



Dear Desmond (Love Letters 4)

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Category: Romance, War

Description: Love by accident...

Dear North,

I don't know what I expected.

This wasn't it.

You weren't it.

And yet, you're everything.

Dear Desmond,

I was so alone, until your letter.

Your compassion gave me life.

Your love is my everything.

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For you.

Loneliness is what happens when you put your life on hold. When you choose to be something bigger than yourself.

Loneliness is what happens when you watch your friends, your commanders, find the girl of their dreams.

Loneliness is not knowing if you'll make it home, and if you do, will someone be waiting for you.

As of right now, I have no one. Nothing.

An empty condo on the fifth floor of a small downtown block in Kitsap, Washington. Growing up in Seattle, it wasn't a stretch for me to join the Navy. With no family and few friends, the decision had been easy.

Now, ten years later, I wish I'd taken the time to form some type of relationship with other people outside of Navy life. Witnessing Maverick—one of my best friends—find the love of his life, preceded by our former Captain and Lieutenant, I can admit I'm jealous of their luck.

Mav suggested getting my own pen pal.

So I have.

The person's name is North Williams. He or she—we don't get told gender—is

nineteen and part of a rehab program in Everett that matches troubled youth with a good influence.

Yeah, I laughed at that one too.

Growing up in foster care, I wasn't the best role model. Thankfully, I managed to do something with my life before I became another statistic.

I look forward to helping someone redirect their attention. It'll pass the time until I find my special girl.

This is a joke. It has to be.

There's no way this can be my life.

My father, a county judge, decided that because I crashed my car four months ago, I needed help. I was a wayward youth in his words. I wasn't drunk; I don't do drugs. For god's sake, I was trying to miss hitting a stray cat! Wound up in a ditch on the wrong side of the road, and because I had one too many energy drinks after a full night of studying, my pupils were kind of dilated.

Cops automatically assumed drugs or alcohol.

My father—mister-know-it-fucking-all—didn't bother to do a blood test like I begged. He just popped me in front of the bench, all official-like, and demanded I attend rehab.

Dumb, right?

This facility is for kids—the under eighteen kind. The ones who need help. Some of these children are six ways to Sunday fucked up and could use the attention I'm

getting because I'm my father's daughter.

"Miss Williams!" The head counselor, Jamie, calls as she walks into the group therapy room. "You have a letter." Her grin scares me. She's too damn happy for this somber place.

"Uh, thanks?" I don't have anyone who would write to me. Email or text, sure, but not put words to paper.

Accepting the envelope from the woman, I go sit in the corner, scowling when I see they've already opened it. Likely to make sure there's no contraband or anything else incriminating. Annoyed, I read.

Dear North,

I realize this might be weird to you, receiving a letter from a stranger. My name is Officer Desmond Rowe of the United States Navy. I've signed on to write letters to at-risk youth and was given your name.

I don't know anything about you other than your name and age, so I thought I'd tell you a bit about me first off.

I'm 28 years old, from Seattle, Washington, and I live in Kitsap now. I've been in the Navy since the day I turned 18. I grew up in foster care, bouncing from home to home because I had a bad temper and nasty attitude. (So says my shitty social worker.)

I travel all over the world for the military and am currently stationed at a Naval base in Spain as overwatch to another base before I'm sent home again.

When I am home, I tend to train more. I don't have much of a life; at least not many

people I care to spend a decent amount of time with. I run a lot, fish, hike when I have the time.

Not sure what else to tell you. I'm a pretty open book if you do want to know anything.

Sincerely,

Des

I say again... How is this my life?

Letters from soldiers now?

I'm not really complaining. He sounds like a decent guy. A little bored maybe. But why would he write some snot-nosed kid with a bad attitude? His time is precious. These punks don't deserve it to be wasted on them.

Hell, neither do I.

Des,

You sound like a rock star with that name.

Tell me something. I respect your position, the job that you do, but why are you wasting precious time on punk-ass kids with no value for life?

These assholes have no idea what they're doing with their lives and thrive on making everyone around here miserable.

The hissy fits! The throwdowns over stupid shit like TV time or rec time is

ridiculous. I ain't perfect, never claimed to be, but some of the peo

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ple here put my worst days to shame.

No lie, one guy thought beating his mom because she took away his Xbox was a good idea. The laughable judge who thought this place was where he belonged should be disbarred.

Fishing—gag!

Hiking—next, please!

Running sounds like a lot of work, too.

Guess I sound like one of these spoiled little pricks, too, huh?

My fault was trying to miss hitting a cat and swerving into a ditch after having one too many energy drinks. In hindsight, I did sound desperate when I begged my father—the asshole judge who decided I needed to be punished—to do a drug test. I wanted to prove he was wrong.

