



Melting A Frozen Heart

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Chapter One

Damn holiday, damn lights, damn city! Jack Forsythe walked past Rockefeller Plaza where the multicolored lights of the big Christmas tree twinkled merrily against the backdrop of the city. He looked at the skaters who were gliding across the ice like graceful moving art, and he felt the frown on his face deepen. *Why do they have to create such a big fuss for this holiday anyway?* he wondered. After all, winter was his, and instead of celebrating the cold, they made it into a holiday for his brother, Nicholas. *Santa Claus*, Jack scoffed.

A puff of cold breath left his mouth and formed icicles in midair before they fell to the cold cement and shattered. If they only knew that his brother was a fake, they would be less likely to let him have the last float in the Thanksgiving Parade. Nicholas had the nerve to actually play himself on the float instead of the usual Santa impersonators they had. Hell there wasn't even a Mrs. Claus, and Nick worked two days a year and spent most of his time in the Caribbean with the buxom natives.

They never appreciated how hard Jack had to work to give them their winter season. To let nature hibernate for next spring, the balance had to be carefully monitored so that when the weather changed the ecosystem stayed correct.

Achoo! Jack sniffed miserably after he sneezed. "Now I'm actually catching a cold. That's just great. Jack Frost getting sick."

Everyone who knew him saw Jack Forsythe, the Wall Street analyst who had a knack for numbers and for picking the right stocks to buy. He had made a fortune via the Internet from his North Pole home and had moved to New York to be closer to the action. The stock market was his hobby, something to pass the time. When the first chill came down from Canada, it was time for his real job. He was *Jokul Frosti*, fourth son of Odin and his mother, Joko. For this, he was the son of winter, and to everyone in the world, he was Jack Frost. The cold winds blew because of his will, and his heart was just as cold.

Jack sneezed again and muttered ancient curses under his breath. Who would think the son of a god would end up with a cold. He grew grumpier by the minute as he trudged along the street to his Manhattan penthouse. Finally, the peace of his building beckoned him. He walked through the revolving doors and gave a terse nod to the doorman behind the desk before heading to the private elevator that lead to his home.

Maybe I should go home for a bit, he thought, knowing that the instant he stepped foot into the cold climate of the North Pole, he would be free of the accursed holiday and the people, and he could walk the frozen landscape and find peace. It also meant he would have to deal with his mother and her love of the Christmas holiday his brother had created and with his father's disapproval of living in a city among mortals. So that idea was off the table as quickly as it had went on. Instead, he went inside, slumped on the leather sofa, and looked out at the darkening night through his skyline window.

Jack lifted his hands, and clouds began to swirl in the sky. From there, snowflakes formed and began to fall to the glass panes that let him view the heavens. Even though they were far away, he could see the uniqueness of each flake. He sneezed again, and this time, it affected

his weather magic. The clouds that darkened the sky became thicker, and it began to snow in earnest. Huge wet flakes that looked like soap foam dropped from the sky.

“Uh-oh,” Jack said under his breath. He tried to concentrate and bring the snow fall back to normal range, but it was not working. A full-fledge blizzard was forming, and unless he could get better, the city would be in for a ride. Thinking it might be best to head back to home after all, he tried to blink away to the Valhalla and maybe his mother’s chicken soup. He felt his body shift through time just a little before he flopped back to reality and his sofa, this time upside down and his head on the floor.

“Damn this! I think I’m really sick.” Jack spoke to no one but himself. He pulled his cell from his pocket and hit the speed dial to reach the one person who would come out to him come hell or high water. Maybe she would bring some soup.

* * * *

Lucy Pierre looked at her bright decorated house and smiled. *Things are coming along nicely*, she thought. She loved all the holidays that came in fall and winter, but by far, her favorite was Christmas. She had already gone to see the tree lighting with friends and had attended many holiday parties around the city. Tonight was her night to stay home and immerse herself in the quiet of her apartment and her own decorating.

She had a string of lights lying across the cushions of her burgundy sofa, and tinsel lay in a slivery blue ball on the floor. This year, her theme colors were blues, white, and silver to represent the cold and winter. Her apartment was going to be a winter wonderland by the time she was done. Lucy looked around with merriment in her heart while soft jazz with a Christmas theme played low in the background. She had a week off for winter, no work, no boss, which meant no Jack Forsythe.

Just his name sent a warm set of butterflies aflutter in her stomach. She had worked for Jack for two and a half years as his personal assistant. Booking dinner for him and the perky bubbleheaded models he dated. Or making sure the various charity events he went to did not drive him to the brink of madness. Keeping his stock portfolio updated even though she knew he could do it with his eyes closed. And making those pesky calls he didn’t want to take disappear. She was his go-between, and Lucy knew she did a damn fine job.

In the process of time, she had fallen for her almost silver-haired boss with ice-blue eyes. She had seen that cold stare go through many a businessman and cut them down when they thought they were more apt at the business than Jack. That stare that Jack gave and never even blinked when tears coursed down the cheeks of another model. These beauties bit the dust with a handful of roses and a simple good-bye. Jack could be as cold as the winter months that enveloped the city, yet she longed to feel his lips but dared not to take a step in that direction. He would break her heart, too, and those blue eyes that held no compassion was something she never wanted to experience.

She shook away the thought about her employer and went back to her decorating with a smile. Lucy was ready to dive right into a decadent holiday without a thought about you-know-who. *Dashing through the snow, in a one horse open sleigh.*

The jolly ringtone of her telephone reached her ears. Lucy looked around for the little cell, but could not find it. The phone stopped in midring just as she was deviling under the plush cushions of her sofa. The ringing started right back up again and sent her scurrying through the decorations and boxes to find it. The cat-and-mouse game with her phone kept going on until she finally found it under her pile of tinsel.

“Shoot, I forgot I was down there,” Lucy murmured with a frazzled smile. She flipped the now found cell. “Season’s greetings. You’ve reached Lucy.”

The only thing she heard from the other end was a series of loud sneezes then a stuffy snort. “Hello?” she said again doubtfully. “Is anyone there?”

“Lucy, I need you,” the husky voice said.

“Jack, is that you?” Lucy asked breathlessly.

“Lucy, I’m sick.” He moaned, and she felt her heart turn to putty for him.

“Well, call a doctor or maybe Mandy to play nursemaid. This is my vacation,” Lucy said firmly. She wasn’t going to let him get to her. *Be strong, Lucy. He is just your boss.*

“Mandy couldn’t nurse a two-by-four. You know that,” Jack replied grumpily before another round of sneezes took hold. “I need my favorite girl Friday and some chicken soup.”

“Uh-huh, since when was I your favorite girl?” Lucy asked. “You know some labor unions would have your head for asking me to work on the holidays.”

“But I’m not asking you to work, just to take care of a sick friend.”

“Its snowing like the Antarctic out there, Jack, and you expect me to come across town and miss my Christmas holidays to come baby you?” Lucy asked. “Plus you never decorate, and I love this holiday—”

“Lucy, I promise if you come you can put any amount of decorations up you want and make that egg drink thing and be as festive as you want. I promise!”

Lucy saw the merits of bringing Christmas to Jack begin to form in her head. A devilish smile slowly lifted the corners of her lips. “I can be as festive as I want?”

“Within reason, Lucy,” Jack warned.

“You just said I could be as festive as I want. You know this is my vacation you are taking away from me and . . .”

“Fine, fine. Do whatever you want. Just get your tush over here, please!” Jack begged.

“Fine, I’ll have the car service come get me,” Lucy said grinning from ear to ear. She would make sure Jack enjoyed Christmas, every last tinsel star piece of the holiday. “I think I might need two cars for the rest of this stuff.”

“Wait. What stuff?” Jack’s voice held panic.

“Toodles. See you soon,” Lucy sang out.

“Hey don’t forget the soup!” Jack yelled through the receiver just as she hung up the phone.

Lucy giggled as she packed the rest of her decorations in their boxes while dialing the car service and a few other places she knew would deliver. She made sure to order him his soup as well. She would have everything ready to go to Jack’s penthouse by the time the cars made it through the snow. Christmas was going to be coming to Jack in full force.

Chapter Two

The unexpected blizzard that gripped New York City has also affected Pennsylvania and Boston. In fact, this widespread mass of clouds has taken over the entire Eastern seaboard. The amazing weather system is expected to drop over two feet of snow in the next few hours and seems to have no intention of moving for a while. We are encouraging New Yorkers and everyone else who watches this station to stock up on food supplies and whatever necessities they need before this storm gets worse. Stay indoors and keep warm. It seems this is going to be a white Christmas after all. Channel Seventeen News reporting.

Jack looked at the television mounted on the wall in disgust. He waved his finger in the air and changed the channels with his magic instead of using the remote that sat in front of him to him on the coffee table. He could hear his cousin Loki's mischievous laughter in his head. How Loki would laugh when he heard about this one. *The winter god who caught a cold and fucked up winter across the world, a laugh riot*, Jack thought with irritation. Hopefully, he could get this cold under control before it got any worse.

At least Lucy was on her way. He could always depend on her. Jack thought of his assistant with the brilliant smile. She always seemed to be happy even when he was in a crappy mood, which was often. She was at least two heads shorter than his six-foot-two, and her cute baby-doll cut accentuated the high cheek bones. There was never a color she wore that didn't accentuate the sexy bronze color of her skin or the light brown of her eyes. Lucy was one of those women who was not just beautiful to look at, but she had a glow that shined from the inside. Jack had thought about getting her into his bed when she first started working for him. But he soon saw that her knack for dealing with him and his business was much more what he needed. *Plus knowing Lucy, she would have shot me down cold*, he thought with a small grin.

If there was anyone he trusted in this world, it was her, but he knew he could never show her the real him. She was good to him from the time she first walked into his penthouse and told him he would never regret hiring her. Two and a half years later, and she was right. Lucy was efficient and could wade through his muck of appointments and days like a pro.

He knew that he scared people, but she never took his shit. She would tell him where to shove it in a minute. He liked that about her. He could always tell her disapproval when a different girl graced his arm each week or when she happened to walk in to see her sitting around only wearing his shirt. But Lucy kept her mouth closed and did as he asked when he needed her to.

She was a friend to him in so many ways, but he knew she held something back from him. He just didn't know what. Her words on the phone flashed back into his memory. Why would she need two cars? Jack shook his head and smiled. Lucy was not one to go overboard with things. She was not the over indulgent type. That is why she made such a good assistant. He lay back and dozed while he waited for Lucy.

He was soon proven wrong, because as he lay on his couch covered in an afghan and sneezing uncontrollably in between sleeping, Lucy whirled in like a winter wind across the North Pole carrying boxes. Jack struggled to sit up and looked over the back of his sofa.

Behind her were the drivers and his doorman who she commandeered to help with her packages.

“Happy holidays, Jack!” Lucy sang as she walked in and dropped her boxes on the floor next to the sofa. She crouched down next to him and brushed his hair back from his forehead in a gentle gesture. “Poor thing, you are sick. Luckily for you, I have come bearing your soup and holiday cheer!” She turned to the drivers and the doorman who had deposited the rest of her boxes on various parts of his floor. “Could you guys get the rest of the stuff for me from the car? I’ll have your Christmas envelopes waiting for you when you get back.”

Jack listened to feet cross his lacquered floor, and his door clicked shut, but he looked at her though bleary eyes. “What Christmas envelopes?”

“Hmm, remember last year when I said you should give your employees a Christmas bonus, and you essentially said bah-humbug to my suggestion? Well since you said I could do whatever I want for the holidays, this is one of them.” Lucy crossed to his desk and pulled out his checkbook. She pushed his feet back a little before she sat precariously on the edge of the sofa. “Here. Sign these.”

