
12 NAUGHTY DAYS OF CHRISTMAS 2021

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

A Kinkirk Holiday

MEGAN MCCOY

Chapter 1

Across the small town of Zephyrhills, Missouri, large shaggy heads turned, looked up, and waited. Nick stopped decorating the tree, his wife Beth, continued on and didn't seem to notice. Ryan's wife Molly, though, had been around long enough to know something was going on and she patted his hand as Ryan laid his fork back on his dessert plate. Shane stopped his car as he was driving home. Rome sighed as he paused from cleaning his bar top, then went back and put a burger on the grill. The twins, Lucas and Connerly stopped playing the video game that they and their cousins Josh and R.J. had been enjoying. Thomas paused the lecture to his errant wife and listened. Around town, Kinkirk men stopped what they were doing, and wondered: Who was it? What did she need? How could they help?

Hailey Napier sighed, shivering in sheer exhaustion. Her arms ached, her legs hurt and numbing cold snaked through her. Stopping at the last town would have been wise, but it didn't seem right. Something kept telling her to go further down the road, and while she often didn't listen to her intuition to her own regret, this time she had. She rolled into the small town proudly

boasting the name Zephyrhills. She was still in Missouri, she knew, but from what she could see, this secluded town looked like a small throw back in time.

Her motorcycle seemed unusually loud as she slowed to head toward what she hoped would be a business center. It was late at night and it seemed everything was probably already closed. She hoped to find a small no frills hotel, but would really love food. Maybe there was someplace still open and she wouldn't have to dine on vending machine offerings.

The Christmas lights sparkled on the store fronts, and she loved the old-fashioned street lights that made the lightly falling snow show up like diamonds ahead of her.

Shivering, she felt glad for her very heavy winter coat and helmet that kept her mostly warm on the road, but the cold was winning now. It was time to get off here. A seat that didn't move or vibrate sounded really great. So did a huge burger and fries with a frosty cold beer, but she'd settle for a gas station turkey and cheese with a side of coffee.

A feeling of ease came over her the further she drove into town. Something warm and comforting enveloped her and she relaxed despite her shivering. She'd look around more in the morning, but this town would more than likely be her next stop. She'd find a job, knowing that as a waitress and expert bartender, she could get a job anywhere, especially during the holidays. No close family meant she could work all the shifts other employees didn't want; extra tips and fun, boisterous groups kept her busy and happy. Biker bars were her favorite, but she cleaned up well, and could fit in just about anywhere, thanks to the exotic looks she inherited from her mother and her never-take-nonsense-from-anyone attitude she got from her dad. At least that's how she remembered him or built him up to be.

What was it about this town? It just felt right. Like home. On the outside, it was an old-fashioned, average, small all-American town; the kind they featured on makeover shows on television.

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The kind of town Hollywood producers seemed to think was how everyone lived.

Hailey shook her helmeted head and smiled at her fancy. She knew most small towns were the same. Shiny and clean on the outside, but they all had their secrets. Her brain was over tired, that's all it was, thinking this town might be special. However, she'd been riding all day and into the night, perhaps the town had been pulling her here. Laughing softly at her own nonsense, she spied a small, still lit up, bar and grill down a side street. The Wild Wolf, the sign said. Nice. Food called and then she'd find a place to crash for the night. Lucky thing they were still open, though she only noted a couple of trucks, and one couple was leaving as she arrived. Hopefully the cook hadn't shut down the grill yet.

Parking her bike, she took off her helmet, slipped it over her arm and grabbed her wallet out of the tank bag before heading in the door. Just as she opened the door, she saw the outside lights turn off. Perhaps if she offered to help clean up, she could still get a sandwich. Depending on who was behind the bar, that could very well work out. Walking in, she looked around, yes, only one other table occupied and they looked about ready to leave. There seemed to be one man working behind the bar, which, she noted, had a lot of very high-end liquors on the shelves in the back, enhanced by a huge mirror. Okay, this wasn't a biker bar, but a nicer, more upscale bar and diner kind of place. She liked it. A Christmas tree twinkled soft lights in the corner and she could smell fresh evergreen. Hopefully they needed more seasonal help. She could envision herself working here for a couple months.

