

All I Want For Kwanzaa - Part 5

For TJ

By TheSpiralledEye

Time is running out, Alex has to make a decision; life as a white man or a black woman?

December 31st

When Alex woke the next morning it was a pristine, snowy day. Tiny flakes of powder floated softly past his window from scattered white clouds that occasionally parted to show a brilliant blue sky. All in all, it was a perfect winter day; the kind that children looked forward to all holidays where staying outside all day without freezing your nose off was an option.

And Alex was miserable.

He sat atop his bed, arms wrapped around his knees staring at the clock as it ticked past seven. The sound of feet racing down the hall told him Amelia was awake, the heavier steps behind her likely Sam or Rachel following in her stead. They'd all be having breakfast soon and he would have to figure out what he was making for dinner tonight. His stomach twisted at the thought; not just because he was an awful cook but because he felt compelled to do a good job. He...liked this new version of his family. He felt at home with them and he found himself not wanting to let them down. But if he succeeded in finishing this strange trial...they'd vanish forever and he no longer knew how to feel about that. On the other hand, had his original family disappeared? Why didn't he feel guilty about that at all but the prospect of losing this one terrified him so?

With a groan Alex buried his head in his knees, letting them press against his eyes until they hurt. He didn't know what to think or feel anymore. About his family, about Davy, about anything. Last night haunted him, especially the way he'd said his name as he left. He still called him Alex, not Alexandra. He almost wished he'd said the latter, it would have laid down clear lines between them, that sleeping together had been a mistake, something to forget. But if that happened not only would he lose his friend but he'd probably be stuck in this body forever!

Alex dug his fingers into his hair and pulled, trying to let the sting focus his mind. He only ended up more confused. Was he Alex or Alexandra? From what he could tell, these two versions of his lives had differences but who he was as a person didn't seem that fundamentally changed. They were both best friends with Davy growing up, were both career focused now, and had trouble connecting with their family; hell, they even read the same comic books growing up for crying out loud!

What he needed was a distraction, something to focus on; finding a recipe was as good as anything else. He slid off the bed and hadn't taken more than a single step when he froze; the books, he'd left them all on Davy's front porch! He scrambled for the window, looking out at the snow, there was no sign of them. If they were buried under the snow they were sure to be ruined! He hadn't even told his mother he was taking them. Then he noticed

something else, a set of fresh footprints leading from Davy's front door and out onto the footpath towards-

Ding dong!

Alex bit his lip; there was only one person that could be. Quietly as possible he slipped out of his room and tiptoed to the top of the stairs where he could hear the front door opening.

"Good morning, Davy." Sam greeted, "I don't know if Alex is up yet."

"No, that's fine. I am just dropping these off, she left them at my place yesterday afternoon."

"Oh? Cook books?"

He let out a sigh of relief; at least his mothers books were safe. Davy must have gathered them up in time.

"She wanted help picking a recipe for tonight."

"Of course! I supposed she's just as awful in the kitchen as ever. I bet you're a whiz though, with your father and everything. Hopefully your help will ensure we get something edible tonight; Davy just cleared his throat.

"Well, I'll be off."

"You're coming for dinner tonight though, right?"

"I don't think so. I've intruded enough on your family holiday, I should give you all some time together without me interloping."

"Nah man, you know you're welcome...did you and Alex have a fight or something?"

Alex held his breath.

"...Or something."

"I know my sister can be a bit snooty sometimes but she's a good egg deep down and she cares about you a lot. I am sure you guys can talk it out. Just come over later when she's awake."

A good egg? Who the hell even said that anymore?

"Maybe. See you, Sam."

The door shut and Alex listened to the sound of shuffling as Sam put the books down somewhere. His guilt built so much that it wasn't until the sound of fast footfalls were rapidly approaching that he realised his brother was running up the stairs until it was too late.

“Aha! I knew you were listening!” He cried.

“No I wasn’t!” He replied all too fast.

“What happened? You must have said something pretty damn stupid to upset him.”

Alex felt anger boil under his skin.

“What makes you so sure *I* was the one who did something?” He placed his hands on his hips but Sam just raised an eyebrow.

“We both know it was you, Davy’s way too nice.”

“What and I’m not?”

“Not in the slightest.” Sam deadpanned.

For a second they both glared at each other and then, Alex stuck out his tongue. Sam grinned in response; siblings had the strangest ability to insult one another while also sounding loving. It was an odd skill Alex had completely forgotten Sam possessed.

“Look, whatever it is, work it out. Davy is too nice a guy for you to lose.”

“Mom is basically giving me away already, are you trying to set me up too?”

“We all are.”

“Fuck you.”

“Love you too, sis.”

