

Jingle Balls

Sara Powell

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**Editor: *Pat Haley*
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Chapter One

"Fuck, Richard, I'm puking my guts out here."

"And this is my problem, why?"

Large beads of sweat rolled down Ed's face. "Damn it, I need your help."

Richard shook his head, grimacing when his brother stuck his head back in the toilet and puked some more. Ed *was* suffering, poor guy. Still, there had to be someone else who could fill in for him tonight.

A soft clucking sound came from down the hall.

Richard rolled his eyes and moved back out of the way as their mother bustled into the bathroom. She always thought she could cure anything.

"Here, dear, drink this. You'll feel better."

Moaning, Ed wiped his mouth with a warm washcloth and stared at his mother. "Anything I drink comes right back up, Mom. If you don't mind, I'd like to stop throwing up."

She smoothed his dark hair back off his sweating forehead. "It's ginger ale, dear. If anything will help calm your stomach, this will."

Richard snorted. Last time he'd been sick, she'd showed up at his apartment and poured cod liver oil down his throat while he was still asleep. He'd puked his guts up for two hours. But Ed got ginger ale. He crossed his arms across his chest. She always did like Ed better. He was her baby, after all.

The sound of bells jangling drifted up the staircase as the front door opened followed by their father's booming voice. "I'm home, darlin'. Where's my little sex kitten?"

Her hands flying to her mouth as she blushed scarlet, their mother hustled to the bathroom door. "John! The boys are home! We're all up here in the bathroom."

Richard cocked an eyebrow at his brother. "Sex kitten?" he mouthed silently.

Ed groaned and leaned over the toilet again.

"What the hell are you all doing in the bathroom, Abby?" John bellowed as his broad form filled the doorway.

Standing on her tiptoes, she kissed his cheek. "Eddie's sick, poor dear. He'll be spending the night so I can keep an eye on him."

Richard grimaced as his father peered over his mother's head and frowned at Ed. Then he switched his glare to Richard. "You boys can't take care of yourselves when you're sick? Why, when I was your age..."

"We know, we know," Ed moaned from the floor, "you puked out your guts in the morning, went to work, and finished puking your guts out after you got home that night."

"Now, that's enough," Abby said after another quick kiss, this one on her husband's lips. "Ed's staying here tonight in his old room, and Richard will fill in as Santa Claus for him at the Prior's store."

"Bullshit!" Richard growled as he snapped to attention. "I'm not dressing in a stupid red suit so a bunch of snotty, spoiled kids can whine to me about all the crap they want for Christmas."

"Richard Allen Cassidy!" Abby snapped as she whirled and stomped over to him.

Richard stepped back. Shit. She'd used his full name. That meant she was really mad. His mother barely came up to the middle of his chest, but she was still the scariest woman he knew.

When her finger jabbed into the middle of his chest, he stepped back again only to have his ass bump against the sink.

"Richard Allen Cassidy," she repeated. "You *will* fill in for your brother tonight. What's more, you will be pleasant to each and every child who sits on your lap. And if I hear of anything to the contrary, you will rue the day you were born."

He raked his fingers through his hair. "Damn it, Mom."

Another jab in the chest. "And who said you could use language like that to your mother?"

Behind her back, his father grinned at him. "Best do what she says, son. You know she'll get her way. She always does."

Gritting his teeth, Richard reviewed every obscenity he knew -- silently. Santa Claus. He was gonna have to be fuckin' Santa Claus. "Fine. I'll do it tonight, but that's it -- and I'm not working any overtime. Where's the freaking costume?"

His father's grin widened. "Downstairs in the closet. Come on, I'll make you a sandwich. Gotta keep up your strength to face all those kids."

Cursing under his breath, Richard followed his father downstairs.

Groaning, Ed put the toilet lid down and leaned his head against it. "I hope you're happy, Mother."

Smiling slightly, Abby patted her younger son on the shoulder. "You did very well, Ed. You could win an Oscar for the performance you put on."

Ed choked. "Acting? Who's acting? What the hell did you put in my food?"

"That's my secret." Another pat on the shoulder. "Don't curse, dear. It's not polite. You had to really be sick you know. Richard would have known if you were faking."

Moaning, Ed pushed himself to his feet, bracing his hand on the sink when he swayed and almost lost his balance. "It would have been easier to get shit-faced drunk until I puked. Richard better appreciate what I've done for him."

Abby chuckled. "He will, dear, in ten or twenty years. I wouldn't tell him before that."

Ed gulped the ginger ale. "Are you sure this blind date crap is going to work?"

A smile lit up Abby's face. "Of course it will. Your Uncle Nick promised it would. I've met Jessica. She's a wonderful girl, perfect for Richard."

Ed gulped more ginger ale. "I don't know, Mom. You know how Richard is about blind dates. Fixing him up with Uncle Nick's sister-in-law might not be such a good idea. Hell, we haven't even seen Uncle Nick since we were kids."

Abby patted her son on the shoulder. "Everything will be fine, dear. My brother may be a bit eccentric what with living in the wilds of Canada and not wanting to visit civilization very often, but he married a wonderful woman. And her sister is just as nice. Jessica's the outdoorsy type -- just like Richard. They'll get along wonderfully."

After another gulp of ginger ale, Ed shook his head. "Just promise me you'll never try to play match-maker for me."

Chuckling, Abby turned, sauntered out of the bathroom, and hurried down the steps where she caught Richard at the front door. "Smile, dear, tonight won't be so bad. You might even enjoy yourself." Standing on tiptoes, she kissed his cheek then opened the front door, hustling him out.

Red suit tucked under his arm, Richard cursed all the way down the street until he got to his truck. There, he tossed the offending garments onto the passenger seat, stomped around the front, wrenched open the door, and slid into the driver's seat. How in the world did he let himself get talked into this one? If he hadn't seen Ed puking himself, he'd suspect his mother set up some scheme to hook him up with some girl. But Ed *was* sick. The entire bathroom stank.

Snapping his seatbelt into place, he stared out the windshield. Playing Santa Claus. Him. Richard Cassidy. Probably the only guy in the entire US of A to have not one but two serious relationships broken up by Santa Claus. Well, some fucking assholes dressed like Santa Claus. Bad enough that Carla had broken up with him with the "jolly old elf" standing right next to her, but Alison -- what a bitch. Richard had walked into their apartment to find her boinking St. Nick three years to the day that Carla had dumped him.

Now, Richard hated Christmas. Even more, he hated Santa Claus. Except for the great meal his mom always cooked, the holiday sucked.

Sighing, he pulled out into the sparse traffic on his parents' street. His life could be worse. His mother could have decided to start playing match-maker again for him. Even worse, she could have found out that for the last five months he was the lead male stripper at Studs and Suds, the hottest club for women in the area.

* * *

"Nicholas!"

Sighing, the nattily dressed man with the neatly trimmed white beard tiptoeing toward the door set his boots on the floor and straightened. "Do you want something, my love?"

Hands fisted on her hips, his wife glared at him from the kitchen door. "Do I want something? Where do you think you're going?"

He smiled weakly. "Why, I'm just meeting the boys at the Moosehead for a pint or two."

Penelope stamped her foot. "The Moosehead? A pint or two? Who do you think you're fooling? You know very well that Jessica is coming to dinner."

Closing his eyes, Nicholas groaned silently. He knew damn well she was coming to dinner. How could he possibly forget his dear sister-in-law, Jessica? The woman who insisted on wearing an old bearskin coat and riding around in a dogsled like it was a Porsche. Blast and damn! And he'd been roped into the crazy plan she and his sister Abby had cooked up to get Jessica and Abby's son Richard together. Shit! He had so hoped he'd be able to sneak out before Penelope knew he was gone. Opening his eyes, he smiled at his wife. "I'm sorry, dear. It slipped my mind."

Penelope's expression was unconvinced. "Humph! I'll just bet it did. Now go on down to the cellar and get a nice bottle of wine."

"Red or white," he asked with another sigh. He was *not* getting one of the really good bottles.

She snorted. "Red, of course. We're having a nice beef roast."

Stamping into his boots, Nicholas headed for the door to the cellar.

A loud knock reverberated through the house.

Penelope wiped her hands on her apron. "She's early again. I must see to my roast. Get the door, dear." Turning, she bustled back into the kitchen.

Nicholas glanced at the fluffy white cat curled on the padded bench sitting in the hallway. "She's here, Sebastian. I suggest you go on upstairs if you want to keep your dignity intact."

The cat's ears flipped forward. His nose wrinkled. After a quick hiss, he fluffed out every hair on his body, jumped from the bench, and galloped up the stairway.

Nicholas shuffled to the door. "Lucky cat." Grasping the knob, he pulled the door open and stepped back.

A series of woofs, yelps, and barks, accompanied by jingling bells, erupted into the house to be followed by eight large, furry bodies.

Nicholas stood stoically as seven of the eight cold noses were shoved into his crotch one at a time. Then, all eight voices whuffed as each nose sniffed the spot where Sebastian had been lying. Anticipatory whines trickled out of eight throats as eight pairs of eyes stared longingly up the stairway. However, all eight dogs remembered how dangerous Penelope could be with a broom. All eight decided that discretion was the better part of valor.

A huge bundle of dark fur followed the dogs into the house.

Nicholas sneezed. "Why do you have to ride in a dogsled? Why can't you be normal and use a four-wheel drive or a snowmobile like everyone else? And must you wear that old bearskin!"

The fur fell to the floor to reveal a head of unruly honey-blond hair and a lush body.

Once her outerwear was shed, Jessica turned to her brother-in-law. "Nice to see you, too, Nick. Dogsled, huh? Isn't that a rather stupid question to come from a man who rides around in a sleigh pulled by eight tiny reindeer?"

Chapter Two

"What is all this racket out here?" Penelope called over the barking dogs. "Vicky! Into the study this instant or you all go back outside."

All eight dogs stopped barking. Seven tails whipped between hind legs and seven heads sank. The lone female, the white Malamute with one blue eye and one brown eye, woofed once then led the way down the hall and into the study. A fine, hot fire would be burning there, and Penelope would make sure they all had a taste of the dinner scraps.

"Well. That takes care of that," Penelope said as she turned toward the man and woman standing in the hallway. "Nicholas, didn't you get that wine yet? Well, hurry along. Dinner is almost ready. Jessica, how wonderful to see you again. Come with me to the kitchen. I have pies to get out of the oven."

Chuckling softly, Jessica hugged her sister and winked at her brother-in-law as he sighed heavily and disappeared in the general direction of the cellar. What a shock it would be if the world found out Santa Claus was henpecked. Of course, it might be more of a shock to find out he really existed.

