



SAMHAIN publishing LLC

The Wolf Who Stole Christmas

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Holiday eBook Freebie

The Wolf Who Stole Christmas
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On the 10th day of Christmas, over some bacon and eggs...

"I have a surprise," Holly's father said, from his position at the head of the breakfast table. That little announcement boded ill for the other occupants.

Contrary to popular belief, surprises from Santa were not a good thing. Santa needed guidance, parameters. A list.

Everyone at the table looked up expectantly.

Her mother had been doing the North-Pole Times crossword puzzle with the same luck she usually had, if her '*drats!*' vs. satisfied huffs were any indication. A three-to-one ratio by Holly's count.

Not that it mattered because mother would just ask Furio for the answer, which he supplied absently while he, true to his name, furiously scribbled down one of his many schematics for yet another improvement to the workshop.

Furio had great hands—strong, with long, knobby, thick fingers. Just looking at them made Holly's stomach dip and her breath speed up. Ghostly nicks marked the tanned skin all over, including a long pale crescent that curved around the base of his right thumb.

She'd had asked him once how he'd gotten that scar. He'd just scowled down at the hand in question, then scowled at her and replied he couldn't remember.

Furio was like that. He scowled a lot while deliberately, in her opinion, remembering little. He had good reason for his personal ticks, if you knew even a bit about his past. Which she did. Just not nearly enough.

With the workshop so close by and Furio being Santa's head engineer, he'd taken to sharing breakfast with the family most mornings. But two years of careful probing over buttered toast and hot tea on Holly's part, had barely elicited enough information from the man to fill a personal ad.

Especially frustrating, when she wanted to be the one to answer that ad:

*Big Bad Wolf : Snow-bunny willing to enter the wolf's lair, share long walks on the glaciers, and evenings in front of the fire playing naked Twister. Call me.
Notice me, damn it!*

She wanted Furio to look at her as a desirable woman for once, and not as Santa's little girl. Seemed the only times he ever noted her presence he frowned, as if she were some mechanical problem he couldn't solve.

He was scowling at her father now; his black brows scrunched together over a rather prominent nose and heavily fringed eyes the color of rich warm chocolate. *Hmmm...chocolate covered Furio...*

"Holly!"

She started, dropping her fork; Furio's sharp gaze zoomed in on her, and she turned toward her father. "Sorry, I wasn't paying attention."

"Obviously. I was saying that we're having some people over for dinner."

"*What?*" She winced at her mother's screech. "Christopher, how could you plan a dinner party without telling me?"

"Now calm down, Sandrine, it's just us, and of course you'll join us, Furio."

"Doesn't sound like much of a party," Holly offered, then colored when her father's chief engineer gave her another cool look.

"I've also invited Jack and Jadis."

"What?" Now it was Holly's turn to screech. "Jack, as in Frost?" Ole Jackie had issues with personal boundaries—that man never met a crack he hadn't tried to penetrate. And his sister followed Furio around like a bad odor.

Unfortunately, Jack had developed a crush on Holly. Unrequited, she might add, which he wasn't taking very well.

"Just be nice to the man."

"The last time I was nice to him was at the New Year's Eve party and he took that as an invitation to blow up under my skirt." She shivered now remembering the icy sensation.

"What else did he do?"

Furio's quiet demand was lost under her mother's sputterings—"But Jack has always been such a gentleman," and so forth, —and her father's equivocations, "You don't know that for sure; it might have been gas," and so on.

"He didn't touch you *inappropriately*, did he?" Her mother's attempt to muffle this question behind the folded newspaper failed miserably.

"Well, did he?" This was Furio, practically growling at her from across the table.

"He didn't get the chance. But let's just say, his barometric pressure was rising, and he's got a *huge* cold front."

"Holly!" She might sound outraged, but Holly didn't like the appraising look her mother gave her.

Sandrine Claus mourned the fact that her only offspring wasn't married. She'd even encouraged Holly to go south where there was a larger selection of promising males besides elves, were-caribou, the odd abominable snowman, trappers, hunters, hard-drinking oilmen and, of course, the ever-scowling Furio.

