

Mojocastle Toys

Santa's Big Little Helper

A Christmas Tale By

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Mojocastle Toys: Santa's Big Little Helper

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Also By Celine Chatillon:

Heavenly Bodies

# Santa's Big Little Helper

“Oh, no, not again. We must have ‘hobo magnet’ on our sign out front.”

Suellen Shoupe slipped a bill in the cash drawer and turned her head toward the door. Sure enough, her head waitress was right. A short, white-haired man with shaggy beard, dirty coat, and tattered clothing gripping a multitude of beat-up shopping bags stood at the entrance.

She sighed. Whoever said managing a truck stop restaurant was easy was completely out of touch with reality. Oh, yeah, right... She had said exactly those words the day she had accepted the job, leaving behind Eddie and twelve years of miserable married bliss. No doubt about it—she was certifiably loony.

“Now, now, Maria, calm down,” Suellen soothed. She shut the cash register door with her hip and flashed her biggest ‘business grin’ for their customers. “It’s Christmas Eve, for heaven’s sake. Have pity on the poor man. Seat him at the counter and give him some coffee and a big bowl of hot soup and a sandwich. We don’t need to have him passing out in front of the fuel pumps or get run over, like what happened to that indigent man at that stop over in Andrews last year.”

Maria shot her an irritated look, grumbling under her breath, but did as she was told. Thirty minutes later, Suellen looked up from the ordering sheet she was working on to catch the somewhat toothless brightness of the vagabond’s smile.

"The waitress over there said you were the one who said it was okay for me to eat here," he began slowly. "I'd like to pay you for your kindness, ma'am."

Suellen smiled back, but felt a sudden stab of guilt in her heart. She couldn't allow someone who was so down on his luck to part with what little money he may have.

"That isn't necessary, sir. You don't have to pay for the food. Call it an early Christmas present if you like. It's the least we can do for a traveler on a windy day."

"Thank you. Thank you kindly. I'd still like to give you something in exchange. Will you accept a small gift?"

Suellen bit her lip. To refuse his gift would be an insulting gesture and rob the destitute man of his pride, and pride may be all this little man had left in the world.

She nodded. "All right then, I'll accept a small gift—just as long as it's nothing that you really need to keep for yourself. I have more than enough, compared to many folks this Christmas."

"In material possessions, yes. But in other, more important things...no."

"What did you say?" Suellen blinked hard. She tried not to stare as he reached into one of his weather-beaten shopping bags and pulled out a small stringed instrument, but it was difficult. She could have sworn she saw a golden glow surrounding him as if he'd donned a halo and wings and picked up a harp.

She shook her head, and the hallucination faded. She'd been on her feet too long today – that had to be it. "Is that a ukulele?"

The red-cheeked man winked and began to strum. "Yes, it is, sort of. A magical instrument if there ever was one."

He plucked a few out-of-tune notes from the battered Hawaiian guitar and then began to sing. From seemingly out of nowhere came a rich tenor voice filled with warmth and cheer, love and happiness and the hope for a brighter tomorrow.

The little hobo stood at the entrance of the truck stop restaurant, serenading Suellen and the few customers they had with moving Christmas carol after Christmas carol. Finally he lowered his ukulele and accepted a cup of cocoa from Maria, who self-consciously dabbed at the tears welling in the corner of her eyes.

"Oh, that was lovely!" Suellen sniffed a few tears of her own away, too. "You have the voice of an angel, sir."

He chuckled, his round belly jiggling under his loose-fitting red plaid shirt like a bowl of Jell-O. "Do I, now? Do you remember the Bible story about the men who came to visit Abraham and Sarah and told them that they would have a son of their own some day?"

Suellen smiled and nodded. "Yes, I do. 'Abraham entertained angels unaware', as some folks say."

"That's right." He winked at her. "You wouldn't happen to know of a place around here where I could stay tonight, do you? I usually sleep rough, but

there's a mighty cold breeze fixin' to blow the top off the Rockies tonight. I'd prefer to be indoors, if at all possible."

"I don't blame you one bit." Suddenly Suellen knew what she had to do. "Why don't you stay at my home, sir? I have an extra bedroom, and it's plenty warm. We can drink eggnog and hang up our stockings tonight for Santa Claus to fill."

The little hobo put down the mug and clapped his chapped hands together. "Sounds wonderful!"

Maria elbowed Suellen in the side and cleared her throat loudly. "Sue, you can't be serious," she whispered in her boss's ear. "You don't know this man. He could be a homicidal maniac on the run from the law. You can't let an old bum into your home."

"It's okay, Maria." Suellen took her head waitress by the elbow, steering her toward the kitchen where they could talk in private. "I'll be all right. I don't seriously think our heavenly singer here is a killer. He's just an old gentleman who has come upon hard times. How can I let him freeze in an open field tonight? It's Christmas Eve."

"Yeah, it's Christmas Eve, all right." Maria shook her dark curls. "Okay, it's your life and your house. But I'll keep the phone by the side of the bed tonight in case you need to call me for help."

"Thanks. That's good of you, but I know we'll be fine tonight. After he's had a good night's sleep and a wash-up, I'll take him over to the Salvation Army in town and see if they can help him get home or find a more permanent place to stay."



"Whew!" Maria rolled her big brown eyes comically. "That certainly takes a load off my mind. I was expecting you were going to take him on as a boarder, since you don't have anyone but an old alley cat living with you now."

The overwhelming sense of loneliness Suellen had fought valiantly for the last year and a half flooded her heart. "Yeah, it's just me and Sunshine. Thanks for reminding me."

Suellen spun on her heels and marched back to the cashier's stand. She instructed her guest to sit in one of the back booths while they closed the restaurant for the night. With most people at home or at church celebrating the holiday, the truckers had been few and far between all day. She wondered...who could have given this angelic-sounding transient a ride this far west, and why had he chosen to get off here, tonight, essentially in the middle of nowhere?



"You have a lovely home, ma'am."

Suellen guided her guest from the carport, through the side entrance and on into the kitchen. "Thank you. But please call me Sue. It's what everybody else calls me in these parts."

He waddled ahead of her, his assorted shopping bags hindering his steps. Still, he had insisted that he carry them all by himself from the car. Such a gentleman, Suellen thought. Eddie would have made her carry at least half the bags, plus run and fetch him

a beer the minute he stepped in the door.

"Sue...short for Suellen, right?" He plopped into a kitchen chair and let out a long, exhausted-sounding sigh.

Suellen froze. How on earth did he know? She never used her full name while working in the truck stop. Was this gent truly an angel in disguise?

"How did you know my name?"

He scratched his long, white whiskers and chuckled. "I saw it written at the bottom of a order sheet you left on the cashier's stand. What did you think?" He wiggled his stubby fingers around in a circle in front of his big, twinkling blue eyes. "That I had magical powers or something?"

"Or something, yeah." She shook her head and laughed. "I've been on my feet way too long today. I'd believe just about anything at this point."

"Would you, now?" The old man arched a bushy white eyebrow. "What would you believe, exactly?"

Suellen grinned. "Oh, nothing in particular. Here, let me pour us some eggnog and get out some homemade oatmeal raisin cookies. We can't let them go to waste now, particularly if Santa decides to skip over my humble abode tonight."

"Why would he do a thing like that? Haven't you been a good girl?"

Her guest sounded dead serious. Maybe Maria was right after all... This little hobo could be as mad as the Hatter, and then some. Oh, well, it was a little too late to entertain second thoughts. He seemed harmless enough, even if he was a bit touched in the head.

She placed a glass of eggnog in front of him and then turned to fetch a plate for the cookies. "Oh, I don't know. I haven't been the nicest person this past year. I've acted mighty irritable at times. It's the stress of being a manager, and the divorce and all, I guess."

"That would do it." He took a big swig of his drink and put it down. "Needs a little kick to this nog, if you don't mind me saying so." He turned and reached into one of his shopping bags. "Ah, here she is, the smoothest sippin' whiskey if ever there was such a thing."

Suellen sat opposite her guest, her eyes widening. "Oh, yeah, I see. My granny used to put a little whiskey in her eggnog, too."

He raised the small flask. "Want some?"

She bit her lip. Who knew what exactly was in that bottle? It could be Sterno, or wood alcohol, or worse. Lots of the transients who frequented the truck stop were alcoholics and drug addicts, willing to steal or do anything for their next fix. Still, it seemed unfriendly not to accept his offer—and she really could stand a drink just about now.

"Sure, but just a little. I don't tolerate the hard stuff too well."

