

A Samhain Publishing Freebie



*Happy Holidays to all my readers. I hope you enjoy this prequel to Serengeti Storm. May we all be lucky enough to spend the holidays with those we love, even if we won't admit we love them... yet.*

A Serengeti Christmas

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*Three Rocks Pride, Christmas Eve, Two Years Ago*

*"Santa Baby, just slip a sable under the tree..."*

Music blared through the speakers in the dining hall. Christmas songs should never be played at that decibel, but by this point in the evening most of the party-goers were so hammered on eggnog they either didn't notice or didn't care.

Shana Delray leaned against the wall and watched the drunken revelers stumbling around in an excess of Christmas cheer. She twirled one red curl around her finger, bored and not even mildly interested in joining the bacchanal in progress. Most of the partiers had already discarded their clothing – which wasn't unusual among the shape-shifters in the pride, where nudity was as natural as fur, but it did contribute to the general air of debauchery.

A Santa wearing a red tasseled hat and nothing else paused at her side with a hopeful leer. "Hey there, princess. Wanna ssssit on Ssssanta's lap n' tell me what a bad girl you've been this year?" he slurred wetly in her ear.

Shana leveled a steady, unblinking stare in his direction and slowly raised one eyebrow. "Go shag Rudolph, Ari."

Even three sheets to the wind, Ari knew better than to push his luck. "Ooookay, Shana-girl don't wanna play." He bobbed his head and lurched off in search of a more willing piece of ass.

Shana dropped her head back against the wall again, the tension in her shoulders refusing to relax.

A whoop from across the room called Shana's attention to where her mother swayed on top of a table. She whipped a tasseled red scarf above her head like a propeller, evidently preparing for the latest in her ongoing series of drunken stripteases. The once-great queen of the Three Rocks Pride reduced to a cheap table-dancer with the assistance of Jack D., Jim B. & Jose C.

Shana closed her eyes and tried to block out the sounds of the room around her, focusing on the lyrics of the song.

A yacht, a ring, a platinum mine... *I want, I want, I want.* Shana liked the singer's style. A woman who knew what she wanted and wasn't afraid to ask for it. Definitely her kind of song.

Shana wanted things too. She was a writhing mass of want.

She wanted Leonus deposed as Alpha. She wanted to be the new Alpha's mate and rule the pride. She wanted all the power she deserved.

Though at the moment, she mostly wanted to be anywhere but here.

A familiar hum thrummed at the base of her spine. Her skin tingled and she could practically feel the blood rushing hot through her veins.

Her heat was coming. She'd felt it bearing down on her all day.

Shana knew she needed to pick a man and drag him out of here to satisfy her before the hormones her body was giving off sent every male in the room into a frenzy. Any man would do. Her body didn't care.

Maybe she shouldn't have told Ari to fuck off...

Shana opened her eyes and wet her lips.

There wasn't a man in the room who would say no to her. The members of the pride with mates and cubs – the family men – had long since abandoned the party in favor of hanging up stockings and setting out cookies and milk. Those that remained were the few young single men the Alpha thought were too weak to be a threat... and the ones the big bad Alpha was secretly afraid of. The ones like Caleb.

A tendril of heat streaked down Shana's spine at just the thought of his name.

Where was Caleb, anyway? She scanned the room, but didn't see those big, broad shoulders anywhere. He'd probably slipped out as soon as the opportunity presented itself. Caleb had never cared much for parties, especially the raucous kind.

Almost before the conscious decision was made, Shana had snagged a sprig of mistletoe off a garland and slipped outside.

The cool night air felt delicious on the exposed skin of her arms and shoulders, kissing every overheated inch. There was no snow on the ground – west Texas winters didn't often include frosty mornings and snow ball fights – but there was a chill in the air. The night was clear and still, like the world was holding its breath, waiting for Christmas morning.

She remembered that feeling from when she was a little girl – the hold-your-breath eagerness, the certainty that something wonderful was coming, so soon she could hardly sit still waiting for it. It felt like forever since she'd felt that way. Was it fifteen years? Twenty? Certainly before her father died and her mother became the pride lush.

Now a new kind of electric anticipation churned through her.

