



Dead Short (Cold Case Psychic #32)

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Category: Suspense Thriller

Description: Join all of your favorite Cold Case Psychic characters in this NEW collection of short stories.

In Dear Tennyson and Ronan, our dynamic duo attempt to dole out advice to readers brave enough to ask for their help.

Everly and the GOAT features a battle of wits between Ronan and Everly, who desperately wants a pajama-clad baby goat. Baaa!

In The Case of the Dozing Detective, Aurora tries to solve a mystery. Will she crack the case?

Wolf Versus Back to School Shopping Pits Wolf against his arch enemy: clothes shopping.

It's the Great Pumpkin, Everly O'Mara, is a sweet tale of Everly and Ezra picking out the perfect pumpkins for Halloween.

In Aurora Gives Thanks, it's the night before Thanksgiving, which finds Aurora putting together a list of things she's thankful for.

Bite Me, Jude, features a toothy argument between Cope and Jude.

Chicken Soup For The Sole finds Ronan attempting to cook for a sick Tennyson. Methinks take out is in their future.

Goodbye Cruel World features a nearly frozen Ronan, whose mouth is still in perfect working order.

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I'm a bookworm. A physical bookworm. There's nothing I love more than bookstores, the smell of books, and buying books. I will never own a Kindle. Get the picture?

My personal library is legend, filled with well-read teenage favorites up through the most recent releases from my favorite authors. All of my friends and neighbors are aware of my collection. One particular friend, I'll call him Damien, recently borrowed a precious book and treated my darling horribly. The book was loaned in pristine condition, but came back with dog-eared pages (!!!), nacho cheese stains on the first page of the book's climax, and a tear to the back of the dust jacket.

Damien just asked to borrow another book. What do I do?

Signed,

Dog-eared in Dayton

Dear Dog-eared,

My advice is to punch Damien. It's obvious the man can't be trusted. He's not a friend. In my humble opinion, he's a barbarian. Not to mention a menace to the entire neighborhood. No jury in the world would convict you, in fact you'd probably get a key to the city for your public service.

Bail money available upon request.

Ronan

“Ronan, we don’t punch our friends.” Tennyson patted Ronan’s hand.

“He’s not a friend. Would you let this man near your books?” Ronan sounded as if he was about to go off on a rant.

“No, I wouldn’t let this man near our garbage, but that doesn’t mean he’s a menace to society. Don’t you think the death penalty is a little harsh for crimes against books?” Ten knew he needed to nip this in the bud before Ronan’s passion turned into an Oscar-worthy performance.

“I don’t know, you tell me. Weren’t you the one who wanted to ground Everly until her thirtieth birthday for ripping a page in your Rock Hudson biography?” Ronan smirked, looking as if he knew he’d won the argument.

“That’s different ,” Ten said sheepishly. “I was at a critical spot in the story.” Maybe Ronan had a small point, but Ten wasn’t about to tell him.

“And you left the book where Everly sits to watch her ten minutes of television before bed. It wasn’t her fault she moved the book and the page tore.” Ronan wagged his eyebrows.

“Just whose side are you on?” Ten felt his own temper start to churn in his gut.

“I’m on the side of literature!” Ronan sat up straighter and set a fluttering hand over his heart.

Here comes the drama... Ten snorted, but managed to keep from rolling his eyes. “You know I apologized to Everly for making such a big deal over my ripped page.” Ronan had worked with her to tape the rip and Ronan left a message in the margin

apologizing on behalf of their little girl.

Ronan brushed a kiss against Ten's cheek. "Back to the problem at hand. What's your advice to Dog-eared in Dayton?"

That was a good question. What was his advice?

Dear Dog Eared,

As important as books are to you, friends are worth more than a book made of pure gold. If you're unsure about lending this friend a book from your collection, get him a gift card to a local book store and go with him. Show him your favorite titles and tell him why they're so important to you. Then he can spend his own money on whichever book he chooses. If it ends up ripped, dog-eared, or with a cracked spine, it's in God's hands.

Please don't take Ronan up on his offer of bail money.

Tennyson

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It was bathtime. Everly Erin O'Mara's favorite time of the night. Except for story time, which was also her favorite time of the night. Oh, and funny video time was also her favorite time of the night. Everly had lots of favorite times, especially where her dad, Ronan, was concerned.

Ronan was the easy parent. Everly had learned at an early age that a smile, a trembling bottom lip, and even a few tears would score her everything she ever wanted, with the exception of one thing. At least so far, but the night was young and so was Everly.

Born with psychic and mediumistic abilities, Everly spent a lot of her days dealing with spirits who needed her help with something or other and with trying to figure out what her psychic visions were actually telling her. It wasn't easy being a six-year-old psychic. She was learning more and more about the world around her every day. Not just school lessons either.

Life lessons.

Everly picked out several books for her father to read after bath time. All of the books were her favorites. Both of the Dragons Love Tacos books were added to the pile. Like the dragons in the books, tacos were her favorite too. Next was Never Let a Unicorn Wear a Tutu. Everly and her best friend, Aurora, had gotten this book for Christmas, along with several unicorn stuffies. Everly had so many now that there wasn't a lot of room left on the bed for her. Her father always made a big deal when he sat on one of her unicorns. He'd yell and scream that the unicorn stabbed him in the ass. Everly wasn't supposed to say that word, but what her parents didn't know wouldn't hurt them.

“Everly! Bath time!” Ronan called from across the hall.

“One sec!” Everly raced to her pajama drawer and grabbed her favorite unicorn nightgown and a pink pair of underpants to match. She crossed the hall to see Ronan sitting on the toilet. “Ewww! Gross!” she shrieked.

“I’m wearing pants, goofball!” Ronan reached out to tickle his daughter. “Your father’s an old man and I need to take a load off sometimes.”

“You’re not old, Dad.” He was totally old. The one thing her father, Tennyson, had been working on with her was editing herself. There were certain thoughts, feelings, and psychic messages that shouldn’t be said out loud. It was hard not to blurt out everything that was on her mind. Talking was one of Everly’s favorite things too.

Shrugging out of her clothes, Everly climbed carefully into the bathtub. She grabbed her mermaid toys and splashed around a bit, making waves. Her favorite was when the waves went so high that they sloshed over the edge of the tub. Ronan would call out for everyone to, “man the lifeboats,” which Everly hadn’t understood the first time, but then he’d showed her a video from a movie where a giant ship was sinking and people were trying to escape. Spoiler alert, they didn’t. Almost everyone died.

Ronan should never have shown that particular movie to Everly, but she’d worked on her editing and hadn’t told Tennyson about Titanic or the cute boy who died at the end, making Ronan cry. Jack was cute, but not worth crying over.

“Okay, little miss. Time to wash up!”

