

Unraveling Threads

A cold chill crept up Mike's leg, waking him. After his meeting with Mrs. Claus last night, it had taken him a long time to fall asleep. His mind had been preoccupied with the Krampus problem, which meant hours spent brainstorming ideas. There was a lot riding on whatever happened next, but he and the others had desperately needed a proper rest.

When he tried to pull his foot back in the blanket, he realized that the comforter wasn't long enough. Lifting his head to see what had happened, he almost laughed. When he had gone to bed, it had just been him and Tink. Now, though, Kisa and Yuki were also under the covers as well. The limited space under the blanket had been monopolized by Yuki, who had pulled the covers up over her head.

He sat up and yawned. They were all in Santa's bed, which Mrs. Claus had let them use on the condition that they didn't have sex in it. Though his sleep had been restful, there certainly hadn't been enough of it.

"Good morning." The voice made him jump, and he looked over to see Holly sitting in a nearby chair. The elf's feet didn't reach the ground, and she kicked her legs back and forth while nursing a mug of cocoa. "Sleep well?"

"I guess." He looked at the others, who were still slumbering soundly. He heard the occasional snort from Tink, who was sleeping off all the alcohol and sugar from the day before. "What are you doing here?"

"Elves don't sleep much," she told him. "Mrs. Claus wanted me to keep an eye on you."

"Why?"

"Make sure nothing happened to you. I don't think Christmas Past is coming back, but there's still one spirit unaccounted for."

"Ugh, right." Mike rubbed at his face, remembering what Mrs. Claus had told him. The Christmas spirits were just another part of Santa, temporal beings that didn't obey the rules of time or space. He wasn't certain if Christmas Future was still lost in the ducts or had simply wandered off, but could stand to be more cautious about a possible encounter.

He doubted he could influence the final specter as he had Christmas Present.

Being careful not to wake anyone, it took him a moment to slide free from the bed. He had to pull himself out of the top of the blankets, then move between the women until he was at the foot of the bed. Yawning, he went to pick up his pants and realized that he was naked in front of Holly. Mrs. Claus hadn't provided him with any sort of underwear, so he had been sleeping naked.

"Oh, wow, I'm sorry." He went to cover himself up, but saw that the elf wasn't offended. In fact, her cheeks had turned bright red, but her intense gaze was on his body. She was staring directly at his cock, her lips parted slightly as she breathed through her mouth.

"Don't worry about it," she responded, lifting her eyes to meet his. "I don't mind."

He almost asked her to turn around or something, but remembered that time she had watched him plow Kisa on top of the jukebox. If she wanted to look at him, he wasn't going to stop her. "So what's the plan, today?" he asked, pulling on his clothes.

"Breakfast, first." Holly looked up at the window. "There's a terrible storm outside right now, we don't know if the Krampus is still lurking about."

"Right." Mrs. Claus had explained that the Krampus was afraid to face her directly over the fear of reverting to Santa. The process by which he transformed wasn't understood, but Mrs. Claus' relationship with her husband was so well defined that it would make perfect sense that she would be the one to pull him out of it.

That hadn't stopped the demon from banging on the front door for several hours. What the Krampus himself didn't know was that Mrs. Claus was afraid to face him because of his influence on the elves and reindeer. If they could be so easily corrupted, why not her? For now, the two were at a stalemate, and that gave him time to figure out a plan.

Finished with his clothes, he found the too-large slippers and put them on. Before sleep, he had searched for something else to wear on his feet, but had been unable to find any other footwear. Maybe shoes could be today's short-term goal.

Holly walked over to the door and waited. He looked at the others in bed, then back at the elf.

"What about them?"

Holly shrugged. "You're officially the most important person according to Mrs. Claus. I can't be everywhere at once."

Frowning, Mike looked back at the bed just as Kisa stirred.

"I can keep watch," Kisa mumbled, sitting up in bed and rubbing her eyes. The blanket fell down, revealing her bare breasts. "Your anxiety is buzzing around inside my head, it feels gross. If I sense danger, I'll wake up the fox, she can handle it."

"Thanks, Kisa." They left, and he was careful to shut the door quietly. Holly walked by his side, but said nothing as they descended the stairs and went back into the kitchen. Mrs. Claus was already there, and had prepped a meal of bacon and eggs.

"Well?" she asked. "Did you sleep or break your promise?"

Mike felt heat rise in his cheeks. "We didn't do anything kinky in your bed, I swear."

Mrs. Claus looked over at Holly. Mike noticed immediately that the woman seemed older this morning. She was in a sexy Santa robe that revealed some extra wrinkles along her neck, and her hair had more streaks of white than it had last night.

"They were sleeping naked," Holly announced, then hopped up into a stool.

"We didn't exactly bring pajamas." Mike threw the snitch a dirty look and sat down next to her. "Besides, even if we had been in the mood, I was way too tired."

"We both know that's a lie." Mrs. Claus slid an empty glass in front of him. "Orange juice?"

"Yes, please." He waited while she made him a plate of food and then poured him some juice from a carafe kept beneath the counter. "We really didn't do anything, though."

"I believe you." Mrs. Claus winked. "And honestly, I don't know that I would blame you if I could. I've been married to a man obsessed with making toys for nearly a century. Maybe obsessed isn't the right word, though. It's so ingrained into his magic, he can't help himself. I imagine sex must be the same for you."

“I’m honestly not sure.” He took a sip of orange juice and broke apart a piece of bacon before taking a bite. “Sex is at the core of my magic, but it’s not like I’m compelled to do it.”

“Hmm. Santa is always acting on some variation of his own magic. Technically, if it’s Christmas related, he can accomplish it, that’s how his magic works.” She stared at the counter as if lost in thought. “Did you know that he helped stop a war once? It was only for a day. Both sides stopped fighting while he was there, then went right back to killing each other. It broke his heart, you know. He had watched each and every one of those men grow up as children.”

“Wait, he can see every child on Earth?” Mike asked.

Mrs. Claus nodded. “Not in a literal sense. It’s almost like he’s plugged into them. Sometimes it breaks him. There are children out there who need help, but it sits right outside his ability to do so. That’s why people notice so many miracles during Christmas, he’s trying to make up for missed opportunities. Still, he’s only one person.”

Mike almost corrected her by saying two, but realized that Holly was nearby. What would the elf do if she found out the Krampus was Santa? And if Holly was technically just some offshoot of Santa, did that mean she could transform into something similar?

A more chilling thought occurred to him. If Santa could sense every child, so could the Krampus.

“What does the Krampus want, exactly?” he asked. “In general terms. I’ve heard the spirits reference the true meaning of Christmas, but that’s hardly specific.”

Mrs. Claus looked at him for a moment, then sighed. “To be honest, I’m not sure. Not to end Christmas, for obvious reasons.” Her eyes flicked to Holly and back. “It has to be related to punishing children.”

“This seems like a long way to go just to smack some kids around. And what about the devil cookies? Is he just keeping the elves busy, or is there some bigger plan?”

“I don’t know. You see—” Mrs. Claus was cut off when Christmas Present appeared, blasting the room with sparkling light and the smell of candy canes. She dropped a pair of envelopes onto the counter, flashed Mike her breasts, and then disappeared.

“What in the...” Mike picked up the envelopes and saw that one was addressed to him and the other to Mrs. Claus. “Why the letters?”

“I’m not sure. Time is flowing much slower here, it could just be that she couldn’t get away for long. A minute here is easily an hour out there on delivery.” Mrs. Claus opened her letter and frowned. “Okay, so this changes things.”

“What’s up?” He hadn’t opened his letter yet.