"It's about time you came for a visit. I haven't seen you in a month of Sundays," Penelope continued as Jessica followed her into the kitchen.

Just inside the door, Jessica stopped and inhaled. Mixed with the delicious odor of roasting beef were the scents of cinnamon, ginger, and apples. "Penny, your kitchen smells just like Mom's used to."

Cheeks rosy with color, her sister turned to face her. "Jess, I think that's one of the nicest things you've ever said to me."

Smiling, Jessica shrugged. "It's the truth. So, you guys all ready for Christmas? It's only a couple of weeks away, you know."

Penelope set the pie on a pie rack and bent over to pull another from the oven. "Since when hasn't Nicholas been ready for Christmas? Honestly, Jessica. Why must you devil him so much?"

Jessica broke off a piece of pie crust and nibbled it. "Because he's so perfect, Penny. I mean, you married Santa Claus, for goodness sakes, just about the greatest guy in the world. And you've never had one negative word to say about him. Jeez, do you have any idea how intimidating that is? No wonder I can't find a decent man."

Penelope looked back over her shoulder. "Humph. You can't find a man because you're too particular. Not only that, you insist on wearing that God-awful coat to hide your figure."

The timer on the other oven dinged. Jessica grabbed a pair of potholders, opened the door, and pulled out the roast pan. "It's cold out, Penny. You want me to freeze?"

Penelope set the final pie down and lifted the lid off the roast pan. The mouth-watering odors of well-done beef and savory spices filled the air. "Freeze indeed. If you had a motor vehicle like normal people instead of traveling by dogsled, you wouldn't need that smelly coat."

"*Normal* people! Your husband rides in a sleigh pulled by 'eight tiny reindeer' and you say *I'm* not normal?" Jessica began fishing potatoes, carrots, onions, and parsnips out of the roast pan. "Besides, I like my dogsled. It gets me where I want to go. And what would I do with my dogs? No reason to let them lie around all day and get fat."

Grabbing the serving dish from Jessica's hands, Penelope set it on the table. "I don't know how you talked Nick into using his powder on them. Get the roast out of the pan. I want to make the gravy."

Jessica chuckled. "He was so head-over-heels in love with you, he'd have used that magic powder on whoever or whatever stood in front of him."

"Put the roast on the table and slice the bread." Jessica was pushed away from the front of the stove by her sister. "Now you're stuck with a pack of immortal dogs."

"Considering I'm immortal too, it's not such a bad thing. At least my pets don't die on me," Jessica said with a chuckle. "You wouldn't want me to be lonely, now would you?"

"Ha!" Penelope exclaimed as she stirred the gravy. "Find yourself a good man, feed him that powder Nicholas gave you, and you won't be lonely."

Brandishing the bread knife, Jessica grinned. "Find a good man, huh. You can't say I haven't tried. But, shit, Penny. An eternity with one man. Gotta be real careful about this. Not everyone is as lucky as you are. I mean, how many men are like Santa Claus?"

Penelope shook her long-handled spoon at her sister. "Most women don't take three hundred years to find a man."

"And some women couldn't find one in three hundred years no matter how hard they tried."

"Well, there's always Hiram," Nicholas stated as he walked into the kitchen carrying a dusty bottle. "He'd marry you in a minute, Jessica."

Snorting, Jessica set the sliced bread on the table. "Oh great, another party heard from. Nick, I am not going to marry Hiram."

Shaking his head, Nicholas wiped the dust off the bottle, fished the corkscrew out of a drawer, and opened the bottle. "Best let this breathe a few minutes." Turning back to Jessica, he grinned devilishly. "There's something to be said for a man of Hiram's stature. Pussy high, so to speak."

"Nicholas!" Penelope exclaimed as Jessica doubled up with laughter. "Mind your manners."

After Jessica's laughter settled to hiccups, she grabbed a glass of water and gulped it down. "Sorry, Nick, I'd like a man who can reach my lips while he's standing -- the ones on my face."

"Jessica! You're just as bad as Nicholas! Now sit down and eat your dinner. The both of you. And mind your manners. No more such talk at my table."

"Ah, hell, Penny," Nicholas growled as he wrapped his arms around her and planted a big kiss on her mouth. "The kids are both away at college. Who's going to hear us? It's not like Jess is a blushing virgin."

Jessica grabbed the wine bottle and poured three glasses. Lifting hers, she toasted her sister and brother-in-law. "Yeah, Penny. Besides, you're the one who always brags about being the lucky woman who gets to screw Santa Claus."

* * *

Pushing his chair back, Nicholas loosened his belt and sighed. Penny was a wonderful cook. One of the reasons he married her. Smiling across the table he winked. "Shall I fetch another bottle of wine then, my dear?"

Setting her glass on the coffee table, Jessica stood. "I recognize that look," she said with a wide grin. "It's my cue to leave so you guys can make hot passionate love here on the kitchen table."

"Indeed?" Penelope answered, one eyebrow rising. "The kitchen table you say? Not with all these dirty dishes about."

Nicholas grinned. "We could just push them out of the way."

"No, dear, we will not," Penelope answered with a wink and a grin for her husband. "Jess and I have to get going."

Jessica stared at her sister. "Get going? Where?"

Rising, Penelope smoothed the long, black wool skirt she was wearing. "We're going clubbing. We haven't had a girls' night out on the town together in ages."

Jessica fisted her hands on her hips. "And whose brilliant idea was this?" She glared at her brother-in-law.

He held up his hands, palms forward. "Don't be looking at me with fire in your eyes. It's not my idea."

Jessica slid her glance back to her sister. What was Penny up to now?

Her sister was smiling innocently. "Oh, come on, Jess. Like you said, Christmas is only a few weeks away, and I'll be too busy to spend any time with you. Is it so

terrible that I want to spend time with my only sister? Now, come on. Barry's going to drive us, so we don't have to worry about having a couple of glasses of wine."

Closing her eyes, Jessica sighed. Penny was right. They didn't spend much time together. It would be fun to go out with her. Opening her eyes, she nodded. "Okay, let me get my coat."

Penelope crossed her arms over her chest. "You will not wear that coat tonight. One of mine will fit."

For a moment, Jessica considered rebelling. If she couldn't wear her coat, she wasn't going anywhere. But then, when she took another look at her sister's face, Penny had her "don't mess with me" look on. No way would she give in.

Jessica felt her lips twitch. Penny did have a point. The coat did smell pretty gamey.

"Okay, I'll wear one of yours. Hope you don't plan on going anywhere too fancy." Jessica looked down at her sweater and jeans. "I'm not dressed as nicely as you."

Smiling, Penelope locked arms with her sister. "No. Nowhere special. Just a place called Studs and Suds."

Chapter Three

"And I want a new Xbox and lots of new video games -- the ones with lots of blood in them -- and a trampoline and one of those motorized scooters and a new red mountain bike and a pony and..."

"Don't you think that's enough?"

The little boy on his lap narrowed his eyes and glared at him. "What kind of stupid Santa Claus are you? You're supposed to say you'll get me everything I want."

"Danny! That's no way to talk to Santa," said the fidgety, gray-haired woman waiting for him.

"I don't care, Grandma. He's not the real Santa anyway. Everybody knows there really isn't any Santa. Daddy and you buy all my presents."

Brat. Richard closed his eyes and shifted his butt. The chair had a cushion, but it had been three hours since his break, and his ass was numb.

The boy slid off his lap. "I wanna go back to the mall," he whined. "This Santa Claus sucks."

"Are you finished yet, Danny? Did you tell Santa everything you wanted?" asked the smartly dressed woman who joined them.

That voice! Sucking in a breath, Richard opened his eyes and pushed himself back against his chair. Alison. What the hell was she doing here? He glanced at the boy. No way was he hers. She'd been practically engaged to him only three years ago.

Danny stuck out his tongue at her. "What do you care? You ain't my real mother."

After a stiff smile for Alison, Danny's grandmother grabbed his hand. "Come along, dear. Let's get some ice cream."

"I want a chocolate sundae and a Mountain Dew to drink."

Richard watched them walk away. *Just what that kid needs, more sugar and more caffeine.*

Alison sighed. "It's so hard being a step-parent." She glanced around. No one else was anywhere near them. Smiling, she stepped as close as she could. "Mind if I tell you what I want for Christmas, Santa?" Her smile was blatantly inviting. Her coat was open and her sweater was low cut.

Richard gawked. Alison was coming on to him -- well, to Santa. And she had no idea who he really was, or did she? Did she regret losing him? He glanced at the huge diamond on her finger and shook his head mentally. Nope, probably not. Time to enlighten her.

When he leaned forward, she licked her lips. Her hand strayed to her breast.

"You sure have a lot of balls, coming on to *me*, Alison."

She stared, then her eyes widened. "Richard? Richard Cassidy? *You're* playing Santa?" For a moment, she seemed nonplussed. However, she quickly gathered her composure and smiled at him. She hooked her finger in the neckline of her sweater and pulled it down to display more cleavage. "If you would have put on that suit sooner, maybe I wouldn't have left you. What more could a good little girl want than to fuck Santa Claus?"

Richard grimaced. Thank God that he hadn't worn this suit sooner and she had dumped him. Then the picture of Alison sliding up and down on a cock surrounded by a red suit flashed into his mind. "Did you even know that guy's real name?"

She shrugged. "It didn't matter. At this time of the year, only Santa matters. Now, since I've been a good girl, can I sit on your lap?" She looked around. "It's almost closing time, and you always were the adventurous sort. How about a little nookie right here?" She brushed her knuckles against the nipples pushing against her tight sweater.

Richard placed his hand in the middle of her chest and pushed her back. "With you? No way is my cock getting anywhere near you. Who knows what kind of diseases I'd catch."

Dumbfounded, Alison stared. Then she lifted her hand.

Richard caught her wrist before she slapped his cheek. "Now, now, Alison. You don't want to be a bad girl or Santa won't bring you any presents for Christmas."

Wrenching her arm free, she hissed. "You were a schmuck when I lived with you and you still are. And you sucked in bed. There were times I could have done my nails while you were grunting away on top of me." Spinning on her expensive, spiked heels, she flounced away.

Muttering under his breath, Richard sank back into his chair and glanced at the clock on the opposite wall. Fifteen minutes. Fifteen more minutes and he was done. Good thing, too. His show at the club would start in just over two hours. Then he was going to go to O'Reilly's and have a couple of good stiff drinks. Then, if he got lucky, he might even find some female companionship for the evening -- one who could care less about Santa Claus.

"Santa?"

Jerking his attention back to the present, Richard looked down at the small girl standing in front of him. "Yes?"

The little girl squeezed her hands together and looked over her shoulder. When she looked back, she smiled hesitantly and whispered, "I don't have to sit on your lap to tell you what I want, do I?"

