

# *Finding Love in the Aspen Snow*

## *Aldis and Lania*

### *Birthday Celebration*

#### *Part 1*

*Lania sat in the cold community tavern. She was furious, burning with anger so the chill from the door opening every few moments did not bother her as it normally would. Another birthday weekend, another disappointing life experience. Only this time she was out of \$4000.00 and hundreds of miles away from home. Planning a group trip is hard enough, but going with your closest friends is supposed to be the reward, right?*

*Lania was in Aspen, Colorado. The Chalet was a gorgeous 5 bedroom 4 bathroom retreat complete with a hot tub, gourmet kitchen, and lift directly to the community tavern. At the age of 35, it was exactly the type of vacation a single business executive from Chicago should be taking. Lania's days of Spring Break hostels and shady trips across the border were no longer appealing. When her best friend Crystal recommended they take a real adult vacation, Lania was thrilled. When her other friend Shannon suggested they do it on her birthday weekend, she was ecstatic. Her friend circle finally arrived at the thriving, boss lady, black girl magic status.*

*In her excitement, she missed all the signs. Shannon never asked any questions about food accommodations in the group chat. Anytime they went anywhere, she was always overly concerned about what type of food would be available. She had weird tastes and even weirder dietary needs. Then she and Crystal did not have their pre-vacation dual braiding appointment. The final sign should have been when they both opted to meet her at the airport instead of being picked up together at one of their homes.*

*"Why would you all pay deposits, and send me reels for weeks of fun group activities, if you both were going to bail on me." Lania whisper shouted in the phone trying to keep things classy in this very upscale place. Both of her ex-friends were apologizing in unison on the phone. Meanwhile, she just wanted to melt into the red velvet booth.*

*"I would never do this to you guys on your birthday. And Crystal, you should be canceled for life because you already knew this was not the year to pull this shit on me." Lania*

said through gritted teeth. Now Shannon was turning things around to be about her. Lania shared more things with Crystal than Shannon, as they had been friends longer. Crystal knew that 3 months ago her ex-fiancé proposed and was getting married, on her birthday, tomorrow. Lania spent 7 years with Martin and after years of no hope he ended it with her to move to St. Louis. There he would meet a 20-something waitress, date, move in, and propose to the girl within weeks. Lania's birthday was tomorrow.

"I do not want to hear your apologies. They do me no good here in Colorado, in the cold, alone." The new fur and fleece poncho had become too hot and she reached over her head to remove it, accidentally bumping the person behind her.

"Sorry." She mumbled to the person behind her.

"Aw, no worries" The deep voice responded. She was vaguely aware of how much he sounded like Teddy Pendergrass, Lania got lost in the thought of trying to remember a Teddy Pendergrass song as she sat finishing her French Connection. She waited until she heard Shannon stop questioning Crystal about her life and relationship regrets.

"Hello, Lania are you there." She heard them screaming through the phone, which she had sat down on the table trying hard to ignore the pities and sorrows of her friends.

"Yes, I am here. And you are not. Tomorrow is my birthday and I am in a beautifully landscaped, expensive as hell Tavern with a drink, and somehow I am still just as pitiful as I was at home.

More apologies.

"Nope, that's fine y'all. I understand. I get it."

More pleas and offerings for a redo.

"I'm just going to stay and use this alone time. I assume I am already paying for it by myself." Lania's phone notifications started to chime with alerts from Cash App and Vimeo. Payments from both ladies. She glanced at the amounts.

"That is only half of what your portion was Shannon!" Now she was screaming. The gentleman behind her coughed a bit. "I am done with the both of you. You are officially blocked for the week. Do not call me, do not text me, and Crystal don't send me any goofy cat reels. I'm done."

