of pleasure. His tongue grinds against my clit, tempting me to a place I've only dreamt about.

“Yes,” I moan as he takes me to the edge, circling back again, up and down with such ease, such tantalizing speed. I ache for more and he knows how to deliver.

“You like that, girl?” he asks, and he knows I do. He's a man that I have basically just met, but I would give myself to him over and over again. How have I waited this long for him to enter my life?

“Do you believe in love at first sight?” he asks as he adds a finger to my pussy, opening me up nice and slow.

“Yes,” I beg. “Yes,” I moan.

“You do, don’t you?”

“Yes,” I say, not even realizing what I’m answering, what I’m committing to. “Yes,” I finish, the orgasm presenting itself in such an absolute and complete way I feel as if I’ve just run a marathon, as if I’ve just finished a term paper, as if I’ve just... Well, as if I’ve just gotten off for the first real time in my life.

“I knew you would. I knew you did. This is real, right?” he asks.

I blink, realizing what I was saying yes to. It was more than just that flood of euphoria. His words, “Do you believe in love at first sight?”

“Yes, yes, yes.”

I look into his eyes.

“You don’t even know me,” I say. “Nicholas.”

“I feel like I know plenty. I know you taste like whipped cream, you look like sugar, you sound like dessert.”

“And I know your family is crazy,” I tell him, running my hands through his hair. “I know you’re lonely. I know you’re looking for a small-town girl to get cozy with. But Nicholas, I think you might like the idea of me more than the reality,” I say as he runs his tongue up and down my body, sucking my breasts as if they are his. I’ll give them over gladly if he doesn’t stop doing that sometime soon.

I reach down, touching his cock. I’ve never been naked like this with a man before, but I don’t feel vulnerable in a way that makes me scared. I feel open and honest and seen in a way that makes me excited for what might be coming next.

“All I know, Quinn, is that when I saw you walk up to this cabin, I felt like I saw an angel, and I’m not saying that in some Biblical sense. I’m saying you were a gift from God. The girl I needed, the girl I wanted, you’re it. I know I don’t have

any idea what your favorite color is, your favorite thing to eat for breakfast or how you take your coffee. But what if none of that mattered? What if all that mattered was a blizzard in the dead of winter? What if all that mattered was you and me finding one another in the middle of a snowstorm? What if that was enough to start a life?”

“A life?” I say, sitting up straight. He kneels before me and I wonder, what if this is more than crazy? What if this is crazy enough to be real?

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NICHOLAS

“I KNOW I’M COMING ON STRONG,” I TELL HER, PULLING HER into my lap.

We’re sitting by the fire and I take the can of whipped cream, shaking it nice and good, and then I spray perfect little dollops on her big round tits.

“Fuck, you look like a goddess,” I tell her, and then I dip my mouth and pleasure myself on her tits. “I’ve always had a sweet tooth,” I tell her. She laughs.

“You’re insane,” she says, “talking about love at first sight with the girl you just met.”

I grin. “Maybe it’s a sugar rush, maybe it’s the snowstorm, maybe it’s just meant to be.”

Quinn, though, seems apprehensive, slightly scared.

“You’re going to wake up tomorrow and the snow is going to melt and you’re going to blink and realize that you’ve lost your goddamn mind and that you’re in bed with a stranger.”

I shake my head, “Not possible. By then, you’re not going to be a stranger. By then, you’re going to be so much more than that.”

“What am I going to be?” she asks, reaching for the fudge, unscrewing the lid, shoving me down on the ground. I laugh, loving the way she looks. The whipped cream is still on her tits and she looks like a fucking mountain peak.

She tips the jar over ever so slightly right on my groin. My stiff, hard cock is now covered in chocolate sauce.

“You’ve made a delicious mess, and the thing is, Quinn, *you* were supposed to be the sundae, not me.”

“I’m sorry,” she says, “I couldn’t help myself. And I didn’t mean to,” she says. “I just...” She licks her lips. “Well, that’s a lie, I did mean to.” She tosses her head back and laughs. “I’ve never done this, but I’ve always wanted to.”

“You’ve always wanted to go down on a man you just met in an A-frame cabin in the middle of a blizzard?”

She laughs hard, her stomach shakes and she grabs it. “Oh my God, don’t. My stomach is aching.”

“Well, you can’t get a stomachache before you’ve had all the sweets. That’s like the opposite of how it’s supposed to work.”