"Here you go, then. You put whatever you like in your glass. I don't want you thinking I'm trying to get you drunk and seduce you. My missus wouldn't think to kindly of me for doing such a naughty thing."

Suellen accepted the flask from his pudgy hand and poured a minute amount of the fragrant, amber-

colored liquid into her drink. "You're married? Where do you and your wife live, may I ask?"

"You may ask, but you'd never believe me." He took another good sip of his eggnog and reached over to grab a cookie from the platter, sniffing it before sampling a bite. "Um-um, good! Brown sugar and vanilla fills the air in here. You're an excellent cookie baker, Suellen."

"Thank you." That whiskey really was doing the trick. She felt like melting butter, and she'd only had one sip. And her kitchen suddenly did smell like she'd just finished baking cookies. Weird.

"Uh, your wife doesn't travel with you, then?" she asked.

The white-bearded man took a long swig and settled back into his seat. "No, my better half prefers to stay at home up north and handle things from there. Me...well, I've got to be on the road much of the holiday season, but we make up for it come the New Year."

"You make up for it?"

He chuckled and slapped the table hard. "Woo-hoo! She's not able to walk for a week after I return home, no sirree bob!"

Suellen covered her crimson cheeks with her hands. It was one thing to drink with a complete stranger, but yet another to start discussing his sex life in great detail. The thought of another woman enjoying the warmth and caresses of a special man filled her with an empty, envious feeling. She didn't enjoy experiencing these jealous thoughts on this

night of love and peace, either.

"It's been a while since you've felt that way about a man, hasn't it?"

"What...?" She was startled from her sad reverie. "What did you say?"

His laughter subsided, and he spoke softly and kindly to her. "You've longed to have that kind of relationship with a man for a very long time. Long before your Eddie waltzed out that door and never looked back. Haven't you?"

"Yes, that's true." A tear trickled down her cheek. She absentmindedly wiped it away with the back of her hand and took another fortifying sip of her eggnog. "How in the world do you know about Eddie?"

He touched his heart and nodded. "I can feel your pain from across several oceans, Suellen, so feeling it from across the table takes no real magic. There's no need to hide it any longer. You don't have to act brave anymore. I've come to help."

"Help? You want to...help...me?" The effects of the liquor were much stronger than usual. What was happening? She felt like she was falling asleep, and yet she was certain she was still sitting at her kitchen table across from a most unusual man.

"Yes, I can help you, Suellen. You've been a good girl this year—in spite of your lapses in manners at times—but all is forgiven. It's time you opened that beautiful heart of yours up so it can start loving again." Her guest stood and walked around the room. "Anyone in particular you're interested in?"

"Interested in?" She blinked several times. He had picked up one of her romance novels from the counter by the phone and was flipping the pages. "Oh, yeah, I dream about those cover models sometimes. They're such hunks. That one on the book cover you're holding is tall, dark and handsome to the max, with his long flowing black hair and those bulging biceps...I wouldn't mind Santa slipping him in my stockings tonight—with me in them!"

She began to giggle, then covered her burning cheeks with her cool hands. "Pardon me. I'm not usually so rude. It's the whiskey."

The little hobo put down the book, joining in the laughter. "Yeah, that truth potion really loosens a person up."

"Truth...potion?" Suddenly she was seeing two—no, four—no, eight of her white-whiskered guest. "It's not just sippin' whiskey, then?"

Smiling at her, he clasped his pudgy hands together, then rubbed them briskly. "All right, then. It's time for a little magic. And I know just the elf who can help me—Carlos, over in Texas. Luckily he lives relatively nearby."

"Carlos?" Suellen clutched the edge of the table and forced herself to sit up so she could continue a coherent conversation. "What a coincidence. That's the name of one of our regulars. He drives a truck between El Paso and Roswell, but always manages to stop by for lunch. He lost his wife to cancer a couple of years ago. It was so sad. She wasn't very old, about my age, I heard. It couldn't have happened to a nicer

guy. Always tips well, too."

"Does he now?"

If she wasn't mistaken, her guest was glowing again. Gold light tinged his roundish form and white, feathery appendages on his back seemed to be spreading wider and wider.

Suellen rubbed her eyes and blinked hard. The hallucination abruptly ceased. She fought off the urge to scream, forcing herself to her feet. "Let's hang our stockings over the mantelpiece," she announced.

"Let's do that." The little man reached into yet another shopping bag, retrieved two bright red velvet ermine-trimmed socks, and handed her one. "Here you go."

"Thanks."

Where did this down-on-his-luck guy obtain such expensive Christmas decorations? She didn't want to even consider the possibilities now. She stumbled from the kitchen and into the living room.

"You know what the weirdest thing is?" she said, leading her guest over to the fireplace. "I was just thinking the other day about how much Carlos resembled that drop-dead gorgeous stud on the cover of my romance novel. I even pretended that he was the hero in the story and that I was the heroine."

"Did you really?" The little hobo waggled his bushy eyebrows and grinned. "Then that settles it. Here, allow me to hang your stocking for you. I don't want you to accidentally hammer your thumb. I want you in tip-top shape when Carlos arrives."

Suellen laughed. "You say that with such a straight

face. How do you know Carlos is driving his rig tonight? He's probably home with his family, enjoying a good old-fashioned carol songfest by the tree."

He finished nailing their stockings to the mantelpiece. "You've got a tree, too."

"A teeny-tiny fake one. It's too difficult to put up a real live one by yourself."

Suellen blinked as a glittery shower of gold and silver sparkled before her eyes.

"Are you sure it's fake?" he asked.

"Of course I'm sure." She turned from the fireplace—which now hosted a roaring fire that hadn't been there a moment previous—and looked at her Wal-Mart Special tree. Instantly her nose was assaulted by the scent of fresh pine.

"What the... It's real! Oh, and it's beautiful. Did you...*do* something to it?"

He winked at her and laid a finger aside of his nose. "A little something. Now, what can we do with all these packages underneath your tree..."

Suellen shook her head. "What packages? I tossed an old Christmas bag under there so it wouldn't look completely naked. Sunshine, my alley cat, came in and dragged it off somewhere to sleep in."

"Are you certain there are no presents under your tree?"

She was getting used to the miracles by now. Sure enough, when she knelt beside her Christmas tree, dozens of beautifully wrapped gift boxes littered the skirt beneath it.



"Okay, I give up." She plopped down and hugged her knees. If she was going insane from loneliness, then so be it. "You're Santa Claus, aren't you?"

He grinned. "However did you guess?"

"It's written all over your face. And those shopping bags...they seem to have whatever you need in them."

He nodded. "Yep, they do. But they don't have Carlos in them, do they?"

"No, they don't." Suellen released a pent-up sigh. Her fantasy would end right now. "Thank heavens. I don't know what I'd do if I woke up and found Carlos in my bed."

"Open that shiny green book-shaped gift on your right. That'll give you some ideas."

"Santa! You didn't bring me a sex manual, did you?"

"Well, you've been such a good girl, I thought a little something naughty couldn't hurt." He lowered his voice to a whisper. "Do remember to open the lavender box toward the back. Carlos will love seeing you wearing that gift...not that you'll be wearing it for long."

"Oh, stop!" She felt her cheeks warming again. "I'll never be able to face you tomorrow morning after this booze-induced hallucination wears off. Here, let me show you to your room."

Suellen stood shakily and headed toward the hallway with her guest following. "It's this first room to the left. I hope there are enough blankets for you."

"It'll be fine. I won't be staying the whole night."

"You won't?" She switched on the room light and

turned to look closely at him. "Why not?"

He touched the side of his nose again. "I've got work to do 'round midnight."

"Around midnight? Ah...I see. You've got a sled and eight reindeer to catch on a one-way ticket around the world to deliver toys to all the good girls and boys, right?"

He smiled. "That's right. But first I wanted to make certain that you received your perfect Christmas gift. So as soon as I go, I'll be sending my 'big little helper' your way so your celebrations will be complete."

She arched a eyebrow and narrowed her eyes in suspicion. "Santa's 'big little helper', you say?"

"Yep, that's right. Carlos is one of my bigger elves. I hope you don't mind."

Suellen laughed. She bent to kiss her lunatic visitor on the cheek before walking to her own bedroom door. "Oh, no, I won't mind a bit. The bigger the better, I always say."



"I have a special mission for you tonight, Carlos."

Carlos Sanchez hopped down from the pick-up bed full of donated items—blankets, linens, gently used baby clothing and some toys—and smiled at the chubby white-whiskered man wearing a red suit standing by his front door.