Forcing a smile onto his face, Richard shook his head. "No. You can tell me from there if you want."

Her smile became less tentative. "My name is Lisa White and I live at 42 North Maple Street."

Richard leaned forward. "Forty-two North Maple Street. Got it."

She glanced over her shoulder again then looked back at Richard. "I only want one thing, Santa, please? Just a kitten. That's all. I already have a doll who I love lots and lots, but I'd like a kitten. Mommy says that kittens are nice, and they only eat a little so I can have one if Santa brings it. But she said that kittens are hard to find at this time of the year because they're mostly born in the spring. But you can find me a kitten, can't you, Santa?"

Richard stared at the little girl. For the first time that evening, a child hadn't asked for more than he or she could possibly ever play with. A kitten. Just a kitten. God, he hoped her mother found one.

"Well..."

"Lisa," scolded the small woman who scurried up to them. "I told you not to bother Santa. It's not safe for him to carry baby kittens in his sleigh."

The little girl looked at him, her eyes wide and pleading. "You know how to take care of kittens, don't you, Santa?"

"Ah..."

Her harried mother grabbed her hand. "I'm sorry. I told Lisa kittens were hard to find at this time of the year. We even went to the SPCA, and the workers there told her the same thing."

"Ah..."

Leaning forward, Lisa patted his hand. "I have faith in you, Santa. I know you can find me a kitten. I don't even care what color it is or if it's a boy or a girl."

"Ah..."

A gentle tug had the child stepping away. "Come on, Lisa. We have to get home. Daddy is waiting for us."

Smiling, Lisa waved to Richard. "Bye, Santa. Thank you for listening to me."

As they disappeared between two aisles of board games, Richard slouched in his chair. A little girl wouldn't get her kitten, and she'd blame him! Fuck. He hated Christmas.

Chapter Four

"Are you fucking crazy?"

Tanya straightened to her full five foot eleven inch height. "I -- beg -- your -- pardon." Every word was low and clearly enunciated.

Richard shifted his weight to the other foot but didn't lower his eyes. Tanya might be the bitchiest bitch he'd ever met, but she didn't intimidate him. "I am *not* dressing like Santa Claus. Santa doesn't strip for a bunch of drooling women."

She smiled slightly -- not too much -- her carefully applied makeup might crack. Lifting her hand, she stroked his arm. "But, darling, you already have the costume. All you need to add is this." She dangled a red and green pouch from her fingers of her other hand. Bells jangled when she shook it. "The customers will love it."

Shaking his head, Richard stepped back. How the hell had she known he'd brought that Santa suit into the club with him? Why hadn't he left it in his car? "No. No way. This is my last night. I'm Zorro, and that's that."

Her chuckle was downright malicious. "Read your contract again, sweet cheeks, although you went through it carefully enough before you signed it. You have to personify whichever character I choose, so tonight you're Santa." She tossed the G-string to him. Bells jangling merrily, it bounced off his chest and fell to the floor. "Now quit whining and get ready. Oh, your background music will be 'Jingle Bells.' I'm sure you'll be able to adapt."

"Damn it, Tanya."

Her expression became downright frosty. "Don't you 'damn it' me, Richard. Tonight might be your last night working here, but you signed the contract of your own free will, so stop the fucking bitching and go get ready. You're on right before Jeff."

Because she was right about the contract, Richard swallowed the obscenities he wanted to hurl after Tanya as she turned and wiggled her ass down the hallway to her office. So, she *was* still pissed about the day he'd turned down her sexual advances. And now he was on *before* Jeff, huh? He'd lost the headliner spot. Fine with him. Sooner he performed his set, the sooner he could get out of here.

Fuck, but he was glad he was finished after tonight. Some men might fantasize about dozens of women panting over them, groping them, sticking hands and fingers in places he'd rather not think about, but he could live without it. This last paycheck -- not to mention the money the women threw at him and tucked into his G-string -- would finish paying off the loan he'd taken out to cover his father's medical bills. So what if he'd lied to his entire family and told them the money came from his savings account. They didn't need to know he stripped for it. And the constant groping, poking, and prodding was worth the look of relief that had appeared on his mother's face when she knew they wouldn't have to sell their home of thirty years.

Sighing, he bent and picked up the colorful G-string. The bells jingled.

"Cute bells."

Richard glanced over his shoulder into Jeff's smirking face.

The other man held out something white. "Tanya wants you to wear this wig and beard, too."

When Richard didn't answer, Jeff shifted his weight to his other foot. "Look, I'm just delivering a message."

Richard grabbed the wig and beard from Jeff's hand. "A word of advice. Just because you're fucking Tanya, don't think you mean anything to her. The only thing she's interested in is money."

"Speaking from experience," the other man sneered.

For the first time that night, a true smile appeared on Richard's face. "Nope. I'm not. Sex with Tanya? No, thanks. I'd rather get in bed with a hungry polar bear. My chances of survival would be better."

Spinning on his heel, Richard strode into his dressing room and pulled the door closed behind him. Damn, but that felt good.

Then he saw the red suit drooping off the side of a chair. He looked down at the beard, wig, and G-string he was carrying. He tossed them onto the chair.

The bells jingled happily again.

Fuck. Santa Claus. Twice in one day. How much worse could it get?

* * *

"Now isn't this fun?" Penelope crowed. Mocha skin glistening beneath the lights, the man on the stage fell to his knees before them. She leaned over and stuck another dollar bill down the front of the G-string. "My oh my. Have you ever seen such muscular thighs?"

He grinned at her and shimmied closer.

Oil glistened on his taut body.

The tantalizing scents of expensive cologne, coconut oil, and male sweat tickled Jessica's nose. She dropped her gaze to the pirate's thighs -- at least she thought he was supposed to be a pirate. He had a gold hoop earring in one ear and a black patch over his left eye. He'd come out on stage carrying a curved sword and wearing a black vest and white pants. Neither had stayed on his body very long. Now all he wore was a black G-string that barely covered his family jewels. As a matter of fact, if he gyrated the wrong way one more time, his left ball would probably pop out.

Jessica sighed and shook her head. All around her, women were screaming and waving dollar bills in the air, their concentration centered on the man shimmying on the stage in front of them. Okay, so he did have a good body. She snorted. Okay, great body.

Leaping to his feet, he gyrated his hips above them, spun around, and pranced across the stage.

Jessica watched him go. And he had a damn fine ass.

Chapter Five

Tanya stood backstage and watched as Andre finished his pirate set, craning her neck as he strutted to the other side of the stage. Damn, but he had nice ass. Why hadn't she noticed before? Just the right size to grab onto as he pumped into her. Or... smack a riding crop across. She glanced up at his face when he turned and gyrated back across the stage. Was he into kinky stuff?

She stepped back as his music reached a crescendo. After one last twirl in the center of the stage, Andre planted his fists on his hips and stomped to a halt, his legs spread, his boot clad feet planted firmly.

As he bowed, Tanya blinked, leaned over, then looked more closely between his legs as he bowed a second time.

His left ball was hanging out of his G-string.

She licked her lips.

After his third bow, he spun away from the audience and headed toward her.

Tanya patted his slick, muscular ass cheek as he passed her. "Nice job."

His white grin flashed. "Thanks, boss."

She watched his ass muscles flex as he walked away. Oh, yes, that was an ass she'd love to spank.

She was yanked out of her fantasies by the merry rollicking music of Jingle Bells.

Dashing through the snow

In a one horse open sleigh.

O'er the fields we go,

Laughing all the way...

Jingle bells, jingle bells,

Jingle all the way...

Lips pinched together, Tanya lit a cigarette and watched as Santa Claus strutted out onto the stage, the bells sewn onto the red suit he wore jingling and jangling in time to the music.

Sucking in as much smoke as she could, she savored the flavor for a moment and then exhaled. Fucking tall, sexy, handsome, I'm-too-good-for-you Richard Cassidy was her one failure. He was the only stripper in her club she hadn't been able to lure into her bed, not even the night she'd cornered him in his dressing room while she was wearing nothing but a black leather corset, a silk G-string, and her thigh high boots with four-inch heels.

He'd taken one look at her, jerked on his jeans and shoes, and stomped out of the club bare-chested. In thirty degree weather!

Santa pranced across the stage, his coat hanging off one broad shoulder.

Shuddering, Tanya blew a smoke ring. He was the only one of her performers who absolutely refused to shave his chest and oil his body before a performance. She shuddered again. Damn, but her nipples hurt. She was too used to the guys who worked in her club being longer on brawn than brains. Richard Cassidy was something else entirely. When he'd first applied for the job explaining he needed money fast, and he'd work six months, but that was it, Tanya had been sure he was just like all the others. The bright lights, the eager women -- not to mention the money -- would be too much to give up. What a miscalculation!

She inhaled more cigarette smoke. Bastard. But she'd get even. Now that Richard had earned the money he needed, he thought he was too good for her, too good for her club. Six months ago, she'd let his dark eyes, rugged good looks, and hard body distract her. While he'd gone over the contract with a fine-toothed comb, questioning every vague clause, demanding clarification in writing, she'd been fantasizing how he would look chained spread-eagled against the wall wearing nothing but a tight, black jock strap. She'd practically creamed her panties right then and there.

Miscalculating a man's motivation was not a mistake Tanya had ever made before, and one she'd never make again.

Eyes narrowed, she watched Richard turn and saunter to the center of the stage. His coat slid off his shoulders, down his back, and puddled on the floor. He flexed his biceps then his abs. The dark hair on his chest contrasted sharply with the white beard he wore.

Dropping her cigarette, Tanya stepped on it, twisting her foot left then right. Then she turned and headed back to her office. Richard had a release form to sign before he left. And he was in such a hurry to get out of here that he probably wouldn't look at it very closely. She'd have him spread-eagled against her wall, totally at her mercy, if it was the last thing she did.

* * *

"My, oh my, oh my, Jess. Just look at him!"

Sighing, Jess pulled her attention away from the risqué prints hanging on the walls to the man posing on the stage. She glanced at him then back toward the print that initially had her attention then jerked her gaze back to the man on the stage.

Santa Claus?

He had to be kidding.

At her side, Penny sighed. "Nick doesn't have a chest like that. I can't wait to see his... er... other parts."

Jessica rested her arms on the edge of the stage -- Penny had managed to wiggle her way to the front of the crowd with her sister in tow. Jessica still hadn't figured out how, but the crowd of women had parted before them like a hot knife going through butter -- and watched as Santa Claus dropped his pants.

"Oh, my, my, my!" Penny muttered, her hands clasped over her chest. "He's wearing bells on his cock. Do you think I could get one of those for Nicholas?"

