

Merry Christmas, Scott and Kip

“You’re not too eager, are you?”

Kip startled at his father’s teasing. He’d been caught looking out the window to the street in front of their house. Again.

“Maybe a little.” Kip felt that he could be forgiven for being excited; Scott had wrapped up a nine-day road trip last night in Dallas, and had boarded a plane home to New York that morning. It was afternoon now—Christmas Eve—and Scott had three days off.

And he would be here soon.

It had been Scott’s suggestion for the two of them to spend Christmas Eve night with Kip’s parents. Kip had moved in with Scott back in June, and Scott had been concerned that his parents would be lonely on Christmas Eve. Kip suspected it had more to do with Scott’s romantic ideas of a Christmas spent with family in Brooklyn. Either way, he was more than happy to oblige.

Scott had texted earlier to tell him that he had arrived back at their apartment and would be heading

over to the Grady house in Bay Ridge soon. The only disadvantage of their plan was that Kip wouldn’t be able to greet Scott the way he wanted to. He supposed they could abstain for a day or two. They had just lasted nine days, after all.

Nine long goddamn days.

The house was *decked*. Kip’s mother always went all out for Christmas. She may have put a little extra care in this year, what with their special guest and all. Kip fiddled with one of the three wise men from the nativity scene that had once belonged to his grandparents as he looked out the window.

He was anxious about a few things. One was the gift he had made for Scott. Being a full-time student with a part-time job, even with Scott covering most of their expenses, Kip had needed to get creative this year.

Another thing he was anxious about was the present that Scott was being very secretive about. He truly hoped it wasn’t elaborate or overly expensive. Especially given the homemade gift Kip would be offering in return.

The third thing that he was anxious about was sharing his little twin bed with Scott tonight, just down the hall from his parents. It was an old bed. It creaked.

But he was also excited. And appreciative. And touched that Scott wanted to spend Christmas at his family’s home. Kip’s parents were pretty pumped.

“Come help me in the kitchen,” his mother called out. “No use staring out at the street all afternoon.”

“Sorry. All right.”

In the Grady house, Christmas Eve meant lasagna.

“You can make the salad dressing,” Mom said. “We’ll just let it sit in the fridge when you’re done.”

“Got it.” He got to work assembling the ingredients

for the Caesar salad dressing she'd taught him to make when he was a teenager. He'd always enjoyed helping out in the kitchen.

There was a plate of gingerbread men sitting on the counter. Kip helped himself to a couple.

"Those are for our guest!" his mother scolded him.

"All of them?!"

"I want the plate to look nice!" She moved the remaining cookies around the plate to fill it back out.

"You know," Kip said, "Scott's not really coming here to judge us or anything."

"I *know* that, it's just...well, I don't want to sound maudlin, but I imagine it's been awhile since he's had a real Christmas."

Aw, Mom.

Kip hugged her. "It has," he said. "Thank you."

His mother really had gone all out. The fridge was full of every festive beverage imaginable: eggnog, apple cider, cranberry juice, some weird holiday-flavored sodas, wine. There was also a wide array of snacks and treats crammed into the cupboards.

Kip had also made a particularly heartwarming discovery that morning: there was an extra Christmas stocking hanging off the mantle for Scott.

His parents *loved* Scott. The fact that the son of Margaret and George Grady was dating the superstar captain of the Admirals was common knowledge around their neighborhood. To their credit, his parents didn't brag about it. They didn't treat Scott like a celebrity. They treated him like family, and Kip loved them for it.

Elvis's Christmas album played from the living room as Kip and his mother busied themselves in the kitchen. Kip worked fast because he really didn't want to smell

like garlic and anchovies when he greeted Scott at the door.

Finally, minutes after the salad dressing had been put in the fridge, and Kip's hands had been thoroughly washed, there was a soft knock on the door. Kip bolted, skidding to a halt in front of the door and managing to take a second to compose himself before he opened it.

And there was Scott. In a parka and a scarf and...a Santa hat. Smiling so big and bright it was blinding. And carrying a wreath.

Kip practically jumped into his arms, and Scott laughed and kissed him.