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He spent much of the morning curled up by the fire working his way through the stacks of recipe books left by Davy; a warm winter cocktail in his hands at all times thanks to his father. There were so many terms he didn't know; how was frying different from sauteing, did it even matter? He was thankful for the distraction when Rachel flopped down on the couch.

“I swear, your father is an absolute menace with those cocktails.” She sighed.

“Pregnant women in my day drank and your generation ended up just fine!” His father called from the other room as Rachel rolled her eyes.

“He’s been trying to get a white Russian into me all morning.” She sighed, “Just because I’m not showing yet doesn’t mean I can go chugging cocktails like there is no tomorrow.”

Alex laughed awkwardly; he had no idea what to say to that, though the fact that he was on his second drink of the day suddenly felt rude somehow.

“Any idea what’s for dinner?” Rachel added when he didn’t respond.

“No idea.’ Alex groaned, “Every time I see something I think I could manage, it’s a dish we had earlier this week!”

Rachel glanced around the room before a wide smile formed on her face.

“Why don’t I help? I can cook us some rice and noodles and you can help. We’ll say you wanted to try some more Chinese dishes after the dumplings the other night.”

It was tempting; Alex bit the inside of his cheek in thought. It would certainly take the stress out of everything but somehow it felt...wrong. It took him a few moments to realise why; he wanted to cook. Not just that he wanted to cook a pan African dish for everybody to enjoy on Kwanzaa. Plus, it was New Years Eve, it had to be something special, something from the heart. This wasn’t the time to take the easy way out. He smiled thankfully and shook his head.

“No, I want to do something a bit more traditional, but if you’re up for helping, that would be great!”

“Not a problem! So long as you are alright with me eating half the ingredients for whatever dish you choose, this baby can’t go half an hour without making me snackish.”

Alex laughed and returned to flicking through the books; he wanted something warm and welcoming, without being too complicated. As he turned the page a small note fell out onto his lap. Curious he picked it up and his cheeks dusted pink realising it was Davy’s handwriting.

I remember one year your mom made this for Kwanzaa, we both thought it was the best thing ever. If you get stuck, I have all the ingredients.

- Davy

The note had fallen from a page labelled Chicken and Peanut Stew; Alex’s mouth began to water. Yet another shared experience between his two lives perhaps; he had actually eaten this before! Years ago when his mother had been going through her ‘exotic cooking’ phase as she called it. He’d never tasted anything quite so rich and lovely and instantly he knew this is what he would be making for dinner.

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Sam, the snitch, had clearly let slip about his and Davy’s little falling out. His mother had been asking him all day if he was okay, if there was anything he wanted to talk about; it was

driving him up the wall. Especially because he just wanted to figure out where all the damn ingredients he needed were. Now that he'd settled on stew he had to figure out side dishes; beans, cornbread and fritters seemed like the easiest and so he decided to try and make them early, rather than doing it all at once in the lead up to dinner. A task that would have been much easier without his family members watching him like a hawk.

"Mom, if you are going to hover over my shoulder the least you can do is chop beans." He said finally, shoving the wooden board and knife over so that it was in front of her on the bench, "Then I can get back to making cornbread."

"Sorry, sweetheart, I just worry. You know how mothers are." She said apologetically, "I can't help but feel like you've got something heavy weighing on your mind. Remember you can lean on us, we're family."

'Are we?' He thought darkly, *'I don't even know anymore.'*

He poured the cream corn into the bowl and began to mix stubbornly refusing to meet her eye. For a while they stayed like that, the only sounds coming from the clink of his spoon hitting the side of the bowl and his mothers knife slicing. It was comforting in a way, grounding.

"Mom, do I seem...different to you?" He asked finally, "Since the last time you saw me I mean, do I seem like a different person?"

His mother gave him an odd look, as if she didn't quite understand the question.

"Like, does my personality seem to have changed? Do I seem...fake? Like somebody else took my place?"

"Sweetie, where is this coming from?" She put the knife down and turned to face him full on.

"Just answer the question, please."

"No, of course not." She said it with such conviction that it actually made him feel a little bit better, "I can tell something is bothering you sweetie, but you're still the same little girl I raised."

He had no idea how to respond to that, he very much wasn't, or was he? Alex bit his lip, unsure of how to continue this stupid conversation when suddenly warm arms were wrapping around him.

"I know it's hard, figuring out who you are, look at your father, he still falls in and out of love with his various passions. It's alright though, you don't have to always have a plan. Life can't be 'figured out' just lived."

Alex returned the hug, letting himself relax into it and breathing in that comforting scent of home. He still wasn't quite sure what to do but he felt comforted at the very least.

“Enough of this talk now.” His mother held his cheeks for a moment, “Take a break and let’s do presents!”

“Did you say present!?” Amelia was in the doorway, grinning ear to ear; there was no way they could delay now and Alex felt his stomach sink.

