



Santas

**OMEGA
STEP BROTHER**

SANTAS OF ALPHA RIDGE

ANNA
WINEHEART

SANTA'S OMEGA STEPBROTHER

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Also by Anna

About the Author

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This novel contains graphic sexual content between two men. Intended for mature readers only.

Warnings: past childhood beatings

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To all of you out there:

You are beautiful.

You are worthy.

You are loved.

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SANTA'S OMEGA STEPBROTHER

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This was previously published as a 6k-word short story, Heating Up My Stepbrother. Santa's Omega Stepbrother comes with 27k extra words and a HEA!

EVERY YEAR ON CHRISTMAS EVE, Brodie gets a visitor he knows nothing about.

Brodie's life has become a sad, lonely thing ever since his son and best friend got together—his only excitement comes from the mysterious presents that appear under his Christmas tree every year.

When his heat rolls around on Christmas eve, all he expects is a good time with his new candy cane toy. Not his estranged stepbrother dressed up as Santa Claus, showing up *in his house*.

Peeking through his door. At him.

It doesn't matter that Noel can now fly through chimneys. Or that his eyes still make those dark promises. The fact remains that Noel has promised not to leave Brodie, and he broke his word.

Except Noel goes into a rut, and no contraceptives are used.

Noel says he wants to make things up, though. He says he's never forgotten Brodie, never stopped caring about him.

Despite his good senses, Brodie badly wants to believe that alpha. But he can't risk his heart again... Can he?

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LEAKING IN THE NOT-FUN SORT OF WAY

BRODIE HUMMED as he unlocked the front door of his home, Christmas carols playing in an annoying, never-ending loop in his head.

On one hand, he loved all the festive cheer. Christmas was fun. Christmas was special, exciting, and there was always a mystery present appearing under his tree every year.

He would've said it was his son River who'd put those presents there, except... they'd shown up ever since River was a baby. They'd even shown up at the hospital one year, when River had been admitted over the holidays and Brodie had spent every free moment away from his shop at his son's bedside.

Anonymous present aside, Christmas was just a season of good cheer.

Just that this year, Brodie was spending it alone.

River's happily bonded, he told himself. You should let him and Nico have a Christmas to themselves.

But it didn't help that he felt so *lonely*.

The downside to your best friend and son getting together was that you felt like a third wheel whenever you were around them both. It was why Brodie hadn't returned to Meadowfall

lately. And why he was going to stay home all day tomorrow and mope.

He sighed, kicking off his shoes. Good thing he had some mint-and-chocolate-chip ice cream tucked away in the freezer—it was never too cold for ice cream.

He made his way through the cozy little house, skirting around his piles of scrapbooking material to the fridge... except his socks grew wet at the toes, suddenly.

Brodie looked down.

A puddle of water surrounded the fridge, sitting on the tiled floor pretending to be innocent.

He groaned. “Tell me this isn’t happening.”

The refrigerator clanked and rumbled. It made a terrible spluttering noise—

—and continued to run.

It had been on its last legs for a while. Brodie had been quietly encouraging it to keep going for another day, another week. He didn’t have the energy or the spare cash to go out and buy a replacement right now.

Besides, no one delivered fridges on Christmas eve.

He grabbed a used towel and laid it on top of the puddle. Then he stepped gingerly onto it, holding his breath as he peeked into the freezer—nope, there were way too many things he’d stashed in there for his comfort. Blocks of corned beef he’d found on sale, stacks of frozen dinners he’d snatched up at the expiring food store, and tubs of his favorite ice cream—also from the expiring food store.

He hadn’t paid top dollar for any of these, but he dreaded the thought of his food going bad.

I need an emergency cooler. And ice packs.

His stress growing, Brodie headed back out of the house, climbing into his junky old car and coaxing it to the home improvement store, which was thankfully still open.

Amidst the woodsy scents of alphas, the grassy scents of betas, and the floral scents of omegas, he found a couple of large coolers with sealable holes at the sides to allow for melting ice to drain. He found some bags of ice, too.

Just as he was about to head over to the checkout stand, he glimpsed a banner hanging over a small selection of brightly-colored things: *Please your omega!*

They were toys.

Adult toys.

He had no idea why these toys were for sale at the home improvement store—except none of them were veiny or cock-shaped. In fact, they looked damn near innocent—thick silicone cucumbers and girthy purple eggplants, and a clear sleeve in the shape of a honey jar, with a hole in the ‘honey’ for a cock to enter.

Amongst them, he found a sizeable glass candy cane, blunt at the ends with red stripes swirling down its clear length.

It was nowhere near the girth of a good cock, but... The longer Brodie stared at it, the more hunger seeped into his veins. A restless warmth began to pool in his gut; the little voice in his head whispered about thick alpha cocks leaking onto him, pressing up against him. Pushing between his cheeks and stretching him open, filling him up with pleasure and come.

He felt too empty, suddenly. *I think I'm going into heat.*

And that candy cane toy looked perfectly festive. Sure, it was nowhere near the sizes Brodie preferred. But he figured it was better to obsess over an inanimate object, than to pretend he had his long-lost stepbrother in bed with him.

It had been twenty-five years, and every single heat, Brodie still thought about that alpha.

What did Noel look like now? At forty-three, he certainly would look far different than he had at eighteen. Alphas only reached their full bulk when they hit twenty—and Noel had left before then. Back then, he'd already been taller than Brodie, more muscular, his shoulders broad, his cock...

Brodie squirmed. He grabbed the candy cane and pushed his cart to a checkout stand with an omega cashier—at least omegas were easy to recognize, with their narrower shoulders and smaller, less-muscular bodies.

The cashier gave him a friendly smile and rang up his purchases. Then, Brodie was out of the home improvements store, ice cream forgotten, his fist gripped tightly around his new toy.

The longer he spent out and about, the more his body clamored to have something filling it. Brodie gritted his teeth, his ass growing wet.

He wanted to be held down, he wanted to be bitten and filled. Over and over until he was in so much pleasure he couldn't breathe.

I shouldn't be fantasizing about him. Hell, Dad had made absolutely sure that Brodie knew it was wrong to bed his stepbrother.

But at night, when it was just him and his toys in the bedroom... Brodie dipped his toes into sin.

Besides, Noel had chosen to disappear from Brodie's life. So, he would never find out what Brodie had been thinking about him all these years later; he would never hear Brodie moaning his name, pretending the toy buried deep inside him was actually Noel.

It was Brodie's biggest secret, and he would take it to his grave.

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NOT YOUR TYPICAL SANTA

LIKE THEY HAD every year before this, the reindeer landed flawlessly, almost soundlessly, on the rooftop. Noel let out the breath he'd been holding. He didn't know why he'd expected this visit to be any different—nothing about the world had changed.

Well, maybe some things had. There was only one occupant in this particular house this year whereas there'd been two before; he'd paused with surprise when he'd checked the records.

Then, he'd felt the littlest sense of unease. Excitement. Things that a man with his responsibility shouldn't be feeling.

But it wasn't every day that Santa landed on the roof of his stepbrother's home, was it?

It wasn't every year, either, that Brodie Robinson spent Christmas alone.

Noel had lost count of the number of times he'd watched the omega he'd grown up with tucking his son into bed, he'd lost count of the number of times he'd watched Brodie taking yet another alpha home, his fists clenched so tight that he'd had to pry them loose from his present sack.

Oh, who was he kidding? He hadn't lost count at all.

“Things are going to be exactly the same this year,” he told himself sternly. “You’re a Santa. A ton of children are counting on you to deliver their presents tonight.”

And after today, those children were counting on him to oversee the toy production back at the North Pole. He and Brodie lived completely separate lives now—nothing would change when the sun rose.

His heart heavy, Noel lifted the bulky sack out of his sleigh and trudged over to the chimney, to make the one exception he’d been making ever since he’d become a Santa.

He’d never really understood how his broad shoulders fitted through the chimneys. Something-something-magic. Then again, he couldn’t explain how the reindeer ran through the air, either, as though there were invisible bridges linking the houses and towns and countries.

Maybe he should’ve asked one of the other Santas on the job, but he’d been too heartbroken to think about it back then, and he didn’t particularly care right now.

What he *did* know was that he’d neatly avoided the embers of a burned log, landing on his feet on the hearth of Brodie’s living room, the lights dimmed around him, a decorated Christmas tree twinkling by its lonesome in the far corner.

Noel sucked in a deep breath, the scent of hibiscus so strong that it felt like a punch to his gut.

For a moment, he could only close his eyes, gulping down lungful after lungful of that scent. Remembering what it felt like to hold that omega in his arms. To touch him and feel his warmth. His insides tightened. *I have to leave soon.*

But first, he just... wanted a glimpse of Brodie. Just one look at his beautiful face—gorgeous walnut eyes framed by soft,

graying black hair, pink lips so pretty that Noel had imagined kissing them countless times. He wanted to make sure Brodie hadn't lost more weight than he already had, he wanted to make sure he couldn't see the ribs on Brodie's chest.

He wanted to see that old tattoo, too. The one on Brodie's right hip that he'd almost chickened out on getting. He'd asked Noel to accompany him to the tattoo shop, back when they were both eighteen.

Gods, he'd missed that man.

Noel padded quietly through the living room with its worn couch, and the coffee table with more stains on it than last year. He sniffed at the faint traces of peppermint and chocolate in the kitchen.

He paused just outside Brodie's bedroom, eyeing the light shining from under the door—Brodie had never stepped out when Noel visited. Had he fallen asleep with the light on, like he'd had the last few Christmases? Could Noel silently open the door and peek inside?

Maybe touch his face?

He'd almost gotten the doorknob all the way turned, when a sound came from behind the door. A thump. Then, a moan so low and needy that Noel felt it all the way to his balls.

It was only then that he smelled that *other* scent. A heady musk that seemed to waft from behind the bedroom door, so strong that it meant only one thing: an omega in heat.

Noel froze. *I need to fucking leave.*

He had presents to deliver. So many fucking presents. But he'd never, ever, in all the years he'd known Brodie, ever caught him in heat.

And when an omega went into heat... all he desired was to be filled. Over and over. Noel's mouth filled with saliva; his cock thickened. *Brodie doesn't want to see me here. Hell, he doesn't even know I'm in his house.*

He needed to get out now, and take the moral high ground. He'd jerk off when he got back to the North Pole.

But there were other sounds now, slick, rhythmic sounds that were so sinful, Noel's entire body came alive.

Santa shouldn't be entering his stepbrother's house. Not with the intention of eavesdropping on him, not with the intention of touching him. Brodie didn't even believe in Santa.

I'm just leaving him a present.

A low whimper came from behind the door. Then, a gasp and a drawn-out moan.

Noel closed his eyes, putting everything he had into self-restraint. Brodie was touching himself, wasn't he? Noel could already imagine him with his stiff cock out, slippery with precome, his bare legs open and inviting. Ready for an alpha to grasp his thighs, and pin him open. Ready for an alpha to stretch his hole and make him writhe.

Noel tried not to think about all the alphas who'd had Brodie. The bastard who had given Brodie a son, and promptly vanished on him. The gods-awful jerks who'd taken him for their own pleasure, and then left him wanting.

I'd make him come so hard. I'd touch every inch of his body and have him begging before I even push in. Noel swallowed, staring at his white-knuckled grip on the door handle.

It'd be so easy to crack the door open for a peek. Just a whiff of Brodie's heat scent, just a fragment of his moans.

Just that. Just ten seconds.

Ever so slowly, Noel twisted the door handle the rest of the way. He stopped breathing as he pushed the door open by fractions of an inch, bit by bit until it cleared the latch bolt.

Past the door, his stepbrother lay sprawled out on the bed, his legs spread, his arm urgently working something between his thighs.

Noel's cock grew so hard, it threatened to rip through both his underwear and his pants. *I need to stop looking.*

But he couldn't see Brodie's face from here. All he saw was the lower half of Brodie's body, the ruddy length of his cock jutting straight up, looking like it hurt. *I need to see his face.*

Noel held his breath, slowly, slowly releasing the door handle and pushing it just the slightest bit more open. He pressed his cheek to the door and craned his neck, glimpsing the bare skin of Brodie's abdomen—still too thin—and then his heaving chest, his dusky, pebbled nipples begging for a taste.

Brodie squirmed and bucked on the bed. Then he turned around onto all fours, and Noel had to bite down his groan.

The clear curve of a huge glass candy cane stuck out of Brodie's ass. With red stripes and everything. But Brodie's ass itself—it was tight, spread open, and the hole that nestled between his cheeks... That was pink and stretched, dark through the glass of his toy. Which was nowhere near Noel's size.

I could put my cock inside him, and he would scream. Noel tried to breathe. He tried not to reach down to give himself a squeeze. *I need to fucking leave.*

But he could only watch as Brodie crammed that toy deep into his body, his breaths growing ragged, a thread of precome

stretched between his cock and the bed. What wouldn't Noel give to knot inside his stepbrother? Grind it into Brodie's prostate and make him howl?

Brodie moaned, his voice sounding awfully like, "Noel."

Noel dropped his present sack; it thumped so loud that *he* jumped. *Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck!*

Immediately, Brodie stiffened, whipping his head around.

Their eyes met through the crack in the door. Noel *throbbed*. Brodie Robinson was even more beautiful than he'd been.

And now that Brodie had seen him, he absolutely had to leave. Would Brodie lock him out next year?

"Wh-who's there?" Brodie squeaked, a thread of terror in his voice.

Gods, Noel couldn't leave him all scared.

He tried to calm his racing heart. He adjusted himself so his arousal wasn't so damn obvious. Then he drew a deep breath, and pushed the door open. "Me."

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A PRESENT FOR BRODIE

THERE'S an intruder in my house! Brodie scrambled to the far edge of his bed. In his panic, he misjudged and went too far, teetering off the mattress, flailing helplessly.

He was going to hit the floor. “No—”

The man swept into the bedroom. He was an alpha, going by the way his shoulders were so broad, his arms muscular beneath his scarlet coat. Brodie barely glimpsed a pair of familiar gray eyes.

Then the alpha leaned over the bed and grabbed Brodie's ankle, dragging him across the mattress. Toward himself. With Brodie's legs wide open, the dildo still buried inside him. Precome squirted all over his abdomen.

Brodie shrieked, at the same time his body flushed with heat. “Don't touch me!”

The alpha dropped his ankle immediately and backed away. “I'm leaving,” he rumbled, his voice stroking into Brodie's ears like a lover's caress. “Sorry.”

Only then did Brodie have time to process the rest of his features. From his shrewd gaze to his strong jaw, from his crooked nose to the jagged scar down his left cheek. The teak scent that haunted his dreams.

Him.

Noel Robinson had become part of Brodie's family by marriage, when his mom married Brodie's alpha dad when they'd both been six. Brodie had tried to push Noel away; he hadn't wanted a new omega parent or a brother. He hadn't wanted to share his toys. But Noel had won him over by sharing *his* snacks, he'd stood up to Brodie's schoolyard bullies and sat across Brodie at the kitchen table, both of them doing their homework in shared misery.

After a while, Brodie had learned that he really liked seeing Noel's smile. It was why he'd started sharing his own things. Because he'd hoped that the things that made him happy would also make Noel grin.

Then they'd grown older together, Brodie creeping into Noel's bedroom, hiding under the blankets with him so they could both read stories with a flashlight in the dark. Noel had been handsy with him—all the way until Dad had caught him fondling Brodie, and beaten him.

Brodie had been a lot more careful after that. They'd secretly taken showers together, they'd learned about their bodies with each other.

Then Dad had caught them again, and this time, he'd threatened to break Noel's wrists. Back then, Noel had been tracing his scent all over Brodie's back, he'd been kissing Brodie's neck, promising care and safety.

After that, Noel had disappeared. That had been twenty-five years ago.

Noel was older now, weather-worn, with wrinkles on his skin and crow's feet at his eyes. He looked stronger, too, bigger and broader than Brodie remembered. Biceps that stretched his

sleeves, muscular thighs that filled his pants. A hefty line between his legs that made Brodie's hole squeeze.

Time changed a person so much.

Noel raked his gaze blatantly down Brodie's chest, leaving tingles wherever he looked, from Brodie's nipples to his abdomen to his still-hard cock.

How dare he?

But the little voice in Brodie's head asked the more important questions: Was Noel imagining what he tasted like? Was he remembering what those places felt like beneath his hands?

He looked far longer than a stepbrother had any right to. But he was Noel, and Noel had seen—touched—every part of Brodie.

Brodie's body stirred, growing hotter as though it wanted *Noel* to sate his heat. As though it wanted Noel to pin him down, force his legs open, and ravage his hole.

I need to be angry, damn it. But liquid heat flowed through his veins, his bones growing heavy and his teeth aching. Now, more than ever, he felt the unsatisfying width of his dildo. The wetness that kept trickling out around it, in preparation for an alpha's cock.

He shoved his hand over his cock self-consciously, then tried to cover up the half-buried candy cane.

Noel had never witnessed him in heat. Dad had threatened Brodie once, warning him never, ever to let Noel see him this way. He'd sent Brodie away to a faraway cabin with Mom each time, he'd set Brodie up with heat suppressants so Noel never knew.

He pulled a pillow over, hiding his entire torso behind it. Needing to show Noel his entire body, except this really was too much.

“Wh-why are you here?” Brodie stammered, cursing himself.

A flush rose to Noel’s cheeks. “I, uh.” He glanced around and focused on the door. “I’m here for a delivery.”

“In my *house*?”

Noel winced. “Kind of? I just... Yes.” He sighed heavily and stepped back, dragging a sack into the room. “I have a ton of deliveries to do tonight.”

Only then did it sink in that Noel was wearing a Santa outfit. Red cap lined with white fuzz and a white puffball, red blazer edged in white, held shut with a black belt. Even his pants were that rich red hue, their hems tucked into smart black boots.

“I never knew FastPost made their couriers dress up,” Brodie blurted. *Why the hell am I still talking to him? He left me! He broke into my house!*

“I...” Noel sighed again. “I’m not a courier. I’m Santa.”

Brodie had officially lost his mind. “And I’m hallucinating. That’s fine. I’m in heat. Just fuck me and I’ll wake up thinking I had a great dream.”

Noel swore. “I’m leaving. I’m really Santa, all right? And I don’t have time to stay. I still have hundreds of thousands of deliveries left to make.”

But it wasn’t Brodie’s imagination that Noel’s bulge had grown bigger. A lot thicker than the candy cane dildo, actually.

It would stretch his ass a lot more than it used to, wouldn’t it? It’d be ruthless inside him. Force an orgasm or three out of

him, until he sobbed and begged for more.

“Is that why you left?” he blurted, trying to breathe. “To play dress-up?”

Noel narrowed his eyes, his shoulders tensing. “Look, I know you don’t believe this is an actual job. But a ton of kids do, all right? I’m basically in the public service.”

Why did he have to be even hotter when he was all riled up? Brodie hated everything about this situation. But he couldn’t help giving in to the little voice urging him to get under Noel’s skin. “Prove it, then. Prove to me you didn’t just stuff the sack with a bunch of shoeboxes and break into my house as some twisted joke.”

Noel gritted his teeth. He began pulling out gifts from the sack—small boxes, big boxes, gifts that were unevenly-shaped, but were wrapped well all the same. He set them in a row on the edge of Brodie’s bed. “Have a look. Shake them if you want, but don’t open them. They’re not yours.”

Cautiously, Brodie leaned forward, reading the tags. *Caleb, Izzy, Belle, Hazel, Gwen, River.*

“River?” Brodie blurted, staring at the red-wrapped box. “That... That’s not my son, is it?”

Noel smiled crookedly. “Yes, it’s for him.”

“Why?” And why did Brodie’s heart have to grow so tight?

“Because he secretly still believes in Santa.” Noel sighed. “It’s a little wind-up car with a frog in it. Call him tomorrow and see if it’s true.”

Brodie badly wanted to shake the boxes, but he kept his hands to himself.

“Not touching them?” Noel raised an eyebrow.

“I can’t.” Brodie scowled. “I haven’t—washed my hands.”

Because his hands had just been all over himself, and those presents were going to *children*.

“I’ll wait. Wash them.”

“I thought you had deliveries to make!”

Noel looked at him, eyes dark, and said nothing. Brodie tried not to remember the old days, back when Noel had looked at him like that, and kissed him breathless.

He left me. I shouldn’t want him back.

“Anyway,” Noel said after a while. “I was going to leave something under your tree, but you can have it now.”

He pulled out a gift from the sack, wrapped in sparkling pink paper—that used to be Brodie’s favorite wrapping paper. The sort that Noel had fished out of Mom’s discard pile and smoothed out for Brodie. Another pang hit his chest.

Noel thrust the box at him; Brodie accepted it on instinct. There was no address anywhere on the exterior; just a tag with his name, and no sender information.

Something heavy thunked around within the box. Noel looked away, his cheeks growing darker. “Open it only when I’m gone.”

“Why? Who is this from, anyway?”

“Me. I really have to go. See you next year.”

“What do you mean, next year?”

“I’m Santa. I don’t know how many times I have to tell you that, Bee.” Noel bit his lip, as though he hadn’t meant to let that nickname slip. He raked his eyes down Brodie, from the top of his head down his pillow-covered body, to his open

thighs and bare feet. “I have reindeer and a sleigh waiting on the roof. They’re already getting impatient. I’m late.”

Brodie’s thoughts went sideways. “Reindeer.”

“Yes.” Noel flashed a quick smile, so boyish that Brodie remembered the old days again. “I’ll show you how I get out, all right? It’s pretty cool.”

But... he’d just gotten here, hadn’t he?

Noel dumped the presents back into his sack and hefted it, flaring his nostrils—he was sniffing at Brodie. Except he wheezed, suddenly, doubling over like he’d been punched in the gut. “Fuck.”

Musk billowed through the air between them, so thick that it overwhelmed even Brodie’s heat scent. Noel’s pupils blew wide. He staggered backward, dropping the sack again, his back hitting the wall. “Oh, f-fuck. What’s—What’s going on?”

His hands shook. He reached down to grasp himself through his pants—had he gotten *bigger*? He had. There was no way that hard line had been *this* thick before.

It would feel so good thrusting inside Brodie’s ass. Brodie shoved his hand over his mouth, trying not to whimper. But the ache in his body had intensified, his ass hurting with how much slick it made, absolutely ready for his alpha’s entrance.