“You’re right,” she says. She’s gone red in the face she’s laughing so hard. She has dimples in her cheeks and fuck, she’s cute.

I love how unabashedly happy she is. How much she’s able to let herself go and give into this moment. We’re a mess. There’s chocolate sauce and whipped cream. We’re sticky and delicious. I look at her and I pull her to me and I kiss her hard. Now we’ve got sauce all over us both and I smack her cute butt again and then I squeeze it nice and good.

“No,” she says, “you’re distracting me with your kisses. I’m here to do something and I’m going to do it well.”

“Yeah?” I ask. “And what’s that?”

“I’m going to suck your cock until you come.”

“You know what that means, right?”

“Yes,” she says. “I realize I might be gagging considering how big you are.”

I grin. “Don’t gag,” I say. “Go nice and slow. Just take a little bit at a time. I don’t want you to hurt yourself.”

She looks over her shoulder at me, smiling softly. I'm on my back and she's on her knees and she pulls her hair over her shoulder. She looks so innocent, so damn sweet. Her pussy is pink and so is her tongue, innocent, ripe, damn. Everything about her is so pure, so good. So damn good. I swear to God, I'm not going to ruin her. I'm going to make her understand how precious I find her, how precious and good and perfect I believe she is.

I don't smack her ass this time. Instead, I caress it as she begins to bob her head up and down, sucking me off. I close my eyes and I make a fucking Christmas wish that Quinn will be mine forever. Mine for goddamn good. I'm going to marry this girl, I know that for sure. I know that for certain.

That's what I'm going to do tomorrow on Christmas fucking Eve, I'm going to make this girl mine.

She doesn't know it yet, but it's going to happen.

Just got to get this snowstorm to stop so I can ask her granddad's permission.

Damn, she feels so good as she sucks me off, up and down. Her fingers running over my balls, hot and heavy, tight.

She fondles them gently, her hand circling around my shaft, stroking me harder up and down. I'm pulsing under them. She's taking me as best she can, but she needs more and so do I.

"Oh God," she moans.

"What is it baby?"

"I'm so wet," she says.

I run my hand over her and I spread her pussy lips with my fingers. She's right, damn, my baby's juicy. I ease her knee over my chest, drawing her cunt to my mouth.

"There we go," I say, "that's how you 69," I teach her. And then I begin to suck her cunt again, the way she needs, and that's how we move as one.

She sucks me off until I come, which isn't so damn long because I'm hot and horny for her in a way I've never been

before. She is mine. She's all mine and I am hers.

“Fuck,” I groan as I lick her cunt.

She comes against my mouth so nice and hard. Her pussy riding my mouth the way she was made to do, and I wonder what she's thinking, sucking me off. All that hot fudge on her lips. I finish and she swallows.

Damn, she's a good fucking girl. She rolls around, dizzy with lust and desire. Her eyes hooded, hot, heavy.

“What is it?” I say.

“Everything about this is making me so ready.”

“For what?” I ask.

“For more,” she tells me. “I need that cock inside me. Please, Nicholas. Don't make me wait anymore.”

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QUINN

“ARE YOU SURE YOU’RE READY?” HE ASKS AND I NOD.

In control, awake and alive in a way I’ve always dreamt about. “I’m ready,” I tell him. “Please,” I beg. “You’re covered in hot fudge and whipped cream.”

“So are you,” he tells me. “Should we shower first?”

“Maybe, that’s a good idea,” I say with a smile. And he picks me up and carries me to the bathroom. He turns the shower on. And he lets it get warm. With his phone on, he finds a playlist with some piano music that is holiday themed. And I appreciate the ambiance.

“That’s perfect,” I say. “I never imagined having sex to Christmas music tonight but...”

He chuckles, “This is perfect. Better than perfect.”

“It is, isn’t it? The start of something.”

He cuts me off with a kiss. A good, soft kiss. “The start of our forever,” he finishes for me.

Then he takes my hand and we walk into the shower stall, together. The steam wraps around us and he picks up a bar of soap, sudsing me nice and slow. It’s sensual and beautiful. And I feel seen by him in a whole different way.

Earlier, it was all laughs and chuckles, giggles and grins. Now, it’s something different. Holier. Is that the right word for this? Sacred, even?

It feels special in a way I wasn't prepared for. Maybe it was using the word "love" out there in the living room that changed it from a purely light-hearted hookup to something more intimate, something more real.

"What?" he asks. "I see you're thinking all sorts of things in those beautiful blue eyes of yours."

