



# Faerie Christmas Cinnamon Sticks

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**Cinnamon Sticks**

**Faerie Christmas**

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**CINNAMON STICKS**

**FAERIE  
CHRISTMAS**

By Katica Locke

## Cinnamon Sticks: Faerie Christmas

Running all the way down the long hall of the seddryn house, Ezarali burst into the room he shared with Datira. The golden-haired faerie was stretched out on their bed, flipping through a magazine, but he tossed it aside and sat up as Ezarali entered the room.

“Well?” Datira asked. Ezarali grinned and ran over, flopping down on the feather mattress beside him.

“Three weeks,” Ezarali said and he giggled, pulling a pillow into his arms and hugging it tight. “I’m to be given to a diplomat from some place called Nethmalon as thanks for helping write up a trade agreement. Something like that. I sort of stopped listening after he said *three weeks*.” He pressed his face into the pillow and laughed out loud. He could feel his wing ridges tingling, the joy and excitement fluttering inside him making it hard to repress his glamour.

Datira laughed.

“Eza, you’re *sparkling*,” he teased.

“I can’t help it,” Ezarali said, shoving the pillow away and sitting up, a cloud of pink sparkles dancing around him. “You’ve only been

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here three years, Dati. I've been here almost *seven*. Seven years of diagrams and worksheets and lectures on sexual positions and foreplay and cock sucking; seven years of waiting and dreaming and yearning. I want to *do* all the things I've learned, I want to worship and please my Master, I want to be loved."

"And soon you will," Datira said with a grin. Ezarali squealed and lay back on the bed, pulling Datira down with him. "What do you suppose he'll be like?" Datira asked, snuggling closer to Ezarali and linking arms with the pale faerie.

"I know *exactly* what he'll be like," Ezarali said, closing his pale pink eyes. "I've been dreaming about him for years. He'll be kind and gentle, but he'll be strong and forceful, too. He will adore me and give me gifts and write songs about me--"

Datira giggled. "You're not expecting much, are you?" he said.

"Okay, fine," Ezarali said. "Songs are optional. And he'll be beautiful, and I'll love him for the rest of my life."

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“And what sort of faerie will he be?” Datira asked. “A ceol sidhe?”

“A music faerie?” Ezarali snorted and flipped his pink hair into Datira’s face. “Don’t be silly. He’s a diplomat; he’ll be something important, like a siochain or an eag, or an anam sidhe.”

“An anam!” Datira said with a gasp. “That would be so good for you. They’re almost as high a class as a soldias.”

“I know,” Ezarali said, “but status doesn’t matter...much.” He laughed. “I just want someone I can love, someone I can make happy.”

“And you’ll get him,” Datira said, reaching over and hugging Ezarali. “Three weeks!”



The early morning air was crisp against Nathan’s face as he left the club, pulling his coat closed against the chill. He took a slow, deep breath as he waited outside the door for his roommate, Joe, his breath flaring white in the streetlights as he exhaled. It was hard to believe summer was only a couple of months away. He

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glanced up at the dark, heavy sky, the clouds lit from below by the glow of the city, and wondered if they were in for one last, late snowstorm. It wouldn't have surprised him in the least.

Joe finally emerged, tucking his wallet back in his pocket, and the two of them headed for the apartment they shared. It was lucky they only lived six blocks from the club; they never had to worry about who would be the designated driver. They always walked.

"Did you see that red-head who kept checking you out?" Joe asked as they stood on the street corner, waiting for the light to change.

"Yeah, she was pretty hot," Nathan said, tucking his hands in his pockets. He hadn't really noticed; he'd been busy sneaking glances at the tall black guy playing pool. "Did you see the blonde by the jukebox as we left?"

"No. Was there really?" Joe asked, turning around. Nathan grinned and shook his head. His friend had a weakness for blondes.

"C'mon, it's late," Nathan said, catching Joe by the arm before he could head back to the club. "The light's about to change." Joe grumbled,

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but returned to Nathan's side as the walk signal flashed from orange to green. Joe started to step down off the curb, but Nathan grabbed him by the back of the jacket and jerked him away from the street as a jacked-up pickup blew through the red light.

"Asshole!" Joe shouted as the truck roared past, but it was drowned out by the squeal of tires and a god-awful *crash* as the truck smashed into the driver's side of an old Firebird. "Oh, fuck!" Joe grabbed Nathan's arm, both of them, for one interminable moment, just standing and staring at the mangled vehicle. He was dead. The driver had to be dead. Nathan had just watched somebody die.

"Call 911," Nathan said, snapping out of his shock and pulling away from Joe. He ran into the street and around to the passenger side of the car. The driver's side was mostly under the truck. Other people were stopping, getting out of their cars; he could hear sirens in the distance, and he hesitated. He didn't have to look. Someone else could take care of it. But everyone else was standing back, a few on their cell phones. Nathan braced himself and leaned down.



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The windows were all smashed, little squares of safety glass everywhere, squealing beneath his shoes as he shifted his feet. He looked in the back seat first, but it was empty, as was the passenger's seat. Thank God for small favors. Finally, his eyes shifted to the driver, and Nathan's stomach knotted up, his insides going cold. The man wasn't dead, but he should have been. A twisted piece of metal was stuck in his neck, blood staining the front of his shirt. Nathan stared, watching little bubbles appear around the edges of the metal as the man took short, wet breaths.

"H- Help is on the way," Nathan said, but he could tell it wouldn't be in time. The man coughed, blood flying from his lips, and his body jerked, one last wave of thick blood rolling down his chest before he went still, his eyes open and staring...and empty. Nathan turned away, feeling like he was going to throw up. A wave of dizziness swept over him and a thick, gray mist swam before his eyes.

He cried out as his shoulder hit the pavement, the world snapping back into crystal-clear focus. Squares of glass dug into his palms as he pushed

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himself up off the ground, shaking off the hands that appeared from nowhere to grab at him.

"I'm fine, I'm fine," he heard himself say, looking around at a swarm of faces he didn't recognize. He pushed through them, stumbling over to Joe, who led him away from the wreck.

"What happened?" Joe asked. "I saw you go down and I ran over--"

"I don't know," Nathan said. "I got... lightheaded... Must have been gasoline fumes."

"Must've been," Joe repeated. "C'mon, let's go sit down; the police want to talk to witnesses." Nathan took one last look at the Firebird, and then let Joe lead him over to a black and white cruiser.



Ezarali was a mess, his hands shaking, his stomach filled with butterflies, as he waited in a small alcove behind a heavy velvet curtain. He smoothed the front of his long, iridescent robe, fingers picking at imaginary lint as he listened to the goings-on out in the main room. The

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buzz of a dozen different conversations made it impossible to hear anything being said, but it also masked the rumble of his stomach as the mouthwatering aromas of dinner permeated the alcove. Ezarali had been too nervous to eat, and now he was regretting it.

He jumped, his heart pounding against the inside of his chest as the clear and melodious *clink-clink-clink* of silver striking fine crystal cut through the noise. The room fell silent.

“On behalf of His Majesty, King Tokara, and with the gratitude of the entire kingdom of Eva-Korina,” a deep and resounding voice announced, “it is my pleasure to present you, Lord Mechastrin, with the highest honor that can be awarded among our people.” Ezarali had one brief moment to wonder what sort of name Mechastrin was--it certainly wasn’t a faerie name--and then the curtain parted, bathing Ezarali in bright light. He heard gasps and murmurs of appreciation as he stepped forward, the gauzy material of the robe whispering around him. His eyes swept back and forth along the high table, trying to pick out his new Master, but all the faeries seated there were members of the council,

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and all of them were clapping politely and smiling toward a very surprised looking human.

Ezarali almost stopped dead. A human? That couldn't be right. Humans were...well, they were nothing. They had no status in sidhe society. Ezarali was better than that--he deserved better than that.

"For you, Lord Mechastrin," the council spokesman said, gesturing toward Ezarali. "Our most beautiful seddryn sidhe. May he please you for years to come." Ezarali swallowed hard, watching his Master--his *human* Master--lean toward the faerie sitting directly to his right. They had a brief conversation, and then Lord Mechastrin rose to his feet. He was an older man, with silver in his dark hair and a strong, chiseled look to his features, like he had been carved from wood.

"Thank you all, very much," the human said, tilting his head slightly toward the spokesman. "Please convey my thanks to His Majesty, as well. And now, with deepest regrets, I must take my leave. I have an early morning appointment on Nethmalon, and their morning is four hours

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ahead of yours.” There was a smattering of light laughter around the room.

Ezarali felt lost, all his years of training had done nothing to prepare him for this. His Master glanced down at him, standing small and lost in the middle of the dining hall.

“Come,” Master said, and Ezarali raced to obey, his robe fluttering behind him as he ran up the dais steps and around the end of the table. Master and the faerie he had been sitting beside were already leaving through the large, double doors at the end of the hall, and Ezarali fell into step behind them, his heart and mind racing.

A human! He could hardly believe it. He was an important human, but still... It was all Ezarali could do not to cry, but he didn't want to ruin his black and gold eyeliner. Not a word was spoken until the three of them had left the palace and climbed into the shiny silver carriage waiting out front. Master sat facing forward, his faerie advisor sat opposite, and Ezarali sat with his legs curled beneath him at Master's feet, hesitantly resting his head against the seat cushion beside Master's thigh.

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“What in the hell is this?” Master said quietly.

“A seddryn,” the faerie said, and Ezarali glanced over at him. “He’s like a...a pet that will see to his master’s intimate needs.”

“You mean he’s a slave,” Master said, his voice flat. “A sex slave.”

“It’s more complicated than that,” the faerie said, “but basically, yes.”

“And you couldn’t warn me that they might do something like *this*? Isn’t that what I pay you for?”

“I was unaware that they would even consider it, M’Lord,” the faerie said. “I’ve never heard of a seddryn being given to a human before.”

“So what am I to do with him?” Master asked, and Ezarali raised his head, his mouth suddenly dry. “My wife will have hysterics if I bring him home.”

“Allow me to take care of it, M’Lord,” the faerie said. “I know someone in Nethmalon who will find him a good home.”

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“No!” Ezarali exclaimed, his voice high and thin. “No, Master, please--”

“Do not speak to me,” Master said, staring out the window of the carriage. “I am not your master.” Ezarali looked over at the faerie, silently pleading, but he just turned away. Laying his head back on the seat cushion, Ezarali closed his eyes and wept.



Nathan sat on the edge of the exam table, staring down at his shoes and humming to himself--something he'd started doing in self-defense. He was on his third chorus of *American Pie* when the door opened and Dr. Morris strode in.

“Afternoon, Nathan,” the tall, smiling man said. “What seems to be the problem?”

Nathan opened his mouth, but hesitated. *He'll think you're crazy.* Maybe he was crazy.

