

Santa Should Know Better

Terri Tanner moaned as warm fingers danced over her stomach, quickly followed by feathery kisses.

“Ooh, morning,” she breathed. She stretched out her arms and then lifted the covers to find her mate, Mal grinning at her.

He kissed her navel again. “Morning, baby,” he whispered.

Her eyes flickered to the cot. Their baby, Seth was still sleeping peacefully. The world went fuzzy and soft the way it always did when she looked at him. He was currently stretched out on his front, snoring slightly and a tiny bit of drool was escaping his pink lips. Apart from the black hair, he looked just like Mal. He was almost seven months old, and they had been the best seven months of Terri's life. Well, the months before he came along were pretty special, too. Her life had been wonderful since she met her mate, Mal. He was a wolf shifter, and she was a human. Seth could be either, but they wouldn't know for certain until he was a teenager. *Although, he did make alarming growling noises if anything came between him and his food.*

Terri relaxed back into the bed and relished the early morning quiet. Seth wasn't a difficult baby, not by any means, but she cherished the moments alone with her mate. Her sister, Jessica told her that her babies never slept a wink for the first six months – *she said it was hell on the nanny*. But Seth spent most of his time sleeping; Terri never had a problem on that front. Admittedly when he was awake, whether he was laughing or crying, he was extremely loud, but Terri had it on good authority from her mother-in-law that the loudness was part and parcel of the Tanner gene. Given the noise level when her brothers-in-law were around, she had to concur with that.

Terri shivered as Mal kissed his way up her body, pushing her nightshirt up, so it bunched under her armpits. He gently suckled her puckered nipples before nibbling on her collarbone.

He moved in for her lips and she turned her face away. He planted a sloppy one on her cheek before pouting. “I want my kiss, baby.”

She gently pushed him away as his lips sought to catch hers. “My morning breath will slay you.”

Mal chuckled and licked her chin. “Worth it, baby.”

“Just let me brush my teeth.” She started to scoot out of bed from under him, but Mal gently pinned her down.

“Baby, I am going to get a kiss from you one way or another.”

His eyes flashed with the amber of his wolf as he slid down her body. Her body clenched in excitement as he hooked her legs over his shoulders. He licked his tongue over her slit, and she shivered, biting her lip.

“Mmmm, you taste so good, baby,” he crooned as he circled her clit with his index finger.

His eyes burned into her, lustily gazing at her as she writhed and moaned under his ministrations. He teased, suckled and lapped at her flesh as she squirmed and panted and tried not to cry out.

She could feel the fire between her legs, rising, burning and begging for release. Mal growled as she moved her hands to her breasts and massaged her mounds. He gripped her hips, holding her still as she tried to press her sex against him, demanding more, needing more.

“Please,” she murmured. “I need to...”

He chuckled, the vibrations making her shudder before he suddenly nibbled on her clit. Terri grabbed a pillow and held it over mouth; her body tightened, and she squealed in ecstasy as her orgasm cascaded through her body.

“Enjoy that, baby?” he asked, smugly.

“Aha,” she breathed from under the pillow.

Terri held her breath as she heard the distinct sounds of Seth fussing and waking up. She tossed the pillow aside and saw Seth wriggling and blinking awake.

Mal gave her a cheeky smile before kissing her thigh and slipping off the bed. He pulled on his boxers and scooped Seth into his arms, kissing his head. “Morning, big guy,” he cooed.

Terri summoned the energy to pull her nightshirt down and raise her head. She smiled as Mal cradled Seth in his massive, muscled arms. Mal was gazing at their baby, adoringly while Seth sucked on his fingers. “Look at you, my two handsome men,” she said, warmly. Mal grinned.

She giggled as he gave Seth an experimental sniff before grimacing. “You want me to change him?” he asked.

“No, you need to get to work.”

“I don’t mind.”

Terri’s insides went gooey over her mate – something that seemed to happen between five and ten times a day. *No, he didn’t mind.* There was no smell too gross for him, no diaper too full, no nose too snotty. He worked full time as a pack enforcer and didn’t complain once about coming home and taking care of both Seth and her.

“I know you don’t, that why I love you.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Ahem.”

“That one of the many reasons why I love you, although it’s currently top of the list.”

She sat up and Mal passed Seth to her. The baby grizzled and tried to latch onto her breast. "He's hungry, I better feed him."

Mal smirked. "Yeah."

Terri snorted. "You've seen me feed him hundreds of times, how can you still get all... all... 'teenage boy' about breastfeeding?"

He let out a dirty laugh and leered. "It never gets old, baby. But I better get going," he said that with deep regret.

"I guess you'll just have to catch the next show."