Everly sighed. It was tough being little. All she wanted to do was play, but she grabbed her bath puff and her favorite soap that smelled like coconuts. It reminded her of being in Florida with her cousin Brooke. “Dad? Can I ask you a question?” This was it, the moment when she’d finally get her heart’s desire.

“You just did!” Ronan laughed as if it were the funniest joke in the world.

It wasn’t.

Everly grumbled and scrubbed the soapy puff over her arms and stomach. “I’ll ask a second question then.” She plowed on, not wanting to give Ronan the chance to interrupt. Ronan was always interrupting. In Everly’s opinion, her father could do with a little editing himself, but she’d keep that to herself. For now. “Can I have a goat?”

Ronan stopped laughing. “You already have a GOAT.”

Everly rolled her eyes. “Dad, I don’t have a goat. Not a stuffie. Not a book about goats. Not an actual goat. Or the pajamas for the goat.

“Like I said, you already have a GOAT. Me!” Ronan laughed again.

Everly was starting to lose her temper. She took a deep breath, like Ten taught her. Boy, he’d really be proud of her tonight, she was acing her editing. “You are stinky like a goat.” Everly giggled. “And you cry like a goat. You eat like a goat too.” Okay, maybe that last bit was too much. More editing was definitely needed.

“Hmm,” Ronan mumbled. “That’s not what I meant.”

Everly could feel Ronan roll his eyes, but stayed calm. “What did you mean?” She tried to sound bright and curious, but had a feeling she failed.

“I’m the Greatest Of All Time. G-O-A-T Get it?” Ronan slapped his knee and laughed again.

There were days when she wished her gift didn’t tell her everything going on in her

father's head. He had several more goat jokes lined up. It was his fence mechanism, so Everly would lose her train of thought. She didn't know what fences had to do with not getting a goat. Maybe goats liked fences.

Taking a deep breath, Everly tried again. "Yes, Dad, you are the greatest." She succeeded in sounding like she meant every word she was saying. It was true. Ronan was the bestest father in the world. Most of the time. When he wasn't being totally annoying, which was a lot. "You would even be greater-er if you got me a goat and pink pajamas for her to wear."

"So you think I'm the greatest?" Ronan asked.

Everly was going to need to edit again. "Yup!" She laid back in the tub and wet her hair and then grabbed her strawberry shampoo, which was her favorite because it was magic. When she used it, her hair didn't get tangled. She hated tangles.

"Why do you want a goat?" Ronan sounded truly curious.

"Well, because they're cute!" They totally were. "And they're cuddly." Totally cuddly. She'd met baby goats at the Happy Hooters Petting Zoo and cuddled five different goats. They'd all run to her like she had a pork chop in her pocket. At least that's what Uncle Jude said. Everly didn't think goats ate pork chops, but if goats did, they could have hers!

"Dixie and Luna are totally cute and cuddly." Ronan snickered, referring to their Yorkie and cat.

"Grrrrrrrr!" Everly splashed her hands into the water. Rinsing out her hair, Everly wrung it out and hopped out of the tub. She grabbed her Little Mermaid towel and wrapped herself up in it like a butterfly in a cocoon. Everly marched toward the hallway, when Ronan tapped her shoulder. "You're a dream killer," she muttered.

“Hey, come here.” Ronan reached out a hand.

Everly climbed into Ronan’s lap. She looked up at him and gave her best bottom lip wobble. She could feel the tears coming too.

“You know who would be crying real tears? The baby goat when you left every day to go to school. She’d be here all alone with no goat friends to talk to or play with or who would worship me as their goat king.”

Everly giggled. Her father would make a good goat king. “You’re right. The goat would be lonely, so we’ll get two! Yippee!” Everly hopped off his lap and ran toward her bedroom.

“Wait! What?” Ronan sounded completely confused.

“Ezzie, we’re getting baby goats!” Everly shouted to her little brother, who was climbing the stairs with Tennyson.

Ezra clapped and baaed loudly. Twice.

“We’re getting what?” Ten asked, sounding gobsmacked.

“I asked Dad for a pink pajama-wearing baby goat and he said that it would be all alone when I went to school, so we’re getting two so they won’t be lonely!”

Ten’s lips twisted into what Everly called the frown of doom. No good ever came from that. “Uh, Ronan, can I speak to you alone for a minute?”

Ronan muttered to himself as he followed behind Ten. He winked at Everly before walking into his bedroom and closing the door.

She'd once again lost the goat battle, but she wouldn't lose the goat war. Sooner or later, she'd get the baby goat of her dreams and pink pajamas to dress her in.

Everly didn't need her gift to tell her that. What her gift wasn't telling her was what her parents were talking about in their room. She ran for their door and put her ear up against the wood. There was no shouting, but there was kissing. She banged on the door with her little fist. "UGH! Stop kissing! We've got books to read!"

To be honest, Everly didn't mind when her daddies kissed each other, but she wished their kissing wouldn't get in the way of her story time.

The bedroom door popped open and out came Ronan. "Who's ready to read about taco-loving dragons?"

"Me!" Everly shouted.

Ronan sat on the edge of the bed and yelped. "Hey, that unicorn stabbed me in the ass!"

Everly laughed along with Ronan. He really was the greatest of all time, but she wasn't going to tell him.

Not until she got a goat of her own.

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A loud, rumbling sound disrupted Aurora Fitzgibbon's painting time. She was in the kitchen with her father, Jace. They both had their easels situated in front of the sliding glass door and were attempting to paint pictures of the backyard. She was focused on the patio table with its bright green and white striped umbrella and the swimming pool with its crystal clear blue water. "Is that funder?" Aurora asked.

Jace shook his head. "I don't think so. The sun is out and there's not a cloud in the sky."

"Maybe its dry funder." Aurora loved learning about the weather. It was something she and her Daddy Kevin talked about a lot. Her favorite thing was to watch weather videos on YouTube.

"It could be, my little weather bug," Jace agreed.

"I'm a ladybug!" Aurora announced, dipping her paintbrush into the red puddle on her palette and added several ladybugs to her painting. They were just perfect. Aurora took a deep breath. She loved the sound of silence.

Sometimes noises made her feel weird, like there was something burrowing under her skin. There were other times when Aurora didn't like the way clothes felt and had to change into something softer. Her Daddies explained that she had sensory issues that a lot of the other kids at school didn't have and wouldn't understand. There were times when sound overwhelmed her, making her feel confused and scared, but for the moment, she was enjoying the beautiful day with her father.

A second rumble sounded, making Aurora frown. The thunder stopped seconds after

it started. “Do you think we should check the weather to see if it’s gonna rain?” Aurora asked.

“We can if you want.” Jace pulled out his phone and handed it to his six-year-old daughter, who quickly navigated to a website with live radar. She saw there were no storms in or around Salem and pinched the map of Massachusetts, so she could see what weather was coming from the west. “Nothing. Rats.”

