



His
CHRISTMAS

Angel

TAMRIN BANKS

His Christmas Angel

A COUNTRY CHRISTMAS

TAMRIN BANKS



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Cover by Matilda Martel

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*For all the Christmas magic out there just waiting to be found! I hope you
find your own! Love y'all!*

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CHAPTER 1

Luca

“I’m so sorry, Luca. I couldn’t get ahold of you and I had an emergency with one of my patients at the hospital. I had to go.”

“Dammit! I didn’t get any of your damn messages. I must have been in a dead zone. I was on a site up the mountain, working on the designs for a new cabin up there. The owner is a ranger and he’s looking for a place out of the public. He’s going to be working in the ranger cabin but he wants his own space of course, for when he’s not working.”

“That’s nice. But I couldn’t wait any longer. I had to get someone to get here with Jessie.”

“Who did you get?” An uneasy foreboding fills me as I race down the mountain, my fingers gripping the steering wheel tightly as I listen to her voice through my speakers.

“Well, don’t be mad. I tried everyone I knew and she was the only one available.”

A sinking feeling hits my gut. “Who is it, Fawn?” I love my sister but if she left Jess with someone inappropriate, I’m gonna have to kill her. This is why I hate the Christmas break. I’ve got to find someone to watch my seven-year old when normally she’d be at school. And her usual babysitter is currently wallowing away on a mountain in Colorado, her foot propped up where she freaking broke it while skiing.

My luck so far this school break sucks so I’m holding my breath hoping that it’s not worse than I hoped.

“Well, I know you have issues but she was available and she’s totally responsible.”

“Oh my God! NO!” I hiss under my breath. I don’t think this could get any worse and when she finally says the name it feels like my heart and my

mind are warring with each other. Well, that and my dick.

“Stop being like that! Gemma’s a lovely person! I don’t know why you don’t like her.”

“Because she’s immature and she parties too much. She’s not responsible at all.”

“I think you’re being a little harsh with her. I mean...we both know how you ended up being a single dad. I know that Jessie’s mom was a flaky nut and that she ran off with that guy who was just passing through town, but Gemma is not Felicia. She’s very responsible for her age.”

Grunting, I ignore her as I take the corner at the bottom of the mountain, heading towards my little house in the middle of town.

One of these days I want to live further up the mountain but it’s just me and Jessie and we need to be close to what amenities Wildwood has. She’s still so young that it worries me being too far from civilization, such as it is on the mountain.

“I’m heading home and I’ll take care of this myself,” I growl. I hang up on my sister and then immediately feel bad about how rude I was being. My sister has dropped things many times to help me out when I was trying to take care of my five-year old who was completely lost after her mother left. She just kept asking where she went to and I didn’t have a clue how to answer her.

Instead I let my mind wander to work. The only place I feel really on point. As a dad, it’s all a little rocky sometimes but with my design work, I feel good.

I’ve been working in custom design for a long time by myself but now I’m being courted by Wildwood Construction to join their team. I’ve been friends with Max for a long time. Their business is booming here on the mountain and other places close by although they’re starting to spread out. Which is why they need more help.

Not that there isn’t enough work for all of us but if I could join the bigger company instead of my freelance business of blueprint design for custom homes, it would be a relief in some ways. The freelance part was important when Jessie was smaller but now that she’s in school full-time I could definitely work more time at the office.

And maybe I’m ready to be around more adults. Maybe I need some conversation with people who actually know what’s going on around them instead of kids my daughter’s age when I volunteer on a field trip or

something for her so that I can spend more time with her and protect her.

I pull up outside my little cottage. The one I moved into when I sold the large house that I owned when I was with Jessie's mom. She liked the space and lording it over some of the other women in town. I couldn't care less.

But as soon as she was out the door after chasing her new boyfriend out of town, I sold that monstrosity and found this adorable little cottage. It was perfect for a man who barely had time to take care of himself, his business and his little girl. Not necessarily in that order.

I sigh and shut off my truck, running my hands through my hair when I see the curvy silhouette at the window where the curtains aren't closed. My dick immediately reacts like it always does.

I know exactly who it is. Gemma Simmons. She's only fifteen freaking years older than my daughter. Twenty two to my thirty two. I'm ten years older than her and most of the time I feel about fifty years older.

But she's made her feelings plain. She doesn't mind that at all. She's teased and tormented me since the first minute she saw me. She's flirty and gorgeous and it's too much. It's like a sensation overload every time I'm near her and I can feel my defenses crumbling the more I'm around her.

And that can't happen. I'm not looking for a good time. I'm not looking for anything really. I just want to be able to take care of my daughter reasonably well and make her happy. That's my only goal in life. That and to make her believe in the magic of Christmas and Santa Claus. She's starting to ask those questions and I know it's partly because she's in second grade and there are other kids that already know. I'm not ready for my little girl to start growing up and moving away from the magic of the holidays and me. I want what little time I have left with her with stars in her eyes before those stars dim and she starts to understand what happened with her mother and that fairytales, dreams and even unicorns aren't real.

Sometimes you just have to grow up and move on. That was the lesson I learned when my wife ran away from our supposedly happy family on Christmas Eve with her new lover.

But I will move heaven and earth to give my daughter just a few more minutes of happiness.

That's the last thing I'm thinking though when the curvy little babysitter steps foot onto my front porch. She smiles at me and her wide green eyes are open and honest. She looks so damn young unless you look at those lush hips, full lips and the best pair of high, round breasts I've ever seen in my

life. It's like she's an angel that's fallen to earth and has every lusty devil running at her, desperate for just a smile, a look, a touch.

Her blond hair whips around in the wind and I frown, stepping out of my truck and stomping up to my front porch. "What the hell are you doing out here without a coat on, Gemma Simmons?"

Her pretty smile falters and I feel like the biggest dick on the planet but I don't back down. I can't.

"Get back in that house until you've got a coat on, woman," I growl and stalk up to her, feeling a strange impulse to stalk after her like a panther on the prowl when she starts backing away from me.

I grasp her arm and turn her around, lightly pulling her along with me. "You need to get your coat so you can go home, Gemma. Thank you for watching Jessie but my sister shouldn't have called you."

She stiffens and her sky-blue eyes narrow angrily. I hate to say it but that only stiffens my cock even more.

I shove that shit down and grit my teeth. "I'll be happy to pay you for your time but in the future I would appreciate it if you didn't do anything like this."

Her pale brows lift and she eyes me like I've gone completely round the bend. "Why on earth wouldn't I want to watch Jessie? She's a sweet little girl. I like spending time with her. We baked some Christmas cookies and we're going to take them over to the nursing home. They love having visitors and I volunteer there every week."

"I don't think that Jessie should go there." My lips firm and I cross my arms over my chest, glaring her down. I know I'm being a dick but I just can't help myself. Because if I give in, I know that I won't be able to resist the honest sweetness of Gemma. She's too wild, too alluring and just too much for me to handle.

She needs to go.



