

"Patrick," His mother said in breathless surprise, "I can't accept that." She'd just unwrapped the gift he'd put on her plate.

Patrick smiled as he sliced the ham. Like previous years, this Christmas dinner was a simple thing. He and his mom, with a roasted ham.

"You needed a new phone, mom." He'd bought it a few days ago and kept it in his underwear drawer.

"But," She held the phone in her hand, sand colored, not a scratch on it. "How much did you pay for it?"

He put the plate on the table and kissed the top of her head. "Don't worry about that, mom. You deserve it." It wasn't a top of the line, he couldn't afford that, not that he would have bought such an expensive phone. It was mid range. he'd paid extra for the warranty, she wouldn't have to worry about anything happening to it, damage or theft.

He took the bread out of the oven, where he'd left it to stay warm. "I'll help you set it up after we've eaten. It's holo capable, with a display that can go up to fifteen inch in full light. It has more processing power than the computer in my room, so you won't have to borrow it anymore. And you won't have to worry about the battery running down in the middle of the day. There's also an ear clip included."

"Patrick, I didn't get you anything."

"You already got me the best present I could ask for." He said putting a bottle of wine on the table. Two weeks before, his father invited them to go skating, and she'd agreed. It wasn't the first time they invited her to a family activity, but she'd always found excuses not to go. Patrick tried to convince her, but he didn't push once she protested.

They'd taken the bus downtown to the outdoor rink, and his family welcomed her. She'd been uncomfortable, but polite. She didn't put on skates. she sat on a bench on the side and watched them. Patrick didn't see any of them discuss it, but one of his brothers was always seated with her.

Between trying to stay on his feet while his fathers helped him get the hang of it, and ending up on his ass, Patrick saw Albert talking with her, paper and pen in hand. Then it was Adam. He was so stunned to see her with Aiden, laughing, he skated right into a hippopotamus family, before ended up on his ass again.

With profuse apologies on his part and laughter on theirs they helped him up and he went back to tittering about. His fathers skated circles around him, forward and backward. They'd learned to skate back in Pittsburgh, they told him, in

their youth, they spent most winter weekend at the local rink in skates and picking up guys.

His brothers were better skaters than he was, but no where near as good as their fathers, except for Anakin, who did a lot of roller skating.

Patrick sat down and put his hands together. "Thank you God, for this food, for the gifts you give us and the family around us. Amen."

"Amen," his mother echoed, and then they ate.

In the middle of the meal, his phone buzzed. he checked it quickly, a file from his father. He'd check it once they were done eating.

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Patrick sat on his bed with his phone on his lap, the display at eye level. He dried his eyes and played the video his family sent him again.

His fathers were seated on the couch, with Arthur on one side, Aiden on the other. Alex, Aaron, Adam and Albert standing behind, and Anakin seated on the floor. They were wearing sweatpants and wool sweater in green red and white with animal designs on them.

"Hi Patrick," his father said. "So you made it clear you didn't want us spending money on you this Christmas, so we spent money on us, and bought these sweaters in your honor."

"Yeah," Adam said, "You should be honored we're wearing anything at all."

Alex smacked his brother behind the head. "Don't listen to him."

His fathers shook their heads. "Anyway. Back when we were kids we'd go caroling around the neighborhoods, We thought we'd do that for you."

"We even brought an actual star to sing with us!" Adam exclaimed.

Patrick had been curious as to whom he'd meant, but then chuckled when he realized he meant Aiden.

The started with Silent Night, harmonizing perfectly. Then on to Joy to the World , The Holy and the Ivy, Do you hear What I hear, and then they fell silent. A moment later Aiden sang quietly a song Patrick hadn't recognized. The lyrics told of a child searching the world, guided by a star, looking for his family. halfway through it Patrick started crying as he realized the song was about him. When Aiden stopped singing Patrick noticed his brothers' and his fathers' eyes were wet too.

"Merry Christmas Patrick," His father said.

"And happy baby Jesus day!" Adam winced when Aaron smacked him, then his legs were kicked out from under him and

his brothers piled on top of him. Laughter resounded as the video ended.

Patrick restarted it and paused it immediately, looking at his family. he wished he as with them right now, but he'd be going to midnight mass in a few hours, not that he was looking forward to that, and he wasn't sure he was ready to participate in the kind of celebrating he expected his fathers and brothers to indulged in, not quite yet.

He put the ear clip in place and called them, hoping they weren't in the middle of anything too ... vigorous.

"Merry Christmas Patrick," his father said and a chorus of greetings resounded.

"Merry Christmas dad. Thanks for the video, it was amazing."

"You're welcome. we wanted to do something special for you."

"It was. Tell Aiden I loved his song." Patrick found his eyes getting wet again. His father must have done something to indicate what he'd said because there were cheers.

"I wish you were here to celebrate with us."

"I wish I was too." Patrick chuckled. "Although I think I'd probably be mortified to see all of you naked in a pile." The hard on he got at that image told him he might be closer to being ready than he thought.

"Don't worry, if you were here, we'd have a more accepted celebration."

Patrick was silent for a moment, trying to understand how he felt about his family's willingness to change their ways for him. "No dad. When I'll be celebrating with you, it's going to be because I'm ready to celebrate the way you do it." He smiled. "the way an Orr does."

It was his father's turn to be silent. "I look forward to that day."

Me too, Patrick thought. "I'll let you get back to it. Oh, and tell Adam that technically, it's Baby Jesus Birthday day."

His father laughed. "I'll pass along the message."

Patrick disconnected the call and went back to looking at the image of his family. He captured the image and transferred it to the frame on his bedside table.

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Patrick walked up the steps to the church next to his mother. If she hadn't insisted he wouldn't be here. She'd played on his guilt a little. After all, she'd made effort to get along with his father, and she hadn't asked that he go to the Sunday services. The least he could do was come to the midnight mass with her, even if he didn't want to have

anything to do with Father Durony.

Like he did at every Christmas mass, the priest was standing by the door, greeting everyone. Patrick thought about finding a different door, but his mother held his hand.

"Margarette, I'm so glad you could come," Father Durony said, shaking her hands.

"I'd never miss midnight mass, Father."

"I know you wouldn't."

She went in and it was Patrick's turn. The priest startled on seeing him.

"Father," was all Patrick said.

"Patrick."

Patrick didn't offer his hand, nor did the priest. They stared for a moment, during which Patrick thought he caught some contempt in the priest's eyes, and Patrick went in.

The mass was good. Father Durony spoke of Jesus's birth, of the magis, seeking him out, of how his birth brought hope to all of God's children, even those who turned his back on Him.

Patrick thought that was directed at him, but the priest was wrong. Patrick hadn't turned his back on God, just to Father Durony's church. It was the first year he didn't feel closer to God by the time the service was over.