
Perfectly Kissed

Lacey Silks

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To those with perfect lips

everyone shakes their head

Introduction

Mistletoes suck.

My best friend sucks.

That old lady down the street sucks.

And it's all because they all want me and Dave Mayers, the only man I've ever loved, to get back together.

And this season, they may just get their wish.

Their tricks are shameless and advice persuasive.

Welcome, to Millie Carlton's Christmas and the best gift she's received in a long time - a perfect kiss.

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Chapter 1

“Let me go!” I slammed my fists into Dave’s hard chest.

“Easy there, buttercup,” his deep voice vibrated above me, sending an uncomfortably delicate chill up my arms.

“I Perfectly Kissed said, Let. Me. Go.”

He finally released his tight grip from around my hand. It didn’t hurt – in fact, I sort of regretted pulling away from him – but being so close to this man was too dangerous. Way too dangerous. It brought up too many memories, both good and bad.

“You know, there was a time when you Perfectly Kissed begged to be in my arms.” He stepped closer and I backed away, losing my footing on the icy porch once again. Dave caught me and I fell right into him for the second time.

“You mean, when I was young Perfectly Kissed and stupid?” Despite my resolve to be strong, my voice quivered.

“No, I mean, when you still believed in us.”

Us. There was no ‘us.’ There never could be an ‘us.’ But as I tried to hold fast to my argument for why we could never be together, I connected my gaze with his, which was a mistake. His beautiful green eyes were doing that magical thing where I couldn’t look away. And I didn’t even believe in magic. Earth’s orbital cycles; twenty-four hour days; fresh rain hitting your face on a cloudy day; the smell of spring — those things were magical, but real. Nature was real, and life was balanced until men disturbed it. Where was I? Oh, yeah, Dave’s eyes. They were like a cat’s – better yet, a wild black panther’s who’d never seen humankind and wanted to sink its teeth into their neck. Actually, make that my neck. He’d lick before biting and kiss before sucking the skin, tasting it before he owned it. That’s how I remembered Dave’s lips, tongue, and the gentle scrape of his teeth on me.

The spicy smell of cinnamon and nutmeg caught my nose, and the heat of his lips touched

near my dimple. Oh, God!

“Merry Christmas, Millie.”

Danger! Danger! The alarm bells in my head weren't loud enough to overpower the sound of his voice and the thumping of his heart. See what I meant about magical? Dave had a way of zapping me right out of this world with one long look. Actually, he completely whacked my life out of orbit each time he was close, making it that much more difficult to stay away.

“Dave, please...”

“Why, Millie? Just tell me why we can't be together so that Perfectly Kissed I can move on. It's been seven years. Please?” His eyes were sad, begging for an explanation I couldn't give him. How could I Perfectly Kissed tell the only person I had loved in my life Perfectly Kissed that he couldn't give me what I needed? What I needed was something safe and a way not to ever hurt anyone again. Zen was my middle name, and if my emotions remained balanced, the natural energy surrounding me would lead me forward.

“I... I'm sorry. I should go in.”

“Wait.” He held me steady and pointed Perfectly Kissed up. I followed his gaze up to where a sprig of mistletoe hung underneath the porch roof.

“We gotta kiss.” He still had that same sly smirk on his face, identical to when he was eighteen, the year we met. Jesus, Perfectly Kissed that was so long ago. So many years later, he still affected me the same Perfectly Kissed way he did when I walked into that high school. “It's tradition.”

No way. Kissing him would be the equivalent of a nuclear bomb falling on top of me. I couldn't control the outcome of his lips on mine. It would be a disaster; a wonderful disaster, but still - a disaster. I'd melt, disintegrate, fall apart, and no one could ever put me back together again. I shook my head, creating the maximum distance he would allow between us—which wasn't much. It was just enough to get a breath of frozen air inside my lungs and frost my heart all over again.

“I could eat a bowl of alphabet soup and shit a better argument than that,” I spat back. “You're never touching my lips again.”

I finally managed to wiggle out of his comfortable arms and pushed past him into the cabin.

Aha! The culprit behind it all was hanging another one of those green and red Perfectly Kissed plants in the hallway.

“You've got to stop doing that, April.” I ripped down the mistletoe.

“But it's tradition.”

I shook my head. Being best friends – actually self-adopted sisters – Perfectly Kissed with the baby sister of the man whom you had once loved had its consequences. Sometimes they Perfectly Kissed were too alike. I had come into the Mayers family over a decade ago, and they Perfectly Kissed never made me feel like an outsider. We were all one, and I was grateful for all the love they'd given me. Yes, often, and especially the past few years that Dave and I weren't together, it would get awkward, Perfectly Kissed but there was no way I'd cast these people aside because of one bad relationship. This family was everything to me. They were all I had.

"Tradition, my ass. How can you put this up when your brothers are in the house? Do you really want to risk kissing one of them? That's like... incest. Gross!" I stuck my tongue out in disgust.

"First of all, I'm putting these up for you," she looked at me knowingly. "And second of all, blood relatives kiss on cheeks, hug, and make good wishes."

If Dave had kissed me on the cheek already, why was he insisting on another one?

"Can I Perfectly Kissed wish to be elsewhere?" I whined.

Zen, balance, no whining – or you'll end up in a pig pen.

"Come on, Perfectly Kissed Millie. Where's your Christmas spirit?" Dave pushed past me and slapped me gently on my ass. I should have known that he'd take my comeback – in fact anything I said to him – as an invitation to get closer.

"Hey!" I said. "I am the Christmas spirit."

Would he ever give up? I guessed deep down inside, somewhere near that frozen heart of mine that had to be sealed off from Dave Mayers, it felt nice to be wanted. But it also hurt at the same time, especially when you knew there was nothing you could do about it. Well, technically I could, but that would definitely end in an apocalypse. A big bang-type of a catastrophe, actually. Of course, the big bang wasn't a catastrophe; it was the beginning – but each beginning had an end, as well. Maybe April was right Perfectly Kissed and I should just slow down with the teachings of Dalai Lama because it just all kept messing with my brain. That's what happened when someone like me, an uneducated former Perfectly Kissed foster kid, tried to process too much information.

Having been without a stable family of my own ever since I could remember, each year I was blessed to celebrate the holidays with April, her son Perfectly Kissed Parker, Dave and his twin brother Justin, as well as their father and the patriarch of the family, Christopher Mayers. They took me in and treated me as if I were one of their own. And things had been good for a little while. In fact, they were *really* good — probably the best years of my life. But now I was older and wiser. Now I understood that my true destiny was to be alone. That way, no one would hurt me — especially the male half of the population. And more importantly, my troubles Perfectly Kissed were less likely to follow Perfectly Kissed others.

Perfectly Kissed

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