

## The Hitman's Guide to Valentine's Day

Alice Winters

“Softly” Proofed by: Courtney Bassett (She has to promise to make it soft or she'll scrutinize every word... which I guess is her job... she just doesn't need to on a free short.) I've tortured her enough this week (she's editing Winsford Shifters 2).

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“Hey, lover, guess what day it is?” I say as I leap over the back of the couch and barely avoid pummeling Jackson into it.

Jackson slowly looks up from the book he's reading and raises an eyebrow. “Um...”

He clearly doesn't know. How could he not know? I grab my chest, reeling back as I let the horror settle in. “You don't... know?” And why do I feel such delight that I know something he doesn't?

He's quiet, slowly thinking about what he should say but he might as well just admit it. Leland the Great—NO!—the Fantastic remembered something that he did not.

Fuck, am I amazing or what?

“I'm... of course I know what today is,” Jackson says but his lying voice *really* needs some work if he's expecting me to believe even a smidge of it.

“Since I clearly am the only one who remembered, that makes me... The Best Lover to Have Ever Loved,” I declare as I push his book out of the way and climb the rest of the way onto his lap. I grab his face in my hands and give it a little shake as his eyes get wide.

“I'm... concerned. I'm also concerned that I'm not as concerned as I used to be when you came at me with these insane plans. Like I used to be terrified, and now I'm just... concerned. Is that concerning?” Jackson asks.

I push his dumb little question off into oblivion and smile at my one true love. “I love your face.”

He smiles back at me and it makes icky feelings swirl all around me. I swear he does it to torture me. Why else would he?

“Since it’s clear you don’t remember what day it is, then I guess you have to do everything I want today,” I say as I poke his nose. “First things first. Get your coat.”

He reluctantly looks out the window. “It’s cold out.”

“It’s never too cold when you have the power of weaponry to keep you warm,” I declare as I stuff Cayenne and Sarge into snowsuits. Sarge absolutely hates them and walks stiff legged every time he has one on, but Cayenne’s excitement can’t get crushed down.

Jackson looks mildly concerned but as soon as I’m off his lap, he gets up and starts putting his winter gear on. I hand him my weapons box and button my coat up before grabbing my gloves and hat. I yank the door open and push Jackson outside into the wintery cold.

“My, what wonderful weather we’re having!” I say as I climb down the steps as Cayenne bounds after us and Sarge waddles after her.

“Beautiful weather,” Jackson concurs. “My favorite part is the little tiny pieces of ice pelting me in the eyeballs. That’s the best part.”

“Good, good!” I say as I grab his hand in mine and drag him through the foot of snow that we’d acquired just last night.

“Is your plan for us to freeze to death?” Jackson shouts after me.

“It is!” I joke as I lead him out back for a short (yet frigidly cold) jaunt across a field to the woods. This time of the year, the trees are mostly barren besides the evergreens which are coated in snow. And the large group of evergreens toward the back is exactly what I’m aiming for.

“I’m scared,” Jackson says.

“Don’t be, honey. Daddy Leland’s got you,” I assure him.

Jackson’s eyebrows disappear under his hat. “That makes me even more scared. Like... have you finally snapped? Are you taking me out here to bury me in the snow? Did I do something wrong? Is this punishment?” Jackson asks.

“Trust me, babe, if you did something wrong, you’d definitely know. I’d probably like kick your ass or something. Imagine this, I just walk in, and there you are, folding my underwear wrong, so I’d grab you in a headlock like this,” I say as I slide behind him, slipping my arm over his neck. “I’d drive my knees into yours, knocking them out from under you.”

Even with the heads up, he’s no match for me and as I smash into them, he crumples down where I ride him into the snow.

“There!” I say as Jackson lays face first in the snow.

He doesn’t move.

“Jackson... Jackson!” I give him a little shake, hoping to stuff life back into him.

“I’ve given up,” he declares.

“That’s okay. We’re not too far away,” I say as I flip him onto his back, set the weapons case on his chest and grab his feet. Once we’re all set, I start dragging him. He slides pretty easily in the snow until Cayenne thinks this is amazing and leaps on top of him, but even then, I struggle on.

“I have figured out what today is!” Jackson says when I have him about twenty feet away from our destination.

“You have?” I ask as I look back at him.

“Torture Day,” he says as he grabs onto a tree, like the tree will save him.

“I *do* love Torture Day but that’s in March, remember? Last year we tortured your mom *all* day long. It was so much fun. Remember when I

pretended like I'd forgotten Blow-up Randy in his S&M gear on the couch?"