When Jack looked at the check, his eyes widened. “Isn’t that too much? What are they buying, a new lung?”

“No, my dear boss. It’s Christmas. You didn’t even know your doorman had three kids. Well, now he can get them some fabulous presents, right?” Lucy said sweetly.

“Whatever,” Jack grumbled. He just wanted his soup and for her to take care of him. “What’s all this crap anyway?” He gestured to all the boxes on his floor.

“Why, Mr. Forsythe, this is Christmas. I even got a tree.” Lucy smiled brilliantly and made his headache worse. “I even got you some cold medication and some VapoRub.”

Jack groaned in misery and wondered if he had made a mistake by calling Lucy. She had obviously gone crazy by sniffing too much snow in a can.

Her happy elves in the form of drivers and one doorman came back with the rest of her stuff. Lucy thanked them and gave them their gratuity envelopes. The gasps of surprise and thank-yous were something that Jack did not expect. He thought the men would just take the money with greedy little hands and leave. Instead, when he raised himself up and looked over the back of his sofa, he saw tears shimmering in the eyes of his doorman, who kept thanking him profusely. The drivers just looked amazed at the number written on the check. Jack waved his hands at them for their appreciation. What was he supposed to say anyway? It was Lucy’s idea. They left talking among themselves, and Lucy turned to him with a smile.

“Didn’t that just feel wonderful? Did you see the look on their faces?”

“Yeah, whatever. Where’s my soup?” Jack asked crossly. The ache in his body was getting worse, and he started sneezing once more. He cast a glance outside his glass fortress and rolled his eyes. The clouds were so thick now that they blocked his view of the Empire State

Building. He turned just as Lucy took a thermometer out of her purse and gestured for him to open his mouth.

Jack shook his head, and she looked at him with one raised eyebrow.

“Nuh-uh.”

“Listen to me, Jack Forsythe. I am taking your temperature this way or at the other end. Pick one. You might be bigger than me, but you have to sleep sometime.” Lucy looked at him with her intentions written clearly on her face.

Jack got her meaning and opened his mouth with a mutinous expression of his own. His sweet Lucy had become Nurse Ratchet. She popped the thermometer in, and he closed his mouth with a snap. Lucy hummed Christmas music while they waited. All the while, Jack tried to make her uncomfortable with his glare. The instrument of his torture gave a series of small beeps to let them know it was time to check. Lucy pulled the thermometer from his mouth and looked at the digital readout.

Her eyes widened. “Jack I think you might have the flu or something. Your temperature says one hundred and three.” He could actually hear some worry in her voice now.

“I’ve been telling you I’m sick!” Jack said in exasperation. “Instead of soup in hand, you come with a bunch of Christmas . . . Christmas . . . junk!”

“I’ll have you know this is not junk, and I do have your soup,” Lucy said, outraged. She got up and walked across the room coming back with a bag and a container of hot soup. She poured out some green liquid from a bottle she got from the bag. “Open up. Drink this.”

Jack sniffed it suspiciously. “What is it?”

“It’s cold medicine, and it will make you feel better. I promise.”

Jack drank the liquid down, and then she handed him a plastic spoon and his soup.

“When you finish eating, go to bed and take a nap,” Lucy said. Her cool fingers stroked the hair away from his face again. Jack felt himself want to lean into her caress.

“Why? I’m not sleepy anymore,” Jack said between the warm sips of his creamy soup. It was not as good as his mother’s, but it would suffice. “I’d rather sit here and watch TV.”

“Oh, you will be sleepy soon. Didn’t I mention the cold medicine has in some sleepy time for Mr. Jack?” Lucy’s smile was radiant. “When you wake up, the apartment will be filled with holiday cheer.”

“Shoot me, shoot me now.” Jack groaned, miserable. No matter how he tried, it seemed he would never be able to evade this damnable holiday. It now came in the form of his unusually insane assistant Lucy Pierre.

* * * *

Jack was tucked into his bed like a kitten wrapped in a basket. He had grumbled all the way to the room and even as she cajoled him under the covers. He wanted attention. Lucy knew that. Jack could be as petulant as a child sometimes. But she loved the boyishness in him that he rarely showed and that few ever saw. He turned on his side and went to sleep almost immediately with gentle snores. Lucy had looked up to the sky, and it seemed even the weather felt relief at her boss's rest or cough-syrup coma. Back in the living room, she began to bring a little bit of the holiday cheer to Jack's cold and sterile penthouse. He kept it like he kept his life, uncomplicated by clutter, which made Lucy wonder all the more about the man he hid inside behind that stone wall he called a personality.

She worked for hours hanging lights and decorations around his apartment. She even hung stockings next to his fireplace and lit it to give it a homey feeling. One of the packages was a prelighted tree that she put together quickly. If it was in more than three parts, Lucy knew she'd be on the floor crying amid of its synthetic pine tree branches. She might be a whiz at keeping appointments, dates, and everything in order, but put her in front of anything with a set of directions and she was completely lost.

Lucy looked around at her handiwork before heading to the immaculate kitchen to make herself something hot to eat. The rest of Jack's soup was waiting in the refrigerator for when he woke up hungry, and she set about heating up some Chinese food, which was among her food purchases, that had gone cold. Lucy had made sure to come prepared after listening to the news before leaving home. As the weather channel blared on Jack's flat-screen TV, she sat down on the sofa and begun to eat. She stared intently at the screen on the wall with a spoonful of chicken broccoli heading to her mouth.

In that short amount of time, the blizzard had lightened, yet the forecaster was still worried. The mass of clouds over the city was still thick, but he was hoping for the best. Already a roof had collapsed on a three story apartment building in Brooklyn because of the heavy snow that had fell in only a few hours. One family would be sleeping in a shelter for Christmas. Lucy felt her heart break when she saw the mother and her three children standing in the street. They looked on helplessly as volunteers and firemen tried to cover what was left of their belongings from the snow.

I'll ask Jack to help them out when he wakes up. Maybe the drugging effects of the cough syrup will make him more charitable than usual, Lucy mused with a small smile as she took another bite of her food. Her boss wasn't that bad. She knew it, but for some reason, every time this holiday came around, he was in a bear of a mood. *Maybe he had his heart broken at Christmas time?* That one thought always floated through her subconscious. It could explain why he was such a playboy now.

"No, I'm sorry!"

Jack's voice reverberated from his bedroom to the living room. Lucy immediately dropped her food to the coffee table and ran for the bedroom door. She rushed in and saw Jack sitting straight up in bed with a blank feverish stare on his face. Lucy sat on the bed and brushed his damp hair off his forehead. He was burning up with fever.

Lucy soothed her boss. "Jack, it's okay. You're going to be fine."

He turned his ice-blue stare to her face. "No, I am going to destroy it all if I don't control it. Can't you see it's my fault!"

What's he talking about? Lucy wondered if he was still immersed in a delirious dream, but she tried to console him the best he could.

"It's fine, sweetie. Nothing is destroyed. Everything is okay."

He gripped her shoulder and shook her, and it sent a sliver of fear shooting through her. "No, it's not. The God of Winter cannot let the balance of the elements shift. It means the world is damned, and it's my fault."

"Okay," Lucy said slowly. She knew now he was definitely delirious from the flu. He thought he was a winter god. She hoped she hadn't overdosed him on the medicine she gave him. "How about you lay back and get some more rest? When you wake up, the world will still be here."

"Stay with me. Don't leave me alone," Jack pleaded.

Lucy couldn't say no to the entreaty. She kicked off her shoes and climbed into his wide bed. She got under the covers with him and gently urged him back against the pillow. She always wanted to be in bed with Jack Forsythe. Somehow, she didn't think it would be this way. Lucy covered him to his neck with the blankets and gently caressed his face until sleep claimed him once more. Lucy fell asleep next to the man who held her heart and didn't even know it. Before her eyes closed she stared outside the thick glass skylight, the blizzard clouds gathered once more as Jack's restless slumber reflected in the skies above.

Chapter Three

Jack blinked slowly as he surfaced into consciousness. He tried to focus on one thought in his head, which felt like it was filled with feathers. *Christmas, cold, soup, and green stuff Lucy made me drink.* It was all coming back to him now. By the gods, he never should have taken it. How would mortal medicine affect his abilities to control the winter? His nose felt like someone had stuffed it full of cotton balls. The pressure behind his eyes was like a steel vise. He had never been sick a day in his life. Not even as a child. Now at the age of two thousand and some change, he had a cold.

Jack felt something shift beside him and heard a gentle snore. He looked over to see Lucy still in her clothes asleep on his bed. He vaguely remembered how he woke up in a frenzy, and she had soothed him and got him lie back. He had thought it was all a dream as he faded in and out of sleep throughout the night. Her cool touch and gentle voice was there each time, coaxing him to relax and to rest. She had stayed with him through the night. The knowledge of this kind gesture from Lucy made something flutter in his chest. The sensation was not something he was familiar with, and it felt almost like pain as he tried to push it away.

Her features were relaxed in sleep, and her full lips slightly parted. She always looked like she was wearing some kind of pink lip gloss, but Jack knew she kept her make up to a minimum. This was natural Lucy, with pink luscious delectable lips which were meant to be kissed. *Whoa!* Jack wondered when his thoughts shifted toward Lucy in that kind of way. It had to be the cold, he tried to explain to himself. But he couldn't help himself as he trailed his fingers across the smooth skin of Lucy's cheek, and caressed her full bottom lip with the pad of his thumb.

Her eyelids fluttered, and she opened her soft chocolate-brown eyes to stare at him. She didn't even question why his hands were cupping her face or why his thumb still trailed along her soft lips. Instead her lips parted just a little bit more, and her tongue touched the tip of his finger. Jack couldn't resist the tempting offer.

He slid his hand behind her neck, and he settled his lips on hers. By the gods, Jack felt his temperature rise with the first taste of Lucy's mouth. She was so receptive already. Her soft purr was fueling the fire of his desire. Her tongue touched his tentatively as if she didn't know if it was what she should do. Jack told her it was exactly what he wanted what he needed by letting his tongue mate and duel with hers. Kissing her was unlike anything he had ever experienced. She kissed with naivet  . Her expressiveness at every sensation sent shards of pleasure to his core. This was what a kiss was supposed to feel like. This was what kissing Lucy felt like. *Lucy.*

The recognition of what he was doing filtered into his brain. She was his assistant, his right hand man. Jack pulled away, and Lucy opened heavy lidded eyes. The sensual curl of heat in her gaze made him want to go back and sample her some more. But she wasn't some girl he could just play with then buy a few thousand dollars worth of useless goods to reciprocate in replace of actual affection. It sounded cruel he knew, but each woman that he ever got involved with knew exactly where he stood in the relationship and what they would be getting out of it. But this was his sweet Lucy, who ran his life like a smooth running steam

engine. He couldn't afford to lose her for a few hours of pleasure. If he slept with her, it would ruin everything. She deserved better than what he could give.

The uncomfortable silence between them seemed to go on forever. He watched the silent acknowledgment of what they had done register on her face. Lucy sat up suddenly and was out of the bed in a flash. Jack was disappointed to see the look of surprised hurt on her face before she masked it with businesslike detachment.

"How do you feel this morning?" Lucy asked. Before he could answer, she continued in a rush. "You had a pretty restless night, and I fell asleep here. Um, I'm sorry for that. I should go make you breakfast. I'll change in the other bedroom. I still have some clothes here from when we had the dinner part and stuff." She took a long deep breath. "I'll be out front when you're ready to . . . eat."

Lucy was out of the room in a flurry. She opened the door and grabbed her shoes with an apologetic smile before the door closed again.

The door opened once more, and she popped her head inside. "I forgot to mention the roof collapsed last night on a family because of the snow. They are at the Red Cross, and I was thinking we could . . . well, you could help them out for Christmas. Think about it, okay?"