“We knew that Frost was helping the Krampus, but it would seem that Jólakötturinn, Grýla, and the Yuletide lads are also part of it. Your friends were making deliveries, but the sleigh is under attack and can’t land anywhere with snow.”

“What? Who?” He almost snatched the letter from her hand to read it himself, but remembered his own. Ripping open the paper, he unfolded a piece of Christmas Stationary and read it.

Romeo, it began. How are you? I hope you’ve been having a great time at the North Pole. Death and I have been busting our behinds delivering presents to brats across the world. No big deal, it will only take us years to finish.

That’s sarcasm, by the way. I am not happy about it, and you owe me big. I’m talking a tropical vacation, or maybe give me permission to eat my way through a prison. Your choice.

Anyway, Dancer and that glorious giantess who smells like you have been a big help. They are speeding up deliveries, but not anywhere cold because of a fudging snowman army. Oh, right, Death tricked me into wearing a hat that won’t let me swear, even if I write it. Fudge. Shirt. See?

Mike noticed several half-scrawled swears along the perimeter of the paper and bit his lip to avoid laughing.

Christmas Present will act as a correspondent, but we need her help too much, so it’s letters only for now. After not delivering presents for a couple of days, the sleigh started to fall out of the sky. So we have to stay busy to keep from crashing it. The ghost and the reindeer helped us catch up, but we’re in trouble if we lose them. These weird potato dudes and a giant cat are trying to take Santa’s sack from us. They suck, by the way.

Speaking of Christmas Present, this woman is a gift. She was supposed to give you a special message from me, I hope you liked it.

Lily had signed her name with a flourish and a kiss. Beneath her name, she had written more.

P.S. We let the dog out, they're pulling our sleigh right now. Good luck finding someone to give them their shots.

"Cerberus?" Mike set the letter down and stared at it. Mrs. Claus was still reading her own letter, her cheeks now flushed.

"Seriously, Death and a hellhound?" She looked over the top of her glasses at him. "And a succubus? Just what kind of house are you running, Caretaker?"

"One where we don't give a damn about what other people think." He saw Holly flinch, reminding him that she was still there. "Sounds like the sleigh is running out of magic."

"It's the number one rule. Santa's magic *must* be used for Christmas. That includes the sleigh and the dimensional bag. If they've just been circling, it..." She took off her glasses and groaned. "Why does my head hurt so bad all of the sudden?"

"Lack of sleep?" Concerned, Mike stood and moved to the other side of the counter just as Mrs. Claus' eyes rolled up in her head and she collapsed. He caught her by the arms as Holly leapt down from her stool.

"This way," she said, then held open the door to the main room. Mike dragged Mrs. Claus, suddenly aware of how light she felt. Holly adjusted some pillows on a recliner and Mike set the older woman down on it.

"Hey, are you okay?" When she didn't respond, he looked around for something to give her, but realized he didn't know what to do. Holly took Mrs. Claus by the hand and held it. The woman's eyes fluttered open, and she looked back and forth at the two of them.

"How did we get here?" she asked.

"You're really tired," Mike said. "You got light-headed is all."

"I don't sleep during Christmas. Don't need to." She smiled sadly. "It's a common belief that Mrs. Claus stays up all night and waits for her husband to come home. If something as simple as a couple of days made me sleepy, I would drop dead long before my husband got home. I'm afraid it's something else."

She took a deep breath, and Mike watched more streaks appear in her hair.

“What’s going on?” he asked.

“I think...he’s draining the magic away from my husband.” Mrs. Claus closed her eyes as if to sleep, but kept talking. “I don’t know how, but I suddenly feel so...old. My bones are weary, and I can feel the soft pull of oblivion calling my name. With so much of the North Pole under the Krampus’ control, it’s only a matter of time before he surpasses Santa in strength. Once that happens, I will cease to exist.”

“No!” Holly put her hands over her mouth.

“I’m afraid it’s true.” Mrs. Claus opened her eyes and looked at Mike. “Unlike the elves, I am just a mere extension. All he needs to do is wait until I’m gone and the North Pole will be his. Once that happens, there will be no one to stand in his way.”

“How long do we have?” he asked.

Mrs. Claus frowned. “I don’t know. But I’m not gone yet.” She took a deep breath and sat forward. “I would love to hear some ideas.”

Mike examined the woman, then opened his senses to the magic surrounding her. He could see the festive ribbons around her body, as if she was woven from several strands of thread. Several of them had become frayed, wispily drifting about as if caught in a breeze.

Staring at those threads, he wondered if he could touch them. They looked similar to his own magic from before, and he was relatively certain that manipulating them wouldn’t cause the same outcome.

“You’re staring,” Holly said.

“Shh.” He held up a finger for silence, then moved his hands across Mrs. Claus body. She followed his movements, but didn’t react when the strands passed through his hands.

“Damn,” he muttered. What was different? Was it because he had previously been manipulating his own magic?

“Your eyes are glowing,” Holly whispered.

“Probably.” He shrugged off her comment and returned his attention to the unraveling threads. What if he could tuck them in or something? How would he even do such a thing?

He felt his magic awaken, sensing his need. Mrs. Claus had closed her eyes again, her skin suddenly pale.

Could his magic touch hers? She was a construct of belief, but still a living being. How would she react if he accidentally zapped her? Contemplating the problem, he watched in horror as one of the threads came undone, as if someone had tugged the free end of it.

Holding out his hands, he summoned the magic into his fingertips, then extended them outward. He could hear the air crackle with magic as he tried to pinch one of the hovering threads with his illusory fingers.

“Yes!” It had taken a couple attempts, but the thread was now firmly trapped between his spectral digits. He thought about how he had looped his magic back into himself and decided to do the same thing with Mrs. Claus. Her magic sustained her existence, so he doubted she would turn into a cum fountain.

And if this backfired, at least she’d be coming while she was going.

“Not the time,” he muttered, chastising himself for the inappropriate thought. Sweat had broken out across his brow as he delicately tucked the exposed thread into the tapestry that was Mrs. Claus, taking care to weave it back into her core. While he did this, he looked at the bun on her head, thinking about how a stray strand of hair could easily be put back in place.

The woman sighed, then took a deep breath as Mike continued to snare the loose threads. Strangely, manipulating her magic almost felt like second nature as he grabbed the unraveling thread and actually braided it back together before tucking it in. His concentration was total, and he barely noticed that his legs were shaking beneath him.

The color returned to her cheeks as he finished up. Smiling, he felt the magic leave him, the room now spinning around him.

“Gah!” Holly tried to catch him as he fell, only to end up on top of him. Her concerned features filled his tunnel vision, and he couldn’t help but notice that her magic was similar to Mrs. Claus’. Where the older woman had come undone and was frayed, Holly was a tight package bound in ribbons just waiting to be opened.

Moments passed, and Holly sat up, her legs spreading wide to accommodate his torso. She held two fingers up in front of him, but all he could think about were the candy-cane tights that now filled his peripheral vision.

“How many fingers am I holding up?” she asked.

“Two,” he replied, then closed his eyes. “Sorry, I’m not sure why I’m so tired.”

“Manipulating magic directly is hard work,” Yuki replied. “But I guess I shouldn’t be surprised.”

Mike opened his eyes and saw Yuki standing over by the stairs, her arms crossed over her chest. The kitsune was wearing a robe she had borrowed from the wardrobe upstairs, the letters **SC** embroidered on the chest.

“Whatever he did, I feel much better.” Mrs. Claus leaned over the side of the chair to look at Mike. A few of the years she had put on were gone now, the wrinkles along her neck faded. “Though I suspect he only bought me some time.”