Jessica ignored her sister and devoted her full attention to Santa. Damn, he was hot, hotter than any man she'd seen in -- well -- about a century.

With one last shimmy, he kicked his pants off the stage into the shadows behind the curtain. As the chorus of “Jingle Bells” played for what had to be the twentieth time, he began to dip and gyrate. Jessica’s mouth dropped open as he jumped, spun in a circle, and landed solidly on slightly outspread feet. One thrust of his hips had the bells on his G-string jangling wildly.

Penelope nudged her. “Close your mouth, Jess. You’re starting to drool.”

Snapping her mouth closed, Jessica leaned closer. Damn, she couldn’t remember the last time she’d seen a man this hot!

Broad shoulders, a wide chest with a sprinkling of dark curls that tapered into a slim line down over his well-defined abdomen and flat stomach to disappear into the red and green G-string. His thighs were lean yet well muscled -- and long.

Her gaze continued its journey down his long legs. Tight black boots with bells jangling from the cuffs hugged his calf muscles.

“Have you ever seen such long legs?” Penny yelled into her ear. With the way the other women were screaming, Jessica wouldn’t have heard her otherwise.

Jessica concentrated on the red and green pouch between Santa’s thighs. Was it really that big or had he stuffed it?

She looked up into his face. Dark eyes concentrated on the wall behind her.

That piqued Jessica’s curiosity. All the other dancers had made eye contact with the audience, winking and teasing. Santa, here, even though his performance was hot and sexy, slid close to the salivating women in his audience only now and then, presenting one hip or the other. The green of dollar bills they stuffed there contrasted nicely with the red strings gripping his hips. No money fluttered from the red and green pouch between his thighs, however. He was very deft at sliding away from eager hands.

Jessica leaned back as he shimmied nearer and smiled. She was going to get a dollar into that pouch if it was the last thing she did.

Chapter Six

*Jingle bells, jingle bells
Jingle all the way.
Oh what fun it is to ride
In a one horse open sleigh.*

If I never hear this song again, it will be too soon. Richard deftly glided away from a woman who had tried to cup his jingling pouch. He whirled, took a step in the opposite direction, and faltered, covering his gaffe quickly with a dip and hip thrust. Holy fuck, that white-haired woman holding out a dollar and screaming how sexy he was, was Mrs. Fleeger, his mother's next-door neighbor. What the hell was she doing here?

Whirling again, Richard strutted away from the audience shaking his butt as he did so. Lifting his arms above his head, he shimmied and his bells jingled. As he lowered his hands, he double-checked to make sure his wig and beard were firmly in place. He also pulled his Santa hat further down over his forehead. Hell, if Mrs. Fleeger recognized him... What the hell was she doing here anyway? She had to be at least seventy-five.

Spinning around, he leaped toward the opposite side of the stage. Fuck, wasn't this damn song ever going to end?

Jessica swallowed once, then once more. When Santa had turned around and she'd gotten a look at his ass, the finest ass she'd ever seen, she'd decided then and there she had to meet him. No, not just meet him, sleep with him, bed him, do a little mattress dancing with him, whatever anybody wanted to call it. Lust. She was in lust, and at her age, she knew better than to fight it, even if it only meant one night in the

sack together -- which would probably be the case. No way would she meet Mr. Right in a male strip club. These guys were too wrapped up in themselves to be good happily-ever-after material. That didn't mean she couldn't have a rollicking good time in bed with one of them for a night or two.

After shaking his ass -- once to the left and once to the right -- he clenched his cheek muscles, one at a time, one after the other, time after time. Holy shit. She didn't know a guy could do that with his ass.

Sucking in her breath, Jessica swallowed. Her nipples were pinpoints of delicate pain and moisture seeped between her thighs. She grasped the edge of the stage so tightly, her knuckles whitened.

* * *

*Bells on bobtails ring,
Making spirits bright.
Oh what fun to ride and sing
A sleighing song tonight.*

Richard sighed with relief. There it was, the slight change in tempo. One more run through of the song, then a final flourish to just the melody, and he'd be finished here for good.

Leaping into the air, he spun around and pranced to the front of the stage, a smile on his face for the first time during his performance. He looked down at the crowd. *Goodbye, ladies. It was nice taking your money, but I'm not going to miss you.*

A classy, well-dressed blonde winked at him and jerked her head to her left.

His gaze traveled in the direction she'd indicated and locked on the woman at her side.

He stumbled, caught himself, and stepped closer. Who was *she*? Standing there with her arms crossed under her breasts -- breasts with nipples straining against the soft wool of her pink sweater. Standing there with a come-hither look on her face.

Come-hither look? Christ, Cassidy. You're losing your mind.

Still, she was good-looking, not drop dead gorgeous, but good-looking. Her mouth was too wide, her chin too prominent, the look in her eyes too obstinate. But they were beautiful eyes, a deep, chocolate brown with long dark lashes.

He centered his gaze on the top of her head. Never had he seen hair color exactly like hers, thick yellow hair with rich golden and honey brown highlights.

Damn, he'd like to bury his hands in all that hair while he buried his cock between her thighs. A quick fantasy flashed into his mind. She was naked beneath him, her legs wrapped around his waist.

Falling to his knees in front of her, he pumped his hips.

Jessica smiled. *Got you now, gorgeous.*

As Santa spread his thighs and thrust his hips forward to jingle his bells, she reached out and grabbed his pouch.

"Nice -- bells -- Santa." Then she stuffed the money she was holding down the front of his G-string, making sure she patted him as she did so. She grinned up into his face. "Yep, you got some nice bells, there, Santa. The North Pole feels pretty good too."

The pouch bells jangled when it snapped back into place.

He leaned closer. His voice was low, intimate. "Sweetheart, you have no idea just how good the North Pole can feel. But if you'd like to find out, meet me in my dressing room."

Jumping to his feet, he whirled away and disappeared behind the curtain as the last strains of "Jingle Bells" drifted away.

Shrugging into a robe, Richard pulled the hat, beard, and wig off, shoved them into the robe's pocket, and stepped away from the curtain at the edge of the stage. After watching Zorro's routine for a few minutes, the sexy blonde was talking to her companion, pointing toward the doorway that led backstage. He pumped his fist in the air. Yes! She was coming. The evening was definitely looking up.

"A blonde with about a ton of honey-colored hair will be asking for me, Don. Send her back to my dressing room."

The stage manager grinned at him. "Sure thing, Rich. Saw her."

Chuckling, Richard clapped the other man on the shoulder. Things were definitely looking up. "Thanks, and it was nice working with you. If you ever get over to O'Reilly's, tell them to give you a beer on me."

* * *

When the lights went down again, and Zorro leaped into the spotlight in the middle of the stage, Jessica watched for a few minutes. His performance wasn't nearly as arousing as Santa's, in her opinion. Most of his routine consisted of thrusting his hips toward the women in the audience or turning around and bending over, inviting them to grab his cock and ass. She sniffed. No class what-so-ever. The Santa Claus was definitely far more interesting.

Legs spread, Zorro slid across the stage, came to a halt before her, and pumped his hips.

She curled her lip. Enough was enough. There was only one man here who interested her now.

Jessica grabbed her sister's wrist. "Come on. We're gonna go meet Santa Claus."

Smiling, Penelope allowed herself to be pulled along. Things were proceeding exactly as planned. She tapped her watch three times.

* * *

When his wrist started to vibrate, Nicholas pulled his concentration from the British soccer game he was watching, and looked at his watch. Sighing, he clicked the remote and the television turned black. Best pay attention to the signals from his watch, or Penelope would never let him forget it. Scratching his belly -- it was expanding as it always did in December -- he rose and headed for the study. Time to hitch up Jessica's dogs and send them home.

His watch vibrated again. Stopping in the hall, he read the instructions scrolling across the tiny screen. Adjusting one of the ten knobs circling the face of his watch, he checked the time then sent a message back to Penelope. There. It was done. He just hoped his wife hadn't gone too far with her meddling.

At the top of the stairs, Sebastian meowed.

Nicholas smiled. "Not to worry, my friend. The dogs are leaving -- now."

Still smiling, he shuffled down the hall and opened the study door. "Come along, Vicky," he said as he patted the dog's head. "Penelope needs you to go home now."

Chapter Seven

"Richard. Richard!"

Muttering curses under his breath -- Tanya was not the woman he wanted to talk to at this moment -- Richard halted in mid stride and turned to face her. "Look, I already told you, I will not sign an extension to my contract."

Shaking her head and grumbling something about thickheaded men, Tanya held out a pen and single sheet of paper. "I know, I know. I've given up. Honest. This is your release form."

He cocked an eyebrow. "Release form?"

"It says your Zorro costume has been returned undamaged."

"Jeff's wearing it now. Looked okay to me."

Flicking the ashes from her cigarette, Tanya shoved the paper toward him. "Just sign it, Richard. Then you can get the hell out of here which is what you've wanted since the first time you walked in."

A warm, husky voice drifted over Tanya's cigarette smoke. "Excuse me? I'm looking for Santa Claus."

Richard smiled. His sexy blonde was here.

Grabbing the paper and pen from Tanya, Richard started to scribble his signature.

"Didn't your mother tell you to read the fine print before you sign something, Richard, dear?" her companion said.

His daydream of burying his hands in the sexy blonde's hair as he kissed the breath out of her dissolved. Looking up, he blinked -- twice. "What? Who are you? How do you know my name?"

The classy blonde nodded toward Tanya. "She just called you Richard. Now, before you sign that, read the fine print."

Hissing, Tanya spun around. "Get out. No one is allowed backstage."

Gazing over Tanya's shoulder, Richard stared at the two women behind her, concentrating first on his sexy blonde. She was standing with her arms crossed under her breasts -- and very nice breasts they were -- her nipples staring at him. She was grinning at the other woman with her. Damn, but she was even prettier when she smiled.

Her companion spoke again. "Really, Tanya, dear, you need to control your temper. And stop being so underhanded and devious. Honestly, you haven't changed since you were a child."

Richard switched his attention to the classy blonde. The resemblance between them was obvious now. Sisters. They were sisters.

Tanya stomped her foot. "Get out or I'll call the bouncers. Here, Richard, sign this and you can get out of here."

The blonde shook her head. "I wouldn't do that if I were you, dear."

Richard frowned. What was that woman talking about? Glancing down at the sheet of paper, he perused it. It was a standard release form. Wait. What was that at the bottom of the page? Squinting, he read the fine print.

"You bitch."

"Now, Richard, you can't blame me for wanting to keep my best dancer, can you?" Tanya said as she dropped her cigarette and backed away holding her hands in front of her body.

"You bitch," he repeated as he stepped forward.

