



Several days before Christmas.

CATIE

"I'm married to the *Grinch* and my life is over." I declare, with all the flare of any redhead going through a marital crisis.

Oh, and it *is* a calamity of epic yuletide proportions.

"Are we talking divorce? I'll grab another bottle of vino from the cellar if it is." My best friend says with a cheeky grin.

She's not taking me seriously. At all.

Didn't she hear my anguish? Maybe I wasn't explaining myself well.

"I'm serious!"

"Catie, no you're not. I love you, girl, but you and Ronan are dramatic as they come. You have spats just so you can bang and make up."

Sulking into my half glass of spiced mulled wine, I glare at her hard enough to set her sparkly red jumpsuit on fire, but there's no real anger behind it.

Gabriella is right. We do that a lot. I love Ronan all fired up when his accent grows thicker and he loses his sense of control, especially if I've done something to rile my Irishman.

But this is different.

It's serious.

A catastrophe of which is *huge*.

It's the reason I haven't spoken a word to Ronan, love of my life, in five long days. God. I didn't realize how hard it would be. But I have a point to prove to his stubborn side.

"Are you saying if Dominic told you he didn't do Christmas and wasn't bothered how you celebrated the day, you'd be fine about it?"

She's chuckling but doesn't get a chance to answer when a deep voice from the doorway interrupts. "Gabriella would likely put my head on a spike." The man in question says, striding across their living room like Lucifer himself has just dropped in from Hell, he has burning with love eyes only for Gabby. Leaning down he kisses her. "I'm leaving, *Cara*. I'll call you from the airport."

I bury my head in my phone to give them some privacy. I hear Gabby telling him to be careful and then a lot of married mush which is freaking adorable. I love them together. It's obvious Dominic Dragna, as powerful as he, if his wife wanted to do snow angels, he'd be on the ground like he'd been asked to hit the deck. Not like my Grinch.

"Where's he off to?" I ask once he's gone.

"Belarus for a couple of days."

"Business?"

"Mhm." She replies. We don't mention it further. Her husband is a hitman. And he's utterly in love with my best friend.

I pull up to the house two hours later. Lights from every corner brick guides the way up the long driveway. At least something feels Christmassy. Not like that man I've married.

It's our first Christmas together after a whirlwind courtship we went headfirst into and then married not long later.

How could I marry a man who doesn't *do* Christmas?

What does that even mean? Does he sleep from December 1st until New Years?

What kind of psychopath can't get into the spirit of the holiday?

No eggnog, no Christmas markets, not even a half-hearted Ho, Ho, Ho.

It's unnatural. It's freaking appalling is what it is.

When I told his mother, she wasn't fazed. "*Oh, our Ronan's never been into Christmas.*" Well, no one told me this!

He's home when I let myself in and my heart gallops at the sight of Ronan. I love that man to distraction. I have done since I was sixteen and it only worsens every day. He's a tall glass of dirty-blond water. He cuts his head to the side and looks at me from the kitchen island where he's eating a plate of cookies with a glass of milk and watching something on the TV mounted to the wall.

He knows I'm not talking to him, not until he comes to his senses, but he still steps off the stool and comes over to me. My heart flutters. He's so beautifully masculine, the urge to scale him is always strong. First, he helps me out of the winter coat and unwinds me from the scarf. A kiss lands on my throat pulse and sends shivers along my spine. "*Missed you, acushla.*"

I miss you too, you big dumb Christmas hater.

I put my nose in the air and walk by him, listening to him chuckling. "You're so damn obstinate." He says in his Irish lilt that sounds like softened toffee. I've

loved his voice forever, but I love it most when we're in bed. Or when we're cuddling and he's being romantic. Even when he's a jackass, he still sounds lickable. "It's all that red hair."

He's trying to rile me into snapping at him and it's just about working.

He's made me a plate of food. Of course he has, my Ronan is a sweetheart and takes care of me like it's his only job in life. I couldn't have conjured a better, more attentive husband if I were able to wield voodoo.

If only he wasn't a Grinch.

Sigh. Maybe I was asking for too much.

I feel his heat along my back while I stand at the microwave waiting for it to ping. He's big all over, hot like a volcano and my organs quiver at his nearness. I'm almost listing backwards just to get any hit of my fix from him. When he curls a hand under my chin and tips my head back to lay on his shoulder, I nearly detonate into a Christmas climax.

"You're going to talk to me, Catherine. Do you know why I know this?" He doesn't wait for an answer I won't give. He's right, I am stubborn. "Because you're fucking crazy about me."

He's not wrong.

I catch a drift of his woodsy, cinnamon cologne and I swallow a moan. His mouth touches my ear while he holds my head back.

"You're gonna have to get over this, *acushla*. I'm fucking perfect in every other way."

I snort from my throat then and he chuckles. We both know he's full of shit. My Ronan is a former criminal, he might be legal now with his famed Irish pub, but the rogue never leaves the man, he still gets the urge to flee when he hears a cop car.

He can charm the leaves from the tree.

He can haggle and make deals as well as any high-powered Wall Street Broker.

Ronan MacNamara is the full package of manliness and he's always, *always* taken care of me as though I'm the pinnacle of his world. I feel a pinch of guilt for how I've ghosted him all week and he hasn't lost his temper once. In fact, he's smiled and kissed me, he held me on his lap while I watched TV, and the sex. *God*, I think it was even better than it's ever been.

I love him. *Completely*.

And I think I can accept ... *one day* ... that he's just not at my level of holiday festiveness.

I wanted him to love Christmas as much as I did. I thought our first as a married couple would be so special.