"I guess I was just wondering when this changed."

He pours out shampoo in his hand and lathers up my hair. "No one ever washes my hair," I tell him. "Not since I was a little girl."

"Would you rather I didn't?"

"No, I like it," I say. "I actually like it a lot."

"Good," he says, "I really like it too." He washes all of me from head to toe. "I think it changed out there, probably when I was licking your pussy, when your cunt was pressed against my mouth," he says.

I close my eyes, shaking my head, cringing for a moment.

"No," he says. "Don't. I mean it. I was with you in the most erotic moment possible and the most explicit way. And it didn't feel like we were just there for the sex. It felt like we were coming together as one. Or," he shakes his head. "Maybe I'm crazy. Maybe I'm the one who's lost my mind. But..."

"No," I say, running the bar of soap over his firm and solid chest. "I felt the same way, Nicholas. I wondered if I was the one who was crazy because I was the one who was sucking your cock covered in chocolate sauce. And yet it didn't feel purely playful. Yes, it did in some ways, but it also felt like I was being intimate with my partner." I bite the side of my lip as the warm water wraps around us. "Like I felt safe doing it because I was with someone who I had known forever." I swallow and he wraps his arms around me, pulling me close. "I felt like I had known you forever, Nicholas."

He kisses me then, as the water washes away the soap in my hair and the soap on our bodies. And eventually, before the water can run cold, we turn the shower off and we wrap ourselves in giant towels. And Nicholas carries me to his

bedroom, setting me on the king-size bed, half wet, still completely naked.

He runs his hands over my body ever so slowly. Kisses planted everywhere. I can't match his fast enough, but God do I try. One here, one there. Faster, until his mouth is on mine, until our fingers lace. And he pins his hands above my head and he moves his body against mine. His cock entering me ever so slowly, inch by inch.

"I don't want to hurt you," he says. "I got you." He promises, and I believe him.

This man I just met, today. This man I am giving myself over to entirely, completely, without reservation. This man who has my heart spun up, my body spun out of control.

This man who is making me melt in a way that seems impossible, considering it's below freezing.

He kisses me and I kiss him back. And I hold him tight. As we come together, hard, hard, harder, still. He growls in my ear as he enters me. As he fills me up and makes me his. I exhale, overwhelmed, overtaken by the force of his length.

"Are you okay?" he asks. I can do nothing but nod, and he kisses me gently, taking me more completely. Entirely. All the way.

We move as one. His cock deep in my pussy. My core on fire. My body, his. Our bodies are wrapped around one another tight, tight.

"Don't let go," I make him promise.

"Never," he swears.

I believe him. And Nicholas – he was right. He's not a stranger. Right now, he feels like he is mine.

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NICHOLAS

IN THE MORNING I DECIDE TO COOK UP A BIG BREAKFAST FOR Quinn. She's still wrapped up in the quilt and sheets in the king-size bed, and I smile to myself as the coffee brews. This window reflects bright white, the mountain peaks dazzling, and there's still snow falling from the sky.

It's a beautiful winter wonderland and I wonder if there's any sleds underneath the cabin, thinking maybe it could be romantic for the two of us to get outside and sled down a hill or build a snowman this morning. I fry up some eggs and toss bacon on a griddle as she saunters into the kitchen, sleepy-eyed, her blonde hair ruffled. God, she looks good, a sheet wrapped around her.

"Fuck, baby," I tell her. "You look hot as hell."

"Yeah?" she asks, looking down, her tits pressed together, her nipples poking through the bed sheet.

"Yeah," I say, drawing her close to me. I'm wearing a pair of sweats, and my cock is already aching at the thought of her and me together again. Last night was nothing but perfection, bliss. I could fuck this girl all night, forever, all day. I don't want to let her go, ever. I could hardly sleep. All I could think about was making her mine for good.

I said the word "love" last night, and it wasn't an exaggeration, it's not something I regret. It was something real.

Love at first sight turns out to be something that's not just found in romance novels and movies made for the big screen.

Turns out, love at first sight is something that can be found right here in Linesworth, because I found it while I was snowed in at Christmas. I found it with her. I want this girl for keeps.

“What are you thinking about?” she says. “I feel like I lost you for a second.”

I cup her cheeks and kiss her. “I got lost in your eyes, Quinn. Got lost in you. Fuck,” I say. “The bacon!”

I can smell it burning, and she laughs, reaching for the potholder. “Here you go,” she says as I grab the potholder from her hand and pull the cast iron skillet off the stove.

