

A Reinhart Christmas

Holiday 2023

Sloane looked at her phone, quickly responding with a thumbs-up emoji to her sister's text. Her sister, Katie, and her boyfriend were about to pull into the driveway shortly. *Gwyn is going to be so excited.*

She looked over at her daughter as they sat on the couch together. They were watching another one of those Netflix Christmas movies again that Gwyn loved. One year Netflix even tweeted about people who had watched one of their movies every day for twenty days. All she could do at the time was cringe when she realized it was Gwyn. Her daughter knew what she liked, and she would not stop until she did. The current movie was about a princess who went to a faraway land with people of completely different cultures. She met a girl and fell in love, and they both had to learn how to respect and cherish their differences. Some noble tried to stop them because of an archaic law that said the princess must be married by the Christmas after her twenty-fifth birthday. Of course, in the end, they got married. These things always had a happy ending. *Just the way Gwyn likes it. She gets so mad if someone doesn't get their happy ending.*

Sloane sighed. *I wonder what the algorithm will come up with next. It's clearly working if Gwyn is anything to go by.*

"Mom. Mom!"

"Hmm?"

Gwyn paused the movie, holding onto the remote, because of course she always had to.

"Why are you staring at me?"

Sloane blinked, not realizing she had been. She came up with a distraction on the fly.

"I have a surprise."

Her daughter's eyes widened. "What is it?"

“*This!*” Sloane shot her hands out and grabbed Gwyn’s sides, a scream emitted from her daughter and she rolled around the couch laughing as Sloane tickled her. When her daughter had clearly given up, and because Sloane was sure the girl may pee herself if she kept going, Sloane stopped. With an exaggerated exhale, Sloane stood up. She bent over, pretending to breathe heavily, before plopping back down heavily on the couch.

With an air of nonchalance, she looked down at her daughter next to her. “Why are you all curled up like that?”

Gwyn rolled her eyes. “*Really?* Why are you so weird?”

Sloane’s eyes widened, grabbed a pillow, and threw it at her daughter. “I am not weird! You’re weird!”

Giggles erupted from Gwyn and the little devil launched herself at Sloane, trying to tickle her. Sloane screeched as she was unprepared for the sneak attack. “Stop! No. *Stop!*” She started laughing and trying to get her daughter but a small hand lodged itself so far into her armpit that she couldn’t move.

She laughed, scared *she* was going to pee herself as she tried to fight the little demon off. The doorbell rang, and Gwyn froze. Sloane took the opportunity the lull in battle gave her and jumped up. “I’ll get it.”

Gwyn started laughing and rushed her again, and Sloane had to dodge and put an arm out to hold her daughter back. “Wait! I need to get the door!”

“No, I’ll get it!”

Gwyn dashed ahead of her, sliding on the wood floor in her socks as she crashed against the door in a fit of giggles. “Ow!”

Her daughter lifted to her tiptoes as she looked through the peephole in the door. “*Mom!*”

She swung open the door and screamed out in surprise. “*Aunt Katie!*” She called out, rushing to her aunt and hugging her.

“Woah, Gwynnie! Careful!” Sloane’s sister said as she tried not to drop the bags in her hands.

“Here, let me get those,” Michael, her sister’s boyfriend said as he reached over and grabbed Katie’s bags.

“Welcome guys! Come on in!”

Gwyn was bouncing on her toes in excitement

“Hey sis. Thanks,” her sister said as the two hugged and kissed each other’s cheeks.

Sloane helped the two bring all of their things in and gave a short tour of the house. Michael thought the wardrobes in the bedrooms were so strange, fixating on the fact that her house didn’t have closets like America. Eventually, they found themselves back in the living room and sitting on her sectional.

“So! How—”

“How are you doing? You flew all the way here! Why couldn’t we pick you up from the airport?” Gwyn blurted out at a hundred kilometers an hour.

Sloane and her sister laughed.

“We are doing well, Gwynnie! We wanted to surprise you for Christmas!” Katie said.

Her daughter’s eyes lit up. “It’s the beginning of December... *Wait*. You’re here until after Christmas?”

“We are! I hear festivals are going on every weekend, too! I was telling Michael all about it.”

The boyfriend in question nodded his head. “She sure did. Katie was telling me all about how you speak Italian now. Will you translate for me?”

“Of course!”

Sloane narrowed her eyes. “You never translated for me while I was learning!”

Gwyn scoffed. “You’re my *mom*. Of course not. Plus, you should have known Italian anyways! That’s what nonna said.”

Katie and Sloane both sputtered. Their mother was a fresh-off-the-boat Italian who had moved to America with her parents when she was just seventeen. She had kept up with her mother tongue to this day, and still gave Sloane crap about her pronunciation. Her father was an Italian-American who, unlike Sloane and Katie, kept up with his Italian. Although, Sloane now knew why her mother constantly corrected her father on his own way of speaking.

