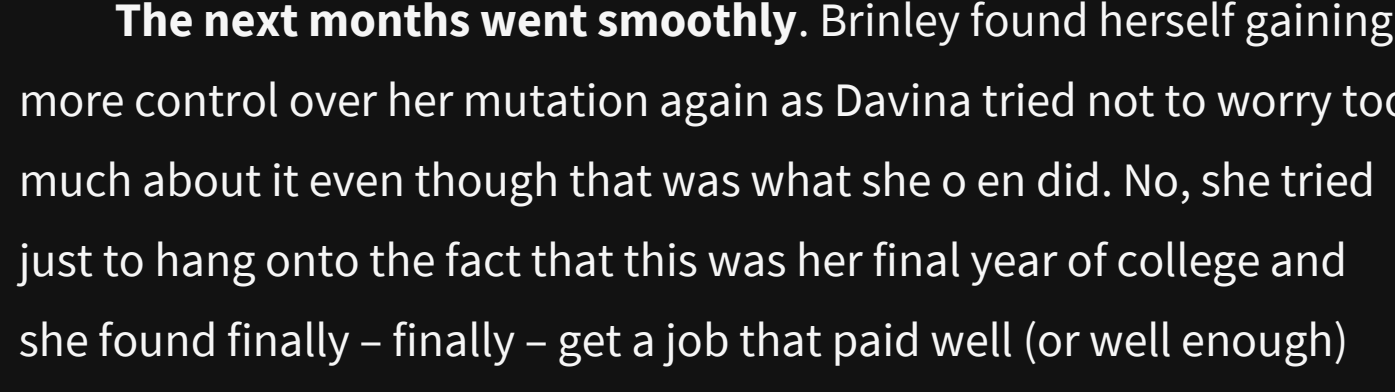


chapter seventeen, ALL THE BRIGHT THINGS



The next months went smoothly. Brinley found herself gaining more control over her mutation again as Davina tried not to worry too much about it even though that was what she often did. No, she tried just to hang onto the fact that this was her final year of college and she found finally – finally – get a job that paid well (or well enough) and stop having to hang around Stevie all the time. That was a blessing in itself.

She also had the fact that Finn was returning next week. In one week she would be able to see her baby brother again, the innocent little boy who went to juvie for some other jerk (asshole, Brinley would say, but she was not Brinley) who was actually guilty.

Whatever, it was fine. She still wasn't bitter about it at all, at least she'd be able to see him again soon.

But all thoughts of that came to a halt when there was a knocking at the door. It was a quiet Saturday afternoon and Brinley was out taking lessons to try and gain control over her life again so she was alone, but that was quite alright. Frowning to herself, because she knew that her friends weren't coming over, she went to the door and opened it without another thought – Finn always said not checking through the peephole would always kill her, she always replied back that strangers didn't come to your house to kill you and especially not at apartments. At least, not these days she supposed.

But she opened the door and saw Wanda there and she smiled to the girl. "Hey!" she greeted the girl warmly, "What brings you here?"

Wanda shrugged carelessly, "Just wanted to hang out today. The others are at work."

To that, Davina found her mouth inching towards a frown as she let the girl pass her and enter her apartment as she closed the door. "I didn't know they had jobs."

"Bucky doesn't, but he's the only one," Wanda answered as she took her seat at the couch, "Steve says he's not stable enough, Bucky says that he might be recognized and be charged, so we all agreed that it's best if he stayed home for the time being. And he doesn't like talking to me. But Steve works at a gym, you'd be surprised at how little people actually know his face when he's not in the Captain America suit."

"Well, he does have a rather plain face...I've seen a lot of people on the street that look just like him," Davina agreed, sitting down beside her, though not getting close enough that any limbs of theirs could touch, "It's nothing really remarkable – oh, that sounds bad."

Wanda chuckled at the girl, eyes twinkling as she looks at her, "I'm sure he's fine with it – helps him."

"And what does Sam do?" Davina asked, taking a blanket and placing it on her.

That caused the girl to frown, "I don't know. He doesn't talk about work much, but I think he's a secretary somewhere. We don't really talk much."

Davina nodded in understanding, wanting to reach out and grasp the girl's hand. However, she withheld. It was silly, really, but whenever they touched she could feel for a moment that maybe – maybe – Wanda liked her, maybe her feelings were shared. Touch was dangerous, she couldn't touch because that meant hopes and dreams that would never come true and she hated having her hopes crushed. Really, it was truly terrible.

So, she stayed away and refrained from reaching out. Wanda didn't need it anyway, so it was completely and totally fine.

Not wanting to dwell on her aching heart, Davina mentioned, "Finn is getting out next week."

Wanda lifted her head slightly and looked at Davina surprised, "Really? Has it already been a year?"

Davina chuckled at that and nodded. Time, which she thought would forever be slow with minutes passing like hours had sped up until then where it had been a year. "Yeah, I guess it has been."

"Man," Wanda leaned back, reaching out her hand until it was almost touching Davina's – so terribly close, "We've known each other for a year, that's crazy."

The Royce girl blinked. She hadn't even thought of that. "Wow," she breathed, "Right. I forgot about that – it just feels like you've been around longer."

To that, Wanda gave her a grin and Davina melted, having to return it. She always melted when it came to Wanda, and she always thought about what it would be like to just saying something – anything – and tell her how she felt. Maybe it would be so much better, maybe they would be cuddled up together and watching a nice film...or maybe they wouldn't talk anymore. Maybe Wanda would sneer at her in disgust and leave forever with Davina's broken heart on the ground.

It was better never to say a word.



