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Red Hot
Holiday
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Holiday eBook Freebie

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“Oh my God. They actually loved it!”

Joshua followed Alina into her office. “I told you they would. Who else in this town could do a Burlesque version of *Santa, Baby* but the one and only Miss Scarlet?”

A swish of sound, then she pressed against him. “Thanks to you and the band backing me up. I thought you were out of your damn mind when you told me to do a song and dance number for the Red-Hot Holiday party. But it worked.”

“From the sounds of the crowd, it more than worked. Did you really deep-throat a candy cane?”

“It wasn’t a big candy cane, and you know exactly how much I can deep-throat.” Amusement lined her voice. “I just pretended that I was giving you a private show.”

“Too bad I had that damn guitar in the way.” His hands roamed over her, taking in the smooth velvet, the fur trim, the expanse of skin between the bottom of her skirt and the top of her above-the-knee boots. “From the feel of this outfit, I understand why you brought the house down.”

“Flattery will get you everywhere.”

“Exactly what I’m counting on.” Sliding his fingers up to her chin, he guided her in for a kiss. She responded immediately, pressing closer to him, a pleased sound vibrating at the back of her throat. Amazement hit him anew that Alina Gregory, former exotic dancer known as Miss Scarlet and owner of The Scarlet Lady, willingly went home with him every night. Course, she’d told him that his hotness and manual dexterity made him irresistible, but he’d been the scruffy blind kid too long to really believe it. He’d wanted her so badly, like every other guy that visited the club, that it almost seemed like a dream that she’d chosen him.

Not that he’d given her any choice. He’d used every ploy in the musician’s playbook to get her, and he’d do it again.

She drew back from him with slow, lingering kisses. “If that’s the reward I get, I’ll sing for you more often.”

“Babe, you can sing for me anytime.” He unhooked her wide belt and opened her jacket, discovering more velvet and boning. A corset, of course. “You know what the best thing about you wearing these outfits is?”

“What’s that?”

“Getting you out of them.”

She laughed, then stepped away. “Then you’ll have to wait a little longer. I’m putting clothes on, not taking them off.”

“What, no after-work nookie in the office?”

“We had before-work nookie in the office, remember?”

“Yeah, but that was *hours* ago.”

A swish of sound as she came closer, wrapped her arms about his neck. “At home we have the fireplace, a nice thick rug, and that expensive red wine your parents gave you for your birthday.”

“And?”

Her lips brushed his ear. “And a shower, after which you’d also have me naked for the rest of the night. Don’t you want the feeling of my fire-warmed skin against that fake fur rug?”

“Home it is, then.”

“Home” now meant sharing his modified Craftsman-style home in Candler Park. It had taken him a month of gentle persuasion to get her to leave her high-rise single-woman condo and move into his single-family house. It had taken another month for both of them to not only get used to living with another person, but blending the domestic habits of one sighted person and one not. There had definitely been a period of adjustment, but he couldn’t imagine not wrapping his arms around her each night.

“I’m going to start a fire before the shower,” she announced as he unlocked the door and disarmed the security system. “How about setting some wine out to breathe, then helping me undress?”

“Just don’t start before I get there.” He hung his coat on the hall tree then headed for the kitchen and the wine cooler. Reds on the right, blush in the middle, light on the left. Glasses on the rack above, placed to mimic the wines. A bottle from the top left right of the cooler, a corkscrew from the drawer beneath, two glasses from above. Whistling *Santa, Baby*, he carried his haul to the living room, set it up, then headed for the master bedroom.

“You didn’t get naked without me, did you?”

“And risk your wrath? Hardly.” She put a hand on his left shoulder. “Besides, you have me laced so tightly it’s all I can do to breathe.”

“Hey, I stop when you tell me to.” He turned her around, started on the laces at her back.

“True. And sometimes I don’t want you to.”

