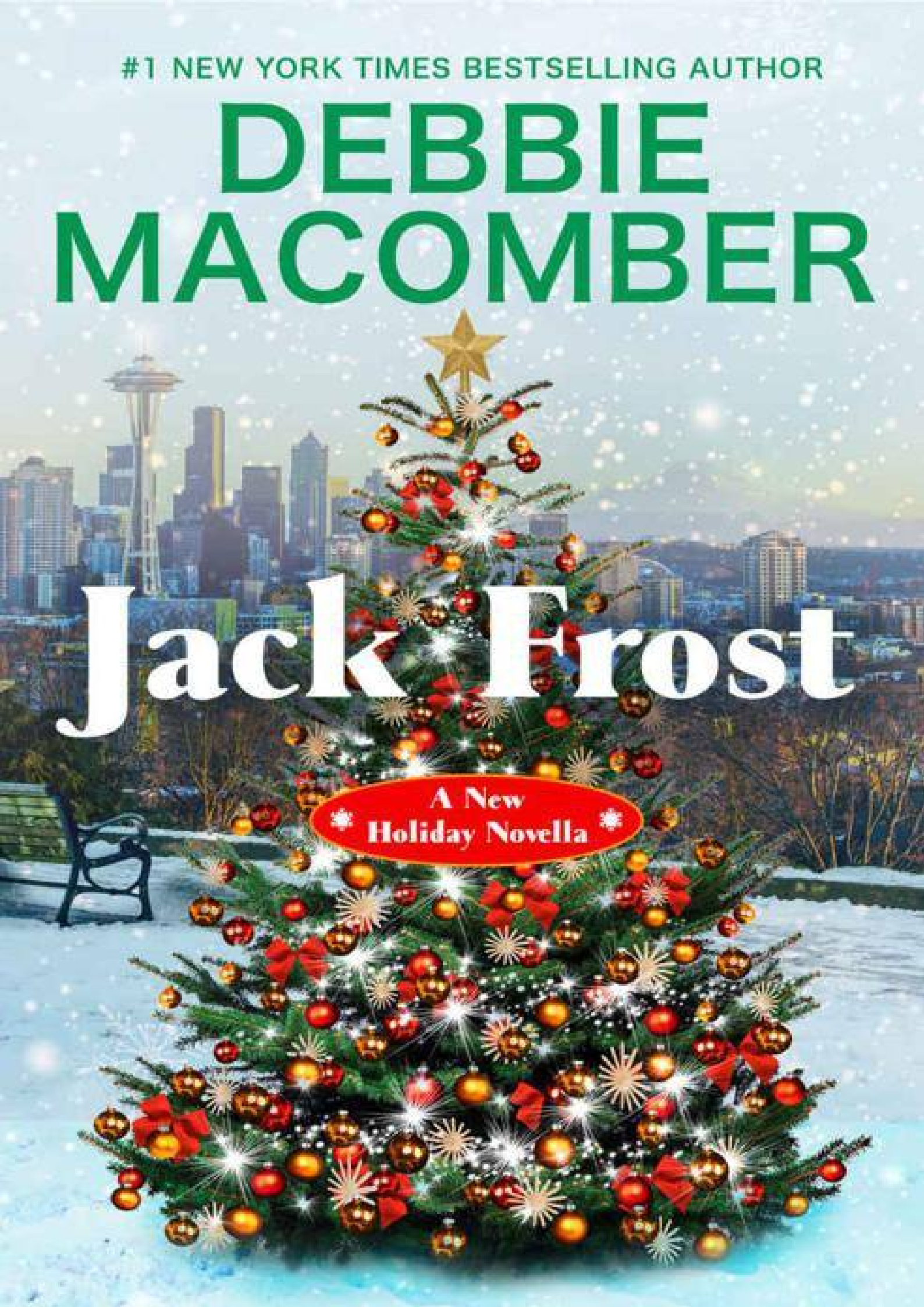


#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

DEBBIE  
MACOMBER

Jack Frost

A New  
Holiday Novella



JACK FROST  
A CHRISTMAS NOVELLA



DEBBIE MACOMBER



Praise for Debbie Macomber's  
bestselling Christmas novels

***The Christmas Spirit***

“Bestseller and Hallmark Channel stalwart Macomber (Dear Santa) does it again with a candy cane–sweet holiday romance about two friends who swap lives for a week before Christmas....An eclectic supporting cast—including cadres of strippers and bikers—and a comically disastrous climactic Christmas Eve church service make the narrative shine bright. It’s exactly what readers want from a Macomber holiday outing.” – *Publishers Weekly*

***Dear Santa***

“A sweet and simple holiday romance...a fun, fluffy holiday escape.” – *Publisher Weekly, starred review*

***Jingle All The Way***

“This delightful Christmas story can be enjoyed any time of the year.” – *New York Journal of Books*

“Jingle All The Way will hit the spot.” – *Insider*

***Alaskan Holiday***

“Author Debbie Macomber is a pro, and “Alaskan Holiday” promises to melt any frozen heart.” – *USA Today*

“This sweet seasonal story warmed up my chilly heart and had me smiling. Plus Josie and Palmer left me starry-eyed for days!” – *First for Women magazine*

***Merry and Bright***

“Online dating leads to hilarious, eventually romantic results for a deserving, likable pair in this tender holiday delight.” – *Library Journal*

“Merry and Bright was a holiday romance with a completely engaging storyline and endearing characters, plus the added bonus of being filled with the warmth and spirit of the Season.” –*Harlequin Junkie*

### ***Twelve Days of Christmas***

“...a delightful, charming read for anyone looking for an enjoyable Christmas novel.... Settle in with a warm blanket and a cup of hot chocolate, and curl up for some Christmas fun with Debbie Macomber’s latest festive read.” – [Bookreporter.com](http://Bookreporter.com)

“Macomber’s celebrated warmth and flair for storytelling make this a fun holiday frolic.” – *Publishers Weekly*

.....