The classy blonde laid her hand on his arm. "Let her be, Richard. Believe me, she's already suffering. Unlike you, she's all alone. I'm Penelope, by the way. This is my sister Jessica."

Ripping another cigarette from the case she always carried, Tanya lit it and inhaled. Blue smoke surrounded them as she exhaled. "Who the hell do you think you

are?" Stomping her foot, she yelled, "Damn it, Don. Where are the bouncers? I want these two skanks out of here now."

That got more than a grin from his blonde -- Jessica, that was her name. Pretty name for a pretty woman.

Jessica was sliding her sleeve up over her arm. "Skanks! Why you bitch. I'll shove that stinking cigarette down your throat." Clenching her hands into fists, she stepped toward Tanya.

"Jessica, no!"

Penelope moved to intercept her sister, but Richard was faster. Wrapping his arms around her waist, he pulled her back against his chest. Oh yeah! What an armful!

"Let me go!"

The sharp elbow in his ribs caused Richard to readjust his hold. Wrapping one arm around Jessica's waist, he tried to grab his arm with his other hand to lock her against his chest. Instead, he grabbed a firm breast -- a real breast. No silicone in this baby. This was the real thing overflowing in his hand. He squeezed it.

Her heel connected with his shin. "Let me go!"

At Richard's side, Penelope blew her bangs off her forehead and sighed. Some day, maybe in another hundred years or so, Jessica would finally learn to act like a lady. "Richard, why don't you take Jessica to your dressing room. I'll deal with Tanya."

As Richard hurried away with his squirming burden, Penelope reached into her skirt pocket, pulled out a small ball, and tossed it after him. As it arched above his head, she wiggled her fingers. The ball popped and a fine, white powder settled on both Richard and Jessica, became translucent, and disappeared.

Almost immediately after, Richard slipped into his dressing room.

The door slammed shut behind him.

A satisfied smile on her lips, Penelope turned back to Tanya. "Now, then, young lady. You and I are going to have a talk." Grabbing the other woman's arm, Penelope propelled her toward her office.

Once inside, Tanya stopped short. Penelope shoved her from behind, and she stumbled to a small settee, her eyes never leaving the two men standing next to her desk. Neither was more than four feet tall.

Penelope sauntered over to the desk, wheeled Tanya's chair out from behind it, and sat down. "Glad to see you got here on time, Hiram, Frank. Were you able to find what I asked for?"

The little man in the red coat smiled and nodded. "Yep. Found the perfect match in San Diego." Turning, he grabbed a pet carrier sitting on the floor behind him, lifted it to the desk, and opened the door.

A scraggly, wire-haired dog with a torn ear and half a tail scampered out. Leaping across the floor to Tanya, the animal sat down in front of her and barked.

She jerked her legs up onto the settee. "What the hell is that?"

Penelope chuckled. "It's a dog. I thought that much was obvious."

Snapping her gaping mouth shut, Tanya jerked her stare from the dog to Penelope. "Are you nuts? It's... it's..."

"Ugly, you think? Nonsense. He just needs a bit of cleaning up."

"I don't want him."

"Too bad. You're responsible for him now. If you don't take care of him, he'll be hauled back into a shelter and euthanized."

Swallowing, Tanya stared at the dog. "But why?"

"Because, my dear, you need something to love you, and he will, no matter what," Penelope said with a chuckle as she rose to her feet. "No matter how bad you feel or how lonely you think you are, he will always be there."

Tanya stopped staring at the dog and lifted her gaze to Penelope. "Who are you?"

"Just a messenger, dear. Just a messenger. Now, if you'll excuse me, there's a little girl who asked Santa for a kitten. She'll be getting it a little early, but that's okay." After a quick stroke to the wiggling dog, Penelope swept out of the door followed by

Hiram, who carried the empty carrier, and Frank, whose carrier held a small multi-colored kitten.

Chapter Eight

Richard tightened his hold on Jessica, spun around, and strode down the hall to his dressing room to the sound of jingling bells -- and sneezes -- from both of them. A quick blink of his eyes, though, had his sight cleared.

The woman in his arms wasn't as lucky. She sneezed twice more, which made it easier for him to carry her. She couldn't struggle while she was sneezing.

Two more steps and he reached his door. He shouldered it open -- luckily it wasn't latched -- and ducked inside. Once there, he kicked the door shut, turned to the left, and dropped the squirming woman in his arms onto the small couch pushed against the wall -- after another quick squeeze to her breast.

Bouncing on her ass once, she came up cursing. "You son of a bitch! What do you think you're doing? Let me out of here."

Richard leaned back against the door. Damn but she was sexy sucking in those big gulps of air which made her breasts bob up and down. He shook his head. "Nope. I don't think your sister wants you out there. Something tells me Tanya doesn't stand a chance against you, and she's the type to sue the pants off somebody who breaks one of her fingernails."

Glaring at him, she raked his body with her gaze. "You always display your wares so blatantly?"

Richard looked down at his gaping robe, which must have come loose when he held her squirming body against his.

Looking back up, he grinned. Was it getting hotter in here? "Only for you, sweetheart." He wiggled his hips and the bells on his G-string jangled. "Wanna add a few more dollars to the ones you shoved into my crotch?" Merry jingling filled the room as he gyrated his hips again.

Fists clenched at her sides, Jessica glared at him. "Shut up and let me out of here. My sister needs me."

The silly smile never leaving his face, he cocked an eyebrow at her. "Somehow I think Tanya will probably need more help than your sister." He wiggled his eyebrows. "How about a private show? Thought you wanted to see the North Pole."

A long exasperated sigh escaped Jessica's throat, and she wiped a few beads of perspiration from her forehead. Yes, she did want to see the North Pole -- and touch and taste and ride it too. But not before she made sure Penny was okay. But first, she had to get six feet of a sexy, almost naked Santa out of her way.

A bead of sweat slid down the side of her face. When did it get so hot in here?

Jessica let her gaze drift down his naked chest -- hmmm, nice pecs -- to his flat stomach and the thin line of dark hair disappearing into the pouch of his G-string. That pouch was definitely starting to look fuller than it had been. And it had been pretty full to start with.

She licked her lips.

She felt her nipples pebble, and warmth began to seep between her legs. Damn, but this guy was making her horny.

The Santa hat dangling from his robe pocket caught her eye. Sauntering toward him, she allowed a sexy smile -- at least she hoped it was sexy -- to appear on her lips. "The North Pole, huh. I must admit, I am intrigued."

A smile curved his lips, and a quick downward glance confirmed that the North Pole was getting bigger.

Stopping just short of plastering her body against his, Jessica flattened her hands against his chest. Ummm. Just as hard and firm as it looked. She swallowed. Did he taste as good as he looked?

Jessica slid her hands across his chest. What was it she wanted to do? Oh yeah, Penny. Something about Penny.

He settled his hands on her hips and she shivered.

The hell with Penny. She could take care of herself.

"So," Jessica said, as she ran her hands up his chest then down his side to the straps of his G-string, "just how big is the North Pole?" She pulled the Santa hat out of his pocket.

"Judge for yourself," he said as he cupped her ass cheeks with his big hands and pulled her tight against his hips.

A small gasp escaped Jessica and she shivered. Hot damn, but this was one nice-sized North Pole. Lifting the hat, she placed it on his head, lifting her other hand to help settle it correctly on his head. "Well then, Santa, time to jingle those bells one more time."

No sooner had she settled the hat on his head, he spun around, pushed her against the door, and attacked her mouth with his.

Jessica counterattacked by stabbing her tongue into his mouth, then sucking his tongue into hers.

Their teeth clicked and clashed.

Groaning, he opened his mouth wider, his tongue dancing with hers. His cock pushed against her belly. Jessica moaned. Never had she wanted, no needed to have a man bury his cock into her so badly.

Somehow, she wiggled her hand between them, something she didn't think was possible considering how closely their bodies were plastered together, and grabbed his cock. Circling the head, she caressed it then slid her hand down its long, rock-hard length.

Moisture pooling between her thighs, she shuddered with the anticipation of his cock buried in her.

"Fuck," he moaned into her mouth. "You're gonna make me come too soon."

"Off. Get this damn thing off," she demanded against his mouth as she jerked the G-string to the side and his cock sprang free. "Oh, gods, yes." She fell to her knees, immediately sucking his cock into her mouth.

"Oh fuck," he groaned, spreading his legs and tilting his head back.

He thrust his hips forward, and she sucked him in. His cock slid into her throat.

As Jessica slid her tongue around him, she freed his balls and rolled them in her hands.

For a few seconds, his entire body stiffened. Then, grabbing her shoulders, he pulled his cock out of her mouth, slipped his hands under her arms, and lifted her back to her feet. "Clothes. Off. Now."

He didn't wait for her to strip. Shoving her sweater up over her breasts, he popped the clasp on the front of her bra, bent over, nipped a taut nipple, then sucked it into his mouth.

When his teeth closed on her already tender nipple, Jessica pounded her fist against the door, and the loud thud echoed around the room. Oh, gods, when had she ever wanted a man so much!

She tore at the buttons on her jeans, popping a few in the process. Shoving the jeans down over her hips, she grabbed his cock again.

When he buried his hand between her thighs, she arched into it, and his fingers slipped inside of her. She ground down against them.

"Fuck, you're wet."

Nuzzling the ball of the Santa hat out of her way, Jessica nipped his earlobe. "I want you, inside me, now!"

She spread her legs wider, cursing with frustration when the jeans tangled around her ankles wouldn't let her lift her leg to wrap around his hips. There were drawbacks to wearing boots.

Her tangled jeans weren't a hindrance to Richard. Cupping her ass, he lifted her against the door, and using his knee to spread her thighs as wide as he could, he dropped her onto his steel-hard cock.

Wrapping her arms around his neck, Jessica sobbed into his mouth as she stretched to accommodate his thick cock. She shuddered when he lifted her and impaled her again.

"Yes, oh yes. Harder. Harder."

He pounded into her.

Her ass thudded against the door.

“Fuck, you feel great. Twist your hips. That’s it. Faster.”

Jessica nipped his shoulder. “Deeper. Harder.”

His fingers slid down the crack in her ass.

Pressure built.

Jessica sobbed. “Now. Oh, now!”

Richard swiveled his hips and thrust into her. His burning balls were tight against his body, and his cock was ready to explode.

She was squirming and bouncing against him, her tight, wet muscles grasping his cock far more tightly than any other woman’s ever had.

He couldn’t hold back.

When she screamed, “Now,” he surged upward one last time.

Darkness roiled around them and the lights went out.

