

GIFT OF YOUTH

HOLIDAY 2022 BONUS STORY

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Christmas time was here again, and with it all of the usual signs were present.

It was a little hard to *ignore* those signs, mind you, when every year it felt like the holidays were being thrown in your face earlier and earlier every year. Maybe I'm just *old* (I am), but back when I was a kid it felt like they at least waited until after Black Friday to begin the Christmas push. These days? The moment Halloween was over, broadcast television was bloated with Christmas themed commercials, radio stations played the holiday classics, and even then you could find Christmas supplies as early as October.

“Is it just because I’m getting old?” Out shopping, I muttered this question under my breath while I observed the endless aisles of Christmas decorations and goodies. I felt *tired* by the mere sight of it, reminding me of all the gifts I had to buy, the things I needed to decorate, and the work I had to do to pay for it all.

My comment was relative to all this. I could remember the Christmases from when I was a kid. When you're young, for most people the holidays were just something to look forward to. The music, the pretty decorations, the waiting for Santa Claus, the *presents*. It was all so exciting, but only because the illusion of all the work that went behind these things was concealed from you.

Once you got older you simply were forced to face this cold reality, and now that I was old enough to have things like an extended family, nieces, nephews and so forth? Well, I was counting my blessings that I wasn't settled down myself in a sense. **“Still, I kind of wish I could go back**

to how I felt about Christmas as a kid.” Hands in the pockets of my winter jacket, I ducked into the decoration aisle – which was strangely vacant, all things considered.

DO YOU MEANT THAT?

“...*Huh?*”

OKAY! I CAN DO THAT!

I could have easily written this interaction off as me hearing things if not for the follow-up, but there had been the disembodied voice of a girl ringing in my head. Something that should have been *impossible*, but in the grand scheme of things it was ultimately much *more* possible than what would soon befall me. “**Am I hearing things?**” If *only* that had been the case. “**I must be hearing things.**”

Since I didn’t hear the voice again after this, it was easy enough for me to put it out of mind. I didn’t want people thinking I was crazy, even if there wasn’t even anyone else around where I was shopping. But slipping deeper into the aisle, I was unaware of the fact that aspects of my *body* had begun to appear... *different*.

That is to say, well... This was the real world. Almost all people had rounded ears, because this wasn’t a world of fantasy where there were things like elves nor dragon people. But creeping backwards from the sides of my head were the very things that *shouldn’t* have existed. My ears not only had elongated, but they were also being pulled into very sharp, almost elven points. *But I was not and would not become an elf.*

More than this were the changes that befell my color scheme. Or, at least, key areas of it. I was already a pale fellow and so when it came to my skin not much really changed there – aside from perhaps becoming a little pinker. On the other hand? It was my eyes and hair that copped the obscener changes in color, because much like how my ears would not be seen as ‘normal’ in this world, neither would this color (in my hair at least).

Because it was a bright forest green that had rooted itself. First in my irises, but then it spread into my eyebrows. From there it jumped into the roots of the hair atop my head, but since I kept my hair so short it didn’t take long for it *all* to be painted in a color that would typically be reserved for cheap hair dyes. But this color wasn’t fake at all, it was wholly biological.

“Anyways, I needed to get new ornaments for the *tree*—!?” A voice crack prompted me to stop short of finishing my sentence. I wasn’t immune to having them, even as an adult, but this one sounded even worse than usual. Rather than just a sudden squeak, it had plagued the entire word that I had been trying to say. **“Huh...”** But as I made a sound again, it didn’t seem to be present any longer.

Bundled up for colder temperatures, I was wearing a relatively thick jacket that hid my figure for the most part. I was a bigger guy so I wore a bigger jacket, there was nothing particularly complicated about that. But in this case it worked against me, because the fact that all that made me *big* was melting away wasn’t something that I immediately noticed. My body was *thinning* at an impossible rate, and before long my tummy was just as flat as my arms were now thin.