Shana scuffed her feet along the dirt path as she strolled toward Caleb's bungalow, intentionally slowing her steps to draw out the anticipation.

Caleb probably wouldn't welcome her with open arms when she showed up on his doorstep, but that was half the appeal – and the reason she kept coming back to him, year after year, no matter how impossible a happily ever after between them might be. She'd never been able to walk all over him. If she pushed him, he pushed back, harder and faster.

Shana realized she was rushing, practically running up the path, and forced her feet to slow again, prowling with the deliberate grace of a lioness instead of the foolish eagerness of a kitten.

Behind her, a new song blared out of the dining hall into the night. *It came upon a midnight clear...*

Shana snickered to herself and added an extra swing to her hips. Who knew Christmas carols could be so *dirty*?

She prowled up onto the porch of Caleb's bungalow, struck a Marilyn pose and knocked her fist against the door. *Come to mama, loverboy.*

#

Caleb Minor answered the knock on the door to find Shana wearing a low-cut scarlet tank-top and leave-no-curve-unhugged jeans. Her red curls tumbled loose and wild around her shoulders. She held mistletoe above her head and had a wicked twinkle in her eyes. That alone was trouble on so many levels Caleb didn't even know where to begin. And then the scent of her hit his nostrils and his brain short-circuited.

*Fuck, she's in heat.*

He knew he should tell her to get her rocks off with someone else and slam the door in her pretty little face, but his brain couldn't seem to transmit that message to the rest of his body. Instead, he stood there, rooted to the spot as his body reacted the way it always did to the scent and sight of her, hardening from one breath to the next.

Shana propped a shoulder against the doorjamb and batted her big green eyes at him. "Aren't you going to invite me in, Cale?" she purred.

"No. What the fuck do you want?"

From the look in her eyes, he could see she was tempted to tell him that a fuck was exactly what she wanted. She must have known that in his current mood that would get her thrown out on her ass, though, because instead of overt temptation, a deceptive flicker

of vulnerability crossed her expression. "I miss you, Caleb. It's Christmas Eve. Aren't you ever lonely on Christmas?"

His chest tightened. How did she always know exactly what to say to stab him right through the heart?

He'd been thinking exactly that before she knocked on his door – how lonely he was. How much he missed her and the way things were between them before she became so obsessed with deposing Leonus and claiming the position of the new Alpha's mate. Christmas had turned him into a goddamn sentimental sap.

He knew better than anyone that Shana wouldn't stay with him if he refused again to challenge Leonus. She'd be out the door so fast she'd leave skid marks, leaving him alone and broken again. Shana'd made an art form out of breaking his heart.

His fingers tightened around the wood of the door, readying to slam it in her face.

She reached out and laid her hand over his on the door. "Cale, I don't want to be alone," she said softly. "Can I come in? Please?"

He was an idiot. This was a new record for stupidity, but she smelled so damn good, and it was Christmas, after all, and, if he was honest with himself, he wanted her to stay. He wanted to wake up with her on Christmas morning, when everything was so hopeful and new and there was that chance, no matter how slight, that this time she might stay.

He could let her in the bungalow. He just had to keep her out of his heart. No falling in love this time. Just sex. They were good at sex.

He pushed the door open wider and Shana smiled a feline smile with just enough triumph to make him nervous. Then she ducked under his arm and into the room, brushing against his body as she passed.

He somehow resisted the urge to chase her heat, to pin her between him and the nearest flat surface. Instead, he flipped the door closed and pressed his palm against it, the contact with the wood his only link to a reality that didn't revolve around her.

This was a bad idea. He needed to remember all the reasons he was angry with her – all the guys she'd been with when she should have been with him, all the times she'd nearly gotten him killed with her goddamn ambition.

Then she turned to him with the slow, seductive smile he knew all too well and every other thought burned right out of his mind. Damn, she was gorgeous. Tall and confident, curvaceous and overtly sexual.

He was so screwed.

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Shana took a deep breath. Caleb's scent teased her and a coil of heat tightened at the base of her spine. She wet her lips and turned to face him.