“I’m not much of a cook,” I admit.

“That’s okay,” she says, swatting my ass with a dish towel. “I’m pretty good around the kitchen.”

“Yeah? And how do you take your coffee?”

“With cream, but considering we’re snowed in,” she says, reaching for a bottle of brandy, “how about we add some of this to the coffee too?”

“Perfect,” I say.

“I was wondering if you had anything I might be able to borrow to wear? Not that I mind walking around the cabin nearly naked, but it’s kind of cold.”

“Right,” I say. “In the bedroom, there’s my suitcase. I haven’t had a chance to unpack, but I have some flannel shirts in there, T-shirts, you can wear anything. I can grab it if you’d like, or you can help yourself. I can start the fire, maybe that will help warm up the place too.”

“Great,” she says. “I’ll be right back. You get the fire, I’ll get some clothes to make myself decent, and then coffee?”

I nod. “Perfect.”

Forgetting about the coffee for a moment, I head to the fireplace and add a few logs to the wood-burning stove. Once it’s crackling, I return to the kitchen and add some brandy and cream to our coffees. Setting them on a tray, I carry it to the

living room and put it down on the coffee table. Plating the bacon and eggs, I bring that into the living room as well, thinking a nice breakfast by the fire sounds good. We need some protein after the night we've had. I know we both certainly worked up quite an appetite several times over.

"Quinn?" I say, realizing she's been taking a while. "Everything okay? Do you need some help?"

A moment later, though, she walks out and she's no longer smiling, bright-eyed, and ready to play. Instead, she's holding my phone, an expression on her face that is anything but happy. "Hey," she says. "So, look, I'm not some creeper, I swear. And I'm not trying to invade your privacy, but..."

"What?" I say.

"Look, I was just reaching in your suitcase and your phone was right next to it on the floor and there was a text that popped up on your screen. I wasn't, like, messing with your passcode or anything. It just was right there. It was impossible to not see." She passes the phone to me, and right on the screen is a text from Veronica.

Fucking Veronica.

The image Veronica sent is impossible to ignore, and now I know why there are tears in Quinn's eyes. The picture is of an engagement ring, a big, fat diamond ring. And the words underneath it are devastating if read in the wrong context.

Nicky, you'll be home tomorrow morning for the engagement party, right? It's time you put this ring on my finger in front of the family, don't you think? XO, yours forever.

"It's not what you think," I say, shoving the phone in my pocket.

"No?" Quinn says. "Then what is it? Because it sounds like there's a girl waiting for you to come home for Christmas to propose."

"Well, there is a girl waiting for me to come home for Christmas to propose, but..."

Quinn shakes her head. “Oh my God. You’re totally playing me. I thought... I thought we...”

“You thought what?”

Quinn covers her face with her hands. “I thought we... I thought you... I thought this was real. Who is she?”

“She’s no one. I mean, she’s my stepsister.”

Quinn drops her hands. “And that’s supposed to make it better? Nicholas, that makes it so much worse.”

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QUINN

HIS *STEPSISTER*?

I shake my head, frustrated and annoyed and still mostly naked.

I turn back to the bedroom and grab my clothes from yesterday. I begin sliding on my jeans before realizing that I'm shaking and I need to sit down.

His stepsister?!

Now my jeans are around my ankles, and I don't even have on any underwear because, well, they were basically ruined last night, and I have no shirt on, and now tears are just falling down my cheeks. I'm on the edge of the bed and I'm crying into my hands and Nick's in here and I haven't had any coffee and this is just worst-case everything. Everything.

He's getting engaged to his stepsister? This can't be real.

"Let me explain," Nicholas says. "Please." He's on his knees in front of me. He hands me a flannel shirt, wrapping it around my shoulders. It smells so good. It smells like him. And I hate that. And I love that. I wipe my eyes.

"Give me the five-second version because I don't have time for more than that."

"Well, you're not going anywhere," he says. "There's a freaking blizzard outside. It's not like you can just jump in your car and go home. You're stuck here. You're stuck with me."

“That’s supposed to make this better?” I moan. “Nicholas, that just makes it worse. That makes me feel trapped with you, a stepbrother-lover-person who tricked me into having sex with him.”

“I didn’t trick you into anything. I love you, Quinn. I want you, forever.”

“Don’t,” I say. “Don’t mess with my heart like that. Don’t mess with my everything. You love me? You love me, but you’re getting engaged to someone else?”