“You know who you remind me of?” Jace asked.

“Wonder Woman!” Aurora guessed. She loved the superhero’s red cape and her long dark curls. Aurora thought adding the superhero to her painting would make it even better than it already was.

“You remind me of Wonder Woman every day, but I was thinking that you checking on the weather reminds me of Daddy Kevin.”

Aurora’s excitement crumpled, along with the look on her face. “I’m not grumpy!”

Jace laughed. “No, I didn’t mean that. When you were looking into the weather you were acting like a detective, just like Daddy Kevin.”

“Ohhhh!” Joy swelled in Aurora’s heart. She wanted so much to be like her Daddy, but didn’t think she was brave enough to be a detective. “Do you think I can be a detective someday?”

“Of course you can! You can be anything you want to be, little ladybug. What if you became a meteorologist like we see on television?”

Aurora’s eyes widened. Daddy Kevin had showed her several videos of storm chasers in Oklahomer, who drove around to make videos of twisters. There was even a movie

called Twister her daddy let her watch. It was a little scary, but very exciting. She'd laughed so hard during the scene with the cow. "I could be a weather reporter like those people who stand in the middle of a hurricane or who chase tornadoes?"

"You could! UMass has a program in Lowell, which is only about forty-five minutes from here." Jace sounded excited at the prospect of Aurora going to college in Massachusetts.

"Really?" Aurora made up her mind. She was going to be a meteorologist when she grew up. "Can we go to Oklahomer and chase twisters together?"

"No way!" Jace snorted. "I'm too scared to do that."

"I'm not!" Aurora crowed. "I'm super brave." Sometimes Aurora felt scared, but when that happened, she repeated the little rhyme her father taught her. I'm okay. Let's go play. Sometimes Everly said it along with her.

"You sure are, honey." Jace opened his mouth to speak, but another rumble interrupted him.

Aurora set her paints down on the table. "I'm gonna be a detective, just like Daddy and figure out where that noise is coming from." She ran toward the fridge and listened for the sound of the ice maker. Sometimes the sound made her jump. "I don't hear anything. It's not the 'fridgerator.

"What about the laundry room? Is it the dryer?" Jace asked.

"Daddy, I'm the detective. I have to figure out the case by myself." With a determined look on her face Aurora had to admit her father's idea was a good one. He was one smart cookie.

“Huh, well Daddy has Uncle Ronan and Jude to help him.” Daddy Jace leaned against the fridge and offered his daughter a smile.

“Yeah, but they’re just sidekicks .” If Aurora had a nickel for every time her Daddy said that word about her uncles, she’d be able to buy a sparkly purple unicorn and a barn to keep her in.

“Can I be your sidekick?” Jace asked with a giggle.

“Okay, but you leave the detecting to me. You can get me a juice box if you want to help me solve the mystery.” Daddy Kevin talked about how Uncle Ronan was always going out to get drinks for everyone. It was a pretty important job.

“Here you go, Detective Fitzgibbon.” Jace handed Aurora an apple juice box with the straw sticking out.

She took a refreshing sip and handed it back to Jace. Aurora could definitely see why a sidekick was important to this mission. She’d have to tell Uncle Ronan the next time she saw him.

With a bit more energy, Aurora ran into the laundry room. The light was shut off and both the washer and the dryer were quiet and dark. She liked being in the laundry room when the dryer was turned on. It was warm and cozy and super fun to watch the clothes do gymnastics. “Nope, not the laundry room. What else could be making the noise?”

“Well, I’m just a sidekick, not a detective, but there’s a room or two downstairs that we haven’t searched for clues.”

“Good thinking! Let’s check the bathroom. Lots of rumbles come from in there.” Aurora giggled and ran on tiptoes out of the laundry room.

“Yeah, especially when your father is in there on taco night.” Jace rolled his eyes.

Aurora’s nose wrinkled. “Daddy is a stink monster!”

“No arguments here,” Jace agreed.

Aurora hurried to the bathroom, but like the laundry room, it was empty and quiet.

“Wow, being a detective is hard work.”

“Do you want some more juice?” Jace offered his daughter the box, as another loud rumble sounded.

Aurora took a long sip. Daddy Jace said there were more rooms downstairs to check out. Which one was next? “The living room! That’s where we’re going to investigate.”

“That’s a great plan, boss.”

Aurora ran across the kitchen, her footsteps were loud on the tile floor. When she got to the living room, she stood absolutely still and listened. After a few seconds, she heard another rumble. Running to the sofa, she found her Daddy Kevin sound asleep. There was no sound coming from him.

“Rats!” Aurora felt like stomping her feet with frustration, but that wasn’t something a detective would do. She took a seat on the edge of the sofa to think about her next move, when a loud rumble came from Kevin. “Aha! The mystery is solved.”

Kevin’s green eyes popped open and he grabbed Aurora, tickling her.

“Daddy!” Aurora laughed, loving her father’s strong arms around her. She always felt safe with him. “I did it!”

“You solved .” Jace offered her a high five.

“I’m so proud of you.” Kevin sat up and settled Aurora in his lap. “Do you know what we do when we solve a big case at work?”

Aurora shook her head. She hoped a trip to the toy store was involved.

“We get ice cream!” Kevin announced.

“I love ice cream! I want mint chocolate chip with a cone on top.” Aurora loved ice cream so much, she wanted to marry it.

“Me too!” Kevin agreed.

“Me three!” Jace laughed.

Aurora loved it when she and her daddies twinned together. “I’ll get my shoes!” Aurora ran toward the front door and grabbed her favorite purple sandals. She sat on the bottom step to put them on. Her body buzzed with excitement over solving her first big case, but she was confused. “Daddy, I wanted to be a meteorologist, but now I want to be a detective. What do I do?”

“Weather is a mystery, right?” Daddy Kevin asked. Meteorologists have to figure out if it’s going to be cold enough to snow or if a hurricane will develop or if conditions are right for tornadoes to form. Sounds to me like a weather girl is a detective.”

“You’re right!” Aurora was so excited. “I’m gonna be a weather girl detective. I’ll be on television and have a podcast and sign autographs and chase tornadoes!”

“Well, that sounds like a lot of work,” Daddy Jace said. “I’m guessing you’ll need two scoops of ice cream for extra energy.”

“With chocolate sprinkles!” Aurora had never felt so proud of herself. She couldn’t wait to tell her friends about solving .

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Wolf Byrne was going to die. Slowly. Painfully. Agonizingly. It was back to school shopping time. Not only did Wolf need to get all of the items on his first grade shopping list, he also needed new clothes and shoes. There weren't a lot of things Wolf hated more than clothes shopping. Brussel sprouts and his father, Jude's, singing were two of them.