"I brought a wreath," Scott said, unnecessarily. "I wasn't sure what to bring, and...oh." Scott's eyes found the large wreath that was already hanging on the door.

Kip kissed him again. "Don't worry about it, we'll find a home for it. I think there might be an inch of house somewhere that isn't covered in Christmas."

They went inside and as soon as the door closed behind them, his parents were there.

"Did we wait long enough?" Mom asked. "We wanted to give you two a moment."

"You're good," Kip said. "Come say hello."

They took turns hugging Scott like a son. Mom was extremely touched about the wreath. Scott was clearly just embarrassed about it. He was corralled into the living room and instructed to sit on the sofa. "What can we get you to drink?" Mom asked.

"Oh, nothing. I'm fine, really."

Mom looked devastated.

"Just pick something," Kip whispered to him, settling beside him. "She bought literally everything."

"Okay, then. Coke?"

Mom looked delighted. "Regular, or gingerbread spice?"

"Um, regular?"

Kip could tell she was trying to hide her disappointment as she went to get him his drink.

"I'm going to go find a home for this," Dad said, holding up the redundant wreath. Kip knew he was making an excuse to give them some privacy.

When he left, Kip snuggled into Scott's side. Scott wrapped an arm around him and kissed him. "Everything looks so great! Look at that tree!"

"Yeah, Mom loves Christmas."

"It smells amazing in here." Scott nuzzled Kip's hair. "*You* smell amazing."

"You miss me?"

"So goddamn much. You know I did." The heat in Scott's eyes had its usual effect on Kip's heartrate. He leaned in, with the plan to bite down on Scott's plump bottom lip, but was interrupted by Mom's return from the kitchen. She was carrying a tray with a glass of Coke for Scott, and an array of snacks, including cookies, clementines, and spiced nuts.

"Oh wow. This is amazing," Scott said. "Thank you."

Mom beamed at him. "I'm just going to get myself a glass of something. I'll be right back."

Scott took the Santa hat off his own head and playfully placed it on Kip's.

"You wanna sit in my lap, or something?" Kip asked, grinning.

"Maybe later." Scott leaned forward and grabbed a gingerbread cookie. He bit the head off with gusto. "Man, this is the best! This is what Christmas is like every year for you?"

"More or less."

"You're so lucky!"

Kip entwined their fingers together and brought Scott's hand to his lips, kissing his knuckles. "I know."

Scott gazed at him warmly and squeezed his hand. "Is your sister coming tonight?"

"No, she'll be here in the morning. She and Andrew had a thing they were doing with friends tonight. They're pretty social."

"Probably for the best they're not coming all the way here tonight," Scott said, glancing outside at the flurries that had started. "We're supposed to get a few inches of snow."

Kip's mother returned with a glass of eggnog for herself, and a platter with a cheeseball and crackers.

"Geez, Mom! No one is going to be able to eat dinner if you keep feeding us."

"I will!" Scott said cheerfully, helping himself to a cracker with a giant scoop of cheeseball on it. "Don't worry about it. I can *always* eat."

"See, Kip? He needs his calories." Mom sat in the armchair next to the sofa and started chatting with Scott, asking him all about his recent road trip. Kip excused himself to get himself a drink, because he didn't have one and he would *never* ask his mother to get him one.

Kip was thrilled that Scott got along so well with his family. He supposed it should be weird, how much he was a part of the Grady family already, but it kind of fit with the whole intense, superspeed relationship thing he and Scott had going since the start.

It had almost been a year since they'd first met. A few weeks after that, they'd hooked up. Then they'd started dating officially (and secretly). It had been a little over

six months since Scott had kissed Kip in front of the whole world after winning the Stanley Cup. A little over six months since Kip had moved in with Scott. And since Scott had made a now legendary speech at the NHL awards that openly professed his love for Kip.

Kip still buzzed with happiness every time he thought of it. It had been an indescribable feeling, sitting in the audience of the NHL Awards, surrounded by hockey players—Scott’s peers—and hearing Scott speak so bravely and openly about his sexuality. About being in love with Kip.

Kip grinned and grabbed a beer from the fridge, then returned to the living room.

“That for me?” Dad asked, nodding at the beer in Kip’s hand.

