

Party Time

“Okay, everyone, when you’re in there, try not to make any sudden movements. In fact, try to stand still as much as possible so we don’t spook them. Also, it’s probably best to speak in a quiet voice, and maybe not laugh at jokes too loudly... also, it’s probably best if you don’t tell the joke about the wolf, the bear, and the skunk, Mr. Tanner.”

Hank Tanner huffed. “Well, if I can’t tell my joke then this won’t be much of a party. It’s hilarious.”

His three sons, Eric, Craig, and Mal nodded dutifully, while Hank’s mate, Ellie, and Mal’s mate, Terri, rolled their eyes.

Britt smiled apologetically. “Yes, it’s... very funny,” she said doubtfully, “but you have to remember that Missy’s family aren’t like you guys, they’re very quiet and quite straitlaced. Whereas, you’re... ah... you’re all...”

Every member of the Tanner family looked at her expectantly, interestedly, and Britt lost her nerve.

“Are you trying to find a polite way to say uncouth?” asked Ellie in amusement.

Britt blushed. “Oh, no, I don’t think you’re uncouth, Mrs. Tanner. Or you, Terri. Or your pups, of course,” she added as she looked over the two young boys. However, her eyes grazed over the rest of the male contingent of the family, and she decided to stop there.

Apart from Terri, who was human, they were all wolf shifters, and members of the same wolf pack. They had been invited to a New Year party at a bunny shifter family’s house. The bunny shifter in question was called Missy, and, as well as being Britt’s best friend, was dating Eric Tanner – something that gave Britt some very mixed feelings. But, Missy was besotted with him, and Britt couldn’t deny a few warm and fuzzy feelings of her own toward a Tanner boy. She glanced up at Craig, he beamed at her, her wolf growled happily, she giggled, Mal made a gagging noise, and then Terri elbowed him.

Missy’s parents invited the Tanners because their daughter was dating their son, or at least that’s what Missy said. Britt was surprised that Missy’s parents wanted to make the effort, especially for Eric. But, while Britt had her doubts about Eric, Missy wanted to be with him, so it was important that the evening go well. However, given that most Tanner family shindigs ended in a fire, a food fight, or someone jumping off the roof, it might be an uphill struggle.

“Britt, honey, you’re worrying over nothing,” said Ellie with a beatific smile, “I’m sure we’ll all be... fine.” She faltered a little as she looked over the males in her family. “Actually, perhaps you should listen to what Britt says.”

The males let out a few protests and she hushed them. “No bad language, no rude jokes, no taking your shirt off because you feel hot...”

“One time,” muttered Eric.

“No taking your pants off because you feel hot...”

“One time,” muttered Hank.

“And you two, my darlings,” she cooed at her grandsons, “no biting any little rabbit kits.”

“We’re keeping a firm grip on them,” reassured Terri, who smiled at her sons affectionately, though not forgetting that her eldest had once chewed his way through the bars of his cot.

Ellie sighed. “At least I managed to persuade Darryl to stay away – I’m not sure I could contain all five of you at once.”

Their second eldest – an inveterate prankster – had made other plans.

“You don’t have to contain us, Mom,” grumbled Mal, “we know how to behave in public.”

Terri started choking in a way that suspiciously sounded like muffled laughter. Mal rubbed her back and made soothing noises.

“Surely, they’ll be okay with you, m’boy,” said Hank, slapping an arm around Eric’s shoulders.

“They’ve met you, right? They know you.”

Eric had been invited to the Christmas Eve party. Britt had already heard all about it.

“Well, yeah, it was fine,” said Eric simply. “I mean, I accidentally ate one of her mom’s candles that was in the shape of a cupcake – didn’t taste too bad by the way. I broke the door off the refrigerator when I was getting a soda out of there. Also, her grandma nearly choked on some nuts she was eating when I kissed Missy in front of her – she had to go to the hospital and everything. Oh, and I might have broken this antique vase when I was showing her uncle a couple of wrestling moves. But yeah, other than that, it was all fine.” He smiled as everyone blinked at him. “What?”

“Nothing,” said Craig, with a smirk. “Just thinking how lucky Missy is.”

“Yeah,” agreed Eric cheerfully.

“Do you think maybe one of us should ring the doorbell now?” suggested Terri. “I mean, we have been standing out here for a while now.”

They looked around, collectively, and yes, it probably was starting to verge on weird just how long they had been out there.

