12 NAUGHTY DAYS OF CHRISTMAS 2018

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Blushing Books

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Her Yuletide Dom 12 NAUGHTY DAYS OF CHRISTMAS 2018

ISABELLA KOLE

Chapter 1

H olly Evans rushed down the steps of the courthouse, taking them two at a time. Glancing at her watch, she saw that she had exactly fifteen minutes to get back to the office if she was going to make the meeting. The meeting that would reveal if she had been chosen as partner in the law firm she worked for, Blair and Klingle. Would the name now become Blair, Klingle, and Evans or Blair, Klingle, and Winters? Christopher Winters was a fierce competitor. He was also an arrogant ass. If he got the partnership instead of her, she'd never hear the end of it.

As she rushed into the conference room and slid into a chair, the calm, cool and collected Christopher smiled at her. Leaning over, he whispered, "Running late, as usual, Miss Evans?" "I was in court all morning, Mr. Winters," she replied icily, in full defense mode.

"Ah, yes, always out to impress, aren't you?" he asked, giving her a crooked grin.

She glared at him. Damn, but he was good looking, and that damn crooked smile of his got her every time. Too bad his personality didn't match his looks. But it wouldn't have mattered if it did. Holly had made a decision when she joined the firm never to date a co-worker. Blair and Klingle had no rule about their attorneys dating each other. They couldn't. Nick and Carol, the lawyers who owned the firm, were married to each other. Her decision was her own and had earned her the nickname of the "Ice Princess" around the office. Many of the male attorneys had attempted to be the one to break her resolution, but none had succeeded. Christopher Winters would be the last person she would ever go out with, should she ever decide to break her own rule, or would he? She couldn't quite seem to get him out of her dreams, which irritated her to no end. Now, they were competing for the same partnership in the firm. And, in just a few minutes, the new partner's name would be announced to the entire staff.

Nick Blair and Carol Klingle walked into the room and took their seats at the head of the long conference table. Carol smiled and greeted everyone. Nick nodded.

"I'm sure you're all anxious to hear who we've chosen as the new partner, so we won't keep you waiting any longer. This was a difficult decision for us to make. Both of the attorneys being considered are well qualified. And in no way is our decision a reflection on the person who wasn't chosen today. There will be other opportunities," Nick began.

"We've taken into consideration the background, former cases, and several other factors in coming to this decision. We feel that Holly Evans is the obvious choice for the partnership. Congratulations, Holly," Carol announced.

Holly gasped. She stood, looked around the table and then back at her new partners. "Thank you, I'll do my very best to fulfill my obligations as partner."

"Christopher, talk to me after the meeting. I have a proposition for you," Nick said, glancing at the handsome man seated next to Holly.

When Holly looked at Christopher, she could tell he was furious, but he covered it well. He congratulated her with a handshake, and looking at Nick, he said, "Certainly, Nick."

When the meeting was adjourned, Holly returned to her office. As she sat behind the desk, she slipped off her heels for the first time that morning and sighed. Leaning her head back, she allowed herself to relax. After a strenuous morning in court and the tension of the meeting, she needed a few minutes to unwind. There was a knock on the door. "Come in," she called as she slipped her feet back into her shoes and sat up straight. *So much for relaxing*.

Carol stuck her head in the door. "I thought I'd better fill you in on the conversation Nick and Christopher are having."

"I was curious about that," Holly replied.

"This decision was more difficult than you can imagine. Both of you are equally qualified. You were finally chosen because of the excellent work you did on the Temple case."

"That was a tough case," Holly agreed.

"Christopher is being given a huge case. A malpractice suit, and if he can prove himself with this case, he'll also be offered a partnership in six months."

"Sounds fair enough," Holly said.

"We want you to be second chair, Holly. I know that's a bit strange with you just being made partner, but we feel the two of you working together on this case will ensure our win. Can you do it? I know you're not overly fond of Christopher."

Knowing she really had no choice, with it being her first day as partner, she agreed a little too cheerily. "I'll be happy to be second chair for Christopher on the case."

"Now, don't sugarcoat it for me, honey. I know how you feel about Christopher, don't I?"

"It's okay. I'll deal with it."

"I realize he can be somewhat of an ass at times, but he's a good attorney, and once you get to know him, he's a good man."

Holly laughed as she asked, "Somewhat of an ass?"

Carol smiled. "The Christmas party is Friday night. Now that you're a partner, you're required to attend."

