

The New North Pole

Part 1

Written by Leo_Todrius
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As an architectural choice, glass and steel had the tendency to feel sterile and lifeless. It was futuristic, yes, but it let just as much out as it let in. Winter was particularly difficult given how austere everything was outside. The trees had lost their leaves, the streets were usually wet and the skies were cloudy... but all it took was a bit of Christmas to bring light and warmth back. The trees outside had been webbed with white lights, making the leafless branches look like ice crystals instead. The white columns inside the building had been wrapped with green garland. While most multiuse cosmopolitan buildings went for unified colored schemes, the Northern Summit building had elected for a traditional rainbow of colors that made a kaleidoscope across the various Christmas trees, living indoor shrubs and the slanted skylight roof. All of it brought a smile to Chris Kleiner's face.

A fair hand brought a red cup up to Christopher's lips as he sipped, green eyes closing for a moment as he savored the mix of peppermint and cocoa in the cup. He had sworn to himself not to repeat a flavor during the Month of December, but with as many visits as he was making to the Cocoa Express, he was on the fast track to breaking that promise. Chris set the cup down and reached up to adjust the reading glasses resting on his nose, then to brush back a loose strand of strawberry blond hair behind his ear. While he wore no jewelry, there were holes in his ears indicating he had once gone with earrings. Christopher was thirty two years old, wearing a white polo shirt with a red sueded microfiber jacket over it. His pants, too, were a dark red denim that was nearly black. He preferred warm colors in winter, especially for his own wardrobe.

Christopher's haircut was simple, a swept back mid length cut that was common enough from when he had gone to college, not bothering to update it in the years since. Only a refinement of the corner of his jaws hinted at his actual age, a general lack of baby fat leaving his features rugged. He seemed comfortable and at peace, though he drew his focus back from the directions and swiped across the tablet resting before him. The screen woke back up at his touch, illuminating with a blue background split into rows and columns. Faces scrolled by along with employee files. Chris kept scrolling until he slowed, catching sight of a familiar face. Chris slowly lifted his head, looking across the sky bridge to see one of the vendors pushing their cart along the walkway. A few more scrolls, a few more faces. One by one, he flagged the employees he saw working in the shops all around the Northern Summit. With them isolated and brought to the fore, Chris stood up and began walking. He tucked his tablet to his ribs with one hand, carrying his cocoa with the other.

Credit had to be given to those that ran the Northern Summit. Even the air smelled of cinnamon and melted marshmallow. It was common enough for malls to scent the air to inspire people to shop, but the Northern Summit was so much more than just a mall. Yes, there were shops on the ground floor, but the second floor offered more refined services to the public. There were tax agents, accountants, personal coaches, life training, masseuses and more. The third floor offered businesses a place to have remote meetings, even satellite offices... and from what Chris could tell, the fourth floor had limited residential services and manufacturing of some

sort. The fourth floor was not his concern, though. He had been brought in to do a job and he would do it.

The red headed man leaned against the guard rail, looking over to the novelty shop on the first floor. A nineteen year old with black and purple dyed hair and nose rings sat behind the counter with his chin resting in hands with black painted nails, the black and white striped t-shirt only highlighting his motionlessness. Setting down his drink, Chris brought out his tablet and scrolled through before coming to a stop.

"Judah Santos..." Christopher muttered under his breath. He looked at the file, then down at the nineteen year old, then back at the file before frowning. The details just weren't matching up. The employee file described Judah as lazy, disinterested, a seat filler until more qualified applicants came along... At the moment, if one were to take a snapshot, Christopher supposed he could see how someone would think that, but the shop was immaculate. Everything was perfectly stocked, perfectly folded and on display. Everything that was supposed to light up did, everything that was supposed to move did. There just weren't any customers, nothing to stir up the status quo.

With a rejuvenating sip of his peppermint cocoa, Christopher stepped onto the escalator and rode his way down to the first floor. The tablet screen was darkened and Chris moved into the shop. Soulful brown eyes peeked out from curtains of guyliner, a small but innocent smile crossing Judah's black painted lips.

"May I help you sir?" he asked. Chris smiled a bit.

"I'm looking for a gift for my boyfriend... Something a little unpredictable, fun, but sweet." Chris said. Judah's otherwise pale cheeks blossomed a bit with a little bit of a blush and he smiled a smile that Chris remembered too well. When one was in the closet and encountered someone that was gay, there was a strange bit of recognition that filled one's heart.

"Unpredictable but sweet..." Judah considered, "Are you thinking clothing? Memorabilia? Jewelry?" Judah asked, moving out from behind the register to start moving through the shop. Chris saw the teenager's gauge piercings and envied them, though he knew he would never have pulled off skinny jeans like that.

"Memorabilia." Chris commented for lack of a better idea. Judah moved to the back wall, brown eyes scanning the items mounted on the wall and behind glass cases. He ran a pierced tongue over his lips before glancing at Chris.

"Is your boyfriend a nerd?" Judah asked. Chris could feel that the shopkeeper had meant it in a good way and he nodded for sake of the exchange. His boyfriend was, in fact, fictitious.

"Okay, unpredictable but sweet..." Judah repeated, moving to open a case. He opened it up and extracted a small metal clasp. The metal itself was a passing facsimile of gold, while the leaf brooch appeared to be made of a translucent emerald or unusually clear jade. The detailing was exquisite, showing every vein of the leaves.

