



***What Are You Doing New Year's Eve
By Stephanie Vaughan***

"So will you be bringing your little friend over for Christmas Eve with the family this year?"

Aaron Preston chewed his lip and continued playing with his pen, drawing a silhouette around his hand on the back of the sports section of the newspaper. After another full circuit, he removed his hand and began adding a face, beak, and wattle to the kid's version of a turkey he'd made.

"Aaron, did you hear me?" He didn't look up, but Aaron could still tell when his mother stopped sorting her mail to look over the top of her reading glasses at him. "We're ordering the food and your father and I need to know how many to plan for. So could you tell me, please?"

"I guess." Fleshing out the feathers of his drawing, Aaron refused to raise his gaze to look at his mother. It annoyed him that he and Danny had been together for over a year, but his mother still semi-regularly referred to Danny as his 'little friend.' Like they were in kindergarten or on the same Little League team. "I dunno. Let me ask him. Can I let you know by the weekend?"

"As long as you promise. Just don't forget, all right? I'm ordering a ham and I don't want a lot of leftovers for your father to eat. His doctor wants him off red meat entirely, but it's traditional and I hate to break with that."

"Red meat is traditional? Since when? What is this, the Christians and the lions?" Aaron realized he was being difficult, but he felt like being difficult, so he didn't even try to fight the urge.

"Since the year I ordered veggie wraps and nearly had a riot on my hands. And lose the smart mouth, would you? I have enough stress this time of year without your contribution, mister."

Aaron frowned and put down the pen. He wanted crayons to fill in the colors, but there hadn't been a child in the house since his sister moved away to go to college, so he didn't hold out a lot of hope.

"Don't look at me. I'm a product of my environment. Fifty-percent of my genetic make-up is yours. I'm blaming you."

"Oh, no. Don't you even try to go there with me. You get that from your father's side. That's one hundred-and-ten-percent Preston; I've got every right to get on you about it."

His mother dropped the stack of mail and tried to glare at him, but it was pointless and they both knew it. Aaron knew he was her favorite and nothing short of murder and mayhem at a preschool would budge her love -- and even then she'd probably say the little monsters had it coming.

Scrunching up his face, Aaron mocked his mom's attempt at a fierce look and mentally counted off the seconds as her expression crumbled. "You are such a little shit, you know that?"

His mom's smile belied the fiery words and Aaron grinned back at her. "Is that why you love me best?"

"I don't know. Either way, you take full advantage of the fact." Reaching to hug him, his mom's face was full of the unconditional love he'd always gotten from her. "You're shameless."

"That's so not true. I'm appropriately ashamed at the proper place and time. It's just that it so rarely is." Aaron squeezed his mom's waist, recognizing how alike they were in so many

ways, regardless of what his mom said. "Speaking of ashamed, is Brad gonna be coming to your little shindig?"

"Honey..." His mom's voice carried that hint of warning that she only got when she was being truly serious. Aaron snuck a glance at her face. Bingo. Dead serious. "You're both a part of this family and you ought to be able to put aside your differences, especially at the holidays. Your grandmother's going to be here and she wants to see you both."

"Well, then tell him to grow a brain and stop being a bigot and a homophobe."

"Aaron, look. I'm not thrilled with some of the ideas he's come home with recently, either. I could say the same thing about a couple of yours, too, by the way. But he's my son and your brother. You can both be cordial for the space of one evening, I hope."

"I don't know, Ma." Aaron shook his head slowly. "I used to think I could look the other way. You know, for the sake of the family and all of that. But..."

"But what?" His mom shot him a level glance.

"But if he says one word to Danny or me about some of those emails he's sent, I'm gonna fuckin' light him up."

Aaron's mom stood silently for several seconds, her mouth a grim line of disapproval and Aaron hoped it was for his brother's actions and not his own. "I'll talk to him before then, all right? I want the whole family here and I want everyone to keep a civil tongue in his head, is that understood?"

"I thought that was part of his problem -- my tongue in Danny's mouth. Or maybe it was Danny's in mine, I wasn't sure." Aaron made a face, but he couldn't help it. As long as Brad had kept his attitudes to himself, it had been possible to maintain a polite fiction that they were all one big, happy family. But recently his brother had become more outspoken about what he liked to call Aaron's 'choices,' and Aaron was tired of always being the diplomatic one, the peacemaker. He'd had about as much as he could handle of Brad's helpful suggestions.

"I'll have a talk with him. And you... I don't want you baiting him, either. There'll be no over-the-top behavior from you and Danny to try and get his goat. Understood?"

