

Christmas Eve.

It feels good to step out of the car and make my way up the brownstone steps after doing my share of hours this morning at the clinic before we shut down for the holidays. Knowing I'm home and have five days off with my girls makes the last two months of hard slog all worth it.

I might be physically exhausted, but there's no way I'm missing a second of our first Christmas with my Bexley.

I have big plans.

Big *Fierro* plans.

There's no point in doing anything if you're just going to half-ass it.

And I want this Christmas to be extra memorable for my girls so when I'm an old man I'll look back on this one and know it's where it all started.

I got a second chance.

We got a second chance and I think it's apparent in our daily actions that we both keep it in mind every second day of our new life together.

It's what makes us work.

It's why we're fucking magic together.

Bexley has me addicted to the sizzle we generate together. Her smile is everything and that's not me being cheesy. I leave that to Lachie, that romantic moose with his bathroom jaunts.

"Where's my girls?" I yell as soon as the door closes behind me. I smell dinner, and hear cartoons going loud in the other room so I know they're here somewhere. Bex has had a big design project going on lately that she worked hard to land last month. More often than not I wake in the night and she's in her studio hunched over the table and drawing frantically brilliant. We both need these few days off that's for damn sure.

It's like walking into Santa's grotto as I shrug off the sheepskin coat and toss it over the newel post. It's been like this since the day after Thanksgiving when Bexley whined that it was unamerican and against her religion not to put the tree up early. Of fucking course I caved and drove an hour to a tree lot to spend another hour while she chose the *perfect* tree. I didn't know there was such a thing until Bexley educated my ass.

Red and silver garlands hand off every-fucking-thing like manic elves have thrown up all over.

My girl has gone Christmas wild.

She never really celebrated the holidays with her dad, now we're together and we have Mia, if she wants to make the house look like it spewed up Christmas, then I'll be the one up a ladder, holding the lights for her and being directed like traffic.

There's no ceiling on my girl's happiness.

Truth be told, I love this shit. The colors, the season, the hiding gifts all over the house. The happiness it brings my girls.

I don't walk into happiness though.

It's Mia who charges down the hallway toward me at speed. She's all smiles and flying hair wearing a "*Buddy the Elf, what's your favorite color?*" shirt as she launches herself right as I catch her up. "Daddy you home!"

"Yeah, baby bird, daddy is home. I missed you."

"Missed you more," she giggles and latches her arms around my neck tight as can be as I carry her through to the kitchen.

Everything looks the same as I left it this morning.

There's a tree in most every room, the one I see is white with red decorations and it has a four foot Santa standing next to it. Mia lost her mind when she saw what Bexley had done.

My girls are equally Christmas crazy.

This is Mia's third and thank god for my parents on that first one because I was hopeless, I didn't know how to organize Christmas. I was raised in the Fierro household which meant mom was like a festive ninja. All we had to do was turn up in a Christmas sweater and indulge. Now I have my shit together and I've gone all in, balls to the festive wall.

It's Bex standing stirring a pot at the stove that draws my attention as Mia chats in her cute toddler babble, but as always after a minute, she wants down so I put her on the floor so she can run back to her cartoons.

This gives me a chance to slip my arms around Bex from behind, my mouth finds her ear.

She smells incredible and my hormones start to bark.

I curb the urge to roam my hand down her body and continue where we left off this morning. Bexley is horny first thing on a morning and I'm horny the rest of the time, didn't I say we were perfect?

Instead, I put my lips against her beating pulse on her throat, cuddling her back into me. She hums and leans her head to the side but she hasn't turned a beaming smile on me like always, she hasn't started jabbering about her day as always so my boyfriend senses are heightened instantly.

"What's wrong, beautiful, is it work?"

"No. Well, yeah, but I'm handling it."

"Wanna give me a clue?"

I'll go full on fucking Santa if that's what she needs. Just watch me jingle my balls. I mean bells.

Fuck, I hope she doesn't want me to dress up. Where the hell would I get that suit on Christmas Eve? Maybe Dad would know someone.

Bex spins around in my arms and it's then I see her eyes.

Sadness swimming in the two toned colors.

It clutches my belly because she was more than fine when I left just a few hours ago. We went to a doctor appointment just at the end of November, one of those routine things where they tell us everything is fine. Did any of her tests need a call back? I feel bile slosh around my lower gut and my mind jumps ten steps ahead, preparing myself. I live with the constant fear her disease comes back and takes Bexley from me.

I can't and *won't* live without her.

She's mine.

I won't give her up to anyone or anything ever again.

My lips coast over her forehead. "Beautiful."

"Mia hates me," she burst out and it was not what I expected so it takes me a second or two to even respond as my mouth curls with a grin with relief. I tuck my worry away again, knowing that it'll be used on another day. I love her more than ever, so I worry, it's a given.

I know this to be false, but she looks so sad so I sit at the table and Bex on my lap, my hand finds the back of her short hair. "You know she adores you, so tell me why you think that."