"Well, ho, ho, ho and bless my soul!" He eagerly crossed over to shake hands with his unexpected visitor. "It's been quite a while, Nick. How can I

help?"

"It's more likely I'll be helping you. Helping you get over your loneliness."

Carlos frowned. "I'm not lonely. I have all these charity projects to help out with during the holidays, and—"

"And you haven't faced facts. You're lonely. Don't lie to me. It's been several years now since Celia passed on. You've been dreaming of a special lady to share Christmas with for some time now, haven't you?"

His denial caught in his throat. Okay, Nick was right. He had been dreaming—or more aptly, lusting—after a special lady for some time now. It was all he could do not to shout out his affection and whisk her into his arms whenever he entered the truck stop. Thing was, she wore a wedding ring, and fortunately both of them possessed a sense of honor better than your average yahoo. They'd never even mildly flirted with each other in front of all the other dirty-minded truckers.

He sighed. Perhaps it was their self-control that was preventing them from taking the next step? But to chase after a married woman... His parents raised him better than to stoop that low.

"Suellen's single, did you know that?"

"She's single?" Chuckling, Carlos shrugged slowly. "You sly dog. You checked her out for me. I never could keep a secret from you, could I?"

"No, you can't keep a secret from me, so don't even waste time trying." Lowering his voice and

casting a furtive glance over his shoulder, the round gentlemen escorted Carlos into his home. "Now, here's what I want you to do..."



Dawn's rosy trickles of light slowly washed across the comforter, splashing across the back of Suellen's closed eyes. She stirred sleepily and yawned. The one day of the year they didn't open the truck stop and she could sleep in, and here she was waking up when the rooster crowed. Strange, the whiskey in the eggnog last night didn't konk her out for twelve hours straight like the hard stuff usually did.

A smile played across her full lips. Whatever was in that strange brew, she sure did enjoy some super-sexy dreams. They began with one of her and the devastatingly handsome hero from the cover of her latest romance read. He was dressed—or rather, half-dressed—in that classic ripped-open-to-the-waist cream-colored poet's shirt and extremely tight black breeches. She stood before him in a lovely lavender silk empire-waist gown that clung to every inch of her frame, outlining full breasts and rounded hips in excruciating detail. Her straw bonnet hung from velvet strings, allowing her curly hair to blow freely in the wind as they stood at the top of a rocky precipice.

Then she turned to take the stud muffin's hand...  
Whoa!

In her dream she did a double take. He looked

exactly like Carlos Sanchez, the trucker! His shoulder-length black hair billowed about him, perfectly framing his sexy strong chin, high cheekbones and brilliant white smile. No doubt about it—her romantic hero resembled the restaurant's most frequent customer.

*Crazy idea, Carlos dressed like a classic romance hero. She sighed. I need to have my head examined.*

Suellen stretched her arms wide and arched her back. Funny, the pillow next to her felt a bit hard. She tapped it again. It felt like a wall of muscle instead of the down-filled, satin-covered cushion she knew it was. Oh, right...she hadn't let the cat out last night. Slowly she opened one eye to confirm that Sunshine had crawled into bed to keep her company.

Heavens above! Her pet had transformed into a sleeping Adonis!

Suellen catapulted herself out of bed, landing on the floor on her tailbone with a thud. "Ow!" She rubbed her sore derriere, moaning. "That whiskey in the eggnog sure did a number on my scrambled brain."

"Whiskey?" Adonis sat up, pushed back his shoulder-length black hair from his chiseled, striking features and glanced over at her, sprawled unladylike on the bedroom carpet. "You must mean Santa's truth potion. It's very effective. He always gets to the truth of the matter whenever he gives you a swig. It always works for me."

"Uh...uh..." Her jaw dropped open and her eyes were on stalks. "Y-y-you... W-w-what are y-you

doing here?"

The Carlos clone leaned across the bed and beamed a brilliant white smile at her. "I'm your very special present from Santa Claus, Suellen. Merry Christmas!"

Her breath caught in the back of her throat and her words died before she could form them. He was *what*? Her present? Did that sweet little old hobo actually go out and hunt down Carlos the trucker and then deposit him in her bed while she was sleeping off the effects of the Mickey Finn?

"M—merry C—Christmas to you, too," she managed, stalling for time. Stealthily, she scooted over toward the chair to retrieve her bathrobe and slippers. If she were lucky, her purse would be there under the pile of clothes. She'd grab her cell phone and dial 9-1-1.

Carlos frowned. "Sue, don't tell me you don't remember asking Santa for someone to keep you warm. He assured me that you'd be thrilled to find me dressed like this in your bed when you woke up this morning."

"Dressed? Are you...dressed?" All she could see was his bare chest, lightly dusted with dark hairs, and well-defined pecs. Her curiosity piqued, she rose to her knees as she grabbed her robe. He obliged her by flinging back the sheets.

His complete outfit consisted of a red, ermine-trimmed Speedo—and a smile.

"Oh, my..." Suddenly Suellen felt faint. She leaned heavily against the chair full of clothes, toppling most of them to the floor. Unfortunately, her purse and cell

phone were nowhere to be seen in the mess.

"It's okay," Carlos rolled over the bed and helped her to her feet, holding her shoulders steady in his strong arms. "It is a bit of a shock. I know I didn't believe it the first time I met ol' Saint Nick, but he's for real. And he brought me to you."

"He brought you here? In his sled?"

Carlos nodded. "That's right. He showed up on my doorstep last night and said he had a special mission for me."

She took a deep breath to steady her nerves. Hmm... He smelled of good honest sweat and soap and what-all. She took another deep breath. That was a big mistake. The aroma of his aftershave mixed with the warm musk of a muscular male body made her head spin.

She could see him, feel him, smell him and, perhaps, she could even taste him. This was the most realistic hallucination she'd ever experienced. What a way to come out of a hangover!

"You work for Santa Claus and not a trucking company?" she babbled.

"Both. I started working for Santa a few years ago in between driving jobs." He chuckled. "His 'big little helper', he likes to call me."

Suellen involuntarily found her gaze wandering from Carlos' bright grin to the bulge in his bikini bottom. "Uh-huh. So, tell me... How many other lonely women have you 'helped' this way for dear old Santa?"

He frowned slightly as a cloud of hurt descended

over his ebony eyes. His hands gripped her shoulders tighter. "You're the first. I promise. I usually help Santa deliver gifts to illegal immigrants and others who hang out in remote places. I also travel along the river on Christmas Eve and give out gifts of food and blankets in the shanty towns on both sides of the border."

"What a wonderful thing to do, helping out those less fortunate." She relaxed slightly, but she couldn't completely block out the effects of his decidedly masculine presence.

"Glad you don't think I'm entirely a stalker."

"No, of course you aren't. And I didn't mean to doubt you." Suellen took another deep breath and regretted it instantly. The spicy cologne scent possessed the same mind-numbing effect as the little hobo's whiskey. "It's just that I'm usually not such a 'naughty girl'. I mean, I've been on Santa's 'good girl' list for years—or so he's told me."

Carlos's blinding white smile instantly reappeared. "Yes, he told me that, too. That's why he didn't want you to be alone anymore."

He dropped a hand from her shoulder and picked up her left hand, rubbing the empty spot on her ring finger. "If I had known earlier that you were single, I would have asked you out."

She bit her lip and shrugged. "I wear my old wedding band while I'm at work. It keeps a lot of the truckers' hands—and their risqué comments—to themselves. Maria calls it 'butt cheek anti-pinching insurance.'"



"Good idea. You never know what some lonely, horny trucker might do." He pulled her closer and tilted her chin toward his face. "He might try to steal a kiss—or two."

Before Suellen could move, his lips descended, hungrily taking possession of hers. Stars blazed and exploded before her eyes. Man, could this figment of her imagination ever kiss! Her protests died as she molded her curves against his taut, muscular form, opening her mouth for his further exploration. Their tongues met and danced as the kiss deepened. He plunged deeper, as if drinking her very essence. She clung to him, her senses reeling at the pervading warmth and masculine scent of him. Her hands eagerly cradled his smooth, firm buttocks as he caressed his way through her tousled tresses.

"Mmm... You taste better than the diner's apple pie," he said at last, coming up for air. "And I've always wanted to wind my fingers through your beautiful strawberry-blonde hair. Why do you keep it pinned up all the time?"

"The health department makes us do that," she explained, sighing. "How did you know I even had hair? I usually have that awful net thing over it."

