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The Ornament
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“Oh, Christmas tree, oh Christmas tree, why don’t I know the stinking words. Ya dada da, ya dada da, nobody knows the stinking words.” Behind her she could hear her partner Becky giggling. She paused in hanging the evergreen garland from the mantle over their fireplace. “Oh please. Do you know them?”

“No. That’s why I don’t sing it.”

Emma shook her head, unable to hide her happy grin. Max had hinted that he had something special he wanted to share with her and she couldn’t wait to find out what it was. “When do we close again?”

“Emma!” Becky shook her head. “Christmas Eve is still two days away.”

“Your point?”

“Didn’t you say Max was hinting at something special for then?”

“Yes.”

“So why are you so hyper now?”

“Hello! Max and surprises.” She finished hanging the garland, tweaking it slightly before stepping back with a satisfied nod. “Last time he surprised me I found myself mated to him and contemplating kitty condos.” She tilted her head, studied the garland, and tweaked it one last time. “And because of the mating the surprise isn’t going to be something like, ‘That chick over there is having my love child’, so it can’t be bad, right?”

Becky was silent.

Emma turned to stare at her friend, suddenly worried. “Right?”

Becky shrugged her head down.

“Becks!” Now Emma was worried. Becky looked torn, and guilty as hell. “He can *not* tell me that.” *Can he?*

“Oh no! No, of course not,” Becky laughed nervously. “No way.” She scurried into the back room. “Need more tinsel!”

Emma blinked. Dread settled into her stomach like a lead lump. *Oh, no.*

What was Max going to surprise her with?

Max stared down at the little black box and grinned. “That should do it.”

“Gah, I hate setting these things up.” Simon stood, stretching out his back before shaking himself all over.

“But it’ll be so worth it once it’s done.” Adrian handed around coffee, sipping from a steaming mug when each man had his own. “Besides, once you plug it in it’s going to look bitchin’.”

“You think the girls will like it?” Simon sat down on the step, running his hands around the mug. It was freezing out.

“They’d better.” Max picked up the plug. “Ready?”

“Ready.”

“Light ‘er up.”

Max plugged it in.

His house lit up like a gaudy bawdy house. Red, green, blue and white lights twinkled merrily. Rattan deer, their innards lit, moved their heads up and down with mechanical precision. And a blow up snow globe type... thing contained a spinning Santa and blowing paper that was supposed to be snow. He even had a glowing baby Jesus, safe in his plastic manger. “It looks. Hmm.”

“Like Rudolph threw up all over your house.”

He glared at Adrian. The man was smart enough to throw up his hands and back off.

“Thank God I picked white lights.” Simon’s head ducked into his coat as a snowball came flying at him.

“Shaddup.” Max studied his yard, frowning. “Maybe I went a *little* overboard.”

“At what point does it go from ‘overboard’ to ‘Kmart blue-light special’? Because I think we’re there.”

Max turned to Simon and growled. “Asshole.”

“Emma might get jealous.” Simon batted his lashes at Max, earning himself another snowball.

“We don’t have time to fix it now. We still have my place and Adrian’s to do.”

Max grumbled and headed for his Durango, worried how his Curana was going to react to what he’d done to their house. Emma wasn’t exactly shy about letting her opinion be known. He got in the car, following his friends over to Simon’s house.

He only hoped she’d be willing to understand what it was he was trying to say. And maybe take some of it down. *It’s the six foot tall snow globe. If I remove that, it should be fine.*

Now to decorate Simon’s house. He patted the bag of colored lights on the passenger seat. *White lights my ass.*

“What the fuck?” Emma got out of her PT Cruiser and stared at the house she now shared with Max. She pulled out her cell phone and called Becky. “Becks?”

“Yes?”

“Santa smoked a reefer and decorated my house.”

“What? Hold on, I’ll be there in a few minutes.”

Emma hung up the phone and stared at her home blinking garishly in the night. She’d envisioned the beautiful old craftsman house in twinkling white lights, a Christmas tree just visible behind the drapes. Perhaps a garland draping the fireplace with two stockings, gold for her, silver for Max.

What she hadn’t pictured was a glowing baby Jesus and a scary, half blown up snow globe.

A car door shut behind her. “My God. Who hit the Kmart blowout sale?”

The two women exchanged a look. “Max.”

“Oh, my God. Simon and Adrian were spending the day with him.” Becky raced back to her car. “I’ll call you!”

She waved by as her phone rang. “Hello?”

“Emma?”

“Hi, Sheri.”

“Do you know where the men are?”

“No. Why?”

“I need to kill Adrian.”

Emma bit her lip. “Did they decorate your house?”

“How’d you know?”

“Lucky guess.” Emma didn’t know if she should laugh or cry.

“I need my darkest glasses to look at my front lawn.”

“I have a baby Jesus night-light on mine. And I think the space shuttle could land safely on my driveway, it’s lit so bright.”

“Oh, dear.”

Her cell phone beeped. “Hold on, I’ve got another call.”

“I’m going to *kill* him.”

“You too, Becks?”

“Yup.”

