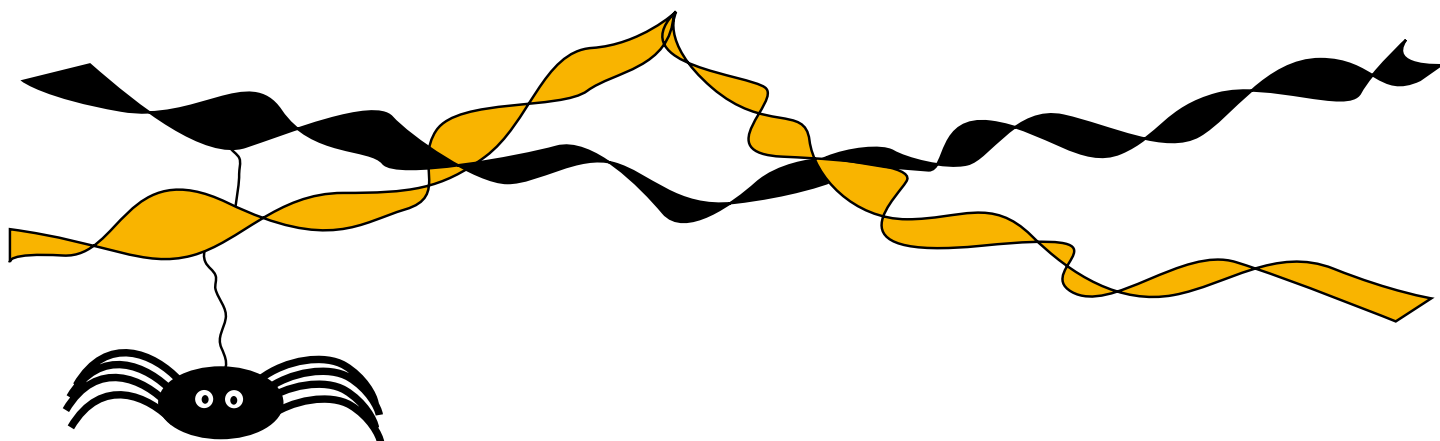
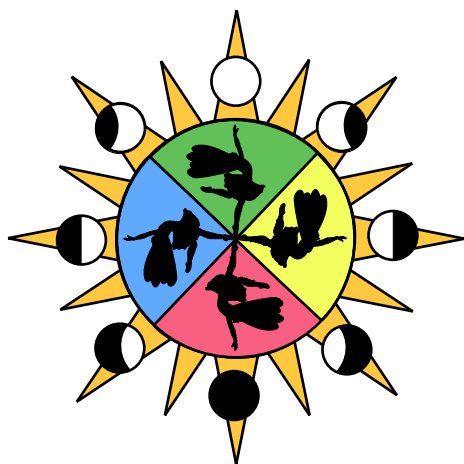


Airy Faerie
Samhain, 2005

Pumpkin Party



Airy Faerie



Samhain, 2005

The Airy Faerie is a publication of the Denver Radical Faerie Tribe.

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Publisher's Notes

Samhain Issue

BOO! I hope I didn't scare you too much. I just wanted to start off the Samhain issue of the Denver Faeries' *Airy Faerie*, with a little scream. I am listening to spooky music and eerie sound effects getting in the mood for this issue. Like I need any help getting into the mood for Samhain. Heck, I have spooky thoughts at Eostar. Anyway! In this issue we asked Lazarus Graves to tell us a tale of a trip to the haunted house. What he gave us was a little meditation on fear. Unfortunately, we were unable to get any contributions from Persephone. She was too busy making a new costume for her son SIDS, and preparing for an underworld party. Speaking of parties, this year you can join us in turning your Jack-o-lantern into a Stud-o-lantern. We are including two patterns that will make for some hot pumpkins as well as some recipes to help feed hungry monsters at any gathering.

Joining our regular contributors this issue is Cielo, with his first contribution to the *Airy Faerie*. He recently moved to Denver from Omaha, Nebraska. Welcome to the tribe.

There is of course the continuation of graphics with naked men and even a season appropriate gay sex scene. So, for any new readers out there, this is your warning: You are looking at a publication with male nudes and gay sex scenes. If you do not wish to continue on, please close the issue and just walk away. If you are viewing this at work or on a public computer, please be very careful in your viewing. If you would like to be taken off our e-mail list just let us know. If you receive the e-mail version but would rather receive the printed snail mail version please let us know that as well.

OK, all that is left to do is set the stage. So turn down the lights, light some candles, put the trick-or-treat bowl of candy within arm's reach and kick back and enjoy the Samhain issue of the *Airy Faerie*. If you are at work or on a public computer and can't set the mood, don't worry, you can still enjoy the issue.

Much Love and Naked Hugs,
DragonSwan

Publisher's Notes, Too

Here are a couple of pumpkin carving tricks that you might find useful, whether you are working on one of the Stud-o-lanterns on the next page or one of the commercial patterns that are available.

Take your time. When you are working with a detailed pattern, it pays to go slowly so that you can get the detail you want. If you need speed, pick a simpler design or go for the old standard design of two triangles for eyes and a crescent moon shape with knock out teeth for the mouth.

Once you have the design you pick magnified to the size you need for your pumpkin, be sure to cut some slits from the edge of the paper toward the design. This helps the flat design to curve on a round object.

Be sure to have some tape handy so you can secure your design to the pumpkin. If past history is any indication, you will need more tape than you really think you will need. You will use some form of sharp object to poke

holes into the pumpkin following the design outline. The carving tool sets all have a "pokey device" included for this purpose, but you could use anything that will puncture the skin of the pumpkin.

Once you have finished tracing your outlines, carefully lift one side of the design and look at the pumpkin to see if you missed something. Now is the time to go back, once you take off the pattern completely, it is really hard to get it lined back up exactly as it had been.

If you are having a problem seeing the design once you take off the pattern, rub some flour over the pumpkin. It will stick to the moisture from all the holes you just made. Now you are ready to start carving.

Falcon

My Beautiful Life: Stories From Our Tribe

Stud-O-Lanterns by Falcon



2002 Stud O'Lantern
Designed by Falcon



The first Stud-O'Lantern served as the Queer God Candle for Samhain 2002.

I designed these patterns for using the sculpting tools rather than the more traditional carving techniques. The difference being in the traditional style of pumpkin carving, you cut all the way through the pumpkin so that you have an open "window" in the shell. When you use the sculpting tools, you only cut part way through the pumpkin, leaving some of the flesh intact which gives you more of a stained glass effect when you are done. This technique allows you to have some free floating design elements such as the eyes and nipples.

Don't get stressed out over trying to make your design be exactly as it is pictured. By the time you transfer the design to the pumpkin and its ridges and bumps, the design will start to take on a life of its own. And by the time you put the candle in, the smidge that you are off will fade into the illusion that you will have created. Don't worry about trying to get all your scrapings to be exactly the same depth and sections perfectly smooth. The inconsistencies actually add to the illusion.

Because this is a sculpted design, there is not as much air flowing into the pumpkin. You will need to cut an air vent in the back towards the bottom to help support your candle's flame.

You have permission to take this page to a copier so you can blow the designs up to a size that will fit your pumpkins. Tips about what to do before and after carving your pumpkin can be found elsewhere in this issue.



2005 Stud O'Lantern
Designed by Falcon Page 3

Quest for the Crystal Phoenix -

Chapter 9: Taking it on the Road

by Orpheus

Prince Apollo sat on his bed and let out a heavy sigh as he watched the last of his trunks carried out. He still found it hard to believe that his grandmother thought that he would need all of those clothes during the few short weeks that he would be visiting his father in Alphatown. When Queen Rose presented him with the trunkloads of new clothes last night, he tried to convince her that they were unnecessary since he had a full closet at his father's castle. She looked him up and down and said, "That may be true, but since you've grown several inches since last summer, I doubt that any of them fit you anymore."

He had to admit that she was probably correct. He had forgotten that the queen was constantly replacing his clothes. It didn't seem like he had grown 'that' much in a week, but Queen Rose was constantly collecting his formal court attire shortly after it was worn and replacing it with something new. The first time he asked her about it, she said it wouldn't be proper for the heir to the throne to be seen in public wearing the same thing twice. Apollo had long suspected that this was part of her overly large vision of self-importance. Since that time, the queen had been cursed so that her mood was reflected in the color of her attire. He was certain that if asked again her gown would be one of the shades of sour apple green that reflected the nastier side of the height of her haughtiness. Now that the curse had worn down some of that arrogance, Apollo decided to ask again to see what kind of answer he would get now.

"It wouldn't be proper for the heir to the throne to be seen in public wearing the same thing twice," came the expected reply. The prince watched the color play on her dress and it stayed the same sunny yellow it had been when she entered his room.

"But why is that?" he asked.