“It is now,” Kip said, handing it to him. “Merry Christmas.”

After Kip returned (again) from the kitchen with a beer for himself, the four of them sat and enjoyed each other’s company.

“Big win last night,” Dad said.

“Yeah,” Scott said, nodding. “Good effort by the whole team. Nice way to break for the holidays.”

“What did you do last year for Christmas?” Mom asked.

“Oh, um...nothing, really. Just enjoyed a little quiet time to myself. Watched *It’s a Wonderful Life* on television.”

“You were all alone?”

“Well, that was nothing new. I was kinda used to that, honestly.”

“At least you won’t have to worry about *that* anymore!” she said cheerfully. Kip blushed because *man* she

was presumptuous.

“That’s true,” Scott said, smiling at Kip. He had so much confidence in them. It was staggering.

* * *

The night went on and on. They ate their dinner, and then sat in the living room and chatted next to the fireplace until they were hungry enough again for cookies. Then they played a game of Trivial Pursuit—which Kip’s dad won because he always won—as the snow that had started gently had soon turned into a blustery, howling winter storm. It was nice to be in their cozy house with nowhere to go.

Scott had switched to beer after his Coke, and then to rum and eggnog and now he and Kip were both pleasantly tipsy as they climbed the stairs. Scott was wearing the Santa hat again, and Kip was wearing a festive green headband with plush reindeer antlers attached, provided by his mother. The antlers had little bells on them. Earlier in the evening Scott had taken a selfie of the two of them wearing the hat and antlers and had posted it on Twitter. It had thousands of likes already.

It was now almost one o’clock and Kip’s mother had shooed them both to bed because, she had said, “Santa is coming to fill the stockings!”

“I love your mom,” Scott slurred as they went upstairs. “I love your parents. And your house.” He grabbed Kip at the top of the stairs and kissed him. “I love *you*.”

“Love you, too. Can’t believe you’re really here. It’s kinda surreal.”

The wreath Scott had brought was hanging on the outside of Kip’s bedroom door. Kip snorted. “Nice, Dad.”

"There any mistletoe in there?" Scott asked, nuzzling Kip's neck.

"Do we need any?"

"Nope."

Kip opened the door and jingled his way into the room. Scott wrapped his arms around him as soon as the door was closed behind them and nipped under Kip's ear. "Anything you wanna give me early?" Scott purred in a low voice.

"I don't know. Have you been a good boy?"

"Most of the time."

"You were pretty naughty the other night. On Skype."

"Worth it."

"Fucking right."

They kissed hungrily, because it had been too fucking long since they'd been able to really touch each other the way they'd both been craving. Scott's sweater and T-shirt came off over his head, taking the Santa hat with them. Kip's antlers were already halfway down the back of his head. He tore them off as the two men tumbled onto Kip's tiny bed and—

Creeeeeeak!

Kip buried his face in Scott's shoulder and shook with laughter. "This isn't gonna work."

"It's okay. We can just—"

"Wait!" Kip stood up and shooed Scott off the bed. He grabbed the mattress and hauled it onto the floor. "That should help."

Scott smiled and unbuttoned Kip's plaid flannel shirt. "You've still got that mark I gave you?"

"It faded," Kip said, a little apologetically. "You can still see it a tiny bit."

"I'll give you a new one before my road trip next

week."

Kip shivered happily. Scott took his shirt off and pulled the collar of his t-shirt down to see where the mark had been. He huffed when he saw the remnants of it, a low, primal noise that did crazy things to Kip. He grabbed Scott's crotch through his jeans, needing to feel him. Scott groaned.

"Shhh!" Kip hissed.

"I'm trying!"

"C'mere." Kip sank down to the mattress on the floor and pulled Scott down with him. Kip lay all the way back and Scott covered him with his weight like a blanket. Now it was Kip who groaned too loudly.

"Shhh!" Scott hissed. Then they both cracked up.

"This is fucking tragic," Kip said.

"I dunno, I think I can work with it." Scott raised himself up with one arm and moved his other hand down to unfasten Kip's jeans.

Kip shook his head. "*That's* not gonna help."

"We'll just have to do our best to be quiet. Silent night, and all that."

Kip bit his lip and watched Scott's hand unzip his pants.