“Lucky me.” He hadn’t been kidding when he’d told Alina the best part about her clothes was getting her out of them. It was a treat to run his fingers over her boots, discover how far up

they went, whether they zipped or tied or both. The stockings were always textured—a fine mesh, a lacy pattern, or a sexy seam with built-in garters. Discovering what type of garters she used, whether she wore panties or not.

He helped her pull the corset off, then cupped her breasts as she tossed the bustier in the direction of the chair beside the walk-in closet. She sighed, leaning back against him as her nipples puckered beneath his touch. “Ooh, baby, you’ve got such good hands.”

“And you’ve got good tits.” He dropped a kiss to her shoulder, then slid his hands down to her waistband. A snap, a zip, and the blip of a skirt fell to the floor.

She bent over to retrieve it, brushing against him. He gripped her waist, holding her close, enjoying the torture of the layers of clothing separating them.

She laughed as she straightened. “Somebody’s happy.”

“I can be a whole lot happier in about two minutes.”

“Only two minutes? I think you need a tune up.”

“I know exactly what I need.” He guided her to their bed, sat her down, then knelt before her. Again he reached for her, his fingertips skimming over her boots. Smooth, cool, slightly sticky. Patent leather. Reaching back twenty years for a memory of Santa, he imagined the boots to be black, the skirt, jacket and corset of red velvet trimmed with white. Alina’s trademark color, and no doubt much better looking on her than any Madison Avenue version of the Christmas Spirit.

Her stockings stopped at the tops of her thighs, the fishnet capped with satiny ribbon and elastic. He felt a tremble go through her as his thumbs slowly stroked the silky skin, moving closer to her core.

Then his fingers brushed something unexpected. “There’s a bow on your panties.”

“Really? I wonder how that got there.”

“Uh-hunh. Does this mean you’re my present?”

“Depends. Have you been a bad boy?”

“I’d like to think I’ve been really good.” He pressed his thumb against her.

She drew in a short breath. “I like it when you’re bad,” she breathed. “You’re really good when you’re bad.”

He hooked his fingers beneath the bow, pulling the silky fabric away from her. “Lift that beautiful ass before I rip these.”

His demand caused her to giggle. “After the shower, I promise.”

“Why?”

“Because I sweated my ass off onstage tonight, and I smell like *eau de club*.”

“We both do. I don’t care.” He didn’t. He needed her more than she’d know, probably more than he should. She’d become a habit that he didn’t want to break, and he couldn’t get enough.

He dragged her panties off, then began to stroke her, his fingers strumming out a sensual melody just for her. Her soft moans were the perfect accompaniment. He stroked out her pleasure, listening for the sound of her approaching orgasm.

“Sing for me, baby,” he urged, circling his thumb over her aroused clit. “Let me hear you come.”

Her breathing shortened as she flexed against his fingers, reaching for her orgasm. He felt it clench her muscles a heartbeat before she groaned, guttural and deep, before going limp.

Alina blinked as Joshua stood, already pulling his shirt over his head. The determined expression on his face left no doubt about what he wanted. What they both wanted.

“Don’t you want to take my boots off first?”

“No.” He shoved off the rest of his clothes, then leaned over her, aqua eyes glinting. “Just watch where you plant your heels.”

Gripping his cock, he stroked the head along her folds for several spine-tingling moments before pushing into her. She arched against him, carefully wrapping her legs around his waist. He settled deeper, and she moaned. “God, I love the way you fill me.”

He smiled, a sensual, teasing twist of lips that told her she was in for it. He withdrew then sank into her again slowly. Over and over he repeated the slow dance, driving her crazy, making her burn. His pace and the clear contentment on his face made it obvious he wasn’t in a hurry. She deliberately tightened her muscles around him, pulling a groan from him.

“Seems like I’m not the only one being bad here. Now I have to punish you.”

He made her whimper, he made her scream, he made her come again. It was the best punishment of her life.

Shampooed and showered, they finally made their way to the mound of pillows she’d thrown atop the faux fur rug in front of the hearth. They toasted each other, the band’s upcoming tour and her upcoming contest to find Scarlet Ladies for the club. Then she did her second favorite thing—lounging in his arms, surrounded by the comforting bulk and heat of his body.