"What? Is that code for Danny and I can't kiss? That's what you're talking about, right? Why can't I kiss Danny if I want to? Does Brad worry about offending *my* sensibilities when he kisses Debbie? No." Aaron's tone was escalating, right along with his volume, but he was fed up, damn it. "Look, it's time to grow up and realize that the whole world's not going to line up behind his little point of view, okay? I'm here, I'm gay, and I'm not going away. He can pray all he wants for me, but he's not changing that fact."

"I know, honey." His mom came back, slipped an arm around his shoulder, and squeezed. "You know how I feel about that. I wouldn't change a thing about you, even if I could. Well... Maybe that you could stand to be a little neater around the house. But you know what I mean."

A lump formed in Aaron's throat and he had to look up at the ceiling to keep the tears from leaking out the corners of his eyes. "Thanks, Mom. You're the best."

Something smelled fantastic.

Aaron closed the front door behind him and followed his nose, finding Danny in the kitchen, spooning dough onto cookie sheets. Since it was Aaron's condo and his kitchen, he knew for a fact those particular bits of bakeware hadn't been there yesterday, which meant Danny must have bought them.

Something was definitely up. "Hey."

"Hey." Danny looked up briefly, but didn't stop. "Get your laundry done?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah. So what's all this?" Nodding in the direction of the baking activity, Aaron stuck a finger in the dough and scooped up a bite.

"Hey, cut it out. It's cookies, genius. Or it's going to be."

Before Aaron had time to react, Danny's hand shot out and grabbed Aaron's arm, redirecting both the finger and the dough into Danny's mouth. Aaron opened his mouth to protest, but Danny began sucking on Aaron's finger and the visual went straight to Aaron's cock, bypassing his brain entirely.

His dick going hard, Aaron groaned. "Did anyone ever tell you you do that really well?"

"Once or twice." Grinning smugly, Danny released Aaron's hand and went back to spooning cookie dough. "Remind me later and I'll show you some other creative uses for chocolate chip cookies."

"Later?" Aaron knew he sounded pathetic, but he'd never been above begging when it came to Danny. He leaned in close, offering his mouth. "Kiss?"

"Sorry. Very busy. Couldn't possibly stop right now."

"You suck." Danny didn't react, so Aaron tried again. "So what's behind the sudden interest in domesticity?"

Finally taking the time to triangulate on the source of the mouth-watering scent that had led him to the kitchen, Aaron spotted it: a plate with completed specimens already cooling. Aaron squeezed behind Danny and his bowl of dough, heading for the refrigerator. After pouring himself a big glass of milk, he snagged a couple of the cookies and retreated to the other side of the low wall that separated the kitchen from the living room.

"I saw that." Danny had another two trays filled with blobs of dough and ready for the oven. "They're to take over to your parents' house for Christmas Eve."

"Danny?"

"Yeah?"

"Dude. That's, like, next week."

Danny slid the trays into the oven. Closing the door on his creations, Danny turned to face Aaron. "Dude. I know, this is what's known as a dry run. I need to make sure I still have the touch."

"This would be a touch I don't know about?" It was difficult to leer around a mouthful of cookies and milk, but Aaron gave it his best shot.

"Aaron, your grandmother's going to be there, right?"

"Yeah."

"And she owns this condo. Right?"

"Uh-huh. And about half of downtown, too. So?"

"So that makes her your landlady." Danny was looking at him like he was a backward six-year-old. "I'm moving in next month, which means pretty soon she'll be my landlady, too. I want her to like me and she'd have to be made out of stone to resist my chocolate chip cookies."

"You've put some thought into this."

"Duh."

"Danny, what are you worried about? I've seen you in charming mode and you're unstoppable." Aaron considered the cookies. "These are pretty good, though, I've got to admit."

"No sense in taking chances. Charm only gets you so far; it never hurts to have an ace in the hole."

"You're definitely into this, then?"

Surprised, Danny looked up. "Yeah. Why not? I thought we wanted to win over your Gran."

Aaron squirmed, not wanting to admit the truth, but Danny pinned him with a look.

"My idiot brother Brad's going to be there and, honestly, I'd just as soon not deal with it. We can charm Grandma Lois some other time. Why don't we just stay home? Or, if you really want to go out, couldn't we go to your parents'?"

"We could, but it would be pretty quiet. They're going to be in Boston." The timer on the oven went off and, for the next couple of minutes, Danny was busy taking the trays out of the oven and transferring the warm cookies to the plate to cool. "I thought I told you."

"You might have." Aaron shrugged. "But if we were fucking at the time, I can't be held responsible for remembering anything... you know... factual."

Danny paused, two cookies poised on the tip of the spatula. "If we were fucking?' Why would I possibly be telling you about my parents' travel plans while we were fucking?"

"I dunno. Just sayin'."

