

A Christmas Wish.

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Funny how life goes. Glancing upon the world through tired eyes. No longer taking that extra minute to appreciate the little things. Forgetting about the simpler joys that at one time could brighten things up. Getting trapped into a rut and calling it everything you were ever meant to be.

Sometimes, it only takes a single nudge in an unexpected direction to have oneself find that special something. As was the case in point for me. And, call it a hunch, if you will. I do suspect that such special nudges come calling for others whom are not quite prepared to leave the rut of an uneventful life. It's just comes down to a matter of answering that call.

In many ways, it feels like another lifetime in these following events that transpired. Hardly is that true. After all, what is one minute amidst an accumulation of a lifetime's worth of minutes? A small portion is given to the youthful moments. Others are reserved for milestones. Suddenly, the downhill coasting into adulthood takes a firm hold and throws the daily routine into something almost bland. Propelled to dredge through it, just to meet some concoction of daily standards, we all find that there is this middle ground that says to do things in the same steps as they occurred from every other day and shall continue to occur upon the following days.

Well, my many '*yesterdays*' consisted of scenes similar to this...

RING!!!

My hand always found it's way to that annoyance, slamming down to deny it's pitiful existence from endlessly robbing me from my little piece of Slumber Land.

With a bit of mental coaxing, I'd find the will to elevate my head up past the level of the warm pillow to gaze upon the far wall. Perhaps a bit cliché, I must admit. Still, it held a bit of humor in me to hang it there. That age old kitty that's just holding on to the edge of it's little tightroped world, knowing that the words 'Hang in there' are always going to be taunting it's never ending struggle for some sort of safer ground.

With that vision refreshed into my mental thoughts, I'd take to my own two and make that small journey to the kitchen for that fresh cup that the coffee maker was preparing. Conveniences of an automated event, based around the notion of a time system that flows in conjunction to the movements of our little world. It always works flawlessly, day in and day out. Guess that's enough to give it praise over. As long as I gave it my couple minutes in the late pm, it would always deliver for me in these passing moments of the am. To think, it was some ill conceived notion of a morning starter that I was more then happy to give up.

Anyhow, I'd pour a cup. Pull out some frozen something-or-other from the refrigerator to warm up, consume, descend the flights of steps in order to depart towards my place of business. Always to the same bus stop. The two-fifteen. Ride ten minutes to the transfer for the Eight-Ten. Another twenty-three minutes to the city landscape. Get off on Third. Walk to Fifth. Enter the Marshal Complex. Press a button for a ride up to the eighteenth floor. Thirty two steps to the left. Take another twenty-three steps after entry to the cubicle. '*Morning, Frank.*' '*Morning, Jenny.*' Collect the daily stack of awaiting papers and proceed to feed them into the '*Eternal Clankery*'. To others, it was considered a computer. Not to me. That looming gray box with a massive monochrome eye and clicking keys was societies way of stating on a daily basis that I was just another component in a cold and massive bit of what that city even meant.

Into the stiff chair, I would land upon. Lay down that stack to my right. Pull the top sheet off. Place it into the holder. Adjust. Bring my fingers to the '*home keys*' and start feeding in the data. Just like every other day. Let the impressions of black print fly from it's ensnared home of micro-tree remains to my eyes. Where it found it's way back to the screen that lay in front of me. It always felt like

an automated function since month one. Numbing my mind amidst the artificially maintained environment of low cost carpeting and particle board filled work space. Perhaps, the mostly hush-hush environment was there to aid my mental state's slide into an oblivious comatose of pure nothingness.

But, not on that particular day...

So, there I was. Punching the clicking keys with a mild preponderance of what to have for the lunch period that was creeping up upon me. When I heard the most unusual sound. After all, it wasn't yet three o'clock when the evening shift typically walked in.

No.

It was the invasive sounds of a delivery man, trampling over the floor to my cubicle. I looked up and swiveled my chair as he clearly pronounced my name.

"Delivery for one Mr. Adana. Just sign here." he said, juggling between a small, brightly colored package and a clipboard that was coming my way.

I took the clipboard and gave it a signature upon the dotted line. This kind of city life had long prepared me to understand what clipboards and dotted lines meant for pens and signatures, after all. And, long before the delivery man had left the room, I was staring at this queer little package, all brightly decorated in a half red, half green tinted wrapping. Perhaps what had taken me as even stranger was how it had no name, nor address affixed to it's exterior.

At the time, my mind went right to a suspicion that this was some kind of gag gift. True. My co-workers had never shown the slightest sense of humor for all the time that I had worked here. But, I was reaching for possible sources to this curiosity. *How* I was reaching.

So, I did what many sensible people would have done when they suspected a box to be semi-innocently booby trapped...I set it aside and returned to my work.

For a whole five minutes that I could tolerate.

Here was the issue. I *knew* that my co-workers weren't the type to spring a gag gift on me. And, I could find no possible person in my inner circle of friends that would have thought of doing anything like this. There was this blank space of a name that kept my mind preoccupied with that little package. The very notion had a way of defusing the mistrust I had placed upon the package. My eyes started darting away from the screen, no matter how many times I tried to will myself into focusing on the job at hand.

Then, when temptation had grown past the point of tolerance, I plucked my fingers from the home keys and reached for the letter opener, tucked away inside my cubicle's desk drawer. It's pointed end slid easily underneath the folds of the package and unbound the little seals with ease.

Seconds was all it took. Mere seconds to reveal the simple box that lay inside.

I care not to measure the splash of the second hand that it took to find the little trinket that hid away amidst the physical cube of pressed wooden remains. It wasn't immediately clear as to what it meant. At least, what it *wasn't* was some kind of gag item.

A trinket.

A mere trinket that was small enough to adorn the '*Eternal Clankery*'. Something to counter the machine that I was connected to, day in and day out. A little reminder about Nature. A deer trinket in mid-prance, to be precise.

Satisfied that the mystery of the package had been solved, I returned my fingers to the home keys, brought my eyes back to the sheet with the black print upon it and continued with my mind numbing job.

I thought nothing more of this deer as I made my way through the lunch period.

Or as I mechanically proceeded to process data to the end of my shift.

Nor as I rode the elevator down to catch the bus on Third.

In fact, I was quite happy to return to my apartment for the evening and do the same things I always did from the previous evening or the evenings before that.

One thing was different on that particular evening, however...

I went to take a seat in my favorite dining chair after having just prepared a TV Dinner. The sharp pain was a real eye awakening moment. My mind snapped to the conclusion that a tack had managed to fall from some nook to find me.

Upon a brief inspection, it was no tack that lay in my chair. Instead, it was that trinket had found it's way into my back pocket.

That... did not make the least bit of sense.

I knew that the thing was still in mid-prance upon the '*Eternal Clankery*' at work. I never touched it past that point after lunch. I barely even looked at it. Yet, some prankster did an anti-pick pocket upon me to slip the thing into my rear pants pocket.

With a renewed sense of curiosity, I rotated the thing in the palm of my hand. Looked at it from every conceivable direction. Studied it's secrets. It was a deer. What else was there to gaze upon? Was some mysterious person trying to tell me something? Why go to the bother of paying a delivery person to bring this thing into my life and insure I went home with it?

Setting the thing down, I proceeded into my evening plans to consume the mass produced meal from the microwave before getting some television time in.

I totally stopped thinking about the thing.

All the way to the point that my eyelids sealed my vision off from the manufactured ceiling of my bedroom.

That old, familiar dream scape was quick to sweep over my vision.

Except, it made no sense.

Then again, what dream ever does, once you proceed to reason it out.

It...wasn't me.

Yet, I was most certainly there.

Perhaps, it was the world that wasn't me more then me not being me.

Where was the city?

Where were the buses and the cars?

Where were the people I passed by, every day?

Why was I running over a field of snow in a dark, chill bitten realm? Yet, knowing that I wasn't the one doing so.

I'd try to rationalize it after snapping back to an awakened state at two, eighteen in the morning. It woke me up long before the alarm clock would have done so. And, as I thought it over, all I could remember was that most everything that wasn't a blur was hardly memorable inside these waking moments.

My normal routine was to always get a good night's sleep.

So, it was little surprise that after thinking it over for a moment or two while the images faded, I was soon to be found returning to a state of slumber.

***RING*!!!**

My hand found it's way on top of that annoyance, muting it's cry from announcing that the day's cycle was starting all over.

I elevated my head upwards.

There was a bit of resistance.

'*Funny*.' I thought to myself. Such resistance wasn't there from any previous days.

It was distracting enough to make me avoid looking at *kitty* and head right to the kitchen to snatch up my awaiting cup of morning coffee.

Now, something important to note about my apartment was how between the kitchen and the bedroom, there was the bathroom. In it was a mirror that could reflect upon the adjoining hallway.

Every morning, I would walk by this little room and it's mirror without taking the slightest bit of notice, until the routine stated to enter it after breakfast.

So, why did my reflection catch my eye on that particular day?

And, why would I ever turn my head to see myself?

Myself...and something else?

Instantaneously, the routine was disrupted.

My order, set to chaos.

My hair was parting.

Well, *not* just parting.

But, parting around some kind of protrusions.

I snapped to a quick conclusion. Remembering a notice about using medical benefits, I quickly realized that I had never actually had scheduled for a check-up on my health.

It was on my *To-Do List*, of course.

Just...never seemed to get around to it.

'*Cancer!*' I quickly concluded with.

It was some kind of head cancer that had I scheduled a visit to my physician, could have been totally prevented. Now, because I had ignored a notice, I was going to die in the most horrid of ways by having head cancer start to tear my skull to bits!

Suddenly, everything about the whole day's activities became a complete struggle. I almost fumbled getting the breakfast to the table. Had to force the morning discs and java down my throat. Find a hat to cover my deformed head with; which was like formulating rocket science. Remembering which bus to transfer to was a painful chore that I just did without thinking on any other *ordinary* day. I almost forgot what floor to get off at or where my office's entrance was located at. I didn't even look or talk at Frank or Jenny. Just went right to my desk with my head hung low.

The cubicle was relative safety.

At least, I used that as an excuse to myself.

'*Off came the hat.*'

Or, more like my hands slipped about the hat's brim.

I gave it another try.

Darn if that hat would just not come off.

I felt pure shame.

The head cancer was going to shame me by keeping my hat upon my head while being indoors.

The chaos of the moment was just not going to yield at all.

Excusing myself from myself, I quick stepped my way to the office restroom to see what was the matter with my hat.

What I did know and what I didn't had a high speed collision inside a matter of two minutes.

Gazing into the restroom's mirror, I saw something that denied reason...even the reason that head cancer might provide. My hat was surrendering my protrusions. Literally flexing outwards to become somewhat oval in it's shape.

'*This can't...be.*' I thought to myself. Surely, my eyes were delusional. It was not even possible that my head cancer was growing...*horns?*

There was no possible explanations that could come to mind. It was a physiological impossibility. One does not just start creating new growths that were deemed by everything known to science to be unrecorded and unsound to ones own DNA sequence.

To that belief, I tried to excuse the impossible by conducting a quick examination. After all, a physical impossibility would not pass the test of simply reaching up and brushing ones hand through the delusional illusion of growths that could not be there.

One problem was quick to present itself, once I was actually successful in removing the misshapen piece of head wear. Simply put, my hand did not pass through the delusional illusion of the

sprouted antlers. And, indeed, they were antlers and not horns. There were significant branches, like a tree would grow.

In fact, my hand merely went **bump** right into the bloody things.

My mind pushed forward this bizarre notion to explain the impossibility.

The Trinket.

It was the bloody Trinket.

That was the wild card in the otherwise uneventful day of the uneventful week in the uneventful month amidst a lifetime of uneventful moments.

'This is bizarre.' is exactly where my mind zeroed in on. *'No scientific way a trinket could cause antler cancer. Tis' true that trinkets can cause harsh growths of cancer that can kill. But, no kind of trinket just causes hard, pointy things to erupt. What am I? A victim of some hack writer's joke, here? Head to a doctor and pay for the cure, perhaps? What kind of Mad Cow disease derivative has soaked into paint that I walked under in order to spring points from my head? Perhaps, Penn and/or Teller have placed a bloody curse upon me and I'm just the butt end of some magician's prank. Perhaps, there's even some bloke watching me from some unseen telly and having his jollies at my misfortune. Let there be some kind of rational explanation and let me get on with my life, already!'*

In other words, I hadn't quite gone around the bend. It was just visible from where I stood. That was a twisted fact from some twisted force that I dare not wish to mess with.

With a rational symbolization of will power over the need to purely panic, I gulped down a disgusting heap of fear and stuck my hat back into place. While it was the dickens to get it off, I would have sworn on a stack of Bibles under the Pope's hand, himself, that the darn thing just wanted to refuse to slip back into place. Pulling and wrestling with all my might was barely doing the job. Only when the tell-tale sound of fabric being ripped in two did I manage to bring the bloody thing back down.

In fear of the thing rising up like a tree sapling at speed play, I dashed into the hallway and proceeded to my boss's office. All the while, my mind was racing for a believable disease to use as an excuse. After all, no doctor in the world was going to have a name for one just sprouting a set of horns inside the office workspace, now are they? Once I shook that door handle downwards and pressed open Mr. Geezerweitz's door, I almost came face-to-face with him.

"Mr. Adana. What is it that has you looking so flushed, this cheery morning? Do tell."

"Oh, Mr. Geezerweitz." I moaned, quite convincingly. "I have the most terrible of urgent news. Just came from the doctor's office. I have the harshest case of *Canter-Oompah-Draks* that he has ever heard of. My head's already pounding and I'll soon be blinded by anything more than the softest of light. He says it may take several weeks to clear up."

"Canter....*whatchamacallit*???" he tried to repeat. "Come now, Joel. I'm sure that it can't be all that bad. We'll just turn off a few of the overhead lights..."

I could swear that I felt those antlers growing with every lie that I tried to speak. "*Canter-Oompah-Draks*. Please. I must make it back to the apartment, before I can't stand to take the bus line home. You must..."

"Alright. Alright." he quickly caved in with. "I know that you've had a few sick days mounting up. So, we'll just bypass the whole doctor's note bit and subtract it from your vacation days. See how you feel about your job in a couple days. Because, any more than that and you may find an *Oompa-Loompa* has filled your seat, Mr. Adana. So, go ahead and rest until you can think up a better excuse like Death Cancer or some kind of muck."

I didn't linger about for niceties. Only took my two steps to the door with the briefest of farewells, then onwards to the elevator.

"Night, Frank."

"Night, Jenny."

Click

Proceed down the hall.
Press the elevator call button.
Things felt...*off*.
I looked down.
My hand!
My hand was starting to fuze!

I mean that I still had the use of my fingers...or at least the fingertips. It was just that they didn't want to fully part in that way that hands are suppose to part the fingers in. It just didn't make all that much...

Ding

The elevator was quick, this time. Usually, when it's the end of my shift, the thing's full of others on a departure to somewhere else. In a way, I was instantly gratified to learn the car had arrived without a soul on-board. Could have only imagined what another passenger might have thought, having seen a levitating hat and a hand that was rapidly beginning to deform itself.

Ding

Stepped out into a rather empty lobby and made my way into the light.

My *made up* disease wasn't all that far off in it's predictions. The second I saw the light of day was when I had wished to have brought a pill for some pain relief. This *thing* was picking up in it's pace and I only wanted to find the shelter of my homestead to hide away from the public. Quite literally dashed down Fifth to catch a crowded Eight-Ten bus. I almost swore under my breath as my hand barely wanted to grasp the yearly bus pass. Have no idea how I even managed to keep a-hold of the thing as I presented it to the driver.

Walked as calmly as I could to the back and took one of the few seats that remained.

Grasped my hat and kept it held during the transfer point.

I was well aware of a few sets of eyes already judging my every move until I reached the transfer station.

Got off.

Eight minutes wait.

Eight lonely minutes as I feared my hat was becoming two halves.

The two-fifteen rolled up to the curb.

I fumbled for the pass and managed to display it without suspicion from the driver.

Took my seat.

And, waited.

"Daddy! That man has horns!"

'Oh, bloody Hell! Called out!!!'

"Daddy! Look!"

I slowly turned my head and just stared at the eight year old that was pointing and raving about my extrusions when I noticed the father was just taking notice. Thinking quickly, I began to say, "So? I have horns. Went and visited a certain type of convention..."

The father just placed his hands between his son's ears and gently guided the kid into looking elsewhere.

That was that.

Whatever was going to be, was going to be.

I was well aware of the silent stares at my broken hat.

I tried to ignore it, the best I could.

It felt like forever for my stop to arrive.

Once it did, I was grease lightning to the door in order to permit my sensation of embarrassment to conclude.

Ran up to the entrance of my housing complex with what might be described as the quickest

pace of my whole life. Didn't slow down until reaching my apartment door upon the third floor. It was then when I had to come to terms with just how fused and numb my hands had become. It was a true chore to fetch the set of keys and get them into the tiny slot.

Determination.

Pure, single minded determination is about all I can explain for making that feat to occur.

Indeed, having gotten the key into the lock was accomplishment enough that I quite abandoned the things there as soon as the door could be swung open.

Didn't even close that door, neither. Just charged inwards to investigate how badly my hat had lifted to show off the new growth.

Quite a bit.

Why, I couldn't begin to comprehend how much the hat had parted, until I reached up with my deformed hands and fidgeted around with the torn garment.

Full on set of antlers.

'What now? Live indoors? No more walks in the sunshine? Get a job as a telemarketer?' I thought to myself.

I was going to have none of it.

Went to the phone to dial up my family doctor.

Seemed the sensible thing to do, after all. You get sick and you go to your family physician. They make it all better.

Except when said doctor isn't there to work the bloody phone for you to reach said doctor with.

It became the comical game of lifting the hand set to watch it flop about.

First upon the table.

Then, to the floor.

Followed up with a bit of a circus act to recover the thing.

I got the brilliant idea to just let it rest upon the floor after dialing in the number and talk to him as best as I could while kneeling.

Rotary dial.

Why did I ever believe in keeping a rotary dial phone around the place?

Sure. It came with the apartment when I first rented. But, that was no excuse.

Especially, not now when I half had a heart attack upon seeing that I almost had no fingers left to speak of. They were slightly present for the keys. It was just that the disease had picked up the pace.

What kind of disease robs a man of their hands in the matter of minutes, anyhow?

No way was I going back on the any public form of transportation with this happening.

Didn't matter.

The distraction of dialing out for help was to be disrupted by a far stronger urge.

A migraine, to be exact.

It suddenly didn't matter how strange my hands had become. I just clutched both sides of my head and went running into the bedroom.

Right along with the pain, came this dizzying sense of confusion.

I was literally finding it hard to place one foot in front of the other as my body kept wanting to collapse into any direction that it could find.

So, I dove for the bed and pressed my face into the pillow.

Couldn't even begin to time how long it took for my whole head to feel as if it were on fire. I do recall the slight notion of the antlers growing down into my brain as a self diagnoses for the cause of it all.

Nor how long it took for the unconsciousness to deliver itself. For, it was the only form of relief I was given to everything that was going on.

Once I had awoken, I had found the covers over my eyes. It was still daylight, though.

Heard the neighbors banging the headboard against the wall, three doors down.

The sheets smelled funky. Not that there was any cause for it. After all, I had taken them down to the local laundry just three days, prior.

Another thing that grabbed my ears were the footfalls, right inside my own hallway.

Perhaps, someone had just let themselves in. After all, I did neglect to bar the front door in the same fashion that any lunatic might have utilized.

Pushing my head upwards to spy on whom it might have been, I was quick to catch on that the whole world...*didn't look quite right*.

"What?!? What is that?!?"

"Call the animal control. We got a live one, here."

'Mr. and Mrs. Bixley!' I tried to say. *'Get out of my apartment, right this instance.'*

Only, it didn't even come close to coming out that way.

All I heard was some crazed animal, screaming about the bloody room.

Next thing my eye locked in on was the kitty poster. It was behind a slight pane of glass and kitty was suddenly having the strangest friend over for visiting.

The light from the window was shining inwards in just the right way to make the reflection happen.

Hence how I was catching the first glimpse of my *new self*.

It wasn't Human in the least.

Have to say that most of who I am was not taking the hint.

It was the instinctive portion that was doing the kicks upon the bed sheets in a mad attempt to rise up out of bed. The fight almost felt as if it were coming from a whole new level that I had no true concepts about.

To be at all honest, it was once I did land my own two feet upon the floor that the shock took a hold. That hard wood floor gave the strangest sound. It always gave this soft plopping like sound when I first stood upon it, right along with a bit of a squeak. No plop, this time. It was a far harsher clonk like sound. And, not two. Four.

Distinctly four.

'Oh, what has this horrid disease been doing to me?' I thought as I took notice of the neighbors making a hasty retreat from my bedroom entrance. Then, I gazed upon what I couldn't believe to be my own body. At least, the torn remnants of my clothes upon it were clueing me in to that fact until I could wrap my head around the changes a little better.