"He's very fond of you, Holly." —*Some patriarchal throat clearing happened here*— "And it'll put him in a better mood if he spends some time with you." At least he had the grace to mumble this last bit, his cherubic cheeks going even redder.

“Christmas is only days away and we need Jack on board.”

Her father’s words had a sobering effect. They all looked out the window. Where there should have been a blanket of white snow, there was brown grass and lichen. It was downright depressing. The rest of the world thought the warmer winters were the effect of greenhouse gasses, but the citizens of the North Pole knew it was all due to a torch-carrying Elemental.

Things couldn’t go on this way. For many, Christmas just wasn’t the same without the snow—the lights didn’t twinkle as bright, the fires didn’t roar as warmly, and the hot chocolate wasn’t as tasty. As a result, some of the magic of Christmas waned a bit more each year, thereby putting their whole operation in jeopardy. And Holly, being the company’s accountant, knew just how dire things could get.

“Jack is a handsome fellow and quite a catch,” father wheedled.

“True.” He was. Wise investments over the millenniums had ensured he was set financially, and he cut a striking figure with his lean ropey physique, piercing grey eyes and shock of white blond hair.

“You two make a nice couple.”

“*Hmmm.*” Lost in thought, Holly was busy making comparisons. Jack was fine, but Furio was all that and a sno-cone. A big sno-cone, judging from the fit of his pants. It was interesting that neither man was currently involved with someone, though. Or maybe not so surprising in the case of a bad-tempered werewolf.

“So, you’ll do it?”

“Why do you think he hasn’t married, if he’s such a catch?” she mused.

Father’s bushy white brows rose. “A man in his position? I’d say he’s particular.”

“No,” she said, absently staring across the table at Furio. “He’s an emotional wreck. No sane woman wants him.”

Furio stood up so abruptly, his chair fell over. He righted it. “I should get to work.”

Holly watched as he stalked from the room—he had a butt so hard you could bounce a chestnut off it. He was always entering and leaving rooms in an all fired hurry. She sighed, so much pent up energy could be put to better use...

“Holly!”

“Sorry, father. Yes, of course I’ll be nice to Jack while he’s here.” She crossed her fingers under the table.

Jack effin Frost. At the thought of Frost’s blue-tinged hands touching Holly, Furio’s claws sliced through his skin; he winced and forced them to retract.

Exiting the Claus house he circled round the side, heading for the oversized workshop in back. A quarter mile away, in the opposite direction, the forest called to the wolf in him; tempting him to shift and run away from his cares.

'He's an emotional wreck. No sane woman wants him,' Holly had said, looking straight at him. And she was right. After the life he'd embroiled himself in when his mate had died by a hunter's bullet, well, he wasn't fit to be with someone as giving and good as Holly. Even if he were, he was afraid... to love again.

As for the rest... the fantasies of her that kept him hard at night. He couldn't betray Christopher Claus's trust like that.

When a man picked you up at the lowest point in your life; when boozing, drugs and other things you weren't particularly proud of had taken over, because you'd lost everything that was good and bright and that had ever mattered to you—you did not then repay that man by banging the living daylights out of his only daughter.

You just didn't.

At least you tried not to, for two long years.

Too. Long. Years.

But all the logic in the world couldn't reason away his yearnings.

Distracted, he almost ran into a large branch of antlers as he turned the corner.

"Do you mind? You could poke an eye out with that thing."

"Funny, the girl I was with last night said the same thing, but she wasn't talking about the antlers," the reindeer quipped.

"Blitzen?"

"In the flesh, er, fur." He stamped his hoofs. "Hey, where were you last night? Man we had a blast. Tourists chicks, you know?" He winked and made a *click-click* sound with his tongue. "So what were you doing? Playing solo with the meat puppet again?"

Furio just sighed in answer and ran a hand through his hair.

"Shit, not her again." Blitzen shifted. In the blink of an eye, a man dressed in a long fur coat stood where the animal had been. A shot of white blazed at the front his brown hair, and another white patch striped the goatee that covered his chin.

"Holly's kinda attractive in a kid sister type way, but dude, really?"