"Why can't we buy clothes online like all of my friends?" Wolf asked, in a last ditch effort to avoid walking into Old Navy. Wolf didn't know if his friends shopped online, but it was worth a shot.

His father, Cope, frowned. "We need to see what size you are. Look at your shirt. I can see your belly at the hemline." Cope poked his son, making him giggle. "The last time you wore pants was in May and you'll need them for the fall."

Wolf knew his clothes were getting too small, but he'd been content to live with them, if it meant avoiding a trip to the store. His friends, Aurora and Everly, loved to shop and were always talking about fashion. Wolf would be happy to wear the same shirt and pants every day for a month, but knew his parents would never let him get away with that. Again.

"Besides, we have to get your school supplies and then there's lunch at your favorite place." Cope grinned widely.

"Green Dragon Buffet?" Wolf asked, sort of hating that his father knew the way to get him to do anything he didn't want was by involving food. His father, Jude, always said he was food motivated. Wolf figured it was a case of like father, like son.

“Yup! I can hear the coconut shrimp calling your name.” Cope put a hand to his ear, as if he could really hear them shouting out to Wolf. “No back to school clothes, no Green Dragon. It’s up to you.” Cope wore a look on his face that said he knew which option his son would choose.

“Uggghh! Fine. We’ll buy stupid clothes.” Wolf folded his arms over his chest in a perfect imitation of Jude. “Do we have to buy clothes for Lizzy B too?”

“Nope! Today is just for you. She loves Green Dragon as much as you do, so she’s just here for the grub.”

Wolf smiled at the mention of his little sister coming to the buffet. She loved chicken lo mein. Only she ate it with her fingers like a caveman, while Wolf, who was much more soap-fist-a-strated, ate his with a fork, twirling the noodles around the tines like spaghetti.

“Lizzy B is ready to go and reporting for duty,” Jude said, coming up from behind them, pushing Wolf’s sixteen month old sister in her stroller. The little girl was dressed in blue shorts and a t-shirt featuring sharks, which had belonged to Wolf when he was little. He would never say it out loud, but his sister was badass for liking sharks.

“Okay, everyone, let’s go!” Cope opened the door to the store and ushered his family inside.

The store was huge with a high ceiling. Wolf bet if he yelled, he’d be able to hear his echo. He trudged alongside his fathers as they walked toward the kids’ section. The closer they got to their destination, the smaller the clothes got.

Cope walked around the clothes racks picking out shirts and pants. Wolf wasn’t particularly excited about any of the selections his father was making.

“Hey?” Jude nudged his son.

“Yeah?”

“Your Dad got made fun of by bullies at school when he was your age. He’s trying to pick clothes out that will keep the same thing from happening to you.”

“Daddy was bullied?” Wolf asked, feeling as offended as he sounded. His father was super cool. He loved to bake cookies and sing along with the radio. Cope even let Wolf pick out as many books as he wanted at the library and had even gotten Wolf a second bookbag for him to fill up.

“He was. Do you think maybe you could go help him find clothes for you?”

Wolf nodded. “I can do that.” His mood instantly brightened, Wolf took off in search of his father, who was comparing two shirts to each other. “I like the blue one,” Wolf said, standing by Cope’s side.

“You do?” Cope shot his son a questioning glance.

“Yeah, blue’s my favorite color.”

“Do you want to try it on?” Cope asked.

“Sure!” Wolf took the shirt and ran toward the fitting room. He could see Cope following along behind him. Last year, his father insisted on being in the changing room with him, but this year, Wolf was big enough to do it by himself. He was going to be a first grader in a few months, after all.

After he shouldered into the shirt, Wolf stood back and looked at his reflection in the mirror. He looked good. More importantly, he felt good. His parents were always

telling Wolf that he needed to be a team player and to cooperate more with activities he wasn't fond of doing.

Wolf felt like he'd take a major step forward today. He felt grown up, which made him proud of himself. They were good feelings to have. Taking a last look in the mirror, Wolf popped out of his dressing room. Not seeing his fathers, he ran back into the store, where they were waiting for him. "What do you think?" Wolf spun around like he'd seen Everly and Aurora do a hundred times.

"You look great!" Cope knelt in front of his son, smoothing down the sleeves and checking to see where the hem fell. "And now we know your size. All we have to do now is find colors you like. Simple, huh?"

Wolf nodded and wrapped his arms around his father's neck. "I'm sorry I was uncooperative, Daddy."

Cope held his son tight. "It's okay, buddy. I know how hard it is to go shopping. I got bullied a lot when I was a kid and I don't want you to go through the same thing. I just want to make sure you look good so that you'll feel good about yourself."

"I already do, Daddy," Wolf said, grinning at his father.

"You do?"

"Yup! I've got the best Dads and little sister in the whole wide world. Spending time with you guys always makes me feel good. Now, let's find me some pants. I'm starving." Wolf still hated clothes shopping, but he'd do it for his fathers.

Cope laughed and followed behind his son.

Wolf loved the happy look in his father's eyes and knew he was the one who put it

there. It felt good to make his parents happy. Wolf promised himself that he would try to do more to help his Dads. His deal made him feel older, more grown up.

Wolf would do anything to make sure his parents were happy. It was a promise he knew he could keep.

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Everly Erin O'Mara was excited for Halloween. She loved dressing up and going out Trick or Treating with her family and friends. What she loved even more than lots of makeup and free candy was going to the local farm to find the perfect pumpkin that her father would carve into a spooky Jack-o'-lantern.

"Come on, Daddy! Let's go! We're gonna miss all the good pumpkins!" Everly shouted up the stairs. Her father had been changing her brother, Ezzie's, diaper, but they'd both been up there forever.

"Daddy's cleaning up your brother," Everly's father, Ronan said, walking into the living room. He popped an entire Reese's Peanut Butter Cup into his mouth.

Everly's mouth dropped open. "Dad, did you get into the Halloween Candy? Daddy's gonna be mad at you." Ronan was addicted to those candies. He'd had a bad accident last Halloween because he'd gotten up in the middle of the night to raid his secret stash. Technically the accident had been Everly's fault because Ronan tripped on one of her toys, but if he'd brought the candy upstairs when he went to bed, then he wouldn't have hurt himself.

Ronan offered a cheeky grin. "No, I didn't break into the candy, this is from my emergency bag of treats. The one I keep hidden in the-" Ronan stopped short.

"The one you keep in the freezer." Everly rolled her eyes. Everyone in the neighborhood knew her father kept candy in there. Uncle Jude especially.

"No, Miss Smarty Pants, the bag in the freezer is a decoy for the real stash hidden in..." Ronan slapped a hand over his mouth. "Nope, I can't tell."

“You know I can see the answer with my gift, right?” Everly could see lots of things with her gift, but she’d really been working hard on not using it to read other people, especially her father.

