

# Blossoming In Winter

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My Senior Year was ravaged by a battle so potent it was comparable to that of the Riders of Rohan riding to the world's ending to relieve a besieged Minas Tirith from the black forces of Mordor.

Then again, I'd be lying if I said that the Leaving was the only thing that occurred in my Senior Year. Ha...Oh, yes...Something even more important than the greatest memory test known to man happened in my final year of High School.

On a day bearing great similarity to a Serbian prison camp, I realised something...something that, even to this day, confounds me in even trying to explain and hurts to comprehend.

The day was ice cold. So cold, it bordered on the point of absolute zero. My school, however, appeared to be shattering all the laws of thermodynamics. The memory of the mucus freezing as it dribbled down from my nose in class that day, still rings in my memory like the events of that fateful afternoon.

After watching the clock slowly tick by from my classroom seat, I leaned forward to engage in a hushed conversation with my friend, Kin.

'Christ-sake...What's with this school?...Brr...Ten more minutes of this, Kin, and I swear I will reopen that indoor bonfire idea.'

'That would be unwise, Aya,' Kin murmured, his sleeves pulled up in their usual position around his elbows. How he survived in that ice-box, god only knows. Most likely it was the antifreeze-infused nanities coursing through his blood, or something.

'Why, I have matches!'

'Fine...Fine...Go ahead and burn the school down, but I'm not paying your bail.'

'Why not...I'm your best friend. If I say lick my feet, you drop on all fours and start licking.'

Kin sighed, facing forward as our teacher's eyes started wandering over to our hushed conversation. I, who had as much desire to listen to that old hag as drinking my own bile, nodded off against the window pane.

Once the witch had signed off, and Kin had kicked me awake, we started packing our frostbitten things. Kin ignored me, making a great deal of fixing up his bag, so I vented my anger at my jacket zip, which seemed to have frozen in place, midway up my navel. Our eyes met and the non-verbal message of, 'Wanna walk home together?' reached into our minds simultaneously. We both nodded in agreement and took to the hormone-infused hallway, walking onwards to the student exit.

Well, I jogged, to keep up with Kin's giant-sized footsteps. Unlike my five-foot, two-inch self, who was sparsely built for athletic purposes, Kin towered over me. His close-cut hair and the abundance of muscle from his neck down, cast a significant shadow over the grey-sweatered First Years.

The Irish Dragon and the Pocket Lioness. These were our nicknames. 'If only Kin could encase me in a wall of flame so I wouldn't experience cryopreservation every time I step into this place,' I thought, drawing my arms over my chest as the sudden chill outside hit me.

'How's judo?' I asked conversationally, trying to tear my mind away from just how cold I was.

'Fine.'

'Ok...How's the family?'

'Fine.'

'I'll just keep talking then, till it bugs the hell out of you.'

He looked at me through his black, beetle eyes. 'Fine by me.'

'AHH...Ha...Hmmp...You're no fun...Ahh, look at the courtyard. The council **sure** has been busy!'

We were out into the frosty courtyard. It sparkled and glimmered with the Student Council's noble but failed effort at Christmas decoration, the electronics having died the night before. But the tinsel and baubles, hanging from the sleeping cherry blossoms, glittered with a thin covering of silver ice that radiated a sort of eerie beauty.

'Mistletoe!' Kin grunted, nodding over towards a courtyard lamppost that was endowed with a floating bundle of the dreaded shrub and a murder of girls flocking beneath it.

'Man, I swear, if any guy ventures inside that orgy in the making, he ain't coming out.'

'Hmm...'

'Don't you even dare think about it,' I snap, kicking his tree-trunk-like leg. Pain instantly formed, causing me to start hopping about, gritting my teeth.

'I wasn't thinking about that.'

'Oh, **come on**...All boys think like that. It's a man's nature to be perverted.' I pulled at his red school blazer, trying and failing to uproot him. 'Man...Come **on**...I'm **hungry**. That's...more important than your sexual desires.'

He pivoted on his heels, almost like one of those androids out of Doctor Who...or my art teacher on a bad day. 'You've never had a problem with me eyeing-up girls before.'

'It's a new year's resolution and I'm starting early. **MOVE**.'

Sighing, he let me drag him along, his eyes wandering back now and again as we bisected the gap between the girls' football match and the hockey team's practice.

We crossed out of the cold prison freezer and, following a road lined with blue LED lights, we headed up Main Street. It was Christmas and I could already feel the sense of joy and uttermost wonder of the pagan festival erasing the negative vibes that school had been radiating on me.

'I should really start to study,' I thought, out loud, trying to evoke a response from my typically pseudo-alien friend. 'I'm **screwed** for the mocks. Screwed with a capital **SC**....'

'I see an A1 in English flying your way.'

'It's not my damned fault I'm in pass. This insane language and its nonsensical spelling and grammar is just **SO** infuriating....**Grr**...I **Hate** it.'

'Yeah..,' Kin stopped outside a café as I continued to lament my misfortunes. He turned when I'd hit the line.

‘And don't get me started on Maths...WHY...**WHY!**...did they need to replace numbers with letters? Wasn't ten enough? God damn you, Newton.’

‘If I buy you dinner would you keep quiet?’

I clench up mid-vowel, ‘..inner?’