He never believes me, which kind of sucks, ‘cause I used to admire everything about him. He was righteous but had dignity. Now, he’s fat and old and lost his power for the cause.

Reading this over, I guess I just might be one of these bitter assholes after all, who knew?

Peace,

North

I don't know whether to laugh or scratch my head. I was hoping I'd have some idea of whether North is a guy or a girl; I don't. The swearing says guy, the printing could go either way, but the admiration for their father could be girl.

Christ, who knew this was going to turn into some sort of algebraic equation? It doesn't really matter, I guess. But it might help me with figuring out the best way to help this kid.

I always thought that when I joined the Navy, I'd be on a ship. Out at sea, but as overwatch from my position in Spain, I help cover landfall for imported goods in a small middle eastern country barely on the map, but highly volatile when it comes to outsider help.

I wonder if telling North about my travels with the Navy, would possibly inspire them to do something good with their life. Become more than another lonely kid looking for attention?

North,

I don't know what it is you like to do. Obviously, anything too strenuous is out of the question. And so, I thought you might like to hear about some of my travels, at least?

After I finished training and qualifications, I was assigned to my first unit and sent to Malaysia nearly eight years ago. I enjoyed it. The peacekeeping work we did was interesting. Experiencing how a lesser advantaged country lives was a humbling experience.

I didn't see a lot of war and fighting back then. It was mostly helping with relief efforts after a typhoon worked its way through the island. There was a smaller

landmass close to it that was left untouched—Christmas Island.

Sounds unreal, right?

It is.

It's mostly a tourist thing with its national park covering the majority of it. I was told there was great snorkeling on the reef, as well.

If I could go anywhere in my life, I think it'd be there.

I've been to nearly every continent in the world now for one reason or another. I enjoy it, but I'd like to be a training officer even better. Helping men and women prepare for battle is nearly as hard as the battle itself.

I don't think I'm wasting my time with you. Right now, I've got nothing but time. Have you travelled? Anywhere you'd like to go?

Thanksgiving is coming up next week, are you allowed to go home, or do you guys have to suffer without family?

Talk soon,

Des

This guy sounds pretty genuine. Like he actually cares about people. He can't possibly be real, could he? Men like that don't exist. Not in my world.

A place called Christmas Island? I'm going to have to look it up because it seems ridiculous. Especially in Malaysia. Isn't it too warm for Santa down there?

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Thanksgiving...

Christmas...

Holidays...

Home?

No thanks. Not anymore. Mom left when I was little and Dad...? Well, I think he hates me now. I was no blessing as a child, and when I didn't get accepted to the college he wanted me going to...? I haven't mattered much to him unless I get into trouble.

So, really, what's the point of even acknowledging the holidays when all they do is bring me down?

I kind of understand why there is so much crime this time of year now. People wanting attention, greed, or shelter. I get it now.

Sadly.

Sometimes my work is tedious, boring. Seemingly inconsequential. Until I get that one sighting. Notice something others shouldn't. Rebels coming upon a shipped container of vaccines. Whether they plan to steal or destroy remains to be seen.

I don't give them a chance, however.

“Overwatch to Base, come in,” I call into the CB mic sitting alongside me.

“Overwatch, this is Base. Go ahead,” the base commander reports back.

Static crackles the line as I answer. “Two trucks with eight heat sources coming your way hot and heavy.”

“How long?” The man never screws around.

“Ten minutes max. Not looking heavily armed. Watch your six.”

“Roger that, Overwatch.”

Like I said, seemingly inconsequential. But that two-minute call is about to save dozens of lives. Fascinated, I watch through my satellite feed as both vehicles stop and begin shooting. Snipers from the base have them taken out before they can even approach the premises, and I know by morning, the vaccines and other supplies will be gone. Hidden from further attack like they were never there.

“Got it covered, Overwatch,” crackles through the line again, full of triumph.

“Nice work, Base.”

The rest of my night is quiet, and I find myself thinking of North. If he or she is stuck in that shithole center over the long weekend or not.

I don’t know what it is, but I feel like we’ve connected in some way. Even though we’ve only exchanged a couple of letters, they’ve been deeply personal in many ways.

“Hey, Des!” the base mail carrier calls out. “Got a letter!” He tosses it on my desk

and walks away, hollering more names as he goes.

It doesn't take me long to rip open the envelope, knowing who it's from.

Dear Des,

I looked up your Christmas Island; it looks tight. Misleading as hell but cool. How long are your tours typically? I tried to look it up online, but the answer varied, which makes sense but also kind of sucks.

What I like to do? Well, I enjoy painting. Oil, watercolor, pastels. I recently tried out hot wax as a paint, and it came out interesting enough. I'd like to explore it a bit more, I think.

