



GRUMPY MOUNTAIN MEN BOOK FOUR

A GRUMPY MOUNTAIN MAN FOR

Ramsey

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR

K. L. RAMSEY

A GRUMPY MOUNTAIN MAN FOR XMAS

GRUMPY MOUNTAIN MEN SERIES BOOK 4

K.L RAMSEY



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A Grumpy Mountain Man for Xmas (Grumpy Mountain Men Series Book 4)

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DREW

Andrew Wild never imagined that his father was hiding a secret from him. But when his dad passed, his whole life changed. His father's lawyer showed up at his apartment and told him that he had two half-brothers that his dad had been keeping from him. Or maybe it was the other way around. He was keeping Drew from them. Drew and his mom were his father's dirty little secret—a second family that he had kept across town after his first wife passed. The question was, why did he need to keep Drew a secret from his two grown sons?

Meeting them both wasn't easy. Hell, he acted like an asshole when it came to demanding his birthright from his older brothers. He wanted the half of the firm that his father had left to him, and he'd fight for it if that was necessary—but it wasn't. All his new brothers wanted was proof that he was truly their little brother, and his father had left that behind for him. His Dad's lawyer, Bob, had a paternity test that his dad had left to prove that Drew was his son. He knew that his older two sons would demand confirmation of his identity and he had planned ahead. Once Grizz and Jed had their evidence, they welcomed both him and his mother into their family as if it had always been that way. They had Sunday meals with his mother and his brothers brought their families with them. It was as if they had known each other their whole lives, not just months.

It didn't stop the ache of missing his dad or the pain of betrayal that he had been lied to his whole life by the man who

claimed to love him, but he found happiness with his new family that he never knew existed. He loved being an uncle to Grizz and Brooklyn's little boy and hanging out with them even got him thinking about ways that he could find a life like they had for himself.

Jed had moved out of the city and was telecommuting into work, taking cases that were pro bono and helping guide Drew in his caseload. He appreciated his older brother's input too. He was still relatively new to the whole lawyer thing, and he needed all the help he could get. He had been thrown into the deep end of the pool when his dad died and thank God, he had two very helpful lifelines—his brothers.

Grizz and Jed were coming into the city tonight and they were supposed to all get together. They had just seen each other over Thanksgiving at his mother's house, but two weeks had passed and now, his brothers were insisting on coming up with a plan to celebrate Christmas together. This would be the first year that he had siblings to celebrate with and Drew had to admit, he was pretty excited about it. He just had to get through the rest of the week at work, and then, he'd have off until the new year. It was going to be nice to shut down the firm and take a proper break. He and Jed both deserved it.

Drew spent the day putting out fires before he headed home to shower and change into something more casual. The guys had agreed to pizza and beer tonight for dinner and he was glad to get out of his monkey suit and put on jeans and a sweater. Grizz offered to pick him up, but Drew insisted that he didn't want to hold them up if he got stuck in court. He told them that he'd meet them at their favorite pizza place and when he walked in and found the two of them sitting in the corner, already on their second beers from his quick count of bottles, he couldn't help but smile to himself.

"Hey guys," he said, joining them in the corner booth. "I see you've been here for a few minutes," he teased, shoving one of the empty bottles out of his way.

"Rough day, little brother?" Grizz asked. Hearing them call him their brother was something that he was still getting used to, although, he liked it.

“Yeah,” he grumbled. Jed flagged down their waitress, ordered another round of beers, and put in their usual pizza order. “I lost a case, and that usually takes me a few days to shake off,” Drew admitted.

“I get it,” Jed said, “but you can’t win them all.”

“Yeah, Dad used to tell me that too,” Drew said.

“I wonder what he’d think about the three of us sitting here planning our first Christmas together,” Grizz said.

“I think he’d be happy about it,” Jed said. “I mean, he did plan for us all to meet eventually. It’s just sad that it took him dying for this to happen.” He pointed around the table and back to himself. Drew had to agree—it was sad that their father couldn’t get it together and introduce the three of them while he was still alive.

“So, what’s the plan for Christmas then?” Jed asked. They both looked at Grizz who had called them to say that his wife, Brooklyn, had an idea for them all to celebrate together.

“Well, Brooklyn thinks it would be fun to get a cabin out in Colorado to spend the holidays in. You know, snow, and skiing—all that stuff,” Grizz said. He hated to break it to his older brothers that he hated being outdoors almost as much as they seemed to love it. As for skiing, he’d never been, and that was just fine with him.

“Will your mom be up for a trip?” Jed asked. “We have a private jet, and we can all fly out together.”

“Of course, you two have your own jet,” he teased.

“Actually, we each have our own jets, so, if we leave and you can’t make that flight, you can catch one out on mine,” Grizz said.

“You two are hard to keep up with sometimes,” he grumbled. “But I’m in. I don’t care where we spend Christmas, as long as it’s together. Plus, it will be good for my mother to get out of the city for a bit. She’s really been down since Dad died. I’ll convince her to pack her suitcase and be on that flight with me.”

“Great,” Jed said. “When can you leave?” he asked.

“Um, I’m free from tomorrow morning on. Tonight, I have a date with a bottle of scotch and my sofa.” He was exhausted. They had more billable hours than either of them planned on and he was worn out.

“How about we leave in two days?” Grizz asked. “That will give me time to find and book a cabin for all of us and Brooklyn won’t kick my ass for having to pack up everything on her own since I’ll be around to help.”

“Sounds good to me,” Drew agreed. Jed nodded as their pizzas were brought out to their table. “Perfect timing,” he said, thanking the waitress.

“This is going to be a Christmas to remember,” Jed said around a mouthful of pizza. Drew had to agree with his brother. He was finally looking forward to the holidays and that had never happened before. He was going to spend two weeks with his new family, and he couldn’t think of a better way to celebrate Christmas this year.

KIRSTEN

Kirsten Moss wasn't about to spend another Christmas with her big, pushy family. Between her mother, father, and four siblings, she didn't know who was the worst during the holidays. Her brothers and sister were all married off popping out offspring as if they were in a race to see who could produce the most and make their parents happier. She wanted no part of that mess, so she lied and told her family that she was going to have to work that weekend.

It wasn't a stretch. She was a stewardess and having to work on holidays was part of the gig, but this year, she had off. Kirsten was planning on going someplace cold where she could ski and celebrate all on her own. Sure, to most people, that would sound awful, but to her, it sounded like heaven.

She switched her flights the day before Christmas with another stewardess. Colorado had the perfect slopes and the most adorable little cabins, and she even found one that was fully decorated for Christmas. All she had to do was bring her necessities and enjoy the holidays in style.

She landed in Colorado and drove from the Denver airport out to her rental cabin and sighed when she saw the perfect Christmas tree peeking out of the front window at her. This was going to be her best Christmas yet; she just knew it.

The little town was adorable—like something right out of a Hallmark movie and she was sure that she'd never want to fly back home to New York City after this little vacation. She used to love the city, but lately, she was finding it harder and

harder to keep her head above water. Even getting to LaGuardia to catch her flight out of town usually ended up being a complete disaster. She was planning on giving her job notice just after Christmas but taking the next leap of faith and signing up for college turned out to be harder than she hoped it would be.

She grabbed her suitcase from the trunk of her rental car and tugged it into the house through the knee-high snow. “Hey, let me help you with that,” a good-looking man magically appeared in front of her, and she looked around as if trying to figure out where he had come from.

“Thank you, but it’s not necessary,” she insisted.

“Sure it is,” he said. “My mother wouldn’t let me hear the end of it if I didn’t give you a hand.” He nodded over to the crowd of people who were watching him help her and they waved at her. Kirsten waved back at them and looked over to the man who was lugging her bags to her rental cabin.

“This snow is something, right?” he asked. “We don’t get snow like this in the city very often,” he said.

“What city are you talking about?” she asked.

“Oh—yeah, sorry,” he said. “I just assume that everyone is from New York City.”

“Actually, your assumption would be correct with me,” she said. “I’m from New York City. I live in Brooklyn, currently.”

“Good to meet you,” he said, holding out his hand. “My name is Drew and I’m in Manhattan.”

“Wow,” she breathed. “A big shot standing right here at my rental cabin.”

“I wouldn’t say that,” he insisted, “I didn’t catch your name.”

“Well, I didn’t give it,” she said, “I’m Kirsten. It’s good to meet you, Drew. Thanks for giving me a hand.” She was trying to dismiss him, and the poor guy stood around as if not taking the hint. “I hope that you’re not waiting for a tip,” she teased.

He chuckled, “Um, no,” he said. “I was debating on whether or not to ask you to join us for dinner tonight.”

“It’s Christmas Eve,” she said. Kirsten looked back over to his family who were all still standing in the snow, watching them. “You should be with your family.”

“I’m assuming that you don’t have family, since you seem to be all alone, and I can’t let you stay over here by yourself for the holiday. It’s just dinner.”

“Oh, I have a family,” she muttered, “it’s the reason why I ran all the way to Colorado to avoid spending Christmas in New York. I just want a nice, quiet Christmas this year,” she grumbled.

“How about you come over to dinner tonight and I promise to leave you alone tomorrow, on Christmas Day?” he asked. The poor guy looked so hopeful, and he was pretty darn irresistible, how could she tell him no?

“But you’re a complete stranger,” she said. “I can’t have dinner with people whom I don’t even know. What if you’re all a bunch of serial killers?” Sure, she was reaching, but excuses were hard to come by on vacation when she had no real plans. What could she say to him? I’ve got plans with family wasn’t going to work out for her.

“Tell me two facts about yourself,” he said. “Don’t think about them, just blurt them out.”

“I’m a stewardess and my favorite color is blue,” she said, playing along. If it would get her into her warm cabin more quickly, she’d do just about anything.

“See, that wasn’t hard. Now, my turn,” Drew insisted. “I’m a lawyer, and I really want a puppy but I’m afraid that I’m not home enough to have one.” Aww—okay, that was kind of cute. “Now, we aren’t strangers, and I can assure you that my two older brothers might look gruff with their beards and all that, but their teddy bears.”

“Bears eat people, you do know that right?” she asked.

He laughed again as she opened her front door with the code that the rental company gave her. “Just have dinner with

us tonight. No one should be alone on Christmas Eve,” he insisted.

“You’re not going to let this go, are you?” she asked.

“No, no I’m not,” he said. “You should just give in now and tell me yes,” he said.

“Fine,” she agreed. “I’ll come to dinner with your family.”

“Great,” he said. “Does six work for you?”

She checked her phone and nodded. That would give her three hours to take a nap, have a shower, and change out of her uniform. “How should I dress?”

“However you would like,” he said. “We are very casual and my oldest brother, Grizz will be grilling tonight.”

“In the snow?” she asked.

“Yeah, he’s a bit of a nut, but in a good way,” Drew said. “See you tonight, Kirsten,” he said. He sat her suitcase and bags just inside her door and turned to leave. She looked back to find that his entire family was still watching them, and she wondered if they had rented a cabin without a television.

“Crazy people,” she muttered to herself as she knocked the snow off of her boots and stepped into the cabin. Kirsten shut the door and looked around the place. It looked like Santa had come down from the North Pole and decorated the cabin himself. It was perfect. Now, all she had to do was get some sleep and a shower. Then, she’d go next door, socialize for an hour or so, make up an excuse about having a headache, and high tail it back over to her rental. She planned on spending Christmas alone and that was exactly what she was going to do —cute guy or not.

DREW

““W ait,” his older brother Grizz said, “you just invited a complete stranger to have Christmas Eve Dinner with us?”

“Oh, leave him alone,” his wife Brooklyn chided, she was cradling her son against her shoulder, trying to get a burp out of him. Drew couldn’t help but smile at his nephew. He was the cutest kid he’d ever seen.

“Thank you, Brooklyn,” Drew said. “Listen, she was all alone and seemed nice.”

“You know nothing about her,” Jed chimed in. “What if she’s a serial killer?”

“I know that her name is Kirsten, she’s a stewardess, and her favorite color is blue.”

“Wow,” Grizz said, “you should just marry the girl right now. I mean, you already know what you need to know about her.”

“Leave him alone guys,” Jed’s wife, Mercedes, insisted. “If he wants to have someone over to dinner, why can’t he? You both do know that your brother is a grown man, right?”

“I really like your wives, guys,” Drew teased. “They both seem so much more level-headed than both of you. It’s really not a big deal. She’s alone for the holidays and my mother has taught me to be kind to people in need.”

“Great, now she’s in need,” Grizz grumbled.

“My son is right,” his mother said, “I wouldn’t be able to eat dinner knowing that poor woman is all alone over there in a rental on Christmas Eve. You did the right thing by inviting her over to dinner with us,” Maria assured.

“Thanks, Ma,” Drew said. He felt like sticking his tongue out at both of his brothers, the way a bratty younger brother should, but he refrained after remembering that he was a grown adult.

“You really are a mama’s boy,” Jed accused.

“I’d really love to stand around here and chat, but I have a date to get ready for.”

“She’s not having any of my steak,” Grizz griped.

“That’s the Christmas spirit,” Drew joked, making Brooklyn and Mercedes giggle.

“Can you carry my suitcase to my room for me?” his mother asked.

“Of course, Ma,” he agreed. They had decided to rent a house without any steps since his mother didn’t handle them so well anymore. Her condo was on the first floor, and she had no steps inside her place. Drew grabbed her suitcase and followed her back to the room that she had chosen. It was nice of his brothers and their wives to give her the first pick. They were always treating her like their own mom, and he worried that they wouldn’t all get along once he told her about Grizz and Jed. He thought that his father’s secret might make his mother too angry to see past the new, instant family that they were inheriting. He really loved that they accepted his mom the way that they had all accepted him.

“I’m going shopping with Brooklyn and Mercedes the day after Christmas. They both said that’s when you get the best deals on stuff. I’m going to buy myself a new pair of slippers.” He knew that she was fishing to see if he’d tell her what he got her for Christmas, but that wasn’t going to happen.

“You go wild, Mom,” he teased. Drew had already picked up the slippers that she had been hinting at for the past three months. He got her a new pair every year, along with a new

bathrobe. His gifts were quite predictable, but this year, he had an ace up his sleeve—a diamond neckless that he had designed at a jeweler's, especially for her.

“Okay, well if you're not even going to give me a hint, I'm going to unpack,” his mother grumbled.

“You'll find out what you're getting for Christmas tomorrow, Mom,” he said, “isn't that soon enough?”

“No,” she said, sticking out her bottom lip. “I'm old and might not even make it until tomorrow.”

“Oh, she's good,” Jed said.

“You have no idea,” Drew grumbled. “Go unpack, Mom,” he said. His mother trudged off down to her room and Jed chuckled at her theatrics.

“I really do love your mother,” he said. He knew that his mother felt the same way about Jed and Grizz. They had all become this strange makeshift family that Drew didn't even know that he needed—but he did. He couldn't imagine a life without either of his brothers or their families.

“She loves you too,” he said. “I know that she appreciates you both inviting her to come along on this trip. I wouldn't have been able to leave her back home knowing that she'd be all alone this year for Christmas. Dad's passing has been hard on her, even if she'd never admit that. She's still pissed that he kept you both a secret from her.”

“I can't blame her,” Brooklyn said, “if Grizz had another family that he was keeping a secret from me, I'd be pretty pissed off too.”

“You'd fucking kill me,” Grizz corrected.

“And rightly so,” Mercedes said. “How can a man do that to a woman?”

“We're still not sure how or why our father did that to us, and maybe we'll never know, but I sure am glad that we have Drew and his mom now,” Jed said. “I love having a partner at work and I especially love not being the little brother anymore.

Grizz has someone else to pick on now and that's just fine with me."

"Don't worry," Grizz said, "you're still my little brother too and I have plenty of energy to pick on both of you." Brooklyn giggled and slapped her husband on the arm.

"Leave them alone," she chided. "How about you take a break from cooking duties and help me unpack?" she asked, bobbing her eyebrows at her husband. He took the baby from her and ordered Drew to keep an eye on the meat as if the steaks were going to get up and leave.

"Subtle," Jed called after them as they headed to their room.

"You know," Mercedes said, "I could use some help unpacking too." At least she didn't bother to bob her eyebrows at her husband, but Drew could tell what she was getting at, even if it seemed to take Jed a minute to catch up. He could tell the exact moment that his brother caught on because of the giant, goofy grin that he wore. God, was everyone getting laid in the house beside him—well, and hopefully his mother?

He watched as Jed hoisted Mercedes into his arms, tossing her over his shoulder in a fireman's hold as she giggled and squealed. "Put me down, Jed," she shouted.

He swatted her ass, making her yelp, "Nope," he said. "You were the one making the offer, now you've unleashed the beast."

She looked up at Drew, smiled, and shrugged. "See you later, Drew," she said.