CHAPTER 2

Gemma

Luca crosses his arms over his spectacular, wide chest and it takes everything in me not to growl and jump him.

I've never been a girl who holds things in and I want Luca. I've made it plain.

He's been just as plain. And stubborn. I know he wants me. I'd have to be blind to miss what happens to his lower body every time I pass him. I mean, I know what I look like and I'm not a thin, beautiful woman. But it still seems to work for him.

I could be good for him if he'd just give in and let me. But he's a stubborn asshole who insists on treating me like I'm a little kid.

My jaw clenches. "Why the hell not?"

He grunts and if anything that rugged jaw of his clenches even more than mine. If looks could freeze my ass, I'd have icicles under my jeans. "Because I said so."

Tossing my blond curls, I cross my own arms over my generous chest, celebrating for one second when his eyes blaze with heat, following the move. Unfortunately, then they turn ice cold.

"You sound very mature for your thirty-two years. What are you, having a midlife crisis but going all the way back to preschool?"

His brow lifts devilishly. "You know, if you keep saying shit like that I'm going to spank your ass."

I sidle up until I'm right up against his body, watching him freeze, his blue eyes heating to boiling. My finger comes out and pokes him in his extra-hard chest. I'd kinda like to know what else might be hard but since I'm pushing a lot of his buttons right now, I resist the impulse to glance down.

"I double-dog dare ya!" I smirk and turn around, knowing damn well he

won't touch me. He's too mature. Or too chicken. I'm not sure which.

He groans behind me and then I gasp as his big hand cups my elbow and spins me around. My mouth drops open but before I can make a sound, he slams his lips down on mine and it's like all my Christmas dreams and fantasies are coming to life right now.

His lips on mine are still chilled from the cold air outside but it takes less than a second for them to heat up on mine. He growls and his big, blunt fingers tangle in my blond curls and tilt my head just right, holding me steady as he plunders my mouth. He tastes like peppermint and coffee and I melt into him, lost in his touch and taste. His tongue tangles with mine, velvet soft and sinful as it dances around the inside of my mouth, sliding along my teeth and the inside of my cheek.

Almost as fast as it started it stops and he backs away from me, appalled.

"I'm sorry, dammit! I didn't mean to do that. You just wouldn't shut up."

My heart sinks but I stiffen my spine, pushing the hurt down. It feels like I'm gonna pass out going from heaven to hell so fast but I'm used to it with this man. He's obviously insane.

I stomp over and pull my coat off the pegs in the corner. "Wow! Tell me how you really feel, asshole. Jessie is in her bedroom working on her homework." I yank on my coat and grab my purse as I head for the door.

"Where are you going?" He asks me.

"Home. Because I've got more important things to do than listen to you tell me I'm a mistake."

I stalk off, my back rigid. I hear him thundering up behind me.

"I didn't mean it exactly like that, Gemma. I just meant that I shouldn't have done that. Not that there's anything wrong with you."

I whirl around and hold my hand out, slamming him to a stop. "I don't want to hear it, Luca. I'm going home and get what I needed to do earlier taken care of and then I'm going to go out and try and forget that today ever happened. Tell Jessie I'm sorry about the cookie thing. I promise I won't bother you anymore. Have a great holiday."

"But...but...".

I stomp off and straight out to my car, my anger keeping most of the hurt at bay. For a little while, anyway.

Luca steps out on the porch and stares at my car and I can almost feel his steely-blue eyes burning into me. His full lips are tight and angry. His scruffy jaw and lean cheeks are reddened from cold and anger. The same anger that I

feel right now.

I'm pissed. And I never thought I'd be as annoyed with this man as I am right now.

But we all live and learn. And what I've learned is that I think I have to kiss the dream of being Luca's good-bye. He doesn't want me. Or rather, he does want me but he is not going to admit it to me or himself. He'd sooner growl and push me away.

Well, fine. I don't care anymore. I've got work and my life to live. I don't need him dragging me down anyway. He's too old for me. Too grouchy for me.

Too much for me to handle.

My steps drag and I hold the door open, staring at him, the frisky, cold wind picking the golden-brown strands of his hair up and fluffing them around. Just like I want to do with my fingers, feeling the soft strands flow through them like silk.

His blue-grey eyes are hard and cold. So damn cold.

I turn away and get in the car, turning it on and hitting the gas to back up, not even looking in the rearview mirror.

I don't want to see him. Don't want to risk seeing him again and losing the will to leave.

This has to be it. I need to find my own happiness and it's obviously not with Luca Baxter.

My chest feels tight and I feel tears trickling down my cheeks. But I sniffle and push all of it down.

I am strong. I am Gemma and I will survive without him. After all, there are plenty of men out there. Surely there's one that I will love more than that one?



CHAPTER 3

Luca

“**W**here’s Gemma? She said that we were going to the nursing home this week with the cookies we made. They’re going to get stale.”

I drop my head into my hands. Jessie’s been chirping for days about spending time with Gemma and how much fun she is. How they just had the best time and I’m ready to rip my damn hair out by the roots. All week I’ve been unable to work because I can’t leave Jessie home alone and the first day when I took her with me I found her messing with a nail gun, knocking herself back on her ass when she shot one and hit the wall by my head. I hustled her ass out of there and haven’t been back. I think it took me two days for my heart rate to go back to normal!

I’m so behind schedule it’s ridiculous. I even called Donna, the old babysitter and offered to pay her for three months in advance and double her usual fees if she made it home. But she can’t drive and her family is insisting that she stay home on the mountain and let them take care of her.

I honestly can’t blame them. But I still need help and my sister has had to work almost non-stop because some of her co-workers have gotten sick as well and she’s pulling doubles at the hospital. When she’s not working, she’s sleeping and she’s grumpy as hell.

It’s also not fair to her to depend on her so much to fix my problems even if she does love her niece like her own.

The one time I woke her up when she was sleeping she almost took my head off and then she growled, “You messed this up. Gemma would have gladly helped you. Fix it.” And then she hung up the phone and I was left staring at it, gritting my teeth.

If I have to hear Gemma’s name one more time, I’m going to lose my mind.

I haven't seen her since we separated the last time and it's quite obvious she's avoiding me. Normally, I would spot her all over town. No matter where I went, I'd see her smiling face and know what she was doing.

Stalking me. Oddly enough, I miss it. It's obvious that I must have hit my head because I have lost my mind.

"I'm sorry, kiddo. Gemma is really busy at the coffee shop. You know she has a job there." Which is why I never go there to get coffee even though they make the best coffee. I was trying to avoid her. Now...it's the other way around.

The phone rings and I pick it up with a sigh of relief. *Thank God!* Saved by the phone.

"Hey, Max! What's up, man?"

"Ummm. You were supposed to meet us this morning to go over that proposal with us for the Michaels house. The one that we don't have time to get the blueprints done for and we asked you for a look at what you might do?"

Oh fuck! "I'm so sorry, Max. I haven't had a babysitter this week and I've gotten so off-schedule it's crazy. But I've got it done. I just forgot about the meeting."