Jack cursed under his breath and flopped back against the rumpled sheets of his bed. He felt guilty about everything, about kissing Lucy, the snow and now a homeless family because of him. There would be a lot more if he didn't get control of his powers soon.

Outside his skylight view, he could see the clouds sending snowflake after snowflake raining down on the city. The only reason that they did not stick to the gall of his roof was because of the heat sensors he had built in to always keep it clear of ice building up on them. He tried once more, unsuccessfully, to reign in the snow, which seemed to increase instead of clearing up. He would have to contact his mother sometime soon to let her know what was going on. She might know what to do. Plus, it was better to speak to her than to his father, Odin.

Hoping a hot shower would alleviate some of the symptoms plaguing him, he got up from the bed and made his way to the bathroom. He came out of the steamed up room fifteen minutes later feeling only a tiny bit better. Nothing prepared him for the scene that greeted him when he walked into his living room.

Lucy had turned his penthouse into a candy cane Christmas nightmare. Light glittered at him, and the tree in the corner screamed holiday cheer. Jack could hear his teeth grinding. It wouldn't be fair to take all the things she carefully put up and throw them out, would it? After all, she did give up her holiday to come take care of him. He would have to grin and bear it until he got better. Right now, holiday decorations were the least of his worries.

He went to the kitchen to grab some juice and stepped on a mat in front of the refrigerator that promptly began to sing "Deck the Halls." Jack groaned and leaned his forehead against the cool stainless steel of his fridge.

“I’m in hell,” he muttered. “Pure Christmas hell.”

* * * *

Lucy escaped to the bathroom and pressed her back against the door of the second bedroom.

“What just happened? What did I do?” She whispered with her fingers to her lips. She could still feel the electric tingle, the pressure of Jack’s lips against hers. She had never felt anything so hot, so tempting in her life. *And now I am doomed?* Lucy moaned to herself.

She pushed away from the cool mahogany door that barred her from seeing Jack’s face at least for a little bit. Undressing quickly, she headed for the warmth of a shower. She would have to face him eventually, and if her embarrassment did not make her melt into the floor, she should be fine. *Just play it off, Lucy girl. Don’t let him know it affected you like it did.* She talked herself into some kind of calm. After all, it was Jack, and he was sick. He probably thought it was Mandy he was kissing when he woke up. His face showed he did not expect to be kissing her. *I am just his assistant after all. He’d never want to kiss me.* But then the kiss entered her mind again and made her skin tingle and her nipples harden with the memory. She wanted more than a kiss. She wanted to feel his hands on her body, even though it was against the rules.

So by the time she was out of the shower and dressed, she had built a new façade around her and was ready to face her icy boss. Lucy walked out into the wide living room still twinkling merrily with her decorations. She found Jack leaning against his marble countertop staring at the room . . . *Scratch that,* Lucy said to herself with a smile. He was glowering at the room.

“What do you think of my Christmas cheer?” Lucy injected bubbly happiness into her voice as she passed behind him to get to his coffee pot.

“I think that every Gem store in the tri-state area came to my penthouse and threw up its decorations,” Jack grumbled.

“Oh, don’t be so dramatic, boss. This museum has never looked better.” Lucy grinned. “Do you want me to make you some breakfast?”

“Nope. Just let me inhale some coffee.”

“It’s on, and the coffeemaker is producing your elixir of life,” Lucy teased. She walked over and let her fingers caress his forehead. “You still have a fever, Jack. Maybe you should head back to bed.”

That one word sent an air of uncomfortable silence into the conversation. Lucy dropped her fingers from his flushed skin, but his hand caught her wrist before it could fall to her side.

“About before . . .” Jack began, but Lucy cut him off.

“No, there was no before, boss. Forget about it. You’re sick and just getting up. You probably thought you were kissing Mandy or something. Totally fine,” Lucy replied hastily.

“Uh-huh.”

She felt Jack’s ice blue stare searching her face, and she looked hastily away. She handed him a fresh cup of coffee before walking from behind the counter and grabbing her coat. “Now I have to run out and get some . . . things. I’ll be back soon, okay?”

“It’s snowing like a winter demon out there. Maybe you shouldn’t go out,” Jack suggested.

Both their gazes went up to the glass roof where they could see the snow falling heavily from the sky. Even his heated glass couldn’t keep up with the rate of snow fall, and the edges of the frames were becoming buried under thick soft snow.

“That’s why I am going now, Jack, before it gets any worse. I was listening to the news, and this storm has everyone baffled. Sometimes it looks like it is easing up, and then the clouds form again and drop more snow. It’s weird.” Lucy threw her bright red scarf around her hair and wrapped the rest of the warm material around her neck. “Besides I’m a New Yorker. This is a walk in the park for me.”

“Hey, Lucy,” Jack called as he settled himself on the couch.

Lucy had opened the door and looked back at her boss wrapped in a thick afghan. He looked so damn cute, and yet she knew he was untouchable. At least to her, anyway.

“Yes, Jack. I know. Bring juice and soup and stuff for your flu.”

“That’s not what I wanted to say,” he replied, his tone serious.

“Okay, what is it then?”

“I knew it wasn’t Mandy I was kissing. I could never make that mistake.”

Lucy flew out the door without giving him a reply. His words alone left the possibility open to what might be. As she went downstairs in the elevator, Lucy firmed her decision not to cross that invisible line when it came to Jack Forsythe. He was a lady killer with the ice-blue stare. She did not want to be on the receiving end of one of his cold good-byes after warming his bed.

Chapter Four

Jack looked at the closed door after Lucy left and then gave a soft sigh. One kiss and that was all it took for him to feel something inside himself that he thought was long gone. He always felt his emotions froze in time. After he had taken on the role of the winter god it felt as though his heart became as cold as the ice he could form at his fingertips. He never questioned it or wondered why. He had always thought that was how it had to be. *Jokul Frosti*, with a heart frozen like the winter months.

He went about his relationships with the same cold attitude, and nothing broke though that cold wall he had built up. It seemed that this wasn't quite true, because just the touch of Lucy's lips sent warmth shooting through his chest. It was almost painful. He didn't like it, and he sure as hell didn't want it to happen again. So he'd stay away from his Lucy until this cold was over, and then he'd head back home for a little while until he could feel nothing again, nothing he did not want to feel.

His mind went back to the question she had asked about helping the family whose apartment roof collapsed. He felt he had to. Because of him, they were now homeless. His lack of control over the winter storm was wrecking havoc on the city so some monetary help couldn't hurt.

Jack picked up the phone and called his lawyer to make the necessary arrangements. By the time the call was done, Jack had accomplished what he needed done. The family would be in a new apartment in their neighborhood before nightfall with presents under the tree and everything they had lost replaced. Lucy would be happy when he told her. Jack made a frustrated groan wondering since when he did things to make Lucy happy. He went into his bedroom mumbling under breath about the damn holiday and the damn flu that was making him crazy. He had another call to make, but not by the normal methods.

An ornate mirror hung from the wall across from his bed. The frame was made of crystal, and silver twined into leaves and branches that went around the entire piece of cut glass. Even the glass itself looked as if it had a chiseled pattern underneath the smooth surface. When Jack looked into the mirror, his reflection became a thousand little ones. To anyone else, this mirror was an antique piece, something that Jack bought to show off his enormous wealth. But to him, it was a piece of home, something created by the gods before he and his father's line, it was thousands of years old. To him, it was priceless in more ways than just cost.

With a few ancient words under his breath, Jack touched the surface of the mirror, which rippled like water under his fingers before turning smooth. The reflection was not his own anymore, but now, it was the immortal beauty of his mother.

"Jokul, I was wondering when I would hear from you!" His mother's voice rang melodic across from the realm of Valhalla causing the mirror to resonate like a tuning fork.

"It's Jack, Mom. I rarely use the old names anymore," Jack replied affectionately. He reached out and caressed his mother's reflection fondly.

“You will always be Jokul to me,” she said firmly. “Now when will you be home? The festivities have already started.”

“That’s why I called, Mom. I have the flu I think, and I cannot move through the realms like I should,” Jack explained. “It is also causing some unusual effects for the winter.”

“You have been living in the human world for too long, son, to be taken down by their sickness,” his mother admonished him. “I sensed a change in the elements. I assumed you were in one of your moods.”

“No mood, Mom. Anything you know that can fix it?”

“Only home will get you back to yourself. But since you cannot get here, maybe I should come there.”

“No! If you come here, father will ask questions, and I do not need him in my affairs.”

“He could help, Jokul,” Jack’s mother said softly.

“Yes he could. Then he will spend the rest of the winter celebration crowing about how he had to go fix his son’s problems,” Jack reminded her. “I will not go through that. Last year Loki was the laughing stock because of him.”

“Your father means no harm. He loves all of you . . .”

“Yeah, yeah. That is why he delights in making our mistakes his crowing points of conversation.”

“You will have to get this under control soon, Jokul, because if I sensed it, he surely will if he pays attention,” Jack’s mother reminded him. “Luckily, the ale and the celebration have kept him occupied, but your presence will be missed soon.”

Jack nodded. “I know. I am working on it as we speak.”

“Very well, Jokul.” His mother smiled lovingly at him. “Come home soon. I need to see my son in person.”

“I love you too, Mom,” Jack said with a grin.

The mirror returned to its etched crystal elaborate state, and Jack turned away and went back to the living room. He stood in front of the fireplace and let the cracking fire warm him. He raised his arms to the sky and concentrated on alleviating the clouds that hung low over the city. He could sense a small change but nothing that could take the danger away from the snow continuing to fall. After walking back to the sofa, he threw himself onto the leather cushions and flicked the TV on. The newscaster’s worried face greeted him on the screen.

This storm has spread across the Eastern seaboard now and is heading into states that would not be accustomed to this kind of weather. Record snowfall is expected from North Carolina into Georgia and

Florida. Floridian farmers are worried about their orange crops falling victim to frost and losing millions in food sales next year. States whose cold weather or even snowfall is left to only a few inches each year are looking at a few feet of snow over the coming days. People are asked to stock up on food in these areas and to stay indoors as much as possible. The wind is unusually cold, and even though you are outside and you feel warm, you can be suffering the effects of hypothermia. Stay tuned to this channel for more weather alerts.

“Oh great,” Jack muttered under his breath. He picked up his cell phone and dialed downstairs to the doorman. He would need a few items to try to combat his sickness before the entire United States became one large ice cube. Or even worse, before his father had to step in. Jack could hear it now. *My son caught a mortal cold, and I had to save him!* Jack was not about to let himself be used as fodder for his father’s pompous stories. Oh no. He would fix this himself.

* * * *

“Holy crap!” Lucy gasped as she came through the large double doors of Jack’s building.

It was absolute mayhem outside on New York’s streets. With all her packages in her hand, she had to trudge through snow-packed sidewalks. The city and business owners were trying to keep them clean by shoveling every few hours, but the rate of snowfall was making their hard work useless. The Port Authority had already stopped buses and trains from working their usual schedules because of the weather. Anyone that was outside was there braving the blizzard to do some shopping since they had no work.

Manhattan had become even more of a madhouse than it usual was at rush hour. Even the rock salt that would keep the snow melted was buried under it, and the wind gusts between the tall buildings could blow a petite person off his or her feet. *Luckily, no one has ever accused me of being petite,* Lucy thought with a small snort of humor.

There was a trail of melting snow and ice in her wake on the shiny floors as she went to the elevators. She looked back at the mess in sympathy, because she knew maintenance would be called out to clean it up seconds after she left. The elevator doors closed in an almost silent whoosh, and she rode upstairs to Jack’s apartment. One of the bags held a special gift for her boss, something she hoped with all her heart he would like.