"I mean," Scott said casually, "*we could* stop. Just go to sleep." He brushed his knuckles over the bulge in Kip's underwear that was now straining through his opened fly.

"Ah," Kip gasped. Then he whispered, "Fuck you. Keep going."

Scott smirked and pulled Kip's jeans all the way down and off. Kip sat up and removed his own t-shirt. Scott slowly pulled off one of Kip's socks, and then the other, which was weirdly erotic. He gently traced his fingers

over the bones in Kip's ankles. It tickled, but it also sent electric jolts through Kip's whole body.

"I somehow manage to keep forgetting how beautiful you are," Scott murmured. Kip just stared back at Scott, desire making his tongue thick. His brain struggled to reconcile the fact that the NHL superstar he'd watch lead his team to victory against Dallas on television last night was now crouched, shirtless, at his feet in Kip's childhood bedroom.

"Come here," Kip said. "Please. Kiss me."

Scott didn't hesitate. He covered him completely again and curled his tongue into Kip's mouth. Kip arched his hips up a bit to get some friction on his cock. Scott grunted into his mouth and pressed his own crotch against Kip's thigh.

They kept kissing each other madly and rubbing against each other, until Scott couldn't stand it anymore and roughly pulled away to unfasten his own jeans and yank them down with his briefs. He mercifully pulled down Kip's underwear too, and then shifted so their cocks could rub together.

"I've got lube in my bag," Kip choked out.

"Me too." Scott smiled, then reached for the strap of Kip's bag because it was closer and hauled it over. He rummaged around for a moment, then pulled the small bottle out. He slicked them both up, and Kip had to bite his lip to keep himself from crying out as Scott stroked the silky liquid onto his cock.

When Scott took both of their cocks in one of his giant hands and started stroking them together, Kip scrunched up his face and balled his hand into a fist and tried like hell not to make any noise. He had no idea how Scott was managing to keep so quiet. It wasn't fair.

Kip raised himself up on his elbows so he could be closer to Scott's ear when he whispered, "You're good at keeping quiet. That come from practice? From always having a roommate?"

Scott pulled back so their eyes met, a mixture of amusement and challenge on his face.

"You jerk off when you think they're asleep, Scott?" Kip continued. "You think any of them knew? Maybe listened. Maybe *watched*?"

Scott pressed his lips together and closed his eyes as his face flushed pink.

"I'll bet you can come without making a goddamn peep, can't you, Hunter?"

Scott's eyes opened and this time it was *all* challenge in them. His lips quirked up. "Can *you*?" he asked.

"Guess we'll find out."

Scott quickened the pace and Kip's mouth flew open. He was so fucking close already. Scott was holding himself up with one arm, and his bicep was straining. Kip stared at it, and then at Scott's hand furiously stroking them, and then up at the determined look on Scott's face and *fuck*.

He could feel his orgasm coming, and it was going to be a *good* one. He shifted so he could balance his weight on one elbow and shoved his hand in his mouth, biting down on the knuckles. He came so hard he felt like his eyes were going to burst. But he stayed quiet, other than a few muffled grunts against his hand.

Scott watched him, then his face went slack and he came, perfectly silent and beautiful, spilling himself onto Kip's stomach. He collapsed on top of Kip and whispered, "How'd I do?"

"Top marks, sweetheart," Kip panted.

“You’re a fucking troublemaker.”

“I’m not the deviant who jerks off next to his sleeping roommates.”

“I *don’t* do that! I mean...not often.”

“Mm.”

“It’s *your* fault anyway. You know how hard it is to lie in bed at night and not think of you?”

Kip’s stomach fluttered the way it always did when Scott said excruciatingly sweet things to him. “I think of you, too. Every night we’re apart. I love you.”

“Love you.” Scott kissed him. “How’re we gonna get cleaned up? I’m not going out to the bathroom like this.” He gestured to the mess on his stomach.

“Look in my bag.”

Scott reached over and pulled a plastic shopping bag out of Kip’s overnight bag. In it were tissues, baby wipes and a couple of hand towels from their apartment. “You brought a clean-up kit?”

“I like to be prepared.”

Scott smiled and shook his head. “Impressive, Grady.”