"How is Jessie doing?" He asks me.

"She's doing great. But she's still a handful."

He chuckles. "She takes after her father. I well remember what you were like when we were young."

"Fine. Yes. But do me a favor and don't ever bring those stories up in front of her, dammit," I whisper into the phone.

"Hey, how about my wife watching her tonight so we can take a look at things. I'm sure she'd love to have a little girl time with Jessie."

I hear voices behind him and then he gets back on. "Yeah. She'd love to but she's got book club in town."

"That's amazing! Jessie loves to read."

"Dude. Not these kinds of books."

My face goes red and I wish I hadn't said that. I know what that damn book club is all about. I just didn't remember right off the bat, dammit!

"Oh. Yeah. That's not gonna work."

I hear the voices behind him again and then he says, "Wait a minute. Aster said that they can do a Christmas movie night instead at the house. With hot chocolate and wine and some Christmas movies they all love."

“Are you sure that’s alright? I don’t want to put the girls out.”

“Don’t you worry about it. I’m sure the girls will have a great time. Just come over tonight at six and we’ll go out and find a place to work. Maybe we’ll come to the offices since they are gonna take over the house.”

“You know that your house is huge. We can probably find a corner to work in away from the movies and stuff.”

“Nope. If we stay there, the guys will keep wandering off to find their wives. All of us can’t stand to be away from them. We wouldn’t get any work done at all.”

Chuckling, I shake my head. It’s actually nice how much they love their wives. And vice versa. I’ve never seen so many happy couples in Wildwood. They’re everywhere.

Except for me. I don’t have a prayer of finding anyone. Not with all my hang-ups.

“Hey, why don’t we come back here and work. I’ll get us some beers and some pizzas so we can eat while we work.”

“That sounds good. I’m gonna see how many of the guys can come. But it might just be me and my brother. Tom is wrapped around Reva’s finger and Harrison is an absolute nut job about his fiancée. We’re losing guys left and right to Cupid.”

“You should know. You’re one of them.”

“There’s nothing like finding the woman of your dreams and realizing she loves you too, man. Speaking of...when are you going to start dating? And what happened with Gemma?”

My back straightens. “She’s too young for me. And too flighty. I’m not looking for a woman any time soon but if I was, it wouldn’t be a woman like her.”

I hear Aster’s voice in the background but I don’t really know what she’s saying and I keep waiting for Max to ask me a question but he doesn’t. So I just tune it all out and start working on my pitch in my head.

By the time I get off the phone after we make our plans, I’ve got my plans made and I call and order pizza and grab my car keys.

“Let’s go to the store, Jessie!” I holler. “I’ve got to pick up a few things.”

“Like what?” She hollers back and I sigh, jiggling my keys nervously.

“Just come on, Jessie! I’ve got to get some things done today so that I can have that meeting tonight while you watch Christmas movies with Aster at Max’s.”

“Yeah!” She fist pumps the air and I try not to be offended that she’s obviously super-excited to be meeting with Aster for the night.

It’s probably a girl thing right? I’m sure I’ll never understand the way girls work and I don’t want to try right now.

I peel out of the driveway and head towards the store, my mind whirling with plans.

I need to get this damn plan perfect. I need this job and I need to get access to Wildwood Construction.

I sigh and watch Jessie as she darts up and down the aisles, babbling at everyone.

One more meeting and I could be in a perfect position to take my business to the next level.

Just don’t screw this up, buddy! After my little pep talk, I head back home to make sure that I’ve got my blueprints drafted as well as I can. Make sure that I’ve added everything on the list.

Tonight is going to be perfect if I have anything to say about it! I’ve got this in the bag.



CHAPTER 4

Gemma

I groan when Aster calls me for a Christmas movie night. I really wanted to get drunk in town and walk home. Or crawl as the case may be.

My heart hurts so freaking much right now, I just want to curl up and drink until I can't see straight.

Christmas movie night sounds like a special form of Hell since the only thing I wanted for Christmas is so far gone out of my reach it might as well be on Mars.

I haven't seen Luca for days. Actually for a whole week and I know how it feels to go through withdrawal from an addiction now. Be it sugar or caffeine or whatever. I can't handle this.

Aster's so damn bubbly on the phone that I almost want to reach through the receiver and punch her in the face.

Then I feel bad because she didn't do anything. Just because I fell for the wrong guy doesn't mean it's her fault. I was the idiot. I mean, the guy made it plain as day he wasn't interested. He might as well have taken out a full-page ad that said, "Get away from me, woman! I'm not gonna love you ever so just give it up."

Ugh! I slump down and dip my spoon in my half-melted ice cream. Even my go-to holiday treat of Peppermint Cookies ice cream isn't helping. It just makes me miss him more.

"Hey, are you listening to me?"

"Hmmm? What did you say?"

"Just come over about five so you can help me get the food and stuff ready. And can you head into town and get me two of those big platters of cookies and sandwiches from the deli? I have been craving their homemade pizza sandwiches for about a week."

“Craving, huh? Got anything you want to tell me?” I snicker.

“I do not. Just help me out. We’re gonna watch a couple of Christmas movies this time and then next week we’ll cover My Boss’s Steamy Proposal.”

“Alright, fine,” I huff and cover my ice cream, throwing it in the freezer. “I’ll see you later.”

“Yep. Thanks.”

Aster hangs up and I groan. Ever since I moved to Wildwood it’s been one thing after another. I knew that I had to follow Luca once he left that job though.

I miss my bestie, Lily though. She’s currently pregnant with their first child and she’s tired and wenchy but she’s still my best friend. I especially miss spending Christmas with her. I wish she could travel or I could but that’s just not gonna happen.

I’m too broke and she’s too big. Not to mention Sam wouldn’t let her out by herself anyway. The man is crazy about her.

A little stab of jealousy hits me right in the gut. I know I shouldn’t feel like this but my Lily has got the man of her dreams, she’s pregnant with his child and she just found out she’s got a twin sister that she met and has been bonding with.

It’s like her life is coming right off the pages of some fairy tale and it’s too damn bad that I can’t be happier for her instead of being such a humbug. I’m a horrible friend.

It just hurts. I don’t think I’ll ever find someone that loves me as much as Sam loves Lily. I thought Luca was the one but I’m an idiot.

I pick up my keys and head to the grocery store, groaning when I see how busy the little lot is. There are cars stacked up on top of each other. It’s going to take forever.

“Hell’s bells,” I mutter under my breath, stomping across the lot. Aster is going to owe me big time for this.

I step inside the bustling store and head straight for the deli. Today is obviously not the day to dawdle. After fifteen minutes standing in line I’m ready to run away, screaming. Everyone around me is talking on the phone to their family members and it just reminds me that since my mom overdosed, I have no one.

Not that she was a peach to start with. The woman didn’t really have a motherly bone in her body.

But she was still all I had left. That's why when she died, I went looking for Luca. I knew his name and I had met Jessie so I knew her name. The rest was fairly easy since I met him on vacation and knew he was an architect from listening to him talking on the phone to a client.

