

Boundaries

“Gah! Fucking hell!”

“Language, dear,” admonished the deceptively small and willowy human.

Troy clutched his mate to him, willing his heartbeat and his inner bear to calm. His mother-in-law hovered at the edge of the bed.

“Wha...?”

Hilary stirred against him, and he instinctively patted her baby bump. Or rather, their baby bump. He was allowed to call it *their* bump; it was the other stuff he wasn't allowed to refer to as 'theirs'. He had stopped calling it *their* nausea and *their* morning sickness after Hilary threw a hissy fit while shopping for a crib.

“I brought a cup of coffee for Daddy, and caffeine free herbal tea for Mommy,” declared Josephine.

Troy gave her a slanted look of disapproval, which she either completely ignored or missed. He wasn't exactly thrilled at being called 'Daddy' by his mother-in-law, but that wasn't what bothered him most. He thought he would get used to waking to find his mother-in-law watching him, but no if anything it was getting worse. He woke up to pee at 2 am and found her roaming the hallway. She offered to fix him something to eat, but he declined. He went back to bed and she... well, he assumed she carried on with her roaming.

His bear growled in frustration. His mate would probably be unhappy if he tried locking her in her bedroom at night.

Josephine had been lonely, and they had talked about it and decided to ask her to come live near them. She took that to mean that she could come live with them immediately and take over their small condo. But it made Hilary happy, so he didn't really see that he had a choice. Troy didn't like to admit it, but one day they might have his parents move in with them – and his domineering mother was a million times worse than Josephine. Plus, it wouldn't hurt for Troy Jr. to have his grandmother around. And, she was definitely moving into her own place. As soon as she found one she liked. None of the others she'd looked at had been adequate. There was the one with the strange smell. The one with the noisy neighbors. And not forgetting the one that Josephine was sure was haunted.

Josephine placed the cups on the bedside table and slipped over to the window, dragging the curtains open with Mary Poppins-like glee. “It's a beautiful day outside; you really shouldn't waste it in bed.”

Hilary squinted at her mother. “Mom, we've talked about this, you really shouldn't come in here while we're sleeping.”

Josephine waved her hand. “Nonsense, I'm sure Troy doesn't mind.”

“Ah...”

“Now I’m going to make a huge breakfast for my grandchild.”

She marched out of the room and Hilary buried her head in his shoulder.

“Let’s run away from home,” she mumbled.

Troy chuckled and stroked their bump. “I would, but you know my mom would just track us down.”

He wasn’t kidding. He wouldn’t put it past his mom to track him across the entire country. All his family members were grizzly bear shifters, but his mom was a particularly strong shifter, dominant even to his dad. His parents were supposed to be enjoying their retirement, traveling around the country in their RV. But the moment his mom found out that Hilary was pregnant with her first grandcub, she hightailed it back to town to try and smother them to death with her overbearing love. She appeared to be tag-teaming them with Josephine – despite their differences the two women got along like a freaking house on fire.

Hilary and her mom were both human. While Josephine was small, skinny and looked like a slightly strong wind would knock her over, Hilary was tall, curvy and built like a goddess. *His goddess*. His bear roared in smug approval as his other hand lightly massaged her ass.

The bear growled with mounting excitement. “Do you think we have time to...”

“Breakfast!” yelled Josephine.

His arousal deflated, and Hilary giggled into his shoulder. He’d ignore her and carry on but Josephine had no boundaries, she’d just march on in there even if she could hear the moans. She didn’t seem the least embarrassed after catching the two of them making hot, passionate love the last time. Troy couldn’t look her in the face for two days after that – especially after Josephine complimented him on his extraordinarily taut butt.

“Let’s have sex in the shower – we’ll jam a chair against the door,” murmured Hilary.

Troy and his bear practically panted. “Have I told you you’re perfect recently?”

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Hilary squeezed Troy’s hand as he led her into his parents’ house. He patted her stomach, and she gave him an indulgent smile. He was sweet, really. Since she found out she was expecting, he’d been obsessed with caressing her stomach. At four and a half months, it was still a tiny bump, but Troy treated it with such reverence – who was she to complain?

They said their hellos to Troy’s mom and dad, his two older brothers and their mates and finally, Tate – Troy’s irrepressible identical twin. Tate beamed at Hilary and went in for a hug, quickly making a detour when Troy snarled.

Josephine immediately started helping Troy’s mom, Deedee in the kitchen. Deedee was a control freak when it came to cooking – much to the chagrin of her daughters-in-law, but for some reason, she had no problem with Josephine helping out. Hilary supposed that for all

their differences, they actually had quite a few similarities, too – like their shameless attempts to interfere in their children’s lives.

Hilary looked up to find Troy frowning at his father. *Uh oh.* Griff – Troy’s dad – had a sympathetic look on his face. She hadn’t seen that look since Deedee invited herself on her eldest son’s romantic Valentine’s Paris getaway with his mate. The couple had not been pleased. However, this time, his sympathy appeared to be directed at them.