“Okay, here goes,” said Britt, pushing the bell.

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Missy breathed in and out a few times as Britt introduced Missy’s parents to Eric’s family. Eric caught her eye and winked, and if a wink could be lascivious, his certainly was. Missy blushed as her inner bunny simpered adoringly. Then she saw her mom looking at her in disapproval and she went back to looking at her feet.

She knew Eric’s family were nice. She knew they wouldn’t intentionally upset hers. It was just that her family were not quite so... so... boisterous as the Tanners. But, after Christmas Eve, when she introduced Eric to her family, it was necessary for the two families to meet.

Missy watched as her parents warily said hello to everyone. Though, when it came to the pups, her mom relaxed and cooed over them. Her mom was a sucker for babies.

“What little angels,” trilled her mom, Sylvia.

“Yes, yes, they are,” agreed Terri, watching her pups closely.

“When are you due?” asked Sylvia, indicating Terri’s pregnancy.

“Month and a half,” replied Mal proudly, his eyes flashing possessively. “Another boy.”

“How lovely,” said Sylvia sincerely.

If there was one thing bunny shifters approved of, it was large families. It was rare to find a bunny shifter family with less than five children. Missy was one of eight.

“Grandkids are a blessing,” rumbled Hank. “Not long until you have one,” he beamed at her dad, Ted.

Sylvia looked stricken while Ted’s eyes nearly popped out of his head. Missy’s inner bunny buried her head in her paws.

“Missy is our eldest,” said Ted, looking at her.

“Missy, you’re not...” stammered Sylvia.

“No, definitely not!” cried Missy as everyone looked at her in interest. Her inner animal wanted to melt in shame.

“Oh, I didn’t mean it like that,” said Hank evenly.

“I’m sure Missy won’t know anything about that kind of thing until she’s mated!” declared Ted, puffing out his small chest.

Craig snorted and Eric slapped his head. Both her parents stared at her in horror. Her bunny chattered.

“Why don’t I get us some drinks?” she squeaked and scampered away before anyone could say anything else.

Missy dodged past family members, saying hello, ignoring questions as to why she was beet red, until she made it to the kitchen. A couple of seconds later, she let out an eep as two large hands grasped her arms. Her bunny cheered up for a second, but only a second.

“Hey,” rumbled Eric soothingly.

“Oh, Eric,” she whispered, burying her head in his chest.

“It wasn’t as bad as you’re imagining,” he dismissed, rubbing her back.

Missy pulled back to look at him. "Eric, within two minutes of being introduced, your dad unintentionally suggested I might be pregnant, and then your brother all but confirmed the fact that I'm no longer a virgin and that we're sleeping together!" she whispered.

"Yeah, and it could have been worse," he said smiling.

Missy gaped at him and he chuckled. "C'mon, babe, they would have figured it out eventually. I mean, they should realize I can't keep my paws off you."

His hands ran down to her butt and he lifted her onto the kitchen counter so their heights were a little more even. He pressed a kiss to her lips and her inner animal sighed contentedly.

"I think my grandma's already aware after she nearly choked when you were groping me at Christmas."

Missy blushed but she giggled softly and put her arms around his neck.

"You are an adult, babe," he said gently.

"I know," she sighed. "I suppose if I want a wolf shifter slobbering all over me there's nothing they can really do to stop it."

"Damn right!" he growled and covered her mouth for another kiss.

Choking noises a few moments later alerted them to the fact that grandma had spied them again.

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"I can't believe your dad said that," giggled Terri

"Hey, he didn't mean anything by it," Mal said, holding up his hands. "He just meant that, you know, soon, they're bound to be grandparents too."

"You're saying the same thing but in a slower voice."

"He was being nice."

Terri patted his chest. "I know, sunshine, but we have to watch what we say. Who knows, one day, we might all be related."

Mal groaned. "And I thought your mom was bad."

Terri pressed her lips together to stop herself from laughing. Her mother was rather prudish and completely disapproved of everything Mal and Terri did with regard to their pups, and Mal and Terri completely ignored her.

"Well, just think, if either of your brothers mate Britt or Gwen, we'll have Hans Lucas as a family member."

Britt's sister, Gwen, was dating Mal's brother, Darryl, and Britt and Gwen had a rather... scary older brother, who definitely did not approve of any of the male members of the Tanner family.

Mal barked in laughter, scaring a couple of bunny shifters. "Worth it just to see the look on Hans' face."

