

First Christmas



A free Adulting 101 short story
for members of Lisa Henry's
Hangout

FIRST CHRISTMAS



LISA HENRY

First Christmas is a free short story set in the Adulting 101 universe.

Please don't share outside the group!

Lisa

FIRST CHRISTMAS



Nick wakes up hot, with Jai plastered up against him, which is weird, because usually Nick is the one who goes all octopus in their sleep, and it's a little bit gross because they're both slick with sweat where their bodies are touching. But it's also awesome, because Nick has a boyfriend and that boyfriend is *Jai Hazenbrook*. Jai is still the hottest guy that Nick has seen in all of his eighteen years—almost nineteen, thank you—and somehow Nick is hitting that.

He's still not entirely sure how it happened, honestly. Like, they had this hook up thing first, and then this friends with benefits thing, and now they're *boyfriends*.

Whatever though, right? Nick's not going to look this incredibly attractive gift horse in the mouth.

He unpeels himself from Jai's side, rolls out of the narrow bed that was optimistically called a double by the hostel owners, and pads down the hallway in his boxers to use the bathroom.

It's hot. Like, not sweltering or anything, but still super hot. Because it's Christmas Eve, and no way should Nick be able to wander around in just his boxers without freezing his balls off. The whole thing is making him...not homesick exactly—he figures that he's saving that for Christmas Day—but a little wrong-footed somehow. Like logically Nick knows that half the world has a summer Christmas. But when they were in the town center yesterday and Nick was wiping sweat off the back of

his neck while surrounded by tinsel and baubles? It's weird and wrong and Nick does not cope well with change.

Nick uses the bathroom, and then heads back down the hallway toward the room he shares with Jai. He covers a yawn with his hand and mumbles a good morning at one of the Japanese girls who arrived late last night.

Jai is still sleeping when Nick gets back, and Nick takes a moment to bask in the sheer glory that is his boyfriend. And then, because he's still half-asleep himself, Nick climbs back into bed, plasters himself against Jai, and dives headfirst back into a warm, sweaty sleep.

NICK HAS NO MONEY. Neither does Jai, but for some reason Jai seems to be okay with this. He's happy wandering the aisles of the local Countdown, checking out the dented tins, the slightly squashed produce, and anything teetering right on the edge of its Best Before date.

Nick is pretty sure they're having canned tomatoes, sardines and pasta for Christmas lunch tomorrow.

And he's totally okay with that.

Really.

He is.

Totally.

Shut up.

Nick squares his shoulders, ignores the massive display of glazed hams, refuses to even glance at the gingerbread, and manfully adds a bag of chickpeas to their basket.

THEY EAT lunch in the middle of the Octagon, sitting on the grass and watching the people go by. It's all very festive and whatnot, but it still

doesn't feel like a real Christmas. This is a weird-ass backward New Zealand Christmas.

The sun beats down on Nick's shoulders.

"You okay?" Jai asks him, looking up from his notebook.

Jai is always writing things in his notebook. He's the one that figures out the budget, and their travel plans, and—as far as Nick knows—is probably writing a comprehensive list of all the things Nick does that annoy the absolute shit out of him.

"Yeah," Nick says. "Totally."

Totally.

NICK'S NOT-HOMESICKNESS hits later in the afternoon, when he and Jai are meandering down a street somewhere near the center of town. Nick is not super good with directions, or with knowing where he is at any given point in time. Jai is like a fucking homing pigeon though, so it all works out.

"Does it feel like Christmas to you?" he blurts outside a gift shop selling way too many sheep-related things.

Jai looks at him, brows raised. "Yeah, I guess."

"Okay," Nick says, because clearly Jai answered that question wrong and Nick needs to make him see the error of his ways. "But there's like no snow, and no Devon, and no Mom and Dad, and those are all totally things I am totally dealing with, right?"

"Totally," Jai deadpans.

What an asshole!

"So." Nick wrinkles his nose. "It's not *those* things, or even the fact that your daypack is full of really, really sad food. It's just... Christmas is supposed to be special, Jai, like *presents* special, and we don't have any money to spend on presents and that sucks."

"Are you regretting buying that giant tuatara in Rotorua?"

“No!” Nick lies.

Jai’s mouth quirks up in a smile. “I got us a present, Nick.”

“What?” Nick punches him in the shoulder reflexively. Jai’s tough. He can take it. “When? What did you get us? Where is it?”

Jai’s smile grows. He reaches out and takes Nick by the hand, and leads him down the street. They’re heading back toward the Octagon maybe? Nick really has no idea. Like maybe he’s passed these shops and things before, or maybe everything just looks familiar because he’s stuck in the Matrix. It could be either.

“I mean...” Nick begins, and discovers his voice is smaller than he thought it would be. “It’s my first Christmas away from home, you know?”

“I get it, Nick,” Jai says, squeezing his hand and drawing him around the corner, and oh, yeah, they’re totally back in the Octagon. Nick’s sense of direction FTW! He’s still not entirely sure where they’re going though, not until he looks up and sees it.

The shiny black posters in front of the cinema.

“Jai,” he says in a very reasonable tone. “Are we going to... Is... Please don’t be teasing me here right now, because, if you are, I will probably have to stab you.”

“Seems a little excessive,” Jai comments, and then the blast of air conditioning from the cinema foyer is hitting Nick right in the face. Bringing him out in chills, actually.

“I ordered the tickets online last night,” Jai says, digging his phone out of his pocket and showing Nick the email confirmation. “And we’re getting popcorn too.”

Rogue One and popcorn!

And Jai and New Zealand!

But mostly *Rogue One*!

Okay. No. Bad Nick. Bad boyfriend Nick.

He squeezes Jai’s hand hard as they join the queue, and bounces up and down on his toes.

“You are the best boyfriend ever,” he says. “And this is going to be the best movie ever!”

Jai laughs, and pulls him closer. “Merry Christmas, Nick.”

And oh, yes, there it is. There’s what Nick needed to make it feel like Christmas. And it turns out that it’s not the weather, or the place, or the even the presents. It’s the words; said with a smile, said with love. Nick grins and fills with warmth as he echoes them back to Jai:

“Merry Christmas.”