His presents; they were still over at Davy’s. He’d managed to get them all finished and wrapped but completely forgotten to bring them back over. Fan-fucking-tastic.

“I’ve just got to go get them.” He said awkwardly, “I hid them over at Davy’s for safe keeping so…”

“We’ll wait.” His mother patted his cheek once more, “Take as long as you need.”

“No, don’t take too long, Auntie Alex, please.” Amelia looked up at him with those big brown eyes and he smiled; it should be illegal to be that cute.

“I promise I won’t be too long.”

At least now he had a proper excuse to be in and out quickly. He didn’t bother with a coat, simply slipped on his shoes and made his way over to Davy’s, spending several long moments pacing on his front porch before finally committing to knocking. Davy was surprisingly fast; his eyes wide and painfully hopeful when he saw who it was. Alex couldn’t stand it; knowing that he was about to crush that hope all over again.

“I came to get my presents.” He blurted out; mentally wincing at how abrupt and rude he sounded. He’d meant to avoid stringing Davy’s hope out but instead he had just dashed it into a thousand pieces.

“Oh, of course. Wait here.”

Alex’s heart ached watching Davy walk away. He wanted so badly to run to him and hold the man close, drink in that scent like he had last night. But…he couldn’t do it; it wasn’t right to use Davy like this, even if it meant being stuck here forever. Besides, even if he was developing feelings for the man he had started this little charade under false pretences; he didn’t deserve somebody as kind and wonderful. Just to add more salt to the wound though when he returned with the bag of carefully wrapped presents Alex instantly noticed the extra one on top.

“That’s for you.” Davy coughed, “I hope you enjoy it.”

He’d never even thought to get Davy something, how awful was that? He had been so caught up in trying to learn how to celebrate Kwanzaa and get out of this reality it hadn’t even crossed his mind. Just another slap in the face to all of his friends’ kindness.

“Thank you.” He whispered before lamely adding, “I’ll get you something next year.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Davy smiled sadly, “Well, have fun.”

He closed the door and Alex trudged back through the snow feeling like the worst person on the planet. Back to his lovely warm house full of family about to open presents; a place Davy would likely be as well if he wasn’t being so polite. Amelia didn’t give him more time to dwell though, appearing the moment he walked in with a bright red package with his name on it.

“This is for you Auntie!”

They distributed presents and Alex felt almost overwhelmed by his own pile; back in New York his presents had been limited to the office’s round of secret santa and a treat or two he got himself. This was unreal; tonic syrup from his father, a beer holder from Sam, Earrings from his mother, a shell necklace from Amelia, all home made. Plus a number of small store bought things ranging from a new scarf to a silver kinara for his own apartment. He held the candlestick gently in his hands; it was light but somehow felt a lot heavier than it should be. Like it had a purpose to it that none of his other possessions had.

He couldn’t help but smile watching his family open the gifts he’d bought them. After all that work threading beads he may have actually cried if his mother didn’t like the necklace. Watching her gasp in pleasure and immediately put it on made his heart warm, the same went for the other girls whom he’d made jewellery for. There was something especially heart warming watching Amelia proudly show off her new bracelets while grinning ear to ear.

“I love them!” She squealed, throwing herself into Alex’s lap in a massive bear hug, “Thank you so much.”

He gave the girl a squeeze; this gift was so much better than the cheap plastic toy cars he’d bought her male counterpart of Christmas. Looking back on it now he felt a small amount of shame. All he’d done was walk into the boys toy aisle and grabbed the first thing he saw under twenty dollars; he could have at least put a little thought into it. Being forced to make something himself as part of the gift had made him do that and he was thankful for it. Thanks to his father they were all quite tipsy by the end of the gift exchange; save for Rachel and Amelia. The latter was already playing with her new doll while the former came and sat by Alex once more.

“You missed one.” She pointed to Davy’s gift, neatly wrapped in blue paper complete with silver ribbon.

“Oh yeah.” He picked it up carefully, almost reverently, how could one little box make him feel so guilty?

“Is it from our handsome neighbour?” Rachel wiggled her eyebrows, “Shouldn’t he be here now? Sam told me he’s practically living here at the moment. Seems a shame, letting him sit all alone while we all enjoy presents.”

“I didn’t get him one.” Alex said through clenched teeth, “It would be awkward to have somebody with nothing to open.”

“Oh.” Rachel actually seemed caught off guard for a second before recovering, “Well, he is coming for dinner right?”

“Maybe.”

Rachel seemed to finally get the hint and got up to go and check on her daughter leaving Alex alone with his present. His jaw was beginning to ache from clenching his teeth so hard so he forced himself to relax and take several deep breaths. It was just a stupid present, there was nothing to be nervous about. He pulled the ribbon free and ripped open the paper to reveal...

Mousetrap.