Don't you have family at home missing you? Girlfriend? Kids? Friends? How do you handle it? I know the movies and TV say all this military stuff—you grow bonds, your comrades become your brothers and sisters. But it must get lonely.

It sounds like it does.

I've always been a loner, but I like being around people. Whether it's watching or sometimes interacting doesn't matter too much. It's the noise I like. The movement.

I used to sit in the food court at the mall while doing homework and catching up on overdue assignments and observe for hours. Not one person was ever the same.

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Being here? Locked up like some common criminal? It's horrible. I can honestly say, for the first time ever, I think I hate my dad.

I hate him for pushing my mom away.

I hate him for treating me like a burden.

I hate him for never seeing me as more than some little girl with pigtails.

I hate him.

I hate him.

I hate him.

Except...

I don't.

I should. And he would deserve it. I don't deserve to be here. I'm not some irresponsible, spoiled little girl looking to make my way in life off of Daddy's dime. I have goals and dreams, and he ruined them.

I should hate him.

I wish I could.

Sorry for being melodramatic. It's been a dreadful day. I didn't go home for Thanksgiving. I hadn't planned to but then changed my mind at the last minute and called him. I asked if I could.

He refused. Told me I was an emb

arrassment to his name. That I'd ruined his legacy. I didn't deserve to come home when I was so troubled.

I should hate him, Desmond...

So why can't I?

.....

North

Fuck. She's breaking my heart. I can practically feel her pain washing off the pages with each word I read. Her heartbreak is magnified, showcasing her feelings of unwanted and rejection by her father.

I'd like to punch the dickhead in the face at the moment. Making her feel anything less than cherished is unacceptable. He doesn't deserve her.

Crumpling the envelope that North's letter came in, I stop when I feel a slight resistance. Opening it, I see a small square of photo paper. Words on the back read: this is me, real, raw, unrelenting.

I flip it over, and it's a punch to gut. Dark hair falls to one side of a perfectly round face with plump, full lips. Her eyes are a perfect almond shape projecting a rich green hue. And sadness. I can see her tears clear as day in the photo. She looks like

someone kicked her puppy down the drain.

The most shocking revelation is the immediate attraction I feel towards her. To her words. Now I understand why I've been feeling so connected to her.

She's meant to be mine.

Biting my nails, I ask Jamie again, "You're sure I'm free to go? I don't have to stay any longer?"

"Sweetheart, the order was very clear, North Williams is free to go. No criminal record has been established since you were never formally charged. The keys are for an apartment in downtown Kitsap. Cash is in the envelope." I hated how much Jamie had smiled when we first met, I truly did. Now, it feels like sunshine on this horribly rainy day.

I have to choke back the tears threatening to consume me. No one has ever done anything nice for me, and I don't even know who my benefactor is. I was supposed to be here for a year, but after just over five months, I'm leaving, and I can breathe again.

"Go, North." Jamie pushes the envelope at me as well as a cell phone and keys to an apartment.

I haven't spent much time in Kitsap, but I'm excited as the Uber driver cruises through the city, and the stars shine brightly in the night sky. After weaving through traffic lights and two accidents, he parks in front of a beautiful building.

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Grabbing my bags from the trunk, I stand in awe of this tower. I don't even think it would be considered an apartment building. It has to be condos. I can't possibly live here.

A cool breeze billows up my jacket and reminds me it's the middle of winter, and Christmas is in a few weeks.

I guess I have no choice.

Approaching the front door, I'm startled when a man opens it for me. "Evening, Miss Williams." I stop mid-step as my name leaves his mouth.

"How do you know my name?" Did I somehow wind up in 50 Shades or something?

"Mr. Rowe has asked me to help you get settled." He waves his arm out in front of him for me to precede him.

"Mr. Rowe?" It takes a minute before it clicks. "You mean Desmond?" He nods. Kitsap—of course, it was Des. "He did all this?" Why would he do this? What else did he do? Crap.

"Yes, ma'am. If you'd please..." His arm directs me again.

Doing as I'm asked, I follow the bellman—Is that what they're called?—to the elevator where he uses a key to turn it on. As it ascends, he hands me another one with instructions on how I only need to use it to go up but not down.

We stop on the fifth floor, and he does the arm wave for a third time. He halts in front of door 535 and says, “This is you, Miss Williams,” and hands me the apartment key and an envelope. “Make yourself at home. The fridge and pantries are stocked. Phone and cable are hooked up; there are no passwords on the computer.” He’s gone before I can ask anything else.

“Here goes nothing,” I mutter, unlocking the door.

The apartment is spacious with an open floor plan. I can see into the modern living room and down the hall from the door. The kitchen is only cut off by a breakfast bar with four stools. Large windows showcase the city in all its winter glory. Snow is falling so that it looks like I’m in one of those snow globes where you shake it and white dust falls around.

