

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

The Twelve Quickies of Christmas



Book 9

Snow Angel
Joey Hill

SNOW ANGEL

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SNOW ANGEL

Joey W. Hill

“So what do you want for Christmas, little girl?”

Constance Jayne Bradwell looked over her shoulder, startled and then amused to find Santa looking directly at her.

The Children’s Home Benefit Party was one of the city elite’s most popular Christmas Eve events. The organizers had wanted some of the hands-on volunteers here tonight to mingle with the wealthy attendees and answer questions about the shelter. She was told she had a pleasing appearance that would fit in well. She’d done her duty, mixing, mingling, making conversation, all the while wondering if any of them had the slightest inkling what it was like to face Christmas alone in the world, belonging to no one but yourself.

She hated this holiday, with its pounding messages of family, love and togetherness, a scream so strong there was no escaping from it. Another hour and she could go home, put a pillow over her ears and sleep until it went away. She tried not to watch the dancing couples, one woman’s elegantly manicured hand resting on the shoulder of her husband, his hand around her waist. What would it be like to have that casual intimacy? Any intimacy at all?

It had been a long time since she’d had sex, and she was lonely enough to long for even the artificial intimacy it could conjure. Wouldn’t it be nice to find a safe guy to take her home, let him inundate her with mindless physical desire, and make her forget what she really wanted? What would it be like to have a man guide her to the dance floor with a protective, possessive hand to the small of her back? Get an aspirin out of the medicine cabinet if she had a headache, rather than having to stumble there by herself, blinded by the pain? What would it be like to have someone else hold the reins for awhile, not because it was his job or volunteer shift, but because he’d made a willing commitment to make her his, to cherish and care for her?

It was a confusing yearning, as if she wanted a parent and a lover both. She'd always been terrified to let go of control of her life, and yet tonight she had an overwhelming desire to do just that.

"You can't tell me a pretty little thing like you doesn't want anything for Christmas. Come here."

Santa held out his hand. On an impulse, she set her rum punch on a nearby table and took his offered hand to help her up to his throne. Some of the wrapped packages around his feet had gotten scattered, so she had to pick her way carefully through them with her heels. Santa's other hand touched her waist to steady and guide her, then she was up the step. He sat back down, using their clasped hands and the hand on her waist to guide her onto his knee.

Well, they always said "knee", but it was really a man's thigh you sat upon, a very intimate posture. There was no doubt the person on whose leg she sat could feel the shape of her bottom, the division of her thighs, perhaps even the small apple-sized area of vulva and labia, the dress being a typical formal, thin silken cloth that hugged her curves and sparkled.

"Let me guess." She arched a brow. "It's getting late, so you decided to make a play for the only other person at the party without a date."

His lips curved into an appreciative smile. Hazel eyes tipped by dark lashes looked at her from the framework of the curly white wig and beard. Putting that together with the muscular thigh that felt capable of accommodating her as long as she wanted to sit there, Constance realized with some surprise that this Santa was in his late thirties.

It made sense. Ironically, there were no children at this event, so his efforts were geared toward adults, exchanging quips with the men as he handed out presents, and encouraging ladies young and old to take his knee for a moment's flirtation.

"Not necessarily. You looked sad, and I thought you might like to tell the one person at the party who's supposed to grant wishes what would make you happy."

He had a compelling voice, with the smooth, rich tones of a late night radio talk show host. It was a voice that inspired confidence and comfort, and Constance felt something in her chest tighten, as if his words had the ability to wrap around her heart and squeeze out thoughts she would normally have no intention of saying out loud.

"So, is this like a confessional? Nothing I say will be repeated?"

"What's spoken in this ear," he tapped it with one finger, cocking his head, "is only repeated to elves and angels."

She'd asked it half joking, but his response was serious, and her attention clung to those beautiful eyes. She had an urge to reach out and touch his mouth, and decided she needed to go home before she embarrassed herself.

But the shallow, harsh noise of two hundred impersonal voices pressed against her, and his touch, kind and strong against the small of her back, his expression attentive, steady, roused things in her she couldn't ignore.

He was Santa, and she had a very special wish. Maybe wishes whispered into the ears of a symbolic Santa *would* get to the ears of an angel and, if she'd been very, very good, some small part of her desire would be answered. She'd believed it once.

Constance leaned back, her shoulder pressing into his chest so she was speaking into his ear, not to any party guests standing too close. He tilted his head closer and when she spoke, she inadvertently brushed his ear with her lips, her jaw line pressing against the silky cotton sideburns of the beard.

She closed her eyes, shutting out reality, giving herself the same courage that the screen of the confessional provided. A safe place to voice her sins, her fears, her deepest wants. His hand tightened on her waist, holding her to him, and the words tumbled out of her mouth.

"I don't want to be here. I want to be home with someone who cares about me. I want to wake up tomorrow with someone's arms around me. I want to hear someone whisper 'Merry Christmas' in my ear, and be able to believe, if just for that moment,

that I'm the most important person in his life. I want to be swept away, taken over. For one night, I want to believe I can trust my happiness in someone else's hands."

She straightened up, looked into those golden green eyes. "Pretty tall order, hmm, Santa? Bet you don't have anything in those little boxes at your feet to cover that."

She pushed off his lap before he could respond and walked away, already feeling like a fool.

* * * * *

For the next half hour, she was caught in a conversation with the owner of the city's pro basketball team and his wife. When she dared a look around, she saw she'd finished off Kris Kringle, because the dais had been removed, the packages cleared to make more dance room. Poor guy. Paid to do a Santa gig and got a load of crap dumped on him.

She made her good-byes to the hostess and then stopped in at the restroom. With only a small twinge of guilt and a relieved sigh, she flipped the lock to keep everyone out. It wasn't the main restroom, but a two-stall facility so the party attendees wouldn't have to walk down to the main foyer. She just couldn't take the risk of one more conversation. It was ridiculous, she knew. She worked with children who'd come from the most horrible of circumstances, who had a wide range of emotional and physical problems, yet tonight's glittering party easily qualified as the hardest volunteer task she'd worked all year. Next year she was taking the children's Christmas party, even if she had to bribe someone to get it. Or maim them.

"Would it help if we nailed some boards over it? It's soundproof, if you need to let out a primal scream."

A man stepped out of the second stall. He wore jeans and was sliding a shirt over his broad shoulders. The Santa suit hung on a rack on the open stall door. The beard

and wig were gone, leaving dark hair raked back by his fingers and a smoothly shaven jaw. A jaw she recognized.

“They...they *pay* you to be Santa?”

Her Santa was S. Coble Whitney III, or Sam Coble as he’d preferred in high school when she’d last known him fifteen years ago. Now he was a wealthy manufacturing CEO, recently divorced. She’d tutored him in math through her junior year, and had had the kind of heart-aching crush on him only an awkward, geeky foster kid could have for a boy who was handsome, funny, and kind to her when others laughed at her unpolished table manners or the way she dressed.

Sam smiled, and she found it could still bump her heart up a few beats. “They’re predicting a slump for manufacturing first quarter, so I figure it would be good to rack up a few extra dollars at Christmas.”

The last thing she wanted tonight was to see someone from high school, someone who remembered her.

“I’m sorry about the Santa thing. I just...it just...” she stopped short, baffled when he took two steps forward, caught her nervous hands in his.

“It’s the best request I’ve had all night. One I think this Santa is going to handle personally.”

His hands moved to her hips and Constance found herself trapped between a warm, solid body and the cool surface of the door. “Sam, what are you---”

“Going on impulse,” he said. “If you’re going to stare at a man’s body with that much hunger in your eyes, you’re going to have to take the risk of being eaten yourself.”

Heat overpowered shock and mortification as he moved in, pressing her body against the door with the strength of his. His lips touched hers, opened them with insistent demand. A shiver swept up from her knees, like an electric shock passing through her muscles and nerve endings. Locking her bones into a paralysis she couldn’t shake as his mouth explored hers, his tongue teasing hers to play with him. His fingers

dug into her waist, her hip bones. His cock, leashed in the tidy, civilized constraint of his jeans, swelled against the denim, pressed between their thighs in blatant invitation.

Her body ignored all rational protests to this astounding turn of events. She was kissing back, perhaps too greedily. One of his large hands captured her nape, controlling her movements, his fingers caressing the back shell of her ear, the dangling earring.

The sensitive pressure points of her neck screamed in response, and the reaction rippled outward, tightening her breasts, her loins, her buttocks.