He kissed her forehead. “This has got to be the best way to unwind, ever.”

“There might be a few spas that disagree with you.”

“Who cares? They don’t have you, so they’re missing out.”

He always said little things like that, and they always surprised her. She still didn’t know

why, except that she wasn't used to hearing those kinds of compliments as anything other than an attempt to get into her thong. Joshua, of course, wanted to get into her thong too, but he meant the words even when sex wasn't on the menu.

Six months ago, she would have never believed she'd be living with a lover, much less happily involved in a long-term committed relationship. Slowly but surely she'd finally grown comfortable in her own skin, comfortable with him, and it was all his doing. It was time to show him that his faith in her wasn't for nothing.

"I got you a present, but I don't want to wait until Christmas to give it to you."

"Really? Now my curiosity's aroused. What is it?"

She left him long enough to snag a small box from the mantel. She thrust it into his hands. "I know you're not big on jewelry other than your watch, but I thought you wouldn't mind this."

He made short work of the wrapping paper, lifted off the lid. She watched anxiously as his fingertips brushed across the twisted chain then found the attached pendant, the Braille imprint: "LOVE U 4EVA. LNA."

She took a deep breath. "I wanted to get you a nice present, but I also wanted to get you something that meant a lot. The last six months have been amazing, and nerve-wracking and the best of my life. I-I didn't think we'd survive two weeks living together, much less two months, but we have. And I just wanted to thank you for your patience with me and my learning curve and for not running away after you met my family at Thanksgiving."

"They weren't that bad."

"They were terrors, but they like you. They love you, and so do I. More than I thought I could. So I wanted to give you something that would remind you, every day, of how much I love you. It says—"

"I know what it says." He fell silent, his forefinger stroking over the Braille running the length of the pendant.

Anxiety turned to dread at the hard edge to his voice. She stared at him, trying to read his expression, but his hair had fallen over his eyes. Was he angry about it? Did he not like the pendant or the sentiment behind it?

She tried for a laugh, but it got stuck in her throat. "Guess I shouldn't have done that, huh? Next time, I'll stick with the autographed B. B. King guitar."

He thrust the pendant at her. "Put it on for me."

"You don't have to wear it, Joshua. And I did get other stuff for you to open when we go over to your parents' house."

“I want to wear it.”

Now he was just humoring her. He'd wear it tonight, and they'd have fantastic sex in front of the fire. He'd get up in the morning, take it off to shower, and then conveniently forget to put it back on. And she'd conveniently pretend that he hadn't just ignored her declaration of forever and stomped on her heart in the process.

Taking the pendant from him, she rose to her knees, shuffled closer to him. He leaned forward instead of turning around as she unclasped the chain. His breath feathered across her breasts, soft and warm. She'd thought he'd at least have thanked her even if he didn't say he loved her. Why didn't he say the words? He always said the words.

As she leaned closer to clasp the necklace again, he pressed his cheek against the rise of her chest. His hands came up to frame her waist as he stroked his cheek across her skin. Wordlessly he pressed her back until she lay against the rug. His eyes glittered in the firelight, his expression intense. She would have given anything to know what he was thinking, but she didn't dare ask him.

Pinning her hands to the floor, he kissed her, a long, possessive dance of tongues and lips that had her moving restlessly beneath him. He traced down the column of her neck with slow, meandering strokes of his tongue. Lick by lick, stroke by stroke, his mouth conquered her anew. Anticipation and want coiled feverishly inside her, sending tremors through her body. By the time he reached the juncture of her thighs, he'd reduced her to a trembling, panting mess of nerve endings and need.

He waited a heartbeat, then another, his mouth hovering an inch above her skin, his breath warm against her. Then dipped his head. All it took was one long, deep stroke of his tongue, just one, and she shattered.

He didn't stop.

The simple taste became a sensual assault as he teased and suckled her clit, thrust deep into her pussy. She thrust her hands into the thickness of his hair, trying to stay grounded, knowing she was moments from taking off again.