"It's a replica of the leaf of Lórien from Lord of the Rings. It's meant to symbolize the spirit and commitment of those who fight to save Middle Earth. It's a beautiful piece on its own, but it can evoke feelings of togetherness, of teamwork, plus if you shipped any of the characters together it has a whole other level." Judah grinned. Chris smiled warmly at that.

"Do you gift wrap?" Christopher asked. Judah nodded. Chris smiled more, "I'll take two, one box, and..." Chris paused for a moment as if visualizing something in his mind, "Silver and purple diamond print wrapping paper." he said. Judah's jaw dropped.

“We just got that in, it’s my favorite...” the gothic boy whispered. Chris grinned.

“I mean, you know style after all.” Chris said. Judah blushed even more before taking the replica and one more behind it, darting into the back room to wrap them. Taking a half step away from the case, Christopher brought out his tablet and woke it up, scrolling back to Judah’s file. One hand supported the tablet while the other typed with a rapidity most rare for one handed use. Christopher wrote that his assessment was that Judah was an exemplary employee, going above and beyond for his customers. Work was done with such efficiency that the lack of other tasks could lead him to looking bored. Allowing him to read, design his own displays or take on more leadership opportunities would no doubt put his idle hands to good use. As Christopher gave the employee file his stamp of approval, Judah emerged with the metal foil clad box.

“I’ll ring you up right over here.” Judah said. Christopher smiled the entire time, tucking his tablet under his arm. He finished off his cocoa before swiping a card through the reader to pay for his purchase.

“Have I seen you around here before?” Judah asked after a moment, printing out the receipt to give to Christopher.

“Maybe here or there. I really like this place.” Christopher said. Judah nodded eagerly.

“Me too, I mean... Most malls are dying or whatever. The fact that Northern Summit is owned by one entity sort of helps keep it afloat. I’m really glad. It’s nice to have a place to work that’s so... happy?” he asked. Christopher smiled at that.

“You’d be surprised how rare of a thing it is.” Chris said with a bow of his head, “I’ll catch you around sometime... Judah?” he asked, making it a point to look at the shopkeeper’s nametag.

“I’d like that.” Judah said with a beaming smile. Christopher left the shop, feeling a bit elated. He walked at a leisurely pace down the main promenade, heading back toward the Mocha Express. He had to try not to blow his cover, but he was always so happy when his work had a positive outcome. Chris had made it a few yards from the Mocha Express when a very tall, very broad shouldered Asian man with a crisp black suit with a green tie stepped in front of him. His eyes were obscured by dark aviator glasses. A dark black mustache adorned his upper lip, a soul patch hanging down beneath his bottom lip, and his ears were... decidedly pointed.

“Christopher Kleiner?” The man asked with a voice deep enough that Chris could feel it in his diaphragm.

“Yes?” Chris asked, looking up at his sunglasses.

“Mister North would like to hear of the progress.” the suited gentleman said before gesturing to a private elevator just a few steps off the main path down a side corridor. Chris nodded slowly. He had been hoping to get a refill on his beverage, but now seemed as good of a time as any.

“Lead the way.” Chris said with a bit of mirth despite the fact that the larger man already had. The two walked towards the elevator, though Chris couldn’t help but look up towards the fourth floor high above them.

The elevator doors opened up into what could have been considered a penthouse office. Christopher's earlier feelings on steel and glass had been pushed to the limit in Mister North's office. Every desk had a glass surface, every piece of furniture had exposed metal. One wall and the entire ceiling were glass panes in a forty five degree joint just above head height. There were even business awards made out of crystal and frosted glass. A white Christmas tree sat to one corner of the office and every Christmas light in the room was white. Despite being well lit, it was hard not to feel chilly.

"Christopher, Christopher!" A joyful voice came. Chris looked up to see a young man in his late twenties, his platinum blond hair frosted white at the tips and styled into points that would have looked at home in a video game.

"Mister North." Christopher replied. The younger man mock-pouted.

"It's Jack, come now, need we be so formal?" Mister North asked, gesturing to the white chair on the other side of his desk, "Can I get you anything? Vodka on the rocks?" he asked.

"Nothing quite that hard, thank you." Christopher said. Jack poured himself a drink, rings on each finger clinking against the glass before he set it down. Turning his back to Christopher, he turned back with a clear glass mug full of rich brown cocoa. Christopher's eyebrow raised at that but he said nothing, bowing his head in thanks as the mug was handed to him. Jack sat himself in the high back office chair, crossing his arms behind his head, swinging one way and then the other as he looked at Christopher. Chris glanced back at the elevator to see the large suited guard standing stock still before he looked back.

"I assume this is about a progress report?" Chris asked, letting the mug of cocoa warm his hands.

"In a way, yes..." Jack said, finally lowering his arms from behind his head. It was only then that Chris realized how crisp Mister North's white suit and tie were. Jack sipped his vodka before letting out a small hiss of satisfaction, looking up at Chris with ice blue eyes, "We invited you here to help us with an employee audit, and it's been, what, two weeks?" Jack asked.

"You hired me as an independent consultant to do an employee audit, yes Mister North. I've been making my list." Chris said.