He grinned and pulled her toward the bed. "I've seen little stray hairs peeking out now and then. I love it when you push them behind your ears when you think no one is looking. I was looking."

She sat next to him, her focus falling to his full lips. "You were? I usually feel invisible at work. I'm there, and yet I'm not really there."

"Oh, you're there, all right." He tugged her into his arms and together they fell backward across the mattress. His hand wiggled its way into the opening of her robe and began to stroke her nipples, poking through the thin cotton material of her nightshirt. She gasped, but didn't push him away. It felt so good...so right...so perfect. He slid the robe from her shoulders, pulling it away from her and tossing it aside.

Carlos lowered his voice to a husky whisper. "I always notice what a terrific body you have under those hideously baggy uniforms and aprons y'all have to wear. It should be outright illegal to cover up a woman as sexy as you."

Suellen laughed. Her hands played along the curve of his chin, dipping down to outline the musculature of his chest. "What should we wear, then? Corsets and garter belts and spike heels? That would sure bring in a few more customers!"

"Hmm, not a bad idea. Santa said he placed some...new clothes under your tree. Want to model them for me?"

"I have new clothes?" She thought hard for a moment and then remembered the miraculous appearing of a tree skirt full of gifts last night. This hallucination definitely had to be the longest on record. "Maybe I do. You think Santa left you something under my tree as well?"

"Let's look. Hopefully he left me some other clothes. I can't walk outside dressed in this outfit."

She gulped hard, her pulse fluttering with excitement. "Y—you're saying you actually came with

him dressed only in a fur-trimmed Speedo?"

"Santa's sled has a really good built-in heating system. I felt fine in just these and my cap."

"Your cap?"

Carlos nodded toward the headboard. Sure enough, a long red Santa cap was parked on the right hand brass knob post. He laughed and she couldn't help but joined in the merriment. Held close, the hardness of his erection bounced up and down against her belly, tempting her to rip off both their undergarments.

Heavens! His body gave ample proof that he desperately wanted to make love to her. And her damp-with-excitement panties proved she felt exactly the same way. There was no denying it any longer. She had been admiring Carlos whenever he stopped by the restaurant for a long time now. Somehow, there never seemed to be a good time to flirt with him or chat with him more than just the usual pleasantries. An opportune time to get to know him better had never come up.

But now? Sometime—or some *thing*—definitely had come up! She smiled to herself. All she had to do was say the word and spread her legs, and his gorgeous cock would be all hers.

*Wait a cotton-pickin' minute here! I'm imagining all this.* It was the whiskey she drank last night; that had to be it. How could a hallucination make love to her?

A cold shiver of reality brought her crashing back to earth. She really was losing her mind. Perhaps she'd better slow down and examine this entire

situation a little closer. A hot cup of coffee was probably all it would take to erase this phantom lover from her bedroom.

*Sigh.* Skip the coffee. A phantom lover was better than none at all. At least she wouldn't have to eat breakfast all alone as usual.

"Okay." She rolled off the Carlos apparition and jumped to her feet. "My Christmas Eve and morning are shaping up to be one of the weirdest ever. I'm not sure any of this is happening at all."

He raised a dark eyebrow. "You mean you can't tell that I find you incredibly desirable?"

"Um..." The wetness gathering in the V between her thighs made her cross her legs tightly together. *Ooo!* That didn't help much. Time to change topics.

"Let's not go there now. Let's go open presents. How about it, Mr. Santa's Big Little Helper, who may or may not exist outside of my addled brain?"

His dark eyes veiled by thick lashes, he appeared disappointed, but he didn't press his suit. Instead he stood, placing his big hands on his svelte hips. "All right. After we open gifts, I'll make breakfast."

"Hey, I'm the one who works in a restaurant," she teased the sexy figment of her imagination. "I should do the cooking."

"No, it's your holiday. You shouldn't have to work on your day off. Besides," he approached and whispered into her ear, "I've got an extra-special recipe to whip up courtesy of the man in the red suit."

"Recipe? What kind?"

Carlos winked and gave her shoulder a rub.

"You'll see."

The moment they stepped into the living room, Suellen rubbed her eyes and shook her head at the sight that greeted them. "Oh, my...I'm hallucinating worse."

Her formerly three-foot tall fake tree had grown into a plush, blue-green seven-foot real-live pine complete with candy-colored lights and hundreds of sparkling crystal ornaments. The boxes she had imagined last night had multiplied as well. A roaring fire blazed in the fireplace, and the scene was made complete with what looked like an authentic bearskin rug lying in front of the dancing flames.

"I like your hallucinations." Carlos stood close enough for her to continue enjoying his warmth and his mesmerizing masculine scent. "Just the perfect spot to curl up and open presents. Is that a pot of hot cocoa sitting on the hearth, you think?"

"It can't be cocoa. I didn't make any last night. And the fireplace should be belching out black smoke—the flue's been totally jammed for years."

"Santa specializes in clearing out jammed chimneys."

"Obviously." Suellen took a step toward the cozy scene and halted. "You know what's really odd? All of this is like my ultimate Christmas fantasy wish has come true. A wonderfully fragrant pine tree beautifully decorated, thousands of gifts, a roaring fire, a bearskin rug and..." She blushed and looked away from her scantily-clad guest.

"And?" He raised a black eyebrow and flashed a

knowing smile.

She shrugged. "A half-nude hunk standing in the middle of it all."

His grin grew broader. "I think Santa did more than just slip you some of his truth potion last night. He must have read your mind while he was at it. He wanted you to experience your dream holiday. This is it, right?"

She nodded. "I guess so."

"You guess so? Is there something missing? It's not like Santa to not deliver on the complete deal. What's missing?"

Suellen bit her lower lip. How could she say what she really missed most of all? That she missed having her own little ones to share cocoa with her and her dream husband while they all opened presents...

"It's not snowing," she said at last.

"Ah." He nodded. "Give it a little time. Even Santa can't perform weather miracles without a little help from the Man Upstairs."

He pulled her into his arms and lowered his lips to hers once more. She stiffened. He pulled back. "Sue, what's wrong?"

"N—nothing. I'm just feeling a bit overwhelmed by everything, that's all."

He smiled, but released her reluctantly. He walked over to the cocoa. "Want a cup?"

"Yes, please." She crossed her arms over her thin nightshirt and shivered, missing her robe, but not wanting to leave the room.

He poured a generous portion into a snowman-

shaped mug beside the pot and handed it to her. "Here you go. Why not open that long blue box below that glass teddy bear ornament on the right? I think something in there will warm you up."

She took a long sip of the silky-sweet chocolate brew. *Hmm... Nothing could be sweeter or more delicious than this cocoa.* Reluctantly she placed her mug on the coffee table and knelt at the foot of the tree. *Maybe this isn't a dream after all? The tastes, the smell, the sounds... It's all too real to be all in my head. My imagination isn't all that good.*

"You see the box I'm talking about?" Carlos's honeyed baritone broke through her reverie.

"This one?" She carefully slid the rectangular package from underneath several smaller ones. "How do you know what's in this box? Did you help Santa wrap it?"

"Maybe." He chuckled at the memory. "I told him the color matched your blue eyes perfectly."

"My eyes?" Her curiosity piqued, she ripped into the satiny royal-blue foil paper and flung open the box faster than an anxious child wanting to get through all her gifts before anyone else had a chance to even open one. "Oh, my... It's breathtaking."

She lifted the sapphire-colored cashmere wrap sweater from the container and rubbed it against her cheek, luxuriating in her tactile sensations. "Oooo! It's as fluffy as a cuddly plush toy." She quickly donned it and sighed contentedly. "So fuzzy and furry and warm. Wish I could say the same for my ol' alley cat."

As if on cue, Sunshine, the orange tabby mix, came

wandering in from the kitchen and jumped into her lap, purring.

"Hey, Sunny! You're up early today." She petted and played with her feline companion. "Whoa! Your coat feels great today. All silky and fine, and you smell good, too. Did Santa and Carlos, his 'big little helper', give you a kitty bath or something?"

The cat purred even louder.

"And this rhinestone collar, too?" Suellen chuckled. "Wow, that's almost too much. You're just an old stray, you are."

"Even a stray deserves a merry Christmas, doesn't he?"

Carlos put down his snowman mug and beckoned for Sunshine to come over to him. To Suellen's surprise, the cat did just that, purring all the way. She couldn't believe what she was seeing.

