

Home for the Holidays

~ December 23, AC 198 ~

Quatre tugged Duo's arm. "Come on, we're gonna be late." Quatre said pulling a resisting Maxwell behind him. "I thought you didn't celebrate Christmas Quatre. Why do you want to drag me to this party." Duo said tugging at the tie that felt like a noose around his neck. "Oh, Duo. I go for Trowa. Besides, it's the office party, it would be rude not to attend." Quatre said tugging Duo up the drive toward the Peacecraft Mansion where the Preventer elite were having the Office Christmas party. "So you date is here, why drag me along Quatre. I don't do well at fancy party's. It's not my style. And I'm only a part time Preventer." Duo said and Quatre grinned. "You moan and grumble too much. I'm dragging you here for one simple reason. Ever since you struck out on your own, you've become a stick in the mud." Quatre said as they climbed the stairs.

Duo frowned. "Just say it man. You mean ever since I screwed up and became an unwilling Bachelor." Duo said smoothing his jacket front. Quatre sighed. "Well frankly Yes. You two never even got to the boyfriend girlfriend stage before you messed up. Honestly Duo." Quatre said ringing the bell. The Butler answered and directed them to the Ballroom. "Yes, I know I screwed up. thanks for reminding me Quatre. Want a little salt to rub into the wound now?" Duo said frowning and Quatre smiled. "No, we want you to swallow that Shinigami pride and apologize to her." Trowa said stepping up to them. "Come again?" Duo said as Trowa stopped beside Quatre. He gestured gracefully to the far side of the ballroom. "Behold my date for the evening. I'd rather have yours Maxwell. Wish to trade?" Trowa asked with a smirk before taking Quatre's hand and walking away. Not waiting for an answer. Seeing as it appeared Duo had lost his tongue as the tall Pilot stood gawking at the woman seated across the floor.

Hilde tried to disappear into the wall paper. She felt extremely out of place at such a fancy function. Why she had agreed to come with Trowa was beyond her. "Persuasive Devil." She hissed under her breath. Her date had vanished, leaving her feeling like a wall flower. An underdressed wallflower at that. She'd put on her very best dress, a simple royal blue, tea length dress. On it's own it was lovely, compared to the graceful gowns the other women wore, Hilde felt like crawling under a rock. Her idea of formal, and the upper crusts idea of formal, obviously were two different things. Then to make the night truly and utterly a complete disaster, he showed up. the last man on earth she wanted to see. Damn, he looked good in a suit. She thought and instantly chastised her inner voice. She hadn't seen him in well over a year, and they had not parted on the best of terms. For him to still have that devastating effect on her, just served to anger her more. She tried to ignore him, pretend she had not seen him. She willed herself into the pattern on the wall behind her, No good, he was walking over.

Duo's mouth was watering, he had never seen her look as beautiful as she did right at the moment. The blue of her dress, brought out the blue highlights in her hair, and accentuated the icy blue color of her eyes. He stammered as he tried to find the right words. "Uh, hey Hilde. Um, you look nice." He said then mentally kicked himself. "**Nice? Nice? you couldn't have found a better word than nice moron?**" He thought as she turned her face to look at him. "Thanks. I feel like a toad." She said gesturing around the room. "One of those gowns would cost me a year's salary." She sighed and Duo looked around the room. "Too much. You loose the girl in those things. You don't need a dress like that Hilde." He said and Hilde fought the blush his complement threatened to induce. "Thanks, I guess. Nice suit by the way. I didn't know you owned one." She teased and Duo laughed. "I don't. The digs belong to Rent-a-Penguin-Suit. There's no way I'd choose to wear something like this." He said and Hilde did laugh this time. Her laughter like music to his ears. "Yes, how could I forget. You were the king of the most un-varied wardrobe in the universe." She said quirked an eye brow at him. "Still a sea of black in your closet Duo?" She asked and Duo chuckled. "Am I that predictable?" He asked pulling up a chair beside her. "To me, yes." She said turning her eyes back out to the party, before she was trapped by his violet gaze again.

Duo was once again captivated by her. Just like the first time he'd met her. "Quit staring at me Duo, you'll give me a complex." She said not looking directly at him. "You look great. You really do." He said laying his chin on the back of the chair he straddled. "You sound like a broken record Duo. But thanks." Hilde said spying Trowa and Quatre off in the opposite corner. "You realize they set this up." Hilde said gesturing to the young couple across the dance floor. "I wondered why Trowa asked me to this shin dig." Hilde said standing. Duo was too busy staring at her to let her words register. They sunk in slowly. "You're probably right. But how do you say no to Quatre? Even I melt under those damn puppy dog eyes of his." Duo grinned and Hilde laughed. "I agree with you there. Quatre does have a gift of getting his way." Hilde said grabbing her shawl. "Hey? Where ya goin'?" Duo asked shooting up out of his chair, nearly knocking it

over. "Home." Hilde said going for the door. "Uh-oh, she's leaving Trowa." Quatre said and Trowa nodded. "Plan B" He said moving to intercept Hilde.