Without so much as a doubt on how to do it, I departed the bedroom to dart right for the bathroom. *Mr. Bixley* took up a defensive position inside the central hall. Was he seriously going to try his three months worth of karate against me, instead of just closing the door?

I minded him little as my interest was more on that bathroom mirror. I just had to see how badly this unknown cancer had become.

The next challenge was the average, everyday, ordinary bathroom light switch. I don't even remember if I looked at my hand or not when I fumbled to press it into the *on* position. All I remember was how annoyingly hard it proved to be.

Once I had the light going, I went to that mirror to find nothing of myself.

Bloody nothing.

My whole face was simply gone.

I must have looked like an absolute beast to my neighbors, now that I was addressing the changes. Danged if I even remotely understand how DNA works. Whatever it had done, my face was totally reconstructed. This elongated region had grown out from my mouth and nose areas. My very eyes were now taking in a whole different range about my presence.

'I'm a rutting deer.' If life had any more surprises to present, I was hopelessly conclusive to one singular notion. Run like the Devil itself were on my heels to the only place an animal stands a chance

in the big city; the city zoo. For, it almost felt like a curse to have retained my Human capacity to reason, if some crazy cancer was going to rob me of plum everything else.

'Alright. Alright. Calm yourself.' I started to think as a form of defense. *'So, you're now some kind of rutting deer. Can't hide out in here. The word's already out and I know what they do to non-licensed beasties about these parts. We're not going to critter jail and some Death Row table over some crazy cancer, now.'*

Once I had it all in my mind, I need not care about the *why*. It was now all about the *how*. That particular *how* was *'how to stay alive'* in a world turned particularly vicious.

So, I took my eyes from the mirror and tried to think in a way that a deer would be seeing this world. After all, the quadruped walking proved a bit easier then the partial loss of my 3-D vision. I used what I had to take a gander at the rest of myself.

The funny thing was that until that minute of observation, I hadn't even given it a conscious thought about how entrapping these tight clothes actually were. Being partially torn from the dimensional shifts had left them as tight or as loose as could be in way too many spots. Now that I was looking at them, my mind began to register the constrictions and the irritations about these mismatched clothes. And, if I was going to make a go at thinking like this kind of beastie, I knew it had to be done.

Then, there was my Human consciousness going off with a counter debate about the idea. *'It wasn't proper to be seen without clothes of any kind in the view of the public.'* It plainly saw as you or I that my body no longer configured to those standards. But, my consciousness flashed back to my days in the hospital with that stupid gown on. Thing didn't wrap around properly and I had my bare ass to that interior world of the ill and it's healers. I countered to my own subconsciousness that in cases of life and death, most rules about police society are to be thrown right out the window.

It didn't seem to want to contend to such an argument and stopped pestering me as I figured out how to undress myself with little more then my mouth and it's new set of teeth, which were rather flawed. Was this critter meant to be dentist bound? I found a whole missing row. Must have been another factor of the disease, I figured.

So. There I was after a bit. Pile of rubbished clothes upon my bathroom floor and staring at myself like a newly awaken child to the notions of sexuality. Leave it to the subconsciousness to argue about letting anyone catch sight of how *hung* I suddenly was. Granted, my first argument point was weak, if not a bit interesting to catch a glimpse of. I didn't even realize how I had any conscious control over it until it waggled into sight for a second. *'At least, the Gods above were intelligent enough to keep me from being bare ass'ed to the world.'* Then, it was easy enough to recycle that *life or death* excuse.

Clip-clopping my way out of the restroom, I was becoming dead set on how to reach the zoo by foot...er, hoof. After all, I was very accustomed to taking the bus system to anywhere I needed to be. Unlikely I could *talk* anyone into assisting me into catching a ride. Which led me to another eye opening aspect. *How* the deuce do I find some place without the capacity for asking directions or even gazing upon a hand held map? Already an established fact that I could not stay here for too much longer. Out into the open air was where I had to be. So, upon placing one hoof in front of the other, I went towards the front door that was still ajar. That's when I...

...heard this strangest form of vibration. I kid you not. It was a tone of the ultra low frequency as much as it was a motion in the air.

I turned my head to find the source.

It was the trinket.

My mind put two and two together.

The bloody thing probably made me this way.

It may also have been the key to finding a resolution.

I tried turning about...inside my own hallway.

Quadruple.

'Think Quadruped.'

Quadruples and hallways don't make the best fit, after all.

And, trust me. Doing a three-point turn while on four hooves is an experience in and of itself.

Regardless, I felt my sides brush along the bathroom door frame as I brought my antler heavy head towards the living room to find that trinket. It also reminded me that this head gear was still growing. Another reason to get out of this apartment building, quickly. The things could wind up growing past the width of the hallways. Then, what would I do?

But, not now. Now was the time to figure out how to do something with said trinket.

Do you even realize how much we take hands for granted? Why should you? Born with them. They're always there. These marvels truly should be given more praise. Maybe even a whole day of all out partying for the simple fact of their existing to us. I now had hooves and no pockets.

Now, pockets are another thing that deserves a celebration day.

I had...I had *what*, exactly? A back. It would never stick to that. A leg that was totally useless to this kind of need. A *prison hole* that...oh, Hell, no. Not doing that! Nor could I just leave it behind. Just what was I suppose to do as I looked this thing over?

'Hey. Wait a...Hadh't seen that, before.'

The thing was a bit more transparent then I remembered it being.

Inside.

There was now something inside.

That's what caught my *real* attention. Inside lay a tiny little nude figure of myself. So, I wasn't really lost. Just some kind of strange *Alice* world of transferred bodies. Now, I *really* had to take this trinket with me.

Got to say. For a micro figure, those pointy antlers were one of the most uncomfortable things I had ever stuck into my mouth. But, that's where I stored it as I left the place I considered home for what may very well have been the final time in my life. Onwards and downwards to a cage for my former fellow public to watch down upon in. Hey. Better that, then some rubbish bin as a stiff. Or hung on some wall, all gutted out and partial. Even a cursed life was considerably better then some flat out death.

To dash outwards into that empty hall was almost liberating. *Mr. and Mrs. Bixley* had retreated back into the safety of their own apartment and nobody else was peeking outwards.

Clop, clop, clop.

Didn't seem how quietly I tried to tip-toe, these new feet o'mine just could not be silent enough. And, the smells. My nostrils had to be enormous, now. The mixture of several outdoor elements and last month's rug shampoo were just assaulting my new nose. That's not taking in the horrid ghost of recent neighbors having come through here. It was like if I had stuck my nose into one of their armpits.

'Bleh!'

It was just wretched to have to sniff at.

Ah, yes. The stairs. My daily *StairMaster* that I was always looking forward to as an excuse for some exercise. I sure came to a bad conclusion about how to approach those. After all, one tends to hold their head up high as they stride down a set of stairs. We don't tend to consider how to do it, *doggy style*. Yet, I *had* to face that very approach.

All so carefully, I lowered my far-too-heavy head and reached down with what was now far more of a front hoof then what I always regarded to be a hand.

Things felt safe enough.

Placing a trusting level of weight upon said hoof, I carefully took the other fore hoof to the next stair.

The whole world took on a slightly slanted perspective and I nearly froze as if to consider that enough victory for today.

'The death cops are coming.' I egged myself on with.

The next couple steps only made things realistically steeper.

But, I hadn't fallen.

Every step further held this feeling of tempting a disastrous end.

I looked back and discovered that my tail end was now higher than my eyes. Plus, I had a nervous tick that caused the tail to flail about, wildly. Being a former Human, I most certainly wasn't expecting it to do much more than just sit there and act as imitation underwear.

It was the following step where the hind end had to come along for the ride. I took to walking on level ground without even thinking about it. Why was it so difficult to bring along those hind legs, now?

With my heart racing and thoughts of plowing an antler tip into the wall to stop a deadly tumble, I dared to take that third hoof off of the third floor.

I tell you, it was no easier to keep the pace as I went down all the way.

Each step held another sensation of walking a tight rope. No rail to grasp. No objects to crash against. Just me, these steps and gravity.

Somehow, probably through pure determination, I reached that final step and was relieved beyond belief to have avoided a harrowing death in a heap of fur and hooves upon the ground floor.

"Doggy!"

I was rather hoping for a quiet and empty lobby.

No such luck.

It was the kid that resided upon the first floor. '*Doggy?*'

What can I say? Kid was daft and everyone knew it.

I froze in mid-stride as that kid was upon me with a lover's touch. Arms thrown about my neck and I was left staring.

Of course, I never wanted to harm the kid. This was a strange situation, however. Was only beginning to grow awareness for my alterations. Plus, was I ever fearful of making the wrong kind of motions. Especially at that kind of moment. I so desperately wanted to get to the street and dash wildly in some direction before the *death dealers* came for my hide. Perhaps, this kid would become like some kind of hostage. Not a likely possibility, though. I was far too large for that size of shield.

"Doggy! Doggy! Doggy!"

'No. I'm no kind of doggy. Go away, you little bugger.' is what I was wishing to say. After all, my life was hanging in the balance and this kid was nothing but a blockade to any potential safety I could have found. If I had been more deer, that kid would have been ground up meat into the side wall. So, I made a rational compromise. I hefted my head up, kid and all, and calmly walked to the door. Found the lever style handle easy enough to push downwards upon. Then, I was out.

Daft, indeed. I wore him like a collar into the sunlight. Just wouldn't let go. Figured that I would have to remain calm and pick a direction. Surely, he would release after a bit. And, stop snuggling his nose into my long neck fur.

The crowd was certain to gather if I lingered about for too long. I so desperately wanted to get moving. After all, *you-know-who* was surely on their way.

"Davey love doggy."

'Yea, kid. Doggy love doggy, too. Now, scoot!'

It proved to be a challenge. But, I did manage to find some form of aggressive voice to yell at this kid with. And, if some crazy deer beast had given me such a tone, I'd be dashing the other way at the speed of an Olympian.

"Doggy angry? Don't be angry, doggy."

My patience was already thin enough with all this. If it's going to come down to being either you or me, kid, I'll opt for it being me.

One hoof in front of the other, preferably in the direction that I was guessing the city zoo had resided in.

“Doggy go for walk? Yay!”

'Fine.' One hostage to the zoo, if that must be.

One hoof in front of the other.

One hoof in front of the other.

One hoof...

“Someone! Save that child!”

'Of course.'

Of course someone was bound to spot this.

My heart began to race, once more.

This anchor had to go or I'd be the one that was *going*.

Onwards to my hopeful destination.

One hoof in front of the other.

Desperate pleas.

One hoof in front of the other.

“Doggy walking.”

One hoof in front of the other.

“I'm on the phone for help, ma'am.” I hear coming from somewhere behind me.

One hoof in front of the other.

“Doggy. Take me.”

'Kid. For the last time, scram!'

“Get the gun, Ralph!” That was a brand new voice. Time was most certainly up.

'No more Mr. Nice Guy...erm, Deer.' I just started to flat out run...kid or no kid. Not to mention how that trinket was really beginning to irritate me.

“Doggy, run. Run, doggy. Run.”

I'm rather serious about the irritation. It felt as if the thing were beginning to burn a hole into my cheek. I knew that I had to keep it. But, if it grew any hotter, I'd have to spit the Devilish thing out.

“Doggy! Doggy! Doggy!”

“Right thing, hun.”

I ran and I ran and I ran. Who knew what was keeping that kid so tightly clung to my neck. I didn't care, anymore.

Run!

Find safety!

Anywhere!

And, damn that trinket.

Gulp

It *had* to leave my cheek. No more joking around with it. If it was going to burn like the dickens...

“Doggy fly!”

'Doggy...WHAT!?!'

My feet were no longer on the ground. It was official. I went around the bend. No more denying it. Humans don't become deer and deer don't go flying. I had to face it. I was laying in a hospital bed, drugged out or comatose. It was all hallucination and I was hopelessly lost in a mad, mad dream. Besides, you only fly in dreams or in airplanes. No wings. No planes. Just a widening gap between me and the ground.

Yup.

Mad, mad dream.

At least, I could no longer hear the panicked voices of neighbors that had sooner wished me dead than captured. I just felt the need to keep on running. In fact, I took a slight notice to the sudden loss of weight about my neck. Thought the kid finally let go.

Not really.

Whatever was going on was altering the whole force of gravity upon me and the kid.

Guess he really is along for the ride, now.

It suddenly didn't really matter about the facts that I was flying while endangering a daft child. It was nothing but a dream, after all. Nothing about dreams make a damn to anything, anyhow. So, I was running in mid-air. Who gives a crap? Run onwards until this madness concluded itself.

Problem was, the dream just kept on going.

Somehow, me and the kid came to an agreement that he could get upon my back. All I remember was that it took a lot of painful grappling to reach that posture.

It's also quite the spectacle to spy upon the setting sun from high up in the air. Breathtaking. Mesmerizing. A vision that states our place amongst the Universe. It just pulls us out of the more comforting daytime into a darkness with nothing but street lamps, far below.

"Doggy go home?"

To all honesty, I never saw anything that looked remotely like the city zoo. For that fact, the whole city that I once called home had long since vanished from my sight. It was like some kind of suburb, down there.

Or, was it?

Now that I began to pay attention to that *ground world*, it seemed to be passing by at some kind of hyper speed. Then, I *really was* mad in a madman's dream. So, it hardly mattered if the blurring suburb had rushed by to become a no-man's land.

The land had turned to sea in the blink of an eye.

The world no longer mattered.

The kid no longer mattered.

My form no longer mattered.

If this dream was going to keep going, it was becoming *the adventure* that was the important bit. Sea.

Land.

Blandness amidst the circling skies, so full of stars.

I still knew not where I was going. Just that I had to ponder what might happen if I were to stop running. What common sense that I could apply was saying that the loss of forward motion may very well cause a loss in levitation. Seeing as how this was my first non-winged flight, I didn't dare chance the reduction in my forward mobility; dream or no dream.

Another thing that crossed my mind after getting used to the oddity of running on air was how I kind of lost a bit of my Humanity amidst the distraction of fleeing for my life. Here, I've been running for a good several hours or more with a child in tow and I completely stopped listening to a social rule about covering my self. Worse yet, I was actually feeling very comfortable in my new skin. Sure. I was swallowing my pride and preparing to be locked inside an animal's jail cell for display as a nudist. Yet, should I have so easily accepted it?

Just as easily as I had accepted playing horsy to a daft child, I suppose.

And, just as easily as I was accepting to the notion of running on air for an indefinite period of time.

Which, now that I even gave *that* some attention, was becoming rather cold.

I came to terms with having a naturally growing layer of protective fur against it. But, what of my passenger? Could feel his snuggle up and down my back. Plus, the shivers he was enduring. T-Shirt and some light weight slacks were not going to cut the needs for long. In fact, he had stopped trying to talk to the *doggy* around an hour or so ago. All I knew was that the snow covered ground was suddenly looking a bit closer under this dim moon that had flown into the skies with us. Yet, if I was still dreaming, why should I even care about an imaginary character? Suppose it's just in my soft heart to.

With every few steps, that ground seemed to be closing in. Yet, no matter how I tried to step up the pace, I just couldn't gain altitude. Perhaps, this was it. The anxiety would snap me out of my dream and I would awaken in that medical bed.

Else, this was going to hurt.

A whole bloody lot.

Yet, I refused to slow down at all. Perhaps a bit of faith. And probably a whole ton of just being clueless on how it all worked. But, I just kept on running. Running, right into that soft powdered snowbank.

When we touched down, it wasn't anywhere near as soft as I had first judged it to be. And it was for the best that the bank was downright ice hard. For I didn't miss a step upon returning to good old *Mother Earth*.

Then, and only then, did I allow myself to slow down and start taking in the environment a little more.

Sure wasn't home.

Almost the polar opposite.

Darkness.

Everywhere.

Slight shadows were cast from the placement of the crescent moon.

And not a street lamp to be found.

To be lost by not knowing which street you were trying to find is one thing.

But, I certainly wasn't one to know what to do when there wasn't even a street.

Never was the woodsy type, after all.

Give me some good maps over a compass, any day.

But here?

This was where *nowhere* went to find out about the very definition of nowhere.

And then...it hit.

My feet were cold.

Or, rather hooven legs.

The trouble with deductive thinking is that you can reason out that in your dreams, you tend to not feel anything like the bite of a chilly breeze or the stab of a stick in your side. You may visually see it and hear something that the mind recognizes as the thing you are suppose to be interacting with. But, you don't feel the bite from said poke or the cold touch from the ice cube while in one.

It would have been easier to ignore something so simple and keep on believing in this being a dream that was just a bit too real.

But, my feet that were not feet...*were cold*.

And, the breeze that was ever so slight was carrying it's own chill.

'Davey.'

It didn't come out anywhere near that English sounding. But, I grunted it again.

'Davey?'

No reply.

'Well, congrats, you overstuffed, selfish twit.' I started thinking to myself. *'You wanted salvation from a bullet, alright. Ran right to the ends of the Earth for it and you killed the neighbors kid to do it, too. Must feel pretty darn proud of your blunt, selfish...'*

My ears were plenty sensitive. Heard the kid give a soft moan. Felt a bit of a shuffle and a squeeze to accompany it.

I peeked around the environment as best as my new eyes could. Tried to judge on what might have been the least chilly spot and gently strolled to it. Knelt down and tried to shake the kid off as best I could.

He was frozen to the bone. But, we managed to part with a bit of effort upon that chosen spot.

I just observed for a few seconds while in the middle of thinking. While I *might* have made it to sunrise, he certainly was not going to last.

'How ever insane life can get, we're in this together.'

Add another oddity mark to this bizarre day. Yet it was something else that I never thought would come to be. Suppose it would be like trying to describe a mother hen's relationship to her eggs. I hovered over that frozen form of Davey and ever so slowly drew closer to the point that my comfort about kneeling was terribly gone.

Alas, what mattered now was that the kid was concealed from the harshness of this place.

He would survive to see daylight.

Even if it killed me.

Despite how much I tried to remain aware of our surroundings, the tag teamed environment of darkness and cold would pull at my consciousness. Plus, the long run had sapped so much of my strength.

I never even knew when it had happened.

My eyes just drifted closed and I darn near crushed the kid in the process. I say almost, because it must have been an almost unconscious thing. Somehow, I kept that perfect balance of concealment without suffocating or pressing too much upon his form. I never thought of myself as having great instincts to protect.

I only came to realize it when I awoke to the most delicious scent hovering about my nose.

Perhaps, what was even more interesting to discover was that we were not so alone.

There were small people with candle lit lanterns about us.

Very festive looking outfits, too.

My nose was most certainly following the one that held this carrot-like food item. It certainly smelled a lot more interesting than it looked. Granted, my eyes were trying to spy upon the activities of the other two visitors. One of whom had this massive coat in hand and the other was trying to pull Davey out from under my fluffy belly.

Once I grasped the event, I most naturally took to my hooves and exposed the boy, understanding that their intent was to help.

Sleeping comfortably.

Thank the Heavens above for that.

There was just something about that carrot that took my attention by storm.

I had to have it.

To taste it.

To consume it.

I apparently just walked right over the boy as they led me by the nose to their sleigh.

The little festive midget played *'keep-a-way'* with it and I, mellow as could be, just followed the wonderful scent about without a struggle.

The *only thing* that broke the enchantment was the sudden weight of some harnesses. It was like I had just popped out of a dream, when these objects of containment were pressed about my neck and shoulder blades.

"Whoa, big fella." said the little person whom was holding the carrot. Even though I was reacting to a burst of raw fear, his voice and hand that was rubbing along my upper leg held a calming effect. He stuck the carrot within biting range and I regained my composure. Once again, the carrot enchanted me with bribery to remain tame. It continued to lock my concentration as I chewed into its crisp surface with ne'er a care about the fastening tightness from the harness.

Once the final bit of the treat has left my jaws, I let my senses tell me what had just happened.

My eyes spied Davey wearing a heavy coat. It was made of an animal pelt and extremely warm looking. I was glad that Davey was being well taken care of.

My touch could feel the heavy straps that had locked me into some kind of rigging that worked with their sleigh. Guess I was expected to be doing some slave work for the privilege of saving Davey's life.

My nose had some other kind of business to attend to.

So my eyes departed from the sleigh and moved my head to see what all the sniffing bit was about.

'Holy Mother...'

I was in some kind of line.

Like some kind of husky placement line.

My nose was telling me more than my eyes amidst the flickering light from the sleigh.

It was a cow of this species.

And, I don't even know why when my shrinking Human mind thought *doe*, it even went to cow inside my own thoughts. Just what seemed to feel more natural to think.

Some crazy part of my head that had nothing to do with that tiny Human portion just screamed about a *love match* having been obtained.

'What a bloody loon!' went my side that worked with the rules of Humanity. *'That's a beastie that you want to go dating? What are you? Totally mad?'*

Yup. Totally mad. This morning, I was nearly Human. Because of some crazy trinket, I lost my apartment, my way-of-life, my body and almost my life in general. I ran through the streets of my neighborhood and across half the Earth in the nude with a neighbor's child on my back. Now, I'm strapped into a beastly line with hooves for feet and I'm arguing with my subconscious that it's *still* some kind of obscene notion to feel one's heart go pitter-patter over another hooven Goddess of my newly acquired species? When *they* wrote the book of morals, I'm pretty darn sure that this kind of circumstance wasn't brought into the light of debate.