“I’ve been having strange dreams,” he said. “Dreams that I’m an animal--a cat, a big cat--and I’m climbing trees and chasing deer... And

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I'm having trouble concentrating. Sometimes I'll just sit and stare at nothing, and when I look up, the whole day is gone. And... and I get urges sometimes to chase things, or stretch out on a sun-warmed sidewalk, or lick myself..." He glanced up to see if Dr. Morris was laughing yet, but there wasn't so much as a grin on the doctor's usually cheerful face.

"Anything else?" Dr. Morris asked.

Nathan drew a slow breath.

*You tell him about me and you'll be drooling on your straight-jacket before dark.*

"There's a voice," Nathan blurted out. "In my head, talking to me. It's- it's schizophrenia, isn't it, Dr. Morris?" Now the doctor laughed.

"No, Nathan," he said. "I can confidently assure you that it is not schizophrenia."

"Then what is it?" Nathan asked. "Are there pills to make it stop?"

"It sounds like stress," Dr. Morris said. "Has anything happened recently that might have triggered this? Were you attacked?"

"No," Nathan said, shaking his head. "I- I did



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witness a car accident about three weeks ago, just before this all started. I breathed the gas fumes and almost blacked out.”

“Was it a fatal accident?”

“Yes,” Nathan said. “I was looking at the driver when he died.” Dr. Morris made a thoughtful noise. “Does that mean something?”

“It means you’ve been traumatized, Nathan. You’re suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and you need to relax and give yourself time to heal. Talk about it with someone, and it doesn’t have to be professional help. A friend, a family member, anyone. And don’t worry; you’ll be fine.”

“Thanks, doctor,” Nathan said, breathing a sigh of relief. Stress. It was just stress.

*Stress, my furry ass. What a quack.*

Nathan pressed his fingers to his temples and groaned.



Numb and hollow, Ezarali sat on the floor of a long, black car, staring down at his hands folded

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in his lap as the vehicle rolled silently down strange streets lined with tall buildings of brick and glass. Ezarali had never been off his home world before, but what could have been a great adventure had turned into a nightmare he could not seem to wake from.

The car eased to a stop and Master's faerie advisor, Oki, climbed out of the back of the car. Ezarali followed silently. All his screaming and pleading and tears had done nothing to change Master's mind, and now Ezarali had nothing left. He was unwanted, rejected, worthless. He didn't know a soul on the entire planet, and even if it had been offered, he couldn't go home. The seddryn house would never take him back. Not even Datira would speak to him. He would be shunned.

Oki led him down a long, narrow path between tall buildings and to a dark doorway set back in the stone wall. The faerie pressed a button beside the door and somewhere inside, a buzzer sounded. Ezarali found his heart pounding as they waited. It didn't matter what happened to him now, but he was still afraid. The faerie glanced at him.

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“Say one word and I’ll cut your throat,” Oki warned.

The door opened, spilling bright light and pipe smoke out into the narrow space. The human standing in the doorway was the tallest that Ezarali had ever seen, with shoulders that filled the opening. He looked down at them, his gaze moving from Ezarali’s head to his bare feet, and then he stepped back, motioning them inside with a jerk of his head.

Keeping close to Oki, Ezarali glanced around the rooms they passed through with a growing sense of dread. This was not a nice place. It was hot and dirty, the air thick with the stench of sweat, waste, and rotting food. He could hear screaming, crying from somewhere, the sound echoing all around him and making his skin crawl.

Finally, Oki took him into a nice room, with carpet on the floor and a fresh breeze whispering through the open window. It was some kind of office, with a large desk and many bookshelves, and a golden-haired human seated behind the desk. Not the bright, shining gold that Datira

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had, but the pale, faded version that was all humans could manage.

“What’s this?” the human asked, looking at Ezarali.

“An ainmhain sidhe,” Oki said. “I heard you were in the market.”

“That’s right,” the human responded. “I’ve got half a dozen mages monitoring my auctions, waiting for a lust faerie.”

“Why?” Oki asked. “Ainmhain are worthless whores.”

“That’s what they want,” the human said with a shrug.

“Stupid mages,” Oki said, shaking his head. “So, is it a deal?” Rising from his chair, the human dug into his pocket and handed the faerie a shiny platinum ilae. Ezarali watched Oki turn and head for the door. He started to follow, but the human grabbed him by the arm and jerked him back. “Where do you think you’re going?” the human asked. “You belong to me now.”

“I do not,” Ezarali told him. “Let me go--” He yelped in pain and shock as the human slapped

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him upside the head. Mouth agape, he stared at the man.

“Never been hit before, eh? Either do as you’re told, or get used to it. Now move.” Ezarali let himself be shoved out of the room and down a long hall. His beautiful robe was stripped from his body, leaving him standing in just his gauzy underthings--meant to tease and excite his Master rather than cover his body. He was shoved into a cold metal chair, his hands bound behind his back and a silver collar fastened around his neck. For the better part of two hours he was made to sit under a bright light. Twice, the human who had struck him came over and pulled him to his feet, turning him around and lifting his undershirt to reveal his delicate wing ridges.

Finally, the light went out and the human returned, clipping a long chain to the collar around Ezarali’s neck.

“You just made me a small fortune,” the human said, cupping Ezarali’s cheek in one large, rough hand. “Come on; your new master is waiting.”

Choking back tears, Ezarali followed the human out into the night, shivering as the wind

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cut through his underclothes. The human led him to a long, black car, and for an instant Ezarali was filled with hope that Master had returned to claim him, but then the door open and a stranger climbed out. Another human. Ezarali bit his lip to stifle a sob.

With his hands still bound behind his back, he tried to climb into the vehicle, but fell, landing on his side on the floor. No one seemed to care. He could hear money being exchanged, and then the new human climbed into the car with him, stepping over him to take a seat. Once the car was moving, though, a pair of strong, gloved hands reached down and sat him up.

“Thank you,” he whispered, glancing up at the man who had bought him.

“I am Lord Desserik,” the human said. “You will address me as M’Lord or master. Understood?”

“Yes, master,” Ezarali said, but he couldn’t bring himself to say it with the same reverence he would have used with his true Master. Lord Desserik didn’t seem to notice.

“I don’t want any trouble out of you,” Lord Desserik said, slowly removing his gloves, one

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finger at a time. Ezarali drew his knees up, a cold, sick feeling growing in the pit of his stomach. Something bad was about to happen. “I can be a generous master, if given cause, but I will not abide any disobedience. This is your only warning.”

“Y- yes, master,” Ezarali said, tears slipping free and rolling down his face. Lord Desserik frowned at him.

“I hope, for your sake, that those tears are real and not some kind of trick,” he said. Ezarali flinched as the man reached for him, but sat still as Lord Desserik removed the horrible metal collar. Ezarali watched him set it on the seat, and wished he could reach up and rub away the feeling from his skin, but his hands were still tied behind his back. Swallowing hard, Ezarali stiffened as Lord Desserik reached out, the human’s thick fingers brushing against his bare arm. Lord Desserik made a soft sound, his scowl deepening, and then grabbed Ezarali’s face in both hands.

“You’re not an ainmhain, are you?”

“No, master,” Ezarali said, trying to shake his head. “Please don’t hurt me.” Lord Desserik

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released him and he fell back against one of the other seats.

“That lying, rat-fuck son-of-a-bitch!” the human shouted, and Ezarali’s fine hair stood on end as sparks of blue and purple lightning crackled in the air around Lord Desserik. Ezarali cowered, hiding his face in the car seat. After a moment, the heavy, prickling feeling in the air died down and he risked a quick glance at Lord Desserik. The man ignored him, acting as though the outburst had never occurred. Ezarali watched him push one of the many buttons located on a panel on the ceiling.

“Change of plans, Les,” Lord Desserik said, and Ezarali’s eyes darted around the car, trying to see who he was speaking to. “We’re going to Siva Delta.”



Nathan glanced away from the news as someone knocked on the door of his apartment. He sat a moment, wondering if he should just pretend that he wasn’t home. He had sent Joe



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out to the bar without him, and he wasn't in the mood for company.

*Don't answer it, the voice said. They don't smell right.*

Nathan grabbed the remote and turned the TV off before rising from the couch and heading for the door. His shoulders tensed, the hair on the back of his neck standing on end as he unlocked the deadbolt. He ignored it. It was just stress.

Standing in the hall were a man and a woman, both dressed in charcoal gray slacks and suit jackets; he wore a white dress shirt and a burgundy tie, she wore a burgundy blouse.

*Color-coordinated; nice. Tell them to go away.*

"Nathan Baxter?" the man asked.

Nathan hesitated.

"Yes."

The man snapped his fingers and a long, echoing howl, like the bawl of a hound, filled the hall, making Nathan's blood run cold. The voice inside him screamed, raising goose-bumps down his arms, and he involuntarily stepped backward,

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his heart suddenly racing. “What’s going on?” he asked. “What was that?”

*It was a fucking Ghost Hound. He’s a Huntsman. Now run!* the voice shouted, and for once he was tempted to listen.

“Sir, you need to come with us,” the man said.

*No! Run!*

“Why?” Nathan asked. “What did I do?”

“Were you witness to a fatal automobile accident twenty-five days ago?” the woman asked.

“Yeah... Are you with the police? I already gave a statement.”

“We have a few more questions,” the man said. “It should only take a few minutes.”

“Can’t you just ask me?”

“We lack the proper equipment for documentation, sir,” the woman said. “Please; this is very important.”

“Well... okay,” Nathan said. “Let me get my shoes and coat.” He pushed the door shut and headed for his room.

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*We have to get the hell out of here,* the voice said. *Nathan, they're going to kill us!*

Nathan pulled on his sneakers and slipped into his coat, grabbing his keys and wallet off the dresser as he left the room. He followed the man and woman down to the street and silently climbed into the back of their black sedan. He stared out the window, watching the dark city roll past, humming under his breath to drown out the voice.

"You can relax," the woman said suddenly, "we're not going to kill you."

Nathan glanced away from the window and frowned.

"I didn't think you were," he said.

"I was talking to your spirit," she said.

"My what?"

*Me, asshole,* the voice said. *She was talking to me, and you can tell her she's hardly convincing.*

"Your spirit," the woman said, the two voices overlapping and making it hard to concentrate on either of them. "That voice in your head that's probably telling you that it doesn't believe me."

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*Oh, she's good,* the voice said, thick with sarcasm.

“Would you shut up,” Nathan snapped, and then glanced toward the front of the car. “Not you.”

*Finally, you talk to me.*

“I didn’t think so,” the woman said.

“How did you know? About the voice, I mean?” Nathan asked, shifting uneasily in his seat. The only person he had told was Dr. Morris. Wasn’t this kind of thing protected under doctor/patient confidentiality?

