

And For A Moment, He Lived

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With the smell of cinnamon and nutmeg in the air I started to rip open the packages of pale white frosting. James sighed at the growing mess of gingerbread and bowls full of gumdrops and sprinkles littering the top of our kitchen table. He came up behind me and held onto my shoulders, wrinkling my black t-shirt as he rested his head against mine. I could smell his musk of pine and motor oil.

“What are you doing, doll?” He asked, his voice gruff. I didn’t answer him, focusing my sole attention on setting out all of the ingredients. The green sprinkles were set next to the red and the base for the gingerbread house was set in the center of it all.

“Maggie, I asked you a question.” His tone was light as he poked at my side. My response was to stick my tongue out at him. He laughed deeply at this. My movements slowed as I heard it. Every sense he had been back stateside, the sound was more rare than a shooting star. His arms wrapped around my waist and pulled me away from the table, large arms enveloped my petite body.

“Fine, we're making a gingerbread house.” He sighed tilting his head as if looking at an overexcited puppy. I scrunched up my nose at him and pushed him onto one of our kitchen chairs. He laughed again, straightening himself out until he comfortably rested against the back of the chair.

“You’re going to have to show me how to do this.” He gestured to the frosting bags and gingerbread walls. This would be his first true Christmas and I was determined to fill it with as much holiday wonder as I could.

“Of course, what am I but a humble gingerbread construction man?” I joked. I took the seat next to him, handing him the bag of frosting. Slowly but surely I guided him in preparing the frosting bag.

“First, put some lines of frosting on our plate so the walls have something to stand on. Then a line on the edge of the gingerbread itself. From there we have to carefully place them together until we get a house.” He followed my instructions, hesitant at first. His hands were rough and calloused making it hard to maneuver the fragile piece. I watched as he delicately put a single line of frosting along the edge of the gingerbread. I sat there completely enraptured by him. I stared at his brilliantly blue eyes that held nothing but curiosity and the broken stubble that lined his strong jaw. The way that pieces of his brown hair fell out of the small ponytail he had tied up this morning. I noticed his broad shoulders and how he curled up on himself as he carefully placed the wall down, as if he was afraid he would crumble the delicate architecture.

“Hey, aren’t you supposed to be helping me?” He asked and, oh god, he turned to face me, with that smile on his face, with that tenderness in his stormy eyes. I couldn’t speak, how could I speak when he was right there in front of me? This man who had held death and seen the worst of humanity was making a gingerbread house with me.

“Maggie?” He asked quizzically.

“I love you,” I whispered. I tried to pour all my love into those words. He had to know that it came from everything in me. Every dark moment in my life was worth it to be so in love with the man in front of me. He turned fully to me, the gingerbread house forgotten as his hands held my face with the same gentleness he had used on the gingerbread.

“I love you too.”

In that moment there was nothing but the overwhelming love that we shared.

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And then I woke up.

The room was bathed in pale moonlight, leaving me to barely make out the shapes of my dresser and open closet door. Still dazed with sleep I reached to the other side of the bed. The sheets were cold against my hand. Only then did my mind catch up to reality. Tears welled up in my eyes as I slowly pulled myself from the heavy covers. It was still dark out, everyone still laid safely in their beds, tucked into their lover's arms. The freezing floor sent shivers down my spine as my bare feet made contact with the hardwood floors. The house was silent, no longer filled with anything but the whistling wind through a cracked window. I trailed through my open bedroom door. I watched as passing cars sent their headlights through the cracks in the curtains, brightening the dusty blue walls before they faded into the darkness again. Yet another chilly gust of wind made its way into the house prompting me to shut the window with a BANG!

I turned back around in an attempt to go back to my bedroom, but then my eyes caught sight of my kitchen table. My breathing seized painfully in my throat, as if the tears that now trailed my face were collecting there, choking me. Another car passed by and for a moment I could still see him there, sitting in the kitchen chair. But the room no longer smelled of cinnamon and nutmeg, and there was no gingerbread. I shuffled across the room slowly, trying to recall the way his voice sounded, the way his blue eyes sparkled. I dared to touch the table and with a single brush of my finger. He was gone. The sobs racked my body as I collapsed to the floor. I cried out smacking my hands against the white tiles of the kitchen over and over until my hands still stung even after my movements had stopped. Shoving the chair I watched as it crashed to the floor in front of me with a smack. My body was uncomfortably hot as I rested my forehead against the cool linoleum. I desperately grasped at the memory of him.

“Please, don’t go! Don’t leave me!”

In this moment there was nothing but the chilled night air and my begging pleas.