I only had a moment of debate with myself before the whole harness gained some motion.

One of the small people yelled out something.

Next thing I knew, the harness was pulling on me and I had to acquire a sense of uniformed galloping to avoid tripping over myself.

I took to it, quick enough. And, in all honesty, my whole face was pretty much focused upon her backside for the whole trip.

Those gyrating thighs.

That firm set of buttocks.

Oh, and the wiggle in her tail that simply teased.

The way she kept releasing that enticing scent.

I found myself wanting to dash just a little bit quicker to see how it would feel to mount. If only the harness wasn't keeping me a teasing amount of vital inches away.

I think we may have been flying for most of the trip. It's just that darn near anything else at that moment was near oblivious.

Before I knew it, the sleigh and it's team of riders were surrounded by some kind of civilization.

Granted, as much as some massive farm could be considered *civilization*.

My eyes were transfixed to the very second that I felt this hand brush over my muzzle. I heard the clinking of a few snaps being undone and then the pull upon my head by a short leash. The *sweet cheeks* that held my attention to the very end went one direction and I was pulled along in another.

How docile was I, really? Perfect stranger in a strange land just pulls on my chain and I start walking. No resistance? No thoughts about why? Completely accepting to be moved from this point to that? For all I knew, Point B might have been some kind of butchering plant. Yet, the more time I had away from my Human form, the more mindless I seemed to have become.

Without the distractions, I took in a view of my handler. Short. Festively dressed. Had a firm

hold. I could have overtaken this one so easily. Wasn't even holding a carrot or anything of temptation. Just didn't seem to have it in me to make a dash for...well, the middle of nowhere.

Perhaps, on some basic needs level, I didn't want to make a dash for the wilderness. This was, after all, a kind of establishment. So what if I was easily surrendering another ounce of freedom from a former life where I had already surrendered so much. Would always be time to fight for freedom if things turned bad.

At least, I supposedly thought so.

The hand that guided me was walking towards a stable. Rather large place and held lots of flickering sources of light. I gathered it would be a bit warmer, too. It held both the smell of fresh hay and what could have been livestock. Or...pets.

I had to catch my way of thinking. After all, livestock would reflect right back upon myself. So, a livery for pets and/or work animals.

Well taken care of pets and/or pack animals.

We entered through a pair of rather large barn style doors. Just enough to fit through. Once inside, I took notice of all the filled stalls.

A lot of antlers attached to deer heads in here.

Guess I was expecting more variety or at least a bunch of horses. I wasn't truly certain what to make of it.

"New guy, coming through."

Whoa!

It wasn't English.

It wasn't even a language, as far as that went.

But, it was as plain as any native language could be to me.

My thoughts went back to when I tried to talk to the kid and it all came out wrong. Out of a question to a theory, I gave a kind of reply back to that. *"Pardon me. Sir? Where am I?"*

It most certainly wasn't English that I was speaking in, either.

"Had a bit too much of the buffet eggnog, too. Amnesia settled in?"

"No. I'm perfectly fine. Perhaps, fine is not the proper word for it. After all, I was just running on air and..."

muffled deer sounds

"And, keep him corn fed!" is what I heard after realizing that my handler had picked up some kind of beet and just shoved it into my mouth.

Guess I was being too noisy for his liking, or something. Not sure how rude it may have been considered to go shoving food into another's mouth to represent a need for quiet. But, I must say that I was a little less then miffed about it.

The beet was, at the very least, tasty. So, I didn't slow down my hoof steps in the name of a protest. If anything, it reminded me of having missed out on both lunch and dinner. *'Wait. Corn fed?'*

The notion of getting an actual meal became an appealing notion.

A slight notion about if Davey was getting a proper dinner just happened to slip through my mind, when my head was pulled to one side.

Rather mindlessly, I obeyed and was brought into one of those small stalls to finish off my beet in, while the rigging that remained about my body was casually stripped away.

The sliver of my Humanity actually wanted to protest about leaving the things on.

It was just trying to relate to the concept of clothes and went away almost as quickly as it had come.

The short person walked by and secured the stall door.

I felt it make a slight breeze about my bare rump as I just stood there, licking my chops.

'Oh. That beet was so good.' I thought to myself.

Then, I was alone.

Well, in a *line of sight* kind of way.

For, just beyond these inches of wood to any side of me was probably another deer.

Maybe even an actual person.

"Hello?" I called out in my Deer'ish voice.

Not truly a real kind of reply, per say. But, I did start to catch a distant conversation.

"*They freshen up your room, yet?*"

"*A bit slow, this time around. Must be busy with the celebrations to get back to us.*"

"*I will yell my lips off about this stale water. Not worth throwing to the bears with.*"

"*That mean you ever wish to return to the toy grind?*"

"*Perhaps I could step down to the level of handler, instead.*"

"*You know the boss would never allow that. We retain too much from this form. You go and return to being Elvish. Suddenly, the food will taste bad. The work will always be too hard. The clothes will always be incredibly itchy. And, you'll have to be locked up during estrogen season.*"

"*They really do that?*"

"*With no male Elf challenging your need, you'll be plugging every hole in the cow's livery until they knock you silly. The instinct is far too strong.*"

"*Does it beat just standing here with stale water?*"

"*It's the lush lifestyle, my friend. Enjoy what we got or fear what could be. We're more free from anything now then what we used to have. Don't fret the change. You're new here. All the newbies have similar concerns.*"

What was I in for? I *wanted* to return to a more Human form. I most certainly did not volunteer for this strange curse. Had no relish for living inside these four little stall walls for what would most certainly be a shortened life span.

Then again, what would be the alternatives? Escape to a wilderness that was harsh, strange and dangerous? Make an attempt to fly, despite not understanding how it even happened in the first place? Return to my home town and seek refuge inside a zoo? Keep hope alive that this was just possibly the most realistic and bizarre dream that I had ever had? Make my way to a whole new spot upon the face of this miserable dust ball in hopes that I had more options? Perhaps, I really could make a life out of what was laying about me. Was it so bad? I mean, *really*?

Given just a few minutes into the experience of just standing around and waiting for an unknown event, my mind that was used to far more interesting distractions was beginning to argue with me. It seemed to exclaim that there must be a far better way to exist then just standing around upon a spread of hay and listening to the conversation of others. It was quite literally a jail sentence, as I could best describe it. A prisoner for crimes that I had no intention of committing. Crimes that I could not even conceive of having committed. As if life had just turned a corner to become a cruel joke of some kind. After all, confinement is a penalty for having committed the cruelest of acts against others. Why should my unusual change in body and location become a crime for the need to merely exist. Then again, in flight from the threat of death from either gun or needle, I had concluded to seeking out life inside a cage. So, perhaps this was something that I would have to become used to. Total, uneventful boredom at the beck and call of another.

Whom that *another* was going to be was a bit beyond me. Was I now a hostage to my saviors? This entire ranch of midgets were now my masters? Was I intended for something or just meant to stand here and age myself to death? Or, what if I actually were to find out that I had an allergy to hay? Then, what would I do?

Perhaps, I should concentrate on the positives, here. It was relatively warmer in here then the world that I and Davey were just rescued from. It seemed likely that our host or hosts were caring enough to bring us in from said environment. It also seemed likely that we weren't going to be starving. So what if I wasn't slaving away in front of the '*Eternal Clankery*' for eight hours of my life a day. Instead, I would be mostly alone with my thoughts for an unknown length of time. Life was life. Sitting

or standing. Working or thinking. Perhaps, I just need to identify my place in life to enjoy what I got. No more payments. No more city traffic and it's noises. No more notions on creating a retirement plan. Where I would be sitting around with my thoughts.

Ah. Yes. That's the key. I was in retirement. A meals provided, lodging mandatory retirement home. Perhaps on the early side. But, it's a way that I could think of this situation as being. Standing around with my personal thoughts inside a slightly private stall where I never had to keep my pants on. Who wouldn't want that? Why, I could just take a crap without having to make way to a toilet, if I so wanted to. Wallow about in my own filth and...

'That's just nasty.'

Even a prisoner convicted of the most horrendous case of murder is permitted a toilet to avoid wallowing about in his or her's own crap.

Alright, then. What else do prisoners get?

Reading material. Which just dawns on me that critters don't read. They don't write relationship letters to loved ones on the outside, either. No mail. No form of entertainment. Just a bunch of hay. A bucket of water. And a bunch of time to stand about with.

Why, I probably never was the type to stand about with my thoughts and concealed behind wooden walls. I'll probably go stark raving mad, by some point. If all I have are my thoughts to keep me company with, I'll be bounding off these plank walls in no time. Then, they'll probably have to cast me out into the cold wilderness or bring in a gun to be-still my crazy mind with. And, even fish in a barrel have an ounce of room to run away in. I'm literally cornered. They'll have no trouble pulling the trigger on me. I'm just an outsider that went stir crazy. One pop. A little bit of hay removal for the blood loss and a carcass to do whatever with. Yup. I'm going to be doomed by my own raving mad series of thoughts. Why, I can feel it happening, even now. It'll start with my insistent need to talk to myself and lead forward into crazed needs for something more stimulating. I'll be bouncing off the walls and causing all kinds of disruption. They'll take one look and see that I'm not stable material.

Stable.

Ha! Unstable is more like it.

That's what I'll be whittled down to. Crazy in the head and in the soul. A crazy man goes to the loony home. A crazed horse goes to the glue factory. A crazed deer probably goes to the dinner table. So, that will be my fate. Being alone with my thoughts will make me start bounding from wall to wall. I'll see the stall door open. That gun barrel will come aiming my way. The muzzle will flash. Then, what remains will take a small trip to the kitchen on it's way to the master's table for a brief hour or so. Then, the freezer for future leftovers.

Oh. My goose is cooked and I won't even have a say about it. Oh, woe is me for having accepted a stupid trinket that caused all of this. Why, I should have decked that delivery guy for having done his job. He did his job, all right. He surely did a job on me. Once, a sane man. Now, just a table topper in waiting. Why don't I just start bashing these antlers into the walls until my head hurts. I never wanted to be an animal. I never asked to. I never thought I'd lose my liberties. I never dreamed that this was even remotely possible in real life. Science fiction and fantasy may do it all the time. But, I am alive. And the living don't go transforming into bloody beasts. It just goes against all the rules set by...

"New guy."

...the new guy. That's right. It goes against the rule book that's written by the big man, upstairs. *The New Guy*. I broke the most important rule of them all. Now, I'm facing my *Death Row* sentence for having broken an unwritten rule by the...

"New guy. Can you hear me?"

Oh. Right. I'm not as alone as I think I am. And, there goes that alien language of the deer that I can totally understand. Nobody taught me how to speak it or hear it. But, bloody Hell if I can't understand it.

"They did lead you into the neighboring stall, didn't they? You can hear me? Right?"

Should be downright neighborly. Deer or no deer. It's what I was, after all.

"I...think so." I heard my voice and it sounded as alien coming out as the other sounded, speaking to me.

"I never seen you around, before. Even your scent is strange. What kind of Elf were you before your 'call to service' came?"

'Call to service'? Is that what this thing is all about. Someone called me in to be of service as a rutting beast? Fits the insanity bill to the T.

"Well, I was a 'Data Processing Technician'. Sure. It wasn't the most spectacular job available. But, it suited me just fine." I informed this neighbor of mine.

"List worker, then. Let me guess. Far too many whiny brats were slipped under your nose to the 'Nice list', then? Didn't you know that you list worker types have to be more careful?"

Now, I was largely confused. What the deuce was all this *'List worker'* bit about? *"Perhaps, I may have processed a few lists in my day. But, nothing about it being named a 'Nice list' is ringing any bells, here. My boss even wanted me to stay around. But, I had to make up a sly excuse to save face. And, I couldn't even manage to do that."*

"The boss? Wanted you to stay? That's a chuckle and a half. It's always the boss that chooses when you must be pruned out for poor workmanship."

Mr. Geezerweitz opted to take me out of the office by turning me into a deer with a cursed trinket? That was so off key, even a person going as crazy as I must have been could not possibly swallow that bit. *"I tell you, my kind deer sir. Mr. Geezerweitz is not one to be pulling out trinkets that..."*

"Whoa, now. New Guy. The boss goes by many names. But. Mr. Geezerweitz? Mr. Kriss Geezerweitz? I don't think so. Never heard of there being more than one boss."

"Actually, it was Mr. Eric Geezerweitz. Not this Christopher fellow that you are speaking of."

"New guy. New guy. Now, tell me true. What kind of Elf were you before you got 'the call'?"

"Elf? As in a Middle Earth Elf? Now see here. I watched the movies as much as the next lad. But, I most certainly didn't go role playing as some kind of Elf from the whole franchise. I may have been reduced to a beast by a stroke of crazy reaction. But, I am by no means any kind of Elf, my fellow deer sir."

"We don't do deliveries to Middle Earth. If you even knew what Silicon children were like, you'd never bring up a visit to Middle Earth. Besides, their world has it's own Saints looking over it."

My stare was blank. Nothing in the movies ever stated about the existence of *'Silicon children'*.

"And, my deer sir, if I may be permitted to ask. Alas, who are we?"

"No. May I ask you about whom you are, first?"

"My name is Joel Adana. I hail from Newcastle upon Tyne, England, where I worked as a Data..."

"A Human!!! No. No! That's against all the rules! We've never imported a Human as anything more than an eyewitness. And, even then, they were always extraordinary children under tight circumstances. No adult Human has ever been permitted and certainly never been sent 'the calling'! Things must be totally out of whack for this to have happened!"

"What's this about a Human?" came a far more distant voice.

Suddenly, a few other Deer'ish voices started calling out about our conversation. It caught on like wildfire as the whole stable barn grew in various tones.

"That's right!" Figured there was no point in not pleading my side of this story to those that would listen. Even if I would have to be some kind of *Dr. Dolittle* while doing so. *"My name is Joel Adana! And, I am a Human trapped inside a deer's body! I would really appreciate knowing where I currently am and if there is any kind of cure for this!"*

"You seriously don't know what you are or where? Protocols have been breached! That's it. We're all going to be outsourced to the Human world! I can see it now. Elves get laid off and we get the

shaft. No more luxuries. We'll be outcast to the wolves and the bears. Cast aside in a world that no longer believes in Santa!"

"Stop your bickering and gossip predictions! Remember the Big Mistake of ninety-eight? They change up things and mistakes flew through the roof. So what if a Human slipped into our ranks? Listen to that poor sod. Won't even know how to make the ranks. No outsider can stand a chance. This mistake will be resolved. No worries, everyone! He'll either be stored, exiled or 'Caribou Corn-dogs' in no time! No outsider that can't be beyond trusted is ever able to leave!"

The voice that was my neighbor began to cut through the rest of the barn's chatter. *"Don't be taking what they are saying too literally, New Human Guy. If you wound up here, you have some kind of special purpose. Just sit it out and await for your reason to come to you. What else are you going to do in the meantime?"*

"I am just so confused, is all. I mean, the other morning, I got this deer trinket via a carrier and...did that deer just say 'Santa'? As in 'Santa Claus'? The jolly fat man in all the malls that promises children gifts that their parents are forced to buy?"

"There's only one Santa Clause in the head office per electoral period. Your Human world has developed it's own queer ways to state things. So, I'm not so privileged to understand how fat Humans in colored costumes fully relates to our activities. As for where you are. Isn't that in the least bit obvious? Santa's compound. Where all the Elves work year round to meet the ever growing demands of your Human world's innocents. I can't state why you were brought here, though. Tradition states that it's the service of less-then-productive Elves that get 'the call' for semi-retirement into the reindeer team. There's always been a handful of under-productive Elves to fill the needs of the new year's potential teammates. Those that make the cut, get to run on that fateful night. Those that can't are free to be servants about here. As for those that can't adapt. It's said they walk 'The Final Mile'. Wherever they go, it's said to be a place that none come back from. Whatever your case may be, I'm sure that you have a special calling that wasn't meant to be like our callings."

Even as my neighbor was saying that, I could tell that there was another bit of activity happening inside this barn. A small gust of cool wind whipped through as the double doors had been opened. And with it was the beginning of a migratory hush. So, I had to ask my newest potential friend this question. *"I hope we weren't making too much of a ruckus. I know it became a bit loud in here."*

"No troubles, my lost Human-bull. Probably just feeding time. They always have to swing the front door open to draw the cart in through. And, in case you didn't realize it. You're not some ordinary deer. You are one of Santa's Caribou. Best to remember what kind of species you've become."

Food?

Yea. Food.

I started to drift my mind away from my grumbling tummy. Having missed out on lunch and dinner, I could go for just about anything. Since they had yet to drop off a menu, I figured that I would order up a nice slab of steak with a side of baked potato.

In fact, I just let my mind explore what options might have been possible.

In what seemed to be forever, I got my meal.

Nope. No menu or gourmet anything.

It was a feed bag.

Slapped over the door to my stall cell.

Guess I should have known better.

Prisoners aren't very privy to selecting what they get, either.

However, a rather interesting surprise came resting her head over the door to my stall.

It was another deer...er, I mean caribou.

My senses just screamed at me that this one was female.

"You're the big source for all the hollering? Came in with the Human child? Found protecting

him from a nip of death with your own heat? You know that the 'Big Elf', himself, sent out a search and rescue team to find your beacon? Executive order just for you and that 'specialty case'."

"You-hoo! How about you and me get some quality time, behind the shed for a bit?"

The cow swung her head to address the other caribou who had just made the comment. *"Just eat your grub and dream of ever touching my goodies, Randolph!"*

"Really? That's 'the' famous Rudolph?" I bleated out.

She turned her head back towards me. *"That a joke? No 'leaders' to be found in this old shed. Maybe a tail runner or two. Most are just hopefuls that try out and keep flunking."* She raised her voice on the next line. *"Some just flunked out of life and landed here!"* She kept it more civil toned after that. *"Name's Janet. You can address me as Cupid, just like everyone else is suppose to. Comes with the rank, after all."*

'...On Dancer. On Prancer. On Comet and Cupid...' raced through my mind after she said that bit. *"Sorry to sound off. But, how can Cupid also be named Janet? I certainly never heard about that one as a child."*

"He's a Human from the larger world, Cupid." clued in my neighboring caribou to the cow.

Her eyes grew as wide as could be. *"Hu...Human? But, Humans look like overgrown Elves with overblown personalities. How...is it that you don't look Human? Come on, now. Strike a pose and let me look you over. Never seen a Human, before."*

"If you don't mind, miss. I am a bit under dressed to be modeling myself off to a lass that I just met."

"Modesty? I've heard of Humans having modesty. Then again, I've heard that Humans have a lot of issues to deal with about themselves."

"Well, I certainly am learning to leave it behind. Can't be departing from my morals in one bound, though."

She took her head from my stall door and I could hear her whispering to another. Perhaps, it was one of those short people that couldn't even be seen over my stall door. Wait! Did my ears start playing tricks? She was whispering in some kind of English dialect? I was so surprised to hear it that I blurted out, *'You can talk!?!'* Alas, it wasn't in English. Just this dang deer tongued gibberish.

When her head came back up into my sight, she gave a deers reply. *"Of course I can talk. It's just not socially acceptable in mixed company. Another privilege of rank is to have personal assistants that are in on our predicament. You must understand that even amongst Elves, we are generally seen as being the beasts of burden for the sleighs. That and a bunch of other tasks that need doing around here."*

I heard the latch to my cell door being opened. Then, she just casually pulled it ajar with her chin. With what I conceived to be a gleam in her eye, she said to me *"I trust that being a Human over an Elf, you're not going to be jumping my bones out of some borderline needs."*

"Aw! Love of my life! Why you making the New Guy go for a walk? I want to be him!"

It was that *other* male bull that was making the pass at her from a moment ago.

She replied to that other bull. *"Eon would kick your teeth in. And, from the looks of it, you can't afford that happening."* Then, she turned her attention back to me. *"Coming? Or, are you just going to stand there and stare, ole 'Modest One'."*

Now that the door had been opened, I could see that she was pulling the cart along with some rigging attached to her body. This cart had a few more feed bags slumped over it's side. I didn't really question why she was letting me out of that small cell-like stall. Nor were any thoughts of using this as a *jail break* even remotely entering my mind. So, I walked by her side as her Elf friend continued to sling the feed bags to the rest of the occupied cells.

"Just how different are you?" asked Janet after she had been released from the duty of *'delivery mule'*. We had found ourselves in a rather private spot that was cozy and warm...for a shack full of hay,

at least.

"I don't know how much you heard. But, I was a Human in a Human land, only a few hours ago. Things just went upside down, ever since. I'm not suppose to be..."