"And checking it twice?" Jack asked with a sharp grin, "I've seen your early submissions. Quite insightful. I don't think we've ever had anyone in human relations quite so... detailed? Have we, Andrew?" Jack asked.

"We have not, sir." The guard replied, moving no more muscles than he had to in order to answer. Chris leaned back in his chair.

"I've always had a knack for this sort of thing. I've been a talent scout, a trainer, human resources..." Chris smiled. Jack nodded, leaning forward a bit, running his finger around the rim of his glass.

"And how about human relations?" Jack asked. Chris' strawberry blond eyebrow arched slightly.

"I don't catch your meaning, sir?" Chris asked. Jack shook his head, leaning back in his own chair. Advance and retreat, every movement seemed part of some machination.

"I'm impressed by your work, Christopher. Particularly the most recent entry, Judah down in Prancer's Novelty shop." Jack said. Chris tensed, his muscles going a little rigid.

"I... barely submitted that a few moments ago." he admitted.

“Oh, yes, I know.” Jack admitted, “I’m quite invested in this audit. Northern Summit isn’t just another Mall, nor even a commerce hub. It is a self contained ecosystem. We provide commerce, entertainment, lifestyle guidance and housing. We even have community outreach.” Jack said. Chris nodded, holding his cocoa a little bit closer.

“That is actually one of the reasons I accepted this job. If I’d had anything like the Frost Foundation to sponsor pride events or even the sort of support groups you do now when I was younger, I...” Chris trailed off. Jack smiled and nodded slowly.

“There are many out there treated as though they were naughty when they were nice, and a lot of naughty people not getting their just deserts. Through all that chaos, you seem to have a way to read people, to know the truth, to understand their... spirit.” Jack said. Chris opened his mouth to speak but Jack held up a hand, each fingernail painted with a milky white enamel, “I know, I know, just one of your natural talents...” he said, “But that is exactly why I brought you up here. I want to offer you a permanent position here in Northern Summit as head of internal relations. It would put you in direct control over hiring and firing, recruiting, training... But the job is a bit more involved than you might expect. You would be granted residency here on site, there would be quite a few non-disclosure agreements, and we have a particularly unusual code of conduct to verse yourself with.” Jack said. Chris said nothing for a moment, his green eyes contemplating what had just happened. He raised the cup to his mouth and took a sip, almost gasping at how cool the peppermint in the drink made his mouth feel despite how warm the contents were.

“A residency...” Chris said finally, “Mister North-” Chris corrected himself, seeing the businessman open his mouth, “Jack... I don’t think I’ve ever seen an organization like this. You oversee this building and all the businesses in it. You guide people’s lives, you see to their needs. You’re almost like some sort of... king.” Chris said. Jack’s lips pursed at that.

“We are but humble stewards of those we care for, are we not? There is no crime in trying to do things a little differently. After all, we all want Northern Summit to be a beacon of hope to those that lived hard lives, those that were dispossessed, those that still have a sparkle in their hearts despite the cruel, cool things the world has done to them... And I want you to be a part of that.” Jack smiled, taking another sip of his vodka. He let out a cool breath before he looked back at Chris, staring dead into his eyes, “How about you spend the night here after closing. We’ll set you up a guest suite. You can see what Northern Summit is really like after dark, and decide if you want to be a part of it. If not, we’ll forget we ever had this conversation.” Jack said, each word sounding both casual and dangerously pointed at the same time. Chris, however, merely smiled.

“Nothing wrong with seeing what goes on here when the doors are locked. Is there a way you can send that code of conduct to my tablet?” Chris asked. Jack set his drink down and leaned back in his chair, steeping his fingers together.

“Already done. It is a pleasure working with you, Christopher.” Mister North smiled, his lips barely visible on his pale skin.

“A pleasure doing business with you, Jack.” Chris smiled warmly.

There was an exotic thrill to wearing socks on industrial carpet. It helped that they were red and white striped socks. The invitation to stay the night had come on such short notice that Chris had done some last minute purchases of amenities at the stores. He'd headed up to the fourth floor and found his modest guest room. White carpet, buttercream walls, recessed light that spilled out from over the mirror and the crown molding of the room. If anything it felt a bit like a dorm room from college, but Christopher's favorite part was that the bed was built into the wall that joined up against the window. He could look all the way down the exterior of the Northern Summit all the way down to the fountains and the park outside. Ice had frosted over most of the fountain but the moving water disrupted it in the center and red and white lights gleamed up through the frost.

Red satin pajama pants slicked back and forth across Christopher's legs as he walked, his round reading glasses resting on his nose, a few strawberry blond bangs falling across his face as he read through the documents on the tablet. He'd signed several NDAs before leaving Mister North's office, though the sorts of things he was reading were quite perplexing. There were a dozen different consent forms for things he did not understand, including inter-office relationships. Given the complex web of interconnectivity, it was recommended that if employees were to get in relationships with one another, it was generally best if they did not work in the same shop or office department. Chris could understand avoiding conflicts of interest, but what corporations were that invested in the social life of their employees?

There were permits for alcohol and food, fairly normal stuff, but there were also permits for use of transmutation of biological matter and possession of non-newtonian fluids and forbidden energies. Chris closed his eyes, rubbing the bridge of his nose with his fingers. Were those permits a joke? Were they seeded in there to make sure he was reading everything? But this wasn't just about rules and lists and ledgers. He had been offered a job, a job with a rather incredible payscale given the fact that he wouldn't have to pay for rent or food or commute.