"Quit trying to distract me. I've got about four dozen more of these suckers to get done here." Backing up his statement with actions, Danny scooped the rest of the cookies off the tray with a skill that approached professional and immediately began spooning more dough with similarly economical movements.

"You've got this whole other side to you, then. I've not seen this Martha Stewart persona before."

"Please. I can't stand the bitch. If you must make comparisons, try Jamie Oliver."

"Who?" Leave it to Danny to pull out the most obscure reference he could to make his point.

"Jamie Oliver? I'll show you a picture later. He's hot."

"Kay."

Aaron leaned on the wall divider, propping his chin on his hands, and drank in the view. It would have been nice if Danny had taken his shirt off first, but Aaron could kind of see how the potential for mistakes might kill that particular idea. But the sheen of Danny's hair and the way it reflected light from the generic overhead fixture was still pretty nice. And the play of muscles across Danny's back and shoulders as he spooned out the dough wasn't bad. The way he filled out the seat of his loose-cut jeans was nothing short of spectacular.

"So, listen. How much longer is all this going to take you?"

Danny looked up, giving Aaron a prime shot of the dark brown eyes that had been one of the first things Aaron had noticed about Danny. "I dunno. Half-hour, forty-five, maybe. Why?"

"Just trying to decide if it's worth it to try to get some work done or if I should just veg in front of the TV."

"If you felt like helping out with the dishes, we could be done that much faster."

"Huh..." Checking out the sink full of dirty dishes, Aaron weighed his choices. On the one hand, doing dishes was quite possibly his least favorite household chore, topped only by cleaning the bathroom. On the other, though, anything that meant quality time with Danny, sooner rather than later, was usually given a thorough consideration. "You know how much I hate dishes."

"Don't worry about it, then." Danny shrugged. "I'll be done here eventually."

"You fight dirty, you know that?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about." The sidelong glance Danny shot him belied the bland words, though.

Grumbling all the way, Aaron rounded the room divider and made his way to the sink. "Sure you don't."

"Thanks for helping. I'm only doing it to make things go better with your family, you know."

"Mother-effing Teresa, that's you." Aaron squirted some soap into the empty mixing bowl and filled the bowl with hot water, a froth of soap bubbles quickly forming. He dumped the assortment of used utensils and smaller bowls into the soapy water and reached for a scrub brush, then spent the next several minutes scrubbing at the bits of drying batter that clung to them. Once they were cleaned and rinsed, Aaron set them on the wooden rack nearby to dry.

Meanwhile, after sliding another tray of doughy blobs into the oven, Danny came and stood behind Aaron, bracing his arms on the sink and trapping Aaron in place -- not that Aaron had any intention of going anywhere. Danny moved in close behind him, pressing his groin flush against Aaron's ass and biting down on Aaron's neck. "Mmm, you taste good."

Aaron's head tilted away from Danny's mouth, moving instinctively to give him total access. Elbow-deep in warm water, Aaron stilled his hands as heat washed over his body. His dick tingled as blood began to flow in and his ass throbbed, remembered sensations filling him with anticipation.

"Danny..." Groaning, Aaron pushed back deeper into Danny's embrace. Danny's breath was warm in Aaron's ear.

"Yeah?"

"I don't know. Just..." Danny's hard-on was pressing into the crack of Aaron's ass and all Aaron knew was that he wanted their clothes gone. Now. "Can we? Please?"

"Uh-huh." Danny abruptly pushed off and moved away. "As soon as I get done here."

Aaron slumped against the sink, his dick hard but useless without Danny. "Oh, man. Come on. That's just mean."

Laughing, Danny went back to his task. "You'll get over it. Hurry up with the dishes. I'm almost done here and I've got an idea."

"I'm gonna get you for that." Hesitating, Aaron contemplated starting without Danny -- taking care of himself. He could do it, but it wouldn't be as much fun.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah." Aaron pulled one dripping hand out of the sink, flicking some of the soapy water clinging to it in Danny's direction, but Danny only dodged it.

"Don't get all aggravated. Haven't you ever heard of delayed gratification?"

"Yes, I have, as a matter of fact, and it sucks. I avoid it as a total waste of my time."

"Um, no. It is a tragic but necessary fact of adult life, Preston, so get over yourself." Danny pulled another tray out of the oven and resumed his spatula-aided exercise in transferring them to the plate.

Aaron grumbled, but went back to work on the dishes, rewarding himself for every item washed with a stealthy rub up against the sink, finding a groove between two vertically-positioned cabinet handles. Thank God they were smooth and not sculpted. It was a surprisingly sensuous experience, with his arms mid-forearm-deep in warm water, to angle his hips a bit and stroke into the space a couple of times.

By the time he'd finished the dishes in the sink, his underwear was slick with his pre-come and he'd just about decided to hell with waiting for Danny. If Danny wanted to play hard to get and screw with Aaron's head instead of his body, Aaron could think of a way to make the most of what he had available.

