



Christmas Intervention Phase I
By Mara Ismine

"You *have* to do it!" Ali's voice rang in my head, accompanied by the image of his hands waving agitatedly. Even in my head, Ali couldn't speak without his hands.

I raised my hand again to ring the bell and watched it drop to my side without touching the door bell. I didn't want to do this. Just because I was Rai's best friend and had been for years didn't mean I was the only one who could do this. My cynical side pointed out that I was the only one in our little group who was currently single, apart from Rai, and that did indeed make me the only one who could do this.

My finger jabbed the door bell and I winced at the harsh jangle of sound. Rai still had the chime set to Fate Knocking which was not a good sign. Ali was right, it should have been on his Christmas medley by now. *Rai* was ignoring Christmas. Rai who would happily have Christmas all year round. Normally. An intervention was needed. It just sucked that I had to be the one to do it.

Most years, it was me who got the intervention and had Christmas thrust upon me and my unsuspecting apartment. Rai would breeze in, trailed by whomever he'd suckered into helping, I would grouch and protest, and my apartment would get Christmassed. Tree, lights, dangly things hanging from the ceiling, wreath on the door, and, of course, mistletoe.

Rai always insisted on the mistletoe. I had never used it. Not in real life anyway. It had played a big part in several fantasies, from the plain sappy to the XXX pornographic variety. The chances were equally unlikely for either outcome. One kiss beneath the mistletoe and Rai would declare his undying love and devotion, maybe even ask me to marry him. One kiss beneath the mistletoe and we'd spend hours, or days, having hot monkey sex on my living room floor... couch... kitchen table... bed... well, you get the idea -- any vaguely flat surface in my apartment would do.

The door in front of me opened a crack and one confused brown eye peered out at me. "Jase? What are you doing here?" Rai asked.

"Ho ho ho. Merry Christmas." I could feel my face heating as I muttered Rai's traditional Christmas Intervention greeting. I pushed past him into his house while he was still looking stunned.

"What?" Rai rubbed a hand over his face and through his messy black hair. "*You* are staging a Christmas Intervention? Mr. Bah-Humbug-leave-me-alone-til-January?"

"Yeah." I stared into the pathetically small box of Christmas stuff I was carrying and looked around Rai's house, the house that seemed to be expanding rapidly as I stood there in the hall. "Thought I'd get my own back for once."

"Hmm." Rai peered into the box with me for a moment, before raising one eyebrow and grinning at me. "Why don't you put that down on the dining room table and come and have a drink?"

"Dining room table?" I wasn't sure I remembered where the dining room table was. Rai had moved in here after last Christmas and I hadn't visited much. Some best friend I'd been for this past year. But I'd had my reasons for that. Or I'd thought so anyway.

"In there." Rai pointed to a dark room to my right. "Just dump it in there and come through to the kitchen." He waved at the open door at the end of the hall where I could see countertops and cabinets. He walked off into the kitchen and left me to dump the box.

I knew that I should refuse the drink and insist on putting up decorations. It was what Rai did every year when he came to my place.

I pushed open one side of the glass double door to the dining room. The light from the hall painted a path to the table, but left most of the room in shadow. I walked in and put the box on the table. I could see the shadowed outline of another familiar box on the table. I could even make out the glittery writing on the side that said "Anti-Bah-Humbug Kit". Had Rai been planning on visiting me as usual?

I shuddered and, for the first time, I was glad that Ali had guilted me into this. I wasn't ready to go through Rai in my apartment with his mistletoe again -- not after last year.

I stared at the battered box of the Anti-Bah-Humbug kit and made myself remember last year. I needed those memories, painful as they were, to help me cope with being here, alone with Rai.

It had started off with the traditional greeting and my suggestion that we have a drink, which was ignored. Rai had brought the whole gang with him: Ali and Mark; Charlie and Anna; and, of course, Josie. Rai and Josie had been an item for several months.

I didn't like Josie. Josie didn't like me, or any of the rest of the gang, really. She acted polite enough where Rai could see her, but I could see the contempt she was hiding when she looked at Ali and Mark, or me.