## *Part 2*

*The tavern was open 24 hours a day and honestly had everything she needed. The menu had a full-service restaurant with 5-star meals and offered full-service chalet service. Thankfully it was relatively empty and she could sulk in private. Lania nursed her 3rd glass of Pino Grigio and quietly shed tears in her booth alone.*

*“Happy Birthday” Lania’s face was bent down into her glass but she heard the voice. It made her smile a sad smile. She recognized the deep sexy voice from earlier. It was the man behind her. She didn’t have the strength to turn. She had nothing left to give.*

*“My birthday was last week, and if it makes you feel any better; I spent it working.” He continues. He sounded like a young man with a very old soul.*

*“It does, thank you.” Lania’s voice was small because she felt small. No one cared about her. Spending time with her, making commitments, or going on stupid vacations with her. The gentleman seemed to shift his weight in the booth because she felt the seat push in a bit. The velvet felt good on her skin, which had cooled down as the anger was dissipating into sorrow. The dress she wore was meant for the day party she thought she would be attending when she got off the plane.*

*“I’m glad because I hate to hear a gorgeous girl like you not feel good, especially on your birthday weekend.” She leaned back into the cushion and could feel his large frame through the seat. The heat from his body soaked through the booth, and she could feel the shadow of his body on her neck. He was a tall guy and she could tell he hadn’t turned around either.*

*“How do you know I am gorgeous,” she asked.*

*“Your voice. Your voice tells me everything I need to know. And your words tell me the strength you have but you obviously hide it regularly.” He casually laid his arm on the back of the bench. Lania could see his hands from the corner of her eye. They were huge and black! In a space that definitely spoke to upper society, she was surprised, although she should have been because it was one of the reasons she booked this resort. We belonged in these spaces too.*

*Lania was quiet for a good while after that. She knew that was true. Her therapist had been telling her for months to stop hiding herself from others to make them feel better. The bartender came back to the table.*

*“Will there be another Pino for the lady?” the server said.*

*"No, she will have another French Connection, and I will take one as well please." The man said. Lania just nodded approval and chuckled.*

*"I'm sorry for disturbing you with my melodrama." She kinda wanted to turn around now, but didn't want to be awkward. As if talking to a strange man's back wasn't weird enough.*

*"It is alright. I miss the social dramatics of real people. I am often so locked in at work that I miss having or eavesdropping on real social interactions." He said.*

*"You aren't missing much. Friends who lie, birthday alone, sad girl in a bar. That pretty much covers my life." She responded.*

*The bartender came back with their drinks and paused. Lania felt the decompression of someone getting up and tensed. Was he leaving? The man, who definitely sounded handsome was leaving. He probably thought she was pitiful. But suddenly he was in front of her. He held both drinks in his hand and the bartender had quietly disappeared.*

*"Well, I am not Crystal or Shannon, but I would love to have a drink with you for your birthday."*

*This man was gorgeous. Chocolate brown skin with the most masculine beard and mustache. It was framed around the biggest whitest smile. He had eyes that twinkled with comedy and levity and a cool swag reserved for a 90's RnB star. And his physique was impressive with large shoulders and long thick legs. He was so tall towering over her and close. Not so close that his body parts were rubbing her shoulder, but he was close enough that Lania could smell his scent. He smelled like cedar and cherries. Or maybe that was that French Connection he was holding. He was standing there expectedly. She had a frog in her throat and didn't know what to say.*

*"Well, I am starting to get the feeling that you're done chatting with me also." He handed her the sifter of golden liquid and she took it. "May I sit with you?"*

*"Sure." Finally, the words came floating from her brain to her mouth. And then lifted the glass in salute. "And thanks." She was too nervous to look up as he slid into the other side of the booth. Stirring the tiny straw in the drink she suddenly felt shy.*

*"Thanks for joining me." She said.*

*"Thanks for letting me sit with you. I feel honored to be on your birthday weekend social card." Lania looked up and almost knocked over the glass.*

### **Part 3**

*Aldis Hodge sat casually across from her. A teal and brown argyle sweater hugged his muscular arms so enticingly. He was as stunning in person as he was on screen. Lania loved his work and Leverage was her favorite daily relaxation show in the evening. What is he doing in a place like this? She briefly looked around to see if there were any camera crews around. She saw none and then looked at him with wide eyes. Oh my God, Aldis Hodge was having a drink with her in Aspen.*

*"Well, I am sure I know a lot about you that you wished I didn't; but I don't know your name. I am Aldis."*