*Jack Frost* is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Copyright © 2023 by Debbie Macomber  
All rights reserved.

Published in the United States  
by Debbie Macomber Inc.

ISBN 000-0-0000-0000-0  
Ebook 000-0-0000-0000-0

FIRST EDITION

*Book Cover by Daniela Medina*

# CONTENTS

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[About the Author](#)

## PROLOGUE



The Christmas party for Stafford Insurance had been a huge success. Lindsay Calhoun had poured her heart into organizing and planning the gathering and her hard work had paid off. She basked in the praise she'd received from her co-workers as they filed out the door. Everyone told her they'd had a great time.

Well, almost everyone.

Jack Taylor was the exception.

Lindsay wasn't surprised. She wasn't even sure why he'd bothered to show up. He'd refused to participate in the icebreakers or any of the games. He'd sat back with his arms crossed and that bored expression, as if he'd rather be anywhere else.

A few snow flurries had started to fall when everyone had first arrived. As the evening progressed, the snow had started to fall in earnest. Before anyone took notice, two to three inches had accumulated in the parking lot. When Janice from Claims had announced that a winter storm advisory had been posted, the room had cleared quickly, but Lindsay had noticed Jack heading out the door even before Janice's announcement.

A couple of Lindsay's friends had tarried long enough to ask if she needed any help with cleanup. Almost before she could assure Stephanie and Alice that she'd be fine, they had already been on their way to the parking lot. Ah, well, Lindsay couldn't really blame them. Growing up in eastern Washington, she was used to driving in winter conditions. Not so for those in the western half of the state. Seattle practically closed down if there was more than a few inches of snow.

There wasn't that much to do other than gather up leftovers and take down the decorations. She'd be on her way soon enough. Like the others, she was eager to get home, put her feet up and relax wrapped in a warm afghan. As she moved about the space, the lack of sound was a stark



contrast to the friendly conversations earlier.