“I-I have to go,” Noel rasped, staggering toward the door. His fist had gone white-knuckled around his bulge, and a dark spot had appeared where his pants were stretched across his tip.

Gods, he was big.

“Wait.” Brodie’s thoughts had slowed down like molasses.

“Are you in a rut?”

Because he'd heard about ruts. Alphas only went into ruts with omegas they cared about... and none of the alphas Brodie had spent his heats with had ever gone into a rut for him.

A rut wouldn't end unless an alpha emptied their come inside someone.

"Don't know," Noel bit. "Never been in one."

Until me. Brodie's heart fluttered. "Your rut won't stop. Not until you sate it."

Noel groaned and pumped himself, thrusting roughly into his fist. "I need to fucking go."

"You can't deliver presents like this!"

Noel was almost through the door. When he turned back, his gaze scorched Brodie's skin as though he was a second from crossing the room, tossing the pillow aside, and plunging his entire cock into Brodie's hole.

Brodie was *this close* to rolling over and presenting his ass.

"I'm not gonna pressure you, okay?" Noel rasped, panting now, his eyes still raking down Brodie's front. "I'm not gonna stop work on the most important night of the year."

"But you can't go into homes like this," Brodie cried. "Not with the way you smell. Someone's going to think you're there on a—a bad mission. What if they shoot you?"

Noel wavered, his jaw clenched tight, his chest heaving. "Fuck. Fuck, it hurts."

Brodie knew he shouldn't say it. He knew they weren't supposed to do this again, but— "It won't hurt inside me."

"Gods, fuck." Noel's groan went all the way to Brodie's hole, pulling it tight.

Brodie tried to stop himself from hurting there. He pumped the candy cane inside himself, except it was no longer enough. Who had he been trying to fool? That toy would never be enough. He needed Noel on top of him, Noel's fist in his hair, Noel's teeth on his skin.

"Just get it over with," Brodie whimpered.

Noel dragged his hand down his face. "We're stepbrothers."

"It's never stopped you before." Then he plucked the toy out of himself, starting to turn around.

"Wait," Noel panted. "I need to go back up. The roof."

Brodie could've cried. "Why?"

"I need to tell the reindeer I'll be a while." Noel winced. "I need to tell the other Santas there's a delay on my end."

"But—But after that..." Brodie swallowed hard.

"I'll come back to solve this problem." Noel licked his lips, palming his cock again. "You can follow me if—if you wanna see how I do this."

Noel grabbed the present sack, his shoulders set. He strode out of Brodie's bedroom; Brodie grabbed his pillow and gift, wobbling after him into the living room.

At the hearth, Noel knelt, reaching up into the chimney. He glanced over his shoulder; their gazes locked.

Then Noel tugged on *something*, and his body compressed along with his sack, disappearing up the chimney like he'd turned into some sort of geyser.

I'm really hallucinating. Brodie shook his head to try and get back into reality. But he was still naked, still standing in the

middle of his living room with his pillow and a sparkling pink present.

What was in there? Noel had said Brodie couldn't open it until he was gone. And he'd left.

Swallowing hard, Brodie dropped his pillow and ripped open the wrapping paper. Were it any other day, he'd have been more careful about preserving that paper. But right now, all he wanted was to see if his guess was correct.

Under the wrapping paper was a long, narrow box. Brodie pried open its lid—nestled within pale blue tissue was a thick, pink-and-gold cock, complete with a blunt tip, a knot, and a flared base, so big that slick trickled down Brodie's thigh.

Was this... Noel's size? Noel's exact replica?

It looked about right. Brodie moaned, scooping out the dildo and dropping the box. Noel didn't seem to be coming back anytime soon. So Brodie turned away from the fireplace, lifting the toy to his face.

It smelled faintly like teak. And musk. As though Noel had rubbed himself all over the replica before he'd wrapped it up. Which stepbrother did that? Another moan escaped Brodie's throat.

The heat in his body thrummed hotter than ever, his hole achingly empty. If Noel wasn't coming back... Brodie licked the velvety end of the toy, pretending it was slippery like Noel's tip. He wriggled his tongue against the spot under Noel's head.

If he'd done this to Noel in person, Noel would've grabbed his hair, and shoved his cock all the way to the back of Brodie's throat.

Brodie panted, rubbing the replica against his nipples. Those were hard now, tingling with every stroke. Then he slid that silicone length down his chest, down his belly to his cock, rubbing it against his own stiffness—but it wasn't enough. He sank onto his pillow, straddling it, laying Noel's replica between his legs. Pretending Noel was holding his legs open as he ground against it, pleasure throbbing through his body.

If Noel were to see this... would he grab Brodie and throw him onto the bed? Would he slam inside like Brodie so badly wanted him to?

Brodie squirmed, standing the toy upright, lowering himself onto it so its thick tip nudged his hole. It began to stretch him there, ever so slowly... In a few more moments, he was going to remember what his stepbrother had felt like inside him.

“Fuck, babe.” The groan came from right behind.

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BRODIE'S HEAT

BRODIE JUMPED a foot into the air, his entire face burning. *When did he get back? How much of my ass did he see?*

“I wasn’t doing anything,” he yelled, turning around. Except he found Noel on the hearth, his pupils completely black, his fist gripping his bare cock.

“You weren’t?” Noel growled softly, closing the distance between them. Until his cock rubbed wetly against Brodie’s abdomen, and the space between their mouths narrowed to a hairsbreadth. He was so tall, so much bigger than Brodie that all of Brodie’s instincts clamored to submit.

“Brodie,” Noel whispered, his breath hot on Brodie’s lips. “Tell me what you were doing with my cock.”

That really was his. Brodie choked. “N-nothing.”

Noel huffed and slipped his fingers into Brodie’s hair, grasping him by the back of his head. His other hand trailed heavily down Brodie’s front, finding his nipple, rubbing it all slow and decadent. Brodie trembled. He shouldn’t be so affected by all this, except Noel was touching him after so long. Stroking and plucking at his nipple exactly the way he loved it.

“Let it out,” Noel whispered. “Let me hear you.”

Brodie moaned, and Noel’s grip tightened in his hair.

“Fuck. You sound incredible.” Noel hauled Brodie up against him, so Brodie’s cock shoved against his velvet coat. Then he brought his hand between them, his calluses catching against Brodie’s sensitive skin. Brodie clutched at him, his precome squirting into Noel’s hand.

“You have to take that off,” Brodie gasped. “It’ll be a mess.”

“It will, huh?” Noel chuckled darkly. And he closed his hot fist around Brodie, squeezing him tight.

Brodie wheezed, bucking helplessly. “F-f-fuck, N-Noel—”

“Still so sensitive,” Noel breathed, pumping Brodie a couple of times. He pulled down Brodie’s foreskin and ground his thumb against Brodie’s tip.

Pleasure shot through him like lightning; Brodie howled and thrashed, desperate now, needing more. “Please, please—”

“Gods, I missed hearing you beg.” And yet Noel did not bend. He skimmed his fist down Brodie’s cock, sometimes so loosely that Brodie could scarcely feel his touch. Then he squeezed so tight that Brodie choked and clawed at him. “I’m gonna make you come a couple of times before I let you have my cock, babe.”

“Just put it in already,” Brodie sobbed, spreading his legs. His entire body hurt. He needed his alpha inside.

Noel groaned. “No.”

He hauled Brodie over to the wall and pinned him up against it, sliding his hot palm heavily down Brodie’s front, down the underside of his cock, and over his balls. Then he wrapped his fist tight around Brodie and jerked him, mashing his thumb against Brodie’s exposed tip. Pleasure shot through him, jacking up the tension in his body. He stopped thinking. He

could only feel Noel's strong body caging him, Noel touching him where he throbbed.

"I-I need—" His voice cracked; he bucked his hips, shoving his cock against Noel's palm. "So close."

"What do you need?" Noel slowed down, his pace turning excruciatingly slow. Brodie whined—except Noel didn't budge. His mouth curved into a dark smile; he worked his callused thumb slowly beneath Brodie's tip, grinding against the bundle of nerves that made Brodie keen.

"Please—" Brodie's voice broke. "I need to come."

"That's it," Noel whispered. "That's my omega."

The words hit Brodie hard, unexpectedly. They sent him spiraling off the edge, pleasure shooting up his spine as his balls writhed and his spine arched, come spurting out of him.

"Noel—"

"Gods." Noel groaned and slanted their mouths together in a searing kiss, his lips so soft, his tongue demanding as it swept through Brodie, claiming him inside.

It was almost too much. Brodie struggled for air, he struggled to yank Noel closer. He begged with his body for Noel to use him, to plunder him until he was a mess of leaking holes.

"Please."

"I will," Noel promised against his lips. "I'll hold you down and fuck you 'til you scream, babe. Until all you know is my cock stretching you open, pumping you full of come. Then I'll knot you, and fuck you raw."

Brodie sobbed. He'd thought maybe he'd need time to recover after that release, except Noel's promises burned through his veins. "Please."

Noel licked off the pearly droplets on his forearm. When that was clean, he fisted his hand in Brodie's hair and pulled his head backward. Then he leaned in and closed his mouth over Brodie's pulse point, and *sucked*.

Brodie's hips shot up, his cock pulsing again. Except Noel didn't stop. He sucked so hard that the pressure tightened Brodie's hole, he sucked hard enough to leave a marking on Brodie's neck.

"I'm going to claim you now," Noel whispered, sliding his hand down Brodie's spine, pushing his fingers roughly between his cheeks. Then he sought out Brodie's hole, and shoved two fingers in without warning. "Fuck, you feel amazing."

Brodie's spine bowed. *He's inside me*. "Y-You need t-to get your clothes off," he gasped. "Y-You're not supposed to wear my c-come."

"Yeah?" Noel's eyes darkened. He pressed down hard on Brodie's prostate; Brodie's eyes rolled back into his head.

"F-fuck, Noel!" Brodie clutched at him.

"I told you." Noel bit lightly down Brodie's throat, interspersing the teeth marks with sucking kisses. "You're going to howl for me. Come for me. You'll take my cock and my knot, babe, and you'll thank me for it."

"*Please*," Brodie sobbed.

"Fuck," Noel rasped. He flipped Brodie around to face the wall. Then a thick, sinful tip pushed up between Brodie's cheeks, spreading them with its sheer width. "Beg for it."

Brodie grabbed his cheeks and spread them, lifting his hips. Offering his leaking hole. It didn't matter anymore that his

stepbrother was behind him, about to plunder his body. It didn't matter that he wanted to be angry with Noel. "Please."

Noel swore. The next thing Brodie knew, Noel had cupped his throat, holding him possessively as he snapped his hips forward, his thick tip pushing its way through Brodie's puckered hole, before inches of cock slammed into his body.

That. That was *nothing* like Brodie's candy cane dildo. He howled as his alpha forced his muscles to stretch, Noel's thickness plowing relentlessly deeper until he was completely spread inside, his body fitting Noel's cock like a glove.

"You're so tight for me," Noel hissed, yanking Brodie against himself to bury every single inch. "Is that enough cock for you, babe?"

Brodie could barely even breathe. "Y-yes."

"Good." Noel pinned him against the wall, pulling out halfway, fucking back in so viciously that Brodie choked on his moan. "This is just the start of it."

Before Brodie could ask, Noel reached around and took Brodie's cock into his hand. And he fucked Brodie into it, his own thrusts so demanding that Brodie could only clutch at the wall.

Gods, it had been so long.

"Mine," Noel growled, sinking his teeth into Brodie's shoulder. "All mine."

He punctuated each word with a sharp thrust, his cock slamming against Brodie's prostate so viciously that Brodie writhed, about to blow again. "I-I can't hold on—"

"Come," Noel demanded.

Brodie came, howling, his body clenching around his alpha. Noel swore and plowed in deeper, he kept fucking through Brodie's climax, working his hole completely open. Brodie clawed at the wall—all he knew was Noel's warmth around him, Noel's touch deep inside, the friction making his instincts sing.

“Gorgeous,” Noel panted, cramming every inch deep and holding it there. Forcing Brodie to adjust to his exact size. Brodie wheezed, trying to just breathe.

Except Noel pulled out, leaving Brodie horribly bereft. “Fuck,” Noel whispered. “You covered my entire cock with your slick, babe.”

He thrust it roughly back Brodie's cheeks, catching his tip against Brodie's hole and slamming it all back in.

Brodie howled and came again. He spasmed and thrashed, barely heeding his surroundings until he felt Noel laying him face-down on the floor, his hips propped up by his pillow. Noel began to fuck him into that pillow, hard thrusts that would've bruised had he been flat on the hardwood floor.

“You take my cock so well, babe,” Noel groaned. His thrusts grew uneven, more vicious, his grip growing tighter as he scooped Brodie up by his shoulders, arching him backward. “I'm bigger now, but you still take every inch.”

Gods, he was bigger. So much bigger. Brodie sobbed and convulsed, coming again. He heard Noel's breath grow ragged behind him, his thrusts turning shorter and more desperate. As though he was trying to fuck Brodie through the pillow.

“Gonna—Gonna give you every single drop, Bee,” Noel panted. His teeth sought out Brodie's neck, biting down

everywhere—until he found one spot that sent bliss razing down Brodie’s spine.

Noel bit down hard on that spot, breaking skin, sending so much pain and pleasure through Brodie that he screamed.

“Fuck,” Noel hissed, his cock swelling. Then he came with a roar, burying himself deep, holding his pulsing cock inside as it flooded Brodie with warmth.

Brodie thought he might stop there. Noel’s knot grew inside him, growing thick and round, pressing up against his prostate with a toe-curling pressure. Except Noel began to ride him again, his knot compressing Brodie’s prostate, so savagely that his eyes rolled back and he screamed, more come shooting out of his cock.

Noel fucked him over and over with his knot, he didn’t stop until Brodie lay boneless against the floor, unable to move.

Noel eased his receding knot out and gathered Brodie against himself, pressing kisses all over his shoulders.

“There,” Noel whispered. Brodie barely knew anything aside from the safety of his embrace.

He felt himself being laid gently on his bed with his pillow. Noel left then; he whimpered. “Where—”

“Bathroom.” Noel returned with a washcloth and wiped Brodie clean between his legs. Then he left again, and Brodie heard the sound of running water. “I’m scrubbing my hands with soap, just so you know. Do you have a scent suppressant?”

“Medicine cabinet,” Brodie mumbled.

Something spritzed nearby. When Noel returned, he leaned over Brodie, gently cupping his cheek. “Sorry I can’t stay

longer,” Noel whispered. “I really am fucking late.”

“But—” Brodie really, really wanted a cuddle.

“Next year,” Noel promised. “I’ll come back next year.”

That was such a long time. “You can’t,” Brodie whimpered.

Noel traced his thumb over Brodie’s lips. Then, the intricate heart tattoo on his hip. “What do you want me to do?”

“Sooner.” This was all a dream. Brodie didn’t care what he was saying—he felt so good right now, his limbs all loose, his body relaxed. “More hugs.”

Noel sucked in a slow breath. “I’ll see what I can do.”

He gathered Brodie into his arms, and held him for a warm moment. His lips brushed Brodie’s forehead. Then he laid Brodie back down, pulling the covers over him.

“Merry Christmas, babe,” Noel murmured. “Sleep tight.”

Brodie didn’t see Noel leave, but he heard footsteps, and shortly after, the quiet thuds of hooves on his roof.

It was probably all a dream. But it was the best dream that Brodie had gotten in a while. He snuggled into the teak-scented sheets, falling into a deep sleep.

DID ANYONE USE CONTRACEPTIVES?

THE SLEIGH SLID to a stop in the snowy courtyard, the reindeer stamping their hooves impatiently. Yeah, *they* could tell that Noel was late, too.

They'd given him the stink eye when he'd emerged from Brodie's chimney, sweaty with a hint of rut-musk on his clothes.

"I won't keep you from breakfast," Noel said, hurrying to release them. He followed them to the open barn and brushed them down, making sure to fill the feed troughs generously. Then he headed over to the largest building at Alpha Ridge—HQ, as they all called it.

It was a lit-up, sprawling cabin with offices and lounges and all the common areas. This was where Noel had spent the last twenty-five years of his life: making sure the toy production lines kept going, making sure the materials showed up on time so these toys could all be made.

He slowed down when he glimpsed the warm firelight through the windows—Kris, Nikolaas, Morozko, Pelz, and the others were all sitting around in the front room with mugs of hard cider in their hands—this was where everyone always gathered after the biggest night of the year.

After Noel had phoned for help from the roof of Brodie's house, his found brothers had all sped up their own deliveries, coming back to the workshops to grab some of Noel's workload so they could all be delivered before daybreak of Christmas morning.

Somehow, they'd done it. Noel's brothers had saved the day, and it was no thanks to him.

Guiltily, Noel pushed open the double doors and stepped in.

Every single Santa looked up. Some of them glanced at his pants.

His cheeks grew hot. "Thanks, guys. I'm just... really sorry."

"How did you get into a *rut*, of all things?" Kris glowered. He'd always been hot-tempered. "You had one job, Noel. Deliver the fucking presents."

"Don't I know it." Noel scrubbed his face, shutting the biting-cold winds out of the building. "I was at my—stepbrother's. For a delivery."

None of them were supposed to have omegas. It was the exact reason why they were chosen for this job: Alpha Ridge sat in the Arctic Circle, closer to the magnetic north pole than true north. But the conditions were harsh here—the temperatures went up to freezing point in the *summer*. There were no schools here, no playgrounds, nothing for anyone to raise a child.

Maybe Noel should've reconsidered before he'd accepted this job, but... he hadn't wanted Brodie to be judged like his dad had judged them. He'd wanted Brodie to have a life that didn't involve constant scrutiny, he'd wanted Brodie to have a chance to be his own person, instead of 'Noel's sidekick'.

The simplest solution had been to remove himself from the equation.

Some days, Noel still regretted leaving.

“Your... *stepbrother*.” Kris’ eyebrows drew low. “You went into a rut for him?”

Noel pinched the bridge of his nose. *Not this again*. “I’ll make sure there’s no second time.”

Some of the others wolf-whistled. “Noel bedded his brother,” Pelz said.

“*Stepbrother*.” But Noel wouldn’t even have cared if Brodie were his blood brother. He would’ve bitten Brodie, and pumped every last drop of his come inside all the same. *Gods, I’m sick*.

“But you grew up together?” Nikolaas raised his eyebrows.

Yeah, they had. They’d shared everything together, from their food to their clothes to their beds. They’d gone to school together, they’d spent every hour of lunch break and after-school together, playing with Brodie’s notebooks and Noel’s toy cars. Eventually, they’d started sleeping together.

Kris sighed and came over, clapping him on the shoulder. “I don’t have anything against you and your stepbrother. But this isn’t a place to raise a family.” In the same breath, he asked, “You used protection, right?”

Noel’s stomach dropped. “Fuck.”

The entire room went silent, with only the crackling flames filling their ears.

Kris gave an exasperated sigh. “Noel.”

“Damn,” Nikolaas said. “Bareback with your stepbrother, huh?”

“I wasn’t thinking straight, all right?” *Crap, crap, crap. What do I do?*

“Hopefully he had more sense than you,” Pelz said dryly.

Noel ran his hand through his hair. Had Brodie taken any pills before his heat? *Please tell me he did.* Noel had no idea how difficult it was for Brodie to conceive, but if he already had a son... that amplified his chances, didn’t it?

And Brodie was half the world away. Noel couldn’t just show up at his doorstep—technically, he *could* with the reindeer, but... did Brodie even want to see him? Would Brodie think his heat sex had all been a dream?

Noel bit his lip. “I need to go back.”

Kris gave him a pointed look. “Remember that you shouldn’t be raising a family here. It’s not fair to him.”

It really wasn’t. Brodie had friends and family outside the North Pole—Noel couldn’t expect him to be happy here. But what were his alternatives? Quit his job and go to Brodie? He couldn’t. He was a Santa.

“I’ll figure something out,” he muttered, his gut sinking.

“Have something to eat.” Kris nodded at the adjoining dining room, where a few other Santas were laying out a reheated meal they’d cooked yesterday. “C’mon, you all. It’s time for some grub.”

Noel had lost his appetite. *Did I give him a baby tonight?* That would be the worst Christmas present ever—especially when Noel had scoffed at the other alpha who’d done the exact same

thing to Brodie. *Gods, he's going to hate me even more if he conceives.*

Or... maybe Brodie was seeking out another alpha right now, to spend his heat with.

Noel hated that thought even more.

Through the windows, the stars twinkled in the dark sky—this time of year, there was no daybreak at the North Pole. But it was probably close to 9 AM for Brodie.

I can't show up in a sleigh in broad daylight. Noel scrubbed his face. *Is he even going to answer the door tonight?*

Nikolaas nudged the cheesy beef casserole over. “You need to eat something, or you’ll be limp-dicked the next time you see him.”

Noel shoved his forehead against the table. “I’m not fucking him again.”

“You sure didn’t hesitate the first time.”

“What part of ‘rut’ don’t you understand?”

Pelz elbowed him in the side. “Yeah, we all understand. Some of us even wish we had an omega to have a rut with. I think... a few of us are living vicariously through you. So, you’d better get enough energy in so you can go out and live all our dreams.”

“Then you shouldn’t even have become a Santa in the first place,” Noel muttered, but he began scooping some casserole onto his plate.

“Life works in mysterious ways,” Pelz said.

Noel rolled his eyes and stuffed the cheesy goodness into his mouth—it was good. Really good. But he kind of wished he

had someone to share this with, someone to show this place to that wasn't his Santa brothers. Someone he could trust with this information, whose mind he could blow.

A pair of walnut eyes came to mind, but he wasn't fool enough to think Brodie would forgive him this easily.

He sighed, and stuffed more food into his mouth.

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BRODIE HAS REGRETS

BRODIE WOKE up feeling as though he'd just had an important dream. For the life of him, though, he couldn't remember what it was.

He turned to grab a drink of water—and *there*, between his legs, was a telling ache.

The memories came rushing back. The candy cane toy. The pleasure. Then, *Noel* had shown up at his bedroom door. *Peeping* at him. In a Santa outfit, of all things. Except Noel had gone up the chimney and back down, he'd pinned Brodie up against the wall and fucked him good and hard. Then he'd knotted Brodie, and fucked him even more.