“I have one, too,” the woman said.

“One what?” Nathan said with a forced laugh. “A stress-induced auditory hallucination?”

“No, a Werespirit,” she said. “I’m a werewolf.”



Ezarali sat on the floor in front of Lord Dessarik’s chair, his chafed wrists red and sore. He’d been untied, finally, and given a glass of water, which he sipped as his gaze roved around

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the room. They were in a manor much like what he would expect to see on his own planet--a sprawling house of wood and stone--not like the tall, glass and metal buildings in the city. Across from them sat yet another human, one that Lord Desserik had politely addressed as Lord Revaise. Unlike every other human Ezarali had met recently, this one seemed very interested in him, and just sat, staring, as Lord Desserik recounted the events that had brought them there.

"I know you are always in the market for pretty new slaves," Lord Desserik concluded, "so I thought I'd see if you were interested."

"Indeed I am," Lord Revaise said, and Ezarali glanced at him, a shiver running down his spine at the hunger in the man's eyes. "How much do you want for him?"

"Well, I paid seven ilae, and drove three hours..."

"I'll give you ten," Lord Revaise said, his eyes never leaving Ezarali.

"It's a deal." Ezarali watched as the money was exchanged and Lord Desserik left without a backward glance. He tensed as Lord Revaise

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walked over to him and took the glass from his hands.

“Get up, slave,” the human said.

Ezarali scrambled to his feet.

“My name is--”

Lord Revaise slapped him across the face, hard enough to make him stumble sideways.

“You have no name,” Lord Revaise said. “You are my slave and will answer as such.”

“Yes, master,” Ezarali said, fighting tears. He cried out as the human grabbed a handful of his hair and used it to steer him out of the room and down a long stone hall to a thick, wooden door. Ezarali trembled, each breath a tiny gasp as Lord Revaise unlocked the door and shoved it open, the light from the hall falling across a bare mattress lying upon the floor of a tiny room. Ezarali balked, his heart climbing up into his throat as Lord Revaise tried to shove him into the room. “No, master, please,” he begged, tears flowing freely. The human punched him in the ribs and flung him into the room. He hit the stone floor, scraping skin off his knees, elbows,

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and shoulder as he skidded to a stop. He sobbed, but Lord Revaise wasn't finished with him yet.

Ezarali screamed as he was dragged by his hair onto the mattress, his face forced down into the filth, and his undershorts ripped from his body. Seddryn were chosen for their desire to be overpowered and controlled, trained to please their Master, and he tried; he tried to want what was happening, he tried to accept his master's will and be grateful that he could please him, but as the human's large, hard cock entered his unprepared, virgin body, all he could do was scream.



*I told you to run.*

"Shut up," Nathan muttered, his voice hollow in the small, empty room. "This is all your fault." The voice didn't argue. Nathan sat, drumming his fingers on the polished metal table and watching rings dance across the surface of the water in the clear plastic cup they had given him. After forever, the door opened and he jumped to his feet as the man and woman entered.

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“What is going to happen to me?” he demanded.

“We need your clothes and personal effects,” the woman said, placing a plastic bag on the table. The man set down a pair of sweat pants, a T-shirt, and a pair of rubber-soled slippers beside it. “I’m sorry, Mr. Baxter, but in accordance with Council law, you will be removed immediately from Earth and placed on a planet of equivalent technological advancement.”

“Wait, you’re going to do *what*?” As usual, he was ignored.

“You will be housed in a facility on Nethmalon equipped to accommodate your special needs, with others in similar situations. You will be taught how to work with, and if need be, to control your spirit so that you are not a danger to yourself or others.”

“And then I can come home?” Nathan asked. The man and woman exchanged glances.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Baxter,” the man said as the woman left the room, “but it is highly unlikely that you will ever return to Earth. As we speak, an unclaimed body in the morgue is being



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prepared to take your place. You are about to die in an apartment fire.”

“What? You can’t do that!” Nathan shouted. “My mother will have a heart-attack!”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Baxter,” the man said again. “These are the rules. Just be glad this happened on Earth and not Eshaedra; you would have been shot on sight. Now, please remove your clothing and place them in the bag.”

Nathan didn’t know what to say. Mutely, he stripped off his shirt and stuffed it into the bag.

“What about my things? What about my roommate? What about my neighbors?”

“You’re roommate is being detained and the building will be cleared before the fire is started. The loss of your possessions is unfortunate, but all of your needs will be taken care of at the facility. When you’re ready, they’ll even help you find a job and place to live.”

“I have a job and a place to live,” Nathan muttered, kicking off his shoes and unbuttoning his jeans. He pulled his wallet out of his pocket and opened it up, ripping the plastic photo sleeves out of the center. “Can I keep these, at

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least?” he asked, holding up the pictures of his family; his brothers, his sister, his mother.

“Yes,” the man said, after a slight hesitation. “I think that can be allowed.”

“You want these, too?” Nathan asked, standing in just his socks and underwear. The man shoved the sweats across the table to him. “I can’t believe this,” Nathan said as he started to re-dress. “This is unconstitutional.” The man made a humorless sound in his throat.

“Unfortunately, this is bigger than the US Constitution.” The man grabbed the bag of Nathan’s old clothes and motioned toward the door. “Let’s go. The facility in Siva Delta knows you’re coming and will have an apartment waiting for you. On behalf of the Great Council, I apologize for the inconvenience and wish you luck in your new life.”

*Tell him he can bite us.*

Nathan smiled grimly as he left the small room, the over-sized slippers making soft flopping sounds against the tile floor.



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Shivering, Ezarali lay on the mattress and watched the line of light that shone through the crack under the door. It was almost time for food again, though which meal it would be, he had no idea. He lost track of time months ago, sleeping when he was tired, eating when there was food, screaming when his master wanted to hurt him, and staring at the line of light in between. It was always there, warm and golden, broken now and then by a shadow passing near the door. Shadows usually meant food, but not always. Sometimes they meant pain. Sometimes they just passed by.

Ezarali's stomach growled and he wrapped his arms tighter around himself, trying to muffle the sound. If Lord Revaise heard, he would be angry. Ezarali began to shake at the thought, and he drew his knees up into the hollow beneath his ribs, hugging them as he rested his chin on his bony knees.

It was much later, much longer than he usually waited between feedings, when a shadow finally appeared in front of the door. Ezarali didn't move, hardly daring to breathe as he listened to the door being unlocked. It flew open, sending a breath of fresh air racing over his naked form and

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making him jump as it banged against the wall. Lord Revaise stepped into the doorway, threw a piece of bread and some vegetable peelings on the floor beside the mattress, and then left again, slamming the door behind him. Ezarali didn't move until the shadow was gone and the light glowed unbroken beneath the door once more.

Scrambling off the mattress, he knelt on the stone floor and grabbed at the food, stuffing it into his mouth with both hands, swallowing almost without bothering to chew. If he didn't eat fast, the rats would come, and then he'd have to fight for it. His arms and legs were covered in scars and scabs from sharp teeth and claws.

As he choked down a handful of potato skins, he glanced at the door, to reassure himself that the shadow had not reappeared, and he froze, staring at the bead of light that ran up the side of the door. For a long moment, he couldn't understand what it meant, or why it was there, and then a breath of wind pushed against the door and the thin line widened.

The door wasn't latched. Lord Revaise left in such a hurry, he hadn't checked to see that it locked behind him. Slowly, Ezarali crawled across

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the floor and peeked out through the crack, his eyes dazzled by the lights burning along the hall. Easing the door open, Ezarali peered out into the empty hall before stepping through the doorway. His heart raced, his stomach churning. Now what?

Chill air brushed against his arm and side, and he shivered as he turned toward it. Heavy drapes swayed on either side of the open window. Pulling the door shut behind him, Ezarali crept over to the window and looked out, a slim, blue crescent moon hanging low in the glow of the distant city and a fat, round silver and black moon with shimmering iridescent rings riding high overhead, casting faint light upon the wide, sloping lawn and tall slender trees. The ground was far away, but not so far that Ezarali wouldn't risk the jump.

Grabbing one side of the thick curtains, he jerked, yanking it down and wrapping it around his thin frame before clambering up onto the windowsill and leaping out into the darkness.



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It should have been December. Nathan should have been bitching about scraping ice off his windshield before he could go to work and the crowds of Christmas shoppers at the malls, but instead, it was the middle of summer, in some damn month he couldn't pronounce. He sat at the window, staring out at the night and watching the moons rise. *Moons*, plural. A blue one and a silver one with big, black splotches and rainbow rings around it. It would have been pretty, if he was watching a sci-fi movie and not stuck in some halfway house for werewolves.

*Quit feeling sorry for yourself and let's go out into the grounds. I want to sharpen my claws.*

"I don't feel like it tonight," Nathan replied, but he did move away from the window, sinking instead onto the couch and staring at his reflection in the dark TV. "Maybe tomorrow. We can go lie on that rock you like."

*That would be nice. Maybe Cinnamon will want to wrestle.* Cinnamon was a reddish-gold werelion, one of the few big cats currently staying at the facility. Cinnamon's real name was Douglas, but using real names was discouraged. All Weres had to choose a folklname after they changed

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for the first time, to signify the new being that they had become and the union between flesh and spirit blah blah blah. Nathan had picked one just to shut them up. He was Surefoot, one of the least pretentious suggestions made by his spirit, though he still hadn't gotten used to answering to it.

There was a knock at the door, but before he could get up to see who it was, he heard a key in the lock and the facility supervisor, a wereturtle named Shellshock, poked his head in.

"Hello?" he said, and smiled as he caught sight of Nathan sitting on the couch. "Hey there, Surefoot. Congratulations, your last evaluation cleared you to have a roommate and overnight guests." He waggled his thin eyebrows suggestively. "I can't help you with the latter, but I've got the former taken care of." He stepped out of the doorway, allowing a thin young man with shaggy brown hair and warm, amber eyes into the room.

*Werewolf*, the voice said disdainfully.

"Hi, I'm Lasanthi," the young man said, shrugging a duffle bag off his shoulder before stepping over and offering his hand.

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“Surefoot,” Nathan said, and his spirit hissed as they shook hands. “Stop it,” he muttered.

“Knock it off,” the young man said, nearly at the same moment. They glanced at each other and the wolf gave him a crooked grin. “Damn instincts, eh?”

“Well, I’ll leave you two to get acquainted,” Shellshock said, backing out the door and pulling it shut behind him. Nathan turned back to his new roommate.

“I’m sorry, what did you say your name was? La-- Les--”

“Lasanthi,” the wolf said, slower. “It means ‘wolf’ in gryphlian. You can just call me Zerik, though, if you want.”

“Thanks. I’m Nathan.”

“Nice to meet you.” He picked up his bag. “So, which room is mine?”

