

Scrooge McSnake
(Supernatural Bounty Hunter
Romance Short Story)
By E A Price

“Must you?” grouched Marcus.

Ling turned around and graced her mate with a guileless look. “What?”

Marcus waved his hand around. “Must you decorate the office like this? It’s too much.”

Ling clucked her tongue. “Nonsense, Scrooge McSnake, it’s perfect.”

He rolled his eyes and cast a look of loathing at the tinsel, baubles, mistletoe, streamers, candy canes, and wreaths currently adorning practically every spare inch of wall space.

“Supposed to be a place of business,” he muttered grumpily.

With her shifter enhanced hearing, Ling heard him and gave him a disapproving glare. Her panda mewled softly. This was their first Christmas together, and she was determined that it was going to be a memorable one.

“There’s nothing wrong with a bit of Christmas spirit,” she admonished gently.

Marcus huffed and turned to go back into his office.

She childishly stuck out her tongue and carefully climbed a stepladder to place another piece of mistletoe on the ceiling. The stepladder wobbled a little and she squeaked. Within seconds, two strong, capable hands were clutching her hips.

“Christ Ling, are you trying to give me a heart attack?!”

She turned slightly to see his bright green eyes were stormy, and his nostrils were flaring. She imagined his inner boa constrictor was hissing up a storm at the moment.

He’d been overprotective of her since the moment they met, but ever since she’d discovered she was carrying twins, he’d really gone into overdrive. She could barely sneeze without him going on high alert and driving her to the ER. *That doctor was not amused.*

Okay, so maybe she shouldn’t be climbing a stepladder in her condition, but she was a shifter, and a damn hardy one - she was hardly made of glass. She decided to make light of it, to try and sooth her seething mate.

Ling wiggled her substantial butt in his grasp and smiled naughtily. “Maybe I just wanted to get you in this position.”

Marcus shook his head and pursed his lips, although she could tell that his eyes had softened a little. He rubbed his thumbs in circles. “Beautiful, all you had to do was ask.”

Ling felt a powerful surge of arousal. She placed her hands over his and was about to suggest they adjourn to his office for a bit of afternoon delight when he looked at the front door sharply. He let out a soft snarl as Carly and Jackson came barreling through.

Unsurprisingly, they were arguing.

The fox and the wolf shifter had been mated longer than Ling and Marcus, and seemed to delight in bickering, then having noisy, athletic make-up sex, and then bickering again.

“Come on, foxy, how the hell did you expect me to react? His hand was on your tit!” snarled Jackson.

Carly let out a sound of irritation. “I said I would handle him, oddly enough it wasn’t the first time some drunken lout had tried to feel me up!”

Jackson snapped to attention. “Who else has tried? You give me all their names, and I will fucking hunt them down and make them pay!”

The fox shifter rolled her eyes theatrically. “Shocking, you’re jealous again. Real attractive, wolfy,” she sneered.

Ling sighed and allowed Marcus to help her down the ladders. *Her libido was firmly in check again.* While her foxy childhood friend might find these pointless arguments to be foreplay to explosive sex, Ling didn’t share that quirk. When she argued with Marcus, sex was the furthest thing from her mind. Probably because when they argued it wasn’t playful, it actually meant something. Marcus could be colder than a polar bear’s butt when the mood took him, and Ling was grateful that he was rarely angry with her.

Nope, Ling liked to be wooed into bed. She liked to be complimented and... *oh, who was she kidding?* All Marcus had to do was raise an eyebrow at her, and she virtually dropped her panties and begged him to take her heaven.

“What are you arguing about now?” asked Ling in practiced exasperation.

“He treats me like a child!” snapped Carly.

“She lets other men feel her up!” growled Jackson.

“The hell I do!”

“Alright, settle down, guys,” said Ling soothingly, “what happened?”

Jackson started, “We were...”

“We were on the trail of our Santa Claus shoplifter – the hippo shifter,” interrupted Carly with a dismissive pout. “He missed his court date two days ago, so we were trying the different stores to see if he was working at one. But it’s really hard to identify someone with the suit and the beard so I had the brilliant...”

