

**My CHrISTMAS  
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HAS WHAT?**

**LK KelleY**

DragonEye Publishing

My Christmas Present... Has WHAT?  
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## My CHRISTMAS PRESENT... HAS WHAT?

~ Dedication ~

This book is dedicated to my husband, who really puts up with a whole lot while I'm writing; my beautiful daughter, who is a true inspiration for my main characters with her indomitable zest for life; a brilliant young man who is a true inspiration for overcoming incredible odds; and my amazing Twitter followers who have been so patient and supportive in my writing efforts; and special thanks to Anita Meyers, Author, Georgia Trospen, and Patti Champion, who absolutely are the kindest and most supportive friends I've ever had.

Above all, I have to thank the Lord, Jesus for my true faith.



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### ~ Prologue ~

“It’s Christmas! It’s the best time of the year! It’s Christmas, and Santa Claus is coming to town! Rudolph’s red nose is blinking red, and he’s zipping Santa’s sleigh through the night sky! So, kids, you’d better be good, ‘cause he’s a-watching! It’s Christmas, and Jingle Bells are rockin’ through the city!” declared the bouncy radio DJ, before he announced the next song. I was late in driving to Ronnie’s home, because of a last minute “I have a Christmas decoration emergency” from one of my clients. Emergency, my eye! One of the garlands along her stair railing had come loose! The sky had let loose a torrent of rain and thunder, just as I left, and I was certain we were under a tornado watch, if not a warning. The radio was the *only* thing keeping me awake at the moment, despite the noise from the storm. Suddenly, I jumped for joy, when one of my favorite Christmas songs came over the air. I opened my mouth to sing right along. “I’ll Be Home for Christmas” had always meant a lot to me, because I had not had a home since I was four years old, and it always made me cry for something that I had lost – family. Nope! No crying happening tonight for me, though, because despite all the corny things the DJ was saying, I have joy in my heart! All because of my very best-est friend and her “pull-off”, as she called it, was why I was heading out so late at night!

My singing was abruptly, and rudely, interrupted when a huge burst of lightning, followed by thunder, scared the heck out of me, reminding me I was also driving in a horrible storm. I decided that I’d sure as hell had better start paying attention to my driving.

Beep, Beep, Beep, the automated radio warning came across in its usual staccato voice.

“The National Weather Center has issued a tornado watch at ten fifteen pm for the following counties in Arkansas...”

After what seemed to be about a thousand counties were named, the current song came back on, and actually started at the beginning. So, I opened my mouth to sing, again, while paying careful attention to my driving!

“I’ll be home for Christmas...You can count on me.” Rumble-rumble, lightning, thunder. “Please have snow and mis-tle-toe and presents on thheee tr...!”

Rumble, lightning, thunder resounded. I stopped singing, when I realized I had finally arrived at my destination. I turned into the drive that led to Ronnie’s house. A massive gate loomed as the lightning lit up the sky, my foot hit the brake, and I began to hyperventilate.

“No Way! Uh-uh!” I denied to myself, shaking my head as if what I was seeing was real.

Holy monsters of all mansions, Batman! There just wasn’t another way to describe it! While I sat, trapped in my car – by my own startled and frozen choice – I started thinking about how everything over the past three weeks had led up to this moment. In the middle of my musings, the only thing that made me mad was that Ronnie had not once told me how big her house was! I mean...look at this place! It’s the size of Disney World – with all the parks put together! OK. So, maybe I am exaggerating, about it being that size, but it was at least as big as half of the Magic Kingdom! No! Really! It was that big!

I gaped at the monster mansion feeling as frozen as a statue that might very well be placed on its lawn.

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Leaning forward as far as I could, before being stopped by the steering wheel, I peered through my rain coated windshield. Dang it! My wipers were not keeping up with the rain. Each time the lightning lit it up, I gasped. How was I ever going to decorate that place? It was going to cost them a fortune! Ronnie surely knew it! But, Ronnie is the one who set it all up for me! It was obvious, too, that the cost would not be an issue. I rubbed my head, feeling a headache coming to a brain near me!

OK. I can do this! I have to, if I wanted my Holiday decorating business to get off the ground in a huge way. I sighed, and felt myself begin to calm down, thank goodness, so I focused on just getting up to the door. I drove up to an intercom system that was underneath an awning. At least the owners were nice enough to consider the weather. I rolled down my window, and punched a button, waiting on someone to answer.

“What do you want!” a male voice demanded.

Wow! Rude! I stumbled with my words.

“I-I’m Ronnie’s best friend? I am here to decorate the house for Christmas.”

Silence followed. After what seemed like forever, the voice answered, as if angry, but resigned.

“Yes. She told me. You may as well come on up!”