*"Yeah, you are Aldis, Aldis Hodge. Wow. I am from Chicago, but I rarely get to see celebrities." Lania stumbled with her words like a kid on stage for the first time.*

*"Well, I rarely get to sit and talk with normal, yet extraordinarily beautiful women, so we are both doing something new," Aldis said. A heavy blush went up her neck and to her cheeks. Her fair skin tone always told her feelings and she hated it.*

*"Yeah, listen; I am just a guy in a bar today. Or is this a tavern?" Lania laughed because she had been having the same debate in her head when she arrived.*

*"See you can smile today. And it is a beautiful one so let's see if we can do a little more of it." He adjusted himself in the cushion a bit before continuing. Lania was trying hard not to gawk at him, but he was freakishly gorgeous. More than model sexy, more than celebrity fine, just classically attractive, and manly.*

*"Anyway, I am just a normal guy enjoying a drink in a tavern far away from home, because my friends too failed to make real plans for me for my birthday last week." He continued.*

*"It was really your birthday last week?" She had a million other things she wanted to say, but that was the only thing that stuck. His sexy chest rumbled with laughter. "No lies here, my birthday was last Tuesday and I was indeed working, but I was off by 4pm. I came home to no messages, no plans."*

*"I'm sorry. I'm sorry for the both of us."*

*"I'm not. Having the chance to hang out with you today is worth it. And for once no one is following me around. Who would be looking for me in Aspen, Colorado."*

*"I booked a chalet here because I thought it was something really grown up to do. I didn't realize it was so secluded. Or I will feel so out of place." She was more honest than she wanted or needed to be, but he didn't seem to mind.*

*"Yeah, I was a little unsure given that I didn't see anyone else that looked like me here. Well other than you of course."*

*"Me too, but at the end of the day, I work hard so I should be able to enjoy the same spaces as those internet influencers living life off of daddy's trust fund."*

*"Touché"* He took a sip of his drink and puckered his lips. His thick eyebrows rose several inches as he looked around at the table for something. Lania guessed water was the need and pushed her water glass closer to him.

*"Wow, is this your regular drink of choice?"*

*"Yeah, it's my favorite. I only switch to wine when I get bummed out."*

*"That's a real drink."* Aldis downed half the glass of water before returning to his cool and comfortable self.

*"Aww that makes sense. You first sat down and got your favorite, but as your friends turned into disappointments you switched to the Pino."*

*"Yeah, Pino is my sad girl drink."*

*"Well no more of that, for you. As for me, this is a little too strong for me Ms..."* Aldis paused before reaching his hand out to her. She placed her hand in his and felt the firm grip cover her petite hand. His fingers grazed the inside of her wrist. The electric zing is what brought the words to her mouth and the moistness to her panties.

*"Oh, I am sorry. I am Lania, Lania Lancaster."*

*"It is nice to meet you Lania. Now how about you and I make some new birthday plans together this weekend?"*

#### **Part 4**

*After a delicious dinner and a few more drinks Aldis and Lania planned a fun-filled week. It was uncanny how much they both had in common. For example, they both agreed that well they both had the status, right, and space to go skiing like the elite; neither thought it was the safest idea. They both also enjoyed new things but hated the act of shopping. Aldis allowed his assistant and stylist to do most of his shopping, and Lania performed online shopping for sustainable reusable pieces. Their plans included going to the gaming center at the base of the mountain, which had bowling, arcade games, and laser tag. They also thought about trying out one of the specialty infusion restaurants. Lania had never tried anything like it and outside of a few times in college, never partaked in marijuana use. But she was turning 35 and owned her own business in addition to consulting for major marketing companies, so she was free to enjoy life the way she saw fit. Lastly, Aldis convinced her a helicopter ride through the mountains would be fun. Lania was terrified, but how could she say no?*

*Part of her kept trying to remind herself that they were just dream-talking. Making plans to have a fun entertaining conversation. She learned he really was visiting Aspen alone, and the fantasy of doing all these fun things with a world superstar was fun. But throughout the night, he said little things that made her second guess the doubt. He asked for her resort pass number. The same pass the concierge told her she had to use to access the gaming center. And he asked her for her demographics as he typed on his phone. "Just connecting with a sky tours company and they are asking for all rider information." This was his response when she asked why he needed to know her weight. It was a joke, all for fun. There was no way the sexiest black actor was planning a week of fun with a consultant from Chicago whom he just met.*