Crossing the threshold, I leave my suitcase by the door and take off my coat, hanging it on the coat tree beside it. Remembering the envelope I was handed, I open it as I meander into the kitchen, opening and closing cupboards as I unfold the paper.

North,

I know what you’re likely going to start thinking in a minute or two, and I want you to cut that shit out. Now! You were handed a raw deal without due cause, and this is my way of righting it. Even if it wasn’t my wrong. After reading your last letter, I couldn’t sit by and do nothing. I hope you can understand that.

You’re special, North, and it pisses me off that your father doesn’t recognize it. I intend to make up for it. I like you, baby, a lot. My home is now your home. Explore, look around. Nothing is off limits to you.

I imagine this must be sudden for you; it is for me, too. I’m hoping to be home in time for Christmas. We can talk more then, though I’d love for you to still write to

me.

While I'll be happy if you're there when I come home, I'll understand if you're not.

Yours,

Des

P.S. You have beautiful eyes. I can see right into the heart of you.

Fucking tears.

Fucking Desmond.

Why's he gotta be so kind? Sweet. Affectionate. He doesn't know me, dammit!
Reaching for my suitcase, I'm tempted to leave. I should leave.

But where would I go?

I can't go back to the rehab center.

I can't go home.

Looking around me, I really see the apartment for what it is.

A safe haven.

Desmond gave me something I never thought I'd have again.

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A home.

Desmond,

I'm at a loss for words.

I'm sitting here, tears streaming down my face at your generosity, your thoughtfulness. I mean, who does this?

Desmond...

Your picture, those knowing eyes, all that thick hair I want to run my fingers through. You look mysterious and heroic all at once. I don't know whether to hide from you or kiss you. You look like the kind of man a girl could cuddle with in front of the fireplace. The kind a girl could get used to having around.

I wish I were good enough to be that girl.

I wish I were good enough for all that you've given me.

The truth is, I don't deserve any of it. I've been nothing but a rotten little shit for years. I don't blame my father for my mistakes. The good thing about being isolated for 5 months is, I had a lot of time to reflect.

I'm bitter, I'm angry, I'm an emotional mess right now, and with Christmas around the corner, it feels like everything is attempting to box me in. Making me claustrophobic in a way I'm not used to.

I've spent the past 3 nights sleeping in your bed, and I have to say, I like it. It smells the way I imagine you do—woodsy with a hint of wild inhibition. I'm not complaining. It's been a while since I've felt comforted in my sleep.

So, thank you, Des.

I know that you said to make myself comfortable. Explore. Do whatever I feel like. Though, I doubt you meant to set up camp in your room and steal your soft baggy shirts. But I've done all of that. I'd say I'm sorry, but I'm not.

Last night, I dreamed you came home and held me all night. I was disappointed when I awoke to find myself alone.

We don't know each other well, but I'd like that to change. You were right when you said there was a connection between us. I want to explore that.

Yours,

North

P.S. I hope you like these pictures as well.

North, in my bed, hiding behind the blanket. Her eyes are full of life. Unlike the first photo I saw of her. The next, she's laying in my shirt on the couch sprawled out and almost melting into the oversized cushions.

The last one... Damn. She's standing in the master suite bathroom in nothing but a towel and a look of awe on her face.

The one thing that remains the same in each picture, though? Her smile. Full of life and a sense of peace I felt was missing from her words.

I know I did the right thing by calling my former captain. I wasn't sure, at first; I honestly thought she would rebuff me and tell me to get lost.

Only two days until Christmas, and I'm sure North thinks I won't make it. I'm one flight and a quick stop away from being home. Away from holding her in my arms.

I don't know what...if...we'll have any chemistry when I get there, but I'm willing to try if she is.

She thinks she's unworthy. That she doesn't deserve all the happiness in the world. I aim to show her just how much she should be demanding from her man.

From me.

North may be young in years, but she's wise in heart. A pure heart full of so much love and understanding that I don't think she knows exactly what she's capable of.

Just one more flight, Des.

Snow is falling, piling up like bricks outside, and the poor bellman in the lobby is doing his very best to have an incredible tree from a farm delivered to me. When I left to go shopping for a few decorations yesterday, he suggested I wait on a tree. That he would have one brought to me.

By the time I got home, he had a picture of a beautiful Blue Spruce that stole my breath. I'm not too embarrassed to admit that I had a tear in my eye and let out an incredibly girlish squeal. Within five minutes, he'd been on the phone and bought it for me.

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Now, I'm waiting w

ith baited breath for it to come.