Lucy almost dropped her bags when she entered Jack’s front door. A slow grin started on her face at the sight that was before her. It was not what she expected and definitely not from her boss. Jack sat in the middle of his living room on the floor. On the coffee table sat a humidifier puffing out steam in his face. A towel was wrapped around his throat under his dark blue bathrobe. From where she was standing, she could smell so much vapor rub that it made her eyes water. Jack’s doorman stood over him with a big cup of god knows what and kept encouraging him to take spoonfuls from the cup amid the rest of cold remedies.

“Take your medicine like a man,” the doorman scoffed.

Lucy almost laughed aloud when Jack gave him a withering stare, and the doorman shifted uncomfortably.

“What did you say to me?” Jack growled menacingly.

“Sorry, boss. That’s what Mira my wife says to me when she gives me this stuff. I thought it might help you get it down,” the doorman said.

“And what is all this?” Lucy asked trying her best not break down into a fit of giggles.

Both men looked over at her, and Jack managed to turn even redder with embarrassment under the steam in his face.

“Hi, Ms. Pierre.” The doorman gave her a wink and a big grin. “Mr. Forsythe has ordered a few things to help get rid of his flu, and I asked him if he wanted to try my wife’s guaranteed home remedy. He said as long as it doesn’t kill me, and I said . . .”

“She gets the point, Richard,” Jack muttered.

“So what’s this secret recipe made of, Richard?” Lucy walked over and sniffed the cup the doorman was holding.

“It’s a mixture of mint tea and lemon zest with some garlic cloves and some other stuff I am not allowed to say.”

“Ahhhh, because it’s a secret recipe?” Lucy teased.

“You can head back downstairs now, Richard. I’m sure they are looking for you,” Jack quickly said.

“Okay, Mr. Forsythe.” The look on Richard’s face was one of disappointment at being dismissed. Lucy was about to chastise Jack as the doorman walked to the door with his shoulders slumped when her boss showed a side few ever really saw.

“Hey, Richard,” Jack called, and the doorman turned to face him. “Thanks for the help. I owe you a baseball game in the spring.”

“Thanks, Mr. Forsythe!” Richard beamed before he went through the door.

Silence prevailed for a moment or two after the doorman left, and Lucy took her coat off and draped across the sofa. The intermittent sound of puffs of steam coming from the humidifier was the only thing that broke the silence.

“Since when don’t you burst through my door with enough bubbly personality to choke a horse?” Jack asked, eyeing her movements, and she pulled her package into the living room.

“Well I’m trying to not to end up on your floor bursting my sides from laughter.” Lucy sat in front of the Christmas tree and began to put brightly colored boxes underneath its decorated boughs. ‘Seriously, Jack, home remedies and vapor rub? I’d never have thought you were the type.’

"I had to try something. If this cold doesn't go away soon, there will be dire consequences."

Lucy snorted. "You make it sound like the world is going to come to an end because you're sick."

"You don't know the half of it," Jack muttered under his breath but not low enough that Lucy did not hear what he said.

"Seriously, it is not the end of the world if you can't spend a few days in Aspen with a few ski bunnies," Lucy said in exasperation. "Get over it."

"If that was my only worry, I'd be ecstatic." Jack deftly changed the subject before she could ask more questions. "Who are all the presents for?"

"For me," Lucy answered simply.

"You are so weird. You bought gifts for yourself and wrapped them?" Jack laughed.

"Listen you, I like presents. I have no family to give me presents, so I give them to myself. I make a wish list every year of things I want for Christmas, and I buy them," Lucy retorted. She had never had a mother, father, brothers, or sisters, and being raised in the New York City foster care system did not teach you family values. She had gotten out of many a bad situation by a hair and fought tooth and nail to make a better life for herself. So, by God, if she treated herself at Christmas, she was not going to feel bad about it.

"I'm sorry if I upset you," Jack said apologetically.

"You didn't upset me, and if you're nice, there might be something under the tree for you."

"I didn't get you anything."

"Just because someone gives you a gift doesn't mean you have to give them one in return," Lucy explained. "So how's the remedy working out for ya. Feeling any better?"

"Not really even though this puffy-steam thing does make me breath easier."

"Only you would call a humidifier a puffy-steam thing." Lucy laughed softly as she scooted closer to him on the floor. She tested his forehead with her fingers to see if he still was feverish. On its own accord, her palm cupped his rough cheek. Her breath caught in her throat when he closed his eyes and rubbed his face against her hand. The texture of the five-o'clock shadow caused a pleasurable friction on her skin.

Lucy pulled her hand away. "How about you go in and wash that gunk off your chest, and I'll bring you something to eat. If you're nice, we'll play Monopoly, and I'll pretend not to demolish you in a game."

She saw the fire of competition burn in his eyes. "You're on!"

Lucy watched him move from the floor and walk into the bedroom to take a shower. She closed her eyes and let her head fall against the cushions of the sofa.

"I am so doomed," she muttered. Because no matter how much she tried, she couldn't stop touching Jack or wanting him to return the favor.

* * * *

A few hours later the game of Monopoly was going at a heated pace. Jack owned Park Place, but Lucy held onto Boardwalk and refused to let him buy it. He already had the board filled with hotels and small houses, which he chose to rename luxury condominiums for the retired. Lucy only held a few pieces of property, and she bought a few houses to place on the board, thinking the slow and steady build of her fortune was the way to go. It obviously was not, since Jack had run out of money twice and had taken two loans from the bank to buy houses and hotels and now was leading the board by an amazing amount. Lucy gritted her teeth in exasperation, because every time she landed on his property, he gloated and did some kind of weird dance in victory at taking her money.

"Come on, Lucy, give me Boardwalk as payment and let me become the Monopoly mogul I was meant to be," Jack coaxed her with a grin.

"Never!" Lucy said between gritted teeth. She searched for play money to pay off landing on St. Charles Place, which had a hotel on it. "I am going to take this property with me to the grave."

"Then you'll have to sell off Baltic and Mediterranean to pay me." Jack's smugness made her want to slap him.

"Fine, whatever," Lucy answered sweetly while she put her card in the foreclosed pile they had formed. "I'll sell off what I need to, but you are never getting Boardwalk."

"Come on, sweet Lucy. I'll even sweeten the pot, pay you double for it, and throw in Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois and their hotels. It will keep you in the game."

"I don't want your Monopoly charity, Jack Forsythe," Lucy said primly. "Besides, if I give you Boardwalk, you are going to build hotels on it and kill me the first time I land on it. No deal. That is a safe haven for me."

"I'd never do that to you!" Jack protested with a grin. "I'd give you at least three free passes . . . before I demolish you."

"Oh, you are such a peach." Lucy couldn't help but smile. "You play this game like it's the real deal, you know. I am never playing with you again."

"You can't resist me, Lucy. Give me Boardwalk." Jack waved his fingers in front of her face imitating hypnotizing her. "Then I shall rule the Monopoly world!"

Lucy threw a few green houses at him. "You suck!"

Jack impersonated an evil laugh, and Lucy giggled. “Come on, Ms. Pierre, give me your land, or I shall send my henchmen after you.”

Lucy threw a few more houses at him as she played along. “Why never, Mr. Forsythe. This land was my dead husband’s, and I shall never give it up.”

Jack lunged at her and overturned the Monopoly game. Money and game pieces went flying all across the floor, and Lucy saw her silver boot game piece slide under the sofa. She squealed as Jack caught her around the waist and lifted her up over his shoulder like she weighed nothing at all.

“Then, it’s off to the railroad tracks with you, Ms. Pierre. The noon train will take care of you!” Jack said in his sinister voice.

“Jack, put me down before you hurt yourself,” Lucy gasped out between her laughter. “You’re sick, and I don’t weigh a bag of feathers like your girlfriends do.”

Jack dropped her on the sofa. Before she could move, he pinned her body under his. The contact sent instant heat through her body.

“What do you mean you don’t weigh a bag of feathers?” Jack asked softly, his blue-eyed stare searching her face.

“I mean . . . well, they wear like a size one or zero even though I didn’t even know they made clothes in zero until Mandy left her jeans here. Who wears a zero? But me, I wear a size nine or ten, and that is on a good day. I know I’m plump and heavier than what you are accustomed to, and I didn’t want to hurt your back, okay!” Lucy knew she was rambling on. Having him pressed so intimately against her was doing strange things to her senses.

“I have a question.” Jack’s voice was low. “Who said I like size zeros?”

“Have you seen the women you tend to play with?”

“That doesn’t mean it is my preference. It just means they are who were available.”

“Now that’s cold.”

“No, it’s the truth. People like Size-Zero Mandy are shallow and vain. They never stay around long, because I couldn’t see myself with someone who thinks more about whether a few grapes will pack on a few pounds. They worry about which designer will be hot in summer, and to me, they are just arm candy, good for a picture and a roll in the hay.”

“Okay,” Lucy replied slowly. “You’re being honest there, but what does that mean in the grand scheme of things?”

It means, Lucy, that you are not plump. You have such delectable curves in all the right places.” Jack lowered his head and kissed the soft skin of her neck, which made her shiver. “You can sit with me and eat a cheeseburger and don’t care.” His lips roamed to the other side of her neck, and Lucy had to bite her lip to keep from moaning. “You think about other people sometimes even before you think about yourself, and you taste so damn sweet, Lucy, my sweet sexy Lucy. I want to bury my face between your thighs and lick you until you come . . . over and over again.”

The game was forgotten. Lucy stared into the ice-blue stare that now held the fiery heat of desire in their depths. She could feel his hand against her, and he pressed himself more intimately against her. She was lost, and even though in the recesses of her subconscious she screamed, “Don’t do it! You’ll end up hurt,” Lucy was past caring. She would deal with it when it came, if it ever came. Right now, she wanted this man more than anything else for Christmas.

Chapter Five

Jack took her lips in a fierce kiss that left them both reeling. Lucy's moan under the onslaught of his lips and tongue devouring her mouth made him want to rip her clothes off and just bury himself inside her. But he knew Lucy deserved more than that, and he wanted to spend the time learning her body. Lucy sat up quickly and stripped off her sweater leaving only a scrap of lacey material covering her breasts. The voluptuous bounty of her body almost spilled out of the cups of her bra, and Jack counted himself lucky to be able to sample her ample goods.

Her skin glowed like a copper statue as the lights from her decorations bounced off her skin. Her lips were swollen and parted from their deep kisses. Jack swooped in to take some more of her lips. She was like one of the wines made on Valhalla. Sweet and full of flavor. So much so that if one drank too much, one could become drunk from the brew, and Jack wanted to be drunk on the taste of Lucy. He left her lips and roamed down her neck until he reached the swell of her breasts. The clasp of her bra opened easily under his fingers, and her full breasts spilled free for his mouth to sample. Lucy moaned as his tongue laved her nipples.

"Such big, thick nipples," Jack murmured as he bathed them with his tongue. "Like perfect black cherries on top of my dessert treat. I want more, Lucy. Can I have more?"

"Take them into your mouth, Jack," Lucy begged. Her head fell back in pleasure.

Jack obliged and took her cocoa bean nipples into his mouth. Lucy cried out in agonized pleasure, and the sound made his cock jump in his pajama bottoms.

"Oh please, I want you," Lucy asked breathlessly as she held his head to her body.

"Not yet, sweet Lucy," he replied. "I'm not finished making your body purr."

With that comment, Jack kissed his way down her stomach and pulled off her tights as he went. Leaving her naked and exposed to his touch, he picked up her foot and placed it on the coffee table, and then he did the exact same thing to the other one.

"Spread your legs for me, sweetheart. Let me see you all wet for me," Jack commanded.

