

Come Fly With Me



An Alaskan Nights
Novel

“A sexy, emotional
journey of the best kind.”
—New York Times Bestselling
Author Carly Phillips



Addison Fox

Author of *Baby It's Cold Outside*

Praise for
Baby It's Cold Outside,
the first novel in Addison Fox's "sexy new series"*

“Heartfelt.... Readers will eagerly await the next novel in Fox’s series after reading this poignant romance.”

—Bookli

“A fun, sassy, well-written, hysterical, heartfelt, and entertaining book.”

—Fiction Vixen Book Review

“Refreshing.... This was a great book that had me laughing out loud.”

—Night Owl Review

“A cute, funny, fast-paced romantic novel filled with humor [and] heartwarming moments...a great read on a cold night in front of a warm fire.”

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—Romance Junki

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—Publishers Week

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Sons of the Zodiac Series**

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“Will delight paranormal romance lovers.... Fox weaves mythology and romance into a fun-filled adventure.”

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—Genre Go Round Reviews

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—*Publishers Weekly*

“[A] blast to read...kept me turning the pages until I finished it.”

—Errant Dreams Reviews

“Fox debuts with a strong start to the Warriors of the Zodiac series...[a] powerful romance.”

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“Promise[s] plenty of action, treachery, and romance!”

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Also by Addison Fox

ALASKAN NIGHTS NOVELS

Baby It's Cold Outside

THE SONS OF THE ZODIAC SERIES

Warrior Ascended

Warrior Avenged

Warrior Betrayed

Warrior Enchanted

*Come
Fly
With Me*

An Alaskan Nights Novel



Addison Fox



A SIGNET ECLIPSE BOOK

SIGNET ECLIPSE

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ALWAYS LEARNING

PEARSON

For Audrey

You smile and the world is brighter.

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Just in Time

Chapter One

New York City
New Year's Eve

Grier Thompson lined up the champagne flutes in neat, even rows. Her CPA's heart gloried in the precise organization and order to be found in the close attention to detail. By her calculation, it would take about three and a half bottles of bubbly to fill all the flutes to properly ring in the new year.

The sounds of her mother's annual New Year's Eve bash swelled from the other side of the swinging kitchen door as she poured glass after glass, but the happy laughter only pushed her further into her own gloomy thoughts. She'd believed coming home for the holidays would be just the thing to shake her out of the doldrums, but unlike her accurate champagne estimate, she'd sorely miscalculated this trip.

Without warning, a barrage of images from the previous New Year's Eve assailed her. She'd attended the same party and smiled and laughed with all the people she'd known for years, a bright diamond sparkling on her left hand and a smart, handsome fiancé by her side.

God, so much had changed in the ensuing twelve months.

The fiancé she'd looked forward to marrying was no longer a part of her life.

The accounting firm where she'd excelled had abandoned her without so much as a good-bye.

And the father who'd ignored her for her entire life had come calling in the form of a contested inheritance in the far-flung reaches of Alaska.

"And now you've got an annoying case of self-pity to boot," she mumbled to herself as she reached for a glass. "Which is about as appealing as an infection."

"What did you say, darling?" The door swung open to reveal her mother's oldest and dearest friend, Monica, as she floated into the kitchen, a surprisingly bright swath of feathers adorning the crown of her head. "I heard you talking about an unpleasant matter?"

Grier almost choked on her sip of champagne as she glanced quickly around the kitchen. "Oh, it's nothing." Her eyes alighted on one of the bottles. "Just muttering about that last cork. What a beast it was."

"Of course, darling." Monica's bright blue gaze was sharp and radiated understanding, but she said nothing more as she reached for a large tray stacked on the far counter. "I thought you could use some help with the champagne. The natives are getting restless out there."

Grier glanced at the clock and saw she had less than ten minutes to go until the new year.

An unexpected wave of anticipation swamped her, even as she knew her life was so far from figured out, she might as well have been standing on Fifth Avenue, naked and wearing a sign: WILL WORK FOR ANSWERS.

Yet that stubborn spark of hope persisted.

Last year she thought she had it all figured out, and through the ensuing months she'd come to realize she understood almost nothing.

But she did understand *herself* a hell of a lot better and that had to count for something.

Monica handed Grier one of the two trays set aside for champagne and busied herself arranging glasses. "Your mother said your friend Sloan was up in Alaska with you."

A memory of her best friend bundled head to toe in a quilted coat made Grier smile. “It was nice to have her there for a few weeks.”

“And she’s getting married?” Although Monica’s voice was casual, Grier sensed something she couldn’t quite put her finger on hovering beneath the question. “To the town lawyer, right?”

“Yes, to Walker Montgomery.”

“Isn’t he your lawyer, too?”

Grier busied herself with her own tray, forcing Monica to ask the questions. “He is.”

“How’s that all going? You know your mother—she doesn’t say much. I swear, she’s been rattling on about this party for a month and there just hasn’t been room to talk about anything else. I’ve never been so glad to ring in a new year.”

Do I ever know my mother, Grier thought to herself. Patrice Thompson was a piece of work. One of New York’s most well-established blue bloods—“Patty-cakes” to all who knew and loved her—she wouldn’t deign to discuss anything that delved deeper than surface matters. Or involved complicated emotions. Or even remotely indicated she and her daughter had a family secret. No, she would never touch such a potential scandal—even if it left her at odds with her only daughter.

“It’s moving slowly.”

