

Christmas Party Mystery

“Will you stop it!” chastised Penny as Diaz’s hand slipped down past her waist a little too far.

Diaz grinned remorselessly and Penny rolled her eyes, giggling, while her inner penguin swooned. Her jaguar mate was relentlessly naughty.

“What? I was just wondering what underwear you were wearing under that itty-bitty dress.”

“You’ll find out later,” she murmured, as she flushed in delight. “For now, behave,” she ordered and pushed the door bell.

Though, it wasn’t said with much conviction. She knew the chances of him actually behaving himself were pretty slim, but that was one of the many why she adored him. She understood from his friends that he had been an incorrigible flirt before they met – riling many males by flirting with their mates. Now, though, he was still an incorrigible flirt, except his real flirting was all for Penny, and instead of flirting with other women, he just shocked them with mischievous innuendos, which in turn had the desired effect of annoying their mates.

The two of them had met on Christmas Eve, so she loved this time of year. They met during a hostage situation during which they were tied together – literally. He had his gorgeous hands all over her, she felt his unbelievably hard body against hers, a little flirting and some saving of lives later and they were inseparable.

Now, they were attending some friends’ Christmas Eve party. They worked with Diaz at the Supernatural Enforcers Agency, and she was looking forward to a fun night. Given the temperaments of Diaz’s friends, there was bound to be some kind of argument or punch up at some point.

His hand once again roamed over her generous derriere and she sighed, though not out of annoyance. No, she loved his wickedness. Before she met Diaz, she worried she was resigned to a life with either a dozen cats or mated to a boring, squat, penguin shifter dentist. Yes, when she brought Diaz to her parents’ home on Christmas day, they had indeed produced a middle-aged, twice-divorced, paunchy penguin shifter for her – declaring they would make a cute couple. Ugh. Diaz proceeded to put an end to that potential set up by openly pawing at her in front of her family and not so subtly hinting about the things they got up to in private. Yes, it had been both hilarious and horrifying. But, she would say one thing for Diaz, he was never boring.

“I love you, so much,” she said with feeling.

Diaz smirked. “Of course you do.”

Penny rolled her eyes and he kissed her. Not just a quick peck to the cheek either, no it was x-rated, and his hands were everywhere. But oh, how could she stop him – having this sexy man fawning over her was incredible. Besides, she doubted she could have stopped him even if she wanted – like she said, he was incorrigible.

“Ahem.”

At the sound, Penny tried to push him away, but nope, that did no good. He didn't really care if anyone was watching. But, they had been together for a while now, and Penny was no stranger to these situations – mostly they happened in front of her parents for maximum embarrassment. But, she knew what to do.

“Grrr!”

Diaz growled and pulled back from her and as planted her very sharp heel in his foot. The high-heeled pumps had been a good idea.

He pouted at her and she beamed at him. Erin laughed at both of them as she stood back from the doorway.

“Hey, guys, Merry Christmas, come on in.”

Penny wiggled her butt as she went and he growled that he would get her later. Oh, she was sure he would.

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“Stop fidgeting, you look amazing,” chided Avery. “Doesn't she look amazing?” she asked her mate, Winston who was currently curled around her.

“Yep,” agreed Winston, who would agree with her no matter what she said.

“See?”

Her little sister, Aimee looked like she had ants in her pants. She wouldn't stop moving. While Avery was wearing her usual jeans and t-shirt, Aimee had specifically gone out shopping to buy a fancy dress for the party. Well, Avery wasn't just wearing any t-shirt – her t-shirt said, ‘ho, ho, ho,’ on it, and then Winston's said, ‘now I have a machine gun.’ They were matching Die Hard t-shirts, which nobody seemed to get – honestly, did no one watch Christmas movies??

Aimee, though, had made the mistake of going shopping with their friend Isis – a shameless tiger shifter, who had no qualms about the amount of skin she showed on a daily basis. But Aimee, while very beautiful with a lovely curvy figure in Avery's opinion, was a very shy lion shifter. That was something to do with being the smallest of the lionesses in their family, and always bullied by the others. Isis, who was also a bully, had talked Aimee into buying a tiny, slinky dress, which highlighted every single curve, and barely reached past her butt.