She'd never had the feeling of safety a parent could evoke, and knew when she was too old to continue hoping she'd be adopted into a family. About that time, she'd gotten hooked on romance novels, transferring her desire for parents to a desire for the protective alpha males within their pages. The emotional and physical yearnings the characters stoked to a fever pitch had grown so excruciating she'd submitted to the eager gropings of a slew of boys happy to find someone upon whom they could relieve their own overwhelming glandular urgings.

It had taught her that sex didn't come with the emotional fulfillment it promised. Like the best sales force, her hormones would tell her anything to get what they wanted.

Now she maintained a careful understanding of what was sex and what was more, and had indulged in lukewarm relationships that dwindled into tepid friendships. She was an adult, beyond the need for the parental bond, but she knew she yearned for something indefinably similar in a lover, a sense that he was in control but with her best interests at heart. A fantasy. No. A fantasy suggested something exciting, whimsical. What her heart ached for was a miracle.

It was Christmas, she was lonely, she wanted to be taken. If it was empty lust, so be it. She'd take lust over simple emptiness. Her body was so ravenous for a man's touch, a man's loving, that even if it was for five minutes in the bathroom, she'd accept it. She

might even convince herself he cared, because Sam had always been a good person to her, the one boy who hadn't taken advantage.

Only now he was a man, a gorgeous male specimen with a warm body and taut muscles that her hands were grasping just above his waist under the unbuttoned shirt. Her thumbs were at his waistband, feeling the curve of his back, the narrowing to his hips. The look in his eyes was pure primal dominance driven by desire, a male ready to sweep her off her feet, overpower her.

"Hold onto me, baby," he murmured, and it was her only warning to clutch his shoulders before he turned them toward the sink counter. The edge pressed into her ass as his teeth scraped over hers, then he pushed her back, breaking the connection. He turned her so she faced the mirror and he stood behind her, those hazel eyes fired with desire. He slipped off the spaghetti strap of one side of her dress and caught her hand in his, holding it by her hip. He reached across her, his forearm pressing against her breasts, and dropped the other strap. She made a helpless noise, mesmerized by their images as he tugged gently at her waist, and the dress tumbled, pooling at her waist, revealing her curves, held up and together for display in the black strapless bra. The straps, lying loosely just above her elbows, held her arms to her sides unless she wanted to rip the dress.

"Beautiful," he slid his thumb across the top of one breast, her flesh prickling with need at his lightest touch. "Constance, you have always had such lovely breasts."

She wanted to tell him it was the clever engineering of wires and side pads, but anything more complicated than a whimper was beyond her just now. His hands moved back to her waist, then he was gathering the fabric of her snug skirt, inching it up over her hips. The palm of one hand pressed the small of her back, bending her forward so her cleavage was propped up on cool formica.

He's going to fuck you like some feudal lord with a castle serving girl, her mind screamed. You're going to feel degraded, cheap, worse than when you started. Remember the boys in the back seat, who wouldn't even buy you a Big Mac when it was over? Cheapest little whore at

school, that's what they called you, because you never asked, never demanded more. You just wanted them to take care of you. But they never did. They didn't care. You're not sixteen anymore, Constance.

"No." She started to rise, and found out how much stronger he was. His hands slid down her bare hips, and he grasped her thighs above the lace top of her stockings. He went to one knee and lifted her as she might lift a pillow, putting her knees on his shoulders, balancing her there, still facing the mirror. She rocked forward as he raised her hips just above the line of her shoulders, making her completely helpless. It was a terrifying, exhilarating feeling to be submissive to a man's overwhelming strength. His mouth closed over her pussy, his lips separated from her flesh only by the black strip of the thong she had worn to avoid panty lines.

He wasn't fucking her like some rutting beast. He was offering her pleasure like a gift.

"Oh, God..." It had been too long since she'd let her body feel this, and now suddenly everything was pressurized, like a bottle of soda that had been tossed around and now lay in his control to turn the top and let what was churning inside explode. She didn't have the reins. He had simply plucked them away.

"Sam, I can't..."

"Yes, baby. You can."

His tongue licked, licked, pulled satin across swollen, wet folds, the friction rubbing again, again. His teeth closed over her clit, pressing down, urging her on. His nose was against her, nuzzling the enervated crease of her buttocks, his hair brushing the inside of her thighs, forced open a fixed width by his head being there. Her feet kicked the air uselessly in her slender heels, her knees pressing into his shoulders as he worked her with his mouth and his arms banded over her thighs. He gripped each of her ass cheeks, spreading her open with his thumbs and moving the strap of her thong against the opening of her anus. As rhythmically and relentlessly as the passage of time, he licked her pussy some more.

"No, no..."

She threw her head back, saw herself in the mirror, eyes wild, moist lips parted, her breasts overflowing the bra, sliding against the smooth surface of the counter as he kept fucking her from behind with his mouth. Her hands caught the edge of the counter below her hips and pressed against it, instinctively seeking the rhythm to send her over, pushing her harder against his mouth.

As the orgasm descended upon her, she turned her head and tried to press her mouth against her shoulder to keep her screams from reverberating.

He caught her fingers, pulled them from the edge of the counter, his grip shifting to hold her arm behind her back in a way that increased the spiral of reaction in her belly. Her other hand lost its purchase on the counter. Now she had no anchor. Like foam, she moved on the ocean of his mouth, only able to travel where it took her.

"It's soundproof, sweetheart. I want to hear you scream."

He replaced his tongue working in her cunt with his thumb, sliding it down from where it had been busy at her anus with the thong strap, to rub her clit in light, perfect circles. At the same moment, he sank his teeth into the meat of her left buttock. The counterpoint of pleasure and pain sent her surging forward. Only his relentless grip on her arm and thighs kept her from slamming face first into the mirror as another orgasm exploded through her. She flailed, tossed ruthlessly on the tempest of her climax, the sensation rolling her psyche over and over, stretching every muscle and tendon to the breaking point. That explosive center he continued to manipulate served as a repeated detonation area, wringing every ounce of response from her straining body.

Moments later, she discovered the faucet pressing against her cheek where her head had come to rest after the tidal wave of sensation had passed. Her thighs trembled against his jaw as he pressed gentle kisses along the skin inside them. Her body quivered, jerked at each touch of his lips.

"Easy," he soothed her. "Easy."

He moved back, lifting her knees from his shoulders, guiding them down so the heels of her shoes made a controlled descent to earth, which was more than she could say for the rest of her. He smoothed her skirt back into place, his palm fully appreciative of the shape and weight of each buttock, and then he slid the same hand under her, his palm flat against her rib cage, raising her up so her back pressed into his chest and she faced him and herself through the reflection of the mirror.

Her skin was flushed, her shoulder-length dark hair mussed, her lips full and parted, eyes gone deep green with confusion and desire. His thumb played idly over the front clasp of the strapless bra, and the hard steel of his erection pressed between her buttocks, through the tough fabric of his jeans and flimsy substance of her skirt, underscoring the differences between male and female. Hard, penetrating. Soft, yielding.

He bent his head, pressed his lips against her temple, a tender gesture that had her leaning the weight of her skull into his palm as he caressed the side of her face.

"I'd like to come home with you, Constance. Be that person who wakes up with you on Christmas morning, my arms around you. I want to go to your home, drink hot chocolate in front of a fire, watch the Christmas tree lights reflect off your face. I want to fuck you senseless. I want you to belong to me tonight."

She put her hand over his at her waist, felt the shape of his long fingers. She didn't lift her head from his touch, wanting to at least savor the fantasy another moment before she had to embrace her reality.

"I'm sure there are plenty of women who would give you a cup of cocoa and an easy lay."

She gasped as he lifted her under the elbows and turned her. He rested her hips on the counter and moved himself between them so the stiff cock beneath his pants was pushed against her still rippling pussy. "Don't, Constance. Don't play Jayna, not tonight."

"Do...do what?"

"You know what. That person you pretended to be in high school. The wise-ass bad girl, when everyone who mattered knew you were just a sixteen-year-old foster kid desperate for love. We can be together tonight without wrapping it up with a bunch of baggage, don't you think?"

"Sure, no-strings-attached sex. A really novel concept." She tried to wrench away from him, settled for crossing her arms over her chest when he kept her pinned, and jutted her chin out. "I had enough of the give-everything-to-a-guy-so-he-can-ignore-me-tomorrow strategy in high school. Why would I want to go back to that?"

"Because my ex-wife and son are in Aspen this week, skiing with her new boyfriend. A boyfriend she efficiently discovered just a few days after our divorce was finalized. We split my son, just like Solomon, but she gets the two weeks of Christmas, because that's the date of the great Aspen getaway. I supposed it makes sense, because how can you spend Christmas together as a family together, anyway, when you're no longer a family?"