Deedee and Josephine came out of the kitchen bubbling with excitement. Troy tensed, and she could feel his unease through their bond.

“I have a surprise for you two,” declared Deedee.

Josephine clapped her hands together.

“Oh?” said Troy in suspicion.

Deedee passed him an envelope. Troy dropped Hilary’s hand and gingerly opened it.

“What’s this?”

“I opened a bank account for the baby – I thought it could be his or her college fund.”

Josephine practically bounced on the spot. “Isn’t that wonderful?”

“There’s a thousand dollars in it,” murmured Troy.

“Thank you, that’s very generous,” said Hilary, warmly.

“Who the fu... heck is Bailey Harris?” asked Troy, roughly.

“The baby, of course,” said Deedee, shaking her head.

“Bailey?” repeated Hilary.

“It’s tradition in my family. I named my oldest child after my grandfather, and now you can, too. Lucky Bailey’s such a good name for a boy or a girl.”

Well, that certainly explained why his oldest brother was called Mycroft. But Hilary wasn’t going to let this one go.

“We haven’t even talked about names,” she protested.

“And now you don’t have to,” said Deedee.

“But...”

“It really is a nice name,” added Josephine, “and it saves you the stress of having to think up a name.”

“I wouldn’t mind the stress!” snapped Hilary.

“Sweetheart, there’s no need to be rude,” chastised Josephine. “Deedee is being very generous.”

Hilary flustered unhappily. “I wasn’t, I...”

“Mom,” growled Troy. “This is...”

“No need to thank me. Dinner in five.”

She bustled back into the kitchen with Josephine following. Griff squeezed Hilary’s shoulders affectionately.

“I’m sorry, kids.”

Troy scrubbed a hand down his face. “They have to be stopped.”

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“Here,” said Deedee after the meal. She handed Hilary a bottle of green, sludge-like liquid.

“Um, thanks, what is it?”

“A healthy shake. While you were using the bathroom, I stood outside the door and scented that your urine was a little off. I don’t think you’re eating enough vegetables. You have to bear in mind that you’re probably carrying a bear cub, and shifter pregnancies are a little different to human pregnancies.”

Hilary gaped at her. *Did she mishear her?* “I’m sorry, are you saying you smelled my pee?”

“Of course, I’ve been doing it ever since you got pregnant.”

“But you smelled my pee?” she repeated slowly.

“Yep, drink that up, and it’ll get you right back on track. I’ve given Josephine the recipe so she can make it for you, too.”

Deedee patted her shoulder while Hilary stared at her. She couldn’t have been more shocked if Deedee had told her... actually she couldn’t think of anything equally shocking at that moment.

Hilary looked at the sludge. *She smelled my pee.* What the hell!

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Knock, knock, knock.

“Be out in a few minutes,” rumbled Troy.

He poured some more of Hilary’s fancy vanilla cupcake shower gel into his hand and smoothed it over his skin. Usually, she didn’t mind how he smelled when he came home from work, but since becoming pregnant she’d been very sensitive to smells, and paint made

her puke. Plus Hilary loved the damn shower gel. Whenever he used it, she was very apt to kiss him all over – *all over*.

Knock, knock, knock.

“Two minutes.”

He turned off the water and opened the shower curtain, freezing as the door opened.

“Don’t mind me,” said Josephine, scuttling inside.

“Josephine!” His bear snarled as he covered his man parts.

“I just need to borrow Hilary’s perfume. I can’t find mine.”

“Josephine!”

“Oh hush now, I don’t mind that you’re naked, and really, you have nothing to worry about. You have a very nice body.”

His bear roared at the word nice.

She grabbed the small glass bottle and smiled in what was supposed to be a reassuring manner. It had the same effect as if all his female relatives had converged and were discussing his winky... *just like they did on his eighth birthday*. It made him cringe and want to curl up into a ball, and that was definitely his worst memory of when he was a kid.

Fuck, he needed to replace the lock on that door. He had planned on a quiet night with his mate, but no, the lock came first.

“Hilary!”

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Troy held out his hand to his mate, rumbling as she placed her own slender, soft hand in his.

Hilary smiled beatifically. “Thank you for driving me today.”

“My pleasure.”

His bear growled. He neglected to mention the fact that his possessive bear had absolutely insisted that he go with her. She’d needed to see a client out of town and Troy took the day off so he could drive her there and back. He had an odd job business with his twin brother, Tate. They could pretty much make their own hours, and it wouldn’t hurt Tate to carry him once in a while.

Hilary was an interior decorator and often – against his bear’s stern wishes - traveled to see big clients, sometimes even spending the night away from him. Or at least she tried. In the year they’d been together, she’d needed to spend the night away from him three times because of late meetings, early starts etcetera, etcetera. Each time he surprised her by

showing up at her hotel. The four-hour drive there and back was worth it just to spend a couple of hours with her.

Hilary let out a whale of a yawn, while stretching her luscious body.

Troy kissed her under her ear. "We better get you into bed."

"Mmmm, good idea... Daddy."

"Not funny," he grumbled.

