

How St. Patrick stole Krismas

GO

LUCK

YOURSELF

A ROYALS AND ROMANCE NOVEL

New York Times bestselling author

SARA RAASCH



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Luck
Yourself

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To you. Again.

Because we could all use a bit of luck.

Chapter One

Two Months after Christmas

I really was making a concerted effort not to be a prick today.

I took the time to work out because that always puts me in a better mood, but honestly, that was my first mistake, letting myself be in public. Home, classes, studying, that's it—I am not fit for community involvement yet.

So tripping off the treadmill and falling on my ass in the crowded gym when a text came through our group chat from Iris?

My fault. Entirely. I accept that. But I put on my big boy pants and attempted to reclaim said concerted effort by grabbing a ridiculously overindulgent mocha on my way to the library.

Which triggered mistake number two: I didn't see one of the café doors was locked and rammed right into it, mocha acting like a scalding, syrupy airbag.

So now, I don't have time to run back to my flat to change—I booked that study room and I'm going to *get it today*, goddamn it—which means the best I can do is towel off the caramel mocha mess in the washroom, zip my sweater over my ruined shirt, and cut over to the library, smelling faintly of espresso and cocoa.

Do not be a prick.

Do not be a prick.

It's been almost two months, and it isn't like I even broke up with her—so why does it *feel* like a breakup?

My phone buzzes in my pocket. I push into the Cambridge University Library, shower-damp hair falling in my face as I look at the screen like it's a bomb that might go off.

PEEP, MINI CANDY CANE, AND THE BEST CLAUS

IRIS

my sister delayed her wedding. AGAIN.

COAL

**what was it this time, she couldn't book
that metallica cover band she wanted**

IRIS

some bullshit about the centerpieces

**oh yeah coal you know my sister, big
into 80s heavy metal to go with her
Springtime Renewal theme**

**but my point is you can cancel your
travel plans, no wedding next weekend**

I exhale, loudly, and stop walking up the south wing staircase to collapse against the wall.

Some of my prick-ness does evaporate now.

I won't have to see Iris next weekend. I won't have to plaster on a smile like I didn't profess my love to her eight weeks ago, right after her engagement to my brother got called off, only to realize halfway through my drunken spewing of feelings that I was not, actually, in love with her. And she was not, in any way, in love with me.

Which should've deflated the awkwardness right out of the whole situation, but the singular moment my brain continues reliving, the thing that keeps me pinned to the wall in the staircase as another student sidles past me and down to the exit, is the bone-aching embarrassment of realizing that she *knew* I'd been at least *trying* to be in love with her *our whole friendship*, and she'd been dreading this proclamation all that while.

It made sense for us to be together. It'd made sense since we were twelve years old, and something about her walking into our Christmas Eve Ball like the personification of springtime, Persephone come to life in pastel purple and airy fuchsia, made all those stories I was obsessed with say *She's a Princess of Easter, you're a Prince of Christmas, that's happy ever after*.

But I'd realized at a younger age that being Santa's son isn't the storybook dream it should be. Not even my own father thought I should be the one to marry Iris when he wanted to forge an alliance with Easter; he'd foisted the situation on Coal. So why did I keep ahold of the *prince and princess, happy ever after* dream, when nothing else in my life was a fantasy?

Because marrying her would've made you useful, and you have nothing else to offer.

My eyes at least don't sting when I think that now. Two months of reeling in the vortex of realizing that I have nothing to contribute to Christmas has helped me progress past grieving to numbness.

Coal and Iris banter in our group chat some more, errant wedding stuff, and my thumb hovers over the *Settings* button. I could mute the chat. Why they continue to use it, to loop me in on their conversations, I don't know. Well, I know why Coal does—he's determined to keep our friend group from falling apart. He and Iris were never even remotely interested in getting married, so their relationship well survived any fallout of their almost-marriage. But is Iris going along with including me in the group chat because it's what Coal wants? Or does *she* want me in her life, even after I proved what an oblivious ass I am?

On paper, she and I worked. Oh my god, the *hours* of my life I wasted writing about that happy ending, bullshit poems and stories and letters,

some love-struck sap. And I didn't realize until the very moment of telling Iris *I love you* that I only loved the idea of a happy ending, not her.

But the look on her face—she knew. And she gently said, “Kris...” in that delicate, trying-to-talk-down-a-crazy-person tone, and *that* was what clinched it for me.

Had I been that disgusting the whole time? Had I been using her for my own ends all along? We were *friends* once, right?