When Tessa Cormac came knocking at her door, Davina ushered the girl in while she had never talked with Tessa, even though she had been friends with Finn for two years – well, more like one year and some time before hand where they were 'friends' – Davina knew a lot about what had happened to the poor girl while she had been the girlfriend of Caden Hayes. Caden...the same boy who threw her innocent brother into juvie. That jerk (asshole, the Brinley in her head corrected.)

"What are you doing here?" Davina asked the teenager as she got her a glass of water, hesitant because it would be anything. Tessa looked fine, she looked perfectly healthy and had the tinge of a glow around her, but looks could always be so deceiving – it could all be a lie, she didn't know.

"Finn told me that he's getting out in a week," Tessa said to her, even though it was obvious that the woman already knew that, "I visited him over the weekend."

Davina nodded anyway, "Yeah, we're excited to have him home."

To that, Tessa gave a nod of agreement, "So...are you picking him up?"

"Yep. Dad's working and I begged Lucy to let me have him since he's going to spend the rest of the week with them," Davina smiled, albeit a little sadly, "Took days of nagging to get her to agree."

"Finn also told me that he's going to dinner with you and Asher," Tessa said and she nodded again.

"His favorite place – a little Italian joint. Why? You wanna join us?" Davina asked, perfectly fine with the prospect of Tessa eating with them even though she hardly knew the girl for herself.

To that, Tessa shook her head before hesitatingly asking, "I was just...wondering if maybe instead of you picking him up...I could."

Davina blinked at the girl, frozen. She had begged for this and now there was Tessa Cormac wanting to ruin it all by picking up Finn from the police station when he got out of juvie. "What?" was all she could get out, stuck.

Tessa swallowed before repeating what she had said, "I want to pick up Finn when he gets out."

She couldn't move. She wanted to refuse – to outright say no because this was her brother and she wanted to see him more than anything, would give a limb for him, and then there was Tessa who had the audacity to ask if she could take the role.

"You can still have dinner with him," Tessa quickly added once she finished restating what she wanted, "I just want a couple hours so that we can talk. We never have enough time at the prison, or whatever you wanna call it, so that I can fully explain everything to him. It's just – a lot's happened in the last year and I really wanna tell my best friend about it."

Davina frowned, "Tessa..."

"I know you probably have a lot to catch up on, too, but please? He told me you come every month but I can't do that – I'll never have the money – so can I just have a few hours with him? You'll get him for dinner and I'm sure he'll be over here the next day, too," Tessa pleaded with her, looking with her doe brown eyes into Davina's, cracking her.

She must have talked to Finn about this and Finn must've told the girl all her weaknesses, just how to get her to crack. That must be it because she was cracking, she was breaking and she was tempted to say yes, that Tessa could pick her little brother up and then she would get him for dinner. She didn't want to, though, she wanted to be selfish and say no and continue to say no and let Tessa see him the next day but Davina had never been a selfish person, everyone knew that.

She always broke for someone else, and it seemed like the pattern was repeating itself as she sighed and looked down, agreeing and hearing the squeal that Tessa gave before feeling the girl's arms wrap around her.

She always broke, didn't she?



The week passed and Davina sat anxiously in her seat at the Italian restaurant with Brinley by her side even though it was clear that Brinley wanted to see Finn too, her glancing at the door every passing minute gave that away, she still reprimanded her friend.

"God, sit still – he's not gonna bail on us," Brinley hissed at her, "Just calm down."

"I can't calm down!" Davina snapped back at her, "I haven't hugged him in a year or seen him in his clothes – of course I'm freaking out!"

There was a moment of silence and Davina sat back in her seat, feeling guilty for snapping at her friend even though it was such a tense situation. "I'm sorry, Brin," she apologized with a sigh, "I'm just – I'm nervous."

Brinley took her hand and looked her straight in the eyes, not breaking contact, "There is no reason to freak out. He's going to be here and we are going to have a great dinner together and everything will be fine."

She didn't take her hand back until Davina nodded. Still, the two of them turned back to the door as Davina's foot tapped against the floor. And then, then, Finn Patterson – her little brother – walked through the door and looked around to find them until his eyes fell to them and he gave such a big smile.

Davina stood up, as did Brinley behind her. Finn didn't race into her arms – it was a restaurant, after all – but it felt like it as Finn wrapped his arms around her and she held him close in return. Tears were swelling in her eyes at the sight of her brother and she held him tighter.

"I missed you so much," Finn said, though his voice was muffled through her shirt.

She laughed at him, racing a hand through his hair and finding that it wasn't so like it always was before. It was coarse and she hated it because it wasn't Finn – this had changed, he had changed, everything had changed – but she still continued the action because at least he was there and they were together. "I missed you, too," she returned.

They broke apart, though neither wanted it, and Finn moved to hug Brinley. "Hey there, kid," Brinley greeted him, laughing when he just hugged her.

"God, I even missed you, Asher," he teased, though they all knew it was heartfelt and terribly true.

Brinley rolled her eyes, though there was a bright smile on her face and not the usual scowl she adorned when she corrected him with, "Brinley, you bitch."

They all laughed at the action for it had been too long since they had all been together and eating dinner – what a simple action. What a simple interaction between the three of them that had been taken for granted until it was taken away and given back a year later when everyone had changed so much.

"You'll always be Asher to me," Finn replied, pulling apart as they all took their seats again.

They were all smiling, they were all so happy, and there was nothing there tonight that could end their happiness. Everything was bright, from the lights hanging above them to their smiles and the glow that surrounded them – and nothing could disrupt it.

So much had changed, time went on, but they all sat together just the same. While Brinley's hair might be short now and Finn's coarse, while Brinley might be learning control again and Davina trying to suppress a crush on a witch, while they had all changed, some things would never change. Them together would never change.