



Also by Jenna Byrnes

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Candy Cane Kisses

JENNA BYRNES

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“**S**tep under the mistletoe and give me a kiss, baby!” The man made a grab for her, missed, and fell flat on his face.

Cyndi Benson sidestepped the drunken stranger and made her way past him to the table where her friend Lisa waited. “Nice,” she muttered, rolling her eyes at the man crawling back up to his bar stool.

Lisa laughed. “You’re too choosy. See, you could have had a date right there.”

“Oh yeah!” Cyndi settled into her seat and leaned back. “That’s just what I need. I’m not sure he’d remember his own name, let alone mine.”

“Maybe *that* is what you need,” Lisa offered, and looked up as the waiter approached their table. “I’ll have a White Russian. Cyn?”

“Um, just a glass of white wine, please.”

“Very good.” The waiter nodded and walked off.

Lisa lasciviously watched him go. “Nice ass. He was cute, too, did you notice?” She flicked her dark hair away from her face and licked her painted lips.

Cyndi laughed. “Sure, and he was probably all of twenty-two. I may be desperate, Lise, but I still have my scruples.”

Lisa reached over and unbuttoned the top button of Cyndi’s blouse. “You’ve got a lot more than just scruples, sweetheart. You just need to let them hang out a little bit.”

“Stop!” Cyndi pushed Lisa’s hand away, but left the button undone. She did tend to overdress. Gil always used to tell her that her breasts were beautiful, and she shouldn’t be afraid to show them off. He certainly enjoyed looking. Gil was lavish with his praise in those days; he loved Cyndi’s long blonde hair and the fact she looked beautiful and polished with very little make-up. She sighed.

“You’re thinking about him again, aren’t you?”

Cyndi smiled and nodded guiltily. “Sorry. Gil was always unbuttoning my top button like you just did.”

“He knew a good thing when he saw it,” Lisa added. “But,

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Cyndi, look, it's been almost a year since Gil...left."

Cyndi knew Lisa wanted to say something else, but checked her temper for Cyndi's benefit. Lisa never particularly liked Gil, but he had been the love of Cyndi's life. Even after a year, she still missed him desperately. She knew it was time to move on, but that was easier said than done. None of Lisa's attempts to fix her up had worked out, because as much as Cyndi craved a man's touch, she wasn't going to settle for just anybody.

That infuriated the hell out of Lisa, who flitted through a string of men before settling down and getting married. She encouraged Cyndi to let herself go, have a few flings, and relax. Every relationship didn't have to be serious. But Cyndi wasn't wired that way. She and Gil had been very serious for several years, and she found it impossible to toss that away, even if it was already long gone.

"I don't know what to do anymore," Cyndi said softly, and smiled at the waiter as he set their drinks down. She watched him retreat. *He does have a nice ass.* She was serious when she told Lisa she was feeling desperate. It was Christmas Eve and she'd be spending the night alone. That thought terrified her.

"I wish you'd come home with me," Lisa told her as if reading her mind. "You could spend the night. We're having my family tonight for dinner and gifts. You know most of them, you'll fit right in."

"I couldn't intrude, but thanks for offering."

"It's not just for you—I'd love the company. Tomorrow I'm going to be surrounded by Jason's relatives and believe me; it would be nice to have someone *I like* to talk to."

Cyndi laughed. "You like Jason's family."

"Mostly," Lisa admitted, and then her eyes lit up. "His cousin Tyler is coming, now he's cute! You need to meet him, Cyn."

"I don't think so. It's sweet of you to offer, though. I'll be fine."

"You'll be alone and wallowing in misery. I wish some of your family could have flown in."

Cyndi shook her head. "It just didn't work out. I saw them at Thanksgiving, anyway."

"It's not about seeing them; it's about *you* not being alone

for Christmas.” Lisa sipped her drink. “I’m worried about you, hon.”

Cyndi finished her glass of wine and reached for her purse. “I’ll be fine, I promise. I hope you and Jason have a lovely Christmas, and I’ll see you in a couple days.” She tossed some cash on the table and leaned in for a hug. “Merry Christmas, Lisa.”