I found her hoof upon my lips. It had an interesting taste to it that I might not have wanted to explore the source of. *"Not the way I heard it. There's been talk ever since that Human child waltzed in. Even us reindeer get tidbits of gossip, after all. Seems that kid had found a special spot in ole Red Suit's heart. Now, I didn't catch exactly what it was. Just that it had something to do with his arrival amidst our presence. So, what's your story?"*

I began at the very beginning. The bit about getting the trinket and the transformation. Running from the neighbors and being unable to lose the kid. The flight and getting lost. The rescue team and coming here. All of it and she was all ears to hear it. I told it to her with as much clarity as I could. All the while, I couldn't help but feel as if the Universe had been listening in. Call it a hunch. Or an instinct. Or...something that perhaps I couldn't fully explain. It just seemed that we weren't quite as alone in that shed as it seemed. Truthfully, I wasn't sure what to make about anything, anymore.

"This trinket. You still carry it inside of you?"

I hadn't even thought about that aspect. Was it going to stay in there or come out as some kind of investigation through my poo. *"I suppose it's still in there. You have to understand that I think it might be the key. And, I certainly am missing out on my fair share of pockets to hold things in."*

"Silly 'bou. It'll come back up on it's own when you chew your cud."

She said it as if it were blasphemy to have it happening in any other way. *"Oh. Right. How foolish of me to think otherwise."*

I could swear that she may have blushed just very slightly. *"No. How foolish I am. It's my fault for thinking too much like what I've become. I, too, was Elvish. Been a few years and I rather forgot that Elves don't have this complex stomach. Why should Humans, either?"* She laid her head over my neck and I found myself questioning if this was some kind of come on in the deer community. *"You're so different in many ways. Most of these bulls around here would have been teasing me to no ends in order to make me cycle. Not you. Think I can trust you more then anyone. Had a feeling from that first moment. Now. You said that you couldn't take your eyes off this one tramp's rump during the whole sleigh pull back to here? I take it that you can't gather why. Simple, really. They intentionally brought along a cow in heat. Sounds like she was peaked, too. Don't wallow over it. Any bull would be no more mindful to that kind of temptation. I'm not in estrogen, right now. And, you've been most civil minded in my company."*

"You are very attractive. And, I can't hide that fact."

She countered my words, right away. *"Mind you, we're beasts in every way. Had you truly found me attractive, you couldn't have hidden it. Reaction over mind set. It's me that has been hiding it. You know how long it's been since I could share time with a responsible..."* She paused for a moment to gaze into my eyes as best she could. *"Listen. You are no longer Human. I am no longer Elvish. We're both in a cross-world where most everyone regards us as a lower class species. I've been mated to the one that held my position from before. Know what it's like to be raped whenever he has an urge to satisfy? I want out. None of these other bulls would ever do it. They're just as lust filled without any notions of love. Or, the few I can talk to on a deeper level aren't built to be reproductively capable. And, I didn't hear about any mates in your love life. In your world, there are ways of protecting many from the acts of rape. I've heard about it through several sources. In this world, we're mere beasts in an almost rule-less society. He can have me killed for denial of his lust. You're the outsider with a tie in with the Big Guy through that kid. You can dethrone my nightmare and become my mate. Please say that you'll fight for me. You are my only hope."*

That was a hard thing to take in. I wasn't even beginning to think about how victimized one sex could be by another amongst the animal kingdom. In some ways, it was as harsh and cold blooded as the wilderness that had surrounded this place. There was true value in fighting for the honor of another.

It reminded me of the time I had to fight for the honor of a lass in a tavern. This one bloke was completely bombed out of his head when he was trying to blatantly pick her up. I stepped in and nearly got my head knocked off by his surprise sucker punch. It was amazing that he was purely drunk, yet could still land a punch at all. Luckily, my cheap retaliation by landing my boot into his crotch was enough to do the trick. He, thankfully, wasn't numbed enough to avoid going down for a bit. And, in a way, this felt a bit like that moment.

"It would be worth your trouble in many ways. Right now, you have the privileges of a base line bull. That stall you were in would hold you between exercise periods. Defeat my pain-in-the-ass and you can share my privileges. I'm a Sleigh Runner. I get to do most anything I want within guidelines. You mate me and you get considerable freedom in return." She sniffed at the air. *"Right on cue. Let us enjoy one of those freedoms."*

Our little privacy area was invaded by the Elf that had accompanied Janet as she was pulling the cart of food. Only, this time, it was the Elf that was wheeling in a fancy push cart with plenty of goodies. Right to our awaiting sides.

"See, stud. I get premium feed. You'd get day old rations without me. The bits and pieces of things that were scraped off the dinner tables and other findings that aren't fit for Elven...or Human consumption. And, with a stud as fine mannered as you are, I'll always be delighted to take in your length."

In all honesty, I was rather hoping to find a cure to this condition. Instead, I was being prostitutionalized for a chance at a better life in this reindeer's body. She only unwound her head and heavy rack from my neck in order to take a bite out of one of the cart's selections. This gently bitten fruit was then plunged into my lips. I hungrily bit into the other half and worked it over as she watched with her half still snuggled between her lips. She quite literally avoided actually eating her half in order to slip me her half.

I had never been *Frenched*. By either a Human or a Caribou. It was remarkably weird. Especially as our fuzz covered noses kept brushing all over each other in the process. She could literally reach all the way back to my throat. I can't say that I felt repulsed by the experience, neither. Especially as she repeated the feeding with a few more offerings. I didn't even notice when the Elf had departed from our company. For this cow was just being too attentive to let me take notice.

"There's my stud. I knew you were able."

Her words were only confusing for a brief moment. I hadn't taken notice of a lot of things. It was when she snuggled her belly into my belly did the words take on meaning. Being all-so-sensitive and exposed was what she used against me. That hot bod, brushing up against my weakness would only serve to excite. Yet, she still kept plucking food from the cart and feeding it into my muzzle until she could *French* me some more.

I was even quick to grow comfortable with her lap dance-like contact.

We spent quite a few hours together. She long since picked that cart dry and comforted me in a way that any great female could. My mixture of Human principles and animal instincts collided. No matter how hard and long she clung to me and worked my shaft, I didn't give in to having my way with her. If anything, it only made her want me even more. And, I had to come to terms that if she was in heat like that other female I was following, I probably would have ejaculated into her. Repeatedly.

But, if just for that night, it was a cross-roads that my subconscious won out against.





The following day, I was led back to my little stall by her. There were several Elves awaiting our return. Plus, there seemed to be some kind of event going on. Had a lot of noise and activity that I wasn't being apart of.

"How did they know?" I softly bleated to her.

"I gave my promise to have you back before curfew." she simply replied with.

"Oh."

"Remember what we talked about, stud muffin. All the love and lust you can muster, if you just get Eon off my back. But, not right now. Your day is bound to be a bit more interesting."

Without even thinking about it, I walked into the open stall with complete submission.

Then, I felt her muzzle take a firm nip on my rump.

I looked back at her, almost ready to say something. Somehow, it no longer felt quite as personal and shook my booty, playfully.

"Why did you feel so embarrassed, anyhow?" she asked.

"It's not proper for a gentle man to be naked in front of a crowd. I must admit that the concept is really slipping from my mind, now."

She pushed her nose up under my stubby tail and licked me right on the privates.

It felt a bit uncomfortable in front of these viewing eyes. Her fur coated nose was literally up into my business as she spoke to me. *"Elven magic can even enchant them. Call it a blindness, stud. In their eyes, we're neither male or female. They're quite literally blind to our little parts and I appear to just be cleaning your tail. Two neutral deer, performing a cleaning on each other. Get used to it. They're here to pamper you. And, it wasn't as a favor to me. Now. Come on. You're still clenching."*

Who ever heard of a magic that can make a person blind to obvious things. I really thought she was yanking my chain. And, of course I was *clenching*. Beast or not, I felt a bit insecure about such contact in sight of others. Even if I quite literally shared the whole night with her in ways I hadn't done with another soul. I wasn't sure what to make of it all as two of our eyewitness Elves took hold of brushes and approached me. Her teasing was very personal and very intense. She wouldn't let up until I found myself opening up. She literally coaxed my aft section into displaying for her approval. Then, the brushes dug into my thigh coat and while I wanted to consider it an obscene reaction as my member became incredibly obtrusive, she seemed to be proving her point. They were either so chill to it that they didn't care or completely oblivious to this lengthy part of mine, just bobbing about so freely in the air.

In all of my life, I had never been pampered like this. Perhaps, my mother's caring touch when I was just fresh to the Earth could have come the closest. All I had to do was stand there as the servicing commenced. Perhaps, if she hadn't started up the whole chain reaction, I could have felt a bit irritated to some of the contact. But, no. She knew what she had caused. It was like full service masturbation and I couldn't mentally challenge the reactions. Found myself panting to ease the sensations. Yet, she was there to stimulate me to no ends. Then, there were the sudsy brushes going into my belly. How could they be so oblivious to my stimulation? And, I swear that she smiled as I lost all will and just fired off hard into the hay. There wasn't even a slight reaction in those two as they just kept on cleaning through my pelt.

She just suckled upon my balls very lightly until it just stopped pumping away. Then, as her lips slurped away, she simply said *"That Elfin magic's some powerful stuff. They have no idea what just happened. In a bit, the mess will be discovered and cleaned for you about the hay. Now, hold still."*

And, I thought the ball suckling was personal. Her tongue found little erogenous zones all about my rump until I didn't want to cloak it. Then, she *French'ed* me in the anal. It was so distracting that I never noticed the moment she just trotted away to leave me alone with the two groomers.

So, there I was. Hung like a horse with my whole back side as open as the Grand Canyon. And, they just worked with their brushes and soaked down what she had licked clean. I was just too far into it and appreciated the contact of those brushes to my now very naked ass. It almost seemed like a nice

cool down after they tag teamed my fore legs and chin fur. They must have continued working me over for another thirty minutes and I swear that the only muscle that moved was reacting to the contact.

I just had a four-way and it was glorious. In thanks, I started to lick over the closest Elf's arm and received a head pat for doing so.

Then, the clinking of some restraint gear came closer and closer to my stall. I gave no complaint as the thing was slipped about my muzzle and over my neck and shoulders. They just tag teamed me through masturbation and if this gear was for my trip to somewhere worse, I wasn't able to offer up any form of resistance.

It must have been a bit of a sight as I was pulled by the neck with a large erection, swaying between the legs. Led through like a porn star, fresh from the set. Yet, nobody seemed to give any notice. Perhaps, I was truly learning what it was like to be just a mere animal.

"Save some of that for me."

Or, maybe this Elven magic was just working upon the Elves.

It didn't matter as much, once I saw those large barn doors swing open and I was paraded out into this wonderland of activity. We were talking hundreds of the little people, swarming about in song and dance. A pure festival of great proportions was underway. The environment was all gussied up and I was just led onwards to some kind of stage, where my handler tied my neck rope to an eyelet on the floor and just left me there on display.

Submissive and partially horny. They just turned me into a display piece in front of the whole place. I certainly didn't sign up for any of this as the eyes started gazing my way. I felt my comfort level go way down. Why were they all beginning to stare at me while in such a state? It only became worse as the stage I was tied down to began to rotate very slowly. Any fears and emotions about this that I had were now being put to the test. I mean, how dare that female get me so charged up, probably knowing that this was going to happen, right afterwards. I was so used. Now was the time to pay the price for...

"Ho! Ho! Ho!"

'Well. At least, I now was apart of all the festivities...' I thought to myself.

The voice just rang out from all directions. Didn't seem to need any amplification to speak of.

The first man...I mean *full sized* man that I had even seen up here just took to the main stage that was to my left. His calling card was a distraction from my display of nudity.

"Today!" the jolly man cried out. "A very special day, indeed! We have a very special visitor from the main land! His dad was killed in a car crash when he was barely two years old! His mother has always been suffering from drug use and the nasty business of selling herself for money! This lad was prematurely born! Raised in poverty and barely able to get by, he still managed to reach out and touch my heart!"

Davey was escorted onto the stage and motioned to stand next to the festively dressed man. Once my head rotated into position so that I could see clearly, I was truly amazed. *"Davey? I never knew about your family being like that?"* To me, he was just the mentally challenged kid from downstairs. Granted. I never really took the time to speak to him or anything. Just another person to pass along the way to work or the grocers or somewhere.

"Through the years, he struggled to learn. He struggled to exist in that cold hearted world of the Humans. *He* is the reason that we work all year long for. To mend a struggling heart. That's what it is all about. He didn't want a toy gun. He didn't want a race car. Or even a warm blanket. No. All he asked for was a proper family. This brave lad came to us through the darkness and the cold from his far off land with only the help of a brave soul. A Caribou. Stranger to our land. Protector to this poor, poor child. Indeed. A lost soul helping a lost soul. We are here on this never ending mission to..."

'I am...a hero? It was mere cowardice and random chance that brought us here. I was only doing a good deed in keeping him alive from the cold. How can that be deemed a heroic act?'

"...I hereby grant permanent asylum to our newest friend, Sir Davey Lloyd. He can be free to

visit us for a hot meal and a comforting evening, anytime. He will have to be departing very soon. So, let's all wish him the best holiday that he can have!"

The lecture may have been brief. But, the crowd didn't seem to mind it at all as they broke out in loud cheers and clapping, before getting right back into the festivities. I set my eyes on Davey as he walked over to me and gave me a big, merry hug.

The jolly man was quick to join us as Davey stared into my eyes. I heard him say, "Son. He's your pet *and* guardian, now. Are you heart felt that your wish came true to really make this happen?"

I just watched Davey's eyes tear up as he simply nodded in agreement.

"Davey? *What agreement did you ask for? What wish did you make?*" Dang it all to Hell that my speaking voice was just coming out as complete gibberish, spoken in some kind of deer's tongue.

"As you wish. We will make right what your former life kept doing wrong." spoke the overweight man in his festively colored suit.

All the while, the rest of the party raged on as Davey and the fat man left, hand in hand.

I, however, had to stand about as my rump side slowly rotated towards the party.

I was glad to see my handler approach after the party members had parted ways. The thought of a little privacy was sounding rather attractive after being a display piece for such a roaring celebration. To my surprise, however, it wasn't the stables that I was walked to. It was some kind of large bedroom. As like the kind that perhaps a king might enjoy. It held a king's sized bed with rich looking sheets. The rest of the room was dedicated to a king's random of food delights. And I was tied to the corner, way out of reach of any of it. Then, quite literally left alone in there.

Not for too long, mind you.

Without a clue as to what was to happen, imagine my surprise when Janet came trotting in without any handlers or gear.

"*Another benefit of becoming your mate?*" I asked after she entered the grand room.

"*Well, no. Not exactly.*" was her reply. "*Seems the boss has plans that regard you and the kid you held in tow. This setup looks familiar. Could say that when I first traded jobs, I was invited to something a little less grand than this.*"

"*When you traded...jobs? What does that mean?*"

"*Means I had the best laid selection of food I had ever seen. Was all cursed, though. It left me a little weak in the knees after I had my fill. Following morning and I was pretty much like you see me. Maybe, you're meant to have a few bites and wake up as what you used to be.*"

"*Then, why am I tied up, as if to observe something? You don't think this has to do with Davey and his wish?*"

"*Very likely it has everything to do with...*"

A main door that Janet didn't come through just swung open and Davey was permitted to enter, alone.

Both Caribou looked over as the boy entered.

Davey looked back and ran over. "Doggy! Doggy!"

"Doggy?" questioned Janet.

"*Kid's got some kind of brain damage. I'm clearly not a dog.*"

Joel got a long hug from the kid before receiving a promise to be fed some food.

Alas, it didn't seem to go quite that way as Davey approached the table.

"*So, explain further about this setup that cursed you into this form.*" I asked.

Janet stood by my side and observed the actions of the boy. "*It means that I feasted myself to the point of being stuffed. Then, took a little snooze. And, here I am.*"

"*So...if Davey eats the food of this place, then he'll be...No! No! You mustn't allow this! Stop him! He must not touch that stuff!*"

"Davey."

I don't know why it shocked me to hear her speak in that English dialect, once more. Why wasn't she always speaking it if she could?

"Davey, dear. Are you most certain that you wouldn't like to have something else to eat?" Her voice was quite charming to hear, in fact.

The kid walked right up to the end of the table and took a hold of a candied yam.

She continued to walk forward as she spoke. "Davey. Please don't eat that. It will make you sick. Wouldn't you like to spend time with *Doggy* some more?"

"My wish. My wish. I got my wish." replied Davey and sank his teeth into the yam, swallowing the ingredients with little hesitation.

"But, *Doggy* is upset about your wish. Wouldn't you like to honor *Doggy's* wish, too?"

Davey dropped the hollowed out shell of the yam and found something else to throw into his mouth.

Janet switched back to her deer voice as she turned to glance my way. *"I don't think Davey wants to talk about this, right now. Got any other bits of advice to sway him away from this feasting?"*

"I...I don't know. He was just the neighbor's kid in my apartment building. How do I know what exactly he wanted?" is what I had found myself admitting.

She turned back to the boy that was stuffing his face. "Davey. Did you wish to no longer be a Human child?"

He didn't respond. Instead, he just swallowed hardcore and grabbed at stuff to plug his mouth up with.

"Can't you stop him?" I cried out to Janet.

"As Elves, we were always suppose to be utterly polite to visitors who came here with a wish in their heart. Are you saying that I should go against tradition?"

"I'm saying to just look at us. Is he suppose to undergo...this? Could he have possibly wished this to happen?"

"How should I know?" countered Janet. *"Perhaps, I will go ask him."*

"Please do." I added.

Janet gazed back at the boy, packing his mouth to the limit. "Davey? You look as if you've been starving for awhile. But, I must need to know what your heart felt wish was." She came around the table and continued to approach the boy. "Do you truly want to miss your mommy? Is living here so preferable to the place you call home?"

The boy simply would not answer. Instead, feasting upon the table with a dedicated passion.

I pleaded across the room in my deer speech. *"Can't you stop him?"*

She made a sharp reply in deer speech. *"Listen. It's one thing to ask about changing one's mind. But, I can't just go and force him out of a wish. It's against all the rules. I know that you're new here. But, we don't do things like that."*

"Then, if it goes against your rules, come over here and set me free from this infernal line! I'll pull the boy away from the temptations and damn the rules!" I bugled.

"I...suppose that responsibility would rest all upon you. After all, I'd just be biting into a cord. Not denying a wish." she reasoned and started to walk back towards my position after clearing the edge of the table. She purposefully smiled, as if to show me the error in my simple plan.

Only thing was, Davey stopped going for the food and found a flask to drink from. By the time that cow even sank her teeth into the rope that was restricting me to that floor eyelet, I could see Davey start to yawn and make his way to the bed. *"You're taking too long."*

She stopped chewing. *"Listen. If freeing oneself from rope was so easy, we'd all have been doing it a long time ago."*

"And, you don't even have the teeth set to do it poorly." I looked at Davey and saw him gripping at the sheets and tucking himself into the bed. Not knowing what else to do, I bleated out, *"Davey! Don't go to sleep! Fight it!"*

Alas, Davey did not obey the commands yelled out in a deer's tongue.

Try as she may, it was a kind of knot that proved resistant to Janet's tugs and bites.

As much as I tried pleading and begging Janet to do something, she kept insisting that she was limited to giving advice and mostly being an eyewitness.

As the time passed, I got a few reports on how nice he was looking from Janet. First, the little antler buds started to shoot out of his head. Then, she reported on the coming of his hoofs and the altering of his arms.

"You know, stud." she finally said after hovering over him for awhile. *"There's one thing we can do for this calf-in-coming."*

I didn't want to hear it. As far as I had convinced myself, we were already too late. *"What?"*

"Mate with me and we can adopt him. Become a true family. I suspect that was apart of his wish, after all."

My hope of seeing my old home land as a Human was sinking into the sunset. Now I had some cow telling me that we can become some kind of deer family. I had lost so much, so quickly. Now...I was losing the boy, too.

That fact was made even more clear after another hour. For, when he awoke and pushed his head up into the air, he wasn't Davey, anymore. Just a little calf, laying in a bed.

"He's beautiful!" proclaimed Janet.

I didn't know what to think. He wasn't my son. I wasn't his father. What kind of crazy place was this that just takes in runaway children and turns them into beasts? Then, in desperation, I remembered the conversation about how these Caribou could be changed back into Elves. *There was hope!* So, I decided to play along with this family bit. *"I guess you may be right. He's in a strange land and now has a strange body. He's going to need all the fostering he can get."*

"We can make this happen! I know we can, stud!" she blurted out.

All the while, all I could think of was *'I'll save us, Davey. I will save us.'*

When the Elves came to remove the new calf from the room, they were slightly surprised to find the three of us just standing as one little herd in the corner. Janet didn't say anything in English to them and gave an equal level of passiveness to their efforts of removing us from the premises. Instead, she only spoke in deer tongue to the calf. *"Don't resist. Do as they wish."*

I spoke softly in my deer's tongue. *"Do they even know this is the Human child?"*

She quickly replied in part. *"It's another part of the Elven magic. They were probably only told to escort the two Caribou from the suite. It was another set that brought in the boy and you. Keeping conversations simple to commands does tend to make it easier to control the population, that way. And I'm highly forbidden to go talking to these two."*

Davey bleated. But, it didn't make sense to me. It just sounded totally like an animal.