*"Wow. It is 10:00pm" Aldis said. This was it. This was when they parted ways. Lania was ready to bid goodbye to this celebrity fantasy and left better than she arrived. She was still upset with her friends, but the day definitely took a turn for the better. She should try to capture the memory because no one would believe her once she got home.*

*"Man, it is. I think we have been talking for 5 hours. That's never happened to me before. I am a bit of a quiet soul."*

*"I just think you present shy because you hold the real you back from others."*

*“And I think you move in secret because you are looking for something more meaningful than action films and rom-coms Aldis.”*

*“Touche” He smiled, but it was different from earlier. More reserved. Lania wondered if he was pondering how to make a smooth exit to his penthouse suite.*

*“Yeah, listen this has been so fun. I cannot thank you enough for making my birthday special.”*

*“Lania, meeting you has been the highlight of my month. Thank you for the best belated birthday gift a normal guy like me could ever ask for.” Lania moved to slide out of the booth and he was up in a flash to assist her. Such a gentleman.*

*“Wow,” He said. Lania turned around getting her very fancy winter fur coat.*

*“What, do I have something on me?” Self consciousness hit and she started examining her green and purple dress. The simple silk party dress was wrinkled from sitting in a booth for 5 hours. Lania fluffed out the tulle and revived the structure of the dress, but she stopped when she felt his arm on her elbow.*

*“Lania, I want you to know that you have the prettiest hazel eyes I have ever seen. And your cheeks beg to be kissed with soft pecks of love and light, daily.” Aldis said.*

*“Thank you” Blush and shyness painted her face, but she forced herself to stand there and absorb the compliment. A compliment like this could hold her for years.*

*“Now that I have acknowledged your facial beauty, I don’t feel like a slimeball saying this.”*

*“Saying what.”*

*“You are working that dress. And that body.” Aldis stood and stared at her for a long moment. Lania smoothed over the dress and down her exposed thigh through the deep split.*

*“Aldis, you are making it hard for me to not blush.”*

*“Good because I want to see you blush more. You are so beautiful.”*

*“Thank you.”*

*“Your ex was a fool. A big fool.” She had told him all about Martin and the wasted years of her prime. He listened sympathetically, even placing his hands over hers as she recounted the breakup. He was so easy to talk to and since she was counting on never seeing*



him again, layers of privacy and embarrassment disappeared with his celebrity. She noticed how his head naturally dipped a little when the Tavern door opened.

"He was. But thank you for reminding me." She had her coat on, and the bill had been handled she assumed by Aldis. "Do you mind if we take a picture? I know you are here on the low, but I would love to have this memory." Lania pulled her phone out, which was cluttered with messages no doubt from Crystal and Shannon. She was finding her camera app and missed Aldis's face.

"Is this the start of our memory book for the week?" From behind her, he moved to fix the fur collar of her cloak. He was so close this time. His mouth was close to her ear, as his fingertips grazed her cheeks.

"Sure." He was still playing along with this birthday showdown.

"Am I okay here?" He placed his hands on her waist and Lania almost fell to her knees. She managed a small nod. And the blush warmed her face. He gently moved her braids from her left shoulder and tucked his chin right next to her collarbone.

"Well, selfie away Nia." The giggle that escaped was like a 6<sup>th</sup> grader who just got kissed in the hallway after school. She accidentally hit the shutter button on the phone.

"Wait, that was a horrible picture. Let's redo it." Lania recovered quickly.

"What, impossible. If you are in it, it is a lovely picture. Let me see it." Aldis reached across her face to touch the gallery button on her phone screen and looked at the last photo. It wasn't best, but she was mid-laugh and there was a streak of light across both of their faces.

"I love it."

"Well yeah, it's alright I guess. But you are an actor, and I am sure you know how to work those camera angles."