Across the town, the males of the Kinkirk clan shared a single thought. 'She's safe, Rome has her' and went back to their lives, tasks and fun. They'd find out more when they needed to know, but no one needed to worry about her tonight.

. . .

Hailey walked confidently into the bar and straight to the man who stood in front of it. Well, he was easy on the eyes, now, wasn't he? Tall, dark, huge, handsome, bearded and luscious. Yup, she already liked this town. Hopefully, she could charm him into feeding her before she got back on the cold bike to find a place to sleep.

"Well, hello, handsome." She turned on her southern drawl for him.

"Good evening, young lady. You look hungry and lost," he said and pulled a plate from under the counter. "I'll make me another one, here you go."

How did he know that she'd been craving a burger with everything and fries?

"Don't want to make the boss man mad about you using the kitchen after hours," she said, sliding her coat off and putting it on the stool beside her. "But that looks really good, thank you." No way was she turning down food, as her growling stomach understood what her nose was smelling.

"I have an in with the boss man," he said. "As long as I clean up before the cook comes in tomorrow, I'm good."

He leaned over and pulled the tap, pouring her a glass of water. *Well, it isn't beer, but it will do*, she thought as she took a big bite of the burger and shut her eyes in happiness. Who cared how he knew? She could consider it an early Christmas present. Now what would she get him? It was only December first, she realized. She had a few weeks to think about it.

She watched as the last group left and he went to the kitchen with their plates, then came back to the bar and started washing up. She could smell his burger frying back there. There was something about the closed bar that made her feel safe, almost like she was home. She'd worked in bars all her life it seemed, and loved the atmosphere and ambiance, the crowds, the noise

and just all of it. Especially, though, she loved the bar after it was closed, all quiet and relaxed, where she could clean and straighten and do the night's paperwork in silence. It was always a great way to unwind after a fun, hectic night.

The man clanked things around in the kitchen and came back with a burger of his own.

"Fryer shut down?" she asked. "Here, I'll share mine." She nudged her plate in his direction, adjusting it slightly so the fries were closest to him.

"Thanks," he said and sat down beside her. "So, little one, what brings you out so late at night?"

"Just got here," she said. "Realized I hadn't eaten since this morning." She grabbed a fry at the same time he did and felt a tingle as his hand touched hers. *Hmmm. What was that?* "You were the only one open."

"Had a private party tonight," he said. "Otherwise I'd have closed up an hour ago. Lucky for you."

"Obviously," she agreed. "Would have settled for a gas station sandwich, but this was amazing. I really appreciate it."

"I'm Romulus Kinkirk," he said. "You can call me Rome."

"Romulus?" She grinned, grabbing another fry. "Your mom have a thing for werewolves? Got a brother named Remus?"

"Yes, and yes," he said, finishing his burger in three bites. "And you are?"

"Oh, sorry. Hailey Napier. Just got to town, and looking for a seasonal job. Got any openings?"

"What can you do?" he asked.

"Make you the best margarita you've ever had; wade into a fight, break it up; run a pool table; and lose my ass at poker, which is why I need a job." She finished her burger almost reluctantly. It would be time to go soon.

"If you gotta have your ass handed to you, yours is darn cute," he said, but smiled in a way that she took no offense. "Yeah, I'm looking for help, I mean, after all..."

“It’s the holidays,” they said together.

“Yeah, I figured, all the extra parties and things. Not hard to find a job this time of year.”

“Got references?” he asked.

“Sure do, out in the bike.”

“What do you ride?” He grabbed the last fry, then picked up both their plates.

“2020 Gold Wing,” she said. She loved that bike.

“Touring bike,” he said. “Smart move for long trips.”

“How did you know I was on a long trip?” Should she be nervous? He was in the kitchen, though, and didn’t answer. She didn’t feel nervous. Probably too tired. Although, there was the mysterious warmth that ebbed and flowed through her. Odd, but, again, probably, just tired.