Obviously he's an overworked one since he couldn't even take off a few days without someone hunting for him.

So poor Jessie was just sitting there bored and we started chatting. I love kids and she's just fun to talk to.

Her dad? He is a serious DILF. First second I saw him it was like my nether regions were ready to party.

Not that I'm a virgin or anything but I don't screw around a lot. Not like Lily who saved it for her prince. But I kept it to a couple of guys. I really wish I hadn't even bothered. They didn't do more than stick it in a couple of times and twist their hips once or twice like it was some damn magic trick to give me an orgasm.

"And a one and a two and... ta dah!" I mutter under my breath. No big orgasm for me though. Not even a baby one. I've had a better time with my rabbit than those guys.

My skin crawls and it feels like my spine is burning. My head twists back and forth and unease hits me. It feels like someone is watching me. But when I look around, I don't see anyone I know.

I turn back to the front and keep my eyes facing forward, ignoring that weird, sketchy feeling that keeps tickling my nerves.

I'm imagining things. There's nobody watching me except old Mrs. Duncan and that's only because the woman is almost blind and I think I'm the only thing close enough for her to see right now.

"Number fifty-two?" The person behind the counter calls my number and I wave it like I've just found the place Jimmy Hoffa is buried.

"That's me," I holler, bouncing up to the counter, rocking back and forth on my sneaker-clad toes.

"Hello, Gemma. What do you need today, girl?"

I raise a brow at Chuck. "I'm here for Aster. She's throwing a party and she needs one of your famous sandwich trays and one of your cookie trays."

"You're in luck, my girl. I've got one of each ready for you. Aster called me to have them ready."

Smiling, I hand him the money. "Thank heavens for that. She's always prepared for everything. I want to be her when I grow up."

He snorts. “Don’t we all. Rich ex-actresses who don’t have to do a thing but look pretty.”

“Hey. Aster is helping out with a bunch of different homeless charities and she’s been building houses too. She’s not one to sit on her ass.”

Abashed, he nods at me. “I shouldn’t have said that. You’re right. She does a lot of good around here. Tell her hi from me.”

I nod my head but it stops when I swear I see someone familiar. My breath hitches and I go still.

I swear that was Luca.

Shaking my head, I take the trays and smile at Chuck. “Thanks. I can’t wait to have one of your infamous tuna sandwiches.”

He groans. “I make better things than that.”

“Hey. We each have our likes. I don’t play favorites. Just in the mood for tuna.”

“Right, right. Have a good time tonight, Gemma.”

“You have a good night, Chuck.”

I turn around and walk right into a broad, muscular chest. I bounce off it and gasp when I look up into steel-blue eyes burning at me.

“Gemma,” he says, nodding his golden-brown head at me.

“Bye, Luca,” I squeak, turning on my heels and taking off at a dead run.

“Hey!” He hollers and I hear his heavy footsteps pounding after me but I don’t stop and for once, the crowds are working in my favor.

I dash out the door and run to my little car, throwing myself in the seat and groaning, bounce my head off the steering wheel.

“That was too close,” I growl, starting the car and heading up the mountain to Aster and Max’s.

God, he looked hot though. His bronze hair was all ruffled by the breeze and his eyes were like London topaz. All smoky and shimmering blue.

But he wasn’t smiling and I’m not looking to get any more hung up on a man that hates me than I already am.

It’s time to get my head on straight and move on.

Easier said than done.



CHAPTER 5

Luca

Absence does make the heart grow fonder. That has to be the reason that my heart felt light as soon as I saw Gemma's curvy little figure in the store.

She was wearing a pair of ass-hugging jeans that couldn't have molded her hips any better if she'd painted them on. She was smiling and talking to the guy behind the deli counter and sheer jealousy roared through me when I saw her smile one of her special smiles at him.

If he wasn't old enough to be her grandpa I'd probably have crawled over that counter and punched him right in the face.

"Hey, Luca!" I drop my head down and suck in air, more winded than I should be at running across a store.

I lift my head and see Mrs. Digby coming up to me, grinning like a sheep-killing pup.

Oh shit! The gossip vine is going to love this one!

"Yeah, Mrs. Digby. Did you need something?"

She shakes her head, not even losing the smile. "No. But you look like you need something." I wince and try not to run. Jessie's standing next to me now and her eyes are huge in her pale face.

"I saw you chasing..."

I cut her off. "Yeah. You know that lady forgot something at the register. I couldn't let her leave without it. I've got to go now. Thanks for checking on me." I grab Jessie's hand and grab my beer off the counter where I dropped it when I saw Gemma.

"See you later."

Then I hit the door at a dead run, groaning when Jessie digs in her heels. "What are we running from, Daddy?"

“Nothing. I’m just gonna be late for my meeting. Let’s go. I bet you’re excited to see those movies with Aster and whichever girls show up tonight.”

She nods, her face serious. Her blue-grey eyes are the spitting image of mine and it makes my heart hurt.

“Yeah. I can’t wait to see Aster. I’m hoping that Rebel and Fern are there too. And Daffy. She said she’d show me how to make my own snow globes this Christmas but I haven’t been to her classes lately.”

She pouts her lower lip out and I immediately struggle to push the guilt back down. We’ve been stuck in the house because of my work and it’s not fair to her either. This is her vacation as well.

“Well, I tell you what. I will take you this Saturday to Daffy’s class so she can show you the snow globe thing.”

“Yay! Thank you, Daddy!”

She throws her arms around my legs and hugs me tightly. Tears sting my eyes and I struggle not to sniffle.

“Sure, peanut. I can’t wait to see what your globe looks like.”

She’s bouncing in her seat in the car as we drive up to the house. “Me either. Daffy is so nice and she said it’s really easy. I’m gonna make you a really special one!”

“I can’t wait, sweetie!”

As I pull up to the house I see a familiar car sitting in the driveway. Jessie sees it too.

“Gemma’s here, she’s here!”

I hurry to get her out of her car seat before she shreds it with her bare hands. “Hold on!” I holler as she takes off for the door.

“I can’t! She might leave!” There’s that punch to the gut again and I lift a hand to my chest, rubbing it ruthlessly.

I knew that Jessie liked Gemma. I didn’t realize that she missed her. Didn’t realize that I was punishing my daughter for my own out-of-control hormones.

She hits the door full tilt and doesn’t even bother knocking.

“Hey, Jessie! Wait until someone answers the door!”

She doesn’t hear me just keeps running. The door opens and Gemma’s smiling face lowers to my daughter’s as she squats and picks her up in a huge hug.

“Hey, Jessie! I’ve missed you so much! Thank you for coming tonight!”

“I didn’t know you were gonna be here!” She’s flushed and babbling but I

miss most of it as Gemma's green eyes catch my eye. Her smile fades and guilt nags at me.

I ache to hold her, touch her and it's not her fault I'm a damn bastard. What am I supposed to do though? She's so young. Surely she doesn't know what she wants.

My wife didn't. Look how that mess turned out.