"Sunny seems to be quite taken with you. He usually hisses at strangers and makes a weird growling sound low in his throat. Maybe his behavior proves you and Santa don't really exist outside of my brain after all."

"We exist, all right. And whoever said I was a 'stranger'?" Carlos tickled the tomcat under the chin. The purring grew even louder. "Sunshine was a great help last night decorating the tree. Weren't you, boy?"

Sunshine purred his answer. Slowly he wandered away from Carlos, sitting at the hearth, and over to a ribbon-bedecked, maroon velvet-lined kitty basket standing in the opposite corner.

"A new bed, too, and a primo one at that. Old Mr.



Sunshine is going to demand top grade cat chow in a crystal dish if I don't wean him from all these luxuries, and soon." She stood and walked over to the basket, petting the happy cat as he flopped upon the cushioned surface. "Well, I guess a little soft living can't hurt."

"You didn't seem to mind your new bedding last night, as I recall."

"My new wha...?" Suellen turned and walked briskly back into the bedroom. She bent close to the bed covers and fingered the cloth. Sure enough the quilt, although similar, was new and much thicker and smoother than her old threadbare one. The sheets seemed to be of a higher quality as well, with an expensive satiny sheen. No wonder she had practically slid out of the bed this morning.

She absentmindedly rubbed the sore spot on her tailbone. Ow! That clinched it. She wasn't making this up.

"How in the world did that happen?" she asked, stomping back toward the tree. She planted herself in the middle of the room, angrily crossing her arms over her budding nipples. "How did you and that little old hobo remake the bed with me in it without me waking up? I'm a very light sleeper—it comes with the territory from having to work third shift occasionally. I would have known if someone had pulled the sheets out from under me."

Carlos shrugged a languid, sexy shrug, rippling his well-defined pecs and biceps in a delicious slow dance. What she wouldn't give to see him standing on

a stage in a club, wiggling those muscles and swinging those hips in agonizingly slow and measured circles... *Down, girl!*

"Magic," he said at last.

"That's it? That's your answer to all this? 'Magic'?"

He nodded. "That's the best way to explain it. Why don't you open some more of your presents? I'll start breakfast."

Grinning, he waltzed out of the room leaving her standing speechless and in shock. "Why...why, you...you couldn't have...I...I..."

It was no use. She had completely lost her marbles. One thing she did know for sure—keeping up this pretense of Carlos being 'Santa's sexy big little helper' was driving her insane. Sure, the little hobo could have helped Carlos get inside last night and fix things up, but what else did the two of them get up to while she slept?

Was anything missing? It didn't appear she'd been burgled. Other than being forced to watch a semi-naked man cavort about her newly decorated home, there was nothing out of the ordinary happening to her.

*Relax. Go with the flow,* a voice echoed in her head. It sounded like her hobo houseguest talking to her.

"Magic. Okay. Sure, why not." Suellen threw up her hands, plopped down on the fur rug and pulled out another package. "This one is for you, Sunny." She tore the cartoon cat paper off and removed the clockwork mouse from its box. "How cute. You've always wanted one of these, haven't ya, fella?"

Sunshine meowed his reply. She wound up the toy, then set it scurrying toward him. With a great leap he tried pouncing on the moving object, madly batting at it with his orange paws.

"Let's see what else is in here." She pulled a gold foil package from the back and read its label. "For Carlos. That confirms Santa knew he'd be here." She rubbed her temples and groaned. "What am I saying? There is no Santa; there are no little helpers—not even big little helpers."

Her heart lurched in her chest. Hadn't she decided that already? The thought that she had completely dreamed up rock-hard-ab Carlos in the kitchen didn't bear a second thought. He was here, in her kitchen, barely dressed and cooking breakfast. She'd accept that as reality until something else convinced her she was completely loony-tunes.

After all, was there any harm in her enjoying Christmas morning with a hunky hallucination?

She sighed and turned to Sunshine, her unusually contented cat. "You know what I've decided, kitty? If I've gone completely around the bend, I might as well enjoy myself." She stood up and entered the kitchen with Carlos's present.

"Is that for me?" He was standing next to the stove, frying an omelet in a brand-new skillet that she had no earthly idea where either it or the fixings had come from. Not that she dwelled on those impossibilities for long. His muscular silhouette easily snatched her attention away from the frying pan to the fire of desire burning low in her belly.

"The tag's got your name on it." She made herself frown to cover the drool pooling in her mouth. She wasn't salivating necessarily because she was hungry. "Is that a western omelet? I don't like bell peppers."

"Right. No bell peppers, but plenty of jalapenos to suit your fiery nature."

She laughed. "Yeah, right! Here, take your present. I'll watch the eggs."

He slipped the wrapping from the flat, rectangular box and opened it. "All right. A change of clothes." Chuckling, he lifted a black silk g-string from the box. "You receive a matching one, by chance?"

"There was a second gold foil-wrapped box beside it, now that I think about it."

He dashed from the room and then reappeared with the present. "Open it."

Suellen turned her back on him to hide her growing discomfort at watching him prance about half-naked. "I can't. I'm cooking an omelet here. Plus, the toast is burning." She reached over to the toaster. The sweet scents of spices and yeast filled her nostrils. "Are those cinnamon-raisin bagels?"

"Yep, your favorite. There's hazelnut-flavored whipped cream cheese to put on them, too."

"Hmm, I'm drooling."

He struck a pose and winked. "Yes, I noticed earlier."

Her cheeks turned as hot as the frying pan. "Uh, sorry. I didn't mean to ogle you, but you can't blame a gal if you run about her house dressed like that."

"So why don't you open your present and we'll

both change into our matching outfits after we eat?" He handed her the box as she switched off the stove.

"Maybe." She placed the gift on the counter and opened the cupboard to retrieve plates. "You will eat at least half of this omelet, won't you? I'm not that big a breakfast eater."

Grinning, he accepted his portion and waited until she had sat down at the table before joining her with the bagels and cream cheese. "I'd make an exception today. You're going to need all the calories you can get."

"Calories?" she mumbled as she bit into a bagel. Hmm—heavenly! "I need extra calories like I need a hole in the head. My backside is wide enough to qualify for a 'wide load' banner."

"Yes, you do have nice, full hips."

Carlos's dark eyes were veiled beneath those thick lashes once more. A dangerous air hung about him. He leaned toward her, lowering his voice. "Whenever you walk past me at the counter in the truck stop, it's all I can do to take my eyes off that deliciously curvy ass of yours. Of course sometimes my gaze stops at your bustline." He slowly licked his lips. "Who needs cream in their coffee when there's two mouthwatering globes bouncing right in front of me?"

Suellen gasped. Her panties were practically stuck to the chair, her juices freely flowing at the thought of how much Carlos had secretly lusted after her all this time.

A naughty vision flashed through her head: The

two of them naked and sweating, locked in a lascivious embrace atop the truck stop counter, Carlos pounding into her as she wrapped her hungry thighs about him, clinging to him for dear life...

"Uh, is that why you always ask for so many coffee refills?" she said, not daring to look him directly in the face.

He wiggled his black eyebrows comically. "Yeah, it is. That way I can admire your backside while you turn to get the coffee pot and then I can admire your cleavage as you pour me another cup. It's a win-win situation."

Chuckling, she shook her head. "And here all this time I thought you were a regular caffeine fiend. How could I have known you were a sex fiend instead?"

He sat back in his chair, frowning. "I'm not a pervert, Sue."

"I—I didn't mean it that way," she stammered, flustered. "I meant it as a compliment."

"A compliment?" His charming smirk returned instantly. "All right. That's better. Santa gave me a little of his truth serum last night, so I can't lie to you anymore. You have a delicious body that makes me hungry for more, the more I see of it. Those cherry-red lips of yours look sweet enough to taste and now that I've sampled them briefly, I can't wait to enjoy a full course. Speaking of which..."

Carlos rose and headed to the refrigerator. He took out a small bowl of crimson cherries and bright pink-red strawberries. "These were scheduled to be on the menu for later after I'd melted the chocolate."

"Chocolate-covered strawberries...my favorite!"

"I don't think I can wait for the chocolate." His eyes had taken on a devilish gleam. "I want you to enjoy a few now."

Suellen put down her fork. "Sure. I love fruit for breakfast."

"That's not quite what I had in mind."

He placed the bowl on the table and moved his chair closer to hers. Taking a cherry, he placed the stem between his teeth and leaned toward her. She took the hint and leaned forward to snatch the glossy cherry, lightly brushing her lips against his. The electric sensation of their lips meeting sent tingling jolts up and down her spine, making her squirm in her seat.