Standing up to stretch, she told him when he came back, “I really need to get going, find a place to sleep tonight. What time do you want me here tomorrow and do you have a dress code?” *Please let him not have a dress code.* “Do I need to meet the big boss?”

“Nobody is bigger than me,” he said and grinned in a way that made a shiver go down her back.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” she said. “Know any place cheap I can crash for the night? And how much do I owe you?” She grabbed her wallet out of the back of her jeans and looked at him.

He seemed to make a decision. He waved her wallet away. “There’s a couple options. A no-tell motel is down the street about a mile, but I live upstairs.”

She shook her head. “Nope on that, but thanks. Not that kind of girl.” Although, it was very tempting to look at those huge arms and want to sleep all snuggled in them.

He grinned at her. “I was offering the little spare bedroom, but I also have a drunk cot off the kitchen. It’s two in the morning, and I don’t know if the kid at the motel will be passed out at

the desk there or not. Might as well stay here. You're safe, you have my word. I take care of my people."

Hailey nodded slowly, although she didn't know how she was his people. For some reason she believed him. Yeah, she could sleep on the drunk cot. She'd seen them before. Someone had too many and shouldn't drive, or someone needed to hide from their boyfriend for a while crashed on them. Occasionally if an employee needed a place for the night – snow storms or car problems, they'd stay there. Not all places had them, but enough did she knew about it. She'd slept in worse. Plus, there was a bathroom and a kitchen right here. No shower, but she'd worry about that in the morning.

"I'll take the drunk cot," she said and once again felt that odd warm, comfort flow over her, as if she were being enveloped in a warm hug. Strange. "Thank you." She smiled at him while trying to stifle a yawn. "Glad you had that party tonight."

"Worked out well, didn't it?" He smiled at her and she felt that feeling again. Tired. That is all it was, surely. "Go get what you need for the night and we'll do paperwork and talk more in the morning."

Standing up, she took her keys out of her pocket and slipped her coat on, leaving her helmet on the seat, and walked to the door, dreading the cold. She inhaled a scent of warm evergreen before she opened the door and went back out into the snowy cold to grab her duffle and another case from the side bags. She'd leave the rest for tomorrow.

Yes, she's safe. No, I know nothing yet, just that she needs us. Now, let me get her settled and let me go to bed. Some of us have been working all day. Yes, I have the family Christmas party on the schedule. Really? Is that important right now? I'm tired. Good night all. I'll keep you updated.

. . .

Rome went to the back room, and quickly checked the bed. It was a little nicer than he'd let on. He'd had a waitress stay here for a few weeks when she was down and out and she'd fixed it up some before she left, as a thank you. Something he'd never thought to do, but right now, he appreciated the thick duvet and soft pillows on the single bed. She'd have a decent place to put down that pretty head. Hailey was very attractive, or she would be when she wasn't so worn out and wind-blown. Not that he minded that at all. He liked tough females and this one was, he already knew. He knew something else, too, though, something even she probably didn't know. Sometimes rough females needed a Daddy to lean on. Right now, though, his job was simply to make sure she had a good night's sleep and a job to wake up to in the morning. Both of those things were doable.

He went to the door and opened it, then strode out into the wind and spitting snow to help her carry in what she needed. Where had she put her bag in that motorcycle? He'd have to check it out when it got light. He had a bike, too, but it wasn't a big touring bike like this one, just a small Harley he zipped around town on in the summer.

He reached out, grabbed her duffle bag, and said, "Come on. The rest can wait till tomorrow."

She looked exhausted. Good, she'd sleep well tonight, then. Her back story would be fascinating. What was she running from or hiding from? He'd find out. How did she find this place? He wouldn't find out. They rarely knew. Occasionally someone was brought in by a friend but often, they simply showed up, either here in town, or out in the woods somewhere with no idea how they got there. Fewer of them did that now, but back in his grandfather's day, it happened regularly. Now they showed up in a friend's truck, their own car, the bus that came by twice a week, or rarely, on a fancy motorcycle.

