



# Christmas Dreams

Merry Christmas 2008 to all of my  
readers wishes Kimberley Jackson



# Christmas Dreams

*(Christmas Story 2008)*

Rating: PG  
Pairing: Kate/Gibbs, Kibbs  
Fandom: Navy CIS, NCIS  
Category: AU, Romance

**Summary: On Christmas Eve, Lady Kate is awaiting her new guardian, whom she wants to get rid of as soon as possible. But then she meets a charming and handsome gentleman in town, not suspecting that he is the man she is supposed to hate.**

A/N: I know this story is a little different from last year's Christmas story, but I hope you still like it. I set the characters in a different period of time, 18<sup>th</sup> century England to be specific.

*Merry Christmas 2008 to all of my faithful readers and friends! Thanks to all of you for your comments and your encouragement, for your cheerful emails and your concerns!*



The snow covered streets of the provincial little town were muddy and gray. It was one of those cold days in December. As a matter of fact it was the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December - not that it made any difference for him.

The tall man stood with a slightly grumpy expression on Main Street - or rather on a very, very tiny version of the Main Street he knew from London. Christmas didn't have any meaning for him. It hadn't had any ever since that fateful day eight years ago, that had changed his life and turned him into the grumpy man he was today. Well, maybe his life would have taken this turn anyway, but the betrayal of his wife had definitely hastened him to enlist in the royal army.

If the behavior of his wife had disillusioned him about romance, his experiences in the army had done the rest for life in general. Christmas was merely a name for a rather ordinary day in his opinion.

He ran his hand through his dark gray hair. He wasn't really old yet - not if you didn't count 36 to be of particular age. Yet his hair had already turned from a very dark

brown to grey.

The man shivered slightly when a cool breeze hit his face, and stuck his hands into the pockets of his long, fashionable coat. It wasn't that he had a lot of time, but he wanted to warm up before renting a carriage to continue his way. So he entered the next best shop that he could find...



„Well, what do you think of these?“ The young woman in the blue satin dress held up some decorations in gold and silver, and looked at the female shopkeeper, whom she obviously knew very well.

„Beautiful,“ the woman, who had to be of the same age as the other, decided after a moment.

„Well,“ the woman in blue pouted slightly and then put the decorations aside. „Then that's not it! Ziva, I'm looking for something crude and distasteful! Something that will make a person who hates Christmas flee at once!“

The man who had just entered the the store was shaking the snowflakes from his coat, when he heard the young women's words and lifted his head in puzzlement at the statement. He estimated that she was around twenty years of age.

In his years at the army, he had lost that adolescent way of looking at a woman that younger men still possessed. And yet, he immediately noticed her delightfully slender waist that was embraced by the material of her dress like a second skin. Her chestnut colored hair made a pretty contrast to the light-blue of her dress. It had been a while since he had last considered the appearance of a woman even pleasant, but this one, he had to admit, was of extraordinary beauty. One of the kind that growing age would not reduce but add to.

„Good afternoon, ladies,“ he made his presence known with a smile. He knew that he had still this way about him: a charming smile that women fell for. But these women barely noticed him, and he felt almost hurt in his pride.

„Well, how about the green one then?“ 'Blue dress' asked, and held up an awfully decorated green branch.

„If you want to turn your home into an inhospitable environment?“ the woman called Ziva replied. The other one laughed.

„You know, I don't understand why you even sell these decorations if you find them 'inhospitable'.“

„Well, a girl has to live. We can't all be of aristocratic descent and live from our inheritance!“ Ziva commented dryly and threw a colorful blanket at her. „Here, something for your table, to match the awfulness on your ceiling. What I don't understand is, why a tasteful woman like you wants her home to look like a cheap brothel on Christmas Eve!“

The man stepped forward and couldn't suppress a smile. „A very valid question!“ he interrupted the two women, and eventually caught their attention.

Ziva rushed to his side immediately to greet him, obviously embarrassed and afraid to have insulted him. The other woman simply smiled at him.

„Well, Milord, I have very good reasons, any of which would do nothing but bore you, I'm sure,“ she replied politely and smiled.

„Try me, Miss,“ he replied, pausing and waiting for her to introduce herself.

„Miss Caitlyn Todd.“ She smiled.

Fortunately his composure was well trained and so he didn't lose the soft smile, although inwardly he was completely stunned. Caitlyn Todd... interesting. She was the reason for which he had traveled here: the daughter of his old friend. Three weeks ago he had received a letter from his lawyer. The man had informed him that his friend had passed away two years ago, and that his only possession, his house, was passed on to his only daughter. Of whom he was to be the guardian and administrator of her possessions until she was either married or reached the age of twenty-five.

He had last seen her when she had been a little girl of about eight years, a cheerful little thing who had caused a lot of trouble by her rather boyish behavior.

He would have never thought that she'd turn into such a beautiful woman someday. A part of him had somehow expected to find a childlike young girl - instead he found a stunningly beautiful lady who almost made him forget about his manners for a while.

„Well,“ he smiled charmingly, „I'm very pleased to meet you, Miss Caitlyn.“ Amused, he noticed that she blushed slightly. „Now, why don't you tell me about those reasons of yours? I assure you, I'd be very interested!“

„Alright,“ she eventually agreed. „Maybe you can help me choose! I'm in a bit of a difficult situation. I'm awaiting a - um - visitor. Let's just say I'm not so fond of having him in my house. I know he rather dislikes Christmas, so my plan is to make my house look as merry and joyful as possible, but in the most crude way, so that it will drive him away as soon as possible.“

„I see,“ the man nodded, well aware, that by said 'visitor' she was referring to him. „so that he will leave as soon as he can?“ Luckily he had arrived today already, otherwise he wouldn't have learned about her plan. All of his letters had announced him to arrive tomorrow morning.

„That's the idea!“ she nodded, obviously relieved that he understood her. „By the way, you didn't even introduce yourself.“

„Oh,“ he smiled, „You can call me Gibbs if you like.“

„Gibbs?“ she arched an eyebrow in confusion - a facial expression that, in his opinion, looked really charming on her.

„Yes, it's a nickname.“

„I see,“ she nodded. „So, Mr. -um- Gibbs, what do you think? Will the green one do or do I need something even more awful?“

Gibbs approached her until he was standing close behind her, looking over her shoulder. He knew, that this would be absolutely inappropriate if they were strangers. But since technically he was part of her family, he took the liberty. Of course he didn't listen to the little voice inside of him that told him that his interest in her did most definitely go beyond that of a protector, and was rather of sexual nature.