She headed to the kitchen to empty the punch bowl when she heard the door open. Wondering who it might be, she turned to look--and froze.

It was Jack.

Her gaze clashed with his. "Why did everyone leave in such a hurry?" he asked.

"You didn't hear?"

"Hear what?"

"There's a winter advisory, and several more inches of snow are due to arrive overnight," she explained, doing her best to ignore him while she worked.

"Anyone who took the time to look outside would see this storm isn't letting up anytime soon." Jack snorted, as if those who'd attended the party should have realized it much sooner.

"We can't all be as brilliant as you," she snapped.

He ignored her comment. "Why are you still here?"

"Cleanup," she said, as she piled the leftover sandwiches onto one plate. There were only a few left, which told her she hadn't overordered.

"You mean to say no one offered to help?"

When it came to Jack and his attitude, her tongue had teeth marks from all the times she'd bitten back an angry reply. She'd tried with him, she really had, but to no avail.

"Yes, of course I had offers to help," she said, feeling defensive of her friends, "but I didn't want to delay anyone. As you can see, there's not that much to do. I don't suppose you're here to carry out the garbage?"

Jack shook his head. "Sounds to me like you have a martyr complex."

Lindsay glared at him. It would be easy to tell Jack Taylor exactly what she thought of him. Not that it was likely to do any good. "Whatever."

"You don't like me, do you?" he asked.

She pretended she hadn't heard that. "Seeing you didn't come back to help, exactly why are you here?"

"I can't find my car keys," he grumbled, his frustration evident in each word. "They must be here. I spent about several minutes digging through the snow all around my car. Figured they must've fallen. No luck. So they have to be here. . ."

"I haven't seen them," she said, as she tossed the empty wine bottles in the recycle bin.

"I'll check the men's room. That's the only place I can think where they might be." He headed in that direction.

If Jack was anyone else, Lindsay would make a point of helping him search. She felt mildly guilty but not enough to act.

Scowling, he returned a few minutes later.

“Find them?”

“No,” he muttered with an irritated sigh. “It was those ridiculous games you dreamed up.”

“Are you blaming *me* for your lost keys?” The man was unbelievable, a piece of work. “Might I remind you that you escaped into the men’s room rather than participate?”

“Forgive me if I’m not into childish games. They were ridiculous.”

Arms akimbo, Lindsay faced him. “You know, you might actually have enjoyed yourself if you’d taken part with everyone else. It seems sulking away the evening didn’t appear to be as entertaining as you would’ve liked.”

Splaying his fingers through his hair, he walked around the room. “I’ll be out of here as soon as I find my keys.”

Jack walked over to the table where he’d first sat and checked below. At the second table, he found his keys. “Found ‘em,” he said, and made a beeline for the front door.

“Good.” Then, feeling she should be the bigger person, she added in a pleasant tone, “Despite everything, I hope you have a Merry Christmas, Jack.”

He snickered, as if to say she was asking the impossible.

All at once, the lights went out and the room went dark.

“What just happened?” she asked, although it was obvious there’d been a power outage.

The room was as dark as midnight. Charcoal black. Deep cave dark.

Jack toppled over a chair, which made a clanging sound that caused Lindsay to gasp.

“It’s only a chair,” he said.

“Right.” They needed to leave, and the sooner the better.

She’d have to return in the morning to finish up. No way could she do anything in the dark.

Before Jack could respond, a loud clicking sound came from the area of the front door.

“What was that?” she asked.

Jack blindly made his way toward the glass double-door entrance. Groaning, he turned, and in the dim light bouncing off the snow, he announced, “The door’s locked.”

“No, it isn’t,” she insisted. “It must be stuck. You just aren’t pushing

hard enough.”

“Feel free to try yourself,” he returned and stepped back.

