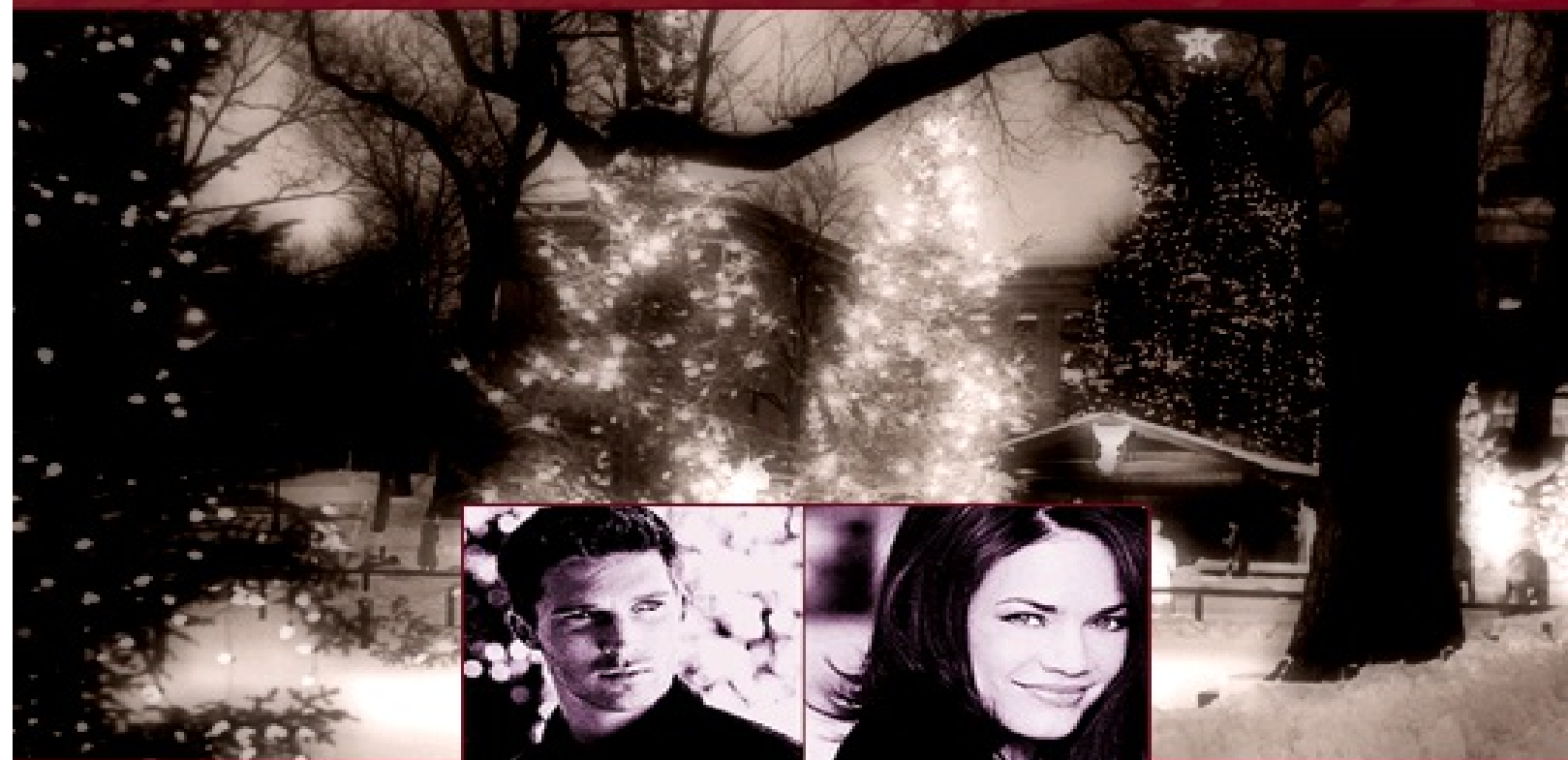


All I Want For Christmas



I just want you for my own more than you could ever know
Make my wish come true, all I want for Christmas is you, yeah

Melissa (LissieLove)

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This story was written 2014.

Disclaimer

I have no affiliation with General Hospital, ABC, Disney, any of the cast or crew that works at any of the above companies. This site is meant for entertainment purposes and I do not own the characters that the show has created, though I wouldn't mind owning Patrick or Dillon.

I'm just saying.

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<http://cg.dearisobel.org>

Please drop me a line if you liked it!
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Dedication

To Mariah Carey for the song that made this story possible.

Background

Inspiration

So as a rule, I don't tend to do a ton of holiday stories. There are a few reasons, but usually it's because I'm so bogged down with writing projects that the thought of doing one more is insane, so the few Christmas projects that are on this site are short stories or longer stories with Christmas celebrations.

However, this year I wanted to do something fun and light-hearted (for the most part) because so much of what I'm working on at the moment is either really complex or just angsty and dark with mental illness, domestic abuse, and whatnot. Plus I almost never write alternate universe — General Hospital canon is just so complex and filled with incredible characters and history that I get distracted for that. So AU is another challenge for me.

Timeline

So, yes, *All I Want* is an alternate universe, so here's my disclaimer. The Jason Morgan in this story has a characterization that's closer to a blend of Jason Morgan and Jason Quartermaine, raised within the Quartermaine family but rejected by his stepmother, Monica, for the most part. Because there's no accident and no mob, it makes sense that his character would not be as stoic or constrained as JM on screen. I had contemplated using Billy Miller's portrayal so far, but I'm just not ready and his character isn't as established as I'd like.

Really, all you need to know is the short-hand abbreviations I use for the ELQ corporate structure, since ELQ is pretty important. Jason is the CFO (Chief Financial Officer) and AJ is the COO (Chief Operations Officer). They both report to Ned as the CEO (Chief Executive Officer). Emily is the corporate events planner, and Elizabeth is her administrative assistant. All other things will be set up in the story. So to speak.

Music

If you have access to the internet, I highly recommend going to the story page:

<http://cg.dearisobel.org/alternate-universe/all-i-want-for-christmas/>

And checking out the soundtrack.

*I just want you for my own
More than you could ever know
Make my wish come true
All I want for Christmas is you, yeah*

Part One

*It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas
Soon the bells will start
And the thing that will make them ring
Is the carol that you sing
Right within your heart*

December 1

ELQ: Jason Morgan's Office

The moment his younger sister waltzed into his office with a bright smile, Jason Morgan should have known she was up to something.

“My wonderful brother!”

Jason rose to his feet. “Emily, I'm kind of in the middle of something, so if you need something—”

Emily draped herself elegantly in the white chair in front of his desk and waved him away. “This won't take more than a minute. I have the most incredible news!”

“Your Christmas parties aren't going to cost this company a single cent?” Jason cautiously resumed his seat and set aside the projected quarterly earnings. “Because that would be news. ”

“My parties, as you so generously term them, are the reason people work at ELQ, the reason why we have such an amazing public reputation. At a time when huge corporations are seen as the Anti-Christ, ELQ is—”

“Yeah, yeah. ” Not in the mood to deal with his sister's impassioned defense of her position as the event planner for ELQ, Jason leaned back. “What's the news?”

“I'll be spending the entire month in Greece,” she declared, clasping her hands to her chest with a dreamy sigh. “White beaches, cabanas, a private island—”

Jason set down his pen. “This month?” he asked. “You're going to Greece *this* month?”

She blinked her caramel colored eyes with a practiced innocence he did not believe for a minute. “It's the best time, you know—”

“This month,” he repeated. “December. The month in which ELQ is committed to throwing no less than six ridiculous events in the span of two weeks. ”

“Well, yes, I do feel bad about that,” Emily said. “But so much work has already been done that I feel

completely confident leaving those details in your hands. ”

“In my hands—” Jason stopped and took a deep breath. His sister was a wonderful, warm, and witty person, but unfortunately, she was also a bit ditzy. “Emily, did you happen to notice the paperwork on my desk?”

She blinked at it. “You always have paperwork on your desk. ”

“What about the title on the damn door?”

Emily actually twisted in her seat to look. “Jason Morgan, Chief Financial Officer. So? It's not like you're *totally* in charge. You, AJ, Ned are all kind of the boss. They thought it was a fantastic idea. ”

His half-brother and cousin *would* absolutely find this hysterical, but Jason wasn't in the mood for their jokes. “Emily, this is the busiest time of the year for me. End of the year earnings, projected earnings for the next year—and that's not even the majority of what I do—”

“I'm not leaving you *completely* by yourself. ” Emily rolled her eyes. “Honestly, Jason. You have no eye for design. I have an assistant, you know. She'll do quite a bit, but you're best suited to approve and sign off on contracts. ”

“Your assistant. ” Jason exhaled slowly. “And that's still Elizabeth?”

“See, I knew you'd remember meeting her. She's only been with me since Labor Day, but my God, she is an incredible designer, with such an attention to detail. She's—”

“Fantastic,” Jason finished dryly. “I remember her. ” Particularly at the company Halloween party when she'd been costumed as Helen of Troy.

And afterward, when she'd been costumed in quite a bit less.

“I knew you'd understand. ” Emily rose to her feet. “I'm already late meeting Nikolas at the airstrip, and Elizabeth is waiting outside to go over the details—”

“Right now?” Jason demanded. “Emily, you cannot do this. ”

“Are you going to tell me I *can't* take a vacation?” Emily planted a hand on her hip and arched a brow. “Jason, when was the last time I took time off?”

Jason pressed his lips together. Never. Emily threw not only the lavish events that garnered them such public attention, but smaller events at their subsidiaries all over the world. At any given moment, she'd be zipping off to throw charity events or even plan retirement parties for long-time employees.

His sister, while flighty and occasionally ditzy, worked her ass off.

“If I do this, you have to promise you will never do this again without warning. I'm talking like a thirty days notice. ”

“You are fantastic.” When Jason rounded the desk to walk her out into reception, she pressed a kiss to his cheek. “The best of brothers.”

“Don't let AJ hear you say that.”

Emily waved that away as they emerged from Jason's office where his executive assistant was behind his desk and Elizabeth Webber was perched in a chair, a slim leather portfolio in her hands.

“It's all settled, Elizabeth. Have an amazing holiday!”

With another wave, Emily had disappeared into the elevator. Once the doors closed, Jason turned his attention to her assistant. “Ah, Elizabeth, do you want to come in?”

“Sure.” The petite brunette rose. “I suppose she didn't tell you anything about her grand vacation until five minutes ago?”

“That would be correct.” He gestured for her to head into the office. “Did you want something to drink? Coffee?”

“Oh, no.” Elizabeth stood there, the folder in her arms acting almost as a barrier between them. They stood there, just inside his office, for nearly a full minute before she cleared her throat. “So maybe we should go over the basics or did you...” She shifted. “I mean, I can technically handle the majority of this—”

“No, no.” Jason indicated that she should take a seat. “Listen, I promised my sister I would do this, and the holiday season is pretty important to the company, so...”

“Right.” She waited for him to take his seat before flipping open her folder. “Well, there are five events planned at the moment. There are two parties on Christmas Eve, one for the shareholders and their friends and families. Another for the local Port Charles society, the usual. There's the Christmas party ELQ sponsors on Christmas Eve for General Hospital and Mercy Hospital during the day. And then New Year's Eve gala, for shareholders and Port Charles society alike.”

“That doesn't...seem like a lot.” Jason reached for a pen. “What's been done so far?”

“Well, the venues have all been secured and the hospitals have signed the contracts. I need to develop themes for all the parties, which Emily tells me is usually done that last moment for...” Elizabeth wrinkled her nose. “I suppose that's for spontaneity.”

“Christ.” Jason shook his head. “I'm no good at any of that—”

“No, I mean, I can deal with all of that. Honestly, I'll mostly just need you to sign paperwork and contracts with the various vendors.” Elizabeth pursed her lips and looked down. “Emily manages to juggle all of this all the time. I can do it once.”

“Right.” Jason cleared his throat. “So, um, how about we set up a daily meeting to go over the details. To stay on top of things. Emily's reputation as an event planner is important to her, so I don't

want to damage that. ” Even if she did decide to abandon him during their busiest and most high profile season.

Leaving him alone with her assistant.

Whom he had not spoken with in four weeks.

Since the morning after Halloween.

“Daily meetings,” Elizabeth repeated. “That—that sounds fine. ” She closed her portfolio. “Um, Emily signed the contracts for the venues before she left, but should I have them sent over?”

“Uh, yeah, just so I'm familiar with the clauses in case it becomes important. ”

When she stood, he followed suit. “I guess I'll see you tomorrow,” she said as she moved towards the door.

“Right. ” He coughed lightly. “Ah, Elizabeth, is there anything else maybe we should talk about?”

She blinked at him, much the way his sister had earlier. “No. Nothing I can think of. ”

She closed the door behind him, and he sat back down.

This was going to be a long month.

The Loft: Living Room

Elizabeth collapsed on the sofa with her hand covering her eyes. “Oh, my God. ”

“I sense a disturbance in the force,” one of her roommates murmured to the other. Shuffling ensued as Robin Scorpio and Nadine Crowell crowded around her.