A flush crept up Brodie's throat. He'd never had a dream *that* realistic before.

But he remembered the press of soft velvet against his skin, the whisper-light touch of Noel's lips on his neck. The hot, hard length plowing him open, stretching him so wide that his toes curled, even now.

Arousal and embarrassment feathered through his body. *That couldn't have been real. It's too good to be true.*

He squeezed himself to ease the pressure between his legs, crawling out of bed. Past the heavy musk of his bedroom, he

thought he smelled teak.

I'm still hallucinating.

He pulled on a loose nightgown and padded out of the bedroom, freezing when he glimpsed sparkling pink paper on the living room floor.

A long box.

And next to it, a pink-and-gold length that looked really, *really* like dream-Noel's cock.

"How did that get there?" Brodie yelped. Because he'd definitely been dreaming. "None of it was real."

Slowly, he edged toward the box, nudging it with his toe. It felt solid. Then he nudged the dildo, and *that* felt solid, too.

Oh, gods.

His heart thumping, Brodie wandered over to his Christmas tree, scanning the rest of his presents. There was no mystery gift this year.

Was the dildo... his mystery gift? Was *Noel* the one who had been leaving him presents every year?

"It's not real," Brodie tried to tell himself. "He's not actually Santa."

This entire time, he'd imagined that the presents had somehow dropped from the heavens and landed in his possession.

Gods, how often has he been here? How often was he watching me?

His stomach flipped. Then, he wanted to throw the silicone cock at the wall. Noel had *disappeared*. For twenty-five years. He'd let Brodie think he didn't care anymore.

And this entire time, he'd been... coming back?

Brodie wanted to burst into tears and throw a tantrum and ride that pink cock, all at the same time. *I'm finally going insane.*

He grabbed that toy off the floor, trying not to admire its weight in his palm. He knew how it'd feel inside him—the memories lingered, tempting him to remind himself just how sinful that thickness felt.

“Damn you, Noel Robinson,” he hissed, hiking his nightgown up.

He spat on the blunt silicone tip. Then he wedged that tip between his cheeks, thrusting it easily inside. Brodie's moan shuddered out of him.

Noel had been hard last night, even before he'd gone into his rut. Had he been jerking off while watching Brodie? Like he used to?

His cock sank all the way in and stopped at its knot. Brodie shuddered and clenched, staggering over to the couch for some support. He remembered Noel's hard body pinning him against the wall. Noel's cock thrusting demandingly inside, as though it had every right to claim him there.

He sank down on the couch and took Noel's length, his own cock pulsing as he tried to work Noel's knot into his body.

This was exactly what Noel had intended him to do, wasn't it?

“I hate y—Fuuuck,” he growled, at the same time his hole opened, and Noel's knot stretched him just like he had last night.

Pleasure shot through him in a bright-white wave, pulling his balls tight.

Brodie swore and rode that toy again, just because he could. Because Noel *owed him*, damn it.

It was nothing like being held down. There were no sharp teeth on his skin, no heavy alpha driving deep, taking his pleasure inside. But Noel's knot ravaged Brodie's prostate, over and over until Brodie was a trembling, wet mess on the couch, his come and slick smeared everywhere, his limbs loose.

Immediately after, he tugged on the toy, trying to work it back out so he could fling it across the room.

It took an embarrassing amount of time to get his body to stretch again, and even more embarrassing gasps and shivers before it was completely out.

But it made *such* a satisfying *thunk* against the drywall.

Brodie scowled at the fallen toy, turning his back on it.

He wasn't going to wash it, because he *wasn't* ever going to use it again.

He stomped into his bathroom to clean up, freezing when he glanced at himself in the mirror. There was a red mark on his neck. Dried blood. Right where his neck met his shoulder, where his scent gland was.

On everyone else, it'd have been a bonding mark.

Brodie stared, and then scowled hard. He wasn't going to think about it—otherwise, he'd burst into tears.

"He's not coming back," he hissed.

I'll see you next year, was what Noel had said.

What kind of crap alpha did that sort of thing?

He hauled himself into the shower and scrubbed his skin pink. Then he dried off, dressed, and checked on his spluttering fridge—it was barely hanging in there.

Absolutely no one sold or delivered fridges on Christmas day.

This Christmas sucks, Brodie thought, pulling out a pint of ice cream. To make up for everything, he was going to dump the entire tub on his frozen waffles.

While the blueberry waffles were toasting in the oven, he brought the chocolate ice cream over to the Christmas tree, sitting cross-legged in front of it. There were presents from people he cared about—his employees at the scrapbooking shop, his son, and his best friend.

His employees had given him a gorgeous teapot set, with intricate paintings of robins perched on tree branches, twittering to welcome spring.

River had sent a whole selection of lace tapes for his personal scrapbooking collection, along with a rabbit ornament that read *World's #1 Dad*, and a packaged loaf of banana bread from Ben's Buns.

Nico had sent a fluffy, warm sweater in bright pink, a matching pair of flannel pants, and a pair of pink rabbit slippers that made Brodie smile.

His phone buzzed.

River: Thanks for the tool set, Dad! I really needed it.

Brodie: You're welcome.

Brodie: Did you get any... anonymous gifts this year?

River: I got something :) I think it's... I think it's from santa.

Brodie's breath snagged in his throat. He remembered this, too. Noel couldn't have been here, and then over in Meadowfall on the same night. Not without incurring all sorts of expenses.

He isn't actually Santa.

River: It's an ugly frog in a wind-up car. I love it

River: [image sent]

Brodie pinched the bridge of his nose. *You didn't break into my son's house too, did you?*

Brodie: Did you save the wrapping paper?

River: I saved it for you. It's nice. It's red foil with damask patterns all over it.

Exactly what Brodie had seen last night.

Brodie: Did Nico get anything from Santa?

River: No, but I think that's because he doesn't believe in Santa. Maybe you can convince him. :)

Brodie set his phone down, his heart pounding. *Is this why you didn't tell me anything? Because you went and became Santa-fucking-Claus?*

He was angry, all over again. *It's not like he's coming back until next year.*

Damn you, Noel!

Brodie stuffed a huge spoonful of ice cream into his mouth. When his waffles were done, he piled as much ice cream on them as he could, stuffing his face in front of the TV. Except the news was full of Santas flying around the world last night.

Brodie rolled his eyes and turned off the TV. *I'm going to have a peaceful Christmas day WITHOUT any Santas, thank you very much.*

A MAGIC SLEIGH RIDE

LATER THAT NIGHT, there came a faint thudding noise from somewhere outside the house. Brodie paid no attention to it at first—until it grew louder.

Then the sound stopped, and shortly after, someone knocked on the door.

It was probably his neighbors wanting to brag all about the presents they'd received. A little too late, Brodie realized they wouldn't leave—because he'd left the lights on in his house.

He heaved a sigh and trudged over to the door, flinging it open. "Yes, Merry Chri—"

Noel stood on the doorstep, as real as day.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" Brodie snapped, his heart tumbling.

Surprise flickered through Noel's expression. Then, hurt. "You found out, huh?"

Why did his voice have to be so rumbly? Brodie glowered, hating that his instincts had all risen to the surface. *Alpha*, they whispered. "I don't want to know anything. Go away."

Noel's gaze dropped to Brodie's neck, though. The spot where he'd washed away the dried blood, leaving a forming scab. "We should talk," Noel murmured.

“You said you’d come back next year,” Brodie hissed.

Noel’s shoulders sagged; Brodie bit his lip. If this was the same Noel he’d known from a long time ago... It took a lot for Noel to feel hurt. Unless it was something really important to him.

“I’ll show you the reindeer,” Noel said. “If that’ll help you believe me.”

He looked hopeless, and so regretful that Brodie relented. “Fine. You get one chance.”

Noel sucked in a quick, sharp breath. “Okay. Okay.”

Then he glanced past Brodie, and froze. “That’s not where you left it last night.”

Brodie followed his gaze—to the pink-and-gold toy lying next to the wall, just feet away.

Heat surged through his cheeks. “I threw it, okay? I was pissed.”

Noel bowed his head. This close, he was a full head taller than Brodie, and so broad that Brodie badly wanted to step into his arms.

“I’ll take it back if you don’t want it,” Noel said.

“Take it,” Brodie grumbled. “I don’t want to see it again.”

He stepped back to allow Noel entry; Noel crouched and closed his large fist around the toy. He blinked and looked more closely at it—and Brodie had the sudden thought that maybe he should’ve thrown it straight in the trash can.

Because Noel lifted it to his nose, and sniffed at it.

Brodie hadn’t even washed that thing. *Fuck.*

Their gazes locked, Noel still crouched on the floor, that damn toy next to his nose. *He knows. Oh, gods, he knows.*

Noel swallowed hard. “You won’t have to see it again,” he said, his voice rasping.

And now Brodie couldn’t even look him in the eye. “Just show me the reindeer and be done with it.”

Was it him, or was Noel hiding a smile?

Noel stepped out through the door. “They’re in the back.”

He took large strides around Brodie’s house, all the way to the backyard. Brodie hurried after him. *Why do his legs have to be so long?*

And there, in the glow of the flickering porch light, were six reindeer snorting and stamping in front of a ruby-red sleigh.

Brodie rubbed his eyes. “How did they get here?”

“I can show you.” Noel smiled again. “Would you like a ride?”

Brodie was probably hallucinating again. “I need to grab my keys.”

“I’ll wait.”

All his logic told him that he should shut the door, and kick Noel off his yard. But the reindeer were watching, almost as though they could understand the conversation. And that confused Brodie even more.

He grabbed his keys. When he returned, the pink-and-gold toy was nowhere in sight.

“I promised. You won’t have to see it again,” Noel said.

“I didn’t say you could read my mind,” Brodie hissed, but a little part of him quivered at that old familiarity.

Noel flashed a quick smile. Then he went to stand with the leading reindeer, stroking their snouts. “Fam, this is my stepbrother, Brodie. Bee, these are Wilson and Wolfgang.”

“Not Dasher and Comet?” Brodie asked dryly.

“Those guys are at the North Pole. But these are mine.” Noel petted their necks and moved to the next pair. “Willow and Wendy. Woodie and Warly.”

At their names, the reindeer lifted their heads, pushing their noses into his palm.

“Why do they all start with W?” Brodie asked.

“I thought it’d be cute. They’re like a family.” Noel’s smile turned crooked. “The Santas are all a family, but... I kind of wanted my own.”

Brodie’s chest squeezed tight. “You... don’t have one?”

Noel looked at him for too long. “I made my job a priority.”

And then Brodie felt sorry for him.

“I’m fine,” Noel said, roughly nodding at the sleigh. “Get on.”

Brodie climbed awkwardly onto the sleigh—it was made for taller people. Except strong hands grasped his waist and lifted him onto the bench seat, and his heart thumped. “Damn it.”

“Should I not have?” Noel murmured, climbing in next to him. Then he settled right next to Brodie, bumping their thighs together. Suddenly, the large sleigh seemed so small.

“Just get going,” Brodie muttered, his cheeks hot.

“Hang tight.” Noel flashed a smile. “Or grab me if you need something to hold onto.”

He gave a short, sharp whistle. The reindeer began to run, the sleigh jerking into a glide. Except instead of moving straight

forward, they were going *up*.

Brodie yelped, clutching at Noel's arm as the ground fell away beneath them. *Are we really flying?*

"I won't take you to the North Pole yet," Noel said above the growing wind. "Maybe when you're a bit more used to flying."

He seemed so calm that Brodie relaxed slightly, his fists clenched around Noel's sleeve as he craned his neck to look at the streetlamps turning into specks of light.

It took him a good few minutes to convince himself that they weren't going to fall out of the sky. "We're not even wearing seatbelts."

Noel chuckled. "Most of the time, seatbelts are a hindrance. Try delivering even a thousand presents a night with your seatbelt on."

At this altitude, everything seemed to move so much more slowly beneath them. The town had turned into a spread of twinkling lights, the highways merely rivers of cars. It felt as though he was in an airplane, except the wind whipped through his hair.

This was either real, or a very vivid hallucination. "So—So you're really Santa," Brodie blurted.

"What other proof do you need?"

"I don't know. I didn't think any of this was real."

Noel smiled lopsidedly. "I didn't think you would've believed me back then, either."

Hurt slid between Brodie's ribs; he tried to breathe. It was always difficult remembering those first few days, when he'd

realized that Noel had completely vanished. When Dad had said, *I knew we couldn't trust him.* “You left me.”

Noel looked away. “I... Yeah. I did. I didn't think anything would be possible between us.”

“You made me a *promise.*”

“And I broke it.” Noel bowed his head. “I'm sorry.”

“I would've forgiven you,” Brodie muttered. “If you'd just come back.”

He wasn't supposed to tell Noel how to make up for his mistakes. But the words kept tumbling out of his mouth, decades of pent-up grievances seeking an escape.

“I hated you for so long,” Brodie said. “I wished I'd never known you. I wished you would never come back.”

Noel took it all in quietly. “I didn't think I would. We were never supposed to be alpha and omega.”

“It's because of Dad, isn't it?”

“Him, and also because I didn't want everyone around us judging you for it. I can take a beating, and I can take harassment. But I didn't want people pointing their fingers at you and shunning you like you're dirty.”

“We could've moved elsewhere together.”

Noel tightened his grip around the reins. “You needed a chance to grow without me. Besides, I have a job now, Bee,” he said quietly. “The North Pole is a harsh place. There are no facilities there for anyone to raise a family.”

No, Brodie would never have been able to get River the medical treatment he needed there. But River had gotten over his illness, and he had his own life now.

They sat in silence for a while, Brodie torn between thinking about the past, and staring at the night sky surrounding them. There were thick clouds in the near distance, flurries of snow scattering through the air onto the ground below.

When he looked up, he found Noel watching him. His heart stuttered.

“You’re still beautiful, you know,” Noel murmured.

Damn it, why did he have to say things like that? “Flattery gets you nowhere,” Brodie muttered.

Noel’s lips quirked into a smile. “And you’d be lying. Flattery gets me everywhere with you. Except it’s not really flattery. I just say things like they are.”

Brodie didn’t know how to answer that. Instead, he pried his fingers off Noel’s sleeve, and peered over the edge of the sleigh.

Everything was so quiet up here. Aside from the gusts of wind, or the occasional plane passing high above them. “What’s it like flying through a snowstorm?” Brodie blurted.

“I can take you through that one.” Noel tugged on the reins, changing the reindeer’s direction.

It began to get colder. Brodie drew his arms closer to himself, sneaking peeks at Noel—of course Noel wasn’t even bothered by it. He was just wearing a red T-shirt and loose black pants. This probably felt like summer to him.

But even if Noel were to offer his T-shirt and pants, those wouldn’t be enough to keep Brodie warm.

They passed under the voluminous clouds, the first snowflakes flying into Brodie’s face.

“Cold?” Noel murmured.

Brodie tucked his fingers under his thighs. “I’m fine.”

More snowflakes flew into him; the wind stole the heat from his body. He began to shiver, huddling into himself.

Noel pulled his shirt off. “Here.”

The wind almost ripped it out of his hands. Brodie snatched at it and struggled into the shirt—it was so loose around him. It cut the wind somewhat, except when he glanced over, he found Noel shirtless, his chest broad and muscled, his biceps so bulky that Brodie knew suddenly where the warmest place on the sleigh was.

Noel cracked a smile. “Want me to steer us out of the storm?”

“No,” Brodie blurted. He wanted to prove that he could do this.

The winds grew steadily colder. Brodie tucked his hands under his arms, his eyes watering in the icy gale.

Noel turned toward him, his legs spreading open. In a smooth movement, he’d hauled Brodie between his thighs and pulled him flush against his chest.

Then he pulled out a thick coat from somewhere, and wrapped them both up in it. Warmth immediately soaked into Brodie’s skin.

Brodie groaned. “You could’ve mentioned the coat sooner!”

He felt, more than saw, Noel’s smile. “I wanted to make sure you’re the warmest I can get you. It’s even colder at the poles.”

Noel’s lips brushed the back of his head, and his ear. He kept one arm wrapped around Brodie’s waist, holding him so close that Brodie’s pulse fluttered wildly.

Nothing's going to happen between us.

But he felt so *safe* all wrapped up in Noel's embrace, Noel's sheer heat radiating into him.

"Better now?" Noel murmured.

Gods, Brodie hated himself for it, but he didn't want this ride to end. "Yes."

"Good." Noel pressed his nose into Brodie's hair. As though he was breathing Brodie's scent off his skin. Then his fingers skimmed down Brodie's side, lingering on his belly. Stroking him so lightly that Brodie forgot to breathe.

Apparently, being forty-three didn't mean you couldn't grow hard real quick when the right alpha touched you.

Brodie could only stare at the rumps of the reindeer, trying not to focus on Noel's fingers brushing his abdomen beneath the coat. Two shirts separated them. If Noel's hand drifted any lower... he would know.

"Bee?" Noel whispered, his soft lips sending tingles from Brodie's ear all the way down to his crotch. "You're tense."

"Because you're touching me," Brodie hissed, trying to breathe.

Noel paused. Then his caresses grew longer, more deliberate. "Do you like it?"

Brodie sank his teeth into his lower lip, his body growing hot. If he said no, Noel would stop for sure. That was how Noel was.

But he didn't want to say yes, and prove Noel right.

So he said nothing, his chest rising and falling, his entire body thrumming with hyperawareness.

Noel stopped. Then he pulled his hand away, and a soft whimper fell out of Brodie's mouth before he could stop himself.

"You don't want it," Noel said.

Brodie scrunched his eyes shut. He should agree. He should just say he wasn't interested.

But he hadn't had another alpha pleasure him like Noel did, through all these years.

As though his thoughts were on full display, Noel whispered, "When was the last time an alpha made you feel real good?"

Last night.

He clenched his fists. "If you're going to do something, do it."

"I'm not about to force you into a corner." But Noel's hand returned, just his fingertips stroking Brodie's belly. Then, they slipped lower, to the waistband of Brodie's pants, and further down, dangerously close to Brodie's erection. Brodie's pulse thudded in his ears.

Just before they touched his cock, Noel's fingers went sideways, down his inner thigh as though he knew *exactly* where Brodie wanted to be touched. And he was avoiding it on purpose.

Brodie could've snarled.

"Are you angry?" Noel chuckled.

"Fuck you."

"You already did." Noel kissed his ear; Brodie's heart skipped a beat. "You looked so fucking perfect when you came around me."

He squeezed Brodie's thigh gently at first. Then, firmly, possessively. And he swept his hand back up, up and up until he barely brushed Brodie's sac through his pants.

"You smell like musk," Noel whispered. He rubbed his fingertips over Brodie's balls, then under them, and further down, closer to Brodie's wet hole.

Gods, Brodie wanted Noel to put something inside, and make him come. So he wasn't stuck on the verge of exploding.

Noel pulled his fingers away completely.

Brodie snarled then. "Damn it, Noel."

Noel laughed. "What do you want?"

"Nothing."

"That's what you'll get, then." Reins in hand, Noel grasped Brodie's thighs, spreading them apart. He stroked back up to the tops of Brodie's thighs, down and up again, brushing his finger against Brodie's sac.

Then, his bulge.

Electricity shot up Brodie's spine; he squirted precome into his underwear, trying not to writhe.

"Would you rather I pretend that nothing's happening?" Noel murmured.

"Yes," Brodie hissed.

"All right." Noel tugged lightly on the reins to steer the reindeer. With his other hand, he dragged his fingers between Brodie's legs, and covered his hard length.

Brodie could've come right there. He choked and gasped, trying his damndest not to move. "Nothing's going on."

“Absolutely nothing,” Noel growled, and squeezed Brodie through his clothes.

Brodie *throbbed*. Noel grasped his cock lightly and stroked him up and down; his fingers wandered to Brodie’s sensitive tip, kneading it. Brodie’s breath shuddered out of him.

“I love it when my omega can’t hold in his moans,” Noel whispered in his ear. “Love it when my omega gets sopping wet for me. Ready for my cock.”

A sound came out of Brodie’s mouth. He did want Noel’s cock—it’d make this ride so much sweeter.

It pressed against his back, hot and hard and thick.

Noel lifted him then, planting Brodie’s ass right on top of his bulge. “There,” Noel rasped. “Now you know.”

Brodie shuddered. He remembered exactly how it had felt inside him, he remembered taking Noel’s knot over and over. “I don’t need it,” he hissed.

“That’s fine.” Noel pushed his hand down the front of Brodie’s pants and grasped his bare cock, sending a jolt of pure bliss through his veins.

Brodie choked on his moan. *He’s touching me there.*

“Gods, the way you sound.” Noel’s breath grew ragged.

“N-Nothing’s going on.”

“Absolutely nothing.” Noel tightened his hand around Brodie and began to pump, slow, electric strokes that told Brodie he *knew* exactly how desperate Brodie was.

Brodie came with a choked-off cry, his entire body tensing as pleasure exploded down his nerves.

Behind him, Noel swore. Brodie was barely aware of Noel stroking him, Noel massaging the rest of his come out of him. Then Noel brought his hand up, out of the coat, and licked the pearly streaks off.

That had just come out of Brodie's *cock*. Brodie's entire head scorched. *I can't believe I let him do that. What's wrong with me?*

He stared unseeingly into the night sky as Noel licked his palm just next to his face, catching every droplet and wet smear. He absolutely wasn't paying attention to Noel's tongue darting between his fingers, chasing every last drop like it was something *precious*.

Why are you doing this?

It was only when Noel stopped licking, when he'd straightened the coat around them, that Brodie realized they were on the edge of the snowstorm, where it was cold but not terribly so. Noel felt like a furnace against his back.

"I don't think there'll be another omega quite as remarkable as you," Noel whispered.

Then he pressed a kiss to Brodie's nape, and rested his nose against Brodie's skin. Breathing him in.

Brodie's heart tumbled. He remembered the old days, back when Noel had pressed kisses all over his body, his gaze soft, a tender smile playing on his lips. He remembered Noel picking him off the ground when he'd tripped over a tree branch, he remembered Noel checking his hands and knees for bruises and scrapes.

If Brodie were to take a tumble right now... Noel would do the exact same thing for him. He knew it in his gut.

I shouldn't be finding excuses to spend time with him!

Noel shifted—Brodie felt the press of his bulge again, still tellingly hard. When he moved to glance over his shoulder, his hip bumped against it. Noel swore under his breath.