Monica’s smile was comforting when she spoke. “A side product of all that cold weather?”

The champagne flutes sat in tidy rows on her tray, but Grier still fiddled with them to make the rows perfect. “More like a half sister who doesn’t want me there and who’s contesting the will.”

“Grier.” Monica’s concerned tone boiled over to something unmistakably possessive as she pulled her into a hug. “I had no idea.”

Grier couldn’t ignore the warmth—or the comfort—of the embrace that enveloped her even through the cool sequins of Monica’s dress. “Of course not. It’s not like Mom to share that sort of thing.”

“Your mother is reserved, darling. You know that.”

It was an oft-repeated phrase throughout her childhood and Grier couldn’t help but hear it as a cop-out. “Reserved” was an excuse, a way of interacting with people that allowed a person to skip over the hard parts of life with a stoic demeanor and an unwillingness to acknowledge anything was wrong.

A loud ding broke the moment as the buzzer on her phone sounded. She and Monica turned at the same time to look at where it lay on the counter.

Suddenly Grier was swamped by a new emotion as she read the text that had appeared on the smooth screen.

WISHING YOU A HAPPY NEW YEAR. WHEN YOU GET BACK TO INDIGO WE NEED TO PICK UP WHERE WE LEFT OFF. I’M NOT WALKING AWAY, GRIER.

A sly smile lit Monica’s face and Grier knew she’d seen the message. “That’s a rather bold way to wish someone a happy new year.”

Grier reached for the phone and turned it facedown on the counter. “It’s nothing.”

Monica’s smile only grew broader. “You sure about that? Because that sounds like unfinished business to me. And I’ve found in my lengthy observations of the males of our species that unfinished business is a rather enjoyable pastime.”

“It’s really nothing.”

“Actually, my dear”—Monica reached over and ran a hand down her back—“that blush riding high on your cheeks suggests otherwise. But I also understand the need to keep a secret or two.”

When Grier didn’t say anything, Monica added, “It also seems like a lovely way to ring in a new year. Text messages full of promise and, if I’m not mistaken, perhaps passion and determination.”

With that, Monica picked up her tray of champagne and headed through the swinging doors and into the party. Grier reached for the phone, intent on putting it into her pocket before grabbing the tray, but couldn’t resist one more glance at the message.

Mick.

On a soft sigh, Grier followed Monica's path through the swinging doors. She couldn't quite muster up the same degree of revelry as the other partygoers, but she had to admit that her spirits were higher than when she'd walked into the kitchen to pour the champagne.

After the year she'd had, she barely thought herself capable of feeling anything. Yet just the thought of him—all six feet two inches of rugged Alaskan male—made her body quiver as something close to anticipation hummed in her veins.

He was the one thing she missed from her stay in Indigo, and even after time away and the distance between them, her powerful response to him had her body growing warm and her breath catching in her chest.

A loud burst of laughter interrupted her thoughts and she lifted her champagne flute to match the other partygoers.

If she touched the phone in her pocket as the entire room screamed, "Happy New Year!" well, that would be her little secret.

That stubborn little spark of hope lit once more.

Perhaps the new year could hold something worth looking forward to—something more than the heartache of sorting through the mess her father had left for her in Indigo.

Maybe it was time Grier Thompson, New York blue blood, acted on a bit of her reckless Alaskan roots.

* * *

The first thing Grier saw as she stepped off the elevator the following morning was Sloan. She was perpetually stunning, with a long, lean, willowy frame and blond hair that artfully fell around her shoulders. Grier knew if she didn't love her so much, she'd hate her on sight.

Just on principle.

Fortunately, she not only loved Sloan McKinley to pieces, but she was exceedingly happy to see that her friend's normally ethereal beauty had morphed into something even lovelier.

She held the beauty of a woman in love.

The object of her best friend's affection, Walker Montgomery, moved up behind Sloan to reach for Grier's bags. "Happy New Year, Grier." He bussed her cheek with a quick kiss before eyeing the roll-aboard suitcase and oversized tote.

"This is all you have?"

"Yep." She squeezed Sloan's hand before dropping it to turn toward Walker. "Let me guess. There are at least four pieces of luggage in that car out there"—she pointed toward the front door of her mother's apartment building—"as well as her full carry-on allotment."

"Are you actually siding with him?" Sloan crossed her arms. "What happened to the unbreakable bonds of sisterhood? Besides, I had to bring some stuff back for the move."

"Because Armani is so incredibly necessary in the middle of Alaska," Walker muttered in a whispered voice that no one missed.

"Exactly," Sloan hollered at his retreating back before turning toward Grier with a big smile. "If he weren't so mind-numbingly hot, I know I'd have a better comeback than that."

Grier wrapped an arm around Sloan's waist as they started for the door. "Your brains are just scrambled."

"I'm not that far gone." Sloan squeezed back before dropping her arm to walk through the door the doorman held wide.

“Oh, I don’t know—your lipstick is awfully smudged, suggesting an arduous kissing session on the car ride over here.”

Sloan’s gasp only made the high five Grier shared with her doorman, Bart, that much sweeter as he followed them both out onto the sidewalk.

Bart helped Walker deal with the luggage and within moments they were headed for the airport.

“Your mom didn’t come down. Is everything all right?”

The complete absence of any attempt to couch her question in a casual offering was appreciated and Grier led with a small sigh. “We said our good-byes this morning. She’s been seeing someone and he invited her up to Vermont for a few days of skiing.”