“I’m hoping that you’ll keep that little bit of information between the two of us. I promise to make it worth your while.” Ronan waggled his eyebrows.

“Does ‘worth my while’ mean I’m getting that big pink unicorn stuffie from Etsy?” Everly grinned at her father.

“Stop bribing our daughter,” Ten said, walking into the kitchen with Ezra in his arms. “We all know about your secret stash in the laundry room, Ronan.”

“No fair using your gift!” Ronan sulked.

“I didn’t use my gift. I used the washing machine.” Ten barked a quick laugh.

“You keep your candy in the washing machine?” Everly giggled. Her father was very silly. He should have kept them in the drawer beneath the washer and not inside the machine.

“Not in the washing machine. In the cabinet above it.” Ronan looked crushed.

“You mean the one where I keep the stain stick.” Ten shot Ronan a knowing grin. “If you didn’t take a bath in mustard every time we ate hot dogs, I wouldn’t have needed to open that cabinet and your treats would be safe.”

“Dream killer,” Ronan muttered, heading into the living room. “Let’s head out.”

Everly followed Ronan out of the house and into the SUV, where she climbed into her booster seat and fastened her seatbelt. Moments later, Ten put Ezra in his car seat

and buckled him in.

Watching Salem pass by her window, Everly concentrated on the kind of pumpkin she was looking for. It had to be big and round, so Ronan could carve lots of scary teeth like he'd done last year. Everly would never tell him, but last year's Jack-o'-lantern scared the pants off her.

"Here we are! Hope Farm!" Ten announced, sounding excited. Tennyson loved Halloween as much as Everly did.

"I love it here!" Everly announced, popping out of her seat. Hope Farm was one of her favorite places to visit. In the spring, they sold pretty baskets of flowers. Over the summer there were baby chickens and lots of yummy strawberries and peaches. In the fall, it was pumpkins, cider donuts, and saying Bon Voyage to the now-grown chickens as they were trucked off to spend the cold weather in the hot sun. In the winter, the farm turned into a wonderland with Christmas trees, wreaths and hot chocolate.

"Pump-king!" Ezra shouted.

"Come on, Ezzie! Let's get the perfect pumpkin." Ten climbed out of the SUV and opened Ezra's door.

It took forever to get her brother out of the car and for her father to open the door for her. Everly wanted to run ahead of everyone to the pumpkin patch. She knew the way, but also knew her fathers would be upset if they couldn't see where she was. It was hard being six years old.

"Wow!" Ronan marveled, when they'd crossed into the patch, dragging a cart behind him. "Look at all of the pumpkins!"

Everly was in awe. “There’s like a million of them!”

“Me!” Ezra shouted, pulling his hand away from Tennyson. He wrapped his arms around the first pumpkin he came to. “Mine!”

Ten wrinkled his nose at the misshapen gourd. “That one’s too lumpy. Let’s find a different one, okay?”

“Mine!” Ezra insisted, with a little stomp of his foot.

“Okay,” Ronan grabbed the odd pumpkin and his son and set them both in the cart.

“Oh, look at this!” Everly ran toward a perfectly round pumpkin. “It’s not big enough.”

“Story of my life,” Ronan muttered, with Ten snorting in response.

“That one!” Everly pointed ahead of her and took off running. She was wearing a bright pink hoodie, her parents would be able to find her easily enough. Rushing to the pumpkin, she bent over and ran her hands over the cool orange skin. The stem was perfectly curled, like one of Tennyson’s twisted locks. She rolled the pumpkin forward to see the back, which was as perfect as the front. “I found the perfect pumpkin!” She waved excitedly at her fathers, who were trying to detach Ezra from another pumpkin he’d wrapped his little arms around.

“Minnnnne!” The little boy wailed.

Everly sighed. “Mine” had become her brother’s favorite word lately. She knew her parents would be tied up with Ezra for a while, so she wrapped her arms around her perfect pumpkin and tried to lift it off the ground. It didn’t budge. “What the?” Everly asked out loud. She was strong, her daddies told her so all the time. It should be a

piece of cake for her to lift the pumpkin.

Taking a deep breath, Everly squatted down and tried to lift with her legs like she'd heard Uncle Jude say. He'd been talking about Ronan not hurting his back, but Everly figured it was good advice. She lifted with her arms and pushed up with her legs. The pumpkin came up with her. After staggering under its weight for a step or two, Everly regained her balance and lumbered off toward her fathers, who were still trying to detach Ezra from his latest pumpkin.

Wobbling toward the cart, Everly didn't think she was going to make it. Her arms hung between her legs, reminding her of the time she went big ball bowling and the ball was too heavy to roll down the aisle. "Get a grip, girl," Everly muttered to herself. She'd heard that saying in one of Nana Kaye's afternoon stories.

With a newfound strength, Everly took three more steps, before her foot slipped into a divot. Falling to the left she tumbled to the ground, her arm pinned beneath the pumpkin.

"Everly!" Ronan shouted. Seconds later, her father was pulling her out from under the pumpkin and dusting her off. "Are you okay?"

Everly nodded. "I was trying to bring my pumpkin to you since you were busy with Ezzie."

"Look at this beauty." Ronan let out a low whistle. "It's big enough to be Cinderella's coach."

"It is, Daddy!" Everly agreed. "Think of the cool face you'll be able to carve in it."

"With lots of wicked sharp teeth."

“And spooky eyes!” Wrapping an arm around Ronan’s shoulder, she grinned at her father. “Can we get this one? Please?” She made her smile even brighter.

“Yup, we can get this one.” Ronan brushed more dirt off Everly’s hoodie and reached for the pumpkin. He had a hard time getting it off the ground.

“Use those muscles, Dad!” Everly urged.

“How on earth did you manage to carry this thing as far as you did?” Ronan asked, huffing and puffing.

Everly flexed her own muscles. “Tiny, but mighty, remember?”

Ronan groaned in response, lugging the pumpkin back to Tennyson and a still-screaming Ezra.

“Wow!” Ten said, releasing his hold on his son, as Ronan set the pumpkin in the cart. “It’s huge.”

“It’s The Great Pumpkin, Everly O’Mara!” Ronan said with a laugh.

“We’re gonna have the best Halloween ever!” Everly couldn’t wait to get home and start carving the pumpkin. So long as her father could carry up the stairs and into the house.

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Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 11:13 am

Aurora Fitzgibbon sat on a pink shag rug on her bedroom floor surrounded by an army of dolls and stuffies. She had a very important job to do and didn't want to mess it up. It would be the worst thing ever if she ruined Thanksgiving for her entire family.

"Daddy says he wants me to be the first person to say what I'm thankful for this year when we sit down to eat Thanksgiving dinner. It's a really big responsibility, but do you think I'm responsible enough?" Aurora nibbled nervously at her fingernail.

"You definitely are," Pinkie, a pink-maned unicorn, said.