She explained that the people, even the nobles in court, need some kind of fantasy ruler that lives the life they dream about. She said that seeing us in the same clothes twice shatters that illusion for them because we become just like them. The kings and queens of the fantasy have secret faeries hiding in the closets just waiting to make the next outfit for us to wear. Apollo had to laugh because that's exactly what his Faerie Godfather accused his grandmother of having.

Rose winked at her grandson and said, "Now, we know that it isn't true. What they don't realize is how expensive this lifestyle can get, so I have something to share with you now that are getting old enough to understand about how a kingdom is run. I have not had to ask your grandfather for one penny to support these clothes since before you were born."

"But how? Are people giving you the fabric for free?"

"Sometimes, but not often. The truth is that after the gowns and doublets have been worn, they get taken to various markets across the country and abroad and sold at auction. The money raised is usually higher than the actual cost of the clothing. It is simply amazing what some people will pay to have something that has been worn by the rich and famous." Her gown got a little streak of muddy green at the thought of strangers wearing her clothes. "There are people who have collections of these clothes. There is a rumor that one of the most frequent buyers actually has the original gown worn

by Queen Ashleigh Ellen at the Masked Ball when King Myron asked for her hand in marriage." The green in her dress changed to a healthier shade of green. "Oh, how I wish that person would present themselves in court and give me a chance to see their collection."

Apollo made a mental note to ask Viola about this. If anyone knew about someone with a massive collection of antique dresses, the flamboyant Faerie Godmother to the Rianglet court would be the place to start. He always had a hard time figuring out gifts for his grandmother's birthday and a visit to the collection might be the surprise of a lifetime for her.

"Anyway," she continued, "after paying for the next gowns, the net profit has gone to support many projects such as helping the folks in Braided Towers replace their belongings after the Thorny Thicket Forest Fire last summer." Her dress faded to the lightest shade that Apollo had ever seen as she talked about the various things she had help support via the auctions. He had to admit to himself that for all the demands that she had made regarding Royal Protocol, his grandmother did understand how she could use her position to help sponsor things that would otherwise mean that the king would have to raise taxes to support.

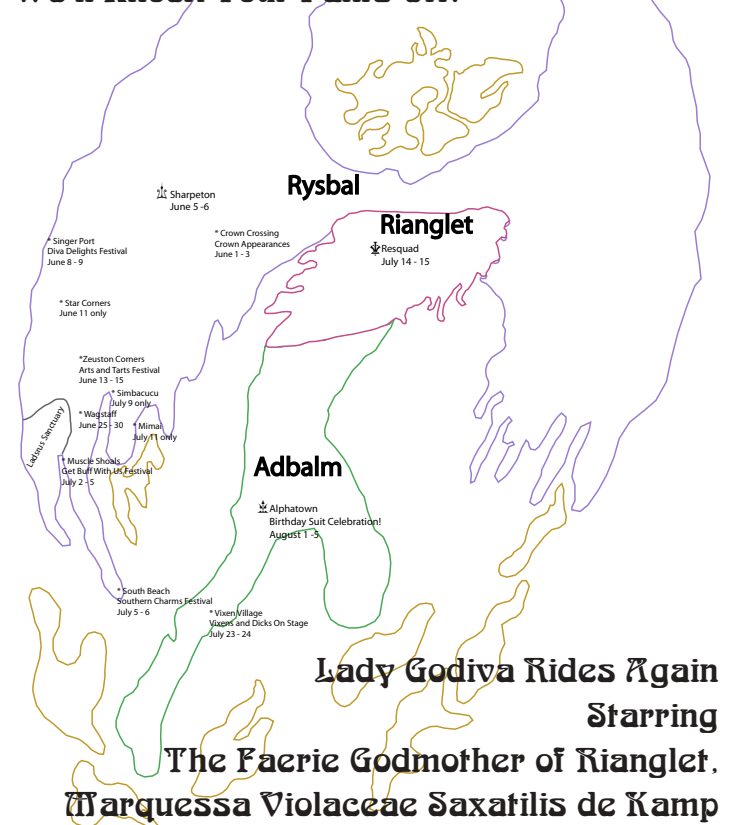
"What was that parade that just left your room?" Johnny's voice brought him back to the present. "You aren't taking all of that with you to the Valley, are you?"

He told him that those trunks were going with the baggage

Opera Buffs For Those In The Buff

200th Anniversary Tour

We'll Knock Your Pants Off!



caravan that was taking Rondar's belongs back to Adbalm. He held up two small backpacks and said, "This is all I'm taking with me."

"That's much better. When I saw the trunks I thought you may have changed your mind about being naked around others."

Apollo gave his friend a hug and assured him at as soon as they got into the valley he was planning on stripping at the first opportunity. He told his friend what the queen had told him and just gotten to her comment about how people thought that she had faeries making her clothes when Viola came waltzing into the room.

"All I heard was something about faeries and clothes and I knew you just had to be talking about me." Viola did a little pirouette causing her kilt to flare up. "How do you like it? It's the official Faerie Tartan."

When she stopped spinning long enough for the Apollo to look at it, he noticed that the usually square plaid pattern of kilts had been changed to a series of interlocked triangles in various shades of pink and lavender. "Queen Rose found a reference to it in one of CeTee's books, so she sent a note to Queen Holly to see if any of the fashion faeries in Fransancisco knew any of the details. One of the elderly faeries, Ima Crone, used to make kilts back when Amaranth was queen and sent the instructions for the weave pattern."

Before he could be distracted by Viola's tale of how the fabric was woven (probably in loving detail, thread by thread) he told her what he had learned from his grandmother. When he got to the part about the clothing collector her eyes brightened. "You mean someone has an Amaranth original? What I'd give to see some of great-grandmother's creations."

"Giving us a week of silence would be a great start," said Johnny.

"Oh, hush yourself. This is important."

Apollo told the two faeries about his idea to find out who had the collection and that he hoped that Viola might be able to help. "If you hadn't asked, I would have worked on finding out for myself," she said. "Which in a roundabout way brings me to what I came to tell you." She sat down on the bed next to Apollo.

"First, I wanted to apologize for not being there yesterday to see the archery contest. I heard it was spectacular. But just before I headed out of the castle, I had a visit from The Stud delivery man."

"That certainly narrows it down, Viola." The prince couldn't pass up on an opportunity to rib his friend. "I was under the impression that you thought all delivery men were studs."

Johnny chuckled. "Normally, I would agree with you, but in this case I think she means a Standard Telegrams Und Deliveries Man, or STUD for short."

"Close, but not quite," she replied. "If I meant that, I would have said 'a Stud' delivery man. Please note that I said 'The Stud' delivery man and trust me, there was nothing short about it."

"You mean Handsome Hans, fastest hands in service?" gasped Johnny in amazement. Viola blushed and nodded. "Why is it that you always seem to get him for your deliveries?"

"He has standing orders with STUD central that he always gets my deliveries when he is available. He likes the tip I give him. In fact, he likes the whole shaft."

"You mean you gave him some arrows?" asked Apollo. The

two faeries burst into laughter at the prince's puzzled look.

"Sometimes I forget how young you are. We were talking about a different shaft," said Johnny, pointing at his crotch.

"Oh."

Viola brought them back to why Hans was there. She told them that he had a message for her from the manager of one of her old theater companies, Opera Buffs for Those in the Buff. They had been preparing a tour of "Lady Godiva Rides Again" by the popular composer Choc O'Laut to celebrate the company's 200th anniversary when their leading soprano discovered that she was allergic to horse hair. They sent me a note hoping that I would come join the tour.

"And will you?" asked the prince.

"Of course. I know the old cow that was going to play the part and knew she would butcher the role that had been created for me."

"What Viola's humility is keeping from you," piped in Johnny, "is the fact that the opera was created right at the time she got in trouble with Queen Amaranth. They didn't have time to find a new singer, so the composer quickly twisted things around and turned Godiva into a drag queen. There is no male singer willing to cut off his testicles in order to parade around on stage in the nude and still be able to hit the high notes."

Viola sighed, "And strap-on dildos on a female singer do nothing to hide the fact that the boobs are real. Anyway, I was worried about my duties in court but King William gave me leave for the summer after I do one small thing for him, which brings me to another thing. We are supposed to go down to the throne room as soon as you are finished packing."

Apollo held up his backpacks and said, "I'm as ready as I'm going to get. Let's go."

The three friends chatted more about the opera and entered the hall laughing at some of Viola's tales about the audience reactions to finding out the Lady Godiva and Peeping Tom were one and the same person. "It's so good to hear the sound of laughter in these halls," came his grandfather's voice from the front. Only then did Apollo notice that his grandparents weren't alone on the dais. Seated next to Queen Rose was her twin sister, Queen Susan of Rysbal and next to King William was the Faerie Queen, Holly. To one side sat Hilda Harbell, Senior Efgee, retired, and Rondar and Lord CeTee, his teachers and soon to be traveling companions.