"I'll be there," Holly replied reluctantly. The annual office Christmas party was not one of her favorite functions; having to attend alone every year only fueled the rumors among the male attorneys that she truly was an ice princess. She hadn't dated anyone since she had broken up with Ted, three years ago. She'd busied herself with work, after finding out her fiancé had been cheating on her for over a year with her neighbor. It had been enough to make her think twice before getting involved again.

She had moved to a different apartment on the other side of town. Lebanon, Tennessee wasn't a big enough town to avoid running into him occasionally, however. The fling with her old neighbor hadn't lasted. But when he'd suggested they try again, she'd flatly refused.

"I'll let you finish your break. Do you have to go back

to the courthouse this afternoon?" Carol asked, bringing her back to reality.

"We're in recess until tomorrow morning. Hopefully, this thing will be wrapped up tomorrow, just in time for the holiday. I have to work on my closing argument this afternoon. But I think I'm going to run out to the mall and pick up some last minute gifts for my family and grab some lunch first."

"Ugh, Christmas shopping, I'm not finished yet either."

Holly smiled as Carol said goodbye and left her office. Damn, the party, she'd almost forgotten she'd have to go, now that she'd made partner.

After relaxing at her desk for a few more minutes, she grabbed her coat and her purse and walked to the elevator. Stepping out onto the street, she saw the threat of snow in the air. She hurried to the parking garage and drove to the outlet mall. She still had to pick up a gift for her brother.

The entire family was flying to Colorado for the holiday to visit with her sister-in-law's family and for some skiing. Everyone but Holly, that is. She had begged off, telling the family she needed the time to relax after the busy schedule she'd been keeping. Her mother had tried to convince her to change her mind, but she'd stood her ground. In fact, she'd just yesterday

confirmed her reservation at the Lodge at Buckberry Creek in Gatlinburg for the entire holiday week. She was going to get away from the hustle and bustle, read, relax, take long walks and sit by the fire. She would sleep when she wanted, get up when she wanted, eat when she wanted, and enjoy all the things she didn't have time to do on a regular basis, with no one she knew around to interfere. Yes, a mountain holiday was just what she needed.

After a night of food and a gift exchange with her family on Saturday, and church on Sunday they'd be on a plane to Colorado, and she'd be in the car, headed east.

As she made her way through the crowds to the Brooks Brothers store, she began looking at ties. Just as she was choosing between two of them, a male voice whispered in her ear, "Deciding on something for someone special, I see."

She looked around in surprise to see who was speaking. *Christopher!*

"Yes, for someone special," she replied coolly. It wasn't a lie; her brother was someone special.

"I'd go for that one," he suggested as he pointed to the one in her right hand.

"Thank you, but I think I prefer the other one." She put the one he'd suggested back on the rack, purely out of meanness.

"Suit yourself. I'm just glad you don't pick out my ties," he said with a smirk.

"I doubt you'll ever have to worry about that," she retorted.

"Ever the ice princess. How does your 'someone special' get past that icy exterior of yours?" he asked.

She smiled and said, "It takes a very special man to get past my 'icy exterior', Mr. Winters."

The crooked grin surfaced again. "I guess you've heard the latest? Are you going to be able to handle being my second chair in the new case?"

She looked him straight in the eyes. "I'll do whatever it takes to win the case for the firm."

"Ah, atta girl, always a team player," he responded with a grin.

"Mr. Winters, as long as you do your job, and I do mine, I don't foresee a problem with the two of us working together on the case."

"Don't you think you should call me Christopher if we're going to be working so closely together, *Holly*?"

"All right, *Christopher*, I really need to finish my shopping and get back to the office. Some of us have things to do before the holiday."

"Join me for lunch? We can discuss the case."

"We don't officially begin work on the case until after the holiday. I'm taking a salad back to the office to eat while I polish my closing argument for the case I'm hoping to finish tomorrow."

"Another time, then, unless, of course, that 'someone special' would object."

"It would be a working lunch, Christopher," she reminded him sharply.

He held his arms up saying, "But, of course, it would be. What other kind could I expect from the ice princess?"

"Goodbye, Christopher." She moved past him to pay for her purchase. As she walked through the mall later, she muttered, "What an ass."

The rest of the afternoon was spent working on her closing argument. The next morning, she presented it, and by afternoon, the verdict was in. She'd won the case. When she walked back into the office after court, she was greeted with congratulations by the other attorneys, the paralegals and the secretaries.

At the end of the day, she packed what she needed in her briefcase and looked around to make sure she hadn't forgotten anything. She was taking the next day, Friday, off to prepare for the family Christmas and her trip to the Smokies. Of course, there was that pesky little office party tomorrow night, but she planned to put in an appearance and make an excuse to leave as early as possible.

