

Celtic Evil

The Fitzgerald Brothers

A Celtic Christmas

by

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Snow blanketed the town of Fitzgaren in the County of Kerry in Ireland as the townsfolk settled inside out of the bitter chill.

They prepared for the coming holiday as most had done for generations, blissfully unaware of the potential for evil that hung near the town waiting for its next moment to strike.

Outside of town, in a manor that had been one of the first to be built upon the town's founding, the Fitzgerald house was seeing the first signs of Christmas in fifteen years.

"Bloody morons, tracking mud, snow and who knows what else all through the foyer." Deirdre O'Connor, the main driving force that ran the house, muttered under her breath as she dry mopped the very mess that she was complaining about.

"How else was Agnus and his sons expected to get the tree inside without the mess, Deirdre?"

Kerry Fitzgerald's dry voice spoke from behind her as he walked from his office after deciding Deirdre's temper had calmed down enough that it was safe to show his face.

The eldest of the five Fitzgerald brothers, Kerry still hated to admit that the smaller woman could still make him remember what it was like when he was younger and she had helped his mother with five unruly boys.

"Choosing a proper day before it had snowed would have been my choice, boyo," she snorted, slapping the mop down on another wet spot and wincing at the sound of the snowmobiles outside. "The lad will kill himself one of these days, mark my word."

Knowing she was referring to his youngest brothers' penchant and love for high speed machines, Kerry smiled. "You were the one bitching at Ian for staying out of your cookies, luv," he reminded her, going to the window to glance outside at the snow covered lawn and fields of his family home.

Kerry recalled the times before his parents were killed when the house and surrounding lands would all be decorated since Christmas was one of his mother's favorite times of the year and Brenna Kerrigan Fitzgerald would always go all out.

"You're not only celebrating His birthday, my darling Kerry," he recalled her saying once. "But since the Winter Solstice and your brothers' birthday falls on before, it gives me the excuse to expand a little in the decorating." Brenna would laugh.

Thinking of that, Kerry considered recent events. Yes, Sebastian had returned to try to stop the prophecy that could end his long life, but it had also returned all of his brothers to Fitzgaren for the first time in fifteen years.

"Still brooding that Mac and Ryan left?" Deirdre asked, though she could still read this young man and knew he was.

Pushing his fingers through his short blond hair, Kerry sighed; wincing as one of the snowmobiles decided to go through a snow pile rather than around it. "No, I accepted that Ryan has a job to tend to and that Mac needed to handle things in Cork before returning in January but it would have been better to have us all here...in case."

Suspecting that the older woman was gearing up for a lecture that he wasn't in the mood for, Kerry reached for this jacket to go outside.

Stepping out onto the porch, he just remembered why he hated winter and why Ryan had probably been thrilled to get back to some place sunny and warm.

"Deirdre says that one of them will break their fool necks before the winter's up." Jessica Hadley spoke from a chair on the porch where she'd been watching the machines race over the snowy lawn and fields.

The young British woman wasn't any happier with the freezing air than Kerry was but she was happy to hear the easy laughter coming from the snowmobiles. "She still yelling at you for buying them?"

"Of course," he sighed, shifting to see that her eyes were fixed on Roarke and Ian. "So long as neither one of them gets killed, I think she'll get over it."

Kerry hoped so at least since it had been his idea to get the new toys for Roarke's birthday which had just passed a few days earlier and he still recalled the wary joy in his brother's eyes the morning Kerry had showed them to him.

Roarke, he knew, still needed the time to adjust to being back home and also to get over the things in his past that Kerry knew could still hurt him.

"Is he happy being here, Jess?" he asked her curiously, knowing that out of his brothers, Roarke still had the hardest time being back in Fitzgaren.

"He misses your parents and he's missing Ryan more than he'll ever admit short of you casting a truth spell on him but otherwise, yes, Roarke's happy." Jessica looked up at Kerry. "It's hard for him to show it."

Kerry knew that all too well. "A Fitzgerald family tradition, that is," he muttered, frowning as snow was blown all over the porch and walk as a snowmobile skidded to a halt. "Deirdre will be makin' you clear that up, lad," he warned, hearing the boyish laugh.

"Will that get her off my back for stealing that whole batch of triple chocolate chunk cookies she made earlier?" Ian countered, pulling his helmet off to brush the snow that somehow had gotten inside it off his face.

"That should have made you too sick to ride that thing," Kerry rolled his eyes, shifting a look as the other machine stopped at a slower pace. "Mac's still vowing to X-ray your stomach when he comes back, Ian."