„If it was me,“ he said lowly, close to her ear and inhaled the flowery scent of her long curly hair, „I would go for the silvery and gold things. They yell Christmas all over the place.“

„Really?“ she thought, holding the decorations in question up to eye them skeptically.

„So, who is that person that you are bothering yourself this much for?“

„Oh, as it turns out, my dear father prearranged for something like a guardian for me before he died two years ago. I mean, it's ridiculous, I've been living by myself for two years now, and all of a sudden this man shows up and wants to take over my house as if I was a little child of twelve years! I want to get rid of him as soon as possible.“ She turned around smiling openly. „Don't think I'm living all alone. I have my old butler, Ducky, who has served my father already. And my maid Abby, and a good handful of servants.“

He nodded, his eyes deeply connected with hers. „So you despise the idea of being regimented.“

„Indeed,“ she nodded. „I've been managing the household for two years and I'm completely able to calculate and keep my books of household accounts. My father taught me to do so. And this man... well, I've heard he's the rather morose kind of guy who likes to control things. I would just hate to be put into the place of a pretty, but brainless young lady whose only obligation is to marry a rich man.“ Then she laughed. „I don't even know why I am telling you this much about my situation when I don't even know anything about you.“

„Then I shall satisfy your curiosity,“ he smiled flirtatiously and pushed himself away from her, looking around in the small shop. „I'm an ex-soldier, who is visiting family in town.“

„What family? Maybe I know them?“ she smiled and pulled out an ugly silvery angel from under the pile of decorations.

„Oh, I doubt that. They're a rather - um - small bunch who like to keep to themselves.“ He didn't know why he was lying. No, that wasn't entirely true. He knew that if he told her the truth, she would immediately assume a rather hostile position towards him, and hostile wasn't something he wanted this woman to be. She was spirited, and somewhat different from the women he was used to, and that was refreshing.

It was obvious that she was used to saying what was on her mind, instead of pretending and putting on dozens of masks to hide her true feelings.

„So you don't come from here?“ she asked, and he didn't know if it was his imagination, but he could swear that he heard disappointment from her voice.

„No, I don't... I am considering settling down here though. A man of my age can't stay on the road forever.“

„Well, you are not that old yet,“ she contradicted and gave him an open smile that warmed his heart - a feeling entirely forgotten. His expression became somewhat serious, when he noticed her open flirtation.

„Well, Lady Caitlyn, I just hope you are not that open and coquettish with every man, otherwise a guardian might be a good idea.“ He didn't know why he said that, didn't know why he had to turn her down once she touched his heart, but something inside him just told him that he had to.

Her facial expression changed immediately, and she put the angel back onto the pile of decorations with a cold stare, and then turned to face Ziva. „Maybe I should leave, and come back later.“

Ziva, who had followed their conversation with wide eyes, handed her her long cape silently. Kate slung the thick, furry material around her shoulders and then walked out of the store with her head held high.

The man's comment had insulted her in the worst possible way, as by his statement he had implied that she was cultivating romantic relationships with more than one young man in the town. Walking away was the only decent thing for a proud and honorable young woman to do.

Gibbs noticed that the young shopkeeper was shooting looks at him that could have killed him if they had been able to do so.

„You know,“ she said snappily, „maybe you should work on your manners, Sir! Insulting decent young ladies is certainly not going to win you friends in this town.“

He growled angrily, mainly angry at himself for this slip in behavior. „It was a valid assumption!“

„Well, I hold to your advantage that you are new to this town, and do not know Lady Katie yet. She's one of the most honorable and decent women I've met. Sure, she usually says what's on her mind, and that doesn't win her any friends among the local aristocratic young men, but everybody in town really enjoys her presence.“ She sighed angrily. „When you started a conversation with her, I thought you might be different from all those cocky, arrogant noble men, who mistake forthrightness for slutty behavior. But I guess you're just the same as all of them... Good day, Sir!“ Said it, and turned around on her heel to vanish in the private rooms in the back of the shop.

Gibbs stood there, just staring at the curtain behind which the young shopkeeper had vanished. He truly felt like an idiot and that was a feeling he wasn't particularly fond of.

Growling, he turned around on his heel to leave the shop and step out on the muddy and cold street again. Thick snowflakes were falling down from the sky, and he felt as if the soft breeze from earlier on had become even more freezing.

He looked around on the street, until he had spotted the female figure in the blue dress. Hurriedly, he followed her, pulling his coat into his face. When he reached her, he grabbed her arm.

„Lady Caitlyn... wait a moment, please...“

She kept her pace up and tore her arm out of his grip. „I have nothing more to say to you.“

„I apologize for what I said in there. It was unnecessary and rude.“

„That it was indeed,“ she agreed, but still kept her pace. The bottom of her dress was already soaked from the mud and snow from the street and her brown hair was slightly covered in snowflakes. „It was insulting!“ she snapped and then looked at him. „And humiliating!“

He stopped in shock when he saw tears glisten in her eyes. Damn! He ran his hand through his hair with a sigh of self-loathing. This was just perfect. In fact, it fitted the

perfection that had become tradition on Christmas over the last few years. It was either being cheated on, or being stuck in a hostile attack in a war zone, or... well... insulting a decent young woman whom he was to be the guardian of.

He set his legs into motion again, following her. „Lady Caitlyn!“ She didn't react, but sped up. „Katie!“

When she heard this familiar nickname, that only her friends used to call her, she stopped abruptly and faced him. „You are a scumbag!“ she informed him angrily.

„Fair enough,“ he nodded.

„And you are not my friend! Stop calling me as if we knew each other. It's enough that you think, I am leading a slutty life. No need to make the whole town believe it.“ she snapped, and turned to rush away again. He growled and kept up with her speed.

Alright, so he had insulted her, but not accepting his apology was completely unreasonable, and he would not accept this misdemeanor.

She turned left to cross the street, but in her hurry she didn't watch her steps. She didn't even realize what exactly happened, she just felt her feet slip away from under her all of a sudden. She was too shocked to even scream, and before she had the chance to do so, she felt strong arms catch her and pull her towards a broad chest. Only then did she let out a small shocked gasp.

„I told you to slow down,“ an all-too familiar voice murmured softly. „You could have broken your neck.“

„I-I...“ she stuttered, and steadied herself on her feet, using Gibbs' broad chest to keep her balance. „I don't know what happened.“

„You slipped,“ he told her. „And you almost hit the pavement. You don't want to spend Christmas in a hospital bed, do you?“

„No,“ she replied shakily. „Tha-thank you.“ She rearranged her hair and pulled her cape into place, then tried to shake the snow and dirt of her dress. „Listen, I accept your apology. But you should go now. I'm sure that you have better things to do than to follow a clumsy young lady through the town.“

He laughed softly, „I don't actually... nothing urgent, at least. So I'd be happy to accompany you.“

He offered her his arm and after a little moment of hesitation, she placed hers in his. „I will have to take care of some more Christmas preparations though,“ she informed him. „I hope it won't disturb you.“

„Not at all,“ he replied, and gave her one of his soft smiles. She returned it hesitantly.