When she walked to the elevator, she was joined by Christopher, who said, "I understand congrats are in order. I heard you absolutely wowed the jury with your closing argument."

"Thanks," she replied as she pushed the button for the elevator.

"See you tomorrow night at the party. Are you bringing that 'someone special' with you? If you are, please do us all a favor and don't pick out his tie for him."

"I'll be attending the party alone, so no need to worry about anyone's tie," she replied tersely, trying desperately to hide the smile that threatened to emerge on her lips.

"Mind if I ride down with you? I'm leaving now too," he said as the elevator door opened.

"Suit yourself."

"Be prepared to buckle down and work after the holiday. I intend to win our case. A partnership depends on it," he said.

"I'll do my best, Christopher," she replied. This time, she was actually smiling as she looked up at him. If only he wasn't so arrogant. A girl could easily get lost in his dark chocolate eyes.

"I wouldn't expect less from the ice princess at Blair, Klingle and Evans."

As she walked off the elevator, glad to get away from

the all-too-evident sex appeal of the arrogant man sharing the ride with her, she turned and said, "I'll see you at the party."

"I can hardly wait, princess."

The next day was spent wrapping gifts and baking for the family celebration. When it was time to get ready for the party, she sighed. Reluctantly, she forced herself to the shower for a hot, steamy cleansing. She turned on the faucet and stepped inside, letting the water wash over her tired body. Sudden thoughts of a certain manly attorney invaded her thoughts and she smiled in spite of herself. Wonder what it would be like to shower with him? she thought. She quickly scolded herself and wondered where that vision had come from. She knew, of course. She dreamed night after night of slipping into bed beside the arrogant and domineering Mr. Winters. She couldn't help it. He was in her blood, but she would never let him know it. Just like she could never let him or anyone else at the firm know of her secret desires - how she longed for someone like Christopher to throw her over his knee and give her a good what for. With all the pressures of her job, she often thought it would be so wonderful to come home to a man who took control. To be able to relinquish the mundane everyday things to him, to let him take care of her, discipline her and, most of all, love her. Hell, she didn't want a man like Christopher

Winters – she wanted *him*. But that could never happen. Not ever.

After rubbing herself dry with a large, fluffy towel, she walked nude to the closet to choose her attire for the evening.

"This should work just fine," she said as she pulled her little black dress from the clothes hanging neatly in the closet. It was a simple, straight style, cut just above the knee, and she knew the perfect jacket to wear with it. A short, red, wool one she'd picked up at Dillard's a few weeks ago when she was in the city would look festive enough. Her jewelry was simple; black pumps and a small black bag finished the look. As she swept her long, blonde hair up into a comb, her usual style for work and office functions, she looked in the mirror. A little more mascara and she'd be ready to go. She gave her head one last shake to rid her mind of the seductive thoughts of Christopher Winters. She had to face him tonight at the party, after all.

AS SHE WALKED into the room the firm had rented at a local hotel, Holly looked around. Spotting Carol, she made a beeline for her, but not before she was approached by none other than Christopher Winters, himself.

"I see the ice princess has arrived. You look very... professional... yet nice," he said with a grin.

"And I see you've been picking out your own tie again," she teased.

"Guilty as charged. May I get you a drink?"

"I'm on my way over to say hello to Carol. I'll get my own, but thank you," she replied as she walked away from him.

Carol smiled as she joined her in a circle. "Hello, Holly, you look sensational."

"Thank you; I love your dress too."

"Did I see you making small talk with Christopher? What's that about?" Carol asked with a sly smile.

"Oh, nothing, really. We ran into each other at the mall the other day, and we had a difference of opinion about a tie I was buying as a Christmas gift. He feels the need to needle me every time he sees me now."

"I see."

"Oh, stop, you see nothing," Holly said with a laugh as she accepted a glass of champagne from a tray one of the waiters was carrying.

As Nick joined the circle, he greeted her. "Hello, Holly. It's good to see you here."

"Thank you, Nick. I wouldn't have missed it," she

replied. She would have loved to have missed it, but that was a moot point.

As they all sat down to dinner, she sat next to Carol. Christopher was on the opposite side of the table from her. Did she imagine it or did his foot just brush hers under the table? What was he trying to prove? It had to have been accidental, of course, if he did. She doubted that he had erotic dreams about her the way she did about him.

She made it through the meal with as much ease as possible, given the fact the most gorgeous attorney in the firm was hanging on her every word during the conversation. She knew he was mocking her, but she chose to ignore it. After all, wasn't it the season of good will?