“I hate the world. ”

“Boys?” Nadine said to Robin, who nodded sagely. “I'll get the Rocky Road. ”

Elizabeth propped herself up on her elbows. “No...this calls for the Godiva. ”

“Whoa...” Nadine halted in her steps. “That is quite the disturbance. ”

Robin sat on the end of the sofa, raising Elizabeth's legs to place them in her lap. “Spill it, sister. ”

“Not until I have passed out the goodies. ” Nadine closed the drawer where they kept the emergency chocolate, handed one bar to each woman before sitting cross-legged on the sturdy wooden coffee table.

“Now that we've assumed our positions. ” Elizabeth sat up and drew her legs underneath her body as she unwrapped the dark chocolate raspberry bar. “Remember Halloween?”

“Ooh, with Hottie McHotster and the Night of Passion. ”

“Oh, hell...” Robin blinked. “You're pregnant. ”

“What?” Elizabeth shuddered. “God, no. This is worse. ”

“There's something worse than children?” Nadine asked Robin. “Like what? Death?”

“You're a pediatrics nurse,” Robin said. “Try and act like it. ”

“Other people's children are fine. I just don't want any of mine. They stink. They're smelly—”

“If we could,” Elizabeth said, annoyed. “I'm not pregnant. You know my boss Emily?”

“She's Hottie McHotster?” Nadine gasped.

Robin and Elizabeth both stared at her until the blonde flushed. “What? It's a reasonable question. ”

“She took off for the entire month, putting all the holiday parties in my hands. ” Elizabeth sighed.

“And her brother's. ”

Nadine hesitated. “Which...one? I don't want to leap to another conclusion. ”

“You slept with Jason Morgan,” Robin said, her eyes wide. “The CFO of ELQ. Holy crap, Elizabeth. Don't you think this should have been covered with a bottle of wine weeks ago?”

“Yeah. Talk about hot. He practically sizzles. ” Nadine sighed, her blue eyes dreamy. “And those eyes. That smile. ”

“Because it's ridiculous. ” Elizabeth pressed her hands to her face. “I mean, God. It was just...a moment of insanity. ”

“Only a moment?” Nadine's face fell. “Because I would have pegged him for more than a—”

“Nadine. ” Robin rolled her eyes. “This is more than a Godiva. ” She pursed her lips. “Liz, this is a Mount Eden moment. ”

“Really? I would have thought it rated at least Elsa Bianchi. ” Nadine got to her feet. “Ooh, what about the Iron Horse? We were saving it for Christmas Eve, but—”

“Do you hear this? This is exactly what's wrong with all of this. Do you think Jason Morgan and his family have to weigh every moment to make sure they're worthy of expensive wine?” With a huff, Elizabeth fell back on the sofa. “And I want the Mount Eden. ”

“Oh, well that's a pile of phooey. ” Nadine tugged the requested bottle from the wine rack in the kitchen and returned to the coffee table, clutching three wine-glasses by the stems.

“Seriously,” Robin agreed as she took her glass from Nadine. “I grew up in Port Charles, and the Q's are not—” She pursed her lips. “Okay, this generation is nothing like the rest of them. Emily went to public school with me. I was like two years behind Jason. He's a good guy. Money is incidental to him.”

“Wait, wait, before we dissent Elizabeth's nonsense, I want all the details she left out of the Halloween story.” Nadine resumed her position on the table. “Let me recap for the audience. Elizabeth takes my fantastic advice and dresses up like Helen of Troy.”

“Didn't Jason just go as a CFO?” Robin wrinkled her nose. “I can't remember anymore. He hates to dress up.”

“He was in a Hugo Boss tuxedo, I pretended he was James Bond,” Elizabeth said. “So, after the Irish trash can Nadine dared me to drink—”

“Because you're five and can't turn down a dare,” Robin cut in.

“I may have slid up to him and...” Elizabeth moaned and bowed her head. “Listen. You have to understand. Emily's department is on the same floor as his. I arrive at the same time sometimes. And I just...he's so gorgeous. And nice. Ugh. I've wanted to jump him since day one.”

“And I helped,” Nadine said proudly, raising her glass in the air. “I rock.”

“So you hit on him first?” Robin asked. “Because I love that. Women should take charge of their sexuality.”

“Well, no. I approached him, and he said something about gladly launching a thousand ships if it meant I'd smile at him.”

“Oh, that's so dorky. I love it. Fantastic opening line.” Nadine sighed. “You're a lucky bitch.”

“And then you jumped him.” Robin said. “Because I saw you walk across the room and then I didn't see you again until you did the walk of shame the next morning.”

“Well, I might have told him that I'd smile at him any time, any where, any place if he would just say my name again.” She closed her eyes. “He always drops his voice just slightly, like an octave. It makes me tingly.”

“I'm confused.” Nadine leaned forward. “Was the sex, like, bad? Because at the moment, I'd sleep with him.”

“No, the sex was fantastic. Ridiculous. Life-ruining.” Elizabeth took a hasty gulp. “I woke up the next morning and realized I'd nailed my boss—”

“Well, you technically nailed your boss's brother—”

“Shut it you.” Elizabeth pointed her finger at Nadine. “Don't help.”

“What did you say the next morning then?” Robin asked. “What did he say?”

“Um, I told him this was insane, completely unprofessional and that I was sorry. Then I booked it. ”

Robin reached for the wine glass. “You're a moron, you don't deserve the Mount Eden. ” To Nadine, she said, “Go get her the Arbor Mist. ”

“Whoa, Robin is pissed. That's a serious downgrade. ” Nadine wiggled her eyebrows. “But you're going to be working with Hottie McHotster, so you know...potential. ”

“He has not said one word to me in the last four weeks,” Elizabeth said. “He's moved on. ”

“Because you ran. ” Robin leaned forward. “Elizabeth, if he gives you the green light, I'm begging you as a single woman, have sex with that man. ”

“Yeah, if we can't, you should be. ” Nadine nodded. “Agree you'll go for it, and Robin will give back your wine. ”

Elizabeth narrowed her eyes. “Do I have to list all the reasons why this is a bad idea?”

“Nope, just remember the one reason it's a great idea. ” Robin held out her wine. “Great sex with gorgeous, nice guys comes along twice, maybe three times in a lifetime, Liz. Throw it away once, you may not get it again. ”

“Well, when you put it that way, how can I say no?”

Part Two

*Santa baby, forgot to mention one little thing
A ring
I don't mean a phone
Santa baby, and hurry down the chimney tonight
Hurry down the chimney tonight
Hurry down the chimney tonight*

December 2

ELQ: Jason Morgan's Office

“Spinelli, hold my calls until I've finished meeting with Ms. Webber,” Jason told his gangly executive administrative assistant as Elizabeth slipped past him into his office.

“Yes, sir, Mr. Morgan, sir. ”

Jason closed the door and flashed a smile at Elizabeth as she stood in the middle of his office, her portfolio clutched in her hands as always. “Good morning. ”

“Good morning,” she replied, drawing her bottom lip between her teeth. She shifted her weight from one black stiletto heel to the other. “Ah. Did you get the contracts? I had Kiki drop them off with your assistant. ”

“Mmm-hmm,” Jason nodded. “Have a seat,” he told her, gesturing towards the shortened conference table. “Do you want coffee or tea? I can ask Spinelli to bring it in—”

“I'm fine. ” Elizabeth sat down, careful to smooth her black skirt down so it didn't bunch up. “Emily signed the contracts before her vacation—”

“It looks fine. ” Jason brought his own coffee over. She appeared to be in a hurry to conduct business, but Jason didn't mind drawing her out a bit more—her cheeks were flushed and she was having trouble making eye contact for more than a moment.

Nothing to talk about, indeed.

“Um...” She twisted her pen in her slim fingers. “I think...maybe we should...” Elizabeth sighed. “About yesterday. When you asked if there was anything else we should talk about. ”

“Yes?” Jason tilted his head, unable to hold back his grin. “You said there was nothing. ”

“So...I *might* have overstated that. ” Elizabeth shifted. “It's just...what happened that night...” She took a deep breath. “Look, I don't usually get drunk and hit on my boss—”

“I’m not your boss,” Jason told her. An important distinction.

“Right. Well, anyway.” Elizabeth pursed her lips. “My roommates were there that night, and one of them dared me to drink this ridiculous mixed cocktail with like...a ton of alcohol—” She huffed. “Not that I was too drunk to know what I was doing. That’s *not* what I’m saying.”

“Nothing would have happened if I thought you were,” Jason said. “There’s no benefit to me to spending time with someone too intoxicated to enjoy it.” He leaned forward. “And I hope I’m not being too arrogant if I assume we both enjoyed ourselves.”

“Well, yes, of course.” The flush spread to her collarbone and the chest area revealed by the white silk blouse she wore. “I mean, I’d been attracted to you before that—” She closed her eyes. “Okay, not important.”

He considered it very important, but filed it away for later. “Elizabeth—”

“Anyway. I woke up the next morning, and I just...I panicked, so I just...said the first thing that came to my mind and left.” She twisted in her chair. “I know it’s...practically history to you, but I just...we’re going to be working together for the next few weeks—”

“Why is it history to me?” Jason interrupted. “It was just a few weeks ago—”

“You...never said anything afterward.” Elizabeth blinked. “I mean, you...never...I don’t know, you didn’t call. So I just...”

“Elizabeth.” Jason leaned back, casually resting a foot on his opposite knee. “As far as I was concerned, you’d made it clear you weren’t interested in pursuing it past that night. Even considered it a mistake.”

“Oh.” Her eyes widened just slightly. “Well, I didn’t. Not exactly, I mean.” She shook her head. “Well, I guess now that we’ve cleared the air—”

Jason let both feet drop to the floor and leaned forward, lowering his voice. “Are you saying you’d be interested?”

The discomfort bled from her shoulders and the light in her eyes changed. She tilted her head to the side. “Are you saying *you* are?”

“A man would have to be dead a couple of years if they weren’t interested in you.” He reached for her hand and toyed with the fingers.

Her lips parted slightly. “This is probably a bad idea,” she murmured. “But right now, I can’t remember why.”

He grinned. “What do you say we deal with the business at hand and if you’re not busy tonight...a drink after work?”

“That sounds...perfect.”

The Next Day

Elizabeth rolled her eyes. “You had these contracts yesterday, Jason.” She leaned over him at his desk as he skimmed the catering paperwork in front of him.

“Your assistant left it with Spinelli who forgot to drop them in my box before I went home.” Jason flipped a page. “This isn't too much to pay for caviar?”

She arched a brow. “How would you even know? It's competitive. And I find it hard to believe Spinelli forgot. The kid worships you.” She wrinkled her nose, and leaned against the desk as he continued to peruse. “How did you end up with him? He doesn't exactly give off that executive air.”

“He drives my grandfather crazy, so he has a job forever as far as I'm concerned.” Jason scrawled his initials on a page before flipping to the next. “He used to work in one of the tech departments. My computer broke. He fixed it. I promoted him.”

“I'm sure *that's* the entire story.” Elizabeth shrugged. “Whatever. I stole mine away from my last employer.”

“Right.” Jason signed the last page and glanced up at her. “Emily went to a party last summer you planned at an art gallery. She was quite proud she lured you away.”

“Just between us?” Elizabeth leaned in, a wicked smile playing across her lips. “I hated my job so much if Emily had just offered me a *dollar* over my current salary, I would have leapt at it. As it was, you guys paid dearly.” She snorted. “And made quite the enemy of Ava Jerome, since I convinced her daughter to jump ship.”

“Well, you're worth every penny.” He grinned at her, but the tease fell short of its charming intention. She returned the smile, but shifted away from the desk.

“Thanks for signing those. I'll have Kiki get them over to the caterers.” She reached for the pile, but Jason caught her wrist.

“What? What'd I say?”

“Nothing.” Elizabeth offered her a half smile. “There's...just a ton more vendors to nail down this week. I mean, most are holding the dates open because Emily always uses them, but I still need to negotiate prices for this year, and—”

He drew her down into his lap, and she sighed. “Elizabeth. We had a good time last night, didn't we? I like you. If I say something that offends you, I can't read your mind to find out what it is.”

She pursed her lips. “Nothing. I just...I mean, I know...” She huffed. “This sound so stupid when I say it out loud, so believe me, I'm aware I'm an idiot. But...we slept together last month. And now...I don't know...we're...” She wiggled her fingers. “Whatever—”

“And me saying you're worth every penny when I've barely worked with you strikes you as a services rendered comment,” Jason finished.

“I *told* you it was stupid. ” She slid her fingers over the nape of his neck, playing with the short hairs there. “I know you didn't mean it that way—”

“Emily has done nothing but rave about you for months,” Jason told her. “She told AJ the only reason she could even dream of taking this time off was because she knew you'd step in without a hiccup. My sister has been working at ELQ for seven years. She's never so much as taken a weekend off, let alone a month, so when I say you're worth every penny, I mean it because I know how much Emily depends on you. ”

“Well, see, now I feel even more stupid. ” Lacing her other hand behind his neck, she continued. “How can I ever make it up to you?”