"I sure will. What are you two planning on doing today?"

Terri ducked her eyes and focused on Seth, who was squirming in her arms. He had an impatient frown on his face that she'd seen on Mal's face countless times when he was hungry, too.

"No plans, we'll probably just hang around the house."

Mal's face lit up with excitement. "You know, I was thinking I might head over to Darlington at lunch and pick up one of those giant polar bear toys for Seth. You know, for Christmas."

"You mean the big, cuddly one that's even bigger than me?"

"Yeah, he'll love it. I reckon we can keep it in Craig's room. As long as he doesn't get too frisky he can pretend it's his girlfriend instead of pretending that Britt is." Craig was Mal's youngest brother; he was currently panting after a female wolf shifter called Britt, who tried her best to ignore Craig at every turn.

"I guess," said Terri, unenthusiastically. "Although Seth might be a little young for it, and we don't want to go too mad. Maybe we should have a low-key Christmas."

He frowned. "What? I thought you enjoyed Christmas last year."

"Oh, I did," she said, quickly. "It was lovely."

Both her parents were Chinese and while growing up, Terri hadn't really celebrated Christmas. She had celebrated with one or two boyfriends as an adult, but it was nothing compared to a Tanner family Christmas. They made their own eggnog, went carolling, decorated their house to such an extent that it would put Clark Griswold to shame and consumed such a huge Christmas meal that their purchases kept the town grocery store in business for an entire year. She enjoyed every present giving-mistletoe waving-turkey eating moment. *Which is why it was so hard to be a buzzkill.*

"It's just, you know, money..."

Although the last seven months had been wonderful, they had not been quite so wonderful for Terri and Mal's new house. They were building their own next to his parents'. But,

construction was very slow, particularly as half the house had been ruined in a freak storm a month ago. The cost of building it was skyrocketing. They had some savings – money Terri inherited after her dad died and money gifted to them by Mal’s parents, plus Terri rented out the small house she had lived in when she was single. But Christmas was very expensive.

“This is his first Christmas, we have to spoil him,” said Mal.

“Yes, but to be fair, he won’t even remember it.”

Mal looked at her in surprise. “No, but we will.”

Terri’s shoulders slumped and she felt like a total heel. Of course, his first Christmas had to be magical, and it *would* mostly be for her and Mal rather than Seth. They were memories they wanted to cultivate so they could enjoy them in sixteen years time when Seth started resenting his parents and pretending not to know them in public. But if her suspicions were right, money was about to get even tighter.

“Just... let’s think about it. Why don’t you come home for lunch today instead – I’ll make you something to eat.”

“Awww, baby, you don’t have to do that.”

“I want to.” She enjoyed taking care of him, although she rarely got the chance. While living with Mal’s family, Terri barely had the chance to lift a finger to do anything at all. *It was almost annoying.*

Mal beamed, perhaps pleased that she did want to take care of him. “I don’t want you to go to any trouble.”

Terri shrugged as she started stripping Seth out of his onesie. Mal looked so happy she felt a little chagrined. “I was just going to slap some peanut butter and jelly between a few slices of bread and open a can of soup. I’m really not going to any trouble.”

He slapped his taut stomach. “My favorite.”

“Everything’s your favorite; you’re easy to feed. As are you, my little pumpkin.” She blew a raspberry on Seth’s stomach and he chuckled, hunger momentarily forgotten.

“Can you blame him when you consider what’s on offer.” He ogled her breasts. “If it came down between that and soup I’d take one of your tit...”

“Go to work!” commanded Terri, trying but failing to be admonishing.

He blew them both a kiss as he left. “Love you.”

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Terri tried not to pant as she lugged everything to the car. She really needed to do more exercise. She still had baby weight she needed to shift. It’s just when it came down to a

choice between getting up early to go jogging in the cold and playing peek-a-boo with Seth or Mal, she didn't have very strong willpower. Of course, peek-a-boo with Mal was an R-rated version and something they saved for when they were alone.

She made faces at Seth, who was sitting in his car seat on the porch, watching her progress. He burst into violent laughter before trying to stick his fist in his mouth

"Okay, so diaper bag, bag with changes of clothing, changing mat just in case we're not near a bathroom, bag with food for you, stroller, baby carrier, some bottles of Mommy's special milk..." She was very careful about how she stored that ever since her brothers-in-law had accidentally put some of it on their cereal. It was worrying that they seemed to enjoy it more than regular milk. "Change of clothes for mommy," – she'd leaked into more than one top. "Breast pump for Mommy, lots of toys, Mommy's purse and... well, pumpkin I think that may just be it."