"This way," he said, and led her past the kitchen, that he noticed she'd barely glanced at. Her adrenaline was crashing,

and she needed a bed. “Employee bathroom there, and the room is right here. It’s not much but you will be safe for the night. Sleep as long as you want tomorrow. Tony won’t come in until about ten and we open at eleven. You can sleep all day if you need to, though. Just go see Tony when you wake up and he’ll find me.”

She didn’t ask anything, but eyed the bed and he saw a half smile. Good. She approved. He’d have rather had her upstairs in the guest room, but this one sufficed for tonight. They’d figure out other things tomorrow.

A few minutes later, he left her to go upstairs. He’d be up before Tony got there and would put a sign on the door so no one would disturb her.

Suddenly, the day washed over him. *What am I doing?* he thought as he stood in the shower a few minutes later. This was his busy time of year. He’d been running on caffeine and four hours of sleep since before Thanksgiving and today was only December first. He had an entire month left. The only day off he had this month was the family Christmas party, but since it was here, at his bar, it really didn’t count as a day off. Then there was a half day for the Christmas parade, but again, since he was in it, it didn’t count as time off either.

The last thing he needed was a female to protect, and yet, here she was. With any luck, she’d be a good worker and know a few drinks. Women, especially, wanted all the fancy drinks at Christmas. March would be a good month, one he looked forward to all holiday season. Then everyone just wanted green beer. That was easy.

Still naked, he wandered around his little place. He was proud of what he did and what he’d done. It was long, hard hours, but he’d done very well for himself and as long as he was healthy and strong, he’d keep doing it because he loved it. Then he’d take his savings and do, well, what? Travel? Maybe.

Where had this little one traveled from? he wondered as he climbed

into bed. *Where did she think she was going?* Wherever it was, she was here now, and he would protect her from whatever it was chasing her, her own demons or something physical, for as long as need be. That's that his family did, after all, and had done for generations. One day he would have his own sons to pass down the legacy to them.

He'd grown up knowing this was their calling. All the Kinkirk men knew it, and had known for generations. To them it wasn't a question and there wasn't a reason to ask why. As always, the major question was how did the women find them? A mystery that would probably always be one.

He looked at the clock. Almost three. He needed to go to sleep. Seven came early.

Hailey smiled, half asleep, listening to the sounds of the kitchen: pans clanking, voices barking orders, knives chopping. She smelled something wonderful. Barbeque? Familiar, comforting, then sat straight up in bed. Where was she? She took a deep breath and looked around. Oh. Yeah. Some small podunk town in Missouri. She remembered now.

She also remembered the hunk of male who could very well be her new boss. Grabbing her phone, she saw that it was ten-thirty. She'd slept a long time. That was okay, she reminded herself. Did he expect her to work today? If so, it would be a long night. That rest would be needed. Stretching, she tried to remember where the bathroom was located. Down the hall. Hailey laid back down and stretched again, feeling stiff and sore from her long ride yesterday. She'd found a place to land. Fitting in, at a bar or restaurant, was what she did. She could wait out the holiday season here. Line her pockets with the mostly generous holiday tips, and then be on her way again.

Five more minutes, she told herself and shut her eyes, listening

to the familiar sounds of the kitchen at work. The next time she opened them, her phone told her it was after one. Okay, she really needed to use the bathroom and get around. Time to get up and get to work. She could tell the bar was open and the smell from the kitchen was amazing. Eating again sounded really good. Finally, she swung her feet to the floor, gathered her toiletries and slipped down the hall to the bathroom.

Once she'd cleaned up and gotten dressed in jeans and a black, long-sleeve tee shirt, she pulled her dark hair back in a high ponytail, made the very comfortable bed that thankfully hadn't been a cot, and headed out toward the smell of the kitchen. Three men turned to look at her as she walked in. One was a very short, swarthy man in a white apron; the other a slight ebony-skinned man, and the third was huge – bearded and long hair, muscled and looked very young. Maybe 20, 21?