A brand new copy, a more modern version to be precise, with extra gadgets, more mice and even options for making custom traps. Atop it was a simple piece of note paper covered in Davy's handwriting; the recipe for his hot chocolate. Alex's eyes began to burn, he could almost see it in his mind; Alex carefully considering what to get him then at the last minute remembering the homemade tradition of Kwanzaa and hastily trying to come up with something he could make at home. So much thought had gone into this.

And he hadn't even thought to get him anything in return. For a minute he sat, feeling sorry for himself and drowning in guilt before he swallowed it down and blinked away the tears. Maybe he didn't give him a present but Alex was going to do his damndest to make sure Davy had the best New Years of his life. And that meant he had to get back in the kitchen.

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If Alex ever saw a peanut again it would be too soon. Would it have killed his mother to buy shelled ones? No matter, the stew was bubbling away, the cornbread and other sides were ready and his father was already getting the drinks made up. Sam and his wife were organising the sparklers and mini fireworks, all that was left was to go and get Davy.

“You go.” His father insisted, “Sam can set the table.”

“What?!”

“Quickly.” His father whispered, grinning widely as he gently pushed Alex toward the back door. “She's already gone! Better get to it, Sammy!”

Alex giggled as he hopped across the backyard to Davy's place, the smell of home cooking wafting out the door in his wake. It was so picturesque, the light, evening snowfall, the warm light of homes all around him, the distant calls as people arrived down the street for a party. He stopped in the middle of Davy's front path and took a deep breath, closing his eyes and lifting his face to the sky to feel the flakes melt on his skin; who cares if it was movie logic this entire scene was perfect as far as he was concerned. Well almost perfect, there was one thing missing, or rather, one person.

“Alex?”

He blinked, Davy was standing in his front door looking vaguely confused.

“Why are you standing in the middle of my garden with your eyes closed?”

“Uh,” He’d gotten so caught up he didn’t even think.

The ludicrousness of the situation got to him and he started to giggle.

“Sorry, I came to invite you to dinner.”

“You...still want me to come?”

‘In more ways than one.’ Alex thought before he could stop himself.

“Of course.” He said seriously, trying to hide his blush, “I was...rude last night. I was just a bit overwhelmed.”

“I understand.”

“Also....thank you for your gift.” Alex said, taking a few steps forward, “It meant a lot, everything you’ve done has meant a lot to me these last few days.”

He paused, before adding.

“You mean a lot to me.”

He meant it too.

“But I don’t think we should act...hastily.” He bit his lip, “Please, come to dinner and celebrate New years with us?”

“As friends?”

“Yes.”

Davy smiled, but there was sadness lingering behind his eyes. It made Alex’s heart ache, a pain that was somewhat alleviated as Davy nodded and closed his door., Following him back to the house. Opening the front door they were hit with a wave of warmth in every sense of the word. The fire was crackling and the air inside was filled to the brim with that infectious happiness that was usually reserved for Christmas Day in big families. Davy gave him a grateful smile.

“Thanks, for inviting me even if things are a little awkward after...last night.” He whispered, “It’s nice to have a family to spend the holidays with.”

A thought occurred.

“Why did you stay? Was it too expensive to change your flight and go home?”

Davy blushed.

“Oh, yeah. That was it.”

Alex was sure that was a lie, Davy couldn't even bear to look vaguely in his direction as he said it. He was about to probe further when Amelia was, as she seemingly had a habit of doing, suddenly before them.

“Mista Davy! Look what Auntie made me!” She beamed, holding up both her wrists with the matching bracelets.

“Wow.” He smiled widely, “Those are beautiful, you certainly have a very artistically gifted aunt.”

Alex snorted; Davy practically had to guide him every step of the way and they both knew it.

“Come on,” He urged, “Food should be on the table.”

Indeed, Sam was just placing the stew in the centre of the table for all to admire, surrounded by the side dishes and empty plates. Davy whistled, clearly looking impressed.

“I thought you said you couldn't cook.”

“Wait,” Sam warned, “It may have been years ago but I still remember the last thing Alex made me...”

Alex gave him a playful punch on the arm.

“Ass.”

“Language!” Their mother admonished, “Amelia is right there.”

Amelia smiled angelically at her grandmother before waving at Alex and Davy to lean down so she could whisper to them.

“I think daddy was being an ass.”

They both snorted; well, Alex figured he was the wine aunt, it was basically his right to teach his niece naughty words. They all sat around the table and began serving out the stew and sides as Alex's heart rate increased. Mentally he went over the recipe again and again, each time expecting to realise he missed some crucial ingredient or step. His mother said a few words about family and togetherness, making them all take one another's hands. His father on one side and Davy on the other; Alex was struck by just how grounded he felt. All of them dressed in their traditional clothing, holding hands, about to eat his homemade food; the situation felt so unreal compared to his life last week. And yet...he was happy. Happier than he had been in a long while; for all the lows, the highs of this reality had been well worth it.