After she had listed all the shoppings that she still planned to do, they started for the first shop.

About three hours of conversation and six shops later, Kate was finally finished. She was giving her last instructions, and immediately, the shop servants hurried to carry all the goods she had purchased to the carriage, that Gibbs had rented and offered to take her home with.

Kate had told him that her own carriage would not return to the town until the evening, so she would have had to spend her time drinking a coffee or hot chocolate

in one of the two cafés of the city. But she had gladly accepted Gibbs' offer, as it meant that she would have enough time today to start decorating the halls.

The man was waiting patiently by the carriage, silently wondering whether he and the young woman would still find a seat in between all the bags and boxes of shoppings. He smiled when the young lady eventually came out of the store, and all the goods were laden on the carriage. Kate said goodbye to Ziva, who was one of her close friends, as he had learned during the previous hours, and then smiled at the man who was waiting for her.

„I'm sorry to keep you waiting so long, but I 'm afraid I won't have the chance to pay another visit to this town before Christmas, so I wanted to wish my friends a merry Christmas evening.“ she explained, „I am really grateful for your offer. I just hope that you will be able to leave my house in time. If the snow gets any worse it might turn into a snowstorm which will keep you there over Christmas.“

He simply smiled as an answer. Of course, he knew he should tell her that her house was actually his house as well, but for some reason he didn't want to destroy the friendly atmosphere yet.

„I am sure that your relatives are already awaiting your arrival with impatience,“ the young woman continued and entered the carriage with his help. Inside, she found a place near the window, and pushed some of the golden decorations aside.

„I do not think so,“ Gibbs replied, when he had entered the carriage, and pulled the door shut. Then he knocked on the roof twice, a sign for the coachman to start moving.

„Well, I cannot imagine any reason why they would not welcome such a charming man in their house,“ she smiled sweetly, and removed the cape from over her head, revealing her soft brown hair to him. Contrary to current fashion, she had not pinned up every single strand of her hair. Most of it was falling down freely, and only a few selected strands were pinned together. He thought again, that she was most beautiful woman he had ever seen. And at the same time, her appearance disturbed him. Her obviously rather free behavior might not only encourage him, but other men as well, and for some reason this thought outraged him.

„Excuse my curiosity, Milord, but don't you have a wife, who would like to spend Christmas with you?“ she continued, and leaned back against the back wall of the carriage. It was rumbling slowly over the uneven pavement which was covered with snow. The vats, which replaced the wheels during winter time, were not made for uneven city streets, but once they had left the city and the uneven pavement turned into the paths of the countryside, the much more even ground made their journey really comfortable.

„I had a wife once,“ Gibbs explained after a few moments.

„I'm sorry,“ Kate immediately said, assuming that the woman had died.

„I'm not,“ Gibbs returned immediately, „She cheated on me, and then decided to live with her lover. I'm surprised that you have never heard of the affair.“ It was only then that he realized she couldn't know what affair he was talking about, as he had never given her his full name.

„I wouldn't,“ replied the young woman to his surprise, „I usually don't stay long in places where gossip and rumor take over the conversations.“

He laughed, „Usually it's even on the balls and receptions.“

„As I said,“ she replied, „I don't stay in these places.“ She pulled her cape a little closer around her neck, as the motionlessness made her grow a little cold.

„You don't visit balls and receptions?“ Gibbs asked and raised his eyebrows. „You should! You're still young.“

Her eyes narrowed, „So I should seek the company of men to find a suitable husband, while I'm still attractive, you mean?“

„Not what I said!“

„But that's what you thought! A young woman should marry and the younger she is, the better her chances are. It's what I have been told dozens of times. Yet, I can not bring myself to find any of these brainless scu... -um- male creatures, that you usually meet on occasions like balls attractive. They are not interested in me, or my thoughts. All they want is a pretty lady which they can show around and brag about - until she's aged and not as pretty anymore. Then they'll take a pretty young mistress in the city, and only show up at their home for reasons of courtesy.“

Gibbs smirked and looked out of the window, „You know, you're a little too grumpy for your age.“

„I'm not grumpy,“ Kate countered with a smile, „But I've experienced it. I've had two admirers by now. They flattered me with compliments and flowers, but as soon as we started to talk, it turned out that they didn't want to hear my opinion about the king's new strategy towards France or...“

„Well, in defense of my sex, a lady, who is interested in politics is rather uncommon.“ Gibbs interrupted her softly. „And especially a young man feels a little overwhelmed when a woman shows intelligence - especially if she turns out to be more intelligent than him. I on the other hand would be delighted to hear your opinions someday. I'm sure it would turn out to be a lively discussion.“ His eyes met hers and a smile crossed her face as she returned his look for several moments.

Then she turned her head away, asking almost casually, „Does that mean that you're planning to visit my house more often?“

He knew what she was really asking. Usually a man only visited a young lady more often when he started to court her. And damn, he shouldn't even be considering this possibility. He should make sure that she found a suitable husband - a good match for her. That was what his dead friend would be expecting of him. And he didn't consider himself a good match for her. Sure, he was a wealthy man. He owned his own lands, and he had paid his dues to his home country, and served in the war - for which he had been rewarded with a seat in the parliament. He was far from being influential, because he was not really into political affairs. Still, most women considered him a very good match.

But Kate was young. She was almost half his age. Of course, a marriage with an age difference of fourteen years was not at all entirely uncommon. Many young women married even older men. But Kate was the only child of his best friend, and he wouldn't betray the trust the man had put into him before his death. Which was the reason, why he should put an end to this charade and reveal his identity to her, before things would get out of hand.

„Kate, I need to tell you...“ he started, when suddenly one of the coachmen on the

roof yelled something, and then slowly, the carriage drifted to the side. Kate shrieked, when the whole vehicle almost tipped over, but then stopped in a dangerously askew position.

Gibbs reacted with the instincts of a soldier and immediately pulled the young woman over against his body, before she could be buried under the dozens of boxes with the decorations, that were falling down to the sides. A few of the boxes fell onto them and then to the ground with a loud clattering sound. Then eventually the carriage was silent.

The young woman was pressed against Gibbs chest, and breathed heavily. She clasped the material of his coat and felt his strong muscles under the fabric. His scent enveloped her and she felt her cheeks flush when she realized how close she was to him. She had never felt the body of a man so intensely pressed against hers.