Lucy did as she was told and spread her legs and revealed her already moist pussy to Jack's gaze. He ran a finger along the swollen lips of her mouth and then the lips of her pussy. She shivered, and Lucy parted her thighs wider in a silent plea for him to slip his finger inside her. Instead, he raised it to his lips and licked it slowly. His head bent between her legs and replaced his finger with his tongue. Lucy arched at each flick of his tongue.

Jack closed his eyes in pleasure as he tasted her. He delved between the soft folds of flesh that held the bud of her clit. It was driving her to the edge of reason. Her head thrashed on the back of the couch, and he knew she wouldn't be able to hold on much longer. Her excitement was building. Jack could see it. A small flick of his finger across her clit or a slow circling around her opening as if he meant to penetrate her had her biting her lips in agony. He gave her what she needed and slid his fingers deep into the warm cavern of her pussy.

The soft scream she gave left him reeling as she moved her body to take more of his digits into her.

Lucy's eyes were closed in pleasure as her breath came in short pants. He fingered her moist entrance with deep, penetrating movements that became faster and harder as she begged for more. Jack could see she was trying to hold on to the last of her control, but he was not going to let her. He wanted her wild and wanton beneath him. It was too late in the game for her to be restrained. She tightened and arched, and with no sound escaping her lips, she shuddered with her first orgasm. Her sweet juice flowed down his hand.

"Oh, baby, that was so good. I loved how you came for me," Jack crowed. He kept his fingers moving inside her and sent her spiraling into another round of ecstasy.

Jack watched in fascination as she gushed again, and she pumped against his hand trying to savor the last waves of sensation. Her eyes had a wild look of passion that Jack had never seen on any woman's face. It enthralled him and aroused him, and he knew he would never be able to just have one taste of her or only one sample of her reaction.

He held onto her thighs, he brought her closer to him, and buried his face into her pussy one more. Burrowing his tongue deep inside, he tasted her flavor. The action wrenched a moan from her as she grabbed his head and took his face deeper into her soft wetness. He was excited by her womanly fragrance. It drove him mad with desire. His tongue was almost furious with its penetration of her wet pussy. Jack could feel her losing control as she pressed against him, smearing her juices across his lips and his face. Jack knew just how to make her come again so he slid three fingers deep inside her while still tasting her pussy. He pushed deeper until she screamed as she convulsed and tightened around his fingers before the warm flow of her juices dripped down his hand.

"Now, Jack, now!" she cried out. "I want you to feel me from the inside. I want your cock."

"Is this what you want?" He asked the question as he knelt between her legs and rubbed his cock against her to make the tip slick and wet with her come.

"Please . . . Please now!" Lucy begged in earnest.

He gladly obliged and sank deep inside her. Her legs wrapped around his waist. They moved together in unison, thrust meeting thrust, her hips grinding toward his trying to take more and give more all at the same time.

"Tell me you want me. Tell me it's only me that can make you feel this way." His voice was a harsh whisper by her ear.

His voice barely registered through the fog of pleasure clouding his own thoughts. He knew that with no other woman had he ever felt like this. He wanted all of her, her complete body mind and soul. She was always going to be his.

"Only you, always you, Jack. I love you. Oh God, I love you," she said between panting breaths. "Oh, baby, I'm going to come. I can't hold back."

As the words left her mouth, Jack felt her begin to tremble, and her pussy throbbed around his cock and pulled him deeper with her muscles. With his head pressed against her breast and her nipple in his mouth, he let himself go and fell over the abyss with her.

The aftermath of their loving was their slick bodies lying on each other. He kissed the soft skin of her stomach as the fireplace crackled amid their contented breathing. As their bodies cooled, the words she cried out in the throes of passion crossed his mind. *I love you*, three words that could send terror into the heart of the winter god. It was probably said in the heat of passion like women always said it. But with Lucy, a nugget of doubt still reigned. Pushing the wayward thoughts aside for the moment, he decided not to let anything interrupt what he just experienced with Lucy. He let himself fall into contentment as her fingers trailed idly through his hair.

* * * *

Jokul! The loud booming voice woke Jack from his sleep and caused him to sit upright in his bed. He looked over to the family mirror and saw it ripple like the seas in turmoil under the booming voice that called his name again. Next to him, Lucy turned over but never woke from her sleep. The voice was not for human ears, just for him alone to hear. He knew exactly who summoned him, and that did not make him happy in the least.

Jack got up and pulled on a robe before walking over to the mirror. The booming voice shook the mirror where it hung, and he touched the surface to activate it. There was no need to use summoning words when it came to his father. There was no summoning him. His father's bold face with a full beard came into view. One ice-blue eye that was an exact replica of his own stared back at Jack through the mirror. It had always been said that his father traded one of his eyes for wisdom. Jack's opinion on the subject was that one of his many women knocked it from his head for his philandering ways.

"Jokul, what took you so long to answer my summon?" Odin demanded. He looked over Jack's shoulder to the bed, and a wide grin spread across his face. "Ah, I see pleasures of the flesh. You are just like me, son."

"I am nothing like you, Father," Jack replied coldly. "Why was I summoned?"

"Do not take that tone with me, you whelp!" his father snarled. "Because you are not doing your duties, Jokul!"

"I am no longer the whelp of one of your many women," Jack replied. "I am my own man, and I have proven that since you gave me my duties."

"I took your mother as my wife. Why do you resent me so?" Odin asked.

Jack could have sworn he heard sadness in his father's voice. But this was Odin. He thought about no one but himself. "You took my mother as one of your many wives, which is the only reason you gave me the winter," Jack replied. "And as I said, I have done my duties up to expectation and more so. Why am I being summoned?"

“You spend too much time in the mortal world, and now you have their mortal afflictions. The winter world is in chaos because of it. Even here, the blizzards have not stopped for days. The ice flow has become too much for the people of the region to even fish for their food. You need help, and I have come to give it.”

Jack listened to his father. He did not know the mayhem of him being sick had spread so far across the world. “You offer me help but at what price, Father? To make me the laughing stock at your table for the winter festivities?”

Odin sighed. “This has gone beyond the trivialities that I speak of at my table, Jokul. Take my help before this winter destroys the spring equinox and the renewal of life. On my oath, I swear to you, I shall not speak of this. Take my hand and let my power infuse you and fix this problem.”

Jack thought about what his father was saying. He had to think about how this fierce winter would affect the humans of the world instead of his fierce pride. With a nod, Jack let his hand go through the mirror, felt it being taken in his father’s strong grip. The power of Odin and of Valhalla flowed through Jack, took the remnants of his illness, and gave him the power to fix the winter and get it back on an even keel.

“Now fix the winter, Jokul, and let us not speak of this again,” Odin said firmly, and with that, the Viking God was gone from Jack’s sight.

Jack knew why his father left so abruptly. He knew the rift between them would leave him no thanks from his son. He was exactly right, because Jack felt no remorse at not saying thank you to a man he had not respected in years, even though he was his father. He went into the living room and felt the familiar power of the gods crackle at his fingertips once more. Lifting his hands to the sky, he let the power fix the damage caused throughout the world from the ice flow in Greenland to the blizzards that plagued the United States. He fixed them all. Looking up, he could see the sky peek from behind the clouds for the first time in days, and he knew all was right once more. Crawling back into bed, he laid his head against the warm skin of Lucy’s back as she slept and curved his body around her. Forgetting about the world and his relationship with his father, he let her warmth enfold him.

* * * *

“I know you’re awake.” Lucy laughed as she pressed soft kisses down Jack’s back.

“If I say yes, will you stop what you’re doing? Because if that’s the case, no, I’m still asleep,” Jack teased back.

“Well, if you admit to being awake, we could do so much more.” Lucy never knew she could make a sexy purr. She smiled as her tongue trailed down Jack’s spine. *I guess when you are in love, it brings out all kinds of new personality traits*, she thought to herself.

Jack rolled over, pulled her up next to him, and took her lips in a searing kiss. He traced her full lips with his tongue, and Lucy thought she would die from the sensation.

“Oh, Jack, I could kiss you forever,” she whispered.

He chuckled softly. “If we had forever, I’d be glad to take on the challenge.”

She felt his hands roam and caress her every curve, and then he slowly rolled his palm over her nipple. Trying to feel more of his touch, Lucy arched into his hand.

“Is this what you want?” he whispered against her ear.

“Yes, I want more.” She moaned.

“More like this?” His lips captured the tight bud in his mouth, and Lucy cried out in ecstasy. He drew small circles on her tummy, working his fingers down to the apex of her thighs. Lucy could already feel the slick wetness of her body and parted her thighs with anticipation of his touch. Gently, he rubbed her clit. Her eyes fluttered closed, and her lips parted in response. She lifted her hips against his hand, searching for more. She wanted to feel him penetrate her with his thick digits like he did last night.

“Oh God . . .” But she was silenced by his kiss.

“Shhh, baby. Just feel,” he whispered.

She felt his finger slip inside her, and she bit her lip and prayed she could hold on from the pleasurable torture. Lucy felt the folds of her pussy tighten around his finger, and still, her body clenched around him trying to keep it inside as he withdrew his digit. Slowly, he touched her. Each time his finger went a little deeper. Lucy undulated her hips wantonly. She spread her legs wider. His thumb pressed against her clit, which caused her to shudder, and she rolled her head from side to side.

“Does that feel good? Do you like it?” His voice was gruff with excitement.

“Yes, yes . . . please, Jack . . . I need—” Her breath came in tiny bursts.

“What do you need? Tell me what it feels like?”

“It feels like a coil is tightening inside my body.” She moaned and squirmed away from him.

“What else, baby? Tell me what you feel.” He kissed his way along her neck while waiting for her to speak.

Lucy moaned softly. “I feel wild and exhilarated all at the same time. I want it to stop but not stop. It feels so fucking good.”

Jack held her tight, not letting her move away from what she was experiencing. His deliberate ministrations were driving her wild, and she was so wet now that he was able to slip another finger inside her.

Lucy cried out again. "Jack! I'm so close to the edge. I'm going to come."

"It's okay. Just feel. Let it take you, sweet Lucy," he murmured. "God, you are driving me crazy."

His lips played at her breast once again, and his fingers worked their magic inside her. Her little groans filled the air as he took her to the edge of reality. She pressed herself against his hand, taking his fingers deeper. Lucy pressed and rubbed against his cock. She could feel him like a length of velvet-covered steel in her hands. He jerked in reaction to her touch on his rod and sucked on her nipples with even more fervor. Her moans were wild and frantic, and they blended with his. Jack's fingers played a merciless game with her until her final cry sent her over the edge.

Lucy's body crested on a wave of total rapture, then she fell weightlessly through the air. She tried to pull air into her body as she worked to bring cognitive thoughts back into her mind. She had never had an orgasm this intensely in her life, and already Jack had made her fly on invisible wings with his lovemaking.

"Damn, is it always going to be like that with you?" she finally breathed out.

"Baby, if I watch you do that too many times, I'm going to explode." Jack chuckled and kissed her hard.

"I want your cock inside me now," Lucy said, lust filling her voice.

"I am glad to oblige you."

He slid over her, kissing his way up her body to her lips. He settled himself between her soft thighs. He kissed her neck again, which brought the embers of her passion back to life.

"Touch me again, Lucy. Please."

She couldn't resist his soft entreaty and let her fingers wrap around his turgid length once more. He pressed his face into her neck, and his agonized groan told her that he enjoyed the way she stroked his cock.

"I ache for you." Jack moaned. "I'm going to bury myself inside you, so deep, baby."

Lucy was past hearing his words. New, delicious sensations wracked her. The tip of Jack's cock pressed against her folds. He moved slowly, letting her body take him in inch by inch and tease them both. The pressure of his entrance stretched and filled her. His slow movements tortured her until she couldn't take it anymore. The road to pleasure seemed unbearably long. Lucy raised her hips in one fluid motion, forced his full length deep inside her. She cried out with the sensation of fullness and completion that infused her body.

