

A Novel Christmas

Bonus Epilogue

By: Lynsey M. Stewart.

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Six months after the wedding.

Drew

"I can't seem to find the words to finish this chapter," Cal said as she pushed her reading glasses to the top of her head. "It's driving me mad. I know what I want to say, but I'm too tired to structure the sentences."

"You need help?" I sat up from where I was relaxing in her usual reading spot, the comfy chair that swallowed her as she got lost in a new book. I put my Kindle down on the arm, giving her my full attention.

"That would be good," she said, failing to turn around. She was in full writing mode. Distracted and edgy, desperate to get the right words down in the right order so that she could pay justice to the characters in her head.

"Tell me the gist."

"She's a dancer. He's a cello player. Moody. Rude. Rough round the edges."

"Sounds like my kind of character," I replied, smiling as she ignored me.

"They've both been through terrible losses, but I want there to be *hope* for them." She finally turned to me, stabbing the pen she had been making notes with into her messy bun. "He's a single dad because yum."

"Is that another popular trope?" I asked, smiling as she let out a frustrated breath.

"Widowed single dad is where it's at," she replied, rubbing her face with her hands. She was tired, and I just wanted to wrap her into me and stroke her head until she finally succumbed to sleep. Working on this book was taking it out of her. "It shows he has a caring side underneath the aloof, rude exterior."

"If he's so rude, will readers fall in love with him?"

"Yes." She bit her lip and smiled. "If I pull it off."

Archie was sitting at her feet. His favourite spot. She'd spend her days typing away and he'd drool over her feet. He was as under her spell, same as I was. If I could spend my days sitting at her feet I would too. I watched her as she twiddled Archie's ear. Her blonde hair was shining under the lights of the Christmas

tree—the one we’d finished decorating earlier. It was later than we wanted, but wrapping up a last-minute Christmas wedding had meant our own celebrations had been dimmed somewhat. Shorts, knee high socks and a step ladder were involved in the decoration again, just like the first time, and I couldn’t resist kissing her thigh, which led to making her come for the rest of the afternoon. She’d pretended she was annoyed that I’d eaten up her writing time by eating her pussy at the foot of the tree. I knew better. She would drop her writing in a heartbeat for the promise of my cock, even with a deadline looming.

“What are you stuck with?” I asked, crawling on the floor to her and resting my head on her lap. Her fingers in my hair never failed to relax me.

“The level of dark sex.”

“How dark is dark?” I asked.

“I’ve been researching Shibaru.”

“Bless you.”

I felt her shoulders move as she laughed.

“It’s Japanese bondage.”

“Of course it is.”

“It’s beautiful. He likes the aesthetics of it.” She waved her hands across her boobs. “How a rope is tied between her breasts.” I loved how she could *see* her characters. Like they were real, almost like family. A familiarity she wanted to convey through her words.

“Care to demonstrate?” I asked, tracing the quote of the tattoo on her thigh and placing a kiss at the full stop.

“I’m on a deadline,” she replied, still not batting me away as I pushed my hands under the sides of her shorts. “Gerry will be on the first plane over here if I don’t send him something by the end of the week.”

“It’s Christmas,” I whispered, pulling her towards me, the slight gasp of arousal dancing from her lips in surprise. “I want to do unspeakable things to you and after the unspeakable things, I want to run you a bath and read you *A Christmas Carol* until you can no longer keep your eyes open.” She yawned and brushed the tendrils of loose hair out of her face. “Which, by the look of you, won’t take long.”

“I’d like that,” she replied, a smirk gracing her lips. “But first, I have to finish this chapter.”

“When will you ever do as I say, Miss Steele?” She laughed loudly.

“Christian, I’m submissive in the red room. Nowhere else.”

“Don’t I fucking know it,” I replied, laughing against her mouth.

We’d promised each other that we would take two weeks off over Christmas, but I should have known that was the stupidest idea I’d ever had. She was in the middle of writing her next book, and author’s brains don’t close down just because of a reindeer with a red nose and fat guy in a red suit. Karensa had had its busiest year so far. We held our first celebrity wedding in the spring, which was covered by a well-known glossy magazine. Jenson was practically vibrating with delight. The phone hadn’t stopped ringing since the first copy hit news shelves a few weeks later.