“People are looking at me,” hissed Aimee as she tried to pull her skirt a bit lower.

Winston looked around. “Guys are looking. They probably think you're hot,” he said practically.

Avery had to stifle a smile. Her sister did look hot, there was no doubt, but Winston only had eyes for Avery. Her wolfy mate was so adorable. Avery squeezed him a little tighter and his glasses started to steam. She worked for the supernatural enforcers agency, while Winston ran a comic book store, and he also had a secret caped crusader side – he was her dream guy.

“I'd be flattered if guys looked at me that way,” Winston added evenly.

“I’d be jealous,” retorted Avery, chuckling.

Her inner lioness snarled. No, she’d be murderous. He was her adorably, geeky, wolf shifter – and no one else should look!

Avery soothed her. It was a nice party – they were not going to go crazy over nothing and ruin it. She was sure there was someone else here who was bound to blow up and ruin it rather than her. A glance around the room found quite a few potential candidates, not least her roommate, Wayne, who appeared to be staring daggers at a member of the enforcers tactical team. Though, that might be something to do with the way he, in turn, was leering at Aimee.

Sigh. She just hoped someone else was going to rush in and stop the fighting. She had one arm around her honey, and mug of eggnog in her other hand, and she did not want to move an inch.

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“Honey, would you mind getting in more beer from the garage?” asked Erin as she tossed some more ice into the bucket

“Hmmm?”

She looked up to see her huge polar bear mate, Gunner, staring at the party goers. Erin bit her lip for a moment, enjoying the sight of her sexy mate, but she pulled herself together. She got to enjoy gawking at him every day. Right now, she needed more beer. Most of her party guests were shifters, and it took a lot to get them drunk, so they had bought in a huge amount of alcohol to keep them going. Pricey maybe, but when they were talking about holding this party, everyone was agreed they would be happy to chip in twenty dollars each and loads of people had brought things with them.

Both Eric and Gunner worked for the Supernatural Enforcers Agency, as did most of their friends. Unfortunately their office party this year was cut short by a hostage situation, so everyone agreed they wanted another party outside of work. Since Eric and Gunner had a large house, they agreed they would host. Gunner’s mom and dad, who were visiting for the holidays, were currently babysitting their three babies.

Erin blinked as she had a flash of what was happening in the party. She was a psychic, and while her visions were sporadic, sometimes she saw exactly what she needed.

“Gunner, honey, just ask Lake to keep an eye on him.”

Gunner spun around to look at her. “What?”

Eric shrugged. “I had a vision of Wayne trying to pummel Smith. Just ask Lake to make sure Wayne doesn’t do anything crazy. That is what you were worried about, right? You could see that Wayne was thinking about going for his throat.”

Not that she would particularly blame Wayne if he did attack – Smith was a fairly repellant tiger shifter, who, in spite of her being mated, had tried to hit on her several times. He had not told

Gunner, lest the giant polar bear try to murder Smith. She did not fancy having conjugal visits with her mate.

He gaped before grinning. “Damn, babe, you are good.”

Erin blushed before trying to smile modestly. She was a fairly powerful psychic, that couldn’t be denied. Gunner wasn’t always comfortable with her visions, so she was pleased that he wasn’t getting upset about them now.

“Other than Smith irritating people, is everything going okay out there?”

She was rather enjoying hosting the party, and if this went well, she was considering making it a yearly tradition. It just seemed like such a warm, coupley type of tradition – and after feeling adrift for so many years, she was all making traditions.

“Zane and Sky won’t come out from under the mistletoe,” chuckled Gunner. “Which is causing quite an issue with Wes who was wanting to use it on a few females.”

“Oh,” giggled Erin.

“Boris and Cecile already left, and so did Juliet and Ryder.”

Erin smiled; they couldn’t wait to get back to their babies – she knew the feeling all too well.

“Oh, now Rick is showing people more pictures of his cub. Humph – he’s kind of insufferable.”

Erin arched an eyebrow, thinking that the lion shifter couldn’t possibly be more enthusiastic about showing people pics of his cub than Gunner was. He used to haunt the agency building looking for people to inundate with the thousands of pictures he used to take. He’d calmed a little since they were newborn, though, not by much.

“More than you were?”