"For sure," several Barbie dolls dressed for a grand ball, agreed in stereo.

Aurora breathed a huge sigh of relief. It was good to be surrounded by stuffies who believed in her. "The big question is what I'm thankful for." She looked around at the circle at all of her companions. "I'm definitely thankful for all you to snuggle and cuddle with and because Daddy, Uncle Jude, and Ronan always get me new friends to add to our family." Aurora always said "thank you" when she got a new stuffie or doll, or new coloring books and markers. Now that she thought of it, Aurora got a lot of stuff.

Remembering all the things she had, like her house, and her cozy, warm bed made Aurora think about the people that lived at her father, Jace's, homeless shelter. They didn't have a house to live in or a hot meal. They didn't have a bed or shower or a room full of toys. All most of them had were the clothes on their back. "I'm definitely thankful for all the work Daddy does to keep everyone at the shelter safe and fed." The animals surrounding Aurora agreed.

“What about all of our friends?” Dorothy, a rainbow-colored teddy bear asked. “Aren’t you thankful for Everly, Woofie, and the other kids at school?”

“Oh, yes,” Aurora agreed quickly. “I’m very thankful for them. I love having sleepovers with Everly and making yummy brownies with Nana Kaye and building Legos with Woofie.” She thought back to the beginning of first grade when she was being bullied by a mean boy in her class who said that her fathers were going to get rid of her because she was adopted. Everly and Woofie were there to protect her and keep her safe. They also told her Daddy what was happening at school so that he could help too. Aurora had been too scared to talk to her father. She didn’t want him to tell her that the boy was right.

After that day, he’d had a long talk with her and said that she was his daughter forever and that he loved her to the moon and back. “I’m thankful for my Daddies too.”

“You have the best Daddies!” Jeff, a green dragon stuffie, said. “Fitz is my favorite because he reads us stories with funny voices.”

“No,” Arthur, a white unicorn, interrupted. “Jace is my favorite because he sings the Frozen songs for us.”

Aurora giggled. Daddy Jace loved to sing, but he wasn’t very good at it. His voice reminded her of the baby goats she’d met at the petting zoo, loud, screechy, and painful to listen to. Fitz said Daddy Jace could hit notes only dogs could hear. She didn’t know what that meant, but Daddy Jace had stuck his tongue out at Fitz.

“What about all the books the daddies read?” Astrid, a purple unicorn asked.

“I got to go to story time at the li-berry last week,” Matilda, a small stuffed tiger, said. “There were soooo many books.”

“Good point. I’m very thankful for the li-berry and the li-berryans. They always help me find the bestest books.” Boy, Aurora’s list was growing by the second. If she told her family all of these things, everyone’s food would be cold by the time she finished talking. It was a good thing she was going first and not Uncle Ronan, who would talk until it was time for breakfast the next morning.

“There are so many things to be thankful for,” she said, picking up Everly, a yellow unicorn that her namesake had given Aurora for her birthday. She gave the stuffie a cuddle. “Which one is the most important?” Was it her warm house? Her awesome fathers? Nana Kaye’s ooey-gooey brownies?

“I think it’s the way that my daddies help everyone. Daddy Fitz helps people who are hurt and Daddy Jace gives people hot meals and warm socks.” Aurora looked around at her room with its pink bed, shelves full of books, a chest full of toys. All of those things were nice, but helping other people was nicer.

“Hey, love bug!” Fitzgibbon said from Aurora’s bedroom door. “You ready for dinner? Daddy Jace made hotdogs.”

“Yummy!” Aurora loved hotdogs, especially when they were slathered in mustard and ketchup.

“What kind of meeting were you having?” Fitz walked into the room and joined the circle.

“We were discussing what I’m thankful for. I was a little nervous about what I was gonna say tomorrow, but everyone helped me figure it out.”

“You’re so thoughtful.” Fitz gave his daughter a hug. “You know what I’m thankful for?”

“Peppermint stick ice cream?” Aurora asked with a giggle.

“No.” Fitz shook his head. “I’m thankful for you. You are the best daughter in the whole wide world.”

Aurora’s heart swelled with Fitzgibbon’s words. “You’re the best detective daddy in the whole wide world.” Jumping into Fitz’s arms, she hugged her father tight.

Thanksgiving would be a day filled with friends, Frozen , family, and food, but Aurora couldn’t wait to tell everyone how thankful she was for all the ways her daddies took care of people and kept everyone safe.

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Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 11:13 am

Jude and Cope had been arguing for fifteen minutes about something stupid. Cope was angry that Jude had to work a stakeout with Ronan on the night he was supposed to go to a school committee meeting. Jude hated those meetings and knew Cope liked to have him on hand in the likely event that his stand on the budget irritated other parents.

“You’re just making shit up! There is no stakeout! I called Tennyson.” Cope crossed his arms over his chest.

Fuuuuck... Jude should have gotten with Ronan ahead of time, so their stories would be straight. “Cope, I-”

“You, what, Jude?” Cope shook his head. “I want Wolf and the other kids to get the best education possible. The school committee wants to cut next year’s budget by twenty percent. That mean bye-bye to art supplies, musical instruments, not to mention the art and music teachers. We’d also lose several classroom teachers and two aids, one of whom works with Aurora on her sensory issues.”

Jude understood how much Miss Tina helped Aurora. “It would suck for those teachers to lose their jobs. I agree completely with you.”

“So why are you being such a dick about going to the meeting tonight?” Cope asked, his tone softer than it had been minutes ago.

“It’s been a long week and I’m tired.” Jude shook his head. “We’ve been working on this case and getting no where with it. I just wanted sometime to myself to throw a pity party for one and get my bad mood out of my system.”

“For the love of God, Jude!” Cope shouted, anger coloring his cheeks. “Don’t you think I’d like a night to myself too? I spent the week consoling people who are going through the worst loss of their lives. I cried along with them and felt their pain. Don’t you think I deserve a night off too?”

“Sure,” Jude agreed easily. “I’ll go first.” He had a feeling Cope would be totally in line with the idea of them taking turns with nights to themselves.

Cope raised an eyebrow. “Bite me, Jude.” Cope crossed his arms over his chest and headed for the stairs.

Jude hurried to catch up with his angry husband. “Your wish is my command.” He sunk his teeth gently into the meaty part of Cope’s left arm.

“Ow! What the actual fuck are you doing!” Cope yelped.

“Biting you! Just like you told me too. Mmm...” Jude had a feeling this little stunt might get him out of the doghouse.

“What? No! Stop!” Cope shoved Jude away from him. “I don’t want you to bite me.” A smile curved his lips and he didn’t look as angry as he had minutes before.

“Not even for science?” Jude wore a cheeky grin.

“Especially not for science.”

“Biting is like kissing, only there’s a winner at the end.” Jude wagged his eyebrows at his husband.