After making a side trip to the bedroom, Aaron dragged a chair in from the living room and positioned it with a good view of the kitchen and Danny's ass and sat down. Danny was absorbed in his project and Aaron was absorbed in Danny.

Watching Danny work reminded him of the times he'd gone to church camp and crushed on the older counselors. One in particular -- Rafael -- had really lit Aaron up, with his dark eyes, curly black hair, and slow, sensuous walk.

Aaron popped the button on his jeans and unzipped his fly, releasing his dick. Slicking up his hands, he stroked himself, submerging himself in the deep well of longing that still lived in him and that Danny called to like no one else. He rubbed his thumb over the tip, arching up into the pleasure, where his adolescent lust for Rafa mixed with his more complicated feelings for Danny.

He'd spent most of his time at camp following the older boy around, signing up for any group activity that let him be close to his crush, thinking he was hiding his interest behind a facade of helpfulness. Aaron hadn't realized until years later that he'd probably been as transparent as the water in the streams they fished out of all week.

The same innocent interest he'd heaped on Rafa now belonged to Danny, only now it was mixed with feelings of his more mature self. Danny fired his lust and engaged his body, sure. But his mind, his core, his self, was wrapped up in Danny in a way his adolescent self never could have been.

Squinting a bit, Aaron imagined Danny naked, as though his boyfriend had chosen to take on his little baking project in nothing but an apron. Aaron's mind's eye already knew the contours, the exact topography of Danny's ass; his hands could still recall the feel of firm, resilient flesh overlaying hard muscle. He closed his eyes and swallowed at the memory of the taste of Danny's skin on his tongue and in his mouth.

Aaron stroked faster, one hand gliding easily over his slicked-up cock, the other going beneath to palm his balls, where he squeezed, taking it right up to the edge of pain. He tried

to swallow his moan, but Aaron must have let some small sound slip out, because Danny turned.

"Jesus, couldn't you wait?" Aaron didn't even try to answer, just smiled a little and looked up at Danny from beneath the fall of hair that had spilled down over his eyes. Danny's breath hitched and after a few seconds he got down on his knees, presumably to get a closer look, because he pushed Aaron's knees apart and put his face up close. "Yeah, baby. Let's see it. Come on -- show me what you got."

Maybe Aaron was conditioned to come when Danny's face got that close to his dick, or maybe he was just ready anyway. Danny didn't have to wait long. Aaron fixed his gaze on Danny's mouth and squeezed hard on his balls. Then he was shooting, while Danny tried to catch some on his tongue.

"Beats snowflakes any day."

"Here you go. If the fit's not right, you can bring 'em back."

"Thanks." Danny took the bag from the sales clerk and tucked it under his arm. "I think he'll like them."

"Enjoy." With a lingering smile, the clerk turned to the next in line behind Danny, somehow conveying wistful regret, as though Danny was special -- the one person the attractive salesman had most enjoyed helping in the whole of his busy day. Danny wasn't sure he believed it, but he left with a smile on his face and a happy glow, nonetheless.

He had ten minutes before he and Aaron were supposed to meet up at Cargo West, their favorite store and usual place to rendezvous when shopping in Belmont Shore. Always a favorite place to shop, it had been elevated to "their store" last summer when Danny had unofficially proposed to Aaron there.

Since then, the law had changed again and marriage really wasn't an option any more without moving to another state, but still... It was still special, as well as an easy shorthand way to arrange to meet -- to say "See you there," and know what was meant.

Danny walked the two blocks at an easy pace, enjoying the festive holiday atmosphere that was Second Street during the holidays. The city decorated the entire five block shopping area with green garlands and colored lights, while the merchants all vied to outdo each other with everything from crèches to menorahs to lavishly decorated trees. Danny's favorite this year was the condom and adult toy store's pervy Santa and fabulous gay elves, but the Gap's homage to Fire Island ran a close second.

Not normally one for making eye contact and speaking to strangers, Danny found himself smiling and wishing people a merry Christmas as he made his way down the block. He got a kick out of seeing people adapt traditional holiday customs to a beach community where the average temperature at night didn't fall much below the fifties. There was still a good representation of winter scarves in snowflake patterns and even the occasional knit cap to be seen.

By the time he made it to the spot where he and Aaron had arranged to meet, he was feeling pretty darn holidayish, which made the sight of Aaron smiling up at another man that much more of a shock. The other man's back was turned so Danny couldn't judge attractiveness, but the build was tall and fit and the hair was an interesting blend of reds and golds.

Danny drew closer and still Aaron hadn't noticed him, laughing at something the tall redhead was saying. "No kidding? That's so cool. Wow. How'd you find that?"