"Naw, it's you. Remember, I am a normal guy today having dinner with a beautiful woman in a random Tavern in Aspen.

"Let's do another one."

"Okay," Lania was surprised when Aldis hugged her closer, pulling her small frame into his broad chest. He wrapped both arms fully around her waist and placed a smooth kiss on her collarbone, then on her cheek,

*“Act right this time girl.” Lania tried to relax as she felt his arousal grow at the base of her back. Reaching out she tilted the camera perfectly before snapping a perfect picture for this memory.*

*“Perfect.” They said together looking at the photo. Aldis grabbed his oversized coat and shoved his arms through it.*

*“What is your chalet number? I will send a car for you tomorrow morning at about 11am unless you want to meet here and ride the lift down to the gaming center?” He was so casual with his words and that is the moment she realized Aldis Hodge was serious. He wanted to be with her, right here and now.*

## **Part 5**

*The air moving through the lift was cold. It was definitely giving winter retreat vibes. The view was unspeakable and both sat in silence as it escalated through tall pine trees and stars to her 5 bedroom chalet. Aldis called ahead to the crew, which Lania didn't realize came with the rentals. The fireplace and the hors d'oeuvres would already be prepared for them when they arrived.*

*“Lania, I am mighty cold over here in this metal seat.” She moved closer to him and he scooted closer, meeting in the middle of the lift bench. He wrapped his arm around her shoulders pulling her even closer.*

*“Sorry, I didn't believe you, Aldis. I just...”*

*“You just expect the worst from people.” He said.*

*“No, it is just that nothing ever just happens for me. It always happens to me.”*

*“I get that. I often feel like things just happen around me. So I get it. Perhaps this year, both you and I can aim to be active participants in our own happiness.” Lania liked the idea and nodded in approval. The stars lit the sky and the mountain tops gave off a light-hue against a deep blue sky.*

*“Do you ever count stars Aldis” They were about halfway to the chalet which was still pretty far in the distance. Only the top was viewable.*

*“Yeah, I do. I have a telescope in my apartment in New York. During the quiet moments, I watch the sky and try to see the stars move. Like I want to catch one in the act.”*

*"I like to name them."*

*"You are a dreamer Nia. I love that." Hearing him use the nickname that only her family and close friends used was oddly normal. It made her giggle again.*

*"What?"*

*"Nothing"*

*"Nia, we have been together all evening and we are currently on the way to a very huge chalet." He nodded to the house coming into view. "Goodness, you really had plans to live it up this week. Your chalet is bigger than mine!" His laughter made the lift tilt a bit and Lania had a brief moment of fear. He must have seen the shadow pass through her face because he used his other arm and hugged her. The embrace was perfect and definitely made her lady bits shimmy.*

*"It's just that you called me Nia. I typically don't hear that from people I met 6 hours ago."*

*"Oh, I'm sorry. It just fell out of my mouth. I should have asked you first."*

*"No, it is fine. I have told you just about everything about myself, so I guess it is almost fitting you use my familiar name." He played with her braids as they got closer to the weekend rental. The huge glass windows welcome them with a big orange glow. She could see people coming out of the home, likely the housekeeper and concierge service leaving by truck,*

*"Nia you are surprisingly intriguing and comforting to be around. You are a deep soul and I look forward to learning everything I can about you." All she could do was lean in and absorb more. If this daydream was going to melt away, she wanted it to melt over her body and hold her tight through the night.*

*"You know what I want to learn next?" They were about 400 feet from the exit. Through the snowy mist, Lania could see the lift operator preparing their landing space.*

*"What's that?"*

*"I want to see if your lips are as sweet as your voice." Before she could properly swoon Aldis kissed her. First softly, then more deeply, leaning his weight into her body. His tongue slowly slid out and caressed hers. She let him explore her mouth before wrapping both her arms around his neck possessively. The lift tilted backwards but she had no fear. Aldis pulled her waist closer almost sliding her onto his lap, and they tilted forward. The earth was moving and*

*their feet weren't even on the ground. This had to be the best kiss she had ever experienced. It was soft yet deep, sensual yet respectful. Wow.*