I heard a clanking sound, and saw the gates open slowly. I put my car into gear, drove past the gates, and up the long drive to the monster mansion.

Very little kept me down long, and I had to admit that my favorite time of the year is Christmas! So much so, that I recently decided to open my very own Holiday Decorating Business called Noel’s Holidays at the insistence of my bestie, Ronnie

Blood. Seriously, I still wanted to know where the heck they came up with that name? I remembered the movie “Captain Blood” with Errol Flynn, and wondered if someone adopted that name in Ronnie’s family? What is it with last names these days? I mean, come on! Did I just have to be called *Noel Snow*? Combine that with my best friend’s name? The first names are bad enough! But, Snow? Blood? Bloody Snow? Oh, for Santa’s sake! If that wasn’t enough to make you toss your cookies! And, you’d think it couldn’t get worse, right? Were you never taught to never ask that question? It always – *always* – gets much worse! How? Well, I was born on December 25<sup>th</sup> twenty-nine years ago. I am rather short at five-feet tall, and not exactly skinny, but not fat either. I have an ample bust, small waist, and my hips were probably a bit larger than I wanted. My hair is a platinum blonde, thanks to a bottle, although its natural condition is dirty blonde, with some red highlights. My nose is small, and my eyes are brilliant green. Oh! And, I have no neck at all! Anyway, to continue, my Mom and Dad had a stroke of “genius”, naming me Noel. Yes, I know. Stupid, but Snow really was my Mom and Dad’s last name. I guess they thought it would be hilarious by giving me a first name from Christmas.

I know. I’m rambling, but the truth is? I absolutely love my name! Can all of this get more corny, you ask? The answer is a resounding why yes...yes it can! Just you wait till you hear my crazy, mixed up story! Even today, I don’t even believe it really happened, and yet, here I am...smack dab in the middle of it all!

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~ NOEL ~

Continuing on from the ridiculous to the absolute impossible, my life was always boring. And, when I say boring, I mean that with a capital “B”. I’d been working as a data entry clerk, making only nine dollars an hour, which just wasn’t enough to keep that wolf from the door. Originally, I opened my own decorating business in my tiny apartment, and while I’d had a few bites, and a few small jobs, it just wasn’t going to hack it. I needed something else if I wanted to get out of the cubicle at my job. I needed something big to showcase my talent.

And, that’s where Ronnie came into the picture about eight months ago. We had accidentally met, when she bumped into me with a hot latte mug, and dumped it all over me. As girls, we couldn’t have been more far apart in looks. In contrast to my green eyes and blonde hair, Ronnie was a five-foot seven, raven haired, dark brown eyed beauty! She had a Baywatch Babe figure, and her perfect proportions would have made me jealous if I was petty. Her skin was rather pale, even compared to my fair skin with freckles, and she told me that her family had a slight allergy to the sun. Not overly strange. I’d heard of it. Yet, Ronnie had not a vain bone in her body, despite all the looks she always received when we were out in public. From that first meeting, we became almost inseparable as friends. It was her idea to suggest backing my Decorating business with her own money, as well as market it. She wasn’t really working for me, because low and behold, I didn’t have money to give her a

paycheck. However, she didn't mind, since she doesn't worry about money. Her family, more specifically, her oldest brother, was as loaded as anyone could get. Oil, I think. But, Ronnie had a huge background in marketing and public relations. And, believe me! She stuck her neck out for me more than once.

Getting back to my money woes, which I know you all really, really wanted to know, right? I was about to lose my apartment, and be tossed to the streets, when Ronnie came up with a perfect idea to decorate their house for Christmas. She called some contacts she had to get my designs published in their magazines and websites after it was completed.

There was only one tiny small problem. Her brother just didn't like Christmas, for some odd reason or other, but Ronnie did. She would never have allowed me to go on the streets, anyway, so she had bugged her big brother, Damian Blood, to let her hire me to do a Christmas makeover for their house. Her brother fought her tooth and nail, even offering to put me up in one of their many classy apartment buildings just to keep me out of the house, but Ronnie is a real go-getter. What she goes after, she gets. And, she got her way in this, and now...wait! Did I happen to mention that she has an awesome website that features small businesses? I didn't? Well, you do now.

Now that you have my basic background – oh, except I forgot to tell you that I was orphaned at the age of four, because of a car accident, in which both my parents were killed. OK. Now, you know about my life before Ronnie.

Back to the here and now.