Almost everyone he'd met so far had been nice. Only a few had been naughty. Maybe it was time to see just how wild things got when people were off the clock. Chris moved over to the bed and riffled through the bag of things he had purchased, pulling out a red overshirt and a white t-shirt covered in faint silver snowflakes. That seemed casual enough, right? Then again, if he was here after closing, people were going to figure out he was an employee... and if anyone asked, he'd be hard pressed to lie to them. Hopefully people would be okay with the fact that he'd been evaluating them all. Chris took a breath to brace himself before he headed for the door. It was time to meet the locals.

Only the faintest rumble sounded as the elevator doors opened up to allow Christopher to step back out onto the first floor of the complex. He had been given a silver lanyard with white snowflakes on it to identify him as someone that should be allowed on the premises after closing, and seeing how closely the last shoppers were watched as they left he could understand why. Another guard similar to Andrew moved up to the front door and pulled it shut before turning a key and swiping a card. Christopher inhaled sharply as the large panes of glass that made up so much of the building started to shift into a milky translucency. Square by square, the effect worked its way up the four stories to the top of the building... and then to

Christopher's delight and amazement, the panes began to twinkle with projected Christmas Lights and snowflakes. It was like being inside a giant Christmas diorama.

A much louder rattle came from one of the nearby shops. Chris turned to see Judah pulling down the metal security curtain that most malls used to protect the space when they were closed. What confused Chris, however, was the fact that as soon as the grate hit the floor, Judah lifted it back up again... to reveal an entirely different shop interior. The tables and shelves were in the same configuration, but the kitsch merchandise featuring fake vomit and shock gags was gone. Comic book belt buckles were replaced with glass bottles of various colored liquids. The inventory of pretend replica swords looked decidedly more realistic. There were foodstuffs when there hadn't been before... and even Judah appeared slightly different, the tips of pointed ears poking through his black and purple hair.

As Chris slowly turned, he saw that the other shop spaces were undergoing similar transformations. The cellphone store disappeared behind the metal grate, revealing an authentic, vintage book store in its place. The activewear clothing shop was replaced with the sort of establishment that saw no harm in showing mannequins in leather harnesses, cod pieces and chaps. Even the food court was transformed, the signage now written in some curving, lilted language Chris had never seen before.

The metamorphosis had been seamless, unfolding in mere moments after closing time. As Chris looked around at the employees, almost all of them were sporting pointed ears now. Chris had another gasp as he saw that the frozen yogurt stand was now being operated by an anthropomorphic polar bear rather than just a burly man with white hair. Chris' strawberry blond eyebrows furrowed as he started running back through everything he'd learned about Northern Summit. It was unheard of for a single organization to run such an involved and diverse complex, let alone to have live-in employees, but now Chris understood... This was some sort of community, some sort of sanctuary for... elves? Was Jack North some sort of-

"You're still here! That is amazing!!" Judah beamed excitedly, running over with belt chains swinging and unnecessarily long striped sleeves hanging down past his hands. Chris turned and gave the goth a sheepish smile.

"I... owe you an apology." Chris said. Judah looked confused.

"An apology about what?" he asked, his reverie halted.

"I wasn't honest with you when I made my purchase earlier. I don't have a boyfriend or anything, I just... was there to do an employee review." Chris said softly. He would have expected most people to respond with shock or betrayal, maybe concern about how they did, but Judah actually smiled, reaching up to brush some of his hair from his face.

"I hope I did okay, I'm really hoping to work my way up from Christmas Elf. I'm thinking maybe Christmas Witch or something else a bit more exotic." Judah said. Chris's mouth hung open for a moment as he looked around at the other employees that were starting to mingle. He looked back at Judah hesitantly.

"I did my employee review without knowing what this place is about. I was an independent contractor. Mister North just offered me a job a few minutes ago for the actual... company? Organization?" Chris said. This time it was Judah whose mouth dropped.

"So you don't know about this place? This is... oh wow, what a first impression." Judah murmured.

“I’d be honored if you’d show me the ropes, maybe explain just what I got myself into?” Chris offered. Judah blushed and smiled at that, although he stiffened a bit as his gaze shifted over Christopher’s shoulder.

“There will be plenty of time to learn about this place, my new friend...” Jack North said as he all but glided up behind them. Chris turned, slightly taken aback again. Like the others, Mister North now sported pointed ears. His platinum blond hair was now ice white, the spikes almost appearing to be frost. Faint ice crystals formed along his cheek bones for a glitter like effect and the air seemed to freeze around his mouth as he spoke. His white suit now came with a translucent tie. As Jack smiled, Chris became aware that his teeth were each individually sharp.

“I see now the reason for the non-disclosure agreement.” Chris commented. Jack let out a light chuckle, circling around Chris and Judah. Judah instinctively pulled closer to Chris until his shoulder rested against Chris’s chest.

“Oh, but this is one of the most important secrets of the new world... Northern Summit is a nexus for the supernatural, the mythical, the forgotten, the dreamed, at least for a certain segment of individuals...” Jack amended with a slight shrug. Chris considered that, looking down to the dormant tablet tucked away in a sling bag on his hip, then around before finally looking back at Mister North.