"Kid sister?" Furio growled. What altitude had the reindeer been flying at lately? Holly was the only female worth noticing around here.

"I like 'em a little more..." Blitzen held his hands out in front of his chest and shrugged unapologetically. "I'm a rack man, what can I say?"

Holly's smaller dimensions were just fine by Furio. He loved the way her blonde hair caught the light, the warmth of her green eyes, and that mouth—the top lip was slightly fuller than the bottom and just begging to be sucked on gently. His thoughts went from network to cable to pay-per-view. With some effort he focused on Holly's less erotic qualities.

"She's sweet. She's got a good head on her shoulders and a good heart. She—"

What else could he say that wouldn't make him sound neutered? All he knew was, meeting her had hit him like a two-by-four. Like he'd been sleepwalking for years, and she'd woken him up. But woke him to a nightmare, because he could never have her.

Yet, the way she looked at him sometimes, made him feel anything was possible...

"Yeah, yeah, she's sweet, big heart, whatever. She's got a good head, but does she give any? That's what I want to know."

Furio hackles bristled. "No you don't."

"No. I don't. That's what I've been telling you all along. Look, man, all I'm saying is, you're naughty and Holly's nice."

"Too nice for me, you mean," he gritted out.

"She's all sunshine lollipops, and you're all Angus McAngsty. You brood. Broads don't dig the brood."

"We can't all be a party animal, *dude*. Some of us hold down real jobs all year long. Not just for 24 hrs once a year."

Blitzen's eyes narrowed. "I'd like to see you haul ass and pull my shift, Fido."

Furio growled in warning. Blitzen stared him down. "Yeah, I bet that thing you do with the foaming mouth and snapping teeth really gets the panty pudding going. Not. Holly's damn near royalty around here, and what've you got to offer her but *grrrs*, fur and maybe ticks."

"All right, I get it." Apparently everyone agreed that Holly was too good for him.

Frustration tore through Furio; he shifted, then dashed off across the grass and into the woods. But no matter how fast or far he ran, his pain followed.

Why couldn't her family be Buddhist?

If they had been, she wouldn't be sitting here, simultaneously trying to play nice with their guest of honor, while resisting the urge to take a blowtorch to his icicle fingers that kept finding their way onto her person.

She jumped now, letting out a tiny yelp when he touched her upper thigh. She grasped Jack's hand and moved it to his own lap. "Keep your hands to yourself."

He wouldn't let go of her, and a little tug of war ensued.

"I was just trying to warm them up," he said innocently.

"Try standing by the fire next time." She inclined her head towards the huge fireplace that dominated one end of the dining room. The mantle was done up in boughs and candles in hurricane glass. Just off to the side, a massive tree was decorated with hundreds of fairy-lights, candy canes, embroidered sachets and hand-painted balls. The whole thing was otherworldly and infused the room with the heavenly scents of evergreen and spices.

"I'd rather start a fire with you." He gazed longingly at her with eyes the color of ice.

"Wouldn't that be an occupational hazard?" She gave a final tug and he let go.

Jack laughed softly, sending a wave of goosebumps over her body. "Oh, I'd be very careful with you, Holly. Much more careful than the wolf. He looks like he'd like to eat you up, or rip my throat out. Or both." He languidly reached for his wine, and took a slow sip.

The way he raised the glass so exactly to his blue-tinged lips made her realize Jack was more than a little tipsy. Even if she hadn't watched him take that drink, what he'd just said was ludicrous. The only thing Furio had been interested in all night was the very rare slices of pot-roast he kept piling onto his plate.

Her stomach had knotted at the sight of his powerful shoulders encased in a tailored velvet jacket, the same rich color as his eyes. And the little shadowed dip below his Adam's apple, framed by his shirt's open collar, made her think it would be a lovely spot to drop a kiss.

In a bid to appear more formal, he'd brushed back his hair, but the stubborn flips and whorls resisted all efforts to smooth out the curls. Her fingers had itched to mess up his hair further. There should be nothing tamed about Furio.