I don't know if Desmond is coming home. I realize it's likely too late for his next letter to arrive before mail delivery today, so I won't know until I wake up alone on Christmas morning. Just in case, I bought him a couple gifts while I was out. I hope he likes at least one.

Since being here for nearly three weeks, I've learned quite a bit about him. He has a love for fighter jets. The ones you can build and paint, and hang on the roof or display on a shelf. He has, at least, a dozen around his apartment. One I didn't see was an older model Storm Bird. By the skin of my teeth, I was able to find one in a hobby shop, alongside a World War II battleship.

"Oh my damn!" I gasp as I see a large pickup truck slowly making its way down the road with my tree strapped to the bed and cascading over the roof.

It's...everything.

Sinfully gorgeous.

Slipping into my runners, I make quick work of jumping in the elevator and heading for the lobby. As soon as the doors open on the main floor, my heart stops as I watch the two men carrying it through the doors.

"Well, Miss Williams, what do you think?" Andy, the doorman/security guard/my

hero, asks, and I just can't form words.

The colors, the beauty, the sheer size of it is overwhelming.

"It's wonderful," I finally whisper.

"Let's get her up there, then." The man who brought it from the tree farm smiles as they walk closer.

Leading them up the elevator and into Desmond's large living room, they place the exquisite tree in front of the window I'd been staring out of earlier. Once it's settled, they leave, and the quiet surrounds me again.

Admiring the beast of a spruce before me, I smile into the night. I've always loved watching the snow fall. Enjoyed it more when it was enveloped in silence. Tonight, though, anticipation fills me. I'm excited about Christmas tomorrow. Even if Des won't be here, I'm still happy.

Pulling out the decorations I'd found in a thrift store, this tree is going to shine with the most mismatched ornaments in the city.

I found white and pink lights that I drape the branches with first, followed by bright green and red garland in a messy array. Next are the cute handmade elves with letters on each of them, and I imagine they were made for a family. I found the cutest set of snowman globes I plan to put on the mantel over the fireplace, too.

After spraying the fake snow on a few branches, the tree is finished, and I love how it looks. Soft, elegant, not cluttered but full of life. My mother used to muddle up the tree with an overabundance of ornaments. She was always so happy while doing it, so no one complained, but I always thought it was over the top.

All that's left to do is hang the stockings and put the small treats I found at the grocery store in them and then wrap the few presents I bought. Grabbing the red and green paper with reindeer on it, I begin cutting and taping. Three paper cuts later, a balled-up roll that refused to be folded, and Desmond's presents are under the tree.

Satisfied, I yawn as I note the late hour. With one last look out the window, I say a quick prayer for Des as I head to bed. Even knowing he's not in battle, I appreciate the danger is still there, and I worry constantly.

Surrounding myself in his bed after stealing another of his shirts, I dream of my soldier. Of all that I want us to be when he returns.

I dream of the strength in which he'll hold me while I sleep. Of the way he'll protect me from the outside world when I feel my worst.

I dream of a love so grand it steals my breath.

Three a.m. and the snow is only now beginning to slow its descent as I approach my condo building. Andy—I swear the man never sleeps—holds open the door for me. “Officer Rowe, glad to have you home again.”

“Thank you, Andy. Is she still here?” My weary stare strays to the elevator. The last obstacle before I have North in my arms for the first time.

“Yes, sir. She hardly leaves.”

I look to him then. “Hardly? It has been nearly a month.”

“She went shopping a couple times, had a big ol' tree brought in tonight. Though, that was more my doing than hers. But she doesn't leave too often.”

Interesting. I figured she was a bit of a loner from her letters, but I thought here she would get out some. Explore the city. “Merry Christmas, Andy.”

“You as well, sir.”

I can hardly stand still as the elevator ascends the few floors to my condo. Once the ding announces the arrival, I’m off and through the door in seconds. The fresh smell of pine and cinnamon greets me as I put my bags down and lock the front door once again.

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The city lights shine in the big window, highlighting the tree North had brought up and decorated, as well as the stockings on the mantel. My girl went all out for us, even not knowing if I would be home in time.

Reaching into my pack, I grab the presents I got for her and place them under the tree, anticipating her surprise when she opens them.

Quietly walking down the hall towards the master bedroom, I'm not shocked to find North curled up in the middle of the bed. She has the blankets piled so high it looks like a small mountain. Walking towards the dresser, I take my clothes off and toss them in the hamper. Upon opening the second drawer where my t-shirts normally are, I'm not shocked to find the drawer empty.

Shaking my head with a smile on my face, I go one drawer down and slip on a pair of basketball shorts and undershirt. Dressed, I go back to my bed. One I'd saved for over a year to purchase. I may have to sleep on the ground half the time, or on a hard cot, but when I'm home, I want comfort. This mattress brings all of that, and so I understand her desire to sleep in it.