Yuki muttered to herself in Japanese, then helped Holly stand. Mike noticed the crotch of Holly’s tights had a snowflake on it.

“What am I going to do with you?” Yuki knelt by Mike’s side and tilted her head. “Hey, look at me, I can see magic for the first time, so maybe I should touch it? Maybe move it around.”

“She was dying,” he replied. “I thought I could help.”

“All I ask is five minutes. Five minutes to wake me up and fill me in. I could have walked you through your first time, it would have been so gentle. Ah, geez, you’re all wet.” Yuki put her hand against his forehead. “No fever, though.”

“Fever?” Holly asked.

“Yeah, fever.” Yuki stood and moved to Mrs. Claus. “How do you feel? What was happening?”

Mrs. Claus gave an explanation that was satisfactory, and Yuki returned to Mike.

“I felt that from upstairs, you know. You were generating a ton of magic, I thought maybe you were down here unwrapping our host and filling her with Christmas cheer.”

“Why would I have a fever?” Mike asked, ignoring the last part of Yuki’s comment.

“From burning out your brain.” She patted him on the cheek. “Your own magic is one thing, but grabbing someone else’s magic and doing stuff to it? Dangerous. Luckily, she was a willing subject and your intentions were good.”

“It felt like a massage,” Mrs. Claus added. “My whole body was tingling.”

“Well I’m glad it was a good experience for you.” Yuki helped Mike to the nearest couch. “But don’t do that again until we can talk about it. I think you’ve taken another step down the magic road, and I need to apprise you of the pitfalls.”

He sighed, grateful that she wasn’t giving him an earful. His ears were buzzing with a nasty bout of tinnitus, and his magic was shifting about in his chest and giving him terrible heartburn.

“You can teach me how to manipulate outside magic?” he asked.

“A bit. Seeing magic can give you better control over it, but apparently you can actually touch it. The real expert is Ratu, how do you think she does all her tricks with those artifacts?” While she spoke, she examined his body with her hands, squeezing his wrists and arms. “Well, you didn’t seem to blow out your meridians or anything, so I think you’ll be okay.”

“Meridians?”

“Don’t worry about it, I’m just making sure your body is okay, because you probably feel terrible right now. You’ll bounce back pretty fast, but maybe take it easy for a bit.” She shook her head and looked at Mrs. Claus. “I really can’t take my eye off of him for a single minute.”

“I’m married to one like that.” Mrs. Claus chuckled. “If he’s not playing with the elves, he’s off taking apart the latest toy so he can mass produce it, or building something new and exciting in his Workshop. I can’t tell you how many times he’s caught that building on fire.”

“It’s a lot.” Holly sat down by Mike’s feet, her eyes wandering across his prone body and eventually settling on his face. “Every year. We have an elf who follows him around with a fire extinguisher, and that one is followed by another elf in case the first elf catches on fire.”

Mike laughed, then saw the serious look on Holly’s face. “Wait, for real?”

“It’s a chain of three elves, actually,” Mrs. Claus added. “But only when he’s working on electrical stuff. When it comes to carpentry, there is nobody better, but the world has moved on from old school dolls and wooden horses. He can

build anything, as long as it's a gift for someone. But that doesn't mean there aren't hiccups along the way."

They all laughed and shared stories for a bit, and the nasty buzzing sound faded. Mike's magic settled down and he was able to sit and chat properly. Eventually Kisa appeared with a very sleepy Tink, and they left the room to have breakfast in the kitchen with Yuki.

While they were gone, Mrs. Claus talked some more about her experiences at the North Pole, most of her stories skirting the edges of what she had told Mike about Santa being a type of Caretaker. He wondered how much more she would have told him if the elf hadn't been around.

Holly, however, had managed to sit down right next to him, her petite body occasionally pressing against his when either of them would shift. He thought he caught her looking at him more than once, and knew better than to just dismiss it.

When the others joined them, Tink promptly found a chair off to the side and crawled into it before passing out.

"What's her deal?" Mike asked. "She okay?"

"She drank booze made for magical reindeer last night," Kisa said. "The hangover is very real this morning."

"I'm surprised it didn't kill her," Mrs. Claus said, then got up to get Tink a pillow. The old woman seemed rejuvenated, but when Mike examined her magic once more, he saw that a couple of tiny threads had already come undone. While he may have extended the woman's lifespan with his stunt earlier, they were definitely on a time limit.

"So I have a question," he said once Mrs. Claus returned to her seat. "You mentioned someone called Jólakötturinn, Grýla and some... Yuletide lads?"

"Yuletide lads. Yes, let's discuss them for a moment." Mrs. Claus sat forward in her chair, then looked at the others. "Once upon a time, my husband fought some otherworldly creatures called frost giants. They were the last ones on Earth, trapped here from a battle long ago. Someone promised them a one-way trip to their homeworld if they could take down Santa, but it wasn't meant to be.

"Jólakötturinn and Grýla belonged to the frost giants. They are giants themselves but nowhere near the same size. Jólakötturinn was their cat, and Grýla essentially their servant. I don't know if they came from the same world that the frost giants did, or if they were simply found here. But that's beside the point.

When the frost giants were defeated, Santa found Jólakötturinn, Grýla, and the others cowering back at the frost giant's camp. He took pity on them and allowed them to stick around as long as they stayed out of trouble."

"And did they?" Mike asked.

Mrs. Claus shook her head. "Of course they didn't. They snuck off and laid low in Iceland of all places. Do you know what they became famous for? Eating children."

"That's horrible!" Kisa said. "And Santa let them get away with it?"

"Not after he found out. He bound them here, and the magic of the North Pole transformed them. Like the Krampus, they were to become mere myths, their memories softened as a reminder for children to be good or else."

"You said there were others?" Yuki leaned toward Mrs. Claus in interest.

"Yes, a few. There were three males, but only Leppalúði remains."

"Wait, who is...Leppalúði?" Mike struggled with the pronunciation.

"Grýla's husband. Other than knocking her up with children, he is absolutely useless. The other two were better, but supposedly Grýla ate them. Now she's stuck with the third, because he's the only one who can give her children. It wouldn't surprise me if he stayed home instead of helping her take over the North Pole with the Krampus, he really is that lazy." Mrs. Claus stared off into space for a moment, then looked back at the others. "The Yuletide lads are Grýla's children. All boys, all trouble. My husband tried to give jobs to some of them early on, but it was clear they weren't cut out for any sort of structure."

"Interesting." Mike wondered how Lily was faring against the Yuletide lads. Or better yet, how they were faring against her. "Any ideas how Jack Frost comes into this?"

Mrs. Claus took a deep breath. "Actually, I do, but I need a break." She stood from her chair and rubbed at her lower back. "Feeling a bit stiff is all, gonna grab myself a quick snack. Does anyone want some cocoa while I'm up?"

Everyone's hands, including Tink's, went up in the air.

Jack had flown above the North Pole for several hours before daring to descend below the whirling mass of ice and snow. The storm she had summoned

had gathered plenty of fury on its own, and she didn't know how long it would continue.

Upon landing, she saw that she had managed to fly to the magical boundary of the North Pole proper. Santa's village lay in the middle of a hundred mile wide island of rock that was actually the peak of a mountain from a range that lay deep beneath the arctic waters. If it could be properly seen from the outside, the North Pole would look like a perfectly circular island surrounded by ice with some steep, rocky cliffs, analogous to a giant snow globe.

She landed on one of the cliffs and let out a scream of frustration. The Arctic ice took her anger, but offered nothing in return.