“How charming.”

“Sloan.” Walker nudged her knee.

“Don’t worry about it, Walker.” Grier waved a hand. “Sloan’s tone always smacks of judgment and derision when she talks about my mother. And since she’s the only person I know who will actually be honest about it, I can’t quite fault her for it.”

“It’s not judgment and derision,” Sloan said, jumping in. “It’s just annoyed puzzlement. And it’s not like my mother’s a giant picnic, either. I just think Patty-cakes could be a wee bit more sympathetic to your plight at the moment.”

Grier didn’t miss Walker’s narrowed eyes, but he kept his mouth firmly shut. “But if she were sympathetic, it would mean acknowledging she had sex with an Alaskan pipeline worker and I was the result.”

“Has she even talked about it?”

“Nope.” Grier played with the small fringe on the border of her sweater. “You’d think I was immaculately conceived.”

“So for the last eight days you’ve gotten nothing out of her?”

“She’s locked up tighter than a drum and that’s after several sessions of beating around the bush and two very pointed requests for information.”

Since she’d been tired of talking about her mother for the majority of her adult life, Grier leaped on the topic that would most assuredly switch the tone of the conversation.

“Did you set the date?”

Sloan’s adoring glance toward Walker gave away the answer before either of them spoke. “We ultimately settled on two dates. There’s no way half of Scarsdale’s headed to Alaska for a wedding. Besides, I like the residents of Indigo far too much to ask them to house the equivalent of rich aliens for a week. So we’re doing it here. Labor Day weekend.”

“What no one here knows, however”—Walker leaned forward on a conspiratorial whisper—“is that the real ceremony will take place in Indigo over the Fourth of July.”

“Your mother knows this?”

“Hell no.” Sloan flopped back against the seat in mock horror. “She thinks she and my father are coming up for Walker’s annual family reunion.”

“I like it. Sneaky yet full of sweet and romantic overtones.”

“Walker and I get the wedding we want and my mother gets the wedding she wants.”

“It’s terrifyingly brilliant.” Grier smiled as Walker wrapped his arm around her friend and pressed a light kiss to her temple.

The confines of the car suddenly felt a bit too small and Grier found herself staring out the window as the driver took them across the bridge toward Queens. Her mind drifted to Mick—a situation that happened all too often—and she wondered what it would be like to see him again.

They’d barely spoken since early December, both keeping their distance since the night he caught her outside her father’s house, attempting to break in.

Unbidden, her thoughts filled with the powerful sensations she had felt that night. The feel of his large body boxing her in against the door and the understanding embedded deep in those clear blue eyes of his.

Her father's house was off-limits to both her and her half sister, Kate, until their joined inheritance was sorted out, but she'd thought to sneak in a private moment and look around. Even without her saying anything, Mick had understood.

He'd also stopped her from actually breaking and entering, but he hadn't been able to stop the frustrated tears that had her running from her father's house.

And from Mick.

In the ensuing weeks, they'd seen each other at a town hall meeting as well as at Walker's grandmother's holiday tree trimming, and Grier had thought maybe they could put what had happened behind them and move on. Just because they'd seen each other naked one night didn't mean they couldn't be cordial and pleasant to each other.

And then he'd gone and sent that text on New Year's Eve and all her plans for easygoing and casual flew out the window.

Because no matter what she said and no matter how hard she tried to tell herself a relationship with Mick O'Shaughnessy was a bad idea, she hadn't been able to stop herself from rereading that text message several times a day.

And she also hadn't been quite able to dismiss the thought that a relationship with Mick O'Shaughnessy was a very, very good idea.

Mick walked through his preflight routine, checking things off on his clipboard and making notes. He saw the slightest beginnings of wear on a few parts and wanted to get them ordered and installed before slight wear became a big problem in the middle of winter. And he also scratched a reminder to put the fuel order in since Jack never managed to remember that one.

As if he'd conjured him up, Jack's large frame came into view as he rounded the side of the plane. "You put the fuel order in?" Mick asked.

A few shades of pink crept through Jack's five o'clock shadow. "No."

Mick waved his clipboard. "That's why I just made a note of it. I swear, you have our taxes in a fucking month early, but you can't remember that we actually need fuel to fly the planes."

"Yeah, well, Uncle Sam won't take too kindly to our ferrying passengers if we don't pay our taxes, so I suppose that makes us even."

Mick couldn't hold back the good-natured smile. "So long as you remember there's nothing to tax we can't get the plane off the ground."

"I suppose that's why we're a good team."

"That we are. The best." Mick crossed the hangar toward a desk he kept in the corner and bent down toward the small fridge next to it. "You want anything?"

"Coke."

Mick grabbed two and crossed toward an old sofa that had seen about twenty Alaska winters and dropped down on a worn cushion. "I've got about a half hour until I need to leave, and you look like you've got something on your mind."

Mick had known the man for a long time. Jack had about eight years on him, but from the first summer Mick had worked for him in high school, they'd been like brothers. He'd seen Jack through his marriage to Molly, standing up for him in the ceremony. They'd built a business together, and Mick had been there when Jack's world came crumbling down with Molly's cancer diagnosis and subsequent losing battle with the disease.

And now he had had the great good fortune of seeing his friend smile again since he started

officially seeing Jessica McFarland.

~~“You’re a crafty bastard, O’Shaughnessy. You don’t miss a thing.”~~

Mick took a long drag on his Coke. “So, what’s up?”