Scott cleaned them both, then they settled onto the little mattress. They more or less had to sleep on top of each other so they could both fit. Scott lay on his back and Kip threw a leg over him, lying on his stomach with his head on Scott’s chest and one of Scott’s arms wrapped around him.

“This isn’t so bad,” Scott said.

“No. It isn’t.” Kip brushed his thumb over one of Scott’s nipples.

“Quit that,” Scott murmured. “Go to sleep. Santa’s going to be here soon.”

Kip registered Scott slipping out from under him in the morning, but he must have gone right back to sleep. When Kip finally woke up, it was nearly ten o’clock and Scott was nowhere to be seen.

He sat up and rubbed his eyes. Then he remembered it was Christmas morning.

He pulled on some clothes and went to the bathroom to get freshened up. As he descended the stairs, he was greeted by the mouthwatering aroma of breakfast cooking. He followed it to the kitchen, and found Scott sitting at the table with a coffee, talking to his parents.

“Well look who’s awake!” Mom said, at the same time Dad said, “Merry Christmas.”

“Merry Christmas,” Kip said. “Uh, sorry I slept in so late.”

“Do you know what your wonderful boyfriend did while you were asleep?” Mom asked.

Kip shook his head.

“He shoveled our driveway and the walk! All by himself!”

Of course he did. Kip looked at Scott. “You trying to make me look bad?”

Scott looked embarrassed. “It’s no big deal. I used to shovel all the time for the family I billeted with in Quebec when I played junior there.”

“He’s a keeper, Kip,” Mom said, beaming at Scott.

“Don’t have to convince me.” Kip ducked to kiss Scott on the cheek as he made his way to the coffee.

“I didn’t realize you played junior in Quebec,” Dad said. “I thought you played college before the NHL.”

“I did. But I did two seasons of junior in the Quebec league first. Then two years of college.”

“He can speak French!” Kip said proudly.

“A little. Not perfectly,” Scott said.

Kip looked at him expectantly. Scott knew how much Kip loved it when he spoke French.

Finally, Scott rolled his eyes and said, “*Votre fils a le sourire le plus adorable.*”

Kip had no idea what he said, but he loved hearing it.

“You know,” Dad said conversationally, “I also speak a fair amount of French.”

Scott blushed.

“Kip, help me set the table for breakfast,” Mom said. “Megan and Andrew will be here soon.”

Kip took a sip of his coffee then put it down and grabbed the stack of plates that his mother was handing him. Scott stood and insisted that he help, too. Within half an hour, Megan and Andrew had arrived with—

“Suzy!” Scott bent to enthusiastically pet the little dog that was spinning in excitement at Scott’s ankles. “Merry Christmas, girl! Have you been a good girl this year? Did Santa find you? Yes he did! You’re such a good girl!”

Kip could swear his heart was bursting out his chest as he took in the adorable scene. Scott had a lot of fans in New York City, but he doubted any of them were as devoted as Suzy.

“Merry Christmas,” Megan said, leaning in to hug Kip. “All Suzy wanted for Christmas was tummy rubs from Scott.”

Me too. “Well, she’s getting them.”

Andrew gave Kip a quick hug, and then nodded awkwardly at Scott. Megan and Andrew were still starstruck every time they saw him. Megan could not believe her little brother had managed to land such a dream man. At least she’d stopped voicing her concern about his

life. Between the solid relationship with Scott, and the fact that he was in grad school, Kip actually had his shit more or less together for once.

Kip had become a bit of a celebrity himself since the famous Madison Square Garden kiss incident. He was shy about it, because really he was only famous for dating someone and that wasn’t anything worth bragging about, but he was happy to support Scott. He had been included in the *Sports Illustrated* article that had run about Scott in the summer. He had even been included in the photo shoot for it. It had been a mix of studio photos, and some candid ones of the two of them at home. It had ended up being a very romantic spread, and he was proud of the magazine for publishing it.

The paparazzi were kind of a lot to take. They always seemed to show up whenever he and Scott had a rare opportunity to go out together. Kip had told Scott very firmly that he wouldn’t let them ruin their evenings. He would not feel like they needed to stay locked in their home. He could put up with a few unwanted photos if it meant having a life with Scott.