I wasn't imagining it; Ali had asked me what her problem was. I didn't have an answer for him, apart from the obvious one. Ali had been out of the closet for so long that he'd probably forgotten there was a closet. I had never decided if I was really in the closet or not. About the time I started wondering about that sort of thing, I realized I was in love with Rai. And realized that he was never going to be in love with me the same way.

I was still waiting to grow out of that teenage crush. Maybe Josie could see it.

Last year, the intervention had gone through all the usual stages, until I had Christmas stuff all over my apartment. Including the hot mince pies and mulled wine, which we sprawled around the living room to eat and drink. Carols played in the background and the room was lit with only the tree lights.

Everyone was mellow, including me. It was good to have friends who cared. It was good to have them spending time with me. I'd had enough mulled wine to be remembering a few of my favorite mistletoe fantasies. The mistletoe was very festive this year: a large bunch with lots of berries, tied with a red silk ribbon and hanging in the usual place over the living room door.

Rai topped up everyone's glasses and went and stood near the mistletoe. "I-- *We've* got an announcement!" Rai grinned widely and held out his hand to Josie. She was flushed and smiling at his side as he continued, "We're going to have a baby! And you are all invited to the wedding!"

As if it wasn't enough to hit me with all that in my own living room, they kissed passionately under *my* mistletoe.

I congratulated them and smiled until my face ached. It wasn't as though I hadn't known that this day would come. I knew that Rai loved kids. I knew he wanted a houseful of them. I knew beyond doubt that he was straight. I knew he would settle down with some girl one day and start work on that houseful of ankle-biters.

I just hadn't expected it to happen yet. Or with this particular girl. Or all at once like this. Or to have it announced in *my* living room. As if Christmas hadn't sucked enough without *that*.

That was probably the last almost happy time I had spent with Rai.

His life had been filled with Josie and the coming baby. They had found this house and moved in without any hiccups -- or help from his friends. Josie was full of wedding plans. Rai was full of plans for his first child and all the other firsts that would come with that. He'd glowed with it.

Despite my cynical suspicions, Josie really was pregnant and I had to be glad for Rai. He was so involved in the pregnancy, so committed to being the best Dad ever, so blindingly happy. He sounded like he was crying when he called to tell me about the first ultrasound scans and the fact that they had pictures of the unborn child.

I had invented a lot of work and business trips to keep me out of the way, so I hadn't seen him in months, but we still spoke on the phone and sent emails. He was my best friend and I loved him; I couldn't just walk away no matter how much his bright new life was hurting me.

I really was out of town on business when Rai's bright new life cracked and turned to ashes. The one time he ever really needed me and I wasn't there.

Josie was in a car accident and lost the baby. It wasn't even anyone's fault. She had swerved to avoid a cat or dog or something that had run out into the road. It had been raining lightly and the road was particularly slick at that point. She lost control and the car had rolled. Or at least that was what the investigators had decided. Josie couldn't remember the accident or even being on that road.

The wedding plans were put on hold while Josie recovered physically from the accident. She went to her parents when she was let out of the hospital. Josie needed round the clock care for a while, so it made sense, Rai told me.

I spent a lot of time around that point listening to Rai. It was funny, in a way, that his broken dreams cut me even deeper than my own.

Josie moved back to the house and suddenly I didn't hear from Rai. I thought that they still had a lot of grieving to do and plans to make. In fact, I made every excuse that I could think of to leave him alone and stop tearing my own wounds open.

I was shocked when they split up. Even more shocked that Josie moved out of the house without argument. And disgusted with myself for being glad she was gone, even if it was only a small part of me crowing in delight.

Rai was devastated. And I couldn't cope with seeing him like that. I was a lousy best friend. I had abandoned him. I couldn't trust myself not to offer the sort of comfort *I* wanted. The sort that Rai wasn't interested in.

I had been his best friend for years. I had held him, and cried with him, when his dog died when we were fourteen. I had comforted him through all his other break-ups and losses since then. But this one, I couldn't cope with. I was too selfish to be there for him.

Now we were alone in the house he had bought for his family. The house he had expected to spend Christmases with his children in. The house that should have been ready for his baby's first Christmas. The house that meant, in my mind, that Rai would never be mine, in any way, again.