Certain he was wrong, Lindsay found her way to where he stood. Pushing, her shoulder against the glass, she shoved with all her strength. The door refused to budge. “It’s locked,” she said, doing her best to hide her dismay.

They were locked inside. They were alone. Lindsay was trapped with the last person on earth she would have chosen to spend time with.

Here she was stuck with Jack.

# CHAPTER 1



## *Two Weeks Earlier*

Lindsay logged onto her company's weekly Monday Zoom call, as she had every week since the team started working remotely. Zoom calls had become the norm for the small, independent insurance agency where she worked as the bookkeeper, and the physical office had closed the last day of November.

Lindsay found it less than satisfying. She much preferred it when the team had been able to meet in the office. As a people person, she didn't look forward to being cooped up inside her apartment day in and day out. When Brad, the agency's owner, had offered the choice of keeping the office open or working remotely, the vote had been almost evenly split. The deciding vote had been Jack Taylor's. Naturally, he chose to work remotely, and his vote had been the tiebreaker.

On her screen, Brad Stafford, reviewed the week, asking each department to check in with a report. Stephanie, the operations director, went first.

Lindsay was pleased to note that her fellow team members were in the Yuletide spirit; they had each decorated their Zoom backgrounds with scenes of Christmas and winter. Everyone, that is, except Jack, who'd made it known he wasn't a fan of the holiday.

Lindsay was anxious for her turn to report, since she'd spent copious amounts of personal time arranging the staff Christmas party, which was planned for later in the month. Because she worked in Accounting, she'd let it slip earlier that Brad would hand out their Christmas bonus checks at the party. This, she felt, was sure to guarantee full participation.

When asked, Lindsay gave her financial report.

“Can you update us on the party?” Brad asked. His tie featured a lighted Christmas tree that blinked as he spoke.

“I can,” she said, leaning forward in her enthusiasm. “I was lucky enough to find a great location in an old bank. It’s perfect for what we need even if it’s in the south end of Seattle and was recently updated with a kitchen and new flooring. The building is new on the market, which is why I was able to rent it at this late date.”

“How far south?” Jack asked. He’d shown zero interest in the party. He rarely said anything on these calls, simply gave his report in a clear, precise way, limiting his words. She’d noticed he wore his long hair down for the Zoom call, rather than in a man bun. She tended to think of him as a recluse.

“It’s not that far, near Auburn. I realize it’s a bit out of the way, but well worth the travel time,” she said, not bothering to hide her excitement. “You’ll agree once you see for yourself.” She didn’t mention that she’d had to scramble after Brad announced they weren’t renewing the lease. Before 2020, the holiday party had always been held at the office itself. Nor did she remind the others that she was working with a limited budget. “We have the building from six until nine. In addition to renting the hall for the night, I’ve placed the food orders.”

“Did you find a gluten-free option?” Stephanie asked.

“I did,” Lindsay assured her. She’d been shocked when several of the team had sought her out to make sure she’d be able to satisfy their specific food needs and preferences. “I’ve also ordered vegan and vegetarian options, and those of you who are lactose intolerant, I can assure you all the drinks will be dairy-free.”

“What about those of us who are carnivores?” Jack asked with a snicker. He sat with his arms crossed, making sure everyone knew his feelings about the party.

When Brad had first suggested the idea, Jack had been the only staff member who claimed he wasn’t interested. When Brad had asked for a volunteer to organize the event and Lindsay had been quick to offer, Jack had asked, “Why would you do that? Don’t you already have enough to do?”

She had replied with the truth. “I happen to love Christmas.”

Once again, Jack had scoffed. “God save us from little elves.”

Lindsay remembered when she’d first met Jack. He’d only been working as the Tech expert for Stafford Insurance Agency a couple of weeks. Jack had his own cubicle, and other than break times he rarely ventured out, so she hadn’t gotten to know him the way she had many of

the others. Shortly after he'd been hired, he'd stopped by her desk and requested that his paycheck be deposited to a different bank. The exchange had lasted less than a minute. She'd been curious about him, mostly because he was so private. As Jack had turned to leave, Lindsay had stopped him.