No matter how he kept himself, his thoughts and feelings, under tight control, she knew the wolf inside was wild and passionate. *And maybe capable of love...?*

Holly spent those first few minutes when he entered the room just staring at him like some drooling idiot while he greeted the other guests. Finally, she'd managed to get herself in hand and had barely glanced in his direction since.

She braced herself and snuck a peek at him now, then froze when she met the heat in his gaze. Furio's eyes darted to Jack and she would've sworn the wolf's canines grew, poking out against his full lips, while his pupils flashed red in the candlelight.

Then Jack's sister Jadis, who was seated beside Furio, placed a pale hand on his arm, drawing his attention to her all-you-can-grab cleavage buffet.

Offering Furio the other, other white meat.

And he didn't seem adverse to changing diets.

Holly clenched her teeth and turned back to an amused Jack.

"I think you're mistaken about Furio's interest. He seems to have his hands full at the moment." And chances were he'd have his hands, mouth, and bed full later on tonight. Miserable, Holly took a huge gulp of wine.

"And how about you? Am I mistaken in your own interests?"

Panic almost made her spit out the wine. Was she so obvious? Could everyone see her pining over Furio?

She caught her father's eye. He was his jolly, old, self tonight; visibly pleased to see her and Jack getting on so well. He gave her a broad wink and she forced herself to smile.

"Your father said it was your idea to invite me."

Her smile turned to a glare.

"To be honest, I was surprised."

He wasn't the only one.

"I owe you an apology for the last time I was here. I came on a little strong, I guess."

Like an avalanche. "Oh no, not at all," she demurred wanting to get off the topic. She missed the sudden gleam in his eyes.

"So, Jack, about tomorrow night." Holly decided to cut to the chase. She pressed fingertips to her temple. She had the beginnings of a headache, whether it was from too much red wine, or from watching Jadis practically feeding her nipples to Furio, or from fending off Jack's flirtatious overtures.

"Yes?" He leaned in closer; she noticed for the first time that tiny crystal flakes clung to his lashes and in his hair. He was quite dazzling when you paid attention. He chuckled. "Well I for one am glad you're finally paying attention."

"Did I say that out loud?"

He nodded, a slight smile curving his lips.

Holly felt her face warm. No more drinking for her tonight.

"About tomorrow night?" he prompted.

"Will you make it snow?"

"Is that what you'd like?"

"Yes. It would make Christmas magical."

“Then I will make magic for you,” he whispered and placed a light kiss on her mouth. His lips were cold, but the sensation was hot. Holly straightened like a shot in her seat, completely flustered. She didn’t want him doing anything for her. She certainly didn’t want him kissing her. All she wanted for Christmas was—

She looked across the table again, past the fancy crystal and silver candlesticks. Furio’s hands were spread out on the white tablecloth, his claws fully extended and embedded into the wood and his eyes blazed at her.

He probably thought she was a hypocritical slut, complaining about Jack at breakfast this morning, and now apparently swapping spit with him at the dinner table. Something inside her shriveled and suddenly she didn’t give a damn anymore. She was tired of trying to get Furio’s attention or approval. At least Jack Frost liked her, and he was going to make magic, just for her.

Holly spent the rest of the night flirting outrageously with Jack and ignoring the wolf.

But there was that one second just before midnight... She and Jack sat side by side on the piano bench, while her parents and Jadis gathered round, all of them singing carols. It was at that moment she caught sight of Furio leaving. The lone wolf. Without saying good night.

And her heart ached.

* * *

Holly put out a plate of freshly baked cookies and a glass of milk on the sideboard. They were for her father, when he returned from his annual trip. He’d be gone for twenty-four hours, but in the end, every child whose letter had been received by Santa Clause in time, would have their Christmas wish fulfilled.

She went to the window and peeked out through the drawn drapes. At least Jack had come through. The ground sparkled with a blanket of white and more feathery flakes fell softly from the sky. The elves had even strung up fairy-lights in the evergreens outside and the whole place looked fantastical.

But in all that festive sparkle, Furio’s little cabin was a dark spot. There were no signs of celebration up there and if it wasn’t for a solitary light in a downstairs window, she would’ve wondered if he was even home. Now she wondered if he were alone. Holly tightened the belt on her robe and closed the drapes with a snap.