Jack's groans mixed with hers as he moved inside her. Taking them both on that ride to ecstasy, he shuddered in her arms as she moved beneath him. She wrapped her legs around

his buttocks and pulled him deeper with every thrust. She wanted it all. She wanted to feel everything he had to offer.

Wild with need, she cried out, "Take me, Jack. Take it all."

"Oh God, Lucy"

She felt her control slip, and carnal need took them both.

"I can't hold back any longer," he said in a throaty voice, as if begging for his own release.

"Yes, my love. Yes. Yes. Yes!" Lucy felt her orgasm take hold, and she ground her hips to him. His harsh cry filled the room as he followed her to completion.

Minutes slipped by before he moved from over her. She murmured in protest when he rolled away, but she snuggled against him. He pulled the covers over them both.

"Mmmmm, that was amazing," Lucy said sleepily. She snuggled into the spoon shape he had created with his body.

"You will hear no disagreements from me on that point." Jack pressed lazy kisses against the back of her neck.

"I always knew it would be like that with you. I mean when you love someone, it's always amazing."

There was silence for a few minutes before she heard a soft question from his lips.

"You keep saying that you love me . . . why?"

Lucy giggled. "You can be a daft man at times. I say it because I do. I have loved you for a while now, Jack, and now with this happening, I mean us happening, seems almost fitting in a way, like it was always mean to be." Lucy felt sleep beginning to overtake her consciousness. "It is the best Christmas gift ever to be with the man I love."

Silence reigned as she fell into a deep relaxed sleep with Jack's fingers slowly caressing the smooth skin of her stomach. She didn't hear his response as the mist took hold of her mind. Or if there was a reply from Jack at all.

Chapter Six

I love you. Those words struck a chord so deep inside his soul. Instead of the exciting thrill in his chest of knowing he was loved, the words filled Jack with trepidation. He had heard the words before, had even said them a few times, but never had he heard the words the way that Lucy had said them. He looked at her sleeping and felt his heart jump in his chest. He didn't want these feelings. He didn't want to feel anything like what she was describing. He had seen what love did to his mother. She followed his father around doing his bidding and let him walk all over her. If this was part of love, he was not going to be a part of it. He would not be made into a weakling by some emotion, nor would he make anyone bend to his will for a word like love.

He pulled a dark lock of hair that fell across Lucy's face and tucked it behind her ear. She smiled in her sleep, and it firmed his resolve of what he had to do. She deserved better than him. He didn't know how to love, and he didn't want to learn. He got up from the bed and went quietly into the living room. After only a few moments, he ached to be curved around hers again feeling her warmth next to him. Jack forced himself to sit in the living room and stare out into the now clear sky watching as night turned to day . . . Christmas Eve.

A few hours later, the door to the bedroom opened, and he turned to see Lucy walk out wearing one of his shirts and his robe. She looked sexy as hell all tousled with sleep. His hands itched to pull her onto his lap and take advantage of those full lips that begged to be kissed.

"Hey, you," Lucy said with sleep still in her voice. "You should've got me up when you got up. I'd have made you an early breakfast. How are you feeling?"

"Fine." Jack could hear the coldness in his own voice. "No need for breakfast."

Lucy walked over to him and put a soft kiss on the top of his head before heading to the kitchen. "You've been sick. You need some kind of food for energy, especially after what we have been doing."

"Don't remind me," Jack muttered under his breath. He didn't want to think of her under him, sexy, wet, and making those noises that drove him wild. It would make this harder than it had to be.

"What did you say?" Lucy called out to him.

Jack took a deep breath and sat up on the sofa. "I said I'll be heading out early today. I'm heading to Aspen after all."

"Oh . . . Okay." Lucy walked out from behind the granite countertop. She gave a small laugh. "I thought we'd spend Christmas here, but Aspen might be nice. We'll just have to open the presents when we get back."

"Not us, Lucy. Me," Jack said softly.

Her eyes met his, and he watched as his meaning finally sank in. He could see the hurt in her eyes, but she looked away and quickly went back to the kitchen.

"While I'm gone, I need you to send Mandy an invitation for the New Year's Eve party," Jack continued. "You can take her shopping with the credit card."

"I see."

Jack pinned Lucy with his cold blue stare. "You should pick up something for yourself, too. Call it a Christmas gift for all you have done."

Lucy gave a hurt laugh. "So that's what I have been relegated to, using the credit card to buy myself something pretty. How many times have I don't that for you, Jack? At least be a man and say what you have to say."

"What is there to say, Lucy? You came over. You took care of your boss with a little extra touch, and now everything is back to normal," Jack replied mildly.

"Oh, that's what I did, and you had no problem taking it. I see." Lucy's voice broke. "Why did you let me tell you I love you, Jack? If I knew all this was to you was a roll in the hay . . . if I knew this is how . . ."

"That was a bit uncomfortable, but women always associate love with sex. I thought you'd see it differently in the morning." Jack tried to smile past the bile that was rising in his throat. He was hurting her. He could see it on her face. *It had to be done!* he kept reminding himself, for both of their sakes.

Lucy's laugh was harsh. "Oh, God knows I wouldn't want to make the cold-blooded Jack Forsythe a little uncomfortable. Pity you didn't think about it when you were whispering in my ears and fucking me in your bed."

"Lucy, I never said . . . Things will be back to normal in a few weeks, and it will be like it never happened."

"Can you be this much of an asshole?" Lucy stated. Tears began to stream down her cheeks. "You seriously think I can go back to picking out the clothes for Size-Zero Mandy and God knows who else? Walking in this apartment in the morning watching them and you?" She shook her head wildly. "You are delusional, Jack. No job is worth tearing my heart in shreds every day."

"I know it seems hard—"

Lucy cut him off. "No, it doesn't seem hard. Not to you. I said to myself that I was never going to be the recipient of that ice-blue stare you give people. Yet, here I am, staring into your eyes that I thought warmed up for me! You're cold, Jack, cold as the ice outside these windows and the winds cutting through the alleys of New York. It took this to show me exactly who you are!" Lucy firmed her shoulders and swiped at the tears on her cheeks angrily. "The thing is, you don't know what you lost, so I'll tell you. Not only did you lose an

excellent goddamn assistant, you lost a woman who would have cherished you like nothing you have felt before. People like Size-Zero Mandy love you for what you have. If you had not a dime to your name, I'd have still loved you as if you were a prince." Lucy took a deep breath. "I quit, Jack. Find yourself another patsy to take advantage off. I'll expect my two weeks severance in the mail, and by God, it better be a damn good check."

With that, Lucy walked into the bedroom, and the room reverberated when she slammed the heavy door.

Jack sent his fingers through this thick blond hair in frustration. 'Fuck!'

He did exactly what he set out to do, and now the lump in his chest hurt. He felt as if he could hardly breathe. *I can't stay here right now*, he thought, panicked. He couldn't see the hurt and pain on her face or the tears that he caused. With one thought, he was dressed, and he left his apartment in the blink of an eye. He could've left in his pajama bottoms and no shirt because the cold would not have affected him.

Lucy was right. He was cold as the ice outside, and it had nothing to do with him being Jack Frost. He wondered if he had made a mistake as he walked around the city streets still cleaning up from the blizzard, the one his sickness had caused and that had brought Lucy to his door. He had seen so much of a difference in her other than being his efficient assistant. He had seen her heart and the kindness she held in herself. She thought about other people first. When she smiled, it was genuine unlike the plastic Barbie smiles of the women he dated. She was a real woman, and he had broken her heart.

Now he actually knew what it was like to be alone. He felt the loss of her more deeply than he thought he would. *It was the only thing to do*, he said to himself. Even that was met with a sarcastic inner laugh from his subconscious. *Liar*, his inner voice taunted him. It was too late now to take it back. The damage was done. He was Jack Frost, the winter god, and now he was as cold and lonely as the endless snowy plains of the North Pole, where nothing grew.

By the time he blinked back into his apartment, she was gone. He didn't even have to check the bedroom. He could no longer feel her presence in the apartment. She had turned off all the holiday lights and left the apartment in darkness. She left so quickly that she hadn't even take the gifts she had bought for herself under the tree. Jack went around the apartment and put all the decorations and lights back on in hope that it would give a spark back to the apartment, which now felt empty in her absence.

With a heavy sigh, he sat back on the sofa and closed his eyes. It had not worked. None of this meant anything without the life that Lucy pulsed into it just by being in the room. In the midst of the Christmas cheer, Jack felt the coldness of being without Lucy slip into his heart. With a low moan of agony, he left his apartment once more and headed to another realm where he hoped to find some peace. Jack Frost went home.

* * * *

Lucy went home and turned on her Christmas decorations and her tree. She hoped and almost begged them in silence and in earnest to fill her with her usual holiday cheer instead

of the ache of loss she felt now. The blue and silver motif of her holiday did nothing but intensify the ache in her chest until she pulled her feet up on to the burgundy cushions and let the pain take over. Sobs wracked her as she played each moment of the last few days over in her head like a movie. How did it get so bad so quickly? Why did she give in to the feeling she had held onto for so long? Lucy chastised herself and, letting her tears flow free, tried to wash away the hurt. It was not working, because like a fragile Christmas ball that hung from her tree, her heart had shattered.

“No job, no man, my love laughed at.” Lucy giggled in between her tears. “Well, very merry Christmas to me.”

She promptly fell into a fit of tears again as she got up and walked over to her answering machine to check her messages. There were many of them, each message from friends begging her to come out and enjoy the holiday in some fashion. Lucy took a breath and decided that she was not going to fall and die over this. She could find a new job, and her world would start spinning again. Right now, the loss was too much to bear to even think about being around anyone who had holiday cheer. She walked slowly to her bedroom, crawled into bed, and pulled her thick coverlet over her while hoping the warmth could heal her wounded soul.

She awoke a few hours later to a banging on her door. Lucy looked at her clock and saw it was only four in the evening. Lucy had hoped she could sleep through the ill fated holiday but no such luck. The constant banging did not seem like it was going to go away. So Lucy crawled out of the warmth of her bed and shuffled over to her apartment door. She peered through it before sighing and opening it to her friend Mack. Mack was the most flamboyant man she had ever met. He had come up to her outside a Soho coffee shop three years ago and told her basically that her outfit was not suitable for a figure like hers. They had been fast friends, and Mack had become her personal shopper slash best friend ever since.

“Why, oh why, do you look like you have been sleeping in your clothes?” Mack stared her up and down before he lifted a lock of her tousled hair.

“Probably because I was,” Lucy muttered and walked away, leaving her friend to close the door. She went into her kitchen, pulled out a carton of orange juice, and then drank straight from the container.

“Whoa there, Missy. Get a glass. We are not feeding like animals from a trough,” Mack chastised her and grabbed the carton from her hands. He pulled a glass from her cupboard and filled it with juice before handing it to her. “What’s the matter with you, anyway? I am not getting the usual Lucy holiday spirit.”

“Screw the holiday. I am going back to bed.”

Mack grabbed her arm as she tried to pass and steered her toward her sofa. “What! Lucy Pierre has become a grinch? Never. I refuse to believe it. What’s going on? Who has dampened your Christmas spirit? They shall feel the wrath of every drag queen in Soho for this injustice.”

Lucy couldn't help but smile at Mack's speech. She would probably relish seeing Jack being attacked by size eleven, double wide, eight inch heeled stripper shoes.

Mack's took on a serious tone. "Come on, babe, tell me what's going on?"

"I slept with my boss," Lucy said quietly.

"Oh, the blue-eyed devil. Oh, babe, you should be jumping for joy, not sleeping in the afternoon." Mack grinned.