“Let’s eat!”

Alex watched Davy like a hawk as he dipped his spoon into the stew and popped it in his mouth. His heart fluttered his elation as Davy sighed happily and closed his eyes.

“This. Is. Amazing.” He said through mouthfuls, “I won’t hear any more slander about your cooking Alex, you’re amazing.”

Alex felt his cheeks turn pink; hearing Davy of all people compliment something he’d made was wonderful. Even Sam couldn’t say anything nasty about the food, in fact he went back for seconds.

“I do believe you’re having humble pie for dessert.” Alex teased, Sam stuck out his tongue and Amelia immediately began copying him much to Rachel’s chagrin.

“And what will the rest of us be having for dessert?” His father queried and Alex’s good mood dissipated.

“Wait, I had to make dessert?”

The panic on his face must have been clear because everybody burst into laughter.

“No darling, we asked David to make it days ago.” His mother assured him, “Really sweetie, you need to learn not to sweat the little things so much.”

He collapsed back into his chair with a sigh of relief; then his mind began to race once more. If Davy was in charge of dessert, had he seriously been going to drop it off and then return home if he hadn’t come over and reinvented him for dinner?

“Well, I set the table so Alex gets to clear it for dessert.” Sam announced.

“Hey! I have been cooking all day!”

“If it gets dessert on the table, I’ll do it.” Davy laughed.

It was good to see him smile genuinely, if he didn’t know any better Alex would assume nothing had changed.

“Help me with the whipped cream?” He asked as he took plates and Alex found himself following, not even caring that he’d somehow been roped into cleaning up as well as cooking.

There was something homey about the situation; clearing the table, rinsing the dishes, stacking them all up to be washed later, all with Davy at his side. It made butterflies dance in his stomach and when their hands brushed accidentally while reaching for the tap at the same time, the butterflies damn near raced. Davy cleared his throat and went about pouring cream into two bowls before handing Alex a whisk.

“All this stuff and you guys don’t have an electric mixer? Do you have any idea how long it takes to whip cream by hand?”

“We could always go get yours?”

“And risk it getting snow in the seams and busting? Hell no, dad would never let me live it down. Worse, he’d probably make me pay for it and while they have it made in the shade I am still working my way up.”

They both laughed awkwardly before lapsing into silence. Every second that past felt like a punch in the gut; how had he screwed this up so badly? Why did he even feel bad about it? He was trying to escape this reality after all, why should it matter if he hurt anybody’s feelings? Indignant rage began to build up inside him; that stupid taxi driver, it was all his fault. Who did he think he was meddling with his life like this? If he had just left well enough alone he would still be in his white male body, back in New York by now after an awkward Christmas. Which is what he wanted.

It was.

“Uh, you’re going to make butter if you keep whipping that hard.” Davy said after a moment.

Alex blinked, looking down at the bowl he’d been whisking away at in his fury, the cream was stiff already.

“Oh.”

“Remind me not to get on your bad side, that’s a mean arm.” Davy tried to joke, but it didn’t land. “Well...more on your bad side than I already am.”

“It’s not like that.”

“Well, what is it like then?” Davy asked, raising his voice slightly, “Last night was...good wasn’t it? You wanted it, hell, I know I’ve wanted it for a long time. We both like each other and we’re adults, this shouldn’t be so hard.”

“You don’t understand.”

“Then make me!” Davy pleaded, taking a moment to calm himself, “I’m sorry I just...you’re giving me mixed signals here, Alex. If you don’t want anything to happen between us that’s your choice but stop bouncing between rejecting me and embracing it with open arms.”

How could he ever hope to explain what was happening? He was trapped between a rock and a hard place, Alex felt something snap. He slammed the bowl down on the bench and ran, he could hear Davy and then the others calling after him but he paid them no heed. Running up to his bedroom and slamming the door closed, sighing with relief as the lock slid into place before collapsing onto the bed.

His options were limited and poor and he had no idea what to do. Slowly, over the course of the last few days he had gotten less and less focused on his goal of completing the 'movie' and getting back to his real life. He'd let this place get to him and now it felt more like home than his old life did but...if he stayed that meant staying a woman. That wasn't exactly something he could just accept and move over from easily. Even now he could feel his new breasts rising and falling as he kept the tears at bay. He had grown so accustomed to the gentle sway of his hips that he barely noticed it when he walked anymore and...in a weird way he would almost miss it. The soft hair, the rich dark skin, he felt more confident than he ever had and the idea of turning back into himself again made Alex feel weirdly...mournful.