"Whatever," he grumbled. "I'll just be here making sure that dinner doesn't go anywhere. I've got a date to get ready for," he shouted, but no one seemed to care. How did they go from his brothers trying to talk him out of inviting a stranger over for Christmas Eve dinner to him standing all alone in the kitchen trying to figure out how to make dinner and grab a shower, all in the next couple of hours? He had no idea, but he was sure of one thing—he was actually looking forward to

getting to know the hot stewardess next door whose favorite color was blue.

KIRSTEN

Kirsten had taken a twenty-minute power nap, showered, and changed into a pair of her favorite jeans and a sweater. She felt refreshed and ready to face a family of strangers who had invited her to spend Christmas Eve with them. But first, she was going to have to call her mother to let her know that she had landed safely and that she was sorry that she was going to have to miss their traditional Christmas Eve dinner and pajama exchange.

Every year, Kirsten and her siblings, and their kids all gathered at their parent's house to exchange pajamas and have dinner together. She loved that everyone seemed to be so happy to be there, but her mother insisted that everyone return for Christmas morning breakfast and presents, and that was beginning to be too much for all of them. She might not have had the guts to tell her parents that she didn't want to spend the entire Christmas holiday with them, but then, neither did her siblings. None of them opened their mouths to protest because they all knew that they'd end up having an argument and fighting with their mother never ended well. Sure, she was a chicken for lying and saying that she had to work, but at least she was doing something about it, rather than just giving in to her mother's demands.

She grabbed her cell phone and called her parent's house, hoping that her father might answer, but she wasn't that lucky. Her mom answered on the second ring and Kirsten sighed. "Hey, Mom," she said.

“Kirsten, I didn’t expect to hear from you tonight,” her mother said. That was a complete lie and they both knew it. If she hadn’t called to check in, her mother would have pouted for days, and then, she’d have to hear everything about her mother’s foul mood from her brothers and sister.

“Well, I had a few minutes before my next flight, and I wanted to call to tell you how sad I am that I have to miss our Christmas celebrations together.” Yeah, she was laying it on a bit thick, but she just couldn’t help herself.

“We’re going to miss you too, Kirsten, but if you have to work what can you do?” How did her mother do that to her? She had a way of making Kirsten feel bad even when she had no idea that she was lying to her. Or maybe her mother knew and was tormenting the hell out of her for spite. If that was the case, her mother would eventually come clean and tell her that she knew and then, she’d follow it up with a healthy dose of guilt and disappointment.

“Right, there’s nothing that can be done about my having to work. It was my turn to take the Christmas holiday,” she lied. Kirsten had asked off for the entire holiday right up to the second day of January this year. She had plotted and planned this whole vacation for months—since the day after Christmas last year when she realized that she just couldn’t take another year of hearing how she was failing as an adult because she wasn’t settled down with kids, or that she wasn’t in a stable job that would allow her to put down roots. She hated being the butt of family jokes and knew that taking the year off from Christmas was for her own sanity, even if she felt like a liar, liar, pants on fire for having to fib to her parents about where she was.

“Well, next year, we’ll have to make up for it,” her mother insisted. Kirsten bit back her groan, not wanting to tell her mother that she was already planning on another “mandatory work” holiday. And if she was lucky enough to be able to pursue her dream of quitting her job and going back to college, she’d have no excuse to keep her from her crazy family’s Christmas celebration. At least this year, she’d be able to take

her little break from them, and for now, that was going to have to be enough for her.

Kirsten checked the clock on the microwave and rolled her eyes. She was already five minutes late for her date with a complete stranger and his entire family. “Listen, Mom,” she said, “I’ve got to go. I’m due on my next flight in ten minutes and I can’t be late. I’ll try to call you tomorrow when we finally land.”

“Where are you heading next?” her mother asked.

“Paris,” Kirsten lied, “so, I’m going to be pretty jet lagged.” That was another lie. Her mother didn’t know that she no longer got jet lag. She had learned a few tricks to help her cope, but the excuse would buy her some extra time so she would be able to sleep in tomorrow morning. It was a Christmas gift to herself and a luxury that she was usually not afforded with her crazy work schedule.

“You sure that you’re good?” her mother asked. “You sound a bit down.”

“I’m just sad that I can’t be home with you guys,” Kirsten lied. She wasn’t sad at all. She was nervous as hell about having to walk next door and ring their doorbell. She wished that she had never run into Drew or his nosey family because all she really wanted to be was alone.

“Aww, me too, Kirsten,” her mother said. “We’ll speak tomorrow and maybe we can even video chat if you have service.” The last thing she needed was to video chat with her mother. The pajamas that she planned on wearing the entire day was going to be a dead giveaway that she wasn’t flying from city to city for work. Plus, she wouldn’t be in Paris and that might be given away by the cozy little cottage she had rented that was decorated to the nines for Christmas.

“Okay, Mom,” she quickly agreed. She’d worry about a way to get out of a video call tomorrow. For now, she was going to have enough to worry about with having dinner with Drew and his family. “I’ll talk to you tomorrow.”

“Great, love you, honey,” her mom said, “talk to you tomorrow.” She ended the call and grabbed her coat. She wasn’t quite used to how cold it was in Colorado. Sure, New York City was cold, but nothing like the weather out west. Plus, the snow was an added bonus. She loved snow, and they didn’t get much in the city anymore. Out in the middle of nowhere, the snow was even more beautiful than she had imagined that it would be.

She zipped her coat, pulled on her mittens and hat, and opened her front door to find Drew standing there in just a sweater and jeans, looking as if he was ready to knock. “Hey,” he said, pulling his hand down to his side.

“Hello,” she breathed.

“I was beginning to worry that you were going to stand me up,” he admitted.

“Um, this isn’t a date, right?” she asked. “Because I’m not really interested in dating.” That was the complete truth too. The last thing she ever wanted was a boyfriend for Christmas. If this was Santa’s idea of a joke, she was going to be pissed off.

“It doesn’t have to be a date. How about if we call it two new friends having dinner together?” he asked.

“That sounds perfect,” she agreed. And maybe, if she stopped thinking that they were on a date, she’d find a way to relax around him, but she couldn’t be sure about that.

“Great, shall we?” he asked, holding out his arm to her, making it feel exactly like a date again. Kirsten sighed and took his offered arm. She pulled the door shut and waited to make sure that it was locked.

“Sorry, I’m not used to the whole smart home thing,” she said. “All I need is a code to get in and I can tell you, I miss the old-fashioned key entry. I think that this house might be too fancy for me.”

Drew chuckled, “I think that it suits you,” he said.

“You’d be wrong,” she challenged. “Back in the city, my place is kind of run down. I never really cared since I was on

the road too much, but I'd like to put down some roots soon."

"How will you do that being a stewardess?" he asked.

"Well, I have a plan, but I haven't had the guts to pull the trigger yet. It's silly, really, especially at my age." The thought of going to college in her late twenties was laughable. When she graduated from high school, all Kirsten wanted to do was see the world. She knew that joining the military, like her oldest brother had, wasn't really in the cards for her. She had heard stories about him having to get up at the butt crack of dawn to run for miles. She hated gym class, so going through boot camp wasn't an option for her. Besides, she couldn't even do a push-up, so she was sure that would disqualify her. So, she got a job with a major airline and didn't look back. Her home base wasn't much of one. It was someplace for her to hang her hat while in town, which wasn't very often.

"How about you tell me what it is that you don't have the guts to do, and I'll honestly tell you how silly it sounds," Drew offered.

"Um, I want to quit being a stewardess and go to college," she almost whispered. Kirsten watched for Drew to make a face or even crack a smile, but he didn't.

"I don't think that's silly at all," he insisted. "What would you go to college for?" he asked.

Kirsten shrugged, "I'm not sure really," she said. They had made it over to his front porch and she was thankful that they weren't having this conversation in front of his family, even if they were all watching them now through the front window. "I was thinking about doing something in business, but I haven't really decided."

"You can take your undergrad classes and get them out of the way while you decide," he said. That was her plan if she ever got the nerve up to do it.

She nodded and smiled over at the woman holding the baby in the window. "Um, we have an audience."

"Yeah, that's my sister-in-law, nephew, and nosey brother. I'm sorry, but that's just the way that they are. It's our first

Christmas together, and I think that they're just excited that we're all together."

"Wait, it's your first Christmas with your family?" she asked. "You will have to tell me your secrets. How do you get out of having to go to visit family on Christmas?" she asked.

"Well, because my brothers and I have only just met after our father passed away. It's always been just me, my mom, and my dad, or so I thought," Drew said.

"Wow, I'd love to hear your story," she said.

"It's a long one, you should come in and meet everyone first, and then, I'll tell you all about my father's other secret family," Drew offered. She felt like an intruder for even asking, but she was curious about his story. Besides, he was the one who had offered the details, so she wasn't going to feel too badly about it. One thing she knew for sure was that Drew was as easy to talk to as he was on the eyes.

DREW

Drew introduced Kirsten to his family and took her into the kitchen to get her a drink. There was no way that he would be leaving her alone with his sisters-in-law or brother. They would end up asking her a million questions and scare her off, and that would ruin his plans to ask her out again.

“What can I get you to drink?” he asked, holding the refrigerator door open wide for her to see what was inside.

“Oh, I’d love a glass of white wine,” she said.

“Great, I’ll have the same,” he agreed, pulling the bottle out of the fridge. He poured them both a glass of wine and he handed one to her.

“Thank you,” she said.

“You’re welcome. How about we go sit by the fire and I’ll tell you about how I met my brothers?” She nodded and he brazenly took her free hand into his own to lead her into the family room. The cabin that they had rented was huge and the family room was the hub of the house. It was a great room that had a lot of space, which he was grateful for since his brothers and their wives were still hovering. His mother had the good sense to be sitting in the corner of the room, pretending to read a book, but he knew that she was listening to every word.

He waited for her to sit down and then he sat next to her, turning in to face her. They were sitting so close that their thighs were practically touching. He worried that she was

going to protest but didn't. "So, your dad had a second family?" she asked.

"Yeah, he met my mom after my brother's mom passed away. They got married and had me. We thought that it was just the three of us until he died last year."

"Your mom didn't know about your brothers either?" she asked.

"Nope," he said, "to say that we were shocked was an understatement. He left me half of his law firm. Jed owns the other half since he's also a lawyer."

"Are all of you lawyers?" she asked. Grizz barked out his laugh and she looked over at him.

"Not on your life," he said. "Jed and I inherited a shitload of money from our grandfather. I don't wear suits anymore, but I was once a part of the corporate world, down in the city. My wife is a lawyer." Kirsten smiled over at Brooklyn who was feeding the baby.

"Well, right now, I stay home with our son. I haven't really decided what my next step is. I don't want to miss a second with this little guy." Brooklyn looked down at her son and smiled.

"I can't blame you," Kirsten said, "he's beautiful."

"Thank you," Brooklyn said.

"Yeah, thank God he looks like his mother," Jed teased. "Otherwise, we'd be having a very different discussion right now."

Kirsten giggled and Jed flashed her his charming smile that made Drew roll his eyes. "I take it you're the funny brother then?" she asked.

"He likes to think so, but he's wrong," Grizz grumbled.

"Don't feed his ego," Drew said, "Jed likes to also think that he's charming, but I think that only Mercedes finds him to be so."

Jed pulled his wife into his arms and kissed her cheek. "She's the only one that I actually care what she thinks about me. The rest of you can go to hell." Maria cleared her throat from the corner, looking up from the book that she was still pretending to read. "Sorry, Maria," Jed said. "Everyone except for you, that is." She smiled back at him and stuck her nose back into her book, making both of his brothers laugh. Yeah, she found Jed to be charming as much as most women did and that really rubbed Drew the wrong way.

"So, how did you all find each other if none of you knew that the others were out in the world?" Kirsten asked. He was thankful for the change of topic.

"My father left me his half of the law firm, and Jed already owned the other half. Dad's lawyer showed up at my place and told me that I inherited his firm and his money, and that's when I found out that I had two brothers. Dad had left me a letter telling me about the two of them, and that's when I looked Jed up. I wanted to be a part of Dad's firm, even if I wasn't sure about it in the beginning. I was too angry to think about taking my father up on his offer because I really wanted to tell him off for keeping a secret like that from me and my mom. But once I got to know the guys, I realized that Dad did this to all of us, and we were all going to have to get used to each other."

"Did it take you very long?" she asked.

"Not really," Jed cut in. "I mean, I think that Drew and I had the biggest challenge because we had to learn not only how to be brothers, but how to work together. But the three of us have figured it all out and Maria is the bonus mom that Grizz and I haven't had in our lives for a very long time."

"Aw, that's nice, Jed, thank you," Maria gushed. Drew rolled his eyes when his brother smiled back at him.

"Sooner or later, I'm going to be her favorite," he said. "You have competition, little brother." For the first time in his life, he did have competition for his mother's affections, and he honestly didn't mind. Having brothers was worth paying the price of having to share his mom.

“Well, we just about have dinner ready,” Grizz said. He was the peacekeeper in the family. Jed would try to stir up the shit and Grizz would change the subject to keep the peace.

“Good, I’m starving,” Brooklyn said. She handed the baby to Jed and offered to help Grizz get everything ready.

“You know, when you hold your nephew, it makes me want one,” Mercedes loudly whispered.

“You are the worst whisperer on the planet,” Jed mock whispered back, “but, I’ve already told you that whenever you’re ready, let me know. I’m up for making a baby any time you are, honey.”

“Ugg,” Drew grumbled, “can you two give it a rest for just one night?” Jed and Mercedes had been talking about a baby since they tied the knot in an intimate ceremony out at their cabin. Drew just wished that they’d get on with it so that he could stop listening to them talking about it.

“Not a chance,” Jed said, “now, hold our nephew so that Mercedes and I can go help in the kitchen.” He took little Will from Jed and smiled down at him.

“He’s really cute,” Kirsten gushed. “What’s his name?”

“William, but we all call him Will,” Drew said. “It’s been pretty awesome having him in our lives. At first, I was scared to death to hold him for fear of breaking him, but now, I can’t wait to get my hands on him when I get the chance. Jed and I are trying to convince Brooklyn to come work with us at the firm, but she said that she needs time to think about it. Honestly, it’s purely selfish on Jed’s and my part. We’ll make sure that she can bring the baby to work and even set up a nursery in the office.”

“That’s so sweet,” Kirsten said. He was beginning to think that she thought that he was a big softy, and that might not work out in his favor. Most women that he went out with liked their men to be a badass, not a sweet, loving brother and uncle.

“I have my moments,” he said.

“Can I hold him?” she asked.

“Sure,” he carefully handed his nephew over and he cuddled into Kirsten’s arms.

“I have a ton of nieces and nephews,” she admitted. “I’ve always loved them at this stage, but then, they go and grow up and they’re all so rowdy. And since I’m the only one who’s not married in my family, they like to think that I’m one of them. Heck, my mother still makes me sit at the kid’s table whenever we have a big family dinner.”

“Wow, that’s awful,” Drew said. He had never had to sit at a “Kid’s table” in his life. He was always an only child, or so he thought, and his parents had no siblings to invite over to a big family dinner. It was always just him and his mom, and on the odd occasion that his father would get home in time for dinner and join them, it would be just the three of them around the table.

“Yeah, well, I have two older brothers and an older sister. I’m the baby and they still like to treat me like one. It’s one of the reasons why I took the year off from Christmas this year. My mother would ask me a million questions about why I’m not in a serious relationship with someone or when I plan on getting married and giving her, even more, grandbabies because I’m not getting any younger.”

“If it makes you feel any better, I get the same lecture from my mother about settling down and giving her grandchildren. Although Will has helped on that front. My brothers treat my mom as though she is their mom, so she’s technically Will’s grandmother.”

He looked over to the corner of the room to find his mother giving him the stink eye, causing Kirsten to giggle. “I’m not trying to pressure you, but I still think that it’s time for you to settle down and give me grandchildren,” his mother said.

“Okay, Ma, let’s change the subject,” Drew insisted. The last thing that he needed was for Kirsten to get the wrong idea about why he had asked her over to dinner. She had already bulked at the idea of tonight being a date, even telling him that she wasn’t looking for anything like that in her life. He didn’t

need his mother butting her nose in to make her feel that tonight was a setup to help get Drew married off.

“Dinner,” Grizz shouted from the kitchen. Drew breathed a sigh of relief that the subject was going to be changed by default. The only thing he wanted to do was spend Christmas Eve with his family and get to know his pretty date, even if she didn’t want him calling it that.

KIRSTEN

Kirsten was surprised that she was having a good time with Drew and his family. In fact, she didn't want the evening to end. Once dessert was over, she helped with dishes and when Drew's family all excused themselves and turned in, she knew that it was time to call it a night.

Drew dried the last dish that she had washed, and she let the water out of the sink and dried her hands. "Well, I guess I should be heading out," she said.

"You don't have to do that," he assured.