“What about you?” Brodie blurted.

“I’ll finish up later. This is good.” Noel tightened his arm around Brodie’s waist. “Everyone at the North Pole already wants to slaughter me. I’m not adding ‘Jerking off on the sleigh’ to my list of offenses.”

That sent alarm bells jangling through Brodie. “Why do they want to slaughter you?”

Noel chuckled awkwardly. “Because of last night.”

Crap. “They know about last night?”

“Yes...? I had to call in some emergency help, Bee. I was horribly late. Forty-five minutes of no work is a *lot* of undelivered presents.”

All Brodie could focus on was that multiple people knew he’d spent his heat with Noel on Christmas eve. “Does that mean I’m... on the naughty list?”

Noel broke into a loud, rumbling laugh. “You’re fine. You don’t even believe in Santa, anyway. *I’m* the one who’s in trouble. I had one job, and I fucked up.”

“That’s... not good.”

Noel slanted a crooked grin at him. “What’s new?”

He looked so chagrined that Brodie reached up, touching his cheek. Trying to comfort Noel even though his mind said he shouldn’t.

Noel caught his hand, his gaze soft.

Brodie thought he might whisper more sweet words. Except Noel sighed, and straightened his shoulders. “So... I was just supposed to talk to you.”

“About what?”

“About last night.” Noel bit his lip. “You were on birth control, right?”

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WHO'S ON BC?

BRODIE FROZE, the words going over his head. No, he hadn't been thinking about BC at all. Why would he?

All he'd planned was a night with himself and his new toy, with no alpha in the picture. Except Noel had shown up inside his house. And he'd gone straight into a rut.

Brodie hadn't thought much about it today, but... he hadn't been quite as hungry for sex as he usually was during his heat.

Had it... stopped?

Noel took one look at his expression, and cursed. "Tell me I'm dreaming."

"We're riding a sleigh in the midair. I think we're both dreaming."

Noel scrubbed his face. "Damn it. It's happening, then."

Brodie began to laugh hysterically—what else could he do? "I'm going crazy. First you break into my house, then you tell me you're Santa, and now I'm being pulled through snowstorms by flying reindeer, and I'm pregnant!"

Noel winced. "It just took one night, huh?"

"You fucking knotted inside me, Noel!"

Noel looked as though he was grasping at straws. “But tonight, you...” He gestured awkwardly at Brodie’s hips.

Brodie’s face burned. “That had nothing to do with my heat.”

“Oh.” Noel looked down between them, except he didn’t mention how Brodie had been perfectly willing to fuck him outside of his heat. “So... you’re really pregnant.”

“I’m not in heat anymore. It only started yesterday.”

Noel leaned closer, pressing his nose against Brodie’s scent gland. “You don’t... smell like you’re in heat.” After a pause, “What are we going to do?”

Brodie sighed. “You were the one who left. You tell me.”

Noel flinched. “It’s your choice whether or not you’re keeping the baby.”

“I am.” It wasn’t even a question.

“I’ll pay the bills—”

“Do you even get paid to be Santa?”

“Yeah.” Noel shrugged. “I don’t have many things to spend it on, though. There’s nothing at the North Pole. Some of us have snowmobiles, but even that gets old after a while. I...” He shut his mouth, looking uncomfortable.

“You...?” Brodie squirmed out of the coat and off his lap—so he could look at Noel without craning his neck. Noel guided the reindeer out of the snowstorm.

“I don’t know if you noticed.” Noel wet his lips. “Back when your son was in the hospital. I... I helped with the bills.”

Brodie stopped breathing. A number of times, there’d been mysterious credits to the hospital bills—Brodie had thought it had been some stroke of luck. He’d still gone into debt trying

to pay off those bills, but it hadn't been crippling like he'd thought it'd be. He'd fully anticipated having to close down his beloved shop to find a salaried position elsewhere. Instead, his landlord had lowered the shop rental costs for no good reason.

"You... How? Even—Even my shop?"

Noel looked away. "I might've stolen one of the bills out of your mailbox. And gotten in touch with your landlord."

Brodie covered his face, his chest tight. *Oh, gods.* "I'm supposed to be mad at you."

"You could still be."

"But..." Brodie bit his lip. "I thought I was alone this whole time, trying to deal with that whole mess."

"I'm sorry." Noel did sound sorry, too. "I didn't think you wanted to deal with seeing me, on top of everything that was going on."

"Probably not."

"I wanted to give you a hug, though. You looked like you needed it."

"Just how long were you watching me?" Brodie asked, flushing with embarrassment. "Noel Robinson!"

Without warning, Noel slipped his arm around Brodie, pulling him close. Brodie fell against his strong, broad chest, only to be held so tight that he almost couldn't breathe.

It felt like the best promise anyone had made him in a long time.

He grasped Noel's coat, burying his face in Noel's shoulder, his lungs filling with that soothing teak scent. He tried to

convince himself that he was stronger than this, that he didn't need an alpha in his life.

But it felt so good to let Noel protect him.

So he closed his eyes, leaning into Noel's shoulder. Noel smoothed his palm down Brodie's spine; he pressed a kiss to Brodie's hair. His touch lingered on Brodie's right hip, where the tattoo was.

"I'm sorry for leaving," Noel murmured. "I really am. I thought you'd find a better alpha than me, but every one of those bastards never treated you the way you deserve to be."

"And you will?"

"I want to. Like I did in the past."

"You're going to hurt me again."

Noel sucked in a slow breath. "I have limitations on what I can do this time. I'll make them perfectly clear to you."

He cradled Brodie's nape and brushed his fingers through Brodie's hair, he held Brodie against himself for so long that Brodie could almost believe he belonged at Noel's side, all over again.

They descended back into real life, into Brodie's backyard. Then the reindeer drew to a stop, and Noel pressed a kiss to Brodie's forehead. "I have a schedule I need to follow back at the North Pole, but you can reach me through email."

Brodie snorted, feeling entirely too comfortable with this alpha. "You have an email address?"

"Yeah. It's how we get hold of supplies to manufacture the toys."

“And here I thought you forced little elves to help you with their magic.”

“There are no elves.”

“And there are no flying reindeer.” Brodie rolled his eyes.

One of the reindeer turned and whuffled at him, as though it had heard.

“Woodie thinks you’re hilarious,” Noel said, grinning.

“I’m sure glad I won your reindeer’s approval.” Brodie stopped moving when all six of the creatures turned their heads to look at him—were they sizing him up? Then they wagged their tails and faced forward again, and Noel grinned.

“See, they like you.”

“Well, that’s a relief,” Brodie sighed. He glanced over at his empty house, the lights still on behind the windows. The thought of returning to that space put a downer on his mood—he just felt so lonely these days. And he didn’t want to face his struggling fridge alone. “Actually... How long does it take for you to get back to the North Pole?”

“Not long. Why?”

“Can I borrow some freezer space? Or even just space outside your door.” Brodie stumbled out of the sleigh and hurried into his house. He grabbed a grocery bag, then flung open his freezer door, jumping when Noel touched the small of his back. “I didn’t say you could come in!”

“I think we’ve moved past being acquaintances, babe.” Noel cracked a smile. “Sounds like you’re having some trouble here.”

Brodie dropped as many blocks of corned beef into the bag as he could, along with a few soft tubs of ice cream. “Keep these

frozen. I want them back.”

“You mean I can’t eat all your ice cream?”

Brodie spun around with a glower; Noel dropped a kiss on his nose, his eyes sparkling.

“Email me.” Noel took the bag from him, closed the freezer door, and pressed him up against it, his sheer height doing all sorts of delightful things to Brodie’s insides. “Tell me which ice cream I should bring you next time.”

“You’re not waiting a year to come back,” Brodie growled. “The ice cream will dry out.”

“Sure. That’s all you want me back for.”

“Yes, it is.” Brodie tried to scowl, except Noel grinned and cupped his jaw, running his thumb over Brodie’s lips.

“So lovely,” Noel whispered. “I’m so glad I put that bonding mark on you.”

Brodie’s stomach flipped. “It doesn’t mean anything!”

“Yeah, and that baby in your belly doesn’t mean anything, either.”

Brodie gulped. “You only just showed up yesterday, Noel. I don’t expect this to last.”

Noel held his gaze for a long moment. “I should prove it to you, huh?”

“Yes, you should.”

“Okay.” Noel’s gaze lingered on Brodie’s mouth for far too long. Then he stepped back, a soft smile playing on his lips. “I’ll see you again.”

“Don’t forget to bring back my ice cream.”

“I’ll bring you some ice packs. They’ll be plenty frozen.”

“What about my ice cream?”

“We’ll see.”

“Noel!”

“Too late. You’ve handed them over.” Noel backed out of Brodie’s reach, laughing when Brodie chased him all the way to the door. Then he waved and disappeared around the house, and it wasn’t long before Brodie heard the quiet thud-thud-thud of hooves.

A vague shadow crossed the night sky, too high up for them to see. But he thought Noel might’ve been waving from the sleigh.

His chest tightened. *I can’t believe I already miss him.*

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MIDNIGHT CHATS WITH SANTA

To: noel@northpole.net

Subject: Question.

Does being Santa give you a super dick? Just curious.

- B

To: b.robinson@brodiesscrapbooking.com

Subject: Re: Question.

As far as I know, Santas only gain the ability to squeeze down narrow chimneys regardless of size.

- Your favorite stepbrother

To: noel@northpole.net

Subject: Re: Re: Question.

So... the chimneys don't feel it? Do they ask, 'Is it in yet?'

- The stepbrother who hasn't forgiven you

To: b.robinson@brodiesscrapbooking.com

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Question.

Did YOUR chimney feel it?

To: noel@northpole.net

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Question.

Wouldn't you like to know?

To: b.robinson@brodiesscrapbooking.com

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Question.

I think I already do.

To: noel@northpole.net

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Question.

I want my raspberry and white chocolate ice cream

To: b.robinson@brodiesscrapbooking.com

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Question.

Is someone changing the subject? ;) Did your chimney feel me going down, Bee?

To: noel@northpole.net

Subject: Re: Question.

shut up.

P.S. I took off all the Re's. It's too long.

To: b.robinson@brodiesscrapbooking.com

Subject: Re: Re: Question.

I didn't think length was an issue for you.

To: noel@northpole.net

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Question.

I'm ignoring you.

To: b.robinson@brodiesscrapbooking.com

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Question.

How's this for length?

[image attached: cock.jpg]

To: noel@northpole.net

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Question.

what the fuck.

To: b.robinson@brodiesscrapbooking.com

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Question.

:)

To: b.robinson@brodiesscrapbooking.com

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Question.

You okay, babe? You haven't answered in a while. I hope there are no plumbing issues on your end.

To: noel@northpole.net

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Question.

Is email really the only way to reach you? I would like to say 'what the fuck' again to your face.

To: b.robinson@brodiesscrapbooking.com

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Question.

I'm at your door.

BRODIE JUMPED when someone knocked at the door. When he picked up his phone, he found Noel's latest reply. *He's here? Crap. Crap.*

He yanked the used, wet toy out of himself and threw it into his bathroom sink, quickly scrubbing his hands clean. Then he pulled his pants back on and headed to the front door, wishing he'd remembered to use some scent suppressants on himself.

There was no one at the front door. The knocking came again—from his *back* door.

Heat crept up Brodie's cheeks; he flung open his back door and scowled. "Did you really have to?"

Noel's smile grew. He was in a red T-shirt and black pants again, looking completely put-together. "Did I have to use your back door? Probably not. I thought it'd be more convenient since that was where we landed."

"Stop using my back door," Brodie hissed, hating that it *all* sounded like an euphemism.

"I will if you stop opening it for me." Noel's dark gaze swept down his body, from the top of his head all the way to his toes. It felt just as good as Brodie remembered. "So."

"Where's my ice cream?"

Noel handed over Brodie's grocery bag; in it were the tub of white chocolate and raspberry ice cream, and three hefty ice packs that were so cold, they hurt Brodie's fingers.

Brodie brought his treasures to the kitchen, trying to ignore the way Noel followed him automatically into the house. He stuck the ice packs into his fridge and wrapped a towel around the ice cream tub before opening it—the ice cream was rock-solid, but what he managed to prise from the edges was sweet, notes of lemon and raspberry balancing it out. "Mm."

"You never replied," Noel began conversationally. "I worried that you might've had an accident."

Brodie rolled his eyes hard. "How about I never replied because you sent me an unsolicited dick pic?"

Noel grinned and glanced at Brodie's hips—nothing there gave him away. Then he flared his nostrils and sniffed, and—yeah. That leftover musk totally betrayed him. Noel's smile turned knowing. "Did you swear at me because you hated the pic, or because you hated that it got you hot?"

“Why do I have to answer when you already know?”

“Because I love hearing it from your lips.”

“You’ll be waiting a while, then.”

“I’ll wait.” Noel leaned against the kitchen counter, just watching Brodie. Somehow, he took up so much space that Brodie had difficulty breathing.

“Why’re you here?” Brodie grumbled.

“To deliver your ice cream.”

“You’ve already delivered it.”

Noel grinned. “Do I get some kind of thanks?”

“I’m not getting on my knees for you.”

“That’s not what I’m after.” At Brodie’s pointed look, Noel amended, “Not right now, anyway.”

He watched as Brodie ate the ice cream, until Brodie grew self-conscious and blurted, “Do you want some?”

“Always.”

Noel wasn’t even looking at the ice cream.

Brodie gulped. Heart thumping, he crossed the kitchen and thrust the tub at his stepbrother, spoon and all.

Noel closed his hand over Brodie’s; warmth soaked through his skin. And he took the spoon, slowly dragging his tongue over its concave surface like he was chasing Brodie’s saliva.

Brodie’s face burned. “I’m getting another spoon.”

Noel released him; Brodie backed away. He shoved his second spoon into the rock-hard ice cream and struggled again.

Noel took the spoon from him. “Here.”

He wrestled a spoonful of ice cream out of the tub, his biceps bunching, stretching the sleeves of his shirt. Then he presented the spoon to Brodie—its handle was wonderfully warm now, the sizeable chunk of ice cream so welcome in his mouth.

“Stop watching me,” Brodie grouched.

Noel dragged his gaze away. But Brodie still felt the weight of his attention, he heard Noel’s barely-audible breaths.

“You smell like honey,” Noel eventually murmured.

Brodie swallowed. That was the first sign of pregnancy every omega had. And of course he smelled like honey—it had been a full week since his heat.

He’d been holding off on contacting Noel, all the way until his impulses won over and he’d sent that first email. “And?”

“What does it feel like?” Noel was looking at his belly again, as though he badly wanted to touch it.

Brodie relented with a sigh. “Go ahead.”

But maybe he shouldn’t have, because Noel surged forward, crowding him against the kitchen counter, one large hand covering Brodie’s entire belly. “Mine,” Noel whispered.

He dragged the scent gland on his wrist over Brodie’s belly, claiming him there. Brodie’s heart skipped.

He’d never had another alpha who cared so much. Long ago, after it had finally sunken in that Noel was gone, Brodie had slept around, he’d hooked up with various alphas in the hopes that someone would care as much as Noel did.

He’d spent his heat with an alpha he’d met through a friend; John had been friendly enough, all the way until Brodie had told him about the pregnancy. Then he’d disappeared, leaving Brodie with no support whatsoever.

“You promise not to leave?” Brodie asked, hating that he sounded so vulnerable.

“I promise.” Noel pressed a kiss to his temple. “You’re carrying my baby, Bee. That’s incredible.”

“But you don’t want me at the North Pole.”

“That’s not what I said. I said it’s harsh there.” Noel looked hesitant. “Most of the Santas hang out at home, or at the workshops or HQ. There’s a few other places, but you’d have to bundle up to go anywhere. It’s not a place I’d bring a pregnant omega. But... maybe I can introduce you to the other Santas?”

Brodie narrowed his eyes. “I won’t be shared around.”

“No,” Noel growled. “You’re all mine.”

Brodie’s heart fluttered. He refused to admit it was something he’d secretly been wanting, even after everything. “I didn’t say I was.”

Noel licked his lips. “That’s—That’s okay. I’ll wait.”

He trailed his knuckles over Brodie’s still-flat abdomen, never once pulling away. This still felt so unreal—Noel here with him, Noel’s bonding mark on his neck, Noel’s *baby* in his belly. “How are you helping with the baby if you have to be at the North Pole all the time?”

“I could come pick you up when I’m done with my chores. Or... I could take over and do the diaper-changing and feeding. You don’t have to do it all by yourself.”

If Brodie’s heart hadn’t slipped before, it certainly was slipping now. “You promise.”

“Cross my heart.”

“But you’re never going to show up in the daytime, are you?” Brodie chewed his lip. “You literally can’t, because you can’t just drop out of the sky with the reindeer.”

Noel winced. “Yeah, that’s part of protocol.”

Brodie wasn’t sure what he thought of that—an alpha who was only available at night, an alpha who lived so far away. “Let me think about it.”

“Okay.” Noel kissed his temple. Then he nudged the tub of ice cream into Brodie’s hands. “It’s going to melt if you don’t eat it.”

Brodie rolled his eyes.

“If you stay up long enough, I’ll make you supper,” Noel added.

“You learned to cook?”

“Of course. Sometimes I don’t feel like hanging out with the rest of the Santas.” Noel wandered over to the fridge, peeking into it. “What about Shepherd’s pie? You have potatoes and ground meat.”

“Gods, that sounds good. Anything with ground beef in it is amazing.”

Noel flicked a glance at him. “You should be eating more of it, then. Make a big batch if you don’t feel like cooking.”

“But my fridge is on its last legs.”

“I brought you ice packs. Those should help.” Noel shut the fridge door and eyed it for a moment. “Do you have a tape measure?”

“It’s in that drawer.”

Noel grabbed it and began taking measurements of the fridge.
“Why haven’t you gotten a new one?”

Brodie flushed. “Because I can’t afford to?”

Noel pulled out his phone. The next thing Brodie knew, Noel had opened a page that looked suspiciously like the home improvement store’s website. He began opening tabs of all the fridges.

Brodie frowned. “What’re you doing?”

“Checking out some fridges.”

“Noel—”

“Think of it as a gift.” Noel smiled crookedly. “But I might do this more often, if it makes you say my name.”

Brodie pursed his lips. “I’m not saying it. And it’s too much.”

“What if I told you it’s to make up for all the birthdays I missed?” He began closing some tabs. When Brodie crept up to peek at his screen, he found Noel looking at fridges that were way out of his price range. The ones Brodie thought belonged in designer homes.

“That’s really too much—”

Noel leaned in, and stole a kiss off the corner of Brodie’s lips. Brodie forgot to breathe. “Let me spoil you,” Noel whispered.

“You’re not buying me.”

“No. I just want you to be happy.”

Gods, if he kept this up, Brodie might forget why he was mad at Noel in the very first place. “I live in a tiny house! It doesn’t need a fancy fridge.”

“I just want one that’ll work for you for a good long time.”

Brodie shoved more ice cream mutinously into his mouth. So he wouldn't burst into tears.

"Here, this looks similar to yours. But it has a big freezer section so you won't have to worry about running out of space for ice cream."

How had he discovered Brodie's secret fridge dreams?

"I'll get it delivered by the end of this week."

"You're not paying extra for express delivery," Brodie spluttered.

Noel grinned. "And you're going to stop me, how?"

"By—By tackling you!"

He set down the ice cream and flung himself at Noel—to do what, exactly, he didn't know.

Noel met him halfway and wrapped his arms tight around Brodie, pinning Brodie's arms to his sides. "There," Noel whispered, his embrace so damn warm. He smelled even better from up close, all soap and teak scent. "Now you can't move and I'm free to get you more nice things."

"Noel Robinson," Brodie squawked.

"What about a crib?"

Oh, gods. No, Brodie didn't have one of those anymore.

"And a diaper station, and milk bottles, and baby clothes, and —"

"I'm just one week along," Brodie said.

Noel's breath puffed into his hair, his fingers lingering on Brodie's right hip. "Yeah, but it's my baby. Ours."

Brodie's pulse kept going wonky around this alpha. "I mean, it's not a sure thing that this pregnancy will go all the way to full-term."

Noel froze. "How many pregnancies have you had?"

"Just one."

"So... maybe this one might turn out well again?" Was it Brodie, or did Noel look... hopeful?

"You want a baby," Brodie blurted.

Noel couldn't meet his eyes. "Maybe."

This was something that Brodie hadn't known about his stepbrother. They'd been too young back then to talk about a family. But now... Noel sneaked another peek at Brodie's abdomen.

"You promise," Brodie said.

"To?"

"To be there for the baby. It's going to be eighteen years of parenthood, Noel. And even beyond then."

Noel looked at him for too long. "Do I get to adopt River, too?"

Brodie blinked rapidly, his eyes burning. "Damn it."

Except Noel looked unsure. "Do you think he'll be okay with having a stepfather? Are you okay with me being his stepdad?"

"We're not getting married or anything," Brodie growled. "We're not even alpha and omega. Hell, Noel, you haven't even been back that long."

"I'm staying this time." Noel linked their pinkies together like they used to do. "I don't expect you to accept me immediately.

But I'm telling you my long-term goals."

"You've never even showed your face before this year."

Noel bit his lip. "Yeah. I wasn't planning to. But I've visited you every Christmas since I became a Santa, Bee. I've never stopped wanting you."

"I don't believe you."

"You don't have to. But give me time, and I'll prove myself."

Brodie had time. He badly wanted to stash away his feelings so he could be unbiased, but with every revelation, Noel was becoming harder and harder to push away.

"Tell you what," Noel said. "I'll pay you child support in advance."

Brodie spluttered. "Who even does that?"

"Me?"

"You're not buying me."

"I want to provide for you."

And maybe Brodie was too pragmatic to turn that down. Children were expensive. "Fine."

Noel kissed his forehead. "Does this Thursday work for you? Fridge delivery."

"You know this sounds like one of those grown-up memes, right? The hottest thing an alpha can do is vacuum your floors?"

At that, Noel's mouth curved into a smile. "You find that hot?"

"No."

"Where's your vacuum?"

"You are not vacuuming my floor!"

But Noel was already stepping through the house, opening the closet doors until he found the vacuum cleaner and plugged it in.

Damn it, he really did look hot vacuuming the floors.