Chapter Nine

Jessica woke up freezing. Well, her ass was freezing since her jeans and panties were down around her ankles. The front of her was nice and warm. Opening her eyes, she found herself staring into the face of the male stripper who'd been dressed as Santa, the man who had just rocked her world with the greatest sex she'd ever had. What was his name? Ricky? No Richard. That was it.

Her thighs were plastered against his.

His cock was still rock hard between her legs.

A cold wind slapped her ass.

Lifting her head, she looked around.

Snow. Lots of snow.

What the hell? Where were they? What the hell was going on?

Jessica shook her head. She remembered going backstage to meet this guy and running into his manager, a real bitch if there ever was one. Then all of a sudden, she was wrapped in this guy's arms, kicking and squirming -- and sneezing.

Sneezing? Angry heat surged into her face. Damn her sister and her love potions! When she got her hands on Penny, she was going to shove one of those frickin "love balls" down her sister's throat -- when Nick wasn't around.

She looked around again. What little light there was was rapidly disappearing. And judging by those dark, gray clouds on the horizon, more snow would be on the way. If they didn't want to freeze to death, they had to get out of here.

Sucking in a deep breath she shoved herself off Richard and pulled her pants up, fastening them as best she could since there were only two buttons left. Refastening her bra, she pulled her sweater down over her goosebump-covered body.

Crossing her arms over her chest, she rubbed her arms and prodded Richard with her toe thankful that she was wearing boots instead of shoes. At least her feet wouldn't get wet. "Hey, Santa, ah, Richard. Wake up. We gotta get going."

He didn't move.

Frowning, Jessica bent down, grabbed his shoulder, and shook him. The shoulder of his robe was damp. "Shit. The back of his robe is soaking wet -- snow melted from his body heat, I'll bet. If we don't find some shelter real quick, he's gonna freeze to death."

Another shake and he groaned.

"Come on, Richard. Get up. You gotta move."

After a louder groan, his eyes fluttered open. Lifting his hand, he flattened his palm against his head. "What hit me?"

Reaching down, Jessica grabbed his wrist and jerked it. "Come on, sexy. If you don't get up now, you'll freeze to death."

Comprehension appeared in his eyes at the exact moment he shivered. Leaping to his feet, he quickly closed the front of his robe only to yelp an expletive when the icy cold back stretched across his skin. He shrugged it off, only to yelp and pull it on again when a blast of icy wind whirled around his body.

A wild look in his eyes, he spun in a circle, finally stopping to stare into her face. "What the hell is going on?"

Arms crossed over her chest, Jessica hugged herself. At least she had dry clothes. Richard only had that wet robe, a jingle-belled G-string, thin black boots with more bells, and his Santa hat. Not much to keep a big man warm.

"Damn it! Where the fuck are we?"

Jessica shivered. He definitely wasn't going to like the answer. "North Pole."

Richard gasped as another blast of freezing wind plastered his wet robe against his back. North Pole. What kind of joke was this? "Look, lady, I wanted to get into your pants as much as you wanted to get into mine, but this has gone far enough. Call off this joke. Now!"

Rubbing her arms, she shivered and stared at him. "I wish it were that easy. This is no joke, and this is not the place to explain anything. Come on. We gotta start walking before we freeze to death." Turning, she struggled through the knee deep snow toward...

Richard looked around. Toward what? He couldn't see anything but snow and gray sky. How the hell did she know which way to go?

Another blast of wind and another shiver. His teeth began to chatter. Fuck. He was going to freeze to death. At least walking was better than waiting to die. He surged after her, doing his best to ignore the clammy robe clinging to his back and the numbness that was already deadening his fingers and toes.

"Where are we going?"

"West."

"How do you know?"

She looked back over her shoulder. "Because I live here."

"Here? In the middle of nowhere?" He shivered and slapped his hands against his arms. Fuck but it was cold. He could feel his balls and cock contracting, trying to bury themselves back in his body. And -- he was getting tired, way too tired.

Jessica trudged along in front of him, a shiver rolling from her shoulders to her ass every few steps. If he weren't so damn cold, he'd really appreciate the way it shimmied.

Her voice drifted back to him. "I like it here. Nobody bothers me." She held up her hand. "Do you hear that?"

He stopped and sucked cold air into his heaving lungs. "What?"

"Shhhh. Listen."

At first, Richard only heard the wind howling. Then, though, another sound reached his ears. Bells. Jingle bells. Closing his eyes, he shook his head. This was it then. He was dying -- freezing to death somewhere in the middle of nowhere, and God only knew how he'd gotten here in the first place.

The bells got louder and he opened his eyes.

Jessica was jumping up and down, the tiny part of his brain not thinking exclusively about survival enjoying the way her breasts bounced.

"Here! Over here! Dashiell, Danny, Prankster, and Vicky. Compass, Cueball, Donny, and Blister."

Richard shook his head. He had to be hearing things. She was calling Santa's reindeer.

Then he began to laugh. That explained it. This was a crazy nightmare. He wasn't really dying. In another few minutes he'd wake up with one hell of a hangover. Yep, he'd had too much to drink last night and was paying for it with a goofy nightmare.

Jessica continued to jump up and down.

Richard cocked his head to the side and watched her breasts. May as well enjoy the one good part of this nightmare.

But the jangling of bells grew louder and interrupted his musings. Pulling his gaze from Jessica's bouncing breasts, he stared at the dark shape that grew larger as it approached. Wind gusted toward them, carrying the sound not only of jingling bells but also of barking dogs.

A dogsled? Richard forced his freezing cheeks into a grin. They were saved.

Soon he could make out the individual dogs -- mostly gray and black mixes except for the leader. That one was completely white and almost invisible against the snow.

Jessica fell to her knees and wrapped her arms around the white dog's neck. "Vicky, I have never been so happy to see you. Good girl."

Pushing herself back to her feet, she stumbled to the side of the sled and pulled out something big, dark, and, thanks to a gust of wind tumbling in Richard's direction, smelly.

"Richard," she called after she'd disappeared into it, "get over here. There are plenty of blankets on the sled. We have to get warm, and Vicky will have us home in no time."

After a few seconds, he stumbled toward the sound of her voice. So what if Jessica had just turned into a smelly bear. That seemed to be a logical state of affairs for this particular nightmare.

"Shit, Richard," the bear said, "you're freezing. Get that wet robe off and get into the sled."

He stood grinning at her. It wasn't that cold anymore; and damn, but that bear had a sexy voice.

Muttering blasphemies, she grabbed him, jerked his robe off, and pushed him down on the blankets piled in the sled.

Richard grinned at her. What did she want with his wet robe?

She cursed again. Shrugging out of her coat, she slid into the sled next to him, sucking in a shocked breath as she came in contact with his icy skin. Richard tried to move over. Pulling her bearskin coat over them, she tucked it in around them.

He yawned. When had he ever felt so tired? Must have been the great sex. Smiling, he closed his eyes. A short nap was just what he needed.

"Vicky," she called. "Take us home. Now! Mush!"

All eight dogs barked and surged forward.

"Don't worry," she said as she pulled the coat up over their faces to shut out the icy wind. "Vicky and the other dogs will get us home all right. She's been traveling this same trail for three hundred years."

Eyes closed, Richard smiled and nodded. Three hundred years. Nice to know they wouldn't get lost.

Chapter Ten

"Come on, big boy, we're home."

Jessica shook the sleeping man's shoulder. Halfway home, he'd finally stopped shivering and gone to sleep. Not a good thing considering how cold he still was, but he had warmed up a bit, and his breathing had remained steady.

"Wake up, Richard. You're too big for me to carry."

"Fucking Santa," he mumbled. "I hate Santa."

"Need some help, Jessica?"

A sigh of relief escaped Jessica as she turned around. Good old Nick. He always sent a couple of his employees over with a Christmas tree. Thank goodness they'd chosen to come with it today.

"I sure could, Jack. Could you dump this guy in the hot tub for me? It's the quickest way I know to thaw him out."

Grinning from pointy ear to pointy ear, the short man grabbed Richard by the wrist and yanked him out of the sled. "What kind of moron roams around the Arctic in the middle of winter mostly naked?"

She didn't answer. The last thing she needed was for Jack to find out Penny had bonked them with a couple of love balls. All elves were hopeless gossips, and Jack was one of the worst.

"Who else is here?"

"Evan," he answered as he draped Richard over his shoulders and headed into the house.

Jessica sighed with relief again. Her dogs liked Evan. He could get them unhitched and fed and the sled put away while she took care of her guest. She didn't want Richard to lose a couple of fingers or toes to frostbite.

She nodded as Evan walked out of the house. "Hey, Jess, Jack said you were home. Hell of a package you brought with you. Once he's thawed out, I'm sure Greta would be glad to take him off your hands."

Grabbing her bearskin, Jessica smiled. Greta would take anything with a cock dangling between his legs off anybody's hands. "I'll keep that in mind. First, though, I gotta make sure frostbite hasn't set in. Losing a few digits wouldn't do Greta any good now, would it?"

Jessica chuckled as Evan roared with laughter and led the dogs around the corner of the house. Then, her bearskin wrapped around her, she stumbled up the steps onto her front porch and shuffled into the house. Gods, but she was tired. First dog sledding to Penny's, then that wild ride to Seattle. Then some wild sex.

She smiled.

Wild, hot sex. Wild, hot, uninhibited sex with a wild, hot, uninhibited guy.

But that magic moonbeam ride afterwards! Shit. Wait until she got her hands on Penny -- dropping the two of them in the middle of the Arctic barely dressed. What had her sister been thinking?

Dropping her bearskin on the living room floor, Jessica yawned, stretched, and headed into the kitchen. Once there, she inhaled and smiled. Spiced cider was heating on the stove. Lord but that was going to taste good.

Jack stomped into the kitchen followed closely by Evan. "Your gentleman friend woke up real fast as soon as his ass hit the hot water. I dumped some brandy down his throat, and now he's out there cursing a blue streak. Evan fed the dogs, so we're outta here. Tree's up, but you have to decorate it yourself this year. Nick got a back order for more wooden blocks, of all things. Whole crew is working overtime."

Smiling, Jessica nodded. "Thanks, guys. I appreciate your help. Oh, thanks for the cider. I need it."

Chuckling, Evan jerked his chin toward the back door. "So does he. Pins and needles were just starting in his fingers and toes. I learned a few new curse words. Didn't think there were any more for me to learn. Thank him for me."

Laughing, both men trotted through the living room and out the front door. The roar of a snowmobile soon filled the night, only to eventually disappear as they headed for home.

After another yawn, Jessica poured two mugs of cider, dropped a cinnamon stick in each, and headed out the back door.