“So, the dark sex?” I asked as she grabbed my chin and pushed me away.

“Drew.”

“What? I’m interested. You wanted help. Let’s talk it out.”

“I want help, not a distraction,” she said kissing me before turning back to her laptop. We’d finished the renovations to the cottage a few months ago, and despite the extra rooms and open-plan living spaces she still wanted to work at the shabby desk I’d set up for her when we first met. I’d set up some twinkling lights at the window, framing the view she loved so much. She squealed with delight when I turned them on and promptly burst into tears. Currently, I was having trouble keeping up with the swing of her moods. We recently met with a couple who booked in for a wedding next summer. It was to be our last appointment until the New Year. The bride-to-be wanted Cal to write a poem in dedication to her husband-to-be. When they talked ideas and put together a mood board, Cal was chewing the inside of her mouth in an adorable attempt to stop the tears. When they left, she told me they were obviously more in love than we were and locked herself in the bathroom. Archie and I sat outside the door, confused and vulnerable to the mood lottery (everyone was NOT a winner) and breathed a sigh of relief when she gingerly opened the door, her finger in her mouth and smiling behind it in embarrassment. We didn’t talk about it again, and I was careful to keep my mouth shut when I witnessed a frustrated eyebrow arch or a look so lethal it almost knocked my teeth out.

“Tell me more about Shiitake,” I said, pulling her sweater down her shoulder and kissing the sweet spot there. She wriggled in her seat and a huge sigh blanketed over the space.

“I’m pretty sure that’s a mushroom,” she gasped as I continued planting tiny kisses against her soft skin.

“Mushrooms aren’t used in Japanese bondage?”

“I don’t think so,” she laughed. “Maybe I need to do more research?”

“I’m all for helping with research.”

“Look,” she said, turning the laptop to me and showing me images of woman wrapped in ropes. “*Shibaru*. Isn’t it amazing?” I leant into her, she rested her head against mine, and all I could think about was running her that bath and getting *A Christmas Carol* ready. “It means to tie decoratively. I *love* that. I could imagine my character *worshipping* the female lead, so much so that he wants to decorate her in knots.”

“Can I just worship you naked?” I said, grazing my teeth across her collarbone. “I don’t need to decorate you in knots. I just need—” I put my hand underneath her sweater and held her breast, “—this.” She pressed her back against me as I ran my finger across her nipple. “And this.” Her arm reached up, pulling me closer. “And you. Just you.”

Cal pulled her sweater over her head and threw it onto the floor behind me. She pushed her breasts out and...Jesus, she’s got magnificent breasts. Larger. Fuller. *What the hell was happening with her breasts?* My hands barely covered them. And just as I moved forward, ready to catch one in my mouth...the phone rang.

“Who the fuck is that?”

“I don’t know until I answer it,” she replied, looking down at my hands hovering over the good stuff.

“No. I *forbid* you.”

She laughed and completely ignored me as she backed away from my outstretched hands, still curved over in the shape of her boobs.

“Hello? Hi Brian. I’m good. Oh, you know...It’s not flowing as I would like it to, but I’ll get there. Drew?” I shook my head profusely. “He’s just here. Let me get him for you.” Cal handed me the phone with a smirk, bright and vivacious.

“You pick your moments,” I said as Brian started laughing.

“Are you *copulating* again?”

I glanced at Cal, she was leaning over the table, clicking around on the laptop. An arse in the air that could only be described as luscious. “I’d like to be doing that, Brian, but you’ve just called me at—” I checked my watch, “—eleven thirty at night.”

“Sorry it’s late, boy.”

“What have you got to tell me that couldn’t possibly wait until the morning?”

“I’m just ringing to let you know that Cal’s parents are all settled in for the night. What time do you want the surprise reveal to happen tomorrow?”

“Fantastic. I’ll have the cottage ready for them by eleven so any time after that,” I replied, lowering my voice.