"Hmmm... Yummy."

"I agree." He caught her by the back of the neck and pulled her lips to his once more to sample. His breathing came slow and heavy as he let her go. "Shall we retire to the sofa and enjoy our dessert by the fire?"

Suellen didn't know what to think anymore. Her breathing came fast and shallow and her crotch was practically aching for his attention. Her fantasy Christmas had come true, and was sitting right across from her. It would be rude of her not to join in the activities her guest suggested, wouldn't it?

"I'd love to."

Carlos took her by the hand and led her to the living room. He indicated for her to sit down on the bearskin rug with the fruit bowl while he stoked the

fire. Watching him kneel in front of the hearth, Suellen found her lips suddenly dry. She licked them slowly while admiring the view from behind. The red-gold firelight caressed every line of his masculine form, outlining his taut musculature, the curve of his tight buttocks, the strength of his legs and arms, wringing a deep sigh of appreciation from deep within her.

"There. That should keep us warm for a while." He settled next to her. "Now, where were we? Oh, yes...the strawberries."

He reached into the bowl she cradled in her lap, choosing a plump berry. He repeated his actions with the cherry, but this time Suellen knew it would be slightly more challenging. Relaxing her mouth with a series of puckers, she slowly leaned forward and bit, her lips crushing the juicy morsel against his as the sticky liquid dribbled down both their chins.

"Ooo, sorry about that. I'm a bit of a sloppy eater."

She turned to reach for a tissue from the box on the side table, but he gently pushed her hand away and leaned forward.

"Oh!" Suellen was completely caught off-guard at how erotic having her face licked and kissed clean felt. She traced the outline of his strong, square jaw and then noisily sucked the strawberry juice from her fingers. His eyes widened with surprise—and desire.

"I see you enjoy taking sticky, long objects down the back of your throat. What to try it with something thicker?"

She stopped her sucking activity, reddening at his



suggestion. Her embarrassment instantly turned to giggles as he stood and took down a stocking full of thick peppermint candy canes. "Here ya go."

"You're such a kidder!"

"Who me?"

She laughed as he tried demonstrating her finger-licking technique on his own candy cane. Even with his wide, full lips he had trouble getting very much of the sweet stick into his mouth at once. After several moments of watching him try to deep throat a candy cane, she could barely stop squirming in her seat. Maybe by concentrating her focus on entertaining him, some of her more wicked thoughts would cease to plague her?

"Want me to demonstrate?" she said huskily.

"Please do." He ripped the plastic wrapper and handed her a long, thick, straight peppermint stick. "Try this one."

Smiling, she slid the confection between her eager lips, sliding it in and out and in and out until she noticed the frown forming on his brow as he bit his lip hard.

"Something wrong?" she said between licks. "You act like you're in pain."

"I am, but it's not a bad kind of pain." He tried crossing his legs to camouflage his growing erection and winced. "It's just an uncomfortable kind."

Suellen sucked harder and faster. She enjoyed having this kind of control over a man, making him as hot and bothered as he made her. She and Eddie never enjoyed anything nearly as fun and frisky as

this game.

Amazing how relaxed and sexy she felt around Carlos... It was as if they were meant for each other, like old lovers. Santa Claus must be an expert in the matchmaking business. Reading her mind, Santa must have realized what was missing in her picture-perfect Christmas. He wanted the two of them to get naked on a bearskin rug in front of a roaring fire in order to create that missing puzzle piece of her life: a child.

*Crack!* The candy broke in half, shattering her reverie.

"Ouch." Carlos smirked. "For some reason, that hurt."

Suellen munched the candy piece, then scooted closer. "Let me kiss it and make it all better." She caressed his chin and brought his lips toward hers, sealing them with a kiss of promise and desire. Her tongue probed and searched, plundering his minty mouth until she brought forth lustful groans, followed by exploring hands that reached under her cashmere sweater to cradle her breasts and tweak her nipples to proud points.

"Oh, please," she whispered as his hands circumvented her panties area, "Don't stop. Touch me all over. I haven't felt so alive in so long... Make me feel alive, Carlos. I promise to return the favor."

"Hmm..." He crushed her to his chest, drinking in the fragrance of her hair and skin. "I have to warn you that once we start, I may not be able to stop. And I'm not sure if Santa provided any protection in any

of these pretty boxes."

"You want me to look?"

At once both happy and sad, she tore herself from his grasp and crossed to the tree to sort through the packages. She was happy that he was concerned for her health and well-being, but she still felt sad because taking precautions would prevent any 'accidents' from occurring. Next year this time it would still be her all alone, celebrating the holidays in an empty house.

"This one looks promising." She tore open the wrapping on the small silver foil-wrapped rectangular box. "Oh."

"What is it?"

Suellen held it up. "Magic 'O' Lickable Body Lotion for Lovers."

Carlos laughed a deep husky chuckle. "Dee-licious. We can try it after the chocolate and berries." He leaned closer and pointed to a gift. "Retrieve that one wrapped in snowflake-patterned paper in the back. It's about the right size and shape."

She bent over on her hands and knees and crawled toward the package. Suddenly she felt something hard yet soft rubbing up against her backside. "Hey!"

"Sorry, I couldn't resist coming up behind you in that position. It was just so...tempting."

Suellen arched her back to afford him even closer access. Slowly, hypnotically, he rocked his firm erection rhythmically against her buttocks. A moan escaped her lips, and then another. She ached to feel him deep inside her... Any second now she'd reach

around, rip off both their underwear and be damned about taking precautions.

"Oh, Carlos. That feels so good. Do you mind if we...if we..."

"Here it is," he said, reaching over her and retrieving the box she had been attempting to pick up. She sighed as he backed away from the tree and unwrapped it. "Hmm, it's not quite what we were looking for, but it's still a lot of fun."

"A lot of fun?" She turned around to check out Santa's gift. "Ah-ha! I've heard of them before, but I'd never seen any in person."

He winked and held the box out to her. "Wanna try them out?"

Suellen bit her lip. Should she? Edible underwear meant exactly that...they were for eating, not just for modeling. Who was she trying to kid? Maybe if she tempted Carlos wrapped in a fruit-flavored bikini, he'd get so excited that he wouldn't remember about looking for condoms.

"There are three kinds, it says on the side—grape, cherry and wild berry. This box says 'wild berry'. You want me to look for another flavor?" she asked, giving him her best innocent look.

"Nah, I think 'wild berry' suits both our moods." Grinning, Carlos stood and helped her to her feet. "I'll wait here by the fire while you get ready. And here," he said, handing her the lickable body lotion. "Try a little of this while you're at it. I'm curious to know what flavor it is."

"Any particular place you want me to put lotion

on?" she teased.

He suggestively wiggled an eyebrow. "Surprise me."

As Suellen sauntered from the living room, Carlos felt his cock harden with expectation. He wanted to make love to her so much it hurt. Damn! Where had Nick stashed the condoms? They weren't under the tree so where else could they be?

Carlos scanned the room for some kind of clue. Of course! He quickly removed the remaining stocking from the mantelpiece and turned it upside down, dumping its contents onto the sofa. More peppermint sticks, candy canes and other sweets, but nothing as practical as a red or green rubber.

If Nick had wanted them both to experience a 'perfect Christmas', then he'd screwed up royally on this fine point. Everything else had been orchestrated to the *n*th degree—the hot cocoa, the breakfast foods, the real tree, the beautifully wrapped gifts and even him, 'wrapped' in a tiny piece of red cloth and fur. How could Santa Claus have forgotten something as important as providing protection?

"You like?"

Carlos spun around. His jaw dropped to his chest. "It's perfect. I mean, *you're* perfect in it."

The midnight-blue candy swimsuit top stretched bewitchingly across Suellen's pointed breasts, cradling her creamy globes with just the right amount of coverage. The French cut bottoms stretched tight across her crotch, outlining her sweet mound in

exquisite detail. Instantly he felt his erection twitch and point itself toward his dream lover.

"You really think so?" Suellen twirled about to give him the three hundred-sixty view. *Oh, shit!* He wasn't going to make it much longer... He was about to explode. Her butt cheeks looked good enough to eat, like two big scoops of vanilla ice cream. He swallowed hard and cleared his throat nervously.

Then it hit him—what was he thinking? She was wearing edible undies. She was *supposed* to be eaten!

"Come here," he commanded. "I haven't had my dessert yet."

