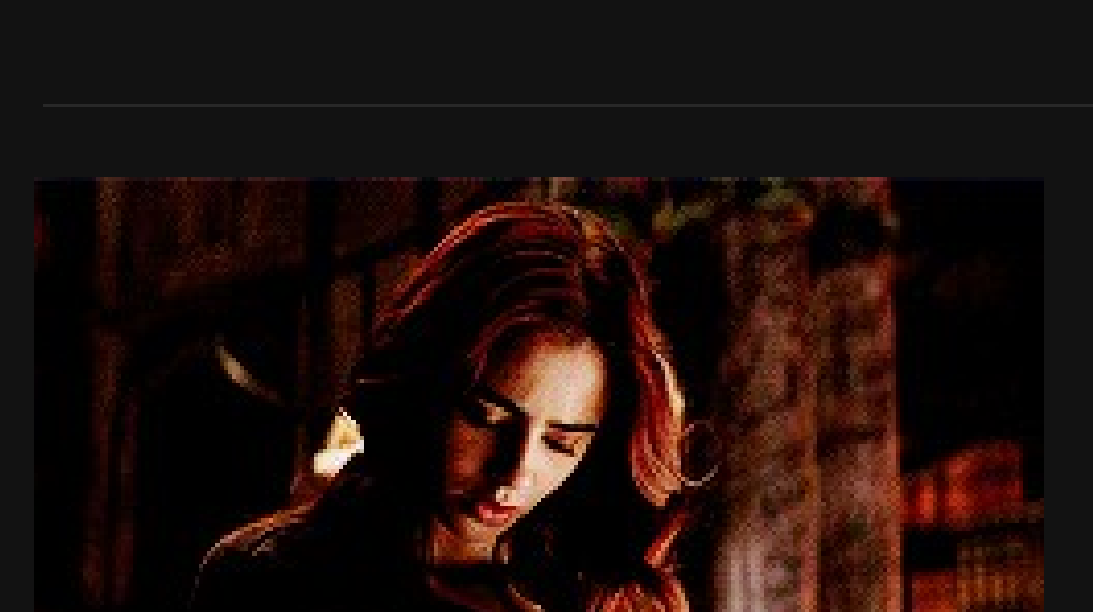
〚 vii. MISTLETOE〛



◤ chapter seven, MISTLETOE ◢

LITTLE THINGS MATTER

The month of November turned to December as the days became even colder and all of New York huddled in their nice, warm jackets with mittens and hats. And Davina Royce, ever the child, loved the season. It always filled her with a joy that seemed to disappear after Christmas came and went, sadly only lasting one day, but returned the next time all the Christmas decorations were strewn about the place and the mall she frequented put up an overly large Christmas tree.

Everything was the same this Christmas. Davina with her wavy hair down with a nice hat on her head and layered clothes which were much needed and appreciated with the weather walked the streets of New York with Brinley by her side at four in the afternoon as her roommate had just finished from her own day of work and going with Davina to hers.

Flowers were always in demand during holidays. Sweet husbands giving their wives flowers, or whoever their partner was, and grown children buying some to give to their parents or take to graves to celebrate with the dead. This popped up again during February and then in May with Mother's Day. Davina loved a flourishing shop, it usually kept herself and Stevie too busy to converse, but everything always felt so crowded which she didn't like very much.

The air was chilly, which Davina didn't like (she was never a fan of the cold), but she didn't mind because everything looked so festive.

Brinley snorted beside her as she saw her friend grinning from ear to ear at everything. "You're a child," she commented.

Davina rolled her eyes, "Just because I get into the Christmas spirit more than you doesn't make me a child, Brin."

"More than me? I think you mean for than every adult ever," Brinley disagreed, "I mean, it's cute and if I were gay I'd totally kiss you right now, but still."

"I think you mean that if you were gay we would be holding hands and I'd be bringing my girlfriend to work and she, being the lovely woman she is, would take some flowers off the stand and hand them to me in a romantic gesture," Davina smiled at her.

Brinley shook her head but there was still a small smile present on her face. "You're too much sometimes. Is this what you're gonna get Wanda to do when the two of you get together?"

A small frown made its way onto Davina's face as her brows furrowed together. "Wanda? What about her?" she asked her friend.

"Oh come on," Brinley stopped as she saw the confused look on her friend's face, "You can't tell me that the two of you aren't absolutely smitten. I mean, you practically flirt with her every time you see her!"

The Royce girl scoffed and turned away, "I don't not flirt with her – we're just friends! And I barely even know her."