We have a whole separate text thread for the two of us, where she sends me the absurd, overly pompous words her professors use that she doesn't even believe are real; and I send her photos of objects that are particularly odd looking or interesting people around campus that she can use as studies for sketching or sculpting or whatever her art outlet of the day is.

That was real, wasn't it? That friendship?

I swipe over to that private thread. The last text was weeks ago, the morning classes started for this term:

IRIS

IRIS

**this poli-sci professor just used the
word myrmecophilous
did i spell that right
even spell check is like wtf**

She initiated it. She reached out. I was the one who chose not to respond.

I can't deal with this right now.

Ever the psychic, my brother sends me a private text.

COAL

COAL

you not responding to the group chat is like if you were lurking in the same room and creepily watching us have fun without you

Then switch to a private thread.

COAL

coward

Fuck off

COAL

asshole

Pissant

There's a long enough pause that I push off the wall and continue up to the third floor of the library. My shirt is stuck to my stomach now, the drying mocha making the fabric stiff and tacky. And I now connect that this means I haven't had coffee all morning, and it's, what, almost ten? I booked the study room for two hours, no time to make another coffee run before my reservation, so this session will have to be done sans caffeine and *this is still no reason to get fucking pissy.*

Deep breaths. I'm making an effort today. Shirking this fog.

My phone buzzes.

COAL

oh that's a new one. i had to google it.

You're going to graduate from Yale in three months and you don't

know what 'pissant' means?

COAL

dude i love you but you text like a boomer

That is quite possibly the cruelest thing you've ever said to me.

COAL

who else texts in full proper punctuation

Hex texts like an evolved human being too.

COAL

oh he does!

wait

oh ew is hex you

did i fall for someone who is basically my brother but goth

Better than someone who is Dad but goth.

In response, Coal sends about fifteen middle finger emojis.

One side of my mouth cocks. He'd be way too pleased with himself if he knew the only time I've smiled the past few weeks was at his bullshit.

Got a paper on the French Revolution to finish, but I have time if there's anything you need me to do. I can work on more correspondence, or speeches? I sent a few things to Wren last week but haven't heard if you need more.

COAL

i'm good on all written requests. i swear. besides, what have we agreed on?

You agreed. I ignored you.

COAL

we agreed that i need to learn to handle this stuff on my own. if there's anything super important, i'll loop you in. but for now, just worry about making louis xvi your bitch

Coal doesn't need to learn to stand on his own as Christmas's leader, though. He's already crushing it.

Which means he doesn't need me as much. He never really did.

I rub my chest as I mute my phone and push into the third floor.

Desks and tables sit in perfectly organized rows between shelves of reference books, but I weave through them all to reach the handful of private rooms. My third year at Cambridge, and just last term I found the *perfect* work setup: a study room that gets ideal air circulation because the vent actually opens, is far enough from the main stairwell so noise is minimal,

and has whiteboard markers that always work. I'm not too proud to admit that I can be bought with office supplies.

But as I come up to the study room, I stop. Dead in my tracks.

The door is shut. The chalkboard on the front has a word scrawled across it in handwriting I know too well:

Occupied

That overly stylized cursive is mocking me. Flat out pretentious for pretentious's sake at this point. And the window to the right has the blinds drawn, but the light is clearly on inside.

I pull out my phone again—ignoring another stream of texts between Iris and Coal—and check the time. Five after my scheduled window started.

No fucking way.

I booked it this time. I fucking booked it this time.

It's a big university. I get that I'm not the only one here. Like, logically, I know that other people have discovered that this study room is excellent, and doesn't have that weird smell that the others do, but as I stand in the middle of the aisle between students typing away on papers like I should be doing, my vision goes red.

This is the *fifth time* in the past two weeks that I've come to use the room and found this same cursive *OCCUPIED* drawn across the chalkboard. The first two times, bad luck on my part, whatever; I'd try again later. C'est la fucking vie. But by the third time, I realized that something about this jackass's study schedule lines up exactly with mine, only they always get here before I'm able to no matter how early I shift things around, so today, I booked it in advance and *that study room is mine*.

There's something at Cambridge called the Week Five Blues: midway through a term, when the end isn't in sight yet, the drag of slogging through the first half catches up to students and everyone goes a little droopy. Only I'm not having Week Five Blues right now; I'm having Week Five *Blind Fury*.

I stomp the remaining space to the study room and bang my fist on the door. Which earns me a startled shush from a nearby guy who looks like he's on the my-blood-is-now-energy-drinks end of the Week Five Blues spectrum.