And I was supposed to help Rai enjoy this holiday. I shuddered and walked out of the dark dining room to find Rai. Surely I could control myself for one evening? Just a few hours?

I stopped in the hall to set Rai's door chime to the Christmas medley. It was a start, even if I didn't have the faintest idea what to do next.

"You get lost?" Rai was sitting at the small table in the kitchen, nursing a glass of Scotch. Another glass waited for me on the other side of the table. The open bottle stood between them.

"Yeah." I dropped into the chair opposite him and took a large belt of my drink, choking slightly as the alcohol hit the back of my throat and made my eyes water.

"Whose idea was this? Ali's?" Rai asked after a few minutes of silent drinking.

"You don't think I'd come up with it by myself?" I hedged without meeting his eyes.

"Not likely. You've been hibernating like you usually do this time of year. You wouldn't have thought of this until Christmas Day at the earliest!"

"Um. I might have noticed before then..."

"Okay. Maybe Christmas Eve when you found the shops shut." Rai chuckled.

"It was Ali's idea." I knew when I was flogging a dead horse.

"Thought so. He was over here the other day, trying to get me to go and pester you. He even found the box."

"I saw it in the dining room," I admitted. "I didn't think you would bother this year..."

"I was trying to decide if it was worth the effort when you turned up." Rai took another mouthful of Scotch. "You've never told me why you hate Christmas so much."

"You've never told me why you love it so much," I countered, keeping my eyes fixed on my glass. I didn't want to talk about the old pain while there was so much new pain just waiting to join in.

"If I tell you why I always loved Christmas, will you tell me why you hate it?"

I flinched at the past tense. The thought of Rai no longer loving Christmas hurt on many levels. But I still didn't want to talk about ancient history.

"We've been best friends for years," Rai said when I didn't reply to his question. "But I've realized that there are things we don't know about each other. Big things. Important things. Is our friendship strong enough to survive the secrets?"

"Maybe it was never strong enough to survive the truth," I said without meaning to. "Maybe it was never as strong as we thought it was."

"Never as strong as *I* thought it was, you mean." Rai reached for the bottle and topped up both our glasses. "I've lost a lot this year."

I flinched again and nodded. I knew how much he had lost. I knew I could never make up for anything he had lost. I knew that this intervention was a stupid idea.

"I've been thinking since Ali came by and I realized something important," Rai continued speaking in that calm voice that I wasn't sure I recognized. I glanced up, risking a quick look at his face. He was staring at his glass as he turned it between his fingers, watching the amber liquid slosh against the sides.

"I realized that what hurt the most wasn't Josie leaving. Wasn't the dreams going sour." His lips quirked in a sad smile. "Wasn't even losing the baby, though that is one of the most painful things that has ever happened to me..."

"You loved the baby." I couldn't keep the words in, they sprayed out of my mouth. "All you've ever wanted was your own children, your own family. Of course it hurt more than anything else to lose that."

"You weren't listening, Jase," Rai said very softly. "Losing the baby wasn't the most painful thing."

I dropped my eyes to the table again, trying to think what could have been more painful than that. He had been so happy, so full of dreams. The baby had been the center of his life, the meaning of it. What had I missed that meant more to him than that? I was such a failure as a best friend, as any sort of friend.

"Ask me what hurt the most."

I wasn't sure I was strong enough to hear what had hurt him so much when I wasn't there for him. What else had gone wrong for him that he had never told me about? I opened my mouth, but the words locked in my throat and wouldn't be spoken.

"What hurt the most," Rai continued as though I had asked, as though I'd had the courage to speak when he told me to. "What really hurt the most was realizing that I'd lost my best friend. That I'd pushed him away with my dreams. Dreams that left no place for him."

"I-- but-- you--" I couldn't say anything coherent. I had been braced for something bad and it took me a few moments to process what Rai had said. He thought he'd lost me? That he'd pushed me away? I knew he hadn't. I had pulled away from him. He hadn't pushed. "You didn't push me away." That was the most important thing. It wasn't his fault.

"I did." Rai drained his glass. "I need more of this to get the Dutch courage to tell you why."