‘Yes, as in the noun...a meal that is usually taken in the latter part of the day.’

‘I know what dinner is, idiot! But why? You've never offered it before.’

‘Heh,’ he reached out and rubbed the crown of my head, ruffling my long blonde hair. ‘It’s my new year’s resolution,’ and he forced open the heavy glass door with his iron-like foot.

The café's toasty aroma hit my nostrils like fireworks. I sucked in massive heap-fulls of smooth, coffee-filled air as we were directed towards a seat by the window and had menus placed in front of us. Kin ordered for us, mainly because I was taking forever to decide between a curry and a fish deal.

‘I was about to order,’ I pouted, pursing my lips and throwing my eyes skyward.

I glared around as Kin shrugged and adopted his usual cool, quiet stance, hands behind his head. The Café hummed with chatter. I recognised a few Juniors in a corner having the time of their lives, tucking into a platefuls of cheesy tacos. ‘How simplistic of them.’ Little did they know of the sheer torrent of work waiting for them just around the bend. ‘Well, I'm one to talk; never do anything in class but sleep and draw cartoons.’

I couldn't say that I'd been an enemy of school my whole life, though. Back in my home town, I had a blast in Middle School but... My move for the Leaving Cert was, well, looking like Italy during the war. Idiotic and ill-informed.

Kin, thankfully, had been there since I first stepped into that deep freezer in Fourth Year. Just by chance, Seth had placed Kin sitting in front of me, back on that wondrous first day and...well, you know...we clicked. <Heh!>

Funny...if it hadn't been for Kin and his quiet yet resolute support, I don't think I would've withstood that blizzard they call the Leaving...and for that I am grateful.

The waitress swooped back, seeming more like a blonde-haired, dumb fashion-model than anything. She gracefully placed Kin's coffee before him, while giving him a face full of her cleavage. She threw my coke in front of me, letting some of the black mixture spill over the lip of the glass, and pranced away looking very pleased with herself.

Snarling, I picked up my knife and aimed for the back of her head, but Kin quickly disarmed me and forced me back in my seat.

He slumped back and resumed his relaxed position with his hands behind his head again. 'You're definitely an interesting friend...willing to defend me from all chances of perversion. You'd think you were in love with me.'

'Ha!'

'... or you see me as a God. The latter would be preferable. '

That comment should have been enough for me to spear him with my fork. But as the thought dwelled in my head, something else came to mind, something contrastive to causing him sheer bodily harm.

Our curvy waitress arrived with our food while I was still in contemplation of my inaction. Kin nodded at her in dismissal, and watched her slump away, deprived of her the chance to commence flirting.

He picked up his spoon. 'There. Eat.'

'...'

'Aya...'

'Hmm...'

'I'm paying but you're going to have to have feed yourself.'

The low buzzing of the restaurant took over as we eye-balled each other in a tense stand-off.

'Aya! Eat!,' his deep gravelly voice broke out like a shotgun. For some reason, I blushed. Only slightly, mind, but still. My cold, brazen mask had slipped for just one accursed moment. 'Aya, are you blushing?'

'No...'

'You **are** sure?'

'Drink your coffee.'

Thirty minutes passed in which I ranted on about meaningless things. Kin inclined his head at the right intervals while maintaining a strained, interested demeanour. Kin, the tall muscular guy I called my friend. I wondered if it could ever work. I'd dated in the past and never liked it that much, always having guys hanging over the phone, saying you're everything and promising the world when all they cared about was their carrot in my shopping basket, to put it delicately.

'Does he love me or have I already warmed to him in such a way that he sees me like a sister and that dating would just be too weird?' I wondered. <Sigh> 'God knows.' I was a hard person to love, I knew that. Boys tended to treat me like a lioness, a beauty to date but a vengeful goddess to piss-off.

'Oh....' Kin grunts.

'What's wrong?' I jumped, a ruby-red glow beginning to dance around my ears

'Hmm...oh. It's snowing.'

He was right. Even in that backwards coastal town it was snowing. It was falling in great spiralling sheets. I watched the people outside being mystified by this unknown force.

'They're saying 2011 is going to be a bad year,' Kin grumbled.

'Oh...Do you hate snow then?'

'No.' He chuckled as he grinned at me. 'But you do.'

When does a friend become a friend? To be honest with you, I can't remember the first time I met Kin, the first time we spoke, the first time I complained about the heating in the school. It's strange how things suddenly just appear in your life, like snow on a brisk Irish day. It seems so insignificant and fragile, snow, but given time it builds until it transforms a country into a crystallised wonderland.

Maybe some things take time. Maybe life doesn't have fixed points of definite change, but rather moments when you look at yourself and say, 'Holy crap...how did that happen?'

The walk home was, yes, cold. I shivered as the night gathered darkness. I chanced a glance at Kin who seemed to be oblivious to the snow building on his hatless head, his figure composed and relaxed as it always was and always would be. I

could say it now,' I thought, but I could feel the call of cliché floating in the wind, and I let the moment pass.

Kin once said that only at the apex do we change; but how can we change when we can't perceive the point of transfiguration? I have no idea when these feelings for Kin flowered or why they grew at all. All I know is that my love blossomed that winter. That's when it finally emerged from the earth. But could it have been that it was there all along, hidden under the cold, cold snow?