“Insane,” murmured Jackson.

“*Brilliant,*” insisted Carly, “idea of waiting in line to sit on Santa’s lap.”

Ling wrinkled her nose as Marcus snorted. “Isn’t that just for kids?”

Carly waved a hand dismissively. “Kids and kids at heart. If you slip the elves ten bucks they’ll let anyone sit on Santa’s lap. Anyway, the first two guys were a bust, plus they weren’t overly happy about me sitting on them – they said I was kind of heavy.”

The corners of her mouth drooped down in displeasure and Jackson harrumphed.

“Dumb, weak assholes, wouldn’t know what to do with a real woman,” he muttered, making Carly flush with pleasure.

“Anyway, the third guy actually kind of, umm, enjoyed me being there and he, ahh, got kind of handsy.”

“Handsy?!” roared Jackson. “The dickhead was trying to get into your bra!”

Carly shook her head. “No, he just tried to cop a feel. He was just a drunken, old Santa; it was no big deal. He certainly didn’t deserve to have his arm broken!” she shouted accusingly.

Ling looked at Jackson with wide eyes. “You actually broke Santa’s arm?” Her voice was a horrified whisper.

Marcus raised his eyebrows. “Was it the guy you were looking for?”

“Sadly, no,” admitted Jackson.

“Did anyone see you do it?”

Carly choked out a laugh. “Oh, only about thirty kids, all their parents and mall security.”

Marcus narrowed his eyes. “Is anyone pressing charges?”

Jackson grinned. “Nah, the guy was drunk as a skunk, and he tried to punch me first. The mall execs are trying to hush it up.”

The snake shifter shrugged. “Huh, no harm done then.”

Ling looked at him incredulously. “No harm done? He broke Santa’s arm!”

“He’s not the real Santa,” he told her patronizingly.

“That’s not the point!” she snapped. “He broke Santa’s arm in front of all those kids. He could have ruined their Christmas! How would you feel if he did that in front of our kids?” She rubbed her stomach for effect but Marcus was unrelenting.

“I figure we won’t bother lying to our kids about Santa, what’s the point?”

Ling’s mouth gaped open. “Are you kidding me?”

Marcus frowned. “No, what’s the big deal?”

“The big deal?” she spluttered. “Every kid deserves Santa Claus. Right, Carly?”

The fox shifter nodded emphatically. “Absolutely, and no kid deserves to see a jealous wolf shifter going loco on Santa either.” She eyed Jackson crossly.

Jackson threw up his arms. “I was protecting what was mine.”

Carly folded her arms. “Meaning me?”

“Yes, you. You belong to me; no other man gets to touch you, and I don’t care whether that man happens to be dressed as Santa or the freaking Easter Bunny! You are mine. What I did was justified. Right, Marcus? Wouldn’t you do the same if it were Ling?”

“Absolutely,” replied Marcus without hesitation.

Ling and Carly cried out in objection.

Ling looked at her mate searchingly. “You cannot seriously condone what he did?”

Marcus cocked his head on one side; his mouth quirked. “It’s no worse than what he usually does.”

“But it’s Christmas!”

“So? It’s overrated; I’d be happy not to celebrate at all.”

“But those children...”

Marcus laughed maliciously. “Will forget all about it when the spoiled brats get all their brand new toys on Christmas morning. They could care less about some old guy in a red suit.”

Ling creased her brow. *What about if they were their brats?*

Her panda wailed unhappily. Why was he so curmudgeonly about Christmas? How had this never come up before? She wanted a mate who would join in with the festivities and the magic of the season. *Why couldn’t he just get with the program?*

“I have some shopping to do, for Christmas,” Ling said quietly, her voice trembling with emotion. “Can I go, please?”

Marcus blinked at her in surprise, and his snake rumbled queasily at her sad tone. “You don’t have to ask permission to leave, Ling.”

She nodded automatically and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek before grabbing her purse.

“I’ll come with you,” Carly declared, giving her own mate a haughty look. “This whole place has a grinchy atmosphere.”