Surrounded in festive cheer, and smells of the food she's cooking on the stove, I know I'd move mountains to fix any hurts she has.

I know she struggles still.

"She knows I abandoned her, Theo. It's you she cries for if she's sick. She never wants me to comfort her. It's always daddy. She asks when you're coming home at least a thousand times. I'm just the babysitter who paints pretty unicorns for her."

Swear to Christ my heart clutches because it all pours out of her like she's been holding it in forever.

“Baby.” My lips touch hers gently and she wilts into me, clutching my shirt.

“I get it, she was deserted. I did a horrible, unforgivable thing, but I’m trying to fix it, Theo. I love her so much my heart aches.”

“Okay, now you listen to me,” as much as I want to soothe her, and I will, I gotta make her understand so my voice is harsher than intended at first just so I can penetrate whatever delusions she’s hiding inside. “Our baby girl fucking loves you, Bex. You’re her best friend.”

“Yeah, her *friend*.”

“It’s just a sleepy habit her calling for me when she wakes, but she does the same for you when I take her to my parents, you’re all she can talk about.”

“Really?” Her little bottom lip trembles, so much so that I want to bite it, so I do. Just a little. “I want her to love me so much, Theo. It’s my only Christmas wish.”

“Swear to the Grinch, baby, you’re her mommy, she loves you.”

I say the right words, the true words and my girl cries on my shoulder. Only for a minute and then it’s over. She wipes her eyes and kisses me on the lips. A sweet kiss I want to take so much further. “How about the next time Mia pukes in her bed, you can clean it?” I suggest and Bexley laughs. “Nah, superstar, she wants her daddy, you get the puke, I’ll take the fun stuff.”

There she is, my queen, lighting me up like one of her damn trees.

“It’s going to be okay; you know. Our family. it’s not going anywhere. We have time.”

She exhales and it’s then I see her truth. Her recently illness still haunts her too. She’s trying to put everything we have as a family into the same second so she doesn’t miss any more.

I hug her in tight, holding her close to my chest.

“We have so much time, beautiful.”

“I believe you,” she replies. “Love you, superstar.”

Ah, fuck. I was trying to be nice, really I was. Be the supportive boyfriend, say the right things, but when she says that in her husky voice and I feel her sitting light as can be on my lap. I’m only a man, a weak man for her so I crush her lips, take the deep, hungry wet kiss I craved from the moment I stepped into the door. Tongues and teeth go to war and I die a little with how fucking good her flavor is exploding through my taste buds.

She tastes of spice and sugar and it’s only as I’m getting going, determining how I can take her on the kitchen table without baby bird bursting in, that the one in question calls out, “Mommy! *Mommmmyyyyy!* Come watch quickly.”

We break apart. I’m the one who groans with need, but it’s Bex who beams a delighted grin.

“Told you, baby.”

Fierro’s are always right. Or at least I keep trying to tell her we are.

She kisses me again, sweeter this time, making me hard as a fucking rock but we won’t get to play now until we put Mia to bed.

After assembling the toys.

Fuck, I should have hired someone.

“Happy Christmas Eve, superstar,” she breathes against my lips as Mia calls out again. “Coming right now, sweetheart.” She lifts off my lap.

“Happy Christmas Eve, baby,” I reply, eating her up with my eyes.

Most perfect woman right there.

I don’t know if tonight is the right night to propose like I want to, *ache to*. I want Bexley to be mine in all the ways that count, including having my name. The diamond ring is burning a hole in the gym bag upstairs where I hid it weeks ago.

She'll make us wear those custom sweaters she had made for us tomorrow. Red and white baseball jersey's with **Team Fierro** on the back and our family picture printed on the front in Christmas hats. They're completely ridiculous and cute. Dakota is going to give me shit for it.

Fuck, I want to propose right now as I watch her little ass sashay down the long hallway to our girl. Just get on my knees and beg her to be mine but the moment has gone. I'll know when it is.

It's soon, this much I know.

She turns a little smile at the end of the hall as I reach for a drink.

"Oh, hey Theo?"

"Yeah, beautiful."

Mouth full of cold beer.

"Guess who is coming to the party?" She's beaming now so of course my suspicions go up instantly.

She's planned a house party for December 26 for our friends.

"Who?"

"Tommy."

I could have choked on the beer and she's laughing when I swallow and glare at the love of my life.

Tommy fucking Bianchi? She's got to be kidding.

But nope, she's smiling at me like a naughty kid caught eating the Christmas cookies.

"Surprise." She tells me so sweetly as though she's an angel. My Bexley is far from an angel, that tiny devil," so play nice," and then she skips off.

Oh, my girl owes me for this shit.

Play nice?

She definitely owes me by expecting to be nice to my mortal enemy and one of her closest friends.

My grin grows slow and deviously, just like the Grinch's did when he stole Christmas.

Only I have something more pleasurable in mind to have her make it up to me.

My dick already aches in anticipation.

Merry Fierro Christmas to me.