"What are you doing?" The voice startled her so hard that she spun around and summoned ice from the ground, jagged spikes that would have ripped apart any other creature. Instead, the Krampus silently side stepped them, his body an inky blur as he whipped around and shattered the icy barrage. "Cute, but ineffective."

"I'm sorry, I..." She took a step back, worried that the Krampus would attack her.

"Relax, child." The Krampus sniffed at the air and grinned. "I can smell your intent, I shouldn't have frightened you."

Worried that the Krampus was acting uncharacteristically nice, Jack hugged herself and tried to look small. If the Krampus could sense intent, he wouldn't have punished her so harshly earlier. "I'm sorry I left the cameras, something came up."

"Oh, I know it did." The Krampus chuckled, then moved to stand beside her. "You looked into my mirror, didn't you?"

A litany of possible lies filtered through her head, but she suspected that the Krampus would only punish her more for whatever answer she gave him. He was a fraud, at least in terms of their relationship. He had promised her relevance and recognition, but had only delivered misery.

She nodded, then winced. When the blow never came, she turned toward the Krampus and was surprised that he had turned his back to her. His gaze was on the Northern Lights above, his whole body swaying from side to side as if hypnotized by them.

“He knew you would find out,” he said, his voice barely legible over the storm. “That’s what he kept telling me, while I was down there. Warned me over and over again that you would find out, that it would change everything. But I kept telling him it wouldn’t matter.”

“Found out what?”

“We’re alike, you and I. Power incarnate, under appreciated, under utilized. If you wanted, you could freeze the ocean, could bring mankind to its knees! Yet here you stand, a glorified snowcone maker, trapped in the North Pole.”

“I’m not trapped,” Jack argued, but the Krampus waved her off.

“Aren’t you? Maybe you weren’t trapped like the others, but you refused to leave. Why is that? Why not seek your fortune elsewhere, make a bigger name for yourself?”

Jack frowned, pondering the Krampus’ words. Why did she hang around the North Pole so much? In hindsight, how many decades had she spent hovering around Santa, hoping to be a bigger part of things?

Pain blossomed in the back of her head again, and she clutched her temples. Memories burned through her mind, images of a much younger Santa kneeling over her broken form. The blood leaking from her body had already frozen, her breath coming in short gasps.

“He did this to you,” the Krampus told her. “Locked away your true potential, made you think you were less than what you are. While your prison is different than my own, perhaps it is time you bend the bars.”

“I don’t—” She was cut off when he shifted toward her, his body like a shadow. Long fingers clutched her throat and he squeezed, lifting her off the ground. Any traces of kindness were now stricken from his dark features.

“You see, I have plans for this place, and I need you to be the better version of yourself.” He held up an empty sack and shook it in her face. She could sense the powerful magic within, realizing it was a smaller version of Santa’s sack. “It’s not ideal, but now I have everything I need to leave this place, to bring truth to my legacy!” He was shouting now, his teeth inches from her eyes.

“You’re...hurting...” She choked as he shook her.

“But I cannot LEAVE until YOU. WAKE. UP!” He slammed her into the ground, over and over again. Ribs cracked and bones splintered as an icy storm formed all around them, trying its best to rip the Krampus apart.

“Please, I...” Her words were weak as the world went black around her. For a moment, she was floating in a ball of golden light, her wounds burning trails of fire across her body. A silhouette appeared, the lights dimming to reveal the woman from the mirror.

“Are you really going to let him kill us?” There was panic in the woman’s voice as she grabbed Jack by the hand, her whole body buzzing with the contact. “Gods, he’s actually killing us, you have to make him stop!”

“How? He’s so strong, I can’t do anything to hurt him.” Jack whimpered, but the woman in gold slapped her, sending a shockwave through her mind.

“You have grown weak! You have made us weak!” The woman’s hair billowed up around her, her eyes now like molten gold as magic streamed away from her. “This isn’t how it was supposed to be, Santa! You were supposed to prolong me, not make me into this miserable creature!”

“Who...what are we?” Jack’s heart pounded in her chest as the woman in gold seized her by the throat and forced her mouth open.

“We were gods! We are whoever we want to be,” the woman told her, then forced her mouth over Jack’s. Energy rippled through Jack’s mind as their magic billowed out of control. Her eyes snapped open to reveal that she was now choking the Krampus.

“Good!” He shouted, his hands on her wrists. “This is power, Jack, the power that he would have denied you! It’s everything I promised you and more!”

The island trembled as massive tornadoes formed out on the ice flows. Enormous pieces of ice were ripped from the ground, revealing the cold waters of the Arctic beneath. Jack felt so connected, as if she had tapped into a reservoir of power just beneath those dark waves.

“I disapprove of your methods,” she hissed, then smashed the Krampus into the ground. He laughed maniacally, rolling onto his back to reveal that he was unharmed.

“And yet they worked!” He was on his feet so fast that he may as well have teleported. “Look, Jack, look! I know I’ve been harsh, but you cannot crack an egg without using a little force!” He snatched her by the hand and held it up for her

to see. Her veins were ablaze with golden light, and she could feel a rush of heat through her entire body.

This was what she had wanted...right?

“Power, Jack, all the power you could ever want!” He spun her around and hopped up and down with glee at the sight of the tornadoes. “Have you ever seen such a devastating force of nature? Tornadoes! At the North Pole! This is the mark of someone the world remembers, somebody who plays second fiddle to nobody!”

Her head still hurt, she was so confused. But what the Krampus was telling her made so much sense. It was power she had wanted, power to make the world notice her, to fear her glory!

No, power was too easy. The pain in her head had focused into a razor’s edge right between her eyes, splitting her mind in half. She could sense that other woman now, the one she used to be, looking out of one of her eyes. They were fractured, but somehow whole.

Not power, the other woman sneered. We already have power.

Yes, Jack replied, remembering what it was she had wanted. She had become obsolete in Santa’s shadow, yet another forgotten fairy tale. The world was a closed door to her, and she wanted to be a part of it. *I want to be free, to be remembered. I want...I want...*

TO BE LOVED. The other woman said it for her. Feeling a surge of emotion, Jack reached into the depths of the storm and poured that golden energy into it, watching the ice on the ocean’s surface tear itself apart in order to obey her. Her self admission brought fiery tears to her eyes as she thought about what she needed to do.

“Yes! That’s it!” The Krampus howled, his whole body tense as the storm gobbled up his cry. “And you can keep that power, Jack, my friend! I just need you to do one more thing for me!”

Jack was suddenly wary, fearing more of the Krampus’ treachery. No, that couldn’t be it, he had helped her, he was her friend. Wait, but he had hurt her, badly, just to—

“I need you to take out that mortal staying in my house.” The Krampus grinned, revealing all of his teeth. “Mrs. Claus will be gone soon, which means the

door can be opened. Remove the Caretaker so that he doesn't usurp my throne, and make sure you kill the elf. When I return, this glory shall be yours...forever!"

"Forever!" Jack raised her hands to the sky, now certain what it was she needed to do. The Northern Lights bent away from her, as if to avoid her outstretched hands. Her whole body was flooded with magic, and she sent it outward, raising an army made of snow and ice. Frozen beasts formed all around her, prying themselves up from deep drifts. Those golden flames burned hot beneath her skin as she lowered her eyes to see the Krampus hop into a makeshift sleigh hooked up to seven corrupted reindeer.

"I'll be back soon, my Queen." He bowed dramatically, and then the reindeer took to the sky.

"I may be a queen," she whispered. "But I am certainly not yours." For the first time she could remember, she felt hot. Her outfit, made of magical ice, melted into a beautiful golden gown. Commanding the winds to carry her back to the Christmas Village, a small voice in the back of her mind cried out that all was not well.