Hilary snickered as she slipped her arms around his neck. "You don't like me calling you Daddy?"

"No," he grouched. "Your mom's ruined that for me."

"Oh, honey. C'mon, let me make it up to you."

Hilary took his hand and led him into the condo. Her face immediately turned green, and he grunted at the smell of fresh paint.

"What's going on?" he muttered.

"A painting burglar?" she suggested before slapping her hand over her mouth and rushing to the bathroom.

Troy growled and followed the smell into the spare bedroom, wincing as he heard Hilary barfing. "What the fuck?" Really, he had no idea what was happening.

"Language," admonished Josephine.

He stared at the newly painted walls – blue with white, fluffy clouds, and then glared at all the furniture in the room. He and Hilary had looked at furniture and discussed decorating – she had loads of ideas – but they hadn't made any decisions. His mom and his mother-in-law smiled at him while Tate grimaced and mouthed that it wasn't his fault.

"Surprise," said Deedee.

"What did you do?"

"We decided that this would be best for the baby. I'm sure I read somewhere that babies found clouds comforting because it reminded them of their mothers' wombs."

Troy really didn't think that was true, but that wasn't the point he wanted to dwell on at that moment. His bear snarled as he heard Hilary groan.

"Enough," he bellowed.

Josephine and Deedee blinked at him while Tate nodded in approval.

"Something wrong, pumpkin?" asked Deedee, uncertainly. "We spent a lot of time..."

“Mom,” he warned. “We appreciate your help. We know you’re excited. We love you both. But we need to have boundaries. We – me and Hilary - are going to choose the name of the baby. We want a say on how our nursery is decorated. No more watching us sleep. No more walking into the bathroom while either of us is naked. And definitely, definitely, no more smelling pee!”

He was visibly shaking as his bear roared.

Deedee was the first to recover from his outburst, which considering his mood was actually pretty eloquent and devoid of growls. Deedee was still upset.

“Fine, if our help isn’t wanted, we’ll leave. Come along, Josephine.”

She strode out, followed by Josephine, who was casting hurt little glances at Troy.

Tate slapped his back. “Good for you. You know Mom used to smell my pee when I was a teenager. She thought I was on drugs.”

“Sometimes you were.”

“Yeah, that’s why I did all my business in the woods.”

“Get out.”

“Kiss Hilary for...”

Tate beat a hasty retreat as Troy shot him a murderous look. He let out a breath, opened a few windows to get rid of the paint smell and went to the bathroom, to comfort his poor mate.

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“I hope our moms aren’t too upset,” said Hilary as they slowly walked up the drive to Troy’s parents’ house.

“Too bad if they are,” Troy grunted.

They had enjoyed a glorious few days alone before they couldn’t avoid seeing their mothers. It was Mother’s Day, after all. Although things were shaky, they had brought flowers and cards – soft things that wouldn’t hurt too much if they were used as weapons.

“You did the right thing - they were driving me insane, too. I just don’t want to bear a grudge.” She elbowed him, gently. “Get it? Bear a grudge.”

He sighed. “You don’t have to do that every time you use the word bear.”

“You love it.”

“I love you.”

Troy wrapped his arms around her and pulled her in for an impromptu kiss, only broken when Griff cleared his throat. Troy glared at his father as Hilary’s cheeks burned red.

“They’re waiting for you.”

“That sounds ominous,” murmured Hilary.

They found Josephine and Deedee sitting at the kitchen table with matching grim expressions.

“Thank you for coming,” said Deedee.

Troy pulled a seat out for Hilary, and they both sat down.

“Look,” started Hilary.

Josephine held up a hand. “No, sweetheart. Let us say what we have to say.” She paused before blurting. “We’re sorry.”

“You are?”

“Very sorry,” agreed Deedee.

“We know we interfere,” said Josephine.

“But we just love you so much.”

“And we want to be involved as much as possible with our grandchild.”

“But we promise we’ll take a step back.”

“Not completely.”

“Maybe just a tiny step.”

“And we’ll let you make the decisions.”

Deedee reached across the table and patted Hilary’s hand. “And I will let you use the bathroom in peace.”

“And I’ll stay out of your bedroom completely,” said Josephine. “In fact, until I find my own place to live, I’m going to stay here with Deedee and Griff.”

“Mom, you don’t have to do that. We want you to stay with us,” protested Hilary, ignoring the brief look of horror on Troy’s face.

“Nonsense,” she chuckled. “You two need your time alone. You should savor it before the baby comes along.”

Hilary opened her mouth to object again, but Troy jumped in. “Thank you.”

Hugs were exchanged, and Deedee shoed them out of the kitchen so she and Josephine could finish dinner.

“You know, after all this, I actually kind of like the clouds,” said Hilary when they were out of earshot.

“Yeah, me too.”

“And that green sludge was delicious.”

“I’d keep that to yourself.”

Troy placed a hand on their baby bump, and his handsome face broke into a grin. His bear rumbled possessively. “Happy Mother’s Day, Mommy.”

“Thank you, Daddy.”

The end