Pausing a few feet away, Danny waited for a break in the conversation.

"Hey. Aaron."

Aaron and the stranger both turned, Aaron's smile broadening when he spotted Danny. Danny glanced at the other man and his thought process stuttered to a halt.

Gabe.

Smiling and flirting with Aaron.

His ex- hadn't lost an iota of attractiveness. In fact, he'd picked up an expensive-looking razor haircut somewhere and a sweater and pants combo that was the up to the minute in stylishness. Gabe looked incredible and something inside Danny turned over with a feeling of happy recognition.

For about two seconds.

Until he remembered how they'd parted. How Gabe had disappeared out of his life, leaving nothing but a note, the contents of which Danny couldn't even recall any more. What lingered, though, was the feeling of betrayal, and the anger when Danny had realized his boyfriend wasn't the only thing missing. His Fender Telecaster with the clear finish and rosewood neck was gone, too.

"Danny. Hey! How's it going?" Gabe's easy smile was the last straw.

"How's it going? It's going okay, Gabe. Still got my guitar, motherfucker?"

Aaron's open-mouthed gasp registered somewhere in Danny's head, but all he could see was Gabe's slowly fading smile and Gabe's hands disappearing into his pants pockets where they jingled coins and a set of keys. For his part, Danny clutched his bag with Aaron's gift still inside closer to his side, grateful for something to hold on to, to keep him from reaching for Gabe.

To keep him from reaching for Aaron, he meant.

Anger was all he felt for Gabe this far after the fact, and to see him smiling and flirting with Aaron was too much. He was inches from slugging the guy.

"Your guitar?" Gabe sounded genuinely puzzled.

"Yeah. My Telecaster. You borrowed it and then took off. The magical pixies of break-ups didn't manage to get it back to me."

"The Telly? Sure I remember it. Except you gave it to me. Or don't you recall?"

"What?! You fucking liar. My parents gave that to me. Why would I let you have it?"

"Um, I don't know. Maybe because you could barely play it?"

"You selfish sonofabitch. That is so like you. Anything you want, you take."

"Better than being a self-pitying whiner." Gabe turned to Aaron, who stood by with a wary look on his face. "Nice seeing you again, Aaron. Give me call sometime, if..."

Gabe glanced back at Danny before moving away, casting one last raised eyebrow in Aaron's direction and then disappearing into the back of the store.

"Old friend?"

Aaron's tone might be wry and a touch amused, but his skin was pale and he was keeping his distance, watching Danny with a troubled expression on his face.

"Not really." Without Gabe's distracting presence, blood began flowing into Danny's brain again and he could put rudimentary thoughts together again. "So how do you know Gabe? And how come you never told me you knew him?"

"No big deal. We had a class together, I don't know... junior or senior year." Aaron shrugged and adjusted the messenger bag he wore over one shoulder. "Sounds like you knew him a lot better than I did."

"For a while I thought I did. I don't know."

"So... did you want look around any?"

"Huh?" Danny looked around, reminded now that they were in a public place. A store. "No, I'm okay. You want to go?"

"Sure."

Aaron followed him out onto the street, where they merged into the near solid stream of people moving in either direction up and down Second Street. They were two stores away by the time it occurred to Danny he didn't know where they were going. "Where to?"

"I don't know. Did you get all your shopping done?"

"I guess." Danny regripped his bag and shifted it beneath his other arm, belatedly realizing he'd meant to hide the identity of the store he'd been shopping in, since the gift was for Aaron. "What about you? Any other stores you wanted to hit while we're out?"

"Nah, I didn't really have anything specific I was looking for. Maybe we could stop at the

bakery. It'd be nice to pick up some rolls for dinner tomorrow. They might even have some good bread left. It's kind of a long shot this late in the day, but if you don't mind..."

"No, that's fine." As they moved farther away from Cargo West and closer to the bakery that Aaron had introduced him to, Danny relaxed a little. He drifted closer to Aaron and dropped an arm over Aaron's shoulders, but the corresponding arm around his waist didn't materialize. "Are you okay?"

Aaron glanced up. "I don't know. Are you?"

"What do you mean? I'm fine. Of course I'm fine."

"Dude, that was pretty intense. I didn't realize I was dating John McClane."

Danny's gut tensed up at the reference. "It wasn't that bad. I was just surprised."

They stood just outside the Chow Yum Fat! bakery with its abundance of enticing aromas and Aaron was shaking his head. "I don't know, man. That was a lot of heat for just running into an old boyfriend."

"No, it..." Danny scrubbed a hand over his face, unable to meet Aaron's gaze for some reason. "He just pushes my buttons. I shouldn't have let him get to me."