The words cut harsh lines into his handsome face, but she had her scars, too. "I don't want to be your consolation prize, or a warming blanket for you to stave off the cold of being by yourself. There are women out there you can buy for that."

"It's not like that. Would you please stop trying to get away?" He set his hands to her shoulders, keeping her in place. "Yes, I want to bury myself in a woman tonight, Constance. A woman who knows what it's like to go through the holidays without a family. But if it were just that, I'd have kept my distance."

He cupped her chin, made her face his gaze. "It was really, really good to see you here. When I saw you, I knew I wanted to find out more about the woman you'd become. I wasn't going to ask you out tonight. I knew if I did, you'd think it was just the desperate come-on of a lonely divorced guy, and I'm not desperate. I'm interested."

Her cheeks warmed, but he wasn't done. "Then you whispered in my ear and made me think, this is a Christmas wish I can grant, because it's my Christmas wish, too. To

be with someone who's not just lonely for a quick fuck, but something deeper. And you felt good on my knee. *Right*. Can't it be that simple?"

No, it couldn't. She knew what it was to indulge in the illusion of intimacy for one night to stave off the demons of loneliness. They came snapping back twice as hard the next day, which is why she'd learned not to fall into the trap of casual sex. There was nothing casual about it for her, no more than one drink could be a casual thing for a reformed alcoholic. But he'd hit her on a night when she was vulnerable. She could despise him for it, or let him take her home, fuck her to exhaustion, and have him slip away in the morning.

"Constance—"

"Yes. Okay. I need my arms free to get my dress back up on my shoulders, unless you want me to walk out like this."

"It has its appeal, but I think I'd rather keep you all to myself. There were too many guys eyeing you as it was." He drew her hands through the straps, slid them back up on her shoulders, lifting the gathered neckline so it hung properly over the swell of her bosom.

"Maybe I should return the favor," she said. If she'd made her choice, then she was going to enjoy the full measure of it. She reached out to button his shirt. When he drew in his breath when she touched him, she found herself a little short of oxygen, especially when he bent, bit her neck. He gathered her in to him, his arm about her waist, his face buried in her hair. Her arms crept up around his neck, and she marveled at the scrape of his rougher chin against the soft skin of her cheek. It had been a long time since she'd held a man.

"Are you sure you don't tell all the Santas what you want for Christmas, to get them to go home with you?"

She curved her lips against him. "Yes, but you're the first to fall for it. I thought I had one at the mall earlier today, but he said he couldn't give up his bingo night with the boys down at the Lions Club."

Sam laughed, lifting his head. He sobered when he looked into her face, traced her lips with a finger. "I'm not going to hurt you, Constance. Okay?"

Yes, you will. It's never as simple as sex. "Okay."

She finished buttoning his shirt and watched him tuck it in the loose waistband of his jeans. The shirt stretched across his upper torso as he did it and she suppressed the urge to touch.

"So why did you do Santa? I imagine someone like you would be one of the partygoers. I don't think anybody even knew it was you."

"That's the point. I don't want them to know it's me. I usually work events with children, but I'm glad to work a dinner party that benefits them as well. You run a good organization, Constance. My company gives about fifteen percent of our charity budget to it."

"I didn't know that."

"I know you didn't." He gave her a steady look. "I didn't tell you that to make this about that, in any way. I just want to make sure you know I think you run a good place."

"Thank you."

He nodded. "I hate these events. Particularly at Christmas. Playing Santa is a way to get out of doing the dog and pony show and put my energy where it will do some good. You're the brave one, sweetheart. You came as yourself, and held up your end of the bargain." His fingers touched her face. "When you spoke to me, it was the first time tonight I wanted to be someone real, not pretending to be someone else. So here we are. Let's take you home."

* * * * *

Her patio home was clean and cozily decorated in warm tones of blue, soft greens, pale yellows. It was a place she always felt welcome, which reflected herself. But as she

let them in, she couldn't help wondering how it looked to him, a man whose address covered five acres, with a ten thousand square foot home, stables and an Olympic-sized swimming pool.

Her Christmas tree was in a corner of the living room. He stopped her from turning on the overhead light, his hand covering hers. "Just let the Christmas lights do it."

She put down her purse and turned to him, twisting her fingers. "Hot cocoa?"

He nodded.

Constance heard him behind her as she went into the kitchen. What on earth could she talk about? Inspired, she reached out to the countertop CD player. The instrumental strains of *Silent Night* filled the room.

"Music always makes things seem more special, doesn't it?" she commented, moving to the cabinet and taking down the canister of cocoa. "A person stops, looks at a chair. Put it to classical music, or to funny music, and people will get choked up or laugh at the way that person is standing there, even if they're standing exactly the same way. Take the music away, and it's just some person standing looking at a chair, no big deal."

His hands closed on her shoulders. She stopped, flushing. "I'm babbling."

"Yes. I like it. I want you out of this."

He pushed her dress off her shoulders again, and Constance held still as he worked it off her arms, loosened her grip on the canister so he could slide the straps over them, then his touch was back at her hips, guiding the dress down, molding the shape of her ass with his hands, bringing the dress to the floor. He bent, looped an arm around her thighs and pressed, causing her to take a half seat on his shoulder so he could lift her feet off the floor and neatly clear the dress from the snag of her heels. Then he moved her into a standing position again and stood. She made to turn in his embrace, but he held her there.

"No," he said against her ear, his fingertips playing over her exposed skin. "Make us hot chocolate, Constance. I want to see you move around the kitchen in nothing but

your heels and stockings, your panties and bra. I like how your breasts jiggle with every little movement, and that swatch of panties, not covering your ass, barely covering your pussy. I'm going to watch and get hard as iron, and never feel the same way again about having a woman fix me a cup of hot chocolate." He reached past her, turned off the CD player. "And the music we make will give this moment its true meaning. We won't play head games with ourselves. Okay?"

She nodded, and he moved back from her, but his body's warmth remained.

When she heard the creak as he settled into one of her chairs, reaction swept through her. What was he seeing as she maneuvered around her kitchen? The stretch of her torso as she reached up to pull down two mugs. Goosepimples rising on her flesh as she opened the refrigerator. The plump curve of her pussy as she bent low to retrieve the saucepan from the cabinets. She deliberately shifted her thighs a little apart.

Pleasure skittered up her spine at the combination of a moan and growl behind her. She took the saucepan back to the stove and noticed he was right, that her breasts swayed attractively as she moved. Heat built in her kitchen, and it wasn't coming from the burner.

A phone tone split the quiet, the only other noise the escalated rate of breathing from two intensely roused bodies and the hum of the refrigerator.

Sam muttered something. Constance turned to see him having some difficulty retrieving the cell phone from his jeans pocket, due to the constriction of the fabric across his crotch. He worked it free.

"Sam Coble. Yeah, hey there, buddy. How's Aspen?"

His son. Constance went to recover her dress. With a smile at her modest gesture, Sam reached out, drew her onto his knee. He settled his hand on her hip, his fingers hooked into the band of the thong, his thumb rubbing her hipbone. He pressed a kiss to her shoulder, reassuring her both with the affectionate touch and the obvious warmth in his voice.

"Second-level slope. That's something else. Yeah, he sounds like he's a pretty darn good skier. You're really lucky, sport, getting to spend Christmas in a place like Aspen."

The love in his voice never diminished, but the hand on the phone whitened, and the grip on her hip convulsed with every word exchanged about his mother and the accomplished skiing boyfriend.

Sam Coble had married Tracy Whitline, an obvious money and looks match, but Constance had always thought Sam had much more character and depth. Watching his pain, she wished she had been wrong.

"Okay. You be careful, son. I love you. Merry Christmas." Sam broke the connection, laid the phone carefully down on the table.

"Sam, I'm so sorry."

"You know what you said about music?" He rubbed a hand over his face. "Right now there'd be some goddamned ballad playing, extolling the pain of fathers ripped from their kids by divorce, something that would hammer its way into your brain and torture you throughout the holiday season."

"Sam." She put her hand out to give him gentleness, but he stopped her.

"Tonight's not going to be about that." He hooked his other hand into her strapless bra, ripping open the front clasp so it fell away from her body, pushed away by his impatient hands. Gripping her around her rib cage, he yanked her forward, thrusting her right breast into his open, eager mouth, clamping down on the nipple, suckling it, flicking it with his tongue.

Constance grabbed onto his shoulders, her belly curling with each pull of his mouth against her stiffening nipple.