Trowa blocked the door "You're not leaving before we dance now are you?" Trowa asked and Hilde blew her bangs out of her eyes. "Nice try Barton. I don't know what sinister little matchmaking game you and Quatre have concocted, But I want no part of it. He threw ME out. He made it clear I was a burden, I don't wish to relive it. Good-night." Hilde said pushing past Trowa. He grabbed her wrist. "Please Hilde, he didn't mean it." Trowa said just as Duo managed to escape Quatre's interception. "Then he should have had the guts to come to me. He obviously had no intention to with out you meddling. Thanks, but no thanks. I appreciate the effort Trowa, but please stop." She said fighting her tears. Trowa nodded and stepped aside, Hilde fled from the party. "Hilde! Hilde wait!" Duo called and Trowa laid a hand to his chest stopping him. "We need to talk Duo. What exactly did you say to her the night you two split up? The WHOLE truth." Trowa said steering Duo into a secluded corner.

Trowa crossed his arms over his chest and waited for Duo to fess up. Duo sighed and flopped into a chair. "I said a lot of things I didn't mean." Duo said as Quatre joined Trowa and stood glaring at the braided former pilot. "We would have never brought her here had we known you'd put her in tears again." Quatre said looking hurt. "Hey, I didn't mean to make her cry. All I said was she looked nice." Duo said and Trowa leaned up against the wall. "So wanna tell us why she's crying Duo?" Trowa asked and Duo shrugged. "Like I said, it was a long time ago. We had an argument, she left. End of story." Duo said and Trowa glared at him. "Funny, I believe I just heard her say, you threw her out. We didn't know this. Spill Maxwell. All of it." Trowa said and Quatre looked stricken. "You didn't throw her out did you?" Quatre asked and Duo looked like a caged animal ready to bolt. The Deer in the proverbial headlights. "Well, I kinda hinted she'd over stayed her welcome. But I was angry." Duo said and Trowa snorted. "You are about as subtle as a bull in a china shop. Your hints are blatant demands. What did you say?" Trowa demanded. A Duo wiped his suddenly sweaty brow. "Um, that she wasn't my mother and she was cramping my style. Ya know, things you say when you're angry. I don't remember what I told her." Duo said as a female voice appeared from behind Trowa. "I forgot my purse." Hilde said looking at Duo. "Let me refresh your memory Maxwell. 'Don't let the Door hit ya in the ass on the way out' I believe were your exact words." Hilde said turning on her heels and back out the door.

This time Duo bolted past Trowa and Quatre and made a bee line after her. "Hilde wait Please." He asked as he caught her hand halting her. The tears in her eyes stabbing him in the chest. "I'm sorry. I never meant those things I said. Honestly." He added reaching up to wipe her tears. She backed away from him. "I would have believed you had you said that to me within a few days or so Duo. It's been almost two years, I just can't believe you. If you really wanted me in your life, you'd have come to me sooner. Let me do you a favor and leave." She said tugging her hand free. Duo grabbed it once more. "No please Hilde, I know I should have found you and apologized. I should have done a lot of things. But I messed up. I was sorry then, I'm still sorry now. Please give me another chance." Duo asked and Hilde shook her head. "No Duo. I mean we had nothing then. I was just the girl who followed you around like a lost puppy. It wasn't like there was a relationship to ruin. Not in your eyes at least." she said bitterly turning to walk away. "I loved you. I really did. God help me I still do. But hurt me once, shame on you. Hurt me twice, shame on me. Good night Duo. Merry Christmas." She said as she burst into tears and started to run.

"Oh no you don't!" Duo said chasing after her. "Don't you hit and run like that!" He said almost tackling her. He spun her around and fixed his violet eyes on hers. "Don't you dare throw that in my face! How dare you say I never loved you! I did! It killed me when you left!" Duo said and Hilde sobbed. "Then why didn't you stop me!? You let me walk out the door Duo! Do you know I waited two hours on the front steps, waiting for you to come out?" She asked and Duo blinked back his own tears. "No , I didn't. Did you know I paced the floor all night worried sick over you? Waiting for the door to open?" He asked and Hilde shook her head. "Damn it I was seventeen Hilde! The love I felt for you scared me to death! Everything I ever loved, died! I was terrified of telling you!" Duo said and Hilde began to collapse to her knees, Duo pulled her to him. "Ah, Hilde. I fell in Love with you the first day I laid eyes on ya. I will always love you. It just took me a little time to get up the courage to tell you. I'm sorry." Duo said kissing the top of her head as she sobbed into his chest.

"Hey, you two. Now Kiss and Make up." Quatre said holding a sprig of Mistletoe over their heads. Hilde looked up and laughed through her tears. "Give me that!" Duo said snatching the Mistletoe and holding it over Hilde's head himself. "Come home?" He asked and Hilde smiled. "I'd love to." She sighed as she accepted Duo's apology, his love, and his kiss, all in one breath. Trowa cleared his throat and Quatre looked up, a second branch of mistletoe dangled above his head. "Little matchmaker." Trowa said smiling. Quatre blushed and got his own little reward under the mistletoe.