"You didn't push me away. I ran and hid." I heard myself say clearly. "You don't need to get drunk to tell me anything. You are still my best friend. You always will be. You just have poor judgment when choosing your friends. I've not been a good best friend to you this year. Maybe I need more Scotch so I can tell you why."

"If we are both going to get drunk and have 'true confessions' maybe we should move this to the lounge and get comfortable," Rai said after a few moments silence while we both eyed the bottle of Scotch. "Do you think we'll need another bottle?"

"True confessions?" I shuddered. "We might need another two."

Moving into the lounge and getting settled didn't take long. I didn't want to start this 'true confession' thing. Maybe we could just get drunk together and forget about the confessions. Maybe I was just a big coward.

"Couch or floor?" I asked, looking around the room.

"Might as well start out on the floor." Rai flashed a grin at me. "That's where we'll end up!"

"Okay." I pushed the coffee table out of the way so we could sit with our backs to the couch.

"I think we should have a fire." Rai decided. "It was one of the main reasons I got the place." He talked quietly as he got the fire going in the fireplace. "This chimney and the mantelpiece."

"Santa Claus and stockings."

"Yeah. That was my first thought when I saw it. My second thought was snuggling in front of an open fire." Rai chuckled ruefully.

"No bearskin rug?" I asked before I thought. I hid my blush by pulling a couple of cushions off the couch for us to sit on.

"There might have been some bare skin in the thought," Rai admitted with a laugh. "Josie hated the idea."

"Oh?" I wasn't sure what else to say. I wasn't sure I wanted to hear about his fantasies involving his ex-fiancée.

"She hated the idea of a real fireplace. Dirty, drafty and smelly, she said. She wanted to get one of those modern replica things that you switch on and off."

"More practical, I suppose," I said carefully.

"Santa Claus and stockings aren't exactly practical." Rai pointed out. "You understood that without me having to explain it. Josie didn't understand it, even when I did explain."

"Oh." I sat down and watched him fiddle with the fire. How could Josie not have known or understood Rai and Christmas? I wasn't sure I understood his attachment to the season, but I knew it was his favorite time of year. Or it had been.

"That should have told me something." Rai left the fire alone and came over to sit next to me. I had put the two bottles and our glasses between our cushions on the floor. Rai took a drink and pulled something out from his side of the couch.

"Buckets?" I couldn't help snickering as he handed me one.

"Emergency use only!" He warned sternly. "One of us will probably need one if we drink all this Scotch."

"Eeww. Nice image, Rai," I complained, but set my bucket within reach on the side away from Rai and the drink. I picked up my glass and admired the flickering flames reflected in the liquid before taking a healthy swallow.

"It's too bright in here," Rai complained and got up to turn the lights off. "I don't think I ever loved her, you know," he said as he dropped back into his place beside me.

"Huh?"

"Josie. I don't think I ever loved her. I tried, but I don't think I ever got past fond." Rai sipped his drink and frowned at the fire.

"You were going to marry her," I pointed out before I could bite my tongue.

"Would it shock you if I said I only wanted to marry her for the baby?" Rai glanced at me and away again.

"I should say 'yes.'" I sighed. I had wondered about it. I knew Rai loved the baby. "But I know how you are about kids."

"You didn't like her, did you?"

"She didn't like me. I didn't really get to know her well enough to say if I liked her or not." Which was sort of true. I hadn't really known Josie. I hadn't wanted to know her because I wanted to dislike her. She had Rai and I didn't. Jealousy is so petty.

"She was jealous of you," Rai said, surprising me. Had I said something aloud? "She knew I loved you more than I loved her."

I blinked at the fire. He hadn't meant that the way I'd heard it. I knew he hadn't. Rai loved me as a friend. And he had just said he didn't think he'd ever loved Josie. I could almost feel sorry for her. Almost.

"We're best friends." I shrugged and took a drink. "Of course we love each other." There! I had nearly said the words! Not quite, though. I was too much a coward to risk it. I didn't want Rai to hear the very real emotion behind them.

"That's what I told her. She didn't believe it though. She insisted that there was more between us than just friendship."