Nerves cause me to stall when it comes time to draw back the blankets. What if she doesn't want me in here? What if we don't click the way I desire us to?

Nothing earned, is nothing gained, I guess.

Sliding in behind North, her warmth sucks me into her body like a forcefield. Immediately, I can feel my body succumbing to her tantalizing curves. Without thought or permission, my arms wrap her body against mine.

Her hips fit perfectly into mine, and her legs tangle with me as she settles down. “North,” I breathe into her ear, “Merry Christmas.”

“Desmond?” she sighs and turns.

“Yeah, baby. I’m here.”

“I knew you would come.” She buries her face in the crook of my neck and is out cold within seconds.

“I’ll always come,” I promise into her hair as I breathe in her scent. My shampoo and body wash smell better on her than it does on me.

I don’t sleep, I only hold North, enjoying the feel of her in my arms. Savoring the sensation of a woman’s softness against me for the first time in more years than I care to admit.

North is everything. So quickly she went from troubled kid to friend, to a woman I can’t see my life without.

I don’t know how or even when it happened, but my heart has started to claim her as its own. It’s not quite love, but something close to it. More than lust. A deep need for companionship with the right person.

North is that person.

The sun rising with a fresh fall of snow has North stretching in my arms. Her ass pressing against my groin has my morning wood growing at a rapid pace.

She freezes, and I wait painfully for her reaction. “You’re really here?” she whispers so quietly I almost miss her words.

Kissing the back of her neck, I say, “I’m really here,” just as quietly.

Her hand reaches back and grazes along my chest, up my neck, and to my face. Her nails in my beard are sinful. “You have a beard,” she murmurs, turning in my arms. “You don’t in any of the pictures.”

“Came home and crawled right in with you. Didn’t feel like shaving.” I nuzzle her hand, loving the feel of her exploring my face.

“I like it. A lot.” She watches me as we lay quietly in the morning light. “I missed you,” she finally confesses. “It’s ri

diculous and corny, but I missed your words.”

“Oh yeah?” I chuckle when a blush hits her cheeks as she nods. “I missed yours, too.”

“I got something for you.” Her excitement is contagious, and in this moment, I see the teenager in her. The one who hasn’t gotten to break free very often as she drags me from the bed and into the living room. “Sit.” She pushes me onto the couch. The same one she took pictures on, and I can’t help fantasizing about what else we could get up to. “Here.” She pushes two gifts into my lap.

Seeing her excitement, I unwrap the larger one first. Shocked, I look from her to the battleship and back again. “Where did you find this?” It’s one I’d been searching for.

“That hobby shop over on First Street. They had just gotten new stock of everything in.”

“How’d you know?”

“You told me to look around, explore, make myself at home. So, I did. I also found

all your models and thought this would be great.” Her grin is wide, self-satisfied. “You do enjoy building them, right?”

“Hell yeah, I do.” I look at North intently. The light in her eyes, the passion in her smile. This, giving me something I like, pleases her. “Sit.” I point to the spot next to me. As she does, I get up and grab her gifts. “It’s nothing fancy.” I shrug as she takes them.

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“Thank you.” Her whispered words are full of amazement, making me wonder, once again, what the hell is wrong with her father.

“Desmond,” she gasps as she opens the first box. “This is stunning.” Carefully pulling out the hot wax paint set I’d found, her face is full of more life than I’ve ever seen on anyone. “I can’t believe you remembered.”

“Of course, I did. I remember everything about you, North,” I tell her sincerely.

Placing everything to the side, she crawls into my lap. Her gentle touch on my neck as her stare meets mine is full of such emotion. “This was incredibly thoughtful,” she murmurs, leaning forward and kissing me lightly.

That small touch isn’t enough, though. Not for me. And if her blush is anything to go by, not for her, either. “Come here,” I demand and pull her in closer. The first touch of our lips is soft, slow. A buildup of what we both crave.

“You’re here.” She breathes in deeply, savoring my presence.

North

Despite where I am, and how I got here, I was somewhat afraid that Desmond was a dream. A figment I made up to keep me sane. I had been terrified of waking up this morning and him not being here.

I don’t want to be lonely anymore. I want the promise of what we could be, and after the light touch of our lips, I feel like it’s within my grasp. Just moments before

becoming a reality.

“I’m here, baby.” His soft words wash over me like a waterfall. Beautiful in their intensity.

“When do you leave again?” We never got too into specifics about what he does, and how often he leaves. I regret not preparing for that now.

“I have six weeks of leave.”

“Six weeks,” I repeat. My heart both cramps and sings with happiness. “Can I stay? Here...with you?” Asking that, it goes against everything I am.