“Merry Christmas, Cyn.” Lisa hugged her back. “Promise you’ll call me if you change your mind. You know you’re welcome at any time. I mean that.”

“I know you do, and thanks.” Cyndi smiled at her friend and stood up. She retrieved her coat from the coat check girl and headed out to her car.

It was bitterly cold outside, and several inches of snow covered the ground. Cyndi drove home carefully. The roads were passable but not clear and she didn’t want to take a chance on an accident. The thought of a traffic accident terrified her more than the idea of spending Christmas alone. She was feeling extremely sorry for herself and quite pathetic when she pulled into the driveway of her little house.

Cyndi was startled to see smoke coming from her chimney. She hadn’t used the fireplace since Gil left the previous winter. *What’s going on?* Had her parents shown up to surprise her? She looked around for cars but didn’t see any, so she pulled into her garage and entered the house cautiously. “Hello?”

Now she was really stunned. Beside the warm, glowing fire sat a fully decorated Christmas tree. Cyndi hadn’t bothered to put up a tree this year; she frankly wanted to forget Christmas and couldn’t wait for it to be over with. “Hello?” she called again, looking around the room.

“Merry Christmas, baby.” Gil stepped from around the corner and smiled at her.

“G-Gil?” she stuttered. She wanted to ask, *What are you doing here?* Instead, she fainted.

* * * *

Cyndi woke up on her sofa with a soft blanket covering her. “Take it easy, you may have hit your head.” Gil set a cup of

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tea on the coffee table and scooted on the edge of the sofa next to her.

“You’re really here?” Cyndi reached out and touched his face. He looked the same as always. His curly dark hair needed a trim and he had a three-day beard growth, like he did the last time she saw him.

“I’m here.” Gil turned his head and kissed the palm of her hand.

“But...why? What are you doing here?”

He shrugged. “I knew you needed me, Cyn. I couldn’t bear the pain you were in, being alone at Christmas.”

She leaned back from him. “How did you know?”

He smiled and shrugged again. “I just knew.”

Cyndi ran her hands through her hair and shook her head, trying to clear it. Gil tried to catch her hands but she pounded them on his chest instead. “You didn’t mind the pain I was in when you left me! *You left me!*” she cried, pummeling him.

“I know, I know.” He tried to comfort her but she was having none of it.

“Where’s Ciara?” Cyndi asked him angrily, tears streaming down her face. “Why aren’t you with Ciara?”

He grabbed her shoulders and faced her. “She’s spending the night with her grandparents and some other family. I’ll be with her tomorrow. I thought maybe tonight, I could be with you.”

Cyndi scrambled away from him and off the sofa. “You bastard! How could you even think...” her sentence trailed off. She couldn’t pretend like she didn’t want him. She looked at him there on the sofa looking sweet, apologetic and dammit, sexy! He still looked so damn sexy, she couldn’t stand it. “I can’t believe this,” Cyndi muttered.

“Don’t think about it so much.” Gil stood up and folded her into his arms. “You needed me, and I’m here. I dare you to tell me that you don’t want me here.”

She looked up at him, the tears falling again. “Of course I want you, you jackass. I’m just scared as hell.”

“I know.” He held her tightly, rubbing her back and pressing her body into his. “Try not to over think it. I’ve missed you, Cyn, and I know you’ve missed me. Let me love you

tonight.”

Cyndi felt the hard ridge of his erection through his jeans and pressed into it. “God, yes,” she murmured, then kissed him passionately. He opened his mouth to her and she forced her tongue in deeply. She plundered with it viciously like she wanted his body to do to hers, and damn if she didn’t want it more than anything. She knew she was breaking her own rule about casual sex, but it didn’t seem to matter, because this was *Gil*. Her beloved Gil was back, even if only for one night. Tomorrow he’d go back to Ciara, but Cyndi wouldn’t think about that. She wanted to relax and enjoy...and not think. “Make love to me, Gil,” she whispered breathlessly between kisses.