"Doesn't mean you can't like her," Brinley commented, "I mean, you light up every time she walks into a room and somehow the two of you just keep bumping into each other which means the universe wants it to happen."

"You've been watching way too much How I Met Your Mother," she shook it off.

"Okay, so maybe I've been binge watching it but that's beside the point; you still like her," Brinley said.

Davina shook her head lightly at her friend's antics, seeing the flower shop in sight. Brinley was still beside her, not letting up as she continued with, "If the universe says it's meant to be then it is! And that's what the universe is trying to tell you if you'd actually listen and not play oblivious. It's not cute when you could get a girlfriend."

"I'm not gonna date Wanda, we're just friends. If anything, the universe keeps pushing us together to be friends," Davina said, indulging her friend a bit, "Wanda's never really had a best friend outside of her brother and I'm changing that."

"You know how much I love the 'best friends to lovers' trope," Brinley grinned.

Davina wrinkled up her nose, "Okay, Brin, I am not your students – you can't push around some desks so that we sit beside each other and partner us up in projects so that we fall in love."

"Says who?" Brinley shot back at her, "Because it works in my classes and I'm sure that I can apply it here – especially with the universe on my side."

The girl with the wavy hair and twinkle in her eyes chuckled and shook her head, seeing the bright Christmas lights that hung outside of the deli shop right beside her work place. "You're too much sometimes, really."

"Jokes on you, I think that's a good thing," Brinley stuck her tongue out before recoiling it quickly, "Damn, it's way too cold for that shit."

"Says the person who does it every time it snows," Davina pointed out.

Brinley shook her a look, "Fine, correction then; it's way too cold to stick your tongue out unless it's snowing so you get a reward."

"Kinky," Davina snorted.

Her friend let out a large gasp and pointed at her, "You! You just made a dirty joke! God, I'm corrupting you."

"Isn't that what you've always wanted though?" Davina teased as she opened to the floor, greeted with the warm air and sweet, intoxicating (and sometimes overpowering) smell of flowers.

"You're right," Brinley said, following her. Davina went to the back, placing on her name tag before coming back out to see her friend still standing there.

"Don't you have more work to do?" Davina raised an eyebrow.

"Yeah," she agreed, "But it's just grading some quizzes and I really don't feel like it. And then I have another essay due soon which I'll have to suffer through – like not fun, ten out of ten would not recommend – so I'll stay here with you for a while."

"No, I have to actually work and we both know that won't happen with you here," Davina disagreed, laughing as she spoke.

"Are you saying that I'm a distraction, Miss Royce?"

"Yes, yes I am, Miss Brinley."

"Good. My dream's coming true," Brinley grinned as Davina rolled her eyes, "Oh! And that reminds me – what are you doing for Christmas this year?"

"I don't know," Davina shrugged before giving a sharp, suspicious look to Brinley, "Why?"

The girl shrugged, "No reason. It's just that I'm going to my friend's house to celebrate and he said that I could bring someone – someone meaning you."

"A guy you say?" Davina grinned wickedly.

At that, Brinley scoffed and hit Davina's arm lightly, "Not like that, dummy. We just knew each other during high school and he's got some...friends staying with him right now and they all invited me over for Christmas and I was wondering if you wanna tag along. You know, if you aren't going to your dad's."

"I'm not," Davina answered, "I only went over there for Finn but, well, you know."

"Sorry," Brinley apologized softly.

Davina shook it off with a smile, "It's fine. But I guess I'll go, beats eating at the diner again."

"Oh, right. Rosie told me about that – at least you got to see 'Wendy' again," Brinley snickered as Davina hit her lightly again.

"Shut up."

"Make me."

"I'd kiss you if you were gay, but well..." Davina trailed off.

"Damn, kinda makes me wish now," Brinley joked, "No, but really, we'll leave around noon on Christmas to go over there. He's cooking lunch and baking cookies apparently. It'll be fine."

"I sure hope so," Davina smiled.

♡

The merry day started with Davina waking up in her bed, warm and cozy with her heating blanket, to no alarm and no screaming child Finn, when he was younger and she spent the night of Christmas Eve at her dad's, used to always wake her up by jumping and yelling 'IT'S CHRISTMAS!' until everyone was awake and in the living room to open presents. Even though it always annoyed her at the time, she thought it was adorable and wouldn't trade it for the world – even if she could do with a couple more hours of sleep.

But no, this Christmas there was no jumping on the bed and her alarm didn't go off and no fire started. It was peaceful and she stayed for a long while, slowly waking up even though she clung hard to sleep. And so, she turned over to check her phone seeing that it was nine and she had three hours until the party or whatever you wanted to call it at Brinley's unnamed friend's place.