"Huh." Aaron's gaze was like a palpable touch and Danny knew the instant Aaron looked away and entered the store, leaving him alone on the sidewalk outside.

Aaron was back in a few minutes with a bag of fragrant rolls, but instead of bread, he had a box he said contained an amazing cake he hadn't been able to resist. The rolls had been self-evident by the sudden smells of butter and yeast in the air when Aaron had emerged, while the details of the cake had been given up only in response to doggedly determined questioning on Danny's part.

It began to dawn on Danny that Aaron was quieter than usual on the walk to the car and the drive home.

When they arrived at Aaron's condo, they hoisted a couple of armfuls of bags each and managed to get everything in from the car in only one trip. Items purchased jointly were put away, while presents were discreetly stashed away out of sight for later. The routine finished the job of calming Danny and his mood was approaching mellow as he gazed at the small Italian pine tree they'd put up atop an end table in the living room and decorated with lights and a few ornaments when Aaron asked his question.

"Danny?"

"Yeah?" There was something so satisfying about the lights. They lifted his mood and made him happy in a way he couldn't put into words.

"What are we doing here?"

"What?" Danny looked up to see Aaron standing midway between the bedroom, the kitchen

and the living room. For no reason Danny could pin down, the look on Aaron's face was subtly troubling.

"I don't know. I'm just... Back at the store, with Gabe... How hung up on this guy are you?"

"Hung up? What the... I'm not, okay?"

"That was pretty weird. I thought we were, like, you know, trying to be together here. But that freaked me out, I have to tell ya."

"Dude." Danny knew he should be doing something, but he had no idea what. Aaron was scaring the shit out of him and, after just running into Gabe for the first time in almost a year and a half, Danny hardly knew which end was up. "That was old news. I'm so over him."

"Really?"

"Yeah, really."

"Because it occurs to me, that maybe Gabe was the missing piece that made me finally understand you -- understand why you could never really commit to anything -- because you were waiting for Gabe to come back to you."

"No, not true. That's not true at all."

Aaron's look was long and measuring. "Okay. If you say so."

Aaron took the little Christmas tree, now denuded of its ornaments, and put it outside on the front porch. He gave it a good watering and made a mental note to stop in at the home improvement store to buy a bigger pot for it. Holiday duties done, it would graduate to a large glazed pot and outdoor living.

Back inside, he put the box of miniature ornaments and two small strings of lights in a larger plastic shoebox and tucked them away on the top shelf of the hall closet until next year. Truth be told, he was happy to see the holidays over with.

After all the stressing Aaron had done over Christmas Eve, his brother Brad had been on his best behavior. He and Debbie had even brought gifts for Danny -- a multi-year supply of cologne and bath gel that was probably their idea of 'appropriate,' but Danny had been a saint and had delivered his thanks with a graciousness and sincerity that had shamed Aaron.

For his part, Aaron had donated money in his brother's name to an international organization that gave livestock to poor people in developing nations, to help them be self-sufficient. Passive-aggressive? Maybe. But it was a good cause and he felt better about the money being spent there than on some useless gift that would be forgotten by New Year's.

Heading for the back bedroom, Aaron hoped Danny was finished with whatever he was doing. When Aaron had left him, Danny had been unpacking boxes of his belongings he'd brought over from his apartment. Danny was supposed to be out of his apartment by January

fifteenth and his landlord had even given him an extra week's grace to move his stuff, but neither Danny nor Aaron owned a truck, so Danny was trying to get it done a little at a time.

Things were suspiciously quiet and Aaron wondered briefly if Danny had fallen asleep. When he stepped into the room, though, he found Danny sitting cross-legged on the floor, completely absorbed in reading something. Danny's mouth hung half-open, so intent on his reading he didn't look up, or even seem to be aware of Aaron's presence, for that matter.

"Hey."

Aaron had pitched his voice low, so as not to startle, but Danny still jumped. "Holy shit, you scared me."

As Aaron moved closer, he could glimpse pictures in the magazine Danny was poring over. Not close enough for a detailed look, still, the general impression of naked men and bondage came through. It took him a couple of seconds to put it together, but Aaron realized Danny must have found an old catalog from Mr. S Leather. When Aaron spotted his metal butt plug and nipple clamps lying nearby, all the pieces fell into place.

Danny had found his stash.

'Holy shit' was about right. This could go any number of ways and Aaron hadn't had the guts to do much more than hint so far.

"So, what do you think?"

Danny's shift to one side exposed the arousal pushing eagerly at his fly, while the focused heat in his dark eyes told the rest of the story. "This stuff is amazing. You're into this?"