* * *

Gritting his teeth against the sharp pain in his fingers and toes, Richard pulled his sopping G-string off, dropped it over the side of the hot tub -- it landed with a soggy jangle -- and examined his surroundings. He sat in a cedar hot tub on a nice-sized deck behind a log cabin. A line of pine trees about 100 feet away circled the yard behind him, and he could just make out the roof of a shed to the left of the cabin. Above his head, the heavy gray clouds had blown away without dropping more snow. Bright stars shone, and a full moon sailed across the sky. And all around the cabin was snow -- more snow than he could remember seeing in his entire life.

Blinking, he wiped his face with his hands. This was no nightmare. What the hell had happened to him? He remembered watching his brother puke his guts out. That hadn't been a dream.

Then playing fucking Santa at Prior's store had been too miserable for it not to have happened. First Alison coming on to him then that little girl who wanted a kitten! Not even his imagination was fertile enough to come up with both of those in one nightmare -- not even after a night drinking cheap wine.

Sliding deeper into the hot water, Richard leaned his head back against the edge of the tub. The club. He'd been there, right? Closing his eyes, he searched his memory. A picture of Tanya puffing on her cigarette appeared in his mind -- so did the smell. Yep, he'd been there. Did his last show. And then the bitch had tried to trick him into signing an extension to his contract. Thank goodness for Penelope.

He frowned. Penelope? Penelope who? And her sister Jessica.

Eyes still closed, Richard smiled. Oh man. Jessica. That was the one part of the evening that he was absolutely sure had happened. Hell, what a ride. She been wet and

wild -- wilder than any other woman he'd ever known. First, she practically swallowed him whole. Then when he'd been ready to explode, he'd pulled her up, ripped her clothes away, shoved her against the door, and slid his cock into her hot tight pussy.

He'd slid his cock into her.

Richard frowned.

He'd slid his cock into her.

When the hell did he put a condom on?

Surging up, he snapped his eyes open. What the fuck had he done?

At that moment, the door slammed open, and his hostess emerged from inside the house carrying two steaming mugs. The tantalizing scent of sweet apples, spicy cinnamon, and nutmeg wafted through the clear, crisp air to his nose.

She smiled at him. "Thawing out okay?"

He scowled at her. "We didn't use a condom."

The smile never left her face. "No we didn't."

He pushed himself to his feet then sat down just as quickly. The water in the tub was nice and hot but the temperature outside of it was below freezing. "We had sex -- unprotected sex. No condom. I'm sorry. I got carried away. I never forget condoms." Richard knew he was babbling, but the nipples pushing against the soft, pink wool of her sweater were distracting him. And she didn't even look cold!

"Aren't you cold? It's freezing out here."

She blinked. "What? Cold? Hell, but your train of thought shifts faster than an elf's. I am cold. I'm just used to it. And you don't have to worry. I'm taking birth control."

Relief washing over him, Richard leaned back and closed his eyes. Birth control. She was on the pill. All his muscles relaxed as he slid back down under the water until only his head was visible. Well, that was a relief. Then he frowned again. "Elf?" He cocked an eyebrow. "What the hell are you talking about?"

Sniffing inelegantly, she lifted the mugs, walked to the side of the tub, and handed him one. "Here, drink this. How do your fingers and toes feel?"

He took the mug from her and cupped it in his hands. "My fingers and toes are fine. Would you mind answering a question for me? Where the hell am I?"

Chapter Eleven

Jessica stared at Richard as she sipped her cider. Too bad Jack hadn't added a couple of shots of whiskey. She had a feeling Richard would need something stronger to drink than cider by the time she finished explaining where he was.

"North Pole?"

He snorted. "Try again."

She shrugged and smiled. "Okay, northern Canada. No one can live at the real North Pole. Too damn cold."

At the same moment, a chorus of barks and howls erupted from around the side of the house. The sound was followed by the dogs -- eight of them, big ones -- with lots of fur leaping up onto the deck. One of them stuck his nose in Richard's face and planted a sloppy kiss on his nose before he could pull away. The others went straight to Jessica.

Smiling, Jessica patted heads and backs. "You guys all have supper? Ready for bed?"

Richard stared at them. Eight dogs. Did she let them all in the house? "What are their names?"

Grinning, she answered, "Dashiell, Danny, Prankster, Vicky, Compass, Cueball, Donny, and Blister."

He blinked. "Why did you name them that?"

"To aggravate my brother-in-law."

"Brother-in-law?"

She nodded. "Nicholas. Most people know him as St. Nicholas. Kids call him Santa Claus."

He dropped his mug over the side of the tub.

Cider and spices rolled across the cedar deck. "Do you really expect me to believe you're Santa Claus's sister?"

"Sister-in-law. You remember Penny, my sister. She's married to him."

His face got red really fast. "What kind of bullshit are you trying to feed me? Quit fucking around and give me some answers, Jessica. What is your last name anyway?"

"Fenstermacher."

"What?"

"My last name is Fenstermacher. And you *are* in Northern Canada."

"And I suppose I got here in a sleigh pulled by reindeer?"

She shook her head. "No, only Nick uses them and only once a year. Magic first. Then dogsled. My dogsled."

Closing his eyes, he covered them with his forearm. "I'm fucking stranded in the middle of fucking nowhere with a fucking crazy woman."

After letting the dogs into the house where they'd fall asleep in front of the fireplace, Jessica swallowed the last of her cider and smiled. Then she began to laugh.

Dropping his arm, he stared at her. "What's so damn funny?"

After a final giggle, Jessica gulped in some air and said, "I'm just trying to see things from your perspective."

"I'm not laughing."

Cocking her head to the side, Jessica nodded. "No, you're not. But except for that goofy hat, you're naked in my hot tub. And, if I remember correctly, you are one fine specimen of maleness." With those words, she toed off her boots and socks, pulled her sweater over her head, unsnapped her bra, undid the only two buttons left on her jeans, shimmied out of them and her panties, then stepped into the hot tub.

Richard snapped his mouth closed. Maybe he really was having a nightmare. His gaze fell to her full breasts and the tight pink nipples that bobbed in and out of the water.

He shifted and spread his legs as his cock swelled. Nightmare? Nope, not a nightmare. This was one hell of a wet dream.

Before he could reach for her, she was in his arms, her lips on his, her tongue caressing his. Moaning, he sucked it deeper into his mouth and cupped her breast.

She shifted and tried to settle herself onto his cock.

He pulled her mouth from his. "Oh no. Not so fast. Not this time. I want to take my time."

A delicious chuckle welled up out of her throat. "By all means, Richard, take your time. I don't have anything better to do except sleep, and that can wait."

"Good!" Sliding his hands down her torso, he lifted her high enough out of the water so that her breasts were level with his face. Leaning forward, he sucked her right nipple into his mouth.

"Oh yes," she said as she wrapped her arms around his head and arched her back, pushing her nipple further into his mouth.

He switched to the other nipple.

"Are you cold?" he mumbled against her breast.

"Oh gods, no. I'm hot. So hot."

"Good." He sucked as much of her breast into his mouth as he could.

Bending her head, she nipped his ear. "You make me so hot, hotter than any man ever has. Fuck me, Richard. Fuck me hard."

Lifting his head from her breasts, he stared into her eyes. "Be glad to." Locking his mouth on hers, he dropped her onto his lap and buried his cock between her legs.

Planting her feet on the floor of the tub, she lifted herself off of him then impaled herself again.

They both groaned.

He kissed her between her breasts. "You're so sweet and wet."

She moaned. "Oh, gods, your cock feels so good! Deeper. Bury it deeper."

"Be glad to, sweetheart." Thrusting his hips up, Richard buried himself even more deeply. "Damn but you're hot." He slid his cock out. "Turn around. I'm going to ride you until you scream."

Shuddering, she did as he asked, resting her arms on the other side of the hot tub.

Richard probed between her thighs, first with his fingers then with his cock. After positioning her hips to his liking, he surged into her.

She clutched the edge of the tub as he withdrew and thrust into her again. "Yes, yes. Harder, harder."

Richard complied, water splashed around them, slopping over the side of the tub. Cold air surrounded his upper body. Warm water surrounded him from the waist down. And Jessica's slick, wet pussy surrounded his cock.

Gripping her hips, he thrust again then swiveled his hips -- once to the left, once to the right.

She moaned as more water sloshed out of the tub.

Her internal muscles clasped and sucked at his cock as he pulled back. They relaxed as he pushed forward. He ground his hips against her ass. His balls tightened.

She spread her legs farther apart.

His cock jerked inside of her.

"That's it, sweetheart, tighten that pussy. Hold me tight."

"I'm going to suck your cock dry," she groaned through gritted teeth.

Leaning over, he slipped a hand between her legs and pinched her clit.

She bucked against him. "Oh, gods. Yes. More."

Richard thrust into her again, pinched her clit again.

"I'm going to come."

"Come, baby. Come for me."

"Oh, oh, oh. Yessssss!"

As her internal muscles rippled and shuddered, Richard thrust into her one final time and exploded.

Some minutes later, Richard slid his cock from her body and collapsed onto a bench. Pulling Jessica with him, he wrapped his arms around her and settled her onto his lap.

She rested her head against his shoulder and smiled into his face. "So, what would you think about living forever?"

Chapter Twelve

Half an hour later, Richard sat before a roaring fire wrapped in his now dry robe and a soft, multi-colored wool throw with a mug of hot coffee cupped in his hands, staring at Jessica. She was snuggled beneath a gold and black afghan in an overstuffed armchair on the other side of the braided rug -- smiling at him.

Assorted yips, whines, and snores escaped from the eight sled dogs sleeping all around them.

Propping his elbows on his thighs, he leaned forward. "Let me get this straight. Your sister Penelope married St. Nicholas three hundred odd years ago. Since she didn't want to live through the centuries without any of her family, she convinced Nicholas to use his 'magic dust' on you."

Still smiling, Jessica nodded.

He glanced at the sleeping white dog at her feet. Her feet twitching, Vicky whined as she chased a rabbit in her sleep. "And you insisted on keeping your dog team."

After another sip of coffee, she nodded again.

Richard leaned back. He was in the Twilight Zone. There was no other reasonable explanation. Because, if he wasn't in the Twilight Zone, then what Jessica was telling him was true. And that wasn't possible, was it? Santa Claus didn't really exist, did he? People didn't live for three hundred years, did they?

Her chocolate brown eyes twinkled. "Richard?"

Before he could answer, the door was shoved open. The sound of jingling bells rolled into the room followed by a man wearing a red coat.

All eight dogs woke, leaped to their feet, and began barking their welcomes.

Penelope was a few steps behind, a large red and green shopping bag looped over her wrist. "Richard. How nice to see you again. I'd like you to meet my husband, Nicholas," she shouted over the general mayhem.