Plus, now that Scott was out, it was good for them to be seen together. To show that they weren’t at all ashamed.

“There are plenty of scrambled eggs left,” Mom said, holding up the bowl. “Kip, you want more?”

“Oh my god, Mom. No. I’ll actually explode.”

“Everything was delicious,” Scott said, always the better son. “Thank you.”

“Well then,” Dad said, pushing his chair back, “I think it’s time for presents!”

Scott smiled at Kip and he looked like a six-year-old kid; bright-eyed and giddy.

They all emptied their stockings first. They were mostly filled with candy, but Scott's had something in it that Kip did *not* approve of

"Oh man!" Scott laughed. "Look at you, Kip!"

"Aw, no. Mom!"

Scott was holding a framed copy of Kip's ninth grade school photo. "Look at how cute!"

"*Why*, Mom?"

"Oh, hush, Kip. There's nothing to be embarrassed about. You were a very handsome young man."

"Lemme see that," Megan said. Scott passed her the photo. "Ha! I forgot about that stupid hemp necklace you always used to wear."

"All right," Kip grumbled.

"I love it," Scott said. "Thank you."

When it came time to open presents, Kip got nervous again. A few nice, but standard, gifts were exchanged amongst them: sweaters, pajamas, socks, books, kitchen utensils. There was a present under the tree for Kip that Elena had sent: an action figure of Scott, which meant it was Scott's turn to be embarrassed.

"I haven't seen this one yet," Scott said, examining it. "My eyebrows aren't *that* thick, are they?"

Eventually, Scott was handed the gift that Kip had made for him, and Kip held his breath as Scott opened it.

"I, uh, I was on kind of a tight budget this year, y'know..." he said, already making excuses for it before Scott had the paper off. He suddenly wished he'd waited to give it to Scott when they were back at home.

"What's this?" Scott asked, turning the book over in his hands. He opened it.

"It's not—it's just an idea I had..."

"Oh, Kip," Scott said quietly. He silently flipped a few

pages.

"What is it?" Mom asked.

"It's, um..." Scott looked up. His eyes were wet. "It's a collection of all of the, um..." he swallowed and looked at Kip. "It's all the nice things people said about me. About us. After I came out. Things people posted online." His face crumpled a little, and Kip hugged him.

"Thank you," Scott whispered into his shoulder.

"I just wanted to make sure you saw them," Kip said. "I know you don't go online much."

Scott sniffed and pulled back, composing himself. "I love it. It's...it really means a lot, Kip. Thank you."

Kip let out a breath and smiled at him. Now everyone's eyes were wet.

"Okay, so that's gonna make our gift seem kinda shitty by comparison," Andrew joked to ease the tension. Everyone laughed, and Andrew slid a gift bag over to Kip. It contained two six-packs of what Andrew explained was very limited edition small-batch local beer.

"What? This is a *great* gift! Thanks guys!" Kip said.

"Carter will be jealous," Scott said. Carter Vaughan—Scott's teammate and best friend—was a lover of food, drink, and life in general. Andrew seemed pleased that he had been able to impress an NHL superstar with a gift.

Scott and Kip gave Megan and Andrew the gift of a reservation at a very popular Manhattan restaurant that normally had a months-long waiting list. Scott explained to them that the meal would be completely paid for.

"No way," Megan said.

"Are you *serious*?" Andrew said. "How did you even manage this? I mean...I guess that's a stupid question."

Scott shrugged sheepishly. "This town loves hockey."

When the excitement over the restaurant reservation

died down, Scott turned to Kip and said, "Before I give you my gift, I just want to say a couple of things."

Kip tensed up. What on earth was this?

"This time last year, I was celebrating Christmas alone. I was lonely, closeted, miserable, and I had no idea that in just a few short weeks, I would meet the love of my life."

Oh god. Scott. Don't make me cry.

"You have made *everything* so much better, Kip. And I racked my brain trying to come up with the perfect present for you. Every idea I had wasn't nearly enough. And," he held up a hand to stop the expected protest from Kip, "I know you don't want me spending money on you, and you don't want lavish gifts. But I would give you anything, Kip."

