

Santa Baby
by Lesley L. Smith

I dropped one of the bags of presents as I tried to unlock the back door. Our string of Christmas lights swayed gently in the wind. I got the door open and yelled into the kitchen, "Jose, I need help unloading the car." I put the bags I hadn't dropped on the table and went back and scooped up the one lying in the doorway. I glanced inside the bag and nothing was broken. That was a relief.

Jose ambled into the kitchen. "Hola, Cara." He kissed my cheek. "What's all this?" He waved his arms around as the cold breeze entered the open door.

"It's the adopt-a-family presents. And there's a bunch more in the car. I need your help unloading."

A hint of a frown shadowed his face. "I know you're warm-hearted, but you didn't buy all this, did you? We're saving our money for the doctor. We agreed."

"Calm down, Jose. Yes, I did buy this stuff." At his alarmed look, I put my hand on his arm. "But it's not our money. Everyone in the lab pitched in. I just did the shopping." I took a step toward the back door. "And now we're going to have a wrapping party."

"We are?" Jose asked. "Do I have anything to say about this?" The corners of his mouth turned up, betraying what he really thought.

"Nope." I grinned. "The party is tomorrow night at work, so you don't. No time to find anyone else."

"Well, you know I love a fiesta," he said smiling. He followed me out the door.

After dinner we had our wrapping fiesta in the family room. The lab adopted ten families this year so there was a lot of wrapping to do. As usual, the parents all picked sensible items like underwear and socks and clothes and the kids all requested toys. I would have loved to buy the most stylish clothes and most popular high-tech toys, but of course the budget didn't allow for that. Still, I'd found a lot of nice stuff. I thought everyone would be pleased.

And after we got done wrapping at about 1:00 a.m. one thing led to another and Jose and I had another kind of fiesta. It had been a long time since we'd made love spontaneously, without doctors instructions, and it was wonderful. It was probably the only Christmas gift we'd be able to afford this year.

The next night Jose brought the wrapped presents over to the lab in his truck. As he brought in bag after bag of wrapped

presents, my co-workers on the party committee were impressed, as was the Santa we'd hired.

He came over to Jose and I as we were arranging the gifts under the tree. "Ho, ho, ho. It looks like Santa has a little help this year."

I glanced at him and he was the best Santa I'd ever seen. His whiskers looked real, his blue eyes twinkled behind his wire-rimmed glasses and his red velvet suit was beautiful.

Jose chuckled from his position kneeling on the floor. "Looks that way, Santa." He pointed up at me. "My wife is too generous."

I flushed. Did Jose know I did spend a tiny bit of our money supplementing the gifts? "Uh, it was the generous people here at the lab. They donated the money for the adopt-a-family. They wanted to have a special Christmas celebration."

Jose settled more comfortably on the floor next to the tree, and grabbed my hand. "Maybe next year, we'll have something extra special to celebrate."

I sighed. "I hope so." I prayed so. But so far, the fertility treatments weren't working.

Santa looked at us carefully from under his red velvet cap.

Someone turned on the CD player and the words, "Santa baby, slip a sable under the tree, for me. Been an awful good girl. Santa baby, and hurry down the chimney tonight," wafted over the room.

My co-workers finished setting out the refreshments just as the first family arrived. It was the Ramirez's. I went to greet them and lead them over to Santa in his throne near the Christmas tree. The parents seemed a little embarrassed but the kids were bouncing-off-the-walls excited.

"Ho, ho, ho," Santa said. "Who do we have here? Could it be the Ramirez family?"

Up close, the three boys and one girl in the Ramirez family seemed awed by the large man dressed all in red.

"Yes, Santa," Mrs. Ramirez said. "That's right. And Alexandro and Umberto and Roberto and Yasmin have been very good this year."

Jose came over and put his arm around me. "Let's leave them to it. You did your job. Let's enjoy the party."

I glanced back at the kids' glowing faces as Jose led me over to the refreshments table. All that work was so worth it.

*"Santa honey, I wanna yacht and really that's
Not a lot.
Been an angel all year.
Santa baby, and hurry down the chimney tonight."*

I got some delicious hot spiced cider and piled up a red and green paper plate with turkey, ham, little rolls, carrot and celery sticks, crackers, cheese, and lots of cookies. Jose and I sat down and enjoyed ourselves.

More and more of my coworkers and our adopted families arrived and the volume of the talking and laughing almost drowned out the music.

*"Santa baby, fill my stocking with a duplex, and checks.
Sign your 'X' on the line.
Santa baby, and hurry down the chimney tonight."*

Someone turned off some of the lights and the festive Christmas lights strung around the room and on the tree blinked on and off much more noticeably. Jose and I finished eating and vacated the table so others could use it.