"Your family has all gone to bed and I love to watch *It's a Wonderful Life* before I fall asleep. It's kind of a tradition."

"I love that movie," Drew admitted. "I'd offer for you to stay here and watch it with me, but we don't have a television in our cabin. My brothers insisted that it would help us to bond without any distractions. Hell, they even took my cell phone when I walked through the front door. Grizz has them all locked up somewhere in the house and for the life of me, I can't find them anywhere."

Kirsten giggled at Drew's brother's antics. "He sounds like my youngest brother. He's always doing stupid things and making us play along with his dumb ideas. He gets me into more trouble than I care to admit." Spending the evening with Drew's family had actually made her miss her own, not that she'd ever admit that to anyone.

“I’d say that I’m mad about it, but I’m not. It’s nice to have family, you know?” he asked.

“Tell me if you feel that way in about thirty years,” she teased.

“Yeah, I guess I sound kind of corny gushing about my family the way that I did tonight, but I never thought that I’d have a Christmas like this. I never thought that I’d have two older brothers to share the holiday with. I guess I’m just a little sappy this year with all of the changes.”

“No, I think that it’s nice,” she said. “Listen, how about you walk me home, and then maybe you could come in and watch the movie with me—if you’re not too tired and all that,” she offered. Kirsten was sure that she was overstepping, but she just couldn’t help herself. She was the one who had insisted that they not call tonight a date, but she was truly hoping that their “date” wouldn’t ever end.

“No, I’m not too tired at all,” he said, “and, I’d love to watch the movie with you. I’ll grab a bottle of wine from the fridge, and I think we have a bag of popcorn in the pantry,” he said.

“Great, I’ll look for the popcorn,” she offered. Kirsten wasn’t sure if she had just made the biggest mistake of her life, asking Drew back to her little rental cabin, but she honestly didn’t care. She thought that being alone was what she needed this year but hanging out with him and his family had proven her wrong. What she really needed was to spend the evening with a handsome man, watching a Christmas classic in her perfect little Christmas cabin.

He helped her with her coat and then pulled on his own. “Ready?” he asked, offering her his arm as he had when he walked her over to his place for dinner.

“Ready,” she said, taking his offered arm. They walked out of his cabin and into the freshly falling snow. “It’s snowing again,” she almost whispered.

“There’s something about snow on Christmas, right?” he asked. “I mean, we get snow in the city and it’s a pain because

it slows down our commute, but out here, on Christmas Eve, it's magical," he said.

"You're a romantic," she said.

"No, I'm not," he grumbled.

"I didn't mean it as a slight, Drew," she insisted. "You're a nice guy and there's nothing wrong with that."

"I'm guessing that you've never heard the old adage about nice guys finishing last," he asked. Sure she had, but she had dated enough bad guys to know that wanting a nice one was the right thing for her.

"Drew," she said, "there is nothing wrong with being a nice guy." She punched in the code to get into the front door and held it open for him. He looked like he was trying to figure out if he wanted to go in or not. He stepped into her cabin, and she quickly followed him, shutting the door behind them before he could change his mind.

"I haven't met many women who want to be with a nice guy," he said, helping her off with her coat. That was something that her former dates wouldn't have done. Heck, at dinner, he held her chair for her and stood every time she did. Those were all sweet gestures that her former dates would have never done for her.

"I want to date a nice guy," she insisted. "I've only dated the bad boy types," she said. "You know, they treated me like shit, and I thought that they were awesome. I was an idiot. I'd like to date a guy who treats me nicely. Someone like you, Drew," she said.

"Wait, you made me promise that this wasn't a date, and now, you're telling me that you'd like to date me?" he asked.

"Actually, I said I'd like to date someone like you, Drew," she corrected.

"You know, you are the most confusing woman I've ever met," he accused.

"So I've been told," she teased. "But to clarify, I'd like to date you, Drew. I mean, I know that we've only just met, but

as I've already pointed out—you're a nice guy and I'd like to date a nice guy." They both lived in the city and if she actually followed her dreams and quit her job to go back to college, she'd be home a lot more. Usually, she set up dates online with guys from around the world. If she was flying to Paris and had a few days' layover, she'd go out on a few dates with men that she had met online. No strings were kind of her thing, but maybe she needed to start looking for at least a few strings.

"Okay, so are we calling tonight a date, or should we start all over?" he asked.

She shrugged, "How about if we start the date now? I mean, we're going to watch a movie and have a few drinks—it's technically a date, you know if we want it to be."

"All right," Drew agreed. "How about if you get the movie going and I'll find a wine bottle opener and some glasses."

"Sounds good," she said. "Would you mind if I changed into something more comfortable?" she asked. She had worn her skinny jeans and after eating dinner, she felt as though she was going to bust out of them.

"Whatever makes you happy," he said.

"See, now that's exactly what a nice guy would say," she said. He frowned at her, and she couldn't help but laugh. "You really need to stop thinking about that as a bad thing, Drew," she insisted, "because, it's not."

"I'll try, but no promises," he griped.

"I'll be right back," she said. Kirsten rushed back to her room and rummaged through her suitcase, trying to find the Christmas pajamas that she had packed. Sure, they might completely scare Drew off, but they were a part of her perfect Christmas plan. She was going to have a nice dinner, alone, but Drew and his family had changed her plans for that. Then, she was going to put on her Christmas pajamas and watch *It's a Wonderful Life* until she fell asleep. It was nice that she wasn't going to have to do the second part of her plan alone either, but there was no way that she was changing her plans to wear her favorite Christmas pajamas.

She pulled on her fuzzy slipper socks and walked back into the family room to find the television remote and turned on the movie. She'd chosen it because one of the stations played the movie on a loop all night on Christmas Eve. Kirsten had gotten lucky that the movie was starting over since it was ten o'clock.

"Just in time," she said to Drew as he walked into the room from the kitchen. "The movie is starting over again."

"Oh yeah, they play it on a loop every Christmas Eve," he said. Drew handed her a glass of wine and she thanked him. "I love the pajamas," he said, "and the fuzzy slippers."

"Um, thanks," she said, "it's not too much, right?"

"Too much for what?" he asked.

"Well, for our first date," she said.

"Not at all. In fact, I think it's the perfect outfit," he teased.

"Well, if you'd like to change into your comfy pajamas and come back over, feel free," she offered.

He chuckled, "Unfortunately, I don't have pajamas. I sleep naked, Kirsten." She could feel her cheeks burn and she was sure that she was bright red. His laughter told her that she had guessed correctly. "Don't worry, honey," he said. "I don't plan on getting ready for bed yet. You're safe." She knew that if Drew could read her mind, he'd find that she wasn't worried about him getting naked at all. In fact, she was looking forward to it, but then, this was only their first date.

She quickly sat down on the sofa and pulled a quilt from the back of it onto her lap. Drew sat down next to her and pulled some of the blanket onto his lap, snuggling into her side. "Is this okay?" he asked.

"Yes," she breathed.

"I have to admit, I haven't watched this whole movie," he admitted.

"Ever?" Kirsten asked.

“Nope,” he said, “I usually fall asleep less than halfway through. I have just always found it boring.”

“Saying that is like admitting that you hate Christmas,” Kirsten said.

“I like other Christmas movies, so you can’t really say that I hate Christmas,” he said.

“What Christmas movies do you like?” she asked.

“Well, there’s The Grinch,” he said. “The cartoon one—that’s a classic. Oh, and the Peanuts Christmas special—I love that one,” he said.

“They are hardly classics,” she said.

“Well, they’re classics to me,” he argued. “I mean, they came out before I was even born.”

“Right, but they aren’t movies. They’re television shows and cartoons at that.”

“Well, you asked what I liked, and I answered honestly. Should I have lied?” he questioned.

“Not at all,” she said. “I guess you just caught me by surprise is all. I think it’s sweet that you love children’s Christmas movies. You have something in common with my nieces and nephews,” she teased.

“Ha, ha,” he drawled. There was something about Drew that she just found so darn charming. She couldn’t help but be drawn to him, even if that wasn’t what she had expected when she accepted his dinner invitation.

“What are you doing tomorrow?” he asked.

“I’m planning on doing nothing—nothing at all. Why?” she asked.

“Because I was hoping that you’d want to spend part of the day with me and my family again,” he said. “Unless you’d like to be alone. I mean, I know that I’m rushing things, but we only have a week here. How long will you be staying?” he asked.

“Also a week,” she said, “and, I don’t feel that you’re rushing things. I’d love to spend part of the day with you and your family, Drew. As long as I’m not intruding.”

“Not at all,” he assured, “they all seemed to love you.” She wasn’t sure how true that was, but it was nice of him to say.

“I don’t know about that, but I’d love to hang out with everyone again,” she said.

“How about me, Kirsten?” he asked. “Do you want to hang out with me?”

“Yes,” she said, “I’d love to see you tomorrow too, Drew. But you’re going to stay to watch the rest of the movie, right?” she asked.

“Of course,” he agreed, “but I have one more question before we get back to the movie.”

“What’s that?” she asked.

“Can I kiss you?” he asked.

“I’d like that,” she said without hesitation. She had already broken all of her rules, what would it hurt to break one more? Besides, she was usually the queen of mistakes, so if Drew turned out to be one, she’d just chalk it up to another lesson learned.

DREW

Drew felt like he was pushing Kirsten for more than she might be willing to give, but he couldn't seem to help himself. He'd asked her if he could kiss her and when she told him, yes, he leaned into her personal space and sealed his lips over hers. He didn't want to give her the chance to change her mind and from the way that she responded to him, that wasn't even a thought she was having.

He broke the kiss, leaving her panting, and when she wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him down for another kiss, he couldn't help but feel proud of himself for pushing her a bit further than he had planned.

"What was that for?" he asked.

She shrugged, "I like the way that you kissed me," she admitted. "I hope that it was okay."

"It was more than okay," he admitted, pulling her against his body. Kirsten snuggled into his side, resting her head on his chest and his whole damn world felt right.

"Is this okay too?" she asked.

"Yes," he breathed. Drew ran his hands up and down her back and she snuggled closer into him. They lay like that, watching the movie, and before he knew it, he was waking up in a bright, sunny room. Drew had a feeling that he had fallen asleep once again while watching *It's a Wonderful Life*, and apparently, Kirsten had too.

“Shit,” he whispered. His arm was asleep from her laying on it and his neck had a horrible kink in it. “We fell asleep,” he breathed.

Kirsten stirred against him and sat up. “Where am I?” she asked.

“You’re in your cabin rental and it’s Christmas morning. Apparently, we both fell asleep while watching the movie, and well, now I’m going to have to explain to my whole family what happened, not that they’ll believe me.”

“Oh God,” she said, “they’re going to think the absolute worst of me.”

“I don’t think that’s possible,” he assured. He was pretty sure that they were going to think the absolute worst of him though—especially his sisters-in-law and his mother. His cave men brothers would pat him on the back while grunting something about him being the man. He really wasn’t the kind of guy who kissed and told, and since kissing was all that happened between the two of them, he had nothing to tell his family. He was just going to have to tell them the truth—he fell asleep over at Kirsten’s place while watching a movie and that’s all that happened.

“I’m so sorry that I fell asleep, Kirsten,” he said.

“Well, it’s just as much my fault as yours. I fell asleep too,” she said.

“Listen, I’ll need to go back over to our cabin and smooth things over with my mother and everyone.” Out of everyone, he worried about what his mother would think the most. “How about you stop by later this afternoon?” he asked.

“Are you sure that’s still a good idea?” she asked. “I mean, they’re going to already think the worst of me.”

“Again, they’ll think that I’m a pig for staying over after our first date. I’m betting that they’ll feel sorry for you for having to put up with me,” he teased. Although, a part of him thought that might be true on some level. “Please, Kirsten,” he said, “I’d really like to see you later.”

“All right, but if everyone hates me, you need to make some excuse for us to leave early—deal?” she asked.

“Deal, but it won’t be necessary, I promise. I’m going to sneak back over to my cabin and hope like hell that no one’s awake yet,” he said. Drew checked the clock and noted that it was just after seven. He had a feeling that his nephew would already be up and that would mean that Brooklyn and Grizz were probably awake too. Drew wasn’t thrilled with the odds of him sneaking back into the cabin undetected. They were going down by the second.

“I’ll see you later?” he asked, slipping on his jacket and boots.

“You will,” she agreed. He gave her a quick kiss and smiled down at her.

“Merry Christmas, Kirsten,” he whispered.

“Merry Christmas, Drew,” she said. He took one last look back at her and opened her front door to step out into the bitterly cold morning air that hit him in the face. He couldn’t remember a colder morning. In fact, he wasn’t sure that he had ever experienced one.

He decided to use the back door, saying a little prayer that everyone was still in bed. Instead, he opened the door that led into the kitchen and stopped dead in his tracks at the sight of everyone sitting around the kitchen table having coffee.

“Well, good morning,” Jed said, “and, where have you been?”

“I’d tell you but it’s none of your business,” Drew said.

“Where have you been, Drew?” his mother asked, staring him down as if daring him not to give an answer. “And before you tell me that it’s not my business, you should remember what used to happen when you back-talked me.” She used to spank his ass red and sit him in time out for what felt like an eternity.

“I hate to tell you this mom, but I’m bigger than you and I’m pretty sure that I won’t fit on your lap anymore for a spanking,” he teased.

“Drew,” his mother said, warning sounding in her voice.

“Fine, if you all must know, I walked Kirsten home last night and she asked me to stay and watch *It’s a Wonderful Life* at her place—you know since we don’t have a television here.”

“Oh, I love that movie,” Mercedes said. “I completely forgot that they play it on a loop on Christmas Eve. Now, I feel like I’ve missed out. Tell me why we didn’t get a television in this place again.”

“Because Grizz wanted us to bond and be together as a family,” Jed reminded.

“Well, that’s lame,” Brooklyn said, shooting her husband a mean look.

“Do you want me to call and get a television sent over?” he asked.

“On Christmas?” Maria asked. “You wouldn’t want someone to come in and work on Christmas, just to deliver you a television, right?”

“Of course not,” Grizz assured. “It can wait until tomorrow, as long as you guys don’t leave for the night to watch television over at Kirsten’s place. I didn’t come up here to sit in a cabin by myself all day watching television.”

“So, you went over to Kirsten’s place and fell asleep?” Maria asked as if trying to get to the bottom of his story. Luckily, he was sticking to the truth.

“Yes, Ma,” he assured. “She invited me in to watch the movie and we drank some wine and talked for a while, and then, we both fell asleep on her couch. Nothing happened.” Not that he’d tell her if something had happened, and he really didn’t count a kiss as any major news to tell his family.

“Well, I don’t like it that you spent the night over at a stranger’s house, but that’s done. Now, can we concentrate on opening presents?” His mother loved to open gifts and giving gifts seemed to bring her even more joy.

“Of course,” Drew agreed. “Can I have ten minutes to freshen up and grab a cup of coffee?” His mother looked like she wanted to tell him, no, but she didn’t. Instead, she just sighed and nodded her agreement while his brothers and their wives just watched the two of them. At least they had the good sense to keep their noses out of his business—for now. He was pretty sure that they’d both have something to say later when his mother wasn’t around.

He couldn’t help but feel that he was letting everyone down this Christmas. His brothers had come up with a great way for them all to be together, and he couldn’t stop thinking about his sexy neighbor who spent the night curled into his side. He couldn’t wait for her to come back over this afternoon, but he was beginning to worry that might not be the best idea. He was going to have to come up with an excuse not to see her again tonight and then, he’d hopefully make things up to his family.

Drew quickly showered and changed, pulling on his coat and boots to run back over to talk to Kirsten. He just hoped like hell that she’d be more understanding than his mother was. He knocked on the front door and she pulled it open. She had also showered and was in her robe and all he wanted to do was push his way into her cabin and ask her to spend the day in bed with him.

“Hey,” she said, “I didn’t expect to see you back here so soon. Did you forget something?” she asked.

“Um, no,” he stuttered, “but, I have some bad news. I can’t meet you this afternoon. My mom isn’t feeling well, and I don’t want to push her. I think it’s best if we cancel.” Kirsten’s face fell and he knew instantly that she was disappointed. “I’m sorry, Kirsten.”

“No, it’s not a big deal,” she lied, “really, I’ll be fine. I have a whole day planned anyway and it’s fine. I hope your mom feels better.”

“Thank you. I just think that this trip has taken more energy than she planned, and she needs time to rest,” he said.

“I understand,” she assured.

“I’d love to see you tomorrow if you don’t have plans. My family plans on going shopping and I hate shopping. Can I take you to dinner? You know, like a real date?” he asked.

“I’d like that,” Kirsten agreed.

“How about we go ice skating downtown beforehand? Do you ice skate?” he asked.

“I love to go ice skating,” she gushed. “That sounds perfect.”

“Great,” he said. “I can pick you up at noon if that works for you,” he offered.