“Over there,” Nathan said, pointing. “So, how come you got to bring stuff? They took everything from me except for my underwear.”

“Sorry to hear that,” Zarik said. “I’m actually here voluntarily, to learn about Earth. I’m trying



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to get a Visa, and I figured I'd have a better shot at passing the tests if I spent time with people who had actually lived there."

"Wait, how come they'll let you go there, but they won't let me go home?" Nathan asked, frowning.

"Well..." Zarik said, settling the strap of his duffle bag on his shoulder. "Usually, they *don't* let Weres travel to Earth, but I owe my life to a mage who wants me to run errands for him on Earth, so he's pulling a few strings."

"Really?" Nathan said. "Do you suppose he could--"

"You *really* don't want to get involved with him," Zarik said, turning away and heading for his room. "I was twelve when I was mauled by a werewolf. My parents didn't know what else to do, so they took me to the mage and he saved my life, but the price... I almost wish they would have let me die."



Holding the tattered and muddy drape close

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about his body, Ezarali crept along the edge of the road, ready to dive into the ditch at the first sight or sound of a car. He could barely walk, but he didn't dare stop. The thought of being put back in that room kept his legs moving. He had to get as far away from Lord Revaise's manor as possible.

Up ahead, in the pale, silver light of coming dawn, he could see an open place where several roads met. Lying there, in the middle of the crossroads, was a broken crate, one side smashed in and a broken loaf of bread poking out. Ezarali rushed forward, as fast as his leaden legs would carry him, and grabbed the bread.

A string was tied around the loaf, and a bell inside the crate rang out, shattering the silent morning. Ezarali pulled, snapping the string, and turned to run, but it was too late. Lights appeared at the edge of the woods and half a dozen figures jumped out of the bushes, several armed with rifles. Ezarali turned circles, hugging the bread to his chest. Tears rolled down his face as the men surrounded him.

One of them grabbed him and he cried out, but he didn't try to pull away. Fighting just made

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it worse. The bread was pried out of his hands and he was carried into the woods, his whole body shaking. Lord Revaise had found him. He was going to be punished.

But it wasn't his master. It was a new group of humans. Ezarali didn't know if it was possible for them to treat him worse than Lord Revaise had, but he wasn't eager to find out. They gave him real clothes--a ragged shirt and a pair of pants that had been ripped off at the knees to make shorts--and placed him in a long, windowless van with a handful of thin, forlorn-looking humans. The doors were closed and the van began to move. Around him, some of the humans were crying, but he sat silently, hugging his knees to his chest. As long as they didn't take him back to Lord Revaise, he didn't care where he went.

After a while, the others grew quiet, the only sound in the van the steady hum of the wheels rolling over the pavement, but they started crying again as the van slowed, turned, and finally stopped. The doors opened and Ezarali climbed out of the van, a hand on his shoulder guiding him into a large building. The building was filled with fenced enclosures, like an animal kennel,

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only these held people. Most were human, but Ezarali saw a few faeries--all dark-colored fey--many wearing silver collars like the one he had worn briefly.

“Are you a Were?” the man escorting him asked, stopping outside an empty kennel.

“No, master,” Ezarali said, not sure how he would prove it if asked. Fortunately, his word seemed good enough. He was placed within the enclosure and the wire door was latched. The space was just wide enough that his hands did not touch either side when he stretched out his arms, and long enough for him to take six steps before he reached the back wall. A narrow mattress sat upon a wooden frame against one side, but Ezarali pulled the thin blanket off of it and sat in the corner on the floor. The memory of the last mattress he’d slept on was still too fresh in his mind.

A while later, a different man walked up, opened the door, and set a bowl inside. Ezarali crawled forward, his mouth watering, and grabbed the bowl, holding it to his chest as he shoveled the creamy brown mush into his mouth with one hand. Tears spilled down his face; he

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couldn't remember the last time he'd eaten anything that tasted so good.



Nathan raised his head as Zarik knocked on his open bedroom door.

"You busy?" the wolf asked. Nathan was lying on his bed, staring up at the ceiling.

"Not really," Nathan said, pushing himself into a sitting position. "What is it?"

"I've got some questions about Earth," Zarik said, holding up a notebook. "You feel like talking about it?" Nathan didn't, but he nodded anyway. "Great." Rather than allow Nathan to get up and both of them go out to the living room, Zarik hurried over and made himself comfortable on the end of Nathan's bed. Nathan was getting used to having his personal space invaded, though. The people on Nethmalon did not have half the inhibitions that Earth did.

"Okay, first of all, what the hell is mini-golf?" Zarik asked. Nathan stared at him for a moment, and then laughed. They spent the better part of

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an hour discussing everything from rock ‘n roll to silk flowers, and Nathan discovered that he really enjoyed remembering Earth and telling stories about his childhood. He was a little disappointed when Zarik glanced at the clock.

“Shit, I’m supposed to be meeting a friend. Just one more question: Why do you trim trees for Christmas? I would think spring or fall is a better time for pruning.” Nathan laughed again.

“No, not pruning. In this case, trim means to decorate.”

“Oh.” Zarik thumped himself on the forehead with the heel of his hand. “Now *that* makes sense. There’s a picture of a tree in the workbook, all covered with lights and colorful glass balls and stringy silver stuff--”

“Tinsel,” Nathan said. Zarik nodded and made a note on his page.

“Right. Thank you. Hey, isn’t it almost Christmas?”

“Not on this planet,” Nathan said, a hint of bitterness in his voice. “We’re supposed be ‘acclimating to our new culture.’”

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“Well...we could do something, if you wanted,” Zarik said. “Trim a tree, maybe. If anyone asks, I could say it was homework.” He closed the notebook and climbed off the bed. “Thanks for your time. I hope it wasn’t too painful to talk about.”

“No, it was fine,” Nathan said. “I had fun.”

“Great, then I’ll probably have more questions when I have more time.” He glanced at the clock again. “Shit.” He ran out of the room.

*Idiot.*

Nathan could tell his spirit really didn’t mean it, though. It hadn’t taken long for the young man to grow on both of them. It was almost like having Joe back.

With a sigh, Nathan rubbed a hand over his face. Joe. Days passed, occasionally, when he didn’t think about Joe or his family, but he always felt guilty when he realized it, like he was forgetting them. Climbing off his bed, Nathan walked to his dresser and opened the top drawer, reaching in amongst his socks for the plastic photo sleeve he’d been allowed to keep.

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“I’m going out,” Zarik called from the living room. “Be back in a while.”

“Okay,” Nathan said. He sat down on the edge of his bed, staring at the dog-eared photographs of his family and trying to imagine what they might be doing. He wanted to think they were decorating the tree, singing carols while his mother played the piano, making absurd guesses about what each had bought the other... He wanted them to be happy, but he doubted they were. Even six months after his “death”, his mother would still be in mourning, *if* her heart had survived the initial shock.

He got up and put the pictures back in his top dresser drawer, then wandered out into the living room. He didn’t feel like watching TV, so he went into the kitchen and opened the fridge. Nothing looked appetizing. He shut the door and went back to his room.



Knees drawn up to his chest, Ezarali sat in the back corner of the kennel, wrapped in his blanket, his head lolling to the side as he drifted



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in and out of sleep. Every time he closed his eyes, he was back in that room again, alone in the dark, and he would jerk awake, his heart pounding in his throat.

A sound down the row near the main door to the building drew his attention, and he sat motionless, his shoulders tensing as footsteps echoed from the cement floor, drawing near. A man came into view and Ezarali breathed a sigh of relief. It wasn't Lord Revaise. He stared with little interest as the human walked past, eerie amber eyes glancing out from under shaggy brown hair, but when the human stopped and came back to look at him, Ezarali drew the blanket tighter around himself and hunched his shoulders, as though he were a turtle trying to hide in his shell.

"Merciful Maele," the human whispered, one hand reaching out to hang on the kennel wires. "What kind of faerie are you?"

"Seddryn, master," Ezarali answered. The human stared at him for a moment more, and then walked away. Ezarali sighed and leaned the side of his head against the wall of the enclosure. Perhaps he ought to pretend to be some other

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kind of faerie, since no one seemed to know what a seddryn was. Then again, the kennel was not as bad as some places he could end up. Maybe they would just let him live there until he died.

“Hey, Brenneth, sorry I’m late.” That sounded like the human with the golden eyes. “What’d you want to see me about?” The voices moved off, too far away for Ezarali to hear. He had just started to doze off again when he realized that the voices were getting louder. He jerked awake. “I was just wondering how much you wanted for the sickly pink one.” Ezarali glanced up as the two men stopped in front of his kennel.

“How ‘bout half a coin?” the older man said.

“I don’t know if I’m feeling *that* sympathetic,” the amber-eyed one said. “I’ll give you seven.”

“Nine.”

“Split the difference?” the young human suggested.

“Fine. Eight laenes and he’s yours.” Ezarali felt the bottom sink out of his stomach as the amber-eyed human handed over a pile of little silver coins. The older man opened the gate and Ezarali scrambled to his feet. He didn’t want to

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go, but he didn't want to be punished either. He didn't know what to do. The human grabbed his arm and he let himself be pulled out. "Here you go," the older man said, handing him over. "Hang on to him; he was a runaway."

"Great. If I'd known that, I wouldn't have paid more than six for him."

"I know," the older human said with a grin.

"Well, can I have a receipt, then?"

The kennel owner snorted.

"You're kidding, right?"

"I don't need any trouble, Brenneth," the young man said. "What if his previous owner comes looking for him?"

"Fine, fine," the older human said, stalking away and disappearing into a small office. Ezarali glanced at his new master, who gave him a kind smile.

"Don't be scared," the amber-eyed human said softly. "I know someone who will take good care of you."

Ezarali wished he could believe him.

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“Here you go,” the owner said, returning and handing over a slip of paper. “See you later, Lasanthi.”



Lying on his bed, Nathan tapped the end of his pencil against the page of his workbook as he read. He couldn't believe he had to pass tests before they'd let him outside the facility. Of course, some of this stuff would be useful to know, like what not to do if he wanted to stay alive. Never stare into a gryphlian's eyes; they take it as a challenge. Never touch a dracorian; they take it as an insult. The same went for asking a centaur for a ride. It was the most ridiculous bullshit--or that's how he would have seen it half a year ago, when he thought humans were the only intelligent life in the universe. On some planets, they weren't even at the top of the food chain anymore.

Out in the living room, he heard the door open.

“Is that you?” he called. He'd get in trouble

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for using Zarik's given name if it wasn't, and he could barely pronounce his folkname.

"Yeah, it's me," Zarik answered. "You in your room?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Stay in there a minute; I got you something."

Nathan frowned and laid his pencil in his workbook before getting up off the bed.