He didn't stop.

She gave a guttural cry as she arched against his mouth, pleasure stealing her breath. He moved upwards, unerringly thrusting deep into her slick walls. He claimed her hands again, his mouth hovering over hers as he stroked deep and sure and strong inside her. It was magical, it was intense, it was overwhelming. She broke, spilling out everything to him, giving him her body, her mind, her heart.

He didn't stop.

His name became a fractured song as he continued to make love with her with single-minded intensity. She didn't think she had anything else to give him; Joshua clearly had other ideas. A circling motion of his hips and her muscles spasmed, tightening around him, her sheath milking his cock. He thudded against her once, twice, then stiffened, a groan grating out of him as he came.

Slowly his muscles relaxed. He collapsed against her, all but crushing her, their foreheads touching. For a long moment, nothing but the sound of harsh breathing and the crackling of the fire interrupted the silence. Sweat beaded on his cheeks, his forehead, and she reached up to gently brush it away. A shudder went through him as he kissed her again, this time soft and gentle. Then he rolled them on their sides, wrapping his arms tightly about her.

The pendant lay between them, warm against her breast. She could hear the racing of his heart, the harshness of his breath, and realized she didn't need the words. Not when he could show her like this, love her like this. Besides, he'd put his heart on the line for her six months ago. He loved her. Whether that was for now or forever didn't matter. Here and now he wanted her, needed her even. And for now, it was enough.

* * *

The smell of coffee woke her up. She stretched the kinks out of her well-worked-over body, then realized Joshua wasn't beside her. Instead, he sat on the couch, still delightfully tousled but wearing long pants. The matching shirt was draped over the coffee table next to two mugs of coffee.

He still wore the pendant, and that encouraged her. "Hey, babe, whatcha doin'?"

"Watching you sleep." He smiled. "Listening to you sleep, anyway. You must have been exhausted. You didn't even move when I crawled out from under you."

"Yeah, well, between the show and the wine and the lovemaking, I couldn't do anything but sleep." She sat up to rub her hands over her eyes. "Ouch."

"What's wrong?"

She held her hand up, the blanket sliding to her waist. "I just about put my eye out with...oh, God."

Her left hand sported a new ring. A platinum band set with diamonds crowned by a blindingly large cushion-cut stone.

"*Joshua.*"

"Is something wrong? Did you hurt yourself?"

"There's a ring on my finger."

He frowned. "Don't you always wear jewelry?"

"Not this big, this expensive, or this much like an engagement ring."

"Oh, that. I seem to recall you asking Santa to give you a ring last night," he said. "Looks like he heard you."

She looked down at the ring then back at him, but couldn't tell a damn thing from his expression. Yeah, a line from the song mentioned a ring, but she hadn't meant it personally—the lyrics demanded a lot of stuff, most she wouldn't want if offered. But this... "So it's a joke?"

"No. I was going to wait until New Year's Eve. I thought it would be a good way to end one year and start another." He touched the charm hanging about his neck. "But when you gave me this, when I knew that you loved me, really loved me, I decided not to wait."

"Joshua." She shuffled over to him, wrapping her arms about his waist. "You always give me the words. Every night, you give me the words. Last night, I wanted to give them to you first and when you didn't give them back, I thought—I thought maybe you'd changed your mind about me."

His hand dropped to her hair. "There have been times when I wondered if I was pushing you too much, taking more than you were ready to give me. But when you gave me this... I couldn't tell you how much that meant to me. Not without bawling like a baby. All I could do was show you."

"Boy, did you show me." She stroked her cheek against his stomach. "I love you, so much. It just took me a while to figure out a way to show you that didn't involve us being naked."

"For the record, I love us being naked." He slid off the couch, gathering her hand and kneeling in front of her. "But I'd also love us sharing the rest of our lives together. Alina Gregory, will you marry me and be my Scarlet Lady?"

"Yes, if you'll be my blues man."

"Babe, I'm already yours."