*Eventually, they both paused when they heard a voice clear their throat. Aldis shifted his body in front of Lania shielding her from the stranger's judgement.*

*"Ms. Lancaster, will you be needing the lift again tonight?" The valet said. He was dressed in a heavy snow coat and snow boots. Immediately she felt bad for making him stand outside so long while she made out with Aldis Hodge.*

*They both hurried to exit the lift. His hand never left hers but he didn't move forward. He just looked at her. Arousal floated between them and the stars. Lania knew this was a life-changing moment and he was letting the choice be hers.*

*"Be an active participant in my happiness." She said more to herself than to the two very cold gentlemen standing in front of her. Aldis stood tall, the maroon fluffy down coat covering his beautiful body. She wanted to see more of it. She wanted more now. She looked at her watch and it was 12:05am. It was her birthday and it was time she acted like it.*

*"No sir, we will not need the lift again tonight. Thank you so much for waiting." Lania tugged his hand forward. "Come on, it's my birthday. We should start the celebrations now."*

*"Well damn, Happy Birthday Lania Lancaster."*

## ***Epilogue***

*"Hey sweetheart" Lania heard Aldis's intense deep voice. She felt his strong body wrapped around hers. The baritone voice was so soothing it almost made her doze back off. She allowed him to rub her body awake and she slowly turned to see him smiling at her. She saw the hint of gray in his beard and rubbed his face tenderly.*

*"You are the sexiest man." Lania said.*

*"You are just saying that because I let you have your way with me this morning."*

*"Well, it is my birthday," Lania said moving her hands down his ribs and tracing his V-line over to his happy trail.*

*"Well, I feel like the birthday boy here, so I guess we are in a win-win situation."* Lania kissed Aldis tenderly. He made her feel so womanly, so adored. In the distance, she heard a humming noise and groaned.

*"That's been going off for 30 minutes now. If I didn't know better I would say you have a boyfriend or someone looking for you."* Aldis's tone was light, but she could tell he was a bit serious.

*"Aldis, I am single. Are you single?"* He held her face close. He still smelled of cedar and cherries, even after all the lovemaking they did throughout the early morning.

*"No, I am not single."* Lania froze for a moment but his firm hands held her in place. *"I recently started dating a beautiful woman named Lania Lancaster. I think I really like her, and I already feel myself getting jealous. So her buzzing phone is making me nervous that I will have to fight off competition."* That made her giggle. He had kept her smiling for the last 12 hours and she could not get enough.

*"Baby, I know you like to pretend like you are not the man, but you are. You are the competition."* Lania reached to grab her phone. She had 43 individual messages. Apparently, she did not properly block her friends. She saw one from her mother in all caps.

*"Oh goodness. My friends called my mother."*

*"You ignoring her too for a whole week?"*

*"No, I am not."* Lania sent a quick, I'm Safe message to relax her mother. As soon as she did that her phone rang in her hand. *"Crystal, that damn IT genius, bypassing my phone settings to make the phone ring"* she mumbled.

*"Nia, answer it."* Aldis was still right there rubbing her lower back. He was such an empathic guy.

*"I'm still kinda angry."*

*"I know, but if you don't answer, they will continue to run your happiness. And remember, we are taking control of happiness this year. Plus don't you think you should tell them how your birthday is going so far?"* He winked and it took her a moment to catch on.

*"Really? You okay with that?"*

*"Nothing says payback like a celebrity boyfriend."* Lania laughed again and Aldis grabbed the phone which was still ringing.

*“Boyfriend?” Lania said with a flirty giggle.*

*“It just fell out of my mouth” he said and then kissed her forehead and threw one arm behind his neck, His beautiful chest on full display for the video call. Before she could stop him, he hit the green accept button.*

*“Hi Crystal, hi Shannon are you looking for Nia.” Lania let her hair fall into the camera before pushing it back out of her face, which was snuggled into Aldis's bare chest. The dirty grin on her face was gleeful.*

*“Hi. Meet my new boyfriend, Aldis.”*

*“Aldis Hodge!” Both ladies screamed in unison.*

*Happy Birthday to me.*

***The End***