"She had a heart attack. You made my mom have a heart attack and you're so proud of yourself."

"She didn't have a heart attack! The devil can't have a heart attack!" I sigh blissfully at the memory. "Anyway. We are here. See that red heart up there, you need to shoot it or you will be forced to stay out in the cold until you do."

Jackson gets up and quickly grabs the weapons case before popping it open. When he sees that it's not a gun but a bow, he slowly looks up at me, even though it's clear I'm very excited.

"Hurry, Jackson!"

"I'm hurrying, but my hands are too cold," he cries as he shakes dramatically. He acts like he can't even pick up the arrow, he's shaking so hard. "L-Leland, I hope this proves h-how much I love you," he says as I hold the dogs back so no one gets accidentally shot.

"Stop being dramatic."

"A-All my love is being f-frozen out of me," he says as he aims the arrow and misses by about five feet. I realize with shock we're going to be here all night. We'll die before he shoots the heart.

"Remember arrows fall, Jackson, you have to shoot higher than the target."

"My ears are frozen. I can't hear you," he says as he tries again, this time missing it by four feet to the left.

Horror is settling deep in my bones right alongside its friend The Fucking Cold. I'm going to die out here waiting for Jackson.

"Oh look at the time, let me do that for you, babe," I say as I grab the bow, nock the arrow and hit the heart perfectly in the middle. It pushes it

back so the little bag hooked to it drops along with some balloons I'd made Cassel help me blow up.

"Happy Valentine's Day!" I say as I turn to look at Jackson who is just staring at the pile of balloons and the bag. "J-Jackson? Did you freeze to death when you were so excited to see what I planned? Or do you feel awful for forgetting? I know in your heart you would have remembered."

Jackson starts laughing so hard he's doubled over. "Oh my god, Leland. You made me feel awful making me think I forgot something. Leland... what's the date?"

"Valentine's Day!"

He shakes his head. "The date."

"Uhhh the thirteenth."

"When is Valentine's Day?"

"Cassel said it's the thirteenth!"

"No, it's the fourteenth."

I narrow my eyes as I realize that Cassel has to die. There is no recovering from this. "We're having roasted Cassel for our Valentine's dinner," I growl as I yank my phone out and quickly call Cassel as Jackson gathers the arrows and balloons.

"Hello!" Cassel cheerly says. Too bad it's the last time he'll ever be happy again.

"You lied to me. I asked you when Valentine's Day was and you said the thirteenth and I *believed* you," I hiss at Cassel.

He's *cackling* and because Jackson can hear him cackling Jackson's *also* cackling. "I know. It was funny. Sometimes you're so smart and other times you're really not!"

"Death is nigh, Cassel. Wait... I know what's better. I'll tell Jeremy something really bad about you."

“Wait... no... Leland. No! He likes me! He looked at me today, Leland! Don't ruin that!”

“I'm writing it right now, 'Dear Jeremy, Cassel is a—'”

“Please! Leland! I will... I'll... be your servant or something. I'll call you your majesty. Please.”

“I'll consider it,” I growl before canceling the call.

Jackson gives me a huge smile. “This is even more special because it's like a pre-Valentine's Day,” Jackson says as he wraps me up in his arms and squeezes me tightly. “And look! The candy has been out in the cold so long it's like eating a brick,” he says as he tries to bite off a piece of the chocolate. “Hear that sound? It's my teeth breaking but this is my favorite chocolate and I must eat it.”

I smile at him since the sound is definitely the nuts and not his teeth. “I mean... maybe that was my plan all along. Maybe it was all a big joke, and I *knew* it was a day early.”

“You know it doesn't matter what day it is, as long as I'm with you, I know the day is going to be amazing.” He gently kisses my lips, and even though I'm freezing *to death* the kiss makes it all worth it.

“Ooh, so today will be my day for Valentine's Day and tomorrow will be yours. Off to the sex dungeon!” I shout.

“Oh no... what... what are you planning?”

“Hee hee hee... Only I will know,” I say as I grab his wrist and drag him after me.

“Fine, fine.” He smiles at me, clearly a little excited. “Just you wait for what I have planned for tomorrow,” Jackson says, and I hesitate.

He can't do that to me. He can't just tease me like that! “Let's go to bed instead! I'm too excited!”

“It's one in the afternoon, we can't go to bed!”

“Perfect. We’ll only have to sleep eleven hours. We can do this,” I say.

“No! I want to see what you have planned,” he says.

“Sex dungeon, then sleep!”

“Deal.”