

It was December 24th, but the spirit of Christmas stubbornly refused to visit sprawling Los Angeles. Aidan found it a little amusing. Seriously—this city, so used to grabbing attention, fame, and all sorts of things, never seemed to get a true festive atmosphere. No snow, no flushed cheeks on passersby, no wet boots or overcoats.

As a kid, this used to upset him—he genuinely wanted to build snowmen and catch snowflakes on his tongue, just like children everywhere else. Now, though, he hardly paid it any mind. For the past two years, he hadn't cared much about anything. Life swirled around him so fast and so unpredictably that sometimes he wouldn't even realize Christmas was coming until the 25th.

It was all because of her. Because of Hannah.

She had appeared in his life suddenly and held onto it tightly, only for both of them to realize their feelings weren't built to last. Yet they couldn't fully let go either. Something deep inside Grey kept pulling him toward her, twisting him up and leaving him drowning in sorrow whenever he saw her with someone else.

But Aidan didn't want to think about that as the holidays approached. There was too much to do, and part of him still clung to the hope that some "Christmas miracle" might happen—that the love he still harbored would somehow return to him.

Stepping out of the taxi, he smiled into the wind as it ruffled his dark hair, pulled his beanie snug, and started toward a familiar house. How long had it been since he'd last been home to LA? It felt like forever, though it seemed only yesterday that the musician had walked down this very street.

Before he could even open the door, a girl ran out to meet him—or rather, she wasn't a girl anymore. Bella had turned seventeen, and now she was, in every sense, a young woman, with long, beautiful black hair that reminded Aidan of California forests—resilient and sun-scorched at first glance.

He had known her since childhood—or nearly childhood—since they were seven, when both signed up for the same guitar class. That was the only time Aidan ever tried learning in a group setting. He hadn't liked it and quit, but he never stopped talking to her.

Why? Who knew? Their friendship grew stronger year after year, and even though Grey had moved to Toronto the year before, their bond hadn't broken. It had thinned, perhaps, but never fully snapped. Bella was the only one who knew all the messy details about Hannah—their endless breakups and attempts to rekindle things. Strangely enough, she was the only person Aidan could trust with those stories because he was sure Bella would never tell anyone.

"Good morning," Bella greeted him, holding out her hand. Instead, he pulled her into a hug. "Good morning. Feels like forever since we've seen each other!"

She laughed, her strange, high-pitched giggle ringing out.
“Forever? I had dinner with your entire family yesterday.”

“Exactly—forever ago! How long has it been? Eight whole hours? It’s unbearable!” Aidan grinned as he stepped inside. “Are your parents out?” he asked, glancing around the empty, festively decorated space, filled with string lights and mistletoe.

Bella nodded.

“Got it. So, how’s the artwork coming along?”

“It’s going okay. I’m just having a bit of trouble drawing your… um, leading lady,” she hesitated, then sat down at the kitchen table. “Want me to show you what I’ve got so far?”

Aidan nodded several times. “You’re kidding, right? Of course, I want to see it.”

With that, Bella stood and hurried off to her room, where she kept several sketches for Grey’s new album cover. Meanwhile, Aidan wandered the house, taking it all in. He’d been there a year ago, in the summer, and memories came rushing back. For some reason, this place always felt like home—a calm settled over him here, and the ache tied to Hannah’s name didn’t seem as sharp.

But more than the house, he loved Bella’s room. Maybe it was because she was an artist, but her space reminded him of his own: a creative mess filled with mysterious trinkets, ribbons, beads, paints, and, of course, guitars resting on stands. It gave him a warm feeling in his chest every time.

Soon, Bella returned with two large folders and handed them to him.

“Here, take a look. Tell me which one you like best, and then I’ll start asking you questions.” Aidan smirked. “That sounds terrifying.”

“Well, what did you expect? Think this is easy?”

“I don’t know. Writing the album was hard enough, but I thought figuring out the cover would be simpler. We’ve been stuck on it for two weeks.”

“It’s just… I’m having a hard time capturing the vibe of your songs. They’re so… familiar yet distant.”

“What do you mean?” Aidan asked, confused.

Bella paused before finally explaining, “It’s like you’re writing about someone else

now.” “If only,” Grey blinked a few times. “It’s all still about her.”

“Oh...”

“I like this one,” Aidan pointed to a drawing of his likeness standing beside a girl stabbing a knife into his chest. “Perfect for the cover.”

“Knew you’d pick that.”

“You know me too well. Maybe,” he added with a nod, “you’re the only one who really knows me.”

Bella smiled, blushing faintly. And what a smile it was—so warm, so familiar and bright, that Aidan couldn’t help returning it. His finger traced the illustration for the cover, but here, with Bella, Hannah was nothing more than a ghost, a figment of broken promises on the pages of false letters. Here, with Bella, he didn’t have to remember any of it.

“Do you want this girl,” Bella gestured to the tormentor on the cover, “to look like

Hannah?” “Yeah,” Aidan nodded several times. “Think you can manage that?”