“I sure won't get to that monster mansion by sitting here...in this massive storm...at one o'clock in

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the morning. Ronnie, not once, told me how wealthy her bat shit crazy brother was! I drove my little burgundy, paint-peeling-off Taurus slowly through the deluge to the front door. I mentally slapped myself. What the hell was I doing here? I'd only decorated a few, small traditional houses, so far, but this place? Holy crap! It's so out of my league! I sighed and put the sputtering car into park, then turned the key. I just sat there, trying to come to a realization that I was here to do my first, big job. But, this was nuts! I stared at the curved, covered front porch. I was about to call the whole thing off, and reached for my phone to call Ronnie, when the huge, hand-carved, wooden double doors were thrown wide, and Ronnie ran down the steps.

"Crap! So much for running away," I muttered, as I reluctantly opened the door of my car.

"It's about time you got here, Noel! It's raining cats and dogs! For goodness sakes, what took you so long to get here? Where's your luggage? In the back? Pop the trunk, and I'll grab it. Did you bring all your stuff for measuring, drawing, and your computer? Hurry up! We have to get out of this rain! Come on! Well, why aren't you answering me?" Ronnie exclaimed. Without a pause, she continued to dig into the trunk grabbing at everything.

I had passed giggling way back, and proceeded to double over in laughter. Ronnie was my perfect friend. I was usually serious; she laughed and smiled all the time. Right now, though, I was howling. Ronnie could really get so excited, that she would not draw a breath, until she got everything out she wanted to say. But, while she was standing in the rain, I had an umbrella, not that it was doing me much good at the moment.

“Howze about we ‘grabs’ everything, and I’ll answer your questions – after we get inside and out of the cats and dogs rain, OK?” I laughed, not even questioning her destruction of the English language.

“Whatever!” Ronnie answered, heading to the back of the car for the next load. She continued rambling. “OK, with your first million, I expect you to buy yourself a new car!”

“Riiiiight. My first million bucks. Just let me write that down in my ‘to do’ notebook,” I laughed. “I’ll get right on that one!”

Ronnie only rolled her eyes, while quickly gathering my supplies, grabbing my suitcase, and somehow, carrying everything else as well. Then, the two of us dashed up the steps. A man was standing just inside the door, waiting to take my ragged and worn little suitcase that was just an embarrassment after seeing this house. Seeing the scowl on the man’s face as he reached for it, I knew it had seen better days. The orphanage gave it to me seven years ago when I left – correction; I was tossed out into the world. And, there went another memory about the accident that killed my parents. I had visions of it for years. It was so real, it was impossible for me to tell the difference between reality and false memories. I shook my head. I didn’t have time for this.

Ronnie grabbed my hand and pulled me into the foyer, where I just came to a standstill in awe and shock. This was a decorator’s dream! Crap! Was my tongue hanging out? Whew! That really would have been embarrassing, I thought after I checked! The floor was a slate gray stone, and when I say stone, I don’t mean tiles. I mean stone...as in a solid piece! Where in the hell did they get this? Actually, *how* did they do it? Did they build a house on top a

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rock? My eyes left the stone, and traveled around the room. A Duncan Phyfe table stood between two curving staircases, which obviously lead to the second and third levels.

“Hmmpf! Did you guys just have to build in the Ozark Mountains, in the middle of nowhere, that took me at least an hour and half to get here? House, indeed,” I muttered.

“What?” Ronnie asked.

I just shook my head. On the table was a huge, Waterford lead crystal vase filled with poinsettias, and apparently the only nod to Christmas in the whole place. The walls were solid mahogany! I’d bet my bottom dollar on it – if I had a bottom dollar, that is. The staircase was also made of mahogany and the stairs looked as if they were cut from that same gray, solid piece of stone in the foyer.

“Holy shit!” I said under my breath. Then, I turned to Ronnie. “You have to be kidding me!”

“Again, what?” Ronnie asked.

I stared at her in shock. She had to be kidding, right?

“Kidding you? Since when have you ever known me to kid you?” Ronnie quipped, and I rolled my eyes. “Come this way. You gotta see the living room! It’s like something out of a medieval castle in the modern age!”

Ronnie dragged me along behind her, although truth was, I’d follow her like the good little obedient best friend that I was. And...I came to my second halt within minutes of the first shock, pulling on Ronnie’s hand as she proceeded forward. I didn’t budge. She dropped my hand, puzzled at my astonishment.

“Oh! My freakin’ gosh!” I said aloud, slapping my cheeks in stunned wonder. I refuse to take my

maker's name in vain – especially at Christmas. “This is...I...is that a Rem...holy shit!”

Ronnie turned to me with a grin.

“You like it?”

“Come on, Ronnie! Who wouldn't love just these two rooms! I can't imagine what the rest of the house looks like!”

“Yeah, yeah,” she replied, grabbing my hand once more. “Come on. I'll take you upstairs to your room, and let you get settled. I know driving an hour and a half in the dark, in the storm, was stressful for you, since I know how storms whack you out.”