Smiling, she gave them a small wave. “Hi all, I’m Hailey and I’m looking for Rome.”

The short, smaller man shook his head. “Boss man is working, but I’m under orders to feed you before you do anything else.”

Okay, that worked for her. She sat down on the stool where he motioned.

He didn't even ask what she wanted, but started plating food. Bringing her a plate, he said, “I’m Tony, the cook, that is Harry who helps me and Shane over there is the boss’s nephew.”

“So, suck up to Shane, huh?” she said, digging into the fragrant BBQ sandwich he'd set down in front of her. Yeah, Shane was as big as his uncle, well, almost. They all laughed as she looked around. High-end kitchen and appliances, she noted, very clean and well organized. She approved. She'd worked in much worse.

“You the new bartender?” Harry asked. “Heard we were getting one.”

“Guess so,” she said. “Pretty busy place?”

Tony snorted. “This time of year? Yeah, we can’t keep up. Lunch was crazy and it will start picking up here again in about an hour and go all night.”

“Usually we are closed on Monday,” Shane added. “But not from Thanksgiving to New Years. We’re open every day.”

“That’s tiring,” she said, reluctantly putting the last bite in her mouth. “Thank you, that was amazing.”

“Tony is known for his BBQ,” Shane said “I’m learning his secrets.”

“You better, boy, I’m fixing to retire in a couple years. Someone needs to take over and it sure isn’t going to be Harry. He’s going to nursing school.” Tony said it proudly and made Hailey smile.

“Good for you, Harry,” she said. “Noble profession.”

“Yeah,” Shane said. “Not like I graduated college or anything.”

Hailey giggled. “You aren’t old enough to have graduated college.”

“Shane here is a smart one. Out of high school at sixteen and straight to college,” Tony said.

“Yeah, tons of fun to be an underage kid at college.” Shane grinned at her.

“I can imagine,” Hailey said. All her classes had been online. The dorm life seemed too confining for her. She hadn’t settled in one place her entire life and four years trapped in a dorm was nothing she’d ever wanted to do.

The kitchen door swung open and a tall woman about 50, maybe, with a mass of dark hair braided around her head, bustled in. “Shane, I need you to get a fresh keg of Guinness from the basement, I swear that’s all they drank last night,” she said. Her eyes swept the kitchen, and she smiled, losing ten years off her face. “You must be Hailey. I’m Jolene and don’t sing to me. I hate that. Rome told me about you. Did you eat?”

“I did and I’m ready to work,” she said, standing up.

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“Good because that lazy girl didn’t show up, and so help me if Rome doesn’t put her over his knee, I will. She’s gotten away with this too long now.”

Jolene walked back out the door and Hailey grinned at the men. “I guess I’m going to work so I don’t go over Rome’s knee!”

Well, that didn’t sound entirely too bad, now, did it? Where was he? She walked out into the bar she’d seen through bleary, exhausted eyes last night as she heard Shane laugh and say, “Good luck with that.”

Not sure of what that meant, she shook it off. The bar looked even more festive today than it had last night. She needed to check on her bike soon too, though she had a feeling it was fine here. But her baby really didn’t like to be out in the snow. She’d have to find a garage to rent soon. Certain things you just had to spend money on.

Jolene went behind the bar of the almost empty place, and Hailey began learning where things were located and what they had.

“You know how to mix a drink?”

“Grew up in a bar,” Hailey said. “Not much I can’t do. I even know how to pour Guinness.”

“Lucky to have you then,” Jolene said. “Boss man did better with you than the last few, if that’s true.”

“Lots of turnover in the business,” Hailey agreed.

“No one wants to work nowadays,” Jolene said, pointing out the supplies. “Especially during the holidays.”

“What’s wrong with them?” Hailey pulled open a few more drawers to check things out. “That’s when all the good tips happen.”

“I agree,” Jolene said. “This bar is my family now since my husband died and my son moved to Japan.”

“He in the service?” she asked. Then paused and looked up as the door opened and Rome walked in.