For some reason, Bella looked a little sad but quickly said, “Of course. Sit tight; it’ll only take twenty minutes. I’ll fix it on my tablet.”

“You sure it’s not a bother?” Aidan asked, noticing the melancholy in her eyes. “No, it’s fine.”

Bella disappeared into her room again, and Aidan, after some thought, started making coffee for both of them. He wanted to thank her somehow for all her support and hard work, though words didn’t seem enough. Ten minutes later, they were back at the table, sipping from festive red-and-green mugs. Bella focused on her drawing while Aidan watched her intently.

Outside, the cold wind howled, but it didn’t frighten the pair. They were safe and warm inside the cozy little house—“like Hansel and Gretel,” Aidan mused, smiling at his own thoughts.

“Maybe you should do a pre-Christmas livestream? Chat with your fans?” Bella suggested, brushing strands of hair out of her face, which kept distracting her from work.

Aidan pouted playfully. “You’re bored with me already?”

“No, silly. I just can’t talk much while I’m working, and—”

“We can just sit quietly. I like sharing silence with you,” he admitted honestly, wiping a coffee spill off his sweater sleeve. “You’re so open in it.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

Bella smirked and dove back into her art. Silence enveloped them for a while, broken only by her occasional cough or the clink of mugs.

“Okay, maybe you’re right. I’ll play something new for everyone,” Aidan finally said, leaning back to grab the guitar from the living room.

Following an old habit, he pulled his phone from his back pocket and propped it up.

Bella glanced at him skeptically. “If we do another livestream together, your fans are going to think I’m your girlfriend. There are already rumors. People have even photoshopped confessions from you.”

“I’m still recovering from that,” Grey groaned. “How many times do I have to say we’re just friends?”

“Yeah, ‘just’ friends,” Bella echoed, hiding her discontent.

But Aidan didn’t catch it, too busy greeting fans who were already joining the stream and asking about the artist beside him.

—... So, someone is asking for “Last Christmas,” — no, guys, — the musician chuckled a little.
— I hate singing this song alone, I feel like an idiot.

He stared expectantly at the screen.

“Then sing with Bella!”

“Sing a duet!”

“Aidan, please!! I need some Christmas spirit!”

Not knowing what to do or say in response to all of this, Aidan actually turned to his friend. She had put down her drawing about five minutes ago and was now watching the broadcast intently.

“Do you want to recall our past a little?”

“Oh no,” she snorted, already knowing where this was going.

“Oh, come on, we always sang New Year’s songs together. Plus, we should lift our spirits too,” he tried to convince her.

“Fine,” she gave in. “But you play. I don’t remember the chords.”

“Deal.”

Grey gently touched the strings, pushing his hair back, while Bella focused her gaze on him. It was always easier for her that way, because in his eyes, she found support and comfort.

The intro ended. For a moment, they looked at each other without starting the chorus.

Last Christmas, I gave you my heart,
but the very next day you gave it away.
This year, to save me from tears,
I'll give it to someone special.

Their voices intertwined into a beautiful harmony, ringing like Christmas bells, and unexpectedly, everything around them felt warmer.

“She sings like she means it,”

“Are they together or not?”

“I can't handle it, why is Bella looking at him like that??”

Bella saw all these comments. Moreover, she was sure that Aidan had seen them too, but neither of them brought it up aloud—once the last chord played, they simply returned to their tasks: Bella went back to finishing something on the cover, and Grey answered the questions from his fans.

“Someone is asking, ‘Are you in LA right now?’ Yes, I’m in Los Angeles, I had to finish some things here, but I’ll be back in Toronto on the 26th.”

“You’ve just arrived and you’re already leaving?” his friend commented on this.

“Who knows, maybe this time I’ll come back earlier, not in a year, but sooner,” Aidan turned to her. She made a dissatisfied noise.

He wanted to add something else, but then suddenly it occurred to him that it was already three in the afternoon. Three o’clock!—and he had promised his mom to pick up a package from the courier.

“Shit, Bella, I completely forgot, I was supposed to...” he slapped his forehead and rolled his eyes. “I’ll come back to you in the evening, okay? Guys, sorry, I have to run...”

He started explaining to the viewers what had happened, and Bella watched him closely, becoming more and more upset. Her sadness about her friend’s upcoming departure was almost impossible to hide, but he, too caught up in his own panic, didn’t notice it. After a short while,

they said a quick goodbye—just hugged each other and awkwardly waved their hands—and Grey was gone.

The sound of his footsteps on the asphalt echoed in Aidan's head, interrupting the memories of him and Bella singing "Last Christmas." For some reason, he couldn't get her out of his head. Over the past three months, she had appeared in his thoughts much more often than she should have, and it slightly frightened Grey. Or maybe not slightly.

He had already met with the courier and picked up the package mom had asked for, and now he was standing outside a café, waiting for his friend. The meeting should have happened fifteen minutes ago, but Nate was never on time, and it was foolish to expect him to be late this time.

Nevertheless, Aidan decided to call him:

"Hello, hey, are you coming soon?"