Terri laughed and rubbed her hand in circles over his chest. Mal growled lustily.

"My parents have the boys; let's go make out in one of the bedrooms."

"We can't do that," murmured Terri, giggling. "Can we?"

Mal smirked and took her hand.

Terri bit her lip. "Okay, but only for a few minutes – we're supposed to be trying to make a good impression."

His eyes flashed excitedly as he led her upstairs.

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"I hope Missy's okay," said Britt as she bit her lip.

She had been mingling in the party, hoping to smooth over any unintentional problems that may have arisen by putting wolves, bunnies, and alcohol together. But, somehow, she found herself maneuvered into a corner by Craig, and both she and her inner wolf were reluctant to leave it.

"I'm sure they're fine," rumbled Craig dismissively as he leaned a little closer.

"No thanks to you," she said with a roll of her eyes.

Craig frowned. "What did I say?"

"Nothing, but her parents could be in no doubt as to what Missy and Eric have been doing in private thanks to you."

Britt blushed even as she thought about it. Missy had told her, of course, in an embarrassed, delighted kind of way.

Craig shrugged, not at all concerned. "I'm sure Eric will charm her parents."

Britt scoffed. She didn't find Eric particularly charming – more oafish than charming, but a strangely high amount of people on the planet did seem to like Eric. Though, she noted a lot of them were female, and that rather bothered her. She didn't know why, as it didn't seem to bother Missy all that much. But, Missy was her friend, and in the future, she wanted Missy to be a part of her life, and that might be difficult if they broke up, especially as Eric was likely to be her brother-in-law...

Her eyes widened as she realized the direction of her thoughts, and gaped at Craig in horror. Her inner wolf yipped. She tried to avoid thinking too much about the future, about potentially mating anyone, but well...

"What's wrong?"

"Umm, nothing," she gulped. "Ah, just thinking how nice this party is."

“Yeah, I suppose so.”

“You seen Missy?” asked Eric, appearing behind Craig.

Craig glared at him. “No, buzz off.”

“Everything okay?” asked Britt, pushing Craig out of the way, rather thankful for the interruption.

Craig grumbled under his breath.

“Yeah, sure,” muttered Eric, though, without much conviction.

Britt looked up at him worriedly.

“It’s fine,” he said. “Go back to what you were doing.”

Britt flushed. “We weren’t doing anything.”

“Your lipstick is smeared.”

“It can’t be; I’m not wearing any.”

Eric smirked at her and she flushed even more. Craig growled at him and he walked away, snickering.

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“Oh, Missy, there you are,” said Sylvia.

“Mom, umm...” Missy stammered as she held a plate of mini spring rolls.

Her inner bunny cringed. She had hoped to avoid her parents completely for the next... four to six months. But, it was not to be. Her parents were surprisingly prudish about sex considering how many children they had. Plus, after finding her parents’ mating celebration photos – which they had tried so hard to hide – Missy already knew from her mom’s stomach that she was a guest at the celebration.

“Look, about what...”

“Come along, darling,” said her mom, briskly. “There’s someone here who wants to meet you.”

“There is?” murmured Missy in surprise.

Didn’t she already know everyone there? They were mostly family and one or two warren members.

“Yes, now, Missy, this is Mark.”

Sylvia pushed her toward a young man maybe a few years older than herself. He too was a bunny shifter, and was smiling in a benign, mystified way, as if he too didn’t know why Missy was being thrust at him.

“Umm, hi,” she squeaked.

“Hello,” he said jovially.

They stared at one another. “Ah, spring roll?” she offered, holding out the plate.

“Sure.”

Mark took a couple, ate them, and then said how good they were.

“Mark’s in college at the moment,” said Sylvia, smiling widely.

“Is that so?” murmured Missy as her bunny got a definite sinking feeling.

“Yep, I’m studying economics. You’re in college too, right?” he asked politely.

“Yes.”

She wondered where exactly her mom had produced Mark from, but it didn’t really matter. Bunnies had large families, so he was probably just a cousin of a warren member, visiting for the holidays. Missy had family members in every single state – even Alaska.

“Well, I should really mingle with these,” said Missy, indicating the spring rolls.

“Oh, I’ll take those,” said Sylvia hurriedly. “You talk to Mark.”

Sylvia damn near snatched the plate away, and after some serious eyebrow wiggling, she left them to it.

Missy chewed on her lip and awkwardly looked at Mark.

“Umm, I...”

