

FREE STORY

Kallysten

*Blush
& Brut*

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by Kallysten

(This ficlet is just a glimpse into a relationship that could have been... Utterly pointless but hopefully sweet and gentle.)

The grass was fresh beneath her toes, a tickling caress, and she sat down with a sigh.

In the distance, she could hear the music coming from the youth hostel, but it was not enough to be distracting. Mathieu sat down next to her, grinning as he presented with a flourish the plastic glasses they would use.

"Sorry that I forgot about the crystal flutes," he joked and she shook her head, smiling.

The champagne bottle felt cool between her thighs even through the material of her pants. A flick of her wrist unwrapped the cork; she held it tight as she slowly twisted it upward, unwilling to spill even a drop of the sweet nectar. The cork finally came free but she held it in place a few more seconds until the bubbly rush had calmed down.

"Blush and brut," she murmured as she raised the bottle up toward the moon so that he could see the small bubbles inside. "As promised."

They had been talking about this for months. She couldn't remember when or how the subject had first come up, but after that talks of blush champagne had sprung every few days. Good grades and the need to celebrate. Bad grades and the need to forget. A good movie. A special occasion. No occasion at all. Champagne had become their rallying cry, and more than once they had shared a quiet laugh at the questioning eyebrows their antics brought forth.

That night, they were celebrating the end of the school year. And even if they weren't saying it, waving an early goodbye to their friendship.

She only filled the glasses halfway before carefully placing the bottle on the ground in front of her.

"What are we toasting to?" she asked as they raised the plastic cups together.

"Vega."

She smiled. He knew her too well.

"To Vega, then."

His fingers brushed hers as they touched their glasses in a toast. She couldn't have said if the contact was accidental or purposeful. She tried not to wonder as she emptied her glass.

"Who is Vega?"

She blinked in surprise; this name was the last she had expected to hear falling from his lips.

"What?"

Mathieu shrugged and adjusted the strap of his bag on his shoulder.

"It was in your agenda. When I was copying down the homework for next week. It said 'Vega's birthday'."

For a few more steps, she was silent. It was September, Vega's birthday was in February. He had been doing more than simply copying down homework. She didn't call him on the lie, though. Instead, she did something she wasn't used to doing. She took a chance.

"It's the name," she started hesitantly, "of a character. I... I wrote a story, like, a short story, and she's one of the characters."

She expected the usual staring, the unvoiced 'dork' she had read on people's face almost every time she had admitted to her writing. What she received was a smile.

"Cool. I write, too. Plays. Well, just one so far but I plan to write more. Would you like to read it? And maybe I could read your story. Would you let me?"

She was too baffled to do more than nod dumbly.

~

The bubbles, though ephemeral, were still tickling the roof of her mouth, prolonging the toast and the memory it had brought back. It sometimes seemed she had met Mathieu a lifetime ago, rather than less than a year. It sometimes seemed it had only been the previous day.

"Second toast," he said, raising his glass again for her to fill. "You choose."

She looked up at him while she was tilting the bottle, and ended up almost spilling the champagne. His hand closing over hers steadied the bottle, and she returned her full attention to what she was doing, serving him first, then herself.

"To the stars," she murmured, holding her glass toward him and meeting his eyes again. They seemed to hold the entire universe.

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Mathieu was a dreamer.

It took her a few weeks to figure it out, and when she did she wanted to roll her eyes at her own blindness. The constant references to movies and books, the innumerable drawings scribbled in lieu of his class notes, the way his face would light up, sometimes, and he would utter the most extraordinary, the most poetic, the most damn strange thing...

She was even more annoyed for not having understood at once that she was the same. Wasn't that why they had found each other, on that first day of class, throwing quotes and references back at each other until they had both been laughing in surprise and delight?

She finally got it one late night, when they had just walked out of a grim, cold movie that had left her shivering inside and the classmates around her silent. Brushing his shoulder to hers, he had caught her attention and she had followed his eyes up to the sky, where the lights of the city didn't quite drown out the stars. He hadn't said anything, but she had understood.

She had understood a lot more than what he hadn't said.

~

The bottle was half empty in front of her, held upright between the soles of her feet. What happened, when they would finish it? Part of her never wanted to know; never wanted this night to end; never wanted to have to leave.

Gentle hands pulled at the neck of the bottle, and she could hear the grin in his voice without looking at him.

"I'll pour this time, seeing how you look like you're drunk already."

She didn't contradict him, even though she was anything but. Two half glasses were nothing. It was his presence here, next to her, in the dark, alone at last, that was making her lightheaded.

That, and the icy knowledge that this was it.

"To friendship," he said after a few seconds, his voice quieter now.

She raised her glass toward his and repeated the words as softly. "To friendship."

~

They were never alone, and sometimes it infuriated her.

Sometimes, it just felt like it was better that way.

She had always been a lonely child, amusing herself with the stories she created, becoming quiet when someone approached. Mathieu was the opposite. He seemed to attract the people around him with his exuberance and smile, and they all loved him. They loved his half-finished

plays, his strange poetry, the slight stuttering that emerged when he was excited or nervous, his grand gestures and grander declarations. They flocked around him, laughed with him, made plans with him, and he would always turn to her and ask if she wanted to come along. She often did; it was the only way to be around him, it seemed.

She wondered, those times when she declined the invitations, what it would be like to go have lunch with him, and only him. To choose a movie together rather than follow half a dozen peers. To talk, uninterrupted, for more than a few instants. She was scared that she would want more if she ever had that much. She knew he wouldn't, couldn't give her more.

She started writing him notes during class. Stupid notes. Quotes he had to complete, deep interrogations about what color exactly the sky was today, a request to see his latest poem. He answered in this sloppy handwriting she could have recognized anywhere, and they forgot they were attending lectures.

She was always the one to keep the notes afterwards.

~

She could barely taste the champagne any more. She knew that once they were done, once they had fulfilled this long awaited promise, he would go back to the rest of the party inside, to the music and laughter she couldn't quite ignore any longer. She didn't want it to end. Different schools, different paths, and with all these friends around him... He'd call her, the first few weeks, or he'd be there when she called. And then he'd be out already, and he wouldn't have thought of asking her to come with him—with them. He would forget. She would stop calling. And she would lose him.

He poured the last of the champagne, dividing it between the two of them, without saying a word, as though he could feel her mood and the wild hopes she was trying to crush.

They raised those ridiculous plastic glasses together one last time, and when she murmured, "To love", she saw him blink, then frown. By the time he repeated the words, she had already gulped down the last of the champagne.

~

She had thought about telling him for weeks, now. She had spent too much money on his birthday gift, and written him a long card that hadn't quite said what she wanted it to say. She had hinted that it'd be nice to go see that movie together, just the two of them. She had brought him a rose at the premiere of that dreadful play he had acted in. She had tried, and hesitated, and made up her mind, and balked again countless times. And he had seen nothing of it.

Now was the time, though. Her last chance. Mouth and mind tingling with bubbles and hopes, heart beating too fast, she leaned toward him just as he was finishing his glass and crushed her lips to his. She counted three heartbeats until he replied in any way.

When he did, she could have wept in joy.

~

"Hey, there you are!"

The voice startled her out of her daydream and she turned, frowning, toward the intruder.

Intruders.

"Look at that! They're hoarding the good stuff! You could have shared, you pig!"

There was a boy on Mathieu's left side and a girl on his right. He was laughing with them now. She was already out of his mind.

She crushed the plastic glass in her hand as she stood. The grass was fresh under her toes. She sighed.

the end

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