Not that it mattered. The only thing on her mind now was that strange man who had compelled her with his voice alone. Santa had ruled her with kindness, and the Krampus with fear. But Mike? He had attempted to rule her with words alone, those beautiful, golden words that had clung to her skin like a lover's touch. She shivered, wondering what could have been if she had given in to her desires, her sudden need to obey.

She was going to kill him for his insolence. After all, nobody told her what to do, not anymore. Once he was dead, she would kill his companions, and anyone else who was a threat to her newfound freedom. And when she was done, she would wait for the Krampus to return.

When he did, she would kill him, too.

Mrs. Claus emerged from the kitchen carrying a tray of cookies with several mugs and a thermos of hot cocoa. Tink nearly hurt herself getting out of her chair to move closer to the table with the cookies. When she grabbed a handful, Mrs. Claus swatted the goblin's hand.

"You need to share," Mrs. Claus warned her. When she looked away, Tink stuck her tongue out, but obeyed.

Mike chuckled, then got up to get some cocoa. While Mrs. Claus was pouring his drink, he saw Yuki's ears open wide as she turned her attention to the nearest window.

"Everything okay?" he asked.

The kitsune frowned. "I just felt...hmm." She got up and moved to the window, then opened it. A fierce blast of cold air tousled her hair, but she ignored it, sticking her head out the window.

"Not to complain, but it's hard enough to keep it warm in here already," Mrs. Claus said, then looked at Mike. "The fire is nice and all, but we really do rely on the furnace."

"That's at the top of our to-do list," he said, knowing full well that task would fall on Tink. The goblin had already snuck a handful of cookies off the tray and had tucked them down into the couch cushions.

"There's a nasty storm rolling in." Yuki looked at Mike. "I'm going to pop outside for a minute, see what's going on."

Mrs. Claus frowned. "The Krampus might be out there."

Yuki winked. "And if he is, I'll give him a frosty reception. Be right back." With that, she let herself out the window, making sure to shut it behind her.

"Will she be okay?" Mrs. Claus looked at Mike.

"I'm sure she will," Mike told her. "She's in her element out there."

"I'm not so sure about that," she replied. "There's a lot more than just snow and ice out there, but you know her better than I do."

"I trust her with my life, which means I trust her judgment. So Jack Frost," he said, prompting her to continue. "I would like to hear what her deal is."

"Ah, yes. A bit of a tragedy, honestly." She started pouring hot cocoa for everyone, pausing briefly to frown at the stack of cookies. When she looked at Tink, the goblin had both hands in her lap, a beatific smile on her face.

"To properly understand Jack Frost, we need to go back a bit further than Christmas. The world of magic and the world of man used to be one and the same. Myths and mortals lived side by side, not necessarily in harmony."

“I’ve heard this.” Mike remembered a conversation he had long ago. “If I recall, Merlin did something about it because things weren’t going well. Something about separating the worlds or something.”

“It was a bit more nuanced than that, but yes.” She smiled weakly, then handed him a mug of cocoa. “So let’s fast forward the conversation a bit. What do you know about the gods? The old ones?”

“Like C’tulhu and stuff?”

“Not the ancient ones. Think of Poseidon and the others.”

“Ah, yes, the Greek gods. Or Roman.” He scratched his chin. “I never could keep them straight.”

“Greek. But that makes for a perfect segue. Mythologically speaking, which gods actually existed? They couldn’t all be real, could they?”

“We know that God is sort of real.” This came from Kisa. “He sent one of his angels to our house earlier this year.”

“Really?” Mrs. Claus’ eyes went wide. “What happened there?”

“Long story, but my friend Death accidentally triggered some conditions of the Apocalypse, so an angel came looking for him. It took them a long time to find him, they actually damaged the geas because I guess God or whoever was looking so hard that it disrupted enchantments.”

Mrs. Claus scowled. “Earlier this year, right? Back in March?”

He felt the moisture flee from his mouth. “Uh, yeah, that’s right.”

“That’s around the same time the protections around here started to fail. Santa thought it was an issue of belief, he spent so much time and energy trying to repair the wards around the North Pole.” Mrs. Claus pinched the bridge of her nose. “It’s why he was so weak this year, the magical barrier here takes a tremendous amount of energy to maintain, especially with all those scientists who wander up. Santa keeps moving magnetic north to throw off their compasses, but their GPS units know better.”

“If that’s true, then I’m really sorry. You guys got caught up in my bullsh—” He felt Holly spasm next to him. “...nonsense.”

“You can’t blame yourself for the actions of others. But if YHWH himself was involved, it’s no wonder our barrier took such a beating.” She stared hard at Mike.

“For such a new player to the Game, you have certainly attracted a lot of attention.”

“I’m not even trying to play it,” Mike said. “I would love to understand it better, but it seems like the whole thing is one big trap.”

She looked like she was going to say something, then thought better of it. “Like I was saying, what happened to these old gods? Who actually existed and who didn’t? Why so many discrepancies?” Mrs. Claus surveyed the others like a teacher waiting for an answer.

“They were the same,” Kisa answered. “Same entities, different name.”

“Usually,” Mrs. Claus said, then offered Kisa a cookie. “It was never uncommon for one of the gods to go by a new name, or change their identity.”

“How did you know they were the same gods?” Mike asked Kisa.

“Please. I spent so much time in the room with all the Egyptian garbage, I read plenty of those books.” She licked her lips and then devoured the cookie.

“It’s best to think of these gods as immensely powerful beings who rely on belief as a wellspring of magic. Yuki is actually a perfect example of this. If she wanted, she could attempt to ascend to godhood, using divinity from worship to power her spells.” Mrs. Claus looked out the window. “But ascension comes with a price of its own.”

“Worshippers,” Mike said. “Without them, you are nothing.”

“Correct. Several millennia ago, the gods started a massive fight with each other. Sometimes, when a god loses, they get consumed by another, or are forced into hiding. If they truly want to survive a war with other gods, they can choose to let go of their divinity and become a lesser deity. Takes them out of the food chain, unless someone is feeling particularly vindictive.”

“Wait, is that what Jack is?” Mike felt a hand on his thigh and looked down. Holly was staring straight at Mrs. Claus, as if enthralled, her small hand now stationary on his leg. It looked accidental, but he said nothing.

“Yes. When my husband found Jack, she had barely survived an all-out attack from another god. She was actually on her way here to get his help. Many of the old gods had perished from this world already, but my husband was known to help a few, here and there.”

“So who was she?” Mike asked.

“That I don’t know. I trust my husband and have no need to pry, especially because that can be dangerous knowledge. He did tell me that the transition was very difficult for her. To save her life, he forced her to descend, to relinquish her godhood in exchange for elemental power. He chose ice and frost because it was so counter to her nature that her enemies wouldn’t expect it. After her transformation, he let her believe that she was an iteration of Old Man Winter himself.”

“Well, maybe that wasn’t his decision to make.” Kisa narrowed her eyes at Mrs. Claus. “Why not at least tell her the truth and let her decide how to handle it?”

“When you ascend and become a god, you become tapped into the universe in a way that no other being can manage. Think of it like the ultimate high, the pinnacle of achievement. To hide her, he locked away her remaining divinity so she wouldn’t be tempted to use it. But it’s more than that.” Mrs. Claus looked at Mike. “Ascending to godhood gives you a body and mind capable of handling that kind of magic, it’s one of the reasons not just anybody can do it. When Jack descended, she changed on a cellular level. It’s the same process by which gods can be animals one century and humans the next. You can’t just casually become a god again. Remembering who she used to be could become a death sentence for her.”