“I’d be pissed if you left, North.” My eyes stray to his. The conviction in his gaze and tone make me smile. He wants me.

“I don’t want to leave.” I rub my cheek against his beard, loving the smooth hairs. Nuzzling in his arms far surpasses anything I’d dreamt of.

“Did you have plans today?”

“No.”

“Ever been ice skating?”

His excitement is infectious. “Of course. But not since I was a little girl.”

“Get dressed. We’re going to Bainbridge Island to skate. Then we’ll go look at lights and come back for hot chocolate and whatever else you want.”

“Christmas movies?”

“Works for me.”

Rushing to get dressed, I marvel at how quickly my life has changed in just a few short weeks. All because a man who cared about a perfect stranger wrote me.

“When I first got your letter,” I begin to say as I join Des in the living room, “I was going to throw it out.”

“Oh yeah?” He stands taller, like he’s waiting on bad news.

“I’m really glad I didn’t.” More than I could ever express to him.

Des walks closer to me, his hands immediately running through my hair to hold my head. Leaning forward, he murmurs, “So am I,” just as our lips touch again. This time it’s deeper, harder. There’s more than gratitude and thanks in it.

There’s lust. Need. Want.

There’s everything we feel but haven’t spoken yet.

My body wakes up for him, screaming for him to take control. I want this, us, Desmond. Everything it will entail and so much more.

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Gasping when he nips my lip, I moan as his tongue slides inside my mouth, tangling with my own. He doesn't hesitate to press our bodies together intimately. Pushing his hardness into my stomach, a shiver works its way through my whole being, and I shake in his arms.

Des deepens the kiss, and I'm breathless. Panting, wanting more.

"Wow." I inhale as he pulls back.

"Yeah." He leans his head forward against mine as we calm our breathing down. "Now imagine what it'll be like when I have you under me."

Holy smokes.

I already can.

Ice skating was amazing. It became a game of cat and mouse between us. Desmond chased me around the rink, stealing kisses and sweet touches each time. He thrilled in making me squeal and breaking out in red from embarrassment when his kisses would linger too long for the young audience surrounding us.

We didn't get to drive around looking at the lights like we'd wanted. A huge snow storm came raging through as we were leaving the ice rink. While slightly disappointed about that, I'm happy to be alone with Des now. Cuddling on his couch watching old Christmas movies and simply enjoying each other.

His fingers keep roaming across my neck and down my arm as the sun slowly sets on

the horizon. With each passing minute, I worry about sleeping arrangements. I readily admit, slumbering in his arms has been the highlight of my life. I'm just not sure I'm ready for that next step between us.

I've had sex before; I'm no shrinking violet. But it's always been with someone I've known for a while. I never just dove right into it. I require a deep emotional connection.

The hours pass, we eat dinner, watch more movies, and when midnight rings in, I feel myself being pulled into sleep. When Desmond moves to stand, I startle and nearly fall off the couch. "I got you." And he does indeed. Picking me up, Des walks to his bedroom, and my body noticeably freezes.

"Just sleep, North." He assures with a kiss on my neck.

I love the feel of his lips on my skin. Anywhere I can get him, I'll take it.

"It's not that I don't want to."

"I know." And he sounds like he does.

Sleep claims me quickly as Des holds me through the night, and I suddenly wish for clarification about my feelings for him and his for me.

I wish I knew more...

Desmond

Spending the day with North, having her at my side as my woman, made the waiting worth it. She may not be comfortable with being intimate now, but when she is, that's when I'll know she loves me, and that is more precious than anything else.

North thinks I kept playing with her at the rink, chasing her around to steal light kisses. I wasn't playing. I saw the looks she kept getting from some of the guys there, even the ones with their own girls. I needed to stamp my claim on North. She is mine, and people needed to see it.

She has a carefree spirit that surrounds her. It's addicting as hell, and I knew that if I saw it, others would as well. Watching her smile, hearing her laugh, was just icing on the cake.

When we got home and she cuddled into me like we'd done it a million times, I knew I wasn't alone in my feelings. I couldn't get enough of touching her, feeling her soft flesh against my own. Like an addict, I want so much more.

Good things come to those who wait.

The mantra I've been repeating in my head for hours now as she once again pushes her ass back into my hard dick while she sleeps. Her light moans haven't been helping either. Checking the clock, I see it's after five a.m. and decide I need to get up and do something with this hard-on before it gets me into trouble with North.

"Don't leave," she moans as I pull away.

Kissing her forehead lightly, I say, "Just going to shower." She rolls back over.

Not turning any lights on, I head to said shower and set the spray. Stepping into the cascade of warmth, I close my eyes and grab the body wash. Soaping my hands, I run them along my body, slowing down when I reach the ache between my thighs. Gripping the swollen member, I stroke lightly, squeezing with each pass.

