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Ryan emerged from the seventh toy store in triumph, clutching the Hannah Montana Karaoke set that Anna had been talking about for the past week. As he headed for the exit, his cell phone sent a sweet jolt of vibration to his dick.

He fished it out of the front pocket of his jeans and checked the caller ID. Grinning, he flipped it open. “Hey.”

“Hey. Where the hell are you?” Jeff’s voice, even on the tinny speaker made Ryan forget about the hot misery of the crowded mall.

Ryan checked the time on the phone. Jesus, it was almost ten. He’d been to so many stores he couldn’t even remember where he was until he passed an identifying kiosk on his way back to parking lot E-6. “St. Paul, I think.”

“You do remember you live here now, right?” Jeff’s smoky voice dropped lower on the question, sending another jolt to Ryan’s cock with sound alone.

“I hope so. Since I gave up my apartment last month. Listen. I got it.”

“I told you, you didn’t have to—”

“I know, but I wanted to.”

“Anna’s going to flip.”

Picturing the excitement on the face of Jeff’s eight-year-old daughter had kept Ryan going through the traffic—on the roads and in the stores—in the mad dash of people at T minus twenty hours to Christmas. Everything had to be perfect for their first Christmas together. He couldn’t imagine what Christmas had been like for Anna or Jeff when they’d had to split time with Anna’s mother Val. Fortunately, Val would be spending this Christmas in her second court-ordered rehab since July. That, coupled with the time she’d spent in the county lock-up for contempt after she’d mouthed off to the judge during the first custody hearing, had Jeff’s lawyer assuring him that Val would have to beg the courts to even have a chance at supervised visitation.

“It took most of the day and we’ll probably wish we were deaf, but I’ve got it.”

“You know what I’ve got?” Jeff’s voice deepened. Ryan swore he could feel Jeff’s big body behind him as he growled the words into Ryan’s ear. “I’ve got a really hard dick and a lover who’s ninety minutes away.”

“I’m hurrying.”

“Some of us have to work on Christmas Eve. At seven. In the morning.”

Ryan picked up his pace, moving between the other shoppers with a skill that would have made an NFL running back proud. Bearing down on him, list in hand, was a grey-haired woman who looked like she’d planned her mall assault with as much care as the landing at Normandy. He shifted his angle to side-step her and absorbed the vicious blow to his shins from her heavy bag.

“Eighty-nine minutes, Rye. And then I’m jerking off and going to sleep.”

“I’ll be there in sixty,” Ryan promised.

Jeff laughed. “Just be here safely.”

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Ryan took the best back route he knew and still got stuck in Mall of America traffic. With his fingers clenched on the wheel in helpless frustration, he watched his eighty-nine minutes tick away in the sea of taillights. Just when he thought traffic might be easing, the temperature dropped the three degrees necessary to change the drizzle into freezing rain. It was long after midnight when he pulled into their driveway and unloaded his trunk.

The house was silent, so he decided to sit up long enough to wrap the karaoke set. When he slid the box under the tree on Anna’s side, he was forced to confess that her side had pretty much taken over the entire base of the tree. He’d tried stacking the gifts, but then Anna’s tower had started to dwarf the tree.

They’d all gone to pick it out from the cut-your-own place out on Rt. 43, but Ryan knew the only opinion that mattered in tree selection was Anna’s. With Jeff’s warm breath in Ryan’s ear, he’d watched her study her choices intently. She’d picked a full specimen, though its crooked trunk had tested Ryan’s kid-friendly vocabulary as he helped Jeff tie it to a bracket in the window frame. Now it was covered in lights and ornaments in such a mix of styles and colors that Ryan’s overly-particular ex-lover Paul probably would have had a seizure at the sight. Anna told him the history of all the ornaments on the tree, from homemade crayoned versions, to the leather-clad Santa on a motorcycle that she’d picked out because Jeff rode his bike to work most days in the summer.

When they'd finished, Anna had handed him a bag. "Open it now, Ryan."

Jeff had smiled and nodded, so Ryan fished out a tissue-paper wrapped ornament. As the thin paper fell away, he saw an elf standing behind what was supposed to be an X-ray machine, a skeleton made up of candy cane bones shown on the black screen.

"They didn't have the sono-thing you do, but Dad said that it's like X-rays. Like when I hurt my shoulder this summer."

Ryan had had to hug her tight, forcing tears away behind a cough.

Yeah, he'd brave much worse than December twenty-third mall mania to make that kid smile. And for her dad ...

Pulling in a deep breath of fresh Douglas Fir, he crawled under to retrieve the box he'd carefully placed in the back last week. He sat back and looked at the simple tag. From Ryan to Jeff. He'd kind of put his heart into that box. Not literally, for obvious reasons, and not quite figuratively because the sentiment was just too, well, sentimental. But yeah, as sappy as he got, that was in the box.