He smiled and pressed her down on to the sofa. Cyndi watched him as he stood to shut off the lights, leaving them in the glow of the fire and the flickering Christmas tree. When he reached out to the tree and grabbed a candy cane from it, Cyndi felt herself cream her underwear. She reached down and flicked off her slacks and panties quickly, and Gil smiled as she tossed her blouse and bra aside.

Unwrapping the cellophane, he pumped the red and white candy stick between his lips a few times to wet it. He leaned over Cyndi and she shivered as he traced the sticky cane across her nipples and down her stomach. “Still like candy cane kisses?” he murmured.

She shivered again. “Only from you.”

Gil held the candy between his teeth like a cigar as he undressed himself. His erection sprang free from his briefs and Cyndi eyed it hungrily. “Are you going to share that candy?”

“When I’m done with it.” He removed it from his mouth as he leaned down to kiss her.

Cyndi groaned as the minty taste mingled with the flavors of their mouths. She inhaled sharply as his lips moved down her body. She knew what was coming and creamed again with the anticipation of it. “Oh, Gil,” she moaned as he licked the stickiness off her nipples one at a time, slowly, thoroughly, and in an achingly familiar way. His mouth continued lower, following the trail of the candy to her own pink opening. “Oh God,” she moaned again, and he chuckled because he hadn’t even started yet. But Cyndi knew what was coming and her hips

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bucked with eagerness.

Gil rubbed the candy cane over her throbbing clit and through her slick folds, spreading peppermint methodically over her. He took the stick and slid it gently into her pussy, and thrust it in and out slowly as he began licking her clean. Cyndi came explosively, shuddering and soaking him with her juices. He lapped them up and continued cleaning her, dragging the melting stick of sugar in circles over her clit as he sucked her pussy dry.

She came again gloriously, and yanked Gil by the hair on top of her. He grinned as he faced her, the candy still hanging out of his mouth like a cigar and his face sticky and wet. "You're a mess," she teased him.

"You're still a gusher. I love that." He kissed her, putting the other end of the candy in her mouth and they both sucked her juices off of it and gazed at each other. Finally Cyndi took the candy cane and flipped Gil to his back. She rubbed the sticky pink cane over his flat nipples and watched them pucker before she sucked them into her mouth. He groaned with pleasure and arched his back.

Cyndi dragged the stick down his body and followed it with her mouth. She settled between his legs and traced the candy up and over his rigid cock. Gil squirmed and she smiled, licking the drop of moisture off the tip of his cock before pulling the whole shaft into her mouth. She heard him groan as she worked him up and down slowly with her mouth and her hands. She cupped his balls, massaging them, and felt his body stiffen. As his stream exploded, she lowered her mouth so it shot straight down her throat. Cyndi didn't realize she was crying until she pulled away from him moments later.

"Hey, come here." Gil reached for her and dragged her up and into his arms. "Don't cry."

"I can't believe how pathetic I am," she stammered. "You show up for one night and I'm all over you like a cheap hooker on a twenty dollar bill."

He rubbed his hands over her back and said softly, "That was worth a lot more than twenty dollars, I guarantee you that."

Cyndi slapped at his chest and he laughed and grabbed her hands.

"I'm teasing!" He wrestled her to the sofa beneath him.

“That was perfect, the way it always was. You’re so beautiful, Cyn.”

Her tears still streamed down her face. “If it was so perfect, then why—?”

“Shhh...” he quieted her, and tugged the last of the candy cane from her hand. “There’s my candy. Share it with me. I need more candy cane kisses.” He broke the last of the stick in half and put a piece in each of their mouths.

“Gil,” Cyndi tried to protest, but he kissed her and she couldn’t form coherent thoughts anymore. His body weighed on her heavily and his tongue possessed her mouth. She wanted to stay that way forever.

* * * *

When she woke alone on the couch, she was fuzzyheaded. The Christmas tree twinkled brightly—it wasn’t a dream. “Gil?”

“Right here, baby.” He carried a tray out of the kitchen. “I thought you might be hungry.”

She pulled the blanket around her and looked at him. “I thought you were a dream.”

Gil smiled. “Damn nice dream.”

“Yeah, it was,” she said softly, and put her head in her hands.