Not to mention these confusing but ultimately real feelings he had for Davy; male on the inside or not, he could no longer deny his attraction, it was consuming him, body and soul in a way that he could not explain away as hormones. He was falling in love with a man and the temptation to stay here and be with him was so real and yet...if he did that, wouldn't he 'win'? He'd reach the romantic climax of this reality and then suddenly be shafted back to his cold, empty life where Davy was nothing but an old acquaintance and he and his family were basically strangers. He laid there for what seemed like hours, tossing and turning trying to figure out what was wrong, both wanting somebody to come and speak to him and dreading it.

Alex pressed his palms into his eyes; he felt paralysed by indecision. Then there was a knock at his door. He waited for Davy or his mother to speak but after a long pause it was Amelia's voice that echoed from beneath the door.

"Auntie Alex? Are you alright?"

Her voice was so innocent in its worry; he swiped away the tears and stood, opening the door a crack to be met with the little girl's large dark eyes staring up at him. He knelt down to face her with a soft smile.

"Yes, sweetie, I'm okay I am just...dealing with some very complicated adult things right now."

"Is it because you love Mista Davy?"

She said it as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

"Sort of." He admitted, "Love can be pretty complicated when you're a grown up."

"But I think Mista Davy likes you too!" Amelia told her in a hushed tone as if it were some great secret, "So I think if ya tell him everything will be okay."

"The world would certainly be an easier place if that was true." Alex sighed.

"My mommy says you should do the things that make you happy, damn the consequences!"

"Yeah, she would and don't let Nana hear you talking like that."

She had a point though; he was so focused on the consequences of his actions he was letting it spoil the journey so to speak. He needed to stop being a coward and just rip the bandaid off. No more running, no more getting caught up in the warmth and wonder of this movie land; he would kiss Davy at midnight, fireworks would explode and the metaphorical credits would roll. In all likelihood he'd had a moment or two to enjoy himself before that entity or whoever he was appeared and he'd be back in the real world; ready to put what he learned about love and family into action or some sappy shit.

"Come on Amelia, I think I need to apologise."

Coming back downstairs was awkward to say the least; Davy had laid out the berry pie and cream ready to be served but nobody was eating; everybody turned as he and Amelia walked back in and he gave Davy a small, apologetic smile that was not returned. Amelia gave his hand a little squeeze before Rachel announced that they should all go into the lounge for a drink; none to subtly leave Alex and Davy alone.

"I don't want to talk here." He said shapely, "I don't want your family overhearing all this."

Alex nodded and the two of them stiffly walked to the front door, passing the lounge as they went. The rest of his family pretended not to notice as they passed but did a pretty poor job of it. The two minute walk to Davy's front room felt like an age and yet, as he closed the front door Alex felt as though it had come too soon for his liking. Davy took off his coat and crossed his arms.

"Well." He sighed, "Are you going to explain that little display or am I going to be left in the lurch again."

He was mad, Alex couldn't blame him. A million different lines and actions raced through his mind; all the different stories he could spin to give some dramatic reveal that would ultimately end in them reconciling just in time for midnight. He reminded himself of the plan; that soon this Davy would be gone so it didn't matter what he said but he just couldn't do it. He looked over at the man before him; regardless of whether this was 'real' or permanent he could not lie to him, at least not fully. He deserved better, he deserved so much better.

"I like you." He said finally, "But...I'm not going to be here much longer, neither will you."

He talked around the issue; let this Davy think he meant New York, not a whole different world.

"I am scared." He admitted as a lump formed in his throat, "That if I got too attached to you I would stay and give everything I worked so hard for up."

"Alex..."

“I want to be with you but I’m scared of what that means!” The words were coming faster now, he couldn’t stop them if he tried, “Being with you means a totally different life to the one I’ve been living up till now and I don’t know how to deal with that.”

Alex looked at the floor, his hands were curled in fists so hard his nails dug painfully into his palm. The sound of gentle footsteps at his side made him look up and suddenly Davy was there, inches from him. Those dark eyes, the warm auburn hair, the strong jaw; he was so handsome and Alex wished he could say that aloud.

“If that’s the case...” Davy said finally, “Then let’s just go our separate ways tomorrow. Love isn’t supposed to be hard, no matter what people say. I want you to be happy, truly happy and if that means going back to New York and working without me then...that’s what I want.”

“Love?” Alex whispered, Davy winced.

Alex wasn’t sure he knew what love felt like; but he did know that what he felt for Davy right here and now was stronger than anything he’d ever felt for another person, male or female.

“Let’s just have tonight.” He found himself whispering, “Then tomorrow we both fly out and pretend this never happened.”

“I won’t be able to pretend it never happened.” Davy said sadly, “but I understand.”