“I’ve been doing a lot of thinking and I’ve talked to Jess about it a bit.”

Mick simply waited and took another sip.

“And I’d like to spend more time with her. I was so busy building the business when Molly and I were first starting out that I missed out on a lot. And I don’t want that to happen again, you know?”

Mick did know. He also knew that Jack had tirelessly taken on a substantial workload to expand their clientele, followed by an even more grueling one to buffer the loneliness after his wife died.

The man deserved a break. And it was time to start thinking about ways to expand their business that didn’t take the two of them killing themselves.

“Funny you should mention it since I’ve been thinking similar things.”

“You’re not mad?”

“Are you telling me you’re never getting into a plane again?”

“Hell no.” Mick almost laughed at the affronted look on his friend’s face, but he also knew that shadow of horror in Jack’s clenched jaw was the proof he needed that all would be well.

Once a pilot, always a pilot.

The love of flying got to a man—it gripped the gut like a living thing and refused to let go. He’d had it his whole life, so he knew the symptoms.

“All I’m saying is I’d like to slow down a bit. Maybe bring in another pilot or two. Or one pilot and someone to handle the books.”

“Seriously, lover boy, you’re preaching to the choir. I’m sick of being the one ordering fuel.” Mick pointed to the clipboard he’d laid on the counter when he’d gotten the Cokes earlier. “And I’d love nothing more than to make a list of what I need and have an office manager who ordered them instead of making the calls myself.”

Jack took the ribbing in stride. “I’m not the only one around here who’s got a woman on the brain. It’s not a very large secret that you’re leaving in a few minutes to pick up Grier.”

Mick shrugged. Although he knew as well as the next person small towns thrived on gossip, the endless chatter had grown abrasive over the holidays. “Walker and Sloan are on the plane, too.”

“A minor detail no one’s interested in.”

“Funny how quickly the town’s favorite son is old news.”

Jack stood and pulled out a large pair of heavy work gloves. “You’re a favorite son, too, Mick. It’s amazing how often you choose to ignore that fact.”

Mick didn’t move until he heard the hangar door slam shut on a gust of wind. Only then did he stand and cross to the recycle bin and drop his empty can.

Getting all riled up about the fuel that kept Indigo running through the winter—and spring, summer and fall, for that matter—was useless. If his neighbors wanted to gossip about his interest in Grier, he couldn’t stop them. Besides, he had far bigger things on his mind.

Like the woman who waited for him at the end of his next flight.

Grier stared out her window at the bright lights of Anchorage as the plane did a hard bank to the right. After miles of darkness, the lights were a welcoming beacon.

She was home.

Or at least what passed for home for another month. Six weeks, tops.

That had been Walker’s latest estimate of how much longer it would take to clear up Jonas Winston’s last will and testament.

Walker had been kind enough to give her an out the week before, suggesting she could stay in New

York and allow him to handle the majority of the proceedings, with her presence necessary only once everything was finalized, but she had refused.

It was bad enough her half sister, Kate, had been the recipient of their father's love and affection for the first twenty-six years of her life. She'd be damned if she'd let the woman have easy access to Jonas's things while Grier sat four thousand miles away waiting for news.

The funny thing was, she acknowledged to herself as she reached beneath her seat for her tote, it wasn't even Jonas's possessions she really cared about. She had a home; she certainly didn't need his. What she did need were answers.

And some small piece of him she could keep.

Sloan smiled a groggy half grin from across the aisle. "You ready?"

"As I'll ever be."

Walker helped her collect her suitcase from the overhead and, as if time were on fast-forward, before she could blink she was filing out of the plane's side door.

The jet bridge was a short walk, but her gaze caught on one of the many tourism posters framed along the corrugated walls: INDIGO TRAVEL AND TRANSPORT.

Mick's company.

As if to simply reinforce the connection, the photo showed Mick and his partner, Jack, bookending the front propeller of one of their planes, broad smiles on their faces. Each sported shoulders like a football player, but where Jack had the heavier build of a grizzly bear, Mick was lean and rangy.

Not for the first time, Grier tried to grasp exactly what it was that made the men up here quite so appealing. It had struck her from the first moments she entered the small town of Indigo, Alaska. She'd assumed the men of Alaska would be hale and hearty. She hadn't counted on their being quite so lovable.

A couple of women behind her giggled and Grier tuned in to their conversation, pulling her attention from the poster as she continued moving down the jet bridge.

"Rachel said the men up here were good-looking."

"She didn't say they looked like Greek gods." Another giggle floated up. "I think we need to kick off our visit by supporting the local economy."

"Indigo Travel and Transport," her friend replied, and Grier didn't miss the light slap of a high five.

Sloan turned from where she walked a few paces ahead and reached for her hand.

"Come on," she whispered on a tight squeeze. "It'll be fine."

Grier took comfort in the support her friend always seemed to share with such simple, effortless ease.

And then the jet bridge ended and Grier suddenly realized she had a far bigger problem than misplaced jealousy over giggling singletons.

Mick O'Shaughnessy was waiting for her.

Mick fought the wave of nerves that dive-bombed his stomach as he waited for Grier to come out of the door to gate seven. He'd played the conversation in his head about fifty different ways since walking into the airport an hour ago and hadn't settled on anything.

"Hi." Yeah, a real smooth opener.

"Good to see you." What was he, a talk show host?