“Well...” Jason's hand slid around her waist and drew her closer. “I think we can think of a few things. ”

Her laugh slid into a moan as his lips covered hers, his fingers burning into the skin beneath her thin red dress. A trail of heat burned down her thigh as Jason's hand slid around to her knee.

“If I could make a request,” he murmured, drawing back slightly. “You look great in these little pencil skirts, but they're not exactly.... conducive to this type of activity. ”

“I'll take that under advisement. ” Elizabeth reluctantly disentangled her arms from his neck. “I really should go send these contracts back. ”

“I have late meetings tonight,” Jason admitted. “Tomorrow?”

Elizabeth scooped the paperwork from his desk, and grinned over her shoulder as she headed out.

This was going to end in complete disaster, but her roommates were right. Opportunities with men like Jason came along so rarely, she was going to hold on with both hands and enjoy every minute.

For the rest of that first week together, their daily meetings became less about the paperwork Jason barely studied before scrawling the necessary signature at the bottom. Instead the half hour he'd carved out of his morning schedule were spent in his office chair or curled up on the sofa, making out like teenagers.

That first weekend, she'd hoped to spend the night with him, but an emergency with an ELQ subsidiary sent Jason to New York until Sunday evening.

Monday morning, Elizabeth breezed past Spinelli into Jason's office. He was leaning against his desk, grinning. “You're early,” he teased.

“Did you get the contracts Kiki sent over?” Elizabeth asked, tossing her portfolio on the conference table.

“Already signed.” Jason eyed her outfit. “I like the dress.”

She arched a brow, stepped forward and grabbed his shirt in her fist. “Any other business?”

“None that I can think of.”

She had clearly not enjoyed his absence any more than he'd liked spending the weekend away, as they came together in a tangle of lips and hands, each trying desperately to get closer. His suit jacket was on the floor before he knew what to think and her back hit the sofa with a hard fall.

“Sorry,” he muttered, torn between dragging her dress over her knees or tugging the wide cowl neck over her shoulders. Her busy hands were drawing apart his shirt and tugging it from his pants.

“Didn't even notice,” she responded, her breaths coming in short pants as his lips nipped at her collarbone. “You have the best hands.”

“Yours aren't so shabby.” He drew back slightly to brush a kiss on her lips. “I missed you.”

“I missed you, too.” Elizabeth flushed, her fingers dancing down his bare chest. “I bought something special for Saturday night.”

“Well, I hope you're free tonight to put it to use,” Jason said, his hand sliding past her knee to the soft skin of her inner thigh.

“It's all right, Spinelli. I'll just be a minute—” The door opened on those words and his cousin, Ned Ashton, stopped in the doorway. “Ah. Sorry.”

Elizabeth squeaked and frantically tried to get out from beneath Jason, who just slowly rose to his feet and glared at his cousin. “If Spinelli tells you I'm busy—”

“Next time, I'll listen.” Ned arched a brow. “You must be Elizabeth.”

“Um...” Elizabeth shoved her ruffled hair over her shoulder. “This...” She sighed. “Yeah, that'd be me.”

“I'll just leave these notes here.” Ned laid the papers on a table near the door. “I'll see you at the board meeting later.”

He exited, and Elizabeth stepped away when Jason reached for her. “I'll have to learn to lock the door—”

“Jason, do you know that's the *first* time I've seen the CEO of this company?” She buried her head in hands. “Oh, man. What a first impression.”

“It's not a big deal—”

“Not a big deal,” Elizabeth repeated flatly. “I suppose Ned walks in on you with women all the time.”

”

“No,” Jason drawled. “But I’ve walked in on him enough that I think I’ve earned one in return.” He drew her closer. “Listen. It’s not the end of the world. He’s not just a nameless corporate shill. He’s my cousin. He’s not going to care.”

“I guess we were flirting with disaster... being so unprofessional at work,” she murmured. ” She combed her fingers through her hair. “Thank God my office is just down the hall. Kiki probably won’t even notice.”

“Well, we should see each other more often outside these four walls.” He brushed a kiss against her unsmiling lips. “I’ve been stuck in meetings, but I should be clear for tonight. And...I’d like to take you to the ELQ parties later this month.”

Elizabeth furrowed her brow. “I’ll be there anyway, Jason. I—I’ll be working—”

“Yes,” Jason said. “But I’d like to take you as my date. Pick you up. Drop you off.” He grinned. “Maybe not so much the second part.”

A nervous laugh escaped her lips. “Jason...that’s...the entire company will be there. Not to mention pretty much all the richest people in the state.”

“Which is why I want to spend time with someone I *actually* like.”

“But...” Elizabeth twisted her fingers together. “Then...everyone would see us together.”

“Ah...” Jason rubbed the back of his neck. “Is...that something that would be a problem? Because I didn’t think it would have to be a secret.”

“There’s a difference between a discreet...whatever and...making the grand debut at the biggest events of the year.” Elizabeth wrinkled her nose. “I’ll...can I just...think about it?”

Slightly annoyed, but knowing that he’d asked her on the tail end of a particularly embarrassing moment, he let it slide. “Fine.”

“Okay.” She reached for the portfolio she’d discarded earlier. “Um, just...send those contracts back to me when you’re done with them.”

“I already signed them,” Jason reminded her. He reached for the small stack. “I’ll call you later to firm up plans for tonight.”

“Okay.” Elizabeth leaned in for another kiss. “Jason, I really...I’m glad you asked me. It’s just...I’m an employee. I...have to think these things through more.”

“I guess.” Jason watched her go, cursing her cousin and himself for his poor timing.

ELQ: Ned Ashton's Office

Ned just grinned at him when Jason followed AJ into his office for their monthly board meeting prep. "Jason. Glad you could tear yourself away. "

AJ arched a brow as he crossed to the mini bar to pour himself a tumbler of gin. "Something going on I should know about?"

"No," Jason said, sending Ned a dark look. "He's an idiot. "

"Jason was being welcomed back in fine fashion by Emily's assistant when I dropped by this morning. " Ned sat down at the conference table. "I see you're making the best of your unexpected foray into event planning. "

"Elizabeth?" AJ asked. "*Damn* it. I was waiting another month for her settle in before I turned on the charm. " He sipped the gin. "You've scooped her up before I even had a chance—"

"If either of you value your lives, you'll shut up now. " Jason stabbed a finger at Ned. "Don't you dare mention this morning to her again. She's mortified that's the way she met the CEO. "

Ned waved it away. "Didn't you tell her it's a family tradition? It's how we always meet the new women. " He shuddered. "I actually walked in on Grandfather once. "

AJ scowled. "Why the hell do you gotta put those images in my head? Seriously. There's not enough liquor in the world. "

"I'm sure you'd try to find it," Jason said dryly as his older brother turned the glare on him.

"And didn't you tell her that's how you met my first wife?" Ned asked.

"And mine," AJ said. "Well, the *only* wife. And it was my bedroom at home. Once you go Carly, you turn away marriage pretty much forever. If not for Michael. I'd block that out for good. " He sighed. "Twenty-two years of blissful freedom. Never get married when you're eighteen. You know nothing about life. "

"Isn't it how you met my second wife, too?" Ned frowned. "I distinctly remember Lois and Alexis never forgiving me for that lock. "

"How do you even keep them straight?" AJ asked. "I mean other than Lois, because you know, Brooke. But I don't even think I remember the other two. "

"Alexis's sister," Jason reminded him. "And the blonde that made Carly look normal. "

"Faith. " Ned sighed in memory. "Insane, but worth all six months. "

"Right, so didn't you just tell Elizabeth it's practically family tradition?" AJ asked. "Though come to think of it, it *is* the first time we've caught you. "

"You're just including yourself in my discovery?" Ned asked. "Of course you are. "

“If you mention it to her even once, I’ll make you sorry you got out of bed in the morning. ” Jason leaned forward. “Are we understood?”

“Fine, but I swear, the next gorgeous woman who comes to work here, I have dibs,” AJ told him. “I should have called dibs in July. ”

“Way to act five years old,” Ned sighed. “You’ll have free reign since it looks like Jason and I are otherwise engaged. ” He hesitated. “To be serious for a moment, Jason. I hope you’ve thought this through. If it doesn’t work out, and Elizabeth leaves the company, Emily will never let you forget it. ”

Jason narrowed his eyes. “I don’t foresee it being a problem. ”

“You never do at the beginning,” AJ said, with a sad sigh. “And then you wake up one morning and realize you’ve married a piranha. ”

Part Three

*We won't know what we're missing
If we don't go out for Christmas
Maybe we should stay in, baby
Won't know what we're missing
If we don't go out for Christmas tonight*

December 9

ELQ: Jason's Office

Elizabeth stepped over the threshold and closed the door before leaning on it. “We've got to stop meeting like this. ”

Jason sighed and leaned back in his chair. “I know. I know. I'm sorry about last night. This is just—a crazy time of the year. ” He rose from his desk and crossed the room to her, dropping a kiss on her mouth. “The board didn't like one of the projections for next quarter, so I had—” He shook his head. “Never mind, it's not important. ”

“Hey, you date the CFO of a worldwide conglomerate during the end of the year, you take what you get. ” Elizabeth arched a brow. “We don't *actually* have to meet every day—”

“I want to meet every day,” he murmured, dipping his head to slip his tongue between her lips. She parted for him and wrapped her arms around his neck.

“Not going to argue with that,” she replied when he drew back. “Besides, I had fires of my own to put out last night. ”

He led her across the office to the sofa where she curled up next to him. “What's up?”

“Oh, well, I'm juggling my usual duties in addition to the stuff Emily usually does,” Elizabeth said. “So I have to secure the venues for the next six months of events. The Metro Court wanted to renegotiate the price for the AIDS benefit in June. ” She rolled her eyes. “If their ballroom weren't perfect for the performances during the Nurse's Ball, I'd swear, we'd go elsewhere, but I managed to talk them down. ”

“AJ's ex-wife runs the place, so she likes to get her digs in when she can,” Jason explained. “They got pregnant in high school, she saw dollar signs and they were married for four miserable years until AJ finally paid her to go away. She bought into the hotel and has been plaguing us ever since. ”

“Oh, that's Michael's mother?” Elizabeth asked. “Emily has photos of him on his desk. I wondered why AJ had a son in his early twenties. ” She shrugged. “Though Carly being the first wife explains why he's never remarried. *I'd* swear off marriage after that. ”

Jason laughed. “Well, we don't do that in our family that often. My grandparents have been married nearly seventy years. ” He hesitated. “My...parents closer to forty-five. Ned's been married four times and taking his fifth round. ”

“Five?” Elizabeth smirked. “Someone's a glutton for punishment. ”

There was a light knock on the door. They both got to their feet, and Jason answered it. “Spinelli—” He stopped. “Ah, Mo-Monica. ”

Elizabeth straightened the bottom of her skirt as Jason's stepmother swept in the room, in a perfectly pressed pink Chanel suit, pearls at her ears and her neck.

“Can we speak alone?” Monica Quartermaine asked, eyeing Elizabeth.

“Monica, this is Elizabeth Webber. She's Emily's executive assistant. ” Jason hesitated. “And I mean, we're—”

“I don't particularly care. You can go,” she told Elizabeth, who bristled.

“Elizabeth and I are going over plans for the ELQ parties this month, so if there's something you need to say, Monica, then maybe you should say it and go. ”

Elizabeth wrapped her arms around her waist, an ache in her chest. Jason's shoulders were so tight and he looked so miserable. She was sure he'd been about to tell the woman who raised him they were seeing one another, but Monica had swept it away.

“Fine. ” Monica lifted her chin. “As you are in a position of personally working on the holiday parties this year, I wanted to assure myself that our usual arrangements will be honored. ”

Jason flicked his eyes to Elizabeth who wanted to shrink back. “Of course, Monica. I didn't suddenly think I'd be invited. Elizabeth will be the ELQ rep at the hospital. ”

“Good. ” Monica cast another eye at Elizabeth before exiting.

“You're not going to the hospital parties?” Elizabeth asked.

“Ah, I have those final decorator contracts you wanted. ” Jason rounded his desk and reached for a pile of paperwork. “Accounting already cut the checks. ”

“Thanks. ” Elizabeth took the contracts from him and set them on the desk. “Jason, what's the *usual* arrangement?”

He shook his head. “It's not important, Elizabeth—” He lowered himself into the chair and reached for a pile papers on his desk. “I should get some of this work done if I wanted to be free tonight—”

He cut off his words abruptly when Elizabeth climbed into his lap, straddling his waist in one of her looser dresses. “I still have twenty minutes of my scheduled meeting. ”

Jason hesitated, his hands automatically going to her waist to keep her steady. “Elizabeth—”

“In fact,” Elizabeth said, slowly undoing the buttons of her silk blouse and drawing the sides apart to reveal the pale red bra she wore underneath. “Maybe you should ask Spinelli to give us another ten to make up for the interruption. ”

A smile tugged against his lips. “Elizabeth, you don't have to—”

“Jump you the way I've wanted to since the moment you stepped off the elevator my first day of work?” Elizabeth let the blouse fall from her shoulders to the floor before reaching for his buttons. “I nearly swallowed my tongue the first time you said my name. ”

“Then you'll come with me to the ELQ parties?” Jason asked, dancing her fingers up her thigh.