"Sam--"

"No." He caught his fingers in her hair, took her head back so they were eye to eye. "I need to take you, Constance. Take you hard. I told you I need to bury myself in a

woman. That woman is you. Tell me you're on birth control, because I've no intention of separating myself from the heat of your pussy with anything if it can be helped. I want my cock driving into your sweet cunt, and I want it there *now*. Will you take it?"

"Yes," she whispered, overwhelmed by his brutal need. How could she deny him when she understood the raging pain she saw in his eyes? Only maybe it was worse for him, because he was the outsider in his own family, whereas she had never had a family.

She rose off of him, bent and laid her upper torso on the table surface gracefully, her ass tilted up because of the height of her heels. Keeping her eyes on his, she reached back, slid her finger under the thong back, moved it aside so her pink, wet labia was clearly visible. "You can fuck me as long and hard as you need to, Sam. But it doesn't help you forget. It just makes it hurt less for a little while."

He stared at her. Her heart thundered against the table surface. He rose abruptly, and she saw the length of one long thigh as he moved behind her. She heard him unfasten his jeans, and her pussy contracted, wanting him even as her heart drew in on itself, protecting her against what was to come. The pounding of flesh against flesh, where her soul would be left out in the cold, unneeded and unwanted because the simple act of lust to escape pain only needed a pussy and a cock to satisfy it.

She tensed as he put his hands to her hips. The silence of the kitchen drew out, the ticking clock on top of her refrigerator and the appliance's low hum the only noise.

"Constance, you really need to learn when to throw a guy out for being a jerk. You're worth more than that." He lifted her, turned her to face him.

She raised her hands to his face. "So are you. You're a good man, Sam. Most dads wouldn't have been able to stop themselves from saying something nasty."

"He and I have a good relationship. I know and he knows I'll always be his dad. It just rankles the hell out of me that some asshole gets to play Daddy to him just so he can fuck what used to be mine. Sorry," he shook his head. "I'm a little territorial. I've no regrets. It was way past time for Tracy and me to split. We never should have gotten

together in the first place. We defined the term 'marriage of convenience'. But, God, I just feel so mad when I think of her with someone else..."

"That you feel like you need to go pee on some bushes or fuck a woman to assert your dominance again?"

He didn't quite manage the smile. "Something exactly like that."

"All right, then." She brought his hand to her breast. "Take me, Sam. I want to feel that. I've never been taken, swept away. Give that to me. Prove to me that I'm yours, that I belong only to you and no one else will ever have me. Fuck my heart and soul when you fuck my pussy."

"Jesus, Constance," he muttered, his hand closing over the nipple that grew stiff and longer under his touch, fueled by the illusion her words were constructing.

"Please, Sam. Please."

Civility had compelled him to rein back animal instincts, but she knew it was still there, simmering behind that control. At her words, it broke free.

He lifted her under the arms, shoved her to her back on the kitchen table and tore the thong away with a rip of fabric that scraped her skin with his brutal need. He gripped her hips, tested her waters with the head of his cock, and finding her ready, drove in with the strength of a stallion in full rut.

Constance arched, cried out. He filled her tight passage to the point of pain, yet she wanted it, wanted the closest thing to intimacy she could have on this Christmas Eve. She raised her stockinged legs, wrapped them around him, driving the points of her heels into his buttocks.

"Oh, sweetheart. Be still, girl. You're tight as a virgin. You've not done this in a while." He bent, bracing one hand over her. "I like knowing that. How long has it been?"

"Since high school," she managed.

With a muttered oath, he stopped. He would not let her move, kept his hand pressed down on her as he shut his eyes, fought some battle within himself. Her pussy quivered around him, wanting to hold that part of him forever.

"No. No, we're not doing it this way." He withdrew from her, groaning at the retreat, but he took both her hands and brought her to her feet. "You were making me some hot chocolate, and that's what you're going to do." He sent her toward the counter with a light smack on one bare buttock. By the time she had turned to look at him with a confused expression, he had his jeans up, fastened and buckled.

"I don't understand. What...Did I do something wrong?"

Sam cupped her face, brushed his lips over hers. "You reminded me of something. A soft voice whispering in my ear what she wanted for Christmas."

"But--"

"What I was about to do wasn't even close to what you wanted, Constance, and we both know it." His fingers slid down the side of her neck, her shoulders. Touched the side of her breast. "Don't settle for being Jayna. You did that in school. You should have outgrown it, but from the tight fit of that sweet pussy of yours, I'd say you just gave up on finding it."

"I thought you went into business, not psychology."

"Don't." He caught her hands. "I'm sorry, Constance. I wasn't trying to make you feel bad. Those phone calls make me unlivable. Sometimes it just seems like everything in the whole world goes wrong and we can't do a damn thing about it. Why should my son be spending fifty percent of his life with some asshole who just wants to get into my ex-wife's pants? Why did you have to sleep with every insensitive jerk in high school just to figure out you were never going to find love that way? Why do we fuck up our lives in ways we can't possibly anticipate?"

"Ah, hell." He wrapped his arms around her, brought her to his warmth and strength, cloaked her with the hug, his fingers wrapped around her bare back and waist, holding her with undemanding intimacy.

"I didn't...I didn't agree to this because..."

"I know, sssh...I know. I'm an idiot, Constance. Forgive me."

He held her for awhile that way, his hands just stroking her back, and after the aching in her throat went away, she wanted it to go on forever, that glide of fingers up and down her bare spine, the closeness of him, his clean smell, the brush of his breath against her temple.

"I'm sorry you had to go through that, Constance. I'm sorry I wasn't a better friend."

Her brow furrowed. "It wasn't your doing, Sam. We barely knew each other."

He shook his head. "I had ten times more fun in our tutoring sessions than I did on one single date with Tracy." At her arch look, he chuckled. "Okay, not counting the sex. Hey, I was seventeen. Give me a break."

"Sam, it was fifteen years ago."

"That would make it a year ago in Mind-Life."

"Oh, God. I can't believe you remembered that."

"You do," he pointed out. "What you said about music earlier? You were always saying things like that. You said that for every decade of time that passed in our adult lives, our minds and hearts would only be one 'Mind Life' year away from the memories of our adolescent lives, because the things that happened then are so strong inside us." He reached out, touched her face. It was a reverent, appreciative touch that startled her, made her suddenly not so aware that she was nearly naked.

"So, Miss Constance Jayne Bradwell, that means you were tutoring me in math all of eighteen months ago. And that is also why," he tipped her chin up, "you're still hurt and embarrassed by the mistakes that lonely teenager who called herself Jayna made, even though you're now a beautiful, accomplished woman who's made an impact in her community and a home for herself, and feels pretty good about life all but these two lousy days of the year. "

"You always called me Constance, even then."

"Because you always were Constance to me. Now finish that cocoa, and then we'll go sit in front of the Christmas tree, just like you said."

"You didn't mention me being naked was part of the plan."

"Well, the best plans allow for a little flexibility." He flashed her a grin. "I'm going to go back to sitting in this chair and watching your beautiful ass."

"It's nothing special," she said, embarrassed.

"You weren't staring at it half the night."

Constance chuckled. "So it wasn't my pickup line, but my ass that got you here tonight?"

She turned from the counter, holding the hot chocolate, and found his heated gaze focused on the movement of her bare breasts. He lifted his attention to her face, and there was no more humor in his eyes, but something far more potent. "If you were mine," he observed softly, "I'd make you walk around the house like this all the time."

"Well, I guess for tonight, I am yours, aren't I?"

She'd meant to be light and facetious with it, but it came out quiet, direct. Inviting. His eyes flamed hotter at her words.

"Yes, you are. Come here, sweetheart."

She obeyed, and leaned forward to set the mugs down on the table.

"No, hold them. I like having your hands occupied." His hand slid up her belly, his thumb sweeping over the top of her mound. "I'd shave your pussy myself, keep you smooth so I could see it, though you have some pretty hair there now, like goose down."

Constance trembled under his touch, as much from the feel of it against her skin as from watching his fingers, their tanned color moving over her. "I can smell you." His hazel eyes lifted to hers. "It makes me want to eat you out all over again."

"I've never known a man who liked doing that," she said. "It was...incredible."

"Most men don't know what they're missing. Look here." His finger brushed her thigh, came away with moisture. "Am I making you hot for me, little girl?"

"You know you are."

"Then let's go in the living room," he rose, "and see what gifts we have for a good girl."

She'd never been with anyone with Sam Coble's sexual confidence. Her body responded to his physical dominance like she was spoils of war and he was the conquering general. Her heart was opening to his gentle touch, his smile. Her soul was terrified of being so out of control. All three parts wanted this Christmas Eve never to end.

