

ix. WELCOME HOME



chapter nine, WELCOME HOME

LITTLE THINGS MATTER

At the end of January, Davina Royce made her way to the airport to pick up Conrad Beauregard a er about seven or eight years of living in California. It happened on a particularly chilly day, where she dressed in her dark purple scarf and nice black jacket with her hair a mess. She didn't dress up too much even though it had so many years, but she also didn't think that Conrad would mind much about what she was wearing.

Brinley had been home when she le, just shu ling out of bed for the first time even though it was around eleven. She looked particularly grumpy that morning, eyes still drooping from sleep as she glared up at Davina. "What are you doing?" she got out, though it looked like it took a lot out of the girl, but she just smiled in response.

"I'm picking up Conrad," she answered, "His flight lands in about an hour and we're going to the diner to catch up."

The Brinley woman nodded, "What about all his stu? He didn't just sell everything, did he?"

Davina shook her head, "Everything's coming in tomorrow, he said, but I don't know how true that is. I'll be home later, okay?"

Her sleepy roommate nodded again and Davina was out the door. A subway and cab ride later, she arrived at the airport and stared down at her phone, waiting from the text Conrad was going to give her when he got o the plane.

Many minutes passed as she continued to play on her phone, leg bouncing anxiously as she waited, until eventually the text from Conrad came through telling her that he would be out for her to meet in a minute.

She stood up, looking around as people poured into the area where she was, being greeted with their own hugs presumably from their family and friends. She couldn't see him yet, but she knew the moment he came out she would – knowing how tall Conrad was. And then, she did; she saw him. Coming out was Conrad Beauregard with a beard adorning his face, a pink hoodie, and smile on his face.

Davina could've squealed when she saw him, but refrained since they were at an airport with many people around. But still, she rushed towards him and it seemed like he still hadn't seen her as she came up from his side and hugged him tightly, probably hurting him as she used all her strength.

He laughed as she continued to hold him, using his hands to grip up and hold her arms around him. "Davina Royce, it has been too long," he said as she let go of him, looking up to see his face.

She nodded along, agreeing, "It really has, but you never come to visit and you know how I feel about warm climates."

As much as she hated the cold and the numbness of her face and hands, the way her body shivered and everything was just so cold – a touch of hot chocolate igniting a flame that warmed her – she hated warm climates more.

It wasn't as if she had never given them an honest try, she had, but decided that it simply wasn't for her. For a month when she was twenty, herself, Brinley, and Conrad went to Florida to stay as a vacation and it went horribly. The experience, the location, the people, the food – all of it was fine. It was just the weather. It was unbearable for her a er growing up with no such hotness. And the humidity – God, it was terrible and she vowed never to live in a warm climate even if it meant having to put up with the coldness of New York.

Conrad rolled his eyes playfully, "You're still not over that?"

"Never," she shook her head, "It was a nice visit but I never want to do it again – so I haven't."

"You're impossible, Royce," he said in response and she just grinned up at him.

"That's just the way you like me though, right?" she teased and he shook his head, but she could see the smile on his face.

"Yeah," he admitted in a mutter, "You're right."



Conrad sat across from her in the booth of Apple's Eye Diner, dipping his fry into his milkshake as Davina did the same. She couldn't help but look around the place, seeing what's changed and what hasn't. Rosie still worked there, though she looked older, more mature. Her hair had gotten curlier throughout the years and he felt sadness as he realized that he had missed so much.

The place itself looked the same. Exactly, really. But Davina didn't work there anymore, and this guy named Johnny got employed even though, when Rosie came over to greet them with a squeal at the sight of him, she complained at the boy. Apparently all he did was makeup and grope his girlfriend instead of doing his job, leaving it on her. Although she did mention that – when Finn worked there – he took up some of the slack.

He found himself frowning again at that, Finn had worked there and now he didn't. He wondered why. So, when Davina finished chewing on her fry, he asked, "Hey, Rosie said Finn used to work here, why doesn't he anymore?"

Davina froze and he knew that he had said something wrong. Or, well, brought up something that she most definitely didn't want to talk about. But, she reached for her shake and took a sip before setting it back down to look at him.

"Um, Finn went to juvie a couple months ago," Davina told him solemnly, sadness in her eyes as she thought of her brother.

If he had been eating or drinking something, Conrad was sure he would've choked on it. Finn? Innocent little Finn, the boy who loved playing sports and always yelled and gave Davina a big hug when she came home. The same one who looked up to him so much, as he remembered. That Finn? That Finn went to juvie? So much had changed.

"Finn?" Conrad asked, eyes wide as he stared at his friend, who nodded, "He went – why is he in juvie."

"One of his old friends was caught selling drugs so he said ratted out Finn for doing the same – even though he hadn't in months – but it didn't matter, the damage was done. The court saw him guilty because of his last charge and he's spending a year in there," Davina explained.

"So, he did sell drugs at one point?" Conrad asked slowly, "Like, he was a drug dealer?"

Davina nodded, "Yeah. His freshman year the same friend got him into it. Once he got caught and put on parole, he stopped. One of his requirements was getting a job, so I pulled some strings and got Wilma to hire him here."

"I see," Conrad nodded, falling back upon the booth as he looked at her, "And then he was falsely accused so he's in juvie?"

She nodded again, "Yep. Which sucks. I mean, I didn't have to spend Thanksgiving or Christmas with my dad, but what does that matter? Finn wasn't there at all. God, Connie, it's terrible and I feel so bad for him."

"I'm so sorry, V," he said, though it wasn't like he had much reason to apologize. To sympathize. He wasn't there, he didn't even know until now – months later as she said. "God, that's – when did it happen?"

"Around the beginning of October," Davina said, "And he, he was finally happy, Con. He felt so happy and everything was going so great for him when all of this happened and how he's all alone there. And he got a boyfriend, you see, right before it all happened, but the guy broke up with him when he got sentenced to juvie."

"That's terrible! How dare he!" Conrad exclaimed, outraged, as if he knew the boy that Finn had been dating before everything happened. He didn't even know there was a 'before' and that now this was the 'a er'.

Davina nodded. "He said that he couldn't date someone who's in juvie, and that he was scared. He came by a couple weeks a er everything happened, asking me if I should go see him, but I told him o."

"He wanted to apologize?"

"I guess," she shrugged, "But Finn – he still so hurt by it and I didn't want to see him in more pain. I just, I thought sending him away would be for the best, allow Finn time to heal and get over him. No one else knows that he came by."

Conrad frowned, "You never told Finn?"

She shook her head, "No. I didn't want him to know, to get his hopes up or anything. Too much has already happened."

"Okay," he nodded, "I think – I think that's for the best. God, I didn't know any of this was happening, I'm sorry."

"It's okay. We've dri ed, it happens. Life goes on. Don't worry about it," she assured him but he still didn't feel so assured.

As she said, life went on. It went on without him and it would continue to pass by.

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