"You didn't tell her!" I turned to Rai in shock. Had he shared our deepest, darkest secret with Josie? Was that why she had looked at me with that faint curl of her lip?

"Of course I didn't tell her!" Rai scoffed.

We both stared at the fire in silence for a while. I was remembering that night, so many years ago. The night I realized that I loved Rai and that he would never love me the same way.

"What do you think it feels like to have someone else's hand on your cock, jacking you off?"

Rai rolled onto his side in the tent we were sharing and stared at me. I could see his eyes glint in the canvas filtered moonlight. He was still breathing heavily and the tent was musty with the scent of semen from our 'who can come quickest' competition.

"What?" I was scared and embarrassed. Did Rai know that I had been imagining his hand on my cock during our competition? That thinking about it now had me rock hard and ready to shoot again?

"You heard me." Rai snickered. "What do you think it feels like?"

"Dunno. Might be alright if they knew what they were doing, I suppose," I replied sullenly. Was Rai teasing? Was he going to find out my dirty secret and never talk to me again? Maybe tell everyone we knew I was a perv?

"Wanna try it and see?"

"What?" He couldn't have said that. He couldn't have been thinking what I was thinking.

"We're best friends, aren't we? We've both got cocks and know what to do with them. So who better to try it out with?" Rai whispered his reasons.

"But we're both boys," I bleated, not sure why I was arguing against what I wanted.

"We wouldn't both have cocks if we weren't." Rai snickered again. "It's just an experiment. Just jerking off, not going steady."

I didn't put up any more resistance. We shuffled our sleeping bags closer and I stuck a nervous hand into Rai's already sticky boxers. I'll never forget that first touch of another man's cock against my hand or that it was Rai's. Or the feel of Rai's hand wrapping around my cock.

"Wonder if it is better if it's a girl's hand?" Rai said a few minutes later when we were back on our own sides of the tent.

"Dunno," I said trying to sound like I really cared. I didn't want anyone else's hand on my cock except Rai's. My blissful bubble burst completely as I remembered Rai talking about how many kids he was going to have when he got married. Rai wouldn't be having kids with me.

In the morning, we agreed, with silence and nervous looks, to pretend it had never happened.

I swallowed the rest of my Scotch and poured another with a shaking hand. Now was not the time to be thinking about how good Rai's hand had felt on my cock. I drew up the leg closest to Rai and hoped he hadn't noticed my helpless reaction.

"I think that night in the tent was the best sex I ever had."

"What?" I spluttered and nearly choked on the mouthful of Scotch I'd just taken. Rai couldn't have said...

"Sorry." He grinned at me. "I know you don't agree." His eyes slid away. "One of those secrets I mentioned. I've had just about enough Scotch to admit it. I know you were shocked and embarrassed and didn't want to talk about it. Still don't want to talk about it," he amended, his eyes sliding back to the fire. "But I didn't want it between us any more."

"Shit." I swallowed more Scotch and tried to think. "It lasted less than a minute and you think it was the best sex you've ever had?"

"It was the best thirty seconds of my life." Rai laughed, but it sounded strained and forced. "I wanted to tell you that then."

"But you didn't," I had to point out. My mind was swirling and not just from the Scotch.

"You were close to bolting as it was." Rai sighed. "I wouldn't have seen you for dust if I'd said anything."

"Shit." I finished what was left in the glass, if Rai had found enough courage in the Scotch maybe I could. "It was the best sex I ever had, too." I forced the words out. "I wanted to do it again. I wanted to do everything I could think of to you and with you. But I remembered how much you wanted to have a big family. Loads of kids. And all that."

"What did that have to do with it?" Rai turned puzzled eyes to me. "We were still basically kids ourselves."

"I didn't think I could have you and then let you go when you found some girl to have all your kids for you." I spoke to the fire. I couldn't look at Rai and get the words out. "I knew you wouldn't want to be in love with a boy."

"I didn't want to be in love with a *boy*." Rai snorted. "I wasn't that sure I wanted to be in love with you. Not that you gave me any choice about that."

"What?"

"I was in love with you. I'd never have come up with such a lame excuse to get my hands in your pants otherwise!"