"Got me something? Like what?"

"A Christmas present. Just hang on another second. It's almost ready."

"Zarik--"

"I know, Christmas isn't for a couple of days, but this won't wait."

Nathan closed his eyes.

"Zarik, did you get me a puppy?"

"No, this is *much* better," Zarik said. "Okay, you can come out." Nathan wasn't sure he wanted to. Taking a deep breath, he braced himself and stepped out into the living room. His jaw dropped.

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Kneeling in the middle of the living room floor was a skinny, dirty creature with matted pink hair and a shiny red bow on the top of its head. It was wearing baggy clothes, hiding any physical clues to its gender, but its face was so delicate that he was tempted to call it a girl.

“What the hell is this?” he asked finally, turning to Zarik, who’s bright smile faded slightly.

“A gift,” he said. “I saw how sad you’ve been, and so when I saw this sidhe in my friend’s slave kennels--”

“She?” Nathan repeated. “It’s a girl?”

“No, sidhe--a race of faerie. He is a guy. I kind of got the impression that you liked guys.” Nathan felt his face color. He thought he’d been hiding it well enough.

“He’s a slave?” Nathan asked, looking back at the kneeling figure to hide his own embarrassment. “You bought me a slave?”

“Don’t say it like that,” Zarik said. “I’ve read about slavery on your world and this isn’t like that. Plus, he’s a seddryn. That’s a very special kind of faerie. Cheer him up and you’ll see.” Before Nathan could argue, Zarik headed for

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his room. “Merry Christmas, Nathan,” he said before shutting the door.



Ezarali looked up at his new master as the human approached. He could tell from the way the human was looking at him that he wasn't wanted this time, either. Now he would be taken somewhere else, traded for another handful of coins-- He started to cry.

“Oh, shit,” his master muttered. “What is it? What's wrong?” The human reached toward him and Ezarali flinched back. The human froze, and then stretched out his hand again. “It's okay,” master said. “I'm not going to hurt you. I'm just going to take off this stupid bow.” Ezarali felt it pull out of his hair. “Do you have a name?”

“Slave,” Ezarali answered without thinking. That was all Lord Revaise ever called him. It made his new master frown, though. “I'm sorry,” Ezarali said. “It's Ezarali. My name is Ezarali. I'm sorry.” But that didn't seem to please this new master, either. Ezarali watched him walk away,

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and then turn back, running his hands through his short blond hair.

“Ezarali, I’m Nathan,” master said. “Why don’t you stand up--” Ezarali scrambled to his feet. “Are you hungry?” Nathan asked. “Thirsty?” His gaze moved down Ezarali’s body. “God, you’re filthy,” he muttered. “Maybe you’d like to clean up?”

Ezarali hesitated, not sure what master wanted him to say. After a moment, he nodded.

“All right,” Nathan said. “Bathroom’s this way.” Ezarali followed Nathan into a bedroom, shying away from the bed as they walked past, and into a small bathroom with a glass shower stall in one corner. “Here you go,” Nathan said, gesturing toward it. “There’s soap and shampoo; I’ll get you some towels...and some clean clothes. Yell if you need anything.” And then Nathan left, pulling the door partway shut behind him.

Ezarali couldn’t breathe. He wrapped his arms around himself and stood, alone, staring at the door and wishing his master would return. Even if this new human hurt him, anything was better than being alone.



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“You okay in there?” Nathan asked from outside the door a few minutes later. “Did you need help with the shower?” The blond human poked his head in, that frown darkening his eyes and making Ezarali’s stomach churn. Nathan stepped into the room and set a large, pale blue towel on the counter, stacking a soft-looking shirt and shorts on top of it. “Is it okay if I help you?” Nathan asked.

“Yes, master,” Ezarali said, nodding.

“I’m not your master,” Nathan said. “Where I come from, people don’t own other people.” He stepped closer, and Ezarali let Nathan remove his clothes. As the shorts hit the floor, Nathan gasped and Ezarali flinched, but Nathan was just looking down at Ezarali’s limp cock. “Sorry,” Nathan said, tearing his gaze away. “I just, I’ve never seen-- Do all faeries look like that?” Ezarali glanced down at himself, slender and soft, the loose skin lying in folds all down the shaft.

“Yes, master,” Ezarali said. All the faeries he had seen, anyway. Nathan looked at him for a moment, but then shook his head and sighed. Ezarali stepped back as Nathan reached past

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him, opening the door of the shower stall and turning the water on.

“There you go,” Nathan said, stepping out of the way. Ezarali moved into the spray, a soft cry escaping him as the hot water hit his skin and rolled down his body. “Is it too hot?” Nathan asked. Ezarali shook his head. “Too cold?” He shook his head again. Nathan was silent for a moment. “How long has it been since you were allowed to bathe?” he asked softly.

“I can’t remember, master,” Ezarali replied, turning a slow circle in the spray.

“I am so sorry,” his master whispered, and Ezarali glanced at him. Sorry for what? Nathan hadn’t done anything to him. In fact, Nathan had been unbelievably nice. Not like everyone else. Ezarali’s heart began to race. This master wasn’t like everyone else. Nathan was a far cry from the Master he’d been dreaming of, but Ezarali was willing to settle for simply not being hurt. He had to make Nathan want him.

“H- help me, master?” he asked, raising his hands to his tangled, filthy hair. Nathan hesitated, and then stripped off his shirt and stepped into the stall doorway. He picked up a

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bottle of shampoo, squeezing a white spot of it into his hand.

“C’mere,” Nathan said. Ezarali moved closer, his hands shaking as he reached out and tried to unbutton his master’s jeans. Nathan jerked back. “What are you doing?”

“I’m sorry, master,” Ezarali said. “I didn’t want your pants to get wet.”

“They’ll be fine,” Nathan said after a moment. “Don’t worry about it.”

Ezarali stood in the shower spray, his eyes closed as his master’s strong fingers worked the shampoo into his hair and then rinsed it away. He did it three times before he set the bottle down and grabbed a bar of soap.

“I’m just going to wash you,” Nathan said, but Ezarali still flinched when the human hands touched his shoulders. Nathan was gentle, though, his touch making Ezarali quiver inside. He was so strong. Nathan’s hands moved down Ezarali’s back and brushed his wing ridges between his shoulder blades. “What is that?” Nathan asked, sweeping Ezarali’s hair off to one side.

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“My wings, master,” Ezarali said, shivering as Nathan trailed his fingers down one fluted edge. The gristly protrusions were very sensitive, and Ezarali felt himself hardening as Nathan ran his soapy hands over them.

“No offense,” Nathan said, “but they don’t look much like wings.” Ezarali raised his hands, bracing them against the misty glass as he swayed on his feet. He closed his eyes, imagining himself staying with Nathan forever, and his ridges began to tingle. He heard Nathan gasp and he opened his eyes, glancing back as the rose, fuchsia, and black butterfly wings spread behind him, shimmering in the steam from the shower. The wings were made of light, generated by special organs in the ridges, and were one manifestation of a faerie’s glamour.

“I take it back,” Nathan whispered. “You have beautiful wings.”

Ezarali turned, trembling as Nathan’s gaze dropped to his cock. Nathan would keep him now, now that he had proved his willingness. Nathan licked his lips, and then turned and walked out of the bathroom.

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Nathan ran his hands back through his hair, his heart racing. What the hell was wrong with him? He'd been attracted to lots of guys, but never like that. It had taken every ounce of will to walk away, to not fall to his knees and take that strange, slender cock into his mouth--

He wanted to slap himself. That poor, traumatized creature would hate him if he did any such thing.

*And yet, he had a hard on,* the voice pointed out.

"That still gives me no right--"

*He belongs to you. Legally, you can do anything you want to him.*

"But morally, I can't," Nathan said. "He needs help."

"Master?" Nathan turned as the faerie stepped out of the bathroom, wrapped in the towel, but dripping water on the carpet anyway. "I'm sorry, master--"

"It's okay, Ezarali," Nathan said. "Go back and

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dry off. I'm just going to go make you a bed on the couch."

"The couch?" He glanced at Nathan's bed. "I can't sleep in here with you?"

"No, why would you--"

"Master, please," Ezarali said, throwing himself at Nathan's feet. "Please, don't make me sleep alone! I can't- I can't sleep-- Not alone, please," he sobbed. Nathan stared down at him, exasperated, and then knelt, gently placing his hands on Ezarali's shoulders.

"Okay, okay, you can sleep in here with me," Nathan said. "I should warn you, though, I'm a... I'm a werecougar, and sometimes I shift in my sleep, but I won't hurt you, I promise." Ezarali raised his head, looking up at him with tear-streaked cheeks.

"You promise?"

Nathan nodded and helped him up off the floor. Without warning, the faerie stepped into him, wrapping bony arms around Nathan's body, the towel falling forgotten to the floor. Awkwardly, Nathan embraced him, his chest aching as Ezarali trembled against him.

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“Now, go get dressed,” Nathan said finally, pulling away. “Are you hungry?”

“No, master. I ate today.”

*We should find the bastard that did this to him. I'll rip his heart out.* Nathan was sorely tempted.

“Well, I’m hungry,” he said, “and you’re skin and bones, so I’m going to make us a sandwich. I’ll be right back.” He watched the panic flash in Ezarali’s rose-colored eyes. The boy was terrified to be alone. Nathan stepped toward him and cupped his cheek in one hand, ignoring the tensing and flinching; Ezarali clearly couldn’t help it. “Listen to me,” he said softly. “I can’t be with you all the time. Sometimes you will have to be by yourself, but I promise I will always come back. Okay?”

Ezarali swallowed hard and nodded. “Yes, master,” he whispered.

Nathan let his hand drop and waited until the faerie had returned to the bathroom before heading out to the kitchen. He returned, two halves of a turkey sandwich on a plate and a glass of water in his hand, to find Ezarali standing in the middle of the bedroom, Nathan’s clothes

## **Cinnamon Sticks: Faerie Christmas**

hanging on him like a scarecrow. The faerie's face lit up at the sight of him, relief evident in his eyes.

Nathan sat on the edge of the bed, motioning for Ezarali to do the same, and he set the plate between them, picking up both halves of the sandwich and handing one to the faerie. Ezarali grabbed it and tried to shove the whole thing into his mouth.

"Whoa, hey-- Stop," Nathan said, and Ezarali froze, his already pale face turning white as a sheet. "You're going to choke on it. Like this; little bites, and chew." He demonstrated. "Now you try." Ezarali raised the sandwich to his mouth, took a tiny bite, and then pulled the rest of the sandwich in against his chest. "That's your food," Nathan told him. "I gave it to you. No one is going to take it." Jesus, what had they done to him? After a moment, Ezarali glanced up.

"Please, master--Why did he give me to you?"