There's no response from the room thief.

I try the handle. Locked. Fucker.

Knock again. Louder. I get another shush and I concave my body around the door like that will muffle what is now full-on pounding.

Finally, there's the sound of a chair creaking inside.

Then a voice. Masculine, annoyed. "Yeah?"

"This room is mine," I say into the door's seam.

A pause.

The lock clicks. The door cracks open a sliver, and a guy peers out at me.

Pale skin. Red hair poking out from under a gray beanie. High, sharp cheekbones. Freckles scattered across his face, full lips twisted in derision through his short red facial hair. Chunky headphones hang around his neck with the faintest pulse of music vibrating out of them.

I have several immediate thoughts:

I should send Iris a picture of this guy. He'd make a great character study.

And: fuck, he's hot.

The latter one might as well be a mental ball gag for the way my throat closes over.

Aaaaaaand now there are two thoughts strangling me.

I legitimately cannot remember the last time I found anyone attractive outside of Iris. The people I dated as half-assed attempts to distract myself from her were more just ... okay? And even the sight of Iris never choked me up like this.

I blink dumbly. I've been quiet for an unacceptably long time.

"The fuck you want?" the guy snaps in an Irish accent so thick my already teetering brain blacks out, resets, and barely registers what he said.

Stop thinking about ball gags.

I whip out my phone—Iris and Coal are still talking, now about how her sister almost had tiers of donuts instead of a wedding cake—and pull up the app to show him my reservation. “This study room is mine.”

The guy squints at the screen. “I got no idea what you’re showing me. Who the fuck is Lily and why does she hate—are those the words *cream filled*?”

I yank my phone back. The texts popped down over the app.

My cheeks burn. “Not that—”

“Cream filled. Ya pervert.” Then he cocks his head and frowns. “Do I know you?”

I glower at him. “I don’t make a habit out of associating with *thieves*.”

His eyes roll. “Christ—”

“*I booked this study room*.” I shove my phone into my pocket. “I got on the app. I booked this room. It’s mine. You need to leave.”

He sizes me up with renewed interest and leans one shoulder against the doorframe. “Ah. So you’re the one.”

“The one?”

“The bastard who’s been stealing it from me.”

I scoff. “Stealing it from *you*? You’re the one illegally here now.”

“Illegally? Get off it.”

Someone shushes us.

I rip a hand through my hair as I drop my voice. “At the very least”—all right, let’s not get carried away—“*negligently* here. I booked this room.”

“I do na care if the King himself gifted this room to you. Is there some repercussion for not obeying that almighty app of yours?”

... is there?

My pause is answer, and he grins, victorious.

“I’ll be getting back to my work, then.”

He starts to shut the door.

I wedge my foot in it.

The look he gives is half disbelief, half disgust. “Oh, piss off—you canna be this high on the room?”

“*You’re* the one high on it. Give it up. There are others you can use without breaching the agreed-upon social constructs of the Spacefinder app.”
Do I sound as batshit as I think I do?

The guy’s brows twist in stifled repulsion.

Yeah. I do.

He leans towards me through the door. He’s taller than I am, which isn’t exactly a rarity, but he’s using that height now to his advantage, so I hate him even more on principle.

A billow of spice hits me, too-rich cologne undercut with a bitter chemical scent that makes my nose itch. And I feel like a moron for *smelling* him, because he’s definitely not *smelling* me, but I can’t move back without relinquishing my hold on the door. He realizes that and presses closer, closer, and I bend back farther, farther, as mocking scorn rises on his face—

He stops. Sniffs.

“What kind of cologne is that, boyo?”

Boyo? “Eau de mind your own business.”

He snorts. “Rather more of an eau de I dropped my coffee all over myself?”

I was really trying to break out of my gloom today.

And you know what? I am.

I’m going from wallowing in self-hatred to being actively irate.

Which is an ... unusual reaction for me. I can’t remember the last time I got *angry*. Even my aforementioned prickish state manifests in me swallowing whatever irritable comments I want to make so I just end up depressed and sulky.

This is the first time I’m letting the anger *out*.

And I gotta admit. It feels good.

“Listen up, pal—I am two days from this paper on French political thought determining whether I pass this course on European politics,” and that won’t save me from having to do a fourth year at what is typically a three-year school, but fuck that. “Which means right now, my body is being held together by obscure facts about the French Revolution. I don’t care how hot

you are, if you don't get out of that room in the next ten seconds, I will grab you by that tank top you think makes you look effortlessly relaxed but really makes you look like you're trying too hard and go full Robespierre on your ass."