Gunner frowned for a moment before grinning and striding over to her to sweep her into his arms. He kissed her and squeezed her and chuckled in happiness. Hey, it was hard not to be happy at this time of year. All their friends were here, no one had started fighting – yet, and they were having a family Christmas tomorrow with their unbelievably adorable triplets, his parents, brother, sister-in-law, and naughty but cute nephews. Erin couldn’t wait.

“You happy, babe?” asked Gunner as he cradled.

“So happy,” she breathed with feeling.

How could anyone not be happy right now?

Cutter stomped into the kitchen and growled on seeing them entwined. Though, some people managed to be grumpy no matter what.

“No more beer,” grunted the sullen wolf shifter.

“It’s in the garage; I’ll get some,” rumbled Gunner.

“No, I’ll do it, don’t let me interrupt you,” snorted Cutter grouchy as he stomped away.

Cutter was actually Gunner’s closest friend- the two were very close. But, it had to be said that the wolf was, in general, pretty grouchy, and he didn’t do well in crowds of people, particularly ones who kept wishing him, ‘Merry Christmas.’

Erin and Gunner chuckled and kissed again.

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Aimee squirmed uneasily and her inner lioness whined. She fidgeted in the uncomfortable dress – she couldn’t help herself. Oh, wearing it had been such a stupid mistake. She had wanted to make someone notice her – a certain laidback gator shifter, but perhaps Isis hadn’t been the best person to seek advice from on getting a man to realize she existed. As, despite being wrapped up like a Christmas turkey, the guy she wanted to impress was looking at everyone but her. When he wasn’t chatting to the new member of the tactical team – the lissome Lara. Grrr.

Aimee sighed and shuffled over to her purse.

“Hey,” purred a voice at her elbow.

Aimee flinched slightly, but her lioness just grunted disinterestedly. She looked up into the smirking countenance of Smith. She didn’t know everyone at the agency yet – she was still in training, and not officially an agent – but bad news like him traveled fast.

“Oh, umm, hey,” she replied unenthusiastically.

“Annie, right?”

“No, actually...”

Smith ignored her completely. “I heard you’re new at the agency.”

“Well, I’m still...”

Again, he didn’t seem interested in hearing anything she had to say.

“Soon we’ll be working together shoulder to uh,” he glanced down for a long leer at her breasts, “shoulder.”

Her lioness rolled her eyes. Jeez, this guy had all the wit and charm of Zapp Brannigan.

“So, maybe we could...”

“Excuse me, she interrupted loudly – to make sure she got his attention. “I need to use the bathroom.”

Smith nodded and looked at her critically. “Yeah, couldn’t hurt to touch up your make up.”

“Yeah, thanks,” Aimee muttered.

She grabbed her purse and made her way to the bathroom as fast as she could in her heels. She almost collided with Lucie who was coming out.

“Oh, hi!” trilled the hedgehog shifter as she realized it was Aimee.

“Hi.”

Lucie’s pretty face immediately creased in concern. “Are you okay?”

Yes, other than feeling a little foolish at the fact that she thought a skimpy dress would make a difference to a guy who obviously wasn’t interested in her.

“Oh yes, I’m fine, but are you? You look a little flushed.”

Lucie’s naturally pink cheeks were almost glowing bright red.

“Yeah, crummy tummy,” said Lucie patting her stomach.

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

Lucie smiled. “Oh hey, we have the same purse!” she said, pointing at it.

“Oh, really?”

“I love that purse.”

“Yeah, me too.”

“Oh, you wanted the bathroom. I’m sorry, I’ll let you get in.” Lucie stepped aside, and then asked. “Have you seen my mate by the way?”

“Umm, I saw him going to the garage a little while ago.”

More like stomping there. He was not a party animal, and it was probably a relief to everyone that he was in there instead of glowering at everyone as they tried to enjoy themselves.

Lucie beamed. “Thanks. See you later.”

“Yep.”

Aimee dropped her purse on the laundry hamper, put the lid down on the toilet and sank onto it. Maybe she should just leave the party. At least then she wouldn’t have to watch Wayne flirting with perfect Lara. She rubbed her forehead as her lioness soothed.

“Hey, hurry up in there,” called a voice.