*"Santa baby, forgot to mention one little thing, a ring.
I don't mean on the phone.
Santa baby, and hurry down the chimney tonight."*

"This song is awful," I said in Jose's ear over the noise. He nodded. "I agree. Where's a nice Ave Maria when you need it?"

I scrunched up my nose. "We aren't allowed to play religious music."

Jose laughed. "At a Christmas party?"

"Technically, it's a holiday party," I said with a smile.

Grinning, he shook his head. "Can I get you some wine?" he asked.

"Depends," I said. "Who's our designated driver?"

"Hhm," Jose rubbed his chin. "I think it's your turn."

"Okay," I said with a smile. Trust Jose to keep track. "I'm designated."

He went off to the bar and I craned my neck trying to see what was going on over near Santa. Unfortunately, it was too crowded; I couldn't see a thing.

A couple of my co-workers stopped and thanked me for my work on Adopt-a-family. It's nice to be appreciated.

*"Santa baby, a 454 too, light blue.
I'll wait up for you dear.
Santa baby, and hurry down the chimney tonight."*

And then something smacked into my leg. I looked down and saw a fancy remote-controlled sports car, closely followed by one of the Ramirez boys.

"Sorry, ma'am," he said.

I crouched down. "Wow. This is a nice toy. Where did you get this?"

"Santa gave it to me!" he said, beaming. "I asked him for this and he gave me a present and it was this! He's awesome!"

The boy was so happy. I was happy for him. "Yes, Santa is awesome."

"Well, bad news," Jose said, above me.

*"Santa cutie, there's one thing I really do need, the deed
To a platinum mine.*

Santa cutie, and hurry down the chimney tonight."

I stood up as the boy and his toy zoomed away. "What?"

"I think they're playing that Santa song again," he said.

I grimaced. "Ugh. I think you're right. I think the music committee needs some assistance."

*"Come and trim my Christmas tree
With some decorations bought at Tiffany's.
I really do believe in you
Let's see if you believe in me.
Boo doo bee doo."*

"Yeah." Jose said, "That was a cool toy, by the way," as we went in search of the CD player.

It was. Very cool. I wonder who brought it?

Several hours of chatting and laughing and eating and drinking later, most folks had cleared out. The Ramirez's were some of the last to go and I couldn't help noticing their gifts. The two oldest kids had some kind of electronic gadgets clutched in their hands. Mr. and Mrs. Ramirez' hands were chock full of stuff and Mr. Ramirez was now wearing a leather Broncos jacket.

I pointed at them. "Jose, do you recall wrapping those gifts?"

"Nope. Must have been some one else on the gift committee."

But I was the only one on the gift committee.

Then Julia, on the party committee, came over to Jose and I. "Can you guys help Santa clean up? Lisa and Sarah already left and my husband and kids are waiting at home for me. I told them I'd be home over an hour ago."

Jose and I looked at each other.

He shrugged. "Whatever."

"I was thinking of going to mass tonight," I said. "But I guess we can stay."

"Thanks!" Julia wasted no time in grabbing her coat and rushing out the door.

*"Santa baby, slip a sable under the tree, for me.
Been an awful good girl.
Santa baby, and hurry down the chimney tonight."*

Listening, Jose and I said, "Ugh," at the same time.
Santa came over to us. "Good. My favorite song!" He smiled.
"So, it looks like we're the clean up crew."
Jose nodded. "Looks like."

I got to work wrapping up the leftovers and sticking them in the fridge.

When I was done, I joined Jose and Santa picking up trash around the tree. "Jeez. It looks like a wrapping paper explosion," I said. "It's all over the place."

Santa chuckled, his belly amazingly similar to a bowl full of jelly. "Yes. They were all very excited. I love giving out gifts."

*"Think of all the fun I've missed.
Think of all the fellas that I haven't kissed.
Next year I could be o' so good.
If you'd check off my Christmas list.
-Bee Doo Bee Doo."*

The three of us finished picking up.
Jose scratched his head. "Cara, does any of this paper look familiar?"

"Come to think of it, no," I said.

"In fact," Santa said. "My heart's desire is giving people's heart's desires to them." His eyes twinkled.

I thought about all the gifts I'd seen at the party and how none of them were the sensible gifts I'd bought. I glanced at Jose, but he was staring at Santa with an odd expression on his face.

"There might be another present under the tree, for you two," Santa said. "Your heart's desire."

*"I really do believe in you.
Let's see if you believe in me.
Boo doo bee doo."*

I knew what our heart's desire was. And I had a feeling Santa knew what it was, too.

Jose reached for my hand.

"Yes, please," I whispered.

Jose squeezed my hand more tightly.

Santa placed his hand on my stomach and smiled.

Jose and I held our breaths.

*"Hurry down the chimney tonight.
Hurry down the chimney tonight..."*

"That should do it," Santa said. "I know you'll take good care of them."

Them?

"Twins. A boy and a girl." Santa smiled. "Merry Christmas."
And then he disappeared.

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