

A photograph of two hands holding a small, red and white patterned object, possibly a candle or a small toy, against a backdrop of a snowy mountain range. The hands are wearing thick, knitted gloves: one is pink and the other is blue. The person holding the object is wearing blue jeans. The background is a bright, snowy landscape with mountains in the distance.

lighting *the* flames

A HANUKKAH STORY BY

SARAH
WENDELL

Copyrighted material

To Adam

And to everyone who loves and misses summer camp.

CHAPTER ONE

Tuesday, December 16, 2014—24 Kislev 5775

Jeremy Gold stood up from his sunscreen-stained canvas lawn chair, now anchored deep into a pile of plowed snow, and pulled Genevieve up to stand with him.

“A moment of silence for the shit-sucker, if you please.”


“It’s not the same when it’s this cold out,” Gen grumbled, rubbing her gloves together and stomping her feet. A small tanker truck rolled past them toward the slowly opening gate that marked the main entrance to Camp Meira. The driver waved at them both, then revved the engine to push through the snow on either side of the road. The plow hadn’t left a path quite wide enough for his truck.

Gen looked up from the pattern she’d been stamping with the treads of her boots, remembering something she wanted to tell Jeremy, but when she saw the side of the truck she started to laugh. The company had upgraded since the previous summer. A sign that had clearly once belonged to a Jiffy Lube now read, thanks to creative use of black marker and white duct tape, “Jiffy Latrine.”

Copyright © 2014 by Sarah Wendell, Smart Bitches Trashy Books LLC

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

 Created with **Vellum**

“Why, is something wrong? Did you have someone coming to stay with you?”

“Stay? What? No. No one.” Jeremy tugged off his cap and rubbed the top of his head with one hand. Then he smiled, bright and eager. “This’ll be great. Assistance in pursuit of merriment and Jiffy!”

“Jiffy? You need peanut butter, too?”

“No, not peanut butter. Don’t worry about it, Scott.” Gen moved in front of Jeremy and when Scott looked away, she elbowed him in the side.

He opened his mouth to protest, but the low rumble and creak of the gates stopped, and the silence interrupted him. They all turned to look. The gates stood only half-open, but high ridges of snow had collected beneath each arm.

“Well, that’s not good,” Jeremy said, his voice dry.

“Come on, Mr. Snow Man.” Gen pushed past Jeremy, but took his arm to pull him along with her. They started clearing the snowdrifts from beneath the metal bars with their hands, kicking the heavy gates open bit by bit. When the gates were finally pressed into the snowbanks on the side of the road, they were both breathing heavily, but the gate motor didn’t restart.

Scott drove through but then parked his car in the road and got out. He stood, looking toward the top of the hill, where the dirt road hit the blacktop that eventually curled through the nearest town, then at the silent gate.

“Can you fix it?”

Jeremy shrugged. “Probably. But we’re supposed to get more snow tonight or tomorrow, so they’d likely get stuck again. They’re not meant to open against snow and ice.”

“They’re meant to withstand impact from a vehicle. Snow shouldn’t be a problem,” Scott answered, rubbing his hand on his face.

Jeremy wandered closer to the gatepost, examining the enclosure that housed the motor and the remote sensor. “I can take a look at it, but it’ll

“Think so.” Jeremy casually formed a snowball in his gloves as he looked toward the camp gate, a large metal barrier that kept people out more than it kept the horses and children inside. It had closed automatically behind the Jiffy Latrine truck and wouldn’t open again until it was triggered.

“Don’t even think about it, Jeremy,” Scott said, glancing at Jeremy’s hands.

“Me? Throw a snowball into your nicely appointed and very attractive car? After you made a special trip out to get snacks for our cabin? Never. I’d *never* do such a thing.”

Jeremy tossed his snowball from one hand to the other, grinning at Scott.

“Did you get the heat to come on?”

Jeremy’s grin didn’t falter, but he stopped playing catch. “Yup. All cabins closest to the dining hall have heat, and the thermostats are set to keep them warm. I have it on my schedule to check them every few hours.”

Scott nodded, glancing out the windshield as he pressed a button on the remote attached to his visor to open the gates. The metal arms of the gate made slow progress through the snowdrifts, but they were slow moving in the summer, too, when the road was clear beneath them.

“Gen, I got your supplies for s’mores.”

“Thanks.”

“You are such a chocolate snob.”

“Sure am.”

Jeremy looked between them, confused. “S’mores?”

“I’m staying in your cabin,” Gen replied.

“Our cabin?” Jeremy’s eyes widened, like he was horrified. That did wonders for her confidence, but she didn’t let it show in her voice.

“Water pipes burst in the girls’ bunkhouse. Everything is soaked.”

“One more thing to fix,” Scott said to no one in particular.

Jeremy still looked aghast at the idea.

He opened his mouth, and she heard him draw a breath to reply, but he was cut off by the sound of another engine coming down the camp road. He stood up and quickly pulled Gen to her feet. Looking at the ground, at themselves, at the road, and not at each other, they pushed wads of wet, clinging snow from their arms and legs.

“Great. We’re going to welcome ten families into camp like we’re the abominable snow couple.” Gen closed her eyes, feeling her own face burn. Great. She’d just made things more awkward. But Jeremy didn’t seem to notice or care that she’d called them a couple.

“Excellent. Now you’ll have to help me score the Jiffy sign.”

“Why, spousal duties?” She gave up worrying about what she’d said. It was easier to laugh and joke the way they always had instead of thinking twice or three times about what she was going to say.

“Yeah. Doodies.”

“You are so twelve.”

“Great! Then I get presents ’cause it’s bar mitzvah time.”

“Yeah, today you are a man. A snow man. Get your own sign, Frosty.”