Her eyes nearly crossing from the sensation, Elizabeth attempted a scowl. “That's dirty pool, Jason Morgan. ”

“Turnabout's fair play. ”

She unknotted his tie and tossed it aside. “Well, if those are the terms, I suppose I have no choice. ” She dipped her head to find his mouth. “You drive a hard bargain. ”

“You have no idea,” he responded, his voice low and gritty. He reached out blindly for his intercom. “Spinelli, push any meetings back. And no interruptions. ”

ELQ: Elizabeth's Office

There was something to be said for a quick office romp, which was half the reason she'd worn her hair loose today. Elizabeth entered her office suite, only to find Maxie Jones and her sister waiting by her assistant's desk. “Oh, was today the final fitting?”

“Please, Liz, like I didn't confirm this a hundred million times. ” The perky blonde rolled her eyes. “Kate wants to make sure everything looks perfect, since these are going to be in the January issue. ”

“Fine. ” Elizabeth set the paperwork Jason had signed on Kiki Jerome's desk. “Kiki, get these back to the vendors. Georgie, Maxie, come back into my office so I can try these on. ”

“I *love* working at Crimson,” Maxie bubbled. “I get to borrow a dress for the New Year's Eve gala. ”

“And I get to hem it,” Georgie sighed. “I hate this job. ”

“It's paying for college,” her sister retorted. She drew out the first garment bag from the rack. “This is your Oscar de la Renta. The red silk with the ruffle back bow and mermaid silhouette. ”

Elizabeth sighed and disappeared behind the changing screen. This was not her first fitting with gowns from Crimson Magazine, nor would it be her last.

“So, gossip on my floor is that you're the new hottie seeing Jason Morgan. ”

Elizabeth emerged from the screen, her back to Maxie for zipping. “We are. How did it get down there so fast?”

“Oh, news travels in the ELQ building. Nothing ever stays a secret. ”

Elizabeth sighed and stepped up on the stool so Georgie could check the hem and the fit. “It's... nothing serious, Maxie. ”

“Well, duh. ” Maxie rolled her eyes. “No one's ever known Jason to do anything serious. He's not like the rest of his family. ”

Elizabeth wasn't sure which part of that sentence disturbed her more. “What?”

“Oh, they *all* go for marriage within like the first five months. It's why they rack up marriages so fast. ” Maxie jerked a thumb at her sullen sister. “She's Dillon Quartermaine's first wife. Well, only wife at the moment. They got married straight out of high school. Lasted a whole year. ”

“I'm going to stick you with this pin,” Georgie threatened.

“Tracy—that's Ned's mom—married at least six times, though I don't think anyone's kept up with the names. Ned's been married four times, AJ got married that once. Alan and Monica have been married for ages, but whoo, did they have the affairs. Well, of course you know all about that. ”

“Hmmm...” Elizabeth murmured stepping down. “What's the next dress?”

“The Badgley Mischka. ” Maxie reached for the second garment bag. “People are going to ask you, Liz. You gotta tell them the right names. It's got the emerald draped chiffon, one shoulder with the a-line. ”

“Right. ” Elizabeth moved back behind the screen. “Ah...what else do you know about the Quartermaines?” she asked, hating to pump Kate's assistant.

“Oh. Well, there's Emily. She was married once, too. To Zander Smith, though that ended in a great deal of tears. We all like her Greek prince much better. But you know, as far as I know, Jason's never been married. ” She pursed her lips. “I'd like to think I would have heard if he had. ”

Elizabeth handed the red dress back to Maxie who put it back in the garment bag and hung it on the rack. “Well, I guess that's good. ”

“I guess. I mean, there's always gossip on who's sleeping with who but it's hard to know who to trust to be honest. I mean, if you believe half the tales, Jason's slept with most of the women who's passed through the ELQ doors. There was even a rumor about me and him once. ”

Elizabeth stepped out in her green gown. “And...that's just a rumor. ”

“Yup. Not that I wouldn't have jumped him because you know, hello! But people just talk. Don't have anything better to do.” Maxie pursed her lips and stepped back. “Take up the right side just a bit, Georgie.”

“Um, if you could not...confirm the rumors about me seeing Jason.” Elizabeth hesitated. “I mean, it's not like I'm keeping it a secret. But we work together, and I just.... I don't want people talking about me.”

“Then less hickeys on the collar bone,” Maxie said. Elizabeth clapped her hand over the red mark she hadn't noticed until then. “Or I can send over this super duper powder that works wonders.”

“Thanks, Maxie.” She eyed herself in the mirror in a designer dress she was borrowing from the magazine publisher in order to fit in at a party where the jewelry would be real and the dresses owned.

Yeah, this was going to end well.

Part Four

*Everybody needs a little lovin'
Around Christmas time
Somehow you got to know you're going to be all right
Do you really remember how it used to be
Sitting under the Christmas tree
In your heart you'll
Find the season*

December 9

The Loft: Living Room

Elizabeth set the bottle of Yellow Tail on the kitchen island as Robin stirred a pot of spaghetti sauce. “It's that kind of night. ”

“I'll get the glasses!” Nadine chirped already at the cabinet. “Yellow Tail is always the start of a sexy story. ”

“Except that one time,” Robin said. “I had rug burns on my ass for a week. ”

Elizabeth snorted as she twisted off the top of the bottle to begin pouring. “Yeah, but that story started as a sexy story. Your problem was not also setting out the Moscato so we'd expect the twist. ” She pursed her lips. “Is that solicitation charge still on your record?”

“Ha. ” Robin sipped her win. “So, you've been smooching the CFO for almost a week now. I take it that you had liftoff today?”

Elizabeth wiggled her brows. “Chair sex is probably going to rank very high on my list of best locations. ” She kicked off her heels and sipped her wine.

“Yummy. ” Nadine held her glass out for a quick toast. “Is it as good as last time?”

“Better. ” Her smile deepened. “Because you know the good stuff already. ” She hesitated. “But something weird happened first. ”

“Weird?” Nadine twisted to their wine rack. “I think we're out of the Moscato. ”

“No, I mean, not the sex. That was all normal—fantastic kind of normal, but...his stepmother showed up before. ” She shifted. “You guys have both lived here longer than I have. I know the basics of the situation, but I guess I never tried to think about the logistics. ”

“Oh, why Jason is the middle child with a different last name?” Robin asked. “I mean, it's common

knowledge, but I think it's, like, old common knowledge. ” She looked at Nadine. “You've been here five years, do you know the story?”

“Not really. I just figured he was adopted. ” She shrugged. “Or something. Why?” Nadine leaned forward. “Oh, is it a sad story?”

“Depends on your perspective. ” Robin tasted a bit of her sauce and then tossed in some cloves of garlic. “So, the gist is that Alan and Monica have been married forever but fidelity was kind of... touch and go. Alan has had some notorious affairs—with Lucy Coe, Bobbie Spencer, umm...” She pursed her lips. “I think there was some gossip about Felicia Jones at some point. Anyway. Monica has put up with it because she's had her own spectacular affairs. ”

“And Jason is the product of one of these affairs?” Elizabeth asked, swirling the wine in her glass. “Then why...”

“So, Susan Morgan,” Robin said, “worked at ELQ. Alan met her at a board meeting or so it goes, and it was a long-term affair. Jason born during that, and no one was really the wiser for almost another year. Until Susan died of cancer. Alan came clean to Monica and they took him in. Monica's stipulation was that she had no intention of adopting him and did not want him to change Jason's name. ”

“That is cold,” Nadine murmured. “I mean, seriously icy. Who blames a kid for their beginnings?”

“You'd be surprised. ” Robin shrugged. “I mean, it was mostly not an issue. AJ took to him immediately, and Emily grew up not really thinking about it. The Quartermaines at large accepted him. It's really just Monica who held him out to be different, not really part of her family. ” She filled a pot of water and set it to boil on the stove. “What did she want?”

“To remind him of the usual arrangements around the hospital parties. ” Elizabeth leaned forward. “I mean, is it like she sees that as her territory and doesn't want him around?”

“Basically. I mean, I guess for Monica, it's a matter of constantly being reminded of Alan's infidelities. They can ignore it, and God knows if he has other kids out there. ” Robin shrugged. “But Jason is public proof to the rest of the world. She agreed to raise him but never agreed to like it. I've never seen him at the parties—and I grew up going to the GH party. He never even came when we were kids. ”

“What a witch. ” Nadine gulped down a third of her glass. “I mean, what the frickin' hell. Holding this crap against him for more than thirty years. People serve less time for murder. ”

“I just...I felt bad about it. ” Elizabeth refilled her glass. “But I'm not surprised he didn't want to talk about it. ”

“I figure Jason mostly lets it roll off him because he's got his family. He was probably just embarrassed it happened in front of you. ” Robin tore open a package of tortellini. “I mean, you've been dating five minutes. No one wants to tell their deep dark family issues that soon. ”

Elizabeth snorted. “Or ever. ”

“It makes me want to cuddle him,” Nadine said. She sighed. “And then punch his mother. ”

Elizabeth eyed their blond roommate. “How much of this has she had? I just opened the bottle. ”

“Oh, she and I were finishing off the Elsa Bianchi we opened last night. ” Robin also glanced at Nadine who just blinked at them. “Anyway. Things are okay other than that?”

“He asked me to be his date for the ELQ parties. ” Elizabeth finished her second glass of wine in a hasty gulp. “Mostly, I'm not freaking out about it. ”

“Mostly,” Robin repeated. “And the restly?”

“That's not even a word. ” Elizabeth sighed and decided a third glass was in order. “I don't know. I've been charity events for ELQ before, but Emily was in charge. So I got to borrow a pretty dress from Kate Howard and run interference while she schmoozed. And now I have to do both while on the arm of the CFO. ” She scowled. “So I'll have to pick out a hair style that hides my ear piece. ”

“Why don't you shove Kiki into a dress and give her your job?” Nadine asked. “I mean, why not enjoy yourself?”

“Because it's temporary. And Kiki's not ready to handle something like this. ” Elizabeth perched on a stool next to the island. “But...it's just.... it feels like a lot of pressure really fast. I mean, I've been planning parties for high society for years. Three years in New York with Ava before we moved up here two years ago. ”

“A move we are continually grateful for. ” Robin said, clinking glasses with Nadine. “Are you feeling like all eyes will be on you?”

“ A little. People know I'm the party planner. ” Elizabeth shifted. “The women at these parties will be wearing dresses they own—even had designed for them. With real diamonds and rubies and whatnot. I'm wearing borrowed dresses from Kate, and she might spring for some accessories. But how's it going to look to people if I'm running off to put out a catering fire? Or deal with a snafu—”

“I'm telling you, it's time for some on the job training for Kiki. ” Nadine shrugged. “And so what if you do have to jet off to fix something? Do you think Jason doesn't get it? He knows you're planning the parties—”

“You're thinking of all the people who are going to be looking at you and Jason and thinking...one of these things doesn't fit,” Robin said.

“And it sounds so freaking stupid, doesn't it?” Elizabeth rolled her eyes. “I know Jason doesn't care. Now. But maybe he will. I don't know. It's all annoying. ”

“I think,” Nadine began, precariously waving her half-filled glass in the air. “That you're making a lot of stuff and nonsense out of bullpuckey. ”

“I actually understood that,” Elizabeth said, biting back her laughter as Robin tugged the glass from Nadine's hand and tipped the blonde into a chair by the dining table. “I actually agree with her. But knowing that and living it?”

“Two totally different things. ” Robin raised her glass and clinked it with hers. “Still, you went out and bought Yellow Tail, so you must have felt okay about it later. ”

“Well,” Elizabeth said, “the sex was pretty great. ”

Harborview Towers: Jason Morgan's Penthouse

Jason scowled over the paperwork and contracts that had prevented him from inviting Elizabeth over for an intimate dinner and an encore of that morning's events.

If he could just get this stuff done tonight, he could keep his nights clear for a few weeks. Just enough time to romance Elizabeth properly—he hated that they'd been forced to spend most of their time in his office or catching a quick drink at the Port Charles Grille across the street.

It was not the way he'd intended to pursue her.

The door pushed open and AJ entered. “Am I interrupting, little brother?”

“No, and don't call me that. ” Jason shoved a contract back. “My eyes are going to cross. ”

AJ sat next to him on the sofa, bypassing his usual visit to the mini bar. “I thought I might find the delectable Ms. Webber here. ”

“Then why didn't you knock?” Jason asked, reaching for his beer.

“Eh, you would have locked your door. ” AJ shifted on the sofa. “Ah, so, there was some gossip today. About you. ”

Jason choked slightly on his beer and looked at him. “Wait, what kind of gossip?” Had someone heard them? Had Elizabeth's assistant said something? He damn well knew Spinelli would keep his mouth shut.