The youngest Fitzgerald brother rolled his blue-grey eyes, stepping off the snowmobile. "Just because I have a healthy appetite?"

"No, he wants to because you eat things that would put any normal person into a sugar coma." Roarke put in after removing his own helmet and trying to push his unruly black hair out of his eyes.

At eighteen, Ian was as cheerful and happy as Kerry was serious and it was clear that he enjoyed teasing his older brothers. "Mac can't yell at what I eat. Have you seen what he eats for breakfast?" he shuddered just as a snowball hit him in the back of the head. "Hey!"

"I eat what normally passes for a semi-healthy breakfast, baby brother, which is not what I can say for you."

Patrick 'Mac' Fitzgerald shook his head, lifting a warning brow as Ian's hand closed on a pile of snow. "Think about it and I promise that I'll bury you in this slush and Kerry won't find you until it thaws."

Snow had settled on his short dark blond hair as he crossed the driveway with a petite red head following him and lecturing.

"Not out of the bloody car a minute and already picking on the lad, Doc," Mary Margaret Cavanaugh was complaining, shaking her head and stepping onto the porch to remove the heavy knit cap she was wearing, a mass of red hair falling free. "I'll leave you to Kerry to deal with but I smell cinnamon and that means Deirdre's baking."

"How come she can have cookies and doesn't get kicked out of the house?" Ian demanded, still trying to get the snow off his neck.

“Probably because Maggie doesn’t swipe the whole tray while it’s cooling.” Jessica laughed, and then decided to go inside out of the cold.

Kerry stepped down a step, knowing both Roarke and Ian had a bad habit of throwing snowballs. “I thought you weren’t coming back until after the first.”

“Yeah well, I finished my business early and Maggie had already decided that she’s sticking to me like glue until she gets that story so…” Mac shrugged, lifting a finger to melt the snowball that had been aimed in his general direction. “I decided we may as well spend Christmas here at home.”

The last two words made Kerry look at his brother closely as it was one of the few times that any of them had referred to Fitzgaren as home.

Noticing that Roarke had been silent and guessing what he was thinking about, Ian slowly shaped a new ball of snow. “Think Ry’s on a beach somewhere surrounded with girls in bikinis?”

“If his luck is holding, then he probably is.” Roarke grinned, seeing the boy shaping his snow weapon with obvious intent and deciding he didn’t want any part of seeing Mac or Kerry slaughter their youngest brother. “I’m going to go change and…”

A sudden wind blew in even as he was speaking, blowing snow gently but heavily in swirls until it kicked up and finally knocked Mac backward into a deep pile of snow.

“The snow decide it doesn’t like us or what?” Ian demanded, grabbing his helmet to keep it from blowing away as Roarke’s hand grabbed his arm to keep him upright even as he was feeling the change in the air.

As Mac struggled to get up, Kerry finally sighed, raising a hand and dispelling the snow and wind easily. “You know what Mum told you about doing that crap, Ry.” he warned without looking.

“Sure, but we’re all mostly adults and it’s not my fault if Mac still can’t stand up under a little wind and snow.” Ryan laughed as he exited the house munching on a cookie.

“When the bloody hell did you get here?” Mac demanded crossly, hating to be wet as a general rule and hating snow worst of all. “Never mind, how’d you get in the house?”

Ryan shared the same dark looks as Roarke only he wore his black hair longer, though today he had it pulled under a black knit cap as he stepped off the porch with his usual smirk.

“Back door,” he replied, reaching into his pocket to toss Ian the cookie he was carrying. “The boss of the kitchen said that this is your last one until after dinner and that if you even think of sneaking any that she was tanning your bloody backside worse than Mum did when you were two and you bit Roarke.”

Ian had caught the cookie with a grin then he frowned. “I bit Roarke?” he was doubtful of that until he saw his brother’s scowl. “Did I?”

“Da had to take him for a rabies shot since we weren’t sure you hadn’t inherited any…unusual talents from some of Mum’s more unique relatives.” Ryan replied, grinning easily.

“It wasn’t that bad, Ian.” Roarke broke in, giving Ryan a slight shove before frowning. “Though you did have a furry look until you were one.”

As Ian shot looks between his brothers, Kerry chuckled and pulled Mac out of the snow. “What happened to the beach, the sun, and warm weather?” he asked Ryan in order

to change the subject since he wasn't ready to tell the boy that their brothers weren't totally kidding him.