She got up to see that Brinley, always the early riser, sitting on the couch with a blanket thrown on her watching Doctor Who Christmas Specials. "Morning!" she grinned, greeting the coddled Davina who had her own blanket wrapped around her. "Merry Christmas!"

Davina smiled back as she took a seat next to Brinley. "Merry Christmas, Brin!"

They stayed like that for an hour and a half until it was time to get ready and they returned to their rooms, neither wanting to shower that morning, and dressing up to leave the house. Once done, they headed out the door, Brinley leading the way.

"So who exactly is this friend?" Davina asked as they got on the subway to his apartment.

"His name is Desmond," Brinley answered before explaining further, "I knew him in high school."

"And how exactly did you get in touch again? Facebook? Tinder?" Davina pestered on, grinning at her last suggestion.

Davina scowled and made a face of pure disgust, "You know I would never stoop so low as to get Tinder. I'm not that lonely or unattractive."

"Then...?"

"Facebook. I tracked him down on Facebook so that I could get him to pay me back a favor," Brinley told her, "I needed him to hack into some files to find the perfect tutor for Finn."

"You did that for Finn?" Davina asked her, tone full of emotion, "That's so sweet."

A small smile started to form on her face, "Yeah, well, he deserves it."

"Wait – did you say hack?" Davina stopped suddenly, the other part of the sentence finally coming back.

"I was waiting to see how long it would take you to realize," Brinley teased, "And yes – hack. He's a genius with computers, really, and everyone knew he'd hack to get your grades up if you paid him enough. It's what made us friends originally. Don't give me that look, V, I did what I had to do and I never got caught, so what's the big deal? But yeah, I got him to hack through the files of some of the Midtown kids – this was really to spite him because of Toni and everything – and he came up with Peter Parker. So, yeah..."

Peter Parker. Brinley trailed off after naming him and it grew silent for a moment. That bastard – breaking her brother's heart and then coming to her for advice as to whether or not go see him in juvie and try to make amends. That jerk.

"I wish Desmond chose another name, but I'm also glad he didn't," Davina told her honestly, "Like, obviously it might've been better if someone else tutored him and he never even met Peter but...God, the guy made Finn so happy and it was great to see. You should've seen his face when he told me that Peter kissed him for the first time, he looked as if he was on cloud nine."

"Yeah, I agree with you," Brinley told her in return, "But he did his best – and Peter was a great tutor, you have to give him that. And Des...he really is great."

"Is he the guy you like?" Davina teased, poking Brinley's side until the girl swatted her hand away.

"Shut up – and no. I don't like anyone who lives there, for your information," the girl said decisively.

"And you, Asher Brinley, are officially a liar," the Royce girl said in return. Her hair was just brushed because even though she cared about first appearances it was Christmas and she really didn't feel like doing any special hairdo.

"Am not!"

"Are too!"

Brinley stuck out her tongue and Davina snickered at her. "You're a child," she told her friend sincerely.

"Like you're any better," Brinley returned.

The subway stopped and Brinley stood up as Davina followed and the two left, fully exiting to the subway station and continuing their walk to an apartment building before going inside.

"So who all lives here exactly?" Davina asked once inside the elevator.

"Just some...friends of his. Well, this guy he met at work and recently moved in with him and this other guy that his friend knows and needs a place to stay," Brinley explained without going into many details.

"That's nice of him to let those two live there," Davina said using the information she had been given.

"Um, yeah," Brinley agreed with a nod but didn't seem to act like she did.

The elevator dinged so they stepped out, Brinley leading the way before stopping to knock on a door. Davina stood there awkwardly, already regretting agreeing to this and wishing she had just stayed home or gone to Apple's Eye Diner to spend the holiday with Rosie. At least she would feel comfortable and not as if she was obtruding. Whatever, it was too late to leave now.

The door opened and a man stood there, smiling briefly at Brinley and swinging the door open enough for the two to enter. "Hey, Des," Brinley greeted him, "This is my friend Davina, the one I told you was coming."

Desmond – or 'Des' – nodded and looked at Davina but not making eye contact, "Nice to meet you."

"You too," Davina returned with a smile, not questioning the avoidance of eye contact, "Thanks for letting me spend Christmas here and everything."

"No problem. I usually spend it working or alone so this is nice," Desmond said as he moved to the living room, the two girls following, "Asher and Davina are here."

On the couch was a buff man with long hair hiding a metal arm while assessing the new character and a black man who simply smiled and nodded his head towards the two of them.