“Is the whole community LGBTQI?” Chris asked in surprise. Jack gave an immense sharp toothed smile.

“Oh yes, Christopher. We are the New North Pole for those of a queer persuasion. Everyone has the right to believe in Jack Frost, the Krampus, even Santa Clause. Each person deserves to have that spirit crystalize in their hearts, to nourish them and energize them, to bring light to a dark and dreary winter. We are that twinkling light shining out... and we want you to be with us, to be one of us.” Jack said, reaching out to caress Christopher’s cheek. As he touched his skin, ice particles formed on the faint stubble that was growing out after a long day. Chris shivered slightly.

“So do I sign up as an elf or something?” Chris asked. Jack tutted, all but sliding one way and then another as he circled around the two, “Not for you, Christopher, I know you have far more in store. Just what direction that takes you is not my place to say. You’ll have an opportunity to try several options out for size though. Regardless of what fate you find, though, I plan for you to put those natural talents to use. We want to ensure our community remains cohesive and efficient.” Jack said, leaning in a bit closer, “And, if you should want some company, you know where to find me.” Jack whispered before he moved off, all but prancing as he re-entered the elevator and Andrew stepped in behind him. Chris looked at the bodyguard, realizing he had to be at least seven feet all now, his suit stretched over almost obscene muscles. The elevator shut with a gentle thump and everyone around seemed to relax. Chris reached up to give Judah’s shoulder a squeeze.

“Can I buy you an egg nog?” Chris offered. Judah blushed and grinned up at the older man.

“I’d love to have one with you, but they don’t charge for food here. Just the more labor intensive stuff.” Judah said. Chris shrugged.

“Where’s the chivalry in that?” Chris smirked. His hand lowered from Judah’s shoulder to his waist and the gothic teenager leaned against him instinctively. A warm shiver ran up through Chris as how nice it felt to have someone walking with him, touching him, unafraid of that

physical contact. He wanted to say it had been a while, but he wasn't sure if he'd ever felt that way before.

It should have been harder to come to grips with the fact that a mega mall in the center of downtown was inhabited by a variety of supernatural winter creatures, all of whom were queer in some way, It should have been, and yet Christopher was finding it oddly comfortable. Everyone got along so well once the doors were shut. It felt like some sort of low key farmer's market or festival. Chris and Judah had walked to one end of the first floor and had sugar cookies and eggnog shakes. Chris had shared his work as an independent consultant and Judah had talked about how he had chanced across an application discarded in the bathroom of the mall when he'd been a shopper. Their walking and talking had almost brought them all the way back to Judah's shop when the metallic glint of the d-loops in the leather harnesses in the former sports shop caught his eye. He slowed to a stop, looking at the rather adult items on display.

"That's the Krampus Korner." Judah said, translating the elvish above the shop. Chris looked at his gothic friend carefully.

"Krampus? That's the evil satyr demon thing that steals bad children and they have festivals about it in Europe?" Chris asked. Judah nodded.

"I've been trying to work up the courage to check it out but most employees don't go straight from an elf to a Krampus." Judah said. Chris looked at Judah, then at the shop, then back at Judah.

"Well, maybe we can work up the courage together. I haven't exactly lived my most out life yet. It might be interesting to take a walk on the wild side." Chris said. Judah smiled at that and nodded, though he stuck close as they approached the shop. Chris paused just outside to finish off his eggnog shake, slurping it up before dropping it into the garbage bin. Judah did the same, not wanting to be rude by taking food or drink inside.

Crossing the threshold was like stepping into another world. The floor of the shop seemed to be made out of actual deep red wood planks and similar paneling ran up the walls. The air was heavy with the smell of leather hide and the reason was obvious. Mannequins aside, the shop had racks of leather vests, jackets, chaps, pants, thongs, pouches and accessories. There were saddles and whips, crops, even hats of a variety of different forms. Chris hesitated slightly to see a rather menacing looking red leather sack hung up on the wall, the panels stitched together with black leather strapping.

Chris looked around with a bit of wonder, although he drew in breath as he saw perhaps the most sophisticated animal sculpture he'd ever seen in his life. It appeared to be some sort of snake man with golden-green scales that shimmered in the light. The scales were flawless, though they grew darker earth tones along the jaw bone and temples, creating mountain ranges of spikes that resembled a chinstrap beard and flared back bi-hawks. The most pronounced feature, however, were dark brown horns that formed a sort of omega symbol, curving out from the snake's head before looping back with a flare.

“Shit!” Judah cursed as the head turned, a nose ring and two eyebrow rings glinting in the light. Two gleaming honey colored eyes with vertical slits blinked languidly before a forked tongue darted out and sampled the air.

“You are not a Krampus...” Chros murmured, almost as alarmed as his friend.

“Ithsss Christhhmasss Ssssnake.” The cashier hissed before lifting a long clawed finger to gesture. Chris turned again to see someone that more or less reminded him of a member of a biker gang, though something certainly felt a bit off. Despite the fact that the man had a salt and pepper beard down to his navel and his long flowing hair seemed to be streaked with gray as well, his face seemed younger than Christopher’s. He wore a black denim vest that exposed a diamond of gray fur on his chest and a triangle of fur starting at his navel and dropping down into a kilt, a kilt that revealed furry digitigrade legs capped off in large hooves beneath. The man’s forearms were almost hairy enough to be fur, and as he came to a stop, the air seemed to fizzle around his head as brown curled horns seemed to manifest from nowhere. Despite their spiral shape, they had several spikes that reminded Chris of blackberry vine thorns.