Slowly, shyly, she approached him. He took her small hands in his and gently helped her down to the fur rug. He eased her onto her back and spread himself across her, then began to tenderly kiss, lick and nibble his way from the top of her head, across her cheeks to the hollow of her graceful neck, then downward to the valley between her incredible breasts. Once there, he boldly took his first bite of candy. "Hmm, wild berry."

She laughed and arched her back. "You've bitten my brand-new bikini top in two."

"Dear me." He took a bigger bite of the blue triangle on his right. The spun sugar cloth melted in his mouth like cotton candy. "Oh, you're lopsided now. I'd better even things out." Another gulp and her rosy peaks stood proudly before his eyes, eager for his touch. He wound his tongue in agonizingly slow circles about her areolas. Her lust-filled moans reverberated like music in his ears.

He raised his gaze to her half-closed eyes. "You like?"

"Um...yes. Please don't stop on my account."

He responded by taking a nipple between his lips and rolling it back and forth. She gasped and arched her back further, inching the sensitive nub further into his mouth to suckle. Her hands fell to his hair, urging him onward.

"Yes, yes...I like that...a lot."

She rocked her pelvis toward his, her intentions clear as ice. She wanted him, and she wanted him badly. And he wanted her, too. Damn! Where had Nick stowed those condoms? He turned his attentions to her other perky breast, suckling it until she squealed with delight. Her cries made his hard-on quiver with anticipation. Perhaps by some miracle they'd discover what became of the protection before too long. But it didn't mean they couldn't enjoy themselves in the meantime...

Carlos rose up on his knees and began trailing feather-like kisses down her midsection, pausing at the dip of her navel.

Suellen laughed and attempted to grab his head as his tongue tickled her belly flesh. "Ooo! Stop that! I'm very ticklish, if you haven't guessed already."

"I would have never known if you hadn't pointed it out." He ducked from her, grabbing her hands, and blew a loud raspberry against her skin.

She squealed.

"Hmmm...I think I know where you rubbed some of that lickable lotion now. Peaches and cream!" He

lapped the smooth flesh around the curve of her hip and kneaded her buttocks with enthusiasm. She arched toward him in response, thrusting her pussy ever closer to his lips.

"Want to lick some more candy?" she purred.

How could he resist such an offer? He lowered his focus from her midsection to her mound, covered in blue spun sugar, and began to lick up and down the visible crevice beneath the candy cloth.

Suellen groaned. Reaching for his thick swath of hair, she held on for dear life. Somewhere in her fuzzy brain she thought, What on earth am I doing? Before today Carlos and I barely said more than a dozen words to each other at any one time.

Yet, somehow, she felt completely safe in his arms...and completely wicked as he hungrily licked and bit his way through her edible undies.

She pushed her throbbing clit closer to his tongue as the candy barrier dissolved. The wondrous touch of him on her intimate region sent shivers racing throughout her body. Shivers not from the cold, but from the sheer joy that she felt in his hands. Emotions, so long held in check after her divorce, threatened to erupt. Could she let go? Could she relax and allow a handsome man to make love to her after all the hurt she'd suffered?

Before Suellen could make up her mind whether or not to continue with their pleasurable activities, Carlos made the decision for her. With a thrust of his tongue into her slick passage, she lost all sense of



space and time. Groaning, she rocked her pelvis toward the exquisite touch, the spiraling pressure building inside.

"Keep that up. I don't think I've ever...ever..."

Suddenly it was if every light on the Christmas tree exploded before her eyes. She cried out his name, her arms flailing for purchase against the soft rug as she was launched into the stratosphere of bliss. Moments—which felt like hours—later, she softly floated back toward earth and Carlos' waiting arms.

"Enjoy your flying sleigh ride without benefit of the sleigh?" he said, chuckling.

Suellen curled up against her lover's strong, warm body. "Did I ever! I've never even been on a regular sleigh before. I sure do like it."

"You're not saying you've never experienced an orgasm, are you?"

She sighed and buried her face against his chest. "Well, nothing quite like that before. I was lucky if my ex remembered I was in the room after he'd experienced his satisfaction."

"Now, that is a crime." He squeezed her tightly in his comforting embrace. "Never to witness you coming... Why, that's like visiting Arizona and never bothering to see the Grand Canyon."

"That's me, then. I only flew through the Phoenix airport that one time on the way back from Los Angeles to attend my cousin's wedding."

"I promise to take you to the Grand Canyon some day. One natural wonder of the world should meet another, don't you think?"

Carlos rolled to his back, bringing her along on top of him. Suellen quickly straddled his svelte hips, laughing and pointing at his smiling face.

"What? What's wrong?" he asked, touching his nose. "Did something drop off?"

"It's your...your lips. And your tongue—they're bright blue!"

He laughed. "What did you expect? You were covered in a wild berry bikini."

She patted his blue-stained cheeks. "You must work for Santa Claus. What a candy-addict you are!"

Carlos willed himself not to tense up as Suellen kissed away the remaining traces of edible underwear from his face. If he could slip out from under her luscious curves for a few moments alone in the bathroom, a splash of cold water would do the trick.

But Suellen wouldn't have any of it. "Hey, you're not trying to slip away from me now, are you?"

"Well, I...need to visit the little boy's room."

"You need to release all that strain in your shorts is what you mean." She kissed his chin, his throat, down his chest toward his belly.

"No, you don't have to do that. There's no need to return the favor," he protested. But already she was making inroads along the elastic waistband of his bottoms. The lower half of his anatomy had a mind all its own...and it wasn't in the mood to cooperate with his conscience's more noble intentions.

"I look forward to licking your 'candy cane', Mr. Santa's Big Little Helper." She quickly tugged the red,

fur-trimmed Speedo downward. Released from its confining space, his hard-on immediately popped out, bright red and purple-veined and ready to burst. "My oh my. You really are Santa's 'big' little helper, aren't you?"

Without further warning, she descended upon his cock. Her tongue danced along its sensitive ridge as she cupped his balls, giving them a firm and friendly squeeze. He groaned, doing his very best to wiggle out from under her expert attention, but it was no use.

"You'd better let up, because I'm about to explode any second... Sue? Sue, no, don't, I—"

She plunged the entire length of his staff down the back of her throat. All sense left his scrambled brains as she sucked and nibbled and tongued his cock until there was no going back. As he felt himself tumbling over the edge of reason toward the spiraling lights of the great beyond, he gently pushed her away and pulled out. With an ear-splitting cry, he splashed his seed across her breasts.

"Santa's Big Little Helper isn't quite as big anymore!" Her Cheshire Cat-like grin lit up her entire face as she rubbed the stickiness around her pert nipples. "Was that as satisfying an experience as flying in an open sleigh?"

"Infinitely more." He pulled her toward him and kissed her soundly. "Thank you."

"You're welcome." A glimmer of a tear trickled from the corner of her eye. "You know what? You're the first man who has ever thanked me for going down on him."

Carlos frowned. "Chivalry is truly dead, then. What kind of selfish jerk wouldn't thank you for pleasuring him so expertly?" He held her close, caressing her backside as sobs wracked her frame. "You should be treated like the queen you are, Suellen. I apologize for all the idiots who have disrespected and used you in the past."

"It's okay. I pretty much asked for it. I kept going to bed with real losers 'cause I thought I deserved them."

He held her chin and looked deeply into her glistening eyes. "You don't believe that nonsense anymore, right? You're a special lady who deserves the love of a guy who will worship and adore you always."

"Someone like...someone like you?"

The question mirrored in her eyes struck him hard as if she had slapped him. She didn't believe he loved her—had loved her from the first moment he'd seen her at the diner pouring coffee. How could he convince her that his love was real?

He pulled her lips to his and plundered the sweetness of her mouth. His hands danced across her luscious round buttocks, squeezing and fondling them with an insatiable lust. Man, did he ever enjoy feeling up a round-bottom girl!

His cock suddenly had an idea all its own. It was ready, willing and able to prove his devotion to Suellen. Carlos groaned and tried shifting his weight out from under the firm vise of Suellen's thighs straddling his hips.

"Am I hurting you?" she asked, breathless. She rubbed her clit steadily against his ever-strengthening erection. "I'll stop what I'm doing if I am."

"No, you're not hurting me one bit. It's just that...we didn't find the box of condoms earlier. Remember?"

Suellen halted her mutually pleasurable hip gyrations. "Oh. Yeah. That's right."

He sat up, halfway on his elbows. "Wanna keep searching through the packages?"