He set the tray down and sat next to her on the sofa. “Cyn, you need to eat something and get your strength built up. You look awfully run down.”

“It’s been stressful at work,” she looked around, “and here. I didn’t want to decorate for Christmas. I just wanted it to be over.”

“I figured that. But you need to keep going, baby. Don’t act as if your life is over. Get out there and get back in the game. You’re a beautiful woman; men will be falling all over themselves to get a shot at you.”

“That’s what Lisa says.” She looked at him angrily. “But it didn’t keep you here.”

He smiled at her patiently. “That was different, and you know it. But I don’t want to talk about that. We still have a long night ahead of us. Eat something and get your strength up for

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round two.”

Cyndi nibbled at some cheese and crackers from the tray. “I can’t believe you waltz in here and think I’m going to make love with you all night long.”

“Believe it,” he said, and flicked a strand of hair back from her face. “Because that’s what we’re going to do. *All night long.*” He leaned in and kissed her cheek. “You want it as much as I do.”

“Yes.” She wrapped her arms around his neck. “I want it badly. I’ve missed you so much.”

Gil worked her to her back on the sofa and hovered over her. “I’ve missed you too, baby.” He looked over her. “God, I love your body.”

“Show me,” she whispered.

He slid his hand between her legs and parted her folds. He inserted a finger and brought it out again. “You ready for me?”

“Oh yes.” Cyndi spread her legs and felt his cock thrust toward her center. “Yes,” she moaned again, and raised her hips to meet his thrust. They joined fully and rocked back and forth as one.

Thrills went down her spine at how right it felt. She wrapped her legs around his and propelled her body against him.

“You feel so good,” he told her through gritted teeth.

“Mmm, you too,” she agreed, and her eyes rolled up in her head as she moaned, “I’m coming!”

“Come on,” Gil encouraged, keeping up his movements as Cyndi shuddered and clung to him. “Oh yeah, that was pretty, you’re such a pretty girl...”

She collapsed to the sofa but he wasn’t quite finished. “Get back up here.” He grinned and worked one hand under her ass, pressing her into him. “You’ve got one more in you, I know you do. And I’m going to come with you this time. Come on, baby. Fuck me hard and come with me.”

Cyndi shivered at his words and felt herself going over the edge again. She practically growled at him, “Yes! Fuck me!”

Gil shuddered and Cyndi held tight to him, orgasmic waves washing over both of them simultaneously. She felt more wonderful than she could ever remember in her life, until she came back to reality and remembered that she only had this man

for one night. She fought back the tears this time.

“Oh, my God,” Gil muttered, holding himself up on his arms so he wouldn’t crush her. “That was fucking incredible.”

“Yeah, it was,” she agreed quietly.

He winced as he pulled out of her, and climbed off the sofa. “If I smoked, I’d want a cigarette right now.”

“There’s always a candy cane,” she told him, and they both chuckled.

He leaned down to kiss her. “I’ve had enough artificial sugar for one night. I only want the real thing now—you, the sweet taste of you.”

Cyndi ran a hand through his hair. “Still such a smooth talker.”

“Only to you, baby.”

She started to comment and he waved a hand to quiet her. “Don’t, Cyn.”

She sat up, pulled her knees to her chest and hugged them. “So, Gil, will you say goodbye when you leave, or just disappear?”

He looked at her seriously. “You know I would never just disappear.” He waved off her comment again and said, “Cyn, if this is too hard, maybe I should just leave.” He reached for his shirt.

“No!” She scrambled off the couch and took the shirt from him. “Don’t go! Please, Gil, I want you to stay!”

He wrapped his arms around her and Cyndi cried into his chest. “I need you to stay,” she whimpered.

“I’m not going anywhere tonight,” he said softly. “I want to be here with you.”

“Thank you.” She looked up and touched his face. “I love you so much.”

He kissed her forehead. “You’ve got to get over me. I want you to be happy, Cyn, not sitting around pining for me.”

“I can’t. I love you.” She kissed him and he responded, pulling her into his arms snugly. She sighed, and murmured, “Let’s go to bed.”