"Let's go on in and get this party started. I've got my favorite movie picked out."

"Which one is it?"

She cocks her blond head at my daughter and winks at her. "I'll never tell but I bet it might be the same as yours."

"Yes!" She punches the air and grins. "You're the best, Gemma!" Then her voice lowers and she whispers rather loudly. "I sent my letter to Santa. I wished that you could be my mommy this year."

The ache in my heart spreads through my whole body. My daughter is missing so much since her damn mom made a run for it. And I've been working so much that I didn't even realize it.

Gemma stiffens and her green eyes close, her chest lifting in a deep breath that makes my jeans tighten until I'm struggling to keep from moving my dick out of the way where my zipper's digging in.

Damn, she's so beautiful. I don't remember seeing the way her pink lips turn up in a killer smile when she looks at Jessie.

I don't remember the way my heart aches when Jessie hugs her long and hard, whispering, "I missed you so much."

"I missed you too, honey," she whispers, her green eyes lifting to mine.

Regret and pain darken their evergreen depths and I can't breathe. I put that look in her eyes. I pushed her away and my daughter suffered. Gemma suffered.

Even I suffered because I missed her so much it hurt to breathe.

"Fern! Yay!" Jessie wriggles and Gemma puts her down, chuckling when she runs to Fern's calm, elegant figure.

She turns to go but I grasp her elbow, wincing when she glares at my hand.

"I'm sorry, Gemma. I shouldn't have made you stay away from Jessie. I didn't realize how much she missed you."

She grimaces and pulls away from me. "That's because you never bothered to ask." She stomps off and I cringe. I'm an ass. I don't think she'll

ever forgive me but I can't help but try.

The next time we're alone, I'm gonna plead my case on my knees if need be. One way or another, maybe she'll give me a second chance.

I still don't think we're right for each other but if I can keep myself from touching her, maybe we can be friends for Jessie's sake.



CHAPTER 6

Luca

“So how’s it going with Gemma?” I wince when Max and Jameson sit down at the table and grab a piece of pizza and beer.

“How do you think it’s going? She’s too young and I told her that. She didn’t like it. We had a fight and now she’s avoiding me.”

Max nods and Jameson smirks. “And now you miss her and realize you made a big mistake, right?”

I whip my head up, my eyes wide. Both of them chuckle. “How’d you know that?”

“It’s easy to tell a woman that you don’t want her but backing it up is hard as hell when you realize that she’s your one.” Jameson chugs a big swallow and tilts his head back. “I fought my feelings for Fern for a long time and so did she. But as soon as we got back together it was like we’d never been apart. We picked up right where we were. But the pain we forced on each other was harder to get over.”

“Yeah. I bet.” I groan and tilt my head back, staring at the ceiling. “Jessie missed her and it’s all my fault she was hiding from me and also Jessie.”

“Yep.” Max and Finn smile at me. “It’s hard to be the bad guy when you realize that you made a mistake. You fucked up. Now how are you gonna fix it?”

“I don’t know. I want to see her but she’s so young. It just seems wrong.”

Finn nods, his eyes sparkling. “Yeah, the old biddies will talk in the salon but do you really care?”

“No. I don’t care. All I care about is Jessie. And Gemma,” I whisper.

“Then figure something out. Either that or some other lucky son of a bitch is gonna get in there and pick up the pieces you left and win her heart. She’s not gonna wait forever.”

My chest aches and I rub it absently. I swear Gemma's gonna give me a heart attack.

"Yeah. I'm a selfish bastard. But I really want to see her. And Jessie is missing her bad. I'm actually taking her to Daffy's studio on Saturday to do that snow globe thing."

Jameson pops up. "Ask her to go with you. Girls love shit like that."

Max glares at his brother. "You better hope that Fern never hears you say something so rude."

"How is it rude?" Jameson grins and his dark head tilts. "It's a well-known thing."

"It's rude to generalize like that."

"Wow. I didn't realize that the Doctor was in."

"Okay. I'll ask her. Just not in front of Jessie. I don't want to get her hopes up."

"Come up with some fun things to do for Christmas with Jessie. Make it a family date. That might work better to win her over since you kinda shot yourself in the ass."

I growl at him and sigh, running my fingers through my hair. "Yeah. Maybe."

"Let's work on this and then we'll take a look at your design. I bet it's perfect so we're not that worried. But I say ask her in front of Jessie. She'll have a harder time saying no."

I glare at Max. "That's sneaky as hell."

"Faint heart never won fair maiden, man. Nut up and fix this if you want your woman."

All of the men around the table grimace. "Ugh. Rude."

But we laugh and start plotting. It's interesting to me. These guys are like a little family and I can't help but hope that they offer me the job because it's actually nice to have someone to lean on besides my sister.

All of these men have good, solid relationships and love their wives or girlfriends. All of their women are happy.

I could do worse than take their advice.



CHAPTER 7

Gemma

I yawn and head out to my car, waving at Aster and all the girls as I climb into my car. I turn the car key and nothing happens. Turn it again with my heart racing like a wild thing.

No matter how many times I turn the key it doesn't do a damn thing. My favorite little car that I've had since I was in high school is now nothing but a gigantic paperweight. Not even one light turns on on the dashboard.

Fern knocks on my window. "What's going on, Gemma?"

"The car won't start. I don't know what's wrong but it won't even turn over."

"Shit. Let me think." She stalks off and I see her on her phone talking to someone, her hands waving excitedly.

"Who is she talking to?" I ask Aster.

She grins at me and shrugs. "You never know with Fern but for sure she'll solve the problem. That's what she does."

I nod and drop my head to the steering wheel. "This week just plain sucks."

"Hey, chin up! You got this. I know you can make these problems your bitch."

Snorting, I lift my head and eye her cheekily. "That's your job. I just fall over my own feet all the time."

"Hey. Don't talk down to my friend. Come on, come in and have another drink since you're not driving home."

"Fine. But I want one of these berry wine coolers. Those are so good."

"Fine. I got you, babe." We go back in the door and I smile when I see that Jessie's fast asleep on the couch.

"What about Jessie?" I ask, nodding my head to her.

“She’s gonna spend the night.”

“Does Luca know?”

“No. But the man needs a break. Even he can’t argue that.”

Snorting, I hug her close and laugh. “That man doesn’t know how to take a break and have some fun. He’s got a fucking Christmas tree stuck so far up his ass he’s snorting pine needles.”

Daffy roars with laughter, tossing her blond curls back. “That’s very descriptive. Have you thought of writing?”

Shaking my head, I grin. “I don’t have enough follow-through for that but if my friend, Lily, ever writes her book, I’m gonna be her agent and make those publishing houses pay through the nose for her books.”

“That sounds like a plan.”

“Yep.”

Fern comes back in with the biggest smirk on her face, her teeth a slash of white in her dark features. “I’ve got it fixed up. I’ve got a ride coming for you. Don’t worry.”

I breathe deep and grin at her. “You’re the best.”

“We’ll see what you think in about twenty minutes,” I hear her mutter under her breath.