I turned my attention to Janet. *"What does that mean? Did you understand him?"*

"I honestly don't know. No Elf has ever undergone the process under the age of one hundred. Never mind how the process may affect Humans. Because, that was just a sound. He didn't just adjust to knowing the language, so it seems. Perhaps, he'll grow into it."

"What about his mother. His real mother? I barely ever saw her. But, I got to believe that she's probably in a horrid state of being frantic, right now."

Janet just stared at me with a serious expression. *"Whatever wish he made, it was between him and The Big Guy. This may just be a step into that wish. Have faith, no matter how it may look. I'm sure it's all for the best turnout. This is the land of miracles, after all."*

'The land of miracles.' I repeated in my mind. Never mind the notion that I was still trying to push that all those stories about a Christmas full of Santa and his flight for gift giving actually had a ring of truth. I may have been living it. But, that's no excuse over settling my thoughts back into order.

Any questions and concerns that I may have had would be given a conclusion after our little walk to *The Head Office*. This was where the festive man that I saw at the ceremonial platform resided.

"Come in! Come in. Feel at home, dear and *deer* friends." he said from this over glorious looking throne. "Why, Cupid! *Erm...*Janet. What a surprise! Why did you come along?"

Janet responded with her accented English voice to the question as she bowed by bringing her fore legs down to lower her head almost to the floor. "Kindest Sir of all the Arctic lands. I have come here to ask for a deep favor that flies against the traditional order of things."

"And, what may that be? Have your rations been altered from agreed parameters?" asked the man on the throne.

"It's concerning Eon, your eminence. I never truly loved him. The relationship came with the career position. And, I would like to..."

"Most troubling. Extremely menacing to come with a request to part from a superior. Especially one whom went to such lengths to secure your position as his replacement. Am I to understand that your request is to depart from his company and surrender your position amongst the *Sleigh Runners*? Do you truthfully understand that to lose your privileged position is also the loss of all your rights?"

She maintained her position of being head down with the tail end up. I wasn't sure if I should follow suit or not. At least, it hadn't been mentioned to me. "It's a little more complicated then that, '*Master over us all*'. I wish to keep my position and exchange my mate status to conjoin with the new reindeer. If I understand the situation, he will be fathering the *wish child*. I would like to become the child's new foster mother."

Santa sat on his high throne for a few seconds in thought. "Your request goes against the traditional ways. To do as you speak of is set to a hard core practice of what we believe in. Mainly because your position is yours as long as your predecessor permits it to be. If you were to leave or die, the position returns to him for his decision to be reinstated or choose another to take his place. Your request quite literally demands that you dethrone both him and any living predecessors amidst the Cupid line, so as to become sole voice to the position. You may have another option to switch lines with another *Sleigh Runner* whom may be more accommodating to your needs. The likelihood of finding such an honor is ultra slim, at best. I have yet to take any notices about a replacement team member for at least the next three years. The easiest is just to surrender your position, part with Eon and become a commoner. You may have your mate be the new comer and the *wish child* as your adopted son. Just understand that it would become the responsibility of your new mate to fight for you or permit your loins to become public domain to any sequesters. In the ancient traditional ways, the most direct root is for your proposed lover to dethrone your current dominating mate from his entire position. And, do the same to any others that might deny your coup. Now, I must warn you that Eon has had a long track record of being brutal. He used that strength to muscle his way into the Cupid line, as it was. His position loss while as an Elf was quite literally due to an excessive and violent temper. As a reindeer, he can very easily tear your new found lover to bits. An all out fight could very surely mean to the death with this one, Janet. And, when your lover is laying upon the cold ground with his life blood spilling out, there's no real guarantee that Eon won't make an attempt to see you are laying right next to him as a second corpse-to-be. I may be all powerful and a decision master. But, this is not a matter of decisions. It's a time honored tradition that has few exceptions to rely upon. Is the risk truly worth the rewards? Or, would you rather sacrifice your right to the prime choice of meals and the freedom to roam the lands, all for the love of the newcomers? You might even be totally pushed out of our community to live a life of a wilderling, completely stripped of everything you ever knew. Your life is your own to choose what can be. But, there is little more then observation and persuasion that I can offer towards your cause. In other words, you and your proposed lover are virtually alone in pursuing this kind of command takeover."

"I understand, *Wise Master*." replied Janet with a respectable tone. "Is there anything else that you can possibly do to aid me in my decision?"

“Depending on if you can succeed, I can give you my blessing in front of the whole community that may persuade others from delivering further conflict.” replied the throne seated one. “It is upon the shoulders of you and your beloved to deliver such a wish. You already know that I would advise retaining Eon as your mate and maintaining all the benefits that come from that relationship. But, if you are dead set on shaking the traditions to the core for personal needs, the penalties seem to me to far outweigh the benefits.”

“Yes, my *Lord*.” concluded Janet.

I bleated softly in Janet's direction. *“I don't exactly know how to fight like this. Last thing we should do is challenge a brute on his home turf, unprepared.”*

“We'll train. By the end, you'll be ready.” she promised. *“With my benefits and by mating me, you'll be richly rewarded for life. Don't worry too much about it.”*

“I don't think I've even seen this Eon of yours. Isn't he a bit jealous of your absence to be seeing so much of me?”

“Eon's on sabbatical. It's the closest thing we get to vacations. That gives us a good week to train in.”

“If you two don't mind.” And, to my total surprise, it was Santa whom was saying that in *Deer'ish*. Then, he switched back to English. “We are actually gathered here to welcome the newest addition to our small herd, *Davey Lloyd*. While I have read many sob worthy stories about poor conditions and distraught families, so rarely have I run across such a heart pulled wish for a better life with a new father. A premature birth to a mother that constantly drank and experimented with drugs. Despite the damage from day one and the abuse, it was Davey that kept fighting for life, even when he didn't know what the fight was about. Raised in one of the worst of ways, Davey's purity managed to shine through. In some ways, his struggle could make many orphans appear to have better lives. Now, Joel. You were a bit of a lost soul, as well. Almost driven on a kind of auto pilot. Why, you never even put up a Christmas tree or seemed to recognize the spirit of the season.”

“Erm...me?” I said in a somewhat surprised way. *“There was always work to be had.”*

“Be honest. You never noticed any of the twinkling lights. Always walked under the Mistletoe that beautiful Jenny in your office had hung. You were totally blind that she held an interest in you and had hope that you'd give her a kiss. Why, the world all around you was celebrating and you just went to and from your job without seeing any of it. In fact, I'll tell you what you saw, Mr. Adana. You saw the same grimy streets. The same tears in the same buses. The same machine that you once recognized as an anchor around your neck. The fact that you still gave it a nickname was just a lingering fact to what you once were conscious of. You had buried the very meaning of life under a pile of excuses and defensive barriers.” explained the jolly man.

“Not true. I...I...I also went to the local grocers on Gemini Street.” I stammered.

“Hardly relevant to use a chore as a diversion from your extreme rut of a life, Mr. Adana. If your bare minimum requirements for stock were to just deliver themselves, you'd have no diversions to speak of. You weren't living life. Life was just there for you to move around in. You would have mechanically gone to and from your work desk until age caught up with a shallow concept of such a life.”

“Perhaps, I liked it. Who are you to say that my life was too one dimensional and in need of change?”

“Not mine, Mr. Adana. It was Davey's. He saw something in you that only a child could see. I'm sure it is something you had quite forgotten about. You once cared. And cared deeply. It is still apart of whom you are. You simply stopped seeing it. You may have stopped seeing Davey in all but the most superficial of ways. But, that's not what he saw in you. His message of wanting you to be his dad in a new life was very clear. He didn't want toys or distractions. He wanted a new life with a new family and he wanted to spread good joy throughout the land. His wish was pure and he showed such selflessness in his wish, too. He wished for you to have a better life, Mr. Adana. And, although it may

sound very harsh right now, even his true mother shall come to see her irresponsibility as a cruel light to improve her life by. If Davey had remained in her life, she would have kept her bad habits in check until an overdose would finally rear it's ugly head. The pain of losing her only son will put her onto the road of recovery. Now, I'm sure that you had notions that Davey should have been reunited with his mother and that you'd like to return to your automated life. Truth is that Davey needs you and Davey needs our ability to care."

"*Can't we do that as Humans?*" I softly asked as I gave notice to Janet still bowing down.

"We are still governed by traditional views to an extremist's point, Mr. Adana. Human adults are almost exclusively denied the right to visit and even Human children are only permitted a special few days under selective rules. While sympathetic hearts would fight on your behalf to let in Humans, utter chaos would seep into our ranks. An all out Elf against Elf civil war would be the final outcome and all would suffer. After all, Mr. Adana, the world in which you come from has had many horrible wars fought over ideals and greed. If our little part of the world were to come unglued, then everyone would suffer. And, I don't mean just in the way of endless arguing. The emotions would spill over into your world. Only the most faithful would remember to celebrate Christmas. While most would start seeing the world as you were doing. And, a world without Christmas is a world that only grows more depressing. Why, the spirit of Christmas has been known to divide warring parties into a unity of good cheer. In simple, the world needs us and we need the world. It sounds like such a simple thing. But, if you and Davey resided here as Humans, the whole Earth would suffer. Even new Elves are suspicious. But, new reindeer? Why, you don't even have to work day in and day out on an assembly line of endless toys. It will grow on you. But only if you give it a chance." Then, he looked at Janet while she was respectfully bowing. "Please, my lady. It's only us in here. You don't need to be so respectful. Please rise. As for this coup that you came pleading about. To involve Mr. Adana in it is an extreme risk to both you, him and even Davey's wish. I would respectfully ask that you reconsider and remain mated to Eon. I may even have success in talking to Eon on your behalf to come to a more peaceful resolve. I know how hard headed he is and he'll probably never let you go or become a foster mother to Davey. If you can only have faith in letting things work themselves out, it should be for the best for everyone."

Janet got off her knees and gave a simple reply in her English accent. "As you wish, *Wise One*."

"And, Janet." continued Kriss Kringle. "I, for one, think you would make a great mother to Davey. It is with every intention that when he matures, he gains a position with the *Sleigh Runners*. Even if it means we bring in more positions to accommodate. If we can get Eon to accept your wish to foster him, then his eventual position would translate into your benefit. Now, this is just our secret that Eon need not hear about. But, if you were to push this coup, you could very well ruin it all. No foster mom for Davey. Demoted to a *stable bitch* with no future. Your beloved, dead or permanently degraded to an outcast. Understand me. Your proposition is too risky when there may be other ways. You just have to give it time. Can you be tolerant for the amount of time needed? I know you are not pleased about how Eon's been treating you. But, just give this a little time."

Even I could tell that she wasn't exactly on board with the calmer approach. Yet, she held her tongue and just bowed her head. Since he seemed to understand this deer's tongue, I brought up a concern. "*Pardon me. I mean not to be intrusive or out of turn, here. But, when Davey had awoken in this form, he tried to talk. Yet, neither of us could understand. I knew that he was daft. But, could there be other circumstances that might arise?*"

"*I should not think so.*" replied St. Nicholas in deer's tongue. "*Davey? Can you understand me?*"

The calf that was Davey made no kinds of replies.

For the first time in this meeting, the festive man got up from his throne and walked over to kneel in front of the calf. Reaching down, Santa stroked under Davey's muzzle and around his ears to see if the calf was reacting feral or consciously. "Quickly." he softly said to one of the Elves that had brought us in with English. "Retrieve the Oscilloscope."

It only took the Elf a few seconds to dash off and retrieve the device. Of which, Santa plucked two small wire leads and brushed them along both sides of Davey's head. Then, he switched on the device and looked into the small screen. It displayed a crazy amount of lines dancing from side to side.

"Davey." said Santa in Deer'ish. He seemed to be understanding what he was gazing at upon the screen. *"Can you understand me, Davey."*

The patterns seemed to change for a second or so.

Santa brushed over Davey's head as one might do to a cat while eagle eyed to those lines.

"He's in there." said the jolly man in Deer'ish, then switched over to English. "But, I think he's slightly rejecting his full self. There seems to be a bit of brain restructuring in effect. Nothing to worry about. Davey will pop his consciousness back out when he feels willing. Right now, it's the highly innocent mind of a recessive calf that is standing here with us. Seems to have no identity and is awaiting Davey to give him one. When Davey comes back, he'll know perfect Deer'ish."

"You're experienced with this kind of thing?" asked Janet in, surprisingly enough, her English voice.

"Nobody is." he replied to her. "The art of brainwave reading is a handed down art. I'm only seeing what the device is telling me. Davey needs to be coaxed out. You see, Davey's brain was always struggling and it did it's best to rewire the damage. When the Elven magic interlaced into Davey, it did more than just recode his DNA. It straightened out his mental gray matter. He's lost and scared inside of his head. To awaken in a body he hasn't inhabited before is it's own mild shock. This calf can handle the basics. But, he's mostly instinct and little else. You two were with him when he awoke, I suspect. Probably enough to create an imprint. Good thing you wanted to be a foster mother to him. He'll be near helpless without you, Mr. Adana or Davey there to protect and guide him."

Janet brought her head close and licked over Davey's chin, getting a small bleat in response from the calf. "I promise to love him for all his life." she vowed. Then switched to Deer'ish. *"My little baby. May you grow up strong, smart and lead us all."*

The meeting wrapped up rather quickly, after that.

Me and the baby were leashed, muzzled and walked out of the building. I felt slightly jealous as Janet was deemed trustworthy enough to walk herself along our sides.

It only deepened as we reached a certain point in the path and our handlers started down the route to the barn stalls. Only she intercepted and with little more than a nudging into their hands, getting our walkers to take us straight to her relatively private accommodations.

Once inside, our restraints were removed and the Elves left.

Rank had it's privileges, indeed.

Space.

Furnishings.

A real bed and not that hay stuff.

She only spoke in Deer'ish to us. *"You are to be considered my honored guests for a little while. Understandably, we can't arrange this, once Eon gets back. Remember. We're not animals, inside these walls. Only my trusted and closest helpers are generally permitted in here. We can speak to each other, under this roof. Even more importantly, I don't want to see you just relieving upon the flooring and things. There is a private bathroom with which is specifically accommodating to our bodies."*

"What about Junior, here?" I asked.

She sighed. *"Potty training. We generally don't have calves up here. When the occasion arises, they tend to be placed into daycare to be protected from the cold. Just...just keep your senses keen. If you see that tail of his start to rise and dance about, dart him in there and coax him to sit on the toilet."*

"I've...never had children." I admitted.

"Well, neither have I." she countered. *"We're winging this, cold turkey. If it was anything like*

me, the major changes pretty much consumed everything that I devoured at my buffet. We'll come to that crossroad in a couple days or more."

While looking around, I said *"Your benefits are to the point of royalty."*

"Us Sleigh Runners are treated very well, indeed. The room is actually handed down from generation to generation. If you had noticed the neighboring buildings with their own, probably familiar position names above the doors, you can see that we're all here. We get to choose furnishings and, to a degree, the stylish look of the whole room. If you can dethrone Eon..."

"Janet!" I bleated out. *"You aren't going to opt for the passive method? Are we to truly fight your husband in an attempt to get you divorced with custody to all the wealth?"*

"Do you even know what it's like to be eating your daily bread off a plate, only to feel his hot breath push up under your tail. He believes so much in being an animal that he insists on taking me until he is satisfied. He just does it without asking or questioning my feelings about it. Elves always held manners and would never just help themselves like that. Eon truly is a beast and I so want him and his brutish ways out of my life. Would you truly just stand by and let me take one more pounding while under this roof or anywhere in this whole community? No Elf would come to my rescue. None of the bulls will challenge him. And, most of them that might would just replace him with perhaps a slightly gentler touch. When I say that you are the best hope that I've ever seen come along, I mean it. Say that you'll fight for me and make me your trophy wife. I don't want to wait one, ten or a hundred years for a possible event to passively come to be. I want salvation, now."

My heart grew heavy. My emotions started to stir. She was in need of rescue. Would I back down against a foe that I hadn't even met? Was it right to go against the wishes of the one whom she admitted was the lord over the whole community? And, even if I was to do this saving bit for her, would I even know how to fight inside *this body*? After all, this body had hooves. Not fists. It seemed to be better at head jabs than body slams. I almost forgot about fighting in the nude. Guess after a day, I had almost begun to feel comfortable with it. *"How would I fight off this Eon?"* were the first words to leave from my lips.

"Step one. We head over to the entertainment center. Eon has every set of the Reindeer Games on file. Being the jock that he is, you may take notice to the count on just how many times he has replayed the combat wrestling chapters. He just loves seeing himself rattle the competition. Utilize this to study how he moves. Especially those select techniques that he favors. Learn to counter and you can easily topple his muscles with strategy. Now, I'm no match for Eon. But, I'll spar with you for the first lesson or two. The real trick will be to find others that aren't too challenging and won't go bragging about anything they might see or suspect. But, leave that hunt to me."

I slightly sighed. *"And, what if we prove that I won't be your miracle savior? Such a short time with no experience in this kind of combat form. He's some kind of deer jock. I was only a Data Processing Technician. That, alone, is it's own handicap. Hardly one to go placing such a big wager upon. Isn't there another..."*

"No!" she stammered. *"It's far too important a point to surrender upon. You must be the best and save me!"*

I had to face some of my own demons and emotions as I observed her sad looking face. She was undergoing some horrible things. But, was her need truly worth the foundation hitting actions that she was suggesting? The notion to humor her at this moment in time had marched it's way through my thoughts. Maybe if I play the game her way for today and throw the game tomorrow, she could be pressed into a gentle surrender. After all, it was just some kind of local movies and a bit of playing around with her...*for now*. I just had to not be good at it...*and sell it*.

Step one. *Say it.*

"Let's take this one step at a time, then. Show me the way to your mate's video collection."

Just how many tournaments did they host and record to video? I figured that this Eon fellow

might have had a good run of three or five events.

But, the things just kept going.

By ten, I was just beginning to think I had seen somewhat hidden birth marks on the old boy.

By twenty, I was pretty sure that he might be too elderly to stand up to me.

By thirty, I was questioning if these tournaments were held every year or every week.

I just lost track somewhere in the fifties and broke off to ask Janet about a few facts on life up here. But, the hours just dragged by as this *Nature show* had grown quite the touch of stale.

"Just how old is this Eon of yours?" I went right to the key without taking a detour.

"Now that, I can tell you." she replied with confidence. *"Because, I was born in the same year that he gained the position of Cupid. I'll be celebrating my one hundredth-and-twenty-ninth birthday, this coming May. Which makes him a runner for a respectable one hundred-and-twenty-five years. He still retains his rights to the games and..."*

"I'm...only...thirty. How long do you people live for?" Apologies were almost needed for my shock to this *unheard of* life span.

"Really? I would have judged you at being barely two-and-a-half to maybe three. Your belly bands are barely present, after all."

"Belly bands?"

"You mean that you hadn't even noticed? Perhaps, they are rather small to a new comer's eyes. Here. Take a view of mine. Then, you'll see what I mean."

I started to vocalize that I didn't want the personal tour. But, she so willingly rolled over and exposed the zone that I let my curiosity override my concepts about personal space.

It was indeed a fascinating sight to behold. Tiny ripples that almost looked like a kind of rank upon a military badge. As she breathed, they had this hypnotizing way of dancing about. I certainly would have struggled to count the things.

"See? I'm still in prime shape and can easily clear the two hundred mark. Go ahead. Try and verify my age...if you can."

I let the whole notion of what to do with Eon slip to the back burner for a bit. *"Um...no thanks, ma'am. I'm not all that..."*

"What do you mean with this 'ma'am' bit? Listen, bub. I am the one that is choosing you. There is no room for impersonal references or personal space in this relationship. Eon may have ruined me on how quickly things can happen. But, I wasn't completely expecting you to be slower than an iceberg's migration into the sea, either. By the time that you have come to share my life, you are going to know anything and everything there is to know about me. Is that clear? So, go ahead and look deeply. Because, I am talking that if I were to be lost in a blizzard, you'll be able to sniff me out at two thousand paces. You will know how my chin tastes, what I regularly ate from day to day via a burp. Tell if my milk's too sour. Know exactly where I am ticklish at. How to rub a bruised hoof. Everything. And so shall I know about you. That even means that if I ever request that you lay backwards and spread your legs, you will let me lick your balls like a salt lick until you are too numb to continue knowing it. Being mates is as close a relationship as can usually be. So, if you are shy about counting my rings, then you have some issues to overcome."

I didn't even bother to think about my reactions over that. Something absolutely primitive just accepted her vow of complete disclosure to my whims.

It was plenty obvious to her observations. *"I'm glad that you agree, stud. Just don't go all the way, all over my clean floor."*

I slightly gasped. *"I wasn't even..."* started spilling from my lips before I realized that my head had dipped a bit and my nose was almost touching her pelt between the thighs.