“That my mother was on the premises. ” His brother sighed. “She didn't come to see me, which means she likely came to harass you. ”

Jason shook his head and rose from the sofa. “So? It wasn't much. ”

“I'm... just—I'm sorry—”

“Why?” Jason turned. “Look, she just wanted to make sure I wasn't going to contaminate her precious hospital party. I haven't gone since I was six years old, I'm not likely to start now just because I'm helping plan it. ”

“She's just...” AJ shrugged, but Jason figured his brother was out of excuses.

“She doesn't care for me, AJ. I get it. I just...” Jason glanced down at his bottle. “Elizabeth was there. And I should have made her leave. I just...didn't think Monica would say anything in front of her. ”

“Ha. Never underestimate my mother. ” AJ stood. “What did Elizabeth have to say about the whole thing?”

“Nothing. She asked a question, I deflected her. ” He shrugged. “She dropped it. I'm not talking about Monica with her. ”

“I get it. ” AJ did cross to the bar this time. “Not something you want to bring up with the office girlfriend. ”

“Don't call her that,” Jason said. “That's what you and Ned call your girlfriends. It's what Dad always...” He glanced away. “I'm tired of that Quartermaine term. ”

“Sorry. ” AJ hesitated. “But I mean, it's always meant the same thing. I know Elizabeth is beautiful and charming, but it's not like you've gone out of your way to treat her differently. You're not exactly wining and dining her. ”

“Because of this damned paperwork and the meetings—because we both have jobs to do—” But the excuses felt hollow. Jason had an entire department under him that could have handled some of these things, but he'd always elected to take on the extra work.

To work harder at being a Quartermaine than the rest of them.

He shook his head. “I'm taking her to the ELQ parties. That will make it clear enough, don't you think?”

AJ nodded, sipping his vodka. “I suppose, if you want to toss her to the wolves, but she was going to be there anyway. ”

“But she'll walk in on my arm and go home with me,” Jason said.

“Fine, fine. ” AJ hesitated. “All three parties? Because you know, that's lot of pressure for a woman who's...not...” He shifted, slid his hand in his pocket. “Not like us. ”

“Don't start that shit. ” Jason scowled. “You don't even give a damn about that—”

“Not really,” AJ admitted, “but there's something to it. Look, we're from different places in society, okay? We just are. We grew up with more money, more opportunities. There's a reason my marriage to Carly didn't work out. ”

“Other than the fact she was batshit insane?” Jason retorted. “So? She grew up in the trailer park. What about it? I don't even know Elizabeth's background, I just know it doesn't matter—”

“And Ned married outside the circle three times. They were all nice enough, but mostly looking to marry up. Being expected to live the life of a Quartermaine? It's a fucking lot of pressure even when you're born into it. I'm just saying that Elizabeth is gonna get blowback from people who have nothing better than to do. ”

Jason shook his head. “It doesn't matter. I want her with me. I'm not going to pretend we're getting married or that we're even remotely that serious, but I'm not going to take another woman or go alone to these parties when I want to be with her. It'd be a lie. ”

AJ held up his hands. “Look, I'm just saying—”

“Yeah, yeah, you're always just saying. ” Jason chugged the rest of his beer.

“I like Elizabeth, Jason. But in the decade since you started at ELQ? You've never brought a woman you're seeing to ELQ benefits. Even when they worked for the company. There are actually people who sit around and think of nothing else except the gossip that goes on in society. Elizabeth is going to be gossip. ” He finished his vodka. “I just hope you're prepared for that. ”

Part Five

*So please just fall in love with me this Christmas
There's nothing else that I will need this Christmas
Won't be wrapped under a tree
I want something that lasts forever
So kiss me on this cold December night*

December 23

The Loft: Living Room

Elizabeth stepped out of her bedroom, her back facing the room. “Someone zip this monstrosity. ”

“Oh, it looks so fantastic!” Nadine squealed as she tugged the metal tag from the base of Elizabeth's spine to just below her shoulder blades. “Even better on you than the hanger. ”

“Really?” Elizabeth twirled around, trying to get a sense of the red bow stuck on her ass. “The bow doesn't look stupid?”

Robin reached over and straightened it. “It looks gorgeous, just like you. I'm just glad we got the opportunity to see you in the dress. ” She leaned back and folded her arms. “Since it's like, the *first* time you've been home in two weeks. ”

“Seriously. Robin and I are drinking way too much wine left to our own devices. ” Nadine held up her glass as proof. “So we're either going to have to move next door to Jason or he's going to have move next to do us. I cannot deal with this separation, Elizabeth. I find it appalling. ”

“It's just...” Elizabeth shrugged and moved across the room to the full-length mirror. “The honeymoon phase. We're trying to keep our hands off one another at work...so we have a lot of...” Her lips curved up. “Pent-up energy after hours. ”

“I haven't had pent-up energy in *months*,” Nadine huffed.

“Calm yourself. ” Robin rolled her eyes. “I think it's great you guys are having so much fun so far. ”

“I promised you guys I would enjoy it as long as it lasted. ” Elizabeth pursed her lips and patted her hair, gathered at the side in an elegant twist of curls. “Does my hair look okay? I told Kate's stylist I wanted it over one ear to hide my earpiece. ”

“It looks great. Jason's going to swallow his tongue. ” Robin sighed. “Lucky bitch. Fancy parties, fancy dresses. Hotties in tuxes. ”

“Oh, I forgot about the tux!” Nadine clasped her hands to his chest and sighed dreamily. “He'll look

just as scrumptious as he did on Halloween. ”

“I'm sorry I couldn't get you guys into this party. I've only been there a few months, and I just...” Elizabeth sighed and reached for the small silk purse that accompanied the gown.

“Didn't want to raise more eyebrows with your own guests when you're going to be on Jason's arm for the first time. ” Robin shrugged. “I totally get it. Maybe next year. ”

“Definitely,” Elizabeth promised as the doorbell rang. Butterflies began to flutter wildly in her stomach as Nadine bounced towards to the door.

God. This was it. She was going to the Christmas Eve gala with Jason Morgan. People were going to stare at her and she'd still have to manage to pull off the same stellar quality people were used to.

How the hell was she going to do this?

“Come in, come in,” Nadine said, opening the door wider. “Oh, Elizabeth!”

Jason stepped into the living room, clad in an elegant black and white tuxedo—minus the bow tie, which he never wore. She stepped forward, hoping her tongue would work. The last time she'd seen him dressed like this, she'd immediately drank all the alcohol in the world and jumped him.

“He's wearing a Ralph Lauren,” Nadine murmured to Robin. “I hate her so much. ”

“Shut it,” the other woman hissed.

“You look...” Jason took his hand out of his pocket, letting it fall to his side, as his eyes moved down, then up again to her eyes. “Incredible. ”

“Kate's stylist has a good eye. ” Elizabeth shifted, uncomfortable. “We should go—Kiki can only run interference for so long—”

Jason just arched a brow, then looked at her roommates. “Robin, I remember. You must be Nadine. ”

“I must be,” Nadine sighed. Robin elbowed her. “Right. That's us. And you are clearly a fine-looking man—”

“She's had a lot of wine. ” Robin stomped on Nadine's shoe. “It's nice to see you again, Jason. ”

Elizabeth rolled her eyes and wrapped her arm through Jason's. “Sorry. I—Jason, this is Nadine Crowell, and I guess you already know Robin. They both work at GH. And...obviously, this is Jason. ”

“Have you thought about moving to our side of town?” Nadine asked. “Because we miss her—ow!” She glared at Robin. “You're going to break my toe, wench!”

Elizabeth reached for her black coat over the back of the sofa and steered Jason towards the door.

“Bye, guys. I'll see you tomorrow. ”

Once they were in the hallway, Jason helped her into the coat. “They seem nice. ”

“They're certifiable,” Elizabeth said. She turned and pressed a kiss to his mouth. “But they're mine. ”

Port Charles Hotel: Ballroom

She was probably imagining it, but two hours later as she stepped back in from the reception area and dealing with an intoxicated server, she just knew people were looking at her.

They'd stepped over the threshold, and Jason had immediately taken her to meet his family—his freaking *family*, for Christ's sake. From the grandparents Edward and Lila, to his father and frosty stepmother, to his brother, his aunt, two cousins—her head was spinning.

And then the caterer piped into her ear. The quiche had burned, and they'd forgotten two entire trays of caviar. She'd rushed off to put out the various fires that always cropped up and hadn't been able to track Jason down since.

“Well, well, well, if it isn't the newest office girl. ”

The snide words stopped Elizabeth in her tracks and she turned to find a dark-haired woman standing by a Grecian column, with a black look on her face and clad in a plunging gold gown.

“Um, do I know you?” Elizabeth asked.

“Samantha McCall. ” The woman strode forward, tossing her silky raven hair over her shoulder. “I used to be Ned Ashton's administrative assistant. ” She smirked. “Until Jason had me transferred to New York. ” She stepped even closer. “*That's* what they're calling you, you know. ”

Elizabeth blinked, trying to register the not-so-subtle hint that she was being confronted by an ex. “Ah, pardon me?”

“The Quartermaines have a term for this kind of thing. ” Sam sighed, feigning sympathy. “Office girlfriend. His grandfather had a string of them until he got too old to chase the girls around the desk. Sure, he's devoted to his wife *now*...” She lifted a shoulder. “Men who work a lot don't have a lot of time to find someone outside the building. ”

Elizabeth stepped back. “Well, that makes sense,” she murmured. “If you'll excuse me—”

“I'm surprised Jason brought you tonight. It's not his style. ” Sam pursed her lips, looking Elizabeth up and down. “I wonder where *you'll* be sent when he's done with you. ”

“I'm going to go now. ” Elizabeth turned and walked away from the harpy as quickly as she could without appearing to flee. God save her from bitter ex-girlfriends. She was going to forget the entire encounter.

She heard Kiki's panicked voice in her ear about a possible dessert table disaster and switched directions in order to reach her assistant.

“—where do you think this one will end up?”

Elizabeth froze in her tracks as a woman in a deep violet dress and skin the color of mocha spoke those words, so similar to Sam McCall's. She was speaking with a cousin Elizabeth vaguely remembered as Maya.

“Keesha, don't *start*—”

“Well, I'm still annoyed he chased Courtney out of the company. I hate having to go see her in New York all the time—”

Elizabeth hurried away from that conversation as well. It wasn't about Jason. It wasn't. He didn't have a reputation of dating women at ELQ like the rest of his family.

Did he?

“There you are. ” Jason reached out for her arm and stopped her. “Hey! I've been looking for you for hours. ”

“I'm sorry. ” Elizabeth plastered a smile on her face and turned back. “There was a catering thing, and now there's some sort of a dessert emergency—” She pressed a hand to ear. “Kiki? I'm on my—okay. Okay. Thanks. Quick thinking. ” She smiled. “Crisis averted then. I'm sorry,” she apologized again, wrapping her arm through his.

“Not a problem. ” Jason gestured towards the older man standing with them. “You remember my grandfather. ”

“Of course, sir. ” Elizabeth extended a hand with a bright smile. “Mr. Quartermaine. ”

The man of many office girlfriends.

Shut up.

“And you are certainly a credit to the company. ” Edward accepted her hand but brushed a kiss across her knuckles. “My family has good taste. ”

Her cheeks heated. “I'm sorry?”

“Grandfather,” Jason hissed.

“Oh, no, no, my dear. ” Edward laughed. “I was, of course, referring to my granddaughter luring you away from Ava Jerome. ” He clapped Jason on the back. “Not that I'm *not* congratulating my grandson on knowing a good thing when he sees it. ”

Her smile felt froze on her face. “Well, I’m certainly pleased for the opportunity to work with Emily at ELQ.” She stepped away from Jason slightly. “And I’m just glad she trusted me enough to take a few weeks off.”

“Well, she knew you’d be in Jason’s capable hands.” Edward elbowed his grandson as if he’d made a grand joke, but Jason just winced.

Christ on a crutch. If she already felt completely out of place, the Quartermaine patriarch wasn’t improving things at all.

“Jason’s been a great help.” Elizabeth took a deep breath. “I just hope I’ve kept up the ELQ standards.”

“Of course, of course.” Edward winked at Jason. “Don’t let this one get transferred.”

“What?” Jason demanded, but Elizabeth just sighed and pulled away again. She pressed her ear piece, as if getting a message.

“I—I have to check on something.” She squeezed his hand. “I’ll catch up with you later.”

“Elizabeth, wait a second—”

But she’d already melted into the sea of Port Charles society.

Jason turned back to his grandfather. “You *want* me to set you on fire or something?”

“What did I say?” Edward asked, blinking his eyes. “I was just trying to let you know how much I like this one—”

“I haven’t...” Jason huffed. “Exactly mentioned that my last two...relationships were also with women who worked here and that both left the company shortly after.”

“Oh.” Edward nodded. “I see. And now you think she has the wrong idea.”