I don’t get a chance to ask her what she meant because Aster and I start working on our new idea for a brand-new coffee drink. It’s got whipped cream, caramel and dark chocolate sauce and rich coffee. I take a test sip when I get done making it and grin wide.

“That’s so good.”

“Let me try!” All the girls start waving hands and we pass the drink around to pour little sips into plastic cups.

“What are you going to call it?”

“I don’t know. It almost tastes like caramel apples. With chocolate which just makes it taste better.”

My head whips round as I hear boots stomping on the porch. My eyes widen as the door opens and Luca’s head pops in the door. “Hey, the guys couldn’t drive except for me. I brought them all back but they said someone here needs a ride?”

Fern grins like the grinch when he’s got that brilliant plan. “Perfect. We’re gonna keep Jessie because she’s sound asleep and it’s silly to move her when we’ve got more than enough room. But Gemma needs a ride home. Her car wouldn’t start.”

His stormy blue eyes turn towards me. “Is that true, Gemma? Your car on the fritz?”

“Yeah, it is. But I can call someone to come get me.” My hands are sweating up a storm and I can’t stop the way I’m panting.

“Don’t be silly. I wanted to talk to you alone anyway.”

Jameson grunts and even Max looks annoyed at him right then but he just waves his hand around. “It’s the perfect chance. Gimme a break!”

My head is spinning and I’m too tired to deal with whatever’s going on here. “Fine. Let’s go. I’m so tired I just want to crawl in bed and curl up with a good book until I pass out.”

Everybody smiles and whispers good-bye while Fern takes a passed-out Jessie upstairs.

I know I should call for someone but now I’m curious what the hell Luca wants. I mean...the man is a vault. Anything good or bad and it takes forever to get the truth out of him.

It’s quiet in the car and I hold my breath, waiting to hear what he wants.

After a minute or two he clears his throat. I jump and swallow a gulp.

“I wanted to talk to you about what’s going on between us, Gemma.”

“I believe you said nothing was or ever will be. I’m too young and immature.”

I wish I’d managed to keep the anger and hurt out of my voice but it snuck out.

He glances over at me, his blue eyes dark in the dim light. “I’m sorry, Gemma. I just got scared that I’d fall in love with you and then Jessie already has. What if it doesn’t work out? How the hell am I supposed to tell Jessie that we’re done? It’s tricky.” He drags in a deep breath and eyes me critically.

“I want us to give this a shot and see where it goes. If something happens and it doesn’t work out, you still keep in touch with Jessie. She loves you and she really needs a woman in her life. I can’t take that away from her.”

My mouth falls open. That’s the last thing I thought I’d hear. “Are you kidding me? You really want to try and work this out as adults?”

“You’re not gonna make this easy on me and I understand that.” I run my fingers through my hair as he stutters around, trying to explain what he wants.

“I was an idiot. I was terrified of you.”

“You’re a foot taller than me and quite a bit heavier. You’ve also got muscles on your muscles. Why the hell would you be scared of me?”

“Because I don’t care how big or small you are, you can still hurt me and Jessie and that terrifies me.”

I nod my head. “I get it. I really do. But life’s full of good and bad things and rarely are they straight good or bad. They’re always a mix.”

Nodding, he smirks at me. “You sound a helluva lot older than you are sometimes.”

He pulls up outside my house and puts the truck in park. He turns to me and his hand comes out, lightly caressing my cheek. My breath hitches in my throat and I struggle to keep myself together.

He’s touching me! It feels like my heart is about to pound right out of my chest. My palms are sweating and I want to climb over onto his lap.

But I make myself stay right where I am and he leans closer, his breath soft and minty on my cheek. At the last second, I turn my head and his lips lightly caress mine. He stills and it feels like I’m holding my breath. Like the whole world is holding its breath to see what happens next.

His hand tangles in my hair and he tugs me closer, his lips delving between mine, his tongue twining with mine. He groans and his hands tighten so much that tiny stings hit my scalp where he’s tugging at me.

I whimper and move closer, my hand reaching out to touch his hard thigh, feeling the thick muscles bunch under my curled-up fingers.

He jumps but then he pulls away, lightly picking up my fingers and kissing them one at a time while I melt. His dark eyes stay locked on mine and there’s a tiny smile on his face.

“Go inside before I decide to come in after you. It’s too soon.”

I open my mouth to argue with him but then sigh and step out of the truck, knowing that he’ll stay put until I’m inside. He’s that kind of man. Strong, silent, protective.

He’s everything I’ve always dreamt of and it feels like a dream that he wants to spend time with me.

But if I’m dreaming, I sure as hell hope nothing wakes me up.



CHAPTER 8

Luca

My dick is throbbing in my tight jeans and I'm struggling to drag in a deep breath.

This last week has been an exercise in torture. The studio with Daffy was fun. The girls both made the snow globes. Gemma's was a snow couple in it with their little stick hands in mittens, holding onto each other and smiling into each other's eyes. The cascading snow was white and glittery and the whole thing was perfect.

On the other hand mine was a disaster. I manage to lose half the liquid in it so my flakes were stuck to the bottom and my reindeer was half-covered in liquid. Poor thing looked lost.

Jessie's was so cute. It was a puppy in a little gift box and the snowflakes were little red glitter sparkles. She handed it to me and grinned, her one lost tooth smirking at me.

"Here you go, Daddy!"

Daffy smiled. "I wonder what's up with the puppy. You trying to say something, kiddo?"

Jessie grins at me with that little gap tooth and my fucking heart melts. "I think the puppy is really cute."

I know where this is going and we don't have enough time for a puppy so I immediately offer to take them to get hot chocolate and a cookie.

It works but I don't think that's gonna be the end of the puppy conversation.

But then we went on a trip to the woods to find the perfect Christmas tree.

Gemma seemed to have an idea exactly what she wanted and when we found the blue spruce, her green eyes lit up like emeralds.

I had to have it. Even if it was about a foot too tall for my house. I cut

some of the bottom off and called it good.

Decorating the tree was amazing. Hot cocoa and laughter. Gemma's eyes sparkled and she laughed so much that she got the hiccups. Which made her laugh harder.

I've never felt so happy. Even with Jessie's mom it never felt so free and easy.

Which makes guilt eat up my insides. Did I try hard enough with my ex? Maybe I made her as miserable as she did me and it's because I didn't treat her the same way I treat Gemma. Like I like her. Like to spend time with her.

Today we're going with everyone for a day of caroling. Not that I really give a damn about caroling but both my girls want to do it so I'm doing it.

"Come on, Jessie! We're gonna be late." She comes downstairs dressed in a red velvet dress with thick black tights and a red velvet bonnet that's covering her light brown curls. Her soft blue eyes so like mine are sparkling with excitement. She twirls and my heart melts.

"You look beautiful, Jessie! Like a little princess."

"Gemma and the girls are all dressing up in old costumes. She found this for me! I love it!"

"Are you gonna be warm enough in it?" My brow lifts when she glares at me.