The firm had hired a band to play after dinner and when a slow song began, Christopher was right there, asking her to dance. She accepted reluctantly, and once on the floor, she asked, "What's with all the attention tonight, Christopher? Are you sucking up to the new partner or trying to prove to everyone there are no sour grapes?"

He feigned a hurt look before replying evenly, "I thought I'd ask the ice princess to dance, since her 'someone special' wasn't able to escort her to the ball."

"Oh, I see, you're feeling sorry for me, is that it? And this is hardly a ball; it's a quiet little office holiday party."

"You probably picked out his tie for him and he refused to come along because he didn't want to be seen wearing such a monstrosity," he quipped in return.

She smiled up at him, and when she did, her deep blue eyes sparkled.

With a sharp intake of breath, he added, "And his loss is my gain."

"I think we should go back to our table now." She would never admit it, but being in his arms and this close to him was definitely doing something to her nerves. The sooner she could get away from him, the better. What was wrong with her? She'd never given him a second thought before, except in those darn dreams. He was hot, yes, but he was also arrogant, a real ass. Now, all of a sudden, it was almost as if she could see a different side of him. But was he playing her? What was his angle? He'd always goaded and teased her; why hadn't she noticed before now?

When Nick and Carol joined them at the table, Carol asked Holly to accompany her to the ladies' room. Once there, the other woman said, "Is something going on with you and Christopher? I know you tried to pass it off earlier, but, Holly, I've been sensing vibes between the two of you all night."

"I... don't know what could be going on. After all, he

thinks I'm an ice princess and you know I think he's an arrogant ass. I've said it many times."

"Exactly my point. I'm beginning to think both of you are protesting just a little too much. Perhaps working on the new case together will bring you closer, shed a whole new light on your working relationship, as well as your personal one."

"Carol, let me assure you, our relationship is strictly a professional one. We may be speaking to each other a little more than usual the past few days, but I think he's just trying to prove to everyone that there are no hard feelings about the way the partnership turned out. That's all there is to it. Either that, or he's sucking up."

"Say what you will, but I, for one, think it would be great if the two of you got together. Two ambitious attorneys in the courtroom could make for two very hot lovers in the bedroom, if you get my drift."

"That may be the case with you and Nick, but not with Christopher and me."

Carol grinned as she smoothed her hair and touched up her lipstick. "Let's get back out there, before they send a search party."

When they returned to their table, Nick and Christopher were deep in conversation. The two men smiled as the women joined them.

"I was just telling Christopher what an attractive

couple the two of you made on the dance floor just now, Holly," Nick said.

"Oh, and I'll bet he just loved hearing that, dancing with the ice princess," Holly said with a grimace.

"As a matter of fact, Miss Evans, when you allow yourself to smile, you don't look like an ice princess," Christopher said coolly in response to her words.

She accepted another glass of champagne, making a mental note to make it her last as she attempted to steer the conversation away from the subject at hand. "So, tell me, what are the two of you doing for the holidays?" she asked, looking at Carol and Nick.

Carol replied, "After the obligatory family thing with both sides, we're heading to Florida for the week, for some sun and fun."

"Oh, that sounds heavenly. I hope you enjoy it," Holly replied.

"And you, Holly, what are your plans?" Christopher asked. "Spending it with someone special?"

She smiled but didn't answer.

After more conversation, she finally made her excuses. "I really have to get going. We have a family thing tomorrow and I've got to get home. I'll mingle around the room and say my goodbyes to everyone before I go."

"Have a good week. We'll see you after the New

Year," Carol said.

"Be ready to start on the new case," Nick added.

"Have a good holiday, princess," Christopher said with a lazy grin.

"Happy holidays to all of you." She got up to get her jacket, and after saying her goodbyes to the rest of the employees, made a quick exit.

Once she was home, she kicked off her pumps and plopped down on the couch. *Whew, that's over with*, she thought. It wasn't all that bad, except for having to hang out with Christopher all night. Those deep, penetrating, chocolate brown eyes of his had unnerved her more than she wanted to admit. Oh, well, a week away from the office and by the time she returned home and back to work, it would all be back to normal. They'd be working on the case, and she'd go back to being the ice princess he thought she was. And he'd go back to being the arrogant ass she thought he was. But it had been nice, being in his arms on the dance floor. It had been a long time since a man as gorgeous as Christopher had paid attention to her, even if she knew it was all for show.

Finally, she got up and prepared for bed. As she washed off her makeup and brushed her hair, she looked in the mirror. Was it her imagination or was she glowing? *Must be the champagne*, she thought as she turned out the light and padded on bare feet across the floor to her bed.