"A few of us get together Fridays after work for a beer. How about joining us?"

"No, thanks."

"Why not? It's fun and--"

"Not interested," he said before she could finish. "Why are you persisting?"

Stunned at his attitude, she had stared up at him, hardly knowing what to say. "No reason other than I was hoping to get to know you better."

"Why? I thought we were here to work, not socialize."

Lindsay had bristled. "I do my job."

"And I do mine, and that's all you need to know about me."

"Right."

Following that short but rather uncomfortable conversation, they'd only spoken in passing, always briefly, as if Jack had better things to do than chat with her. He wasn't rude or confrontational; he was simply there to do his job. To his credit, he did it well and was available when needed.

Lately though, ever since the mention of the Christmas party, Jack had been in a mood--grouchy and negative. On the Zoom call, Lindsay stiffened at his lack of enthusiasm at every mention of the party.

"To answer your question, Jack, you needn't worry. I promise there'll be plenty to satisfy the *carnivores* among us."

"It looks like you've put a lot of effort into this," Stephanie said, clearly trying to defuse the tension. "And I, for one, want you to know how much I appreciate it."

"Hear, hear," came a chorus of replies.

Stephanie's gratitude helped smooth Lindsay's ruffled feathers.

"This gathering is important," Brad said, before Jack could comment again, "because a couple of you hired on after the move and have yet to meet in person. As far as I'm concerned, there's no better way for us all to get to know each other than attending this party, which we can do thanks to Lindsay."

Everyone but Jack seemed to agree. "Wouldn't it have been better to arrange this party during the summer?" he asked.

"Good idea, Jack. We'll plan another gathering in July," Brad concurred. "But since we've already arranged this one, it's my sincere

hope that everyone will make an effort to attend.” He seemed to be speaking directly to Jack.

That was Lindsay’s hope, too, although she wouldn’t mind if Jack decided to bow out.

“Do you need help?” Stephanie offered.

“Thanks, Steph, but I’ve got everything under control.” By nature, Lindsay was an organizer, a trait she’d inherited from her father, along with her dark hair and rich chocolate-brown eyes. Her pert nose was from her mother.

“How long is this party supposed to last?” Jack asked with the clear indication that the sooner it was over the better.

“Like I said, we have the hall between six and nine. I have a few icebreaker games planned. I thought we could eat after, and then visit and get to know each other better.”

“Games,” Jack groaned. “What is this? Junior High?”

“Jack,” Collin, one of the underwriters, snapped. “Your attitude isn’t helping.”

“Yeah.,” This came from Janice, who worked in Claims.

“Jack, we can discuss this later,” Brad said, as if he, too, appeared to be losing patience.

“If you don’t want to attend, that isn’t a problem,” Lindsay chimed in.

“Let Brad deal with Jack,” Stephanie advised.

“Okay, okay,” Brad said. “Jack will go to the party, won’t you, son?”

Lindsay wasn’t sure anyone else noticed the way Jack bristled when Brad referred to him as *son*. She did, though.

Jack shrugged. “Whatever.”

“I hope you do,” Lindsay encouraged. “The icebreaker games I found online are going to be a lot of fun.”

From the way Jack’s mouth tightened, Lindsay could see he wasn’t convinced.

After the call, Lindsay tried to work, but her mind continued to drift back to Jack and his attitude. She didn’t know what it was about him that intrigued her--and not in a positive way. But she knew it wasn’t just her. Jack was a loner. He hadn’t tried to get to know any of the other team members, either. He kept to himself, ate his lunch at his desk and worked alone.

Lindsay got up, wandered around her home office, made herself a cup of coffee, then returned to her computer.