Brodie thought Noel was just doing it for show, but Noel vacuumed the entire living room. And the kitchen. And River's old room. Then he went into Brodie's bedroom and vacuumed that, too.

He paused at the bathroom doorway, looking at something in the sink.

The dildo. The one Brodie had ridden while looking at Noel's dick pic. He'd completely forgotten about it.

Noel looked back over his shoulder, clearly amused. "I thought you didn't like toys."

"Just yours," Brodie growled, trying not to feel embarrassed. *That was just inside me, and I haven't even washed it off!* "Get out of my bathroom."

Noel glanced at the bathroom floor. "There's hair all over the tiles. It'll take twenty seconds."

Brodie covered his face. "Oh, gods. Just get out of there."

Noel obliged, carrying the vacuum out with him.

"No, just leave it where it is."

"Why? I'm done vacuuming."

"I'll do the bathroom when you're gone."

Noel looked like he might ignore Brodie's wishes and vacuum the bathroom tiles anyway, but he set the vacuum cleaner down, winding up its electrical cord so it wasn't a mess.

“Do you just do that out of habit?” Brodie grumbled. “Some Santa code?”

“Yes, actually.” Noel grinned. “Santas are not slobs.”

“I don’t suppose that’s how they picked you to be a Santa.”

“There are other criteria.” Noel’s smile turned crooked. “And rigorous tests. Strength of character, sense of duty, physical capabilities. We’re not allowed to deliver presents unless we pass all the tests. And we’re reassessed every year.”

“But you were in my house. And I didn’t even believe in Santa.”

Noel scratched his cheek, looking shifty. “Well.”

“I won’t tell,” Brodie said. “But you owe me.”

“I owe you the world, Bee.”

“I don’t need the world. I just need an alpha who won’t break his word again.”

At that, Noel bowed his head. “I understand, and I’m sorry for what I’ve done.”

He looked so contrite that Brodie’s heart softened. “I might forgive you.”

Noel’s gaze snapped up. “You will?”

“Maybe. I’m thinking about it.”

Joy and relief seeped into Noel’s expression. “That’s good enough. I just need to know I have a chance with you.”

He already did, but Brodie wasn’t about to tell him that.

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AWKWARD TIMES

Nico: I haven't heard from you lately, are you ok?

Brodie: I'm fine. Actually... I'm pregnant.

THE CALL CAME SO QUICKLY that Brodie wasn't really surprised. He answered it, flopping heavily onto his bed. "Hey."

"You're pregnant?" his best friend squeaked. In the background somewhere, Brodie heard River ask, "Are you talking to my dad? Wait. He's *pregnant?*"

"Maybe we should do a video call instead," Brodie said dryly. "I'd rather not have this conversation twice."

They hung up; Nico's bespectacled face appeared on his screen soon after, joined by River squeezing himself into the frame.

"Who knocked you up, Dad?" River frowned deeply. "Do I need to fly back and punch him?"

Brodie rolled his eyes and propped his phone against the pillow so he didn't have to hold it upright. "I'm fine. He's fine. Remember I mentioned I had a stepbrother?"

Nico and River looked at each other. Brodie was glad to see they were both doing well. Despite his goggle-thick glasses and short arm, Nico was much happier these days. Probably

because River was there to get all growly and alpha around him—that had really helped fend off the alpha professor who’d been bullying Nico at Meadowfall College.

River looked a lot like Brodie, with his dark hair and walnut eyes. Brodie studied him... and wondered if his next child would look anything like himself. Or if the baby would resemble Noel more.

“You briefly mentioned a stepbrother,” Nico said slowly. “But I don’t know anything about him.”

“He left when I was eighteen. Way before either of you came along. Then he completely dropped off the face of the Earth, because he went and became Santa Claus.”

River’s eyes bugged out of his head. “You—Wait. Santa? My step-uncle’s Santa? Isn’t Santa super old, like, in his eighties? Nineties? Can he even get it u—Uh. How’d he manage to knock you up?”

“I take offense to that,” someone said behind Brodie.

Brodie jumped and looked over his shoulder, only to find Noel grinning. “How’d you get in here? I didn’t give you a key.”

“Chimney?” Noel shrugged and came to sit next to Brodie on the bed. “You didn’t answer when I knocked. I figured you were in the bathroom.”

“He looks legitimate,” Nico said faintly. “He’s wearing a red shirt.”

“You can’t be Santa,” River said dubiously. “Shouldn’t you have a long white beard and a big belly and small round glasses?” His eyebrows drew low. “Are you sure it’s not a scam, Dad?”

Noel snorted. “For someone who believes in Santa, you sure are doubting me a lot.”

“You look so *young*,” River retorted, still frowning.

“I’m forty-three. Same age as your dad.”

“Too young,” River repeated.

“You got a model train last year for Christmas,” Noel said. “Red with silver stripes down the side. And the year before that, it was a small cow plush with silver bells.”

River’s mouth fell open. “How...”

Brodie turned to stare. “Even *I* don’t remember that.”

“I wrapped them myself.” Noel shrugged. “You used to get the bright plaid wrapping papers, but when you got older, I swapped them out for the damask foils.”

“Do you remember *all* the presents?” Brodie asked, his mind blown. “Or just those going to certain people?”

“I take note of a few.” Noel slanted a smile at him. “He’s special to you, so I paid attention.”

Brodie swallowed. *Stop being so nice, Noel.*

On the screen, River opened and closed his mouth. “I still don’t believe it. He could just be really fucking creepy.”

Brodie sighed. “I’ll show you the sleigh.” To Noel, he asked, “Where is it?”

“On the roof.”

Brodie grabbed his phone and padded out the back door. And there, lounging on the roof, were the six reindeer shoving their snouts into feed bags, the sleigh red and elegant behind them.

“You know, I’d love it if you could show up at a children’s scrapbooking event at my shop,” Brodie said. “With your sleigh and all.”

Noel inclined his head. “I’ll see if I can arrange something.”

“Are those... reindeer?” River squawked.

“Yes.” Brodie tilted the phone so River could get a good look at the large creatures. “They’re beautiful, aren’t they?”

“I wish I could see them in person,” Nico said wistfully.

“We took a ride with them the other night.” Brodie brought his phone back into his bedroom; Noel sat way too comfortably with him on the bed, one hand slowly rubbing his back. “But I’m not sure Noel has clearance to show you the chimney stuff.”

“I guess the name checks out,” River said grudgingly. “Wait. He’s not... *allowed* to show the chimney stuff?”

“There’s more than one Santa,” Noel said dryly. “How do you think we manage to deliver all those presents in one night? There is a Santa Protocol, as well.”

Brodie watched as River’s expression shifted into one of hesitant admiration. His heart swelled. “One day,” Brodie promised. “Maybe when you visit.”

River looked between Noel and Brodie, blurting, “So I’m going to get a brother or sister.”

“Yes,” Brodie said.

“That’s really weird. I’m old enough to be their dad. Hell, even their niece is older than them.”

Brodie shrugged. “Accidents happen, I guess.”

“Ew.” River made a face. “I did not need to know that.”

“Is it going to be okay?” Nico asked in concern. “Are you happy?”

Brodie wished he'd asked it while Noel wasn't around. He made a face and shoved at Noel. “You shouldn't be listening to this conversation.”

But Noel only looked too intently at him. “I want to know your answer, too. Are you happy with this situation?”

“I'd tell you that if we're actually dating.”

“We're not?” Noel grinned and squeezed his ass, out of sight of the phone camera. “You liked it when I vacuumed your floors.”

River looked disgusted. “Is that some kind of euphemism?”

“No, I did vacuum,” Noel said. “Your dad seemed to enjoy it.”

“Great, now everyone will think I have some sort of housekeeping kink.”

“Don't you?” Noel grinned knowingly.

After that incident with the vacuum, Brodie had shoved Noel out of the bedroom for a few minutes so he could jerk off again. When he'd opened the door to let Noel back in, Noel had been right there, with a telling knot in his pants.

That damn bastard was a sneak and an eavesdropper, and it was just Brodie's luck that this was who he trusted.

“Shoo,” Brodie muttered.

Noel wandered into Brodie's bathroom and shut the door.

Nico was all wide eyes. “You like him.”

“I do not.”

“You do,” River said dryly. “You’re trying really hard not to smile.”

He was right.

“Ugh.” Brodie scrubbed his face. “We had history together.”

And now Nico was beaming, almost beside himself with joy.

“I’m so happy for you.”

“Don’t be—he lives at the North Pole. I don’t know if it’s something I want to deal with long-term.”

“Oh.” Nico hesitated, thinking. “You don’t have to uproot yourself completely, either, if you could commute between both places.”

That was true. Brodie’s house was paid for. He could return whenever he wanted, if things ever went wrong with Noel. Besides, Noel wasn’t all that bad. He’d promised to do his share of parenting.

Maybe... Brodie could give this a try.

“Tell me if he ever hurts you,” River said mulishly. “I’ll make sure he knows who he’s answering to.”

“Trust me, he’ll have me to deal with first.” Brodie laughed.

“So how are you both doing?”

“We’re helping with Perry’s toy shop,” Nico said brightly. “He sent us some prototypes to try.”

“How’s that working out?” Brodie had heard on and off about Nico’s professor friends; Perry Larkin owned a small adult store as a side gig, and the products there were mostly vibrators that he’d invented himself.

Nico glanced at River. “I don’t think you want the details.”

“Probably not,” Brodie said, shuddering inwardly.

The bathroom door opened, and Noel stepped out. Brodie hadn't heard him use anything in there. Had he just been poking around?

Before he could ask, Noel came to sit with him on the bed, leaning close so his face fit in the video. "Am I allowed back?"

"Yes," Brodie said, propping his chin in his hands. "I should introduce you properly. River's my son, and Nico's my best friend. This is Noel."

They all exchanged hellos. Then, with his body pressed close and his hand out of view, Noel cupped Brodie's ass, squeezing it lightly. "Tell me about yourselves," Noel said. "I guess we'll be hearing about each other a lot."

Brodie shot him a *look*. Noel smirked.

And he slipped his fingers between Brodie's legs, lightly stroking his sac through his pants.

Gods, he was bold. Especially when Nico began talking, and all Noel did was caress Brodie up and down, from his balls to his taint to his hole, and back down. Over and over with more pressure each time, until Brodie's sac tightened and he grew half-hard in his pants.

"I do material sourcing for the production lines," Noel said, reaching under Brodie and grasping his cock.

Brodie jerked. *We're not alone!* But Noel massaged him slow and deliberately, coaxing yet more need to build there. Brodie's cock obeyed his touch, growing hard.

There was a smile in Noel's voice. "You won't believe it, but it's incredibly difficult to bring hardwood to the North Pole."

“Because it’s so cold?” Brodie muttered, pleasure humming through his body when Noel gave him a secret, sinful squeeze. He tried not to buck into Noel’s hand. *I shouldn’t be this worked up.*

“Well, it’s very taxing on the reindeer. Wood is heavy.” Noel went on to talk about supply chains, but all Brodie could focus on was the slow stroke of Noel’s fingers along his length, up and down until he squirmed and spread his legs, his cock aching with need.

Noel squeezed his tip and ground his finger against the bunch of nerves under it. Brodie had to shove his hand over his mouth so he didn’t moan out loud.

“Here’s a fun fact that no one knows,” Noel said, slanting a hot look at him. “HQ is located at Alpha Ridge, which is closer to the magnetic North Pole than the actual North Pole, but Alpha Ridge itself is named after the ridges of the ocean floor.”

“So you’re not actually at the North Pole?” River looked scandalized.

“It’s between both North Poles, but the reindeer instinctively head to the magnetic North.” Noel gave Brodie’s cock a good squeeze. Then he pushed his fingers down Brodie’s waistband and caught his bare cock, and Brodie almost came right there. He tried to breathe, thankful that his hands hid his panting mouth from the camera.

“Brodie?” Nico asked softly.

“I’m fine.” Brodie flushed and scowled at Noel.

Nico’s mouth fell open. He knew. “M-Maybe we should call it a night.”

“But he never said how many Santas there are,” River protested.

Noel snorted too quietly for them to hear. He released Brodie’s cock, bringing his hand up to Brodie’s ass—and he pushed it down the back of Brodie’s pants, his fingers delving straight between Brodie’s cheeks. Spreading them, searching out Brodie’s hole. Brodie jerked, heat swooping between his legs.

I can’t believe he’s doing this.

But fuck, he didn’t want Noel to stop. Not when his body ached with need, not when he’d grown drenched from Noel’s heavy touches full of promise.

There was a thick line in Noel’s pants that was completely off-camera.

Noel tickled the bundle of nerves that was Brodie’s hole. Brodie choked on his breath. *He wouldn’t dare.*

But of course he did. Still talking as though this was the most normal conversation in the world, Noel slid his fingertip around to coat it with slick, and then worked it into Brodie’s ass, slowly stretching out his hole.

It had been so long since Noel was last there, that it was all Brodie could do to just *breathe*.

He’s inside me again.

Noel pushed another fingertip in, and thrust them both deep like how he’d fuck in with his cock. Brodie wheezed, throbbing. More so when Noel spread his fingers inside. “Fuck.”

Noel looked innocently at him. “Did I say something wrong?”

Are you serious?

The video of Nico and River turned shaky; Nico was picking up his phone. “I think we should go to bed,” he squeaked. “Um, have a good night?”

“But he wasn’t done telling me about the Santa hiring process,” River protested.

The video call ended abruptly.

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DELIVERING ON PROMISES

NOEL CHUCKLED INFURIATINGLY. “Your son’s cute. I don’t think he even knew.”

“I don’t want to talk about him right now. *You* are not cute,” Brodie growled.

“Yeah?” Noel licked his lips. Then he twisted his fingers inside Brodie and crammed them against his prostate.

Brodie’s spine arched, pleasure razing through him as he came with a howl.

“Fuck, you’re amazing,” Noel rasped. He withdrew his fingers and grasped Brodie’s pants, yanking them clean off his legs. Then he pushed Brodie’s legs the widest apart they could go, leaving his hole completely exposed. “Been a while since you had my cock, Bee.”

Brodie shoved his face against the mattress, raising his hips. “Don’t flaunt it and do nothing,” he snarled.

“I love when you get like that,” Noel growled.

The next thing Brodie knew, Noel had pinned his shoulders down, his heavy body covering Brodie’s as he shoved three fingers into Brodie’s hole, spreading them apart. Grinding them pleurably against that one spot.

Brodie tried to breathe. All he could do was moan and writhe, because those fingers were not fucking enough. “Damn it, Noel.”

“Tell me what you want,” Noel whispered in his ear.

“Fuck me with your cock.”

Noel groaned and pulled out his fingers. A zipper rasped. Then a blunt, slippery tip pushed between Brodie’s cheeks, and Noel dipped it into Brodie’s hole with no warning.

Except he stopped there, breathing hard, his fist closing in Brodie’s hair. “Fuck, you’re so tight for me.”

Brodie could’ve cried. “Don’t just stop there!”

“You want every inch, babe?” Noel pulled out.

Brodie sobbed and thrashed, trying to spread his legs even wider. “Inside,” he hissed.

Noel groaned and fitted his tip back in. Then he held Brodie down and fucked it all in, inches and inches of alpha cock stretching him wide open.

Brodie screamed, clawing at the sheets, squirting helplessly. None of his toys felt *this* good. “Oh, f-fuuuck.”

“Like it, babe?” Noel groaned, sinking so deep that his balls tapped Brodie’s taint. “You took it all, Bee. You feel so good around me.”

Brodie wheezed and squeezed around him. “Fucking *move*.”

“Gods, you’re perfect.” Noel bit hard into his shoulder and began to thrust. Pleasure seared down Brodie’s spine; Noel built a rhythm, his cock massaging Brodie, mashing against his prostate so he choked and writhed. “Your body’s trying to

suck me all in,” Noel panted, reaching down to grasp Brodie’s sensitive cock. “Feel how big you make me?”

Oh, Brodie felt it all. “Harder.”

Noel rumbled low in his throat. “As you wish.”

He pinned Brodie down heavily, the way Brodie loved it. And he began to thrust, deep, hard strokes that sent Brodie’s eyes rolling back, his balls squirming with pleasure.

Brodie came again. Noel fucked him through that orgasm, groaning low. “You get so fucking tight,” Noel panted, his cock growing thicker. “You’re so damn ready for my come, Bee. I’m gonna pump you full and make you mine.”

He tugged ruthlessly on Brodie’s cock, slapping their hips together, covering Brodie inside with his precome. Then Noel roared and came, jets and jets of heat filling Brodie up.

Except Noel kept fucking him, smearing his come all over Brodie’s insides. He pulled out and let some splatter onto Brodie’s hole, and then plowed back in, holding himself deep so his knot swelled and locked them together.

Before Brodie could get a chance to breathe, Noel shoved his knot against Brodie’s prostate, working it so ruthlessly that Brodie screamed and came, clenching around his alpha.

“That’s it,” Noel panted into his hair. “Take my knot, Bee.”

Brodie lost count of how many climaxes Noel rode him through. But he must’ve blacked out, because Noel had stopped moving when he opened his eyes, his soft lips whispering across Brodie’s shoulder.

“Maybe I went too hard,” Noel murmured, his arms snug around Brodie.

Brodie squirmed to try and regain his bearings—Noel was still knotted inside him, his knot full and heavy and comforting. But his breathing had evened out, and he'd rolled them onto their sides.

“Bee?” Noel whispered when Brodie went too long without answering.

“You’re fine,” Brodie croaked. “Gods, I’m thirsty.”

“I’ll get you some water.” Noel sat up behind him, looked around, then sighed and dropped back onto the mattress. “It’ll have to wait until my knot goes down.”

I can't believe I let him knot inside me again. Except it felt so good, when Noel snuggled into him and kissed his nape, his embrace so safe that Brodie wished he could wake up like this every morning.

“Mine,” Noel whispered.

“I didn’t say I am.”

“I’m patient.” Noel kissed his shoulder.

Brodie was dozing off in his arms again when a loud knocking came from above.

“Gods,” Noel muttered. “Not right now.”

“What is it?”

Knock, knock, knock.

Noel sighed and yelled, “Give me five minutes!”

“The... reindeer?” Brodie asked, remembering the sleigh on the roof.

“Yeah. They like to boss me around.” Noel rolled his eyes. Except something went tumbling right outside the window,

hitting the ground with a puff of... dust? “Damn it. That’s a feed bag.” Noel groaned. “Wilson!”

“How do you know it’s him?”

Noel shifted, his knot tugging inside Brodie. “He’s the troublemaker. But he has the best sense of direction, so he gets lead position. I might have to go up top to lecture him.”

“While we’re knotted?”

Noel sighed. “I’d really hate for him to knock everyone else’s feed bags off the roof.”

Noel gathered Brodie into his arms, sitting them both upright. Then he fumbled them off the bed. Brodie had to tiptoe so his body wouldn’t put too much weight on Noel’s knot.

“Do you have a towel? Or should we use the sheets to cover up?”

“Towel. I’m not getting soot all over my sheets.”

Noel grabbed a mug from the bathroom and filled it with water, handing it to Brodie. When he’d gotten a large towel wrapped around their waists, he shuffled them over to the fireplace, crouching awkwardly in front of it. In this position, Brodie’s hips were nestled snugly between Noel’s thighs.

“What are you grabbing, anyway?” Brodie asked, trying to see what Noel was reaching for inside the chimney.

“Some air from above. I don’t know how to explain it.”

Noel leaned them both into the tiny fireplace. A heartbeat later, Brodie felt himself being stretched so thin, all the air rushed out of his lungs.

They landed on the roof in a dizzying rush. Brodie wobbled and flailed; Noel held him securely around the waist. “I got

you.”

All six reindeer were looking at them, some tilting their heads quizzically.

Brodie couldn't decide what he found more strange—standing on his own roof pants-less and knotted with Noel, or having a bunch of reindeer stare at him as though *he* were the odd one out.

“He’s my mate,” Noel told them. “But *Wilson*. I told you I was coming back. You didn’t have to roll your feed bag off the roof. Now you’ll only have what I can scrape off the ground, and it won’t be a lot.”

Wilson shook his head as though he wasn’t the least bit concerned; Noel sighed and reached out, rubbing his snout.

“C’mon, let’s get you and the sleigh onto the ground.” Noel kissed Brodie on the nape. “Sorry, babe. I’m gonna have to bend you over to grab those bags.”

Brodie snorted. “Like you haven’t already bent me over a million times.”

“Not a million.” But there was a smile in Noel’s voice. “I wouldn’t mind trying for that number, though.”

“That a couple thousand years if we did it every night.”

“You’d spend the next two thousand years with me?”

“I didn’t say that.”

But deep down, Brodie couldn’t think of a better alpha to live out all that time with.

Noel handed him a couple of feed bags to carry; the rest, he carried himself. They shuffled over to the sleigh and stored the

feed in the back, before Noel loosened the towel. Brodie squawked.

“I can’t lift our legs high enough to get in the sleigh,” Noel whispered. “Shh. You don’t want your neighbors looking out of their windows.”

Brodie flushed, his skin prickling in the night air.

Noel nudged Brodie’s leg up with his own, first one then the other as they climbed in. Noel wrapped the towel back around their hips and whistled, guiding the reindeer off the roof and onto Brodie’s backyard below.

It was such an odd experience, riding naked and knotted in Santa’s sleigh. It felt as though the elf police would come screeching after them in tiny toy cars with glowing mint wheels.

“Have you done this before?” Brodie blurted.

“No. Not like this.” Noel kissed his ear. “Although come to think of it, there’s nothing in the Santa Protocol that specifies whether this is allowed.”

“I don’t think I want to find out.”

“Me, either.”

“Really? But you’re Santa.”

Noel laughed. “And I don’t want to be kicked out of the Santa family just because I knotted my omega in my sleigh.”

Brodie froze, heat surging through his cheeks. “I’m not your omega.”

“I can dream, can’t I?” Noel traced his lips against Brodie’s ear. Then he pulled Brodie flush against his chest, leaning back. “Pity there are hardly any stars in the sky here.”

Brodie blinked. “Really? I see some.”

“It’s not like the stars at the North Pole. There’s no light pollution there, babe. On a clear night, the sky is like a velvet blanket covered in stars.” Noel went quiet for a while. “I read that you can only see about four hundred stars from the suburbs.”