Aaron shrugged. "A little. I mean, I don't have to if you don't--"

"If I don't..." Are you shitting me? You'd let me do this to you?" Danny's gaze dropped to the pictures in the catalog again. Guys wearing ball-gags. Guys naked and shaved. Some suspended in slings, hands bound, eyes blindfolded. Some being tortured with forceps clamped on their tits, some with painful-looking ball-stretchers affixed to their nuts, but every one with a steel-hard erection, looking ready to be fucked. Dying for it, maybe.

Gaze glued on the pictures in the catalog, Aaron bit his lip, a slow nod developing eventually. "Yeah."

"Oh, wow."

Looking at the pictures, thinking about having those things done to him. By Danny.

A shiver raced down his spine.

He was suddenly painfully hard.

Aaron swallowed past the lump in his throat. "Yeah."

"C'mere."

There was just enough command in Danny's voice to trip Aaron's trigger. He wrestled his gaze from the images in the catalog to meet Danny's.

"Okay." Going down on his knees, Aaron kept a cautious eye on Danny. He let his hands rest on his thighs, not sure who should make the first move.

Danny seemed to be wondering the same thing because he sat watching for a moment before he set the magazine aside and slowly rose to his feet, his hands reaching for the buckle of his belt and then the snap of his jeans.

Aaron's gaze climbed past Danny's knees to his crotch, up to the heat in Danny's dark eyes. Flickering quickly between his face and his hands and the bulge now pushing eagerly behind them, Aaron bit his lip and waited.

"Well?"

"What do you want?" The husky note in his voice surprised Aaron. He'd thought about this, fantasized about it, but now it was happening and his heart was racing.

"What do you think I want?"

Aaron couldn't tell if Danny was bluffing -- putting it back to Aaron because he'd never done this before, either -- but it didn't really matter. Aaron wanted it, however it rolled out.

Rolling his gaze back up to Danny's face, the clenched jaw and shuttered gaze ramped up Aaron's desire. Judging from the size of the bulge in Danny's pants, Danny was into it, too.

It would suck to want something this bad and be the only one who did.

"I think you want me. My mouth. My ass." Aaron knee-walked forward, until Danny's crotch was a scant two inches away and he had to crane his neck backward to hold Danny's gaze. "I think you want *me*."

"Oh, yeah? What makes you so different from every other guy?"

Ha. So Aaron was right. Danny didn't know what he wanted -- didn't know enough to even speak it out loud, call it by name. "If you have to ask, you don't deserve it."

"Don't deserve what?"

"Me. I'm pretty fucking special."

Aaron held his breath, waiting for Danny's answer. They'd had versions of this conversation before and Aaron had laid it all out. On the one hand, he wasn't going to settle for second best. He knew what he wanted and he wasn't going to make do.

But on the other, he just wanted Danny *so much*.

Still... If Danny couldn't figure out what Aaron was offering and put some value to it, well--

Danny shoved a rough hand through Aaron's hair, pulling Aaron's head back even farther. "You're fucking *amazing*."

Down on his knees now, too, Danny's kiss was fierce. One hand was in Aaron's hair, the other grabbing a tight hold on Aaron's ass, pulling their bodies tightly together. His tongue was in Aaron's mouth, his breath hot on Aaron's face.

Pushing Aaron over backward, Danny climbed on top, pinning Aaron's arms to the floor, his erection grinding urgently against Aaron's. "God, I want you."

"Then take me." Aaron arched up into Danny-- as much as he could, anyway, with Danny grinding him into the carpet.

Danny paused to stare down at him, his gaze hot. Panting. "*Fuck*." And then Danny was kissing him again hard, like he could fuse their bodies together, starting with their mouths. Hot and sweet, the taste of him never failed to thrill Aaron, familiarity doing nothing to dull the sharp pleasure of Danny's mouth on his.

Pulling back, Danny had the command thing really going now. "Turn over."

Dazed, Aaron tried to summon enough brain activity to function. He nodded. "Okay."

Danny yanked Aaron's pants down over his hips, not bothering to unsnap them first and taking at least part of the top layer of skin along with them, from the feel of it. Aaron didn't care.

Two firm hands on Aaron's hips, Danny pulled and Aaron followed, rocking up onto his hands and knees. Danny's hands were hard as he pried Aaron's cheeks apart. He blew a brief stream of cool air over Aaron's hole before plunging his tongue inside, all energy and no finesse, driving Aaron crazy.

"Oh, dude. *Dude*. Please, please, please." He didn't even know what he was asking for. More. More of something, anything, so long as it was Danny doing it.

"Hang on. Just..."

Aaron nodded. Anything. Anything Danny wanted.

The blunt head of Danny's dick was pressing on him, slipping inside, hot and slick. A ripple of pure pleasure traveled up Aaron's spine as Danny filled him, thrusting until Danny's thighs met the backs of Aaron's legs and Danny's hips bumped up against Aaron's ass.