She blew Jackson a kiss, *sarcastically of course*, and he growled in return.

They left, and Jackson started complaining about his mate. She never listened; she never did as she was told; she was argumentative; she was far too sexy for her own good when she was angry... It was the standard spiel, and he said it anyway even though he knew the two of them would kiss and make up within hours. Jackson had nothing to worry about. Marcus, on the other hand, was a little more concerned about his own mate’s reaction.

Ling made small 'uh-huh' noises while Carly complained, complained and complained again about her mate, but otherwise the red panda shifter remained quiet, thinking about her mate.

Surely, she was overreacting. *So what if he didn't like Christmas?* It wasn't that big of a deal. So they may have to forgo a few of the things that Ling had envisioned in their perfect first Christmas together, but, no big deal.

Just because she wouldn't get to enjoy sharing eggnog with her mate while curled up on the sofa watching horrible Christmas movies. Just because they wouldn't leap out of bed at the crack of dawn and excitedly rip open their gifts to see what the other had bought them. Just because they wouldn't snuggle up in bed on wearing their new Christmas pajamas and tell each other how wonderful their day had been together...

Nope, no biggie. They were very happy together. And even if Christmas Day were just like any other day, it wouldn't make her any less happy. It just made her a little disappointed. Her panda mewled in agreement.

Carly gripped her arm as they moved around the department store.

"Holy Kris Kringle!" she muttered.

"What?" Ling looked in the direction to which Carly was openly staring.

"That Santa, I'm sure that's the guy we're after. Can't you smell hippo?"

Sure enough, there was a man dressed as Santa, and boy was he good. No fake beard or pillow up the jacket for this guy, he looked every inch of the real Santa. His cheeks were ruddy, and his blue eyes sparkled as he walked around the store letting out 'ho, ho, ho's and ruffling delighted children's hair.

Unfortunately, no one was really focusing on him for very long, so they didn't see him swipe the pair of gloves and stick it in his pants. Nor did they see the perfume bottle he hid in his beard or the cashmere scarf that got shoved down his coat. *Except for Carly and Ling, of course.*

"Let's follow him," whispered Carly excitedly.

"Ummm..." Ling bit her lip, and her panda took on a rabbit-in-the-headlights stance.

It wasn't that Ling didn't trust Carly's skills as a bounty hunter... *No, it was that.* It was absolutely that. The first time Carly had duped Ling into tagging along on one of her hunting expeditions, Ling had ended up naked, chased around by a knife-wielding shark shifter, eye-fondled by said sneering shark shifter and covered in gazpacho soup. Not an altogether happy memory.

"Why don't we call Jackson?" suggested the panda shifter as the fox shifter started tugging her in the wake of the Santa shoplifter.

Carly let out a sound of disgust. "We don't need that meathead tripping us up."

Alarm bells started ringing in Ling's head. No, not alarm bells, these were full on foghorns designed to keep ships from crashing into rocks. *Or maybe designed to stop fox shifters from getting red pandas seriously maimed.*

"We?" squeaked Ling. "Us?!"

"Yeah, I just need you to pass me to cuffs when I take him down."

Sure enough, Carly pressed a pair of pink fur-lined cuffs into her hand.

"They were a Christmas gift for the bonehead – he loves that kind of thing," Carly said in reply to Ling's unasked question.

"He likes to tie you up?" Ling knew just about every detail of Carly's sex life – the fox shifter didn't hold back, but somehow she had never heard about the use of cuffs.

Carly gave her a sidelong smirk as they hid behind a rack of scarves. She kept one eye on Santa, who appeared to be trying to put a smoked sausage down his pants. "Actually, he's kind of getting into being tied up. We have this scenario where I've got him tied to the bed, and I'm dominating him, and then he escapes and shows me the error of my ways... and then after that I dominate him some more."

Carly took on a wistful, almost drunken look. "Do you and Marcus ever do anything like that?"

Ling, *in spite of being very comfortable with sex*, actually blushed a little. She couldn't imagine her controlling mate would ever allow himself to be handcuffed or restrained in any way. He never tried to tie her up either. *He didn't have to.* Unless she was being deliberately naughty to get a rise out of him, she did as she was darn well told.