This was amusing to Sloane because her mother was from southern Italy, and Sloane now lived in northern Italy. It was like the notion of regional differences didn’t exist to her stubborn mamma. *We love that woman anyway.*

She had to admit, having a conversation with her genitori, or parents, in Italian was something Sloane wished she had been able to do for far longer. It took her thirty-plus years, but she finally could speak it.

“So, Gwyn. What have you been watching nowadays? Any anime?” Katie asked.

Sloane gave her sister a look as she raised her eyebrow.

Gwyn shook her head. “Nope. The only anime I like is Pokemon. I’ve been watching a lot of other stuff though! Have you seen the Dragon Prince? It is sooo good! The dragons and magic and elves!” She let out a little squee. *That’s my girl.*

Katie chuckled. “I don’t think we’ve seen that one, yet. Slo, do you have Crunchyroll on your TV?”

Sloane narrowed her eyes.

“Of course. You were the one that installed the app the last time you were here. It still has your account connected.”

Katie’s eyes twinkled. “Perfect! Gwyn, I have some stuff for you to watch.”

Sloane groaned. “No one wants to watch your cultivation crap!”

Katie scowled and whipped her arm around exaggeratively. “Are you courting death? You will kowtow—”

The pillow Sloane tossed at her sister smacked the younger woman right in the face.

“Ow!” Katie cried out.

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Gwyn smiled as she looked around the piazza. Her mom had brought them all to the festival. She *loved* the festivals. Today was the day of Arriva San Nicolò, the patron saint. She was excited. He would walk through the town with his donkey and they would toss out candy.

She loved candy.

The first thing she saw was the carousel. While she may be a tad big for it, she had to admit it was still a bit fun. Not that she would admit that to her mom.

“Hey. Mom. Psst.”

Her mom turned away from Aunt Katie and looked at her.

“What’s up, sweetie?”

“The lines for everything else are really long. Can I go wait... on the carousel?”

Her mom’s lip turned upward. *She’s on to me. Backtrack!*

“Or maybe not. It’s boring. Can I have my phone?”

Her mom rolled her eyes. “You can go wait on the carousel.”

“Thanks!”

She ran off before she had to pump the brakes and turn back around. Her mom was already holding out some euros for her to grab. Snatching the cash, she rushed over to the ticket booth and gave the man the money.

Gwyn waited her turn, and almost jumped for joy when she was first in line. Her eyes scanned all the animals, seeing the boring lion, tiger, and... yeah there’s the unicorn. *Lame.*

The carousel slowed to a stop and right in front of her was the one she wanted. *The dragon has arrived.* While it was a bit kiddie, and not nearly as fierce or cool looking as the ones from her shows, it would do.

She jumped on the green dragon and waited.

“Ciao, Gwyn! Come va?” *How are you?*

She looked over and saw her friend Martina hopping onto the horse next to her. *My dragon would eat your poor horse, Martina.*

Gwyn waved. “Ciao, Martina! Bene e tu?”

The ride started moving, and her friend asked a question.

“Bene. Sei qui per vedere san nicolo?”

“Cosa?”

“Sei qui per vedera—”

“Ohh, si!” *Yeah, I’m here to see Saint Nicholas.*

When the ride was done, she and her friend rushed over to where her mom was introducing Aunt Katie to Martina’s mom. It was amusing to watch her aunt’s boyfriend attempt to speak *anything* other than English. He was molto male in italiano. *Very bad.*

The group all walked together as they moved around the market. Her mom quickly found some wine to drink and was talking about it with her aunt. Her aunt pretended to listen, but Gwyn knew better. Aunt Katie liked to drink *other stuff* that would get her drunk while she partied. She wouldn’t spill the beans though, because she only knew from when she was scrolling through the pictures on her aunt’s phone and saw a bunch of pictures of her at a party.

Gwyn realized she messed up when she asked Aunt Katie why she was turning a bottle that said tequila upside down and letting it spill out of her mouth as she drank it.

I don’t think anyone has ever snatched something from me quicker than when she grabbed her phone back.

They walked around for a while as it got dark, and the lights came out that shone snowflakes and trees onto the buildings surrounding the piazza. The lights on the big Christmas tree came on and it all looked really pretty.

She looked at her mom and aunt. *I'm really happy that we're all here together. I wish nonna and nonno were both here. I know mom would like that.*

Her mom's work was starting to get busy, and her mom said that the next few months would be extremely busy. Gwyn had been staying at dopascuola, or after school, a lot longer recently. Some nights her mom didn't get her until it was almost closed.

It was okay, though. Her mom spent all the time she could with her whenever they were home. They watched Netflix, played games, and drew pictures together. When the weather was nicer, they would go out for gelato or even ride bikes around town.

Her mom was the best.

It was just the two of them, and she wished her mom could find someone who made her happy like Aunt Katie's boyfriend did for her.

As they walked around and looked at the various little things for sale. She especially enjoyed the jewelry that was made by two girls. They took pretty stones and made rings and earrings or even necklaces from them.

Her aunt wasn't sneaky at all. Gwyn saw Aunt Katie try and quietly buy a pretty necklace and earrings she had pointed out.