It has been. I can't lie about that. We've been on many dates this month where he's swept me off my feet until stars dazzled in my eyes.

Do I want him to go crazy over decorating the house like I have? No.

Do I want him to freak out over my snow globe collection? No again.

But a little *ho, ho, ho* would be nice from the love of my life.

RONAN

Trying to surprise my wife means I've had to resort to my old lying ways to keep it to myself for as long as possible.

It also means my little white lie has reduced my darling Catherine to a vengeful angry elf. How was I to know my telling her I didn't do Christmas would result in her not speaking to me for nearly a week?

Christ alive, she's *dramatic as fuck*.

And I adore every fucking wild freckle on her face.

"I love you, you know?"

She wriggles in my arms and bumps back with her butt right on my dick. Little girl knows what she's doing when she "hmpfs" a reply. She wasn't so standoffish last night when I reached between the sheets for her.

Nah, she screamed my name multiple times while I pumped her full of me. Then she curled up on her side to go to sleep like I hadn't just pounded four climaxes out of her.

This woman is my eternal torment and my earned heaven rolled into one ginger girl package. Had I known she'd throw a sulk, I might have thought of something else, but it's been fun having her kick my arse all week.

"You are so sexy, my little ginger reindeer."

It's time to drop the bomb before she takes off for her parents until I 'get into the Christmas spirit.' She's about to learn how much fucking spirit I have for her.

She softens into my body and I know she's not really mad at me. She just likes to make her point. As do I.

We fight often so we can fuck and make up.

She's wild and I'm the one who tames her.

"Eat your food, *acushla*, and then put on some warmer clothes. We're going on a trip, you and me." I feel her stiffen with interest. She loves nothing more than going places. Especially if they're unexpected. "No need to pack, I got our stuff in the car."

She spins around and my five-day drought for her voice ends. "Where are we going?"

Smirking, I kiss the tip of her freckled nose, using two fingers to push her glasses up.

"You'll know soon enough."

I catch a grope of her ass while she's disorientated in glee. Tempted to fuck her over the table to get my tamed, sated wife back, but I'm on a schedule. And I haven't planned this for six months to fall at the last hurdle.

I'm about to earn a year's worth of husband points for this.

Blowjobs for life, I'm sure.

Making Catherine happy is why I do what I do.

Her joy is infectious.

She hates being cold, but will roll around in the backyard snow like a frolicking rottweiler. She'll sing loudly to any Christmas song, no matter where we are.

I think Catherine forgot all about her 'Ronan quarantine' as I drive us to the airport. She's as excitable as a puppy, pumping me for clues.

"C'mon, Irish boy. Tell me."

"No," I grin over at her.

"Are we going to Florida? What about Colorado?" Her guesses go on and on.

I keep quiet, and don't tell her where we're going until it's necessary. Inside the airport, I make her sit alone while I check us in, and then, situating her in front of the departure board, I stand behind her, my mouth at her ear, hands holding her gorgeous hips. "Take a look. Where would you like to go on there?"

I don't need to be facing her to see she's frowning. "That's not fair, what if I choose wrong?"

"You won't."

I know my wife.

It takes her four seconds. "Finland."

I brush a kiss to her ear and then her neck, "bingo."

Catherine spins so fast, I catch her in time. Green eyes about to tear up, holding all the love for me in their depth. See? I know how to make her happy.

She's a little breathless. Beautifully so. Eyes dilated with joy. "Really, really? We're going to Lapland? Don't lie to me, Ronan."

"Yes, really."

Where else would you take a Christmas lover at this time of the year? To the heart of the holiday to see the man himself.

"It's four days, we'll be back in time to have dinner with your parents on Christmas Eve."

And then she's all mine.

To fucking adore and lavish her with every single thing Catherine has mentioned this year. She may think I don't listen. But I do. I take note of everything she says she wants as though I'm studying for a test.

She wants to bake cookies and feed reindeer and enjoy every moment of our first married Christmas together.

So, that's what I've done for her.

I'll probably get a toothache from all the saccharine shit. But who cares?

She's happy.

Crying in my arms and happy.

"I was such a brat, Ronan." Rubbing her nose on my shirt, she curls her skinny arms around me.

"You don't say," I smirk.

"You really do love Christmas."

Eh, not so much, I was always too busy grafting to care about the holiday. But for her? I feel differently. I want to gorge on her joy, slurp up her enthusiastic happiness.

Who knows if I'll be any good at this Christmas shit.

For love, I'll go the extra mile.

She's tamed me. My mates from back home would laugh their arses off to see me under her thumb. But then, they don't have a woman like Catherine.

I don't need to make a Christmas wish.

She's it.

She's all of everything.

Taking my ginger girl to Lapland where she can meet Father Christmas and tell him her wishes ... *which is me* ... isn't a bad start to get into the spirit.

And then tonight, in our snowy cabin, while she's so fucking high on merriness, I'll get into my wife. *So deep*. I'll find my Christmas gift there.

In her screams, in her bad girl claws, in the way she pants my name.

She all but climbs me in in the middle of the busy airport, peppering frantic kisses over my face. Christ, she's asking to be fucked right here.

"I love you, Ronan. I love you, I love you. Merry Christmas."

Claiming a kiss, holding the back of her neck, she's all soft and pliant like my obedient ginger girl should be and *rarely* is. I have to take my kicks where I can, and I love seeing her this way.

A rogue, I might not be any longer, but I stole her, didn't I?

Never giving her back.

Now, I wonder what my light fingers can lift from Lapland as a souvenir for my Catherine.

Doubt I could get a reindeer on the airplane coming back home...

Happy Holidays from the MacNamara's.