"Happy New Year." Only if he were Dick Fucking Clark.

And then there were no words, save one, as Grier walked through the door with Sloan and Walker.

Wow.

Mick lifted his hand in a wave to catch her attention and the rest of the airport faded away.

How had this happened?

He loved women. He loved their perspective and the way their take on the world around them was just...different from his. And unlike a lot of men he knew, he loved their company in bed or out.

But Grier Thompson was different.

She was...*so much more*, somehow. More interesting. More enticing. More compelling than anyone he'd ever met.

"Hi."

"Hi." He leaned down before he could stop himself and pressed a quick kiss on her cheek. The light scent of her filled his nose and the nerves flooding his stomach shifted into something a great deal more interesting.

Need. Desire. *And hunger.*

Walker slapped him on the shoulder and reached for his hand, the moment shattered in the wake of his friend's exuberance. Mick didn't miss the frustration that crossed Sloan's gorgeous cheekbones, and it was that slight acknowledgment that had him smiling and slapping Walker on the back as they embraced.

Damn, but he'd missed his friend—even if he was about as subtle as a freight train.

He reached for Sloan next, not surprised to hear the lightly whispered "sorry" as she hugged him.

"Good flight?"

A round of murmured "yes's" and they were off.

Mick reached for the handle of Grier's suitcase and pointed toward the herd of people heading down the corridor. "Baggage claim's that way."

"This is all I have."

Mick glanced down at the small roll-aboard in his grip and the large bag that sat on top of it. "But you were gone more than a week."

"I packed light."

"Oh."

The first smile he'd seen lit up her face. "You were expecting six pieces of matched Louis Vuitton?"

He couldn't hold back the grin, the last vestiges of nervous energy fading in the bright light of her smile. "Maybe only four."

Grier's smile brightened even further as something suspiciously like mischief alighted in the depths of her gray gaze. "Ask Sloan how many bags she brought."

Mick had spent far too many years with Walker and their other best friend, Roman, to ask a question so deliberately posed. With a broad smile for Sloan, he pointed in the direction of the claim area.

"I'm sure every piece is full of well-needed items."

"Ass kisser," Grier muttered as Sloan gifted him with a broad smile.

"Nope." Feeling lighter than he had in days, he draped a casual arm around Grier's shoulders and leaned down to whisper in her ear. "I'm just very, very smart."

Chapter Two

Grier tamped down on the rush of joy that assaulted her in waves from the base of her neck straight down her spine the moment Mick wrapped his arm around her. Although he had dropped his arm when they'd arrived in the baggage area, she could still feel the heavy weight of where his body had rested against hers. She could still smell his delicious scent—a mix of leather and fresh air that had her body reacting in needy hunger.

“That’s quite a welcome,” Sloan whispered as the men moved off to grab her bags. “And I’m suddenly quite pleased I packed half my apartment since it gives us a few extra minutes to talk.”

“Oh please.” Grier waved a hand. “That’s not even half your closet.”

“Shhh—that’s our secret.”

“And now you’re just a liar as I know damn well Walker has actually seen your apartment.”

“The apartment, yes. I won’t let him within ten feet of my closet. And you’re stalling.”

“And you’re making too much of this. Whatever else Mick O’Shaughnessy is to me, he is my friend.”

“That man had his arm wrapped around you in a rather possessive grasp. It was way more than friendly. And those women from the plane who ogled his photo on the jet bridge”—Sloan pointed at them standing at the far side of the claim area—“haven’t stopped giving you the evil eye. Even they can see there’s something between you.”

“He’s a toucher.”

“Not to me.”

“Walker would beat him senseless.”

“Grier, you know what I mean.”

“I’m actually trying to ignore what you mean.”

Sloan moved so Grier was forced to look at her and not the slow-moving baggage belt. “Why are you being so stubborn about this?”

“Hello, pot?”

“Grier, I’m serious.”

“I’m serious, too, Sloan. I appreciate the concern, but there’s nothing between Mick and me.”

Before her friend could object or call her on her bullshit, Grier clarified. “Nothing that can be acted on.”

The men had Sloan’s luggage and were headed back in their direction. “Now let’s go collect your treasure trove of clothing and get going.”

Before she could drag her own bag behind her, Sloan laid a hand on her arm. “Please, wait a sec. Look. I’ll cut out the pushy shit if you’ll promise me one thing.”

“What’s that?”

“Give him a chance. The two of you might surprise yourselves.”

“Maybe it just looks like we fit on the surface.”

“Or maybe it’s real.”

She’d never been very good at keeping things from Sloan and she was getting tired of defending a position she knew was rather flimsy, so Grier opted for the truth. “What if it’s just a matter of history repeating itself?”

“He’s not like Jason. He’s nothing like him.”

“Actually, I was talking about my mother and father.”

The light that dawned brightly in Sloan’s blue eyes let Grier know she’d finally gotten through.

“Some things just aren’t meant to be, Sloan. And I’m living proof of that reality.”

The flight to Indigo was short, and before Mick knew it, he was helping Walker drag Sloan’s bags to the house while the women stayed in the warmth of his SUV.

“She wanted to bring six,” Walker said on a heavy huff of air as he dropped one of the largest suitcases at his front door before digging in his pockets for his keys.

“Six suitcases? No shit?”

“Scout’s honor.” The keys jingled from the tip of Walker’s fingers as he got the key in the lock.

“You sure you don’t want to come with us tonight? My grandmother said the more, the merrier.”