„You alright?“ The man eventually asked softly and Kate looked up at him, her face only inches away from his.

„Yes.“ She breathed in his scent and blushed even more. „I'm just... I... wow...“

„Yes,“ he chuckled, „That's what they all tell me.“

He was flirting with her! And he was so overstepping the line. She hit his chest softly, putting an angry expression onto her face.

„How dare you mock me in a situation like this?“

He smirked and then looked up when one of the coachmen opened the door. „Milord, are you alright?“

„Yes, we are! What happened?“ Gibbs asked, immediately becoming serious again.

„The snow became so heavy that we couldn't see the path anymore. The carriage hit the ditch and it's too deep for the horses to pull it out. We'll have to unload the carriage and try it then.“

Gibbs' expression immediately became darker. „We have a lady in here. Do you expect her to sit in the snow for hours?“

„I'm afraid we have no other choice, Sir!“ The young man returned.

Kate saw the dangerous expression on the man's face, knowing that it was of course an impossible thing to ask of a young woman. But she had always loved to take walks in the snow, and they couldn't be far from her house anymore.

„It's alright, Milord! I'm sure these men are doing everything they can.“

He looked down into her face, and then eventually nodded. „Fine.“ Then he helped her to climb out of the carriage. The coachmen assisted as well as they could. The snow was still heavily falling down, and Kate immediately covered her head. If it kept snowing like this, the path would be impassable in a few hours. They had to hurry. She turned around and looked at Gibbs who was just jumping down the carriage. She shielded her face from the icy breeze, that was playing with her dress. In a few hours they would be in a real snowstorm.

„My house is not far in that direction! We should walk there! If we start now, we might make it before the snowstorm hits us!“ she said loudly against the wind, and Gibbs hurried to her.

„Not an option! We would freeze in the storm!“ he returned loudly.

„But it's really...“ she started to counter, before his stare shut her up. This man was obviously used to giving orders and be the one in control.

„I am not going to risk your life. We might make it, but we might just as well be captured in the storm, or lose our way, and freeze to death. There's a forest over there! We'll go there and find shelter, until the carriage is ready to move again.“ He urged her to go over the field towards the forest. The snow had covered the whole field and reached up to her calves, soaking the lower part of her dress. Kate shivered.

„They will never be able to pull the carriage out before the snowstorm hits us!“ she tried it again, and then stopped. „My lord! I have an idea!“

„Kate!“ he said sharper now and grabbed her arm. „The forest will shield us from the most of the storm.“

„The horses!“ she yelled against the wind. „One coachman can take a horse and ride back to the house! My carriage is ready to go, as it was planned to leave for the town in about an hour anyway. I'm sure my butler will immediately send it, and the coachman could show my servants the way! They could be here within the hour!“

Gibbs nodded. „Fine! But an hour is still a long time in an unprotected snowstorm! You will catch a cold.“

She surrendered, as his reasoning was flawless. So she followed him to a group of trees. Immediately, she had to admit that she was feeling better. The wind wasn't as sharp and cold anymore, and only few snowflakes made their way through the trees. She shivered slightly and hugged her body with her arms.

„Stay here!“ The man ordered. „I will be back in a minute.“

With those words he hurried away. Kate looked into the dark forest and shivered slightly, then turned her head back towards the street. Although it was merely about thirty meters of white field that was separating the forest from the path, she could barely see the carriage anymore. Only some vague shadows between the swirling snowflakes indicated where the men were working.

A few seemingly endless moments later, Gibbs returned with a blanket. He placed it around the young woman's shoulders. „It's alright. One of the men will get help from your house.“ He rubbed her arms to keep her warm. „It's not sure whether the carriage will still get through though, so possibly they will just get a few horses and we'll have to ride back.“

„That's fine... I'm alright!“ She looked in the direction of the path, which she couldn't see anymore at all now.

„You should go help them!“ Kate thought. „Or at least be somewhere in sight.“

„I will not leave you alone in this forest,“ he stated clearly, knowing the reasons for which she had made this suggestion. It was absolutely unacceptable for a young, unmarried woman to be alone with a man – even if it was in a snowstorm like this. And he was sure that the coachmen would immediately talk about it once they were back in town. From experience he knew that gossip was a quick traveler. „Don't worry about your reputation, we'll take care of that later.“

This would be a great time to tell her that she needn't worry, because legally he was her custodian. True, normally circumstances like these would require a man to marry

the woman in question. Ridiculous as it was to assume that any immoral actions could take place in a snowstorm, rumors spread too fast and nobody asked whether they were true. It was just assumed they were.

He would have to make a visit to all the important neighbors and introduce himself as Kate's guardian so that she would not become the sitting target for gossip in the county.

Not even one hour later, Gibbs had to admit that Kate's household had to be well organized and her servants loyal and hardworking. The carriage arrived just in time, with two extra horses and six servants to help pull the other carriage out of the ditch. It took only a few minutes to carry the boxes with the goods and shoppings into the other carriage. The servants would then follow in the second carriage which they had almost pulled out of the ditch when the carriage with Kate and Gibbs started.

They were both frozen through, and Kate was shaking from cold. They were sitting next to each other and Gibbs was rubbing her arms. Not even twenty minutes later they had reached her house. Warm light was shining through the windows into the cold snowy weather.

„I'm sorry...“ Kate whispered, „It looks as if you cannot continue your journey to your relatives tonight!“

„Don't worry,“ he replied and opened the carriage door once the horses had stopped. „I'm just where I want to be.“

He lifted her up into his arms and then hurried the few meters through the snow towards the house. The butler had already seen them arriving and opened the door. His hair was gray and his face aged, but Gibbs still recognized him.

„Ducky!“ he greeted him.

„Milord!“ the butler exclaimed in almost shocked surprise and bowed. „We didn't expect you to arrive that early, Sir. If I had known...“

„Don't worry,“ Gibbs interrupted him and let Kate down, who took a moment to understand the situation. „Tell the maids to prepare a hot bath for this young lady. And bring us some hot grog, will you? We need to warm up, before we catch a cold.“

„Very well, Mylord.“ And with these words he hurried away.

Kate just stared at her servant and felt as if she hadn't even been present. Very slowly, her mind grasped the meaning of the old butler's behavior. She was aware of the fact that Ducky still knew her guardian in person, and the way he behaved towards the man could only mean that he was standing higher than the lady of the house. She inhaled deeply, as she became more and more angry. It wasn't possible.

„You? You... are...“ she almost hissed angrily.