He'd looked all over online first and then finally found it in a dusty hobby shop in downtown Sauk Rapids. A perfect model of the '68 Camaro Jeff had fixed up and then had to sell so he could afford the kind of lawyer who could make sure he'd never have to worry about losing custody of his daughter to a mother who landed the kid in the emergency room or worse. Ryan and Jeff had taken the Camaro up to the state park on their first date. Well, their first date if you didn't count the reach-around Jeff had given him in a bar last June before Ryan even knew Jeff's name. And Ryan wasn't ever taking that one off the books.

He hoped Jeff would understand what the model meant, would know that someday Ryan planned to get back Jeff's dream car. Ryan slid the gift back under the tree and stepped back, bumping into the Santa on a motorcycle. He reached out to steady it with his hand.

"I think Santa makes a pretty sexy Bear myself."

Ryan laughed, but didn't turn, letting Jeff slide his arms around his waist and pull him close. Rubbing the day's growth on his jaw, Ryan asked, "Should I stop shaving?"

"Didn't say *I* wanted one. Heard you come in. I thought you'd join me."

"Figured you'd be asleep." Ryan turned to face his lover, grinning as Jeff's hands slipped down to cup his ass.

Jeff lowered his head and let their cheeks scrape together. "I'll always wait for you, Ryan."

Ryan swallowed down the lump in his throat. Since he wasn't allergic to fir trees, he decided to blame it on the season. "Good practice for Anna in oh, about eight years."

Jeff's shudder was genuine. "Christ, don't remind me. So what were you doing out here?"

Ryan shrugged. "Just checking things. I want—"

"It's already perfect. And even if it isn't Anna doesn't care. She wants you here."

Ryan searched Jeff's eyes, trying to read him in the soft light of the Christmas tree.

"I asked her back in November what she wanted for Christmas," Jeff went on. "She said she wanted you to move in."

Ryan smiled, relaxing against Jeff's body.

"Of course—" Jeff cupped Ryan's ass and pulled him in tight "—she also wanted Jessica to move in. Because that would be fair, she said. That was all she wanted until she saw the Hannah Montana Karaoke set on TV."

"I don't know what Jessica's mom would have to say about it, but at least we've got the Hannah Montana covered." Ryan pointed to the newly wrapped box.

"You have completed the mission as assigned, Private First Class." Jeff raised his hand to offer a salute.

"Bite me."

Jeff was grinning when Ryan dragged him down for a kiss. Vibrating cell phones had nothing on the feel of Jeff's mouth opening to Ryan's tongue. The wet warmth sent a shock to Ryan's dick as the familiar taste of Jeff's toothpaste disappeared into the heat of their tongues together. Jaw open to let Ryan lick in deep, Jeff spread his legs to erase his extra two inches of height. Ryan pulled on the short hair of Jeff's neck, and the answering groan vibrated down Ryan's spine.

The hands cupping his ass tightened, lifting him in and up so that their cocks could rub together. Ryan released Jeff's hair and he lifted his head. "Gonna suck you hard so you can fuck me. Want your cock in me, Ryan."

Ryan swallowed his groan and licked the side of Jeff's neck, warm salty skin on his tongue. "Never turn down your mouth on me, but it might be overkill at this point," Ryan dragged Jeff's hand down between them, teeth clenched to keep back another groan as that hand stroked Ryan's already hard cock through the denim.

Jeff ran his tongue over Ryan's lips until Ryan relaxed his jaw. "She's sound asleep. And she's seen us kiss before."

"I know."

"Wish we could do it here, though. Want to see your eyes in the light from the tree. Want you to fuck me hard enough to knock half the needles off."

"I think the fear of an audience would give me performance anxiety."

"Do you ever wish...?" Jeff's question trailed away.

"What?"

"That I didn't have a kid?"

"God no. That's crazy." Ryan wouldn't deny that he'd love to pull Jeff down onto the rug in front of the tree, but he wouldn't have traded any sex for the knowledge that Anna got to wake up in the same bed every morning. That she'd grow up knowing that Jeff—and Ryan—loved her and would keep her safe. "Besides, she's pretty much the only reason I put up with you."

"Really?" Jeff grinned and his hand tightened around Ryan's dick, stroking him through his jeans again. "That's all you can think of?"

"Pretty much."

Jeff walked Ryan back toward their bedroom. "I'm going to have to work harder." Jeff kicked the door shut behind them.

The backs of Ryan's knees hit the mattress and he let Jeff push him over. "Thought you had to be at work at seven."

"Guess I'll just have to make you come fast. I need my beauty sleep."

Ryan was still laughing when Jeff undid the fly on Ryan's jeans and started yanking them and his briefs over his hips. He arched up to speed things along, but Jeff stopped when the jeans were at Ryan's knees. Before Ryan could kick them off, Jeff shoved him up farther on the big bed, cutting off the question forming in Ryan's brain by sucking the head of Ryan's cock into his mouth.

