

Happy Holidays
by S.A. Payne
An Is Yet Holiday Short...

Nick has to make a choice but it's not an easy one!

Happy Holiday an Is Yet Short Story

Nick was only half listening to ESPN's news talking on the television across the living room. They'd spent most of the day finishing up holiday shopping for his family and now they were flopped on the sofa, Epi curled up against him. He could have gotten everything done faster without his lover but it had seemed important to Epi to go along so he hadn't protested. Ever since he'd brought the slender man to Thanksgiving dinner with him Epi had been trying to make an effort to fit in with his family. That and he'd argued that his handicapped parking placard would make getting a parking spot easier.

Epi sighed and elbowed Nick into moving his arm so he could drape himself tighter against his chest. The current issue of Men's Vogue was open almost across Nick's groin and Epi was leisurely turning the pages. It was a tease and it was making focusing on the sports news more difficult. He was lingering on pages with hot looking men and lightly stroking the paper in a way that wasn't at all suggestive. It was making him think about going to bed early.

"Epi..."

"Hmm?" He glanced up and brushed his hair back. "Something on your mind?"

The smug tone chased some of his ideas at dragging Epi upstairs or at least onto the floor. Nick put a hand on Epi's head and pushed at him a little. It pleased him that the other man wasn't using make up to hide the scar on his forehead as often but he knew if he made a fuss over it Epi would go all self conscious and nervous over it.

"Your head is blocking the tv."

"Sorry..." Epi grinned and went back to fondling his magazine.

His hand turned to petting the dark hair and he struggled to keep his eyes on the screen. It was a struggle he would have failed at if the phone hadn't rung and broke into his thoughts.

Epi sighed and stretched across Nick to the coffee table to grab the phone. "Hello? Yeah, he's here." He pulled the phone away from his ear. "It's your mom."

Nick took the phone from Epi but the slender man wiggled and squirmed against him as he settled back in. "Hello, Mom."

"Nick." Epi sighed as he could hear Nick's mother through the phone. It wasn't so much that she was loud but her voice carried. "I tried calling you at your apartment but you're never there."

"I told you I'm over at Epi's most of the time unless I'm working."

"Hm." She made a disapproving sound. "If you'd check your voice mail more often..."

"Sorry, Mom."

"I'm just glad I was able to track you down."

"What did you need?"

"I was talking to your sister today."

That was never a good start to any conversation. "Okay?"

"And while it was kind of you to bring your friend to Thanksgiving dinner, Christmas is for family. I'm sorry his family is scattered all over God knows where but it just wouldn't be proper if you brought him with you."

The tone of her voice made his stomach turn over a little but Nick felt himself nodding. "I understand."

"It was nice and all that but it made things awkward."

"I get it, Mother. Was there anything else?"

There wasn't and Nick made the right noises and got out of the conversation as quickly as he could. When he pushed to turn the phone off he was surprised to find the hand he had resting on Epi's shoulder was gripping the slender body a little too tightly. "Mom..." He wasn't sure how he was going to explain.

"You know..." Epi sighed. "I think I'll stay here for Christmas, if you don't mind? I mean your family..." He snorted. "Pains in the ass!"

"Epi..."

"It's not like you'll be over there the whole day. It'll give you an excuse to leave early. The gimp needs fed or something..."

Epi's voice sounded okay with the idea but he was turning the pages with a little too much force and he wasn't lingering on the pictures of handsome men any more. "It's not like that. They're not even comfortable with me being gay."

"I know. Thanksgiving was so brutal it was almost amusing, or at least I was mildly drunk enough that it was amusing."

The joke was strained. "I'm sorry."

"Not your fault that they're assholes."

It felt like his fault and he wasn't sure why. "It won't even be like you're missing anything. They barely want me there. I don't want you having to try to seem straight to keep from getting the evil eye from my brother or having my sister pull her kids away because you're a pervert again." Thanksgiving had been difficult and while it had seemed to quietly please Epi to so disturb their not so subtle bigotry it had made the afternoon horribly uncomfortable.

"I don't know, I kind of liked making them squirm. Serves them right for being so mean to you."

"They're not mean, just...closed minded."

"We could open their minds....with pick axes and dynamite."

"Epi."

"Seriously, it's okay. I don't mind staying here. I'll have you the rest of the day."

"At least no airports and ski lodges this year."

Epi nodded. "Mom and Dad are off in...ah...Naples? Everyone else has their only family and Tori's going home since his sister had the baby. It's okay, go, do the family thing and I'll watch movies."

It still felt wrong and Nick couldn't quite pin down why. It didn't matter that Epi sounded okay with it or that he would have happily avoided his family if he'd been given the out, it felt wrong. He petted the dark hair again and brushed his fingers across Epi's face. "Want to go to bed?"

Epi shook his head. "Not really tired yet, you can go on ahead without me. I might take a bath, all the walking today has my back sore."