If she'd been in her clothes, she would have sat down on the couch, settled a hip comfortably so she was facing her guest, her elbow along the head rest, forming a comfortable position for conversation, but in her current state of undress and the current mood, something else seemed more appropriate.

When Sam sat down, she folded her legs beneath her and sat down on the carpet between his knees. She put the mugs on the table, and then put her back against the brace of his calf and thigh so she could look up at his face, bathed in the soft light thrown from the Christmas tree. She liked things that moved, so her tree had a variety of little electronic ornaments that made soft clicks and slides, whirs as angels turned in joyous celebration. A tiny train ran the gamut around and around to the base of the tree, and then back up again.

She found him studying her with an unreadable expression. "What?"

He lifted a shoulder. "Tracy and I were combatants, in a way. It sounds strange, but she never would have sat this way."

She flushed. "I like feeling protected and safe, and you like making a woman feel that way," she said simply. "The way you acted in the kitchen, taking control, I can tell you like it."

"And what about you? Tell me the truth, Constance. It won't change my desire for you either way."

"I like it," she admitted. "I mean, I'm not saying I'd like a man ordering me about, but for this...this way, I like it."

"I like it, too." He touched her hair, curled a lock back behind her ear, offered a smile that didn't quite reach his eyes. "I'm fairly alpha when it comes to sex. A chauvinist pig down to the bone. I like to overpower a woman until she's screaming with pleasure, begging me to fuck her. I like her to obey me in the bedroom, accept and submit to me for our mutual pleasure. Do you understand what I'm talking about?" He wound the lock around his fingers, taking a firmer grip on her hair, tilting back her head so their eyes met. He leaned forward, bringing his energy closer to hers. "Tell me if you like what you're hearing, Constance."

She'd respond if she could breathe. She did know what he was talking about, though no man had ever cared about her enough to want to overwhelm her, be her master in the bedroom. It took a level of caring and possession no one had ever been willing to offer her, even if it was just for a night.

"Yes. I like it," she whispered.

"I thought so, the minute I took you over in the bathroom. I could sense it in you. I think that helped me make the move I did." He leaned down further, resting his hand along the side of her throat, and reached with his other hand. She parted her thighs and he passed his finger over her clit, testing her wetness, making them both aware of how aroused she was. His expression reflected how her actions were affecting him. She could feel the heat building around him, drawing her into it.

"I've been a remiss Santa," he straightened, turned his attention to the mostly empty skirt beneath her tree. "A pretty little thing like you deserves more gifts." He rose, swinging his leg over her head, making her giggle.

"It's not this pitiful. I've got gifts the children gave me, I just prefer putting them out on Christmas morning."

"Well, we have one more gift to wrap. You." He had zeroed in on the canister on her fireplace, whose half open top revealed tools and materials for decorating the tree and the room. Extra tinsel, ribbon, scissors. Multi-colored satin nylon cords for hanging Christmas cards over her valances.

Sam removed a spool of gold cord and one of deep pine green. He measured out a length of each over twenty feet, withdrew a pocket knife from his jeans and made a clean cut with the sharp blade.

"This isn't where you tell me your Boston Strangler fantasy, is it?" she asked, eyeing him.

"No." His sensual lips curved, reminding her how they felt on her. "In one of my brief hiatuses from my relationship with Tracy, before we were married, I dated a girl who was a fan of Shibari. Are you familiar with it?"

"No...no." But her heart was beating faster, as she watched him shake out the cords.

"Come stand out here, in the middle of the floor."

His voice was low. It wasn't a request. Constance swallowed, rose and moved around the table.

After she came to a halt where he motioned to her to stand, silence drew out in the room, and she became exponentially more aroused as he simply sat there on the hearth, studying her. She was aware of how he watched her breasts as she moved toward him, the track of his gaze now over her hips, her thighs, damp with her arousal, the soft furred mound of her pussy. She was aware not just because she watched him with her eyes, but she felt his attention press upon her flesh like a physical touch stroking her in all those same places.

"Shibari uses sensual pressure on the skin and the psychological impact of being restrained to arouse," he said at last. "As well as some very clever knots and arrangements. Even suspension. I could suspend you from the ceiling like a Christmas

angel, and stroke every part of you at my pleasure. Feed you when you're hungry, let you suck water from my fingertips."

He stood up and came to her, his broad shoulders and greater height taking up all her senses as he approached. His hands slid up her rib cage, spanning it with the spread of his fingers, as if he was learning her shape and size. Then he took up the green cord, doubled it, and passed it around to the back of her body. He moved behind her and she felt him pass the ends through the loop of the double end and tighten it on her rib cage, just under her breasts. The slack dangled down her back, the rope end brushing her buttocks, the back of her knee, her ankle.

"This," he put his fingers beneath the point at her back where he had passed the ends through the looped end, "is the first cinch. Each one will increase the sense of constriction and restraint and can be adjusted for more or less of the same. It's called a lark's head, since it looks somewhat like a bird's head and you," his fingers whispered down her back, caressed her buttocks exposed by the thong, "are as delicate as one."

His body pressed up against hers as he passed the rope forward and back, creating another cinch. She felt a perceptible tightening, and her breathing rate went up, but the trouble didn't lie with the constriction, but her response to it. "The first series I'm doing is *shinju*," he said. "A breast restraint. Shinju means pearls, and that's how your breasts are treated. Jewels placed in a setting, displayed to their best advantage to a man's eyes. My eyes."

He brought the rope around, and now the cord ran in two parallel lengths above and below her breasts. He moved back behind her again. His unexpected touches made her dizzy, his movements, the spinning and twirls of the sparkling angels on the tree, the shine of the Christmas lights in her eyes. Her whole body quivered with a strong emotional as well as physical reaction to what he was doing.

Now he was in front of her again. He brought the two pieces of the green cord over her shoulders and passed them under the lines above and below her breasts. He turned a loop in the rope beneath them, his fingertips brushing her curves, and then threaded it

back up, making a knot that drew together the two parallel lines, constricting her breasts, causing them to swell and distend before his appreciative gaze.

"Oh..." Her breath left her in a shudder, and he took the ends back over her shoulder, securing them to the lark's head in back, lifting her breasts higher at the same time, increasing the sensitivity caused by the constriction, creating the sense that she was wearing a silken harness on her upper body.

"Clasp your hands together behind your back, palms facing, sweetheart."

She did, overcome by her arousal as he wrapped more cord around the wrists, clothing them in a coil, working the last of the two strands between her clasped fingers, then tying them off.

"After a few minutes of this, I could put my lips to your nipples, and they'd be so sensitive, you'd scream at the sensation. It's wonderful, isn't it?" He put his hands on her shoulders, dropped a kiss into her collarbone, then slid his hands around, cupping her.

She did cry out, though he did no more than caress her, lightly pinch the pink tips.

"Hang on, sweetheart, there's more." He bent, picked up the other rope, and attached it to the back of the harness she wore now, at the point below her shoulder blades. "You can wear the *shinju* under your clothes, as a reminder of your lover's claim on you."

"How about as a reminder of my claim on him, by him knowing I'm wearing this?" She looked up at him, her nose brushing his jaw since he stood right behind her.

"You're learning, baby."

He pressed her back against him and she arched her neck, giving him better access to sink his teeth into her. His hand, still holding the loose end of the rope, came around to caress her nipple again, and Constance whimpered, brushing her ass against the hard length of him. He groaned and managed to draw back, putting some distance between them.

"I'm not through decorating you, sweetheart. You're just going to have to wait."

Her body was turning into liquid heat, needing him inside her. He created another double wrap at her waist and now came in front of her, going to one knee so she could gaze down at the broad shoulders, the dark strands of hair that fell over his forehead. The movement of those large, capable hands as they worked the cinches. He tied two knots, one right after the other, then slid his hands between her legs, reaching under her to the back, his fingers probing her anus. She gasped, caught his shoulder for balance. He slid his fingers forward again, away from her, used whatever he had been doing to determine where to tie the next knot.

"Spread your legs a bit for me."

She opened trembling thighs and he passed the length of knots between her legs, moved around back to take up the slack.

"Sam, I want you."

"I know, sweetheart. I want you, too. But I want you wild for me. I want you to soak your bindings. Feel this, sweetheart."