“What about at the North Pole?”

“Four thousand.”

Brodie sucked in a slow breath. “I want to see that.”

Noel tightened his arms around Brodie. “Ready to come up north with me? For a night or two. Let me show you where I live.”

Brodie’s heart thumped. This wasn’t just Noel offering him a vacation. This was Noel offering Brodie a glimpse of his life. And what it’d be like to live with him.

“Yes,” Brodie breathed. “But—But not right now. I need to tell my shop staff in advance. I can’t just disappear at the drop of a hat.”

“Of course.” Noel stroked his chest lightly, then down, lingering on his tattoo. Brodie realized that Noel was pressing his wrist to his skin, leaving his scent everywhere he touched.

“I didn’t say you could claim me.”

“So tell me to stop.”

Gods, Brodie couldn’t.

Noel chuckled quietly, and kept on marking him.

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MEMORIES

TRUE TO NOEL'S WORD, the night sky grew darker and darker the further they left civilization. And the darker the skies grew, the more stars twinkled down at them.

Brodie spent most of the trip on his back, his head in Noel's lap, just staring up at the stars.

There were so many of them. More than he could count—bright ones, dim ones, even the faint, cloudy patches that made up the Milky Way.

“There are so many stars out there,” he breathed.

“Some of them are entire galaxies,” Noel pointed out. “But they're so far away that they look like a single star.”

Each of those had their own stars and planets, and maybe one or two even had their own life forms. “Why are we so concerned about us when there's so much to see out there?”

Noel shrugged, following Brodie's gaze. “I don't know, it's hard to focus on things so far away when there are important people closer to us.”

He rested his hand on Brodie's jacket, over his heart. Then he slipped it down, to Brodie's belly. Brodie's pulse skipped.

Five weeks after his heat, he didn't look any more pregnant than before. But he'd been fatigued lately, craving salty

crackers and sour apples, throwing up everything else he ate. Even though the new fridge was now in his house, Brodie hadn't had any appetite for his favorite ice creams at all.

Thick fingers tapped softly against his belly, as though Noel was trying to give their baby a message in Morse code.

"We're not talking about love, or anything like that," Brodie blurted.

Noel looked down at him with too much emotion in his eyes, and said nothing.

Brodie swallowed hard. "Let's change the subject. Is there enough food for me at the North Pole?"

"I brought you some," Noel said dryly. "No one eats crackers or sour apples there."

"I'm thankful from the bottom of my heart, oh esteemed alpha."

Noel grinned. "So I'm your alpha now?"

Brodie turned away to hide his smile. "Maybe."

They'd been chatting on and off ever since Brodie began emailing Noel—sometimes they talked about favorite foods, and sometimes they talked about new movies and fond memories.

Noel stroked his fingers through Brodie's hair, settling into a more comfortable position. "Remember when we used to build tiny houses in the backyard?"

"Why that memory in particular?"

"Because my cottage at Alpha Ridge is kinda like those houses. It's small. Basically the adult version of our play houses."

Back then, there'd been stacks and stacks of firewood in their parents' backyard; Noel had dragged the smaller logs over to a shady spot under a sprawling oak tree. When he'd learned to wield an ax, he'd split the wood and stacked the logs together, building a tiny, wobbly cabin that had collapsed a several times before they'd figured out how to make it sturdy.

"I'm okay with a small cabin. I still have Natsy."

"You do?" Nate was smiling again.

Natsy was a stuffed baby elephant that they'd both pretended to parent—she'd even had her own basket-cot and bottle, and they'd taken turns feeding her and taking her out to play.

Brodie shrugged and looked away. "I really liked her. Couldn't bear to leave her behind."

"What about Honey?" The squeaking stuffed hamster.

"I have him."

"Chickie?" A chirping chick.

"Chickie, too."

"Remember the time you hid Honey on top of the fridge? You didn't push him all the way back so he kinda sat on the door, and when Mom opened the freezer, he fell on her and she screamed."

Brodie laughed. "Better than the time we tried to raise a gecko. That little guy escaped into Mom's bathroom."

"Gods, we were grounded for a week."

"Then again, a week is nothing. Remember the time we tried to copy each other's handwriting and Mrs. Gibbs said we were cheating on our homework?"

"Grounded for three months." Noel laughed.

“But the best prank was when we filled Dad’s ice cream with frozen peas.” Brodie snorted. Back then, they’d peeled the protective plastic off the top of the ice cream, eaten a solid tunnel straight down the middle, and then filled it up with peas so it still weighed a lot.

“I got my ass beaten so bad.” Noel shook his head.

“You could’ve let me take some responsibility for it, too.”

“And let you get beaten? Nah.”

Brodie rolled his eyes. “I’m much tougher than that, okay?”

Noel was quiet for a while. “Yeah, I realized that later. When you had your own kid.”

“Are you jealous?”

Noel looked too deeply into him. “Of you being a parent, or that you became a parent without me?”

Brodie’s breath stuck in his throat. That second part hadn’t even occurred to him, and suddenly he felt guilty. “Sorry.”

Noel shrugged, stroking Brodie’s hair again. “I chose to leave. It was my fault.”

They fell into a companionable silence for a while, until Noel broke it.

“Do you remember the first time I kissed you?”

Brodie’s heart tripped. There’d been countless first kisses over the years. “Which kiss?”

“You know which one.”

The one on his lips. The one Noel had skirted around because it had been *important* to him. They’d seen it so many times on TV and in movies, alphas kissing their omegas as a promise, as an act of devotion. Noel had held Brodie’s hand more and

more tightly every time they'd witnessed one of those kisses, until Brodie had blurted one day, *Why don't you just do it?*

Because I want it to be special, Noel had said.

He'd gone out to the backyard the day Brodie turned sixteen, bringing back a bundle of flowers wrapped in pink tissue, held together with a ribbon. Back then, Brodie had already presented as an omega, but they hadn't known for sure that Noel would be an alpha.

Noel had brought Brodie to his room, he'd arranged all the blankets and pillows into a fluffy pile on his bed, and gotten Brodie to sit on it.

Close your eyes, Noel had told him.

Brodie had closed his eyes, smelling the sun-warmed flowers from the garden. He'd felt Noel lean in, he'd smelled Noel's clean soap scent, the fresh sweat on his skin. Then he'd felt the hot rush of Noel's breath, and a soft, fumbling kiss on his lips.

For how familiar they already were with each other's bodies back then, the kiss had been unexpectedly without finesse.

Brodie had laughed. And Noel had been so embarrassed, he'd hidden in the closet.

"I remember the closet," Brodie said.

Noel groaned and scrubbed his face. "Do you really have to?"

"No other alpha put themselves in the closet after they kissed me."

"I guess I should make sure there's room in my closet this time, huh?" Noel chuckled lowly. "You'll laugh me back in there."

"I didn't say there was going to be a this time."

But Brodie hadn't missed all the glances Noel had been stealing. More than once, he'd had to clear his throat; Noel's eyes would snap up to lock with his.

"I guess I shouldn't get my hopes up so high." Noel rubbed his jaw. "Or I could retreat under the bed."

"Don't bump your head there."

"I don't care if I do, if it means I got to kiss you."

"Not happening." But Brodie's mouth tingled; it had been so long.

And Noel had gotten very, very good at kissing him.

Noel smiled and traced his thumb along Brodie's jaw. "I can dream."

Brodie's heart tripped again. "You might get a chance if it's special enough."

Noel's breath hitched. "Really?"

"Maybe." Brodie wet his lips, trying not to let Noel's hopeful expression get to him.

But he was weak against Noel—he always had been. And the more Noel did for him, the more he wanted to believe this man. To let Noel promise him the world.

"You're gorgeous," Noel murmured.

"Stop giving me sweet-talk."

"I can't wait to wake up with you." Noel cracked a smile.

"And that's not an empty compliment, babe."

Sharing a bed with Noel—Brodie hadn't done that in a long time, either. "I'm surprised you get a decent-sized bed when you're living there all by yourself."

“Well, Santas need some room to stretch. But I think you and I will fit perfectly.”

Brodie swallowed. He sat up in the sleigh, blinking when he saw a cluster of golden lights drawing closer—Alpha Ridge. “We’re there already?”

“I told you it was a short trip.”

The Santa village wasn’t anything like Brodie had expected. In the middle of a vast sheet of ice, several tiny white buildings surrounded other larger, domed ones. These were all enclosed in a massive circular snow break, with tall walls keeping the surrounding snow from piling onto the village.

“It mostly works, but we still have to shovel some snow,” Noel explained, following his gaze.

Scattered lamps lit the way to the larger silver buildings; Brodie assumed those were the common areas. “Are those where you make the toys?”

“Some of them house the production lines, yes. But the rest are warehouses and reindeer barns. And the log cabin in the middle is HQ—that’s where the Santas go to hang out. After hanging out, we go home to sleep in those tiny houses.”

The small buildings got marginally bigger as they approached. Through the flurry of snow, Brodie saw some reindeer wandering between the buildings, and smoke rising from a few chimneys.

“I was expecting elves and candy canes and a colorful winter wonderland,” he said dryly, tugging up his hood and collar to shield his face from the stinging wind.

Noel snorted. “Well, we decorate the place for Christmas, but the decorations have been taken down. It loses some of its magic when you see the tinsel all year round.”

“I don’t know. I could see you all year round and still be excited for Christmas.”

Noel raised an eyebrow. “Granted, you won’t be seeing much of me on Christmas eve.”

“What *do* Santas do on Christmas day, anyway?”

“Sleep like logs.” Noel laughed. “We were up all night rushing deliveries.”

Brodie was almost ashamed to realize he’d never thought about that, either.

They landed quietly in front of a large barn, where several covered, scarlet sleighs were all lined up. In the dim glow of the lamps, Noel guided the reindeer to park his sleigh at the end of the line.

Brodie’s teeth chattered. “How do you know which sleigh is yours?”

“My name’s right in front of it. See?” Noel helped Brodie out of the sleigh and pointed out some white lettering just under its lip. *Noel R.*

Brodie peeked at the next sleigh. *Nikolaas S.* The next, *Pelz N.*

Noel unhitched the reindeer, grabbing Brodie’s overnight bags before covering the sleigh with a tarp. Then he caught Brodie’s hand and pulled him closer, draping another jacket over his shoulders.

That felt so much warmer.

The reindeer had already strolled through the open barn doors by the time they reached it. Noel ushered Brodie into the brightly-lit space.

It smelled like hay and animal, and it was so much cozier than the snowstorm outside.

“Hey, Noel.” There was only one Santa there; she looked up as they approached, waving. “That’s the omega who caused the big delay?”

Brodie flushed. *I guess everyone knows about my heat.*

“Yes, and he’s off-limits.” Noel narrowed his eyes. “Don’t flirt with him.”

“None of us would dream of it.” The alpha went back to mucking the stalls; Noel grabbed a couple of brushes and brought Brodie to where his reindeer were waiting to be unharnessed.

He showed Brodie how to brush down the first reindeer. Then Brodie brushed down his own reindeer, giggling when it licked his neck.

“Hey, Wendy. He’s mine,” Noel grumbled. “Don’t assume that warning didn’t apply to you, too.”

“It’s just a lick,” Brodie said.

“Yeah, and you’d ream me if I licked your neck.”

Someone coughed loudly elsewhere in the barn. Brodie froze, meeting Noel’s eyes.

Noel only grinned. Except Wendy began chewing on Brodie’s ear, and Noel went back to scowling.

“Maybe you should brush down your own reindeer,” Brodie said.

“Maybe I need to brush them down faster, so I can bring you back to my bed and really claim you.”

More coughing from the barn.

“I hope you’re not catching a cold, Greta,” Noel called.

“Must be something in the air,” she replied. “Careful you don’t get pregnant yourself.”

Noel rolled his eyes.

“Can you, though?” Brodie asked. “Since you have magic. And a super-dick.”

“I don’t have a super-dick.”

“Just a really big one,” Brodie said under his breath.

“What was that?” Noel smirked.

“Nothing.”

“I doubt alphas can get pregnant,” Noel said. “We don’t have the equipment.”

“But you have magic.”

“Not that kind of magic.”

Brodie kept brushing Wendy. By the time he was done, he was sweating under all the layers of his clothes. He pulled them off and brushed another reindeer, and Noel did the rest. Wendy and Willow crowded around him even after he’d set down his brush, their stubby tails wagging.

“Hey, they like you more than they like me,” Noel grumbled.

“Because I’m nice!”

“I’m nice, too.” Noel reached into a bag and brought out some apples—that got the reindeer’s attention.

Wendy and Willow took the apples, then returned to Brodie.

“Figures,” Noel said. “At least I know I made the right choice.”

“What, giving them just one apple each?”

“No. Choosing my omega.” Noel grinned. “Looks like they approve of you.”

Brodie’s cheeks heated. “I’m not your omega.”

But he followed Noel out of the barn anyway, Noel’s coats wrapped tightly around him.

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MORNING SICKNESS AT ALPHA RIDGE

“I’LL INTRODUCE you to the others later,” Noel said when they reached a small building near the edge of the village. Brodie noticed that each of these buildings had a conical wind-turbine anchored to their roofs. “Right now, I want to warm you up.”

“In front of a fire?” Brodie shivered all the way into Noel’s house.

Noel had been speaking the truth about his living quarters—the single room contained almost everything: his bed, a tiny kitchenette, a table with folders and calculators stacked on one side, and a closet. There was a small bathroom on the other side of the apartment, and a large TV took up the wall in front of the bed. Hell, there was hardly space for *both* of them to move around, much less, a growing child.

“You can see why I’m hesitant to raise a child here,” Noel said dryly.

Brodie could understand. “So how...?”

“I’m thinking of building an extra room or two.” Noel hung up their jackets. “A bedroom with a door, and a nursery. That is, if you’d like to live here with me.”

Noel was looking too intently at him again. Butterflies flooded Brodie’s stomach. “I... I suppose I could.”

Noel closed the space between them; he was in a simple sweater now, but he peeled that off, too. “Get in bed.”

“Aren’t we’re meeting your friends soon?”

“I’m just gonna warm you up real quick.” Noel grinned. “Body heat works best, remember?”

“How much of my clothes should I remove?”

“All of it.” Noel laughed. “You know me. However much you’re comfortable with.”

Brodie really wanted to feel Noel against him, skin on skin. They hadn’t done that much lately. So he shoved off his clothes, leaving just his underwear on before crawling into bed.

Teak filled his lungs even before his face hit the pillow. *Gods, this smells so good.* Brodie bit down his groan, snuggling under the covers.

Noel laughed and slipped under the covers, too. Then he pulled Brodie’s back flush against his chest, spooning him. Warmth soaked into Brodie like a luxurious bath.

“I should dress you in my clothes, huh?” Noel whispered in his ear. “So my scent follows you wherever you go.”

“It already does,” Brodie mumbled.

Noel dragged his wrist down Brodie’s throat and all over his chest, covering his nipples thickly in his scent. “Do you think this is how babies recognize their parents? When they suckle on you and smell both our scents.”

“Possibly. I know River recognized my voice first.”

Noel sucked in a slow breath. Then he dove under the covers and nudged Brodie onto his back. Brodie yelped when he felt

Noel's face on his belly.

"Hey," Noel said, his voice vibrating through Brodie's midsection. "I don't know if you've heard my voice before, but you're definitely hearing me now. I'm your other dad. I can't visit you as often as I'd like because I'm Santa, but I want you to know that we both love you."

Brodie's throat tightened. *Damn it, Noel.*

Even though he tried to be standoffish, Noel kept doing things that made all of Brodie's instincts want to acknowledge him as his alpha.

Noel dropped soft kisses all over Brodie's belly; Brodie closed his eyes, helplessly craving Noel in every part of his life. He remembered how much he'd adored Noel back when they were younger; he was feeling the exact same thing now.

Apparently, it showed in his face, because Noel stilled when he surfaced, looking too closely.

"What's wrong?" Noel whispered, leaning in close.

He straddled Brodie and cupped his face, his gaze so soft that Brodie bowed his head. Showing his submission.

Noel sucked in a slow breath. "Bee."

He tipped Brodie's head up, waiting for so long that Brodie opened his eyes.

"Bee," Noel whispered again, caressing Brodie's lips with a gentle thumb. Then he leaned in and slanted their mouths together, and sparks shot down Brodie's spine.

Noel kissed him gently, reverently. He brushed his wrist over Brodie's cheek and consumed him with a kiss so sweet that Brodie's insides turned into mush, and his instincts sang, *Alpha.*

“Noel,” Brodie gasped.

Noel slipped into his mouth, claiming him there—a damp, careful stroke. Then Brodie touched their tongues together, the contact so intimate that Noel groaned and kissed him more hungrily, more deeply, thrusting into Brodie’s mouth so demandingly that Brodie grew wet.

“Mine,” Noel growled, making way when Brodie began to part his thighs. He hooked his thumbs into Brodie’s panties and slipped them off his legs. He fumbled with his own underwear, and his hard cock slid between Brodie’s cheeks, spreading them, leaving a trail of precome all over his skin.

He didn’t tease this time. He stretched Brodie with his tip and sank home, going so deep that Brodie’s eyes rolled back. *He’s inside.*

“Mine,” Noel said again, pinning Brodie’s legs open wide, bending him in half as he thrust in deep, claiming Brodie with every inch of his cock.

Brodie gasped and squirmed; Noel swallowed his sounds and kissed him harder, pounding Brodie into the mattress, over and over so Brodie cried out and clutched at him, leaking all over his belly.

Noel found the right angle to hit his prostate. Brodie squirted and clawed at his back; he howled when Noel hit it again. And again.

Then Noel grasped his cock and worked it ruthlessly, and Brodie came all over himself, thrashing so hard that Noel pinned him down and pushed in deep. Forcing him to take every last inch.

“Love it when you come around me,” Noel rasped, plowing deeper. “Love how tight you squeeze my cock, Bee. I’m gonna

give you every drop of my come. Gonna ruin your hole and put another baby inside you.”

Brodie choked on his moan, more so when Noel’s cock, ravaging his body so demandingly that he came again, his limbs trembling with pleasure.

Noel swore and thrust a final time into him, pulses and pulses of warmth filling him deep. Then he held himself inside and his knot grew, locking them together.

Noel covered his face with kisses. Brodie tried to catch his breath, he tried to figure out if anything had changed between them.

But it had—of course it had. Noel had said the L-word too many times in the last hour.

“You’re so lovely,” Noel breathed, nuzzling the side of his head.

“That word again,” Brodie mumbled, slumping back into the pillows.

Noel gave a half-smile. “And?”

“I don’t know if I’m ready to hear it.”

“Okay.” Noel kissed the corner of his lips. Then he stole a kiss from Brodie’s mouth, and Brodie’s stomach flipped. “What about mouth kisses?”

“Those—Those are fine.”

“Good.” Noel kissed him there again like he was parched, and he couldn’t get enough.

Truthfully, Brodie couldn’t get enough of it, either.

Except the more Noel kissed his lips, the more it felt as though his heart might burst.

Eventually, Noel pulled away when his knot receded, looking between their bodies with a frown. “Guess we got messy, huh?”

“We did.”

“That’s not what I had in mind when I said I’d warm you up.”

Brodie rolled his eyes. “Yeah, sure.”

“I’m serious!” Noel climbed out of bed; Brodie peeked at the glory that was his naked form. Instead of going to the bathroom, Noel grabbed a washcloth from his closet, ran it under his kitchen faucet, and added a splash of hot water from a kettle. He tested its temperature and returned, wiping the drying come off Brodie’s belly.

With each swipe of the washcloth, Noel pressed kisses to Brodie’s skin. He kissed down Brodie’s shoulders and chest, down his midriff, to the intricate tattoo at his hip—it was a heart made of lace and crinkled paper, with the words *Love Always* in the middle. Noel kissed all around that tattoo, and then right on the words.

Brodie’s heart squeezed. He remembered Noel helping to care for that tattoo, back when it was still so new.

He remembered Noel helping him with its creation. They’d pored over several scrapbooking magazines for ideas, and in the end, Brodie had narrowed his choices down to two he couldn’t decide between. He’d let Noel pick the final design.

Maybe that was why Noel kept touching Brodie’s right hip.

“We keep ending up in bed together,” Brodie muttered.

Noel snorted. “And that surprises you?”

“Well, I didn’t want to trust you.”

“But you trust me more now?”

“I guess.”

That put a bright smile on Noel’s face. “We should be heading out for supper—”

Brodie’s stomach turned, suddenly. He sat upright in bed, waiting for it to go away... except it just kept getting worse. “I think I’m going to throw up.”

Noel grimaced. He grabbed a plastic bucket off the kitchenette, handing it over.

“I can just go to the bathroom,” Brodie said.

“Maybe not the bathroom. Just use the bucket.”

Brodie didn’t have time to question it—he heaved, his stomach emptying itself. Noel rubbed his back and tucked his hair behind his ear, helping to hold the bucket. Then he handed Brodie a mug of water to rinse his mouth with.

This was so different from his previous pregnancy. Brodie was no longer alone—he felt so spoiled when Noel hovered around to make sure he was okay.

“You really are pregnant,” Noel breathed, rubbing his belly.

Brodie rolled his eyes. “You already knew that.”

“Yes, but seeing the morning sickness—that makes it very real.” Noel brushed his wrist over Brodie’s abdomen again. Then he took the bucket to the bathroom and Brodie followed him, wetness leaking down his thighs. “I guess I have to mention this sooner or later,” Noel said with some resignation.

“Mention what?”

“The toilet is fairly primitive. It’s just a really deep, frozen hole. You’ll want to stick to throwing up in the bucket if you

can.”

“Since you put it that way... Yeah.” Brodie waited for Noel to rinse out the bucket in the sink. “But the faucet works?”

“I have a small water tank in here. We fly water in on the sleighs, but we also have a gray water treatment facility at Alpha Ridge.”

“Guess it’s not as simple as having elves magic everything away,” Brodie said dryly.

“I wish.” Noel laughed and returned, touching Brodie’s midriff gently. “Feel better?”

“Yes.” Brodie leaned into him and sighed. “I guess we should get the meet-and-greet over with.”

“They’re a friendly bunch. You’re a welcome guest.”

“And everyone knows we fucked on Christmas eve.”

Noel shrugged awkwardly. “Occupational hazards?”