“You goddamn Quartermaines and your affairs,” he muttered, trying to find Elizabeth’s crimson red gown in the sea of black tuxedos and colorful dresses.

“Hey, little cousin!” Ned grabbed him by the shoulder, his eyes a little bright from the champagne. “You did good tonight.” He turned to his fiancée. “Did I tell you, Olivia, that Jason is taking a turn with a party planner?”

“Ned—” He was going to murder everyone in this room.

“Sorry, sorry. He’s *playing* party planner tonight,” Ned said.

Olivia Falconieri just rolled her eyes. “Ignore him, Jason. It’s a nice party and your girlfriend is holding her own with these scavengers.” She narrowed her eyes. “Is that Sam McCall and her tits I

see?" She whacked Ned's shoulder. "I thought you had her skanky ass transferred. "

Jason turned and groaned at seeing his last ex-girlfriend in a group of people. "Christ, Ned. Why is she here?"

"I don't know. Maybe Paulie from the New York brought her. " Ned rubbed his arm. "Hey, I couldn't fire her, Olivia. She was sleeping with Jason while doing her best to sleep with me. I figured if I fired, I'd be a shoo-in for a sexual harassment lawsuit. "

"Hmph. " Olivia folded her arms. "You'd better find your girl, Jason, and stick to her like glue. You don't want *that* one pouring poison into her ear. "

"I've always liked you," he told her with a kiss to her cheek.

He eventually found Elizabeth giving one of the orchestra members a lecture about abusing the champagne. He slid an arm around her waist after she walked away from that.

"I cannot wait for this to be over and to get away from these people. "

Elizabeth sighed and leaned forward, her forehead resting against his chin. "You said it. Jason, I don't like people very much. This is a bad sign for my future as an event planner. "

"It's my fault," he murmured. "But I promise to make it up to you tonight. " He glanced down at her with a half grin. "I intend to peel that delectable dress from you with my teeth. "

She grinned. "As long as you're careful. I have to give this back to Kate tomorrow. " She wrapped her arms around his neck. "But you know, there's something very interesting underneath. "

"Merry Christmas to me," he murmured, pressing a kiss to her mouth but keeping it short. This group of rabid society vultures didn't need any more fuel for the fire.

Part Six

*And when those blue snowflakes start falling
That's when those blue memories start calling
You'll be doin' all right, with your Christmas of white
But I'll have a blue, blue blue blue Christmas*

December 24

Morgan Penthouse: Jason's Bedroom

“Kiki, I don't care if God himself plants his ass in front of you to block traffic, you had better have those presents in GH's conference room by 11 AM this morning or I will send you back to your mother in pieces. ”

Elizabeth hit the end button on her phone and scowled. “I miss being able to slam my phone down. It was so much more satisfying. ”

Jason laughed from across the room where he was hanging up the tuxedo they'd tossed over a chair the evening before—her dress had only fared mildly better. The fear of Kate Howard's wrath had caused her to break off the delightful activities right after he had peeled it away (with the promised teeth) in order to carefully place it on a hanger in the closet.

“Why did you go to the trouble of stealing her from Ava Jerome if she's not capable?” he asked, closing the door and striding towards her.

She pursed her lips, considering him in those black briefs, and winced. Her schedule this morning did not allow for more than another twenty minutes at his place.

She had a party at GH at noon, another at Mercy at two, and then the gala at the Metro Court at eight. Christ on a crutch, how did Emily do this every year?

She blinked because he had asked her a question and he stood there, patiently waiting for the answer. “Oh. Kiki. Well, first, she's *usually* fine. She's just feeling the pressure of it all. Second, I did it because Ava was a pain in the ass who threatened to sue me for terminating my contract with her because I was supposedly violating my non-compete clause. ”

“You're a corporate planner,” Jason said. “We wouldn't use Ava's services anyway. ” He wrinkled his nose. “Though she used to be Ned's type. ”

“I have no doubt of that—I'm familiar with Faith Roscoe. ” Elizabeth crossed to the dresser and slid a watch over her wrist. “Kiki's got a great eye for colors and design. She's only hanging with me to get experience and contacts—she wants to break out into wedding planning eventually. ” She shrugged. “Anyway, she just doesn't want to mess up the GH party since your father is on the board. ”

“I'm sure it'll be fine. ” He stepped behind her and slid his hands up and down the arms left bare by her green silk dress. “I think you did a great job last night. ”

“Hmm, well, *you're* biased. ” She reached for the diamond studded earrings in the porcelain bowl she used to store her jewelry. “Honestly? I don't know how Emily does this every year—juggling all of this while still doing the estimates for the next year. ” She shuddered. “Thank God I don't have her job. ”

“You never know. ” Jason brushed his lips over her nape. “Her boyfriend that swept her away on this vacation? He's the head of Cassadine Industries and might steal her away for *his* events. ”

“That's not remotely funny. ” She bumped him. “You have to get a shower, and I have to finish dressing. We've both got a crazy day in front of us. ”

“Only because I want to take off the week after Emily gets back from Greece. How would you feel about a trip to the Bahamas?”

Elizabeth narrowed her eyes. “Are you asking me to go on a tropical vacation, leaving all my duties and responsibilities on your sister?” She smirked and reached for a comb to draw her through her hair. “Where do I sign up?”

“Maybe not the islands, though,” Jason said, leaning against the wall next to the dresser. “What about Europe? You've been to London as part of ELQ, and I know Ava worked out of France and Spain. ”

“Mmmhmm... and I spent a month in Portugal to plan one of her events. ” Elizabeth reached for the charcoal blazer she'd left on the armchair. “I've never been to Scotland or Germany. ”

“What about Italy? Florence or Venice?”

She paused. “Seriously? You think I could do either of those in a *week*?” She laughed. “I couldn't do those in a lifetime. Maybe we should stick to the islands where I won't be so distracted by the scenery. ”

“Well, we'll nail it down after tonight. You have a lot on your plate today. ” He kissed her forehead. “Too bad you're almost ready or I'd suggest you jump in the shower with me. ”

“The next time I have to go early, I'll wake you up. ” She slid her arms around his waist and reached for up another kiss. “Now, let me finish my makeup in peace or I'm going to miss meeting with your father on time. I don't want him thinking because I'm sleeping with his son that I expect special treatment. ”

“All right, all right. ” He kissed her again before disappearing into the bathroom. A moment later, she heard the water running.

She was glad she'd put last night out of her head. She was not going to let catty, jealous women ruin this for her.

Or his grandfather with his innuendo. Or his father. Or any other Quartermaine.

The cell phone on the dresser buzzed. Elizabeth reached for it, had it in her hand before she realized that it was Jason's and not hers.

And then she saw the name scrawled across the front. Samantha McCall.

An image of the tarty brunette with the plunging neckline flashed in her mind. Why the hell...?

And even though she knew she'd regret it later, she hit the decline on the call, slid the bar to unlock his phone and went into his call history for her number. God, she was one of *those* women now. Her life sucked.

Sam had called him three times the day before. Twice before that. And they'd spoken several times—not all her calls had been declined or sent to voicemail.

Carefully, she set the phone back on the dresser and reached for her eyeliner.

Had that been why the woman was so upset the night before? Had she harbored hopes of reuniting with him? And why hadn't Jason mentioned an ex-girlfriend calling him so often?

Wasn't that part of the relationship rules?

She set the eyeliner on the dresser with a thud, her eyes meeting her own in the image reflecting back. They *were* exclusive, weren't they? They hadn't said it, but you didn't always have to say it.

Did you?

“Damn it.” Elizabeth dumped the rest of her makeup in her bag and left the room without another word.

So much for not letting last night in her head.

ELQ: Conference Room

Jason frowned at the text message from Elizabeth, then glanced up at his cousins, busy with their own paperwork. “Elizabeth just told me not to pick her up tonight, that we'd meet at the hotel.”

AJ finished scrawling his signature at the bottom of a contract and slid it over to Ned. “So? She's the party planner, not just your arm candy. Maybe she has to be there early.”

“So *I'd* go early.” Jason set his phone aside. “I—I think she saw a phone call on my phone this morning. Before she left. I was in the shower.”

“You left a phone unintended with a woman you're sleeping with?” Ned said. He shook his head, sadly. “Young Skywalker, have I taught you *nothing*?”

“Shut up. I'm saying that maybe the phone rang and she saw the caller ID. ”

“Your phone was locked, though, right?” AJ leaned forward. “If nothing else, little brother, that much you've learned from *me*. ”

“Who the hell has time to put a fucking pin code in every damn time they want to use their phone?” He scowled. “No, it wasn't locked. ”

“Hell. Then if she saw the phone call—and believe me, we're getting back to *that* in a moment—then she probably checked the call history. ” Ned arched a brow. “Would that have raised flags?”

Jason glared at his phone. “Sam called me this morning. ”

“Oh, hell. I *knew* you should have fired her. We could have settled any sexual harassment lawsuit,” AJ told Ned. “She tried to get her hooks in me, too. Thought I'd be too drunk to remember protection. Ha. Haven't forgotten to dress myself for a party since Carly. ”

Ned rolled his eyes at AJ, and turned his attention to Jason. “Listen. It's not the end of the world. She probably doesn't even know who Sam is. It's a guy's name—” He closed his eyes. “She's in your phone as Samantha, isn't she?”

“I'll just tell her that Sam's been annoying me to transfer back to Port Charles, into my department, but I usually tell her it's not my decision and hang up. ” Jason nodded. “That'll fix everything. ”

“You're an idiot. Never let one girlfriend know about the other—” AJ scowled. “Do you not know the rules? You've dated enough women in the company—”

“Three,” Jason said, his teeth clenched. “And Brenda barely counts. ”

“Your forty-eight hour wife doesn't count?” Ned asked. “Because—”

“We were drunk and AJ bet me—” Jason shook his head. “Not important. Where *else* do I meet women? I'm always working. ” He hesitated. “People don't think I'm like you idiots, do they?”

“Ah...” AJ blinked. “You mean, that you're following in the footsteps of our illustrious grandfather? Of the nefarious Alan Quartermaine? You're kidding, right? You've dated four women total at ELQ, and Elizabeth is the only one who still works here. ”

“Son of a bitch. ” Jason rapped his fist against his head. “How much do you think people said to her last night? She was acting off for most of the night. And, of course, Grandfather didn't help. ”

“The sad fact is he tries *so* hard to,” Ned mused. “But, odds are more than one person commented on it. Listen, explain the Sam thing to Elizabeth. I'm sure it's not an issue. ” He looked at AJ, jabbing a finger at him. “You, stop comparing Jason to the rest of us. Do not insinuate in front of Elizabeth that she's like all the other women. ”

“Well, I know she's not. She's got more brains. But I can't control the world. ” AJ shook his head.

“Much as I'd like to, I just don't. ”

“I hate you both. ”

General Hospital: Nurse's Station

“Did I do it right?” Kiki asked, wringing her hands together as she and Elizabeth watched various children, doctors, nurses, and other hospital staff members and their families gathered around Edward Quartermaine dressed as Santa Claus, listening to a story.

“You were fine, Kiki. I need you to relax. ” Elizabeth shifted from one foot to the other. She loved these shoes, but her Jimmy Choos were not made to hit the ground running at seven-thirty without sitting for six hours.

“Okay, I mean, it's just a big deal, you know? Because the board is here and I just want them to like me. ” Kiki blew her hair out of her eyes. “And there's Michael Quartermaine. Oh, he's so pretty. Does he work at ELQ? Can you introduce me?”

Elizabeth glared at her assistant who just offered a sheepish grin. “Does everyone think with their hormones in this company?” she muttered.

“Totally not picking that up and running with it. ” Kiki sucked in a breath. “Dr. Quartermaine is heading for us, Lizzie. What do we do?”

“First, you *stop* calling me that. Your mother always thought it was hilarious. ” Elizabeth tried not to look directly at Alan Quartermaine as the older man approached them, but eventually, there was no ignoring the fact he was coming right for them.

“Elizabeth, we didn't get a chance to speak much last night. ” Alan reached for her hand, held it between both of his with a winning smile. “You were flawless at the gala. ”

“Well, I couldn't have done it without Kiki and my team,” Elizabeth said, tightly, choosing to believe he was referring to her work on the party and not her appearance. Jason's father was *not* hitting on her. Her fragile temper could not handle that nonsense today.

“I was so pleased when I saw you arriving on Jason's arm,” Alan continued. “From what I heard, you're a step above his usual sort. ”

Kiki's eyes were as wide saucers. “You're kidding me, right?” she muttered, but the chief of staff either ignored her or didn't notice.

Elizabeth's smile froze in place, a familiar feeling when dealing with Quartermaine men. Was any man in the world worth this kind of nonsense?

Thinking of that morning and the black briefs, she took a deep breath. “That's very nice, Dr. Quartermaine. If you'll excuse me, I have another party at Mercy—”

“I didn't like the last one at all,” Alan said. “And of course, Courtney was all right but not really up to par with the Quartermaines.” He furrowed his brow. “I could have lived with Brenda, but they annulled that—”

Annulled? What in the name of all that was holy—had Jason been *married*? Shouldn't *that* have come up at some point?