Abruptly the line of knots tightened against her flesh and pressed perfectly against her clit. His fingers opened her ass cheeks, made an adjustment, and the other set of knots settled against her anus. He tightened the cinches again and she made a small whimpering noise of need. When he tied the rope ends into the fulcrum of the shoulder harness and modified it so that every movement of her upper or lower body tightened the ropes in the opposite region, she had to fight the urge to simply roll her body with the sensations. She felt completely bound and yet she still had a wide range of mobility, with every movement telegraphing a sensual message to her body.

"You look gorgeous," he said. "And look at this." His hand slipped between her legs, where the two lengths of rope between the lowest knot at her clit and the first knot at her rectum allowed his fingers access to slip between them inside her pussy, which clenched around his fingers in fervent welcome.

"Sam, I'm...my knees."

Constance swayed, her breath coming short, and Sam caught her at the waist. "Easy, sweetheart. It's a bit overwhelming, isn't it?"

He caught her just as they buckled, and lifted her over his shoulder, so her ass was under his hand, her head hanging down. He retrieved a straight-backed chair from the kitchen and brought it into the living room, then slid her back over his shoulder and put her gently into the chair in one easy movement that made her heart lodge in her throat. With her hands bound, increasing her sense of helplessness, and the bending of her knees and body rubbing the bindings against her, she felt almost...

"It's...it's magic."

"You're magic." He thrust his fingers into her gently, mimicking the motion of a cock, and she gasped, bucking against him.

"Try holding still, sweetheart," he suggested. "It makes it much more potent."

"Command me," she whispered, her green eyes flickering up to his startled ones, eyes that went from surprise to flame in the next blink.

"Be still," he told her, his voice rough. "I want you wet and panting for it, but don't you move a muscle unless I give you permission."

If it was possible, the quivering in her body doubled. He withdrew from her slowly, brought his fingers to his lips, tasting her as she watched him, wanting to beg him to fill her, wanting to wait and see what he did next. He went to her tree, removed several items. His jeans hugged his ass and she wanted to grip it under her fingers, feel his buttocks clench and release as he thrust into her. Just the thought made her want to squirm her clit and anus against the cleverly placed knots, but she was frozen by his command, and by the certainty that the slightest movement might send her into orgasm.

He brought back a handful of items, and set them on the table next to her, sat himself on the coffee table before her, spreading his legs so they were outside her clasped ones.

"Open your thighs for me, sweetheart," he said. "Just until your knees touch the inside of mine."

The silk knot slid up higher, pressing upward on her clit, pulling the knot deeper into her ass. Her constricted breasts jutted out further for his regard.

"I can smell your cunt, Constance. I like it." He lifted two small icicle ornaments, done in delicate blown glass that caught the lights of the Christmas tree. "These are beautiful," he observed, fingering the wire hooks on them.

She could tell what he was going to do, and the anticipation was excruciating, so that she made small plaintive noises as he leaned forward, cried out again as he worked the wrap of the wire hooks over her nipples and tightened them. The tips responded to the pressure of his fingers as well as the wire and the weight of the glass.

He picked up a handful of tinsel he'd plucked from the branches then and scattered it over her shoulders, the crown of her hair, smiling at her, bending forward to kiss the side of her breast in a gesture that was oddly tender. She battled back laughter and tears both. She'd never been so aroused and happy at once, even as her body strained for more of his attention.

"Look at this." He plucked her digital camera off the table by her purse.

"Oh, Sam, don't—"

"You, Miss Bradwell, aren't in a position to make demands." With a wicked grin, he stepped back, went to one knee. The flash was a quick, blinding moment that obliterated her view of him.

His hand touched her shoulder as she blinked, and he knelt down next to her.

"Look."

The view screen showed a woman decorated and bound in gold and green silken ropes, her breasts high and proud, the sparkle of tinsel on her shoulders and her fall of hair. There was a soft smile on her lips, her lashes fanning her cheeks, head slightly tilted away. In most pictures, Constance made a funny face or came off looking self-

conscious. She liked this picture. Ironically, by stripping away everything on the outside and decorating her as he wished, he had brought forward something from within her. In that picture, for once, she saw some of her true self.

“Quiet. Intense. Passionate. The real Constance Jayne at last.”

She lifted her gaze, amazed he spoke her thoughts. Sam pushed her hair from her cheek, threading his fingers in the softness of it with the tinsel, and laid his lips over hers.

If he had kissed her roughly, demanding her body’s response, it would have obliged. But this kiss was more, rousing an emotional reaction that swamped the physical, so that she shivered within and without, wanting him in ways that surpassed the simple desires of their bodies, as if everything was being reduced to raw need.

She knew the illusory danger of intimacy, making her believe more was there. But tonight was about magic and miracles, and suddenly she truly believed anything was possible, the way a child at Christmas was supposed to feel, even if that same child was an adult who knew that Santa Claus might or might not be the figure she had been raised to believe he was.

For tonight, she chose to believe he was.

“I think I need to have you now, Constance,” Sam observed, raising his lips only the necessary amount to speak the words. His hazel eyes filled her vision so there was nothing but the grey, gold and green color, a mix of all the colors of the earth, wind, sea and sky.

“Please,” she whispered. “Take off all your clothes. I want to feel you everywhere.”

He rose and unbuttoned the cuffs of the shirt, then the front of it, showing her the smooth muscle of a man in his thirties who took good care of his body. He shrugged out of it, and she relished that motion, that beautiful roll of powerful shoulder muscles, the slide of cotton down firm skin. The shirt dropped, drawing her eyes to his waist, the way the jeans fit even more loosely there with the shirt gone, but tight over the crotch, almost level with her gaze.

He unfastened the button, eased down the zipper. He left it open that way as he toed off his shoes. Her fingers itched to slide into that gapped area, reach in and down, cup his heat through the thin cloth of his underwear, run her thumb over the broad head she could see straining and wetting the threads of the fabric. She wanted him in her mouth, to taste the meat and power of him.

"Sam," she strained against the bonds. "Let me taste you. Please."

"I think you could make me do anything with those hungry eyes of yours." He pushed the pants down to his thighs with the underwear, took them off his long legs with his socks and stood before her in nothing but the fine flesh he had been blessed with.

His pubic hair was dark like the hair on his head and the light covering of it on his arms, legs and chest. It was very fine, gleaming hair that lay against his body like fur rather than curling. She wanted to touch it, rub her face against him, and she groaned in approval as he guided his cock to her waiting lips.

She had to bend forward a little to take him and she worked the fingers of her bound hands into the back slat of the kitchen chair to give her balance and an anchor point to steady her as she slid her lips and teeth down the full length of him. She wanted to get all the way to where her bottom lip would touch that sensitive base against the scrotum, but there was too much of him. She took in as much as she could and then flicked her tongue over him, licked, bathed him, sucked hard on him as her head moved up and down.

"You are too damn good at this," he muttered.

How could she explain that it was the first time she'd actually enjoyed doing it as much for the man as for herself? Always before, in high school, the act had been between her and the cock, as if the organ had possessed the sentience its gland-driven teenage owner had not. It seemed to understand the energy of the connection between her mouth and the pulsing power she was drawing from it. In a way, the boy hadn't even been part of it. This was the first time her emotions remained linked to the man's

response, so that every groan and tightening of his touch on her head heightened her own fevered reaction, the fervor of her mouth working on him. Each hard thrust into her mouth made her body roll forward in proportionate response. The knot caressing her became more insistent.

"I'm going to come," she gasped around his cock.

"Come, baby," he urged. "I'll make you come again tonight. I don't want you to hold any of it back."

He wouldn't let her resist, used the strength of his hand and arm to keep her going down on him, rocking her body back and forth on those devilishly clever knots and her thighs sliding on the fluids slicked there from her pussy.

He also wouldn't let her draw back, so her jaw trembled with the effort not to bite down as the orgasm rolled over her, rippling out from her cunt, tightening all the motions of her body so that she was helpless to the rhythmic movement he kept forcing her to make, making it unbearable, unbelievable, glittering. It was a volcanic explosion, the heat and power shaking every structure on its foundations. Her hands lost their purchase on the back of the chair and his cock shoved into the back of her throat. He forced her to stillness there, her mouth full of his erection as she shuddered and screamed, jerked and twisted against her bonds until her vision teared.

She came down to earth, making soft whimpers like the cooing noises of a dove, an instinctive lullaby. The sounds were an antidote to the adrenaline, the body bringing all the organs back to a normal cadence with the soothing noise.

She tried to resume her movements on him with her mouth, but he pulled back, taking his glistening, hard cock away, and cradled her chin with his fingers as he did so to ease the removal.

"I'll hold out a little longer, baby," he said. "When I come I want to be deep in your cunt." He bent down, brushed a kiss on her soft lips. "It will be the last thing you feel before you fall asleep in my arms, knowing someone is with you, holding you close throughout the night."

