



# *An Unforgettable Christmas*

Ginny Baird

It always smells so good in here,” Sam said to Angie, setting his suitcase aside and hanging up his clothes.

“We’re having adobo pork chops for dinner,” Elena announced merrily from the kitchen, apparently having overheard him.

Sam raised his eyebrows at Angie, and she giggled. “I’m afraid there’s not much privacy around here.”

“Black beans and rice, and fried *plátanos*, too!” Elena shouted.

“*Plátanos*?”

Angie smiled at Sam. “You call them plantains. Ma cooks them in butter, vanilla, and sugar. They get all caramelized and sticky.”

“And *yum*,” Pepe said, skipping into the living room.

“Thanks for cooking tonight, Ma!” Angie called into the kitchen.

“No problem,” Elena answered. “You and Sam have had a very busy day.”

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Pepe gazed happily at Sam and handed him a piece of paper. "I drew you a picture."

Sam stared down at the little boy's rendering of what looked like an igloo with a couple of stick figures standing outside it. "It's a snow fort," Pepe proclaimed proudly. "Just like we're going to build."

Sam admired the drawing at length and then said to Pepe, "It's a masterpiece! Thank you. Can I keep it?"

"Will you put it on your refrigerator when you get home?"

Sam thought of his spick and span condo with its lack of personal adornments. "Sure, I will," he said, brightening at the boy. "It's just what I need."

"Sam doesn't have much on his refrigerator," Angie told Pepe from behind the back of her hand.

"*Ay, no?*" Lita said sadly, gliding in from the next room in her wheelchair. She had one hand on the controls and another held a piece of sketchpad paper. "You can have this one, too," she said gently in heavily accented English.

Sam's neck flushed at the embarrassment of riches as he accepted Lita's gift. It was a gorgeous colored pencil drawing of a pair of cardinals: a male and a female perched together on the bow of a pine tree before a snowy background.

"Lovebirds," she told Sam.

Angie laughed indulgently. "I think those are cardinals, Lita."

Lita raised her finger and waggled it from side to side. "Lovebirds," she stated again, this time with conviction. Her gaze darted from Angie to Sam then back again.

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Angie's cheeks colored and she ducked her chin. "Anyway," she said, setting her hand on her grandmother's shoulder. "They're beautiful."

Sam's voice grew husky. "Extra lovely. Thank you, Lita." He met her gaze and her brown eyes sparkled. "Thank you for the generous gift."

"Sam and I are going to build a snow fort," Pepe informed Angie.

"Oh, gosh...Pepe," she carefully addressed her son. "Today might not be the *best* time. Sam still has to see the doctor tomorrow, and—"

"But he promised," Pepe protested, and Sam agreed.

"It's true," he said, nodding at Angie. "I did."

Angie checked her watch, seeing it was nearly four o'clock. "But it's getting late, and it will be dark soon." She glanced toward the kitchen as Lita observed the goings on with interest. "Ma's already started dinner."

"Dinner can wait!" Elena exclaimed loudly, and Sam couldn't help but chuckle.

"I think you're outnumbered," he whispered to Angie.

She folded her arms in front of her. "I don't think it's a very good idea. Not until you've seen the doctor."

"But I'm fine."

She arched an eyebrow.

"I mean, physically fine."

Pepe bounced up and down on his heels and tugged at Angie's hand. "Oh, boy! Oh, boy! Can we, puh-leeze?"

Sam lifted his forehead in a petitioning manner, and Angie's heart caved. Pepe wanted this so badly, and Sam was being extra kind to indulge him. It

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probably wouldn't hurt *that much* to let Sam play in the snow with her son, and the fresh air might even do Sam good. Sam's heart was certainly in the right place. The fact that he was being so kind to Pepe warmed her through and through.

Angie glanced at Lita who was grinning. "*Déjales jugar en la nieve,*" Lita told Angie in sing-songy tones, and Pepe beamed up at his mom.

"Yes, Angela." Elena stood on the threshold to the kitchen and leaned a shoulder against the doorframe. "We're in no hurry. Schools have already been closed for tomorrow."

At this announcement, Pepe let out a "Woo-hoo!"

Angie huffed, feeling cornered. "All right already." She set her hands on her hips and stared Pepe down. "But you don't overtire him." Next, she sternly addressed Sam. "You feel anything at all. Any sign of weakness. You come back indoors."

"Aye-aye," he said with a grin. Sam studied her curiously. "Anything else?"

"Yeah," Angie said, grabbing her coat from the closet. "I'm coming with you."