“Sure, I’ll be ready then,” Kirsten agreed.

“I better get back,” he said, nodding over to his cabin. “Merry Christmas, Kirsten,” he said.

“Merry Christmas, Drew.” He didn’t bother to turn back to take one last look at her. He knew for sure that she was watching him leave and God, that made him feel like a complete idiot. He hated canceling on her today, but he needed to give this new family Christmas a try. He made a promise to his brothers to start new traditions as a family unit. He just had no idea that he’d be giving up the pretty girl next door to do so.

KIRSTEN

Kirsten wasn't sure how she was going to get through the whole day alone. It sounded like such a great plan when she came up with it, but now, she was depressed, sitting in her robe, and watching sappy Christmas movies—alone. She thought about calling back home but knew that she'd be interrupting unwrapping presents and she'd never live that down. It was always a big deal on Christmas morning for them all to gather back at her parent's house and open presents. It was a chaotic frenzy that she was hoping to avoid but now missed like crazy. What the hell was wrong with her? Maybe she was just being nostalgic, or maybe she was just feeling guilty for lying to her family, but she needed to get off of the sofa and do something about it.

She grabbed her cell phone and checked the employee website to see if anyone had requested a replacement for the day that might get her close to New York City. Sometimes she got lucky with her flights and sometimes, she didn't. Kirsten scrolled through the group chat of stewardesses who were asking for the day off for one reason or another and came across a flight that would get her pretty darn close to home. Her friend Julie was asking for someone to take her flight from Denver to Newark Airport today. It was supposed to leave in about three hours and would put her back home in time for Christmas dinner if she could find a lift from the airport down into the city. She'd even take a train if she could find one running from Newark down to Brooklyn. If not, she'd have to break down and call her oldest brother to come and get her. Owen owed her one anyway. Heck, he owed her a lot more

than one with all of the times that she helped him out with last-minute flights.

She shot off a message to Julie that she'd be able to cover her flight and quickly got dressed and packed up her stuff. She had just enough time to drive down to Colorado and turn in her rental car before having to report to her flight.

Kirsten was halfway out of the door when she remembered that she had just made a date with Drew for tomorrow. She'd need to leave him a note, not wanting to interrupt his family's Christmas morning. She ran back into her cabin and found a pen and paper, quickly writing a note to let him know that she had to take a flight for a friend. He didn't need to know that she was going home and giving up on her silly quest to have a quiet Christmas all to herself.

I'm sorry but I will have to cancel our date tomorrow. I got called into work. I hope you enjoy the rest of your time here with your family. Maybe our paths will cross again someday. Until then, wishing you all the best, Kirsten

She taped the note to her front door and thought about adding her number but decided that might be presumptuous of her to think that Drew might actually call her once he got back to the city. She knew that she was just a fling. Heck, she wasn't even that. Could she be considered a fling after only a few stolen kisses? Probably not. She was someone that he hung out with for a night, and honestly, she'd never forget Drew or the magical Christmas Eve that they shared together.

* * *

Her flight was on time—thank God, and she got into Newark in the early afternoon. The problem was, no trains were running into the city, and no Uber or Lyft drivers were willing to drive her more than an hour to her parent's house. Kirsten had no choice but to call her brother, Owen, and call in a few of the favors he owed her.

Luckily, he had his cell phone on him and answered when she called. "Hello," he said.

“Owen, it’s me. I’m stuck in Newark and need a ride down to Brooklyn. Can you come to get me?”

“You’re kidding, right?” he asked.

“I’m not,” she said.

“Kirsten, it’s Christmas Day,” he reminded.

“I’m aware,” she drawled. “I was able to get a flight home to surprise Mom and Dad. Help me do that, Owen.”

“It’s a big ask, Sis,” he said.

She sighed, “Don’t make me remind you that you owe me, Owen,” she said. “I can call in a whole bunch of favors if you refuse.”

“You’re evil,” he mumbled.

“Thank you, and don’t tell Mom or Dad that I’m here, I want it to be a surprise,” she said.

“How the hell am I supposed to slip away for over two hours?” he asked.

“Not sure, but you’ll come up with something,” she said.

“You’re not only going to get me in trouble with mom, but with Patti too. My wife is going to ask questions and I won’t lie to her.”

“Fine, tell Patti that I’m here and swear her to secrecy,” she ordered.

“You know, you did all of this just to sit at the kid’s table and have dinner with us, right?” he asked.

“Yeah, about that,” she said, “I’m going to need for you to switch places with me. You can sit with your children for dinner. I’m not their parent and I don’t really like them as much as you hopefully do. You can sit with your offspring and I’m going to take your place at the big person’s table.”

“That’s not fair,” he said.

“What’s not fair is that I haven’t reproduced but I’m always forced to sit with my nieces and nephews. That’s

what's not fair," she insisted. "Now, get moving. I'm sitting in the empty airport and it's kind of creepy."

"I'll be there in about an hour," he grumbled, ending the call. Now, all she had to do was sit around and wait for Owen to show up—oh, and not think about the sexy neighbor she stood up just to come home and deal with her family drama.

* * *

Her brother grumbled all the way home about having to give up his Christmas to accommodate her, and Kirsten reminded him at least half a dozen times that he owed her, but that still didn't shut him up. What she really needed was a giant bottle of wine and some food since she hadn't eaten all day. She was counting on her mother to have both and was actually looking forward to surprising her.

As soon as her mother pulled the front door open, she started crying, and God love her, she didn't stop crying all through dinner. But the food was fantastic, and she was on her third glass of wine, so that helped.

Owen gave up his seat at the adult table and sat with his kids, saying that he wanted to spend some extra time with them. Of course, Pattie saw right through her husband's excuse, leaning over to whisper to Kirsten, "He owed you, didn't he?"

"Yep," Kirsten whispered back. She wanted to feel bad for the guy, but she couldn't bring herself to because the view from the adult table was fantastic. For the first time in her adult life, she was going to walk out of the dining room not wearing most of her niece's and nephew's meals on her shirt and in her hair.

She was so happy to be with her family, she even offered to help her mother to wash the dishes, a chore that she was usually told to do, and hated. "I'm so happy that you were able to get a flight home for the day," her mother said.

"Thanks, Ma," she said, "me too."

“And you flew all the way in from France?” her mother asked. God, why was it so hard to lie to her mother?

“Actually, I never got to France. I was put on a flight to Colorado, and I was going to spend some time out there, but then, my friend Julie needed to give up a flight to Newark, so I took it.” There, that was a little bit of the truth mixed in with her lie. She just hoped that her mother bought it.

“Well, Colorado is a far cry from France, but that’s no matter. I’m just happy that you’re home now. Have you given any more thought to quitting your job and going to college?” her mother asked.

“I have and I think that it’s not the right time,” she said. “I don’t think that I have enough money saved to quit my job, and I’m just not ready.” Meeting Drew had her thinking about the other things in life that she wanted—namely a partner to spend her life with and possibly, kids. She wasn’t about to admit that to her mother though. The woman would have potential suitors lined up around the block if she found out that her only unmarried daughter was looking to settle down.

“You’ll figure it all out, I’m sure. How about we leave these dishes for later and you can open your gifts?” She had planned this trip for so long, Kirsten had sent all of the gifts for her family to her parent’s house earlier in the month.

“Mom, I told you not to get me anything,” she reminded.

“Well, I’m your mother and you don’t tell me what I can and can’t do,” her mother said. “By the way, the kids loved the nerf guns that you sent for them. Your brothers and sister weren’t as excited about them though.”

“I imagine that they weren’t,” she said. When Kirsten bought them, she could just imagine her sibling’s faces as their kids ran around trying to shoot each other with the nerf guns. It was payback for every time she was roped into having to babysit for them.

Her mother wrapped her arm around Kirsten’s waist as they walked back to the family room where everyone was watching Christmas movies. “You’re kind of evil,” her mother

said, “you get that from me.” She giggled and hugged her mother close. It was good to be home. She might have had to leave behind a date with the perfect man, but she was sure that there were other fish in the sea, she just had to find the right one. Kirsten just hoped that she hadn’t already given up the perfect man, leaving him back in Colorado, because Drew seemed pretty darn perfect to her.

DREW

Drew had walked over to Kirsten's cabin the next day and found that her rental car was gone and there was no sign of her either. He called the rental company that handled the cabins, and they wouldn't give him any personal information about her but did confirm that she left early and turned in her keys to the rental. She had left town and, in the process, stood him up for their second date. She didn't even leave a note to let him know why—and that was his biggest question.

He spent the rest of the week imagining the worst—that something happened to her or someone in her family. Or that she got called back into work and agreed to go because he had canceled their Christmas Day date. He felt awful about that. If he had just kept their date, maybe she wouldn't have decided to leave town. At the very least, he would have had the chance to get her number or even her last name. He was a fool for not asking for either. Now, he'd never be able to track her down. He didn't even know what airline she worked for. When they met, she was wearing her uniform, but she had her coat on over it.

He moped around for the rest of the week, wondering if he'd ever get lucky enough to find her again. The only thing he had to go on was that she was a stewardess, her favorite color was blue, and she lived in Brooklyn. Yeah—he was an idiot and was screwed when it came to ever being able to find her.

Every night, he'd go to sleep hoping that he'd wake up to find her rental car in the driveway and every day, he was disappointed. He tried to enjoy the rest of the week, but every passing day had him feeling more and more depressed. And when they finally boarded Grizz's private jet to head back to New York on New Year's Eve, he was more than ready to go home. Jed and Mercedes wanted to drive up to their cabin to celebrate the New Year, and Brooklyn said she just wanted to sleep for the rest of the year, giggling at her bad joke.

They landed at LaGuardia and Drew had called ahead for his car, so it was there waiting for him and his mom. He planned on dropping her off at her place and then, he was going to head home, unpack, and drink himself into the New Year.

"You don't seem yourself," his mother said after getting into his car, "are you all right?"

"I'm just worried that something bad happened to Kirsten and that's why she left so quickly," he said.

"I get it, but you two only spent an evening together. You seem almost heartbroken, and that can't be," she insisted. He couldn't explain it either. Maybe it was that she stood him up or maybe he liked her more than he was letting on—even to himself. He really liked her, that much he was sure of.

"I can't explain it, Ma," he admitted. "I really liked her, and she just disappeared from my life, without even a note. She didn't seem to be the type of person who would do something like that—even if I only spent one night with her."

"Are you sure that you didn't do more than just sleep with her?" his mother asked, giving him her trademark side eyes.

"I'm sure," he grumbled. "Maybe that was for the best too. If she was going to just take off, I'm glad that we didn't end up sleeping together. Still, I feel like we should have had more time together, but she left. I'd just like to know why."

"She never told you her last name?" his mom asked.

"No," he said, "and I'm a fool for not asking for it. I usually do, but I didn't want to push since I was a complete

stranger. The last time I spoke to her was Christmas morning when I ran back to her place to cancel our plans for later that day. I saw how upset everyone was about me falling asleep over at her place and decided that maybe having her over for dinner again might not be a good idea, so I canceled.”

“You canceled having her over on Christmas?” his mother asked.

“I did, do you think that might be why she left?” he asked.

“I don’t know, but it wasn’t fair of you to do that. She would have been all alone on Christmas. Maybe she was upset about being alone on Christmas Day, and she decided to go home,” his mother said.

“She told me that she was in Colorado to escape the chaos of her family’s Christmas get-together,” he said.

“Well, Christmas does strange things to people. Someone might feel that they want to be alone on Christmas but change their mind once they are truly alone,” his mother offered. It made sense to him, even if he hadn’t spent one Christmas all alone in his life. His mother was always there for him, and his dad even showed up on most holidays. He was never alone, and maybe he was crazy for not wanting that, but Christmas was about being with family—and now, his was even bigger.

“All I know is that I really liked her, Mom, and now, I’ll never see her again. I mean, I can’t just go from house to house asking if a woman named Kirsten lives there.”

“No, I don’t suppose that you can,” his mother agreed. “I just wish that there was a way to look her up. Can you call the airlines and ask if they have a stewardess named Kirsten working for them?” she asked.

“No, it would go against Employee Privacy Rights,” he said. “It would be against the law for anyone to tell me about one of their employees without me knowing her last name and having her permission ahead of time.”

“Well, that hardly seems like a good law,” his mother grumbled.

He barked out his laugh, “I didn’t make the law, Mom,” he said, “and, it’s really not a bad one to have in place. It protects people’s privacy. Maybe Kirsten wants to remain private. I have to accept the fact that I probably won’t ever see her again. It stinks, but it’s the way things are. They just didn’t work out between the two of us.” Saying those words out loud felt wrong, even if he was only saying them to help soothe his mother.

“Well, that just makes me sad,” his mother said, “but I’m sure that you’ll meet someone soon. I mean, you’re a good-looking boy and what woman wouldn’t want to spend time with you, Drew?” his mother asked.

“Eww, Mom,” he said, “I don’t want to discuss my dating life, or lack thereof, with you. And please stop calling me a ‘Good looking boy.’ You’re giving me a complex.” She chuckled and turned to stare out her window.

“I do miss the snow that we had out west. It was beautiful. Do you think that we’ll get snow here?” she asked.

“It sure feels like it will snow, but there isn’t any in the forecast for this week.”

“Well, that’s sad,” she said. “Oh well, I’m sure that we’ll get our share of snow in January.” She was right—they usually got their fair share of snow in January and even February. He loved to watch it snow out of his apartment window. He was lucky enough to find a place overlooking the park that was rent controlled. He wasn’t sure how it had happened, but he was taught never to look a gift horse in the mouth. He just wished that he was lucky in other areas of his life, like love

* * *

Jed called to check in on him later that evening, and he told his brother that he planned on staying in and watching the ball drop on television. Everyone was crowding into the city and that just didn’t appeal to him. All he had to do was run downtown to pick up some groceries and then, he’d be back

home in time to sip some champagne and count down to the New Year.

After he got off the phone with Jed, Grizz called. “Hey, man,” Grizz said.

“Let me guess, you just talked to Jed, and he told you that I planned on staying home tonight. Have you called to try to talk me into going into Time Square to watch the ball drop?”

“Hell no,” Grizz said. “I wouldn’t go down into that mess for anything. Why not come up here?” he asked. “You can even spend the night if you want to.”

“No, but thank you for the offer. You and Brooklyn plan on catching up on some sleep, and I can’t blame you. Little Will was up a lot at night. You deserve some rest, and you don’t need to worry about me.”

“It’s my job to worry about you now, little brother. It’s what I’m supposed to do—Jed too. You’re just going to have to get used to it. Listen, I know you’ve been down since Kirsten left without a word. I’d be happy to give you the name of my private detective to help you track her down.”

“That’s a nice offer, but I’m afraid that I wouldn’t have much for him to go on. All I know about her is that she’s a stewardess and her favorite color is blue. Oh, and she lives in Brooklyn. That’s not much to give to a detective to find her.”

“It’s worth a try,” Grizz said.

“I’ll give it some thought,” Drew promised, “maybe it just isn’t meant to be.”

“I don’t know,” he said, “you and Kirsten really seemed to hit it off on Christmas Eve. At least try to find her, so that you can say that you did something after she disappeared.”

“Again, I’ll think about it,” Drew promised, “for now, I’ve got to get to the grocery store before they start closing streets down here. It’s a madhouse and I’d like to get home before dark when the true craziness happens.”

“Can’t blame you on that one,” Grizz said. “Happy New Year,” he said.

“Happy New year, brother,” Drew said, ending the call. If he hurried, he’d be able to get into town, grab what he needed for the next week, and head back home without too much fuss—fingers crossed.

KIRSTEN

The last thing that Kirsten wanted was to go into the city and watch the ball drop with a bunch of drunk tourists. Most of them were happy couples—some that might even get engaged today, and others were just plain happy, and that made her sick. Honestly, she hadn't felt happy since Christmas dinner at her parent's house. She left there that night and went back to her lonely apartment, realizing what she had given up by leaving Colorado—a date with a really nice guy. They were hard to come by these days—nice guys, but she blew her chance with Drew.

Kirsten thought about going back to Colorado and convincing him to give her another chance, but she was a big chicken. Plus, she had turned in her rental keys and said that she wouldn't be back. She couldn't just show back up in Colorado without somewhere to stay for the rest of the week, so, she rode out her vacation days at home in her little apartment, feeling sorry for herself.

At least she could do it in the privacy of her own apartment and not at her parent's home. Her sister was staying with their parents for the week, and she ran over there a few times to visit with her and her two kids. They were younger than the rest of her nieces and nephews, and Kirsten felt as though she could tolerate them a bit more than the others. Their mother had agreed to watch the kids while she, her sister, and her brother-in-law went into the city to watch the ball drop. Yeah, they were trying to help her out of her funk, but she wasn't ready to stop wallowing. She really liked Drew

and knowing that she'd blown things with him on her own made her feel even worse.

