



**A
CHRISTMAS
ROMANCE
SHORT
STORY**

EBONY FINDS CHRISTMAS

by Kim Johnson

Ebony groaned and flung another manuscript into the garbage. Rubbing her temples in an attempt to ward off the coming migraine, “if I have to read one more ‘once upon a time’, I’m going to scream, I swear”, she said, thinking her office walls were the only listening ears around.

“Oh, it can’t be that bad, can it?” Antonio, her best friend asked; walking into her office and plopping into a chair, without waiting for an invitation.

“It is that bad. Just because the stupid holidays are approaching, people seem to come out of the wood works with these happy ever after, lovey-dovey mushy stories. It’s irritating.”

“So, you’re still dead set against celebrating the holidays, huh?” Antonio replied, with a smirk on his face and his smile reaching all the way to his coffee brown eyes.”

“Shut up. My decision to not celebrate Christmas has nothing to do with this crap.” She got up and went to the window, taking in the view of the skyline, with the river in the distance. Relaxing, her mind began to wander to her upcoming cruise.

A smile teased her lips, as thoughts of martinis by the pool and cabana boys filled her head. She didn’t realize anticipation had caused her to lean forward, until her head hit the glass with a resounding thunk. “Ugh!” she cried and reached a hand up to rub her forehead, sure a migraine would come now.

Antonio couldn’t hold back his laughter and let its robust sound fill the office, “serves you right. I’ve been talking to you and you haven’t been listening.”

Guiltily, Ebony smiled widely. “I was listening”, she turned to emphasize her point.

“Sure, you were” Antonio drew his words out. “I’ve got to get back to work. You know, coming up with ideas that sell this trash you’re gathering.” Giving a pointed look toward her trashcan, he pushed himself up and sauntered to the door. Before disappearing, he called over his shoulder, “Since you didn’t object, I’ll see you at seven.”

Ebony’s head snapped up, “what?” When Antonio didn’t offer any explanation, she rushed after him, bumping into her boss as she rounded the corner. Sobering in the moment, she decided she didn’t have time to chase Antonio.

Later, Ebony was lost in her work, when Kara, another of her close friends, popped her head in. “You’re still here.”

“Is it really all that surprising? I mean, I do work here.” Ebony replied without looking up from the potential book. She’d finally found one that stood out from all the crap she’d been reading.

“Yes, it’s surprising! You said ‘yes’, so you need to be home, getting ready!” Kara said, as she walked over to Ebony’s desk and started to shut things down.

“Hey! What are you doing?” Ebony objected futilely, now being made to stand, forced into her coat and ushered out the door.

Back home, after being updated on the ride home, Ebony was ready to murder her friends. “You realize I won’t be here for Christmas and that I have no intention of celebrating Christmas.”

Kara nodded, while continuing to rummage for the perfect outfit.

Ebony was still objecting when she folded herself into Antonio’s car. “Since you insist on doing this and you insisted on involving Kara, we might as well get this show on the road.”

“I can’t believe you stood in that line and didn’t freak out.” Antonio had taken her to the Bethlehem Walk, where they’d stood in line for forty-five minutes and then walked through a replica of the town, during t Jesus’ coming birth.

“Anything for you,” Antonio whispered under his breath. With a side glance, he tried putting some sarcasm in his voice, “is that fun you’re having, Ms. Ebony?”

Playfully swatting his arm, Ebony replied, “yeah. I’m having fun. But it still doesn’t mean I’m putting up a tree or celebrating Christmas or anything.”

Over the next few hours, Antonio chauffeured her to several magical Christmas destinations and each time the conversation repeated itself. Cold made Ebony’s chocolate cheeks flush as she smiled, having just finished tubing down the snow covered hill. “I can’t believe we did that! And before you ask, yes, I’m having fun.” What she didn’t say aloud was that she was beginning to see him differently; beginning to rethink her stand on Christmas—especially if Christmas came with him.

“One last stop” was all he said in reply and Ebony couldn’t help but wonder if she’d really seen the hint of uncertainty that had flashed in his eyes.

“You’re quiet” Ebony nearly leaned into Antonio as they shared a horse driven sleigh ride around the river. When Antonio didn’t respond, she continued, “What’s up with you?”

Antonio remained silent, until the carriage came to stop. Glancing up, Ebony realized they were at the spot they often claimed during the summer, as their own.

“Eb, I didn’t do all of this just for fun,” he started and Ebony was sure she heard a nervous lilt in his voice. “You know how much I love Christmas, and well, I love you just as much.”

He didn’t give her time to respond. He just bent over her and kissed her with all he had. Ebony was stunned at first, but then her heart began to take over. ‘You love him’, it seemed to scream to her, as she kissed him back.

The sparks Ebony thought were supposed to fly when you found your soul-mate didn’t come. Instead, pictures of Christmases to come played on a movie reel in her head, images of fun and family played over and over and Ebony knew she wanted to be with this man forever. Christmas was love and family and Antonio had helped her realize all of those things. With a start, Ebony realized she had found Christmas and it had been in front of her the whole time. “I love you” she said and snuggled into Antonio for the rest of the ride.