My head falls back as a familiar pleasure envelops me. One I wish I could share with the woman in my room. Strong, steady strokes evoke pictures of North in here with

me, watching, waiting for each drop of pre-cum as it drips through the small hole and leaks onto my hand.

A cool breeze hits my back, followed by warm hands, and a small bite on my shoulder blade. Turning into the arms of the woman I'd been fantasizing about, I watch with passion as she wraps her own hand around my dick. With the same grip I once held, she strokes me to a too quick release and sighs into my chest as her arms envelop me.

“North?” I question once I've got my bearings again.

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“I think”—she kisses my nipple—“I’ve been falling in love with you a little more with each letter. I could love you bigger than the stars, higher than the sun.” My arms circle her as she talks. “I don’t want to be one of those people who had everything they wanted right in front of them but were too chicken to take it.”

“Neither do I.” I lift her chin, so she looks at me. “I want you, North. Have since that first picture and your broken words. I’ve f

elt a connection with you from the start. I don’t want you having regrets, however.”

“The only regret I’ll ever have is not keeping you in my life, Desmond.” Her smile is the only confirmation I need.

“Back at you, babe,” I mutter into her mouth. “Back at you.”

New Year’s Eve

One year later.

“Officer Rowe!” I hear my name being called, and I’m fucking pissed. My video call to North was cut short a few hours ago, and I haven’t been able to get ahold of her since then.

“What?” I snap at the officer calling for me as I leave my office. I’m back in Spain again as overwatch for another mission in Serbia, and I’d rather be almost anywhere else in the fucking world. Namely in my new wife’s bed, keeping her warm on what I’m sure is a cold damn night.

“Got a package for you.” He whistles as he leaves the break room. The door closes behind me as I enter, and before I can protest, the passage to the bathroom bursts open, and there she is.

“North?” She isn’t supposed to be here for two more weeks.

Wiping her mouth, she walks closer and kisses my cheek. “Sorry, I wanted this to be a lot sexier, but well, it’s positive!” She whips out a stick and practically shoves it in my face.

“You’re pregnant?” I’m thrilled and terrified all at once. “We’re having a baby?”

Her radiant smile says it all. “We are!” Her scream is followed by cheers outside of our door.

“Should you be flying? What did the doctor say?” I want to be excited, but she had to have taken at least three flights to get here.

“Breathe, Desmond. Everything’s fine. I’m only eight weeks along, and the doctor says I can fly until the third trimester.”

Eight weeks? That means...“Halloween?” She’d flown out to see me because my tour was extended.

“Yes.” Her beaming smile is radiant.

“Thank you!” I pull her body into my arms, hugging her tight against me, needing to feel her erratic heart beat in tune with mine. “Bigger than the stars.” I tell her. It’d become our way of saying I love you.

“Higher than the sun.” She leans in to kiss me lightly. “Can we leave now?” she

whispers into my neck. “Steele said you were done for the day; he’d take over.”

“Yeah, baby, we can go now.” I’m sure my grin is lecherous as we leave to celebrate.

Thanksgiving

Two years later.

“Desmond!” I giggle. “Wait a hot minute, would you!” He’s advancing further on me. Our son, Jackson, is with my father for the weekend, and we finally have time to ourselves. After a year of not speaking to me, my father made contact, and we were able to reconcile our relationship, and he’s proven to be a wonderful grandfather to our son.

“Get your ass over here, North,” Des growls. His beard, longer and thicker than the first time we met, makes his animalistic demands seem that much more ominous. I’ll never admit to him how much I love it.

“You’ve gotta work for it.” I wink and run down the hallway of our little bungalow house. His heavy footsteps follow, and I feel his hand brush through my hair as I jump on our bed.

“Got you now,” Des groans into my back as his body towers over mine.

“You always have,” I whisper, looking back to him.

Spinning me onto my back, he opens my robe to reveal my nude body. “You’ve been a bad girl, Mrs. Rowe.”

“Are you complaining, officer Rowe?” A devilish tilt to his grin shows just how much he isn’t.

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“Fuck, have I missed you, baby.” Des rests his head against my chest. He confessed once that when he comes home from a tour, listening to my heart beat grounds him. Brings him back to reality so that when life gets to be too much, he knows exactly where he belongs.

I fell so deeply in love with my husband that day that I was brought to tears.

The love we have isn’t traditional. It’s not what some think could last.

To us, it’s everything.

It’s our son, our family—small as it may be—it’s our silent connection that doesn’t always need words to be expressed.

Our love is, “Bigger than the stars, Desmond.”

“Higher than the sun, North.”

And that’s all we’ll ever need.

The end.