"Now," his tone lightened before she could respond, "I don't know about you, but I need a cool down. First, let's take the top part off. Don't pout," he touched her lips before she could protest. "I'm glad you like it, but it's not supposed to be too tight for too long."

He loosened the cords around her breasts and removed the *shinju* arrangement, unwinding it from her rib cage. Her breasts tingled with the release of tension, but he quickened the blood flow by tracing the path where the ropes had been with his tongue, the sensitive undercurve, the delicate pale slope at the top. Constance watched him, her head bent attentively over his, and touched soft kisses on his hair, the curve of his ear. He smiled, rubbed his cheek against her mouth, then put the cord aside. He did not remove the lower piece that girded her loins, but he did make an adjustment to compensate for the release in tension from the removal of the top. The friction of the knots rippled an aftershock from her orgasm through her, and he anticipated it, catching her nipple in his mouth as she arched.

The feel of his tongue and lips over the encircling wire of the icicle was as breathtaking as the true touch of heated flesh against cold. She moaned, lifting herself up higher, deeper into his mouth, and he tugged, flicked, let her feel the edge of his teeth. He reached behind her as he did it, with one jerk loosening the knot holding her hands tied and the coil so it dropped away, freeing her wrists.

She ran her palms down the bare slopes of his shoulders. Her gaze fixed upon his cock, still erect from his unsatisfied need. Incredibly, her pussy responded to the sight, as if it had not just been sated beyond anything it had ever known before. But this was more. She wanted to be filled, joined, and he was holding that back until the end, knowing that.

He bent, scooped her back up in his arms before she could reach for it, and headed for the kitchen.

"Where are we going?" she asked, winding her arms around his shoulders and gratified when he picked up on her need and held her closer, a mid-air hug.

"Outside. Your backyard. It's snowing again."

"What...What?!"

He balanced and held her struggling body easily with one arm and opened up her door to the back courtyard. She kept a cottage garden out there with a small bench next to a fountain. It was a quiet secluded niche she enjoyed for reading, unwinding, sipping her morning coffee. Surrounded by a ten foot high privacy fence, there was no easy view into it by her neighbors, but it was the principle of it, being naked, outside, in snow. The cold shocked her warm, stimulated flesh.

"You like to make snow angels, Constance?" He let her feet down but kept a firm grasp on her when she would have dashed for the door. "Come on, let's make two of them, before we freeze our asses off."

He tugged her off the stoop, swinging her down into a clear spot in the fresh snow. She squealed as her feet sank into the half foot coverage.

"You're nuts. You're--"

"Crazy about you." He turned, caught her in his arms. Lifted her off her feet. "Hold on."

He fell backwards, and she was laughing by the time he landed, straight as a tree falling to earth.

She held on tight so she wouldn't slide and ruin his impression, and because it felt so good to hold his body, his heart pounding beneath her racing one, his legs tangled with hers, rough male hair and firm skin against her smoothly shaven calves. His genitals pressed against her thighs, semi-erect now due to the cold and the change in their focus, but she felt his response grow as she slid her thighs around him, squeezed.

It was so incredibly warm between their bodies, but the air was so cold in contrast around them she could not stop a shiver from running through her shoulders and back, tightening her buttocks beneath the firm clutch of his hands on either cheek. "You're a temptress," he growled, curling his fingers in the rope and giving her pussy a swift, tart burst of sensation. Then he lifted her in the air like a figure skating move, bringing his

own body straight up from the waist to set her between his calves, a feat of strength that clearly displayed the ripple of upper body muscles and made those in her own abdomen weaken beneath the beat of butterfly wings. "Do a little hop leap over there, sweetheart," he pointed to the patch of snow just past his armspan. "And show me what kind of snow angel an angel makes."

She wanted to just stand there and look down at his body, the fine lines of thigh and torso, the cluster of his cock lying against the nest of testicles. She wanted to explore every inch of him, as if he were the one Christmas gift she'd been allowed to open the night before Christmas Day.

"You've no idea how beautiful you look," he gazed up at her. "Your pussy all tied up, those icicles sparkling on your nipples, your hair soft around your face. You're a sugar plum fairy, baby. Make an angel for me."

She hopped over, a good three foot jump, fueled by exuberance like that of a well-loved child who didn't know how to be self-conscious, and lowered herself to the snow. Constance gasped as she lay back. The cold ice of the snow flakes burned into her skin and she immediately stretched her arms out to either side of her and began to make wings, sliding her arms through the sugar spun snow, feeling the disturbed and newly fallen flakes on her lashes and lips. It was painful and exhilarating at once, and she laughed out loud, hearing him snorting and doing the same, a furious cloud of snow coming from her right as he put his considerable male strength to it while she flowed through it like she lay in water.

She remembered the skirt part, and began to open and close her legs. She immediately discovered that to be a pleasurable sensation, the arch and press of hips communicating itself to her delicate silken restraint, the diamond crisscross of the ropes tightening over her hips, the knots rubbing against her, all reminding her that she was bound in sexual restraints, and rousing her the more she continued the movement. If not for the cold, she could have just lost herself in the building heat of renewed arousal, the undulation, cold to heat, friction to pleasure, over and over, not really able to build

to climax, just riding wave after sweet wave of sensation, as if she were an angel in truth, floating over air currents.

She bared her throat, opening her mouth to take in the flakes, seeing the faceted jewel pattern as they collected on her lashes. The world was a soft swirl of white, gray and black, icy cold and yet ringing with the passion and heat of life all at once. She was happy. It was Christmas Eve, and for the first time in her life on this night, she was happy.

Constance brought her legs back together. The backs of her calves were losing feeling. They closed on Sam's ankles, and she tilted her head down to gaze upon another miracle and wonder of nature.

He stood above her, looking at her body against the snow, his hazel eyes glinting with the same sparkling light that rippled over the white ground. She wanted him to touch her, could almost feel the way those hands would feel on her, and she lifted her own hands, molded them over her breasts, let the nipples slide through her fingers, tugged on the icicles. As he watched, she drifted down, found her pussy, caressed it. Her nipples were tight with cold, her legs spread, opening herself to him, her pale body dusted with flakes and the icicles glittering at her nipples. She knew her cheeks were flushed with her excitement and the reaction of her body to the cold.

"I think I've found a snow angel in truth," he observed, his voice gruff. "Are you cold, baby?"

She nodded, and when he bent to her, she wrapped her arms around his shoulders, her legs around his hips. He lifted her out of her angel silhouette, turned and carried her back into the house.

The blast of warmth shivered through her skin and his arms tightened around her. She kept her cheek pressed against his neck as he moved through the house, past the living room, and down the short hallway into her bedroom.

She'd painted the walls a tranquil blue and hung chimes of metal stars from the ceiling fan, so they sang softly with the slow level air currents. He laid her back on the

quilted comforter, her knees crooked over the side so her hips were on the edge and he stood between her knees. His chest filled her vision in that moment, and then slid back as he took her arms from his neck and laid them over her head so they draped, relaxed against the soft fabric. The only illumination was the hall light, so every feature of his body was defined by the interplay between shadows and shafts of light.

He raised and shifted her to ease the remaining cords from her waist, thighs and crotch. His fingers caressed her clit as he eased the knots away from them, and her hips lifted, responding to his fingers, wanting more.

"Hold on a moment, sweetheart," he said. "I want this off so there's nothing to keep me from burying my cock all the way to the hilt in your cunt." But when he got the ropes off, he did not move immediately to do that. He stroked her, his hooded eyes becoming more intent as her movements began to work in a rhythm with his stroking, and she turned her cheek to the cover, biting it as he manipulated her clit between his fingers, worked it in tiny movements and light squeezings of his fingers, lazy long caresses with his knuckles and finger tips.

"Sam, please..."

"That's right, Constance. Remember, I want my woman wet and begging. I love to watch you get hot. See how hard you're making me?"

She did, and it made her want him all the more. The numbness of her cold backside, thighs and back had become a tingling that meshed with the coiling sensation of his fingers. She was losing her mind, losing everything but an intent focus on everything he was doing to her.

He removed the icicles, one at a time, leaving her completely naked, just her and him now.

"This moment is about more than sex, Constance. When I fuck you, it's just going to be you and me."

She wanted to believe him, but was so afraid to do so that she did not respond. He kept his fingers on her clit and pussy, kept her moving restlessly beneath his touch, her

body open and eager for him. She thought he might move to take her then, but then his gaze flicked up to hers and she knew before he said it that he wanted to drive her up even higher.

