

HOT WINTER NIGHTS Excerpt

Joe looked behind him to make sure they were alone. “Molly and the old lady elves. What’s really going on with that?”

“Have you tried asking her yourself?”

Joe grimaced. “Look, she doesn’t belong out there doing what we do, okay? She’s ... amazing, but too soft to do it.” He shook his head. “She’s always been that way, far too tender-hearted for her own good, dragging home strays, wanting to save the world. She’ll believe any sob story given to her. She loves too hard. She’ll get taken advantage of doing what we do—“

“Don’t,” Lucas said. “Don’t do that.”

“Do what?”

“Don’t belittle her. She’s not a little kid anymore, Joe. Nor is she incompetent. Far from it. In fact, she’s smart as hell. Look, a lot of bad shit happens to all of us, and our experiences have made us hard. Cold. But not her. She’s special, and stronger than both of us put together.”

This got a moment of surprised silence from Joe. And since Lucas didn’t want to fight with him, he rose and grabbed his laptop for their meeting.

“What’s going on between the two of you?” Joe asked.

Lucas turned back. “You asked me to get involved. I’m involved. And you know what? Out of all the things she loves, she loves you the most. Instead of trying to hold her back, do you know what you should be doing? *You* should be doing the job you asked me to do. *You* should be training her, letting her fly, and stand at her back while she does.”

Joe was stunned. “This is all just a phase for her, why would I do that?”

“It’s not a phase. And you should do it because she would do it for you,” Lucas said. He then walked out of his own office, doing his best to shrug off his irritation at Joe.