Well, I couldn't argue with her, because that's exactly how I felt right now. Normally, the drive would have probably taken about thirty-five minutes to an hour, but the storm just made the drive much longer. I hate driving at night, and especially in the rain! Taking a deep breath, while trying to pay attention to where Ronnie was going, I silently followed her up the left side of the staircase. We turned left into a monster of a hallway! I really, really needed to stop using that word! But, truth was, the monster hallway seemed as if it went on forever. I had a sudden *deja vu* thing, remembering the movie series “Rose Red”, where the unoccupied house just kept getting larger and larger, but no one knew why or how a house could procreate. That caused me to shiver a bit.

Several doors – fifteen to be exact – were lined up on either side of the hallway with the last door at the end. The floor was like the others – solid wood, and I bet it was not stained mahogany, but was mahogany. A runner in a crimson oriental design, stretched the length of the hallway, covered with many colors of flowers and leaves carved into it. And,

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talk about plush! I sank into the carpet with every step! Various paintings of people hung on the wall, and Ronnie began a running commentary on the characters imprinted on canvas for all time.

“...and that is Damian’s Great Uncle Dominion. He was a real odd-ball, and never had a nice word to say about anyone.”

I stared at him. He gave her the creeps! Dominion was obviously extremely tall, his eyes were black, his skin...really an odd pale color for such a bold painting.

“Wait! Did you just say Dominion? Why is he so pale?” I asked.

Either the odd glance at me from Ronnie was real, or I was imagining it was almost irritation. Not at me, though. More at this guy hanging from a nail on the wall.

“Huh? Oh, yeah. I guess he was a bit pale. Never really noticed that aspect of the painting. Maybe his parents must have had a morbid sense of humor. Or, they wanted him to rule the world. Really, don’t know whether they wanted to do that, or they were just crazy. Either way would work. I vote for crazy as loons.”

She turned with an evil grin, and that just made me grin right back at her. When she didn’t elaborate, I just followed her to the door on the right at the end of the hallway. Ronnie grasped the door handle and turned it. She walked through the door, and motioned me inside. I did another shock moment of stopping dead in my tracks. I had no words. I had never seen a more beautiful room in my life! A hand-carved ceiling of mahogany (they really liked mahogany, I’d decided), looked down upon us. The walls were painted a hunter green, while the drapes and

bedspread – uh...excuse me...that would be “duvet” – were crimson red, trimmed in gold, with golden tassels as tie backs on the windows. The bed looked like something out of a castle, and had a small canopy jutting out that covered the head of the person who was sleeping. It was also covered in red and trimmed in gold braid. The floor, strangely, was covered in green, wall-to-wall carpeting. I frowned at Ronnie, who understood.

“Yeah. A few years ago, an employee left the water on the tub above us run. By the time, we discovered it, it had crashed through the ceiling, and slammed into the floor below. Damian had two choices: either completely redo everything, or repair the ceiling, and the place where the tub landed. At that time he was, uh, preoccupied, and left things to Caleb, who didn’t want to spend the money, so he just had the carpet put in here and in the room above as well. He’s kind of a stingy bastard.”

“The stories this house could tell!” I added.

“You have no idea!” a voice laughed.

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~ NOEL ~

Both girls turned. Leaning against the doorjamb, stood the most lick-lippin', panty droppin' man I had ever seen in my life! But the truth was that he was a player, if I was a day! Besides, I knew he was full of it, and not my type, but he looked like he'd be fun to be around – and I was in no doubt that he loved to play around! His eyes were full on black, kind of like the painting of that Dominion relative, or was that a navy color? His skin pale as it could be (like everyone else around here), with his blonde hair cut short, he casually leaned against the doorjamb, laughing at us. His mouth was perfect, and naturally rose. His nose was rather patrician. He stood at least 6' 3", wore a turtleneck of charcoal gray, and a black blazer over solid black pants. And, I would have given ten to one that he had six-pack abs, and what was below that...well, nope. Better not go there! In other words, ladies? He was yummy with a capital YUMMY! But, he wasn't my type, so I felt nothing at all for him other than eye candy.

“Hey, Caleb,” Ronnie said, rolling her eyes.

“Hey, little sis! And, who might this gorgeous creature be?”

I caught the narrowing of Ronnie's eyes, but man! Was I melting under his gaze!

“Back it off and turn it off, Caleb. This is Noel – my best friend! Noel, this is my bastard of a brother and resident man whore, Caleb Blood.”

He walked leisurely forward with his hand outstretched. His lips turned up into a gorgeous and

sexy smile. As he came to a halt by Ronnie, it struck me that the two of them were not from the same parents. No way could they be. Ronnie's body was every bit as flawless as Caleb. Sigh. If only I could be as perfect as they were! But, right now, I ignored Ronnie, and took his hand. It was warm, but cool. Don't ask. I don't get it either.