Mike leaned forward in interest. “Kind of like Yuki saying I could have burned out my brain earlier. but on a larger scale. Last spring, I almost blew off my arm, forcing powerful magic to... hurt someone.” He let his mind dance away from Leeds’ memory, may he rot forever. “I didn’t have full control of what I was about to do.”

“And that’s why her secret was so important. Should she remember, it would be like an entirely new identity has surfaced, one that now fights to control a body that is no longer qualified for godhood.” Mrs. Claus turned her attention to Tink, who had just stuffed three cookies into her mouth. “You’re unusually quiet.”

Tink grinned awkwardly, revealing chocolate chips crammed in her teeth. The hand on Mike’s thigh moved closer to his crotch, but when he looked at Holly, she acted like she was unaware of her actions. He would have to be daft to think it was accidental.

“So, anyway, I suspect that the Krampus knows Jack’s secret.” Mrs. Claus turned her attention back to Mike with a knowing look. There was no doubt in her mind or Mike’s that the Krampus knew, but she wasn’t about to let everyone in on Santa’s secret. “And he plans to use her powers to...I don’t know. I’m still foggy on that part.”

“The Krampus wants Christmas,” Kisa said. “That’s all we need to know. You’re slowly dying, this place is freezing, and Jack is in our way. Let’s address the issues in order. The furnace is easy. What do we need to do to keep you from dying?”

Mrs. Claus shivered. “We need more faith. Even though the elves were made from Santa’s magic, they are still separate beings capable of existing even if Santa didn’t. The same is not true for me. If not for Holly, I likely would have ceased to be hours ago.”

“So then let’s find the elves.” Kisa looked at Mike. “We saw some in the bakery, I’m sure they’re squirreled away somewhere.”

“I agree.” Mike shifted away from Holly to see what she would do. Her hand slid from his leg, but she casually dragged her nails across the fabric of his pants as her hand slid off. “Tink can head down to fix the furnace, but find somewhere to drop off Kisa to better scout the area for elves. Once we locate them, we can figure out how to make them good again.”

“Breaking the Krampus’ control should do it,” Mrs. Claus said. “They have been under his thrall only a short time and will tend to long-term behaviors. Once free, we can bring some here, or hide them throughout the village. That should buy me and us some more time.”

“Do you have a map of this place?” Mike asked.

“No, but I’ve got plenty of paper in the workshop. Not *the* Workshop, just the room my husband tinkers in here.” She stood with a groan. “I can draw something up.”

“Tink go see workshop.” The goblin was already on her feet. “See Santa’s tools, maybe find new hammer?”

Kisa narrowed her eyes at the goblin, then looked at Mrs. Claus. “I’ll come with you. That way, I can ask questions about how this place is laid out. As long as I’m quiet, almost nobody can see me, and I can fit in plenty of tight spaces, so that’s not a problem.”

Mike studied Kisa's face. The catgirl was up to something, he knew it for a fact. Kisa's eyes flicked his way, and he saw hesitation in her features. Whatever she was up to, he might not approve.

Still, he trusted her. She might be his familiar, but he didn't own her. There was something she wanted to do, and he would find out eventually. "You guys should make a couple of maps. That way, if we use cat radio, I have one to look at here to get a better sense of what's going on."

"Oh." Mrs. Claus looked at Mike. "It just occurred to me that we haven't discussed what to do about Jack."

"Let Mike deal with her," Kisa said out of the corner of her mouth. "He's got a particular set of skills when it comes to situations like these."

"What Kisa is trying to say is that we've been in tighter spots and Yuki and I can figure out how to deal with Frosty the snowbitch." He grimaced and looked over at Holly. "I am super sorry."

"I'm getting used to it," she told him with a pout.

"I hope not." Mrs. Claus moved in front of Holly and knelt down. "Hmm. Eyes are still clear, complexion good. The last thing I need is for you to come down with Naughty Sickness. We need you at your best, so please take some time to relax."

"Yes, ma'am." Holly watched Mrs. Claus lead Kisa and Tink up the stairs toward wherever the workshop was. Once they were gone, she moved to the table and picked up the tray and thermos, then disappeared through the kitchen door.

Finally alone, Mike let out a huge sigh. This whole situation was poised on the edge of a knife, but it wasn't the worst thing he'd been through. At least they knew their enemy and had the start of a plan, which gave him an advantage. The incident with Leeds had caught him off guard and nearly broken who he was. Months had been spent dedicating time and energy to controlling his magic and strengthening his body just for an occasion like this one.

Now, if he didn't think of all the times his magic had gone haywire on him already since arriving at the North Pole, he would actually feel confident in their chances. Looking down at his belly, he gave his magic a little stroke and watched as it manifested as a glowing orb only he could see. Being able to visualize magic was going to be a game changer in a lot of ways.

“Why are you such a troublemaker?” he asked his stomach. His magic, realizing that it had been awakened for nothing, swirled around and popped out of existence, but not before forming into a shape that looked remarkably like a hand with a middle finger raised.

He made a note to bring that up with Yuki, then noticed that Holly had left a couple of mugs behind. Deciding not to be the terrible guest he already was, he picked them up and carried them into the kitchen where he assumed she was probably taking care of leftover cookies.

Stepping through the door of the kitchen, he was surprised when Holly nearly tackled him. Despite her small size, she was able to press him up against the wall by his hips, her fingers frantically working to undo the drawstring of his pants.

“Holly, um, the mugs!” He had nowhere to set them down, and she had caught him completely off guard.

“Fuck your mugs.” She groaned after swearing, her eyes rolling back in her head. “Oh, gosh I love that word so much. When it leaves my mouth, I can feel it reverberate through my whole body.”

Suddenly worried about her, Mike tried to move away, but Holly yanked his pants down, revealing his cock. Gasping in awe, she used both hands to lift it, contemplating both its length and girth.

“Are you okay? Is it Naughty Sickness?”

She lifted her eyes to meet his, a lascivious twinkle in her eyes. “This isn’t Naughty Sickness at all, Mike Radley. You see, what I’m about to do to you is one-hundred percent me.” With that, she opened her lips wide and tried to fit the head of his cock in her mouth.

Her already tight lips stretched wide when his cock expanded, and she made a gurgling sound as she barely managed the first inch. Surprised by her behavior, it took him a moment to notice that she now had a hand down the front of her tights and was frantically masturbating.

Her technique was terrible, but she absolutely made up the difference with pure, unbridled enthusiasm. His cock practically vibrated as she continuously moaned into him, the narrow tip of her tongue dancing across the edges of his urethra.

She had been getting a little handsy with him out in the living room, but he thought back to how she had calmly watched him fuck Kisa. Clearly there was something more to Holly than originally expected, and he was now determined to find out what.

“Here, at least let me set these down.” With two mugs in one hand and a third in the other, he didn’t think dropping them on the floor was a good idea. He did a stiff-legged waddle toward the nearest counter by the sink, Holly crouch walking backward to avoid breaking contact. Once near the counter, he heard the sound of footsteps just outside the door and moved so that his waist was hidden from view.

Holly chased him, and resumed blowing him just as the door opened. Mrs. Claus had an odd look on her face as Mike quickly set the mugs by the sink and turned on the faucet to rinse them out.

“Problem?” he asked, putting on his best poker face. Holly, to her credit, stopped moaning. She did, however, intensify the tongue play on the head of his cock.

“We’re gonna be a while in the workshop,” she said, then walked toward the counter, her eyes on the thermos that Holly had set there. Mike saw her eyes dart to the dirty mugs in his hands and he quickly rinsed them and dried them out with his shirt.