Seth waved his hands around like he was trying to clap and Terri gave her son a bow. Maybe everything she packed was overkill, but she didn't want to be caught short. This was one aspect of having a baby that Jessica didn't exaggerate. Jessica said that you practically had to take the kitchen sink everywhere you went. Jessica had a large brood; *her nanny walked with a slight stoop these days.*

Terri gave an oof as she picked up the car seat. "Ooh, you are Mommy's big boy, aren't you?"

He gave her an almost dirty chuckle. *Yep, just like Mal.*

Seth had been born slightly premature, but he was already so big at that point that there were no worries about his health, and he had just got bigger and bigger over the months. Compared to other babies his age, he was off the charts - *particularly his head.* Her brothers-in-law compared him to Mr Potato Head. Then Mal beat them up. His rate of growth made buying clothes difficult, and she was not going to let him roll around nude as Mal suggested. While she was fairly certain that Seth would take after Mal and would be a wolf shifter, she kind of wanted her son to have a few of her human hang-ups about nudity.

She strapped him into the car, and he happily waved a rattle around.

"Okay, pumpkin, we are going on a little adventure. And at the end of it, either Daddy is going to be very happy or very freaked out."

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"Okay, pumpkin, settle down."

Seth was crying. It was a hungry cry. How did she know it was a hungry cry? It was always a hungry cry. It was the only reason he ever cried. A full diaper only required a disgruntled look. Seth could and would eat everything he was given, and to be hungry and not be given food right away was a catastrophe for the little guy.

Her friends and pack mates, Liv and Delilah complained that their baby girls were difficult and picky eaters. Terri never had that trouble. If Seth had all his teeth he probably would have munched on the spoon she fed him with, too.

“For the love of...” muttered a man in a Santa suit behind her.

Terri glared at him as she passed Seth a teething biscuit. “He’s a baby, sir. Babies cry.”

The woman in front of her nodded in agreement. “You tell him, honey. Santa should know better.”

The man turned his back on them and continued grumbling. Terri tried to rearrange the baby carrier and not drop her basket.

The woman beamed as Seth industriously tried to eat the biscuit. “Isn’t he a cutie?”

“We think so,” said Terri turning pink in delight. See, it wasn’t just her. Seth really was the cutest baby in the world – *other people could see it, too.*

The woman glanced down at the contents of Terri’s basket and grinned. Terri tried not to blush.

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Someone banged on the door.

“I’ll be out in a minute,” called Terri.

Perhaps she should have waited until she got home to consume the big gulp. She would have felt more comfortable doing this at home. But, with a desperate need to go, she decided here was as good a place as any. She was wedged into the pharmacy’s tiny handicapped bathroom-cum-baby changing room.

Someone banged on the door again.

Terri shook her head and ignored them. “Some people are so impatient.”

Seth from his perch on the changing table burred in agreement. He made a grab for one of the sticks and Terri pulled them out of reach. “Not for you, pumpkin.”

She bit her lip as she watched the unanimous outcome. “Well, that’s that, pumpkin,” she muttered to Seth, who seemed nonplussed.

Excitement, worry and a smidge of terror blossomed inside her. There was nothing she could do about the situation. Not that she wanted to – *this was what she wanted.* She just wasn’t sure she wanted it to happen quite so soon.

Someone banged on the door, again.

“Okay, I’m coming!”

She scooped the sticks into the trash, collected all her things together and strapped Seth back into the carrier.

“Come on, let’s see who can’t wait to use the bathroom.”

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Terri stroked Seth’s head. He was happily sucking on another teething biscuit, oblivious to the drama. Her heart was beating a mile a minute as she crouched on the floor with the other pharmacy customers.

The rude Santa Claus from earlier was waving a gun around. “I want all your money and all the pills you have. Put them all in here.” He threw a bag at the pharmacist.

The pharmacist pursed her lips. “It’s only three hundred dollars, and if I put the pills in there you won’t be able to tell them apart,”

“Just do it!” cried Santa.

The pharmacist pursed her lips. “Sir, I’ve been robbed three times. You’re holding a water pistol.” She peered at him over her half-moon spectacles

The would-be robber Santa started backing away. “No, it’s not.”

A rough looking customer, whom Terri had unfortunately overheard asking the pharmacist about the best treatments for foot fungus, squinted at the weapon. “Hey, she’s right.”

There were a few grumblings from some of the other customers, annoyed at being held up with a water pistol. Terri couldn’t tell whether they were angry at having their time wasted or because he didn’t have the decency to bring a real gun.

“Stay back,” warned Santa.

He walked backwards until he was next to the door. The rough looking man started to get to his feet when the door flew open, smashing into the wannabe robber and knocking him out cold.