"I know," Kip said hoarsely.

Scott nodded. "So...I thought about what would truly make you happy."

"Oh my god!" Mom burst out. She clapped her hand over her mouth. "Sorry. Please continue, Scott."

Scott looked at her, and he seemed puzzled. "I—" he glanced around the room, probably taking in the stunned and excited expressions on everyone's faces. Even Suzy had raised her head with interest from where she'd been dozing on the rug. "Wait. What's going on?"

"Nothing!" Megan squeaked. Scott frowned, then shot Kip a questioning look. Kip couldn't say anything in response. Was Scott about to—?

"So," Scott continued, "I'll understand if this is too much, and you can absolutely say no." He was looking at Kip's parents now as he said this, which was kind of weird. "I just thought the timing was right and—"

Kip's father was slowly dragging the coffee table away

from the sofa, providing, Kip realized, more floor space in front of where Kip and Scott were sitting together. He winked at Kip. Kip felt like he was going to pass out.

"So, my gift to you, Kip..." Scott stood, and Megan gasped. He reached into his pocket and pulled out...

...an envelope.

Which he handed to Kip's mother.

"Is a gift for your parents," Scott finished.

Bewildered, Mom opened the envelope. Dad leaned in so he could read the folded papers she pulled out. There was a moment of silence and then Dad just started laughing.

"What is it?" Kip asked. Because at this point he really couldn't even begin to guess.

"Oh my god, Scott!" Mom said. "This is...is this...?"

"Kip told me that you've never been to Europe. So, I enlisted Carter to help me plan a month-long trip, all-expenses-paid." He leaned over them and pointed to the paper. "You fly to Dublin to start, and then go on to Scotland, England, France, Germany, and then Italy."

Scott looked at Kip, and Kip knew he was seeking his approval, but Kip was still reeling from what he'd thought was about to happen.

"Are you okay, Kip?" Scott asked.

"Yeah, I mean...of course. I'm just..."

"If it's too much—"

"It's way too much," Dad laughed. "But, my god, Margaret! Europe!"

"I can't believe it!"

Scott smiled at that, but he still shot a worried glance at Kip. "Sorry I didn't ask you first, Kip. I just wanted it to be a surprise, you know?"

"I don't think that's what Kip is being all weird about,"

Megan said.

“It isn’t?”

“I think he was expecting you to pull something *else* out of your pocket,” Dad suggested.

“I think we *all* were,” Mom added.

“What do you—?” Scott froze, understanding dawning on his face. “Shit. Oh *shit*, Kip. You thought I was going to—”

Kip waved a hand. “No. No, forget it. I wasn’t...I mean, I’m relieved, honestly.” He grimaced. “Not that I don’t want to...someday.” He buried his face in his hands.

Scott was by his side in an instant. “I can’t believe I messed this up. I need to cool it with the speeches. I’m sorry, Kip.”

“Please don’t apologize. Jesus, Scott. You’re sending my parents to *Europe*. That’s amazing! I’m being a weird asshole.”

“If you *did* want to propose to our son,” Dad said cheerfully, “please know that you have our blessing. But don’t plan for a June wedding because we’ll be in Europe!”

Kip touched a hand to Scott’s cheek. “This is the best present you could have given them. Or me. Let’s just forget the other thing, okay? I love you. Thank you for this.”

Scott nodded, and smiled. “Okay. But now that it’s been suggested, it’s all I’m going to be thinking about.”

“Stop it.”

“I’d be a great husband.” He waggled his eyebrows.

“Knock it off”

“You guys are gross,” Megan complained affectionately. “We got Mom and Dad a god damned toaster. I’m going to open some wine.”

Kip laughed. “Okay, but it’s a *four-slice* toaster!”

She flipped him off as she headed for the kitchen, followed by Andrew, and then Suzy.

Kip’s parents were poring over the details of their vacation, grinning and talking excitedly. Kip kissed Scott quickly and said, “Shall we join them in the kitchen for wine?”

“Sounds perfect.”