"Hold completely still for just a minute. One full minute, don't move a muscle. Not until I tell you that you can. If you can do that, all the waiting will be over."

She gave a savage moan, but she obeyed, though it was like reining in a chariot of wild horses. Her body wanted to buck and twist, only instead of trying to throw a rider she was trying to entice one to mount her.

He traced a path down between her breasts, drew a fingertip under the crease of one. "Be still. Not a single movement, or we'll start over..."

She became aware of the ticking of the bedroom clock like the countdown of a bomb, and she was eager for the explosion, the shattering of the world around her. All the nerves in her stomach and thigh muscles tightened, like an orchestra waiting to begin a piece of classical music. Her senses, every part of her body attuned to his cock like the sections of winds, percussion and bass to the raising of the conductor's baton.

"Sam..." She almost wailed it.

"Constance. Beautiful, sexy, shy, Constance. Do you want me, sweetheart?"

"Yes. Yes!"

"Only half a minute more."

She cursed him colorfully, and made him smile down at her, a playful, sexy smile.

Her body shuddered a response she couldn't control and she had a moment of panic that he'd count it as a movement, but he did not. He leaned closer, closer to her body. She almost clenched her fingers to remind herself she had to stay still, remembered just in time that would be *movement*. Air left her in a soundless scream as his mouth stopped, hovering just over her breast, his thighs brushing the inside of her immobile ones. The head of his cock brushed her pussy.

"Don't move. I mean it, baby. Twelve more seconds..."

She registered it, marked it on the first tick of the bedside clock at the same moment he closed his mouth over her nipple and the breast around it, suckling her, gently for a moment, then harder, pressing his tongue over the swollen tip, teasing it, nursing it, all while she shook in the throes of his imposed command.

Unbelievably, she was able to make her body stay still through that, though she could not control the trembling, the reaction of her nerves to the friction between her taut muscles and emotional arousal. His hand clasped that same breast, squeezing as if he were getting the sweetness from an orange into his mouth.

Five, four...

Her legs quivered harder. She wanted to spread even wider for him. His hands slid down and he lifted his head, looked into her eyes, only inches away.

"Two, one..." he whispered. "Don't move, baby. Not yet." The lips covered her, as gentle as the kiss of an angel, silencing the futility of her protest, and then she cried out in his mouth as his cock eased into her, slowly, slowly, stroking her, teasing her. Sliding into a wetness so complete she could feel it lubricate him as he made his slow, sweet way in, pushing himself into her like the slide of a plow's shaft into a furrow of rich, moist earth.

"Sam..." It was a whispered plea because she had strength for nothing more. "Please let me move. Please. You said one minute. I can't bear any more."

"You're so sweet, baby. So obedient." He nibbled the corner of her mouth and she felt his muscular body shudder, wanting her. "You want to move."

"Yes," she hissed. "Yes."

"Okay. Move, sweetheart. Fuck me."

She lifted aching, needy arms to him and he came down to where she could curl her arms around his shoulders, draw her body halfway up to his, pressing heart to heart, mouth to mouth. She was as greedy for that intimate kiss as she was to lift her hips, take him deep within her, clutch him with her silken walls and make him drag himself through her snug lubricated tissues.

She wasn't sure why her subconscious had capitulated so easily to him, why it had been so easy to fall under his command, obey him, let him bind her. She'd never had any inkling that she enjoyed bondage games, but then she'd always equated it with the maneuvers in a cheap S&M flick. She had never realized the term could mean something like this, a complete sexual trust that spilled into the emotional, a mastery where they both served what the other needed. A fulfillment, the discovery of a bond where there'd been none just a handful of hours before.

His hands slid from her waist to her hips, his large hands curling under her, cupping her ass, lifting her up, lifting her thighs, so when he rammed back in again, it was all the way to the womb, stirring places in her that spun at the same high intensity as her clit, not toward a finish, but a completion.

Constance let go of his shoulders, her arms falling above her head, and gave him her complete surrender, using her stomach muscles and the drive of her hips to take his every stroke, match it, suck him deep within, hold him tight as he pulled out. She watched the changes in his handsome face, the gathering of flames there, the awareness of the pinnacle they were reaching, civilized things that were overwhelmed by the power of the male animal charging toward climax. Muscles rippled along his chest and the strength increased as he drove in her again and again. If he did not stand next to the high tester bed, holding tight to her thighs, they'd have been sliding across the mattress with the propulsion of a battering ram against a gateway.

"Sam."

"Come for me, baby," he growled.

"You too," she gasped. "Please...you go, too. This time. I... want... to... feel... you..."

The last syllable was lost as the climax overwhelmed her, exploded down her channel, clenched her pussy hard on his cock. Her fists tangled in the covers and her body bowed up impossibly, her thighs and calves clutching him to her. She heard him groan, felt the hot fluid of him, and her cries escalated with the increased sensitivity and

the joy of it, shared experiences. She wanted it to go on and on, never wanted to return to rational thought, to the dreadful thought of what might come next. There was only now, and Sam.

When the room stopped spinning, there was a stillness within her so strong she felt it vibrate between them, emanate through the room, hold them in its tranquil, soft grasp. She tried to speak and couldn't, tried to lift her arms to touch him but they wouldn't. There was no strength in her, just complete quiet and exhaustion. Three mind-blowing orgasms in such a short time, all she could do was look up at him, form words with no sound.

Touch. Hold. You.

He was braced over her, one arm between her head and shoulder, so she rubbed her temple and cheek against his forearm. He saw her words and his arm slid beneath her waist, turned them carefully so he stayed within her as he shifted them onto the bed and settled himself full upon her, that hard male body warming, protecting and sheltering her own.

Let me lose consciousness before you decide to leave, she thought, so I can believe you're the most wonderful dream I've ever had.

He pressed a kiss to her lips, nestled his jaw against her cheek and ear. "Go to sleep, snow angel," he murmured. "I'm right here, inside you, around you. With you."

* * * * *

She was an early riser most mornings, but Christmas was special. It was ironic, since she'd never had anything particular to look forward to on this day. Still, as if the inner child never lost hope, when dawn touched its rosy fingers to her window and caressed her face, she woke to a frosted window pane and the promise of a sunny, snowy day. A good day for snowball fights and snowmen. To make snow angels.

A breath tickled her ear and remembrance came with awareness. Awareness of a body spooned around her, an arm firmly around her waist, a male palm cupping her bare breast, stroking it.

"Merry Christmas, Constance."

She closed her eyes against the flood of tears and his hand rose, the forearm pressing her back against his chest as he cupped her jaw, stroked her throat until she turned her head up for a kiss. "Christmas is a time to be happy, angel."

"I am. *I am*. Oh, Sam." She turned to her back to look at him as he raised to an elbow, still holding her firmly. "Thank you. Thank you so much. Even if it's only for last night. Thank you."

His eyes darkened. "I'd say too many guys have made sure you keep your expectations low, haven't they?"

Not just men had done that, she knew. Life had. But this holiday was about the miracle of the unexpected. The anger in his expression raised a tiny hope that maybe such a miracle had happened for her.

"I wasn't planning a one-night fuck," he continued, oblivious to the rapid flow of thoughts going through her head, the happiness welling in her. *He was here. He had stayed. And he was furious that she had thought he would do otherwise.* "I never would have come if that was the case. Is that what you wanted, Constance?"

"No," she managed without smiling, though it was very difficult. "No."

"All right then. Let me tell you what I want from you now." He shifted so he was above her, his body sliding over hers, covering her, his knee nudging hers apart, settling himself between them.

She arched with a guttural moan as he eased himself inexorably into tissues well used the night before, but she could see in his face he was making a point. A claim. And those same tissues, though sore, were moistening for him, responding to him in kind. Accepting him, possessing him as much as he was possessing her.

"I want you to let go, Constance, and believe. Isn't that what Christmas is about?"

"Not belief. Faith, Sam."

Her lips did curve now, and his expression eased from determination to sensual heat as she revealed her feelings. He bent and took her lips in a thorough kiss, then slid down her neck to her breast to take one nipple and suckle her.

"Obey me then, Constance," he whispered against her flesh. "Have faith and let go."

The tug of desire and yearning beneath his mouth pounded deep into her heart and she capitulated. She released her fears and opened herself to the miracle of Christmas, the promise of love. To him.

About the author:

Joey W. Hill lives on the Carolina coast with her wonderful husband, a houseful of animals, and their dauntless sailboat, Shadowfax. She is published in two genres, contemporary/epic fantasy and women's erotica, and has won awards for both.

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