“Sheri too.”

“Frank’s?”

“On my way.” She clicked the phone over and relayed the invitation to Sheri, offering to pick her up.

“I’m in.”

Emma got into her car. “Be there in a few.” She hung up and pulled away from the house, wondering if Lion-O’s dead body would fit in the snow globe.

“What the hell were they thinking?” Becky bit into her burger, a savage frown on her face. Emma wondered if she was picturing Simon’s ass.

“That’s just it. They couldn’t have been.” Sheri, the calmest of the three, took a sip of her double-chocolate milk shake. Sheri was legally blind. The fact that she found her mate’s house decorations an eyesore said a lot about what Adrian must have done to their home.

“So, what are we going to do about it?”

“Not a clue.”

“No idea.”

Emma bit into her own burger, thinking hard. “We could just take most of it down.”

“Yeah, but, think about it.” Sheri leaned forward, her expression morose. “How long do you think it took them to put all that up?”

Emma and Becky exchanged a horrified glance. “You’re right. We should make them take it down.”

“No, not that! Do you think any of them would have gone to all that trouble, put all that stuff up, doing three different houses in one afternoon, if they didn’t think it would please *us*? They must be exhausted.”

Becky collapsed back into the booth. “Damn. She’s right.”

Emma resisted the urge to bang her head against the Formica table. “Hell.”

“Yup.”

“We have to live with it.”

“And next year make sure we put up the decorations.”

“Amen.” The three women clinked their glasses together.

“Frank!”

“Hey, Emma, what can I do for ya?”

“I, no we, need three to-go orders.”

Three bags landed on the table. She looked up at the sweaty, grinning face of Frank. "Thought you might."

She wasn't here. Her car wasn't in the garage and her purse wasn't on the kitchen counter. Her scent wasn't in the bedroom. "Fuck. Maybe I went too far."

She wouldn't really break out the grapefruit spoon. Would she?

His ears caught the sound of the garage door opening. He took a deep breath, pouring his mate a glass of wine. He stared at the tastefully decorated Christmas tree and sighed. He just hoped it would mellow her mood. If not, he was one dead kitty.

Emma stepped into the kitchen, a white bag in her hand. The scent of fresh burger and fries wafted from the bag, causing his stomach to rumble. "Hey, sweetheart."

"Max."

Oh, not good. That careful tone of voice could only mean trouble. "Wine?" He held out the glass, watching as she stepped closer to take it. "Am I in trouble?"

She sipped, putting the white bag in his hands. "I'm not going to lie to you. I thought about it." She headed to the kitchen table and sat, pushing out a seat for him. "But, no." She smiled wearily. "I know how much trouble you went through to do this for me. For us." She laid her hand over his, and his heart stuttered. "But next year you're waiting for us to do it together or there *will* be consequences."

He laughed at her narrow-eyed glare, digging into the bag with gusto. "Yes, dear."

She smiled, sipping her wine as he ate. They discussed their days, hers hectic, his less so. When it came time to relax, he pulled her into the great room.

"Oh, my."

He grinned with satisfaction as she approached the tree he'd set up near the fireplace. The way the house was set up she hadn't been able to see it from the kitchen. He'd decorated it in white and gold, the white lights twinkling softly next to the crackling fire. Two white and gold traditional stockings graced the fireplace, his name embroidered on one, hers on the other. "Oh, Lion-O. It's perfect." She turned on him, suspicion highlighting those pretty brown eyes of hers. "If you can do this, why did you do that?" She pointed out the front window.

"Surprise?"

Her head tilted, obviously confused. But like the cat she was, she was curious now. He settled in on the floor in front of the fire and patted the rug next to him.

“You are up to something.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Because I know you, Lion-O. You’ve got that smug male ‘I know something you don’t know’ look on your face.”

That was the joy of having his mate by his side. Even though they’d only been together two months she really did know him, better than anyone alive. He shrugged, trying to look innocent as he sipped at his wine.

“Max.”

He slipped his arm around her shoulders, delighted when she snuggled in to him. No matter how upset she was she always snuggled into him. “What?”

“Is this somehow part of my Christmas Eve surprise?”

He kissed her pert nose. “Why wait for Christmas?” Her eyes went wide as he nodded towards the tree. “There’s something special in the tree for us. See if you can find it.” He smiled indulgently as she practically ran him over, scrambling for the tree and examining it inch by inch.

“Ah-hah!” She gently pulled a golden glass ornament off the tree. Etched across the front was *Max and Emma 2009*. “Huh?”

“Look closer.”

She turned it over in her hands, her fingers stroking the hinges. “Max?”

“Open it.”

She worked the latch with shaking fingers. Inside, nestled on a bed of velvet, was a round diamond solitaire.

“Marry me.”

She looked up, her eyes dazed, tears pooling. “You already asked me, remember?”

He shook his head. “Not like this.” He got up on his haunches, sitting back on his heels. He took the ring out of the ornament, holding it up. “No fire, no wine, no twinkling lights.”

“Oh, Max.” One crystal tear slipped down her cheek.