What she really needed was another vacation to forget about her last one if that was even possible. As her father liked to say, she needed to get back on the horse, but in this case, a horse was a man, and she was pretty sure that wasn't what he meant at all.

She walked into her parent's house and found her sister feeding her toddler. "We still doing this thing tonight?" she asked Darla.

"Oh, shoot," Darla said, "Scooter was supposed to call you." Leave it to her sister to find, date, and marry a grown man named Scooter. Every time anyone said Scooter's name, Kirsten wanted to giggle. In the five years that her sister had been married, Kirsten was sure that she had never used Scooter's name once. She stuck with "Hey you," or called him her brother-in-law, but never his first name.

"Why was he supposed to call me?" Kirsten asked.

"Because Xavier is sick. He's running a fever and we don't want to saddle mom with a sick four-year-old. He's up in bed right now and Scooter is with him."

"I'm sorry that the little guy is sick," Kirsten said, but secretly, she was high-fiving her nephew for getting her out of having to watch the ball drop and those crazy crowds. "How is Daisy feeling?" she asked nodding to her two-year-old niece.

"Miss Daisy is feeling fine, but you know how kids are, they get sick in pairs," Darla said. She had no idea how kids were, and her sister liked to take every chance she could to remind her of that fact.

"I'm going to say hi to mom, and then, I'll leave you with your little germ factories," Kirsten teased.

"If I don't see you before we leave, I'm really glad that you came home to hang out with us for a few days," Darla said.

"I am too," Kirsten admitted. "It's been nice to catch up with you guys. I hope Xavier feels better soon." Darla nodded

and went back to feeding Daisy.

Kirsten walked back to the kitchen and found her mother and father having a cup of coffee at the kitchen table. “Hey guys,” she said. “I hear Xavier is sick.”

“Yeah, and he kept us up most of the night. I love your sister and her family, but I’m looking forward to getting some sleep when they leave tomorrow,” her father said. It had to be quite an adjustment for her parents, having a houseful of kids and people. They had to both be exhausted.

“Well, we’re not going out tonight, so I’m going to head home.” She kissed her mother’s cheek and then her father’s. “I’ll see you guys in a few days. Maybe we could go out for dinner if you have a night free. I don’t have a flight again for a few more days.”

“Boy, they really gave you a lot of time off,” her father said. “Have you made a decision about college?” She hadn’t given it much thought at all. In fact, the only thing, or in this case, person, she could think about was Drew.

“Not really,” she admitted. “I’ll keep thinking about it and I’m sure that I’ll come to some kind of decision soon enough.” She wasn’t sure about anything, but she wasn’t about to tell her parents that.

“Okay, honey,” her father said. “See you soon.” She left out the back door, taking the side alley out to her car out front. Kirsten needed to run by the grocery store and then, she’d drive back to Brooklyn. She was actually looking forward to having the night to herself. She’d watch the ball drop on television like she did most years, and then, she’d make some New Year’s resolutions that she’d probably break in the first month of the New Year.

* * *

Kirsten pulled the list she had made out of her purse. With any luck, she’d be in and out of the grocery store in a flash, which worked for her since her commute back to her place would take a good thirty minutes. She and her parents only lived

about fifteen miles apart, but with the traffic, it took half an hour to get to their place. She thought that was a good thing when she found her apartment. It would stop her parents from just dropping by, but she had underestimated her mother's desire to be a helicopter parent—even to her adult kids.

It seemed that everyone in the city had the same idea that she had to run to the grocery store before the chaos started. She grabbed one of the last available carts and pushed her way into the store, carefully avoiding everyone who was stopping at the entrance to pick up bags of chips that were on sale. All she needed was some cereal, eggs, milk, and bread. Maybe, if she felt brave, she'd find a good bottle of wine and some grapes and cheese to go with it to help celebrate the New Year. She was hoping that she'd be able to stay awake this year to actually watch the ball drop. Usually, she was in a strange city dealing with jet lag, going to bed early to try to catch some sleep before having to head back out on another flight. She was happy to be home this year, for the first time in a very long time.

She had made her way around the store and grabbed a bottle of wine and the cheese she liked. She was ready to check out, but the lines were long. Kirsten searched for the shortest line as if that would help to get her out of the store faster and parked her cart and herself behind the guy in front of her. It seemed that everyone in the store decided to check out at the same time. People were pushing and shoving each other as if that would get them to the front of the line faster. When the person behind her bumped her with the cart, propelling her and her cart into the person in front of her, she wanted to shout and tell the person to watch what they were doing. Instead, all she could do was turn around and stare at the guy who had taken down half the damn line.

“You,” she shouted.

“Oh my God, I'm so sorry,” he said, helping to pick up the stuff that had fallen out of her cart. He stood and looked her over, a smile covering his handsome face. “Kirsten.”

“What are you doing here, Drew?” she asked.

“This is my neighborhood,” he said, “I thought you said that you lived in Brooklyn. What are you doing in this area?”

“Um, my parents live here. I was visiting them,” she said. Her brain felt as though it was muddled, and everything seemed as jumbled as the line of people who were shooting them both dirty looks.

“You left,” he whispered.

“I’m sorry,” she said, “I was homesick and realized that I missed my family. I didn’t want to interrupt your family’s Christmas, but I didn’t want to spend Christmas alone.”

He handed her back the cheese that had fallen from her cart and nodded. “I thought that was why you went to Colorado in the first place,” he said, “to get away from your crazy family’s Christmas celebration. What changed?”

She shrugged, “I guess that watching you with your family changed my mind. When you left me Christmas morning, I realized that I was going to spend my favorite holiday alone for the first time in my life, and I don’t know, it just made me sad, so I took my friend’s flight into Newark and left you the note explaining what I was doing.”

“I didn’t get any note,” he said.

“Well, I left it on the front door of my cabin. I’m so sorry, Drew. You thought that I just ghosted you?” she asked.

“I did, and I have to say, I moped around for the rest of the week. My mother wasn’t very happy with me, but I thought that I did something wrong to scare you off.”

“No, and now, I feel awful that you didn’t get my note. It basically said what I just told you. I flew home in time for Christmas dinner with my family, and I’m glad that I did—or I was until I realized that I never gave you my number.”

“Or your last name,” he reminded. “Grizz wanted me to hire a detective to find you but all I knew about you was that you’re a stewardess, your favorite color is blue, and that you live in Brooklyn. Oh—and you have the sweetest smile that I’ve ever seen in my life.”

The guy in front of them made a sound of disgust and Drew laughed. “Yeah, I know that it sounds like a line, but it’s not,” he shouted loud enough for the guy to hear. “What are you doing tonight?” he asked.

“Um, you’re looking at it,” she said, nodding to the food in her cart. “I was supposed to go to the city to watch the ball drop with my sister, but thankfully, her kid got sick, and she didn’t want to leave him with my mother.”

“Did you just say that your nephew thankfully got sick?” he asked.

Kirsten giggled, “I know, I sound like a monster, but I hate going into Time Square and although I hope that my nephew gets better soon, I’m happy that he gave me an excuse not to have to go to the city.”

“I get it,” Drew admitted. “I stay as far away from that mess as possible. How about coming back to my place tonight and we can watch the ball drop on television together?” How could she tell him now after she spent the entire week upset that she might never see him again? The simple answer was that she couldn’t.

“I’d love to watch the ball drop with you, Drew.” She wasn’t sure how she had gotten through such a crazy year. Kirsten worried herself half sick wondering what her next move should be when it came to her job and going to college. But she knew for sure that spending the end of the year with Drew and ringing in the New Year with him was just what she needed.

DREW

Drew didn't believe in luck or even kismet, but literally running into Kirsten at the grocery store turned him into a believer. He felt like he was the luckiest man on the planet to find her in the check-out lane. He couldn't let her go again without asking her out. Hell, he planned on getting her phone number, address, and last name if she'd give it. His place was a mess, his bags still unpacked, and he was pretty sure that she would run from his home, kicking and screaming, but he had to come up with something to get her from leaving the grocery store without asking her out. She said she hated going downtown on New Year's Eve and he didn't blame her, but that didn't leave him many other places to take her without a reservation. So, he basically blurted out for her to come over to his apartment.

"Um, I'd really love to run back to my place and put my groceries away. What time should I come over?" she asked. "Oh, and I'll need your address and you might want to give me your number too."

"What's your number?" he asked. Kirsten rattled it off and he put her number into his phone and called her. She answered and he laughed. "Now you have my number," he said, ending the call. "If you want, I could come to your place tonight. That way you won't have to come all the way back over here. Plus, I'm sure that traffic is going to get worse."

"I'd love not to have to come back over here tonight. Traffic was horrible when I was driving over earlier. Are you sure that you don't mind coming to Brooklyn?"

“I’m sure,” he agreed.

“You’re welcome to spend the night on my sofa so that you won’t have to come all the way back over here either,” she offered. He saw the hope in her eyes and telling her no wasn’t something that he wanted to do. He quickly agreed and her smile nearly lit up the whole store.

“I’ll pack an overnight bag and then, I’ll head over. What’s your address?” he asked.

She pulled her phone back out of her pocket and shot him off a text with her address. “My last name is Moss,” she said, holding out her hand to him as if it was the first time that they were meeting.

He couldn’t help his smile, “Andrew Wild,” he said, “it’s nice to meet you, Kirsten Moss.”

“You too, Andrew Wild,” she said. Kirsten checked out and then hung around to wait for him. Drew helped her put her groceries into her car and then promised to be over to her place by seven. That would give him just enough time to put his groceries away, grab a shower, pick up a bouquet of flowers, and drive across town to her place. To say that he was excited about what was going to technically be their second date, was an understatement. He felt as though the planets and stars aligned to bring the two of them together. Now, all he had to do was convince Kirsten of that.

* * *

The closer he got to Kirsten’s place, the more nervous he became. His GPS told him that he would be at her place in just thirteen minutes, and he felt like he needed to pull over and throw up. Instead, he decided to call Grizz. He’d tell him what to do, whereas Jed would just make fun of him the rest of the drive.

Grizz answered his call and Drew thought about hanging up, but it was too late. His brother knew that it was him and he’d just keep calling him back until he told him what was going on.

“I found her,” he said.

“Well, hello to you too, brother,” Grizz teased.

“Oh, sorry,” Drew grumbled. He was anxious to tell him the whole story and wasn’t sure if he’d have enough time to do it before he got to the address that she had given to him. “Hi,” he said.

“Whom did you find?” his brother asked.

“Kirsten,” Drew whispered.

“Why are you whispering?” his brother asked. He wasn’t sure why he was whispering. Maybe he thought that if he said it too loudly, the universe would decide that it made a mistake and take away his second chance with Kirsten.

“I don’t know. I have no idea what I’m doing,” he said. “I was at the grocery store and literally ran into her. It was like fate stepped in and put us in the same place at the same time. She invited me over and I’m heading that way now.”

“You do know that you sound like a girl right now, don’t you?” Grizz asked.

“Forget it,” Drew shouted, “I called you because I knew that Jed would just make fun of me. I guess I had it backward.”

“I’m sorry,” Grizz said, “I didn’t know how on edge you were. You really like this woman, don’t you?”

“I thought that was evident with the way that I moped around the cabin the week after she left. I thought that she just took off on me, but she left a note on her front door. I guess it just got lost.”

“So, that’s why you were acting like someone kicked your puppy,” Grizz said. “I just thought that being with me and Jed was getting to be too much for you. Didn’t you only spend one night with Kirsten?” his brother asked.

“Yeah, and nothing happened, but I do really like her. We hit it off and now, I’m on my way to her place. I’m getting my second chance with her, and I don’t want to blow it. What should I do?”

“Are you asking me how to put the moves on your woman?” Grizz asked.

“She’s not my woman—not yet and I have no idea why, but I’m nervous as hell,” Drew admitted.

“You have been on a date before, right?” his brother asked.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Drew shouted. “I’ve been on dates before, asshole.” Grizz laughed on the other end of the line and Drew rolled his eyes. His brother was trying to get a rise out of him, and it was working.

“You’re trying to distract me from being nervous, aren’t you?” Drew asked.

“Is it working?” Grizz asked. “Because if not, we can talk about sex next. Has anyone explained the fundamentals to you?”

“Shut the fuck up, man,” Drew said, chuckling to himself.

“How long until you get to her place?” Grizz asked.

“Just a few minutes,” he said.

“Great, then here’s my advice,” Grizz said. Drew felt like he was holding his breath waiting for him to give it. “Just be yourself,” Grizz said, “she obviously likes you, or she wouldn’t have agreed to have you over, right?”

“Yeah.” He knew that his brother was right, but a part of him wanted to protest everything that Grizz was saying. It didn’t feel right that he was lucky enough for a second chance with Kirsten. He wasn’t usually the guy to have second chances, but this year had been full of them. His father passed away and he found out that he had two brothers. They gave him a second chance at having a family—something that he never thought he’d have. Now, he ran into the one woman that he couldn’t stop thinking about, and she agreed to a second date with him. Maybe his luck was changing, and he wasn’t sure why, but he didn’t want to tempt fate to kick him to the curb again. No, he was just going to accept his newfound luck and hope that it didn’t run out any time soon.

“Thanks for talking me down, Grizz,” he said.

“Not a problem, man,” Grizz said, “that’s what brothers are for. Good luck.”

“Thanks, I can use all the luck I can get. Happy New Year,” Drew said.

“Happy New Year,” Grizz said, ending the call. Drew pulled up to the apartment complex at the address that Kirsten had given to him at the grocery store earlier and was lucky to find a parking spot. He parked and cut his engine, giving himself a silent pep talk before grabbing the wine and flowers that he had picked up for her. With any luck, he was going to finally get that second date with the woman of his dreams. And if things worked out, he’d be waking up next to her to begin a new year.

* * *

He didn’t even have to ring her doorbell or knock on her door. Kirsten was waiting for him at the door, pulling it open as soon as he stepped onto her doormat. She seemed as eager and nervous as he was feeling, and he wasn’t sure if that was a good or bad sign.

“Hey,” he said. She had changed into a dress that really showed off her figure and her long legs. He looked her over and smiled. “You look beautiful,” he said.

“Well, I had enough time for a shower, and I even shaved my legs, so I thought, why not wear my favorite dress on New Year’s Eve? I was all bundled up when we ran into each other since I was supposed to go into the city.”

“Well, the change of wardrobe suits you. Plus, I have to say, that is now my favorite dress too,” he teased.

She giggled, “But you haven’t even seen the others or given them a chance.”

“This is true,” he agreed, “I guess you’ll just have to agree to go on another date with me then.” Yeah, that was about as smooth as he got, but he was hoping that his charms were working on her. From the way that she smiled at him, they just

might be. “These are for you,” he said, handing her the flowers that he bought her. “And this is too.” He handed her the bottle of wine that he picked out and she took it.

“I love red wine,” she said. He wasn’t sure which wine to even get, so he closed his eyes and just picked one. Not his finest moment in picking out wine, but he didn’t know what she would like.

“Good,” he said. “Your place is great.”

She laughed, “Well, you don’t have to lie to me, Drew. I’ll still go out with you again, even if you call my place what it is—a dump. I like it though. I mean, it’s not the safest neighborhood, but my neighbors and I all look out for each other. When I’m working, they help to keep an eye on my apartment.”

“You can’t beat that,” he said. “Good neighbors are hard to come by.” He didn’t really know any of the people who lived in his building. He took up the entire top floor, and the old saying was true—it was lonely at the top. “I don’t know many of my neighbors, but I love my place. Maybe that should be my resolution this year—to make more friends in my building.”

“That’s a great one,” she said.

“What’s yours?” he asked.

“I don’t really make them because I always break them even before January is over. I stopped making resolutions a few years back. But I like yours. Maybe I’ll come up with one tonight too,” she said.

“I’m sure that we’ll be able to figure something out,” he offered. “You know if we put our heads together.” Drew wanted to tell her that he’d like to put more than just their heads together, but he didn’t want to push her.

“All right,” she agreed. “I hope that you don’t mind, but I ordered us some dinner. It should be here any minute.”

“That’s great. Thank you,” he said.

“It’s not much,” she admitted. “I just ordered a couple of pizzas from the shop around the corner.”

“It sounds perfect,” he said.

“Let me take your coat,” she said. He removed his jacket and handed it to her, noticing that her hands were shaking.

“Are you all right?” he asked. He pulled her hands into his after she hung his coat on a hook by her front door.

“I guess that I’m a bit more nervous than I thought I would be. You were honest with me earlier, saying that you were grumpy for the rest of the week, thinking that I had left without leaving a note.”

“I was miserable and kicking myself that I never got your information. I thought that I’d never see you again,” he admitted.

