

Cold Spell Excerpt

LIDDY TREKKED DOWN the path alone toward the Lodge just before twilight. *Shit!* After she'd unpacked, she'd found her goggles had cracked in her luggage during flight. She had no choice but to buy a pair from the shop for the duration of the vacation. While spending the money irritated her beyond belief, it was either that or go without.

Flurries of snow danced in the air, and Liddy stopped among the pine trees and breathed in the fresh air. Crisp and refreshing. Just perfect. It had been far too long since her last winter vacation. Her favorite, even more so than beach trips.

Shortly after her parents had adopted her, they'd brought her skiing to Lake Tahoe, to celebrate. That trip had triggered her love for snow skiing though the last time had been with her parents as a college graduation present, where they'd secretly saved to surprise her by returning to Lake Tahoe in celebration.

Between working at the boutique and volunteering at Holly House, there was hardly any time for socializing. Damn, life had been crazy lately. Well, the entirety of her life had been crazy, actually. Thank God she had two of the best friends a woman could ask for to keep her in check. To remind her that she was, indeed, not psychotic, and more than worthy of the best kind of relationship.

The Lodge sat before her like a long, log cabin, an oasis in a desert of heavenly, frozen wonderland. The warm light in the windows gave it a Candyland cottage appeal in a frosting landscape.

She smiled.

A few steps into the Lodge, and Liddy had to catch her breath. It would take a while to get used to the altitude. The lobby was even more packed than when they'd first arrived. The rental shop was toward the back, and she wound her way through the throng of people.

The same handsome and loud man from the earlier in the day now stood by the back door, calling people out.

"Anyone need skiing lessons? We have the best instructors on the planet, right here at Buffalo Ridge. Or at least the best ones who showed up to their final exams." He grinned and got a few chuckles from bystanders. "We promise full support and positive reinforcement, and will only make fun of you behind your back. We encourage everyone to take a nice full shot of whiskey before they put on their skis, to help loosen up your muscles and your wallets for extra tips."

"Oh, brother," Liddy mumbled under her breath, and pushed through a crowd of teenagers watching the man's pathetic excuse for a sales pitch.

The instructor continued, "Safety is our top priority, followed closely by leaving all inhibitions at the door."

Just as I expected—one of those guys.

Liddy had almost made it to the end of the hallway.

"You, the gorgeous woman in the white coat trying to sneak by..."

Liddy froze. And cringed.

The man grinned. "You look like you could use ski lessons. Or at least a stiff drink at the bar."

She straightened her spine, and addressed him eye-to-eye, despite all the gawkers and bystanders. "Are you the instructor? *My* instructor?"

"I can be, for you."

Liddy smiled. "Then, no thanks."

The man's smile slipped. A few guests oohed at the burn, and others chuckled.

"Why not?" he asked.

Never mind that I ski black diamonds, I just don't like you. "If it were with one of the others, I might consider it."

A few more hisses came from the crowd.

She turned to find the rental shop, but she heard his footsteps behind her, trying to follow.

"Wait, you don't like me? Everyone likes me."

"I can't imagine why," Liddy threw over her shoulder.

He laughed, the sound of his voice much closer than before. "Why don't you like me?"

"You're obnoxious. *And* I already know how to ski."

"I could make you better."

She rolled her eyes. "Modesty is so hard to find these days."

"I'm not being cocky, just trying to find the best way to talk to you more. It's not every day an angel walks into Buffalo Ridge."

Liddy whirled, and glared at him head on. *An angel.* That's what the jackass in Mexico had called her, right before he'd dropped a roofie in her drink and stole her stuff. Now, she never trusted it. "I'm not interested."

He raised his hands in surrender, and chuckled. "Okay, fair enough. I'll see you on the slopes. Be safe."

As he walked away, she picked up a pair of stylish purple goggles.

Arrogant asswipe.