~ Christmas Morning AC 201 ~ (Three Years Later)

Duo was awakened with a start as a unidentified flying demigod made a crash landing into his middle. "Oomph!" Duo said bolting awake. "Oi, I was much happier when you didn't know how to walk!" Duo said pulling his two year old son up in between himself and Hilde. "Daddy! did Santa come? Did he? I herded him on the woof last night." Little Joseph "Joey" Maxwell asked, his violet eyes beaming with anticipation. Duo chuckled and ruffled his son's wild and unruly jet black locks. "How could you hear Santa over Daddy's snoring?" Hilde teased as her Son cuddled up under her chin. "Hey! It's Christmas! It the one day of the year I don't get picked on thank you very much!" Duo said playfully stricken. "Who wrote that rule?" Hilde asked smiling. "Right, that's it. Come on Joey. Let's get Mommy." He said as both he and his son tackled and began to playfully tickle her.

Wrapped in big fluffy terry cloth robes Duo and Hilde sat on the couch as their "holy terror" had a field day opening his gifts from Santa. It was then an unexpected knock came to the door. Coffee in hand Duo rose and went to answer it "Who the hell could this be?" He asked rhetorically and Hilde shrugged. An Man in what appeared to be his late sixties stood there. "Can I help ya?" Duo asked and the older man just stared, his familiar violet eyes misting with tears. "Dear God, you look just like him." The old man said and Duo raised an eyebrow. "Listen, I don't mean to be rude, but what is it old timer?" Duo asked and the Old man wiped his eyes. "I'm sorry, I, is your name by chance David Mitchell?" The old man asked and Duo dropped his mug, it shattered into a hundred pieces. He had not heard that name since he was six years old. That name had been dead for over fifteen years. His knees felt week. "Where did you hear that name old man?" Duo asked his hands shaking. "Is it? Is that your name?" The old man asked. By now Hilde had joined Duo by the door, holding their Son. "Dear me, you look just like your daddy did as a baby." The old man said looking at Joseph. Duo's hands clutched Hilde and Joseph to him. "How do you know my name? Nobody knows me by that name! Nobody. David died a long time ago." Duo asked shaking like a leaf.

"David, oh David. I am your grandfather. You were named after me." David Mitchell said his tears rolling down his cheeks. "We thought you died in the explosion. That's what the telegram said. We regret to inform you that your son's home was caught in crossfire and was destroyed. No survivors." David said reaching out to Duo. "Then I saw you yesterday, you came into the toy shop and I could swear I was looking at the ghost of my son. When I turned around, you had gone. But I tracked you down." David said holding out his arms to a young man, who strangely resembled him. Hilde burst into tears seeing the resemblance in the tall men. Duo was weeping as he pulled the old man into his embrace. "Grandpa!" He cried grasping onto this man for dear life. A bit of his past he'd thought gone forever.

"David lad." He began and Duo shook his head. "No, David is gone. That little boy was lost. Call me Duo grandpa. I go by Duo Maxwell now." Duo said and David nodded. He could see the scars of war deep within his Grandson's eyes. "Daddy? Why is everyone crying?" Innocent little Joseph asked. Duo laughed and took his son from Hilde's arms. "We're happy Joey." Duo said kissing his son's round cheek. "Grandpa, this is my wife Hilde and our Son Joseph." Duo said introducing his new family to the old. Hilde quickly embrace the elder version of Duo, pulling him inside. Come in! Come in! Sit down, let me get you some coffee." Hilde said dashing off in tears. Duo and David both chuckled, almost identically. It was plain to see now, that Duo was indeed the grandson of the old man sitting in the living room. "You married a right little twinkle toes. Yer Grandma was like that. God rest her soul." David said as Hilde returned with the coffee. "Thank you pet." He said and Hilde kissed his cheek. "No thank you." She said sitting down next to Duo on the couch. Duo wrapped his arm around her shoulders. "You're right gramps. I got real lucky with this one. She gave me everything I ever wanted outta life." Duo said kissing her temple as Joseph crawled up on David lap. "Why does Daddy call you gwamps?" He asked and David grinned, Duo had been just as curious as a toddler. "Because I'm his grandpa. which makes me your Great grandpa." David said pushing Joseph's button nose. "And you remind me so much of your daddy. He was just like you when he was a tot." David said and Hilde grinned.

This was all that was missing from Duo life. A happy reminder from his past. From a time before the bloodshed had darkened his life. This was perhaps the greatest Christmas ever in her books. It represented Christmas Past, David and his tales of Duo's toddler years. Christmas Present, with Duo and his new lease on life. And Christmas Future, which was Joseph and his wonderful wide eyed innocence that would sustain the peace that his father had fought and suffered to give him. This was truly a time of Peace on Earth. Goodwill towards man. A silent tear trickled down her cheek as she said a prayer of thanks. Her Christmas wish had been granted. It was so good to be home for the Holidays.