"Nice to meet you, Caleb," I said.

"You, too, doll face. Nice to put a face to Ronnie's best friend. You know she talks about you all the time, right?"

My eyes darted to Ronnie in surprise, while her eyes rolled.

"Now, pray gorgeous, what is a beauty like you doing in a place like this?"

Oh, man! He was a hoot and a flirt! I just couldn't help myself but throw back my head and laugh. He was going to be hilariously fun! But, before he could talk, Ronnie grabbed his arm, pulling him to the door.

"Go play with one of your hundreds of girlfriends, Caleb. We have work to do!" Then, she pushed him out the door, and slammed it in his face.

"I won't forget that, Sis!" They heard him yell, as his laughter and footsteps disappeared down the hallway.

"He always like that?" I said, jerking my head in his direction.

"Pretty much. He's a real drama queen! Now, where were we?" Ronnie answered, rolling her eyes. "Oh, yes. That door on the right of the bed is a closet. The door on the left is the bathroom. So, right now, since it's so late, just get some sleep, and I'll see you in the morning. After all, you are going to be here

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for a whole week! We'll begin in the morning. That okay with you?"

"Sure," I said, turning to see Ronnie walk to the door. "Hey, Ronnie?"

She turned.

"Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity. I don't want to fail you, or disappoint you."

As if she could read my mind, she answered, "There is no way – ever – that you will do either of those, Noel! You and I are besties forever!"

I just grinned at her as she walked out the door. Before she closed it, she stuck her head back in around the door, and said, "Noel?"

"Yeah?"

"Don't go wandering around the house at night. You could fall down the – uh – stairs and hurt yourself. You aren't familiar with it, yet, and you might run into things, OK?"

Barely listening, I nodded my head, and Ronnie shut the door. First, I decided on a shower, then I'd get some shuteye. I opened the door to the bathroom, and sighed with awe and happiness at the room. It was truly like a dream come true. I started stripping, and walked into the huge shower. I'll tell you how it looks later, because right now, I just want to get clean, and go to sleep.

I looked at my iPhone. Geez! It was 2 AM! I usually sleep like a log anywhere...any time. But whatever was happening, I was lying on the bed wide-awake! OK. So. I could either lay here awake, and try to force myself to fall asleep, which would only succeed in keeping me wider awake, or I could go downstairs with my iPad, take pictures of at least the living room and the foyer, then plan out my decorating

scheme. What had Ronnie said? Don't go wandering around in the dark. But, I knew my way back to the foyer and living room, so I didn't see how that could hurt. Making a split second decision, I sat up, swung my legs off the bed, and grabbed my phone for its camera. I had packed my other one, but I really didn't want to drag it out yet.

"Yeah. I'll just get a head start on decorating! It's better than lying here, and not sleeping!" I said aloud.

Completely ignoring Ronnie's warning about not wandering around the house at night, I grabbed my short robe, and threw it over my tank top and shorts in which I always slept. Then, I grabbed my iPad, and headed toward the door. Opening it, I peeked at the hallway, and man, did it ever give me the willies. It was so quiet. In order to stay as quiet as I could, I tippy-toed down the corridor in my stocking feet. As I reached the stairs, I remembered Ronnie's warning.

"Well, she said I wasn't familiar with the house, but like I said to myself. I have been in the foyer and the living room, so I at least know where they are," I muttered under my breath, and started down the stairs. "I mean, that's right, right?"

As I shuffled down the stairs, I immediately knew exactly what the Christmas theme for this house was going to be for the magazine and website. In my mind, I decided that I wanted it very old-fashioned with a touch of contemporary. This house was old, and extremely beautiful. Everything about it screamed Castle! A Royal Christmas would be perfect! I stopped to take an elevated photo of the two circular staircases from above and below, then decided that I would drape real blue spruce garlands, tied with small blue spruce wreaths in between the draped

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garlands, and alternating red and white poinsettias with red and white bows between them. I actually used a minor app to draw these things onto the photo, so I could save my ideas, and present a photo to the clients. I also decided that I would use the tiny lights, that are reserved for smallest of decorations, intertwined within the garland and the small wreaths. I know I had pre-made commercial light wreaths and garlands, but I didn't want to use them. I wanted real greenery. I wanted a very subtle approach. In those long ago days, they had only candles for lights, but those just were not used any more. Way too dangerous. Even in today's world, some idiots actually put candles on their real and artificial trees! Oooh! The largest tree for show needed to go right in the center between these two staircases! And, the tree needed to be huge. I mean, like 20' tall huge! I knew I'd have to call Jackie Mann for a tree that large, and made a note to call him the next day. He was the best tree farmer in Arkansas, if not the United States, and I'd used him since I started my business.