„Yes.“ he nodded. But before he had any chance to add something, Kate had turned around and rushed up the stairs, muttering very un-lady-like curses. Gibbs' eyes narrowed and he followed the young woman.

„Where are you going?“ he requested to know, and she turned to him. His eyes were sparking with rage.

„I am getting rid of my wet clothes and then taking a bath. Or do I need to ask permission to do all this from now on, 'Milord'?“ she asked snappily, and the way she

ironically pronounced his title made him angry.

She didn't care for the dangerous expression on his face and just rushed away. Gibbs looked after her somewhat incredulous. He wasn't used to people standing up to him. A part of him could of course understand her rage. But at the same time, she should be apologizing to him. She had this whole plan worked out to drive him out of his own house, and she had openly told him every detail of it. Hell, he had even helped her buy all these things. She should be embarrassed! But instead she was mocking his title and disrespecting him. He would not accept that.

With a growl he started after her, following the maids who were carrying buckets of hot water to find the right room. Without any previous warning he pushed open the door and entered the young woman's personal chambers. Kate shrieked in surprise, as her personal maid Abygail had just helped her out of her soaked dress and she was now standing in the room wearing only her white shift dress.

„How dare you!“ she exclaimed in disbelief and grabbed a silky, thin robe from her sofa to cover her half-nakedness.

The maids in the room stood motionless, staring at the male intruder. None of them dared to move even an inch, when they saw the dark expression on the face of the older man. Kate seemed to be the only unimpressed person in the room.

„You have no right to step into my private rooms as if they were your own!“

Gibbs looked at the maids. „Leave us alone, will you?“ he ordered, and waited until the women had left the room. When the door clicked shut, he looked at the young woman in front of him again.

„Don't ever disrespect me like this again!“ he said dangerously low.

„I disrespected you?!?“ she repeated his accusation and stepped back. „You played this whole comedy. You knew who I was the whole time, and yet you preferred not to tell me about our relation! You flirted with me and played those charms of yours. I really thought that... that...“ She shut up and inhaled. „You made fun of me, and now you expect me to just smile and welcome you in my house?“ She let herself sink onto the couch and sighed in defeat. „You had your fun, Milord. Now please, allow me some privacy...“

Gibbs growled. „You had this whole conspiracy planned to drive me from this house. What's with all the Christmas decorations you bought?“

„That's because I didn't want to have you here! Because I heard what you were like!“

„And what would that be?“ Gibbs asked darkly. Kate looked up, meeting his eyes fiercely.

„A grumpy old bastard who has been disappointed by life and takes it out on the persons around him!“ she snapped and he was put off by her honesty for a moment.

„'S that what you think of me?“ he snapped back.

„Do you want to know the truth? When I met you, I would have never considered the possibility, that you could be that man. Of course you were being a bastard when you insulted me - but you were also charming and friendly. Maybe a little too arrogant, but never grumpy and mean. But now I'm thinking that I misjudged your character by that first impression.“ She had taken a few steps towards him in her anger, and when

she ended her speech, they were standing close to each other and Kate was glaring into his eyes.

„I told you not to pay attention to gossip!“ Gibbs growled angrily, and Kate chuckled ironically.

„I don't! But do you expect me to thank you for embarrassing me?“ she asked, feeling the heat of his body through the thin shift dress. She couldn't care less for her clothing, or rather the lack thereof.

„Do you expect me to reward you for trying to make fun of me with the help of your whole domestic staff? I am a proud man, and I don't like to be fooled.“ he explained almost coldly, calming down slowly.

„Neither do I!“ Her brown eyes were still locked with his blue ones. Only after a while she lowered them to a point somewhere close to his neck. „When I met you and then later on in the carriage I just... I thought... I mean, I have never met a man with whom talking seemed to be so easy. I felt comfortable. You should have told me that it was all fake.“ She turned around quickly and went back to her couch.

Gibbs looked at her, instantly understanding what she was implying. At first he wanted to tell her that it had not been fake. That he had not told her who he was, because he had actually enjoyed their little banter and her playful honesty. But then he remembered their relation. He was supposed to take care of her and secure a future for her. He was to organize her household and guard her until she was safe and her husband could take over for him. His duty was to do what was best for her. Happiness and hope were two virtues which life would take as a sacrifice for experience first. And the earlier she learned that, the less painful it would be.

He ignored the sting in a part of his heart, that he didn't even know still existed, when he turned away from her, and said, „I am your guardian, no more and no less. Think about that as you want, but this will be my household from now on and you will do as you are being told.“ And then he left the room, slamming the door shut behind him.

Kate just stared through the window outside into the cold winter night. Snowflakes were still dancing down from the skies, and the edges of the windows were covered in icy crystals which were glistening in the warm light of the candle that was standing on a small table. Eventually, a sob escaped her throat and she felt tears burn in her eyes. She remembered how Gibbs had flirted with her, how warm his body had felt, when she was pressed against him in the carriage and how charming he had been. And all of that had been a lie. He had made fun of her. She had never felt this humiliated in her life.

Shivering, she let herself sink onto her knees, her chest trembling from sobs. Through tear-clouded eyes, she looked out of the window, and then started to cry. Her heart ached with a pain she had never known before and she could not even come up with a reasonable explanation for it...



Outside of her room, Gibbs was leaning against the door, hating himself for having been so heartless. He was at an age at which one was generally considered to be experienced and reasonable. And yet, the unreasonable urge to go back into her room and apologize to her became almost overwhelming.

And then he heard her soft sobs, and he felt as if a knife bore into his heart.

It was unreasonable. He knew that what he was said had been for the best of her, and yet he felt the need to soothe her pain; to cradle her up in his arms and assure her that everything would be fine; to promise her happiness.

His face hardened and determinedly, he walked away from her room, ignoring the pain inside. The world was cold. It had been for him and it would be for her. And there was nothing he could do that would change that...



Gibbs looked up from the papers he had been reading through, when the old door to the study room opened with a soft squeaking noise, and the old butler Ducky came in, followed by a few servants who were carrying Christmas decorations.

„I am sorry to disturb you, master, but the lady ordered to decorate the halls and rooms.“

Gibbs' eyes fell on the clock on the wall. It was still very early in the morning and the sun had not even risen yet – although dawn already announced its presence. He raised his eyebrows. „She's awake that early in the morning?“

„Yes, Sir. On Christmas Day, the lady always gets up early to organize the day. A lot needs to be prepared for the Christmas celebrations.“ The butler explained. Gibbs nodded.

„Very well, but leave this room out. I need silence for the moment.“ he ordered, and was about to turn his attention back on the calculations, when the old butler surprised him by his reaction.