“You guys enjoy. I know Sophie’s eager to see you.”

“You’re practically her second grandson and you’re definitely her favorite. Truth be told, I think she likes you more than she likes me.”

Mick was surprised by how closely Walker’s words matched Jack’s earlier.

“*Favorite son.*”

Brushing it off along with the painful reminder that his own father certainly didn’t see him that way, Mick lifted his two bags and followed Walker into the entranceway. “Of course she does—she’s got outstanding taste. But seeing as how my grandmother did her typical feast for Christmas and how Maggie out at the airstrip cooked her New Year’s Day spread, all I can say is that it’s your turn, buddy.”

“Traitor,” Walker muttered as he flipped a light switch.

“No, I’m a dutiful grandson who’s already paid his holiday dues.”

They headed back to the SUV and Mick wanted to laugh at the sight of Sloan struggling with her oversized carry-on tote. The besotted, sloppy smile that crossed his best friend’s face was proof positive Walker’s bitching about the suitcases was all for show as he stepped up to help her.

They all said a round of good-byes, cut short by the biting cold, and Grier turned on a wave to open the door to the passenger seat. Even in heavy layers of winter padding, she captivated him, her dark hair flowing down her back out of the wool hat that sat slightly askew on her head.

God, he had it bad.

There were about a million things he loved about his home, but winter attire wasn’t one of them. Nevertheless, he’d accepted long ago that the women up here spent a good portion of the year dressed up like the Michelin Man, with sizable acres of wool and plaid to add color.

So how did she manage to make that heavy padding look sexy and adorable, all in one fell swoop?

Grier lifted a booted foot to step on the running panel beneath the door and the hard-packed snow caking her foot was slippery, catching her off-balance. He was already moving toward her to help her up into the car when her footing went out from under her and she tumbled back against him.

His chest took the impact of her fall and his arms wrapped around her to steady her. Unwilling to miss the fortuitous opportunity, Mick tightened his hold and leaned in toward her ear. “You okay?”

“Y-y-yeah. Sure.”

He fought the overwhelming urge to bend down and kiss the exposed swath of skin at the base of her neck visible where her scarf parted, but he held himself back, whispering instead. “Positive?”

He saw heavy puffs rise into the air as her breathing turned shallow and felt his own ramp up in response.

“I’m fine. Really.”

Shifting his hold to her elbow, he took her at her word and took a step back. “Let me help you up

into the car.”

“Thanks.”

Mick crossed to his own side and climbed in. He could see the Indigo Blue from Walker’s front door, which meant their time together was about to come to an end.

“Did you have a nice holiday?” The breathy overtones that had filled her voice only moments before were gone, floating away on the cold night air.

“It was good. My grandmother cooked a feast on Christmas that produced a week of excellent leftovers.”

He got a small laugh at that, but she didn’t say anything else as she stared out the window. “What about you?”

The lightest of sighs escaped her lips before she spoke. “The holidays were the usual—quiet and dignified. Except, of course, for my mother’s annual New Year’s Eve bash. It’s quite the crush.”

The image of Grier mixing it up with New York’s blue bloods had his fingers tightening on the steering wheel. “Your mother likes to entertain?”

“She likes being the center of society’s attention. Which is quite the opposite end of the spectrum from entertaining, truth be told.”

“I can imagine.” He couldn’t, but Mick had pieced together a few comments from Walker and Avery along with his own observations. Although he really didn’t know much about Grier’s background, what he did know was that the bright and interesting woman sitting next to him had built those attributes pretty much all on her own merits.

“You didn’t enjoy the party?”

“I never enjoy the party.”

The words were out before he could stop them. “So why go?”

“I was home for eight days. It was a lot easier than picking a fight. Besides, I didn’t have any plans this year.”

“Sloan and Walker were in the city.”

Grier glanced up at him, a half smile filling her face. “And they were incredibly sweet to invite me to their evening of take-out food and wine, but they’re so wrapped up in each other—as they should be—that I didn’t want to intrude.”

“That I can understand. Jack and Jessica spent the holiday slobbering all over each other. It would have been gross if it hadn’t been so sweet.” The porte cochere came into view as Mick swung into the parking lot of the hotel.

“Is that a note of jealousy I detect?”

“About Jack and Jess?” At her nod, he kept going. “Not in the least. I’m happy for them. I just don’t want to see it.”

Grier did laugh at that, the light, breezy sound echoing through the car. “Point taken. Love is in the air.”

His hand tightened on the handle of her roll-aboard. “Is it?”

“It certainly seems to be.”

Grier winced at her overly bright tone, but refused to let the moment become heavy with innuendo. She couldn’t overanalyze every word that came out of her mouth to Mick, no matter how nervous he made her.

And she certainly couldn’t sit and analyze those crazy moments she’d spent in his arms when all she’d wanted to do was turn her head ever so slightly so she could capture his lips with hers. Or the strong, steady feel of his back pressed to hers that had her standing in the circle of his arms just a few moments more than necessary. They had shared one night together weeks ago, and she needed to get past it.

The real rub of it all, Grier knew, was that when she got right down to it, the man made her jumpy. Off-balance. Uncentered.

And she loved it.

Before she could dwell on it further, Mick pulled up to the hotel and turned to face her. His searching blue gaze softened as crinkles wrapped around the corners of his eyes, pulling her from her memories. “The grandmothers are in their glory. Not only have Walker and Sloan and Jack and Jess hooked up, but they’re taking credit for two more successful matches from the dinner dance at the end of the year.”