“Be right out!”

Aimee flushed the toilet, pretended to wash her hands and left, passing Penny on the way out.

“Sorry, but I think I’m going to be sick,” grumbled Penny as she slammed the door.

“No problem,” muttered Aimee as she reluctantly went out to mingle in the party. She completely forgot about her purse.

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Wayne grunted as he watched Smith flirting with Aimee. That son of a nutcracker better keep his pervy paws to himself.

Wayne was good friends with Avery, which is why he wanted to protect Aimee. Yeah, that’s the reason, grumbled his inner gator. Wayne sneered at him to hush.

His eyes flashed as Smith had the audacity to place his hand on Aimee’s arm. His gator growled, and he was about to storm over there when Lara appeared in front of him.

“Hey, Wayne.”

“Yeah, hey,” he muttered, trying to see around her.

“Listen, I’ve got two tickets to see...”

“Yeah, that’s great,” muttered Wayne, not listening in the least. “Excuse me, will you.”

He dodged around her and withheld the growl as he found the room was now lacking both Smith and Aimee. If they had gone to one of the bedrooms...

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“Hey, honey,” cooed Lucie as she found her gorgeous mate in the garage.

He was drinking a beer atop of Gunner’s rid on mower. Her little hedgehog sighed in happiness at the sight of him – she always did.

“Hey,” he grunted. “I was thinking I’d go and check on Rosie.”

Luice smiled serenely. “She’s fine.”

Currently, their baby was being taken care of by Gunner’s parents at their house. She doubted any harm would come to their adorable pup while the enormous she-bear was in charge. The woman seemed like one of the most terrifying and capable women on the planet.

He humphed. “Then maybe I’ll go get some more beer.”

Lucie pointed at the stack of beer. “They have four crates.”

Cutter grimaced. He didn’t want to be there. Yes, he considered some of the people out there in the party to be his friends – not all, but some – but he would much prefer to be at home with just her and their baby. He was not a social wolf; he was an angry wolf, and preferred the quiet.

“Oh honey, just another hour and we’ll go.”

“Sure,” he muttered.

“I mean it; I still have a half dozen things to wrap for Rosie.”

Cutter’s hard face softened. They might have gone a wee bit overboard with presents this year, but this was her first Christmas.

“Yeah? She’s gonna love opening them.”

Lucie giggled and climbed onto his lap. “I doubt she’ll know what’s going on, never mind be able to unwrap anything. It’s mostly for us.”

“Yeah.” He chuckled and pulled her a little closer. “I can’t wait for you to see what I got you.”

“Nor can I - I love Christmas,” she trilled, bouncing in his lap. “I can’t wait for you to see what I got you.”

Cutter raised an eyebrow. “You got me something?”

Usually, she didn’t get him anything because he was impossible. He never wanted anything – he was content. Well, not content exactly, more like he didn’t care about possessions or things like vacations.

“Well, sort of,” she admitted shyly.

She hadn’t really bought it, but she hoped he was pleased. She was certainly pleased.

Lucie kissed him deeply, reveling in the glorious taste of her mate.

“You’re very merry,” he rumbled in approval.

“Yes, very.” She had a lot to be merry and thankful about. Lucie bit her lip and her inner hedgehog twinkled naughtily. “We don’t have to go back to the party right away.”

Cutter got her meaning right away, and his eyes flashed to the amber of his wolf.

“No kidding.”

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“Why are following me?” snapped Wayne.

Lake gave him an impassive look. His gator huffed. He was supposed to be the cold-blooded creature around there, but he swore that the arctic wolf shifter had ice in his veins.

“Gunner seemed to think you had a murderous look in your eye,” replied Lake mildly.

“What?” grouched Wayne impatiently.

Lake rolled a shoulder. “He had this idea that you were going to attack Smith and ruin his party.”

“I don’t know why he’d think that,” huffed Wayne, even though he had envisioned attacking Smith in no less than seventeen ways since the party started.

“Hey, we’ve all been there, but you gotta control yourself,” said Bettina, who had been the unfortunate victim of Smith’s flirting quite a few times. “I mean, you don’t want to know about how many times I thought about turning his ding dong green, but I held back.”