I reached the bottom, and marched to the front double doors, turned and took a photo of the foyer, then sat on a bench by the front door. I used my iPad to sketch what I had in mind for the stairs and entry. I tilted my head to study it, and changed my mind in an instant. Most decorators would consider the foyer the focal point as one entered the house, and probably put a ginormous Christmas tree where the table was. But, no one ever said that I was like most decorators. I wanted more than one tree. I would make both the foyer and the living focal points, but my plan was to have a "grove" of Christmas trees of various sizes adorning the entrance, while others would be scattered

throughout the living room! Each would be draped with lights so dense, it would look as if fireflies inhabited the trees. And, then, decorated with red and white poinsettias to match the staircases. The Duncan Phyfe table would need to be moved from its usual place, and the bottom of the trees covered with a red silk cloth with potted poinsettias in the folds, and the same very small lights woven in and out of them. Keeping the foyer simple, yet beautiful, was my goal. There were five entrances to other rooms from where I stood – and there would be larger, blue spruce wreaths dangling over the doorways with tiny lights. I could picture each doorway draped with garlands and light to welcome the visitor into each room.

“White or multi?” I whispered to myself. Personally, I had always loved multi, but would it be right here? I tapped my finger against my chin.

“Ah, hang it! Multi it is!”

That decided, I had a great wreath maker, Beth Rose, and decided to ask her to make two, Christmas tree wreaths with the multi lights to hang on the outside of the front doors. I also wanted some white peace doves, red and white poinsettias with some gold and silver decorations on them as well. It would be different, and something that everyone would love. Well, everyone but Ronnie’s brother, if she were to be believed what everyone said, and that he did turn out to be a stuck up and pompous prick.

I stood, and quietly slipped into the living room. I began to take photos from each corner of the room, and one from each quadrant of the room as well. I walked around the massive room, studying the lay of the land. Three walls of windows wrapped around the room, while a monster of a fireplace

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dominated the one wall in the center of the front windows of the mansion. Chocolate brown leather sofas were placed around the fireplace in a “U” shape, taking advantage of the warmth of the fire. Noel could see a large garland draping the mantel of the massive fireplace, but without lights. There was no need for them, because the firelight would be the ambiance. The windows would have garlands, but only stretched above them like a valance. Behind all three sofas were sofa tables topped with unique, antique porcelains and lamps. Each of these tables would be perfect for cream-colored Luminara candles set inside wreaths of holly and berries – perhaps in staggering sizes and heights. But, the porcelains and lamps would remain on the tables. No one could ever make me touch those things! Nope, I thought. Never gonna happen!

Scattered around the living room were wingback chairs sporting gradient upholstery in teals, creams, and chocolate. Most were in groupings for people to converse, while a couple of them were placed as single seating with tables and lamps. I noticed, at that point, that one could easily see the circle drive out front, and decided to place a blue spruce tree to the left side of the center, and maybe a life-size Santa to the right of the center. They would be surrounded by fake presents.

“Yes! Perfect!” I said to no one. I tapped my finger on my chin. Something was missing. I looked up to the ceiling, and brilliance hit me like a ton of bricks. I grinned as I made a quick note. “Snowflakes falling delicately, and intricately in different heights from the ceilings both in here and the entry way! And, even possibly in the dining room!”

I yawned a couple of times, realizing that I was finally getting a bit sleepy. Maybe I could finish all of this before I went back to bed. I plopped down on one of the sofas, imagining in my mind's eye how the fireplace should look. It was the size of the Empire State Building! I know. I have this tendency to exaggerate, but it was still the largest fireplace that I had ever seen. Certainly big enough that someone could cook something the size of a large man, with all kinds of room left over! Well, that was a morbid thought, and I have no idea where it came from, so anyway, I decided that it might be prudent to use a fake blue spruce garland around the fireplace for safety. Covering that with scattered red and white poinsettias, and it would be gorgeous! I decided to change my mind, and use the tiny lights there as well. On the mantel, I think scattering some red and cream-colored luminara candles of different heights would look beautiful placed among a topper of holly and berries.

That reminded me. The chandelier in the foyer could be dripping with holly and berries. Since it was crystal, the lights would create a wonderful aura of the true spirit of the season! Now, if it were my home, I would have set up the small towns that had been so popular a few years ago, simply because they were just fun! From what Ronnie had said, I was almost certain that the "master" of the mansion wouldn't appreciate my levity! I also decided to scatter Luminara candles all over the house in various sizes,

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heights, and groupings for warmth. The windows came together in the corner of the room, and that was where I would place the main Christmas tree for the house, where all the wrapped, bright colored presents would sit for the family. Ronnie had also said something about a party, but nothing had yet to be decided. I'd work on a preliminary design for it, after I saw their dining room.