“Here you go.” He slid the mugs across the counter, and she took them, letting out a yawn.

“Thank you, Mike. For everything you’re trying to accomplish here.” She stood there for a moment, as if lost in thought. “I almost feel like you were meant to be here.”

“Uh, yeah. I think I know what you mean.” He tried to keep a stupid grin off his face when Holly started playing with his balls. It was clear she was screwing with him, and he didn’t want to end up on Mrs. Claus’ bad side once again.

“Listen, before I forget, there’s something I want to tell you.” She set the mugs on the tray next to the thermos. “It’s about Holly. If something happens to me, Santa, all of this...please take care of her. She can be a handful sometimes, all of the elves are, but she has a really good heart.”

Holly paused for a moment, one hand tightly squeezing the base of his shaft. Her grip was strong despite only being able to get her fingers around his girth.

“Yeah, um...I can see that. She’s very...enthusiastic.”

“Always has been, bless her heart.” Mrs. Claus contemplated the tray, her fingers tracing the silver filigree along the edges. “But all the elves are that way. Each one is like a tiny piece of my husband, let loose on the world to do good things. Do you have kids?”

He nodded, silently cursing the fact that the woman was feeling chatty while the equivalent of her daughter was trying to inhale his boner. It was the plot of a cheap porn, and he wasn’t amused. “A horse boy and an omelet on the way,” he told her.

She laughed, then realized he wasn’t joking. “You are an odd one, Caretaker.”

“You have no idea.” He shifted his weight from one foot to the other, which caused Holly to make a tiny sputtering sound as his cock went further into her mouth. Mike covered it up by faking a cough of his own. “It’s so dry up here,” he complained.

“I can get you some water,” she said, then started to move around the counter.

“Nope, I’m fine.” He grabbed the thermos and poured himself some more hot cocoa, then slammed it. The hot beverage trickled down his throat just as his glans popped past Holly’s tonsils, causing him to moan and choke at the same time. “Yeah, that’s really good,” he said with a raspy voice, then put the cup back on the tray. “Tink can use that one, we’re married.”

Mrs. Claus looked like she had a lot of questions for him, but just shook her head and picked up the tray. “We’ll be upstairs if you need us,” she told him before leaving.

“Will probably be up in a bit,” he said, then checked on her aura as she walked away. It was already unraveling again.

“Gah!” Holly pulled her mouth off his cock, a large gob of spit hanging from her lips. She wiped it away and looked up at him. “Knowing she might catch us made me so scared I got horny!”

“Yeah, about that.” He knelt down and picked her up under her arms, then set her down on the counter. “I thought this sort of thing was bad for your kind.”

“Heh.” She leaned forward and grabbed him by the cock with both hands, stroking him to keep him hard. “Let’s just say that elves react poorly to naughty behavior they aren’t accustomed to. I had a bit of an...awakening some years back. I’ve spent the last couple of decades educating myself on certain topics.”

“Certain topics?” He raised an eyebrow.

“I’ve been watching people *fuck*.” She grinned as if drunk. “And before you ask, yes, that word is still hard to say, but I am so horny that I don’t...fudging care.”

He almost laughed at the slipup, but kept his face neutral. “You’ve been watching people have sex?”

She nodded eagerly. “Here’s the thing, Mike. Sex is taboo, but not by law or anything. The other elves just don’t do it. Finding a willing partner has been very difficult, and ever since I watched you pound Kisa in the Cocoa Lounge, I decided that I just had to have you. Your cock is huge, it probably won’t even fit, and all I can think about is spending days trying to make it happen.”

“That’s a long time,” he replied.

“I’ve been celibate for so long that everything up here looks like a dick to me,” she told him. “Do you know how many tools I’ve borrowed just to get myself through the night?”

Oddly, that reminded him of a comment Tink once made about fucking her own hammer. “Maybe Santa should branch out, start giving grown-ups some toys of their own.”

“I’ve put that in the suggestion box,” she declared, letting go of his cock to pull up her skirt. “Every year, actually!”

Seeing those candy-cane tights, he felt his resolve weaken drastically. He put his hands on her upper thighs and used his thumb to tease her groin through the thin fabric.

“Oh, wow,” she muttered. “Your thumb is almost the size of...elf dick.”

“I imagine the average human cock looks monstrous to you.”

She nodded, her eyes suddenly wide. "It's actually a little scary," she whispered. "Thinking about that big thing inside of me."

"Do you want to be scared?" he asked, dropping his voice an octave.

"Oh, yes, please," she begged, stroking him faster. "I've been so good, or naughty. Whichever one will get that dick inside of me."

Using both hands, he pulled at the center of her tights until it lifted away from her flesh, and then tore the fabric. It didn't rip easily, but when it did, Holly jumped. The snowflake covering her groin ripped in two, revealing that she wasn't wearing any underwear beneath her tights. Instead of pubic hair, her mound was adorned with glistening crystals that looked like tiny snowflakes of their own.

"Okay, didn't expect that," he noted.

"I put them on earlier," she told him. "As a surprise for you."

"I am...very much surprised." He broke out in a stupid grin at the thought of Holly bedazzling her pubes for him, much less trying to track down a bedazzler in the middle of a Christmas crisis. Mike teased the outer folds of her labia with his finger tips while she bit her lip and groaned. The level of stimulation was minimal, but he was receiving maximum rewards for his efforts.

"It's been so long since someone has touched me," she cooed, then grabbed his wrist. "Please don't stop."

"Oh, I wasn't planning to." He felt a sudden rush at the idea of fucking her on the counter, or maybe bending her over the table. She was small enough that it would be easy to put her anywhere, and she definitely wouldn't bite him during sex like a certain goblin he knew.

Well, he assumed she wouldn't. "So it's been awhile since someone has touched you?"

Holly nodded with a shiver.

"So I'm guessing it's been even longer since someone did this?" He grabbed her by the hips and slid her across the counter before bending forward and kissing her inner thighs. She made tiny sounds of joy while wrapping her legs around his head, then gasped when his tongue traced a circle along the thin folds of her mound.

“What?” Mike stopped for a moment, surprised that Holly’s pussy tasted like a candy cane.

“Um...” He felt Holly’s body stiffen up. “Is something wrong?”

“Heck, no!” he exclaimed, careful to keep his words PG for her sake. “You’re magically delicious!”

He buried his face in her crotch, his tongue exploring her inner folds. The kitchen filled with gasps of delight and surprise as he tried to see how deep he could get his tongue inside her. Since Holly hadn’t offered any explanation as to the flavor of her pussy, he assumed it was a Christmas elf thing and not that she had been using a candy cane recently to get herself off.

It didn’t take Holly long to come this way. Her face turned beat red as she held her breath and let out a tiny squeak before grabbing Mike’s hair so hard that she pulled a small clump out. Pressing his lips tight to her body, his mouth was flooded with the taste of peppermint while teasing her clit with his tongue. Holly bit down on her screams of joy, which made her sound like she had a bad case of the hiccups.

Feeling pretty good about himself, Mike pulled her butt closer to the edge of the counter and kissed her. Holly seemed surprised, but melted into him. Her hands went under his shirt, one of them sliding up and teasing his nipple. She giggled when his erect cock bumped against her leg.

“I can think of somewhere better for that,” she told him.

He chuckled, then stood. She opened her legs and moved to the edge of the counter before rolling over onto her stomach so that she could slide down. His pelvis was nearly a foot beneath the surface of the counter, which meant he wasn’t going to be able to fuck her unless he found something to stand on.

Her curvy hips were the perfect size for grabbing, and he slid his hands along her bubble butt as she tried to back onto him. Her labia were already swollen and wet, but the head of his cock wasn’t going in that easily. He teased her for a bit, pressing against her pussy until she let out a groan and tried to guide him in with her hands.