"Oh. Well..." Nathan scratched his chin. "There's a holiday where I come from called Christmas--"



## **Cinnamon Sticks: Faerie Christmas**

“Merry Christmas?” Ezarali said. “I heard him say that.”

“Yes, that’s a way of wishing someone a happy holiday. People get together with family and friends and sing songs and give each other gifts. I miss my home and can’t be with my family, so he gave you to me to cheer me up.”

“I want to cheer you up,” Ezarali said eagerly, the desperation on his face almost painful to look at. “Please, master, tell me how I can please you. I’ll do anything.”

“Can you get them to let me go home?” Nathan asked.

Ezarali hung his head.

“No, master.”

“It’s okay,” Nathan said, feeling like an asshole. “I knew you couldn’t. I was just being bitter. Sorry.” When they were finished, Nathan set the plate on the nightstand and turned down the bed, sliding in on his usual side and gesturing for Ezarali to take the other. The faerie pulled the covers up and was asleep before his head hit the pillow. For a long moment, Nathan just watched him, and then he quietly slipped out of bed and

## **Cinnamon Sticks: Faerie Christmas**

returned to the living room, stopping in front of the bookshelf.

Pulling down a dusty text book, he carried it to the couch. Most of the books he'd been given so he could read up on his "new world" had never been opened, but he'd spent plenty of time sitting and staring at the spines. Turning to the table of contents, he flipped through the pages to the chapter on seddryn sidhe.



Ezarali jerked awake, gasping for breath. He sat up, glancing around the bedroom. His master was gone.

"Master?" he called, his voice rising in pitch. "Master?" Footsteps hurried down the hall and Ezarali drew his knees up to his chest. Nathan stepped into the room and Ezarali sobbed with relief.

"It's all right," Nathan said, hurrying over to the side of the bed. He sat down on top of the covers and reached out, taking Ezarali's hand. That small gesture brought a fresh wave of tears,

## **Cinnamon Sticks: Faerie Christmas**

but for a different reason. “Are you really a seddryn?” Nathan asked after several moments.

“Yes, master,” Ezarali said, reaching up with his other hand to wipe his eyes.

“What happened?” Nathan asked. “Seddryn are supposed to be gifts to important people. Were you lost, or kidnapped?”

“No, master,” Ezarali whispered, shaking his head. “He didn’t want me.” He seemed to hesitate. “I- I know you don’t really want me, either, but please don’t sell me again. Please, master.” He was crying again, and he couldn’t stop it.

“Shhh, Ezarali, don’t cry,” Nathan said, sliding closer and wrapping an arm around Ezarali’s shoulders. “I won’t sell you.” Struggling out from under the blankets, Ezarali nearly crawled into Nathan’s lap, trying to get close to him. He wanted to show his master how grateful he was; he had to prove himself before Nathan changed his mind.

Ezarali kissed him. Nathan tensed, and for a moment, Ezarali thought he was going to pull away, but then strong arms encircled Ezarali, and Nathan’s lips parted, a warm tongue seeking

## **Cinnamon Sticks: Faerie Christmas**

entrance to Ezarali's mouth. Ezarali complied, groaning as Nathan slipped past his lips. That reminded Ezarali of something else he could do, and his hands slid down Nathan's bare chest and quickly unbuttoned his jeans.

Nathan pulled back, his hands grabbing Ezarali's shoulders, and for one unbearable minute, Nathan just stared at him. Finally, Nathan let go and rose to his feet, but he didn't leave. Ezarali trembled as his master finished unzipping his jeans.

"On your knees," Nathan said, his voice faint, unsure, and Ezarali hastened to obey. He licked his lips as Nathan pushed down the front of his shorts, releasing his hardening cock. Ezarali's eyes widened. He was so big! He had to be at least as thick as Lord Revaise...which meant it was going to hurt as much as it did with Lord Revaise.

Ezarali wrapped his lips around the human cock before Nathan could see his hesitation. It didn't matter if it hurt. Nathan was not like Lord Revaise. Ezarali's pain would be meaningful, it would prove how much Ezarali loved his master. It would be worth it.

Nathan moaned, low in his throat, as Ezarali

## **Cinnamon Sticks: Faerie Christmas**

began to suck on him, his tongue teasing the slit and exploring the exposed crown, the smooth shaft. Ezarali had been taught how to please a faerie; he had no idea what to do with a human. Nathan didn't seem to mind, though. He arched his back, placing one hand on the top of Ezarali's head, and Ezarali sucked harder, taking more of that thick cock into his mouth until he felt like he would choke.

Suddenly, Nathan cried out, pulling almost completely out of Ezarali's mouth before thrusting back in. "Eza!" Nathan gasped, and Ezarali felt the thick, warm semen hit the roof of his mouth. He braced himself for the foul taste, but it was only slightly salty, and not at all unpleasant. At the seddryn house, they had been warned about how bad semen tasted. Maybe they were talking about faerie semen. Ezarali swallowed it all and licked Nathan clean as he grew soft again.

"God, that was amazing," Nathan said, and Ezarali raised his head, pink sparkles shimmering around him at the praise. "Get up," Nathan said, stepping back and sliding his jeans and underwear

## Cinnamon Sticks: Faerie Christmas

all the way down until he was completely naked.  
“Take off your clothes and lie on my bed.”



Nathan couldn't believe what he was doing. He watched the faerie strip and lie down on his stomach with his legs parted, and tried to convince himself that it was okay.

*It's what he wants, his spirit said. Look at him--he's not flinching or crying--I think the little faerie was even sparkling a minute ago.* Nathan wasn't sure that made it okay, though. Careful not to alarm him, Nathan climbed onto the bed beside Ezarali, his gaze moving slowly over the thin body, lingering on deep bruises that hadn't quite faded, pale scars on his arms and legs. Nathan could tell that he had been beautiful once--he still was--but Nathan was sad that he hadn't seen Ezarali before all this happened.

He reached out, placing his hand at the small of Ezarali's back.

“I know I'm not the master you must have wanted,” he said, his voice soft. “I know I'm just a human, and I don't really know what I'm

## Cinnamon Sticks: Faerie Christmas

doing, but I want to make you happy, and I'll do whatever I can to be a master worthy of a seddryn sidhe."

"I am not worthy to *be* a seddryn, master," Ezarali whispered. "They didn't want me."

"They were fools," Nathan said before Ezarali could start crying again. "I know nothing about faeries, but even I can see that you are the most precious thing in the universe." Ezarali made a small sound, like he was choking back tears, but he began to sparkle again, the scalloped edges of his wing ridges beginning to glow just beneath the skin. He spread his legs wider and raised his ass in the air.

"Please, master," he begged. "I want to please you." Nathan slid his hand down over the curve of Ezarali's ass. His skin was so smooth, it was like silk.

"You do please me," Nathan said, drawing away and turning to his bedside table. He opened the drawer and dug around until he found the unopened jar of lubricating gel that he'd been given. When they said they'd see to his every need, they meant it. "Now just relax," he said as he peeled away the plastic seal and twisted

## **Cinnamon Sticks: Faerie Christmas**

off the lid. "If you don't like it, it's okay to ask me to stop." He dipped his fingers into the cool gel and reached out, smearing it across Ezarali's opening.

The faerie cried out and jerked away.

"I'm sorry, master," he said immediately, raising his ass again. "I'm sorry. I won't pull away again. Please forgive me, master."

"No, no, wait--" Nathan said, and Ezarali looked back at him, the color draining from his pale face. "I forgive you," Nathan said quickly to reassure him, setting the jar back on the nightstand and reaching out for Ezarali. He sat him up. "I meant, you don't have to apologize. You didn't do anything wrong."

"I pulled away--"

"That's okay," Nathan said, reaching up to brush the hair back out of Ezarali's rose-colored eyes. "What happened to you?" he asked. Ezarali looked down at his hands, his fingers twisted together in his lap.

"He held me down," Ezarali said, his voice taking on a hollow, echoing quality. "He climbed



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on top of me; he forced himself inside me. It hurt."

"Oh, my God," Nathan whispered. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have tried to--"

"No! No, master, please, I want to please you, I want to make you happy--" Nathan grabbed him by the shoulders and he fell silent, staring up at him with wide eyes.

"It won't please me if I think you're scared or hurting," he said. "I won't be happy unless I can please you, too. Understand?"

Ezarali nodded.

"Yes, mast--" Nathan kissed him before he could finish, his hands rising up to tangle in Ezarali's still-damp hair. Ezarali opened his mouth to Nathan, so willing, so compliant, lying back on the bed when Nathan leaned over him, squirming as Nathan's hand roved down his side, over his ribs, to his bony hip. Nathan broke the kiss, breathing hard as he stared down into the faerie's beautiful face.

"Close your eyes," Nathan instructed. Ezarali whimpered, but obeyed, and Nathan slowly leaned down, his lips parting as he neared the

## **Cinnamon Sticks: Faerie Christmas**

head of Ezarali's cock. He slid his tongue along the slit and Ezarali gasped, his back arching. Nathan engulfed Ezarali's cock in his mouth, the loose, wrinkled skin tightening into stiff ridges as he played his tongue along the shaft, bobbing his head as he sucked.

"Master... Master, please..." Ezarali gasped, his voice tight. Nathan let him slip out of his mouth.

"You can open your eyes now," he said, waiting until Ezarali was looking at him before taking the head of Ezarali's cock into his mouth again. He sucked, and the faerie moaned, his whole body trembling. After a moment, Nathan raised his head. "Just relax. I promised you, remember? I won't hurt you." Ezarali still tensed as Nathan slid his hand between the faerie's legs, his fingers easing between Ezarali's cheeks. The gel was warm and slippery, and Nathan circled Ezarali's entrance, his eyes never leaving Ezarali's face. He looked scared, but it was clear that he trusted Nathan to keep his word.

Nathan leaned down, swallowing as much of Ezarali's cock as he could, and as the faerie gasped, he pressed against that tight ring of

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muscle, easing inside to the second knuckle before Ezarali clenched around him. Nathan sat up, shifting his body so that he was leaning over the small sidhe and looking down into his eyes.

“You need to relax,” he said, bowing his head to brush his lips against Ezarali’s cheek, his forehead, his nose, his lips. “Please, just relax down there; I don’t want to hurt you.”

“It- it’s o- okay if it h- hurts,” Ezarali said, his breath coming in short gasps. “I know you don’t want it to.” Nathan kissed him, long and lingering, and after a moment, Nathan felt the tightness ease. Slowly, he began to spread the gel, stretching the small opening until he could slip a second finger inside, and eventually, a third.

“Is it okay?” Nathan asked, watching Ezarali’s face for signs of discomfort. “I can stop if you--”

“No, no, master, please,” Ezarali said. “I want you inside me.” Nathan withdrew his fingers, dipped more gel out of the jar, and spread it along his length. As he moved to kneel between Ezarali’s legs, the faerie started to turn over, but Nathan grabbed his hip and pushed him back down.