"It's quite alright. We're in my private home and the bull of the house is far away. You'll get so used to the sights; the smells; the close and tender embrace. Before you know it, we can cuddle without your needs having a reaction. Just nice to know that I'll have to break you in a little."

"And, we'll be mates for how long?" I found myself asking as I lifted my head.

She reached with a fore limb and placed it into my rack, forcing my nose back down to the point of direct contact with her vaginal region. *"Let's see how the first hundred years go. I'll let you know, past that."*

She seemed very confident about this. And, just whom was coping the most feel, anyhow? I really had no means of hiding the level of *turned on* that I was now gaining.

"Just wait until I'm in heat. Then, we shall see just how much of a gentle deer you truly are."

"Davey..." I started to blurt out. Only, to find that by inhaling her various anal scents was doing something to my subconsciousness.

"The calf? They have to learn young. Nothing about privacy for them, either."

I slightly fought against her hoof and the friction made her pulsate against my fur coated nose tip.

"You do love me? Right?"

For a being that was stating how long she lived, she sure seemed in a hurry to push the concepts of love and lust into my nervously beating heart. The subtle notion that she might hold me down and start kicking until my head fell off had an evil way of creeping into my noggin. So, I lied. *"Yes."*

"Deem this mating lesson number one. Notions of privacy are to be vacated. I have female parts that your male parts want to come visit. Yet, you are barely working out how to make that happen. While I want you to be comfortable with not trying to merge as you wish, I also want you to stop being shy about knowing me, head to tail."

"What about more of number two, where I train to fight off Eon and win your right to mating? Isn't that why I was even watching these hours of his footage to begin with?" Perhaps, if I reminded her of what needed to happen, she'd let me rise before I seeped into some kind of undignified and primitive urge.

"Then, tell me of what weaknesses you think that you've found in Eon's stance."

"You have beautiful rings. Perhaps, if they weren't trying to jab me in the eyes, I could tell you from a more comfortable position?"

She removed her hoof from my antlers and I didn't hesitate a second to bring my head back into the fresh air. *"He did favor that right fore hoof when charging in. I can look at it for a forewarning to his stronger charges."*

"Are you sure that you can even deflect that kind of approach? He is famous for toppling an opponent with a ramming approach."

"Over eighteen defeats that I had counted with just that move. It's almost unnatural as he twists at the last second to push his opponent off balance."

"It's that patented move that gives him the chance to antler jab into his enemy's chest and make them cry out in defeat."

"I must admit that to watch it was making my hair stand on end while shivers traversed my spine."

She took up a standing position and lowered her head. *"Who's going to lead?"*

I approached very casually, leveling my antlers to her head full of tips and kept my eyes on her face. *"Now, I don't want to harm you in any..."*

She lunged!

I panicked!

Our antlers clanked together and oddly embraced each other!

I darn near ran away, except that her interlock had stuffed my head into a weird tug-o-war.

"We don't give concern about how we're not harming others when doing this. Now, fight me off!" she bleated in that Deer'ish tongue with extreme force.

"I can see that!" was my emotionally charged reply.

She pulled hard to the left and I feared that my neck was going to be kinked.

"You have to counter my moves or you'll be down on your side for sure." she advised.

Guess she didn't feel that I *actually was trying* to keep her move from ripping my head off. Then, it slightly clanked some more as our antlers shifted in each others embrace. *"Just what is it that I'm suppose to be doing, here?"*

"Making me understand that I am inferior to you. Get the point?"

I don't care just how many hours of growing numb to watching this Eon fellow head wrestle with other bulls I had just seen. Actually performing this act with someone that may or may not have been holding back was bloody hard. All I had going for me was a desire to keep her points from pushing into my face and leaving a few painful marks. So, I tried adding a bit of force into this next head twisting motion.

She read it like a pro and let me slam my shoulder into the ground.

"Did I say upwards of three years? I meant under one. You clearly haven't rutted at all. Don't Humans rut in the slightest?" At least, she stopped trying to rip my head in two, after I went down.

"We call them brawls, actually. Lots of fist hitting and boot kicking involved. Only those with no brains to risk losing would even dare try for a head butt."

"Fine, then." she said as she withdrew from my bony embrace. *"I demote you to stature of senior calf. Get up. Let's do this again."*

Time and time again, I picked myself up from her floor and met with it in the very next moment.

Did I already mention that this was bloody hard to do?

"Come at me."

I charged.

Our antlers met in a noisy clash.

The pain in my skull amplified.

She grunted.

I jerked hard to the left.

She counter veered to the left.

I kept going with it.

She stuffed a hoof into the ground and suddenly pushed my head to the right.

I fought through the sensations and kept going.

We actually kept the counter-force up for a whole minute, which was a personal best for me.

"You going to surrender, already?" she suddenly blurted out as our antlers rattled about.

"Not until you do." was my rapidly yelled reply.

"Good!" she barked back at me with. *"If you were to ever surrender to me, you'd have no hope around here."*

Her head jolted in a way she hadn't used against me and I was, once again, upon my side.

As I laid there, panting and awaiting her to yell out for the hundred time to get up, I was very surprised when she asked to call it a night. To which I agreed to without hesitation.

"Alright, stud. Come with me. You've more then earned this."

I hadn't really been thinking about it. But, as I pushed myself back to a four hoof standing position, half my body had launched a complaint.

"Follow." she ordered.

Didn't matter. I followed her in spite of the aches and pains.

Right into the bathroom.

"Step in."

She was motioning towards this little region that reminded me of a shower. Actually, after that work out, it sounded exceedingly appropriate. *"Sure. You going to join me?"*

"It only handles one occupant, silly." she replied with a light hearted tone.

I was rather looking forward to some hot streams of water, right about now. Some pulsating jets...erm. Where were the controls at? The spigot? Well, like *things* that a shower would typically have. *"How do you work this thing?"*

"See that indent on the floor? Step on it with your front hoof." she informed.

So, I did.

The wide open entry way slid closed with a pair of doors and I was suddenly neck high in a boxy enclosure. Then, I heard something. Thought it might have been the water rushing through the pipes in a way I had never heard, before.

Oh. That was *so not* what it was. I was soon feeling what I was hearing. *"Janet? What is this?"*

"Don't know about this either, senior calf?" she mocked. *"It's called a sonic shower. Gets underneath all that heavy hair and scrubs out the filth."*

"What about the..." I began to say.

That was funny.

I went to use the word 'sweat' and my deer's tongue produced no sound. So, I tried again.

"...about the..."

I swear the word wasn't there, even if my lips were in motion.

"About the what?" she inquired.

Whatever the sound waves were doing, it was feeling rather good. *"Dang these deer lips. It seems I have a word to say that isn't coming out."*

"Human words? You should know that not everything has a translation. It's just getting lost, is all."

"Oh? Is that all? Thought I was just starting to lose it. And, what of..."

This sonic shower of her's just changed frequencies and I felt it all over. Like tiny ants were crawling upon my insides, even.

"Just phase two. It'll pass rather quickly."

I didn't know my teeth could chatter.

What she called *Phase 3* was also as much of a surprise. Especially when it came out like a thick fog and smelled like something beastly.

She chuckled at my expression. *"I'm so sorry. Should have changed the setting just a bit. It's a perfume to make us more tolerable to each other. Eon has his own masculine formula and you probably would have approved a little more of that."*

"Oh, how appropriate. Now, I'll be smelling like a cow." Silly deer tongue. The word was doe. Not cow. I half tried to say doe again. But, gave up on trying to outsmart the translation that my body seemed to be conducting, all on it's own. After all, to say that one smells like a cow just sounds even worse.

As if completing a mechanical cycle, the vapor was rapidly sucked away and the doors parted.

"Enjoy yourself?" she simply asked.

I had to think about it. Did seem to ease some of those aches. So, I nodded in agreement.

"You can stop pressing down on the lever, now."

After I gathered my thoughts, we exchanged places and I was able to observe her pure pleasure at being pounded upon by the sound waves. In some sense of the way I was reading it, she almost seemed to be having an orgasm as the sounds were literally *rocking her world*.

On the way to her bedroom, we took a brief moment to observe little calf Davey, just standing there in the corner.

I brought up, *"Wasn't he standing there when we left him?"* as I tried my darnedest to remember from just a few minutes, prior.

To that, she replied, *"Remember. The poor calf is just a shell of himself. If Davey comes out to play, we should be able to tell."*

"Guess he'll be alright on his own...right?"

"I'm sure of it, stud. You've got some big days ahead. Come, now. Let's get some rest."

We made our way to her bed and figured out how to get cozy with one another. While she was ready for a bit of action, my morals were holding strong between my slight thoughts of still retaining some kind of Human notions and that she was another's wife. Which meant that about the best I could do was press my body against hers throughout the night.

The days that followed were indeed lengthy.

Me and Janet would clash with each others antlers in the mornings before I got to see the outside world. And, that mainly meant to meet up and spar against some other males that seemed just a bit too willing to do so. I admittedly lost a lot and won only a few of those fights.

Quite literally between meals and the overnight stays at Janet's mansion of a home, it was mostly a string of sparing matches. Some days, it felt as if the sonic shower was the only thing that would get the kinks out of my neck.

Perhaps, I had gotten better. At least, Janet was being supportive towards that notion. Yet, I had seen this guy's strength on all those videos. Even a come-from-behind underling has more skill at making his chance than I felt able to muster.

Fate would have its way. For, Eon's return day was upon us in no time, flat.

And, I had literally been trying too hard to fake my failure rate.

"There he is."

I didn't question how Janet just knew. Looked like a dot in the sky to me.

"You ready for this?" she asked.

"I have a choice?" was my simplistic reply.

"As much as I do for making things right."

Yea. That's what I was afraid of. Especially as that dot grew in size by the passing second.

"Know your techniques you think can get the job done?"

If I even said yes to that, I would be even more of a liar now than I was about a week ago. *"I don't even know what's going to happen. Just know that win or lose, I did it all for you."*

Did that small spot in the sky just speed up? I think my few seconds of grace were just sliced to bits. Especially as I heard it yell out, *"You got another one, love?"*

Then, she made a strong statement to that. *"You know that I want my freedom, Eon! Let us be and free me! Or else, my new mate here will tear you to shreds! He's not like the others!"*

'Others???' The word just jabbed itself into my head. Just how many *others* had she talked into doing this, anyhow?

"For everyone of those louses that I defeat, it only makes me want you all that much more, love." screamed the fearfully bulky looking Eon.

I'd swear that this Eon chap didn't even slow down until he was right in my face.

Every rippling muscle was seemingly flexing into my face.

"What she promise to you, huh!?" This bull was so angry, his breath did half the yelling. *"A life of luxury? A replacement into my rightful position that I granted to her as a marriage gift? Things you grunt types could never otherwise get a chance at? Because, all you're going to find with me is an early death."*

"I've been personally teaching him how to dethrone you, Eon!" countered Janet. *"He's a champion!"*

"Love! I'm going to personally split you in two after I have split your champion into hundreds of micro splats! You are my property to do with and you can't send in champions, because you don't like something about me!"

When I felt his antlers grind into mine, it was nothing like I had felt throughout this entire

week's worth of training. This guy truly was all muscle. He did something I hadn't seen on the videos, right off the bat. He twisted and locked my whole head in. Then, he frigging stood up!

No. Seriously! This guy stood higher than my body length and supported my entire weight upon his hind legs.

We were nose to nose and almost eye to eye as I wasn't quite sure what to do.

But, surprisingly enough, he whispered to me instead of making another threat that I was all too certain he could deliver upon. *"Bitch is crazy. She always suckers in another idiot to challenge me for her so-called rights. Forget what she suckered you in with. I took her for all the worse she could dish out. Now, go take a dive and I won't have to hurt you too badly. Be a bro and take the fall. I could snap your neck like a twig, right now. We don't have to take it that far. Know what..."*

I answered in one swift kick. Despite my position, I placed everything my back legs had, right into his *temple of male hood*.

No more standing.

He went down like a sack of potatoes and deposited me into a more deer-like position in the process.

I let my voice speak after that cheap shot. *"And, let that be a lesson to you, deer chap! I don't frighten so easily to threats and thugs! Now you learn your lesson and leave us be. Or I will..."*

Now, I know when you nail a chap in the privates, they tend to stay down, regardless of how piss drunk they may be. So, why was this *sack of potatoes* getting up and spitting fire from its eyes?

Better yet, my whole life started up a micro movie theater in fast forward as he rose like a Herculean God over my form.

All I felt was the lunge.

The lunge that used that warning hoof.

The one that I tried to train myself to recognize and avoid.

Doesn't matter, when it's happening at point blank range.

Then, it was shear, cold darkness.

When I came to, the world didn't seem quite right.

Way too blurry.

So out of focus.

Janet was nowhere in sight.

Nor, was Eon.

Once I could gather my surroundings mentally, I judged it to be that stall they had stored me in before Janet came along to show me a better world.

One blurry thing was different.

Took me a minute to study. But, I deemed it to be the daft lad. He was still quite a calf, all right. Just standing there and staring back at me.

"Well, Merry bloody Christmas to you, son." I said in Deer'ish. *"Is this what you truly wanted? To lose all identity, just because life was handing out some raw and spoiled eggs? Pull some crazy dream out from La-La Land and pull me right into the thick of it? Now, look at us. We're some jacked off pair of beasties in a no-where land. Hell. You're probably too brain dead to know what I am saying. Probably defective for all of eternity and only know a half broken form of English. Am I right?"*

The calf just looked at me all wide eyed and innocent like. What else was I to guess at if he was standing right here inside my locked cell. That whore was probably with her husband, making all kinds of apologies as I laid here, wishing for pain killers.

"Can you even understand me, lad? I never asked to be apart of your wish. Can't you go about wishing to undo all this, or something?"

Still, all I got was the quiet treatment.

So, I let it go.

Turned my weary head away from him and rested it upon the hay filled ground. Maybe, this was what I truly deserved. Retirement without a means to enjoy it.

Then, I heard it.

His little hooves were clicking.

He was walking to my side.

And, dropped something.

I nuzzled it.

I even tongue gripped it without too much thought involved.

'Well, all be.' I thought. *'If it isn't the trinket that got me into this, in the first place.'*

Sure felt like the thing. The pointed antlers on top of the transparent head. But, I had swallowed the thing. Never even remotely remembered having lost the thing, during the whole time here. The concept just nailed me and I had to ask it. *"Davey. You weren't just licking my ass hole, right now?"*

Like I was going to get a reply to that.

Then, I remembered how my Human form appeared to be trapped, inside.

But, what exactly did it mean? If I were to bite into the trinket, would I be biting into myself? Or was it a way to free myself from this *other* form?

Did I truly hold my destiny within licking distance?

"Davey? Can you tell me what to do, here? Is there something that you recognize that I'm being blind to? Just what exactly did you wish for?"

I couldn't exactly see it. But, I did feel him pressing the trinket into my mouth.

'Bite?' Did he want me to bite into the trinket and set myself free? What alternative was there? Spend the rest of my life...perhaps multiple lifetimes of existence inside this wooden cell?

I just stopped questioning and bit into the trinket.

It crunched. As if it were made up of rock candy.

I bit harder.

It stung as it's sharp bits went against my tongue, lips and gums. But, I bit it to pieces, regardless of not having a full set of Human teeth to do so.

The world became more than just blurry. It became almost along the lines of being super drunk. I didn't need to see the world to know that it was spinning. That details were falling out of place. That what I conceived to be reality was reality conceiving that I was no longer a realistic figurehead.

Whatever happened after that was a mystery to me.

At least, until I came to.

The apartment was run down. But, it was an apartment and not a wooden stall for beasties.

The first thing I did was raise my head and clearly saw the world around me.

Second on that checklist was to inspect my body.

Clothes!

Human hands!

I was back!

Not quite in a place I was familiar with.

But, I was back!

I gazed around.

Davey was in the corner.

A *Human* Davey. Not that statue of a caribou calf.

"Is this...reality?"

"I saw Santa!" was his reply.

"Did you save me, Davey?"

"Will you be my daddy?"

Kid was right to the point, all right.

Truth be told, I kept the whole experience in my heart. Now, I was never quite sure if this whole thing was some kind of crazy dream or a delusion from some kind of accident that I couldn't remember having. But, I saw some new value to life.

As God as my witness, I really did make an effort to get to know Davey and his drugged out stripper of a mother. It took a few years. But, I saw her to multiple classes and medical facilities. Together, we cleaned up her and Davey's lives. Moved out of that run down apartment building and managed to afford a little cottage in the suburbs, once I found a far better job with more pay. Don't ask me why it looked in the least bit familiar. Because, even in the back of my head, I would swear that I flew over it for just the briefest of a split second.

And, would you believe that Davey actually grew more and more intelligent as the years went by? It became my private running joke that we were having the next Einstein in our midst.

Then, he scribbled something that looked formulated and way over my head by his eighteenth year.

But, all this would be admitting to something that couldn't have possibly have happened. Right?



Original story portion.

Janet, the Elf.

Copyright December of 2010

By: jup-reindeer

- December 23'th. 4:15 pm.

The gigantic facility that was the main Toy Shoppe Production Factory, located at the North Pole, was the current location of one Janet Elf. She worked hard at her post, each and every day as the constant demands for production refused to yield. Every Elf has a vast array of tools at their request, available at a moment's notice. And, when they weren't at work on creation, they were either learning all the latest in toy notions or busy at play and/or recreational activities. Sleep was tightly governed.

Just like the Elf to her left and to her right, Janet's hands were always busy assembling this or pounding on that or twisting upon something. It was a truly hectic and thought numbing job and gave little time for anything else. She was born to do this job. As were her many, many companions. Today was to be a special day, however. For, the Big Man, himself, was to come through and inspect the troupes as they labored away.

- 4:29 pm.

The tension was in the air, thick enough to be sliced by a pen quill. (*Never mind the butter knife.*) It was enough to cause many an inexperienced Elf to make a mistake or two. Very few showed signs of the tension, however. Janet was amongst the majority on this bit.

At 4:30 sharp, the big doors swung open and let the jolly soul trudge in. His clothes were well insulated and blazing in the hues of red. His very presence both eased and raised the tension in an odd sort of way. He gazed about the place with a twinkle in his eye, chuckling with a deep throated force.

A helper came to his side as he slowly moved for the stairs leading to the overhead cat walk. He was handed a rather large scroll, which he quickly removed the binding from and unraveled. His attention

was absorbed into the mysterious writings that were intended for his eyes, only. He never lost a step in the process of walking, even as he seemed to almost glide up the steps, eyes glued to the scroll.

- 5:00 pm.

For twenty minutes, he observed the Elves from above as they toiled away at making presents. His eyes glanced back and forth over the scroll before making a pass over the room. A few Elves stood out, as they seemed to watch him and not do a single thing else.

The guy in red would lift a hand and point on occasion. The stationary Elves understood with absolute authority and moved in upon the ones he pointed at. The workers were quickly withdrawn under escort to a location away from the work floor.

Janet had a quick knee jerk reaction as a hand tapped upon her shoulder and the words, "Come with me." were whispered into her ear. Not knowing what to expect, as this procedure was kept highly classified, she promptly abandoned her work station and quite willingly departed with her escort.

The rest of the work force took minimum notice of the withdrawn Elves in order to keep up with the work quota.

- 5:18 pm. (*Company meeting.*)

Janet rested back in a small room, along with a hand full of other Elves, also chosen by the big guy. They looked back at one another, none truly knowing what to expect. The escorts were also there, standing perfectly still near the walls.

Then, a package was hand delivered. An escort took it, promptly opened the box and distributed the letters that were inside. He did not bother to look at the plain, white envelopes as he handed them out to the waiting Elves in the seats.

Janet kept the letter in her lap, afraid to jump the gun. It didn't matter very much. Some of the Elves were too eager and opened the envelope upon being handed it. Janet waited for instructions, which were promptly given.

Janet opened the envelope and withdrew the paper inside of it. Written was a basic command. "Report to the Cupid Room, ASAP."

All the Elves were permitted to leave the gathering room by 5:20 pm.

- 5:30 pm.

Janet came to the door marked '*Cupid Suite*' and twisted the handle, rendering the door to open on hushed hinges. Inside was a very lush environment. Soft furniture abounded and the walls ran with pink trim and wallpapering. A rather large table sat in the middle, spilling over with a banquet of food items and drinks. A big sign pointed out that the supplies were for sampling at leisure and to just rest awhile and await the arrival of the big man.

Janet found a very comfy seat to rest back upon. It was very comfortable and she was snoozing away in no time.

- 7:42 pm. (*A room with a view...or two.*)

She wasn't really certain as to how long she had been asleep for, as there were no clocks in the room. Her eyes looked over the table and she re-read the sign. She felt a bit odd about diving into the meal without another to share the experience with. But, she was hungry. And, the sign stated it to be OK to do. So, she got up and walked around the table, taking a smidgen of this and a pinch of that. Sampling, like the sign said.

It was a vast array of foods. Recipes taken from all over the Earth and laid out before her. Everything was so new and flavorful. Oh, what did she do to deserve this? That was something she could not put an answer to. Alas, it was here and all for her. So, how could she refuse?