“Well, I felt the same way. I came home and was happy to spend Christmas with my family. I don’t know what I was thinking. As if I could just skip Christmas and not miss my crazy family. Hearing how you found the family that you never knew existed and were having your first Christmas together, well, made me reconsider what I was doing to my family. But the next day, when I realized that I was going to miss out on our second date, I was miserable. I thought about flying back to Colorado, but I’d already given up my rental and I worried that you wouldn’t want to see me after I stood you up. So, I decided to try to forget about you, but I just couldn’t. I locked myself away in here and tried not to think about you, but I couldn’t stop. And then, bumping into you today—it just felt like kismet or something.”

He pulled her into his arms, not caring if it was the right thing to do. Grizz was right. He just needed to be himself and follow his gut when it came to Kirsten. “You couldn’t stop thinking about me?” he whispered.

“No,” she admitted. “I don’t know why but our night together meant more to me than you’ll ever know. You showed me that family is important, even when they get on your last nerve.”

Drew chuckled, “Yeah, my family has a way of getting on my last nerve too, but I feel so lucky to have them.” Kirsten wrapped her arms around his neck and smiled up at him. “I’m lucky that I found you again too. I’m not sure that I’m a big believer in fate but bumping into you in the grocery store has me rethinking my stance on fate and all of that stuff.”

“So, what now?” she asked. That was a very good question. He had no idea what to do next.

“I have no idea,” he said. “What do you suggest?”

“I’d suggest this,” Kirsten said. She went up on her tiptoes and brushed her lips over his. God, she tasted better than he remembered.

She broke the kiss and smiled up at him. “I’ve missed you, Kirsten,” he breathed. Sure, it sounded corny since they had only had one evening together, but he felt drawn to her and that was something he couldn’t really explain.

“I’ve missed you too, Drew.” Kirsten wrapped her arms around his neck again and pulled him down for another kiss.

This time, he was the one who broke the kiss. He needed answers and she was distracting him from getting them. “I need to know what you want, honey,” he said. “Where is this thing between us going? Do you want to take things slowly or jump right in with both feet?”

She smiled up at him and nodded. “They are all valid questions,” she said, pulling free from his arms and grabbing his hand into her own. She tugged him into her small apartment’s living room and kept on going. “First, I want you, Drew. Being apart this past week when we were just getting started showed me that. I’d like to think that this thing between us is going to end with you in my bed because I’m a jump-right-in-with-both-feet kind of woman. But, if that’s not what you want stop me now. This is the door to my bedroom, and I won’t take you in there unless you say that it’s what you want too.”

“It’s what I want too,” he agreed. “But I don’t want just one night with you,” he said. “I want more. I’m not looking for

a hookup, Kirsten. I'm looking for someone that I can spend my life with."

"Oh," she breathed. He thought for sure that he had pushed for too much. Maybe he shouldn't have spilled his guts the way that he did, but he wanted her to know exactly where he stood. He wanted a future with her and the only way to have that would be to ask for it. "I'm a stewardess and I'm hardly home, Drew. I can't promise you that I'd be very good at a relationship. Truthfully, I've never had a long-term relationship unless you count the two high school boys that I dated for a little over six months each. I'm not sure that I can offer you what you are looking for."

"I see," he said, she released his hand, and he knew that she was giving him an out, but that wasn't what he wanted. He'd take what she'd give him and hell, he'd beg her for more. If he had to, he'd quit the firm and follow her around the damn country, but that wasn't something that he planned on telling her.

Drew reached for her hand, pulling it back into his own. "I'll take whatever you're willing to give, Kirsten," he admitted.

"But that's not fair to you, Drew."

"How about you let me worry about what's fair to me and I'll worry about the rest?" he asked. She nodded as he took lead, pulling her into her bedroom with him. The way that she watched him made him hot. It was the same way that she looked at him during their first date together, back at her rental cabin, but he didn't take things further with her that night. He planned on taking things as far as she'd allow tonight and then, he'd ask her for more.

He walked her back to the bed, stripping her down to just her bra and panties. "I'm so glad that I got the chance to shave my legs," she mumbled as he looked her over. Drew chuckled as he ran his hands up her thighs.

"You are so fucking sexy," he breathed. "I've been dreaming about doing this to you all week. You were all I could think about, Kirsten."

“Drew,” she whispered, “you’re wearing too many clothes,” she teased. He quickly stripped down to his boxers and she sat on the bed, taking him in from head to toe. He wasn’t sure how just a gaze could set his cock on fire the way that it did, but he wasn’t going to start analyzing things now. All he wanted to do was make Kirsten his and wake up tomorrow morning hoping that a new year might change her entire perspective of what was next for the two of them.

KIRSTEN

She was honest with him—to a fault. Her work schedule was crazy, and she was hardly ever home, but she wanted him as much as he seemed to want her. She just couldn't make him any promises.

Seeing him standing almost naked in front of her, his erection tenting his boxers, made her want to do wicked things to him. Kirsten took a chance that he'd allow her some leeway in what she wanted to do and sunk to her knees from the bed.

"What are you doing, honey?" he choked.

"I'm taking what I want from you, Drew. Right now, I want to see you, all of you, and then, I want to make you come so hard that all you can do is shout my name."

"Fuck," Drew hissed as she pulled down his boxers. "I had no idea that you had such a filthy mouth," he said.

"Is that a praise or a condemnation?" she asked.

"Praise," he hoarsely choked as she sucked him into her mouth. She loved that he liked her a little bit dirty. Honestly, it was the only way that she knew how to be. She had very little time to play games and with Drew, she didn't want to play them at all.

"Baby, I'm not going to last," he groaned. Drew ran his hands through her hair, tugging it gently as she licked and sucked her way up and down his cock. He was massive and every time he hit the back of her throat; she gagged just a little bit. God, she loved that. She knew that he was close when he

held her head in place, hitting the back of her throat. He seemed to know exactly what she needed, when she needed it, letting her up for air when she wasn't sure that she could take anymore.

"So fucking perfect," he said. She gave him control, letting him pump in and out of her mouth as she knelt before him on the floor. "I want you so fucking much," he hissed. She knew that was about all he was going to be able to say as he came down her throat and when he shouted out her name, it was all she could do not to let him pop free from her mouth, smile up at him, and tell him that was just what she wanted.

She looked up at Drew and smiled as he panted out his breath. He held his hand out to her to help her up from the floor and she took it, coyly sliding up his body. "You really are a tease," he said. "But now, it's my turn." He walked her back against the wall and she wasn't sure what he had planned, but judging from the wicked look in his eyes, he wasn't going to disappoint. And when Drew hit his knees in front of her, she nearly swallowed her damn tongue. He told her to put a leg over his shoulder, grabbing handfuls of her ass, and spreading her open for himself. And when he licked through her folds, she couldn't help but toss her head back and moan his name. Drew was giving her as good as he got, and Kirsten wasn't sure if she was going to be able to take everything he had planned for her.

"Drew," she hummed as she rode out her orgasm. He didn't seem to let up, and when he finally finished with her, she felt boneless. If he hadn't stood and pulled her into his arms, she would have sunk to the floor.

"That was so good," she whispered.

"Oh, we're not finished yet, honey," he said. "You tasted good, and hearing you call my name like that made me hard again. I'm going to fuck you until you can't take anymore. Every time your muscles hurt tomorrow; I want you to think about me." She wasn't sure if she'd be able to stop thinking about him any time soon.

He didn't give her any time to argue or even catch her breath. He laid her across the bed, covered her with his body, and slid into her already drenched pussy. He stilled when she cried out his name and when she nodded and wrapped her arms and legs around his body, he took that as his cue to keep going.

Drew pumped in her body, and when she called out his name, having another orgasm, he pulled out and flipped her body over and pulled her to the edge of the bed to take her from behind. Drew held her hips in his big hands, keeping her in place, and Kirsten was sure that she'd be wearing his handprints on her flesh tomorrow. He wasn't gentle or sweet. He wasn't the same guy who kissed her softly while they watched a Christmas movie on the sofa and then held her while they both slept. She was seeing a completely different side of Drew in the bedroom, and Kirsten had to admit, she loved it. He gave her everything that she needed and so much more and when he finally lost himself inside of her, she felt completely rung out and ready to sleep for the next few days, curled up into his hot body. The one thing she knew for sure was that she wasn't sure if she'd ever be able to give Drew up now that she had a taste of him.

* * *

She woke up early the next day to an email from work. One of her co-workers had come down with the flu and wouldn't be able to handle her next five flights. They were switching things up and giving Kirsten her flights and now, she had two hours to get dressed, pack, and report to the airport.

"Shit," she grumbled. "I've got to go."

"What's going on?" Drew asked, wiping the sleep from his eyes. They had spent the rest of the night in her bed, eating the pizza that was delivered to her doorstep, drinking wine, and watching the ball drop on the tiny television in her room. It was the best New Year's Eve that she had ever had, and now, she was going to have to crawl out of her nice warm bed and go to work.

“Work emailed me. I’ve got to go in to cover for a co-worker who has the flu,” she grumbled. “Honestly, I’m betting she has a case of being hungover and not the flu, but I have to do this. I’m on call as a backup. If someone calls off, I have to cover for them.”

“Oh, I see,” he said. “I was hoping to spend the day with you,” he admitted.

She leaned over her side of the bed and kissed him, “While I appreciate the fact that you don’t want to kick me to the curb after sex, I’m afraid that I can’t accept. I have to go to work.”

“How long will you be gone?” he asked.

“A week and a half, with layovers. I’m flying to Europe for this trip and if there are weather delays, I might be gone for longer than that,” she said.

“Will I be able to see you when you get home?” he asked.

“If you want to,” she said. “I’m sorry, Drew, but I told you that I might not be able to give you what you wanted. I was honest with you.”

“You were, but it still doesn’t take away the sting. I’ll get used to you having to travel as long as you can squeeze me in when you get back to town.” She knew that he was saying what they both wanted to hear, but she also knew that long-distance relationships just didn’t work.

“I’ll call you while I’m gone, and we can set something up. Fair warning—I’m horrible at figuring out time zones and I am notorious for calling people in the middle of the night.”

“Noted, and feel free to call me whenever you would like honey,” he said. “Just promise to call me.”

“Promise,” she said, “now, I have to shower and pack. You’re welcome to stay.”

“Um, no,” he said. “I’ll get out of your way.” She leaned over and kissed him again, regretting even looking at her emails this morning.

“Thanks for being so understanding,” she whispered. “I’ll call you later today after I land.” Drew nodded and she knew

that if she didn't get up and shower right now, she'd end up staying in bed with him all day, and that wouldn't end well for her. She went into the bathroom and shut the door, knowing that when she walked back out into her room, Drew would be gone, and for some reason, it felt more final to her than it should have.

DREW

Drew had heard from Kirsten a handful of times after she first left, but a week had passed, and her calls were becoming few and far between. He wasn't sure if she was working crazy hours and catching up on her sleep or giving up on him all together.

"You look like hell," Jed said, walking into his office. "Bad day in court?" He hadn't even been to court today, but it felt like he was running on fumes and all he wanted to do was see Kirsten.

"I didn't have court today," he said.

"Well then, what has you looking like this? Are you not feeling well?" Jed asked.

"I feel fine," Drew hissed. That was a total fucking lie. He felt as though his heart had been ripped out by a woman who had caught him totally off guard. She was a surprise—showing up at the rental cabin next door to him, and then bumping into him at the grocery store. He was sure that the universe was trying to push them together, but the problem was, Kirsten didn't seem to see that.

"Why don't you go home and get some rest?" Jed asked. "I can't afford to get sick right now."

Jed barked out his laugh, "I know how much you're worth, brother. You can afford whatever you want." Drew knew about the money that Jed and Grizz were left by their grandfather. He just wished that he had the chance to meet the man because from the stories that they told him about their grandpa, he

sounded wonderful. Drew was left well off from the money that their father had left him. None of them ever had to work a day in their lives again, if they didn't want to, but sitting around doing nothing wasn't any of their ideas of fun.

"I'm not talking about money here, brother. Mercedes is pregnant. We just found out, so we're not telling anyone yet, but if I get her sick, she'll be pissed."

"Oh, man, that's wonderful," Drew said, "congratulations." He stood and hugged his brother. "And I'm not sick, for the record. I'm just down about Kirsten. I finally got a second chance with her, and it doesn't seem to be working out. It's been almost two weeks and I haven't heard much from her. I don't even know if I'll see her again."

"You really like her, don't you?" Jed asked.

"I know this sounds crazy, but I think that I've fallen in love with her," Drew admitted.

"That was fast, but I get it. It's how I fell for Mercedes—hard and fast. When you know, you just know," Jed said. "Have you thought about telling her?"

"How can I when I haven't even heard from her? All of my calls are going straight to voicemail. I'm worried that she just considered me a one-night stand."

"I didn't," she said from his office doorway. She was standing there in her flight attendant's uniform, suitcase in hand. "I came here from the airport. We need to talk, Drew," she said.

"On that note, I'm heading home to my wife. I'll see you next week. We're heading to the cabin for a few days, and I'll be working remotely." It was one of the agreements that he and Jed had made when he took over his half of the firm. He'd hold down the office while Jed worked remotely up at his cabin. On days that his brother had to work in the city, he and Mercedes came down to stay at their penthouse, but Drew knew that his brother loved being up at his cabin.

"I'll call you if I need you," Drew agreed. "Safe trip."

Jed nodded and smiled at Kirsten as he left. “Good to see you again, Kirsten.”

“You too, Jed. Tell Mercedes that I said hi.”

“Will do.” His brother left the office and Kirsten shut the door, giving them both privacy.

“You know, when a woman says, ‘We need to talk,’ it usually doesn’t end well for the guy.”

“Well, I didn’t mean it that way, but we do need to talk, Drew,” she said.

“About?” he questioned. He wasn’t sure if he was going to like what she was going to say or not, judging from the look on her face. She walked into his office, leaving her suitcase at the door, and sunk into the chair in front of his desk.

“I’ve done something crazy,” she said.

“And what crazy thing have you done?” he asked.

“I’ve quit my job, and I’m not sure if I’m going to cry or not.”

“Are you happy that you quit your job?” he asked.

“Well, I told you that I wanted to quit and go to college, but I never had the nerve. Plus, I really liked my job—until recently.”

“What happened to made you not like your job?” he asked.

“You happened. I left you on New Year’s Day and was miserable the whole time that I was gone. I even called a passenger a cow, but in fairness, she was acting like one.” He chuckled and she held up her hand as if shushing him. “I’ve never done anything like that in my life and while I was sitting in my manager’s office, getting reamed out, I realized that I did it because I was miserable.”

“Wait, are you blaming me for making you call a passenger a cow?” he asked.

“No,” she breathed, “yes, I am. You made me go and fall in love with you and now, every time I travel to a new and exciting place, I wonder what you’re doing. I wonder if you’re

thinking about me or if you finally wised up and found another woman—an available woman, who could give you what you wanted.”

“Well, that would be impossible because I only want you, Kirsten.” He rounded his desk and sat on the edge in front of her. “Did I hear you tell me that you fell in love with me?” he asked.

“I know that it sounds crazy. We haven’t even known each other for a whole month, but I think that I love you, Drew. So, I’m miserable and crazy—God, I’m pathetic.”

“If you’re pathetic, then I’m not much better,” he said. “Because I’ve been pretty miserable without you here, Kirsten,” he admitted. “You just walked in on me complaining to my brother about missing you. And if you would have gotten here just a few seconds earlier, you would have heard me tell him that I’ve fallen in love with you.”

“You have?” she squeaked. He nodded and pulled her up from the chair.

“I have,” he said. “Is that okay?” he asked.

“It’s more than okay,” she agreed, throwing her arms around his neck. “But only if you’re all right with dating a college student. I’ve already enrolled in classes for this semester, and I start in a week.”

“I’m more than fine with dating a sexy college student, but as long as we’re negotiating, how about if you move into my dorm room with me? Yours is a bit tight and I’m not willing to let you out of my bed for another night, Kirsten.”

“Are you asking me to move in with you?” she asked.

“I am,” he said. “Hell, I’m going to convince you to marry me at some point, but I can be patient.”

“Marry you?” she asked.

“Yeah, but we’ll get to that. Right now, all I know is that I don’t want to let you go. Say you’ll move into my place, honey.”

She didn't seem to even think about it. Kirsten shouted, "Yes," as he pulled her into his arms and spun her around.

"I've met your family, but you haven't met mine," she said. "We'll start slowly and work you into meeting them all by next Christmas."

"Next Christmas?" he asked. "That gives me an idea. How about if we rent a big cabin and use Grizz and Jed's jets to fly everyone to Colorado for Christmas next year? We'll stir up your crazy family Christmas and add it to my new family traditions. It will be the perfect mashup."

"You're crazy," she said, "but, I love the idea. Wait, your brothers have their own planes?"

"Yeah, they inherited money from our grandfather, and well, I inherited my father's estate. I haven't gotten my own jet yet, but, then again, I never had my very own stewardess to take care of me on it."