"Before my husband begins his business, I have a bit of news to share with you. As you know, I declined to travel with you this summer. You have suitable traveling companions and I need to focus on my own inner journey."

"Sister, you would turn the Minute Waltz into a fifteen hour opera," came Susan's gruff voice. Apollo liked his great-aunt's no-nonsense way of talking from the first time he met her last winter. "What she was about to write a novel about is that Holly and I found out that she was going to stay here all summer and came to get her to take a break from all her obligations and join us on our annual vacation to Hera's Havens for some much earned pampering."

—continued on page 6

"And then on to the Sisterhood Sanctuary," came Holly's bell-like voice, "for some much needed time away from the closed walls of the castle. We both felt that is was way past time for our sister to spend some time in the sun and with nature."

Apollo noticed that his grandmother's gown had a rose blush to its tone. He suspected that his great-aunts' version of being with nature was similar to his experience at the Valley of the Kings and had told her a bit of what to expect.

"And what will you do while I'm gone, dear husband?" asked Rose.

"Enjoy my time off anyway I can," William replied.

Everyone, including Rose, laughed at the joke. The fact that her dress was not a flaming red at her anger about a joke being made at her expense showed how much she had changed in the last couple of months. Apollo knew that this time had been as difficult for the king as it had been for Rose. There probably was more truth to his statement then either of them would be willing to admit.

"With the news out of the way, let's get on to the business that brings you here," King William said. "Ever since I learned that I had been granted the traditional three wishes I have been racking my brain trying to figure out how to best use them for the greater good of the kingdom. I struggled with the easy out choices related to money and food for the people but remembered the lessons of those who made similar wishes. I have consulted with Queen Holly and Duchess Hilda and they have agreed to my first wish."

The king stood up. "Sir Johnny JumpUp, please come forward."

Johnny got a puzzled look on his face since Viola was the granter of wishes for King William, not he. The king continued, "I have learned that while you can change size from very small to a more standard size, you do have some limits. Is that true?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," said Johnny meekly. "Faeries can only grow to five foot, nine inches. If they grow larger than that, they loose their powers and become mortal."

"That matches what I learned from the others. I fear that there will be a day when the prince is in danger and you will be forced to face that mortality in order to save him. I don't want you to have to make that sacrifice for the kingdom and risk you hesitating at the time he needs you most." The king took a deep breathe before stating his carefully crafted wish.

"I wish that Sir Johnny JumpUp, descendent of Amaranth, former Queen of the Faeries, have the ability to achieve the exact height required to assist in the safety and survival of Apollo Phoenix, also descendent of Amaranth, without worry of loosing his faerie powers."

"The Queen of the Faeries grants the Faerie Godmother of Riangle Her permission to grant this wish," said Holly. "But this is some serious magic and I want to make sure that my grandson understands the details of what to expect."

"I figured that there had to be one of those 'before midnight' fine print kind of rules to something like this," said Johnny.

"Close, but not quite," she said, ruffling his hair. "First, you have to be in physical contact with the prince to effect the growth. You will be drawing on his faerie blood to sustain the added magic needed. You don't need to maintain contact once you reach the required height, just until then. Second, you need to be in physical



contact again to release the energy back to him.

"And third, each time you use this gift, it will become increasingly longer before you can shrink to normal size. The first time it would be an hour for each minute you spend beyond the normal limit. Then a day, a week, a month, a year, and on to a century."

Johnny did a little math in his head. "That would mean that if I did this too many times, it might take centuries to recover and by that time, Prince Apollo would be dead. Which means no physical contact, at which point what happens?" he asked.

"We don't know for certain, but the spell experts think that you will know when the time limit is about to expire as it will become very painful to sustain the spell. If you delay the return, you run the risk of the pain becoming permanent." Queen Holly looked at him. "No faerie can cast a spell on another without their permission. With the things that I've said in mind, may Viola grant the king's wish?"

"I have to admit that I had worried about this myself after Queen Amaranth was attacked and I realized that the next attack could be against the Prince. I would do anything for my friend and my permission is willingly given."

"Then make it so," said Holly.

"But may you never need it," added Hilda.

Viola stepped up to stand next to the others. "Your Majesty, in order for the spell to work, the wish needs to be fresh in the air. Could you please restate your wish?"

The king motioned for the prince and Johnny to come stand on either side of him. He placed his hands on their shoulders and repeated his wish.

"I, William, King of Riangle wish that Sir Johnny JumpUp, descendent of Amaranth, former Queen of the Faeries, have the ability to achieve the exact height required to assist in the safety and survival of Apollo Phoenix, also descendent of Amaranth, without worry of loosing his faerie powers."

Having been given permission to work magic, Viola began to glow as words of the king's wish reached her ears. She pulled out a star-topped wand and waved it over the heads of the trio standing before her. The wand focused the glow and ribbons of light wove around the three of them.

"Skippidy-Do and Fiddlilee-Dee. What he said, make it be."

The ribbons of light unwove from the king and prince and disappeared into Johnny. "That was it?" he asked. "I don't feel any different."

Hilda spoke up, "That was well cast, but you won't be able to tell until you are called up to use it." Viola beamed at the praise from her teacher. "However, Viola, we do need to work on your presentation when granting wishes that are of this importance. 'Skippidy Do?' I can see that we will need to spend some time on spell casting."

"My apologies, teacher, that was the first thing that popped in my head. It was either that or start singing 'My lover's cock swung between two balls, but since he cheated, it's hanging on my walls' from my upcoming tour. I couldn't figure out words quick enough to match the melody so I fell back on the old standard from when I was working with children."

"Granddaughter," said Holly, "perchance is your tour taking you anywhere near Hera's Haven or the sanctuary?"

"Alas, no," she replied. "This particular show is very popular with the boys at Ladsrus Sanctuary so we will stop at a couple of towns in the West Blade before setting up a festival tent near the sanctuary. The town councils in the area are working on creating a major arts festival around our tour in order to encourage folks going to Slong Beach to stop and spend some money on their way in and out of the sanctuary."

"Good, I was about to change our travel plans to be elsewhere if you were." Everyone laughed.

Before Viola could respond, Rondar spoke up. "Speaking of travel plans, we need to ask your permission to leave. If we are to get to The Three Corner Inn by nightfall, then we need to be on our way soon."

"You plan to get that far tonight?" asked Rose. "That was where we usually stopped for lunch on the second day of our journey."

"We are traveling fast and light, your majesty," he replied.

"Then good journey to you all," said William.

Bowing to the assembled queens, Rondar said, "And good journey to you, Fair Queens on your own journey when it comes time for you to depart."

With the formalities completed, it took nearly a half hour for everyone to say good-bye to each other. By the time they finished, Rose insisted that Apollo get something to eat before getting on the road.

The prince leaned over to Rondar and whispered, "Do we have time for this or is it going to make us late?"

Rondar gave him a wink as he said, "Knowing Queen Rose, I already figured that into the schedule."

The group left the throne room and went to the small dining hall. A light lunch of sandwiches and fruit was waiting for them when they arrived. They ate quickly and soon the scene in the throne room was repeated, just not taking as long. Before they left, Rose presented each of them with a travel sack of fruit and other snacks suitable for the road.

Rondar sent Johnny and Cetee ahead with the sacks while he took one quick look around the castle that had been his home these past years. "Are you going to miss this place?" asked Apollo.

"I would be heartless if I didn't. I have many good memories of

times here, but it has never been 'home' to me. It is a beautiful place but my truthfully my heart longs to be back in the lands of my childhood. I will miss teaching you and seeing you when you master the Brogrim Challenge."

"And I will miss you too."

"When I walk out these doors, I'll stop being your teacher. Do you think I could become your friend?"

"There was something in one of my philosophy lessons that didn't make complete sense at the time," said the prince. "But being around Viola, Johnny, Cetee and yourself has given some meaning to it. 'A teacher is nothing but a special kind of friend. A friend is nothing but a special kind of teacher.'"

"I don't recall hearing that before, but I like it."

"I think teachers have to be some kind of friend to everyone. They are there to help people. They may not be at your side when you party, but they are there when it matters. I know that Viola and Johnny are officially some of my teachers, but they are more like friends that happen to have something to teach me."

"And me?"

"Of all my teachers, I think you are the one that cares the most. I would certainly want to think that you are a friend." Apollo held out his arms in an invitation for a hug, which was quickly accepted by Rondar.

"Thanks friend," said Rondar. "I needed that."

"Before we join the others, I have a question to ask you," said the prince.

"Is this about the letter from your mother?"

"No." He hesitated a moment. "When you see father are you going to wait until you're both naked to give him the hug you both want? Or are you going to try to pretend that you are 'just friends?'"