They stared at the witch, all wondering if she really could do that, then considering that they should all stay on her good side.

Moose, the aptly nicknamed moose shifter, cleared his throat and tried to steer the conversation away from rainbow ding dongs.

“I don’t think Aimee’s interested in Smith.”

“What?” spluttered Wayne through a mouthful of beer, “what’s that to do with anything?!”

Moose shrugged a massive shoulder. “You’re obviously pissed at him because he’s leering at her.”

Candy canes! Had everyone else noticed too? He thought he was hiding it well. Though, his gator had no idea why he would think that. When he had searched the bedrooms five minutes ago, positive that he would find them making out in there, he had not been subtle. He had also disturbed one of bosses, Arik and his penguin mate, Crystal who were making out in a guest bedroom. Plus Isis and her mate, Raf who were making out in Erin and Gunner’s bedroom – because Isis had absolutely no shame.

“I’m sure Avery appreciates you looking out for her sister,” added Moose.

“Right, yeah,” muttered Wayne, and started sucking on his beer.

Lake and Bettina shared a look but they didn’t say anything.

“So, do you think I should ask Aimee out?” asked Moose.

“What?!” The beer went everywhere.

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“I feel self-conscious,” said Jessie as she patted her hair.

Diaz looked at the squirrel shifter critically. She had dyed her hair blue. Jessie was always a little wild when it came to her hair

“Your hair doesn’t look that weird,” he said. He’d seen it weirder.

Jessie narrowed her eyes. “I meant because it’s the first time I’ve been out without our baby since I gave birth.”

Her mate and snake shifter, Gerry, growled at Diaz, but he paid neither of them any mind. He didn’t really worry if he offended people, and usually didn’t pay attention when he pissed them off – he’d be minding all day if he did.

“Oh, yeah. How is Cable?”

“Caleb,” gritted Gerry.

“He’s perfect,” laughed Jessie as she soothingly stroked her mate’s arm.

Diaz nodded. “Yeah, I’ve been thinking that me and Penny should have kids. What do you think about a couple of little Diaz’s running around?”

“Frankly, horrified,” deadpanned Gerry while Jessie just laughed.

“Oh my god, guys!” whispered Penny as she ran up.

Diaz grinned and his jaguar roared in happiness on seeing his adorable little mate, and immediately slipped an arm around her, and let his hand land on her butt. She was buzzing with excitement, so much so that she didn’t even object when he started squeezing her peachy rear.

“I was in the bathroom...”

“I don’t like where this story is heading,” quipped Jessie.

“I went in right after Aimee...”

“Yep, not getting better.”

“And while I was in there dry heaving...”

“Dry heaving?” His inner jaguar howled in concern for their mate. “Baby, are you okay?”

“Yes, yes, yes,” she snapped impatiently, “more importantly, I knocked over Aimee’s purse and can you guess what came out?”

Her eyes widened and she bit her lip, as if she was about to impart something unbelievably profound - or at least very juicy.

“Unless it’s a severed finger I can’t imagine it’s that bad,” teased Jessie.

“It was a positive pregnancy test,” breathed Penny and then leaned back for effect.

“Really?” murmured Jessie thoughtfully.

Diaz wrinkled his forehead. “She keeps that in her purse?”

Frankly, that just sounded nasty to him. Didn’t women pee on those things?

“It was in a plastic bag,” dismissed Penny, “but it was definitely positive.”

Gerry gave her a bored look. “So?”

“So, it means she’s pregnant,” said Penny.

“Yes, so what?” asked Gerry peevishly.

Penny spread out her hands. “So, who’s the father?”

Gerry snorted. “I’m sure it’s none of our business, right?”

“Oh, yeah I suppose so,” agreed Jessie reluctantly.

Gerry led her away while she made signals at Penny to call her to update her on what was going on.

“So who do you think the father is?” asked Penny as soon as they were gone.

“I don’t know; that Aimee’s a sly lioness, that’s all I’ll say.”

“Who’s a sly lioness?” asked Avery, appearing behind them.

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“You’re sure it was positive?” asked Avery doubtfully.

Penny nodded.

“Maybe it wasn’t hers,” suggested Winston.

“Right, because carrying around someone else’s pregnancy test is the most natural thing in the world,” chuckled Diaz.

