

Scott sat back on the wide log and stretched his feet to the campfire. He closed his eyes for a moment and drank in the details of his birthday celebration.

All around him was the sound of merriment. Tyler and Alex were replaying their game of flashlight tag again, giving a blow by blow account including the moment when Gordon tripped over a rock and fell, arms-flailing, head over butt.

Scott breathed in deeply. The smells of the campfire brought back innumerable memories from childhood, like cookouts with his grandfather Grant. It always felt like they had been in the middle of the wilderness, but in truth they were probably still on his grandfather's farm. Grant had never failed to enthrall his grandchildren on those trips.

Rough wood scratched against Scott's fingertips as he gripped the log, and when he licked his lips he could still taste the s'mores from earlier. When he opened his eyes at last he saw the dancing fire and the shadows licking the sand around them, and all those gathered together to help celebrate his birthday his father, both his biological and step brothers, and a small group of other men who had become his friends over the last year. Something struck him then, some kind of irrepressible desire to express his thanks and probably embarrass himself. Even so, he stood up.

"Hey guys, can I say something?"

Several heads turned towards him.

"I think you just did," John said with a wink.

Scott rolled his eyes.

"You know what I mean. Call the squirts in."

John did as he was asked and the group started to gather around the campfire. Jeff regarded his son with a mixture of curiosity and...pride?

Once everyone was together and silently waiting, Scott cleared his throat. Just as he was about to speak he saw a familiar glint in Gordon's eye and knew what was coming.

"Quiet everyone, quiet!" Gordon said with mock outrage.

He received a punch in the side from John for his mirth and Scott shook his head. Gordon rubbed his ribs but was still smiling.

"Thanks, Johnny," Scott said. "Everyone, I just wanted to say thanks for everything not just for coming out here to celebrate my birthday, but for all the times over the last year - and more - that you've stood by my side, trusted my judgement and have helped me to smile, even in dark times. I do appreciate it." He picked up a bottle of water and raised it. "To you all."

"And to you, son," Jeff said softly as he returned the toast.

There was a round of 'cheers' and 'hear-hears' above the crackle of the fire. Scott sat back down and Jeff shuffled over to him, clapping him on the shoulder.

"Happy Birthday, son," he said.

Scott grinned. It was indeed a happy, happy birthday.

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