„I'm sorry, Sir, but the young lady was very explicit in her orders. This is her working room, and she wants it properly decorated.“

Gibbs raised slowly from his chair. „I believe it has been made clear that my word weighs more than that of the young lady.“ he almost bellowed grumpily. Ducky mustered him for a moment, then he turned around to the servants.

„You heard the masters word. Let's move on to the main hall...“ The butler waited until the servants had left the room, then he closed the door discreetly and turned around to look at the grumpy man. „Sir, pardon my honesty, but I have known you for a long time and you seem to have changed quite a lot.“

„It's been nine years since we last met,“ Gibbs confirmed his statement. „A lot of things have happened.“

„So I have heard,“ the butler noted dryly and rearranged some of the vases on the nearby table. It was a courteous way of referring to the rumors that had been going around. „Still, the young lady deserves a chance. Her father has been dead for two years and all this time she has managed this household her own way.“

Gibbs looked back down onto the papers. „So?“ he asked almost gruff.

„I'm just saying...“ The butler looked at the man near the desk with a somewhat displeased expression on his face. „Rumor has it, that the young lady looked as if she had cried the whole night long this morning.“ Ducky mentioned and acted as if his whole concentration was on cleaning the bookshelves. „You do not by any chance know a reason why she would?“

The man at the desk sighed and put the quill aside. „I cannot act as if I was her

admirer when I am supposed to be her guardian!" He spoke these words more to himself than to the old butler, and when he raised his head, he could read from the face of the servant that he was surprised. An emotion so openly displayed was really rare for the man, Gibbs knew that.

„Well, is there a good reason why she would think that you intended to court her, Sir?“

„There might be.“ Gibbs answered. „When I saw her I didn't know who she was, and I started to be flirtatious towards her before I even realized that she is my protégé.“

„And why would that be, Sir?“ The old butler continued his questions. Gibbs sighed.

„I have to admit that I was captured by her natural charms. She has a way around her that I have never seen in any woman ever before.“ A vivid image of the young woman in the decoration shop came to his mind, how she had been standing in front of him with her light-blue dress, that silky brown hair and her deep, brown eyes. He growled, pulling himself out of this fantasy. „But of course, as soon as I realized who she was, I knew what my duties were.“

„Mmm...“ the man nodded thoughtfully. „With all due respect Sir, I do not see your problem. Obviously, the young lady was equally fascinated.“

„Well, she better not be!“ Gibbs retorted in a hard voice. „Life doesn't give us what we want to have. It's better she learns that early in her life, then she won't put her hopes up.“

„I see,“ Ducky nodded, having finished cleaning the room, „so you're assuming that because your wife cheated on you and left you, and life became disappointing afterwards, that it would be the same for every other person on this planet. That's an interesting world view. Have you ever considered all those couples that still live together happily married?“ He smiled inwardly at the perplexed expression of the man sitting at the desk, and bowed. „Have a good day Sir.“ With these words he left the room.



Kate kept herself busy. She knew from experience that it was the only way to keep herself from drowning in her sorrows. So she delegated the servants, observed how they decorated the great entrance hall and the living room with holly and mistletoes, and took charge of the decoration of the great Christmas tree.

By the time they were almost finished with the tree, she had forgotten about the unwanted presence of her new 'guardian' in the house. She was just giggling and showering her personal maid Abby with the rest of the leaves of holly, the servants around them laughing and joking along with them, when Gibbs came down the stairs into the entrance hall, eyeing the scenario with obvious displeasure on his face.

Immediately, the servants became silent, and Kate, who was standing on a ladder to be able to reach the wall above the entrance door, turned around surprised.

„What's going on here?“ Gibbs asked, looking around.

„We're just...“ Abby started, fumbling the holly out of her hair, „...decorating the hall, Sir! We do it every year, but this year we have especially much holly. Much more than last year. Of course we...“ The young woman started to babble, until she was interrupted by Ducky with a sharp „Abygail!“

The young maid was known for talking a little too much - as was the butler. But contrary to the maid, he knew when it was time to be silent. Kate stepped down the ladder and streaked the dirt and leaves from her long dress. „I didn't know that I would need your permission to decorate my home,“ she informed him shortly, her tone making clear that she was on the warpath with him.

From the corner of his eyes, Gibbs saw the old butler raise an eyebrow. He looked from the servants to the pretty young woman, and then nodded. „Carry on... but be careful on that ladder. Let one of the young men take care of the high decorations.“

After he had said that, he turned around to enter the living room. Kate smiled at her servants, and murmured „Carry on!“ before grabbing the hems of her dress and following him quickly.

„I do this every year!“ she informed him brusquely, when she had caught up with him in front of the door to her living room.

He turned around, finding her standing right in front of him. „I am just concerned about your safety.“ His remark was spoken calm and almost kind.

She sighed and looked at him, taking in every detail of his face. He looked like a man who had been disappointed in life. Not that this was any excuse for his behavior - or her problem for that matter - but it was Christmas, and her father had taught her to be a kind person.

„Why don't you join us, you could help us with the decorations,“ she proposed friendly and for a split second he looked surprised. Then he shook his head. „I am sorry, I have a lot of work to do. I need to look through the calculations for the last two years and...“

„But it's Christmas!“ Kate interrupted him. „I do not want to fight with you over my - over our house - throughout the whole Christmas season.“

His face stayed hard and grumpily he retorted, „Some things just shouldn't be put off too long - especially not for a superfluous festivity.“

That was the moment when Abby, who was just passing them by with a beautiful bouquet of Christmas flowers, exclaimed, „The master and the young lady are standing under a mistletoe!“

Instantly, the servants were silent again, and their eyes were on the couple, who looked around rather perplexed. Kate raised her eyes and spotted the large mistletoe which was hanging on the wall right above them.

„Who put that up there?“ she asked strictly, not remembering having ordered mistletoe to be hung up near the living room. The old butler Ducky approached with a smile. „You need to kiss him, Miss Kate. It's tradition. Or do you want to bring bad luck over this household.“

Kate looked at the man who was standing in front of her, her heart racing. He was looking back at her with an equally stunned look. Then all of a sudden he did something that came totally unexpected for her. His expression turned soft and with the hint of a smile, he bent forward and pulled her slender body a little closer to his. She gasped, but before she could protest, she felt his warm, soft lips touching hers in a butterfly kiss. At first she froze against him, her hands lying on the fabric of his shirt near his waist. She was shocked by his sudden

closeness, and the feelings he evoked with it.

Then his lips softly moved along hers, enticing her to open her lips. Before she even realized it, she was reacting to him. Her hands moved up to his arms, and she leaned into the kiss, her lips parting very softly.