The man was eleven different kinds of sexy. He was tall and muscled everywhere. The bulge of his biceps as he pressed his palm against the door made her mouth water. His dark hair was cut ruthlessly short and looked black in the low light of the bungalow, but in his lion form, when the sunlight hit it, teasing hints of reds and browns streaked through. The curve of his lip, the jagged angle of his jaw, everything about him made her want him.

But that was just the hormones talking, wasn't it? It was perfectly natural for her to hunger for him like this. The vise closing tight around her heart was just a side effect of the need pulsing through her veins in waves. It had nothing to do with *him*.

She wasn't here because it was Christmas Eve and she'd missed him like a hole in her heart. She was here because she needed to wrap her legs around a man and scream.

She just needed to keep reminding herself of that.

Just sex. If she kept it at just sex, Caleb couldn't disappoint her again.

She tossed the mistletoe onto the bedside table and grabbed a long curl of green ribbon off the desk. Caleb had apparently been doing some last minute package wrapping. Shana licked her lips. There was only one package she wanted to unwrap tonight.

She closed the distance between them, holding his eyes the entire time. "Have you been a good boy this year, Caleb?"

He shrugged, dropping his hand from the door. "Sure."

Shana flipped the ribbon over his head. She held the ends of the green cord so it stretched taut behind his neck. He kept his hands loose at his sides, not reaching for her, and she kept her distance as well, the ribbon their only point of contact.

"Aren't you going to ask me if I've been a good girl?" she asked softly, leaning closer.

"You're never a good girl."

A slow smile curled her lips. "You know me so well." Shana ducked under the ribbon and turned so her back was to his front and the green cord wrapped around both of them. She held the ends with her hands crossed in front of her.

His body heat warmed her back and she tugged on the ribbon until he stepped forward. She bit back the little sound of want that tried to escape as his strength and heat pressed against her back from shoulders to thighs. She closed her eyes as his erection pressed into the small of her back through the layers of their clothing.

Shana hummed a few bars from *Santa Baby* as she bent her knees and slowly rolled her hips in a teasing little grind against him. His hands closed on her hips, but not to stop

her. Caleb urged her closer, coaxing her into another sinuous roll of her hips as he pressed the bulge in his jeans against her ass. She let her head fall back against his shoulder and his mouth pressed against the side of her neck as his hands grazed her stomach, working their way up under her top.

Shana was too far gone for foreplay. She arched against him, reaching behind to grab his hips and press him tight against her. Caleb's hands closed over her breasts, pinching her nipples through the sheer lace of her bra, and then rolling the tips between his fingers. He knew exactly what she liked, exactly how to touch her to bring her right to the edge of what she could take.

Shana writhed back against him as heat shot down to her pussy. She needed *more*. She was drowning in his scent and the feel of him surrounding her, lost in sensation. She'd fallen into an open well of need.

The soft clink of her belt buckle and the sound of her zipper were unnaturally loud to her ears, as was the sound of her own breath. Caleb worked one large hand down the loosened front of her jeans and beneath the elastic of her panties. Shana pressed up onto her tiptoes, angling her hips and arching into his touch. She was so ready to come. Just a little more, a little farther, right *there*.

"Oh, Jesus, yes."

He rolled her clit beneath his finger with just the right amount of pressure. Her first orgasm was like popping the cork on the first bottle of champagne – just the beginning of the party. She reached her arms above her head and linked her fingers behind his neck, keeping her back pressed tight to his front as his finger pulled a series of sweet popping aftershocks from her body.

That little eruption had barely dulled the edge of her need. She didn't want a considerate lover. She wanted to be *owned*.

Shana's eyelids fluttered open and she licked her lips. "Come on, Cale," she whispered. "It's the season of giving." Her ass bumped back against his cock. "So give it to me."

Caleb made a rough sound that might have been a laugh or a groan and yanked his hand out of her jeans, shoving them and her panties down to her thighs with one quick jerk. He made quick work of his own zipper, then pushed her shoulders down so she bent at the waist, her ass raised to him like an offering. Shana caught herself with her hands braced on her knees so she wouldn't fall over. A low laugh rippled in her throat. This was more like it.