“I’m not getting engaged to anybody. Well, I want to get engaged to somebody.”

“See,” I say, “you do want to get engaged to your stepsister.”

“No, I want to get engaged to you. I want to marry you, Quinn. God, I freaking love you. I met you last night and I want to make my life here with you in Linesworth. I don’t even know your granddad, but heck, I’m going to do whatever I can to make him trust me. I want to help out with your family so he can retire and I can help with the grocery store. Heck, I’ll work the cash register. I’ll bag the groceries. I’ll unload the trucks. What do you need, Quinn? Let me be your person.”

“Stop it,” I say. “Just stop it. Stop saying everything right and everything perfect, and explain who Veronica is.”

“Veronica is my stepdad’s daughter. My mom thinks we should get married, for some reason unbeknownst to me. My mom married this guy like four years ago and Veronica thinks... I don’t know what she thinks. She is not the one for me. In fact, you’re everything she’s not. We work in the same office because it’s a family business, but we didn’t grow up together or anything. We’ve never been anything at all, I swear to you. I’ve never kissed her. I’ve never so much as touched her. I’ve never gone on a date with her. She is nothing to me.”

“That’s not what she thinks,” Quinn says. “And why is that?”

“Because my mother is meddling in my life. Why do you think I left for Christmas? Because I was refusing to play their

game anymore. I knew if I didn't cut ties, I was going to be trapped in a world that I don't want to live in. I don't want to stay there anymore because it means foregoing my own choices for a life that they're going to choose for me."

"You want this instead? You've never even been into the town of Linesworth. You've never even been to my granddad's marketplace. You've known me less than 24 hours and you're making promises that you have no idea if you can keep."

"I'm a man of my word. I told you I had a big package and I did, didn't I?"

I shake my head. "Stop it, Nicholas."

"Stop what?" he says.

"Stop being everything that I want."

"Why?" he asks. He presses his hands to both my cheeks. He wipes away my tears with his perfect thumbs. "Why?" he says again. "Why would you want me to stop being what you need? Because, Quinn, you're everything I want. Let me be what you need. Let me be yours this Christmas. We're snowed in together. Won't you please be my Christmas miracle?"

"You mean that? You really don't love her?"

"Not even close," he says. He pulls out his phone. "Look, listen," he says. He calls Veronica and puts her on speakerphone. "Hey," he says. "It's Nick."

"Hey, Nicky," she says. "So did you get my text?" she cackles. "I thought it was kind of funny, right? Okay. So are you coming home or what? Because the party is tomorrow, and like everybody is coming and it's going to be like, super awkward if you don't even show up for our own engagement party, which is already going to be awkward enough considering, you know, we're not together, but like, for all intents and purposes, we have to make this happen."

"No," he says. "We don't. We're not together, Veronica. We never have been and I'm not marrying you."

"Nicky, that's so stupid. Like, there's a thousand reasons this makes sense."

“No,” he tells her, “there’s a thousand reasons it doesn’t. Whatever plan you and my mom have, it’s twisted and it’s wrong and I’m not going along with it.”

“For tax reasons alone it makes sense,” she moans.

“I’m not marrying anyone for tax purposes. Besides, I’m already engaged.”

“What?” she says. “That is not possible, considering there is no ring on my finger.”

“Well, that would make sense because I’m not marrying you. I’m marrying Quinn.”

My eyes go wide as I listen to the words coming out of Nicholas’s mouth. He hasn’t officially proposed, but, I mean, I guess he basically has, and I guess I basically have said yes.

I shake my head, trying not to squeal.

“Are you serious? Your mom is going to literally lose it. You understand that, right?”

“I don’t care what my mom does. I’m going to let her know shortly that I am not working for her or the family business anymore. I have other work that I need to tend to. Goodbye. And Veronica?”

“What?” she shrieks. “What?”

“Merry Christmas,” he says.

Then he ends the call and he draws me to him. “Quinn,” he says, “one more thing.”

“And what is that?” I ask. “You know, besides the official proposal that hasn’t exactly happened.”

He laughs. “Well, I can’t actually officially propose until I talk to your grandfather.”

“Fair enough,” I say, laughing as he scoops me up into his arms and carries me into the living room where breakfast and coffee are waiting for us in front of the fire.

Bodies entwined, we watch the snow fall. I kiss him.

Again and again and again. I kiss him all day long, knowing in my heart that I am ready to start a life with this man who swept me off my feet when we got snowed inn for Christmas.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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