Try as she might, she still couldn’t stop thinking about Jack.

## CHAPTER 2



Following the Zoom call, Lindsay tried to work, but she couldn't focus. She kept thinking about Jack and his attitude. She got up from her desk again, roamed around the house, made herself another cup of coffee and returned once more to her computer. Her mind drifted back to the week of the move from the office. She'd worked hard getting everything ready for the transition and then lent a helping hand to a few of her colleagues. For the most part, everything had gone smoothly. Everyone was working extra hours.

With only a few days left before she'd be moving her workstation to her apartment, Lindsay's computer had crashed. It had been the worst possible time. Lindsay had tried everything she knew to bring it back to life without success. She had no option but to seek out Jack, the group's tech expert. To her dismay, he'd already left.

"Where's Jack?" Lindsay had asked Brad.

"He had an appointment this afternoon." He must have heard the panic in her voice. "Computer problems?"

"Big-time."

"Leave him a note."

"Okay."

She'd done as Brad suggested and eagerly watched for Jack's return, hoping that whatever had taken him away from the office wouldn't keep him too long. By closing time, he still wasn't back. Convinced she'd likely go another day without her computer, Lindsay had headed home. She hadn't slept much that night, tossing and fretting, fearing she might not be able to get payroll out on time.

To her surprise, the following morning she'd found her computer working again, with a scribbled note from Jack that read *Up and running*. Finding his note first thing that morning had been a huge relief. Because



she'd lost an entire day's work and had to do payroll, she'd been at her computer all day. Although she'd intended to thank him, she hadn't gotten a chance before Jack left the office. She could only imagine how long he'd worked or how late he'd stayed to get her up and running again. And so that night, she'd baked cookies. Her grandmother's recipe for chocolate chip cookies with walnuts.

The next day, she'd delivered them to his desk with a thank-you note. It surprised her when she didn't hear anything back from him. She'd hoped giving him the cookies would open a line of communication between them. It hadn't, and that had disappointed her. Still, busy as they were with the move, she could accept his lack of response. No need to dwell on it, she'd told herself. Jack wasn't obligated to thank her or anything. He was the one who'd helped her out.

On their last day in the office, Lindsay had finished getting everything loaded into her vehicle. Stephanie had tuned the radio to the all-Christmas station, but the cheerful sounds of "Jingle Bells" couldn't change the lonely mood of the empty space. Nearly everyone had already left. Jack had stood outside his cubicle, looking distracted. It'd been a while since she'd seen him in person, and she hadn't remembered how tall he was. He was easily over six feet.

"Anything I can do?" she'd asked. She'd helped both Janice and Stephanie, her two best friends from the agency, load up their cars earlier.

Instead of answering, Jack had appeared to be studying her. "Are you always this cheerful?"

What an odd question. It had seemed like a joke until she realized he was serious. "Mostly, yes. Does that bother you?"

His gaze had narrowed. "If you must know, I could do with a little less Mary Sunshine."

His words had stung, and she'd tried again, making light of his comment. "Oh, come on, Jack, loosen up. You got your wish--we're letting go of the office. Other than the Christmas party, we're not likely to see each other in person again."

He had snorted softly. "I should be so lucky."

Now she was offended. He was being a jerk. "Hey, that was unnecessary. I was only trying to be helpful."

He had stuffed the tips of his fingers in his jeans pockets and released a rugged sigh. "You're right. I'm not in the best mood and I don't need to be taking it out on you."

He'd apologized--well, sort of--which had surprised her. "Anything you want to talk about?"

“No.” His response had been quick and to the point. He’d been as closed off as ever.

She had raised both hands as though surrendering. “Just asking.”

“Asked and answered.” He had avoided meeting her gaze, silently letting her know he would prefer that she leave.

“All righty then, seeing that you’d clearly prefer me to move along, I’ll go.” Then, because he’d irked her, she had added, “And just so you know, you’re permanently off my homemade cookie list.”