She was trying to think of a polite way to leave when a familiar growl sounded.

“There you are,” cried Eric amiably. “I’ve been looking all over for you.”

Her bunny chattered happily as he strode over and immediately draped an arm around her. Eric was smiling, but she sensed a strange tension in him.

“Oh, Mark, this is Eric...”

“The boyfriend,” he rumbled. His smile never slipped, but he didn’t seem altogether happy.

“Nice to meet you,” said Mark, noting nothing amiss. “Are you...” He paused as his phone beeped. On pulling it out, he smiled. “Sorry, it’s my girlfriend. She’s on vacation with her family over New Year. I better call her and wish her a Happy New Year. See you later, guys.”

Eric relaxed as Mark walked away.

“Everything okay?” she asked timidly.

“No,” grumbled Eric, “I think your parents have invited dozens of bunny shifters here to throw them at you to see if one will stick.”

“Dozens?”

“Well, other than him I saw at least two. Jeez, why invite my family and then set you up with other guys in front of me?”

Missy and her bunny sighed. “They didn’t invite your family. I did. I only told my parents you were coming an hour again.”

Eric frowned. “I thought you were afraid to introduce them. You were almost hyperventilating the last time we talked about it.”

“I know but...” She hesitated as one of her younger sisters flitted through the room. “Let’s go up to my bedroom.”

Eric’s face lit up and she was quick to squash any thoughts he might have had in that direction.

“To talk,” she clarified.

“Yeah, that’s fun too,” he agreed, following her up the stairs.

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“Oh, I’m so sorry – he doesn’t usually bite,” lied Ellie as she pulled Seth, her eldest grandson, away from the iPad he was trying to chew on. “I’m sure it will still work with teeth marks.”

“I once ran over mine with a truck,” said Hank, who was holding their other grandson, William, up high, away from biting temptation.

“And it still worked?” asked the doubtful bunny shifter, eyeing the iPad.

“Oh no, it was absolute toast. I’m just saying it could be a lot worse than teeth marks.”

Ellie gave him the look – the look he’d seen a thousand times before whenever his boys had done something bad and he needed to step in. His wolf groaned.

“And we will pay for the damage,” he said.

It was a sentence he’d said a thousand times before too. Nearly bankrupted them when their boys were young. He was kind of hoping that he was past that stage of his life, but since Mal and Terri weren’t about, it was down to them.

Other than the iPad, everyone seemed to be behaving themselves. In fact, he’d barely heard a peep out of any of his boys. Though, he couldn’t actually spot any of them, and given that the crowd rarely got any taller than five-foot-seven, and all his boys were at least six-foot-six, he would have spotted them quickly. Well, they were staying out of trouble at least, leaving Ellie to charm the bunny shifters. His wolf growled proudly. His gorgeous mate could charm the birds out of the trees. He’d actually seen her do that once. Well, she growled so loudly she scared the birds out of the trees, but it was close enough. Even Missy’s skittish grandma relaxed around Ellie, not to mention all of Missy’s younger brothers and sisters who had already engaged Ellie in two games of hide and go seek.

“Have you seen Missy?” asked Ted, looking mildly harassed.

“No, but I’m sure she’s around here somewhere. It’s a wonderful party,” said Ellie, dazzling him with her beautiful smile.

It was lost on Ted. Humph. Oblivious bunny shifter grumbled his wolf.

“Hmmm.”

Ted’s eyes darted around the room, clearly searching for his daughter.

“It was such a good idea for us all to meet,” continued Ellie. “I know my Eric is just crazy about Missy.”

Ted looked at her in disbelief. “Hmmm.”

“What does that mean?” rumbled Hank, frowning at the small bunny shifter.

“Hank,” murmured Ellie.

“Well, nothing really,” said Ted, blanching under Hank’s frown. “But... but I know what male predators are like.”

His wolf snorted. “What are we like?” asked Hank, almost in amusement.

“You... you lead girls on and then... then... drop them as soon as something better comes along. Oh, your son may be crazy about my Missy now, but, in a couple of weeks, he’ll meet someone else and Missy will be completely forgotten. I’ve seen it happen to plenty of prey girls. Predators only want one thing!”

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“Eric!” chided Missy as she slapped at his hands. “I was serious, I just want to talk.”

Eric rolled his eyes exaggeratedly and his wolf panted excitedly. He didn’t know why it should be exciting to be in Missy’s bedroom, it just was. It was all pink, pretty, stuffed with Care Bears, and smelled like Missy – amazing.