The question was the last thing he expected from his former student. "I should have known that you figured that out. I told Adam that you were smart but he still thinks of you as his little boy. Don't tell him that you know. I think he's been trying to figure out how to tell you and we shouldn't spoil his plans prematurely."

"You just want to see him squirm for a while, don't you?"

"Caught again. It sounds like we have much to talk about on the journey to the valley. Shall we go?"

Rondar held out his arm and pulled Apollo to his side. With arms around each other, they headed towards the stables. When they got there, they were still trying to figure out what the prize was for being the first person to get naked. "Can I play, too?" said Johnny.

He gave Rondar a questioning look with his raised eyebrow, to which Rondar simply nodded his head. "Well, then that's simple," said Johnny. "Winner gets the first naked hug with Adam and I plan to win."

"Remember the rules! No magic during a strip off contest."

"Be that way."

"Sounds like a good prize, but what if it's a tie?" asked the prince.

The faerie got a gleam in his eye. "Sounds like a naked group hug to me."

You Have Nothing to Fear But Fear Itself...or Do You?

by Lazarus Graves

Make yourself comfortable, and try to relax. I will guide you to a house that I have been to many times. But first I want you to connect with the powers of the sky and the powers of the earth. As you feel that connection imagine yourself deep in the woods, the cold air is blowing around you, autumn leaves cover the ground. The sky is covered with dark clouds threaten to storm at any minute. The dead leaves swirl and dance in the wind, as they cover your path. It is growing darker and the path is harder to see, but you go forward, trusting that you will remain on the path. From deep within the woods, the wind carries harsh whispers. You're not sure if they are teasing you or warning you. You begin to run hoping that your feet know where the path is. Lightning flashes as thunder rolls across the sky. You see a tall rod iron fence and run to it.

You follow the fence until you get to the towering gated entrance of the fenced in property. Lightning and thunder announce the rain, as it starts to fall. The sky grows even darker as the rain increases. The wind seems to open the massive iron gates for you. The heavy iron gates slowly creak open to allow you to enter. You run through them towards an old house for shelter until childhood memories start flooding into your mind. All the stories you have heard, and told, of this old haunted house in the woods begin to fill your head. You recall how all the owners of the house died, or went insane and mysteriously disappeared. Their souls, and those of their victims, as the stories are told, remain forever in this house.

The pouring rain causes you to force the childhood stories from your mind as you run up to the old decaying house. Once you are on the front porch you stop running and try to catch your breath. Looking at the old house, with its boarded windows, the stories return. How many different versions are there? The wind once again carries jumbled whispers to your ear. You turn to look out over the vast dead landscape of the front lawn. How many unfortunate travelers are said to be buried in this yard? If all the stories are to be believed, there are over a hundred bodies hidden beneath the thorny bushes, weeds, vines and dead grass. As you look around the yard you see someone standing near a small bare tree. You jump back and blink your eyes in disbelief, but when you open your eyes and look back at the tree no one is there. The floor boards creak and you quickly turn around. A flash of lightning and clasp of thunder helps the scream escape from your throat. Your body shivers, from fear or is it the damp cold wind that blows around you? Your body's desire for warmth leads you to the front door, which opens as you approach. The nightmarish tales of the house fill your head again, but logic tells you it was just the wind.

Inside you slowly walk to the middle of the entrance hall, where decay and mold fill your senses. The room is dark, but you can see to your left is a small fireplace with large boarded up windows on either side. To your right there is a closed door, and straight ahead of you are two closed doors. Behind you the front door slams shut, and the room becomes even darker. You stand still trying to control your breathing, as the sound of your beating heart seems to become louder then the storm outside. The tales of the entrance hall come to you. The original owner had gone insane and killed his daughter's lover in the entrance hall. The young man had been trying to enter the house to see his true love. She, of course, had already met her bloody fate in the upstairs bathroom.

More recently there were tales of a young forest ranger who had disappeared after reporting that he thought he saw people inside the house and was going to investigate. He was never seen again, and nothing was ever found in or around the house, except his badge. They had found it lying just inside the front door.

You hear the door to your right as it creaks open. Surly it was opened by the small breeze that made its way into the room through the broken windows. Your eyes have adjusted enough to see that there is something right behind the door. You cross over and open the door and stare into a small closet. The object is lying on the floor. Even in the darkness you can make out a large flashlight, the kind rangers use. You bend down and pick it up, blow off the dust and try to turn it on. Bright light floods the closet and you notice the blood on the floor.

The storm has gotten worse since you entered the house, and you know that you could not leave, but dare you explore the house of so many haunted tales? From somewhere inside the house, a door slams shut and floor boards creak. Logic tries to tell you it is from the storm, but the stories of the house have you wondering, which ghost is preparing to greet you? Nervously you turn to look around the room. The doors across from the front door are now wide open, as if welcoming you in. As you stare at the open doorway, the wind carries whispers to your ears. A woman is saying something, but it hard to understand what she is saying. You shine the light through the doorway into the darkness of a long empty hallway. The hallway has several windows on one side and several doors on the other side. You again hear the woman whispering something. It sounds almost like she is saying to get out. You look into the hallway, but there is no one there. You stand in the front hall, trying to steady your nerves; logic no longer explaining away your fears. Lightning flashes and in the hallway you see a tall dark figure walking towards you. As thunder shakes the house you realize the light from your flashlight shows nothing but an empty dusty hallway full of cobwebs. Your heart is beating fast, your breath is shallow and quick, and fear has you in its grip.

Do you venture into the hallway to face the tall dark shadow that seems to have come to see who has entered the house? Do you stay in the front hall and wait for the terrors of the house to find you there? Do you leave the house and face the storm and whoever or whatever you saw in the front yard?

I will leave you here to face whatever fear you choose, leaving you alone with your fears. Before I go, allow me say one last thing. Once you face your fear, you will learn as I have, that there is more to your fear then what first appears. What is it that you are really afraid of? Take a closer look, shine the light upon it. Our fears are made up of so many layers that it may be difficult to see at first, but just keep looking past whatever ghostly figure you think you see. Look to the base fear. What is it? Why are you so afraid of it? Do you know where this fear came from? For as a child we have no fears. This fear was given to you. Who gave it to you? Think about your fear, it may seem rational, but is it really? Maybe it is, maybe not, that is not for me to say. As you ponder your fear and continue to shine the light upon it, you may find you are no longer afraid of it. Some will choose to keep the fear they have, other will toss it away like a bad dream.

Pain

by Cielo

Tears run down my face
to mingle with dropped dreams
shattered at my feet,
plucked from my head
by fingers of common flesh.

My pain does not surmount
the mountain blocking it's path.
behind it the lake of its culmination,
lost many suns ago.
Anguish evolves to find a way.

Torment trickles around the peak,
in a crack in the foundation
and collects to make a river,
gauging a valley,
making the summit ever higher.

The fatigued valley floor
crumbles as I stride above it,
and excuses to be oblivious
to the mountain's weight dissolve,
and gather like so much dust.

I have fallen.

A faceless head speaks through a hole
in the foundation from above
and tells me of a great disaster.
I wonder about the warning
as I brush myself off
only to find the mirth steadfast
and all too palpable,
like rusted copper, in my mouth.

A shout breaks through the lost cavern
where I sojourn, and my hair
and hands fill with falling
dirt and foundation.
The mountain in all its grandeur, decays
then sinks in its own triumph.

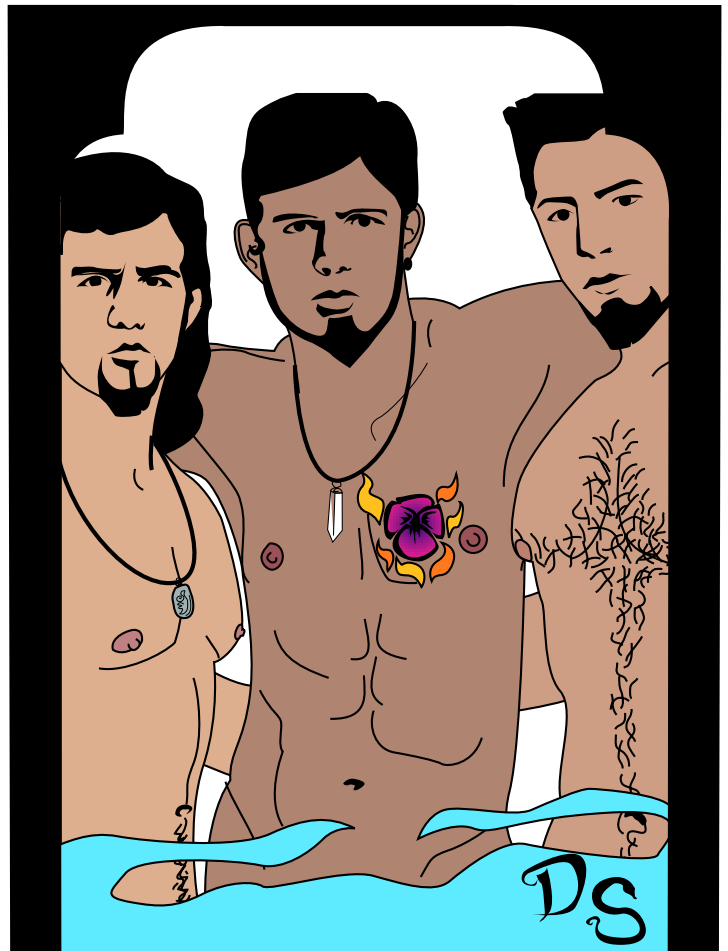
Earth, flung into the air,
cues a roaming leviathan
and it attacks. Trying to
strip away my life
in the absence of the mountain.

