



A Royal Christmas Wish

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I DIDN'T SEE THE JOGGER COMING around a corner—
Until I was broadsiding him, my momentum carrying both of us off our feet, sending us flying into a snowbank.

“Oh!”

“Uhnhg!” I'd landed on something entirely too firm to be snow. The man beneath me grunted with the impact.

Mortification swamped me as I tried to clamber off him, earning another grunt when I pushed down—which was a good sign, right? If he was grunting, then at least I hadn't killed him.

“I'm so sorry! Are you okay?” *Please let nothing be broken.* “Sir?” I lifted myself high enough to check for injuries and found myself looking into the bluest eyes I'd ever seen.

“Are you all right?” a deep voice tinged with a slight accent asked, but I’d lost my powers of speech.

Crystal-blue eyes with a dark gray circle outlining the edge of the iris and fringed by the thickest, darkest lashes imaginable stared up into mine from a distance of inches and for a moment, my breath caught in my throat as the outside world seemed to fade away...

Only to return with a thunder of footsteps as a group of joggers rushed toward us. “Are you all right, y—”

“I’m fine,” the man beneath me told the joggers in a stiff accented voice, holding up a hand to wave them off before arching a brow at me. “Do you mind?” he asked—and I realized I’d been gaping at him like an idiot while hovering over him so he couldn’t get up.

“Sorry! I’m so sorry!” I babbled, scrambling to one side. The joggers, a group of men in matching black running gear, had fallen back to the opposite side of the path, pretending to stretch and watching me as if I might start tackling more unsuspecting runners. I couldn’t really blame them. Why did I have to be such a human train wreck? “Does anything hurt?” I asked, kneeling at my victim’s side—and getting my first good look at him when I wasn’t fixated on his dreamy eyes or tackling him into the snow.

He really was unfairly good looking. Tall and fit, your basic dream guy—and posh, with fancy designer jogging gear and his thick, dark hair styled perfectly. Everything about him was basically perfect, which only made me feel like more of a walking disaster.

He glanced at me warily as he sat up, rubbing a

hand across the sharp plane of his jaw. “All parts functional,” he replied and the accent tugged at me; something vaguely European that seemed to wrap the words in luxury. “And you?”

“I’m fine. I’m so sorry,” I said. Once the words started, I couldn’t seem to stop. “My dog—it wasn’t his fault. I threw the ball too hard and it bounced, and he didn’t know he wasn’t supposed to chase it, he’s always been allowed to chase it in the park before, so how would he know we weren’t supposed to be on the jogging path—”

He studied me, as if suspicious of the barrage of words. Why did I have to body slam someone so intimidatingly perfect and composed? “Your dog?” He seemed skeptical as he came to his feet, looking at me as if he was wondering exactly how many bricks short of a load I was—though he still extended his hand to help me to my feet.

I took the offered hand, which lifted me effortlessly to my feet, and I felt my face heat as I dusted the snow off my tailored gray pants. “I was chasing my dog—well, *a* dog.” Belatedly realizing that didn’t make me sound any more rational, as if I just ran through the park chasing random dogs and attacking joggers, I blushed and rushed on, “I promise I don’t normally tackle strangers in the park. And I promise there’s a dog.” Prince Harry reappeared then, bounding over the snow with the ball clutched in his mouth, and I pointed at him with a rush of relief. “That dog.”

The jogger’s shoulders lowered a notch at the sight of Prince Harry—canine confirmation that I wasn’t *completely* out of my mind—and for a moment

I almost thought I saw his lips twitch. “Looks like he got it.”

Prince Harry bounced in front of us, proud of himself for vanquishing the renegade ball, and I wasn’t sure whether I should praise him for returning with it or scold him for chasing it—though I was the one who had thrown it for him to chase, and he didn’t know he was supposed to stay off the jogging path. I settled for patting him on the head and murmuring, “Good boy, baby,” as I clipped the leash back onto his collar.

Prince Harry dropped the ball at my feet, though he didn’t go into his crouch, confused by the combination of the leash and the ball, which we’d never had out at the same time before.

“I’m so sorry—” I began again, but the jogger gave me a look that froze the seventeen millionth apology in my throat and bent to search for something in the snow—which put him right on Prince Harry’s level. The dog enthusiastically snuffled his ear and I started to apologize and pull him away, but the jogger was already rubbing his head affectionately, earning puppy kisses in return.

Which of course made me melt into a puddle of goo. He liked dogs. Of course he did. He was perfect. The kind of man who hadn’t threatened to sue when I broadsided him into a snowbank and instead asked if *I* was okay.

“Cute mutt,” he said, bending his head toward Prince Harry’s.