“Well, it could be someone she’s close to...” Winston’s eyes widened as he looked at Avery.

“It’s not mine,” she snorted. “I just can’t believe Aimee would be pregnant. I’ve barely seen her talk to any males. All she’s been doing recently is training to join the agency.”

“You know some of the tactical team teach at the training center.” Diaz gave a not very subtle nod toward Smith who was currently following Aimee around the room.

Avery growled. “You’re not serious?”

Lara smiled slightly as she listened to the conversation.

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“What are you all doing in here?” asked Erin.

She had only returned to the kitchen to grab another pitcher of eggnog. She didn’t expect to find more than half a dozen of her guests crowded around the kitchen counter, apparently arguing, while they scribbled over a piece of paper.

“Aimee’s pregnant!” declared Isis with a certain amount of relish.

“We don’t know that for certain,” said Avery waspishly.

Diaz’s eyes flashed in amusement. “We’re trying to work out who the father.”

“You’re trying to work out who the father is?” repeated Erin slowly.

“Yep, we’re making a timeline of what she’s been doing for the past couple of months, and looking to see who she might have come into contact with,” said Zane, as if this was completely logical.

“You don’t think this is a huge invasion of her privacy?” asked Erin.

Raf appeared to not be taking part and was instead inspecting the contents of her fridge. "I wouldn't bother," he said mildly. "Shifters don't really know the meaning of the word privacy."

"Is it the same as wet blanket?" said Isis snippily.

Raf laughed and blew her a kiss.

"Honestly, you guys..." started Erin, but she didn't get very far.

"Erin can have a vision!" declared Isis. "Quick, Erin, have a vision!"

Erin held up her hands. "Oh, it doesn't really..."

"Do it! Do it, do it, do it!"

Erin gasped. "Oh crimeny!"

"You actually had one?" asked Sky in surprise.

She nodded and rubbed her temples. The vision had been brief, but she knew what she saw. Huh, the next time she was struggling to get a vision she may just ask Isis to yell at her – it seemed to work!

"It wasn't about Aimee though. Penny, is it true?"

"Is what true?" she mumbled through a mouthful of string cheese.

"That you're pregnant?"

"What?!" roared Diaz.

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"They make a cute couple, right?"

Wayne didn't take his eyes off Smith and Aimee as Lara appeared by his side. "What?"

"Those two. I guess they'll be mating soon."

That did get his attention, and cold reptilian eyes swung in her direction as Wayne glared at her. Sure, she thought Wayne was hot, and didn't like him fawning over that young lioness shifter, but she was a little taken aback by the look on his face

"I mean, uh, given that she's pregnant," stammered Lara.

"Pregnant?!"

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Aimee finally managed to shake Smith and made her way to the kitchen. She would hide in here until Avery was ready to go home. She didn't think Smith would find her in here. She was sure she once heard him say that the kitchen was 'female's domain.' Ugh sneered her lioness.

Yes, she would just sit quietly in the kitchen while...

Aimee paused at the entrance to the kitchen. "Umm, hi... everyone."

All the occupants of the room went quiet at her entrance. Well, apart from Penny and Diaz who were making out with gusto.

"What's with them?" she whispered to everyone else.

"Penny's pregnant," explained Erin.

"So they're celebrating in my kitchen where my children eat," grumbled Gunner pointedly and loudly, but it didn't seem to get through to the kissing couple.

"Oh, that's wonderful," exclaimed Aimee. "Congratulations."

Penny gave her a thumbs-up without breaking the lip lock with her mate.

Everyone else in the kitchen gave her shifty, odd looks - even Avery and Winston. Though, Isis was just smirking as usual.

"Ummm, is everything okay?"

"There you are!" declared Smith at her.

"There you are!" growled Wayne at him.

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"Sugar plums! What's all the yelling about?" asked Lucie as she and Cutter entered the kitchen.

Their garage escapade had taken a little longer than expected, but at least it had relaxed her mate, and put a definite smile on his face. However, it appeared that things weren't quite so relaxed out here. A massive argument was brewing in the kitchen. In the center of it appeared to be Aimee and Wayne.

"Aimee's pregnant with Smith's baby!" howled Wayne.