The struggle ends
and the beast is left dead.
Its life washes away the dust
leaving me unencumbered and free.

I check the wound caused by the contest
and watch as its warmth
travels down my arm,
to collect on the body
of the leviathan
in a small mountain of dust.

You Have Nothing to Fear - continued

Once you have finished with your fear, you hear someone walking down the hall. You shine your light upon the tall figure. A beautiful forest ranger greets you and says he has been looking for the light for sometime. He asks for his flashlight and you hand it over to him. The two of you walk out of the house. The sky is now clear, as the two of you continue down to the main gates. The friendly forest ranger guilds you back, making sure you are safe and sound. With the cool crisp air around you, and the ground covered in autumn leaves, you realize that you have remained connected to the sky and earth.



Dante's Dream - Part 2 of 2

by Falcon

Dante quickly dressed and checked his messages. The call on his cell phone had been a wrong number. "Wrong number, worse timing" grumbled Dante. He spent the next hour returning the calls that Marvin had taken while he was with Thaniel. As he cleaned up the last of emails that he hadn't gotten to at home, he noticed that there were no new messages. "That's odd," he thought, "must be something wrong with the mail server. I'll check again after I go to the gym."

On the way to the gym, Dante turned off the radio in his car. He wanted to relive the memory of the morning without distraction. His phone rang breaking the silence. "Hey, it's Thaniel," came the deep baritone voice. "I just wanted to make sure you hadn't changed your mind about joining me this evening. Ron tells me that the ferries are running full today with folks heading to The Gates. He was thinking about adding a couple of more runs which would mean that we would need to be ready at 5:45."

"That shouldn't be a problem," he replied. "Oops, that doesn't give me much time to run home and grab my things."

"Don't worry," said Thaniel. "I forgot to mention that clothing isn't an option at the retreat. Anything you need will be provided." As he disconnected, he added "See you in a few hours."

Dante pulled up to the gym and smiled as he saw the sign over the door. The name was what had caught his attention when he got the original membership offer. He was struck by the irony of people like himself coming to work off extra weight before they have heart attacks coming to a place called "Bodies to Die For." Still, there were some guys who put some serious effort into their exercise that served as his personal inspiration.

He headed to the locker room and quickly changed. When he got back to the main workout room, he could not see Bruce anywhere. "Oh, yeah," he thought. "Bruce said that he had to do something with his kids and would be running a few minutes late." Dante headed over to the treadmill to start his warm up routine. It wasn't long before the steady pace of the equipment sent his mind wandering back to the morning's meeting.

"That's what I like to see," came a deep bass voice, breaking the reverie. "Someone using the equipment and actually smiling like they enjoy it."

Dante turned to see a tall, blonde, well built man in blue exercise garb. He had seen him in the gym on numerous occasions but never had the opportunity to talk to him. He had the perfect body. But more than that, he had the perfect attitude. Dante loved watching him walk through the gym with an air of grace. He would stop and visit with someone who was struggling with the equipment that they were using. On more than one occasion, he wished that Bruce hadn't been there, so that the mysterious stranger would have a chance to come over.

"Are you Dante Miller?" he asked. Dante nodded, so he continued. "Bruce just called and said that he was in an accident." He held up a hand to stop Dante's next question. "He said he's all right, just bruised, but his car is totaled. Someone decided that 'red' means go full speed through the intersection. He asked if I would be willing to substitute as your work out buddy today."

"And you are...?" asked Dante.

"I'm sorry. I've seen you here for months and thought you knew.

I'm Mark, Mark Curry that is, owner of Bodies to Die For, at your service," he said as he gave Dante a full court bow. It did not escape his notice that the bow gave Mark every opportunity to check him out from his head to his toes.

"No, Milord. It is I, who should bow to you for operating this fine establishment." Dante repeated Mark's gesture and liked what he saw. He was thankful that his jockstrap kept things tucked in place.

Mark chuckled. "Now that we've finished checking each other out, do you want to check out the equipment?" Mark made a show of adjusting his shorts. Before Dante could respond, Mark led him over to the weights and started the work out in earnest.

After an hour of sheer pleasure...ok, Dante's body thought it was sheer hell, but an hour in close proximity to Mark was certainly more enjoyable than Bruce's detached manner. Dante looked up at the clock. "Good," he thought, "it's only 3:00. I've got plenty of time to wash up and head out to the ferries."

"Thanks for the great work out," said Dante. "I know it's kind of rude, but I'm sort of glad that Bruce had his accident. He never pushes me that hard. I know I'm going to feel it in the morning, but right now I feel great."

"I have a feeling that we will be doing this again," was his reply.

The two men shook hands and parted company. Dante headed back to the locker room. He threw his sweaty clothes into his locker, grabbed a towel from the stack on the shelf and headed to the steam room. "You don't want to go in there," came Mark's voice from behind him. Mark grabbed Dante's cock and said, "Follow me."

He was led to a door to the left of the steam room that he hadn't noticed before. Once through the door, he found himself in a second locker room. "The other area is for the public," said Mark. "This is reserved for the Sweet Lethe Studs." Before Dante could speak, Mark stopped him with a kiss. "Welcome to the family."

"What do you mean?" asked Dante. Mark had stripped off his shirt and gave him another kiss as he stepped out of his pants. Upon seeing his nude body, the light of recognition came over Dante's face. "You're THE Mark Curry?" Dante said. "I know you said that, but I didn't connect the name with the face. How did you know I was thinking about posing?"

"That's easy. Than was here about an hour before you got here and said that he found a new member for the family. He asked me to take good care of you and to make sure you get to the ferry on time." Mark didn't give Dante time to respond. The passion that had been awoken by the interrupted session that morning with Thaniel came alive again. It was not long before Mark brought Dante back to the point that he had been earlier in the day.

Feeling that Dante was getting ready to explode, he said, "Unfortunately, we don't have time to do everything I would like to. Earlier I said I was at your service, but right now I just want to be serviced by you."

Dante was too lost in the euphoria of the moment to give a verbal response. He spit into his hand and added the moisture to his cock. Mark took that as a signal and turned around, thrusting his ass Dante's direction. Dante slipped into the waiting hole and began pumping with a passion that surprised him. He felt his cum start to

rise when he realized that he hadn't put on a condom and pulled out.

"Oh no you don't," said Mark. "I need your cum inside me and wouldn't have it any other way." Mark turned around and laid back on a bench and pulled Dante on top of him. "Fuck me like there's no tomorrow," he said. Dante slipped back into Mark's waiting hole and leaned over to kiss him. The passion soared to a fevered pitch and it wasn't long before Dante felt his cum shoot into Mark.

Dante pulled out and started to work on bringing Mark to climax. "Don't worry about me," he said. "Focus on your own dick and I bet we can make you shoot again."

The two men kissed and stroked themselves with an intensity that Dante hadn't experienced before. In a few minutes, Dante exploded into a shower of cum. He was amazed since he could not remember the last time he shot twice in a matter of moments. He couldn't even remember the last time his cum went further than his nipples. No sooner than he exploded, Mark let out an "Oh YES!" that filled the room and Dante felt the splat of Mark's cum on his face. Dante's tongue was quick to taste the sweet salty cum that was waiting on his lips. Dante wiped off cum from his cheek and sucked it from his finger.

"Keep that up and I'll start round three," said Mark.

Dante started to reply when he noticed the clock. "Shit," he said. "It's almost 5:00 and I'm supposed to be at the ferry in forty-five minutes. I hate to cum and go, but I don't want to be late. Thaniel said the ferries were running full today."



"Don't worry," said Mark. "I can get you there on time without a problem. Besides, Than has a way of knowing exactly when someone will be on one of his ferries." Mark paused a moment. "I know we've only formally met today, but I've been watching you for a long time and have a couple of serious questions to ask you. I've been in this business a long time and I need your honest answers."

Dante nodded for him to continue. He figured that this was that awkward moment when the person he just fucked confessed that they had AIDS.

"Did Than give you any papers to sign?"

That caught him off-guard. He said that all the papers that were signed today were drafted by Dante's company. He said that Thaniel told him that they would sign the formal studio model papers later.