I yawned, and decided maybe a little nap right here would be a good idea. That was my first mistake. My second mistake? Well, that was having Ronnie as my best friend. I was really having a great dream, where I was the top Holiday Decorator in the world, and acclaimed by everyone. I woke with a start, when I felt a large hand slap over my mouth to keep me from screaming. My eyes met those of a man whose eyes were red. Not red from being drunk; crimson, like blood! I tried to struggle, but his hands were like a vise, holding me down easily. What the hell?

"Shhh, little pussy," his voice cooed.

I wanted to throw up at his sickeningly sweet and lust-filled voice. Did he really just call me a "little pussy"? Oh, shit! I couldn't talk; I couldn't move, and all I could do was listen. And, only hell knows I wish I could stop remembering that moment in time. But, even after all this time later, it still manages to make me sick!

"Now, now, little pussy. Let's be a quiet little human, Hmmm? We don't want the others coming down here, and interrupting our little sex fest, now do we? Of course, if they wanted, they could join us, and we could have a whole lot of fun, don't you think? I'm not at all opposed to sharing, you know. Our kind love orgies!" His eyes closed as he sniffed deeply.

He opened them. They looked even more red! “You smell so delicious, little pussy! I wonder if your pussy tastes as wonderful as you smell?”

Without a pause, his hands turned into claws, and he ripped my robe and tank top off, exposing my breasts not only to the cold air in the room, which made my nipples pebble, but to his lust-filled, red eyes. What the hell was he? Holding both of my hands over my head, he quickly jabbed something nasty in my mouth. It tasted tangy and almost like iron. A bloody rag? Oh, God, NO! His other hand rubbed my breasts. He squeezed, pinched, groaned, and began lowering his head to suck them in his mouth. I couldn’t move at all, and tears ran down my cheeks as I felt his teeth scrape my nipple. He then bit my nipple so hard, it bled. I saw his eyes grow even redder as he watched the blood run down my skin. My nipple was in horrible pain, and all he could do was grin like a lunatic. His tongue flipped out, and began to lick the blood that continued to flow.

“Mmop!” I tried to yell.

The next instant, I felt a sting as he slapped me, causing my head to bounce, and slam into the wood trim that surrounded the sofas, and hard enough for me to taste blood. I felt it trickling down my chin, from my lip. It literally almost knocked me out from the viciousness! I wouldn’t be at all shocked to have a concussion. Then, he slapped me again and yet again, my head continuously slamming into the same wood. My head was pounding, and I was in the worst pain, ever! I could feel my face running with tears and blood all while feeling his tongue lapping my blood like a dog would lick its master! Then he bent his head to my other nipple, biting it as well, and drawing even more blood. This time, my swelling

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eyes met his, and I saw his fangs. FANGS? Oh, my God!

“Mmampire!” I screamed, but it was muffled.

“That’s right, sweet, sweet little pussy. I am. I will only drain you dry, when I am finished biting you all over. Then, I’m going to drink you!”

He leaned down, sniffed my face, and then yanked my head to the right, causing severe pain to my neck. I felt his fangs scraping my carotid artery, just below my skin, and I knew I was dead. He was going to kill me! I gained enough strength to start to struggle. I kicked my legs, and pulled at my arms! He just laughed, and gripped my arms even tighter as he straddled my legs to keep me from kicking.

“Uh-uh. Not so fast, bitch! We are going to have fun in another way, first. I promise to be quick when I kill you, but you are too luscious for me not to fuck several times before I gulp down your blood!”

His free hand went down to his pants, and I heard him unzip his zipper. I panicked! He was going to rape me! And, I was powerless to stop him. I saw him free his cock, which was not all that impressive! Oh, crap! I didn’t want that pissant thing in me! He put his hand on his tiny hard-on, stroking himself in front of me. I tried to close my eyes, but the swelling wouldn’t allow me to do so voluntarily, but I was hoping that they would swell up, so I wouldn’t be able to keep them open to watch. He grabbed my hand, and put it on his cock.

“Masturbate me!” he ordered.

I drew up my face in disgust, even though it hurt. It was already bad enough that he ordered me to – gross – masturbate him, but when I touched it, his cock was clammy and wet. I didn’t want that nasty thing inside me, let alone touch it! Finally, anger

filled me with hatred, and I began to twitch violently. Because my hand was free, I yanked it off him, fisted it, and hit his face. Oh! That wasn't smart! He was as hard as stone! But, still, he wasn't going to have me without a fight!