It took some doing, but he finally achieved the right angle so that he didn’t slide away. Holding tight to her hips, he let gravity help him as he pulled her down onto his cock. She was so tight that he worried about hurting her, but the happy sounds she made said otherwise.

“Oh, Santa, yes, please!” Holly was pressing against the counter so hard that her nails were digging into the wood. She started to bounce herself, only achieving a small amount of success with each thrust. Mike found himself pressed deep inside of her, and was surprised to see that over half of his cock had made the journey. By now, he should have run into the back wall, or bumped against her uterus.

Curious as to how deep he could go, he allowed the elf to impale herself on his throbbing rod, her legs now spasming every time another inch was inside her. The head of his cock was now warmer than usual, and a gush of fluid squirted out of Holly’s pussy, coating his shaft.

“Oh, sweet Christmas,” she gasped, then turned her head sideways. Her eyes had rolled up into her head, and she was drooling from breathing so hard. “More, please, Santa, more! I’ve been such a good girl!”

Feeling it was poor taste to deny such a simple request, Mike obliged. The last couple of inches were tough, but he moved his hands up to her waist and pulled as hard as he could, surprised that there was still room for him. A jolt of pleasure rushed up his spine when his magic came to life, sending small sparks that crept across Holly’s ass and disappeared under her skirt.

Holly was whimpering now, a queer smile stuck on her face as he slowly fucked her. If he paused for more than a couple of seconds, she would start bucking her hips in an attempt to get him deeper inside. The butcher block counter now had small scratches in it where she had gouged out the wood with her nails.

He picked up the pace, emboldened by her enthusiasm. On an impulse, he used his thumb to penetrate her asshole, which got a loud groan followed by Holly whispering the chorus to *Jingle Bells* under her breath.

Seeing that the sparks were all concentrating on Holly, it occurred to Mike that shooting his load inside of an elf might be a bad idea. Though Holly had somehow found a way to incorporate sexuality into her life without blowing a fuse, what would happen to her if she got a piece of him? For that matter, what would he get from her? If he fully understood Mrs. Claus, Holly was technically at least half-eldritch, and he didn’t know if he wanted to tie himself to that kind of chaos.

Opening his mind, he saw his magic dancing along Holly’s body, sliding into her pores to tease at the swirling core in the middle of her body. Her own magic

looked like taffy in a taffy-puller—it shimmered and changed colors as it stretched and distorted, mingling with the sparks that had vanished. His magic was spreading out, forming into a series of liquid runes that danced along Holly’s rib cage. The closer he got to orgasm, the more solid they appeared.

They looked almost identical to the ones Naia had. The longer he looked at them, the more they seemed to twist and distort, his eyes unable to focus properly on them.

“Hold up,” he told the elf. “I’m about to come. Where do you want it?”

The announcement of his orgasm caused her to groan and come again, her legs kicking wildly. He tried to pull himself free, but she used the counter to flip herself over so that she was facing him.

“I want to feel you inside me,” she growled, her emerald eyes blazing with magic. It was mostly her own, but he could see that his magic had permeated her body and spun around her, the runes now blazing with light. They shifted and locked into place as the familiar sensation of heat filled his groin.

“But, um...you could get pregnant,” he stuttered, not sure how to tell her that they probably shouldn’t swap souls. Did elves even have souls? How did that work?

“Elves don’t get pregnant,” she told him. “We’re made, not born. Now fill me up with your steaming hot cum, I want to feel it leaking out of me like the dirty slut I am.”

Surprised, he didn’t resist when she wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled herself up to him. When she kissed him, her legs tightened around his waist, her ankles not quite crossing. The magic was swirling around both of them now, and he was barely holding on.

Holly’s eyes lit up, and she buried her face in his shoulder, her hot breath on his ear just before she bit him.

He roared when he came, and the magical lights dimmed as a maelstrom of energy only he could see settled around the two of them. A bright light emanated from Holly’s chest, and a mote the size of a firefly emerged from it. A similar mote appeared from him, only this one was blue. The two of them fluttered around each other before swapping places.

A ripple of energy went through the room, like a massive wave in a small pond. It rebounded off of the walls and sank back into the two of them, vanishing

as the magical runes on Holly's chest smoldered through her clothing, then disappeared. She was growling now, her pussy squeezing him every couple of seconds.

Yuki is gonna be so mad at me, he thought. So much for watching who he came in.

Holly had an intense look on her face as she rolled her hips, using his shoulders to support her weight. There was a scary determination there, almost as if he was being challenged. The elf licked her lips, revealing that her upper lip had blood on it from when she bit him.

The magic circling them suddenly vanished, and Holly let out a moan before falling limp onto the counter, a satisfied grin pasted on her face. Her legs released him, and he pulled his cock out of her and watched in horror as a massive amount of shimmering cum leaked onto the floor, splattering everywhere.

He flinched when the door to the kitchen opened, but was relieved to see it was Kisa and not Mrs. Claus.

"I fucking knew it," Kisa said, shaking her head. "I even thought to myself, 'nah, he isn't gonna fuck her, they should be fine together.'"

"She started it," he said, pushing Holly onto the counter so that she wouldn't fall. The elf giggled, her eyes frozen on some faraway scene. She was clearly in her own world now. "I wasn't even trying to seduce her, I promise."

"Damn, you wrecked her." Kisa hopped onto the counter and waved her hand in front of Holly's eyes. Seeing no response, she laughed and moved her hand to the pouch on Holly's waist. "Main reason I came down here was for these."

Kisa pulled a pair of earmuffs out, which she put on Holly. "Holly explained Naughty Sickness a bit. When they get caught up in something, they go all out. I could tell you two were banging, and came down to toss these on her before the two of you kicked off a week-long marathon session. Looks like there wasn't any need though."

Mike let out a sigh of relief, then looked down at the mess by his feet. "I don't suppose you know where the towels are."

"Just ask Mrs. Claus, she's right behind me." Kisa looked over at the door as Mike frantically hopped, trying to pull his pants back up. He slipped in his own

cum and landed ass first on the floor. Kisa looked over the edge of the counter and laughed.

“I was just messing with you. Told them I was going to the bathroom and would be right back.” She stuck her hand beneath the counter and opened one of the drawers. Inside was a set of small towels with Christmas trees embroidered on them. “Here.”

Mike took the towel and cleaned up the floor first, mortified by how the surface seemed to shimmer afterward, despite his best efforts. Kisa helped adjust Holly’s outfit, and the two of them moved the semi-conscious elf back into the living room. Holly kept giggling to herself and fluttering her eyelashes at Mike.

“You broke her,” Kisa declared, then looked upstairs. “I’d better get back. Stay out of trouble this time?”

He shook his head. “I honestly can’t make any promises. It’s been a weird couple of days.”

“It always is.” She hopped onto a nearby table, putting her at eye level with him. She touched his chest and leaned forward to give him a kiss. “But, seriously. Stop fucking everyone you meet. Especially when I’m nearby, cause now I’m all hot and bothered.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.” He watched her go, then looked over at the elf. Holly was watching him with that stupid grin. “You okay over there?”

She giggled, then winced, holding her stomach. “Ooh, I’ve never been so sore inside. But yes, I’ll be fine. And Mike?”

“Hmm?” He sat down across from her, now wary. In a lot of ways, she really was like Tink. The thought made him touch his ear, which had already healed.

“I will not be waiting until next Christmas to do that again.” Smirking, she pulled a cookie out of her belt and took a bite. “You can count on it.”