- 8:24 pm.

There was a gauntlet that stood out from everything else upon the table. It was large. It was labeled, '**DRINK ME.**' in bold, capital lettering. Some of the samplings left her pallet a little dry and she obeyed the commanding gauntlet.

The first sip was rather odd, in and of itself. Like nothing that she had ever tasted, before. Not bad. Just very weird. A few more sips had a way of making her long for more and more. She was quick to finish off the liquid to it's very last drop and she even found herself licking her lips to locate any droplets that were trying to escape.

- 9:30 pm.

By this time, even Janet was beginning to ponder if she had been forgotten about. She was walking around the room in sheer boredom. She had never quite known such stillness in her life. There was always something to be doing.

Then, a sensation crept up her leg. She looked down and saw nothing wrong. Still, she felt it. It was growing stronger by the second. Then, without warning, she fell to the ground as her legs just stopped giving support to her stance.

- 9:45 pm. (*Why did Alice HAVE to follow that White Rabbit, anyhow?*)

Janet just rested there for a few minutes, letting the sensation pass and thinking that this was just a freak thing. She thought about getting up, deciding against it, as there seemed little point. She let her mind wonder, having little else to do as tiny tingles ran throughout her body, thoroughly ignored.

- 10:04 pm.

Janet pushed herself up off the floor and made her way to the bed. She wasn't sure exactly how long this wait was suppose to take. Given the nature of the deadline, she was forming a notion that this might truly take a while to conclude.

- December 24'th. (*Some point past midnight.*)

Janet began to have the strangest dreams of her life. Wild flashes, happening at a rapid pace. Scenery set far away from the comfort of urban living. Scents. Sounds. Sensations abounded. It was almost overwhelming. Almost too real to be just a mere dream. She did not understand any part of it. Even the thoughts of pure movement. Swift. Soft. Silent. It was confusing. There was...something...that felt

right about it. She couldn't have pin pointed what it was to save her life. It was just...there.

When the dreams became slightly more calming, she could begin to visualize the streaks as tree limbs. The blur as a thick layer of snow. The light as a full moon. She felt more freedom then she had ever known before. As with most dreams, it was too random to follow. Yet, too vivid to disassociate with. Riding out the vision without applying real thought or logic to it all.

These dreams would persist throughout the night.

- December 24'th. 10:04 am.

Janet awoke with blurry eyes. She leaned up and looked out the window. **(REFERENCE)** There was the moon upon the horizon. It was shining upon the landscape, casting over it in an eerie light. She felt a little different on the inside as she tried to focus her eyes. It almost seemed as if the world was going double around her, only to fix itself after noticing that it's activities were being observed.

She gave up on viewing the exterior and looked around, noticing that the table of food from the previous night had been cleaned off. In place of the banquet was just a simple bowl of grub. Some kind of mushy porridge, as best as she could make out.

With thoughts of the vivid dreams still dwelling inside her head, she started to think of the annual celebration that would occur in just a few hours. Despite not knowing exactly how few hours it would be, she kept the notion fresh in her mind that she had not slept through the event.

She glanced over at the bowl and pondered if she was truly hungry enough to try it.

Her decision was to pass for now and await what might come next.

...

...

...

...was she going to be in for a surprise.

- 10:26 am. (Ho. Ho. Ho. Green Giant.)

Janet's desire to attend the annual launching of the sleigh was weighing heavily in her mind. She moved her feet to the floor and pulled herself out of bed to take a couple steps towards the window. The sensations had also returned, albeit in a far milder form. She leaned down to ease the feeling and casually questioned to the quiet air around her, "I don't understand why Santa made me stay in. It's Christmas Eve."

She was so used to constantly being around others that she thought nothing of voicing her opinion to the empty room. The tingling was growing worse about her body as she sat there. Beads of sweat formed upon her brow and it seemed as if the room's central heating had gone haywire, making her add, "Although...you'd never know what with how **HOT** it is!"

She raised a hand to her brow to wipe away the sweat and it had a slightly different feel. Not only was there a stiffness in her hand, it felt rough. Even unyielding.

This unusual sensation made her give extra attention to her hands. And, what she saw, made her

heart skip a beat. “OHMIGOD!” she cried out. “What the heck?!” was the follow up as she noticed her finger tips were now very callus, extremely thick and had become hardened to the max. “My hands!!”

To her horror, she observed the webbing of her hands grow together and turn dark in a matter of seconds. “No, no, no! This isn't right! This isn't right at all! What on Earth is going on?!” she exclaimed as the sensation of tingling shot down from the base of her neck, traverse along her spine and throughout through her legs. It felt horrible and she tried to stand up, as if doing so would be the solution to all her problems.

Instead, she found that her back was not so willing to support her and she pushed out her hooven hands into the floor, taking on a kneeling stance. Her hearing caught the sound of her leggings being ripped apart.

She glanced back and noticed that her hind feet were also coming together behind a sheath of hardening matter that matched the state of her hands. “My feet!? Oh, †God...”† and she looked frantically all over her body. Seeing the set of four hooves and the growing coat of brown fur, she locked on to the most familiar thing that had hooves and leaved around her town. “...I'm looking like...like a reindeer!!” Even her elven ears had found a new way to stay warm.

She glanced back and gasped as a small bump was pushing up her skirt, while her body felt as if it were burning up. A budding pair of antlers were shooting like bamboo from her forehead and creating a mild pain, all their own. Though, she was too distracted to give much notice to the approach of the potential migraine.

Despite the whole level of sensations running throughout her body, she was determined to stand up and make a run for the door. She knew that this was unnatural and wished all so disparately to seek out help.

The fur was sprouting out like weeds from all points across her body. Muscles bulged out and even her bone structure was recasting it's shape. The sensation of heat was overwhelming, forcing her to take in deep breaths at a frantic rate. The directions her body was demanding to go were giving the clothes a run for their money, making her express “My clothes. So tight!” to the empty room. The sound of shredding fabric was erupting from everywhere. Brown fur was pushing outwards with a vengeance. Her skirt tore to rags, drooping downwards and giving a peek to the stretchy support bra that was built to be a trooper as she screamed out of total confusion.

Heaving breasts, throbbing full of unyielding fur took the trooper to town and tore him down, pushing pink nipples out into the open air.

Just wishing for an answer, she cried out, “Why?! Why me?” Her tongue alterations were kicking in and she fought to say the words clearly. She also concluded that she would be too embarrassed to approach another for help with most of her clothes falling from her body. For, public nudity was absolute taboo to all Elves.

Then, something greater then the pain of baring antlers hit her head...

It felt like her skull was shifting under her skin. A thousand tiny ants roaming at random and there was nothing she could do to remove them. The sweat poured off her brow as her face extended out, spewing wet fur from the freshly stretched skin. Even her mindset felt like it was under assault. She needed help. She felt like she was losing her mind and body in one shot.

† Reference source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elf> - Elves are considered fallen beings that do not have godly abilities. Thus, they do hold believes to higher ranking beings, be it *gods* or *God*.

The world grew blurry and she had to close her eyes, once more. The hot sweat flowed like tiny chambers off her new muzzle and into her mouth. It tasted horrible and she gagged a bit on it. She knew that help was only beyond the door and she fought to walk towards it. But, she had to keep her eyes closed. For the blurry world was just too disturbing.

The pain of it all was overwhelming and her determination to stand only made it worse. She could not fathom at what point it happened. But, she made a few steps towards the door before totally passing out.

- December 24'th. Time: *Unknown.*

Some time had passed before she opened her eyes, moaning softly. The room was still empty of anyone but herself. She grasped at her head, knocking hooves against antlers. Her sense of urgency had since departed. She just laid there on the floor, panting mildly.

It took her a couple minutes to compose her thoughts before rising up upon her haunches.

She sat there, becoming rather conscious of the fact that a metamorphosis had just taken place. She didn't grasp the reasons behind it, just yet. Nor, did she even try to stay silent about it. "Are you... Is this... Am I really... This has got to be..." The questions came faster then she could spit out the words and she was still expecting to get some form of a rapid response. Yet, nothing came to her side to offer such replies. She also found that her words were slightly slurred as her new tongue tried to cooperate with the movements required to form the words.

Something caught her eye. It must not have been very interesting amidst the rest of the room's items, earlier. It was a fairly large mirror.

She rose up to move over to it. Then, she squatted down and gazed back at her own self. It was very weird...yet, she did not freak out by what she saw. The creature she had turned into was rather sexy and attractive. She gazed in wonderment and fondled a little bit of her body, out of experimentation. Firm and flexible. The more she looked, the more she liked, bringing out a smile in her face. "I don't understand. This isn't half bad, if it had to be." she commented.

- December 24'th. *Some time later.* (*"We're just sharing some kind of dream. A strange, bizarre, tainted egg nog kind of dream."*)

Janet sniffed at the porridge upon the table. It held quite an alluring scent that she had not noticed, earlier. Something about her new set of senses was now keen to portions of it's ingredients. Dipping her muzzle in, she had managed to finish the bowl off in a matter of minutes. She even licked the bowl clean with some sloppy licks.

- December 24'th. 12 noon.

Janet slowly trotted around the room, circling the table and getting used to the new approach at movement when the door opened up. She swiveled her head towards the source of the air movement to gaze upon the very Elf that had escorted her in. "Your new designation is Cupid. Remember that. Come this way, please." was all he said, despite her attempt to ask a couple questions. He motioned for her to depart from the room, which she found to be slightly awkward, given that the door was in the current direction of her rump.

She also heard the chiming of the central clock ringing out to signal that it had just passed the noon point of the day.

- 12:22 pm. (*When did we enter the Army?*)

Janet 'Cupid' Elf felt the hand of her escort holding firm upon the scarf of her muzzle, leading her into a kind of shoulder-to-shoulder lineup with many other reindeer. They were all facing a small gathering of Elves and *the big man*, himself. She found it rather surprising that a few of the other caribou were speaking in an understandable manner.

"Anyone understand what is going on, here?" asked one caribou.

"I just want to go back into the warmth. Please?" asked another.

"Thought I had won the lottery. What kind of prize is this???"

"Who else wants to complain to the Union? Count this vote as favor."

"Where are my clothes? I feel so exposed."

"We're just sharing some kind of dream. A strange, bizarre, tainted eggnog kind of dream."

The random comments just kept coming until an Elf that seemed to have a voice for authority stepped up. "Attention! Attention, if you please! Every year, we have the competition for choosing of *the sleigh team*. Congratulations for meeting the first stage requirements. To have reached this stage, you were pre-required to have been born under the harvester's moon. Your blood had to be pure Elven. And, you had to be personally chosen, both by our great leader and by your predecessor. You also had to be obedient enough to have taken the elixir, without the encouragement from another. Several have already failed that test, this year. They will go back on the line, thinking that they had a nice meal and know of nothing more. Which brings us to the third test. Full on obedience, attitude and participation will be tested by the team members from last year. You will notice that not all our team members will be amongst you. They have chosen to remain fit and prepared for another run. This year, many have opted for retirement. Slightly odd, considering the rare honor that involves this task. We usually see only one to three retirements on random years. Be prepared for the potential of failing any given test and not making *the sleigh team*. The results are up to you for qualification and your judges for the justification of their choices. Another test of obedience is your requirement to remain mute around all Elves that you might encounter. As of this moment, you are not to consider yourself Elvish. You will refrain from using language, with the exception of private zones and during the flight. As time goes on, practicing this will become easier. You will find an instinct for a unique kind of speech will naturally come to you. Use this between your fellow team members in place of the more complicated language that you've been using throughout your lives. Now, all Prancer's and Dancer's, step forth. You will be following your potential predecessor to the testing area. Next up..."

Janet watched as multiple reindeer moved on from the line up and trot behind some of the famous sleigh team members to an unseen location as the announcing Elf kept dishing out instructions and facts. She found it rather quickly paced and just a tad confusing. She also noticed that most of the team had chosen members of the opposite sex. She didn't have much time to ponder upon the situation as the announcer yelled out, "Cupid! Step forth and meet your predecessor!"

She did as she was told, expecting others to enter the arena. Only one did. It was Cupid. *The real Cupid*. His fur was shiny and shapely to the point of showing how thoroughly groomed it had been kept.

She felt honored as he approached and nuzzled her neck with an incredibly tender touch. He seemed to motion in a way that made sense to her before trotting off. Even his tail fur bounced with class as

it was a fair portion of what she was able to see while following him to a gate in the wooden plank fencing.

He bleated at her. It was very unusual to hear for the first time. Yet, very understandable. Why didn't he just talk like everyone? Or, could he even talk? She tried to set her questions aside as he spoke in that deer tongue. She opened her muzzle and he immediately told her not to speak back until addressed to do so. She felt a bit intimidated by the abrupt instruction that she kept silent. He kept bleating at her as he circled her body, telling her to stand firm and tall. Telling her not to move. Telling her to keep her eyes forward. His voice was coming at her in a full three hundred and sixty degree radius as he circled.

He looked her directly in the eye and bleated, *"What makes you think that you can even handle this? Speak now."*

"I...am a hard worker. A loyal elfling, through and true, sir! I will..." she said in her Elf language.

"Did they not inform you that you are not an Elf?" he bleated, cutting her off. *"Speak as we do. Not as they do. Now, speak. Speak your heart out and win me over."*

She paused, not expecting to say anything that made sense. Rolling her tongue, she bleated a word. Then, another. A sentence quickly formed. *"I...worker. Me work very hard."*

"Force it, you do." commented the bull Cupid. *"Talk that. Many name you retard. Now...try not to force what you mean and just mean what you speak. Even most early recruits catch on by the end of this one meager testing phase. Let your instinct guide, as it was intended to."*

She eased up her thinking and tried to speak in a harmonious rhythm. *"I am a hard worker, sir. I will do this task as I am expected to. It is an honor to even be here."*

"It is a destiny to be here. At my side. Star crossed, all so long ago. I have seen your work. You may have not recognized me on many occasions. But, I most certainly recognized you. I was named...Eon, at one time. Feels like a lifetime ago. Yet, not really so."

"No, you're not. You're the famous Cupid that so many have looked up to on occasion. Do not try to fool me..."

Eon 'Cupid' smirked at her for saying that and started to circle her, once more. *"Need a mirror? You're not so much your usual self, either."*

She paused, yet again, in requirement of a moment to think it over. Her next word was met with his tail covering over her lips. He spoke, instead. *"We are free. Society will not demand of us the need to create, endlessly. Society will praise us for doing the most unthinkable of acts. We are superstars. We are acceptable. We are co-stars to the world's biggest show on the road. And, all will love us for it. Relax. Lose yourself."*

The next thing she felt was a touch of a personal nature. The fur coated nose of the male was tickling around her tail and slipping about, pressing it upwards. She immediately shook her muzzle away from his tail and bleated, *"Listen, bub! Rules are meant to be followed! Respect my privacy or I'll..."*

"...continue to think like an Elf?" concluded the bull. *"You should be made aware that I have a bit more say in your fate than you might feel comfortable with. Just test driving the goods before I commit to a purchase, is all. We can argue over the finer details at a later date. Stop thinking like an Elf and give yourself up to the inner cow."*

"Horny jerk! This is about something greater than getting laid. Are you just going to push me around

and..." she bleated out, rather harshly.

"Excommunicated, babe!" he butted in with before forcing his sniffer under her tail. *"You can disappear from our urban paradise and take on a life, alone in the arctic conditions for the remainder of your life. I can even have you menu-tized, chopped, cooked and served to the hungry working crew, if I so chose to. Your life is quite literally in my hooves."*

"Still a horny jerk." she repeated herself. *"I did not give you permission to touch me in such a..."* and she found that tail pressed up against her muzzled lips, once more. She pulled her head away and argued, *"That thing smells bad. Don't you ever wash it?"*

Under the stump, he replied, *"Sniffing at it isn't the only thing it's good for. Stand perfectly still."* and he licked at her rump, helping to expose the skin portion enough for a quick taste test.

He rubbed his rump in her face repeatedly while licking at her clit. She didn't want to admit it. But, this was beginning to arouse something of a desire. She tried to cloak it through protest. Only to find her own body responding to his touches.

The soft brushing of his warm body against hers. The little connections were making a big spark. It was unlike anything that she had experienced. The stench pushing up her nostrils was holding a milder effect that almost nailed her interests like a freight train. That long tongue changed from a privacy violation into something wonderful. She spiked her little tail upwards and spread those legs to let him lick her like a lollipop.

His tail was out of her face, soon enough. Only to find his weight had been gathered up upon her back. She wasn't resisting in the least as he pressed his broad chest up and against her rump. He smothered her hips against his belly as powerful legs pushed his bulk upon her. A throbbing rod slid out from between his legs, poking between her hips and slipping into the valley to find the sinkhole that was her clit. His mighty thrust needed only one try to part her lips and sink down into the moist cave that was her virgin vagina. His probe vibrated it's way down the dark chasm that was her canal. From it's hot tip, spewed the seed of life in small doses. He began to thrust his hips against her, spiking the tip against her moist, soft walls and stimulating her into the condition of heat.

He bit down into the nape of her neck and pulled up. In turn, she pressed her hips together and tightened, increasing the friction of the intercourse and raising the stimulation until he was cum spitting right into her uterus. The pair danced with rhythm to the beat of the throbbing cock, silencing her attempts at insult and flooding her mind into a passionate numbness.

"That's it, my love. Feel. Just feel like the beasts we are. Be mine and we can feel one another, forever. I think we will have a long and fruitful mating to look forward to. Want the best part? We can love anywhere we want and be accepted for doing so."

She just remained silent to that notion as he pounded into her clit, igniting wave after wave of the kind of pleasure that a massive penis can induce.

They copulated for quite some minutes before she was given a lengthy tongue bath.

She stood tall and proud as his tongue washed over her body, slicking every little curve and indent. After the banging that she just received, the excess of contact was creating a kind of closeness that was sparking her new found bond for this bull. He ended the session with a long and detailed inspection over her body before giving her the acceptance speech. *"Welcome to the team, my mate. I know that we'll go far. Together. Now, we just have to go through the formalities of 'ole Red Stuffing's approval."*

- 2:00 pm.

Some of the reindeer that Janet had seen depart earlier that day were now herded together in the gathering area courtyard as she trotted in. The Elf population had remained the same since their last meeting. Even the red clothed one was there, conducting some sort of vocal interview with one of the reindeer.

Eon strolled by her side, escorting her into position amidst the line and patiently awaited their turn.

It was a long wait.

Janet kept a casual observation of how Santa performed the inspection. It seemed to consist of mostly questions and a couple presses of his hand into the chest region. Finally, a feeding of something small. Perhaps, a sugar cube. She thought about how full chested the transformation has managed to create upon her and if the touch would feel weird, obscene or acceptable.

Each time the red suited one came closer, Janet could feel anxiety build higher and higher. Where would she go from here? What kind of testing might she have to endure. Things of imagination flowed through her puzzled mind.

Which made it a big shock when her turn came around. As she had missed one thing. All the others were in competition for the position. She was alone.

The red suit was in front of her face, blocking out the view of a few reindeer being escorted to some distant place. She looked at how fat the belly truly was. It indeed was bouncing about. She looked up and saw the white bearded face staring back. Behind the beard were a pair of lips that spoke to her. "Cupid, eh? Usually, we have a few choices. However, I think in your case, there was no other choice to be had. Winner was always written all over you. As a toy builder, you were just shy of making the success quota. At 6.8 percent failure, you were just letting too many children feeling a bit too blue. Your social relationship was also deemed too reserved. Believe me when I state that such types make the best sleigh pullers. Cupid, here, gave a standing ovation as to your selection. Now, if you don't like this choice, you can always opt out. We're not here to put you against your will. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity and you should feel honored to have been chosen. Now, if you have anything to comment on, now would be the time."

She just bowed her head and gave silent thanks.

He lowered his hand to her bowed muzzle, opening his palm and producing one of those square cubes. "Now, eat from this and envelop the spirit of Christmas as apart of yourself."

She licked it from his palm and swallowed without question. Being unsure of what to expect, she tried to stay open minded to almost anything. An anything that did not come. No tingling. No mind altering viewpoint. No vibrations. No...nothing. It was sweet, like sugar. And, that was it.

That was not it, in reality.

- 10:15 pm. (*Give me some sugar, baby!*)

The Elves were busy, conducting a million things at once as an intelligent mass. Preparations were high in spirit and activity. The place was as chaotic as it was ever going to get.

In the middle of it all was Janet and other reindeer being led to the sled. The mass made room for their movements, as handlers kept gentle touches upon the bases of their muzzles. Janet kept darting

her eyes about, letting emotions drag in about how the crowd was filled with friends, even family. She was awash in embarrassment at letting the public stare at her disclosed nudity, participating some kind of parade. It hadn't fully kicked in that her new form was acceptable, as is.

- 10:22 pm.