“Fine,” he sighed theatrically. “Let’s talk.”

He reverentially placed himself on her bed – oh, the holiest of holy places, and pulled her down beside him.

Missy gave him her cute, scrunched up nose look. Rawr.

“I invited your family because, since Christmas Eve, my mom and dad have been really... okay about us being together.”

Eric looked at her, expecting more. “And that’s a bad thing?” he asked slowly.

Missy shook her head. “No, they’ve been okay about me dating you – I mean, they haven’t been happy about it, but they’ve been okay, because they’re so sure that in a week or so you’ll forget all about me and find a wolf shifter or someone else... more appropriate.”

Both man and beast growled in objection.

“They kept saying it over and over, they were sure that you would get sick of me, so I invited your family to show that this is serious, that you’re not about to get sick of me, and that I’m not just some dumb bunny for wanting to be with you. Also, until they met your family, they were sure that we hadn’t done anything more than kiss – so that might have changed things a little.”

“Yeah, well, your family’s just going to have to get used to me, because I’m not going anywhere.”

His wolf howled in agreement and Missy beamed.

“So, that’s why I only told them last minute that you guys were coming. Sorry, I should have warned you.”

“That’s fine – I’m sure my family can cope.”

“Also, I didn’t know my parents were trying to set me up with random bunny shifters.”

Grrr. “Doesn’t matter,” he rumbled.

He had made sure everyone at the party knew they were dating, and well, it seemed unlikely that any of the males would be willing to risk life and limb for a chance to date a bunny shifter they’d never met before. Of course, he’d risk life or limb for her, because he knew she was worth it, but, thankfully, they didn’t.

Eric smirked down at Missy and she shook her head.

“Come here,” he crooned.

“Nuh uh, if you get too playful you’ll break my bed – it’s designed for one curvy bunny shifter. Not one curvy bunny shifter and one enormous wolf shifter who’s feeling frisky.”

Eric chuckled and pulled her into his arms. She giggled and they kissed, and moments later, the bed broke.

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Ted’s face kept getting redder and redder, and the room, quieter and quieter throughout his mini-speech. Hank was mildly impressed with the outburst. He could tell that none of Missy’s family were very dominant, and it had taken a lot of guts to say that to a couple of wolf shifters. Still, his wolf was mightily pissed at that moment.

“Hank,” said Ellie warningly.

Hank inhaled and went against the wishes of his wolf – who was all for using the bunny as a chew toy. “I’m sorry you feel that way,” he said slowly. “But my son is not some mindless animal chasing your daughter, trying to ravish her senseless!”

A crash sounded overhead and Ted squeaked. "That came from Missy's room!"

He gave Hank a scowl and whipped up the stairs with Hank and Ellie following. They found Missy and Eric coming out of Missy's room with sheepish expressions.

"We broke my bed," admitted Missy, her face creasing with worry.

Ted sounded like he was choking.

"Wonderful timing, m'boy," grumbled Hank.

"We were just sitting on it," said Eric.

"What happened?" rumbled Mal.

He and Terri appeared looking mighty disheveled.

Ted gawked at them. "Were you in my guest bedroom?"

"No!" denied Mal as Terri blushed.

"Your shirt's inside out and back to front, dear," remarked Ellie drolly.

Mal groaned.

"What's happening?" asked Sylvia as she, Britt and Craig joined the unexpected crowd outside Missy's bedroom.

"Perhaps we ought to go," suggested Ellie kindly. "The last thing we want is to ruin your party."

"This is all my fault," mumbled Missy screwing up her face. "I'm sorry, Mr. and Mrs. Tanner. My parents didn't invite you – I did. I just wanted to prove to my parents that Eric and I... well... that we..."

"This is all my fault," said Eric.

"How?" wondered Missy.

Eric shrugged. "I don't know. I was just showing solidarity, babe. But, Teddy, Sylvia..."

Everyone apart from Ted, Sylvia and Missy sighed.

"I gotta say that, I appreciate you don't like me, but I'm not going anywhere – so you're probably going to have to get used to me." He grinned apologetically and his wolf snickered.

"You're not good enough for my daughter," said Ted uncertainly, temporarily overcoming his inner beast's submissive nature in a misguided attempt to protect his daughter.

"I agree," said Eric, just as Missy said, "That's not true."

"But, you hating me won't get rid of me," said Eric in his usual good-natured way.