Alex stood himself up on his toes, lips pressed gently to Davy’s as the man’s arms wrapped around him. Outside the sound of whistling fireworks filled the air and splashes of bright colour painted the room they were in. Alex let his eyes flutter closed and deepened their kiss; if this was to be his last night in this world he wanted to go out with a bang. Their kiss was beautiful but also sad; he could sense pain in it from both of them. Neither truly wanted this to be the last time they were together but Alex knew this was the way things had to be.

Hands flew across clothing, zippers were undone, buttons flew as they stumbled across the room. Davy’s hands pressed into the small of his back, then slid down to cup his round ass, kneading at the soft skin in a way that made Alex whimper with need. He stepped backward, letting Davy gently push him down onto the couch before crawling atop him. He’d never been in this position before; Alex had always been the one on top and now he was trapped; legs tangled and shoulders pinned by this man who was so much stronger than him. Yet he felt totally safe and secure. Davy’s mouth traced kisses down the length of his neck as one of his hands stroked across the curve of Alex’s chest, bringing his nipples to full hardness. Alex in turn took his time, tracing his long fingers across the plains of Davy’s back and sides; memorising the feel of that coiled muscle, revelling in the hardness that pressed against his inner thigh. The darkness of the room was lit up intermittently with flashes of red, gold or green; making the man’s eyes sparkle in a way that left Alex breathless.

They gazed at one another, each refusing to look away even as Alex guided Davy inside him. It was so difficult to keep his eyes from rolling back in his head as his inner walls stretched, by the time he was fully sheathed inside Alex lost the battle. His eyes fluttered closed as he pulled Davy close, crushing his breasts between them as the man began to buck his hips. It wasn’t like last night; this was slow and sensual, the pleasure built up

gradually in a way that almost drove Alex mad; and he was sure that this wasn't sex, this was making love. He cried out, drinking in Davy's sounds in turn as they both got closer.

Alex's orgasm took him almost by surprise; his whole body quivering as the wave passed through, his legs wrapped themselves around Davy's hips to keep him deep inside as he continued to rock his hips. Davy groaned deeply, pressing his lips to Alex's one final time; it was hard enough to almost be painful but the feel of Davy's whole body shuddering atop him as he came was well worth the discomfort.

They both gasped, mouths breaking apart as they collapsed against one another to catch their breath. Alex wished he could stay in the moment forever but as suddenly as it had come, it was over and Davy was pulling out and awkwardly gathering his discarded clothes. Alex swallowed but didn't speak as they eyes met; nothing more needed to be said. He sighed, redressing himself awkwardly.

"Goodbye Davy."

"...Goodbye, Alexandra."

He closed the door softly behind him, the whole farewell felt incomplete, too short and awkward to be satisfying. Still, the end was the end. He walked out onto the street, expecting the man to appear at any moment...but he didn't. Alex waited for almost half an hour before giving up and going home, entering through the back door so he wouldn't have to face his family. He'd done it; he'd learned the true meaning of Kwanzaa and found love, so why wasn't he back in his own reality now? His tactic didn't work, as he opened the door his mother was waiting for him. She looked to him with eyes filled with kindness and love; it was the straw that broke the camel's back. Alex burst into tears, his mother wordlessly holding him through it all.

"I ruined everything."

"No sweetheart, no." His mother soothed, "Things will work out, just you wait."

They wouldn't though; he'd failed whatever test that entity had set for him *and* he'd lost Davy. He'd somehow managed to make this a no win scenario. He let his father fix him a drink, then another until he decided he just wanted to go to bed. Part of him still had hope that tomorrow he would wake up to find he was back in his real body but deep down, he knew it wouldn't be the case.

~

New Year's Day meant lots of different things for different kinds of people; a new start, regrets, a hangover; Alex had a bit of all of them. He rubbed at his slightly aching temple as he finished folding the last of his clothes back into the suitcase. His flight was leaving in a few hours and the taxi would be here any minute to pick him up. He'd failed, he was sure of

it, now he was going to be stuck this way forever; he still didn't know how to feel about it; he didn't hate this life but he didn't love the idea of being a black woman forever.

He distracted himself by packing. The only thing left out now was the kaftan, his grandmother's kaftan to be precise. He had washed and folded it with almost a sense of reverence and to his surprise he found he was going to miss it.

With a heavy heart he carried it back to his parents room only to find his mother and father still in their pyjamas in bed.

"Sorry to disturb." he said sheepishly, "but I wanted to return this before the cab gets here."

"Oh darling, you keep that. Nana would have wanted it." His father insisted, "Besides, your mother looks awful in that one."

"Joe!" His mother gasped in mock offence, "He's right though sweetie. You may as well keep it."

A strange mix of guilt and affection mixed in his stomach as he hugged the kaftan close.

"Thank you."

There was a beep outside. The taxi was early.

"Ah, quick get out there, we'll just put our robes on and come see you off!" His father insisted, "Don't keep him waiting, you know how impatient cabbies are!"