"Hey, Ash, how's my favorite firecracker?" the black man cackled and Brinley scowled, as she always did when someone used her first name or made a joke about the nature of it.

"About to burn you, Wilson," she gritted out, going over there and whacking him in the face with a pillow, Wilson continuing to laugh as she did.

Davina still stood in the same place, uncomfortable, as Desmond took a seat on the remaining cushion of the couch. Brinley let up, grinning at her work, before turning back to her friend. "Oh right! V, this is Sam and his friend, Bucky. Sam and Bucky, this is Davina – my roommate and best friend."

The Royce girl waved at them, making a point to ignore the suspicious look that Bucky was giving her. "Hi, nice to meet you guys."

"You too, Davina," Sam smile back at her, always the charmer, "Don't mind Bucky here, he doesn't like talking much. Just not his style."

She nodded, accepting that answer. She was about to go sit down when her phone, which was in her purse, began to ring. Taking it out – and missing the sharp, calculating gaze of Bucky that was mixed with alarm at the noise – she checked the caller ID only to frown.

connie

But Conrad hadn't contacted her in such a long time. They had gone their separate paths and didn't talk anymore and that was fine. Conrad was living his life in LA and she was great in New York, or she was great before Finn's unfortunate imprisonment.

"Sorry," Davina apologized, "I'm gonna step into the hallway and take this – it's important."

They all nodded and Davina did in fact go the hallway, answering the call with a confused, "Conrad?" when she brought the phone to her ear.

"Hey, V! Merry Christmas!" Conrad exclaimed over the phone, acting as if it hadn't been months since they last texted – never mind it being well over a year since the last call from him.

"Yeah, Merry Christmas to you too," Davina said back but not as loud or energetic, "What's going on?"

"Oh, nothing. Just thought I should call my best friend from New York to wish her a great day and tell her the amazing Christmas present she's gonna get," Conrad said, as smug as never. At least some things never change.

Davina let out a laugh, "Oh? And what would that be?"

"Well, it's not there yet, but Conrad Beauregard – your hot best friend, fuck whatever Brinley says – is coming back to New York in a month! Woah!" Conrad exclaimed again and chorus began in the background of the phone call.

"What?" Davina choked out, "You're moving back?"

"Yeah! LA gets boring after a while and I miss New York, especially the people," Conrad explained, "And I was gonna tell you earlier when I made the plans and everything but it was past your birthday so I decided to wait until the next big holiday which, of course, is Christmas. So...Merry Christmas! Your present will be there in a month and we have to catch up because I miss my favorite Royce."

"I'm the only god Royce you've met, so that's not fair," Davina rolled her eyes, laughing.

"Shut up, but that's true. Shit! Gotta go, V, the cookies are ready!" Conrad said.

"Bye, Connie," Davina teased finally, hanging up the phone with a smile still on her face as she stayed there for a moment. A door opened in front of her and out popped a face she was not expecting to see. "Wanda?"

The girl who exited the bathroom, as it looked, seemed just as shocked to see Davina standing there. "Davina? What are you doing here?"

"Brinley invited me – she knows Desmond," Davina answered, "What are you doing here?"

"Well, uh, Sam invited me since he knew I was back in New York," Wanda told her, "He's nice."

"Sam...oh my God that's Sam Wilson isn't it?" Davina asked, piecing it together before groaning, "I'm an idiot – how did I not recognize him sooner?"

Wanda chuckled at her, "If there's one thing I've learned about you, Davina, it's how oblivious you are. Don't beat yourself up about it."

"Yeah, yeah, whatever. Come on, we should go back out," Davina smiled at her.

Wanda nodded and the two of them started to leave the hallway and join the others in the living room when they were stopped at the threshold.

"Guys!" Brinley's voice rang, "Guess who has to kiss now, lovebirds!"

"What?" Davina asked, confused, "Brinley what are you talking about?"

Brinley rolled her eyes, "Look above you, dumbo."

She did and saw a piece of mistletoe above her and rolled her own eyes. "We're not kissing," she said.

"You have to, it's the law."

"Brinley, I sincerely doubt that I will be arrested and thrown in jail for not abiding by the tradition of kissing someone under a piece of mistletoe," Davina said bluntly to her friend.

"I do not mind," Wanda told her, "It is tradition."

Davina sighed, looking at her before turning back to Brinley who was grinning and nodding at her. Groaning, she said, "fine" and leaned in to press her lips to Wanda's. They stayed for a second or two, not seeing the picture that Brinley took of them before uploading it to her social media account.

Parting, they looked into each other's eyes and Wanda smiled. "Merry Christmas, Davina."

"Merry Christmas, Wanda."

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