"No, I'm not!" cried Aimee

"But she is pregnant," crowed Isis.

"No, I'm really not!" denied Aimee.

"Penny saw your pregnancy test."

"It was in your purse," added Zane.

"I don't have a pregnancy test!" wailed Aimee.

Lucie let out a small giggle. "Oh my, Aimee, I'm so sorry. This is all my fault."

Everyone stared at her.

“Your fault?” rumbled Cutter.

Her hedgehog mewled encouragingly and she smiled at her mate in utter adoration. “I don’t know. A room full of investigators and none of you noticed that Aimee and I have the same purse, or that I’ve thrown up twice while I’ve been at the party.”

Cutter’s eyes widened in shock. “You’re pregnant?!”

Lucie nodded.

“You carry a pregnancy test in your purse?” said Diaz.

“I wanted it to be a surprise – I wanted to show it to you on Christmas day, and I didn’t want you to find it before then, so I put it in my purse,” she said directly to her mate. She turned to Aimee.

“Again, so sorry you got caught up in this.”

“Not your fault,” said Aimee, glaring at Wayne.

Cutter stared down at her.

“So, uh, what do you think? A little baby brother or sister for Rosie.”

“That’s...” His hard expression creased. “Baby, that’s amazing. Best Christmas ever.”

Lucie and her beast squealed in happiness as she jumped into his arms. Everyone around them let out awws and he snarled at them to ‘beat it’ before planting a kiss on his mate’s lips that she wouldn’t soon forget. It lasted until she said she was nauseous, and then he ran to the bathroom, and kicked out the cheetah shifter trying to take a leak.

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“Uh, hey.”

Aimee looked up through hooded eyes as Wayne approached. In spite of her annoyance, her lioness actually sighed dreamily.

“Hello. Let me guess, I’m now pregnant with twins and Moose is the father.”

“No,” he replied with a forced laugh and then looked a little worried. “No, right?”

Aimee gaped in disbelief. “Of course not!”

Wayne lowered himself onto the bench beside her. Feeling a little hot and frustrated, she had retreated to the garden.

“I uh, I’m sorry. I acted like an ass. Please come back inside.”

Aimee pursed her lips. “Everyone heard you say I was pregnant with Smith’s demon child. How can I face everyone after that?”

“Demon child?”

She softened slightly. "Yes, I'm fairly positive it would be a demon child if I ever let him... which I never would. The guy's awful, and he calls me Annie." After a moment's thought she added. "You know you should probably apologize to him too."

Her lion harrumphed, but he didn't really deserve Wayne calling him a degenerate hussy – those exact words - and trying to punch him.

"If anyone ever catches up to him I will."

Aimee let out a giggle before she caught herself. Yes, after Wayne accused him of fathering her child, he took off running. He appeared to be moving at about forty miles an hour. He should be in Playa Lunar by midnight.

"You acted like such a lunatic in there."

"I know," he breathed. He stood up and held out his hand. "Please come back inside. There's no need for you to be embarrassed – I'll make sure everyone knows that I'm the idiot."

Aimee sighed inwardly and cursed herself for being such a pushover. She couldn't stay mad at him for long. She placed her hand in his and allowed him to pull her up. He winced slightly.

"Am I heavy?"

"No. Avery just punched my arm so hard it's going to be sore for days. Your sister didn't believe you were pregnant by the way. It was me and the other idiots who got carried away."

Aimee nodded. She was a little relieved to hear that at least.

He started to move back to the house and she pulled his arm, making him wince again. Her lioness yowled slightly, but Aimee thought he deserved that at least.

"When you thought I was pregnant by Smith, you were jealous, weren't you?"

Red dusted his cheeks.

"Be honest – you at least owe me that."

"I was angry," he admitted reluctantly. "Angry at the thought of you being... with him."

"What if the hypothetical father of my hypothetical baby had been someone else?"

"Like Moose?" suggested Wayne sourly.

"Anyone – wouldn't you have been just as angry?"

Aimee looked up at him expectantly, fully expecting him to deny it.

But, she was surprised by his reaction. He didn't deny, and nor did he confirm. Wayne smiled and cupped her cheek.

"Merry Christmas, Aimee."

Then he kissed her.

The end