His smile soon faded to a grim line as Lucy recounted the events of the past few days to her friend. Her tears began again in earnest, and Mack held her and patted her back until they tapered into soft hiccups. When Lucy looked up into his face, she saw the compassion in her friend's eyes, along with a fierce look of savage protection.

"I can honestly say if I see that man who was your so-called boss, I will beat his ass," Mack said.

"Thank you, Mack, but there's no need. I won't be seeing him ever again." Lucy sniffled.

"No matter. He is still on my shit list, and I will give him the evil eye," Mack replied. "My granny-poo showed me how."

"You're sweet, Mack. I'll let you do that." Lucy smiled and wiped her eyes.

"Okay, you are not sitting here moping while he goes off to play in Aspen." Mack stood and pulled her to her feet.

Lucy shook her head. "I don't feel like going out, Mack. I just want my bed and block out the world right now."

"Nope, not going to happen, diva." Mack pushed her toward her bedroom. "We are going out to the hottest Christmas party of the year, and you are going to have fun even if it kills us both."

Mack sat her down on her bed and began rummaging through her closets and drawers pulling out clothes. He came up with a burgundy satin dress cut to show every sexy curve of her body. He held it up in front of him and raised an eyebrow in her direction. Lucy knew he was just being a good friend, but she did not feel up to the cheerful holiday crowds.

"Mack, I don't know if I want to go out. I feel rung out and . . ."

"You're going, Lucy, and that's final. I will throw you over my shoulder and take you if necessary," Mack answered her simply. "What's better for getting over a broken heart than by drinking Kahlúa bombs?"

“Good point.” Lucy got up and headed to the shower. If she couldn’t forget him, she would be so completely drunk by the end of the night that she wouldn’t even know the name Jack Forsythe.

Chapter Seven

The halls of Valhalla were lighted by thick torches held in steel cases. They not only cast a light down the long stone walkways but also warmed the cold rock from the buffeting winter winds from outside. Through the darkness, Jack could hear the hunting dogs barking from their pens and the stallions neighing from the stables. Inside the castle walls, the festivities were in full swing for the winter solstice holidays. Roasting meats combined with the robust smell of fermented ale filled the air. The sounds of the music from ancient instruments echoed through the halls along with shouts of laughter from men and women, and children ran all around in play. This was home for Jack, where he grew up and what drew him back countless of times. Even though it held some memories, he would soon forget there was no place like home to soothe the beast within him.

Jack's footsteps echoed on the stone floor as he walked. He didn't feel like facing anyone in the large hall as yet, especially his father. So instead he stood and looked out the thick glass window into the night. The moon cast a beautiful glow of the white snow. Men walked though the winds carrying more food and meats in from the roasting pits. The simple things should be making him feel at peace, but all he could see was Lucy's smiling face turning to tears after he broke her heart.

"You look like a man who is not enjoying his element."

Jack turned to face his brother and the one and only man the world called Saint Nick. He gritted his teeth in irritation at his brother's open friendly face. This was not what he needed right now.

"Nicholas, how are you?" Jack greeted him formally.

"I'm good and feeling wonderful!" Nick pulled Jack into a bear hug which surprised the hell out of him.

"You seem, uh . . . different," Jack commented looking into his brother's happy face.

"I should be. I got married, man." Nick clapped his brother on the shoulder. "Neeva, come and meet my brother."

Jack saw a young woman walk from around the corner with a smile on her oval face. The bronze skin of her face was the only thing that was not covered in thick clothes against the cold winter of Valhalla. But her obvious, pregnant belly showed roundly even under her thick garments.

"You got married?" Jack asked dubiously.

"Yes." Nick laughed and pulled his wife close. "We even had a start on the family. Neeva, this is my brother, Jack. He is the winter god for these parts. Neeva is from Trinidad where I spent last winter."

"It is very nice to meet you," Neeva said with a thick native accent.

“Same here,” Jack replied and took her warm hand in his.

“I am going to find your mother, Nicholas. She told me she had something that would help my backache.”

Jack watched as Nick kissed his wife good-bye, and she walked gracefully, despite her pregnant state, down the hall.

“I never thought you’d marry a mortal,” Jack said as he watched her walk away.

“Imagine what Father thought. But as soon as he saw her tummy, he was a different person,” Nick explained.

“I wouldn’t care what he thought one way or the other,” Jack growled.

“When are you going to give up these harsh feeling against him?”

“Look at the man, Nick! He has more than one wife, and still he cavorts around this place, strutting like a rooster, bedding who he feels like! My mother, our mother, has to see this, and it’s disrespectful to her. Yet, she dotes on him like he hung the moon.”

“As far as I heard he did,” Nick joked.

“Nick . . .” Jack said in a warning tone.

His brother held up his hands, but his face still held a grin. “Seriously, Jack. Before you cast judgment on our mother’s behalf, get the entire story. Look at me. Santa finally has a Mrs. Claus.”

“Uh-huh. So now that you are blissfully chained to marriage, we all should.”

“Don’t knock it unless you try it, brother. I am sure there is someone who might be able to catch the elusive Jack Frost.”

“Maybe, but not anymore . . .” Jack shook his head trying to get Lucy’s face from his mind. “Never mind. I am going to head in and see what’s going on in the main hall. I’ll catch you around Nick. I’m sure I’ll see you and Neeva again before I go.”

Jack headed down the wide stone hall heading toward the sounds of revelry and away from Nick’s curious stare. No matter how relaxed it seemed between him and his brother he was not ready to get deep and personal into his own life. In the main hall, he thought he was prepared for the usual festivities, but this was unlike anything he had seen in thousands of years. Garlands hung from every thick beam in the main hall. Christmas tress stood in every corner. Everything was decorated in the old traditional way with berries and brightly painted handmade wooden ornaments hanging from every bough. The three stone fireplaces burned with thick logs, warming everyone inside who enjoyed the festivities with the scent of pine. Children squealed and played with toys that were being handed out. His father sat at the

head of his table and watched the merriment around him with bright childlike wonder. *Where the hell am I?* Jack wondered, and he walked around. By now, most of the men would be drunk on ale and his father would be groping one of the serving girls. Instead, everyone seemed thrilled at the new air of festivities. Jack couldn't help but think of Lucy and of how all of this would thrill her if she saw it.

"Jokull!" His father's voice boomed, and Jack sighed as he walked toward his father's throne.

"Father," Jack greeted him coldly. His eyes widened as Odin pulled him into a crushing hug in front of his warriors.

"My son, how do you like the merriment so far?"

"It's different," Jack replied slowly.

"Yes, yes I know!" Odin boomed. "It is time for a new way to take place here in the halls of Valhalla!" Around him, everyone cheered. "Now come, sit in your place as winter god and enjoy!"

Jack sat down on the left side of his father in his chair. He looked down the long table at the rest of his immortal family. Thor who sat at his left side raised his mug in greeting. Loki sat sullenly farther down, obviously upset at this new way of enjoying the winter solstice. The Valkeries were there at their rightful place at the massive table. They were all sisters and were all warriors who actually had children on their laps and looked magnificent in their beauty. Even the fairies and elves that usually stayed away because of drunken tricks of the other gods, flew around and buzzed in excitement. To Jack, it seemed like his father was trying to unite the entire kingdom and was doing a good job at it.

"The queen enters!" A loud voice echoed off the wall of the main hall, and everyone stood as a matter of respect. Jack gritted his teeth expecting to see Odin's first wife enter the room. Instead, he saw his own mother, Joko, dressed in silks and furs, walk into the main hall. Everyone bowed as she passed, and Jack knew his mouth fell open in surprise. His mother took her place on the throne next to Odin before everyone sat once more and the music started up again.

"Jokul why didn't you come see me as soon as you arrived?" His mother came over to his chair and placed kisses on both his cheeks.

"So you're first wife now. How did you pull that off?" Jack asked without preamble. He stared at his father coldly who just grinned and looked away. "What is with that man?"

"Come, Jokul. Walk with me, and we shall talk." Joko asked and held out her hand to her son.

Jack took her hand, and they left the hall by the main door and began to walk together. "Mother, why you, why now. If he got rid of his first, when will it be your turn to be cast aside?"

“He has not only gotten rid of his first wife. He got rid of them all,” Joko explained. “I am his only consort now. He let them all out of their marital vows and gave them lands and titles so they could remarry.”

This revelation stopped Jack in his tracks. “What? But why? This is Odin, god of Valhalla!”

“Your father is trying to usher in a new way so mortals do not forget the old ways and to keep us strong and united as a family. For many years now, he has spoken of this time, and he has made it a reality.” Joko smiled up at her son. “Not everyone has embraced the new way, but so far it is going well. No one would dare defy him.”

“So what now? I am supposed to say, ‘Oh great, Dad is a changed man. Let’s hug and bury the hatchet?’” Jack asked sarcastically. “I remember how much you cried over him, how much he hurt you with everything he has done. I cannot just forgive that!”

“I’m not asking you to, Jokul. I am asking you to let time heal old wounds,” Joko asked gently. “For all his faults, your father loves me, and he has always loved you.”

“Yeah, sure he does. I’ll hold onto my judgment for a while. Just in case he decides that serving girls are still part of his diet.” Jack saw hurt flash in his mother’s eyes and was instantly sorry for his comment. “I am sorry, Mama. I’ll try. I promise.”

“That is all that I ask.” Joko sat and patted the cushions of the window seat next to her. “Your mood is even more sour than usual, Jokul. Tell me what is wrong.”

Jack could never hide anything from his mother. He sat next to her and smiled sadly. “You can see that, hmm?”

“A mother’s second sight is never wrong.” Joko rubbed his shoulder in affection. “Talk to your mother.”

“It is a woman. Her name is Lucy.”

Joko clapped her hands in glee. “Ahhh, more grandchildren for me!”

“Not likely, Mother,” Jack said sadly. “I messed it up big time.”

Jack went on to tell his mother everything that happened, and as the story progressed, she made sounds of sympathy and irritation. By the time he was done, instead of her rubbing his shoulders in affection, she was slapping him angrily.

“Mother!” Jack moved away from the sting of her hands against his shoulder. “Aren’t you supposed to make me feel better here?”

“Not when my son’s head is as thick as the stones in this castle. Why would you do that to the poor girl who obviously loves you?”

“How can it work?” Jack asked in exasperation. “I am the embodiment of winter, and it’s not like I had the greatest role model in the world here.”

That remark earned him another slap from Joko. “Do not blame your father for this. You have always been loved, especially by me! You can rise above anything, and just because you are the winter god does not mean your heart has to be frozen. Go to Lucy, and tell her the truth. Tell her you love her, and get on your fool knees and beg for her forgiveness.”

“What if I don’t know how to love, Mother?” Jack asked pleadingly.

“Oh, my sweet Jokul. If you did not know how to love, you would not be sitting here torn to shreds right now,” his mother explained as she caressed his cheek. “Go to her, and win her love back. Then bring her home to meet the family. Your father will be excited. He already adores Neeva.”

Jack felt hope blossoming in his chest, and a grin spread across his face. “Thank you, Mother. Thank you for everything.”

Joko kissed his cheek. “Run my son and win your woman’s heart before it is too late.”

Jack embraced his mother tightly before closing his eyes and sending himself back to where he needed to be, New York City, and to find Lucy before it was too late. In the realm of Valhalla, time runs slower than in the world of mortals. By the time Jack returned, almost a week had passed, and he went on a mission to find his lost love.