It was all happening so fast, one moment he was in his room placing the kaftan in his suitcase the next he was on the porch giving each of his family members a hug in turn before rushing down the path toward the yellow car. Just like that, the family he'd grown so close to in the last few days felt a million miles away. Amelia was jumping up and down waving to him as he opened the car door and he managed a sad little wave before hardening his heart and ducking inside.

"Airport." He said quietly as he slid into the cab and closed the door.

He felt empty, a strange guilt slowly filling his stomach as the car pulled away from the curb and his family waved goodbye;

"You sure about that, miss?"

He turned quickly, eyes wide as they met with the cabbies in the mirror; it was that man from the day he arrived.

"You!" He breathed.

"Little ol' me." He chuckled, "Did you have a good Christmas? Oh wait, I mean, Kwanzaa? Learn a little something about people and holidays?"

Alex hissed; he didn't even care who or what this man was anymore, he just wanted him to stop messing with his life.

“Just. Drive.”

“You’re sure you’re ready to go back to being the snobby white dude?”

Alex blinked in shock.

“I...you’re going to turn me back?”

“More accurately, I will put reality back to the way it was.” The taxi driver shrugged, “And of course, I was always going to give you the choice.”

He had so many questions that they all built up into a giant word soup in his mind; so much so that none of them made it past his lips instead what came out was;

“Why is this reality like a movie?”

The taxi driver laughed.

“Well, because things always work out in those family holiday movies don’t they? Maybe I am getting sappy in my old age but I quite like a nice happy ending. I admit, messing with you was pretty fun but I won't deny you yours.”

Was this his happy ending? Going back to New York, to his lonely empty apartment and frozen dinners? No more cocktails from his father, no more Amelia hopping at his ankles...no more Davy. That was the one that was really sticking with him; old Alex hasn't spoken to Davy in years and the idea of going back to that was so dreadfully unappealing. Not to mention leaving this one on such a bad note.

His thoughts went back to the kaftan in his suitcase; how comfortable and at home he felt in it, and in the world. Most of all though he thought of that night in the hottub with Davy; not just how pleasurable it had been but that hidden emotion in Davy's eyes. The one he had not been able to identify. All of a sudden he had one of those moments where the haze cleared and everything became crystal clear; it was love. Not the undying, true love that would be spouted if this really was a Hallmark movie but the genuine kind; the young kind that had so much more growing to do if only the person being looked at would give it a chance.

“Stop! Take me back!”

The taxi driver grinned.

“Right away, miss.”

Tyres slid across the slushy ground as he did a U-turn right then and there. Cars honked their horns and Alex felt a wild burst of elated laughter escape him; he didn't care what they thought right now. The ride back seemed to take only seconds and yet it was far too long; as

they came down the street he saw Davy, he was out front with his own suitcase because of course he was. Alex was unbuckling his seatbelt and opening the door before the cab had even come to a stop.

“Davy!” He yelled, jumping out into the snow and mercifully managing to keep his footing.

Davy’s head snapped up, eyes widening in shock as he beheld the woman dashing toward him. For a moment, Alex feared rejection but then Davy dropped the suitcase and opened his arms just in time for Alex to dive into them. Then they were spinning, Alex held in Davy’s arms as he spun on his heels only to end up falling backwards into a snowdrift, both of them laughing like kids. Alex pressed their foreheads together and flakes began to stick to his curly hair and kissed him. He tasted like coffee and *home*.

“You came back.” He breathed after a moment, Alex nodded.

“Well, I still owed you a present, didn’t I?” Pressing his lips to Davy’s again briefly, “I hope this is satisfactory.”

“It’s adequate, I am sure you will improve the offerings later.” Davy purred before they both laughed.

Alex cleared his throat; he had to make sure everything was clear before he got too carried away.

“I’m not giving up New York.” He warned seriously, “I still have my career to think about but...I also want you. I’m sorry for denying it for so long.”

Davy ran his fingers up into Alex’s soft hair and he sighed.

“We can make it work.” He smiled, “You’re too stubborn to let it fail.”

“You love it.”

“I do.”

Alex leaned down to kiss him again.

“Mommy! Auntie Alex is back! And she’s making snow angels with Davy!”

Amelia; she was out on the front porch already hopping down the stairs to join them before her mother managed to grab hold of her arm.

“You can make angles later, sweetheart.” Rachel giggled, “I think your aunt has some things to talk about with your new uncle.”

Amelia squealed.

“Are you getting married Auntie? Can I be the flower girl!?”

“Well that escalated quickly.” Alex deadpanned, Davy just laughed and kissed him again and Alex melted back into the touch.

Fuck the finer points of this reality; he was staying because that meant being with Davy and more than anything else in his life, either version, that felt right.