

Christmas in Evergreen: Bells are Ringing

by
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Hannah and David walked home later that night, marveling at all the lights and decorations around town as if they'd never seen them before. Tonight had been special and romantic and everything she, Sonya and David had hoped for Michelle to experience. Seeing Thomas and Michelle staring at each other with that loving gaze, knowing that even though this wasn't the night they had planned, it had still turned out to be special, had touched her heart. And made her think of Elliot.

He'd been so handsome wearing black slacks, white turtleneck and a heather gray blazer tonight, smiling and talking to everyone as he always did. The people of Evergreen loved him, and most of them seemed genuinely happy about him opening another Tinker Shop in Boston. Everyone but Hannah. But no, that wasn't correct, she was happy for him. She hadn't lied when she told him his idea was smart. What she hadn't told him was how proud she was that he would be the one carrying on the Turner name in the industry.

They crossed the street and were just passing the church when Hannah heard music coming from the

small building. It was after ten in the evening, so there shouldn't be anyone in the church, but the piano playing was proof that there was. And when she let herself really listen to the melody, her heart warmed because she knew the song.

It was "Give Love on Christmas Day," the song Elliot had played at last year's Christmas Festival. Hannah had sat on the bench with him that night, moving her hands as if she were playing, but singing along instead.

"I can walk the rest of the way by myself. It's only two blocks."

Hannah hadn't realized she'd stopped walking until David spoke. Without knowing the words to respond, she nodded and squeezed his hand. Standing there, she watched until he'd crossed another street. Then, she turned toward the church and took a deep breath, letting it out slowly before walking up the front steps. She stepped inside the church, the same way she had so many times before, but tonight, Hannah knew it was different.

The overhead lights were out, leaving the sanctuary illuminated by only the white twinkle lights hung throughout. It seemed warm in the space and much smaller than usual.

When Elliot looked up to see her standing by the door, he gave a little nod for her to join him.

"What are you doing here so late?" she asked, after walking down the aisle and taking a seat on the bench beside him.

She watched his fingers moving over the keys,

waiting until she thought she had picked up the right note, before starting to play along with him.

“I came here to think,” he said.

“Well, we’ve always been good at a duet.” It was her attempt at keeping things light, but that was pointless. What was between them now was as heavy as it got.

“An unstoppable pair,” he replied, staring at her.

She continued to play along until Elliot stopped, placing a hand over hers. They stared at each other then, no words necessary.

On instinct, Hannah leaned in and touched her lips to his.

Elliot joined in the kiss and she closed her eyes, marveling at how perfect it felt to be with him. Whether they were working at the Tinker Shop, having a snowball fight, or sitting at a piano kissing when they should’ve been playing, it was always just right.

It was a short kiss, but nonetheless tender and heartfelt.

“That was unexpected,” he said when it was over, but he didn’t move away.

Regret immediately seized Hannah and she turned away, focusing her gaze on the piano keys once more. “Oh. I shouldn’t have done that.”

“No, no,” Elliot said quickly and touched a hand to hers. “I’m glad you did.”

For what seemed like endless moments their gazes held and all Hannah could wonder was if she’d ever feel this way about someone else again. The answer was probably no, and it broke her heart to admit it.

“But I’m also confused,” Elliot continued. “I just keep thinking there’s gotta be a way to make this work.”

She heard his words and wished with everything inside her that there was a way. All the options had run on repeat in her mind these past few days, but the probability of any of them working was slim. At least for her anyway. “We already know what love looks like,” she told him. “I want us to be like we were. Seeing each other every day, working together, being with our friends together. We wouldn’t be okay with long distance.”

“You’re right, we wouldn’t be.” He shook his head. “But what if it turns out that we do want different things? And...what if we were in too deep, and there’s no friendship to go back to?”

With a resigned sigh she answered, “If your heart is pulling you elsewhere, a friend won’t stand in your way. And certainly not me.”

For an instant, Hannah felt hopeful and expectant, the same way she knew they’d both felt together at one time. But she didn’t know how to say that, and when his silence stretched on, she gave him a faint smile and touched his hand before standing. She walked out of the church, knowing without a doubt that she was leaving a chunk of her heart back there on the bench with Elliot.