Grier couldn’t stop the bubble of laughter as the image of the town grandmothers took root. “Why do I have visions of them rubbing their hands together like a group of villainesses in a bad silent movie?”

“Don’t think I haven’t wondered over the years if the three grandmothers had formed a coven and were practicing witchcraft outside the Indigo city limits during a full moon.”

An image of a sweet, gray-haired woman with bright blue eyes filled her mind’s eye. “Your cute, incredibly charming grandmother doesn’t strike me as the type.”

“Oh, don’t let that pleasant demeanor fool you. Mary O’Shaughnessy may be small, but she’d give you grizzly a run for its money. Add to it she’s extra ornery when under the influence of Sophie and Julia and I wouldn’t bet against her. Those three take matchmaking very seriously.”

Grier couldn’t stop laughing as she unbuckled her seat belt. How was it possible that he made her deeply uneasy yet he was so easy to be with?

It was a question with no simple answers.

The hotel lobby glowed brightly as she stared out the windows. “It’s nice to be back.”

“Do you really feel that way?”

Grier turned back to face him. “Well, yeah.”

“The town wasn’t all that friendly to you when you arrived. That’s saying something if you still like Indigo anyway.”

“The town’s incredibly charming. And no, people weren’t all that friendly,” she acknowledged, unable to lie. Those first few weeks had been more disorienting—and deeply disappointing—than she even wanted to admit to herself. “But everyone came around after Sloan showed up.”

“Does that bother you?”

His curious tone stopped her up short. “Do you really care about this?”

“Yeah, actually. I do. I didn’t think your initial reception in town was very fair. Still don’t, but I am glad folks came around.”

“It’s a lot to ask of people. They’ve known Kate forever and I was the interloper.”

His gaze drifted back to her. “You’re Jonas Winston’s daughter, not an interloper.”

“Illegitimate daughter.”

“You’re his *daughter*, Grier. Don’t let anyone diminish that, least of all yourself.”

The earnest tone and hard set of his jaw lit a small spark of something she couldn’t quite define. His conviction—his absolute belief in her—was heady. And it was something she’d never experienced from anyone other than Sloan.

As if he sensed the moment had gotten too tense, a broad smile cracked his face as his blue eyes found hers. “You’re a keeper, Grier Thompson, and I’m damn glad you’re here.”

“Mick—” She broke off, not sure what to say, because she *was* glad to be here. With him.

And she didn’t quite know what to do about it.

“Go ahead on in. I’ll take care of your bags.”

“Grier!” Avery’s shriek echoed around the lobby of the Indigo Blue as she ran from behind the check

in desk to greet Grier, grabbing her in a huge bear hug. Mick stood off to the side, unable to hide his amusement at Avery's enthusiastic response to their arrival.

Grier took in the warm hug and squeezed back just as hard.

Oh, how she'd missed Avery Marks.

They'd known each other for only a short time—not even six weeks—but the woman had become essential to her life as Sloan was.

A quick nip of gratitude filled her memories as she thought about her first month in Indigo. The chilly reception, with no support from anyone save Walker and his legal advice, had nearly done her in.

And now she was hugging her new friend as if they'd known each other for years, more at home with her than anyone she'd grown up with or knew in New York.

Avery turned to buss Mick's cheek with a quick kiss before dragging them both toward the hotel's large bar area. "Drinks are on me. I've missed you."

"You saw me yesterday," Mick teased her as they moved up toward the dark wood of the bar.

"Oh yeah, that's right. I had to use you as a stand-in so I could gossip with someone."

"Ooh. You've got juicies? Who's riding the gossip train now?" Grier smiled as she slid onto one of the heavy leather-covered stools that rimmed the edge of the bar, then reached for a handful of pretzels from a small silver dish. "I want to hear all about it."

Mick pointed toward the far side of the bar as Avery pulled on the tap for his beer. "That's my cue to go. I see Doc Cloud just came in, so why don't you pour me one for him, too? I think I'll engage in some gossip of my own."

Avery reached for another glass and deftly began curling it in her hands as it filled with bright amber liquid. "Discussing—oh, excuse me, *betting*—on this week's bowl games does not constitute gossip."

"Nah, but it's a hell of a lot more fun." Mick grabbed the two foaming beers off the counter, then leaned down to press a quick kiss on Grier's lips.

Grier felt her mouth drop into a small, shocked *O* of surprise as he pulled away. Once again, his rich, warm scent surrounded her and she could still feel the hard imprint of his lips against hers.

He deliberately didn't look back as he crossed the lobby to where Doc Cloud settled himself in a chair and she fought to close her mouth so she didn't look like a gaping fish.

"Do I even need to ask the question or is there a gigantic bubble above my head with words in it?" A wicked grin spread across Avery's face as she twisted the corkscrew in a bottle of Cabernet that Grier had become particularly fond of.

"First, you sound just like Sloan. And second, I had no idea he was going to do that."

"It didn't stop you from enjoying it."

Grier refused to respond for fear of digging a hole for herself she'd not be able to climb back out of. She *had* enjoyed it.

That brief, possessive touch of his lips and the merry twinkle in his bright blue eyes had sent a shock of heat to her core that she'd likely be reliving long into the night.

"He's still crazy about you, you know," Avery added as she poured the rich red wine.

"Yeah."

"And...?"