"Sure thing." Suellen quickly sprang to her feet to hide the disappointment she knew was mirrored there. How could she tell Carlos that she didn't want to practice safe sex? That she wanted to become pregnant and have his child...

She shook her head hard to push the thought from her mind and went over to the tree. "Hmm...all the remaining boxes seem on the big side—unless Santa provided a year's supply or something."

"Could be. Wasn't there another smaller package we left in the kitchen?"

"Right." She spun around and headed toward the dining area before he could catch a glimpse of the tear spilling down her cheek. What did she have to cry over? Santa had granted ninety-nine percent of her 'perfect Christmas' scenario. He couldn't provide it all—some decisions were clearly left in Carlos's court. Obviously having a child with her wasn't one of them.

Suellen took a deep breath, retrieved the gold foil-

wrapped box from the kitchen counter and returned to the living room. At the sight of the toned, dark and handsome naked man with a rock-hard erection lying on a bearskin rug in front of a roaring fire, she gave a long sigh. Some things in life were simply too delicious to describe with mere words.

"Here it is." She knelt beside him and handed him the package.

"Don't you want to open it?"

"No. You do it."

"All right." Carlos shrugged then tore into the gift-wrapping with gusto. He lifted the lid and laughed. "That ol' Nick! What a practical joker."

Her eyes widened. Curious, she leaned forward. "What is it?"

With one finger he took out the contents of the box—two matching pairs of red velvet-covered handcuffs.

"Oh, my goodness..." She laughed and blushed. "Santa must think we're a couple of perverts or something."

"Or something. They aren't anything too terribly kinky. I mean, they're kind of on the large side, so your wrists would slip out fairly easily. I doubt the lock works all that well, either."

An erotic idea flashed through Suellen's mind. She felt her womanly juices flowing with anticipation. The handcuffs may be too big to fit her, but that didn't mean they wouldn't fit Carlos's wrists perfectly. Perhaps Santa really wanted to grant *all* of her wish for a perfect Christmas after all?

"Let me see those things a moment." Carlos handed both sets of handcuffs over to her with a grin. "You open them up like this, right?" She demonstrated and then picked up his closest hand. "And they go around your arm like this, right?" She clicked the cuff shut about her lover's wrist and smiled.

"Yeah, you've figured them out. I think the key to open them is in the box there."

"Is it?" Suellen grabbed the opened box and tossed it across the room. "Oh, dear. It's out of reach now." She quickly snapped the open cuff around a chair leg. "Now you'll stay put and do as you're told, right?"

Carlos chuckled. "I guess so. But there's no need for you to tie me up, Sue. I'm more than willing to lie naked on this fur rug with you all day."

"I bet you are. But I want to make doubly sure all my Christmas fantasies all come true." She hooked the second pair of handcuffs to the opposite chair leg and then snapped the other opening around his other wrist. Gazing upon Carlos lying with his arms stretched above him and sporting red fuzzy handcuffs was enough to make her heartbeat thunder louder than a violent desert rainstorm. She had never felt so in control.

How exciting!

"Okay, Sue, don't overdo it. I'm not sure Santa really meant us to use them. It was a joke. I'm pretty sure of it."

"Are you?" She bit her lip and rubbed her hands gleefully together. "I don't think the handcuffs were a

joke. I think Santa wanted to make sure I'd get my final and most important wish of all... And if you didn't cooperate, he provided the means to help me accomplish it with or without your help."

"Your wish?" Carlos swallowed hard as she straddled his hips and once more began to massage her clit against his saluting member. "Sue, don't keep doing that...I won't be responsible if something should happen."

She moaned and closed her eyes. "Something like what?"

"Like getting you pregnant. I don't want to ruin your life that way. I want you to stay with me because you love me as much as I love you—I don't want you to feel obligated to stay with me because of a baby."

"You really do love me." She kissed him passionately on the lips. "I love you, too. I want your baby. I wasn't absolutely certain until just this moment, but I know now it's *your* baby I want and not just *a* baby. Does that make sense?"

"It does to me." They kissed again. "Uh, Sue? Can you take these handcuffs off me now? They're hard on the arms, and I'd so enjoy caressing your backside while I thrust into you."

"Hmmm..." She rubbed against him with renewed vigor. "I think I'd like that. Okay, I'll release one."

"Both, please."

She grinned and shook her head. "You may get cold feet and push me away. At least with one hand cuffed I know I can keep you on this rug. Maybe I should look through the packages for a whip to help



you obey me?"

He laughed. "Those sexy curves can keep me on this rug. There's no need to use the whip on me. I surrender to your wicked, wicked ways, my beautiful love mistress."

"I surrender to your strength and love, my handsome sex god."

She quickly crawled over to the box with the handcuff keys and released her captive. Then with one swift movement she flung a leg across his hips, impaling herself on his erection. She gasped as he began the ancient rhythm with strong, solid strokes.

"Surprised?" He chuckled low in his throat. "You didn't think one of Santa's Little Helpers could feel so big inside you, did you?"

He massaged her buttocks, easing himself even deeper. Suellen moaned, swiveling her hips, drawing his cock in deeper still. Carlos took a nipple into his mouth and tongued it until it peaked. Her pussy muscles clenched about his staff as if holding on for dear life.

"Ah...you're so incredibly tight, Sue. I certainly got my wish. Thanks, Santa."

"I'm impressed how Santa thought of everything," she said, panting. "Everything so perfect... The man, the mood, the place. Perfect right down to how I've always wanted to conceive a child—on a bearskin rug in front of a fireplace."

"Yes, Santa's mind-reading abilities are legendary." Carlos suckled her other breast with gusto. She gasped as she felt familiar tremors

building low in her belly. He picked up the pace and intensity of his thrusts.

"I can read minds, too," he teased. "I think you're about to come."

Her breathing quickened. She tried to slow the circling motion of her hips, but they seemed to possess a will of their own. "No, I don't want to, yet. I want to...hang on until...you and I both..."

"No, problems. I love you so much, I'm about to burst any second."

"Oh, Carlos." A tear graced her cheek. "I love you, too. I—I'm about to..."

"No, we are... *we* are..."

They finished their sentences together with a lover's cry. Suellen tossed her head backward and arched her back as the orgasmic shudders repeatedly wracked her body. Blissful explosions detonated before her eyes. She went soaring through the heavens as Carlos lifted her high with one last powerful thrust, pumping his seed deep within her.

"I love you, Sue." He kissed her forehead as she laid her cheek against his shoulder.

"I love you, too."

Feeling safe and sated, they collapsed into each other's arms and dozed off.

Several minutes later, Sunshine's loud purring near her ear woke Suellen up.

"What is it, boy? You need some more of that fancy cat chow Santa got you?"

He meowed and headed toward the front window,

indicating he wanted her to follow him. Carefully she unwrapped herself from her lover's warm embrace and put on the cashmere wrap cardigan lying on the sofa.

"Oh, my goodness. It's really happening!"

Carlos sprung to his feet and rushed over to her side. "What is?"

She turned to him and smiled. "It's snowing. It's actually snowing heavy out there. Who would believe it could snow like this here, when just yesterday it was so dry and windy."

Carlos laughed, hugging her close as they watched the big flakes drift to earth. "That Nick! The man really knows how to give the perfect gift, doesn't he?"

Suellen patted her belly, then turned around to face her lover. She threw an arm about his neck and planted a passionate kiss on his lips, squeezing his bare buttocks with her other hand for good measure. "Yes, he does. Want to make doubly certain of it?"



That very next Christmas, the temperatures hovered around seventy degrees and not a drop of precipitation filled the skies, but Suellen didn't mind. It made it easier to get out and about with her newborn son Nicholas and her new husband Carlos. She wanted to take them to drive into the city to have their first family picture taken with Santa Claus at the mall.

There's always something magical about Santa

cradling a tiny baby in his arms, Suellen thought as they smiled and posed for their family photo. She sincerely hoped she and Carlos would repeat this tradition year after year after year.

Merry Christmas!

## Celine\*Chatillon\*

Celine Chatillon is the alter ego of multi-published contemporary romance novelist, Cynthianna Appel. Celine finds writing erotica a very pleasant departure from her day job as a small press manuscript reader.

Celine has released contemporary, paranormal and sf/comedy erotic romance tales with several other publishers. More stories of erotic fun and wonder are in progress or under contract at this time. Be patient, please.

Celine run an e-newsletter, a MySpace site, and a blog "Celine's Dreams". (Links at her main web site: <http://www.celinechatillon.com>) She may have other sites online, but she's mislaid them along with the batteries for her vibrator.