“What the hell are you talking about?” Cope wore a curious look.

“Lips are involved in biting and kissing.” Jude gave his husband a demonstration.

Cope rolled his eyes. “Oh, brother.”

“So are teeth,” Jude continued, undeterred by his husband’s reluctance to follow the plot. He nibbled Cope’s lips gently with his own teeth to prove his point.

“Uh, huh.”

“Tongues are used in kissing and biting.”

“How do you use your tongue in biting? You’d chomp it off for god’s sake. Damn, caveman.”

“You use your tongue to taste the juicy meat you’re about to chomp. Do I have to teach you everything?”

“Juicy meat? Ew, Jude. Just ew.” Cope didn’t look as put off as he sounded.

“Let me bite you, please.”

Cope laughed. “No. I’m not going to let my husband -the father of my child- take a bite out of me like some kabob on a stick.”

“Don’t think of me as your husband right now...”

“Good, because I wasn’t.”

Jude grinned, his eyes glittered. “Think of me as an elemental man. A hunter. A predator.”

“A troglodyte, more like.”

“Vampires bite people and you don’t say ‘ew’ to them.” Jude put his hands on his hips.

“Firstly, I’ve never met a vampire. Well, not one that wanted to bite me anyway.” Cope looked like he wasn’t opposed to the idea.

Jude knew Cope was thinking about Salem’s former resident vampire Luca Pennington.

“Are you saying you want to suck my blood like some deranged modern-day Count Dracula?”

“Fuck, no! That’s gross. I’m just trying to explain that biting, love biting, specifically is more common than you think.”

“You just said, and I quote, ‘Vampire’s bite people.’” Cope said, grinning at Jude.

“Grrr,” Jude growled, wishing he had more time to explain the idea to his husband.

“Toddlers bite too. Do you want me to wake Wolf up and let him gnaw on your shin?”

“You’re missing the point entirely.” Jude shook his head.

“What is the point?”

“That I love you and don’t want to sleep on the sofa because I’m an idiot.”

“I’m listening,” Cope said.

“It’s been a long and frustrating week.”

“Jude, it’s Tuesday.”

“Exactly my point,” Jude agreed. “I know how important this school committee meeting is. I also know how hard you’re going to fight for our kids and their classmates. I just wish we could slow down a bit, that’s all. I need a break.”

“I do too,” Cope said, thoughtfully. “Let’s get through this meeting tonight and if you want, we can sit down and look at trip ideas later.”

“After the love bites?”

Cope snorted. “Yes, my fuzzy Wolfman.”

Jude growled and nuzzled his face into Cope’s neck. He knew he could make it through the boring school committee meeting, so long as he and Cope had a little time to themselves after Cope won the day.

Jude was going to win the night.

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Just because Ten kept denying it, didn't make it any less true. He was sick. Not just sick, but sick as a dog. "I never get sick." Ten had one foot in the grave and the other was dancing perilously closer to the edge of the hole. He made it sound like he was okay, if his bluster could be believed. Ronan didn't buy it for one second

Ronan knew it was just a cold and Ten would be fine in a few days. He felt bad that there was nothing he could do to make his husband feel better. Or rather there was nothing Ten would let him do. Since he was stuck in bed, Ronan didn't think Ten's opinion held any sway. He opened his laptop and clicked around until he found a seemingly simple recipe for chicken soup.

"I'm running out for a sec, can I get you anything, babe?" Ronan asked as he smoothed a hand through Ten's sweat-slicked hair.

"Just get me a coffin, Ronan." Ten whined. He really did look pitiful with dark circles under his eyes from lack of sleep. His nose was swollen, red and runny. Ten was a complete disaster. Just then he started coughing, if you could call it coughing. To Ronan it sounded like a nagging seal bark. He had to hide his laugh with a fake cough of his own, not wanting to hurt Ten's feelings.

"Sure you don't need any DayQuil or NyQuil?" Ronan asked, wiping his messy hand on the bed as discretely as he could.

"Yeah, grab me some, 'Leave me alone so I can die in peace-Quil.'" Ten grumbled.

Ronan did laugh this time. "Got my phone if you think of anything or if you come up with coffin measurements." Ronan ducked a flying pillow, laughing all the way out to

his truck.

Ten was sleeping when Ronan got home from the grocery store. He was snoring loudly and drooling all over Ronan's pillow. He grimaced as he made a mental note to change the sheets.

Once he was back in the kitchen, he began to unpack his purchases. He had gotten Ten a new jar of Vick's VapoRub and some Day and NyQuil along with the ingredients he needed to make chicken soup.

Ronan hummed to himself as he read and re-read the soup recipe and began to cook. He peeled and chopped fresh carrots, shredded the pre-cooked chicken and measured out the right amount of chicken broth, green bean and peas. He even cooked the egg noodles in a separate pan. Soon the house was filled with the mouth-watering aroma of cooking soup.

Once the soup was set to simmer, Ronan laid down on the couch. He hadn't gotten a lot of sleep the night before as Ten had been tossing, turning and hacking. Several times Ronan was just about to drop off to sleep when Ten coughed and startled him into full wakefulness. The high pitched jingle of their Christmas bell woke Ronan up, seemingly just after his eyes had closed. Whose bright idea was it to give Ten the bell to ring when he needed something anyway?

"Hey babe, how're you feeling?" Ronan asked as he rubbed his tired eyes and stretched.

"Peachy, Ronan. Ready to enter the Miss Salem pageant. Grab my tiara, would you?" Ten deadpanned, then coughed.

Rather than engaging his sick husband in battle, Ronan chose the high road. "I got you some Day-Quil. Do you want to take some now?"

“No, Ronan. Let’s wait ‘til I’m dead and you can leave it in my casket, hmm?” Ten eyebrow was arched in a nightmarish rainbow over his right eye.

Ronan snarled and left the room to grab the box of medicine. “Here we go, Ten,” he sing-songed as he walked back into the room. Ronan sat on the edge of their bed and opened the box, pulling out a sheet of bubble-sealed gel-caps. He broke off one section and worked to get the bubble open and free the little orange capsules. He wasn’t having any luck. The sheet was supposed to be perforated for easy opening, but Ronan couldn’t get the packaging to tear, so he grabbed for the second bubble of pills. His luck wasn’t any better with his second try.

“Seriously, Ronan? A two year old could open that.” Ten snarked then sneezed, shaking the bed.

“Well then it’s age appropriate for you.” Ronan grumped and pulled harder. The bubble pack ripped open sending the small orange capsules flying into the air. One landed near Ten’s pillow and the other flew out of sight near the nightstand.

Ten grabbed the untouched sheet of Day-Quil and easily freed two capsules. He gave Ronan a triumphant smile before he shot them into his mouth chased by a mouthful of water. “Did you get my Vicks?” He asked as he settled himself back against his pillow. Ten started to cough and Ronan pulled him forward to rub his back.