"You know, I've never joined the mile high club, but a private jet might have me changing my mind," she teased.

"I'm going to put it on my to-do list to buy a plane tomorrow," he joked.

Kirsten giggled, "Are you serious about us taking our families to a cabin next Christmas? I've warned you that my family is a lot, right?"

"You have and I'm serious about it. I was also hoping that you might agree to marry me on Christmas Eve, you know since it's the anniversary of our first date—technically."

"For all of the trouble I gave you about it not being a date, I'm so happy that I agreed to call it a date. I'd love to marry you next Christmas Eve, Drew." She had a feeling that she'd be counting down the days, but this time, she'd do so with the man she loved by her side and in her bed every night.

* * *

Christmas Eve (355 days later)

Kirsten and Drew had flown out a few days earlier to make sure that everything was perfect for their big day. Drew had hired a wedding planner who handled the entire affair for her so that she could study and keep her head in the game for her college courses. She had aced her first year in college and was looking forward to beginning her second year once they got back from Christmas break. But first, she planned to marry the man of her dreams and giving him some news that he might not be ready for. She wasn't sure if she was ready for the news that she had gotten two days ago, but there was no going back now.

She had moved into his apartment, which he had forgotten to mention was the penthouse of his building. It took up the top floor of the whole building and when she moved in, it took her weeks to get used to having so much space, even though they had spent most of their time in the master bedroom.

Kirsten had slowly introduced her family to him, not bringing in everyone all at once. She didn't want to scare Drew off, and she was sure that her family being all together might just do that.

"You look beautiful," her mother said, coming into the bedroom. She had slipped into her wedding gown and knew that it would only be a matter of time before she had to have her father escort her down the stairs to where Drew was waiting for her. They had rented a cabin that was more like a mansion, and it could comfortably fit her big family and his. It was perfect and getting married in it was just the icing on the cake. She wanted to get ready on her own, to have a few minutes of quiet, but she knew that her mother, sister, and new sisters-in-law were all waiting to get into see her. Mercedes held her daughter in her arms and Kirsten looked at the baby, wondering what she and Drew's children would look like. She was planning on waiting, but fate had stepped in once again and she was going to have to tell Drew about the baby. She planned on telling him after the wedding since she just found out about the pregnancy the day before last when she finally gave up and took the test, but now, she was having second thoughts. Seeing Mercedes with the baby made her want to tell Drew before they said their vows. She needed to be upfront

with him, even if she knew that he'd be fine with it. They had been talking about having kids, and even though she wanted to wait until she was done with college, the universe had another plan for them.

"You look beautiful," Brooklyn said.

"Thank you. Listen, I know that this goes against the rules, but I need to see Drew," she said.

"Please tell me that you're not having cold feet," her mother said.

"No, not at all," she said, "I just need to talk to him before the ceremony."

"I'll go get him," her sister offered.

"Thank you. I'll meet you all downstairs," she said. She and Drew had decided not to have any bridesmaids or groomsmen. Heck, picking a flower girl would have ended up with a fistfight between her nieces, and forget about a ring bearer. Instead, they just invited everyone to be their guests and have a good time, so that there would be no hurt feelings.

Drew rushed into the master bedroom and looked her over. "Wow," he breathed. "Your sister said that you needed to see me. Is everything all right?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, "and, no. I need to tell you something."

"You can tell me anything," he promised. She was trying to hold back the tears, but these stupid hormones were getting the best of her. "Honey, I'm worried now. Tell me what's wrong."

"I'm pregnant," she whispered. "I found out two days ago, and I was going to wait to tell you after the wedding, but I just can't do that. I need to make sure that you know what you're getting into with me. With college and the pregnancy, I'm a mess."

He pulled her into his arms and let her sob against his shoulder. "Baby, first, you are not a mess. You're beautiful and I love you so much. I'm also going to love this baby. I know that it's not perfect timing, but I promise that I'll pick up the

slack and help you so that you can finish college. We'll get through all of this, I promise."

"I love you," she sobbed.

"I love you too, honey," he said. "Now, how about we go downstairs and get hitched?"

"I'd like that, but my make-up," she started.

"You're perfect just the way that you are," he assured. "I'm the luckiest man on the planet," he said.

"No, I'm the lucky one," she said. "I'm so thankful that Santa brought you to me last Christmas," she said. "I've always wanted my very own mountain man for Christmas, and now, I've got one." Fate had a hand in bringing them together and now, she was never going to take a sign from the universe for granted again. She had the man of her dreams and a baby on the way, what more could a girl want for Christmas? The answer was simple—nothing.

The End

What's coming up next from K.L. Ramsey? His Rebellious Assistant (Billionaire Boys Club Book 6) will be out in December 2022!

ELI

Eli Kingston wasn't sure if he was making a good decision by taking the job offer from McTavish Industries or not. When his brother, Evan called him to extend the offer from his new business partners, Alex, and Rod McTavish, he thought for sure that he was joking. But he should have known better since his brother never joked around—especially when it came to business.

His brother had bailed him out of more than one mess that he had gotten himself into, and for that reason, he felt as though he owed him. But that wasn't why he had taken the job. He accepted the job offer because it was the best he'd ever had. They were willing to let him head up the new risk assessment department at McTavish Industries and it came with a hefty salary. How could he say no? He couldn't, so he took the job offer, after their first meeting, and he wasn't about to second guess himself—at least not this morning since he was about to walk into the intimidating office building and start his first day.

Luke Tracy met him at the entrance, as promised, and took him back to security to get him signed in. “Your new assistant, Mina Flores is starting today too. Have you met her yet?” Luke asked.

“I have,” he admitted, “at Carrie and Evan’s wedding. She was Carrie’s maid of honor, and I was Evan’s best man, so we were kind of thrown together.” Not that he had any complaints about being tossed together with the raven-haired beauty. Mina was gorgeous and he had to admit, having to walk her down

the aisle and dance with her wasn't a hardship. Eli was just glad that he didn't follow his gut and ask her out on a date because now, they were going to be working together every day and that would have been awkward, to say the least.

"It was a great day," Luke said. "It was nice that Carrie's father stuck around for the wedding."

"Yeah, he's a character," Eli said. Carrie had convinced her father to stick around for the baby to be born, and he agreed. He had practically moved into her, and Evan's house and Eli loved being invited over to hang out with her dad. "Jack's a great guy."

"Well, you're going to be in training today with Mina, and then, I'll show you to your office. You'll be on the fifth floor. It's where the entire risk assessment team will be housed."

"Sounds great," Eli sarcastically said.

Luke chuckled, "Yeah, I guess that being stuck in training all day doesn't sound very glamorous, but I promise, it gets better."

"I know, I'm just joking around," Eli said.

"Sometimes I forget that you and Evan are nothing alike. You guys look so similar, but you have a sense of humor, and your brother—"

"Doesn't," Eli finished for him.

"I was going to say that, but as his friend, I didn't want to sound like an ass," Luke said.

"As his brother, it's okay for me to call him names and sound like an ass. It's expected, really," Eli teased. "I've always liked giving my brother a little bit of hell."

"And you've been so good at it," Evan said, walking into security. "Hey, man," he said to Luke, shaking his hand. "How's it going?"

"Good," Luke said, "how's things with you and Carrie?"

"She's going to have the baby any day now, and she's more than ready. She's been working half days, trying to take

some time for herself before the baby gets here, but it's driving her crazy. She's the type who likes to go full speed, every day. I'm just hoping that the little guy or girl gets here before Carrie goes completely crazy and takes me with her."

Luke and Eli both laughed. He knew how excited his brother was about the baby. It didn't matter that it wasn't his by blood. Once he married Carrie, he became that baby's father. Eli had to admit, he was pretty damn excited about being an uncle for the first time. He planned on being the coolest uncle on the planet—as long as he didn't have to change any dirty diapers.

A soft knock at the door had the three of them turning to find Mina standing in the doorway. "Um, hi," she squeaked. "I'm Mina Flores. I'm here to start my first day," she said to one of the security guards at the door.

"Hey, Mina," Evan said, pulling her in for a quick hug. "It's good to see you."

"You too," Mina said.

"You remember Eli," he said. She nodded and held out her hand to him.

"I'm looking forward to working for you, Mr. Kingston."

"Please don't call me that, Mina. I'm fine with Eli."

"Okay, Eli," she said, releasing his hand.

"And this is Luke Tracy," Evan introduced. "He's one of the heads of security here at McTavish."

"Nice to meet you, Mina," Luke said. "I've heard good things about you from Evan here."

She giggled, "He has to say nice things about me. I'm his wife's best friend."

"She's not wrong," Evan said, shrugging. "My pregnant wife will beat the crap out of me if I say anything bad about Mina."

"Well, I'm very excited to start today," she said. "I'm looking forward to working for McTavish Industries," Eli

noted that she seemed a bit nervous, but he understood the first-day jitters. He had them too.

“Great,” Luke said, “HR is expecting you both,” he said.

“I’ll take them up,” Evan offered, “I’m going that way.”

“Thanks, man,” Luke said, “good luck you two. If you need anything, just holler.” Eli followed Mina and Evan out of security after thanking Luke and noted the way that she clutched her bag. She was holding onto it as though it was her lifeline. They filed into the elevator and Evan pushed the button for the third floor.

“You okay?” Eli asked her.

“Um, yeah, why?” she asked.

“Because you seem a little bit nervous,” he said, nodding to the way that she was white knuckling her handbag.

“Oh, well, I am a bit nervous,” she admitted.

“I am too if it makes you feel any better. Don’t worry,” he said, “we’ll get through the first-day jitters together.”

“Thanks, Eli,” she whispered. His brother shot him a look and he wondered what that was all about. Honestly, it was the way that Evan usually looked at him—as though he was disappointed in everything that Eli did. He wanted to ask him what was going on, but he knew that now wasn’t the time or place. He was going to get through his first day on the job, and then he’d worry about not disappointing his brother later.

MINA

Mina Flores was sure that taking the job at McTavish Industries was a huge mistake. Sure, her best friend, and former neighbor, Carrie McTavish—well, now Carrie Kingston, was crazy to even offer her the chance, but she had. When she first met Carrie, she was fresh off the plane from Scotland, pregnant, and scared out of her mind. It didn't help that she had her crazy ex-boyfriend hunting her down, all the way from Scotland, once he found out that she was carrying his baby. Meeting Evan Kingston was the best thing to ever happen to her friend, and now, Mina was going to work for his younger brother, Eli, as his assistant. She had zero experience at being anyone's assistant and the thought of fetching the boss's coffee made her want to gag. She had gone to college and foolishly dropped out after three years, not sure if she was on the right path or not. But now, all she wanted was to finish her degree in business management and hopefully aspire to be more than someone's assistant. It was a good start for her, and it paid well, but she still wanted more.

As soon as she walked into McTavish Industries, the butterflies in her tummy started. She was nervous about seeing Eli again if she was being honest. They were paired together at Evan and Carrie's wedding, and she had to admit that dancing with him was no hardship. They spent the day together, as best man and maid of honor and she found herself smiling a whole lot more than she usually did, and that had everything to do with the groom's very charming brother. She liked Eli and when the wedding was over, and he still hadn't asked her for

her number, she started to worry. Maybe he didn't feel the same way about her. Hell, maybe he had a girlfriend or wife even, who couldn't make it to the wedding. She just assumed that he was single, and now, she was getting herself all worked up over the same man again. But this time, he was going to be her boss and not just some guy that she was supposed to dance with at her best friend's wedding. This time, she shouldn't be wondering what he looked like naked or if he was a good kisser because she was pretty sure that HR would have some rules about that.

After the polite introductions were made, she tried to will herself to calm the hell down, but nothing seemed to be working. And God, when Eli dipped his head in the elevator to ask her if she was okay, she knew that she was a goner. He smelled as good as he had the day of the wedding. Of course, Mina lied and told him that she was just nervous, and hearing him admit that he has too melted her defenses a little bit. She needed to get herself under control if she was going to get through the rest of the day. The very last thing she needed was for HR to pick up on some vibe she was giving off about Eli. She had liked guys before and had to be around them as just friends. She'd find a way to do that again because she needed this job if she was going to save up the money necessary to go back to college and complete her degree.

She and Eli spent most of the morning in HR, filling out paperwork and watching some boring videos about company policies and rules, and regulations that she was already thinking about breaking by asking Eli out for drinks tonight. She was even coming up with some stupid speech about needing to celebrate their first day at McTavish—but the problem still remained of her not knowing if he was single, and the only way that she'd be able to know was if she called and bothered her very pregnant best friend. Carrie would tell her for sure if she was about to make a fool of herself.

She ducked her head into Eli's new office and found him unpacking a few boxes. "Hey, I'm going to take a coffee break," she said. "Can I bring you back anything?"

“Nope,” he said. “I just had a cup. And by the way, you don’t have to tell me every time you’re leaving your desk.”

“Well, I’m going to be gone for about twenty minutes,” she said. “I didn’t want you to wonder where I was.”

“You’re allowed to take breaks, and I don’t need to know your location at every minute of the day. I don’t like to micromanage people,” he said.

“Thanks, Eli,” she breathed. “It’s just weird that we know each other and now, I’m working for you.”

“That should make things easier,” he insisted. “I mean, we already like each other, right?” She more than liked him, but there was no chance that she’d tell him that. Instead, she just nodded. “Okay then, we have a leg up on our working relationship then. I think us knowing each other is a good thing,” he said.

“I guess I just wasn’t looking at it that way,” she said. “I’ll be back in a flash,” she promised, turning to leave his office. As soon as she got into the elevator, she pulled her cell phone from her purse and dialed Carrie’s number.

“Hey, how’s the first day going?” Carrie asked.

“Good,” she said. “How are you feeling?”

“I feel like if one more person asks me how I feel, I’ll murder them,” Carrie grumbled, causing Mina to giggle.

“Sorry,” she said, “I’m at least smart enough to know not to ask if you’re still pregnant.” Carrie made it very clear after her eighth month that no one was allowed to even joke about that. Every time one of her relatives called from Scotland, they’d ask if she was still pregnant or if she’d finally had the baby. Carrie would assure them that if she had the baby, everyone back home would know it because her father would shout the news from the rooftops. Mina knew how much her friend hated waiting for anything and this baby was really trying her patience.

“Yeah, at least you’re smart enough not to ask me that question,” Carrie agreed. “So, why are you calling me when you should be working?” she asked, not missing a beat.

“Well, I’m on a coffee break and I thought that while I ride the elevator down to the cafeteria, I’d call you,” Mina said.

“Um, you do know that they have coffee machines on every floor, right?” Carrie asked. “Eli might even have one in his office.”

“Oh, I didn’t know that,” she lied, “but, it is my first day. Plus, I wouldn’t want to bother Eli by traipsing into his office to get a cup of coffee.”

“Are you all right?” Carrie asked.

“Sure, why do you ask?” Mina lied. She was feeling more and more out of sorts with every passing hour. She wasn’t sure if just coming right out and asking Carrie about Eli’s dating status was a good idea or not, but she had nothing more to talk to her about and she was going to have to get back to her desk at some point.

“Fine,” Mina whispered more to herself than to Carrie. “I called to find out if Eli has a girlfriend or if he’s married or something,” she admitted. The doors to the elevator opened and she stepped out into the lobby of the building. She had missed her floor, and now, she was wondering if she was losing her damn mind.

“Crap, I’ve missed my floor,” she mumbled.

“If you go outside and make a left, there’s a great little coffee shop about two blocks down. Their coffee is so much better than the stuff they have in the building,” Carrie said. “And, to answer your question, Eli is single. Should I ask why you want to know?”

“I think you can guess,” Mina breathed. She walked out of the building, nodding to the security guard on her way out. She spotted the coffee shop right away and practically ran down the two blocks to it.

“You like him,” Carrie said. She wasn’t asking, more telling Mina that she had figured out her deepest, darkest secret.

“Yeah,” Mina admitted. “Hold on a minute,” she ordered, “I found the coffee shop and I need to order my afternoon

pick-me-up.”

Carrie groaned into the phone, “Oh how I wish I could have more than one wee cup of coffee a day.”

Mina giggled, “You know, when you whine, you sound even more Scottish than usual.” She placed her coffee order, knowing that her friend was listening the whole time by the little moans coming from the other side of the phone.

“So, back to your brother-in-law,” Mina said, paying the cashier and stepping to the side to wait for her order. “You’re sure that he’s single and doesn’t have some woman hidden away somewhere?” she asked.

“I mean, I can ask Evan when he gets home, but I’m ninety-nine percent sure,” she insisted. “Why do you question if he’s single or not?”

“Because he didn’t ask me out at your wedding,” Mina admitted. “He didn’t even ask me for my number, and I was sure that we had hit it off, you know?”

“Yeah, you two seemed pretty cozy at my wedding, but I thought it was because we threw you both together. I had no idea that you liked him,” Carrie said.