Janet stood tall upon the elevated floor along side several other reindeer. Her eyes darted about. Yet, she kept her cool as several Elves worked with a professional effort upon her. The weight of the red harness with shiny bells felt a bit weird against her furred skin. Small fingers made quick efforts upon measuring and tightening the straps around her legs and upper chest. A muzzle strap looped around her mouth and created a slight sensation that needed attending to. She felt something slipping about her tail and she almost took a step forward off the table with a word hanging on her tongue when one of the Elves held her gently under the chin and spoke in soft tones. It was strange. Her attention was instantly locked upon the speaker, giving words of comfort with an almost hypnotic undertone. It made her feel comforted, while numb. She did not notice as the hand lifted her tail and tightened the rump strap around her hind thighs as the speaker comforted her. All she remembered hearing was "Good girl." and getting a hand full of something sweet to lick from as the last of the harness tightened its grip about her body and her muzzle strap became easier to deal with.

- 10:30 pm.

She was led down the path, between a small valley of observing Elves to a large, grand sleigh. Other reindeer were already harnessed up to it and she was struggling with her nerves from all the attention. She clung to the notions of pride and let it keep her head up high. It couldn't help her with keeping those eyes closed tight. She felt a bit like screaming if she recognized a few faces in the crowd. Then, what would she do? She wasn't suppose to talk or acknowledge their presence on a personal basis, anymore. Besides, the handler was there to guide her. And...and...she hadn't realized it. But, the crowd was yelling and screaming with joyful tones, all around her. Chants of 'Cupid' were ringing in harmony and she was just beginning to realize it. How were they doing this? She didn't look a thing like Cupid. Could they not notice the differences? The sex, alone, was a dead give away. 'Or...was...wait...wait a minute? Cupid never had a sex. None of them did. What the???' she thought in her mind. Gee. She never even thought about it, before. The sled deer were always neutral in sex. Or, so she had thought.

The constant chanting encouraged her to open her eyes. They were in full party mode. A mass of glee, singing and chanting in harmony. Her heart pounded in her chest. The fear slowly evaporated in mid-stride as she caught on that they were praising her. She raised her head and pranced. And, the crowd went crazy for it. Her embarrassment turned to joy in seconds, flat. She thought for sure that nobody would be doing this for her.

Then, another name started to be chanted behind her. "Vixen." some of the crowd near the rear began to say. She had to look while the hand kept her guided the right way. She nearly chuckled at the bull whom got the nick. She could tell that he looked extremely embarrassed. Perhaps, just as much as she was from a moment before.

She bleated out with a loud, deep rumble, "*It's all right. They're here to praise you...Vix...*" and she almost broke down into pure laughter, not quite completing the sentence.

The bull just stared back at her for a few seconds before dipping his head low to the ground.

- 10:40 pm.

Janet kept her head held high as she stood between a pair of colorful straps, decorated in sleigh bells and finely woven stitching, amidst other fasteners and ropes. The crowd was randomly dispersed amidst itself, full of conversation and a kind of general party attitude. She was beginning to feel a sense of pride, the likes of which, she had never felt before. It was still hard to completely accept where she now was. The notions were settling at their own pace, even as the busy hands were attaching all the hardware up to her harness.

Others were quickly taking up positions in front of her. She half expected to know them all, instantly. This, to her amazement, was not the case. She had been neighbors, of a sort, with all the sleigh team. Not a single one was here. She already gathered why she wasn't going to be seeing Cupid. He wasn't the real one. Just some sexual predator named Eon that had previously undergone this process of change. She'd get back at him, somehow.

- 10:45 pm.

All but one was secured into the rigging and Janet watched this one, very masculine bull take unescorted strides through the crowd. Acting like a superstar and nuzzling with as much attention as he could absorb, he all so slowly approached the sleigh.

And, when at long last, he pushed through the crowd and strolled into the small oval of clearing, he had the gull to chit chat with the ones standing nearest the sleigh for a very long time.

- 10:53 pm.

"New recruit, I see."

She had stopped paying attention to the "superstar" enough that when he spoke to her, it came as a surprise.

"Designation, Cupid. And, I thought the fella was really going to stroke a good dozen more years before relinquishing. Lucky you." His voice held a rather authoritative quality that he would be confirming a thousand times over before the year was up. *"There's a few things to know before we get underway..."*

Perhaps, she had picked up the wrong impression. He was actually rather charming and intently concentrated on helping her. The minutes just flew by as she slightly drifted into a daydream about him.

"...so, take your pre-flight treat and just relax. We'll all be team fit in no time."

She hoped that she hadn't missed out on anything too important.

- 11:27 pm.

The superstar stud was now addressing the whole team from upfront. His gaze swiveled between each team member as he bleated very loudly. *"This is a sacred night. It is the night that we have been preparing for as a family, all year around. The night of a million smiles. Lifting up spirits, nearly cast out into the cold, dark night. We are here to be the guiding light. To set things up right. This tradition that we all are vital in upholding, sets the path to a brighter tomorrow. In turn, those we cheer this night shall be given hope in bringing cheer to more in the years to come. We are the thin, silent line for those in desperation to strive for. We are the..."*

His speech went on and on like that without pause or stutter. Until, at long last, he relinquished his

'soap box', turned around and permitted the straps to buckle him in.

- 11:55 pm.

The flurry of activity had reached it's peak as several checklists were being read off. Each hand had it's own task to do in final preparations as every last detail was checked twice over to the finest of degrees. And, before it seemed possible, the avalanche of assistance just parted with machine like precision.

Suddenly, the route seemed clear. The personal space was defined. The task was ready to begin. The sleigh; to depart. A hush scattered over the crowd and they all bowed their heads, hats in hand to their chests. The traditional prayer for a good journey was silently spoken.

Janet felt unsure if she should partake in the prayer or not. She took a few glances around and noticed other reindeer seemed to be giving the prayer. She quickly fell into step as Santa stepped into the sleigh.

- 11:58 pm.

A single slice of apple was given to each reindeer upon the team by a helper.

Janet wasn't immediately sure what for. But, by merely touching it, she felt a strong tingling sensation come over her.

- 11:59:55 pm. December 24'th.

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" It was cried out like a starter's pistol. The crowd exploded into massive cheer.

12:00 am. December 25'th.

A massive clock tower rang out and the reigns were given a firm whipping motion. The team reacted with a stellar tugging force that moved the clumsy sleigh down the wooden runway. It's metal runners offering a fair level of resistance. Nothing the team couldn't handle.

Closer and closer to the end they came. Further whipping actions were applied for encouragement. The team gained speed at an unrealistic pace. Clickety-clack of hooves to wood echoed rampantly as the ramp increased in it's angle.

One second; wood. The next; air. It was an impossible miracle. Running on air. Ascending into the sky. The reins were constantly applied and Janet dare not hesitate to figure out how this was happening. It still felt solid under her footing. Yet, nothing was there to be pushing against.

If she had looked, she might have noticed a slight sparking effect. For, there was something unexplainable there. It had no visible signs. No sense to truly detect it was there. It just was what it was. A kind of magic that created solid out of liquid for a momentary second. Just enough to push against.

Higher and higher into the air they went. The leader knowing which direction to go. The driver; ushering them onwards to keep running. On and on into the deep, dark night. The world they all knew was becoming just a small point of light beneath them. Then, blinking out, as though the electric bill had not been paid.

Suddenly, they were all alone. The world was mostly bells and the clicking of hooves against an invisible floor. A world of layered solid white was far below...somewhere, down there.

Janet fell into the pattern of the team, for there wasn't much else to do. Another ran beside her. A few were in front of her. They all matched hoof steps and made the strides easier on one another. She couldn't communicate very well. The muzzle bar was somewhat a hindrance to trying it. The world around her was dark. She could slightly make out the one beside her. A form that shimmered and held an outline in motion. The one in front of her cast a slightly reflective display on occasion from the field of white fur. Everything else was darker than dark. The bells masked the eerie silence. The slight shower of sparks had still gone unnoticed by Janet...for now. Cold air flushed through her nostrils, coupled up with beast musk; a bit too strong. She hoped that it might become familiar as the night drew on.

- 12:03 am.

It came upon them at lighting speeds. A complete blur. The lights of a city...a rather large city, to be precise. It was passing by so quickly under their hooves and Janet barely noticed what was going on.

It was '*common knowledge*' that this trip was all about a billion-plus stops to deliver presents and such. A myth, as she was discovering. For, from the sleigh, was falling not boxes, but glowing embers. It almost looked like lightning bugs, shooting down like falling stars to the buildings, below.

More incredible magic. It was as if the gifts had a kind of intelligence about them. They knew where to go, so as to be found by their intended receivers. He didn't have to slow down or do much of anything. The bag was spilling over with these glowing embers and raining down upon the city, spreading into a million directions at once. If one wasn't looking for it, they'd probably miss the entire visual display.

And then...it was gone. The city had been passed by and the bag's yield had nearly fallen to a trickle. Before she could even begin to miss the sight of the first city, another blazed beneath them. The bag poured like a stream over the city scape. Then another and another. The pattern was clear to see. Their speed was beyond imagination. The atmosphere wasn't demanding that they follow it's rules of friction. Then again, how could they run on air?

- 12:05 am.

The guiding reindeer bleated "*Plane!*" and a slight turning movement occurred. To her eye, there was a glint of steel that was there for a heart beat to their right. No time to notice any detail. '*How did he...*' She gave up on even trying to comprehend how he saw that at their given speed.

The bag continued to sprinkle the landscape with glowing embers as the reigns were given the occasional encouragement.

- 12:08 am.

The world was a blur and Janet stopped giving it so much attention. The lights below were almost impossible to see when it wasn't over a major metropolis zone. Her task was to aid in the pulling. And, she wasn't even thinking about how energetic she truly was. A mere eight minutes of pulling and she felt like it had only been eight seconds.

Then, just when everything started to feel like a simple routine to follow, the reins were pulled upon and she felt the need to stop.

The process of deceleration took longer than flying at a thousand miles a minute. Weirder yet, they were actually heading towards the ground. Janet would quickly learn why.

- 12:10 am.

It felt very natural as her hooves touched down on solid ground. There truly was a difference between the magically solid air and true Earth. Even as inexperienced as she was at this, the difference was note worthy.

This location was in the middle of nowhere. Civilization didn't seem to have a great presence, here. The ground was packed in snow and it was incredibly dark. Yet, pull on, they did. At a reasonable pace, of course. The bells were ever so louder with a surface to help reflect the sound from.

Their destination was the stuff of legend. A small, out of the way orphanage. It's condition was barely adequate as housing. Poor of the poor. Absolute charity was all that kept them afloat. And, the residence were expecting as the sleigh pulled up and was brought to a stop.

This was no drop-and-run deal. The big man, himself, actually got out and personally handed out the gifts and listened to their many stories of hardship...laced with hope. In turn, these children, barely dressed in more then tattered rags, were willing to give what they could. Little home made trinkets. Letters. Food items. They had nothing and were willing to give their world, freely.

Janet found little hands slipping along her thick fur lining and offerings of carrots, lettuce and a few other selections. Another bleated to her to accept without hesitation. So, she did.

These people knew how to keep a secret. Imagine if word got out that the real Santa Clause visited here, what might happen.

He spent over half an hour, visiting and wishing them well before they returned to the annual flight.

- 12:55 am.

The activity of constant flight with ember packets dropping towards the distant ground continued at a regular pace until they passed an international time line.

- 11:56 pm.

The time backtracked a whole hour upon them and one might not even recognize the change without aid of a device for tracking all of time, itself.

- 12:11 am.

They reached their next pit stop, another rural orphanage. Similar conditions and similar smiling faces, holding on to gifts and offerings; very happy to see them arriving.

- 12:30 am/12:50 am/11:51 pm/12:06 am/12:18 am/11:45 pm...

On and on, went this cycle of flight, drop, repeat with the irregular stop off at desolate locations with those less then fortunate to have a regular meal. Janet never had such an opportunity to see what they were truly working year round to achieve. She had only heard the same stories that so much of the world believed in. The truth was far more fascinating. Then, the return to the flight to continue delivery and pass over another international time boundary.

- 12:00 am. December 26'th.

The constant activity throughout the night didn't seem to phase Janet at all. Nor, any of her fellow

sleigh pullers. She couldn't understand why that was. Chalk it up to elven magic, like everything else. Like it began, so it ended. The bleak world underneath slowly popped up with a pin point of light. One whole day's travel and they were reaching the finish line. That tiny dot grew bigger as the reins were pulled back upon. There was such a roar of appreciation for their safe return, it was even reaching this altitude and overcoming those tiresome bells.

Seconds passed like minute hands with spikes welded to them. The thrill of returning home washed over the team and they wanted to run even faster. However, their driver kept the reins pulled hard, encouraging them from making a suicide drop into the ground.

Hooves pounding upon the magical barrier between air and nothingness, the team descended onto a sort of landing strip that doubled as Main Street throughout the rest of the year.

Three feet.

Two feet.

One.

The runners plowed into the special paving of Main Street with a grinding sound as the team was quickly brought to a slow trot. Then, a standstill.

The crowd of Elves were soon to gather around. Some helping to unload what little trinkets were about and most to cheer for the closing activity of their annual festival as the big guy in flowing red stepped out.

Helpers emerged from the crowd to guide the reindeer to place the sleigh into storage, then themselves into their marked stalls. It would be a long, restless night for the bunch of them as the energy kept flowing through their bodies.

Their feed buckets would contain nuggets, laced with a downer to aid in neutralizing the specialized energy...if only at a mildly declining rate.

Now that it was all done with and the celebrations raged onwards in the distance, Janet began to identify with what truly being alone would be like. Or...nearly.

For, she was not the only reindeer to have things to say and questions to ask.

(Janet, the Elf: Addendum.)

- 12 noon. January 18'th.

Janet would find the following weeks to move at a strange pace. Courses of key behavior on how to behave and interact. Lessons on independent activities. Teachings on interaction around others. Even learning how to exist with '*Your fellow Caribou*'.

On what time she had off, she would wind up spending with Eon. Turns out that he was only being aggressive during the interview and she was able to adjust to being in his company...

- 2:00 pm. March 3'rd.

By now, Janet was growing very used to the daily life in this form. She had long since discarded the concept of clothes and nearly let her Elven language skills slip away into the past. Even coupling

with Eon had gained quite the appeal. The training lessons had just concluded with little else then the monthly brush up tests to keep going with.

Her mind occasionally wondered back to things were as an Elf and all those things she did with the others. Granted, the freedom of not being apart of a group held it's own benefits. She was capable of giving attention to her own thoughts, this way.

For the most part, Janet was taking well to this new way of life.

- 1:33 pm. April 11'th.

An Elf that was being slightly mischievous, managed to sneak back into the stables to slip a treat to the deer. Janet's stall was fairly close to the gates and when they met, there was a kind of spark that occurred. Without words, a kind of friendship was born that would persist for years. Which would lead to other positive things.

- 3:08 pm. June 15'th.

There were several Elves that Janet was becoming rather fond of, including the sneaker. By promising to behave herself to the fullest, she was permitted the special privilege of departing for limited periods of time to accompany them. Oh, she could not reveal certain facts or speak like an Elf. This was a top law fact. One she was well prepared to take the responsibilities over.

Since, they didn't suspect a thing, it was rather easy to keep up the illusion. Secretly understanding every spoken word and even keeping up with a few novelty secrets that chit-chat will reveal. Being able to easily mingle and stay close. It was very easy for her to become a favorite with the group, never acting like an animal around them and all that.

The visits were kept to a limited basis and on an after hours basis, so that she wouldn't be so tempted to slip up by forgetting herself, due to overexposure.

- 9:00 am. July 14'th.

Janet looked outwards from her stall with fond memories of this special Elven day. True. They did have many holidays to help spread out the endless line of work. But, this one was especially special to Janet. It was hard for her to just stand by, knowing the celebrations were just starting to kick off.

She was rather hoping that this would be one of those celebrations that the deer were permitted to be a part of...even if on the sidelines. Though, she wasn't at all sure if this would be so.

She wasn't alone on this.

- 9:58 am. July 14'th.

To her relief, the helpers came and gave them escort into the heart of the celebrations.

Perhaps, she had always been too preoccupied during celebrations to notice whether the reindeer were around or not. Perhaps, it's something she might now be interested in attempting to remember.

- 10:24 am. September 22'nd.

Janet had just met with her Elven friends, when the plan on sneaking out into the rural landscape was brought up. Janet's training was pressed hard at the troublesome four prepared their big escape and she found it hard to produce a counterpoint without using words. Despite all efforts to produce a

visual complaint to the notion, she wound up proceed with the group, out into the exterior boundaries and entering the wilds.

- 1:11 pm. September 22'nd.

The world seemed all the same to the group. They had never been this far out, away from the civilization that they knew. The world had lost all reference points before they had knew what happened. The lost group started to fall into despair as they couldn't figure out which direction went home.

Janet proved to be their savior, as her capacity for understanding and flight gave the edge on locating civilization.

- 4:25 pm. September 22'nd.

By shuffling between the group and the town, Janet had the troublesome four back on Main Street in time for dinner.

- 7:15 pm. September 22'nd.

Every year, in order to prepare for the big three crunch months ahead of them, the little northern village would whoop it up into a frenzied, week long party. Not a hammer would be lifted or a driver turned during this week. It was dedicated towards complete and total fun. So much so that many of the rules to live by were lifted in order to conduct a level of party so wild that next to nothing could be considered a taboo. At the height of the festivities was a challenging game of both sporting contests and endurance. Not a soul, dare miss this event, where two opposing forces took it neck to neck in a three dimensional contest of keeping a small, black ball in constant flight, while avoiding any opportunities to let the opposing side gain control of said ball. Each contestant would mount their own flying hoof with a long stick in hand. Upon each end, a small, woven cup was attached. This cup would be used to catch, hold and launch the ball into the air, as quickly as possible. Each side had a small square, propped some thirty feet into the air. By passing the ball through this square, a point was scored. However, a point would be lost to the last side whom possessed the ball, should it fall to the fluffy white surface of the ground. This fact would lead to some rather unruly game play when one side had a major scoring advantage. For, it was rather common for the losing side to attempt to pole swipe at the possessing team's carrier or even perform some down-and-out ramming maneuvers in an attempt to dismount a rider. The game would conclude after a grueling hour set time limit. Only the condition of a tie would create a sudden death race for the first side to score three additional points would permit the game to run overtime.

After this full week of partying it down, there was the traditional detox day before the work whistle would blow, announcing the return to the daily grind. Those that were not ready...well...work won't deny it's need.

Janet was not asked to participate in this year's game. For, the sport is considered compatible with the more experienced of flyers.

- 4:25 pm. September 23'rd.

Santa approached the large facility that was the toy factory, hesitating to take a big breath and look over the list of candidates for this year's potential replacement crew. Nine names appeared upon it. A rather short list, thanks to the number of retirements from the previous dozen. Choosing might be

tough, though. Only two slots vacant. He brushed through his winter coat of red and prepared himself for the decisions to come until the signal to approach was given.

- 4:30 pm. December 23'rd.

The big doors swung open and let the jolly soul trudge in. His clothes blazed in many hues of red. His very presence both eased and raised the tension in an odd sort of way. He gazed about the place with a twinkle in his eye, chuckling with a deep throated force, before being led up to the overhead cat walk. With scroll in hand, his attention was drawn out over the working crowd as the helpers started to circulate and draw out the nine candidates.

- 9:45 pm. December 24'th.

Eon stood next to Janet and softly bleated at her. *"You ready, hun? Prepared and raring to go, and all that?"*

Janet just turned her head slowly and smiled, showing that she had no regrets. *"It's what we're meant for, my love. Though, it hardly seems like a whole year has passed us by. Everything was so quick, it seemed."*

"In comparison to doing the same task of assembly, I can place a lot of understanding to that very feeling. The time flows with a pace that's unreal. Freedom without being left to boredom does that." Eon replied, smiling all along. *"Now, get out there and show them what being a Cupid is all about."*

As she began to trot out into the waiting hand of a helper, Eon reached up with a hoof and slapped her shaking fanny. She just turned her head and shook it. The expression over her face was a mixture of disappointment and excitement. She just couldn't quite get him to completely stop touching her as he pleased. Yet...she couldn't deny liking it by this point, either. It would prove a battle of wills to see whom surrendered on this issue...if, indeed, it ever would happen.

"Babe!" bleated Eon. *"When you get back, I'm upgrading your ranks and privileges!"*

She knew what that meant.

- 10:16 pm. December 24'th.

Janet followed suit with the others to her position on the sleigh team as the party environment roared into full swing. She felt comfortable and proud to be where she was, at this given moment.

- 11:59 pm. December 24'th.

The excitement was at a climax as Janet felt her tensions rising, waiting to begin the run. Final preparations were underway and every second felt sluggish. She dined on the offering and then...

- 12:00 am. December 25'th.

A massive clock tower rang out and the reigns were given a firm whipping motion. The team reacted with a stellar tugging force that moved the sleigh down the runway.

Janet put her all into the pulling, as did the whole team. In seconds, they had cleared the ramp and were heading for another yearly trip around the Earth, delivering presents by the millions to all the good children of the world.

THE END. *(of our little story. However, the magic of Christmas shall live on inside all of us.)*