"Good. I have some time to act," said Mark, with a visible sign of relief crossing his face. "This is the question that I need the most honest answer from you. Than mentioned that the two of you were getting it on when you got interrupted. Who would you rather be playing with in film after film? Him or me?"

Dante thought about it a moment. This was the thing of fantasy. Two of the hottest guys in the porn industry seduced him in the same day and this one wants to know which was better. "You asked for honesty so I would have to say that given the choice, I would have to choose you. Granted, I only got a sample of the goods earlier, but under the passion I think I sensed a cold, calculating person. It was fun and I liked it, but with you, I feel more alive than I have felt in a long time. I guess if I had to spend an eternity with only one of you, I guess I would have to pick you. Now, if it wouldn't be too greedy, it would certainly be nice to not have to choose and get both of you at the same time."

"If you don't mind me tagging along, the latter certainly can be arranged. In fact, if we are to catch the ferry, we need to scoot." The two men got quickly dressed. Mark had Dante move his car to the employee parking area. "We'll take my car," he said. "It's faster."

Dante ran out to his car and pulled around the building. He noticed that the time was 5:35 as he pulled into the space Mark pointed at. As Dante got out of the car, Mark tossed a SLStudio card on the dash. He led Dante to his car. As soon as they were buckled in, Mark put his foot to the floor and squealed out of the parking lot. "How are we going to get to the ferries on the other side of town in ten minutes" Dante asked.

"Trust me."

After several breakneck turns and near misses at stop lights, Dante was sure his fingers had become one with the door handle. "What are you trying to do? Kill us both?"

"No. Actually the opposite and I haven't lost a passenger yet. I'm just doing what you would do under the circumstances; just faster. Hold on."

Before Dante could respond with proper indignity (even if he had to admit that Mark was right), he looked up and saw that a semi-trailer was stalled out in front of them and Mark hadn't slowed down. In an impossible maneuver, Mark turned the car in a sharp right turn and went zooming down the street. In the background,

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Dante's Dream continued

Dante could hear the sound of an accident as some other soul was not as fortunate in their turn.

As he tried to catch his breath from the narrow miss, he felt the car slow down. "Here we are, precisely on time as promised."

Dante looked at his watch and saw it flip to 5:45. Out the window he saw the docks. "I'm going to drop you off here and let you proceed as if you had come here by yourself. I want to surprise Than, so I'll zip over and catch the Sticks and Bones Ferry." Mark kissed him good-bye and pointed him in the direction to get in line for the Cock Eat Us Ferry. "I'll see you on the other side."

Dante looked at the line that seemed to stretch out forever. He started to turn back to say something to Mark, he heard the familiar sound of tire squeals. "Note to myself," thought Dante, "Remember that when going someplace with Mark, be sure to be the driver." He decided that being around Mark for any length of time would be anything but slow and dull.

He headed over to the line. Over the loud speakers came a booming voice. "Now that everyone is here, the boarding for the 5:45 Cock Eat Us Ferry will begin."

Dante was surprised that no one moved. The message was repeated and again, no one moved. Dante decided to see what the hold up was and stepped out of line and started to walk up to the front. Someone from the line shouted at him, "Hey! What are you doing? You *want* to get on the 5:45?"

"Actually, yes," shouted Dante back to the person. "I have someone waiting on the other side and they are expecting me to be on this ferry."

"We all have someone waiting for us, but if it's that important to ya, knock yourself out. I don't think anyone will mind you taking their spot." Murmurs of 'go for it' and 'fine with me' came from elsewhere in the line. Dante ran up to the front and was stopped by a big burly man.

"What do you think you are doing? You should know that we don't let your kind on the ferries."

Dante was taken aback with that attitude. Today had been such bliss and here was someone saying he couldn't do something based on what? "And just what kind is that, Mister...", Dante tried to read the name tag on the man's shirt as he was trying to usher others onto the ferry.

"Char Ron," he automatically filled in. "Not that my name makes a difference, I still can't let your kind on the ferry. I did that once in the past and the boss ripped me a new one. I couldn't sit down for a month."

As the ferryman mentioned his boss, Dante remembered the card that Thaniel had given him. He pulled it out of his pocket and handed it to Char. "You must be the Ron that Thaniel mentioned. I thought he said that he was going to meet me here for the 5:45 ferry."

"Oh, so you are the one that the boss was eager to get to the other side. Funny, I was expecting you to be..." Char paused. "Well, like the others. I've been wrong before when it comes to the boss's needs. Anyway, hop on board. He said to tell you that he caught an early ferry so that he could have everything prepared for your arrival."

Dante boarded and found a seat. Now that someone else went

first, the ferry filled up and Char cast off. Dante tried to talk to some of the folks around him but they all seemed to be in their own worlds. After several minutes of listening to endless moans, he sought out a quieter spot out on deck. He decided that since Thaniel wasn't there to keep him company he might as well check messages. He pulled out his cell phone but didn't get a dial tone. He tried several times with no success. He checked the battery gauge and it said that it had a full charge.

Char noticed Dante's efforts and came towards him. "Those things don't work out here."

"I'm paying for extra coverage – guaranteed for two hundred miles from my home. They are going to get a piece of my mind when I get back."

"Good luck on that. If you can figure out how a phone can work out here, let me know and cut me in on the action. Folks have been trying for centuries to reach people over here without much luck. If you can make it work, you would be the richest man in the universe."

Now that the chill of the earlier conversation had began to thaw, Dante enjoyed the ferryman's company. After a while, Dante ventured back to his initial question. "So what did you mean by that 'your kind' comment? I've been looking around and I can't see how I'm any different than anyone else on board."

"It's nothing personal, but if the boss didn't tell you, then I'm not about to spoil his fun."

No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't get Char to budge, so he changed the subject to asking him questions about the studio and the different models. Time flew by and soon he felt the thump of the ferry hitting a dock. Dante watched people leave the ferry. Char stood at the top of the gangplank collecting money from everyone. Dante stood on deck watching for Thaniel to show up to take him off to the retreat, but it soon came clear that there was no one waiting; not even someone waiting to take the ferry back to the mainland.

"Where is everyone that is going back?" Dante asked.

"They never do. It gets lonely on the return trip with no one to talk to. Thanks for the talk coming here. That hasn't happened in a very long time and I'd forgotten how nice that can be."

Dante asked Char how to find Thaniel's retreat. Char led him to a path that veered from the one taken by the other passengers. "Just follow this and you will find him."

Char gave Dante a big bear hug. "Damn, you feel good. You are definitely not like the others. I could only wish that I met you first, but I don't mess with the boss's selections."

"You feel pretty good yourself. Since he isn't here to object, at least let me thank you for your company." Dante gave Char a big kiss. "Let that be something to keep you company on the way back."

Dante headed up the path and looked back toward the ferry. He saw a smile on Char's face that had not been there when they first met. Dante waved at the ferryman. Char waved back as the ferry drifted into the fog that seemed to be everywhere.

He turned back to the path that Char had pointed out and started walking. The silence around him was almost as thick as the fog itself. It didn't take him long to imagine that the world had ended and he was the sole survivor of a nuclear disaster. On more that one

occasion, he wondered if Char had pulled a trick on him and sent him off in the wrong direction. What if it was Thaniel that set him up to it? He realized that no one back home knew where he went. Panic rose inside as the silence and fog filled his senses. "Hello! Is anyone out there?"

He listened a moment. Nothing responded. His outcry was met with more silence. He grabbed a deep breath so that he could shout as loud as he possibly could. "Hell..."

"Oh, there you are," came Thaniel's voice from the middle of the fog right in front of him. He was wearing a big, voluptuous robe. As he moved, the front opened ever so slightly to hint at the fact that he was nude underneath.

"Geez, give a guy some warning next time. I nearly had a heart attack."

"My apologies as that was certainly not my intent, but I don't think it would have been possible in your current state. You look like..." Thaniel hesitated a second, "...like a million dollars." He spent the next several minutes prattling on about the business that made him catch the earlier ferry. Dante only half listened to his excuses. He had been in sales long enough to know that 'a million dollars' was not what Thaniel had planned to say. His thought drifted back to his conversation with Mark when he said that he felt that Thaniel was cold and calculating. "Yes," he thought. "But something is wrong with that calculation."