"Andi happened is what happened to those plans," Ryan scowled, turning from teasing Ian to looking at Roarke before finally focusing on Kerry and remembering his recent days. "Andrea Michelle Colleen McCabe is what happened to my vacation plan in Rio."

Not remembering his brother ever having that tone before told Kerry that there was something else brewing but rather than bring that up just then, he simply waited, as he knew that Ryan would eventually get to the point.

"Damn bloody woman only had to install a simple security system in a house but no, she decides to go all righteous and bloody feminine on me when she learns out the sod who hired us for the job is a womanizing, two-timing son of a bitch." Ryan rolled his eyes in exasperation. "Broke both the blokes' arms, four teeth and took the video feeds to his wife when he propositioned her."

Roarke turned from Ian, running his tongue over his teeth and knowing how he would react if it had been Jessica. "You blame her then?"

"Who the bloody hell said I blamed her?" Ryan returned sourly. "I threatened to break something else but the issue is that little incident totally ruined my mood for mindless women on a beach." he sighed, finishing the cookie. "So, I told Andi to stay out of my sight until January and came home to bug the brat and see if Deirdre has anything that Ian won't eat."

"You know, his fondness for the weird and ultra strong stomach may still have something to do with you giving him that bone to teeth on when he was a baby." Roarke mused, smiling when Ian shot him a dark look. "Hey, you were a strange little baby, Ian."

Ian considered using the snowball on Roarke but then shifted and hurled it at Ryan who, almost expecting it, had already dodged it and snagged a handful to throw back at his brother.

"Ian, ask the brat, I was a champion snowball thrower when we were lads, he warned with an evil laugh that changed to a snarl when something slammed into his back. "Roarke, if I didn't know that your girlfriend could either fry me or have her mercenaries shoot me, I'd get you for that one."

Roarke just smiled, shifting slightly away from the snowmobile. "Since when did Jess scare you, Ry?" he teased, seeing his brother's eyes go dark and balanced himself for what would come next.

"Ryan, don't do..." Mac had started to say but Ryan had already decided to ignore that in order to lunge. "Yeah, this will go over bloody well since Jess is still pretty protective of Roarke." he muttered, shifting a look to see that Kerry was watching the scene calmly. "You know that we should stop this since we both know what this will turn into."

"Yes, I know," he acknowledged, watching as Roarke turned but wasn't fast enough to avoid the blow that landed both himself and Ryan into the snow while Ian began stockpiling snowballs. "Listen to that, Mac," he encouraged.

Frowning, Mac did listen but all he heard besides the Christmas music Deirdre had playing in the house was his dopey brothers laughing like...and then what Kerry was saying dawned on him, understanding his reluctance to break them up.

He would have been about fifteen, almost sixteen years ago, since he could recall listening to the sounds of his brothers laughing and playing in the snow. "Mum would have come out yelling by now," he murmured.

"Aye, but Da would just tell her that boys would be boys...unless Ry tried to drown Roarke in a snow bank again." Kerry grinned. "I need to believe that somewhere they're happy that we're here on Christmas Eve together and that we will make this work."

Mac dodged another snowball, pulling his gloves on. "We will, Kerry and we will put Sebastian back in Hell," he declared, eyeing the growing pile of snowballs that Ian had. "However, the first thing that I'm doing is dumping baby brother in that mound of snowballs he's made."

Ian had been so fascinated by watching Ryan try to bury Roarke in the snow and was pleased that Roarke was tensing as he would have once that he didn't notice the change in the air until he felt the snowball barrage hit him like a gentle wave and he lost his footing. "Mac, knock that off!" he shouted, laughing.

Kerry shook his head when something caught his eye from the tower window. Torryn Fitzgerald would always watch his sons from the tower and as Kerry looked harder, he saw his father's calm face watching his grown sons playing in the snow as they had as boys and Kerry knew that for this day, for the coming holiday, that his brothers were safe.

"Ryan! Don't do..." Mac's voice cut off when a pile of snow was thrown in his face and the wind whipped up.

"Well, safe from Sebastian at least. I won't say that Mac won't kill one of them before Mass." Kerry muttered, and then decided to give up and join in when he easily took Ryan off his feet.

Roarke spit snow as he managed to roll and dodge a snowy missile. "One of us should have called no powers!" he snapped, knowing that Ian was using his.

"The May it harm none rule does not apply to snow fights, brat," Ryan replied, slipping and landing next to him on the ground. "Oh, in case I forget or Jess kills me for this fight, Merry Christmas and don't say I never gave you anything." he muttered, quickly pushing up to find Ian.