“We won’t have the Christmas tree,” he reminded.

“We’ll make do.” She pulled him by the hand and led him to her bedroom.

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As they walked in, Gil picked up the framed picture of him from her dresser and said, "You should put this away. It won't look good when you bring other men in here."

"There are no other men." She knelt on the bed and tugged him toward her. "I only want you. I want you to taste every inch of me, and when you're ready, I want you inside me again. I want you, Gil. I want you." Cyndi knew she was begging, but he started it by coming here, and now she wanted as much of him as she could get before he left again.

"I want you, too, my beautiful Cyndi." He pressed her back on the bed and began exploring with his mouth.

She lay back and tried to think about nothing more than the feelings he was stirring inside her. Her mind kept coming around to the fact she wasn't 'his beautiful Cyndi' anymore, but she knew if she voiced her concerns he might leave, and she couldn't allow that. She had several more hours until morning, and she intended to make the most of them. "Love me, Gil," she said softly, and he murmured something unintelligible back to her. His mouth was otherwise occupied, and Cyndi was floating to the clouds.

* * * *

She awoke with the late morning sun peeking in through her window blinds. She yawned, stretched, and remembered. "Gil?" Cyndi sat up and looked around but there was no answer.

They'd made love until dawn, when the first shards of daybreak filtered a murky pink light into the room. She vaguely remembered him telling her goodbye, but she was so sleepy and so contented, it was fuzzy in her mind.

She got up and went to the bathroom, sore with muscles aching she hadn't used in ages...or twelve months, to be exact. She'd made love with no one since Gil, and after last night, it would be a long time before she wanted to make love with anyone else. He had satisfied her completely, and she'd savor and cherish the memory for a long, long time.

Standing under the shower spray, Cyndi cried in fits and spurts. She tried to be happy, and grateful for the gift Gil had given her. But it hurt so damn bad to know he was gone, back

with Ciara, and she might never see him again. She stood under the stream of water until it turned cold, then grabbed a towel and proceeded to dry herself off. She felt better, if a little numb.

Cyndi had just dressed in jeans and a festive red sweater when the doorbell rang. She darted down the hall, checking the living room quickly for signs of debauchery. It looked strangely neat and tidy, not exactly how she remembered leaving it. She shrugged and opened the front door to Lisa.

"Merry Christmas, sweetheart! Wow, you look better! Did you have a good night?"

"Yes." Cyndi smiled. "I had a great night." She started to tell Lisa about Gil coming back, but stopped. Lisa never liked Gil, and she wouldn't appreciate his one night stand with Cyndi. So she smiled, and left it at that.

"I'm so happy to hear it. I was worried about you."

"I'm fine, really I am. I feel much better today." That was the God's honest truth.

"Wonderful! Then perhaps you'll change your mind about coming to my house. Jason sent me over to see if I could convince you to come. His family will love you, and you and I can make fun of them behind their backs."

Cyndi laughed. "We'll do no such thing. But yeah, I think I will come over. It might be nice to be around a family today."

"Cousin Tyler will be there," Lisa reminded Cyndi, raising her eyebrows up and down.

"You don't need to fix me up. I told you I'm fine and I mean it."

"Then grab your coat and come on. I've got a turkey in the oven."

Cyndi hesitated and then said, "If you don't mind, I think I'll drive my car. I've got one stop to make before I come over, but it'll be quick, I promise."

Lisa nodded. "I thought you might." She reached down on the ground behind her and pulled up a bouquet of carnations in the Christmas colors of red and white. Three candy canes were threaded through the arrangement, and it looked very festive. "I brought you these. Tell Ciara I miss her, and Auntie Lisa remembered how much she loved candy canes."

"Oh, thank you," Cyndi took the arrangement and smelled

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the fragrant flowers. "It's beautiful." She smiled at Lisa and gave her a hug. "I won't be long. I'll see you soon."

"We're counting on it. If you're not there in an hour, Jason will send out a search party."

"I'll be there. Thanks again, Lisa," she looked at the flowers, "for everything."

"You bet." Lisa winked. "See you soon." She turned and walked to her car, and Cyndi closed the front door.