She saw the green ribbon curled on the floor around their feet. She didn't even remember dropping it. Then the head of his cock pressed into her pussy from behind and

her vision went black as her entire world narrowed down to that feeling, the hot, hard man slowly filling her, stretching her tight. His hands were firm on her hips, holding her steady as he drew back and pushed forward again, rougher this time, nearly knocking her off her feet. The third time, Shana stumbled and Caleb brought them down to the floor, Shana kneeling on all fours as he crouched over her. His cock slammed into her again and she moaned, bracing her hands and pushing back against him. God, she needed this, the rough, dark heat of it.

He ground his hips hard against hers, then reached around and pressed against her clit, rolling it beneath the pad of his finger. Shana came again, harder this time, a rough catapult off the edge of a volcano, straight down into the molten heat. Her pussy clamped tight around his cock and he followed her with a ragged curse. His hands locked tight on her, clenching her against him as he emptied himself inside her.

Shana collapsed to the floor, Caleb falling heavily beside her. She panted raggedly, trying to gather her scattered thoughts into something coherent.

Her first semi-rational realization was that they hadn't even gotten their clothes off. Her jeans were still tangled around her knees and his hadn't even made it down that far. She probably had zipper burn on her ass. Shana snorted out a laugh. What a way to celebrate the holiday. *Merry fucking Christmas.*

Her second realization was that she still wanted him. The tight burn of her heat was cooler now, but it was by no means gone. She'd need him inside her again soon.

It was going to be one hell of a holy night.

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Caleb opened his eyes on Christmas morning with an optimism he hadn't felt in years. That optimism was instantly crushed. The room was empty. Shana had taken off. Again.

Then the sound of running water penetrated his brain. Seconds later, Shana strolled out of the bathroom. She paused in the doorway when she saw him watching her. He knew he must look half-rabid, but for that fraction of a second when he thought she'd left him again, he'd forgotten how to breathe.

"Merry Christmas," she said, tossing her hair back over her shoulder. She wasn't wearing a stitch and his mouth went dry at the sight of her.

*Merry Christmas to me.* "Uh-huh."

Her emerald eyes narrowed and she propped a hand on her hip. "You're wearing that look."

"What?"

"That look," she insisted. "The one like you're wondering what the hell I'm still doing here. Don't worry. I was just leaving. You can go back to sleep."

"This isn't that look."

"It looks like the look."

He shook his head. "Not the look."

She tipped her head to the side, and for just a second beneath all her bravado, he saw a glimmer of vulnerability. "So you want me to stay or what?"

"Stay." It was more a command than a request, but Shana didn't seem to mind.

Her face cleared instantly and she flashed him a wicked smile. "Good, because I have an idea. Close your eyes."

He didn't want to take his eyes off her until he was certain she wasn't going to bolt. "Shana, I don't think—"

"For fuck's sake, Caleb. I don't trust you either, but it's not like I'm gonna chop off your balls. Just close your fucking eyes, okay? I wanna give you a present."

A present. Caleb closed his eyes, trusting his ears would tell him if her *present* was her patented disappearing act. He heard her pad over to the bedside, then felt the bed dip slightly under her weight.

A moment later, her voice came, husky and low. "Open 'em."

The second time Caleb opened his eyes on Christmas morning, he saw Shana kneeling over him, holding a sprig of mistletoe directly above his cock. She smiled with wicked promise and bent down, wetting her lips.

"Merry Christmas, Caleb."

"Jesus *Christ*."

Just before he lost the capacity for rational thought, Caleb decided this was the best damn Christmas he'd ever had. Shana was here with him and it didn't look like she was going anywhere. That was about as close as he'd ever gotten to a bonafide Christmas miracle.

If only he could be certain she'd still be with him on New Year's Eve.

### **About the Author**

*Vivi Andrews is the author of the Serengeti Shifter and Karmic Consultants books. Native to Alaska, she's been spoiled by a lifetime of white Christmases with her wonderful family. For more about Vivi and her books, please visit [www.viviandrews.com](http://www.viviandrews.com), <http://samhainpublishing.com/authors/vivi-andrews>, or drop by her blog at <http://viviandrews.blogspot.com>. Happy Holidays.*