"Oh."

"I'm still in love with you, for all the good it does."

"Oh." I needed to get another script writer or another brain. Rai couldn't really be telling me that he loved me *that* way, could he?

"Going to run away now?"

"No." I took a deep breath. "I'm going to see if I can find enough courage in this bottle to tell you I feel the same way."

"Oh."

"Yeah." The bad script must be catching, I thought blearily. "Then I might get real brave and kiss you."

"Oh?"

"And then maybe I could show you that I can last longer than thirty seconds." I thought about that one for a moment. "Or maybe you'd better show me that you can last longer, 'cos I'm not real sure I can with you."

"Jase?"

"Yeah?"

"Stop talking and kiss me!"

"Yeah!"

Rai had some real good ideas sometimes, though neither of us lasted much more than thirty seconds the first time.

"Jase? I thought you were going to go over to Rai's house and decorate?" Ali glared at me, hands fluttering.

"I did go over." I shrugged and watched Rai stringing garlands around my living room. "But you'd told him he had to come over here, and it's *traditional* for you all to come and force Christmas on me."

"At least Rai looks like he is enjoying himself," Ali said rather smugly.

I bit my lip and didn't say 'not as much as he was earlier.' I wasn't going to spoil Rai's fun.

The whole gang was here again this year. Anna was presiding over the mulled wine and warming mince pies in the kitchen. Charlie and Mark had tree duty. Ali was supposed to be helping Rai with the garlands and other twiddly stuff. I was grouching and grumping and waiting for the mistletoe to go up.

I sipped mulled wine and contemplated Rai as he stood on a chair to hang the mistletoe. This year's bunch was even bigger and even better than last year's. It was tied with ribbon again, but not a red satin ribbon. This year's ribbon was a sparkly metallic rainbow.

Rai got down off the chair and grabbed a glass of wine from Anna. I dragged my gaze off Rai and looked at the mistletoe. The carols were already playing and Charlie turned the main lights off, now the mistletoe was up.

Rai went and stood near the mistletoe. "I-- *We've* got an announcement!" Rai grinned widely and held out his hand to me. I walked over to him, handing my glass off to Ali along the way. I plucked Rai's glass out of his hand and gave it back to Anna. I dragged him directly under the mistletoe and kissed him the way I'd always wanted to.

The shock of cold water broke us apart. I blinked stupidly at Rai. He was flushed and the water running down his face made him look cute. His lips were moist and inviting...

"There's more where that came from!" Charlie growled. "Don't make me get it!" He brandished an empty jug at me.

"You're just jealous." Rai smirked at Charlie and licked my cheek.

"I'm not jealous," Charlie protested. "But it looks like I'm the only straight one left."

"I'm straight!" Anna reminded him with a poke in the ribs. "You said something about an announcement, Rai? Or was that it?"

"Announcement? Oh. Yeah, the announcement," I muttered, letting a little space, and lukewarm water, between my body and Rai's. "Um. The kiss was me improvising. The announcement is Rai's."

"You all know how important Christmas and traditions are to me," Rai spoke to the gang, but his arms stayed firmly around me. "So you know that I wouldn't miss out on a tradition without a very good reason. This is the last year that we'll have this Anti-Bah-Humbug intervention. I'll not be dragging you over here next year to the Jason-grouch's lair. But you are all invited to our house for the mulled wine and mince pies!" He finished over the hoots and catcalls of our friends. "You are supposed to kiss me now!" Rai hissed at me.

"I better get some more cold water," Charlie muttered loudly.

I just gave him the finger and kissed Rai under *my* mistletoe. Maybe I could get to like Christmas traditions after all, if Rai supplied suitable incentive.

And we didn't let Charlie near a jug.

Christmas Intervention Phase One

Copyright © 2009 by Mara Ismine

All rights reserved. No part of this eBook may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews. For information address Torquere Press, Inc., PO Box 2545, Round Rock, TX 78680

Printed in the United States of America.

Torquere Press, Inc.: Sips electronic edition / December 2009

Torquere Press eBooks are published by Torquere Press, Inc., PO Box 2545, Round Rock, TX 78680