She smelled the flowers one more time before setting them on the table and returning to her room to finish getting dressed. She applied a touch of make-up and some jewelry, and decided she looked pretty good considering her lack of sleep. As she left her room, Cyndi stopped and touched the picture of Gil on her dresser. "I love you," she told him. She picked up the picture next to his and smiled at her beautiful blonde-haired daughter. "I love you, too, Ciara, and I always will." Setting the picture back down, Cyndi brushed away a tear and returned to the front room, gathering up the flowers, her coat and purse.

It was a short drive to the cemetery, a trip Cyndi could make in her sleep because she'd driven it so often. She entered the large white gates and took the first left past the tall angel statue of a family named Stevens. Several rows later, she stopped her car in front of the white marble stone she'd picked out. *Benson*. Cyndi inhaled and exhaled carefully before she stepped out of her car. The snow covering the graves was untouched. For some reason, she expected to see footprints.

She knelt by the stone and wiped away the snow from the name nearest her. "Gilbert James, October 22, 1979—December 28, 2008." She reached across to the middle of the stone and wiped away more snow. "Ciara Michelle, June 12, 2005—December 28, 2008."

She nestled the flowers in front of Ciara and plucked one red carnation and one candy cane out to put in front of Gil. "Oh, I miss you two so much. I can't believe it's been almost a year already. The anniversary is in three days." She twirled the candy cane around in her fingers and smiled as she stuck it in the snow by Gil's name. She inhaled the fragrance of the red flower and closed her eyes.

The deep red color reminded her of all the blood she saw

when she first arrived at the scene of their car accident. It happened on a Friday, three days after Christmas last year. Gil got off work first, so he picked Ciara up from daycare, and they stopped for pizza on their way home. Cyndi got the call on her cell phone; she hadn't even left work yet. She raced to the scene just as the ambulance was preparing to haul Gil away. He made them stop so he could tell Cyndi good-bye. She was frantic but he clasped her hand and told her he loved her, and to go to Ciara. The ambulance took off, and Cyndi was informed Ciara had already been taken to the hospital.

All Cyndi could see was blood everywhere. A drunk driver had appeared out of nowhere and Gil's car was totaled. Cyndi looked in through the broken windshield and saw a mangled bouquet of flowers and a crumpled pizza box. She got in her car and drove quickly after Gil's ambulance, but when she got there, she discovered both he and their daughter had died on the way to the hospital.

She opened her eyes and the bright sun glaring on the white snow made her squint. She set the flower down for Gil by the candy cane, and smiled. "Thanks for last night, baby. I love your candy cane kisses."

She looked at Ciara's name on the stone. "Merry Christmas, sweetheart. Tell Grandma and Grandpa Benson hello for me. I love you, Ciara."

Cyndi looked at the gravestone. There was room for her name next to Ciara's, and someday, she'd be buried here with them. Right after the accident, Cyndi would often lie down on the ground next to the two dirt mounds that covered her husband and daughter, hoping to somehow sink in there with them. She didn't feel that way anymore.

She still felt sad, and a part of her probably always would. But today, she felt loved—very, very much loved—and strangely hopeful for the future. A few days ago, the mere thought of facing the anniversary of the accident was nearly overwhelming. Now, she knew she could do it.

"Merry Christmas." Cyndi kissed her fingertips and pressed them to the top of the stone. She stood up and headed for her car. Lisa, Jason and their family awaited her. The future awaited her. Cyndi smiled.

About the Author

Jenna Byrnes could use more cabinet space and more hours in a day. She'd fill the kitchen with gadgets her husband purchases off TV and let him cook for her to his heart's content. She'd breeze through the days adding hours of sleep, and more time for writing the hot, erotic romance she loves to read.

Jenna thinks everyone deserves a happy ending, and loves to provide as many of those as possible to her gay, lesbian and hetero characters. Her favorite quote, from a pro-gay billboard, is "Be careful who you hate. It may be someone you love."

For the latest news, visit Jenna's blog at <http://jennabyrnes.blogspot.com/> and her website at <http://www.jennabyrnes.com/>.