“I'm very...” Elizabeth tugged her hand from his. “I'm flattered, I'm sure. But as I said, Kiki and I have a long day in front of us. It was a pleasure to meet you.”

She grabbed Kiki by the arm and steered her towards the elevator. To hell with this.

Metro Court Hotel: Ballroom

“Elizabeth, I really think you're overreacting,” Kiki murmured as she handed a glass of champagne to her. “His family is appalling, but he's been nice enough—”

“You're not being paid for your opinion on my love life.” Elizabeth flexed her ankle, wishing she'd sprung for a set of flats rather than the silver Manolo Blahniks Maxie had insisted went perfectly with the green confection she wore.

Why did men get to wear flats and still look professional but women were pressured into these heels to make their legs long and their asses stick out? Damned patriarchy.

“No, that's free,” Kiki chirped. “Look, he's got a colorful history. I'm sure yours doesn't look as good under scrutiny—”

“Yes, but *my* family isn't walking around reminding him of it—” Elizabeth stopped and took a deep breath. “I'm fine, Kiki. I need you to run interference with the orchestra and keep them from enjoying the booze as much as last night.”

“I'm on it,” Kiki began, but as she turned away, she almost ran into another member of the Quartermaine family.

“Ms. Quartermaine,” Elizabeth said politely to Ned's mother, Tracy. “You look lovely this evening.”

“You're smart to keep your day job, Ms. Webber,” Tracy snipped. “That sets you apart from the *rest* of the social climbers that try to weasel their way into my family's money.”

“I enjoy my job,” Elizabeth said blandly. She reached for Kiki's arm to hold her in place. “Kiki Jerome, this is Tracy Quartermaine. My assistant—”

“You want to be taken seriously?” Tracy snapped. “Drop the Kiki. You sound like a stripper.”

Kiki's mouth dropped. “Are you *kidding* me? You people are—”

“Don't make the same mistake the others do,” Tracy said, dismissing Kiki's protests. “Jason doesn't

marry whatever walks in front of him like my son, and he's not going to buy an accidental pregnancy like my idiot nephew. ” She smirked. “He's more like my brother and father. They'll screw whatever is on front of them, maybe even pretend to love them, but they never do. ”

She pursed her lips. “So *don't* get your hopes up. ”

Tracy whirled and disappeared into the crowd.

“I've changed my mind,” Kiki said. “I don't want to meet Michael after all. These people are insane. You should run as fast as you can. ”

Was it worth the headache for another few months of fun? Of constantly being accused of being just a step under a whore every time she went in public or saw a member of Jason's family?

And what about those phone calls to his last girlfriend? Why bother to wait around two months and find herself transferred?

“I'm certainly considering it,” she murmured.

Part Seven

*I've got to know
Nobody ought to be alone on Christmas
Where do lonely hearts go
Nobody ought to be alone on Christmas
Nobody ought to be alone on Christmas*

December 24

Metro Court Hotel: Ballroom

The gala had been in full swing for nearly two hours before Jason was able to track Elizabeth down. She stood with her assistant, looking tired and harried. He might have to make that one week vacation more like two at this rate.

He'd overheard his Ward cousins speculate on the real reasons Elizabeth had left her job with Ava Jerome, and if sleeping with Jason was part of the incentives. If this was the kind of treatment she was experiencing at the hands of the people in his family, it was no wonder she was avoiding him.

“Elizabeth...” He stepped up to her. “Kiki, could you give us a moment?”

The younger brunette blinked and looked at her boss in panic. “Um, if I say no, do I get fired?”

Jason scowled. “*No.*”

“Okay.” Kiki lifted her chin. “So, um, no.”

Elizabeth rolled her eyes. “Kiki, go deal with the catering. I'll handle the sagging banner.” She folded her arms and turned to Jason. “Hey.”

Her posture and the set of her mouth screamed *Don't touch!* So Jason kept his hands at his side. “Ah, I've been looking for you—”

“Well, I've been working,” she interrupted. “Maybe some people have nothing better to do than drink champagne and be a pain in the ass, but I've been fighting fires all night.” She looked away. “Listen. Things—they're moving really fast.”

That did not sound promising. He stepped towards. “Elizabeth, wait—”

“A—and my career is important to me, okay?” She held up a hand, her face frozen in a pleasant expression as if to ward off gossip from those who may be in earshot. “So...I'm just...I'm reevaluating my choices. I'm not...I'm not interested in being one of many.”

She *had* seen the call from Sam, he was sure of it now. “You're not, Elizabeth.” He reached out for her arm, but she turned to the side to keep away. “I can explain about this morning—”

“You—you don't have to.” She backed up. “We—we never said it was exclusive. A-And you know, it's for the best. Like I said, I love my job. I want to keep doing it with ELQ.” She pursed her lips. “So let me just do my job, okay?”

She walked away, and Jason didn't follow her. He was not going to make a scene in the middle of the Metro Court ballroom. It would only make the gossip worse.

And she didn't deserve that.

So he'd find her after the party, or talk to her after Christmas. Give them both time to calm down.

The Loft: Living Room

When Elizabeth trudged home the early hours of Christmas, she found Robin sitting up, watching Christmas cartoons, with Nadine sprawled out on the sofa, her feet in Robin's lap, sleeping.

“You...waited up.” Elizabeth's lip trembled, and she let her silver purse fall to the ground.

“We did. Or at least we tried. After you called to say you'd be home tonight.” Robin pushed Nadine's feet away so she could stand. “What happened?”

“Oh...just twenty-four of the most *humiliating* hours of my life. Most of Jason's family thinks I'm a social climbing whore and those who don't are probably just slapping his back and offering him a cigar.” Her eyes burned. “And he's *married*.”

“Whoa, what?” Robin's eyes widened. “That doesn't sound right—”

“Or he was. And he's been talking to his ex on the phone for weeks.” She wrapped her arms around herself. “I'm such an idiot—”

Robin wrapped her arms around her and the tears started to fall. “Hey, I'm sure it'll be okay in the morning. We'll discuss it in detail over Christmas breakfast. I'll make mimosas since it's too early for wine.”

“You guys are the best.” She sniffled.

Robin started to steer her towards Elizabeth's bedroom. “I guess you guys had a fight about the ex.”

“No.” Elizabeth collapsed on her bed and reached for the straps of her heels. “I—just told him it was moving too fast.” She closed her eyes. “I'm just one in a long line of ELQ floozies for the Quartermaine men.”

“I think it's probably more complicated than that.” Robin leaned against the doorframe of the room. “But we'll sort it out in the morning.” Her smile was dim in the shadows of the darkened room.

“Merry Christmas, for what it's worth. ”

“Merry Christmas,” Elizabeth murmured in response. For what it was worth.

December 25

Quartermaine Mansion: Family Room

Sometimes Jason liked his family, but most of the time he marveled that not only was he a biological member of this circus, but that he'd been *raised* with them.

He sipped his coffee and stood in the corner of the room watching as his father handed out gifts from under the Christmas tree to various members of the family.

“I thought for sure you'd bring that nice Elizabeth,” his grandfather said, joining him with a snifter of brandy and a cigar. “After you brought her to the party—”

Jason clenched his teeth. “She has her own family. ” Or did she? She was close to her roommates, but she did have family in Port Charles?

“Your grandmother thought she was quite lovely. Exactly what you need. ” Edward tapped his cigar into the ashtray on the nearby shelf to rid himself of the ash. “I hope we didn't come on too strong. ”

Coffee wasn't strong enough to be a member of this family.

“I'm not dignifying *that* with a response,” Jason muttered.

His grandfather huffed and rejoined his wife near the tree. For all his philandering (and Edward had at least two illegitimate sons to show for it), he had retained the love and devotion of his wife for nearly three-quarters of a century.

He loved his grandmother, but damned if he understood that marriage. Or that of his father and stepmother. Insanity.

“You look like a lost puppy over here. ” AJ joined him, followed by Ned. “I've heard Grandfather muse on the absence of your one true love like five times. ” He snorted. “They're *all* true loves until it's over. ”

“Do you two have a point here?” Jason demanded. “I'm not in the mood. Someone must have said something to Elizabeth, because she was miserable last night. She didn't even let me explain about the phone calls. ”

Ned tugged on his ear. “Yeah, so...Olivia mentioned that she saw *my* mother near Elizabeth and her assistant early on in the evening. ”

Oh, hell. Jason pinched the bridge of his nose. “Does no one have impulse control on this family?”

“And I saw Dad with her at the hospital party,” AJ said. “I tried to get closer to find out what was being said, but I only heard Brenda's name. ”

“I'm going to set this place on fire with every one of you inside. ” Jason set his coffee mug down with a clack of the porcelain against the oak desk. “Let me get this straight. Yesterday—*just* yesterday—Elizabeth finds out I've been talking with my ex-girlfriend, my father tells her I was married once, and *then* your ridiculous mother probably mentioned something about social climbers?”

“Yeah, when you list it that way, it's no wonder she walked out on you,” AJ said, in almost cheerful tone. “Couple that with Sam cornering her the evening before—” He put his hands up in mock surrender when Jason glared at him. “I only heard that *today* from Dillon. ”

“So, some damage control is necessary,” Ned said. “It can be done. Kristina still married me even after she found out I had been married briefly to her sister. ”

“Point of order—she found out *after* you were married and moved out for a month,” AJ reminded him.

Jason stared at the both of them. “And I consider the two of you friends. No wonder I've never had a relationship longer than two months. ”

“Hey, I've been with Olivia for three years now,” Ned pointed out. “So, you know, eventually I figured it out. ” He looked at AJ, who just looked at him. “Junior's a lost cause, but he's a half decent father. ”

“I'm touched,” AJ said dryly.

Jason shook his head. “I'm going to go see her tomorrow. I'll bring her gift and hope like hell she'll talk to me. We work together, she can't avoid me forever. ”

“There's the silver lining. If you can't harass her personally, do it professionally. ” AJ raised his bourbon in a mock toast. “Welcome to the Quartermaine family. ”

When Jason only growled, Ned steered AJ away. “Let me get you away before he *actually* hurts you. ”

December 26

The Loft: Hallway

When the door swung open the next afternoon, he found Robin Scorpio staring back at him, her eyes raised in expectation. “Ah...hey, Robin. Can I see—” He faltered when she just shook her head.

“Sorry, she's not in the mood. We just split open a bottle of Riesling. ”

Jason frowned, because she'd said that final part like it was supposed to mean something. Right, Elizabeth said she and her roommates took wine very seriously. “Ah, I guess you don't use that for

holidays. ”

“Nope, it's more to drink away various humiliations. ” Robin pursed her lips. “Not romantically, so much. That's usually the Moscato. Riesling is more general. You know, for being treated like a social climbing whore for two days straight, and finding out the guy you're sleeping with is not only talking to an ex-girlfriend, but used to be married. ”

She looked back to her blonde roommate, who was perched on the arm of the sofa. “Did I get it all?”

“Oh, and the one where her assistant is called a stripper,” Nadine said. “And um,” She paused. “I think there was *something* in there about the horrors of heels, but that's more a female thing than directly his fault. ”

“Right. ” Robin turned back. “Listen. I know you're a good guy. *She* knows it, too. She just...didn't grow up in this town. Most of us are immune to the Quartermaines after so much exposure. ”

“I barely blink when your dad pinches my butt these days,” Nadine said blandly. “Though I twisted his wrist the last time. That was awesome. ”

Jason closed his eyes. “I know. And I should have...said something to them, but they don't exactly listen. ”

“I hear ya. ” Robin tapped her fingers on the edge of the door. “So, I'd love to let you in, but she's still working off her mad. If you talk to her now, you're both going to say stuff you don't entirely mean. Let her come to you. ” She narrowed her eyes. “You are here to work it out right? Because if you're just here to tell her it's not worth the trouble—”

“I'll twist *your* wrist right off,” Nadine said, rising to her feet. “Along with other body parts you might miss. ” She cracked her knuckles and rubbed her hands together.

“I'm glad Elizabeth has such good friends,” Jason said after a moment. He wasn't scared. Not really. He held out the small rectangular box wrapped in silver. “Could you give this to her?”

“Hmm, jewelry as a peace offering. It's not original, but there's a reason it's a standard. ” Robin accepted the gift. “Any other message?”

Jason shifted. “Well, I didn't—there's no card, because—I thought I'd give it to her in person. ” He coughed lightly. “I had planned to tell her it's so we'll always remember our first Christmas together, but...” He winced. “That sounds worse out loud than it did in my head. ”

Robin considered him for a long moment before nodding. “That's acceptable. If she wants to call you after this, then that's up to her. I'll...*think* about encouraging it. ”

“Thanks, Robin. ”

She swung the door shut then and turned to Nadine. “He looked contrite. ”

“I think *we* should open it,” Nadine said. “Just to make sure it's appropriate. ”

Robin just rolled her eyes and headed for Elizabeth's room.