“Pfft. Like it happens all the time.”

“Not really. I received some serious side-eye when I got back.” Noel gave a wry smile. “C’mon, let’s introduce you to the fam while they’re still awake.”

He wiped Brodie’s thighs clean again, then helped him back into the thick layers of clothes.

This time, Brodie was more prepared for the biting cold outside. The walk to HQ didn’t take quite as long as he’d anticipated, though his teeth were starting to chatter when they approached the sprawling building.

Through the few windows, he glimpsed a roaring hearth, and several alphas in red seated in armchairs. He held Noel’s hand

more tightly, his nerves tauter than he would've liked; he was the only omega here.

Noel pushed the door open and tugged Brodie in with him. At once, the conversations stopped. Someone wolf-whistled.

“So, this is Brodie. My omega.” Noel wrapped his arm around Brodie’s waist and pulled him closer, and Brodie had no doubt this was another claim.

It only made sense: the smells in HQ weren’t the least bit Christmassy—the woodsy scents of alphas dominated the place, supplemented by the grassy scents of betas.

One of the alphas stood and strode forward, hand outstretched. He looked slightly older than Noel, with greyer hair and a more weather-worn face, but his eyes shone with warmth. “Nikolaas,” he said. “Noel has sung so many praises about you, he sounds like a besotted fool.”

Noel rolled his eyes. “Shut up, Nik.”

But he didn’t mind when Brodie shook Nik’s hand.

More Santas came up. They were all dressed in red sweaters and black pants, and Brodie was glad he was wearing Noel’s jacket so he didn’t stand out.

“Pelz.” The next Santa took Brodie’s hand, stouter and younger with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. “I can’t tell you how many of us are envious that Noel’s got you.”

“You just want someone to warm your bed,” Noel retorted.

“Doesn’t everyone?” Pelz asked.

The third Santa clapped Brodie on the shoulder, studying him shrewdly. He looked the same age as Brodie and Noel, but he seemed more weary. “I’m Kris,” he said. “Enjoy your freedom before the baby comes along.”

Noel laughed. “Actually, we’re both looking forward to the baby.”

“You’ve officially gone insane,” a fourth Santa said to Noel, extending his hand to Brodie. “Morozko. I don’t know if I can help with babysitting. I’m allergic to children.”

“But you’re a Santa?” Brodie blurted.

Morozko grinned. “Delivering presents doesn’t involve establishing a rapport with kids. I get along perfectly fine with my reindeer.”

More Santas came up to shake his hand, including Greta from the reindeer barn. By the time they were done with the introductions, Brodie wasn’t sure he could match any of the names to all these faces.

“Here, let’s get you something to eat.” Noel tugged him over to a large dining room, where a spread of cookies and a warm pot of soup sat on the side table.

“Is that corn soup?” Brodie asked, sniffing at it. His stomach seemed to be in a better mood now.

“Sure is.” Noel ladled some into a bowl for him, piling additional crackers on a plate.

The first few Santas who had introduced themselves came over. One of them caught Brodie staring too long, and smiled. “Still remember my name?”

“No,” Brodie said honestly. “I tried, but that was a *lot* of Santas.”

That Santa laughed. “I’m Morozko. Allergies to children.”

“Now I remember.” Brodie smiled, gesturing at his belly. “I’ll make sure not to ask you for help with this one.”

“Hey, what about me?” Noel pretended to frown.

“I figured that you can’t drop your work immediately any time I ask.” Brodie shrugged. “Especially if you’re away on errands. It’s best for me to make some friends here.”

Noel sighed, but didn’t complain. “Yeah, I’d hate for you to feel like you’re alone here.”

“You can definitely trust us,” Morozko said.

“I can feed babies, but not much more than that.” Kris tucked his hands in his pockets.

“Yeah?” Noel looked curious. “I thought you have a son.”

“And he doesn’t speak to me anymore.” Kris smiled crookedly. “I wouldn’t trust me with kids.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Brodie said. “My son married my best friend.”

Some of the Santas chuckled. “Is that why you came here with Noel?”

“Maybe.” Brodie followed Noel to a dining table by a roaring hearth, where the other alphas sat with them. The conversation drifted away from him, leaving him some peace to drink his soup. Noel never removed his hand from Brodie’s thigh, though.

As the night wore on, Brodie grew more comfortable being surrounded by Noel and his friends—they felt like trustworthy people, people he could turn to for help if he ever needed it. They involved him in their conversation, allowing him to share what he felt comfortable with.

And ever so slightly, Alpha Ridge began to feel a little bit like home.

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SANTA FOR SCRAPBOOKING

NOEL GUIDED the sleigh into a descent as the first light of dawn hit the sky. By now, the reindeer knew exactly which backyard they were landing in. Wilson and Wolfgang touched down on the ground; Noel slowed them down and dropped the reins in the sleigh.

“Good work, all of you. I’ll break out the feed bags once we’re parked in the next destination. We won’t be long here today.”

He jogged across the backyard and knocked on Brodie’s back door. Inside the house, the lights were already on.

Brodie opened the door instead of waiting for Noel to hop into the chimney. “I’m awake.”

“And you’re gorgeous.” Noel grinned, leaning in to drop a kiss on his lips. “Morning, sunshine.”

Brodie rolled his eyes, but he was smiling. “Someone’s in a good mood.”

“I’m always in a good mood whenever I get to see you. Ready to go?”

“Yeah. It’s going to be a long day.” Brodie picked up two full tote bags—they looked to be packed with snacks and reading material. “I’m glad you don’t mind doing this.”

“Thank the reindeer. They’re the ones who didn’t exactly agree to it.” Noel smiled, watching curiously when Brodie’s mouth formed a small ‘o’.

“That’s right, I almost forgot.” Brodie shoved the tote bags at Noel and disappeared back into the house. He reappeared with a huge sack of carrots. “They sell these for horses. I thought maybe the reindeer might appreciate it.”

Noel’s reindeer were his because of his job, but they were family to him. For Brodie to bring them a whole sack of treats... His heart swelled. “They’ll appreciate it.”

“I’m glad.” Brodie locked up and followed Noel to the sleigh, tearing open a corner of the carrot bag. “Here, guys. I brought you all a treat.”

He fished out a handful of large carrots and gave one to each reindeer—the ones at the back were wagging their tails even before Brodie reached them.

“They’re *really* fond of you, just so you know,” Noel said.

Brodie shot him a cheeky grin. “I didn’t know that.”

“And they would be very disappointed if you don’t want to continue seeing me.”

Brodie snorted, but he gazed at Noel through his lashes.

“What, are you suggesting they want me to marry you?”

Noel’s stomach flipped. He hadn’t even dared to consider that.

Apparently, neither had Brodie. Brodie stumbled over his next words, his cheeks turning red. Noel stepped closer, crowding him against the sleigh. Kissing him fervently on the lips. “Us married, huh?”

“I’m—I’m not saying that!”

“You *don't* want to be married?”

Brodie fidgeted, looking at everything but Noel. Noel reached down and touched his belly—there was a pronounced bump there now. *Ours*.

“I almost can't wait,” Noel whispered. “I've already ordered cots for here and up north.”

“I'm just three months along.”

Brodie still hadn't made a decision on where he'd be living—most nights, he still slept in his own bed, and Noel visited whenever he could. He didn't want to subject Brodie to the harsh cold of the North Pole, but... he also loved his job. “C'mon, we need to move before it gets brighter.”

He stored the totes and carrot sack in the sleigh, helping Brodie in before taking the reins himself.

The reindeer landed in front of Brodie's scrapbooking shop, where the parking lot was—and they would remain here until it got late enough that no one would witness them taking off. Brodie hurried to open up the shop.

Noel unhitched the reindeer, laid out their feed bags, and followed Brodie in with the totes. “You don't have to rush, you know.”

“I just want to make sure everyone's comfortable.” Brodie's forehead crinkled. “It'll be a long day.”

Noel's chest warmed. He helped Brodie with the event setup, pulling out tiny tables and chairs for the kids, picnic tables for the adults, getting the materials all in place so they wouldn't be rushing later.

By the time they were done, the sun was just starting to rise, casting shades of gold onto the clouds. Noel sipped from his

insulated tumbler of coffee as they relaxed on one of the picnic benches. “Do you usually set these up yourself?”

“Nah. I usually get here later and my employees help me.” Brodie laughed softly. “It’s just that we had to be here crazy early so no one sees us flying in.”

“Sorry.”

Brodie shook his head with a smile. “Don’t be. I’m just glad you and the reindeer could make it.”

“It’s our pleasure. Although it is a bit warm here.” Noel was wearing his thinnest shirt and coat—living at the North Pole made everywhere else feel hot.

“Did you bring a fake beard?” Brodie asked.

Noel laughed. “No. The kids should learn that not all Santas have beards or glasses.”

“And I’m sure their parents think you’re pretending.”

Noel shrugged. “I’m used to that.”

Brodie’s employees arrived two hours later to man the shop. By then, a number of curious townsfolk had stopped by to inquire about the reindeer and sleigh. They’d returned with their children or grandkids, and Noel had to drag out the last of Brodie’s chairs and tables so everyone had a spot to do their arts and crafts.

Because of this scrapbooking event, Brodie’s shop did brisk business all day—he’d even run out of stock on some items, and had to promise to call his customers when he had them back in. That made Noel swell with pride; he loved seeing his omega being so successful.

A car pulled in toward the end of the event, while Noel was busy taking photos with a couple of kids in the sleigh. So he

didn't notice until Brodie came up to him with an alpha, an omega, and a toddler in tow—the adults were both short people, but the alpha looked startlingly similar to Brodie in person.

“You must be Santa,” River said dryly, sizing Noel up.

“I'm *a* Santa.” Noel shook his hand. They'd met a few more times on video since—River had gradually warmed up to Noel, which Noel was grateful for. “You know what, though? I got clearance to give you a sleigh ride.”

River's eyes grew wide; he sucked in a sharp breath and glanced at the people around them. “Later?”

“Yeah, when we get back to your dad's place.”

So Noel had absolutely pulled some strings, but he really, really wanted to get on River's good side. And it paid off—River's excitement was palpable, even as he brought his omega, Nico, and their daughter, Yona, closer so Noel could meet them.

Nico very much preferred to hang out with his daughter, Brodie, and the reindeer, though. Noel left them to chat; from the corner of his eye, he caught Nico peering at Brodie's belly, and touching it.

“Are you excited?” Nico asked.

Brodie flushed and smiled, and Noel's stomach did somersaults.

“So,” River said from his other side. “You're really serious about him.”

Noel was about to say, *I've always been serious about him*, when he remembered it didn't always appear that way. “I'll admit I wasn't around for a while. And I'll admit I should've

tried harder. But yes. I am serious. I spent a huge part of my life learning everything about him; I've never loved any other omega."

River's eyebrows crawled up his forehead. Feet away, Brodie's head snapped up; he looked wide-eyed at Noel. Noel held his breath, his heart pounding.

"I wasn't ready to hear that," Brodie blurted.

This wasn't how Noel had planned on confessing, either, but it wasn't as though Brodie didn't know. Brodie looked away, his cheeks pink. He didn't reject the sentiment, though. That was such a relief.

"Your dad really is gorgeous," Noel murmured.

River smiled. "I'm married to the best omega. Sorry, Dad."

Brodie rolled his eyes.

Between playing with their daughter, River and Nico helped out with the scrapbooking event until the attendees all went home. Then they moved the furniture back in, and Brodie instructed River and his family to head over to his house first.

"So," Brodie said, his cheeks pink again.

"So...?" Noel grinned. "Are you craving anything? We can get some delivered."

"Fish sandwiches. With extra lemon and pickles and tartar sauce." Brodie rubbed his belly and groaned.

"That actually sounds more delicious than the peanut butter and pickles you've been mashing together."

"Oh, hush. *You* started eating peanut butter and pickles after you tried mine." Brodie laughed. "Worse, you add even more weird stuff to it!"

“You’ve seen how alphas mash all the condiments on the same sandwich, right? I think we might be pretty sick in our own right.”

Brodie made a face. “Yeah, that’s the ultimate alpha pregnancy craving. Speaking of, I’ve heard of alpha pregnancies, you know. Nico’s professor friend’s husband, York, knows an alpha firefighter who got pregnant.”

“Huh. And that happened without magic?”

“No magic involved,” Brodie confirmed.

“That’s crazy.”

“Something something science.” Brodie grinned. “I think York has even met the doctor who made it possible.”

“It’s sure a small world.”

“Isn’t it?”

Brodie locked up the shop, feeding the reindeer the last of his carrots. Then they took the sleigh back up into the air, crossed the town, and landed neatly in Brodie’s backyard just as River’s car pulled into the driveway.

By the time River and his family made their way to the back, River’s eyes were round. “I saw you fly in.”

Noel grinned. “Told ya. Want a ride?”

It was dark enough now that no one would see. River nodded eagerly, so Noel unloaded Brodie’s things, and nodded for River to hop in.

“Don’t be late to dinner,” Brodie warned. “Or we might finish all the food before you get back.”

“Nah. I ordered extra. There should be enough for leftovers even if you eat double.”

Brodie shook his head exasperatedly; Nico elbowed him in the ribs. Noel left them to gossip, whistling for the reindeer to ascend. “Hang tight.”

He almost wanted to watch Brodie hanging out with his best friend, but flight safety was the most important. Noel kept his attention on the sky around him, glancing at River every so often to take in his white-knuckled fists, and his shock and awe.

“How did you even know Santas existed?” River breathed, peering over the side of the sleigh.

“I answered an ad in the papers.” Noel laughed. “Funny enough, there was no mention of Santa. They were looking for honest and upstanding workers in a very cold environment.”

“And then this happened.” River waved at the reindeer, still disbelieving.

“Yup.”

It took River a long while to relax. Finally, he breathed out, fidgeting uneasily. “Okay, I’d like to go back down.”

“Too long without your omega?” Noel asked.

“That, and I don’t think I like heights. Not like this.”

Noel steered the reindeer into a descent. When they landed, River climbed shakily out of the sleigh, all wobbly.

“You did great,” Noel said, clapping his shoulder.

River tried to smile. “I don’t think you could pay me a million bucks to do that job.”

“That’s all right. There’s a person for every job. You’re doing well with yours.”

River brightened. “Thanks.”

When Noel looked over, he found Brodie watching them with the softest look in his eyes.

“I might want to adopt him as my stepdad,” River said. “How cool is that? Noel flies around in a sleigh.”

Noel’s heart leaped.

Brodie flushed a bright red. “We haven’t talked about the future yet.”

“Even with the baby?” Nico asked.

“Somewhat,” Brodie mumbled. Even though he allowed intimacy between them, he was still hesitant about the very long term. Noel could understand. He wanted to give Brodie as much time as he needed.

“Good alphas don’t come along so often, Dad,” River said, winking. “Better grab Noel while you can.”

Brodie rolled his eyes. “Oh, hush.”

“Don’t pressure him,” Noel said, slipping his arm around Brodie’s waist. “I’m willing to wait.”

Brodie’s blush deepened even more; Nico and River both gave him pointed looks.

“C’mon,” Noel said, changing the subject. “I’m starving. How about some dinner?”

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ALL I NEED

“I BROUGHT YOU ANOTHER GIFT,” Noel said when Brodie answered his back door. “I think you’ll like it.”

Brodie accepted the paper bag, his heart skipping. Over the past few months, Noel’s happiness and excitement at seeing him had never once waned. He followed Brodie into the house eagerly, wrapping his arms around Brodie from behind.

Then he buried his nose in Brodie’s hair and groaned. “I’ve missed you.”

“You saw me two days ago!”

“Still missed you.”

Brodie felt the same, though. Noel’s presence always gave him a shot of excitement and peace and comfort all rolled into one. More and more often, he craved Noel’s presence—Noel had not invited Brodie back to Alpha Ridge, because he’d been cutting open the walls of his home to add the new rooms.

But he’d sent pictures. And Brodie looked forward to the day when he could wake up to Noel sleeping soundly next to him.

“I can’t open the bag when you’re squishing me,” he said jokingly.

Noel released him, tugging him into the bedroom. He sat them on the edge of the bed, Brodie between his legs, and slipped

his hand under Brodie's shirt to stroke his belly.

At twenty-four weeks, Brodie's belly was round; he'd been feeling little kicks from their child. Noel had terrible timing with it, though.

"I just want to feel one kick," Noel grumbled, nipping at Brodie's shoulder. "C'mon, kick."

Brodie laughed. "You'll get more chances in the future."

"Yeah, but I'm impatient." Noel kissed the bonding mark on Brodie's neck. "Open the bag."

Brodie opened it, his breath snagging at the pastel colors in there. Then he pulled out the first onesie. "I didn't know you went and bought these."

"I did. I got different sizes, but mostly the bigger ones 'cuz someone said babies grow quick."

They did. Brodie emptied the onesies onto his lap—ones with tiny hoods with animal faces, ones with polka dots and zebra stripes. Brodie hugged them to his chest, his heart skipping.

"That's not all," Noel whispered. "Let's get you bundled up. I have something to show you."

"We're not spending the night here?"

"Probably not," Noel said vaguely. He pulled out Brodie's thicker coats—really his own that he'd lent to Brodie—and helped him into them.

Then they climbed into the sleigh, and took off into the night sky.

"What're you going to show me?" Brodie asked, snuggling into Noel's side.

"You'll see."

Brodie elbowed him in the ribs, but Noel only laughed.

After some riding, the golden glow of Alpha Ridge rose up over the horizon. Then they were descending into the village, except Noel wasn't parking the sleigh where it was supposed to go.

He pulled up in front of his little house—it wasn't quite so little anymore, though. Two newly-built rooms flanked the building; small rooms, but extra space nonetheless.

“It's ready,” Noel murmured in Brodie's ear. “I wanted it to be a surprise.”

Brodie's stomach flipped. “It's ready?”

“Yeah. Kris and the others helped me out a bit.”

Noel unhitched the reindeer so they could wander off, then helped Brodie out of the sleigh. The house looked the same from the outside, and it smelled the same, if kind of new, when Brodie stepped in.

The bed was gone from the original room. In its place were a small couch, an expanded coat rack, and a rolling pantry on wheels. Before Brodie could examine them more closely, Noel helped to pull off his boots, and brought him to the nursery.

“It's kind of small,” Noel said, flipping on the light switch. In there was a crib, a changing station, and a closet. “I made sure there's enough space so we can switch the crib out for a single bed. For when our baby grows up.” Then he turned to Brodie, looking so hopeful that Brodie's heart squeezed. “What do you think?”

Brodie leaned in and kissed him softly on the lips. “I think it's perfect.”

Noel looked like maybe he might shed a tear. He took Brodie's hands and kissed all his knuckles. Then he tugged Brodie into the other new room—and *there* was the bed they'd been using, with a new closet alongside the old one.

"It's just big enough for us. I hope." Noel gathered Brodie close. "Because if you choose to live here, you'll be spending a lot of time sharing this space with me."

"Truthfully? I don't mind that at all." Brodie laughed and bowed his head. "I've done it before. I want to do it again."

"You... want to?" Noel's breath hitched.

After all that Noel had done, all that he'd proven he wanted to do for their family—Brodie was convinced that Noel was sorry for leaving him behind in the past. He was convinced that Noel would do everything to make amends, and that Noel wouldn't leave him again.

And maybe... he didn't need Noel to prove himself anymore.

He took Noel's hands in his own, tiptoeing to kiss his alpha on the lips. "I love you," Brodie murmured.

Noel went so still, he wasn't even breathing. "R-really?"

"I always have." Brodie smiled crookedly. "I was just afraid that you'd hurt me again."

"I promise not to," Noel whispered, his voice cracking. He gathered Brodie close. "I love you. I'd hurt myself before I ever hurt you again."

Brodie narrowed his eyes. "No hurting yourself, either."

"Okay. I won't." Noel dropped kisses all over Brodie's face, then down his neck, little sucking kisses that skittered down his spine. "I... I bought a few things to celebrate. The house, I mean. But also—what you just said."

“What did you buy?” Brodie yelled when Noel swept him off his feet and planted him on the bed.

“Fun things.” Noel grinned and nipped at his lips. He stripped them both, shoving all that clothing onto the floor. Then he reached into the nightstand and brought out a set of restraints—black straps that made Brodie’s hole tighten. *He remembered.*

“What’re you going to do with those?”

“Tie you down.” Noel licked his lips, his gaze dark. “Unless you don’t want me to?”

They hadn’t done that in so long. Brodie groaned and spread his legs, and Noel was on him in seconds, caging him in, pinning Brodie’s legs open as he settled between them, their cocks grinding together.

“You’ll let me come?” Brodie panted against Noel’s hungry lips.

Noel chuckled. “No. You’re not supposed to come, Bee. But I’ll make you. I’ll fuck you raw, ‘til you’ve screamed yourself hoarse. Then I’ll fuck you more and fill you up with come.”

Brodie grew so wet, he squirmed. “You’re cruel.”

“You love it when I make you scream.” Noel pushed his cock between Brodie’s cheeks, letting it rest unfulfillingly against Brodie’s hole. He kissed Brodie hard, thrusting into his mouth with all the desire of an alpha who was hell-bent on claiming him. Brodie moaned; Noel reached between them and grasped his cock, pumping it firmly.

Pleasure jolted down Brodie’s spine; he bucked and writhed, only to whimper when Noel left him hanging on the edge. His cock pulsed and dripped, but it needed more. “Noel!”

“That’s it,” Noel rumbled, wrapping a strap securely around Brodie’s ankle. He tied that to one corner of the bed. Then he tied down Brodie’s other leg, leaving him spread completely, at his alpha’s mercy. The next strap was a fine one; he secured that snugly around Brodie’s cock and sac, anchoring his attention there. “Fuck, your hole looks so pink and pretty. It’s gonna look even better when I’ve fucked it loose.”

“Gods, you’re filthy.” Brodie’s balls tightened; he reached down to pump himself.

Except Noel caught his hands and tied them above his head, leaving him spread open, his slick leaking onto the bed. “Gods, you’re beautiful,” Noel breathed. “So ready for me.”

He sat back and pumped his own cock, letting its precome drip onto Brodie’s heated, sensitive length. Then he leaned in and sucked on Brodie’s nipples, hard, intense strokes that had Brodie gasping and moaning, his hole flooding with slick.