"And what, Avery? Nothing's changed."

"You mean you haven't turned over a new leaf for the new year?"

"And what new leaf would that be? The one that says I'll indiscriminately knock boots with the hot bush pilot until I go home again in four to six weeks? I don't think so."

"It's not indiscriminate if it's only one hot bush pilot."

“It doesn’t change the four-to-six-weeks part.” Grier reached for her wine. “Walker thinks it’ll all be wrapped up by then.”

“And then you’re going to leave?”

Grier swirled the wine in her glass. “I’ve got a phone interview for a job tomorrow.”

“Is it something you want?”

The question struck Grier with swift clarity and in that moment, all the reasons she and Sloan had come to care for Avery so quickly were clear.

“You’re not upset?”

Avery laid a hand over hers, the show of solidarity and silent support a beacon Grier wanted to cling to.

“Of course not. I’m disappointed at the idea I won’t see you all that often, but I want what’s best for you. You’re my friend and I want you to be happy.”

“It’s at a very well-respected accounting firm. It’s not quite what I was doing before and it’s nowhere near the partner track I was on, but it’s something. Seeing as how my name’s not exactly golden among the New York firms right now, I’m grateful for the opportunity.”

Avery lifted her own wine and swirled it in the light, her actions casual and her voice low enough for the few patrons assembled around the bar wouldn’t hear. “Why should your name be mud? From the little you’ve said, it was your ex’s fault you were dismissed.”

“Doesn’t matter. I’m the reason his behavior was exposed. I’m damaged goods.”

“You look pretty saucy from here.”

“It’s that fresh Alaska air.”

Avery flashed another wicked grin. “I think it’s the fresh Alaska men.”

Grier risked a glance over her shoulder to where Mick and Doc Cloud sat in overstuffed chairs, engaged in comfortable conversation. She couldn’t argue with Avery’s point, no matter how many times she told herself she couldn’t—or shouldn’t—partake of the locals. There was *something* about this one particular man.

Mick had shed his leather jacket and she could see the heavy flannel shirt that covered his broad shoulders. Even when he was sitting, his coiled, rangy strength drew her attention so that she could barely see anything but him.

Uncomfortable with the renewed wave of heat that had her thick wool sweater suddenly feeling much too heavy, Grier shifted her gaze toward Doc Cloud. Despite his age, which she estimated to be about seventy-five, he had a hale and hearty attractiveness that was unusual this late in life. The doctor had an incredibly appealing competence and underlying strength.

Maybe there really was something in the Alaska air.

Or, she acknowledged to herself, maybe it was that people had different priorities than she was used to.

In Indigo, friendships didn’t depend on how much money you made or who your friends were or whether you kept your mouth shut after watching your fiancé humiliate you.

Grier took a thoughtful sip of her wine as she allowed her gaze to continue to roam around the room. People she recognized—townsfolk she’d gotten to know over the last few months—sat in small conversation areas while a waitress worked the room, taking care of everyone.

She’d nearly turned back in her seat—more than ready to hear all of Avery’s good gossip—when the front door of the Indigo Blue opened.

And her half sister, Kate, walked through the door.

Chapter Three

Kate Winston tugged at the neckline of her heavy sweater as she walked into the warm lobby of the Indigo Blue. She hadn't wanted to come out tonight, but Trina had insisted she make some attempt to be social. The holidays had been about as interesting as a root canal—and about as painful too—and she hadn't done much socializing.

She certainly hadn't *felt* very social. Her father was gone and the holidays had been just as difficult as she'd known they would be.

But at least she'd made it through the first Christmas without him.

That now made Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas she'd passed, not to mention New Year's Day. If she took out the birthdays to come in January—hers and her father's—she could almost believe she was halfway through the first year of grieving.

Almost.

“Oh shit.” Kate heard Trina's not so lightly whispered curse. “I didn't know.”

Kate didn't need to look across the room to know what had brought on the sudden wash of silence that had hushed every patron in the bar.

Her half sister, Grier, was back in town.

On a soft sigh, Kate crossed the room toward an empty set of chairs that formed a small conversation area. “Come on, Trina. Let's grab a seat.”

She'd be damned if she'd run away. This was *her* home.

“We can leave if you want and go to Maguire's.”

Kate didn't miss Grier's gaze as it caught her from across the room before the woman turned back around on her barstool. A quick spark fired in her blood as the low hum of conversation started up again. “No.”

“Look at her over there,” Trina added, warming up to the subtle battle of wills. “Thick as thieves. You'd think Avery would have more respect for the locals instead of taking the side of an interloper.”

“Are we really going to have this conversation again?”

“Yes, because you refuse to have it for the first time, let alone again. Why won't you talk about this?”

Kate knew exactly why she wasn't talking about it—because whatever she said would not only be quoted across town faster than she could walk the four blocks home, but it would be twisted beyond a recognition as it traveled. She knew not everyone thought of Grier in the same way Trina did.

As an interloper.

In fact, she knew a lot of people were starting to think Grier had a rather decent claim to a place in town. And they had also begun to think of Grier Thompson as their own.

Just like her father had.

“What can I get for you?” Avery's smile was broad and her warm brown gaze was tinged with sympathy.

“Chardonnay.” Kate heard the clipped notes of her own voice but wasn't all that inclined to hide them. The friendly smile she could take.

The sympathy was off-limits.

“Strawberry margarita,” Trina added. “And some of that bar mix you have.”

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