

Her Christmas Bad Boy

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Prologue

“You should just walk over there and ask him to dance. He’s been eyeballing you since you walked in. Trust me. He wants you, Zoe.”

Zoe adored Cindy. She’d moved back to Silverlake after several years away. Now that she was head-over-heels in love with Rafe’s younger brother Dallas, she’d been trying to get her and Rafe together. Heck, Zoe wanted her and Rafe together too, but the infuriating man didn’t seem to be on the same page. *Dang it.*

“I think you just want everyone to find their happily-ever-after because you and Dallas are so blissfully in love. You’re seeing things that aren’t there.”

Cindy took a sip of her white wine before saying, “Nope, that’s not it. Since you walked through the front door, Rafe is staring at you like he wants to unwrap *you* for Christmas.”

She was so tempted to look, but she was a big sissy. “I want to ask him to dance. You know how badly I want that. But if he turns me down I’ll feel like the biggest idiot.”

Cindy sighed. “Do yourself a favor. Look to your left.”

Zoe glared at her friend and clutched her glass a little tighter. “Why?”

She rolled her eyes. “Just do it. Please.”

Zoe took the plunge and lifted her head. The instant she spotted him her heartbeat leaped into a fast sprint. He stared at her from across the room. Dallas was talking to him, but Rafe didn’t seem to be paying attention to the conversation. Cindy was right, he was definitely watching her. God, he looked so good. He wore a black, long-sleeved shirt with the words I LIKE ‘EM NAUGHTY printed in red letters across his massive chest and a pair of blue jeans that molded to his thick thighs in a way that made her a little envious of the lucky denim. His black hair was tossed around as if he hadn’t bothered with a comb and he had a five o’clock shadow. It annoyed her how drool-worthy the man was.

“Okay, so he notices me. Now what?”

“Girl, he’s practically drooling. That dress is killer and he wants to get up close and personal. Trust me.”

She’d bought the black dress specifically for Rafe. It had cap sleeves, a sweetheart neckline and it sat just above her knees. It was way more daring than what she normally wore to Hank and Nellie’s Holiday Bash, which usually consisted of black slacks and some sort of holiday sweater. This year she didn’t want to go for a fun look. She wanted to be sexy. For Rafe.

Zoe caught Rafe lick his lips and she quickly looked away before he could see the heat filling her cheeks. “I’ve had a major crush on him for so long,” she admitted in a hushed voice. “I think there could be something between us, but he and my brother are best friends.”

Cindy cursed. “That stupid sister code.”

Her shoulders fell. “Yeah. Besides, if I take the plunge and it blows up in my face…”

Cindy put her hand over hers and offered her a sad smile. “And what if you don’t take the plunge? You will never know unless you go for it.”

Her friend was right. She would regret it. Zoe took a fortifying deep breath and said, “I’m going to ask him. To a dance. It’s a start, right?”

Cindy’s eyes lit with excitement. “That’s the spirit!”

Zoe glanced around for Rafe, but he wasn’t standing next to Dallas anymore. She scanned the room and came up empty. Had he left? “Do you see him?”

Cindy began to search too. “Maybe he went to the bathroom?”

Zoe’s stomach pitched when she saw Dallas cross the room toward them. He took Cindy into his arms and kissed her cheek. “You both look amazing tonight.”

Dallas Montgomery had a head full of sandy blonde hair and a charming smile. He was cute and sweet and loved Cindy with every fiber of his being. Cindy with her long red curly hair and killer body would undoubtedly turn heads, especially in the sleeveless emerald green satin dress she wore. Still, as beautiful as she was Dallas claimed it’d been her quick mind that had won him over. Zoe envied the couple. Would she ever have that with Rafe? *Not if I stand around twiddling my thumbs.*

“Where’s your annoying brother?” Cindy asked, saving Zoe from humiliating herself further.

Dallas’s grin fell as he spared her an apologetic glance. “He ducked out early.”

She’d missed her chance. He’d been right in front of her. Watching her, according to Cindy. And what had she done? Squandered the opportunity. Again.

“He’s leaving for Miami later this week,” Dallas said as he continued to watch her.

Miami. Which meant he’d be away from Silverlake. Away from her overprotective family. Did she dare?

Half an hour earlier...

“You’re a dumbass,” Dallas muttered.

Rafe rubbed a hand over his face. “Gee, don’t tiptoe around it, little bro. Tell me how you really feel.”

“She’s freaking gorgeous and she’s staring at you like you’re a triple-layer chocolate cake. Go for it already.”

“No,” he ground out. “And you know why.”

“Because of Ace? Look, he’s at home with the flu. This might be your one chance to approach her without big brother hovering.”

He clutched the long neck bottle tighter and watched Zoe laugh at something Cindy said. She was so damn pretty when she smiled. He scanned the room and realized a half dozen men also watched Zoe laugh. Damn it all. The killer black dress she wore molded to subtle curves and showed off the length of her toned legs. She’d piled her hair all up on top of her head and it made Rafe want to undo it. Mess her up. Kiss her senseless.

He pulled his attention away and thought of Dallas’s question and answered, “Ace is part of it. We’re best friends. It’d be the biggest betrayal ever if I hit on Zoe. And for some reason, he’s extra protective of her too. I’d never get a chance with her anyway.”

“Okay, I guess I understand that but what’s the other part?”

Rafe took his attention away from Zoe for a second to glare at his brother. “Do I need to spell it out?”

“I guess you do because I think you two would be great together.”

Rafe raised his head toward the ceiling. “God, save me from happy couples.”

Dallas punched him on the shoulder. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“From the moment you and Cindy moved in together you’ve both been trying to get me to ask Zoe out. You want everyone to be as lovey-dovey as you.”

Dallas punched him on the shoulder again. Harder this time. “You’re a dumbass.”

Fuck. Would it put a damper on the Christmas spirit if he delivered a right jab to his brother’s perfect nose? “And you’re becoming repetitive.”

“Give me a break. The minute you walked in you zeroed in on her. Forget about Ace. Forget about your stupid insecurities and just dance with her. What harm is one dance?”

He quirked a brow at that bit of absurdity. “Have you seen the dress she’s wearing? I get her in my arms tonight I’m not about to let her go home alone.”

“So?”

He shook his head and took a swig of his beer. “Are you purposely being obtuse?”

“Look, you might not want to snatch a chance with her, but last I counted there are at least seven other men here more than willing. Do you want her to dance with one of them?”

Rafe saw red as he imagined Zoe in the arms of another man. He had no right to her. She could choose any man here and he’d have to sit back and watch. “I need another drink,” He grumbled.

Dallas quirked a brow at him. “You have half a beer still.”

“I don’t mean here,” he ground out as he slammed his beer on a round cherry-wood table in front of him and stalked off. He heard his brother calling after him, but Rafe kept walking until he was out the door and in his pickup. He might not be able to touch Zoe VanBurn, but to hell if he was going to watch another man take what he so badly craved.