The groans vibrating along Ryan's cock were interspersed with the thick wet sounds of suction, open mouthed kisses, and slick tongue lapping all over his dick. Spit dripped down to the root, cold, almost icy in contrast with the heat of Jeff's mouth on the head. Ryan shuddered and swore he could feel Jeff's lips tighten in a grin, a grin right around Ryan's cock.

Jeff warmed Ryan's wet dick with a hot hand, stroking steady but not nearly tight enough while his mouth moved down to Ryan's balls. A deep wet suck on one and then the other. Ryan thought about yanking the comforter over Jeff's head to keep everything warm when he shifted his attention again. And then fuck the comforter because Jeff shifted lower, licking the skin under Ryan's balls, tongue working down to his hole—Ryan tried to spread his legs but his jeans held him pinned.

“Fuck.”

Jeff lifted his head for a second. “Okay.”

He tried to wiggle the jeans down lower, but Jeff was keeping them trapped, keeping all of Ryan helpless with the mouth back on Ryan's cock and a spit-slick finger burning into his ass. Spit wasn't the best lube, especially not when Ryan couldn't open his legs, but with Jeff's mouth gliding down until Ryan felt the soft hot throat close around him, he didn't care. Even when a second finger pushed in, the stinging fading as Jeff's fingers curled, stroked, rubbed. He took Ryan deep just as those fingers started tapping his prostate. Heat flooded from his ass, his dick, body ramping up. Jeff hadn't been kidding about making him come fast.

Jeff pulled off, teeth a warning graze on the shaft.

“What?”

“Don't come yet.”

“Then don't do that.”

“This?” Jeff's fingers tapped, then rubbed steadily. “Or this?” He bent his head.

While he still had higher brain function Ryan gritted out, “Thought you wanted me to fuck you.”

Jeff lifted his head again. “I do. So. Don't. Come. Yet.”

When he climbed over Ryan to get to the nightstand and Ryan stripped off his jeans, briefs and shirt. Jeff rolled off the bed on the other side and pulled off his pajama bottoms and T-shirt, then tossed the comforter on the floor. Before he climbed back into bed, he turned off the lamp and flicked a wall switch. The window lit up with a multi-colored strand of mini Christmas lights.

“Now I can watch you in the lights.” Jeff popped open the lube and started slicking his cock.

Ryan rolled onto his back and arched an eyebrow.

“I thought I’d see if I could remind you of another reason to put up with me.” Jeff slid two lubed fingers into Ryan’s ass. “This for example.” Jeff replaced his fingers with his cock, filling Ryan with a slow steady pressure.

Ryan’s heart-rate sped up, sharpest in his dick and the muscles of his ass. Jeff eased back until it was just the head inside, thick, solid heat of their pulses pounding together, and then stretched forward to kiss him. Ryan felt his body shift and open around Jeff’s cock, and he slid in deep on a long moan. Hiking his legs up on Jeff’s back, Ryan grabbed the back of Jeff’s neck to hold him down where he could reach him with his mouth, not caring that the kisses were nothing more than shared groans and a quick brush of lips. When Jeff shifted from side to side, rubbing everything just right, he sucked Ryan’s tongue into his mouth and kissed him until they ran out of breath.

With a gentle nip on Ryan’s lower lip, Jeff raised his head and stared down. Lifting Ryan’s leg over his shoulder, he started deep thrusts Ryan felt in his gut, the pressure inside spilling pleasure into his cock and balls and even his thighs. Tension fired nerves from his spine to the base of his cock. He reached for his dick, but Jeff pushed his hand away.

“Don’t come yet.”

“Jesus, Jeff. I’m going to die.”

“I doubt it.”

He was fucking grinning. Again. Even the LED lights couldn’t match Jeff’s blue eyes when he had that grin on. “Still want you to fuck me.” His voice rumbled through Ryan, vibration tingling in his ass, in his balls.

“What about you?”

“Oh, gonna come. Gonna fill you with it.”

Ryan clamped back the rush of sensation with every muscle he had, thighs and abs straining like he was hitting mile twenty of a marathon. They’d waited the three months and gotten their negative tests at the end of November. Before then, Ryan had never had sex without a condom. He couldn’t decide which was better, the incredible heat and wet of Jeff’s slick walls his cock or feeling Jeff go inside him, knowing there was nothing between them.

Jeff’s hips rocked him deep and fast, grin slipping as his face melted into pleasure. Ryan’s control melted along with it, and he dragged an anatomy chart into his head, naming the bones and muscles of the human hand until Jeff leaned in again, forcing Ryan’s leg into his own chest.