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“You’re fine where you are,” he said, stretching out over him, careful to support himself on his forearms. He would probably crush the fragile creature if he didn’t. “Like I said before, you can ask me to stop.” Ezarali nodded, and Nathan captured his mouth in another deep kiss, groaning as he reached down and guided himself to Ezarali’s opening. As he slid inside, Ezarali clutched at his shoulders, fingernails digging into his skin, and he held the faerie tight, pulling away from the kiss and whispering again and again, “Hold on; it’s almost over.” He doubted that it actually hurt, but the fear that it *would* hurt could be just as bad as physical pain.

“You feel so good, Eza,” Nathan murmured, his lips close to the faerie’s ear. “I’ve never made love to anyone who felt so good in my arms.” Ezarali drew a shuddering breath and hid his face against Nathan’s shoulder, shaking as Nathan sank his entire length inside him. Nathan stopped moving, giving him a moment to adjust. “Does it hurt too much?” he asked.

“No, master,” Ezarali said, his voice muffled in the crook of Nathan’s neck. “It feels good.”

“I hope you’re telling me the truth,” Nathan

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said, and he began to rock his hips, working his cock in and out of the faerie's tight body.

"A seddryn never lies to his master," Ezarali gasped, and he arched his back, making breathless, strangled noises as Nathan found a rhythm and began thrusting deeper.

"Don't come," Nathan said, tangling one hand in the silky, pink hair. "I won't be mad if you do, but I'll be happier if you wait."

"I- I- I don't know how," Ezarali stuttered. "I feel- I feel like I'm going to burst." Nathan raised his eyebrows.

"I thought seddryn were taught all about sex," he said, reaching back and coaxing Ezarali's legs up around his waist.

"Taught, yes," Ezarali said, his voice high and tight. "I never--" He shook his head. "I was waiting for my Master, saving myself for him." He squeezed his eyes shut as tears rolled down the sides of his face. "I'm sorry I couldn't save myself for you." Nathan wiped the tears away and softly kissed Ezarali's lips.

"What he did to you doesn't count," he said. "It only counts if you give yourself to someone."

## Cinnamon Sticks: Faerie Christmas

Besides, he never made you feel like this, did he?" Nathan lifted Ezarali's hips, angling his thrusts to hit the faerie's prostate-- Did faeries even have a prostate? Apparently. Ezarali began to shout wordlessly, writhing beneath him as Nathan began to pound into him.

"I've *never* felt like this," Ezarali gasped. "I can't take any more!"

"I'm almost there," Nathan said, reaching down between their bodies and wrapping his hand around Ezarali's cock. "You can come now."

"I can't, I don't know--" He cried out as Nathan stroked him, just a few firm pulls enough to tip him over the edge, thick, pearly strings splattering both of them. Nathan moaned, his hips jerking, as he spilled himself inside the faerie. He lowered himself to the bed, sliding to one side of Ezarali and lying with his arms wrapped around the frail figure. He wouldn't call himself a whore, but he'd been with more than his fair share of guys over the years, and no one had ever made him feel like that.



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Ezarali stared up at the ceiling as he tried to catch his breath. It hadn't hurt. Having Nathan inside him had been uncomfortable at first, but it wasn't that burning, tearing pain that ripped up into his guts, and then it had felt so good. He hadn't known anything could feel like that.

He glanced over at Nathan, lying beside him with his eyes closed. Ezarali smiled. His master loved him. That was all he ever really wanted; to belong to someone who loved him. He was glad, then, that his time with Lord Revaise didn't count and that he could give himself to Nathan. He snuggled closer, resting his head on Nathan's shoulder.

"I love you, too, master," he sighed, closing his eyes. Beneath him, Nathan tensed.

"When did I--" He broke off, and then groaned. "Oh, shit." Gently, he pushed Ezarali away and sat up. "Listen, Ezarali, and please don't get upset." Ezarali knew bad news when he heard it coming. He drew his knees up to his chest and pressed his face against them. He felt Nathan's hand on his shoulder, but he didn't move.

"Eza, I said 'making love'. That's a euphemism-another way of saying 'having sex'. I *do* like you,

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I just..." Nathan sighed, a long, heavy silence falling between them. "Come on, let's go wash up," Nathan said finally

Ezarali rose and followed him into the bathroom, standing with his arms wrapped around himself, staring at the floor while Nathan turned on the shower. He stepped into the spray, letting the water hide the tears that rolled down his face. He felt like a fool. He'd gone and given his second chance, the most precious part of himself, to a master who only *liked* him. He glanced up as Nathan stepped into the shower with him.

"What did I do wrong, master?" he asked, his voice echoing in the small space. "What can I do better? Please..." Nathan leaned his forehead against the glass wall.

"You didn't do anything wrong, Eza," he said. "You have to understand, I'm not a faerie. I'm not even from this planet. I'm from a place where people don't fall in love hours after they meet."

"Why not?"

Nathan shrugged.



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“Scared, I guess. When you give someone your heart, you give them the power to hurt you.”

“I would never hurt you, master,” Ezarali said, hesitantly reaching up and touching Nathan’s shoulder. Nathan turned away from the wall and regarded him for a long moment.

“I know,” Nathan said finally, “but it doesn’t stop me from being afraid.” Ezarali knew what that was like. He had known Nathan wouldn’t hurt him, but he had been so scared... Maybe Nathan just needed to be reassured. Ezarali stepped forward and rose up on his toes, brushing his lips against his master’s. Nathan kissed him back and Ezarali melted into his strong embrace, wrapping his arms around Nathan’s neck. Even if Nathan didn’t say it, this felt like love to him.

Ezarali gasped as Nathan suddenly lifted him off his feet, the faerie’s legs automatically wrapping around Nathan’s waist, and he moaned into Nathan’s mouth as he felt the hard length of Nathan’s cock against his thigh. The hot water rained down on them, caressing their bodies as Nathan pressed him against the glass wall and slid inside, filling him completely. Nathan began to move his hips, rubbing that spot inside Ezarali

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that made the breath catch in his throat. He felt the tight, trembling pressure begin to build, pleasure so sharp it was almost unbearable, and he clung to Nathan, shaking from the inside out.

“Oh, master,” he moaned, his head tipped back as Nathan kissed and sucked his neck, “I love you. It’s okay if you don’t, but I do; I love you so much.” He cried out, his legs tightening around Nathan’s waist as Nathan thrust deep, hitting that spot inside him again.

“Why won’t you...call me Nathan?” he asked, grunting, his breath tickling the skin beneath Ezarali’s ear.

“It’s forbidden to call a Master by name,” he said, his hands sliding up into Nathan’s hair, his fingers curling into fists.

“But I’m not really a Master,” Nathan said. “I’m just some guy you were given to.”

“No,” Ezarali said, looking down into Nathan’s green eyes. “No, I am your gift, and you are my Master.” He could see that now. It had just taken them longer than usual to find each other. Ezarali kissed him, their tongues tangling, but

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arched away as Nathan plunged inside him again. "Please, Master, harder!" he cried. He needed it, he needed that fire to burn through him, to white out his vision and stop his breath. He needed it, and only his Master could give it to him.

Nathan reached between them, grasping Ezarali's shaft, and began to stroke him in time with his thrusts. Ezarali felt himself coming undone and shouted wordlessly, his voice quavering. He felt his seed against his skin, warm, slippery between their bodies, washed away in the spray of the shower. Nathan gasped, his grip on Ezarali tightening, and Ezarali closed his eyes as Nathan came, filling him with warmth.

"God help me," Nathan whispered, "I think I do love you." It wasn't quite the perfect declaration of eternal devotion Ezarali had dreamed of, but life, as he had discovered, was not a dream. It was harsh and unfair, but filled with unexpected gifts and blessings.

"Merry Christmas, Master," Ezarali said, pink sparkles dancing around them both.

"Merry Christmas, Eza," Nathan said with a smile as he lowered him to the floor. Ezarali's knees wobbled, but Nathan didn't seem to mind

## **Cinnamon Sticks: Faerie Christmas**

holding him up as he leaned down, stealing Ezarali's breath with a long, slow kiss.

END

## About the Author

I was born and raised in western Oregon's Willamette Valley. After graduating high school, I skipped college and took a part-time job to help support my family. I am contentedly unattached, working for the school district, and spending all my free time writing, reading, or watching TV, movies and sporting events. I'm a huge football and NASCAR fan.

I've been writing stories since I was ten, and in all these years, the one constant in my writing has always been the magic, the supernatural, the inexplicable. Nothing inspires me like fantasy. These days I'm working on numerous short stories and a dark homoerotic fantasy romance series, the first two volumes of which are *Magebound* available in spring of 2009 and *Spellwrought* available in Spring of 2010 through PD Publishing.

## Book Excerpts

Following are some excerpts of other hot m/m erotic romance titles from Shadowfire Press.

If you enjoyed *Cinnamon Sticks: Faerie Christmas* by Katica Locke might also *Midwinter's Night* by Michael Barnette, a 2008 Christmas story.

*A Seelie knight exiled for murder, a cruel enemy, and proof that true love never dies.*

Aerdyn is a Seelie Knight exiled for a murder he didn't commit. Alone, his magic dying, all he has are memories of the past, memories of his lost love Ellian. Then a stranger arrives. A stranger who turns his lonely world upside down and shows him that true love never dies.

Here is a short excerpt from *Midwinter's Night* by Michael Barnette

He stood by the double-paned window of

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his cabin and gazed out upon the fury of the blizzard. Winter had well and truly gripped the land in its frigid talons, and he knew it wouldn't let up until the warmth of spring returned.

He sipped hot cider from the mug in his hands and tried not to think, tried not to feel.

There was only now. Only the screaming storm and the cup in his hands.

No past.

No future, either.

He sighed and shook his head.

But the inescapable memories were there, rooted in his head like some noxious weed he couldn't excise.

And they were always strongest when the winter winds blew cold as death's hands.

"No point in tormenting yourself with things you cannot change," he whispered, voice harsh from little use.

It was a bad habit, talking to himself. But there wasn't anyone else to talk to these days. Even the traders that came up the pass in the late spring, and went down the pass in early fall, had

## Book Excerpts

stopped using the narrow track near his cabin. He couldn't even recall the last time he'd seen a fur trapper on his lonely mountain.

Thinking about the past was an even worse habit than talking to himself. The long winter nights—when the only sounds were the wailing of wind and wolves—seemed to bring out the worst of those memories, because it was then that he remembered *her*.