"Stop it!" he ordered, trying to gain control, until he finally pinned me down, again, and I saw his fingers grow into claws.

He used them to rip my sleep shorts off along with my panties. He pushed my legs apart, and then just as I felt his cock head pushing through my opening, he was just – gone.

"Oh, My God!" a man's voice roared.

"Noel!" cried Ronnie. She quickly covered my nudity with her own robe, then helped me sit. I yanked the stinking, bloody cloth out of my mouth, spitting blood from the cuts that were inside my mouth, all over the floor. Ronnie's arms came around me to hold me steady.

"Who sent you!" a man's voice demanded.

I turned my head to see what was happening, and shock set into my bones. There stood the most handsome man I had ever seen in my life – and he gripped my rapist by the neck, holding him in the air as if he weighed nothing! I wrapped my arms around myself, holding Ronnie's robe in place, and despite the beating I'd received, I couldn't turn my head from the drama unfolding in front of me. I watched in stunned silence, as everything I had ever believed or known went up in smoke! The bastard just smirked at the beautiful man. And, the battle began. Between the gorgeous hunk and the rapist, I realized I wasn't watching just an ordinary battle, but I wasn't sure what I was seeing. I decided I'd file that all away to think about much later.

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“That’s for me to know, Damian.” His voice turned deadly. “No matter what you do, you are going to lose. You know it, and so do they!”

“I will not ask again. Who. Sent. You?”

His staccato words only served to emphasize what Damian was asking. Wait! THAT gorgeous hunk of man was DAMIAN? That was Ronnie’s *brother*??? The surprise almost made me totally forget what I was seeing. Unfortunately, though, that didn’t last that long, and there was more happening.

A gasping laugh escaped that bastard’s lips, but he still said nothing. Nor did he even attempt saying anything else. He just held the perpetual smirk, as if he knew something Damian did not know.

“I know you, Galel. You think I won’t kill you,” Damian warned.

The restrained rapist...uh...vampire, began to laugh almost maniacally.

“No, you won’t. You lost your mojo long ago, and your courage right along with it! Everyone knows you haven’t the balls to fight any more, and your days are numbered!”

Damian looked at him. I jerked backwards as I realized Damian had turned to look at me in disgust, and with another set of red eyes, complete with fangs!

“*Oh, shit!*” I mumbled to myself. I had walked into a nest of the impossible! Vampires! As a human, that’s a bit disconcerting. Ah hell! It was a lot more than disconcerting! Suddenly, I had a terrible suspicion, albeit almost unbelievable. I had an insane idea to laugh at this point. Closing my eyes, I slowly turned to look at my best friend in the world, terrified at what I might see. When I opened them, and met her eyes, I gasped in shock, even though I already knew what I was going to see! Ronnie’s face was full of

guilt, sadness, and remorse. No matter, though. The problem was that I was not prepared for the shock of seeing her red eyes.

“Noel, I...,” she began, but I held up a hand to stop her excuses.

She snapped her lips together, and her eyes returned to their natural color of brown. Instead, I turned my head back to the two men. I really didn’t want to watch, yet I was helpless not to do so.

Damian kept a tight grip on Galel’s throat. My eyes met his as I realized he was still staring at me, and despite the shock I was experiencing, I felt a slow burn deep inside my womb – as if I craved his dick in me! I looked down, and saw that he was far more well-endowed than any man I had ever seen...big, hard, and I realized that this type of confrontation is what turned him on! My eyes fled upward in embarrassment, and I blushed like a tomato. His eyes met mine with an arrogant smirk, and I knew he caught staring at his package. The left side of his mouth turned upward into a huge grin, before it disappeared, and he looked back at his prey. Isn’t that what they called humans? Prey? Obviously, it wasn’t completely relegated to humans.

“Wrong answer,” he said quietly and controlled.

In seconds, Damian held Galel with one hand, and with his right hand, correction, his right *claw*, he literally plunged his hand into Galel’s chest. In the next second, just like sacrifices of old, where a beating heart was cut out of one’s chest, Damian retracted his dripping and bloody hand. In it, he held a black mass of flesh – the heart of Galel, whose eyes looked completely shocked just before his head fell backward, and Damian released him. And, then, Galel disappeared in a puff of smoke, as his entire body

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disintegrated, leaving nothing behind except the heart dripping in blood that Damian still held in his hand. A vampire had saved me from another vampire, but I had no idea if he wouldn't actually kill me himself. He turned to me to watch my horrified eyes as he squeezed his hand together. Seconds later, nothing of the heart or blood remained, as it, too, disintegrated into ash. Then his face turned to anger, as he slowly approached the sofa. Had I just signed my death certificate?