“Please, please,” Brodie begged, lifting his hips.

Noel closed his fist around Brodie’s cock; Brodie’s eyes rolled back into his head. “What do you want?”

“I want to come.”

Noel chuckled lowly. “You’re not supposed to, Bee. Remember? I want you to be good. Obey me.”

But he stroked Brodie’s cock firm and slow anyway. Brodie gritted his teeth, needing to obey. But each tug increased the pressure inside his cock. He was going to blow if Noel kept this up.

“Don’t come,” Noel whispered, kissing just below his ear. His other hand tweaked Brodie’s hard nipples.

Brodie sobbed, trying to drag his thoughts away from Noel's fist. Away from Noel's cock nudging against his hole.

"You could think about what color to paint the walls," Noel whispered, swirling his fingers around Brodie's tip. Then he pushed his fingertip under Brodie's foreskin, grinding it against his too-sensitive head. Pleasure curled his toes.

"Fuck the walls," Brodie hissed.

"We can't unless there's a hole in there." Noel chuckled. "Want me to make you a fuck-hole?"

"I don't even know how that works."

Noel slid Brodie's foreskin down his head and closed his mouth around that bundle of nerves. Brodie choked on his moan. But Noel took his entire cock into his mouth, and tried to suck Brodie's soul out of him.

Brodie's balls emptied themselves in a hard release. He screamed and yanked against the restraints, trying to hold onto something, anything, except he couldn't.

Noel watched him the entire time, sucking until Brodie's cock had no more to give. Then he pulled away and licked his lips, smiling because he'd gotten his cream. "I told you not to come, Bee."

"You made me," Brodie growled.

Noel groaned and pumped his own cock. "Damn, you're hot." He leaned in and slanted their lips together, thrusting into Brodie's mouth—so Brodie tasted his bitter musk on his alpha's tongue. Then Noel pulled back, and Brodie felt his alpha's fingers at his hole.

With their gazes locked, Noel pushed his fingers in, stretching Brodie inside.

A sound escaped Brodie's lips. It always felt so good when Noel massaged him there—except Noel was watching every little shift of his expression. He knew exactly how much Brodie loved being touched inside. And he curled his fingers against Brodie's prostate, his eyes darkening when Brodie jolted at the pressure.

“Don't come,” Noel whispered.

“I'd like to see *you* not come,” Brodie retorted.

Noel smirked. And he crammed his fingers hard against that spot, so Brodie howled and clenched, his cock squirting precome. “This isn't about me,” Noel murmured, pushing against Brodie's prostate, over and over. “I want it to be good for you. Obey me.”

Brodie tried to look at the ceiling. To imagine it in any color aside from white. But all he could think about was Noel's fingers inside his body, grinding against his prostate until his legs trembled and his breath stuttered, and his entire body clenched in another orgasm. “Damn it, N-Noel!”

“Fuck,” Noel breathed. He pinned Brodie down and kissed him hard, and the whole time, he worked his fingers against Brodie's prostate. Until Brodie shuddered and came around him again, choking on a moan. “Don't come, babe.”

“I'm fucking trying,” Brodie hissed, but his entire body twitched, too sensitive from his orgasms.

Noel pulled his fingers out. Brodie had a moment to relax—until he realized that Noel was holding a hooked red-and-white rod. A candy cane. But it was semi-firm and opaque, instead of hard and clear like the one Brodie had bought on Christmas eve. And it was shorter, and thinner.

Noel pushed a button; it began to buzz.

“Oh, hell no,” Brodie said.

It whispered along Brodie’s cock, sending an electric thrill down his nerves. “You can stop yourself from coming,” Noel said, amused.

“Like hell I can.” Brodie moaned when Noel rubbed it against his balls and taint, then nestled it against his hole. The vibrations tingled through his body. “I’ve never seen anything like that.”

“Remember Nico’s friend who makes specialty vibrators?” Noel grinned. “I had Perry make this.”

Then he pushed it into Brodie’s wet hole, and the vibrations shot through him. Brodie jerked; Noel slid two fingers in alongside it, making sure it shoved up against his prostate.

Brodie’s eyes rolled back; he clutched at his restraints, his cock twitching helplessly. “N-Noel—”

“Don’t come,” Noel murmured, and worked the vibrator so relentlessly against his prostate that Brodie howled and shuddered, struggling to breathe. He tried to close his legs, he tried to bring his hands down to shove the vibrator out. But he couldn’t move.

It remained deep inside him, tormenting his prostate so he sobbed and came again, his balls aching with the strain.

“Gorgeous,” Noel whispered. He spread his fingers within Brodie and pulled them out slowly, forcing Brodie’s hole to open. With the candy cane hooked against Brodie’s taint, he eased his cockhead between his fingers and pushed between them, stretching Brodie wider.

“I s-swear, N-Noel,” Brodie growled, his entire body trembling.

Noel grinned. “You swear?”

“I’m going to kill you after this.”

“That’ll put you on the naughty list, but okay.” And Noel sank his cock halfway into Brodie, his thickness so glorious that Brodie’s breath punched out of him. “After I ruin your hole. You can do whatever you want to me then.”

His cock trapped the vibrator against Brodie’s prostate. Brodie cried out, thrashing against his bonds, trying to get free so he could rip that damn thing out of his ass.

Except Noel plowed all the way into him, so deep that Brodie’s eyes rolled back and he came, his entire body wrung tight, his cock pulsing.

“Feel my cock, Bee?” Noel whispered, trapping the candy cane between their bodies. The vibrator hummed; Noel groaned. “Fuck. I need to see what else there is on Perry’s store, ‘cuz this feels fucking amazing inside you.”

Brodie could barely answer—he felt so full with Noel all the way inside, compressing the vibrator against his walls.

Noel grasped the hook end of the candy cane to anchor it. With his other hand, he grasped Brodie’s shoulder to hold him down.

He began to thrust. Deep, hard strokes that spread Brodie wide open, friction sizzling down Brodie’s nerves each time he moved. Brodie struggled against his restraints, his moans going high.

“Don’t come anymore, Bee,” Noel panted. “You’ve disobeyed me so many times.”

And yet he fucked in, his thrusts turning frantic, his cock swelling.

“Fuck,” Noel groaned, his precome filling Brodie inside. “I’m not—not gonna last.”

He fucked that vibrating end against Brodie’s prostate; Brodie came, his ass clenching hard around Noel, dragging him into a release. Noel roared and slammed in, hot jets of come filling Brodie inside.

Except his knot began to swell, shoving that buzzing end against Brodie’s prostate. Brodie howled and struggled, come squirting out of him. “Take it out,” he begged.

Noel pressed heavy kisses all over his face. “Two more minutes. Hold it in there for me.”

Brodie sobbed, his pleasure on the brink of pain.

But it felt good. So, so good.

“I almost hate you,” he wheezed.

Noel kissed his lips tenderly, rolling his hips so his knot compressed the vibrator against that sensitive spot. He worked Brodie into a last orgasm, and as Brodie shuddered and floated in a pleasure-induced haze, he removed the vibrator and all the restraints, gathering Brodie against himself.

For a long while, all Brodie knew was Noel massaging his wrists, kissing his neck, tracing his scent glands all over Brodie’s skin.

“Mine,” Noel whispered, kissing everywhere he could reach. “So gorgeous.”

“I don’t know how you expect me to keep myself from coming,” he muttered.

Noel laughed. “I love it when you try your best, and you come anyway. I love seeing you in so much pleasure.”

Yeah, Noel had always wanted that for him.

Brodie sagged against the bed, drifting between reality and unconsciousness. He felt Noel pull the covers over them. When Noel's knot eventually receded, Noel spooned him from behind, his lips pressed against Brodie's nape.

Something kicked in Brodie's abdomen just as Noel brushed his hand over it. Noel froze, sucking in a sharp breath. "Was that—"

"Yeah, it was a kick." Brodie turned to look over his shoulder; he found his alpha with the most blinding smile on his face.

"I felt our baby kick! I felt it!" Noel did a small dance behind him, cupping Brodie's belly in case he felt it again.

Another kick. Brodie thought Noel might faint; he looked so radiant.

"I'm glad you're already in bed," Brodie said dryly. "I can't catch you if you fall over."

Noel beamed and shuffled down, pressing his face to the side of Brodie's belly. "Hey. I felt you from out here," he said against Brodie's skin. "So damn excited to meet you."

Brodie laughed. "You know, maybe we should work on the swearing."

"It'd definitely be awkward if our child swore like a sailor in kindergarten."

"But pirate babies swear like sailors, don't they?" Brodie asked. "What about Santas' children?"

"I don't know about pirate babies, but Santas' children say, 'Ho, ho, ho!'" Noel answered dryly. "Not that any of us have raised children as Santa before."

Brodie rubbed his belly. “I was thinking about homeschooling. Especially if we have more than one.”

Noel sucked in a quick breath. “More than one?”

“Are you okay with that?”

Noel glanced at the door. “I’ll have to run it through the other Santas,” he murmured. “We’re the exception right now, but if any of the other Santas ever get a family... things might look different around here.”

Brodie wondered what that future might look like. “I guess we’ll leave it on the backburner for now.”

“But inside the back door.” Noel grinned.

“Noel Robinson,” Brodie growled, except Noel hugged him close and blew raspberries against his neck. His heart fluttered. “I guess I’m stuck with you.”

“Definitely stuck with me,” Noel agreed.

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BIRTH

BRODIE'S WATER broke on a warm September evening, while Noel was on his way to HQ after a long day's work.

Noel whistled as he climbed the stairs to the front entrance, stomping the ice off his boots. Brodie had texted his location; Noel couldn't wait to cuddle with his omega again.

He found his bondmate in front of the fireplace, chatting with Kris and Morozko.

"Noel!" Brodie brightened when Noel kissed the top of his head.

"Ugh, no one needs to see that." Morozko covered his eyes. "Save that sap for the bedroom."

Noel rolled his eyes. "You're just jealous."

He perched on the armrest of Brodie's comfy seat, admiring the swell of Brodie's large belly through his sweater. "How are you both today?"

"Good," Brodie said, rubbing his belly. "I've been starting to get contractions, though. And... I think my water just broke."

Panic and relief shot through Noel.

"It broke?" Morozko squeaked.

The conversations in the sitting area stopped. All the Santas looked over, their breaths collectively held. Then everyone began talking and gathering around.

“Hey, this is my omega,” Noel said. “I should be the one freaking out.”

“Aren’t you?” Brodie asked archly.

He was a little late, actually. They’d been preparing for an early birth, but this baby seemed to like plodding along slowly. Noel had been wringing his hands waiting for any sign of contractions for the last several days.

“I’m relieved,” Noel said, trying not to get too excited. “C’mon, let’s get going.”

“We’ll get your overnight bag and sleigh,” Kris said. “I’m not a fan of you trudging through the cold right now.”

He took Noel’s keys and disappeared with Morozko. The other Santas began to volunteer help.

“Do you need a blanket?” Nikolaas asked.

“What about snacks?” Pelz said.

“I just made more corn soup,” Greta offered.

“We’re fine,” Noel said to shut them up so he could think. He gathered Brodie into his arms, his sense of urgency kicking in. “How long has it been since the contractions started?”

“A few hours, actually.” Brodie chewed his lip. “We might need to get to a hospital soon. I’ve already texted Nico.”

That made Noel properly panic. “Crap.”

Brodie snorted. “Watch your swearing, *Papa*.”

“I’ll watch it when you’re both safe in my arms.” Noel had heard about complications during birth. He’d only just gotten

his omega back; he wasn't about to lose Brodie now.

They waited by the door with the other Santas until Morozko and Kris pulled up. With Pelz and Nikolaas flanking them for warmth, Noel scooped Brodie off his feet and carried him to the sleigh, gently depositing him in there. They waved at all the Santas who had gathered outside to send them off. Then they were flying, the reindeer running fast into the sky.

Noel tried to focus on the journey. But it was a quiet night; they passed over thunderstorms and large cities, Brodie rubbing his belly calmly next to him.

"Aren't *you* anxious?" Noel asked.

"I've been through this once already," Brodie said dryly. "It took a long time back then. I was so exhausted that I just wanted it to be over."

"You're so strong," Noel blurted.

Brodie only smiled.

They descended into Meadowfall not long after, where Nico and River lived. Noel had the reindeer land in their backyard; Nico and River were hurrying over even before they'd gotten out of the sleigh.

"Sorry about the last minute notice," Noel said.

"It's okay," Nico answered. "River will drive you there. I'm in the middle of cooking for the next few days."

River sure drove a lot more calmly than Noel would have. Noel sat with Brodie in the backseat, one hand on Brodie's belly, the other in his hair.

"I was a wreck when Nico gave birth, too," River said, meeting Noel's eyes through the rearview mirror. "But it turned out okay in the end."

He was living proof of Brodie's previous labor; even so, Noel's guts twisted up with anxiety. "Maybe I'll be calmer the next time around."

River grinned and dropped them off at the hospital. "I'm going back to help with the prep," he said. "We've got the guestroom ready for you."

"Thanks," Noel and Brodie said.

They got Brodie checked into a room. Noel paced around with him, holding him just so he was absolutely sure Brodie wouldn't fall over.

"I'm fine," Brodie said dryly.

"I'm not. I need to hold you."

Brodie smiled and allowed Noel to crowd closer. Then the midwife came in and checked Brodie inside, and Noel couldn't help growling.

"Noel," Brodie said exasperatedly. "They need to know how dilated I am."

"See, you should learn from your omega," the midwife grouched. "How is it that you don't know this? What are they teaching you in school?"

Honestly, Noel couldn't remember anything from school right now. His mind was just a blank space, with *Baby, baby, baby* going through it a million times a second.

He crowded onto the hospital bed with Brodie, thumbing the bonding marks he'd left on Brodie's wrists. Brodie had given him a set of matching marks, too. But Noel wanted even more.

"Marry me," he blurted.

Brodie looked up, surprise crossing his face. “That was unexpected.”

Noel laughed raggedly and hugged him close. “I want to share everything with you. I want everyone to know you’re mine. I know we’re already bondmates, but I—I’ve always wanted us to be husbands. Even back then.”

His heart stuttered while Brodie absorbed his words. Even now, Brodie could turn him down for any reason at all.

But Brodie smiled and tucked his head into the crook of Noel’s neck. “I’ll marry you.”

Noel’s heart swelled so much, he thought it might burst. “Gods, I love you.”

“Love you,” Brodie whispered, kissing him softly. Then a contraction rolled through him, and his face contorted in pain.

Noel held his breath, rubbing Brodie’s back, whispering soft encouragements into his ear. The contractions came faster; Brodie’s abdomen tightened over and over, and sweat matted his hair.

He was in so much pain that Noel wished he could bear all of it for his omega.

“Push,” the midwife said. “Push again.”

Noel tried his best to bite those words down, but they came out of him anyway. “Push, Bee.”

Both the midwife and Brodie glared daggers at him.

“Don’t you come near me with that cock again,” Brodie snarled, his grip deathly-tight around Noel’s hand. “Or I’ll make sure you regret it.”

Noel's balls shrank back into his body. He held his breath and stroked Brodie's hair, his heart almost pounding out of his chest.

Then something bloody slid out of Brodie, and the tension in Noel's body deflated. "You did it," he choked, overwhelmed. "You're amazing."

Brodie smiled tiredly up at him, so beautiful that Noel pressed kisses all over his face.

A loud wail burst through the room. The midwife came over with a bright grin, laying their baby on Brodie's chest. "Congratulations! You have a beautiful son."

He was so small that Noel was afraid he'd accidentally hurt him. But Brodie just smiled and cradled their baby, kissing his head. "Hey, Joe. We've been waiting a while for you. Welcome to the family."

At his voice, Joel's wailing quietened, as though he was seeking out Brodie.

"Both of you are perfect." Noel's voice cracked. Gingerly, he hugged them, careful not to crush their son with his strength. Then he trailed his wrists over them both, so they smelled like him. *Mine*.

Brodie met his eyes over Joe's head, his gaze warm and soft. In that moment, Noel could see their future playing out: both of them taking turns to care for their son, feeding him, burping him, tucking him into bed. They'd introduce Joe to all the uncles and aunts he had at the North Pole, teach him to talk and share his things, and take him down to Meadowfall so he could meet the rest of Brodie's family.

"I love you both," Noel rasped, his heart so full.

“Love you too.” Brodie beamed. And Noel couldn’t wait to take them both home.

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EPILOGUE

“WHAT COLOR DO you want your flower?” Brodie asked four-year-old Joe, moving the tarp up against the side of their house.

“Blue!” Joe exclaimed, hopping in his little boots and coat. “Blue flower! Blue ev’rywhere!”

“Hey, watch that paintbrush, squirt.” Noel grinned and caught Joe’s hand so his son wouldn’t accidentally poke him in the eye. “We’re going to have to plan this real carefully, okay? We can’t have the paint cans open for too long.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s cold out—this space heater isn’t going to keep the tent very warm at all. And paint doesn’t like being cold or it’ll harden up. Then you can’t paint anymore.”

“Oh,” Joe said, looking so adorable that Noel wanted to hug him, all over again.

They were painting the outside of their house at Alpha Ridge. Lately, Joe had been painting on every surface they let him—and even some they didn’t—so Brodie and Noel had figured they could let him use the outside of their house as a canvas.

Of course, that had taken special preparation: Noel had acquired a tall, cube-shaped tent with one wall rolled up so

they could keep the wind and cold away, and he'd also gotten his hands on some paint that could withstand the temperatures here. Brodie had used a marker to draw the outlines of a sun, a rainbow, and a field of flowers on one side of their house; that was today's painting project.

"Let's start with blue, then," Brodie said, grinning when Noel came to crouch next to him. Noel squeezed his hip, and out of Joe's sight, he slipped his hand lower and squeezed Brodie's ass. "Noel!"

"What did I do?" Noel released him and pretended to look innocent.

Brodie rolled his eyes, but he opened the paint can and dipped the end of Joe's paintbrush inside to collect some pastel blue paint. "Here, hon. Go paint your flowers."

Joe hopped forward with a squeal, smushing the paintbrush against the wall. Brodie closed the paint can and leaned into Noel, looking so content that Noel's heart swelled.

"He's amazing," Noel whispered in his ear. "You're amazing."

"So are you," Brodie said.

Noel beamed, fingering the ring on Brodie's finger.

They'd gotten married at Alpha Ridge soon after Joe's birth, with the Santas and reindeer as their witnesses, along with River and his family. Most days, Brodie spent his time managing his scrapbooking shop from the North Pole, but once a week, Noel took them back down south so they could maintain the house, and so Brodie could visit his shop to hold the events he so loved.

"Wanna paint rainbow," Joe said, trying to reach it.

"What color do you want?" Brodie asked.

“Yellow!”

Brodie dipped Joe’s paintbrush into the pastel yellow paint. Noel lifted Joe into the air and held him up while he smacked the wall with the brush, leaving blotches of yellow everywhere.

Brodie laughed. “I love it.”

Their house would be the first colorful one at Alpha Ridge—Noel was so proud of that. Brodie had mentioned once that the houses here all looked too similar, and while that had been to reduce the heat loss of the houses, it did make the Santa village look so bare, at least until Christmastime.

“Just you wait,” Noel said. “Pretty soon, everyone’s gonna want to paint their houses. We’re going to face some stiff competition.”

“They’ll probably have more adult paintings,” Brodie said, pausing when he caught the look in Noel’s eyes. “I meant, paintings that are more complex. Not, you know. Pin-ups.”

“I’d love a pin-up of you,” Noel said, grinning. “It’s not like they’re explicit or anything, either.”

“Maybe on your side of the bed,” Brodie said dryly.

“On my bed?” Joe asked, all bright-eyed.

Noel snorted. “One day, you’ll be allowed to have pin-ups. But not right now, young man.”

As Joe painted, Brodie came over, slipping his arms around Noel’s waist. Noel grinned and kissed him over his shoulder, which only made Brodie smile more brightly.

“I can’t wait to see it finished,” Brodie said. “One day, we’ll show Joe a picture of it, and he’ll look at us and groan.”

“And he’ll say we’re too boring to be cool, huh?” Noel laughed.

“Probably.” Brodie grinned and kissed Noel on the back. Then he squeezed Noel’s ass, and danced away.

“Bee,” Noel growled.

It was Brodie’s turn to look innocent. “What did I do?”

Noel laughed. “You’ll get some payback later.”

Except Joe threw his arms into the air, poking Noel in the nose with the paintbrush.

“Hey!”

Brodie pulled out his phone for a picture.

Noel could only shake his head. “Photo before cleanup, huh?”

“Exactly.”

As Brodie came closer to get the perfect angle for the photo, Noel admired his omega, and the life they’d created together. He’d made a mistake once, and he’d spent years regretting it. But now—Brodie had given him a chance to make things up. The life they shared now was amazing, and Noel wouldn’t trade it for anything in the world.

He hugged his son tighter and leaned in to give Brodie a kiss, smearing paint on Brodie’s face, too.

“I love you,” Noel whispered.

Brodie’s smile in return lit up his soul.

READY FOR MORE OF *this universe?*

- I'm planning to release **the other Santas' books** every Nov - [join my mailing list](#) for more updates!
- Check out **River and Nico's book**, [Dad's Omega Best Friend](#) - it begins with a banana boat crashing through Nico's front door!
- I've also begun a **new series** in this universe - the first book features a chubby omega! ([A Daddy for the Chubby Omega](#), in the Daddies For Dumpster Omegas series)



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ALSO BY ANNA

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Taboo books (Not available on Amazon)

Monster-Forced (monster noncon)

Knotted by the Wolf (shifted sex)

Forced by the Wolf (alternate ending to Knotted by the Wolf, non-con with shifted sex and forced breeding)

Resistance is Fertile (non-con, breeding kink)

Tentacled by the Toilet (non-con, tentacles)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hello! Thank you for wondering about me. I'm a funny, dick-loving goofball with a surprisingly tolerant husband, and an ever-growing menagerie of stuffed animals and edible balls (in the garden). When I'm not busy writing (which is very rare), I can be found wrangling pests in the garden, or drawing copious amounts of dicks!

I've been scribbling since I was fourteen, and I believe that everyone needs a safe place. My dorky guys fall in love, make mistakes, and sometimes they fumble a little before finding their way back into each other's arms. :D

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