Before he could answer, Jessica was out of her chair stomping toward her sister, her braless breasts bouncing beneath her gray sweatshirt. "Dashiell, Danny, Prankster! Compass, Cueball, Danny, Blister! Vicky, take them all out for your evening run."

With a woof, the white dog complied. The other seven followed her.

Richard glanced back at Penelope and her companion.

Nicholas's eyes were glued to Jessica's chest.

A burst of anger rolled in Richard's stomach. Those were his breasts.

"Damn it, Penny. We could have frozen to death!" Hands fisted on her hips, Jessica glared into her sister's face. "And you!" she exclaimed, switching her attention to Nicholas. "What were you thinking to transport us into the middle of nowhere without proper clothing?"

Lips twitching and eyes twinkling, he answered, "I didn't think you'd be half naked."

"That's enough," Penelope said as she slipped an arm beneath Jessica's. "What's done is done, all's well that ends well, I always say."

Jessica snorted. "You never say that."

Bells jingling, Nicholas shrugged out of his coat. He turned to hang it on the coat rack but stopped short and wrinkled his nose when he saw Jessica's bearskin coat hanging there. "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, Jessica. Do you have to hang that coat in your house? It's a wonder the whole place doesn't smell like a hibernating bear's den."

Tossing her hair back over her shoulder, Jessica sniffed. "It's my house. I can bring in a hibernating bear if I want to."

Nicholas dropped his coat over the back of the sofa. "Well, don't ask me to help you get him back out again."

Still sitting in his chair, Richard listened to the banter between Jessica and her sister but continued to stare at the bearded man. Fuck, but he looked exactly like Santa

Claus was supposed to look, even if he was wearing blue jeans. But then lots of guys looked like Santa Claus. Still, there was something else familiar about him.

Setting his coffee mug on the table next to his chair, Richard leaned forward, studying Nicholas's face. He'd seen it somewhere before -- and not on a Christmas card.

A picture appeared in his mind, a picture sitting among all the other family pictures his mother had on the mantel.

His mouth dropped open. He snapped it closed, swallowed, and said, "Uncle Nick?"

Nicholas chuckled. "I was wondering if you'd recognize me."

Jessica looked from one to the other. "You two know each other?"

Richard continued to stare at the older man, so Nicholas answered, "The one and only time Richard saw me was when he was eight years old and his brother was six. His mother is my sister." Then he chuckled. "Well, not really. His mother's I don't know how many greats grandmother was my sister. Did you ever meet Anya?"

Jessica shook her head.

Nicholas shrugged. "She was a good ten years older than I, married, and living in Germany when I met Penelope. However, I have kept track of her descendants. It's a closely guarded secret, but one girl in every generation knows the truth -- that she's a relative of St. Nicholas. They explain me to their families as their much older, eccentric, antisocial brother Nick who lives in the wilds of Canada."

Shaking his head, Richard continued to stare at his "Uncle" Nick. Eccentric didn't even begin to describe him.

Richard leaned forward again. "How did you get here?"

Nicholas grinned at him. "Snowmobile. Snow's too deep for the four-wheel drive."

Relaxing his tense muscles, Richard leaned back.

"And I only use the deer on Christmas Eve," Nicholas continued.

Richard slumped in his chair. "I'm going fucking crazy."

Chuckling, Penelope leaned over from where she was now sitting on the sofa and patted his knee. "No you aren't, dear. I know all this is hard to believe, but how else can you explain sitting here right now?"

Directing a baleful glare her way, he answered, "Twilight Zone."

Her merry laugh bouncing around the room, she clapped her hands together. "You have the most droll sense of humor." Lifting the shopping bag, Penelope set it in his lap. "Here, I thought you might like some of your clothing."

After looking in the bag, Richard locked his gaze on Penelope. These weren't the clothes he'd worn to the club. "Where did you get these?"

"Your mother, of course."

"My mother?"

She smiled. "Well, how else would I get them?"

"This is fucking insane," Richard growled as he wrenched himself to his feet. "I'm stranded in the middle of nowhere with two women and a lunatic who thinks he's Santa Claus."

Rising from her chair, Jessica said, "That's enough. Thanks for bringing Richard his clothes, Penny. Nick, it was very thoughtful of you. But it's time for you to leave."

Stomach churning, Richard stared at the three of them. They were all nuts, him included. Still, he had a bone to pick. "I hate Santa Claus."

Chapter Thirteen

That brought all three of them up short.

"I hate Santa Claus," Richard repeated.

"Why?" all three chorused.

"Because he's fucked up my life."

Nicholas puffed out his chest, a very indignant look on his face. "I have not 'fucked up' your life! You got almost every toy you wanted when you were a boy."

Richard shook his head. Maybe he was nuts, but he finally had a Santa in front of him, he was sitting in a cabin somewhere in northern Canada without a clue as to how he'd gotten here, and he was going to tell him exactly what he thought. Rising to his feet, he stepped in front of Nick and poked a finger against his chest. "Because every time I got serious about a woman, she ended up fucking some asshole Santa and leaving me for him. So what do you have to say to that, you jolly old elf?"

Sticking his chin out, Nicholas stepped into Richard's finger. "Wasn't me, you young whippersnapper. Penelope'd have my balls in a vise grip if I fooled around. Not that I want to. Not a woman anywhere can compare with her."

Well shit. Jessica stared from one man to the other. Just what she needed in her living room, raging testosterone. Her gaze rested on Richard. Damn, but he was the finest man she'd ever met, and considering her age, that was saying something. But was the baggage from his past worth dealing with? The last thing she wanted or needed was a man dwelling on the lost loves of his past, especially since the real Santa Claus was her brother-in-law. Animosity could really screw up a family picnic.

Jessica shifted to her other foot. Besides, she didn't even know if Richard was interested in hanging around for the next millennium. Hell, she wasn't even sure if she

wanted him hanging around that long. Yes, they'd had fantastic sex, but sex wasn't everything.

Her lips twitched. Okay, sex was a lot; but, shit, she would like to have a man around who could carry on a decent conversation.

"Time for you to make up your mind, Jessica."

Blinking, she turned to her sister. "What?"

Penelope nodded in the general direction of the growling men. "Is he worth the trouble? Men are rather like children, you know. They have to be guided. It's a lot of work, but certainly has its rewards."

Sighing, Jessica shrugged. "I don't know, Penny. Hell, I've known him less than twenty-four hours. I can't make a life-changing decision only based on great sex."

Chuckling, Penelope patted her shoulder. "Never settle for anything else. Convince him to stay a few days. Get to know each other. If he's the right one, you'll know. So will he. Now, I better get Nicholas home before they come to blows. Santa has never delivered toys with a black eye, and he's not going to start now. Just let me know if Richard wants to go home. We'll have him there in a jiffy."

With those words, she stepped between the two men, grabbed Nicholas's coat from the back of the sofa, and tossed it to him, the bells sewn onto it jingling. "Time to go home, Nicholas. Only a few weeks left until Christmas, and there's still a lot to do."

Far more quickly than seemed possible, Penelope had them both bundled up and out the door. The loud roar of the snowmobile's engine faded quickly into the distance.

Richard stared at the closed door then down at the gaily colored shopping bag he still held in his hand. He shook it. When the bells fastened to the handle jingled, he cringed. "If I ever hear another fucking bell, it will be too soon."

Jessica's voice was dry. "Really?"

Dropping the bag on the floor, he turned to look at her. "Yeah. What's it to you?"

A devilish smile on her face, she held up his G-string and shook it. The bells jangled. "I was rather hoping you'd model this again for me some day."

He cocked an eyebrow. "Oh?"

She nodded. "Want to hang around a few days and get to know me, so to speak?"

A smile tugging the corners of his mouth, Richard stared at Jessica. Hang around a few more days? He'd already gotten to "know" Jessica very well, but...

A full smile stretched his lips... there was a lot more about her he'd like to get to know. "Are you ticklish behind your knees?"

She chuckled. "I don't know. No one ever bothered to find out."

Letting the wool throw slide off his shoulders, he stepped toward her. "And after I find out just where you're ticklish, then what?"

Tossing her long hair back over her shoulder, she slid her hands under his robe, scissoring his nipples between her fingers. "Oh, well, I could find out how many places you're ticklish."

Bending down, he brushed his lips against hers. "Then what?"

She stepped closer. "Do you like to fish?"

Placing his hands on her hips, he slid his hands under her sweatshirt up the soft skin of her back. "Yes," he answered before he nibbled the exact spot her neck and shoulder met.

Sighing, she tilted her head, giving him better access. "How about cooking? Can you?"

He slid his hands down her back, under the waistband of her sweatpants -- no panties -- and gently massaged her ass. "Nope," he breathed against her neck. "But I'm a hell of a Bar-B-Quer."

"Hmmm. That's great. Do you care if there's a little dust around the house?" She tugged the robe loose and slid it off his shoulders.

It puddled at his feet.

She stepped closer.

His erection nudged her belly.

"What dust?" he asked as he pulled her shirt over her head.

Both pebbled nipples got a quick suckle and kiss.

Jessica arched her back into his mouth. "Dogs!" she gasped. "Do you like dogs?"

He slipped his fingers under the waistband of her sweats again and slid them down. "Dogs? Man's best friend."

"Oh good. I have eight of them, you know." She shivered in his arms as he lifted her and set her on the back of the sofa.

"Yeah, I know. Dashiell, Danny, Frankster, Vicky, Compass, Cueball, Donny, and Blister," he answered as he lifted her legs and placed one on each side of his hips.

She locked her legs around his waist. Breathlessly, she answered, "They're good dogs."

He dipped his fingers between her legs. "They saved my life." He slid two fingers into her.

She arched. "Yes, they did. And mine too."

As he twisted his fingers, she gasped, "Richard!" and dug her blunt nails into his shoulders.

He covered her mouth with his and sucked her tongue into his mouth. Pulling his hand from her body, he probed with his cock -- once, twice, then slid into her.

She shuddered both inside and out.

As she arched her back, he lifted his mouth from hers and slid his hands around her sides to cup her ass. As he thrust, he pulled her closer.

Hot, moist heat surrounded his straining cock.

Did he want to stay around and get to know Jessica?

Hell yes.

Sara Powell

Far off places, exotic lovers... Sara Powell dreams of hot passionate love on sultry summer nights, festive fall evenings, winsome winter mornings, and sparkling spring days. Pictures, songs, or errant phrases will set her vivid imagination into flights of fancy.

Sara is happily married to a man who helps her embellish her fancies. She loves nature in all its myriad forms and can often be found outside in her garden or hiking through the woods.

Sara would love to hear from you. Email her at authorpowell@yahoo.com