"I am very warm and look at this!" She almost squeals with excitement when she pulls out a little white fur wrap and a white fur hand warmer. She's almost dancing in place and I can't stop smiling.

"That looks perfect."

"Are you guys dressing up?"

"I sure as hell hope not," I mutter under my breath.

There's a knock at the door and I open it, feeling like a huge punch to the gut just got me.

Gemma's wearing a full-length version of the costume Jessie is wearing, her blond hair curling out of the bonnet, her green eyes sparkling and her curvy little figure so damn perfect that my dick goes hard as stone.

Until Jessie squeals and comes running between us.

"Yay! We match!"

I glance out the door and see four sleds outside, eight shiny horses dancing in place in the cold air.

"Let's go! We've got places to be!"

Hours later, we're all tired and cold but happy. The ladies are wilting and

Jessie is asleep on Fern.

“Hey, is it alright if we take Jessie home with us? We promised her that she could help us return the horses in the morning.”

Nodding my head, I keep my eyes on Gemma. “That would be great.”

Jameson hits me with a shoulder. “Maybe you can come up with something to do tonight?” He winks and then turns back to his wife.

I grit my teeth and push my totally inappropriate visions of Gemma to the back of my mind.

But once we’re back at my place, I tell her that I’ll take her home and she waves at everyone.

She follows me inside. “That was fun!”

She barely clears the door before I slam it and grab her around the waist, lifting her in my arms. Her face is level with mine. “I need you , Gemma,” I growl and thrust my hips into her velvet-clad hips. Her green eyes darken to deep spruce green and her pupils dilate until there’s just the tiniest splash of green at the edges.

“I need you too, Luca.”

I grind into her and moan, taking her lips with mine, biting, sucking and nibbling like a man possessed.

“I need you,” I growl and she whimpers back.

No words. Just moans and whimpers. “I need to know if you need me, baby.”

“Yes. Please. Now.” Her words are disjointed, strained, raspy with hunger.

I pull the bonnet off and her blond curls tumble down over her shoulders, wild and soft. Her lips part and she whispers, “Take me. Claim me.”

That’s what I’m gonna do. Claim her as mine.

My hands lift her skirts up and I groan when I feel her soft skin for the first time. Warm, silky, so damn perfect.

Briefly I drop her to the floor and whirl her to the door, her back to me as I work at the hook and eye closures. As soon as I rip them open, the dress flies over her head and her soft curls fly around her flushed face.

She bites her pink lip and I groan, tugging it free with my own lips. Then I grasp her again and lift her high, holding her against the door with my body.

My hands find all her lush curves, sinking deep into her soft skin until I know I’m leaving bruises but I don’t care and she just groans and her hips stutter into mine. My hands land on her ass and I work her on my aching dick

still in my jeans. She throws her head back, her curls streaming down her back.

“Yes, please!” She begs so damn pretty.

“You sound so pretty when you beg me, little one.”

Her eyes pop open and she glares at me. “Then fuck me.”

And that’s it. I’ve wanted her so damn long. “You got it, baby.” I rip my zipper down and pull my dick out with one hand, holding her in place with my body. Stroking her with one finger, I pull her panties to the side and groan at how wet she is. I whirl her around, pick her up and push her into the door, holding her steady, my lips close to her ear, panting harshly.

“You’re so wet for me, baby. You want this, don’t you? Want me to fuck you so hard you’ll never want another dick but mine.”

She flushes and shakes her head yes. I slip the thick head of my dick into her and groan when I feel her silky walls close around it. Gritting my teeth, I push in an inch at a time, feeling her tugging and pulling at my length.

“You’re so damn tight,” I manage through gritted teeth. She wraps her legs around me tighter and her fingers tangle in my hair, tugging at it painfully.

“Fuck me hard, Luca. Fuck me so hard that I’m gonna walk funny tomorrow and everyone will know why.”

Growling, I slam into her so hard that the door shakes. My hand closes on her breast and I pluck at her pebbled pink nipple while she grinds and groans. I dip my head and my lips close around her little peak and she sighs and pushes her hips faster, harder.

In and out we push until we’re racing towards that feeling. I can feel the sizzle in my back and all around my belly as my balls tighten up, ready to explode in her silky depths.

Her walls flutter around me and I lose it, my hips slamming against her as we both fall apart. Her pussy clasps me tight and milks every last drop of my seed out of me until I’m staggering over to the couch and dropping down with her on my lap.

She giggles, her cheeks pink with sweat, her soft hair sticking to her skin.

I lift a brow and she sighs. “That was perfect.”

“Yeah, it was.”

I hug her tight and carry her upstairs to my bedroom to fall asleep together wrapped around each other so tight that her head is pillowed gently on my chest and her legs entwined with mine.

This is the most perfect moment of my life and I don't want it to end. Can I win her over completely?

Can I make her my Christmas angel?

I don't know. But I have to try. I'm not sure how I'll survive without my angel to guide me, hold me, love me.

Make me believe in the season of miracles. The best of which is her.



CHAPTER 9

Gemma

I wake, stiff and sore, stretching with a mighty yawn. I reach my hand out and feel for Luca but the sheets are cold. Not my thoughts. My clit is still throbbing from the workout it got last night.

He comes in the door and grins. “There she is.” I push my hair behind my ears as he grins and holds out a tray with scrambled eggs and toast. There’s also a piping cup of coffee and I hold out my hands.

“Gimme, gimme!”

He laughs and hands me the coffee. I take a huge sip and groan when the hot liquid hits my belly.

“Oh, that’s good.”

He snorts. “I think that’s just because you need caffeine. We both know I don’t make good coffee.”

“You make great coffee! This is excellent.”

I jump and spill some on me when there’s a banging at the door.

“What the hell?” He growls and stalks out of the room.

I grab my clothes and slip them on. A cold feeling washes over me and I just know there’s something wrong.

“What the hell do you mean? You lost her?”

I hear muttering but my senses are tingling wildly.

I run out the bedroom door and down the steps. “What’s going on?”

“We can’t find Jessie. She went to bed last night but she wasn’t in her bed this morning.”

“I knew I made a mistake last night. I should have made her come home last night instead of....” His voice trails off but Jameson winces and I struggle to keep from doing the same.

He’s upset. He doesn’t mean it.

“Let’s go. I’m sure with all of us we’ll find her in no time.”

We pile out of the house and head back to Jameson’s house. As soon as we hit the property, I can see everyone out hollering for Jessie and my heart clenches painfully.

I love that little girl and her daddy.

But when I turn to Luca, he won’t look at me and his jaw is set tight. I struggle not to cry.

This feels bad. Like it’s over when it was just beginning and I don’t understand it. We were so happy last night.

I notice the two big haulers that the horses are in since Jameson doesn’t have a working stable. I head over to them and peek inside of one, my body wilting when I don’t see her inside it. But I push my shoulders back and head to the other.

My eyes sharpen when I see a tousled golden-brown head leaning against one of the dappled gray mares and talking to her softly.