“And I thought that he liked me too, but I guess I was wrong. Oh well, I’m going to have to do something about these damn feelings so that I can get on with my work,” Mina said.

“Or you can ask him out,” Carrie countered.

“He’s my boss,” Mina squeaked. The guy behind the counter called her name and she snatched up her coffee, nodding her head at him. She was going to make it back to the office in time if she hurried.

“Well, I hate to remind you of this fact, but my husband is my boss,” Carrie said.

“Yeah, I remember, but not all of us get your fairytale ending, Carrie,” Mina reminded. “But I appreciate the intel on your new brother-in-law. Talk later,” Mina said. Her friend protested loudly over the phone until she ended the call and

shoved her phone back into her purse. She'd pay for that later, but right now, she was going to have to hurry if she planned on making it back to her desk by the end of her break. Eli seemed cool about her taking breaks, but she didn't want to push her luck. Then, she planned on spending the rest of the night trying to figure out reasons why wanting her new boss was a horrible idea. She'd put him out of her head and move on in no time, Mina was just sure of it.

His Rebellious Assistant (Billionaire Boys Club Book 6) is coming before the end of 2022!

Have you read the rest of the Grumpy Mountain Men Series? Books 1-3 are available now on Amazon! Enjoy the first two chapters of Grizz below!

Grizz-> <https://books2read.com/u/bpwDNq>

Jed-> <https://books2read.com/u/mv1NOV>

Axel-> <https://books2read.com/u/baoN78>

GRIZZ

The snow was coming down harder now, causing Grizz to have to stop chopping wood. He figured that he had enough for the week at least an hour ago, but he still had a bit of aggression to work out and now, he wouldn't be able to do that.

"Shit," he grumbled to himself. He wouldn't be in such a foul mood, needing to chop down an entire fucking forest, if he hadn't gone into town. He knew better, but he had to see her. Maybe that made him a masochist or maybe he was just an idiot. It was probably a bit of both in his case. But Brooklyn was worth it. Just seeing her face was worth the trek down from his mountain in the Catskills to the city. Seeing her smile was worth riding the fucking train into New York City and dealing with the fast-talking, fast-walking jerks. God, he hated that place but seeing Brooklyn made it all worth it.

Two fucking hours—that was how long it took him to get to the city on that train. He hated riding the train, but it was the quickest way for him to get from his mountain top down to see Brooklyn. He'd been a part of the rat race who took the train into the city every day to sell his soul to his nine-to-five job. He was a fool believing that he'd make something of himself that way, but he wanted to prove his father wrong. His old man said that he'd never make anything out of his life and maybe he was right. Grizz got sick of taking orders from his asshole boss and when he told the guy that he didn't need the job or the money, he laughed in Grizz's face. Once he explained to his boss that he could buy and sell his little company about ten

times over, with the money that his grandfather had left him, he seemed to sober rather quickly.

Grizz had been raised surrounded by wealth and privilege and he didn't want anything to do with that life now, even if he never did prove his old man right. At thirty, he just didn't give a fuck anymore. His father was closer to Jedediah, Grizz's little brother. He was always such a kiss ass and Grizz knew that he'd have no problem playing the loving son. It was all a fucking lie though because nothing about the house they grew up in or their family was loving. Once their mother died, when Grizz was only ten, all the love disappeared from their home and in its wake, sadness was all that was left for them. He and Jed had found a way to muddle through, it's what they were taught to do, but it wasn't easy. Nothing in life was ever easy and that was all he needed to remember.

Grizz grabbed his ax and the jacket he had discarded when he overheated from chopping wood. "You really have some shitty timing, Mother Nature," he grumbled. He looked back at the pile of wood that littered the ground and shook his head. He was hoping to get it all stacked and covered before the storm blew in, but the unpredictable Catskill weather won again. He should have gotten used to it after so many years of living by himself up on the mountain, but he hadn't. The only thing he had truly gotten used to was living alone—and that was something that wouldn't change any time soon. Not unless Brooklyn agreed to his proposal, but he knew that his wishful dreaming would only end with him being disappointed once again. She wasn't ready to leave her job in the city. Brooklyn wasn't about to leave the job that she had worked so hard to land. She was a damn good lawyer and there was no way that she'd give that up any time soon, even if it was him being the one to do the asking.

Grizz stowed his ax on the porch and stomped the snow off his boots. It had only been snowing for about an hour and he was sure that there were already a few inches on the ground. He had a feeling that the storm was going to be a rough one and he'd end up trapped in his cabin for the next few days to a week—alone. That was fine by him, he had a few books to

catch up on and when they were finished, he could catch up on his sleep.

His only saving grace was that he picked up the supplies in town on his drive back from the train station. He was set for months, if necessary, and with how colossally bad things went today with Brooklyn, he might just hide away for that long.

His cell phone rang in his pocket, and he pulled it from his jeans, surprised that he still had service with the storm picking up around his cabin. He knew that he'd lose power sooner rather than later and have to get the generator going if the fire couldn't keep his place warm enough.

Grizz answered his cell before it went to voicemail. "Lo," he growled.

"Grizz, it's me." He'd know her voice anywhere; it didn't matter that he had just spoken to her earlier that day.

"Brooklyn," he breathed.

"Listen, I know we didn't end on a good note today, but I'm in trouble and need your help." The panic in her voice had him pulling on his jacket and boots.

"Where are you?" he asked. "I'll come find you."

"You haven't even asked me what's wrong," she said.

"Doesn't matter," he insisted. "Whatever it is, I'll find you and help fix it."

"Does that offer to stay with you still stand?" she asked. He wanted to tell her that he didn't offer to let her stay with him when they met today. What he asked her to do was move in with him and be his woman. She must have just forgotten that part. Turning her away now might mean that he'd lose his chance with her forever, and he wasn't willing to let that happen. Not now that she was willingly turning to him for help.

"Sure," he said. "It still stands, Brooklyn."

"Good," she almost whispered. "Then, open your door, Grizz," she ordered.

He turned around and pulled his front door open to find her standing on his porch, shivering against the cold wind that had picked up with the storm. Brooklyn was shaking as she shoved her phone back into her parka.

“Thanks,” she said. “I was starting to think that I might freeze to death out here.”

“Why didn’t you just knock?” he asked. Grizz pulled her into his cabin and shut the door, trying to keep out the blustery cold.

“I was afraid that you wouldn’t answer, and I had to know where we stood, Grizz. When you left me in the city today, you seemed so angry. I couldn’t just show up here and knock on your front door hoping for the best.”

She was right—he did leave her while in a foul mood. She had told him no again and that plain pissed him off. Brooklyn was the only woman to hold that kind of power over him. She was the only woman that he’d ever loved and now, she was on his doorstep asking for his help. Grizz would have to put his pettiness away for the time being if he was going to be any good to her.

“How can I help?” he asked. It was a start and judging by the smile on Brooklyn’s beautiful face, it was a good one.

BROOKLYN

Brooklyn Summers wasn't sure how it had happened, but she found herself in quite a mess. Her day had all started so normal—coffee, shower, makeup, and messy bun, in that order. But then, Grizz showed up at her office demanding that she make time to talk to him and that's where her day started to spiral downhill.

He'd shown up again, begging her to move up to his cabin with him, but they had already been down that road and both knew how it ended—with heartbreak.

They had been college sweethearts. Grizz was trying to figure out his next step on how to piss off his old man and she was just trying to work her way through law school and pay her tuition. Hooking up with Grizz was a fun distraction at first, but then he went and convinced her to move in with him. They lived in complete bliss for the first year. Grizz seemed happy about the added bonus that his father hated that he was “Slumming it” with her and she loved having a partner. At least, she thought that's whom she had found in Grizz, but she was so wrong.

They rang in the New Year together and they had so many plans. They were both supposed to graduate the next year—him from business school and then, he planned to go for his master's, while Brooklyn planned to attend law school. But best-laid plans usually went wrong and theirs certainly had. Brooklyn found out that she was a few months pregnant by February and when she told Grizz about the baby, he flipped out on her. He accused her of getting pregnant on purpose and

then walked out on her. He was gone for over a week before he returned, begging her to take him back, telling her that he was a fool, but it was already too late. She had lost the baby the day after he left.

It was crazy, really. She never thought that she'd want to have a kid. At least, not before finishing law school and building her career. Hell, she wasn't sure she'd ever want kids at all, but losing her and Grizz's baby had shown her differently. She not only wanted that baby but she was devastated when she lost it. Brooklyn blamed Grizz for her loss and when she told him about the baby, and he seemed almost relieved, she told him to get his stuff and get out of her apartment. As far as she was concerned, they were over.

But life was crazy sometimes and she learned quickly that just because she said something was over, didn't make it so. Grizz graduated from school, just as she had, and they went their separate ways. She was sure that would be the last that she'd hear from him until he started showing up at court when she had a case. He'd sit in the back of the courtroom for open cases and watch her. It was almost like he was catching her performance in a play or something, the way he'd watch her every move and seem to hang on her every word. It was kind of creepy and when she confronted him to tell him that, he begged her for another chance.

Grizz told her that he had quit his job and moved into his grandfather's cabin up in the Catskills. He told her all about how beautiful it was up there and then he asked her to move in with him. It sounded nice, but that wasn't the kind of life she wanted for herself. Besides, Brooklyn finally was working toward the career that she always wanted, and walking away from it now wasn't an option for her, so she turned him down and sent him on his way back up to the mountains. But that didn't matter to Grizz. He kept on coming back to the city every few weeks, asking her the same question each time. He wanted her to move up to his mountain and be his woman. She turned him down every time he asked and sent him home, wondering if that would be the last time she'd hear from him. Sooner or later, Grizz would get sick of her telling him, no, and he'd stop trying. At least, that was what she thought would

happen, but it never did. He was the most stubborn man she'd ever known, and that was saying something in her line of work.

He should never want to speak to her again, with the way that she dismissed him earlier that morning, yet here he was, asking how he could help her. He was either a masochist or a fool, but she didn't have time to figure any of that out right now.

"I'm in trouble," she said.

"What kind of trouble?" he asked.

"You know the kind of people that I represent," she said. "I'm in that kind of trouble, and I'm not allowed to tell you anything more. I'd be breaking lawyer, client confidentiality."

"Shit, Brooklyn," he grumbled. "How can I help you if I don't know what we're up against?" Hearing Grizz call them a "We" did strange things to her battered heart. How would she ever come out of this with it still intact? She wouldn't—it was that simple.

"I just need a place to stay for a bit. You know, ride out the storm," she teased.

"This isn't a joking matter," Grizz grumbled.

"I know," she agreed. "But I have nothing else left, Grizz. I have to keep my sense of humor intact because otherwise, I'd go crazy."

"It's that bad?" he asked.

"Worse, actually," she breathed. "Listen, at some point, maybe I'll be able to tell you the whole story, but for now, can you please just trust me?"

He nodded without hesitation. "Already done," he agreed. "I trust you more than anyone else on the planet, Brooklyn." She wanted to "Aww" his statement, but she also knew from experience that he hated that.

"Thank you," she whispered. Brooklyn unzipped her coat and pulled it off. "Your place is great," she said. He'd talked so much about his cabin and the mountains, she thought she

had it all pegged, but she was wrong. The cabin was better than she ever imagined. “I haven’t stayed out this way since I was a kid,” she said. “My parents used to bring me and my brother and sister up here for vacations every summer. I loved coming up to the Catskills.”

“I hadn’t been up here since I was a little boy. I always loved this place and now, I can’t think of anyplace else I’d rather live.”

“I can see why,” she said, spinning around. “It suits you. I don’t mean to be rude, but I’d love to change out of my wet clothes. I had to park my car about a half-mile down the mountain and hike the rest of the way up here in this storm. Can you point me to your spare room?” she asked.

“Can’t,” he said.

“I don’t want to play games, Grizz,” Brooklyn insisted.

“I’m not playing games, honey. I can’t point you in the direction of my spare room because I don’t have one. This cabin is a one-bedroom. The master is through that hallway and to the right,” he said, pointing back to his room.

“We can’t share a room, Grizz,” she insisted.

“I don’t see why not, Brooklyn. We used to live together and slept in the same bed together for over a year. I think that we can handle that now that we’re friends, right?”

He was issuing her a challenge. Every time she turned him away, she claimed that they were better off as friends, and she didn’t want to lose their friendship because it was too important to her. Now, he was throwing all of that back in her face and by telling him that they couldn’t sleep in the same bed together, she’d just be proving him right. That was the last thing she needed because Grizz gloating would get on her nerves in no time flat.

“Sure,” she reluctantly agreed. “We can handle sharing the same bed—as friends.”

He smiled down at her and took her two bags. “Great,” he said. “Follow me then.” He nodded back down the hallway to his bedroom and every step she took felt as though the walls

were closing in around her. How the hell was she going to get through the next few days having to share a bed with Grizz, and keep her hands to herself? The question was simple—she wouldn't.

ABOUT K.L. RAMSEY & BE KELLY

Romance Rebel fighting for

Happily Ever After!

K. L. Ramsey currently resides in West Virginia (Go Mountaineers!). In her spare time, she likes to read romance novels, go to WVU football games and attend book club (aka-drink wine) with girlfriends. K. L. enjoys writing Contemporary Romance, Erotic Romance, and Sexy Ménage! She loves to write strong, capable women and bossy, hot as hell alphas, who fall ass over tea kettle for them. And of course, her stories always have a happy ending. But wait—there's more!

Somewhere along the writing path, K.L. developed a love of ALL things paranormal (but has a special affinity for shifters <YUM!!>)!! She decided to take a chance and create another persona- BE Kelly- to bring you all of her yummy shifters, seers, and everything paranormal (plus a hefty dash of MC!).

K. L. RAMSEY'S SOCIAL MEDIA

Ramsey's Rebels - K.L. Ramsey's Readers Group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ramseysrebels>

KL Ramsey & BE Kelly's ARC Team

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/klramseyandbekellyarcteam>

KL Ramsey and BE Kelly's Newsletter

<https://mailchi.mp/4e73ed1b04b9/authorklramsey/>

KL Ramsey and BE Kelly's Website

<https://www.klramsey.com>



BE KELLY'S SOCIAL MEDIA

BE Kelly's Reader's group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/kellsangelsreadersgroup/>



WORKS BY K. L. RAMSEY

The Relinquished Series Box Set

Love Times Infinity
Love's Patient Journey
Love's Design
Love's Promise

Harvest Ridge Series Box Set

Worth the Wait
The Christmas Wedding
Line of Fire
Torn Devotion
Fighting for Justice

Last First Kiss Series Box Set

Theirs to Keep
Theirs to Love
Theirs to Have
Theirs to Take

Second Chance Summer Series

True North

The Wrong Mister Right

Ties That Bind Series

Saving Valentine

Blurred Lines

Dirty Little Secrets

Ties That Bind Box Set

Taken Series

Double Bossed

Double Crossed

Double The Mistletoe

Double Down

Owned

His Secret Submissive

His Reluctant Submissive

His Cougar Submissive

His Nerdy Submissive

His Stubborn Submissive

Alphas in Uniform

Hellfire

Royal Bastards MC

Savage Heat

Whiskey Tango

Can't Fix Cupid

Ratchet's Revenge

Patched for Christmas

Love at First Fight

Dizzy's Desire

Possessing Demon

Mistletoe and Mayhem

Legend

Savage Hell MC Series

Roadkill

REPOssession

Dirty Ryder

Hart's Desire

Axel's Grind

Razor's Edge

Trista's Truth

Thorne's Rose

Lone Star Rangers

Don't Mess With Texas

Sweet Adeline

Dash of Regret

Austin's Starlet

Ranger's Revenge

Heart of Stone

Smokey Bandits MC Series

Aces Wild

Queen of Hearts

Full House

King of Clubs

Joker's Wild

Betting on Blaze

Tirana Brothers (Social Rejects Syndicate)

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Sloth

Gluttony

Forgiven Series

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[Confessions of a Saint](#)

Confessions of a Rebel

Chasing Serendipity Series

[Kismet](#)

Sealed With a Kiss Series

[Kissable](#)

Never Been Kissed

Garro Syndicate Trilogy

[Edon](#)

[Bekim](#)

Rovena

Billionaire Boys Club

[His Naughty Assistant](#)

[His Virgin Assistant](#)

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His Curvy Assistant

His Bossy Assistant

His Rebellious Assistant

Grumpy Mountain Men Series

Grizz

Jed

Axel

A Grumpy Mountain Man for Xmas

The Bridezilla Series

Happily Ever After- Almost

Picture Perfect

Haunted Honeymoon for One

Rope ‘Em and Ride ‘Em Series

Saddle Up

A Cowboy for Christmas

WORKS BY BE KELLY (K.L.'S ALTER EGO...)

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[Reckoning MC Series Box Set](#)

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[Eden's Playground](#)

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