Neither he nor his wolf saw Missy's parents as any kind of obstacle – a pack of ravenous velociraptors, now there was an obstacle you would be hard pressed to get around.

"There's no shame in being hated by your female's father," said Hank knowledgeably. "Ellie's father's been trying to get rid of me for years. He once tried to pay me five grand to break up with her."

"Did he?" asked Ellie wondrously – apparently this was the first she'd heard of this. "His last offer to me was twenty thousand to leave you. At the time, you were trying to learn the trumpet, so I admit I considered taking him up on it for a while."

Hank looked horrified and she giggled to show she was kidding. Though, anyone who had heard Hank's efforts on the trumpet wouldn't blame her.

Ted paled slightly. "I just realized I'm doing to you what my father in law did to me," he said slowly. "He hated me on sight and desperately tried to get rid of me and set Sylvia up with lots of other males."

"My father doesn't hate you," denied Sylvia, "he just... he's just strict. I'm sure it's the same for you," she said, looking at Ellie.

"Oh no, my father loathes Hank with the fire of a thousand suns – that's a direct quote," laughed Ellie.

Hank nodded.

"Dad," murmured Missy quietly, "I know you're wary of Eric because he's a wolf, but we... well... we..." She blushed profusely before trying a different tack. "Well, it doesn't make any difference to us. And... and I am an adult, so really, I can... umm... date..." Missy started stammering, completely unused to being forceful.

"And she can date whoever she wants," finished Eric with a grin.

Ted and Sylvia exchanged looks. "You're right," murmured Sylvia.

Ellie beamed. "Perhaps we should all go downstairs and enjoy the party. It won't be long until the New Year, and until this we were having a lovely time. Oh, by the way," she said as she handed baby Seth to Mal, "he's been chewing on an iPad, so we may have to pay for that."

Mal groaned as he took his son. "What is wrong with the wooden teething rings I got for you, little man?"

"And this time," continued Ellie, glaring at her sons, "we'll stay downstairs and away from the bedrooms, and, Hank?" she prompted with the look.

Hank groaned. "We'll pay for the damage to Missy's bed, and if there's any damage to the guestroom," he glared at Mal and Terri, "we'll pay for that too, and..." He looked at Craig who shrugged and Hank nodded in approval that his youngest son had been staying out of trouble so far. "Well, I guess that's it for now."

"Thank you," murmured Sylvia.

Hank shifted William in his arms who was squirming, and gave Ted a mildly sympathetic look. “You know, if it’s any consolation, if I had a daughter, I wouldn’t want her dating my son either.”

Everyone stared at him.

“Maybe you should rephrase that,” giggled Terri as she took William into her arms.

Hank waved a hand dismissively and gave Ted a playful slap on the shoulder – he shot forward too fast. “You know, Ellie and I have been together for over thirty years, and her dad still calls me ‘that idiot wolf.’”

Ted chuckled, only slightly nervously. “Yes, we’ve been together over twenty and my father-in-law just calls me, ‘him.’”

“Mine won’t put my name on Christmas cards and regularly calls to ask if we’re still together.”

“Mine tried to...”

Hank gently led Ted back downstairs as they regaled one another with stories of fathers in law from hell. Ellie slipped an arm through Sylvia’s, and started leading her away as well, complimenting her on her carrot cake and asking for the recipe.

Terri, Mal, Craig, and Britt filtered downstairs, leaving Missy and Eric.

“Now, where were we?” rumbled Eric, eyes flashing.

Missy pouted at him.

“Oh right, we were going downstairs.”

Missy pulled him down for a kiss and he growled softly into her mouth.

“Thank you,” she murmured.

“What for?” he asked dreamily as his wolf sighed at her lovely carrot cake scent. She both smelled and tasted incredible.

Missy smiled sweetly. “For what you said.”

Eric’s forehead creased as he tried to think about what he had said. He hadn’t thought it was particularly astounding, but it appeared to have done the trick with both Missy and her parents – though his family helped a little there.

“I do love you, you know.”

His inner wolf howled happily and Eric grinned. “You almost said that to your parents.”

“I know.” Missy flushed. “I decided not to – one small thing at a time. For now, why don’t we go downstairs and have some carrot cake – my mom makes amazing carrot cake.”

He snickered. “My favorite.”

They kissed again and they went back to the party. He couldn't wait for the new year to start, something told him it was going to be even better than the past year – and that had been pretty amazing.

The end