Then she felt a touch behind her head. Jeremy had removed his glove and was pulling snow from her hair with gentle fingers. It felt like her hair had nerve endings, the feeling of him carefully removing ice from between the dark curls sending tingles over her head and down her back.

Sure, she’d be able to pretend like nothing had happened between them, while his touch made her jump like she’d scuffed her socks on the carpet and touched a light switch. No big deal.

She stepped back, out of his reach, and grabbed her hair with both hands, shaking the rest of the snow away. They almost looked like responsible staff members when a red SUV stopped in front of them.

Scott, the camp director, lowered the window, and Gen saw his smile freeze with a coating of horror when he felt the cold air hit his skin.

“Ready for Winter Camp?” Scott’s voice was as awkward as the grin on his face.

into a snow pile. His surprise gave her an advantage, but it was only momentary.

“You dare attack the latrine pirate? You shall pay!” Since he outweighed her by at least an additional person’s worth of pounds, it was no big deal for Jeremy to toss Gen into the snow pile beside him.

But he didn’t anticipate Gen coming up armed with chunks of very tossable snow and hurling them at his head with a yell. “Never! I defend the rightful signage of the Jiffy Latrine!”

“Rightful, my ass!” Dodging both of Gen’s snowballs, Jeremy built a mammoth snow missile of his own and fired at her. She ducked, rolled past him, and tried to gain her feet long enough to run past him to the chairs. He grabbed her around the waist, hauled her into the air and spun her around.

“*You’re* an ass!” She tried to escape, but he was too strong, and she was laughing too hard.

“And my rightful ass is incomplete! The Jiffy Latrine shall be mine, and you shall help me attain my booty!”

Jeremy moved to toss her into another snowbank left behind by the plow, but he lost his balance and fell. Gen landed under him, both of them buried past their shoulders in a slanted drift of snow.

“Oh, crap, Gen, did I hurt you?” Jeremy looked horrified, lifting his body away from hers. She rolled to her side, bracketed in the space between his arms, sheltered beneath his chest and suddenly in no need of a flask or any blankets. His proximity was enough to set her on fire.

Then his hands slipped and he landed on her again.

His face was so close to hers, she could only see parts of it at a time. His eyelashes, curled with tears from laughing. His beard, which he’d grown in the time she’d been away, a mix of red, brown, and gold, now with a frosting of snow.

He laughed, but it sounded strained. Jeremy’s cheeks above his beard were already red from the cold, but they burned even deeper when he managed to steady himself and caught her staring at him.

cap with a ponytail pulled through the back loop, leaving her with a nearly permanent crease across the back of her head. When it was never quiet or still, when there were campers everywhere and noise and laughter and the smells of marshmallows, campfires, and—depending on the direction of the wind—horse poop followed her all day. When all those things combined into the sensory distraction that felt like home. Since her parents had died, camp was the most familiar home she had within reach.

Jeremy wasn't being the distraction she'd expected, though. She'd hoped that during the few days of Winter Camp, their friendship could go back to being normal and easy, and she could pretend like he'd never kissed her, like they hadn't been apart for more than a year with things unfinished and unsaid. They'd covered up the unanswered questions with a mountain of status updates, texts, e-mail, messages, and digital snapshots, which were meaningful since they kept her connected to Jeremy across oceans and time zones, but meaningless in that they didn't talk about what had really happened, and what might have changed.

Jeremy seemed to be acting like his usual giant, goofy self. Maybe he'd forgotten that they'd kissed in the first place.

"You dream of August. I'll dream of my new sign." Jeremy folded his arms over his chest and grinned down at her. With her sitting and him standing at full height with his horribly perfect posture, it was like trying to look up at the sun—painful yet difficult to look away.

"You're nuts, Jer," Gen said, shaking her head and curling into a ball in her lawn chair, desperate for any kind of warmth. Maybe yoga would help. The kind of yoga where she lit her chair on fire, hid under four blankets, and drank from a flask.

"The Jiffy Latrine shall be mine! It will be *epic*!" Jeremy raised his arms and bellowed into the forest, startling two birds from their branches and causing snow to fall directly onto Gen's head.

"What the—Jeremy!" With a growl, Gen launched herself from her chair, tackled Jeremy around the midsection, and drove him backward

“That must have taken some work,” Gen said, nudging Jeremy.

Jeremy had bowed his head in his typical gesture of respect to the Jiffy Latrine cleaning visit, which amounted to a twenty-minute drive to all three portable toilets in camp. When he raised his head and saw the sign, he began laughing so hard he could barely stand up.

“Now, Jer, that’s hardly respectful.”

“It’s *Jiffy Lube*!”

He bent forward, resting his hands on his knees to try to catch his breath between howls of laughter. His position brought his face down from his normal stratosphere, and Gen watched as tears curled his eyelashes before she looked away.

Then he silenced abruptly, his face serious. “I must have that sign.”

“No.”

“I MUST. It is imperative.”

“No.”

“You must aid me in pursuit of the shit-sucker’s Jiffy sign!”

“I will do no such thing. Sit your behind down in your chair and wait for the bus.”

“You dare question my authority? I outrank you.”

“You outrank me? In what dream?” Gen turned to face him, her hands on her hips. She was biting the inside corners of her lips to keep from smiling.

“I’ve been staff for longer than you.”

“Yeah, you and your long staff. So impressive.” Gen sat back down in her canvas chair, rolling her eyes. “And yet, you’re out here with me on freezing bus detail. Shouldn’t you have a more important job, oh highly ranked one?”

“Yes. And I do. Acquisition of the Jiffy Latrine sign.”

“You’re nuts. Have fun with that. I’m going to sit here and pretend it’s August.” Or July, when the air was thick and humid and relentlessly hot. When she never had a good hair day, no matter what her hair products promised. When she spent three straight months wearing a ball