They had a nice time hanging out in the kitchen. Megan played some Christmas music from her phone and Kip started peeling potatoes for dinner. Scott insisted on helping so Kip set him up with a peeler. Megan made cranberry sauce. Andrew made them drinks. The room was full of laughter and the aroma of turkey roasting in the oven, and Kip felt emotional. Everyone in the house was happy and with someone they loved.

Just before dinner, he and Scott snuck upstairs under the guise of needing to pack their bags. Instead, they made out for a while, and Kip said “That really was the perfect gift, Scott. I can’t believe how much planning you put into that! I’ll have to thank Carter next time I see him.”

“I think he’s coming to The Kingfisher with me tomorrow night.” The Kingfisher—the Greenwich Village pub where Kip worked—was always a popular spot on Boxing Day. Kip was working until close tomorrow night, and he expected to see a lot of friends there.

“By the way,” Scott said, “that book you gave me is incredible. I can’t believe you did that.”

“It’s about what *you* did. That book just shows how incredible *you* are.”

“Well, I love it. And I love you so much. I can’t wait to get you home,” Scott said in a low voice. He kissed just under Kip’s jaw, and Kip shuddered.

“Oh, fuck. Okay. We’ve gotta stop.”

“Mm...” Scott said, continuing to scrape his teeth along the stubble on Kip’s face.

“Stop, you asshole!” Kip laughed. He playfully shoved Scott away. “When we get home. I promise.”

Scott came right back and kissed him on the mouth before saying, “There might be a couple of *toys* from Santa at home.”

“Ooo! Big ones?”

“Big,” Scott slid a hand into the back pocket of Kip’s jeans, “small. *Vibrating.*”

“So Santa *did* get my letter!”

Scott smiled at him. “Seriously. Thank you. For all of this. Best Christmas ever.”

“We’ll have to do it again next year, huh?” Kip said, uncharacteristically shyly.

“Yeah,” Scott said, gently brushing a lock of hair to the side of Kip’s forehead. “Wouldn’t mind a whole lot more Christmases just like this one.”

Kip was full to bursting with love for this man. He had no idea how he was going to fit turkey dinner in there too. He stretched up onto his toes and nipped Scott’s ear. “What are you doing New Year’s?” he purred.

“Playing against Toronto. But after that, no plans.”

Kip sighed. “I can’t believe we both have to work on New Year’s Eve.”

“Capitalism. What are you gonna do?”

“You’ll come to the Kingfisher after the game, though, right?”

Scott pulled back and looked at him with so much affection Kip nearly melted on the spot. “Hell yes. I’ve never kissed anyone at midnight before. I’d like to see what all the fuss is about.”

“I’d better make it good, then.”

“I expect you to bring your A-game.”

They both laughed. “Let’s go eat and then go home as fast as possible,” Kip suggested.

Scott fixed his best Captain-of-the-New-York-Admirals admonishing glare on him. “A lot of work went into that meal, Grady, and we will give it the respect it deserves.”

“Ooo, yes sir,” Kip drawled.

“And tuck your shirt in. This is Christmas dinner, not a mosh pit.”

Kip laughed and shoved the hem of his plaid shirt into his jeans. “Are you looking for me to call you ‘Dad’?”

“No,” Scott said quickly. “Please don’t.”

Kip bit his lip, and silently made a New Year’s resolution to bring out Scott’s authoritarian side in the bedroom more often.

He reached for the doorknob, but Scott gently wrapped his fingers around his wrist, stopping him. “I really am so happy, Kip. A year ago I would never have been able to imagine that I’d be out, and in love. It’s been amazing, and I can’t wait to see where this year takes us.”

Kip swallowed, because he wasn’t going to let himself get all choked up again. “Are you sure it can’t take us to our bedroom? Right now? Immediately?”

“If you rob me of a Christmas dinner with your lovely family I will never forgive you.” He opened the door and gestured toward the stairs. “March,” he ordered.

“Kinda really want to call you ‘Dad,’” Kip teased him.

“Try it and see what happens,” Scott said in a low voice.

Kip’s eyes went wide. “Holy fuck. Is that supposed to deter me?”

Scott blushed. "That wasn't supposed to come out that way."

Kip laughed and took Scott's hand. "Come on. Dinner. Then sex. Then the rest of our lives."

Scott beamed at him. "Lead the way."

The End