For a moment he stopped eyeing the blowing snow in the window and saw instead the reflection of a face he hardly knew. Pale and gaunt, the eyes once bright as summer leaves were dulled to grey; hair once the color of new forged gold had lost its shine and dimmed to the color of sun-bleached straw.

He turned aside from the stranger he'd become to himself, preferring not to see the toll the years away from his homeland had wrought on his body.

He already knew the price he'd paid within his soul.

You might also like *Sweet Pet* by J. Applebee.



## Book Excerpts

*Geon is desperate to be free. Can Stephan's love release the shapeshifter from his cage?*

Geon is a Shapeshifter, raised by humans, but kept like a pet. His new owner, Robert wants to use him for his own pleasure, and to entertain friends, but Geon dreams of a life beyond being Robert's personal sex toy.

As Christmas draws near, Geon escapes into the arms of a stranger named Stephan. Together they enjoy intense passionate encounters that leave both men hungry for more. However, Robert wants his pet back, and he thinks nothing of using force and blackmail to snatch the shifter away.

Stephan takes matters into his own hands when he sets out to rescue his new lover from the clutches of the powerful man. He uses an innovative and sexually charged plan to make sure that when the New Year rolls around, Geon will be free forever.

## Book Excerpts

Here is a short excerpt from *Sweet Pet* by J. Applebee

Geon answered him, by removing the large coat in a single shrug. Stephan looked at the garment as it lay around Geon's bare feet, and then he looked up, followed the sleek lines of Geon's legs, the powerful looking muscles of his thighs, the rigid cock that pointed right at him.

Stephan gulped at the sight. He returned his hands to Geon's cool skin, stroked up and down the other man's chest, and over the peaked points of his nipples. Geon gasped quietly, and arched up to Stephan's exploring fingers with a murmur of delight. The sound seemed to echo against Stephan's own frame, and he could feel himself begin to harden.

"This is all kinds of wrong," he murmured. "This shouldn't be happening."

"Just tell me how you feel." Geon nuzzled the dark brown skin of Stephan's neck, with hot breath, and he felt the other man stiffen with resistance before he finally spoke.

"Good, so good," Stephan whispered, surprised

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at the hoarseness in his throat. “What does it feel like--when you change I mean, do you feel the fur coming out? Does it hurt?” Stephan asked with curiosity, and Geon chuckled lightly. He stroked a gentle path over Stephan’s backside, on the skin just above his thick leather belt.

“It’s ticklish; makes me want to rub myself all over,” Geon growled, and then ground his hips against Stephan.

“My bedroom’s upstairs,” he whispered.

Stephan climbed the stairs, not daring to look over his shoulder as he moved. He didn’t want to question what was real, and what was not.

As the door closed behind them, Stephan stepped out of his T-shirt and jeans. The warmth that had gathered now slipped away from him, and he was left feeling exposed and totally vulnerable. Geon’s arms were around him in moments, squeezing, and kneading the long muscles of his arms and his back. Each press of flesh released a soft moan of surrender, and Geon claimed that too. He crushed his lips on Stephan’s own, parted the hungry mouth beneath, and sucked on the hesitant tongue inside. Stephan felt the room tip as he fell

backwards onto his small bed. He exhaled in a whoosh of forced breath as Geon landed on top of him, with those amazing green eyes open, drinking in the sight of him. All too soon the comforting weight disappeared as Geon lifted himself up on his knees and elbows. He bent his head and nipped at a spot on Stephan's throat, then lower to his collarbone. Tiny flickers of not-quite-pain sparked wherever Geon bit and Stephan could almost imagine the little red marks that would be left in his wake. When Geon reached his purple-tinged cock, Stephan held himself rigidly, not daring to move. But Geon did not bite; he just made a low noise in his throat that reverberated against Stephan's balls. He swallowed him completely in a slow, wet gulp. When Geon withdrew, the empty dampness made Stephan want to howl with frustration. He felt his hands move to Geon's hair, but his new lover batted his hand away, and kept out of reach.

"Tell me what you want, Stephan," he purred.

A thousand different words battled on Stephan's tongue, and he mouthed soundlessly until a single expression escaped into the air.

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“Please,” he gasped, arching off the bed. “Please, Geon.” He was shameless with desire; it had been longer than he wanted to admit since someone had done anything close to this with him. He looked up, and the evil smile on Geon’s face made him want to snarl. Geon lowered his head once more, and sucked Stephan’s dick in a noisy slurp. Geon’s tongue was longer and more agile than any that Stephan had encountered before; it seemed to wrap itself around the length of his hardness, and pull on the core of his being, until he felt himself disappear into the depths of Geon’s throat. Stephan jerked violently as he came with a muttered curse.

You might also enjoy the sequel to *Sweet Pet*, *Battle Cry* also by J. Applebee.

*Will a new shapeshifter make Geon’s dreams come true, or give him nightmares?*

There’s a new shifter in town. Geon becomes obsessed with meeting this new creature, and will do anything to find him. However, Geon’s

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lovers, Stephan and Danny would prefer him to stay out of sight with them.

Stephan and Danny are torn between protecting their lover, and letting him learn about others of his kind. The men have to trust their sweet pet that he will do the right thing, even if their instincts make them want to drag Geon back to bed for some more hot sex.

On Christmas Eve, Geon learns of his true origins, but to see more he must leave his lovers just as their three-way relationship reaches an intense stage. The new shifter is sexy, strong and smart. He seems to have all the answers Geon needs, but is he too good to be true? Geon has to risk everything to discover the facts for himself.

Here is a short excerpt from *Sweet Pet 2: Battle Cry* by J. Applebee

“What time is dinner? I’m starving,” Geon asked sleepily.

Danny leaned over, smiling at the young man.

## Book Excerpts

“What did I say? Geon eats way more than I do.”

“I need the extra calories for the change from human to animal. What’s your excuse, big boy?”

Danny leapt off his seat, only to lower himself on to the naked shifter. “I’ll show you what it’s for,” he said with a husky voice.

Geon gyrated beneath the larger man, purring. “Do me now. Fuck me.”

The demand made Stephan’s eyes grow wide. Geon was usually so polite. He wondered where he had learnt that kind of language. Stephan had his answer when the Welshman only said, “I love it when you talk like that.”

Danny unzipped his jeans. The slow metal slide echoed above the sound of the old black and white film that still played on the television set. Geon ran his hands over his own chest, tweaking his small pink nipples.

“Did I tell you to touch yourself?” Danny questioned in a slow voice. “First you disrespect me, and then you do this.” Danny slapped Geon’s

## Book Excerpts

hands away. "You're just making things harder on yourself, slut."

Like a magical incantation, the last word made Geon shudder. The shifter bit his lip. "I'm your slut," he recited over and over again. Geon reached out a hand to Stephan, claspings his fingers tight. "I'm your slut too."

"Don't call yourself that," Stephan whispered, unsure of why it irked him so much. The three men had played dominance games before, but for some reason, Geon's submission felt more profound this time.

"I like being used by you both." Geon arched up, mouthing the words against the bulge in Danny's pants. He used his teeth and lips to pull Danny's boxer shorts down so they sat bunched over his jeans. Danny's solid cock sprang out, wavering slightly as Geon breathed over it. His long tongue wrapped around the shaft.

"This is the best Christmas ever," Danny declared with a groan. "I must have been really good this year."

Stephan gazed at the two men as Geon continued to suck Danny. They looked so



## Book Excerpts

natural together. Stephan found himself moving away slightly, however Geon's long arm tugged him back. His hand slipped down lower until it rested on the prominent bulge in Stephan's sweatpants. The darker man bucked against Geon involuntarily, groaning at the sensation that zigzagged through his body like lightning. As Geon continued to fist Stephan's cock through the fabric of his pants, the shifter licked and sucked on Danny, making contented noises. At long last, Geon's smooth hands dove beneath the elastic of Stephan's clothing, wrapping around his cock. The touches were firm but practiced as the shifter expertly jerked his lover off. Danny came first, throwing back his head as he shuddered. Stephan gazed at his best friend, entranced by the way Danny's muscles grew firm and defined whenever he had an orgasm. As if the larger man could read his thoughts, he reached over to kiss Stephan, holding the back of his head as they embraced. Stephan panted as he came, tipping over the edge as his orgasm struck. The men broke free with a gasp, still looking deep into each other's eyes. Geon raised himself up and then kissed first one and then the other man. "I'm still hungry," he whispered.

## Book Excerpts

Or you might like the urban fantasy *Unspoken*  
by Katica Locke

*An impulsive werecat sparks a twisted game of cat and mouse he may not survive.*

Huntsmen kill Werefolk--it's what they're trained to do. Kae, a young and impetuous werecat, knows this, but it doesn't stop him from following one surly Huntsman into the bathroom of a nightclub. One spontaneous, not completely unwanted sexual encounter later, he's running for his life, pursued by a Huntsman bent on murder...or is it simply revenge? Or is it something else entirely?

Here is a short excerpt from *Unspoken* by Katica Locke

Hands clenched into fists, he starts to rise, but I grab him by the back of the shirt and shove him off balance, his pants tangled around his ankles.

## Book Excerpts

He falls against the stall wall and I twist one arm up behind his back, pinning him there. For a moment, the only sounds are the throbbing music and our ragged breathing.

“Well?” he says finally. “Go on then, kill me. Won’t your furry friends be impressed—the big bad wolf caught a retired Huntsman in the toilet with his pants down.”

“Shut up,” I say, shoving him harder against the poorly painted wood. “I didn’t think Huntsmen retired,” I add, leaning against him as I dig into my pocket.

“Shows what you know,” he says through his teeth. “Now what the fuck are you doing?”

I smirk to myself as I open the little tube of lubricant, warmed by my body heat and slick on my fingers.

“You,” I say, reaching down and pushing a single slippery finger into his ass. He jumps like he’s been shot, a surprised cry escaping between his clenched teeth, and tries to pull away from me. “Just relax, old man,” I say, adding a second finger.. “I don’t get off on hurting people.”

“You fuck—I’m gonna—son-of-a-bitch, stop

## Book Excerpts

it—I'm gonna kill you," he hisses, rattling the entire set of stalls as he twists and bucks, trying to throw me off.

"Don't try to tell me you don't want it," I say, taking my fingers out of him and reaching around to grasp his still hard cock. He gasps, his whole body going rigid, as I let my hand slide along his shaft. "If you weren't such a bigot, this would be deep in my ass right now." His cock twitches in my hand and I let go of it, freeing my own growing erection instead. I slick the remaining lube across the head and then position myself at his entrance. He makes a strangled sound as I slide inside, several short thrusts burying my cock up to the hilt.

You can buy *Midwinter's Night* by Michael Barnette, *Sweet Pet* and *Sweet Pet 2: Battle Cry* by J. Applebee and *Unspoken* by Katica Locke along with other fine m/m erotic romance and yaoi titles from:

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