He reached over and brushed it away. “An argument in my Durango is not the way I wanted to ask my mate to marry me.” He waved his hand, taking everything in that he’d done that day. “There will be times when I annoy you. Times when I aggravate you beyond belief. Times when I go overboard and you want to kill me.”

“And times when you touch my soul.”

He nodded. “I love you, Emma.” He slipped the ring on her finger. “Say yes.”

“Oh, Lion-O. You are so getting laid tonight.”

He threw his head back and laughed as she threw herself into his arms. “That is not a yes.”

“You want a yes?” Her eyes turned gold as she stared up at him through her lashes.

His sunshine-blue eyes turned gold. He licked his lips, the smile still turning up the corners. “Say it, Emma.”

She purred, rubbing her breasts against his chest. The diamond ring twinkled in the firelight. “Make me.”

“My pleasure.”

Emma gasped as Max licked a line up her neck, ending at her earlobe. She clamped her teeth together, determined to play the game to the final, gasping end.

She was going to enjoy having him wring a “yes” from her.

Making love to this woman just keeps getting better and better. They’d shed their clothes slowly, his Curana teasing him as the firelight played over her chest. Max nipped at Emma’s breast, chuckling softly when she whispered, “Oh, boy.” He sipped around her nipple, tasting her, teasing her, but leaving the best part for last.

God, he loved her breasts. He could spend eternity with his face buried between them.

“Are you a dog or a cat?”

He glared up at her, his nose buried in her cleavage.

“You’re snuffling.”

His head popped up. “I am not!”

“Are so!”

“Am not.” He took a deep breath. “I’m enjoying my mate’s endowments.”

“You’re drooling is what you mean.”

“I do *not* drool.”

She shrugged, her delectable breasts bouncing. “If you say so, Lion-O.” She gave a delicate yawn. “Let me know when you’re done admiring my assets.” Her eyes closed, but her mouth was curling at the edges.

Oh, no you don't. Max tickled Emma, loving the way she squealed and squirmed under him. Love and laughter lit those dark eyes of hers, a sight he never grew tired of. "Still feel like sleeping?"

Before she could answer he licked roughly at one pouty nipple. "Uh..."

"Take your time." He sucked the bud into his mouth, strumming it with his tongue.

"No. No, I'm awake."

She sounded breathless. *Good.* "Glad to hear it." He switched to the other nipple, giving it the same treatment.

And then she did that thing that always managed to drive him wild. Her head tilted back and to the side, baring her throat, her arms over her head. The vulnerable submission in the gesture always managed to bring the beast out in him.

He watched as her chest bowed, offering her breasts to his mouth. He took advantage, feeding from them, his fingers delving into the wet heat of her pussy. Her hips arched, accepting his invitation as he fucked her with three fingers.

She was moaning, biting her lip, on the edge of orgasm.

He stopped, pulling his fingers from her wet core and his mouth from her breast. "Do you have something to say to me?"

Her golden eyes narrowed. "Fuck me."

He chuckled, delighted at the demand in her tone. "Not quite, my Curana." His fingers stroked her clit and she groaned. "Well?"

"Fuck you?"

"Soon." He lined his cock up with her opening. Taking himself in hand he stroked the head up and down her slit, hissing at the sensation racing down his spine.

"Well?"

"Fuck *us* sounds schizophrenic. Either that or ménage a trois-ish."

He growled, sliding the head of his cock into her pussy. "No ménage a trios-ish."

"Okay."

He began sliding into her with a shallow series of thrusts, never completely entering her.

She whimpered. "Please?"

"Please what?"

She growled, grabbing him by the ears. "Please fuck me before I break out the grapefruit spoon!"

He threw his head back and laughed, slamming into her so hard his balls slapped loudly against her ass. “God, I love you.”

She snarled, bucking her hips. “Now, Lion-O.”

“Anything for my Curana.” He began fucking her in quick, hard jabs, no longer in the mood to play. He was much more in the mood to come.

But not before he got her to say the words. He reached down, stroking her clit in time with his thrusts, pushing her back to the edge of orgasm.

“Yes! Oh, God, yes!”

The feel of her coming around him drove him over the edge. His teeth pierced his mark on her neck, sending her even deeper into the spiral of her orgasm. He poured himself into her, her spasms wringing every last drop from him as stars burst behind his eyelids.

He collapsed on top of her, panting, exhausted, and loving the feel of her still quivering around him. She was the miracle he’d never thought he’d find.

Emma stroked her mate’s sweat-damp hair. “Yes.”

Max smiled against her neck, purring.

“By the way, don’t you think shoving a light bulb up baby Jesus’ butt and plugging it in is just a *little* sacrilegious?”

“*Emma!*”

She giggled.

Oh yeah. Life is very good.

Author Biography

Dana Marie Bell wrote her first short story when she was thirteen years old. She attended the High School for Creative and Performing Arts for creative writing, where freedom of expression was the order of the day. When her parents moved out of the city and placed her in a Catholic high school for her senior year she tried desperately to get away, but the nuns held fast, and she graduated with honors despite herself.

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