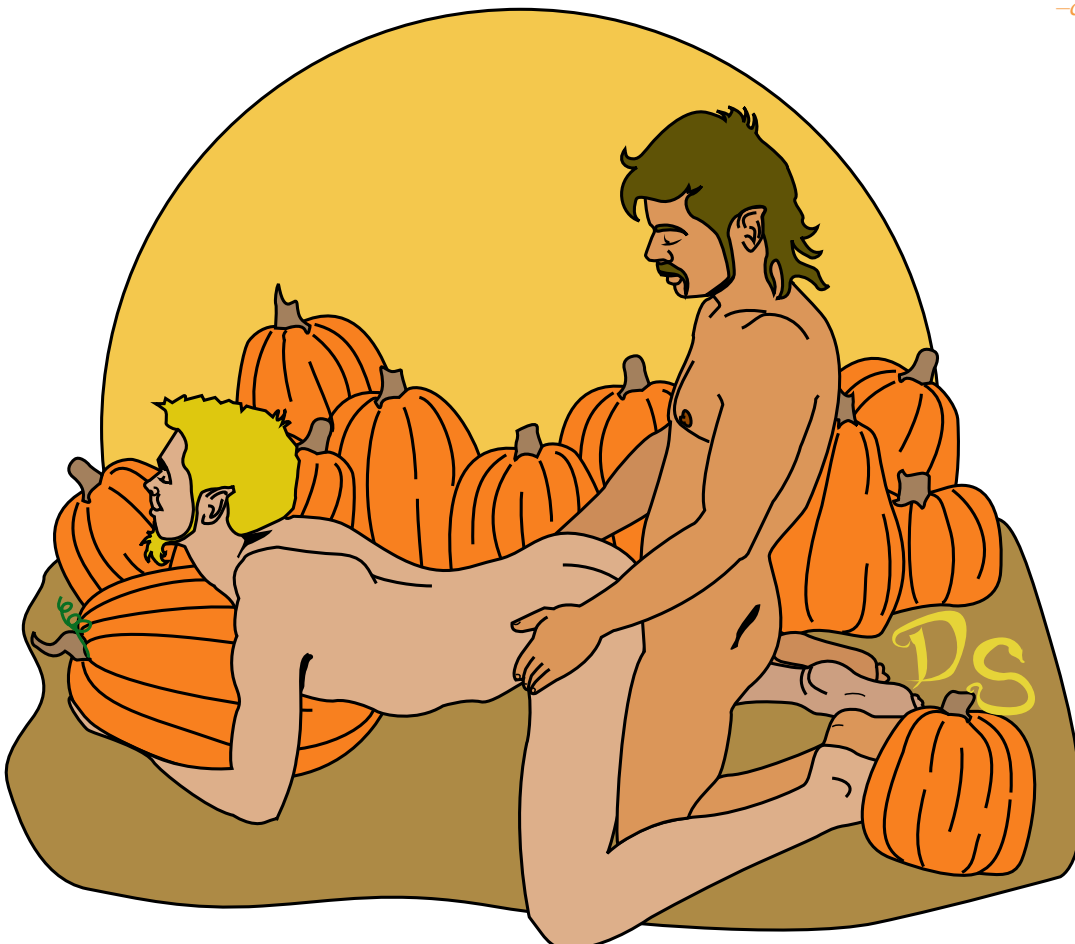
Thaniel led him to over a small hill, and with a sweeping motion of his hand, he said, "Welcome to my humble abode." As if

on cue, the fog lifted revealing a home that was anything but 'humble.' It was a mansion in the truest Hollywood style. A white marble staircase led up to an ornate golden door. The wings to either side gave Dante the impression that there must be hundreds of rooms in the place. Once inside, Dante was blown away with the opulence of the gilded grand staircase. They were greeted by a hoard of people all demanding Thaniel's attention. Each of them had something that only he would be able to address. He dismissed all but one of them saying that if it had waited that long to become a crisis, another day or two won't matter.

The one that remained stepped up and took Thaniel's cloak, and indeed he was totally nude underneath. "Thank you Alfred. Ah, that's better," he said. "No matter how long I've been here, that fog by the docks gives me such a chill. Let me give you a proper welcome." He pulled Dante into an embrace and gave him a kiss that almost made Dante forget his earlier thoughts about the man. Almost, but not quite. This had the feel of being staged to impress him and overwhelm him into forgetting something important. He thought, "Let him impress me, but I'm going to keep my feet planted on the ground."

After a couple of minutes of liplock, Thaniel led him upstairs. "You look seriously overdressed. Let's get you settled and give you a chance to freshen up after your journey." The room he was led to was larger than most of his penthouse condo. The bed was huge and looked like you could have four or five people in it and never touch each other. The bathroom was larger than his bedroom at home. It

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had both a shower and spa tub.

"I hope this is to your liking," said his host. "I will leave you to freshen up. Dinner will be served in an hour. Just come down the main stairs and Alfred will be waiting to guide you to the patio dining area." With that, Thaniel gave Dante a kiss. "Consider this an appetizer. We'll save the rest for dessert."

Dante decided that a shower might be in order. Since he had been distracted by Mark he had not had a chance to clean up. "Maybe that's why he's being a bit elusive," he thought. "I probably stink of sweat and sex." Dante stripped and put his clothes in the hamper in the bathroom. The shower had double shower heads. He luxuriated in the feeling of having the water stream down both sides of his body.

Feeling fresh, he explored his room. The closet had cloaks of varying colors in a similar style to the one Thaniel had worn earlier but nothing else. The window overlooked the pool. It was one of those fancy marble pools with multiple layers and little waterfalls connecting them. He recognized it as being the setting for several scenes in various Sweet Lethe films. As the time approached for dinner, Dante was feeling a little nervous about heading out to dinner wearing only his birthday suit. As he thought about, the people that were there upon his arrival were all in various states of undress. They were nude with the exception of some article of clothing that might suggest their function in the household. A cook hat, a frilly apron, a necktie; all something simple but the person was otherwise naked. "Well, as the saying goes, when in Rome..."

He headed down the stairs and as promised Alfred was waiting for him. Dante was led through several rooms that were filled with male nude art; everything from the cleaner classic styles to more abstract styles that were the current rage in the magazines. By the time Alfred opened the door to the pool, the images on the paintings and statues had aroused Dante's dick to its full stature.

Thaniel rose from the table at their approach. With his eyes focused on Dante's cock, he said, "You must be hungry indeed." He picked up a strawberry from the table and brushed it across Dante's lips. Dante gave a soft murmur of affirmation and licked the strawberry before biting into its flesh. The juice that squirted was quickly kissed out of existence by Thaniel.

The two of them teased each other with pieces of the finger food for a few moments before Thaniel made a show of seating his guest at the table. Thaniel rang a bell and dinner was served. They chatted about the porn industry. Dante was full of questions. All his life he had been an outside observer and here he was, guest of the head of the largest studio. All through the meal, Dante got the impression that Thaniel was distracted by something. He would go silent for several minutes as if he was replaying something in his mind trying to figure out where it went wrong. After the fifth time he noticed this, Dante decided to ask about it. "You look distracted. Maybe this isn't the right time for me to be here."

"Sorry. It's not that. It is the perfect time for you to be here. I've just been trying to figure out how you survived the journey unscathed."

"The trip wasn't that bad," said Dante. Then something clicked in his mind. "Oh, you must mean something about the curmudgeon,

Char, that runs the ferry. He started off like a big bully, but I had a chance to talk to him and he seems like a good guy. That reminds me, he said something about me not being your type. What did he mean by that?"

"Well," started Thaniel, "he's almost right. You are nearly perfect except for one thing. How do I say this?"

Dante felt a pair of hands on his shoulders. "What Than is trying to say," came Mark's voice from behind him, "is that he is wondering how you managed to make it here alive." Dante reached up and put one of his hands on top of Mark's. His gesture was rewarded with a kiss on the top of his head. Dante felt a sudden chill in the air. He looked back at Thaniel and saw the look of quiet rage in his eyes. He realized that this was definitely not playing out as his host had planned.

"You wouldn't have anything to do with that, would you Merc?" demanded Than.

"Ever have I brought people to your doors, Mr. Than Atos. You directed that I make sure that he arrived at the Cocytus Ferry at a certain time, and I did as you asked."

"But you knew that I wanted..."

"Yes, but you didn't specify the condition. I have had my eye on him for some time and decided to steal him from you before you could get your claws in him."

"Time out," said Dante, as he stood up. "You are both great guys, but I really don't want to be in the middle of a lover's quarrel." Looking back and forth at them, "Or is it an ex-lover's quarrel?"

Than and Mark guffawed at that notion. "I guess it would sound like that to someone," said Mark. "But it is more serious than a simple emotional battle. This is more like a life and death struggle where the life in question is yours." The look on both men's face sent a chill down his spine.

"You are starting to make me wonder about my decision about coming here," said Dante.

Mark coaxed Dante to sit on one of the benches so that he could hold him close to him as they talked. As if to try to soften the impact of his next words, Mark placed his right hand on Dante's heart. "You will learn that when Thanatos requests your presence in Hades, you don't have a choice in the matter."

Dante felt a warmth come from Mark's touch as the words settled into his brain. An understanding of the situation slowly penetrated his thoughts even if he didn't want to believe it. "Hades? As in the place for the dead? Is this some kind of joke?"

Both men shook their heads. "Are you saying I'm dead?"