Cal had spent her first Christmas without her family when she arrived at Karensa to write her next book. She was a traditionalist, and although she had treated them to an all-expenses-paid cruise with her advance from the publisher, I knew she missed them like crazy. Last year, our first Christmas as a couple was quiet and relaxed. Her parents were helping prepare Christmas dinner at a residential home in London, and although Cal was in awe of them, I knew she was disappointed that they couldn’t make it to the Island. So, what better Christmas present could I give her this year? Cal’s parents were staying at Brian’s farm for the evening, the only way I could keep it a surprise, and would be joining us at Karensa with Jensen and Sam for the rest of the holidays.

“She’s going to be over the moon, boy,” Brian said.

“I know,” I replied. “Listen. Thanks for helping out.”

“Of course. Anything for Cal.”

I put the phone down and turned to find her watching me, a small smile on her face and her hands clasped across her belly.

“Sit down,” she said quietly, the smile still there.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, thinking she’d overheard my conversation.

“I know we’ve left Christmas late this year. I’ve been so busy with the book and you’ve been busy with weddings.”

“That’s OK. We’ve made it in one piece, haven’t we? I replied.

She turned to look at the Christmas tree. “Today has made me think about our first Christmas together. Going to the Minack Theatre, decorating the tree.”

I laughed, remembering how that night ended with me fucking Cal against the wall and how today had pretty much had the same conclusion. “Familiar, was it?” I walked over to the bookshelf in the corner of the room and lifted a copy of *To Be Continued*. “This is a great book. One of your best.” Cal laughed, and the sound I lived for filled the room.

“It didn’t start off as a great book. What was the working title? Oh, yes. *The Woodcutter’s Chopper*” I cringed dramatically at the thought of the original book inspired by my shirtless woodcutting. “Can you remember the cover?”

“I’ve tried to block it out of my mind,” I replied.

She turned and opened the drawer of her desk, producing a manila envelope. It threw out a memory. The night I found the mock-up cover and blurb of *The Woodcutter’s chopper*, the night I could have lost her forever. I swallowed harshly.

“This is the mock-up cover for the next adventure,” Cal said, handing the envelope to me.

“Adventure?” I asked, confused. “It’s not a romance?”

“I’m sure it will be,” she replied. “Open it and tell me what you think.”

I pushed my finger underneath the sealed flap and broke it open with one swoop of my finger. I peeked inside, even more confused and watched as she covered her mouth with her hands as I slipped the glossy paper out slowly.

I held them up. A cover mock-up with Cal and me laughing, an image that must have been taken when we were both unaware and lost in each other for a while. Totally captured. The words, *We’re having a baby!* were arched over in pale yellow. I slipped that behind the other, an image of Archie with the words, *You’re going to have a brother or sister!* And finally, an image of me with the words, *You’re going to be a daddy!*

“Fuck,” I whispered, brushing the tears from my face. My girl. My wonderful girl was pregnant.

She narrowed her eyes, held back slightly. “Tell me how you feel.” I closed my eyes, the warmth of my tears trickling down my cheek and onto my chin. Cal stood up, knelt down before me and wiped them away. “Say something.”

“I love you.”

“I know,” she replied, nodding.

“How long have you known?”

“A few days. Gerry had these made up for me.”

“We need to frame them. Put them in the baby’s room.”

“Wow!” she replied, laughing against my cheek. “The baby’s room. How good does that sound?”

“Fucking amazing, Cal.” I kissed her softly, immediately looking at her belly and pulling back in case I hurt her. She laughed at my wide eyes.

“I think we may need to hold off the Shibaru practice,” she said, smiling. “But that doesn’t mean you’re going to break me with your kisses.”

“Good,” I replied, picking her up quickly and taking her up to our bedroom. Our eyes met, mine in panic.

“What?”

“But can I break you with my cock?”

“Bloody hell, Drew,” she said shaking her head. We stayed in the moment, Cal in my arms, smiles on our faces, tears in our eyes, and the rush of love I felt when I realised I was falling in love with her—rushed again.

“You’re going to be an amazing mum.”

“You think so?” she asked.

I closed my eyes, kissed her forehead.

“I *know* so.”

The End