

FLETCHER & FREYA

NEW YEAR'S EVE (TWO)

A crowd has gathered in front of the television. Fletcher stands in the back of the room. Emulating a Russian, he links his arm with Freya's, and drinks. She laughs, and grips his shoulder for balance; he puts his arm around her waist and draws her to his side.

—Having a good time? he asks.

—Well, she says. —None of my stuff is broken.

—True, Fletcher says.

—And only one person got *sick*, she continues.

—So far, Fletcher says.

—So far. So does that mean the party is good or bad?

—I don't know. I can, you know, throw somebody through a window if you wanted me to.

—Yeah, wouldja? Then we'll *really* be partying.

—Done, he says. He looks around, as if scoping for a victim.

—What about you? Freya asks.

—Yeah, Fletcher says. —I'm having fun.

—Where's your date?

—Clark is my date.

Freya frowns. —Clark? she says. —You guys aren't *dating*.

—Very perceptive, Fletcher says. —But she's who I came with, and unless something really dramatic happens, I'll be leaving with her, too. Thus: my date.

Freya points her finger up into Fletcher's face. —But you're not gonna *kiss* her, she says.

—It's doubtful, Fletcher says.

—But it's New Year's Eve, Freya protests. —You need someone to kiss at midnight.

—I made this exact point to her, Fletcher says. —But she wasn't having it.

—Stupid, Freya says.

Fletcher moves his head from side to side, as if weighing this assessment.

—I thought there was a woman, Freya says. —From online. Charlotte?

—Oh, *Charlotte*? Fletcher rolls his eyes. —We had dinner, he says. —It didn't really—let's just say that there wasn't exactly a *spark*.

—No? Freya says.

—No, Fletcher says. He doesn't really want to end the year talking about this. His watch reads 12:02; he checks it against the television. —Oh, look, he says. He turns Freya's head by pressing his index finger against her cheek; she snarls and grabs it. —The ball is dropping.

—Ten! The group on the couch leads the room into a countdown. Fletcher and Freya join in. She still has a grip on his finger. He still has his arm around her waist.

The room chants *one*, there is a beat, and then everyone explodes into cheers and twirls their cheap noisemakers. Someone tries to lead a round of "Auld Lang Syne." Fletcher turns to look at Freya; her face is close to his. Her eyes are half-closed. She is pressing against the back of his neck with her fist.

—I, Fletcher says, and then they are kissing.

It's just a moment's thing, really; their mouths only half-connect and then they both draw back for a second. Freya is laughing; Fletcher can't tell whether it's from surprise or delight or if she's ridiculing him. He can't believe it's over already—he has wanted to kiss her for so long, and it was over before he even knew it was happening.

But she is still standing here. Her hands on the sides of his head. And somehow he finds the courage to lean forward, and Freya shrugs, as if to say *what the hell*, and they kiss again, this time for real, her tongue is in his mouth and all he can think is *oh my God she is Frenching me*.