"I could rub it for you?"

"Naw, I'm okay, the bath will fix it enough."

It was a sure enough sign that Epi was more upset then he was letting on. When the slender man tried to sit up Nick held on and didn't let him. The magazine became crumpled between them, a page tore a little as Epi pulled away and Nick pulled him back.

"Don't."

"Nick...it's okay."

"You're upset."

"Over you're bigoted family? No way."

"But you're upset."

"I'm fine. I'll get over it."

"Tell me why?"

Epi shook his head. "I'm not, we've never promised anything. You'll go and come back to me and all this holiday nonsense will be over with. We'll be together for New Year's Day, right?"

"Of course."

"That's good enough."

It didn't feel good enough. He pulled Epi closer and tightened his arms.

"Nick? You're squishing me."

"I..."

"Squishing me...can't breathe..."

"Sorry." He let go but sat on the edge of the sofa.

"Bath and bed, you'll have the bed warmed up for me?" Epi slipped to sit on the edge beside

Nick.

He was spending most of his nights with Epi, beside Epi, so much so that his family had learned the easiest way to reach him was at Epi's phone and not his own. The tiny apartment over the garage was being used more now as an office for him than anything else. Best of all, the months had made him happy and he wasn't in any rush to change things but he was aware they were in some kind of relationship limbo. He wasn't officially dating Epi, or officially living with the other man but he may as well be.

That made everything clear and as Epi started to move to sit up he reached out and put a hand on Epi's knee. "Wait."

"What now?"

"Just, wait." He scooped the phone back up and quickly dialed the number to his parent's house. His mom answered on the third ring. "Mom?"

There was a pause. "Nick? Something the matter?"

"No, nothing at all. Look, I understand, okay, I mean I do but I can't change who I am and I wouldn't if I could. I'm sorry it upsets you but that isn't my problem. All these years I've never brought anyone around, not once and you're right Christmas should be for family."

"Nick, what are you going on about?"

"Mom, Epi isn't just my friend." He glanced to where the other man sat and was watching with serious, uncertain eyes. It made him embarrassed and he blushed and looked down. "He's my boyfriend, Mom. He's family. So you have to call my sister and either accept that he'll be coming with me to Christmas. If he's not welcome, I'm not welcome."

"Let's not be dramatic."

"I'm not being dramatic, Mother." He sighed. "It's a simple fact. Epi is important to me, that's all there is to it." There was silence on the phone. "Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"You're being stubborn. We've always welcomed you, all we've asked is not having what you are rubbed in our noses."

"What I am?" Nick shook his head and was surprised at the sharp stab of pain those words caused. A hand slipped onto his knee and squeezed lightly. The pain almost instantly dissolved and settled into what was almost anger. "If Epi was a girl you'd have no problems with him coming with me to Christmas."

"But he isn't a girl."

"No, he's not."

"I'll drop the presents off at your house tomorrow. You call them and let me know. If you all can't treat both of us with some measure of respect, we'll stay home." It was one of the hardest things Nick had ever said in his life but he was suddenly sick to death of being ashamed of himself, of being ashamed of who he loved.

"You're not being fair."

He glanced to the hand on his knee. "Trust me, Mom, we don't want to get into what's fair." Suddenly it all was right there on the tip of his tongue. He wanted to spill out about the abuse, about the years of feeling less than his siblings. He wanted to tell her how she'd made him feel

so unloved and alone all because he'd preferred to sleep with men and how Epi had made him feel really safe and wanted for the first time in his life. Trouble was, words had never been his friend and they stuck in his throat. "Just get back to me about if we should bother coming by or not. Okay?"

"Okay?" She sounded confused but Nick couldn't blame her. He'd always taken their treatment without a word and now he was rocking the boat. That's why it had felt wrong. He didn't care how they treated him but it made him sick that they'd treat Epi the same way. Epi was, without a doubt, worth disturbing the status quo over.

"Goodnight, Mother." He said a little softly, sounding shocked at his own boldness now too and hung up the phone. "I just...shit..." He dropped the phone and flopped back against the sofa, his head lolling back and his spine feeling weak.

Epi's hand slid off of his knee and the man moved beside him. Before he could lift his head to see where the other man was going he knew. The slender man may have complained about being sore but he managed to crawl into Nick's lap with relative grace. He straddled Nick's lap and leaned down to kiss his frowning mouth.

"I'm so hot for you right now..." Epi whispered into Nick's ear.

"I did good?" Nick asked as the lips nibbled his chin before he worked down to his neck. He wasn't sure they were going to make it up to the bedroom now.

"You did damn good." Epi's hands slipped up under Nick's shirt. "And...I love you too. Merry....merry Christmas...This is where you make a joke about Santa's lap or having a present for me to unwrap or something..."

The hands tugged at his belt and Nick just smiled.

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