Having made her feelings known, she’d started toward the front of the office only to hear him mumble behind her. It had taken her a moment to make out his words. “Darn, I should’ve kept my mouth shut.”

As Lindsay had left the office, she couldn’t keep the smile off her face.

## CHAPTER 3



The day of the party, Lindsay woke up excited about the evening ahead. She intended to finish the last of her errands and arrive at the rented hall well before starting time.

While on the road, Lindsay called her mother to update her on how her day was going. "I want to make this Christmas party something special," she said, speaking through the Bluetooth in her vehicle. "Well, maybe not for Jack Taylor, the Grinch personified!"

"Lindsay, be kind. There might well be a reason he's such a Jack Frost."

"Good one, Mom!"

"But you agree?"

"Mostly," Lindsay murmured. Jack was Jack. He'd been a constant thorn in her side for weeks. The fact that he'd rejected every effort she'd made to be friends rankled her. The only aspect of this party that worried her was Jack. He would likely put a damper on the entire evening. In fact, she suspected that was his intention.

"He's really gotten under your skin, hasn't he?" her mother asked, although it was more of a comment than a question.

"He has," she confessed. "If you met him, you'd know what I mean. Being around him is a downer. I'm afraid he's going to ruin everything, and I've worked so hard to make tonight perfect."

"Lindsay, my goodness, listen to yourself. You're making assumptions about him. He might just surprise you."

"I doubt it," she muttered. She had half a mind to tell her mother Jack would show up simply to spite her. "Did I tell you that he called me Mary Sunshine?" She grimaced every time she thought about it. "The way he said it suggested being around me was like falling into a sickening sweet jar of honey."

“Did you consider that might have been a compliment?”

“Not likely.” Her mother had always been one to believe the best of others. “It was a dig and not one I’m eager to forget or forgive.”

“Oh, Lindsay . . .”

“I’m sorry, Mom, I didn’t mean to dump on you, especially when you and Dad are ready to leave on your cruise.”

“No worries. I’m happy to listen to your frustrations. A word of advice, though. Don’t be so quick to judge Jack.”

She’d try. “I’ll do my best,” she promised.

“Did you bake the fruitcake recipe I emailed?” her mother asked in a blatant effort to change the subject. “You know it’s been in the family for generations and a family favorite. I’m sure your coworkers will want the recipe but please don’t share it.”

Her mother enjoyed the hard-as-a-rock fruitcake but no one else in the family did, something her mother chose to ignore. Every holiday, Lindsay did her best to disguise how much she disliked that particular tradition. She wasn’t the only one, either. It had become something of a family conspiracy to pretend to enjoy the fruitcake while finding clever ways to dispose of it.

“Sorry, Mom, no time. Maybe next year.” She suspected that if her coworkers knew, they would forever thank her for sparing them.

“What did you think of my ideas for the party games?”

“Pinning the hat on Santa while blindfolded?” Lindsay murmured. Her mother had only tried to help. “That’s more a game for kids, don’t you think? I appreciate the suggestion, though.”

“I should’ve known you’d have everything under control. You’re so much like your father. He’s got an itinerary for every day of our Christmas cruise planned.”

“Of course, he does,” Lindsay said with a smile. Her parents were taking their first cruise, which coincided with Christmas and their thirtieth wedding anniversary. Lindsay would miss spending Christmas with her parents, but she couldn’t begrudge them this long-anticipated trip.

“You sure you don’t want to join Kelly and John for the holidays?” her mother asked for the umpteenth time.

“Mom, please, we’ve already been through this. Kelly is spending Christmas with John’s family. My sister doesn’t need me tagging along. I’ll be fine. Now stop feeling guilty, I’m going to have a perfectly wonderful Christmas on my own.”

“Oh, honey, are you sure?”

“I’m positive. In fact, I’ve lined up several projects I’ve been wanting