“My, my, talk about some fresh hide.” The man said with a grin, revealing spider bite piercings on his lower lip. As Chris looked at him, his human nose seemed to devolve into a more goat like tape, the curve of his nasal bridge flattening out and his mouth protruding slightly.

“This is quite the shop you have here.” Chris commented. The Krampus bit his bottom lip with a cheeky grin.

“I’m honored you would visit, especially two good boys like yourselves...” he commented, “Judah, I’ve been hoping to have you in here for a fitting for ages.” he purred.

“Really?!” Judah asked in surprise.

“I could always use a few good fauns around here, if I could lure you away from your own shop anyway.” The Krampus smirked before offering his hand to Chris, “I’m Lukas Koln.” he introduced.

“Christopher Kleiner.” Chris replied, shaking his hand, “Our ancestors might have come from similar regions.” he offered. Lukas grinned wider, betraying sharp teeth.

“Perhaps they did. Perhaps they will.” he mused, “But I don’t think you came just for a social call. Are you here for accessories, or would you like a fitting?” Lukas asked.

“A fitting?” Chris asked. Judah nodded.

“You try on the part to see if you’re meant to be whatever the thing is. Some people try a half dozen roles before they find themselves.” Judah said.

“I thought you wanted to be a Christmas Witch?” Chris asked. Judah shrugged.

“No harm in trying things out, right?” he asked sheepishly.

“Nesser, get these fine gentlemen some fitting rooms. I’ll help them pick out their wardrobe.” Lukas grinned, his brows pushing out as fur started to spread across his face. He stocked off through the showroom, starting to rifle through the racks and the displays. Chris took a deep breath. Perhaps he’d bitten off more than he could chew.

After the sheer chaos of Lukas’ shopping spree, the quiet of the fitting room was a bit comforting. Chris tried to take that on as solace as he looked at what the Krampus had picked out for him; A red leather jacket, black leather chaps, a codpiece with no cover for his ass and a

red leather sack similar to the one on the wall above the registers. Chris had been hesitating almost three minutes before he looked at himself in the mirror. Strawberry blond hair in a vague average cut, reading glasses, pale pasty body... He could use a change. His red satin shirt and t-shirt were removed, then the lanyard, then his pajama pants and underwear and socks. He stood there naked for as little time as he could before he grabbed the leather cod piece and tried to figure out how it went on.

After a few moments, the leather pouch slid around his balls and cock and he tugged it tighter, tying the leather strap around his waist until it was snug. He grabbed the red leather jacket next, sliding one arm into it before he gasped, feeling the interior lined with soft, downy fur. It was velvety and embracing and luxurious. He shivered with delight as the coat massaged his smooth back, then he sunk his other arm down the other sleeve and felt the weight of the jacket come down across his shoulders. He made a bit of a face, blinking his eyes as he wriggled a bit with it. The fur was so soft and so smooth and silky and... sharp? No, that couldn't be right, it couldn't be-

"Fuck!" Chris gasped, back arching as the fur lining of the coat suddenly sunk into his flesh. Each strand took root across his back, his shoulders and his arms. The coat pulled itself shut, fasteners fastening. He felt prickles across his chest, his shoulders, his stomach and his love handles. The coat suddenly felt way lighter since the fur was now attached to him rather than it. Chris panted hard, bracing a hand against the wall of the fitting room, panting. He looked down, watching as fur began creeping down from the waist of the coat, creeping across his hips and his lap.

The fur blossomed in a rich coppery red color at first before it darkened to a mixture of gray and black. It swept down around the codpiece, covering his thighs, then his shins, then his ankles. It felt strange and exhilarating, but Chris lost focus on the fur as his face started to tingle and burn. He looked back at the mirror, watching strawberry blond stubble pushing out of his cheeks, his chin, and his upper lip. As the hair pushed out, it darkened from its light color to a rusty red and then a dark black. The mustache grew in first, the hairs getting thick enough that the skin beneath disappeared. The hair curved down over his upper lip before the sides trailed down.

When they hit his jawline, the hair erupted out like a wildfire in all directions. Hair bristled out from his jaw, surging back to the back of his cheeks. It crept up like climbing ivy until it plunged into his hairline. Having carved an outline, the stubble began to fill in his cheeks, sweeping down in a crescent from the top of his ear to the corner of his thickening mustache. Chris panted, watching his beard grow in the mirror. In moments it looked as though he hadn't shaved all month, then all winter, then more. A strange, almost intoxicating euphoria effervesced from where the hairs emerged from his face. Each hair brought him pleasure, pride, and power...

Chris reached up to caress his forming beard and let out a moan at how thick and bushy it was. He pet it as it curved down from his chin and jaw, he scritchd at the underside, combing his fingers through it. His eyes squeezed shut and he moaned louder, unaware that the leather on his codpiece was starting to wriggle and move, form fitting around his cock and balls. It pressed against the skin of his groin, curving its way around the edge of his shaft until it was very clear what he was packing beneath. Chris fell back against the back of the fitting room wall, groaning as his shoulders suddenly broadened.