Chapter Eight

Lucy set about to get her New Year's Eve party off and running. Mack had conceived the notion that a party to ring in the next year was exactly what she needed to get over her broken heart. She had the perfect venue. Her apartment was right over Times Square. Her guests would be able to watch the mayhem of thousands of partygoers in the middle of the biggest party in New York City without having to deal with the crowd. He had poked and prodded at her until she agreed, with his help of course. Now her apartment held streamers with 2009 hanging from her ceiling. She had enough drinks to put a small pub to shame and food prepared with the help of a few of Mack's friends. They were ready to rock and roll.

Her outfit of a leather miniskirt with a top hat that said "Party Animal 2009" and a plain white tank was of course the cake topper of Mack's flamboyant ideas. Lucy went along with it all, because she just needed to forget for a little while and lose herself in something other than her misery. Before the night was over, she planned to be completely bombed. She had already started with a rum and Coke in her hand as she greeted guests coming through her front door. By ten that night, the party was in full swing. Her apartment was wall to wall with partygoers, and the music pulsed all around her.

"I told you this was a good idea," Mack yelled as he pulled her into a big bear hug.

Lucy laughed. "I hope you say that when we have to clean up the mess."

"I plan to be well and truly passed out on your couch by the time that comes around, my dear."

She barely heard the doorbell over the noise in her home. Lucy grinned and pointed to the door to let Mack know that was where she was heading. He nodded and danced away to one of the hip-hop tunes playing. Lucy pushed her way slowly through her guests who kept stopping her for hugs and to tell her the party was awesome. By the time she got to the door, she was breathing heavy from exertion. Her breath completely stopped when she opened the door. On the threshold stood Jack, holding a bouquet of orchids. His eyes widened when he saw her outfit, and he looked past her to see the party going on in her apartment.

"It seems like I came at a bad time." A small smile crossed his lips.

"For you, it is always a bad time," Lucy retorted rudely. "What do you want, Jack?"

"I want to talk to you, Lucy, to apologize . . ."

"Save it. Do you think you can come here with a bunch of flowers, and everything will be okay?" Lucy's voice was harsh. "Let me guess. You can't find the socks that Mandy likes, and you need me to work for you again. No thanks, Jack. I've moved on."

"You have?" Jack said slowly.

Lucy waved her hands behind her. "You think this happens when someone's heart is broken? Honey, you weren't that good. I am having a grand time being free of you."

“You don’t mean that, Lucy, just like I didn’t mean anything I said.”

“Oh, I do mean it, Jack. You know nothing about me, about my life, and when this door closes, I am going to go back to my friends. And when I go to bed tonight, I won’t be alone. Go find Size-Zero Mandy. I hope she can keep you warm.”

Lucy slammed the door before Jack could say another thing, and she leaned against the wooden barrier. *Jack came here! He came here to find me!* Her mind reeled at the implications, but then the hurt of what he did filled her heart once more. Lucy pasted a smile on her face and tried to head to her bedroom. She needed a minute of quiet. She needed to think. Her path to her sanctuary was blocked by a few partygoers, and soon she was dragged away to join the fun. Lucy looked at her bedroom door helplessly as everyone pulled her into the fray of fun. The time was winding down until the new year would be ushered in, and she would have to wait until everyone left to finally get some peace.

The new year came in with the roar of the crowd outside her window and in her apartment. The party went into full swing, and Lucy finally got away to her bedroom for a few minutes to calm her frayed nerves. A few minutes turned into a half an hour and would have been more, but Mack came to find her.

“Why are you in here hiding out when everyone is out there asking for their hostess?” Mack plopped down on the bed next to her.

“I needed a few minutes by myself, Mack.” The pillow over her face muffled Lucy’s voice. “It was getting too overwhelming.”

“So you decided to come in here and try to smother yourself with a pillow,” Mack commented.

“Maybe.”

“Okay, diva. What’s going on?” Mack lay next to her.

Lucy pulled her pillow down and looked at Mack. “Jack showed up outside the door tonight.”

“Oh, so he came back begging for the luscious Lucy.” Mack rubbed his hand.

“He probably can’t even find where he put his checkbook and wanted to hire me back. Not for the other thing.”

“I hope you sent him packing.”

“I told him where he could shove the flowers and that I wouldn’t be going to bed alone tonight.”

“Good for you, sweetie.”

“But it still hurts like hell, Mack.” Tears choked Lucy’s words. “I have loved him for years, and in a matter of a day, he tore my heart out of my chest and shattered it. He is cold, Mack, cold as ice, and he didn’t care that he hurt me.”

“Oh, pudding.” Mack rolled to his side and pulled Lucy into a hug. “It will be okay. You have me.”

“Take your hands off her!”

The snarl came from the edge of the bed, and both Lucy and Mack jumped apart like two schoolchildren caught making out. She sat up, and her eyes widened when she saw Jack standing there with fire in his ice-blue eyes.

“How the hell did you get in here?” Lucy asked.

“Don’t you worry about that. I got here in time to stop this biker-wanna-be from taking advantage of you.” Jack looked her friend up and down with disdain. “Is this who you think can take my place?”

“Hey, buddy, I’ll have you know I am a fine specimen of a man!” Mack got off the bed and stood toe to toe with Jack.

Jack looked at Lucy. “Who talks like that? A fine specimen. Is he a junkie?”

“He is not a junkie!” Lucy protested. “He’s Mack.”

“Seriously, you picked a guy whose name rhymes with my name.”

Lucy glared at Jack. “Trust me, you had nothing to do with the name choice, you pompous ass.”

“Here, here, Lucy!” Mack cheered.

“You be quiet,” Jack snarled at her best friend. “Lucy, we have to talk before anything goes further with him. Let me state my case.”

“Why?” Lucy asked. “What, Aspen Bunnies didn’t suit your taste this week, or did you get tired of them already?”

“I didn’t go to Aspen. I went home.” Jack’s eyes searched her, and he implored. “Please, Lucy, talk to me. Let me tell you everything.”

Lucy stared into Jack’s eyes, which held more emotion in those blue depths than she had ever seen in the years she had known him. Without taking her eyes off him, she spoke to Mack. “Can you please get the party out of my apartment, Mack? I need to have this out.”

“Are you sure, Lucy?” Mack asked.

“She said give them the boot, Biker, and while you’re at it, get on your chopper and go too,” Jack said rudely.

“Jack, leave him alone.”

“No worries, Lucy. Me and Blond-Ken-Doll here will have it out eventually. He’ll have to eat his words,” Mack said, and with a simple salute, he left the bedroom to do as Lucy asked.

“Not likely,” Jack muttered.

Lucy sighed. “You probably will have to apologize to him. He’s my best friend and family.”

“Damn.”

“So no Aspen, huh?” Lucy asked. “Where’s home then? You have never once spoken about having a family.”

“I have a mother, father, and one brother. Tons of half brothers and cousins.” Jack took a breath. “Home is at the North Pole. Kinda.”

“Sounds like a complicated family. I didn’t know anyone lived at the North Pole. What, is your father Santa Claus?”

“He’s my brother,” Jack said simply.

Lucy’s mouth dropped open. “Are you insane?”

“I wish.” Jack sighed. “My family is complicated. My father is Odin, the Norse god. My mother is Joko, his wife, and we live in Valhalla.

“You live in Valhalla, where Viking souls go after a brave death?” Lucy said slowly.

“That’s one part of it. It is a vast place filled with wonders that you wouldn’t believe.”

“I see. And your brother is Santa Claus.”

“His name is Nick, and he just got married.”

“Oh, now there is a Mrs. Claus.” Lucy tried to wrap her mind around what she was hearing and was failing miserably.

“Yup, her name is Neeva.”

“And what are you Jack, an elf?” Lucy was skeptical of his every word.

“No, I am the winter god. My real name is Jokul Frosti.” Jack gazed at her face. “I’m Jack Frost. That is why the blizzards were so bad when I was sick. I couldn’t control the element.”

Lucy stared in his face and then broke out laughing. She couldn’t help it. Jack was coming to her with this flaming story, and she was expected to believe it. Lucy sat back on the bed and rolled into a ball with tears of mirth running down her cheeks. Jack stood there silently until she sat up and wiped the tears from her eyes.

“That was good, Jack.” A small giggle escaped her lips. “Happy New Year to me. Jack comes with jokes, or he is on crack.”

“It’s not a joke, Lucy, nor am I on drugs,” Jack replied in a low voice.

“Why are you here, Jack?” Lucy asked tiredly, the hilarity of the situation gone for the moment. “I can’t work for you anymore. I can’t do that to myself.”

“I don’t want you to work for me.”

“Then why are you bothering me?”

“You said you loved me, Lucy. Did you mean it?”

“Jack, why are going to do this to me!”

“Answer the question. Do you love me?”

“Yes! Is that what you need to hear? Yes, I love you!” Lucy cried out. “And you laughed at my love, Jack.”

“I’m sorry, Lucy, for everything I said,” Jack said softly.

“So you decide to come here for this information as another nail in my coffin to torture me?” Hurt etched Lucy’s voice.

“I’m here to tell you that I love you, Lucy, and that I want you to forgive me,” Jack implored her. “There is so much I have to tell you, so much that made me scared, but my mother helped me understand. I was running away from love, from you, and I don’t want to run anymore.”

“How can I be sure, Jack?” Lucy could feel tears begin to run down her cheeks. “How do I know you won’t run again for another size zero when feeling some kind of emotion makes you uncomfortable?”

“I’ll learn to talk to you, Lucy.” Jack got down on his knees in front of her. “I’m not saying it all going go be cake and ice cream. But help me, work with me and show me how to be a better man. Please, I need you in my life, or I will be lost.”

Lucy searched his face. She was looking for some kind of hidden agenda that would send her running in the opposite direction. There was none. All she could see was the bare raw truth on Jack's face. He was open, exposing his soul to her, and Lucy felt elation fill her heart. She pulled his face to hers and let her lips settle on his. Jack hesitated for a second before taking charge of the kiss and leaving her breathless.

Between kisses, he asked, "So is this a yes? I thought you'd make me work harder."

"I try not to hold grudges," Lucy said against his lips. "But you hurt me again, and I'll let Mack fillet you like a fish."

Jack chuckled. "I can live under that threat, just as long as I have you."

Lucy pulled away and looked at him, her tone serious. "Good, because you have me, Jack. You have my love."

"And you have mine." Jack lifted her and sat her on his lap. He held her body close and cradling Lucy against him.

"Did you think that the story about you being Jack Frost would get me to say yes to be with you?" Lucy asked against his neck where she licked a sensitive spot that made him shiver.

"You still don't believe that, hmmm?"

"Nope. I need some kind of proof to believe something like that, sweetheart."

"Then look, my sweet Lucy, and get the proof you need."

Lucy raised her head from the crook of his neck. She looked at his hand that he had lifted for her to see. From his fingertip, she saw ice form, and her eyes widened in amazement. She didn't believe what she was seeing, but it was happening right before her eyes. The ice form grew and morphed until a perfect ice snowflake turned in a slow circle on his fingertip. Lucy reached out, touched the delicate perfect snowflake, and found it cold to the touch and formed by his will alone.

"Holy crap!" she whispered as Jack made two then three perfect snowflakes all intricate and different before her eyes.

"I told you there was a lot I had to tell you." Jack laughed softly.

"You ain't kidding!" Lucy breathed the words out in amazement.

Jack threw the snowflakes in the air, and they turned into snow before her eyes. He took her lips in a swift kiss while she felt the sensation of snowflakes falling against her skin.

The End

About the Author

Dahlia Rose is the best-selling author of contemporary and paranormal romance with a hint of Caribbean spice. She was born and raised on a Caribbean island and now currently lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, with her four kids, who she affectionately nicknamed “The Children of the Corn,” and her biggest supporter and long-time love. She has a love of erotica, dark fantasy, sci-fi, and the things that go bump in the night. Books and writing are her biggest passions, and she hopes to open your imagination to the unknown between the pages of her books.