She opened her mouth to answer but instead let out a yelp as Carly gave her arm a punishing squeeze.

"He's leaving!" growled the fox shifter. "Come on."

They fled through the store in pursuit. Ling threw the items she had intended to purchase at an unsuspecting sales assistant. She gave him an apologetic shrug as Carly mercilessly tore toward the exit.

They got outside and... ran smack dab straight into Santa.

He oofed and staggered forwards a few steps. Spinning round, he gave them a murderous glare that soon evaporated when he realized they were two lush, young women. He beamed at Carly but positively lit up like the Northern Lights when he saw Ling.

Carly was the first to recover and elbowed Ling. "Gee, Santa, we're so sorry, we didn't hurt you, did we?"

Santa twinkled at them and puffed out his large chest. "As if you two tiny, little things could hurt Santa."

Carly fluttered her eyelashes so quickly she almost blew him away. "Ooh, Santa," she cooed. "We were actually trying to catch you."

His expression turned to frosty suspicion. "You were?"

Ling wanted to make a run for it. She wasn't fast, but she was fairly certain she could outrun the huge guy in front of her. *Unless he shifted to his beast and then she was done for.*

The fox shifter wasn't in the least worried. She simply nodded her head and said, "Yep, we both, love, love, love Santa, and we, umm," she paused to bite her lip and gaze at him through her eyelashes, "we were hoping we could sit on your lap."

Ling let out a small groan and got another elbow for her troubles. Did Carly actually expect her to sit on this gross guy's lap? Given the hungry looks he was throwing her, he was definitely interested.

Nuts to that.

"Well, I wouldn't want to disappoint a pair of gorgeous women at Christmas." He gave them both a leer and Ling's panda shuddered.

Carly inclined her head at the bar across the street. "Why don't we go and get a drink, and see where the night takes us?" Carly was trying to get him drunk enough to actually willingly put on the cuffs and allow himself to be led back to the cops.

She wagged her eyebrows about like there was no tomorrow. Ling couldn't believe this guy was actually buying her friend's incredibly unsubtle flirting. *Did he honestly believe they were interested?*

"Sounds like fun," he answered in a husky voice.

Yep, clearly he did.

Carly giggled and bounced excitedly as she slipped an arm through his. Reluctantly, Ling did the same with his other arm

And the day had stated out so well...

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"What the fuck did she think I was going to do? She was sat on his lap, and his damn tentacle hands were all over her!"

Marcus gripped the steering wheel and tried to count to ten. *One... two...*

"The guy was a shifter anyway; it's not like his arm won't heal."

Three... four... five...

"She's as stubborn as a mule, and she only does it to rile me up."

Six... seven... eight...

“I’ll bet she’s out there right now trying to track him down; I’ll bet she’s dragged Ling with her to scour the department stores for him.”

NINE... TEN... “What?!”

Marcus could just about stand listening to Jackson’s constant complaining about his fox mate, but the idea that she had put his own little panda in danger was too much. He and his snake were at breaking point.

He roared. “I swear to god, Jackson...”

The surly wolf shifter waved his hand dismissively. “Carly wouldn’t let Ling get hurt; they’ve been friends forever. She spends more time talking to Ling than she does to me.”

If Marcus wasn’t so wound up, he might have laughed at the jealous tinge in Jackson’s voice. Not that he could really make fun of the wolf shifter, he had also felt an irrational stab of jealousy over Ling’s closeness to the ditzy fox shifter on more than one occasion.

It’s not that Marcus didn’t have friends. Well, he had a friend – a lion shifter – but they sure as hell didn’t discuss their sex lives with one another, and they weren’t able to communicate without talking. Unlike Ling and Carly.

No, for him, Ling was his whole world. His whole world who had looked hurt and crumpled when he last saw her. He could easily dismiss it as being down to her pregnancy hormones, and his snake was all for that – as far as the beast was concerned, everything could be blamed on those damn, bastardy hormones, but the man knew it wasn’t true.