She went up to her room, undressed, and slipped between the sheets where she finally fell into a troubled sleep. At some point, she swam to hazy consciousness with a shiver. *Where was that draft coming from?*

“Don’t worry, you’ll be hot soon enough, my love.”

Suddenly she was awake, her heart battering more than beating in her chest. “What are you doing?” She wrestled with the sheets, her legs tangling with cool smooth male ones.

“Hey, it’s just me, relax.”

"Are you crazy?" She was pissed, but that wasn't the only reason her breath skimmed in and out of her lungs in flitting gasps.

Holly finally escaped from the bed, and stood in the middle of the room shaking. She didn't have to ask how he'd gotten in, one of the windows was cracked open—although she was sure they'd all been latched. A dusting of frost coated the sill and trailed across the floor to the bed.

She pressed a clammy hand to her throat. "I can't believe you're in here."

"And I can't believe you're way over there, wasting time." Jack winked. "Now come back to bed." He patted the rumpled sheets she'd just vacated.

Un-believable. The man was skiing with one pole. Holly shook her head. "Just get out."

He sat up, genuinely perplexed. "I thought you wanted tonight to be magic."

"For Christmas, you idiot! Not for you to come here and-and shake your wand." She gestured wildly.

Jack exited the bed, his shirtless torso smooth and rippled with lean muscles. "I don't like being teased," he said coldly.

"I didn't—"

"Yes, you did. You let me kiss you."

"That was barely a kiss, Jack. It was nothing."

"Nothing?" His eyes flashed in the dark, turning diamond-hard, as hard as his voice. "Nothing to you, maybe. But not to me." He disintegrated into a whirlwind of snow, a storm that filled her room, tearing the nightgown from her body.

She felt him all over, touching her, chilling her. She had to get away. Holly kept her eyes shut tight against tiny crystalline flakes that flicked against her skin in stinging icy kisses and staggered across wet slippery floorboards.

"Where do you think you're going? Don't run away from me," Jack raged.

Furio. His name flashed in her brain. He would keep her safe. Somehow Holly got her door opened, but the wind Jack created knocked her off her feet, then tumbled her down the stairs. Moments later she slammed through a window in a funnel of snow and flew up in the sky.

"You're mine, Holly. You promised. You said you wanted me."

"No, no I didn't. I don't want you, I want Furio." There. She'd said it out loud. "Fuuuurrriiiiiioooo." The name tore from her as Jack filled her mouth with his cold-hot kiss.

* * *

Furio headed home through the woods at a slow trot. Under his pelt he was sweating, and his breath bellowed out into the arctic air in great puffs of steam.

But no amount of sprinting through the trees was going to help him when there was only one tail he wanted to chase, and it didn't belong to a rabbit.

The run had barely taken the edge off his anger and frustration. Jack Frost was the real catch, rich and famous and an Elemental. Why would Chris Claus's only daughter spare a lone wolf a second glance when Jack was on tap?

As he reached the edge of the forest where the trees thinned, temperatures suddenly dropped and the lazy fall of downy flakes morphed into a lashing curtain of hail and snow. Such was life at the Pole. He lowered his muzzle and trudged towards the cabin, his belly surfing along the top of snow drifts. To his sensitive ears the wind sounded like a thousand voices, then Furio realized he could hear snatches of an argument. A man's voice and a woman's—

A scream cut through the cacophony of the gale; his name was unmistakable.

Holly! Furio changed direction and ran straight for the worst of the storm. Instinct made him slash through the snow, claws fully extended and teeth snapping at the wind, canines goring air. Frost built up on his fur and sprayed into his eyes. *Frost*. Jack!

"Frost, let her go. She's mine!" Furio howled into the night.

"No, mine!" The wind raged.

"MINE!" Furio leapt into the air. He hit something soft and solid, and they fell to earth in a powdery white explosion. The thing beneath him moaned.

Furio whimpered. He licked at Holly's face, touched his paw to her cold flesh. She was unclothed and barely breathing but he couldn't carry her in his wolf state. He shifted, then lifted her in his arms and struggled back through the storm to his cabin, both of them stark naked.