The Loft: Elizabeth's Bedroom

Elizabeth was curled up in her bed, watching *Love, Actually* for the fifth time, sniffing. At Robin's light knock, she hit pause as Mark was showing Juliet the sign that proclaimed her to be perfect to him.

Why couldn't love be like the movies?

“Come in. ” She drew her legs up so Robin could sit the edge of her bed and Nadine just settled next to her. “Who was at the door?”

“Jason,” Robin said. She handed her a silver box. “He wanted to talk to you, but settled for leaving this. I told him you were still working off your mad. ” She tilted her head. “Did I overstep? Should I have let him in?”

Elizabeth looked down at her pink camisole and gray sweatpants. “Um, no. The next time I see him, I want to be past the wallowing part of the program. ” She took the box. “Is it wrong I don't want to open this?”

“No,” Robin said slowly, “but there's a question I didn't ask you yesterday. It was your day for being coddled. ”

“And *that* part is over,” Nadine said, slinging an arm around Elizabeth's shoulder and reaching into the bowl of popcorn. “Today, Robin becomes the speaker of common sense. ”

“Ah. ” A smile tugged at the corners of her lips. “Which tells me you were mostly patting my head yesterday but you think I'm an idiot. ”

“I think you have a reason to be annoyed,” Robin said. “I personally think that after three weeks of dating and roughly three months of knowing one another, the fact that he was married before should come up. Particularly if you're together as often as the two of you were. ”

“Even if you didn't really get into the ex part of the conversation,” Nadine said, “marriage is different. So, Robin and I agree—that's a faux pas there. ”

“And the talking with his ex thing?” Robin hesitated. “I don't know. I knew him in high school, which was a long time ago, but he wasn't much for dating a bunch of girls at once. I'd ask him about it with an open mind. ”

“But the rest of it, girlfriend?” Nadine said. “You know, the part where you're accosted by the majority of Port Charles' class of idiots and his family?”

“Not his fault,” Elizabeth sighed. “Which I'd mostly accepted two days ago. It was just the

culmination of it. ”

“So what you have to ask yourself, my love, is—*other* than the two points we've already discussed, what has Jason done to make you distrust him?”

“Other than the girlfriend and wife thing?” Elizabeth shook her head. “Nothing. He—he even suggested a trip after Emily comes back. He went into work on Christmas Eve, trying to clear his schedule a bit. ” She closed her eyes. “But right after that, I saw the phone calls, and I stopped thinking about it—”

“So maybe you give him a chance to explain the two aspects we agree he's in hot water over, and the rest?” Robin shrugged. “You chalk it up to not having to sleep with his family. ”

Elizabeth laughed, and slowly began to unwrap the gift.

Inside the velvet lined box from Tiffany, laid a delicate diamond snow flake on a silver chain. “I shouldn't let jewelry impress me,” she murmured.

“Tell her the message,” Nadine urged.

“He said—and I quote—that it's so you'll always remember your first Christmas together. ” Robin smirked. “And he looked embarrassed to say it to us. ”

“But he did. ” Elizabeth removed the necklace and held the charm in the palm of her hand. “That has to mean something, doesn't it?” She blinked and looked up. “Our *first* Christmas?”

“Yeah, I liked that part of it, too. ” Nadine grinned. “You gonna forgive him?”

Not yet, but...

Elizabeth smirked. “He *does* look fantastic just wearing black briefs. There is that to cling to. ”

Part Eight

*Maybe I'm crazy to suppose
I'd ever be the one you chose
Out of a thousand invitations
You received
Aah, but in case I stand one little chance
Here comes the jackpot question in advance
What are you doing New Year's
New Year's Eve?*

December 31

Port Charles Hotel: Ballroom

“I've changed my mind,” Kiki declared. “I want you to introduce me to Michael. ”

Elizabeth gestured for orchestra leader to begin setting up before turning her attention to her assistant. “What, are you insane? I still have to figure out if *I* want to be introduced to anymore Quartermaines. You think I'm fixing you up?”

“Just a thought. ” Kiki followed her to the wall where Elizabeth briefly conferred with the hotel employee that had set up the balloons and confetti meant to fall at midnight. “I thought I was taking point tonight. ” She tapped her ear piece. “Isn't that why I've got this?”

“I still have mine for emergencies,” Elizabeth murmured. She pursed her lips, considering the placement of the silver silk draping across several of the tables. “I think that's dragging a bit—”

“So it's been a week,” Kiki said as Elizabeth straightened the silk. “Are you taking Hottie back?”

Elizabeth sighed and briefly touched the snowflake she'd yet to take off. “It's not that simple, Kiki. I...*may* have overreacted. ”

“Listen, his aunt called me a stripper and I'm pretty sure his dad tried to hit on you. ” Kiki pursed her lips. “I'm not sure that *can* be overreacted to. ”

“She's got a point about the nickname,” Elizabeth murmured, taking a clipboard from the caterer and scrawling her name.

“It annoys my mother, so that's reason enough. ” Kiki blinked. “Um, I thought the guests weren't arriving for another hour. ”

“They're not supposed to,” Elizabeth said as a blonde woman in a blue velvet dress approached them. “Ma'am? I'm sorry, the ballroom is still closed—”

“Oh, I just...” The woman stopped a few feet away from her. “You are Elizabeth Webber, right?”

“Yes.” Elizabeth handed the clipboard back to the caterer. “Can I help you with something?”

“I’m Courtney Matthews...” The blonde glanced at Kiki, who just folded her arms and lifted her chin. “Since I arrived in town yesterday, your name has been mentioned to me more than once. I’m assuming mine isn’t exactly unfamiliar.”

“There’s a vague bell ringing,” Elizabeth murmured. “You used to work at ELQ?”

“I did, in New York, but I was in Port Charles for a few months about two years ago.” Courtney stepped closer. “And I dated Jason while I was here.”

“Oh, hell, can’t people just leave her alone?” Kiki demanded. “This is getting ridiculous—”

Courtney held up her hands. “I—I’m sorry, this isn’t...what you think. No, I just wondered—you’re probably getting some of the same treatment I did.” A faint smile appeared. “The Quartermaines close ranks, even when they’re not wanted.”

“Ah, so you’re another social climbing whore,” Elizabeth nodded. She looked to Kiki. “Can you make sure the servers are ready to go?”

Kiki nodded and headed across the room for the bar. Courtney watched her go. “She’s a fierce one.”

“I rescued her from employment with Ava Jerome, so her loyalty is undying.” Elizabeth twirled a pen in her fingers. “I don’t really know what you want from me—”

“It’s...more to make sure you’re not...that you have the right idea about what happened between Jason and I.” She held up her hand where a large diamond flashed. “I’m engaged, so I promise you, I come in peace.”

Elizabeth sighed. “I’m not really sure it’s my business—”

“It is if you’re being fed the same lines...” Courtney stepped closer. “Jason’s *not* like the rest of his family, I’m sure you get that by now. He and I...it was casual. I worked in Port Charles on a deal with Jacks Industries, which is how I met my fiancé, Jax. Meeting him changed my life, because I saw him and I just knew—so Jason and I very amicably broke things off. I went to work with Jax because I wasn’t comfortable dating him and working for a competitor, though I’m sure the gossip has me unceremoniously removed due to the end of my time with Jason.”

“That’s the general gossip,” Elizabeth agreed. “You really don’t have to explain anything—”

“I worked for ELQ long enough to get the family dynamics,” Courtney continued, “and I’m sure you picked up on it, too. This current crop of Quartermaine men? They date, sure. But they’re *nothing* like Edward or Alan. AJ was burned really badly with his ex-wife, and Ned is an eternal romantic, which is why he gets married so often. Jason—”

“I’ve heard he was married once,” she murmured in response.

“For five minutes.” Courtney flashed a smile. “I’ll let Jason explain the details, but it was annulled within two days.” She tilted her head. “I don’t know what happened with the last one—Sam—but I’m sure it’s nothing like the gossip.” She shrugged. “Anyway, Jason was really good to me. I don’t like being used to annoy someone else he cares about.”

“Fair enough. I appreciate the gesture.”

As Courtney exited the way she came in, Elizabeth sighed. So the marriage had lasted five seconds, probably a drunken weekend. Courtney had left voluntarily.

Which meant the phone calls from Sam McCall likely had a logical explanation.

“I hate being wrong,” she muttered.

It was several hours later before Elizabeth finally had the courage to approach Jason, trying to wait until he had separated from the majority of his family. When he was just standing with his nephew Michael, she finally went for it.

“Ah, Jason?” She fought the urge to clasp her hands behind her back. “I...was wondering if I could speak to you for a moment.”

Jason turned to look at her, his eyes focusing on the necklace she wore. He exhaled slowly. “Of course. Michael, if you’ll excuse me?”

“Of course. Ah, Ms. Webber, I had a quick question for you,” AJ’s son said with a grin. “You’ve got that assistant...Kiki right? I was wondering if you might introduce me or put in a good word. Jason can vouch for me—”

Quartermaine men. But she just smiled. “Don’t tell her this because she’ll kill me, but she’s begging me to arrange an introduction for about a week, so if you ask her to dance, she’ll say yes.”

“Fantastic.” Michael drained his champagne and disappeared into the crowd.

“You Quartermaines have to get out more,” Elizabeth said with an easy smile she did not feel. “There’s probably a reason you *only* date women who work at ELQ.”

“Probably,” Jason agreed. He stepped forward. “Elizabeth, listen—”

“Let—let me.” She glanced around and stepped closer to make sure her words weren’t overheard. “I just wanted to apologize. I—I overreacted...in certain ways. I...let the things people said to me get in my head.” She lifted a shoulder. “Mostly because I know what this is, and what it can’t be.”

Jason frowned. “I don’t know what that means. I—”

“Well, isn’t it obvious?” Elizabeth lifted her champagne glass to gesture at the gold gown she wore.

“You're a Quartermaine and I'm—”

“I'm a Quartermaine by default,” Jason interrupted. “Not because my father wanted me to be, but because he either took me home when my mother died or I was shuffled into the system. I don't care what my aunt says or anyone else—”

Elizabeth sighed and rubbed her head. “I know. I'm sorry. I did it again. I...that part of my apology is a lot more complicated than I have time for right now. “

Jason set his empty champagne on the tray of a passing server and snagged another. “Is there something I'm supposed to say to reassure you that none of that matters to me?”

“No, that's...my own crap to deal with. ” She looked down. “I'm just—I'm sorry—”

“I don't want you to be sorry. ” Jason stepped closer and tipped her chin up to force her to meet her eyes. “I know you...saw my phone. That you think I was talking to my ex-girlfriend. ”

“Um...I may have glanced at something like that,” Elizabeth admitted, with a sheepish smile. “And I'm sure there's a logical explanation—”

“She's mad that I found out she was trying to sleep with Ned. And had made a pass at AJ. So I dumped her, and Ned transferred her to New York to keep Olivia from ripping her hair out. ” Jason shrugged. “She worked for me back then, and wants her job back. I told her no. Again. ”

“Well, now I feel like an idiot,” she muttered.

“Don't. I should have mentioned it. There's just...no easy way to bring that up. ” His thumb brushed over her bottom lip. “Are we done fighting now? It'll be midnight in about—” Jason glanced at his watch. “Thirty seconds. ”

“Well, in that case, I declare our first fight officially at the end,” Elizabeth said. She wiggled her eyebrows. “Now comes the best part. ”

He grinned. “The making up, right?”

She wrapped her arms around his neck and sank into his kiss as the clock struck midnight and the balloons and confetti released as scheduled.

It was going to be a very happy new year.

Epilogue

*Oh, there's no place like home for the holidays,
'Cause no matter how far away you roam,
When you pine for the sunshine of a friendly gaze,
For the holidays, you can't beat home, sweet home*

January 7

ELQ: Elizabeth's Office

Emily Quartermaine breezed into her assistant's office, her smile bright, her skin sun kissed from her weeks in the Greek sun. “Elizabeth!”

Elizabeth was waiting for her with a bright smile and a pile of paperwork. She dumped it straight in her arms. “Here's the contracts for the next quarter. ”

Emily blinked as the brunette breezed past her. “Wait a second—”

She followed Elizabeth into the outer offices where Kiki sat at her desk. “Where are you going?”

Elizabeth swept her jacket on and stepped onto the elevator. “Your brother's taking me to Italy. I'll see you in two weeks. ”

As the elevator slid closed, Emily huffed and set the contracts on the desk.

When she was sure Elizabeth was gone, she grinned at Kiki. “How did it go, kiddo?”

“Well,” Kiki said, “I'd say it couldn't have gone better if you'd *planned* it, but...”

Emily smirked. “Better to keep letting them think I had nothing to do with it. Ned *still* doesn't know I helped him with Olivia. ”

She set off towards her office, but spun around with one last smile. “Isn't it fantastic when a plan works exactly as you intended it? It's going to be a fantastic year. ”

THE END

Author's Note

Thanks so much for reading my little fluffy Christmas novella. I would love to continue writing in this alternate universe, but I don't know what I'd write next! If you have any thoughts, please let drop me a line:

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Happy Holidays!