"Aw, *sweet*. Yeah."

Danny's groan echoed in Aaron's head and the incredible fullness gave way to the sweet drag of Danny's dick as he pulled back. Aaron braced himself on one forearm so that he could touch himself -- stroke himself with a firm grip that added to the sensations cascading through him.

As Danny's angle changed, Aaron adjusted, pushing back and twisting a bit, trying to position himself so that Danny hit his sweet spot. When he got it just right, they were working together -- Danny pushing in and pulling out at a feverish pace while Aaron fisted his cock in rhythm with Danny's movements.

Danny's thrusts got shorter, more forceful, as he gave it all he had. Little grunts and exhalations filled Aaron's ears as he lost himself in the purity of their connection. When Danny came in short, jerky movements, Aaron was flooded with emotion as Danny filled him, all heat and passion and emotion.

Aaron reveled in it. Let the feelings wash over him in one perfect moment before he squeezed his cock hard, his thumb scraping the head and Aaron shot, hot streams of spunk spilling over his hand and the floor.

The afternoon sun filtered in through the windows set high along one wall, warming the room as Aaron drowsed, head on Danny's shoulder. He'd roused himself enough to kick off his pants, but he hadn't wanted to move far enough to even make it to the bathroom to clean up. Hadn't wanted to leave Danny. He just wanted to lie there with Danny's arm around him and let himself savor the moment.

Danny was being his usual quintessential guy self and had fallen asleep. He lay there looking surprisingly innocent -- angelic, even. Must be the pretty mouth and thick lashes, 'cause it sure wasn't the naked dick or nearby jumbled pile of clothing, obviously hastily shed.

Without thinking, Aaron reached out and touched Danny's cock, petting it.

The sex wasn't the only reason he and Danny were together, but it didn't hurt. A quick slide show of moments from their relationship flickered through his head and, yeah, a lot of them were sexual, but even more weren't: he and Danny huddled around a fire pit at Bolsa Chica beach; the two of them standing in line all night for the midnight release of the new version of Halo; his arms around Danny's neck as they slow danced at *Recherche*, their favorite night spot.

Danny yawned and stretched, arching playfully up into Aaron's hand. He yawned again -- a really gargantuan one, this time -- and reached for Aaron, lacing their fingers together. "Did I fall asleep?"

"For a little while." Aaron gripped Danny's hand tightly and Danny squeezed back harder, a test of wills they'd fallen into and something they both did without conscious thought.

"If it's not too late, want to go downtown and grab some dinner?"

"Sure. I guess," Aaron shrugged. "What's up?"

"I was just thinking..." Danny extricated his shoulder, rolled Aaron onto his back and climbed on top. "I want to go to the tux shop. I think we should both get fitted."

Aaron squinted and cocked his head a bit, trying to read Danny's expression. "Um... okay. Can I ask why?"

"Cause we're invited to some big New Year's Eve shindig on the Queen Mary."

"Shut the fuck up." Danny was playing it nonchalant, but Aaron wasn't fooled.

"Nope. We're going. Your grandmother invited us. In fact, I think we're her date. Dates," he corrected himself.

"You are such a fucking liar. My grandmother didn't invite us. Nobody our age gets invited to that. It's a charity gig and tickets cost about a kajillion dollars each. My Gram does not throw money around like that."

"What can I say? I was charming. She liked me." Danny rotated his hips, mashing their dicks together. "She says I remind her of Montgomery Cliff."

"Who?"

"I don't know. I think he's the dude who invented Cliff Bars. Anyway." Climbing off Aaron to stand, Danny offered a hand to pull Aaron up. "How's this for a plan: get fitted for tuxes, have some dinner, go to the Center to get tested?"

Danny slid the last item in unannounced, while Aaron was mid-pull. Standing upright, Aaron tried to meet Danny's gaze, but Danny was suddenly busy stepping into his jeans. "Tested?"

"Yeah. If we're going to be going bareback, I think... you know... it's probably a good idea."

Grabbing Danny's arm, Aaron pulled him around so that he could see Danny's face. "I didn't know we were."

"I, uh... yeah. We just did, actually."

Aaron replayed the last hour or so in his head. "Huh. No shit?"

"I didn't mean to. I just... got carried away. It was stupid. I'm sorry. It was fucking awesome, though. Dude." Danny took both of Aaron's hands in his, looking down at Aaron with an intensity that was mesmerizing. "I think it's time. I'm ready. How about you?"

He gazed back, reading the look in Danny's eyes. This was about as close to saying the words as Danny ever got.

"Yeah. I'm ready, too. Let's do it."

END

What Are You Doing New Year's Eve

Copyright © 2009 by Stephanie Vaughan

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