No matter how the wind battered at him and tried to tear his prize from him, he wouldn't let go, just held her closer. No matter how Jack nipped at him and blinded his way, Furio didn't stop. He walked on when there was no more feeling left in his numbed body, only the sharp pain of possible loss that stabbed his heart with each step.

Finally, he made it to the cabin. He pushed the door open, then shoved it closed with his shoulder, and stood panting, back braced against the door.

"She's mine. You can't have her," he whispered fiercely.

He'd saved his woman. *She belonged to him.*

The wind suddenly died with one last mournful moan, and all was quiet.

He laid her down on the rug in front of the fire, plied blankets under her, and covered her with furs. He made her drink cup after cup of hot sweet tea, and chafed her limbs. Eventually, her color returned, the shivers abated and her thick hair dried to its usual silky straightness.

Only then, did he let her sleep.

Furio was having a pleasant dream. Soft kisses rained over his face and chest. He rumbled approval and a little giggle tickled his ear. He knew then it wasn't a dream. A fine tensile thread of hope wound round his heart and tightened. He opened his eyes.

"Hello, sleepyhead." Holly smiled up at him sweetly. Her leg was crossed over his hips, her thigh resting against a very interesting and very hard part of his body. Her core—soft, hot, and interestingly enough, *wet*—pressed against his side.

He adjusted his arm under her, grabbed a handful of firm ass and pulled her closer. "Hello, yourself."

She raked her fingers through the hair on his chest. "Thank you for last night. You saved my life."

"Jack wouldn't have let you die." It was a hard admission. As it was, he practically chewed each constant and vowel before spitting them out, but he knew it was the truth. Jack had been hurt. When you were an Elemental, with so much inherent power, strong emotions were a dangerous thing to have.

"I'm not so sure," she whispered.

Furio pulled her fully on top of him. Now she straddled him, the moist print of her silky heat enfolding his erection, which grew harder and more urgent. He felt the pre-cum seep out between their bellies as he cradled her head in his hands. Furio stared into her green eyes. He would drown in them if he could.

"When I was out there, I could feel his desperation. And if anyone knows what desperation feels like, it's me. I've been living with it for the last two years.

"Desperate to be with you." He prodded her with his hips, and kissed her softly. "Desperate to make you mine," he said against her lips.

"To make love to you. To have your love." He punctuated each statement with a kiss, the last more demanding, more hungry than the first.

"You have it," she said. "You always did."

Furio rolled over, so he was on top, the head of his cock pressed against her entry. "I'm sorry, Hols. Can't be gentle this time. Next time—" He plunged inside. Pounding fast and hard, taking kisses with no coaxing. When he tried to spread her thighs wider, needing to fill her with every inch of himself, she tightened her legs wrapped around his waist, heels digging into the base of his spine.

And then she wrapped her arms around him tighter, like she'd never let him go. And his heart felt like it would burst with love for her.

Furio pistoned faster. He could feel her wetness coating his testes, feel her muscles milking him. She was hot, and moaning, and biting at him and begging him and oh, *fuck he was*

coming. He flung his head back, the wolf in him howling, lost in overwhelming *sweet, sweet*, sensation.

Slowly, he came back to himself. He looked down at her. Damp wisps of her hair clung to her forehead and flushed cheeks. Her lips were swollen and her eyes glassy.

"You okay?"

"More than. You?"

He barely got the laugh out, needing to catch his breath. "Yeah, more than." He kissed her then pulled out and collapsed beside her. "I think I just opened my Christmas present."

That made her laugh. She raised her head and looked around. "You don't even have a tree in here."

"Because I always spend the day at the house with your family." He would talk about his loneliness another time. Not now. Now, he knew that he'd never be alone again. He'd stolen another chance at love.

"Besides, I don't need a tree. Don't need garlands or fairy-lights or mistletoe, or candy canes, either.

"All I need is Holly."

The End

Author Biography

Vanessa Jaye lives in Toronto, Canada under an assumed name with seven dwarfs. When she's not polishing mirrors and baking apple strudel, she makes up stuff, writes it down and sends it into her editor.

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