Those will probably be for me later.

Finally came the event they were there for. Everyone lined up by the street and she heard the instruments being played. A group of four men played some long flute-looking things that sounded pretty. Behind them came two men walking next to a donkey that pulled a small cart. Sitting on the cart was a man dressed in white robes and a red cloak. He had a long white beard and a funny golden hat like those she would see in the churches. The hat was tall and kind of looked like the cones she got when getting gelato.

The back of the cart was filled with presents. She knew these were fake because the real San Nicolo has already visited her at scuola during religione class. *It's okay, this is for the little kids. They would have been sad.*

Still, the main event for the night was what the fake Nicolo held. A bag filled with candies and sweets. He reached it and tossed out some to the kids as he passed. When he got to her, she waved. Martina called out something she couldn't make out, and the man laughed. He got a big handful of candy and... tossed it straight to Martina.

What?!

She of course still ran over and stole some. After all, Martina couldn't eat that much. Only a good friend would relieve her of the burden of a tummy ache.

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Sloane took a sip of her cappuccino as she watched Gwyn grab another present. Katie was sitting next to her drinking her own cup that Sloane had made. Katie's boyfriend Michael wasn't a fan of Italian coffee. So as the dirty dishwasher-drinking person he was, Katie had placed him on picture duty. His hair was pulled up into a bun that Gwyn had thought was just *hilarious*.

The morning had been filled with watching Gwyn find the two elf-on-a-shelf that her daughter loved. Elf-Elf Cool J and Sprinkles had a late-night cookie bender while they built a Lego Santa's Workshop. Gwyn had been tickled and adored the little note the two elves had left. *Thank God that Katie is here... Gwyn has been starting to recognize my handwriting.*

"Oh! Mom, look!"

Gwyn pulled out Picman 4 for her Nintendo Switch that she had wanted. Sloane smiled at how excited her daughter looked as she ran over and hugged her.

"Thank you, Mom!"

"You're welcome, sweetie! Do you like it?"

“I love it! Now I am going to have an army that will fight for me! *Mwahahaha!*” She cackled, like an actual evil laugh, hands up in the classic villain pose. Sloane laughed.

“Picmen are the good guys, silly! But, I think it’s your aunt’s turn now,” she said.

“Oh! Aunt Katie, open this one!” Gwyn grabbed a small present that Sloane had gotten her sister after a long wheel-and-deal. *I’m proud of this one.*

Katie raised a brow, likely knowing from the shape that it was the case of a game. *But not which one!*

Gwyn silently clapped her hands together in anticipation, and Katie opened the present and gasped.

“Oh. My. God. Sloane. *Really?*” Her eyes narrowed. “It was delayed. How the hell did you get this?” She turned around the Final Fantasy 7 Rebirth game that had been supposed to be released during the season, but a last-minute delay caused the release date to shift to January.

Sloane smirked as she sat up straighter. “I have my ways. I happen to know someone over at Square and we did a deal. Now, he’s going to test a new project we’re working on.”

Katie nearly spilled her coffee all over Michael as she shoved the mug into his hand, and rushed over to Sloane. “Thank you! I’ve been wanting this! *I can’t believe you did that!*” She squealed.

Sloane laughed. “You’re welcome!”

Gwyn rushed over and joined the hug. Her daughter pulled away and handed a present to Sloane from Michael.

"Oh? What's this? Want to help me open it, Gwyn?"

"Mom. It's your present," her daughter said with an eye roll.

"You used to help me all the time!" Sloane complained.

"Yeah... when I was a baby! I'm grown up now."

Katie laughed. "Oh, you're grown up now?"

"Yup!"

Sloane shook her head as she opened up the present, and smiled as she pulled out the House of the Dragon t-shirt. "Thank you, Michael!"

Gwyn's eyes widened. "Oh, mom! A *dragon*."

"Katie told me how much you loved that show and fantasy," Michael explained.

"I do love me some fantasy," Sloane agreed.

Gwyn did a little hop. "Me too! Magic and dragons! Mom, can I turn on Netflix?"

Sloane smirked. "Sure, Gwynnie. Toss something on we'll all like."

"Ohh let's watch that show!" She said, pointing at Sloane's shirt.

"How about anything but that? You're too young for these dragons."

"But, Mom! Those dragons breathe *fire*. It's so cool!"

Sloane raised a brow. "I dunno, Gwyn. I'd think it would be *hot*."

Gwyn groaned. "Ugh, *Mom!*"

Sloane sipped her cappuccino with satisfaction, sitting back to watch her sister and daughter open more presents while the new Netflix season of Dragon Age played in the background.

Her phone rang. She looked down and accepted the Facetime.

"*Buon Natale, famiglia mia!*" Sloane's mamma said loudly. She had clearly woken up in the middle of the night just to talk to them. *I love her*.

"Ciao, mamma."

Both Katie and Gwyn's heads jerked around in surprise.

"*Nonna!*" Gwyn cried out.

Sloane smiled.

This is a perfect day. I love my family.