The red leather coat tugged tighter across Christopher's growing chest, but the sleeves seemed to stretch around engorging biceps and triceps. His chest pushed out further with every breath, failing to fall back to its starting position. Whatever this was, it was a form of power that Chris had never felt before. He was sure of himself, realized and actualized. He was his own person, his own entity, and he was gay... Gay and manly... No, more than manly, he was beastly, monstrous, dangerous...

A growl escaped Christopher's mouth as his teeth sharpened to fangs. His ears stretched to points. His eyes clenched shut. When they snapped open, his irises had compressed to vertical slits like those of a goat. His fingers ached, his fingernails darkening from ivory to ashen gray to black as they stretched out into claws. Black hair sprouted from knuckles, then the back of his hand before spiraling up his arm to join the fur that the coat had implanted in him. His back popped and creaked as it stretched taller, all the while his furry legs were extending too. Chris felt so great, so amazing. He flexed and unflexed muscles in his arms, his stomach, and then his groin. As he did, a slick and wet sounding peeling noise came. He looked down to see his manhood free itself from his groin while still being fully encased in what had been the codpiece.

Looking down at it, the leather had made his cock look hard and firm, large and alien. The normally mushroom shaped tip had been blunted into a flat instrument. Verbs bulged and the entire length throbbed before suddenly and without warning, the leather sunk into and became a part of his skin. Chris was no longer wearing anything other than his red coat. The black fur grew all the way to the base of his equine cock, even managing to cover his pendulous balls as they hung lower and lower, weighed down by the growing size of his testicles. Chris exhaled a hot breath, trying slightly to grapple with it all until he inevitably gave into his baser instincts.

One clawed hand coiled around his black leather horse cock as he started to stroke it, feeling it swell and bloat with each stroke. The other clawed hand moved to comb through his elongating beard. He turned to look at the mirror, seeing the black beard had reached his adam's apple. It wasn't enough. He wanted more! He deserved more than Lukas had. He grabbed at it, clutching at his beard, tugging. He shuddered and nearly fell to his knees as the beard surged out in length to meet with the demands of his hand. Chris tugged and pulled, feeling his beard growing not just longer, but wider too. It flared out from his cheeks. At first it was just a few inches past his pointed ears, but then it started inching out along his shoulders, making an elongated diamond shape.

Nostrils flared as his nose reshaped into the goat-like flat. His brow furrowed before he hissed, feeling pressure building in his temples. Chris wanted to rub them, but he couldn't let go of his cock and his beard. He tried to clench and unclench his toes, but they had grown oddly numb and warm, flexing through a soupy mix of keratin as it expanded to encase his now fused toes. In moments all he could do was drag a hoof along the floor of the fitting room. The red coat creaked again as Christopher's shoulders hunched and his knees cracked and bent, going digitigrade. His furry ass cheeks were pulling apart to make room for a small diamond tail to flick out and up, twitching as he pleased himself. Almost as if it was some kind of exercise routine, Christopher's hand was pried apart as his cock got thicker and thicker. It pushed well past the diameter of a beer can even as it packed on another two inches, then four, then six.

Chris drooled slightly, unable to control himself as his beard stretched past his collar bone, inching its way down his chest. He shuddered happily and then spasmed, inadvertently tilting his head forward. It bumped against the wall, sending simultaneous bolts of pain and pleasure through his temples. Realizing how close he was to the edge, Chris suddenly rammed his head against the fitting room wall. The structure shook, the mirror vibrating and the lights wobbling. He let out a mild curse, but it had been enough to break the skin that covered the bump on his right temple. The skin peeled back enough for a grayish brown horn to emerge. Tilting his head, Chris did the same to the other side, roaring as his other horn emerged.

No longer restrained, the bones began to surge out of his skull, rising taller and fanning back ever so slightly before splitting into antler-like prongs. Chris kept jerking off his foot long cock, but it didn't feel like enough. His beard felt amazing, but it, too, wasn't enough. His horns nearly scraped the ceiling of the fitting room and it was clear that it wasn't going to contain him for much longer. Chris grabbed at the door and flung it open before striding out into the store, standing a good eight feet tall and weighing over four hundred pounds of muscle and fur.

"Verrry nicceeee..." The snake cashier hissed in appreciation, but Chris' gleaming eyes were drawn down to the black and purple satyr faun currently hung over the counter, his pucker pulsating invitingly while his purple tail twitched. Chris strode forward before he reached out, grabbing the faun by the scruffy fur around the nape of his neck. He lifted him up from the counter and turned the faun to face him. Judah was panting hard, a long purple tuft of hair hanging down from his chin, earrings dangling from wicked pointed ears. The goatee was at least seven inches long and managed to brush the tip of the faun's very achingly hard pointed and spined violet cock,=.

"Chris?" Judah bleated, wriggling and writhing, panting hard as his nipples began to ooze what looked like egg nog. The eight foot tall Krampus only nodded as the furs wept across the last of his face, leaving him indistinguishable. Judah moaned even harder and looked up with needy, pleading eyes, "Fuck me, Chris, please! I need it so bad!" he begged. Hearing the faun's ascent, Chris wasted no time to slam Judah back down on the counter, ass splayed in the air before he moved forward. Judah bleated out again, this time with relief as he felt his ass, his intestines, and then his stomach all filled with big black krampus cock. Clawed hands dug into the black and purple furry hips as Chris started thrusting without mercy.