The guy peels back from me with a tawdry grin.

Then I hear what I said.

Ohhhhhh for fuck's sake.

"Hot, eh?" His eyes trail over me so very, very slowly, but his conceited smirk is an equalizer to any reaction that tries to prickle along my skin.

"Not..." I stutter. "That isn't the point of what I said."

"Nah. Rather the bit where you wanted to grab me by my tank top and do what with me?"

Jesus fuck. *"Get out of my study room."*

His jaw cocks to the side and he arches one thick brow. "Or what? You'll enact your fancy wee *death threat*?"

This situation.

Might be getting away from me.

I'm in too deep now. So I hold, seething, and the guy chuckles dryly.

"Christ, but this university will kill us all." He scratches his forehead and fixes me with a resolved glower. "I got my own overhanging schedule of misery to dance with, so bring it on, Coffee Shop."

He punts my foot out of the way and slams the door in my face.

I grab the knob, but he instantly locks it, and I rattle the handle futilely. I swear I hear him laugh inside.

Part of me wants to hammer on the door again, cause all kinds of pandemonium until he gives it up. But I don't want to risk being thrown out of the library or losing access to this study room entirely, so I force myself to breathe slowly through my nose.

What would I do if I wasn't mentally and emotionally drained from school and home shit, and overall stretched in like seventeen directions? What would I do. What would I ...

No. Screw that.

I don't *want* to take the High Road.

I don't *want* to do the responsible thing because I *did* the responsible thing and this asshole is *in my study room*.

So what would my brother do? Or what would he have done before he reformed, back when he was a whirlwind of rashness and chaos?

I look down at my hand and flex my palm.

Christmas's magic lets me spread my Holiday's cheer far and wide. It also lets me create a lot of things spontaneously.

Like, for instance, for a totally innocent example, tinsel.

Enough to fill a whole study room?

This is a horrific use of magic. It breaks pretty much all the *don't use excessive displays of magic around normal people* rules, but Dad isn't really in charge of Christmas anymore, is he? Coal is. And Coal would absolutely be behind this use of Christmas's magic.

So fuck it.

There's a moment. Where I'm staring at the door. And I think to myself, *This is my rock bottom*.

But I might as well find out what the full depth of my rock bottom looks like. Maybe there's something interesting down here, like my dignity.

I lay my hand flat on the door and grab on to every connection I have to Christmas's magic and *pummel* that study room with tinsel. In Cambridge blue, school spirit and all.

A sharp cry pops from within the room.

"JESUS FUCKING SHITE—"

Time stretches in a weird pause as I nonchalantly walk a few feet back towards the desks. I get to a bookshelf and duck against it as the knob is twisting, and everyone seated is looking at the room. Someone is already shushing.

The door heaves inward, shoving against the tinsel, until he manages to get it open enough that he can stumble out—along with a waterfall, a deluge, a *whole ass bunch* of bright blue tinsel.

The study hub goes utterly still.

The guy stands there, arms out helplessly, looking like the Swamp Thing from the Cambridge lagoon. I can't even see his face, he's so covered.

I'm proud to say that I'm not the first one to laugh.

That honor goes to energy-drink-in-my-blood guy, who cackles and yanks out his phone and records, and soon the whole study hub is busting up and filming this guy getting pranked.

I pull out my phone and hit record as he removes a handful of tinsel from his face. His eyes snap around at the laughing students and he looks more irritated than embarrassed as he bobs his head in a *yeah, have a laugh at my expense* way.

His gaze locks on my phone.

I lower it and give him a cheesy grin.

He'll probably blame it on some kind of confetti bomb. I don't care. Let him know it was me though. I want this credit.

Don't mess with my study room, asshole.

His face dissolves into a withering glare and he flips me off.

★ ★ ★

If I'd known it was that easy to vanquish this squatter from my study room, I'd have tinselled him weeks ago.

The guy digs his stuff out of the piles of glittery mess and stomps off, leaving a trail of shimmering blue in his wake. I watch him go from where I'm leaning on a bookshelf, and as he gets to the stairs, he glances back, meets my eyes again, and grimaces.

I waggle my fingers at him, my princely upbringing channeled into that fuck-you cordiality.

He disappears down the stairs.

I do feel bad for whatever janitorial staff will have to deal with this mess, so after I magic away the tinsel from the room and finish my paper—in peace and quiet, the *luxury*—I follow that guy's path through the library and make the rest of the tinsel vanish when no one's looking. The trail takes me down