

Christmas in Evergreen: Bells are Ringing

by
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“You always get that ribbon just right,” Elliot told Hannah later that morning when they were at the Christmas Museum.

“Yeah,” she replied, “but you have a great eye for balancing the ratio of ornaments with bulbs. I always just put them all up and hope for the best.”

They were decorating one of the trees they’d just picked up from Henry’s farm. This one was the biggest balsam fir, the one that Henry had suggested for the entrance because its strong branches would hold the most decorations. In the other rooms they had a mixture of Douglas and Fraser firs that were just as beautiful and smelled absolutely perfect.

“Well, the best is always what happens once you’re finished. This red and white color scheme is festive and elegant,” he continued.

“Yeah, I love this plaid ribbon with the tiny specks of silver throughout. I think we should order more of this for the Tinker Shop.”

“Okay, I’ll put that on our supply list for the next order. Oh, and those clear bulbs. We’ve been going

through those in the ornament-making class.”

“Right,” she said, enjoying the easy companionship as much as decorating the tree.

When they were done, Hannah climbed up on the ladder to put a delicate filigree star on top.

“There,” Elliot said, helping her down off the ladder. “Nice work.”

“We made the entrance look better already,” she replied, and folded her arms over her chest. A quick glance over at Elliot and she saw that he was standing the same way. “Now, to get old Uncle Scrooge down and hung in another room.”

Elliot walked over to the wall where the picture of Hiram Cooper hung. “Well, out with the old,” he said as he took down the oval-shaped antique frame.

“Hmmm,” she said tilting her head. “What do you think should go over there?”

“Hmmm, maybe something like—” His words trailed off as he moved away from her to dig into one of the boxes sitting on the floor. “This,” he said, and returned to stand beside her. He showed her the picture he’d taken out of the box.

Hannah leaned in close so she could see it and beamed as she recognized the old photo.

“Oh, wow, it’s the mural my parents painted in Kringle Alley.” She held one side of the picture while Elliot held the other. Her parents stood proudly in front of the mural, their hands joined, smiles on their faces. Her chest tightened. “It’s a shame it was taken down.”

“Well, what if we recreated it?”

Tears instantly stung her eyes as a mixture of reminiscing about her parents and Elliot's sweet offer collided.

"Yeah," she said with a nod, trying to keep the quick flush of emotion from overtaking her. "That would be a nice way to honor them."

"I'll get started figuring it out when I get to the Tinker Shop," he said.

"Okay." She took a deep steadying breath and reached for his hand. "And thanks for letting me join you on your walk and helping me with the trees today."

With a smile Elliot took her other hand, and leaned in closer to kiss her gently on the lips. He pulled back only slightly but they continued to stare at each other. In those few moments there was nothing else, no place to rush off to, no job to complete, just her and Elliot, and Hannah loved it.

"You're most welcome, Hannah Turner," Elliot whispered.

After another quick kiss he was gone, and Hannah was in the entryway alone once again, her thoughts returning to what else she could add to the space. When she heard the front door open and close, she just assumed Elliot had forgotten something and come back for it. The unfamiliar brusque voice shocked her.

"What are you doing with that?"

Hannah laughed and turned around to see the visitor walking in. "Oh, goodness. You scared me."

The man wearing a surly expression and a long black coat walked farther into the entrance, looking around

as if he'd lost something. Hannah was too busy trying to figure out who he was and what he wanted to notice anything else about him at the moment.

"Hi. Um, can I help you...?" Hannah said, and when he just kept walking she continued, "Can I help you with something?"

He strode farther into the space, going close to another box, and picked up an ornament, then dropped it back down into the box.

"What do you think you're doing, exactly?"

"In life?" Hannah asked, only half-jokingly.

"What are you doing with the old Hat Factory?"

He came closer to her.

Now she got a better look at him. His hair, from what she could see from beneath his smoke-gray fedora, was salt and pepper gray, his eyes a cooler shade of the same gray tone. Thin lips were drawn tightly and his brow was furrowed, confirming her first impression that he was surly for some reason. Try as she might, though, she didn't recognize him. Evergreen was a very friendly town and Hannah knew just about everyone who lived there. But Christmas was a big tourist season, so she assumed this guy was one of them. Not one that she needed to be afraid of, she presumed, but still. "Well, um, hi. I'm Hannah. I'm the new manager of the Evergreen Christmas Museum. And who might you be?"

He'd walked past her again, seeming to ignore her question for a second time.

"I'm looking for Jenny and Josie Cooper," he said with a passing glance over his shoulder.

Still baffled by this whole exchange and now actually wishing the unfriendly man would just leave, Hannah shrugged. “Well, I haven’t seen them. Have you tried the farm?”

His response was a heavy sigh before he turned and walked out the door, leaving Hannah alone once again, and very confused.

“Merry Christmas,” she said with a wave to his retreating back.