"That's the issue that Mercury and I were quarreling over," said Thanatos. "If you had died like you were supposed to, you would be here in total ignorance of the situation."

"I was supposed to die?" Dante wasn't sure that he was hearing this and was sure that any minute he would walk up for this nightmare.

"Remember that crash we heard on the drive to the ferries?" asked Mercury. When Dante nodded, he continued. "If you had left the gym when you planned, that would have been you. After talking to you in the gym I couldn't let that happen. When you headed to

the showers I made an arrangement with the Fates to have a person who was going to commit suicide take your place in the accident. I delayed you long enough to ensure that Thanatos couldn't do anything to switch things back."

"You're going to pay for this Mercury," came Thanatos's half-hearted attempt at indignified wrath.

"I have something of value that you might want to consider as fair exchange," he replied.

"Oh, what might you have that I haven't already seen before?"

"You have been wanting me to make a new film and..."

"That's a good start," said Thanatos with an eager gleam in his eye. "What's the 'and' part?"

"...and what have I always told you in previous films?"

"That you are a pure Top and that Hades would freeze over before you..." Thanatos came to a screeching halt. "You mean that chill in the air is because of you?"

"You got it. I finally found the man that I want to play Bottom for and there was no way in Hades that I would let you take that away from me. Ever."

"And you didn't think that was my plan from the start?" Thanatos excused himself and left Dante in Mercury's care.

"I'm not dead?" said Dante with a puzzled look on his face.

Mercury pulled Dante's head to his shoulder and played with his hair. "No, dear one. You are very much alive. Anytime you want to go home, let me know and I'll take you back."

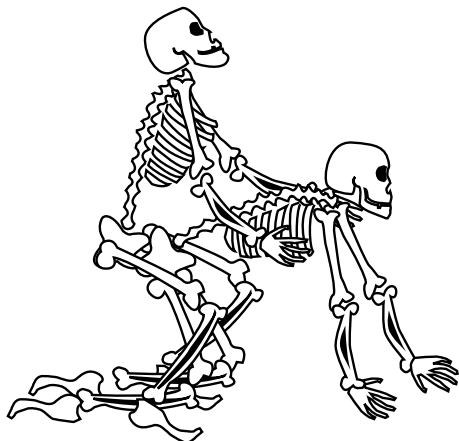
"Right now, being in your arms is more real than any home I've had." Dante yawned. "This has been a weird day, and if I didn't think it would be rude, I think I could fall asleep right here in your arms. This is definitely better than by bed back in my condo."

Mercury led him back to his room and held him until he fell asleep.

* * * * *

Dante woke up to the smell of fresh coffee brewing on his nightstand. "Gods, that was a weird dream last night," he thought as he filled his cup. After taking a couple of sips, he got out of bed and walked over to the mirror. After a moment of admiring the results of his workout efforts, he began his morning stretches.

"You may love waking up to your coffee, but nothing beats seeing your naked body as the first thing I see in the morning," came the voice from the far side of the bed.



"I'm glad you appreciate the show. What's it worth?"

"For starters, how about some cream for your coffee?" Mark asked.

Dante went back to the bed and gave his lover a kiss. "Happy Anniversary, dear. How many does that make now?"

Mark thought a moment. "This marks our 120th anniversary."

"That doesn't seem possible. Not to sound ungrateful for the time we've had together, but I would have expected to be long dead by now. I look great. I feel great and I just had my 153rd birthday. I have always been afraid to ask. I dreamt about the day we met last night. Does this have anything to do with that?" he asked.

"Partially," was Mark's reply. "After tricking you to get there the first time, Thanatos is bound by his rules so that he can't take you there against your will and you have never expressed interest in visiting the mansion again."

"That makes sense. What's the other part?"

"That part is my doing. Each time you suck me dry your body is absorbing the semen of an immortal, and..."

"And now I'm one? I went to Hades and returned and now I'm immortal?"

"Not quite. If we were to split up, the effect would eventually wear off and you would start to grow old. At some point you would want to take the ferry ride again and Thanatos would be waiting for you."

"Just how long does the effect last?" Dante asked.

"The Fates always told me that they had to shift things four days each time I had sex with a partner that swallowed my cum."

Dante's mind was racing with the math. They had sex every day; often two or three times during the day; often with multiple orgasms. "At that rate..."

"At that rate, even if we never had sex again, it would be over a thousand years before you would start to show signs of aging. I know it was a bit selfish of me not explaining this to you before, but I kind of hoped you would want to stay around for a while and wouldn't mind."

Dante answered him with a kiss.

"You won't get away with that answer," said Mark.

"Do you remember the day we met and you asked which of the two of you I wanted to be in film after film with?" Mark nodded. "And do you recall my reply?"

"I remember as if it was yesterday as it is one of my fondest memories. You said, 'I guess if I had to spend an eternity with only one of you, I guess I would have to pick you'"

Dante kissed him again. "And I haven't changed my mind. Now, let's add some more time to my biological clock."

Post Pumpkin Carving Tidbit

by Falcon

When you are ready to light your Stud-o-lantern, sprinkle the inside of the pumpkin with some Pumpkin Spice that you have left over from making pies. The heat from the candle will warm the spices and help fill the air with that fresh baked pumpkin pie smell.

Pumpkin Recipe's

Collected by Potsan Panz

Sweet Pumpkin Spread

Ingredients:

2 packages (8 oz each) cream cheese, softened
1 can (15 oz) pure pumpkin
2 cups sifted powdered sugar
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon ground ginger

Directions:

Beat cream cheese and pumpkin in a large mixing bowl until the mixture is smooth. Add the rest of the ingredients to the mixture and mix thoroughly. Cover and refrigerate for one hour.

Makes five cups.

Serve as a spread or a dip. Try it on cinnamon graham crackers, gingersnaps cookies, toasted bagels, muffins, English muffins, or a slice of toast. It is also recommended as a dip for fresh fruit.

Creamy Pumpkin Soup

Ingredients:

1/4 cup butter
1 small onion (1/4 cup, chopped)
1 clove garlic, finely chopped
2 tsp firmly packed brown sugar
1 can (14.5 oz.) chicken broth
1/2 cup water
1/2 tsp salt
1/2 tsp pepper
1 can (15 oz.) pure pumpkin
1 can (12 oz.) evaporated milk
1/8 tsp ground cinnamon

Directions:

Melt butter in 3-quart saucepan until sizzling. Add onion, garlic and sugar; cook over medium heat until onion is softend (1 to 2 minutes). Add broth, water, salt and pepper; bring to a boil, stirring occasionally. Reduce heat to low; cook, stirring occasionally, for 15 minutes. Stir in pumpkin, evaporated milk and cinnamon. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes. Remove from heat.

Transfer mixture to food processor bowl fitted with metal blade or 5-cup blender container. Cover; process until smooth. Return mixture to saucepan. Server warm. (The use of an immersion blender is great if you don't want to do all the transferring back and forth.)



Chili, Pumpkin Style

Ingredients:

2 cups pumpkin (fresh or canned)
3 lbs. lean ground beef
2 cans red kidney beans
2 medium onions, chopped
3 cans (15 oz) cut tomatoes
2 Tbsp Chili powder
1/4 tsp red pepper (optional)
2 Tbsp sugar
1 tsp salt
2 bay leaves
1 cup mushrooms (optional)

Directions:

Brown ground beef and drain off excess fat. Put ground beef into a large pot. Add remaining ingredients to the pot. Cook on low for one to two hours. Server with crackers.

Pumpkin Spice Quick Bread

Ingredients:

1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
1 cup cooked pumpkin
3/4 cup firmly packed brown sugar
1/2 cup butter, softened
2 eggs
2 tsp pumpkin pie spice*
1 tsp baking soda
1/2 tsp salt
1/4 tsp baking powder

(*substitute 1tsp ground cinnamon, 1/2 tsp ground ginger, and 1/2 tsp each of ground nutmeg and ground cloves as needed)

Directions:

Heat oven to 350°F. Combine all ingredients in large bowl. Beat at medium speed, scraping bowl often, until well mixed.

Spoon batter into greased 9x5-inch loaf pan. Bake for 45 to 55 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool 10 minutes; remove from pan. Cool completely.

Roasted Pumpkin Seeds

After you carve your pumpkin, you can roast the seeds. Remove as much of the fibers from the seeds as you can. Wash the seeds and let them dry. Lightly coat the seeds with vegetable oil. For added flavor toss the oiled seeds in cinnamon sugar, or some grated Parmesan cheese and dried Italian seasoning or even use some of the fancy popcorn flavorings that are available. Spread the seeds in a single layer on a baking sheet and bake at 350 degrees for about 12-15 minutes (until golden brown.) You should stir the seeds occasionally while baking to prevent burning. If you use your pumpkin on your altar, think about using the seeds of "The Queer God" as part of your ritual food.