Incredibly tender, and well aware of her innocence, Gibbs caressed her lips with his, before he eventually deepened the kiss. It was so natural, that neither of them thought about it. It felt right for him to kiss her, and for a brief eternity he thought that this was what he should have been doing his whole life.

Endlessly, he explored her mouth with his tongue, pulling her body closer against his, until her chest was pressed against his. She could feel his strength, the muscles under his clothing, while her hands moved up slowly until they were resting on his shoulders.

When eventually, Gibbs broke the kiss, the young woman sighed regretfully and opened her eyes. For a moment she stared at him in complete bewilderment, before she became aware of the servants who were surrounding them, and were now starting to clap and cheer. Embarrassed, Kate touched her lips with her fingers and turned around, her cheeks flushed.

„I... we... we still have a lot of work to do until tonight...” she stuttered, putting on a strict expression when she was looking at the servants. „Let's get started...” The maids started to get back to their work, while Kate was still standing there in the room, trying to regain her composure. She turned slightly, looking at the man who was still leaning in the door frame and returning her look with a mysterious expression on his face. Feeling flushed and heated, she eventually turned and almost ran away to refresh herself.

Gibbs observed her thoughtfully. What had gotten into him? When he had bent down, he had intended to peek a short kiss on her lips and then return to his work – just to satisfy the servants. But once he had felt the softness of her lips, smelled her soft scent – a mixture of holly, cinnamon and fresh winter air – and touched her warm body which seemed to melt so perfectly into his, he had not been able to stop touching her. He had been drawn to her warmth, thinking for a short moment, that she might hold in store what he had been looking for all his life. And then things had gotten out of hand. Instead of a quick kiss, he had turned it into a heated exploration of her lips which went far beyond a traditional kiss under the mistletoe.

And the way her brown eyes had looked at him in complete bewilderment told him, that her feelings were similar to his.

He sighed and straightened himself out. That was the moment in which Ducky passed him by with a sneaky smile. „You're welcome,“ he rasped, and then vanished in the hallway that led to the kitchen. Gibbs couldn't help but stare after the sneaky butler. Maybe he should feel thankful to his old friend after all...



A few hours later, everything was prepared for the celebration. The Christmas tree was standing, and all the presents had been spread around it.

Throughout the previous years, it had become a tradition for Kate to celebrate Christmas in the midst of her servants and their families. So she was used to having more than twenty people around her on Christmas evening.

But today it was different. She had spent the whole day trying to distract herself from

the disturbingly pleasant kiss, that she had shared with Gibbs – a man whom she had decided to hate about a week ago. But then she had met him in the town, not knowing who he was, and she had found him attractive and charming. Yet, he had made clear that he would never be more than her guardian. She needed to figure out a way to deal with her very disturbing emotions, which confused her more than anything else ever had.

And that was the reason why she wished for some privacy to think.

Christmas was always very beautiful in her house. Ducky and a few other servants brought the musical instruments they knew how to play, and Abby and another young maid sang the traditional songs. Every year they surprised the present guests with a new song they had studied throughout the year. The candles on the big tree were burning while five children, three girls and two boys whose parents were among her servants, jumped up and down impatiently, waiting for the big moment when they would finally be allowed to search for their present under the tree.

It was a lovely and warm atmosphere, and not even Gibbs could elude the celebration.

Sometime during the little concert he left the study room and observed the scenery from the small balcony that the stairs formed. His eyes were resting on the young lady of the house the whole time, and with every minute his fascination with her grew. He couldn't avert his eyes from her slender figure, which was accentuated by the pretty white dress that she was wearing. Her dark hair made a beautiful contrast to the light color of the dress.

Ever since the kiss he could no longer see her as his protégé – not that he had ever done so, if he was truly honest with himself – but he saw in her a fascinating young lady with a spirit that he had lost throughout the disappointments in his life and experiences in the war; a spirit which seemed to infect him and awaken something inside of him that he had believed to be gone forever. He felt almost young again.

He smiled when Kate was admiring a little, wooden ship one of the children had made for her. It was, objectively spoken, ugly and deformed, but she thanked the child with so much joy and enthusiasm as if she had been given the crown jewels of England. She possessed a quality that all the women he had met until now had lacked – that included his first wife.

Jennifer had always searched for more, she had never been contented with what he could offer her. Sure, their marriage had been arranged by his parents, but after a while he had learned to love her and wanted her to be happy. That feeling had obviously never been mutual. Jennifer had wanted a husband with an influential position at court, but he had always been more of a practical man. He wasn't so much interested in politics and the hypocrisy connected with it, as he was in doing things himself. Jennifer on the other hand had been a really material woman, and nothing he had done had truly made her happy.

Observing this joyful little ceremony downstairs, he suddenly got the feeling that it had never been meant to work out with Jennifer. She had not been the right woman. Whereas Kate...

Gibbs sighed and weighed the glass with whiskey in his hand. Surely he would someday go to hell for betraying his old friend like this. Instead of making sure his daughter would be safely married to a wealthy member of the county, he considered doing something completely selfish...

„Sir Fornell always cared more for the happiness of his daughter than for what society dictated.“

Gibbs turned around to find Ducky next to him who was handing him a glass of traditional Christmas tea. He raised his eyebrow in puzzlement, wondering if the butler possessed the ability to read his mind.

„What do you mean?“

„Every year, young Katie begged him for a huge Christmas ceremony, and one year he surprised her by holding a ceremony like this for all of his servants and their families. Ever since then, this has become a tradition in the family. The old lord never cared much for what society dictated to be best for a young woman. All he cared for was that she was happy.“ The man smiled and then rearranged the monocle on his nose. With a neutral face he turned around. „I am sure he would want you to take just the same values into consideration.“

And before Gibbs could ask him what he was trying to say, he was gone.



Later that night, after the children had finally been put to bed, and the main part of the ceremony was over, Kate eventually found the silence she had been wishing for the whole day.

She shivered when she stepped out of the back door into the huge garden which belonged to her house. The winter air was cold and icy, and her warm breath puffed in white clouds towards the sky. Snowflakes were still falling down, and the young woman stepped through the thick blanket of snow on the ground, hugging her body with her hands.

She was only wearing her white dress which she spared for festivities like Christmas. It was a beautiful, but also rather thin dress, revealing most of her shoulders and cleavage.

Kate inhaled deeply and looked up into the sky, closing her eyes when the snowflakes hit her skin. The feeling was wonderful, and the thick flakes cooled her skin and put her mind to a peaceful rest. She gazed up into the skies, looking into the millions of dancing and twirling snowflakes.