Ronan felt awful for being so petty. He wasn’t sick often and right now all Ronan wanted was for him to feel better. “Yup, it’s right here. Do you want me to help you?”

“Yeah, would you?” He pushed down the covers and laid back.

Ronan easily twisted the lid off the jar and was surprised that a large dollop was already gone. He had no idea what he’d done with it. Maybe it was in the kitchen

ready to go into Ten's vaporizer. Putting the mystery of the missing Vicks out of his mind, he scooped some of the cool gel onto his fingers and was about to smear it on Ten's chest when the microwave timer started to beep, indicating the soup was ready. The sound of the alarm startled Ronan and his hand hit Ten's shoulder sending the glop of Vicks flying off his fingers to land in Ten's hair. Ronan started laughing, he couldn't help himself. His usually dignified husband looked completely ridiculous.

"Never mind." Ten grumped, pulling the greasy medicine out of his hair and slathering it against his own skin. "What's the timer for?"

"I made you some soup." Ronan said proudly.

"From a can?" Ten sounded hopeful.

Ronan looked wounded. "No, from scratch, want some?"

Ten nodded, looking reluctant.

Several minutes later, just as Ten was falling into an uneasy sleep, Ronan breezed back into the bedroom with a bowl of soup on their T.V. tray. Ronan set the tray on his husband's lap and waited expectantly for Ten to try his masterpiece.

Ten took a tentative sip of broth and made a face like a five year old eating liver. "Fuck Ronan, what's in this, boot polish?"

"Oh, fuck," Ronan muttered. He knew instantly what happened to the missing glop of Vicks. It was in the soup. The whole pot was ruined. "It's not called 'Chicken Soup for the Soul' for nothing." Ronan protested, hands on his hips.

"Yeah Ronan, that's S-O-U-L, not S-O-L-E." Ten started to laugh.

Ronan grabbed the tray and strode from the room. Muttering to himself about having to make Ten soup from a can.

“Hey! Where are you going, Betty Crocker?” Ten called out.

“To make you food that won’t kill you!” Ronan called back, wishing he’d just grabbed a couple cans of soup from the supermarket, instead of thinking he could pull off a pot of soup like he was Bobby Flay.

“Just call Greek Life! We love their pizza. I want sausage,” Ten called, before coughing.

Ronan did as Ten asked, feeling like an asshole for not thinking of it himself. Tennyson always took care of him no matter what was going on and Ronan couldn’t manage to do the same thing in return. Feeling sorry for himself, Ronan placed the order and grabbed cash for the driver.

“Mission accomplished,” Ronan said, sitting on the edge of Ten’s bed. “Food will be here soon.”

“Thank you for everything you’ve done for me today. Even though it didn’t go as planned, you’re still my hero.” Ten offered Ronan a happy smile. “Maybe we could have dinner and then we could watch a movie together and snuggle.”

It was on the tip of Ronan’s tongue to decline, knowing if he got too close to Ten he was likely to catch his cold and be miserable along with him. “That sounds great.” He leaned forward to kiss his husband. Ronan was about to move in for a second kiss when the doorbell rang. “Must be the food.” He was halfway out the door when Ten spoke again.

“I’ll take mine with out the VapoRub!” Ten laughed until he started to cough.

“A guy makes one mistake,” Ronan muttered to himself. He went to the door and paid the driver for the food. Grabbing plates and napkins from the kitchen, Ronan hurried upstairs to Ten, who was truly chicken soup for his soul. He’d never been happier in his entire life and that was thanks to Tennyson.

If Ronan lived to be one hundred, he’d never be able to repay all of the kindness and love Ten had shown him, but he sure as hell was going to try.

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Ronan's face was surrounded by the icy fog of his own breath. "The fuck was wrong with me thinking a vacation in Canada in January was a good idea?" The wooden deck crackled loudly as he walked across it, nearly losing his balance twice as he moved.

"Dammit Ten, this weather is more frigid than my ex and that's saying something." Stupid asshole was colder than Christmas day in Siberia, which incidentally was probably a damn sight warmer than Toronto.

Ten rolled his eyes as he listened to his thin-blooded, thick cocked husband complain about the weather. What did you expect? Flip flop weather?"

"Bet it's warmer in fricken Antarctica, it's goddamned summer there..." Ronan muttered as he kept moving forward. It was so cold his skin felt wind-burned and he was pretty sure the next blast of icy wind was going to rip the skin clean off his face.

"It's so cold I bet the hookers downtown charge \$20 just to blow on your hands." Ronan knew frostbite could set in within thirty minutes of exposure in -20 degree windchill, the weather girl on the local ABC affiliate had been saying it once every 10 minutes for the entire newscast. "Life-threatening cold," she'd called it.

"Wish my cock was as stiff as the wind, Christ I think my balls are drawn so high they're holding a royal flush." He thought he heard Ten snort with laughter, but it could have been the actual wind or cold madness or his brain function ceasing as he slowly froze to fucking death.

"This is like the ice planet Hoth. Not gonna gut then climb into the still warm body

cavity of a Tauntaun. Don't even ask, Ten. Don't care if you have a Han Solo kink." Han Solo in the captain's chair of the Millennium Falcon, now that was something he could work with, if his cock defrosted and didn't crack and break off in the bone-chilling cold.

"Leave me here to die alone. Go on without me, Ten. Tell my mother I love her. Goodbye cruel world." There were so many things he'd never have a chance to do; snorkel with sea turtles, eat snails in Paris, enter a wet tee-shirt contest. It was a short life, but a good one. He hoped his husband would miss him.

"Don't pine for me forever, babe, just ten years or so. I want you to be happy with someone less handsome than me..." And with a smaller dick. Ronan almost burst out laughing. He was afraid if he did, his tongue would freeze and fall off. Wouldn't Ten love that!

"No man left behind, drama queen." Tennyson hollered. "It's ten more feet to the car which has been warming up for twenty minutes."

Ronan snorted, both nostrils froze shut. He hurried the last few feet to the car. "What the hell was I thinking coming this far north in the middle of winter?" He must have been temporarily insane when he agreed to come with Ten to a personal appearance in Canada.

"You were thinking that you love me," Ten said with a sappy smile.

Ronan nodded. "Damn right I was." He pressed his cold lips to Ten's nearly frozen cheek. "I'd do anything for you, including freezing my ass off."

"Ditto, babe." Ten kissed him back. "Think of how nice a hot shower's going to feel when we get back to the hotel later."

"Can't wait." Ronan felt warmer already. It didn't matter where Ten went, the Arctic

Circle, the Amazonian Rainforest, Antarctica, or back home to Salem, Ronan would always be at his husband's side. With a little drama thrown in for good measure.

THE END