She was disappointed about Christmas.

As much as Marcus didn’t want to disappoint her, it was hard to shake away the anger and anguish he had come to associate with the holiday season.

He wasn’t worried about losing Ling. *Nope, she was his through and through.* He’d mated, bitten, bonded and impregnated the luscious little panda, and there was no escape in sight for her. But she could always regret choosing to mate with a cold snake, and that thought bothered him more than he could even admit to his beast.

Ling was a lively, beautiful, young woman who could have any man she wanted, but she wanted him. *So every other man could go stuff it.* But that didn’t mean that she wouldn’t sometimes lament being with him.

He needed to do something about that. His snake grumbled; it wasn’t in his nature to change, but for his mate he was willing to do anything to keep her happy.

“Over there,” rumbled Jackson, cocking his head at a seedy little bar.

Marcus parked, and they got out to talk to a weasel shifter who emerged from an alley.

The weasel was a previous skip of Jackson’s and had spotted their Santa bounty in a department store. He had called to say the hippo was last seen sauntering into the bar in

the company of two hot, curvy women. Jackson slipped the guy twenty bucks for his trouble and sent him on his way.

“Wonder where he got the money for the women?” sneered Jackson.

Marcus pushed his way into the bar. His reply caught in his throat as he spotted the hot, curvy women. Or rather, as he spotted his hot, curvy panda shifter currently writhing in the Santa’s lap as Carly struggled to snap some cuffs on him.

Marcus bellowed his fury in time with his snake. He rushed to them. Snatching his mate up, the hippo shifter let go of her in surprise. Marcus howled the word ‘mine’ and sucker-punched the hippo. He stumbled backwards, and various items seemed to fall out of his person, including, but not limited to, a four-pack of stockings, a travel alarm clock and a set of moustache combs.

Santa rubbed his jaw and would have retaliated against Marcus were it not for the solid weight of a massive wolf hitting him, quickly followed by the smaller, but no less determined, heft of a fox. The hippo went down, and after suffering numerous bites they were able to subdue him and get him into a pair of cuffs.

Ling blinked at Marcus before she gasped and slumped against his body.

Oh, fuck.

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Ling awoke to the enchanting sensation of someone kissing her stomach. She feigned sleep for a few more minutes, trying to hide the smile threatening to creep over her face as the kisses became more insistent. But when the talented mouth lavishing those kisses travelled further south, she was powerless to stop the whimper that escaped her lips.

Marcus chuckled against her clit. “Knew you were awake, beautiful.”

He sucked her nub into his mouth, causing her hips to buck against him.

“Know it all,” she breathed, keeping her eyes closed and concentrating on the exquisite feelings his ministrations incited.

He hummed, sending delicious vibrations through her. He slung an arm over her hips keeping her in place as he gently nibbled on her tender flesh, before soothing it with his tongue. A finger snaked its way into her drenched channel, followed by another. They caressed her inner walls, easily finding her sweet spot and manipulating it for all he was worth.

Ling tried to control herself, and make the moment last as long as possible, but within a few minutes it was too much for her. Her body began shaking as pleasure tore through her body and an orgasm swept over her.

Her little beast howled excitedly. She clutched her mate’s head to her sex, and she cried out in ecstasy.

Ling felt as soft as cotton and fell against the bed limply, a dazed look of satisfaction on her face as Marcus unhurriedly laved his tongue over her slit, tasting her sweet honey.

“Oooh, what a lovely way to wake up,” she crooned.

Marcus snickered as he climbed up over her body and nestled between her legs. Instinctively, she wrapped her arms around him and rubbed her hands up and down his back.

“Glad you approve. How are you?” The laughter was gone from his voice to be replaced by steely worry.

“Hmmm?” Oh right, yesterday... An unexpected morning orgasm had been just about enough to make her forget her own name. “I’m fine.”