"Listen, man..." came the voice on the other end of the line. "I just woke up, so..." "Oh my God, okay. I'll wait for you," the guitarist cut him off and hung up.

The weather was getting worse, there was nothing to do—so he went inside the café and sat at a free table. Minutes passed by, one after another.

When boredom became unbearable, Aidan opened TikTok.

His fingers were scrolling and refreshing the feed, not finding anything interesting or worth his attention, and then suddenly he froze: someone had posted a video from the live stream he had done with Bella.

"How do they manage it?" Grey muttered more to himself than to his fans, and out of curiosity, he opened the comments.

Almost everyone was writing about how those two must be together and hiding it, but they were bad at it because "you can see it in their eyes." Aidan snorted.

"I did my own investigation," he began reading aloud one of the longest comments. "By the way, Bella never liked any photos of Grey when he was with Hannah, and she once posted a drawing that looked like it was of her and him, and at the bottom, it said, 'if only.' I think she's in love with him!" What?!

The last part didn't relate to the text, but Aidan couldn't hold back his emotions. The absurd words, which had seemed so silly at first, no longer felt so stupid—suddenly he froze: what if it was true? After all, there were a lot of signs pointing in that direction...

"Snow! Snow!" someone shouted, and it brought him out of his thoughts.

“It’s snowing!”

Indeed, as soon as Aidan looked out the window, he froze—big snowflakes were falling outside. They fell evenly and slowly, as if they had fallen many times before and were tired of their task of falling every winter; tiny snowflakes flew past, the wind picked them up and carried them in different directions before bringing them together again—just as fate did with people. With him and Bella: after all, they had been on the verge of not talking to each other many times, yet life stubbornly kept bringing them together—as if there were some reason for it.

Barely managing to put on his jacket, Grey rushed out the door. The cold hit his nose, ears, and any exposed skin, but he didn’t even feel it. The atmosphere was so magical that everything else faded into the background.

“Snow...” he muttered again, smiling with joy. “This is... incredible...”

It was a true miracle: Los Angeles, which had never seen snow before, was literally starting to drown in it—the snowflakes didn’t melt, and the temperature must have dropped below zero. The evening helped in this—darkness was falling, and for now, the small snowdrifts were sparkling.

Aidan looked around: children had already rushed outside and were throwing snowballs at each other; a little girl nearby put on someone else’s hat, trying to tuck in her unruly red hair. To his right, a couple of lovers embraced dreamily, the guy took his partner’s hand and pulled her closer; two elders, who had come out of the café right after Aidan, were gazing lovingly at the sky.

Aidan didn’t allow himself to take another breath. Something strange was happening—and it wasn’t even about the snow. No, it was about love, which was settling over the surroundings. Suddenly, Aidan realized: it was everywhere. In every gaze, in every phrase like “zip up your jacket!” in every snowball thrown, and every exclamation of “look here!” Everyone was trying to share this truly magical moment with their loved ones—and Aidan, too. He reached for his phone and dialed the familiar number—not Hannah’s, but Bella’s. She didn’t answer.

“Shit, they must’ve cut the power off for her,” he decided immediately, and without hesitation, he rushed to the next block.

The soft snow slid under his feet as he ran. And the snowflakes kept falling, falling, falling—so strange, so exceptional—delighting his eyes and heart.

As Grey covered the distance, the feeling that had settled inside him back in the café intensified: finally, after all these years, he realized that all the love he had given had been returned to him, he just hadn’t seen it before. He hadn’t accepted it.

Bella appeared on the street long before the musician reached her house, and he immediately enveloped her in his embrace. For some reason, in her zipped-up jacket and pink hat that covered

her already thin, invisible eyebrows and green eyes, she looked even cuter. “Did you already come back?” her first question was when they pulled

apart. “Yeah, and so much so...” Aidan began.

He wanted to say something like, “So much that I’ll never disappear again,” but he suddenly slipped and fell right on top of Bella.

“Shit, sorry, that was so clumsy...” he blushed, apologizing, and placed his palms on the asphalt.

“It’s okay,” she reassured him, propping herself up on her elbow. There was almost no space left between them.

Aidan’s lips touched hers; he wanted to pour everything he had never said into this kiss—all the “thank you’s,” all the “you’re wonderful,” all the “I wouldn’t be myself without you,” and all the “I love you so much.” All the things he had just realized but had known all his life. Surprised by the unexpectedness, Bella didn’t break their connection; she only leaned forward and touched his hair. And the snow kept falling, falling, falling—like a true Christmas miracle, and if people had been paying attention, they would have certainly noticed that it wasn’t the only one. After all, each of them, together and separately, was a real miracle and magic.

“I want to redo the cover,” Grey whispered to the girl. “I want it to show two lovers lying in the snow—one of them looks like me, and the other like you.”

She widened her eyes.

“For... for the next album or for this one?”

Aidan leaned in again to kiss her and firmly said:

“For this one. For the next one. For all the songs I’ll write—because they’ll all be about you.”