“Terri!” boomed Mal.

“Mal!”

He ran forward and pulled her to her feet. “I’ve been calling you for the last half hour; I was getting worried.”

“Oh! I put my phone on silent in the car while I was singing ‘The Wheels on the Bus’ to Seth. How did you find me?”

He shrugged and rubbed her shoulders. “‘Where’s my Mate?’ app on my phone.”

“There’s actually a ‘Where’s my Mate?’ app?”

“Sure, it just tracks your phone, though. I don’t have you chipped if that’s what you’re thinking.” He pouted slightly before looking at the baffled customers and the Santa he knocked out. “Ah, what’s going on?”

“Santa Claus was trying to rob the pharmacy with a water pistol,” offered the woman from earlier, helpfully.

“What?!” roared Mal, his eyes flashing at Terri. “Were you hurt?”

“No, I remained comfortably dry throughout the whole ordeal.”

“But you could have been! Hurt I mean, not wet,” argued Mal.

Her eyes flicked over to the unconscious Santa. “Santa really should know better.” She looked back at Mal. “You don’t even have to try to be my hero, do you?”

“I always try, baby,” he murmured, cupping her cheek.

Terri smiled and pulled him down for a soft, brief kiss, mindful that Seth was sandwiched between them and trying his best to chew on his biscuit with only the beginnings of a couple of teeth. Mal kissed Seth’s head, who in turn gave a little growl in fear that Daddy was trying to take his biscuit away. The babble of voices started as other customers got to their feet and the pharmacist called the police.

Mal looked around the pharmacy, seemingly seeing it for the first time. “What are you doing here? They sell this stuff at the grocery store in town.”

She smiled, sheepishly. “I just wanted a little privacy, and I didn’t want someone else telling you what I was buying.”

He looked slightly fearful. “Why? What wouldn’t you want me to know?”

“I didn’t want to worry you... or get your hopes up... I really had no idea how you would react so I just thought I would find out before I told you.”

Now he turned to confused. “Told me?”

Terri took a deep breath. “When I had food poisoning a couple of weeks ago...”

“I told my mom not to feed you clams,” Mal grunted.

“The clams aren’t the point. Anyway, I was throwing up, and I think I must have thrown up my pill.”

“What pill?”

“The pill, *my* pill!” she hissed.

He frowned before it slowly dawned on him. “You mean...”

“Yes, I drove to this pharmacy, to buy twelve pregnancy tests, I already used them in the bathroom, and they’re all positive.”

Mal gaped at her.

"I wasn't trying to hide it from you, I just, you know... it's such bad timing. We're still living with your parents, our house isn't remotely finished, Seth's so young, I'm not working, I'm still carrying baby weight, I was so sick during the last pregnancy... But you know my chances of getting pregnant are so small that I don't..."

He silenced her with a kiss. "Baby, I'm thrilled."

Terri felt her eyes moisten. "You are?"

"Of course I am, and all that other stuff – we'll figure it out."

"Really?" she sniffled, as happy tears trickled down her cheeks.

"You, Seth, you're amazing. I'd have a dozen if I could."

"A dozen mates or a dozen babies?" she asked, trying not to giggle.

Mal wrapped his arms around his mate and his pup. "A dozen pups, you're all the mate I need."

"You see why we need to take it easy this Christmas when it comes to buying presents?"

He looked pained, and Terri narrowed her eyes. "You already bought the polar bear, didn't you?"

"Well, Uncle Greyson was heading to Darlington so he said he'd pick it up for me."

"Mal!" She slapped his arm, lightly and Mal let out a theatrical ouch. Seth smiled. *He found Mommy hitting Daddy to be very amusing.*

"It'll be fine, baby," said Mal, soothingly. "We can still have an amazing Christmas."

"I don't want to alarm you, but my mother said she would give us an allowance if we moved in with her. If we're not careful, it may come to that."

He tried to repress his shudder, and even Seth seemed a little subdued. *Her mother wasn't exactly a warm person.* "Baby, I can pick up extra shifts. We'll find the money. I'll work a two hundred hour week if I have to, just to make sure my family has everything they want."

A couple of female customers let out some awws.

Terri smiled. "There're only one hundred and sixty-eight hours in a week, but I appreciate the sentiment. And to be clear, we," she caressed Seth's head, "only want you." Mal grinned, goofily. "Also, let's not bother with presents for each other this year. We'll consider the new baby our gift to each other. So Happy Christmas."

"And to think, some men get golf clubs for Christmas. They don't know what they're missing. Love you, baby."

"Love you, too." Seth burred. "And you, pumpkin."