She’d fainted at the bar, *and been mortified about it*. When dangers afoot, what does she do? Comes down with a fit of the vapors, apparently. She’d soon woken up to find herself in the ER, naturally. She was fine; she just needed to eat more often. The babies were taking a lot more out of her than she thought, and the doctor suggested she started eating a total of nine small meals a day to keep up with their demands. *Eep!* Even with her hearty appetite that sounded daunting. *But, she was told that snake shifter babies needed a lot of protein...*

“You’re not still mad, are you?”

Ling opened her eyes in surprise and gazed up at his handsome yet anxious face. “Mad? What do I have to be mad about?”

Marcus shifted slightly rubbing his engorged member against her already sensitive clit. Ling let out a moan and in spite of his uncertainty he smirked.

“I thought you were mad about me not liking Christmas.”

Her expression clouded and he deflated a little. His snake hissed at him. *There was far too much talking and not nearly enough coupling for the beast’s liking.*

She surprised him by smiling and running a hand down his cheek. “I’m not mad, just sorry that you don’t enjoy it as much as me. It’s my problem, not yours.”

“No, it’s not a problem. I’ve just never been one for Christmas, my parents weren’t exactly loving, we didn’t really ever celebrate anything in our house. Snakes aren’t generally affectionate or kind.”

“You’re both those things,” she insisted as she rubbed his nose with hers.

“Yeah, well, I’m abnormal.”

“No, you’re perfect.”

Ling hooked her legs round him and was gratified to feel his manhood grow even harder against her.

He let his body rest against hers and nuzzled his head into her neck. "Plus, I kind of stopped wanting to have anything to do with Christmas after what happened with Kelly."

Ling sucked in a breath at the mention of his first wife. Marcus and Kelly had been friends in the end, but their breakup had been painful, and Marcus didn't like talking about it.

"I found out she was cheating at this time of year and she walked out on me on Christmas Eve."

Her panda twittered at her. "I'm sorry, honey."

Marcus groaned appreciatively. "It doesn't matter now; it's just kind of hard to stop associating Christmas with pain. I avoided the festive spirit like the plague for over a decade, and it's difficult to get back into the swing of things."

Ling kissed his neck. "We don't have to do anything. We can just stay in and pretend it's not happening. It'll be fun; we'll just lock ourselves in the house with only each other for company."

He chuckled. "Yeah, that sounds like heaven to me, but that's not what you want, and I want you to be happy, and when our kids come along, I want them to be happy too."

She felt herself close to tears. *Crazy pregnancy hormones*. "But not if it comes at your expense, I don't want you to be unhappy," she sniffled.

"Beautiful, this is the happiest I've ever been in my life, and it's all because of you. I spent most of my life being angry or miserable, but since I met you, I finally feel like I'm alive. As long as I have you, I can never be really unhappy."

Tears streamed down her cheeks. "Soppy snake," she croaked.

His body shook in silent laughter, and he raised his face to look at her. She giggled as he licked at her tears.

"That tickles," she pouted.

"Made you laugh, though."

"So, would you be okay if I got a tree for the house?" she asked tentatively.

"Beautiful, I want this place decorated from top to bottom. I want an embarrassing Rudolph sweater, a hideous light-up tie, I want to go caroling and drink egg nog for breakfast, and eat figgy pudding for supper. In other words, I want the works. I want a big, no holds barred Christmas, and no matter what I say I don't want you to stop. I want to be bombarded with Christmas spirit; I want a full-frontal assault, so that I can't help but give in and surrender to the holiday festivities."

Ling blinked at him in shock, and even her panda was quiet. *When did he become so verbose?* “I think that can be arranged,” she said seriously.

They both burst into laughter.

He recovered first. “Now if we’ve finished talking, I really need to be inside you, because I’m pretty sure my balls are turning blue.”

“Aww, you say the sweetest things,” she chided playfully.

Marcus angled her hips and pushed inside, eliciting a lusty moan as her eyes rolled into the back of her head. He snagged her wrists and pinned them over her head as he started taking her with long, leisurely thrusts. “Merry Christmas, beautiful.”

“Merry Christmas, honey.”

He took her mouth in a searing kiss as she surrendered to her desire. *Yep, it was going to be a very good Christmas.*