That drove the head of Jeff's cock right over Ryan's gland with every thrust, and Jeff would just have to fuck himself because Ryan wasn't going to make it. No anatomy chart, no images of his high school chemistry teacher naked, nothing was going to stop this.

"Christ, yeah, Ryan. Like that ..."

Ryan tighten his muscles again, squeezing Jeff's dick and finally he snapped his hips and groaned so deep and low Ryan felt it more than heard it, choking gasps as Jeff pumped his hips a few more times and then just held himself there, jerking as he came.

Jeff reached between them as he eased out, his fingers sliding into Ryan's body. "Christ. It's— ah, fuck." He bent forward and kissed Ryan, lips hard, tongue insistent.

It was. The sensation of doing it raw so new, so amazing Ryan had trouble finding the words for it too. And fuck if every second didn't get better than the last until Ryan had a desperate need to freeze time. Because if it did get better than this, than watching Jeff's grin split his face as he reached back to slick his ass with his own come, that next breath of I'm-so-stupidly-happy would be too much to take.

"What?" Jeff asked.

Ryan shook his head, digging around in the sheets for the lube.

"Shit. It's the Catholic guilt thing again, isn't it? You're allowed to be happy, Ryan. Everything's going to be okay."

Fuck. Ryan's eyes burned. He *was* allergic to fir trees, no matter how rare anyone said it was. "Didn't think so six months ago, when you didn't even want me to meet Anna."

Jeff's grin faded. "Thirty grand of lawyer buys a lot of okay. But, Rye." Jeff climbed over him straddling his stomach. "Even without it, things have changed. I've changed. Don't you know how good this is?"

"Yeah, I do." He did. It was just scary sometimes. Because Jeff and Anna were the best part of being alive and sometimes his brain got busy thinking of what could happen to fuck it all up.

Jeff took the lube from Ryan's hand, poured out a palmful and reached back to stroke Ryan's dick. Fir trees made his dick soft too. Fucking allergies. The blood flooded back with an ache that reminded Ryan he'd been horny since the phone buzzed in his jeans three hours ago.

Jeff lifted himself on his knees, positioning Ryan's dick right against that hot slick hole. "So," Jeff was grinning again. "What did you ask Santa Bear to bring you this Christmas?"

"Shut up and sit on my dick."

Jeff did. He hadn't stretched himself much, and his ass was tight, the pressure so sweet Ryan's heart stopped.

"So." Jeff ground the words out between clenched teeth. "That all you asked Santa for?"

Ryan shook his head, concentrating on sensation to keep the fucking allergies from starting again. Jesus, so much wet-hot-soft-skin squeezing all over his dick. He brought his knees up and forced his hips down against the mattress, waiting until Jeff was ready to move. He'd forced himself down so fast, his muscles were still fighting Ryan's cock, tightening all around him.

Jeff leaned back against Ryan's thighs, and Ryan could see the moment his cock shifted forward in Jeff as the tension melted from his face.

"Fuck yeah. Move."

They fell into a shallow rhythm of Jeff pressing down as Ryan bucked up. Each thrust made Jeff's dick thicken and fill.

"Christ. Gonna come again." Jeff moved faster.

Thank god. Because Ryan had been riding that hard edge so long he might just have forgotten how to go over.

"Come in me, Rye." Jeff started stripping his dick hard, his hand a blur as he worked the shaft. "Want it now."

When the first creamy shot landed on Ryan's abs, he knew he hadn't forgotten how. He reached up to dig his fingers into Jeff's hips, slamming him down on the last few thrusts that twisted in Ryan's gut, turned him upside down and inside out--his body feeling like it hit a thousand degrees as it all flooded deep inside Jeff's body.

Jeff collapsed on top of him, smearing them together with lube, sweat and come. He brought a hand up to push back the hair sweat-stuck to Ryan's face. Tangled bodies cooling, the hard press of Jeff's chest against his own, Jeff's fingers sliding in Ryan's hair. He loved this. Loved him.

"What else would you ask Santa for?" Jeff said at last.

"Besides a bed that automatically puts on fresh sheets?"

"Besides that."

Ryan swallowed. "This. Us. You, me, Anna. I didn't know how much I would want it."

Jeff's hand stopped moving in Ryan's hair. "And now?"

"Now it's all I want."

"And that's what you're freaking out about? That's why the obsession with the turkey and the presents and the family pictures?"

"Yeah."

Jeff's hand started moving through his hair again. "All that shit doesn't matter. We are a family, Ryan. This is what I want too. And I'll do anything to make sure it stays that way." Jeff looked down at him, blue eyes full of that same intensity that had been there from the first, softened now with an affection that made Ryan want to slide back inside him, let Jeff surround him.

A heavy warmth punched Ryan's gut. There was no defense against it, not that he wanted to fight it. "You're right."

Jeff grinned. "I know."