“I like Christmas too. Did you make a Christmas wish?” She pats her gently. “I bet it was for extra oats or a new blanket. I saw a really pretty one that would look really nice on you. I’ll tell Santa you liked it.”

The horse snorts and tosses its head and I smile, stepping up into the back. “Hey. Your dad is losing his mind. You shouldn’t have come out here all on your own.”

Her sweet blue eyes turn down. “I just wanted to say good-bye alone. I didn’t want to miss her leaving.”

“I know. But your daddy is really upset. You scared him. You can’t just disappear like that.”

She nods and sighs. “I know. But I just couldn’t let her leave without talking to me.”

I hold my hand out. “Come on. Time to face the music.”

“I thought we were going to see Dad.”

I sigh. “Yeah. Never mind.”

But I help her out and smile when everyone around us comes to a screeching halt and stares at her before they rush her and hug her so hard she might have more bruises.

“What were you thinking? How did you get out? You can’t do things like that alone. What if something had happened to you?”

All of the voices are a muddle but only one man says nothing. His stern blue eyes watch the both of us and he nods to his daughter. “Come here.”

“Do you know what you did wrong?”

She sighs. “Yeah. I should have told you what I was doing. Told someone.”

“That’s right. You scared the hell out of everyone here.”

“I’m sorry, Daddy. I just wanted to say goodbye to Holly. She’s my favorite.”

Holly stamps her feet and her halter jingles with the little bells on her head.

“I’ll let you guys talk.” Jameson steps away and drags everyone with him.

“You shouldn’t have done this. And you’re gonna be grounded for a week.”

“But, Daddy.” He holds up a hand and sighs.

“Nope. Not another word. Go say good-bye to everyone. And then we’re heading home.”

She heads out and I stand there, stunned silent and exhausted.

“I’m so sorry, Gemma. I was an idiot. It’s not my fault that I was so lost to you last night that I forgot to charge my phone which is why Jameson had to come by. It’s my own fault.”

He runs his hands into his hair and groans, tugging it painfully. “I shouldn’t have blamed anyone. It was just a silly mistake. And I hurt you over it.”

His blue eyes shimmer with regret and pain. “I’m such a damn idiot that I can’t see what’s right in front of my face. I love you. I love you so much that it feels like I could die from it.”

I move to him but he holds up his hand. “You’re a beautiful, smart, sexy woman that I love so damn much I can’t believe that you’re real. But I guarantee that I will always love you and I will do my level best to never hurt you again but I’m a man and sometimes we just can’t shut up.”

“I know.”

“But I want to do all the things with you. I want to make love to you every morning and night. I want to have Christmas morning waking in your arms and New Year’s Eve kissing you at midnight for the luck and joy of a new year holding you tight.”

“I want to drive you when your car breaks down. I want to laugh with you when you laugh so hard you start hiccuping. And most of all, I want to make love to you until we make more babies and we raise them up to be as smart and happy and sweet as you are.”

“Say you love me and you’ll forgive me and I swear I’ll do everything in my power to make it up to you.”

I shake my head and his mouth drops open. I can’t believe what I’m hearing. It’s like going from Hell to Heaven in seconds. I thought for sure he was about to leave me broken-hearted, standing her trying to pretend for Jessie’s sake that it didn’t hurt. That I wasn’t broken.

I lift my hand up and close it. “I don’t want you to make it up to me. Just love me and that will be all I need.”

He smiles down at me and tugs me closer until I can smell his pine-fresh scent. His lips caress mine. “I think I can do that. Merry Christmas, my angel.”

“Merry Christmas, my grumpy grinch.”

I throw my head back and laugh when he glares at me and growls under his breath that he’s gonna spank my ass one of these days which immediately sets off my imagination and my clit. My panties are damn in two seconds flat. But I push all those feelings down and smile at Jessie when she comes running, her gorgeous eyes so like her dad’s sparkling when she sees us holding hands.

We walk out to get Jessie and I hold his hand, going home to take care of them. Love them and make sure that they’re never unhappy, never sad. My new little family. The family I’ve always wanted and could never find. Until I met Luca and his daughter. This is what I always pictured family as being. Taking care of each other, loving each other through good and bad.

It’s my job. And I intend to do a damn good job. I intend to love and keep them both and whatever else comes along, that love will never fade.

It will just grow and make my life better for knowing them both.

I’m too damn lucky for my own good but fuck it! I’ll take it all!

I smile over at Luca and he grins back, holding my hand as he takes me home.

This man and his daughter are my forever home. Christmas magic is real and I got my wish. Happily ever after with my one.

Epilogue: Luca

I bounce on my feet and watch as Gemma darts back into the room. “They’re almost here. We’ve got fifty guests already downstairs. I want to marry you, baby. But you gotta get dressed.”

She groans and pops her head out. “I can’t help it your child is trying to kill me.”

She heaves and darts back inside.

“Hang on.” I grab the white robe lying on the bed that she wore for getting ready and hold it out to her.

“Wear that.”

“I’m not getting married in a robe!” She huffs and throws it back out.

“You either wear that or I’m gonna haul you out there naked. Pick one.”

“Fine,” she groans and puts it on and then comes back out after I hear her brushing her teeth.

My heart clenches and I have to hold myself together before I lose my mind. She looks so delicate. She’s had morning sickness all day for the last two months.

“We can do this another time,” I say but she shakes her head.

“No. Today.”

“Here’s your bouquet.” I hand it to her and then pick her up, carrying her gently.

I step in front of everyone and walk to the minister who’s eyeing us skeptically.

“She’s not feeling well but doesn’t want to put it off.”

“Alright. Let’s get started.” And the words flow around us as I stare down into her gorgeous green eyes.

“I do.”

“I do.”

I touch her lips gently and whisper, “I promise you. I’ll take care of you and this baby for the rest of my life, princess. We’re a family now and what hurts one of us hurts us all. I can’t stand to see you so sick.”

“It will pass.” She smiles gently and her hand touches my cheek as I turn into her touch, closing my eyes.

“Only good things from now on.”

I nod. “Happily ever after.”

And I will make sure that she has her own fairytale. My new job with the boys has a lot of perks including daddy leave and I’m gonna take care of all my girls.

Because they are my everything.

Series REVEAL



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The Cowboy's Holidate by Eve London <https://mybook.to/CowboysHolidate>

About the Author

I'm a mother of three who works for a school district as a cafeteria aide but I've also had a lot of different hats over the years. Divorced single mom fresh out of the military working nights in a plastics factory all the way to teaching cardio kickboxing and zumba at the YMCA.

I've been married to my honey bunny for 22 years now. He's absolutely the best and tries to keep me in check as much as possible because I am a crazy person that stacks too much on her plate and then does it all no matter what. Even if it drives everyone nuts!

I love the kind of romances where you know what you're getting. I don't like happily for now. That just feels like cheating to me. I also don't like love triangles. I'm an easy girl and I like my books like I like my men...lol! Uncomplicated. So if you're reading my books, you know that no matter what, there's a happily ever after!



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