Despite the fact that his rear end was getting filled like a jackhammer, Judah looked up as he heard a zipping sound in front of him. Looking one way and then the other, the horned snake drew down the fly of his khaki corduroy pants. His beige sand colored underbelly was only faintly green around the central slit. As it was exposed to air, a small gush of clear precum squirted out before two thin but sturdy hemipenises emerged, each of them pierced with a thick metal ring. Judah's goat eyes dilated before he grabbed one in each hand, stroking them both vigorously before plunging them into his mouth.

"Oh yesssss..." The cashier groaned, his scaly hand rubbing the purple shag of hair between Judah's two faun ears.

No longer being pushed over the counter by Christopher's thrusting, Judah was stationary for the full grown Krampus to get in as deep as he could. Each strike to the faun's prostate sent wave after wave of pleasure through him, but he still suckled the snake man's twin cocks. Chris moaned, panted, groaned and howled. His hands held Judah's hips firmly, making him unable to respond as another clawed hand turned his head and met him with a bearded

krampus kiss. The shopkeeper filled Christopher's mouth with his ample tongue, the two embracing. Chris didn't fight it at first, feeling their tongues tangle and wriggle and writhe. Mustaches meshed, beard manes brushed, horns clattered and clicked as they hit one another and still they kissed.

The heat of the kiss began to bleed away, leaving Christopher feel oddly cold, as if he was standing in a snowbank at the edge of dark and dreary woods. There was a faint clatter of the leafless branches shifting in the winter wind. The fur that hung down around his thick hooves was sopping wet, his back ached from not only lugging a heavy bag around on his shoulder, but having it wriggle and flex as he carried out the duties of a Krampus. The physical form was undeniably compelling, like the way his grapefruit sized balls fed his absolute monster of a horse cock, but it just didn't feel like him, like his story or his Christmas. As Christopher grappled with the realization, the weight of reality came rushing back as he suddenly came deep inside of Judah's ass. Chris threw his head toward the ceiling of the shop and let out a howl of delight. Judah pulled back off the snake man's twin cocks, serpentine semen dripping from his mouth as he bleated out an orgasm of his own, his spined cock spewing satyr cum across the wood floor.

There was a moment of exaltation, of orgasm, of the infinite glow of sexual pleasure, and then a sudden burst of glittering ice crystals. Chris fell forward against Judah's bare back, the red coat suddenly hanging heavy and oversized on his bare skin. Toes splayed out on the wood to keep his balance and soft fingertips brushed bare hips as Chris felt where he had filled the goth's virgin ass.

"Ah damn, I thought for sure we'd get at least one of them..." The Krampus sighed sadly, reverting back to his mostly human guise with a fluid ease, though he kept short brownish black horns sticking up before the hairline of his long flowing locks, his salt and pepper beard impressive as always. Chris still arched over Judah, both of them panting hard, spent and confused about what had just happened... despite the fact that they had each enjoyed it very much.

The hours had run, one into another as the night had grown longer. The light of the moon fought back against the projected Christmas lights and snowflakes on the milky glass. The mythical shops had closed, the security gates pulled down and locked. Even the main lights had been dimmed, leaving the mall illuminated only by the random assortment of Christmas Trees and illuminated garlands. It had taken some humility and determination, but Chris had retrieved his clothes and gotten dressed before helping Judah do the same, the two sitting on the raised white tile edge of a large planter currently containing a fourteen foot tall Christmas tree. They were the only souls still awake, apart from a night guard wearing what appeared to be a blue nutcracker's uniform. Chris waited until the guard was half way down one of the side corridors before he spoke.

"I hope I wasn't too rough on you." Chris said softly. Judah turned his head to look over his shoulder at Chris before giving a meek smile.

"No, you were just the right rough." he said, "I'm glad we did it, even if it wasn't the right fit." Judah said fondly. Chris gave a half-weary laugh.

“So that’s really what you meant? That was the fitting?” he asked. Chrus turned half way around in his lap, giving a shrug.

“We tried to see if we were meant to be Krampus and it didn’t fit. That’s just one less thing to think about as we try to find our true selves.” Judah said. Chris looked at Judah’s face with wonder before he leaned forward, bringing his lips softly to the clerk’s. Judah closed his eyes and leaned back, letting their lips dance and brush for a few moments before they broke it. For a long moment there was silence, the two feeling the warmth of the Christmas lights glowing on them. Chris opened his eyes first, seeing Judah bask in the kiss.

“I should get you to bed, I don’t want you sleeping through your shift tomorrow.” Chris said softly.

“And I don’t want you too tired to try a different fit tomorrow night.” Judah grinned, “But could we maybe just stay here a few minutes longer? I like the way you feel around me.” Judah said. Chris smiled warmly at that and let Judah turn forward again, letting the smaller man’s back rest against his chest. He wrapped his arms around Judah’s shoulders and stomach and held him there. Judah leaned back into the embrace and closed his eyes, feeling safe and content. For Chris, it felt as though his life had been one long flurry of days and he had finally found the most wonderful time of the year.