"Ry?" Roarke frowned, looking at the small box his brother had shoved at him before opening it and staring at the well-worn gold pocket watch.

Even without touching it, he knew what it was and recognized it as the one their father had always worn. "Ry, this is yours and..."

"He meant for you to have it, Roarke," Brenna Fitzgerald's spirit spoke from the porch where she was standing, dressed in the same bright red winter coat that he recalled from years earlier. "Ryan knew that your father meant the watch to go to you and he has kept it for you until you were emotionally healed enough to receive it.

"This is one of Ryan's gifts to you." she smiled, her eyes trailing to the ensuing snow war her sons were now waging before looking at Roarke. "His other was coming home to Fitzgaren to spend the holiday with his brothers rather than spend it at a Greek villa with that rather interesting young woman that makes his blood pressure climb."

Roarke understood what his mother was saying, slowly nodding as he closed his hand around the watch. "Merry Christmas, Mum," he whispered, looking up as Kerry held a hand out to him. "I usually spend Christmas with Jess alone...this is..."

“I’m sure you can squeeze time in with Jess after dinner, brat,” Ryan called over, swearing when Mac’s hand shoved his face into the snow.

“Being together is new for all of us, Roarke, but it’s the strength and love that binds us as a family that will always keep us together.” Kerry told him, helping him up and seeing Ian’s head jerk up even as the front door was banging open.

Deirdre O’Connor stepped out onto the porch to eye the scene with a well-practiced eye. “What the devil are you hooligans doing out here brawling in the snow?” she demanded, eyeing each of her former charges critically. “You’ll all have your death of cold before the New Year comes, now get yourselves in his house and changed before I take a hand to all of you!” she snapped, turning and marching back into the house.

“Gee, Doc, I think you ticked Deirdre off.” Maggie laughed as she went back into the house.

“If I didn’t know she’d actually do it, I’d call her bluff.” Ryan muttered, climbing back to his feet and shaking his hat off where it had fallen into the snow. “She’s worse than Mum.”

“You’d know since they were always yelling at you.” Mac replied, grinning at the hand gesture his brother shot him. “Happy Holidays to you too, Ry.”

Kerry held out a hand, a simple gesture that Mac recognized. “A gesture for the Yule that Mum and Da always did and taught us was that on the Eve of the birth of our Lord we reaffirm the strength that has always united the Fitzgerald family.”

“It was a silly act too,” Ryan muttered but sighed as his oldest brother lifted one brow at him. “I said it was silly, not that I wouldn’t do it.”

Mac placed a hand over the one that Ian had placed on Kerry’s without question but sensed Roarke’s hesitance until he looked to Ryan and then finally placed his hand on Mac’s. “Ry?”

“Deirdre yells when we make sparks.” Ryan warned but slowly did complete the circle of five by placing his hand on top and finished the spell that he knew Kerry would have casted silently. “Nollaig shona (Happy Christmas).”

As it always happened when they combined powers, a shower of bright sparkles lit the sky.

“Blessed be,” Kerry whispered, looking at his brothers as the unspoken went between them. “Let’s go in before Deirdre calls Gramps.”

“Lord, that’s all I need.” Mac muttered, reaching for the doorknob and sighing. “By next Christmas we’ll have all this crap settled, Kerry.”

Looking back at his brothers, Kerry could only hope so but right then he was content that they were together for Christmas, safe and as Ryan dumped one more handful of snow on Ian, happy.

“Nollaig shona, Mum and Da.” he murmured, stepping into the warmth of Fitzgaren manor to see Roarke, ignoring that he was snow covered and wet, scoop Jessica up into his arms for a kiss that even just a few months previous he wouldn’t have done in front of them.

“C’mon, Doc, drag Ry and Kid Wonder-Stomach into the kitchen.” Maggie urged with a laugh. “Deirdre has hot drinks ready.”

As Maggie got his brothers moving, Kerry waited for one final moment for casting a simple spell that lit the single candles in every window in the manor.

“Merry Christmas to everyone.” he whispered, heading toward the kitchen and not seeing the smiling forms of his parents in the front room where they had always sat by the fire.

Toryn watched his sons a moment longer before looking at his wife. “We raised them well enough, Brenna my love.”

“They’re happy and safe, despite being too proud and stubborn like their father to admit it.” she laughed at his scowl, lighting the large tree that had also always been a tradition. “Merry Christmas, my darling boys.” she whispered before they shimmered out, leaving the sounds of laughter echoing in the house.

Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays and A Wonderful New Year to one and all!