Slowly, she strolled through the snow, until she had reached to the small fountain which made a beautiful decoration during summer and spring seasons. Oblivious to her surroundings she drew little strokes into the blanket of snow, which was lying on the stony surface that framed the fountain.

When all of a sudden she heard steps behind her in the snow, she turned around, awaiting to find her butler, who would hand her a glass of hot glogg - as he did every year.

But instead she found Gibbs approaching her position, his face turned up to look at the sky. When he reached her, he looked down at her and his eyes locked with hers, his expression soft and gentle. She immediately blushed, as she had never seen an expression like this on his face before.

„It's a beautiful night, isn't it?“ she opened up courteously, after a long moment of silence. He nodded.

„It is indeed. Winter on the countryside truly feels more intense and peaceful than it does in the city,“ he agreed and Kate smiled, her fingers playing with the cold snow. The snowflakes were starting to cover her brown hair, and paired with her white dress, she almost looked like the snow princess herself.

„Kate,“ the man eventually started, his tone more serious than before, which caught the young woman's attention. His hand touched her cheek softly, and his thumb moved over her lower lip. Her body tightened slightly in surprise at this unsuspected caress. „I know, our start was – well, let's just say it was not perfect.“

„No, it wasn't,“ the young woman agreed.

„And I behaved like... like...“

„A bastard?“ Kate helped out with a smile, which made him raise his eyebrows in a silent warning. Her smile grew wider.

„Something like that,“ he agreed with a nod, and she realized that this man was not one who often apologized for his actions. She touched his hand with hers in the softest gesture, almost afraid that he would push her away again; that he was just playing with her.

„I came to this town because I had received a letter by my solicitor, that said that my oldest friend had assigned me the guardianship of his daughter. And I was determined to find a good match for her and then return to my life as soon as possible.“ He inhaled and just looked at her for a moment. „That was before I knew you.“

„And now?“ Kate asked lowly, holding her breath in anticipation of what he was about to say.

„Now I have seen that you are more than capable of keeping the house. So, I have two options for you to choose from now. I can leave as soon as the snow starts to melt and the streets are passable again. Once a month, I would then expect a written letter by you, reporting the status of the house, until you turn twenty-five or get married.“

A shadow fell over her face and she retracted her hand from his. „Oh.“ She turned her eyes away from him to look at the small fountain into which the snowflakes were still silently falling. „What's the second option?“

„You allow me to court you properly. In that case I would of course have to find an apartment in the town, because we don't want to risk ruining your reputation.“

She gasped and turned her head to look at him totally stunned. For a few moments, she could do nothing but simply gaze at him, then she sat down on the stony frame of the fountain, not caring for the thick blanket of snow which she sank into. „What?“ she asked perplexed and in complete disbelief.

„As I said,“ Gibbs explained almost coolly, mistaking her bewilderment for shock at his proposal, „It is your choice to make.“

„I'm stubborn!“ she suddenly informed him and looked up. „And you are used to being in control. I'm not used to obey.“

„Yes, I figured that,“ he answered, still not conveying any kind of emotion.

„I am not like the other ladies that you have met at court.“

„Which I'm grateful for,“ he nodded, realizing slowly, that she was not considering turning him down because of himself, but because she thought she wouldn't be able to satisfy him.

„You told me that you would never be more than my guardian and...”

„Kate!” he stopped her before she could give him another reason for not taking the second option. Softly he pulled her up from the cold surface and she almost tumbled against him. Immediately he closed his arms around her. He felt her catch her breath, her fingers clutching the material of his jacket softly, when she raised her head to look at him. Her eyes shimmered warmly, and she was just about to speak when he closed her lips with his mouth and muffled every word that she had intended to say.

This time he was not as gentle as he had been under the mistletoe. Passionately, his tongue sought hers in a fierce exploration, until she was moaning against him and her body softening under his touch. She wrapped her arms around him and returned his kiss with equal fire until he broke the kiss, but not their body contact and locked his eyes with hers deeply. „There is of course also a third option.” He paused a moment to give her time to recover from the kiss and refocusing her concentration on what he was saying. Then he spoke his proposal. “Marry me!” She caught her breath, just staring at him and trying to figure out whether he was mocking her or being serious. Eventually she took a step back, breaking contact with him.

The snow fell down stronger again and Kate felt a soft shiver run through her body. „Why?” she whispered shakily.

„Katie, you shouldn't be asking for the reasons if a man proposes to you!” he informed her in a mock-gruff tone, and she laughed at the intimate nickname that he was using.

„Also, a man shouldn't propose out of the blue!” she countered with a soft smile and lifted her hand to run her fingers through his dark hair, which was pervaded by gray streaks.

Gibbs smirked and looked at her flirtatiously. „What about the kiss made you think that it came out of the blue,” he countered softly. „Of course, if you accepted my proposal right away, I wouldn't have to go through the trouble of finding a suitable place in the town.”

„What if I didn't accept at all?” she smiled playfully and he shrugged amused.

„Then I would have to throw you over my shoulders and lock you up somewhere until you couldn't think of anything but how much you love me,” he retorted and chuckled at her almost outraged scoff. Then he added, „But... I have a feeling that this won't be necessary!”

He grabbed her hand and pulled her towards him until she fell back against his chest. His hands moved to her waist while he was looking into her eyes intently. „So, what is your answer? Marry me, or never seeing me again?”

„Well, I could certainly not live with never seeing you again.” she whispered and trembled in anticipation when he approached her lips with his.

„So?” he asked amused.

„So, I will marry you!” she smiled. „But I have one condition!”

„I'm listening.”

„I will be allowed to decorate the house for Christmas every year!“ she stated seriously, and he started to laugh.

For the first time in years he felt like Christmas and had the feeling that maybe his life was not over yet. And he was sure that he wanted to remember this Christmas night forever.

„Agreed!“ he nodded, and then indulged her into a series of deep kisses amidst the twirling dance of the snowflakes that covered the world in a white blanket of beauty on Christmas Eve.

The End (Dec 24, 2008)



The texts, artworks and ideas included in this file are property of Kimberley Jackson.

Any unauthorized use or publication in any printed or non-printed form without the explicit written permission of Kimberley Jackson will be considered copyright infringement!

You are allowed to download this story and print it out. You may also share this file via email. You are not allowed to alter the story in any way or use parts of it for your own works unless you have the author's permission to do so.

If you are a private person, you may host this story on your website, but if you do so, you have to notify Kimberley Jackson about it!

For inquiries, questions or comments, you can contact the author via email:  
[kimberley@kimberley-jackson.com](mailto:kimberley@kimberley-jackson.com)

Or visit the website: <http://www.kimberley-jackson.com>

Thank you for reading my stories!