“*Wha—!?*” Just because I didn’t notice it when it was happening, though? That didn’t mean that I hadn’t noticed when it was finished. My pants slipped from my hips and pooled around my ankles *along* with my boxers, and the shrill, effeminate shriek I cried out with was a product of the shock I felt in response to it. I quickly reached down to try and pull them up, but instead?

I fell forward like an idiot.

I certainly *felt* like an idiot, but truthfully? The tumble hadn’t exactly been my fault. I already wasn’t used to my body being light, and in the process of leaning forward that weight had shifted in a *different* way. It was all being pushed down upon because, well... My body was *vertically* shrinking now. I was practically absorbed *into* my jacket and the long-sleeved shirt I had been wearing while laying on my tummy on the floor, fortunately covering any sensitive areas as fingers and toes became small and daintier upon stubbier limbs.

“*What in the world is happening to me?*” Since I was currently *pant-free*, I didn’t make much of a scene about it while trying to push myself back up into a standing position. I felt shaky, and the weight of my jacket was so *hefty* that it was even hard to stand – and it wasn’t until I’d even gotten upright onto now shoe and sockless feet (for they had gone flying off when I’d tripped) that I realized *exactly* what had happened. **“*W-Wait a moment, how am I so short?*”**

The jacket and shirt were practically falling off of me, which was of no surprise because I had gone from almost six feet in height to a meager four feet and five inches. I was practically the size of a child! And my voice was so high that I *sounded* like one. A lot more girlish too, but I chalked it up to my tinier stature.

Youth had been reclaimed, and it showed in my face too. My features were smaller, daintier, and rounder. My nose was as cute as a button, and my eyes brighter and wider than ever. But while all of this might have been expected of someone younger just in general, it was unusually skewed towards the *feminine*. There was a subtle fullness and glossy sheen to my lips that stood out, and my lashes were certainly longer – all coming together to give off the impression of a young *girl*.

And just like that? “**Kyaa!?**” It was no longer simply an *impression*. My smaller, thinner fingers dared not reach down because I *knew* what had happened. All that had made me a man – or a boy in this case – had been taken from me, leaving nothing but smoothness and the female alternative between my legs. In fact, the moment I’d screamed? My short, now-green hair had shot out of my head like a wave of green water crashing out behind me. *Except it was hair*. Nonetheless, my main became long and flowing, spilling all of the way down to my ankles behind me with all it’s heft. “**I’m a girl? And my hair...**”

As more and more happened, it all began to seem more *familiar*. The sound of my voice was almost identical to a certain voice actress, and the color and wavy style of my hair complimented a character that immediately came to mind. “**No... This has to be impossible.**” I hadn’t noticed that my own behaviors and mannerisms had shifted too. I was carrying myself with more confidence, and I was very deliberate with how I moved this smaller body. In fact? I felt quite *comfortable* in it.

Needless to say, my changed sex wasn’t without any subtle side-effects, though. My figure was youthful, and so puberty had not hit it. But there was still a small chest that was built beneath my clothes, and my hips widened just a touch past what would be expected of a young boy – with my rump and thighs a bit *healthier* as a result.

The delicate balancing act that I’d been doing with my shirt and jacket finally gave way, and since my body was so small and thin I slipped *right* through the neck holes of both. I was naturally quick to try and cover up, afraid that my body would be *completely* exposed. But I was left confused because, well... I didn’t need to cover up at all. “**Wait...**”

Rather than stand there naked, it seemed that clothing had appeared against my body that *actually fit me* beneath what I had been wearing before. And it was *excessively* Christmas themed. From the short red skirt with wool trim, to the matching top that exposed my arms and tummy, to the *Christmas tree cape* that now hung from my shoulders. It looked like a holiday costume designer’s wet dream. A tiara had even appeared in my hair, and my long hair had been layered with ribbons, ornaments, and even a pair of braids weaved with red behind my ears.

“This outfit is so... festive! But I guess this confirms what I was already assuming. Sothis, huh?” Physically I looked the part of a child, fulfilling the wish I had carelessly made earlier, and yet at the same time? One definitely couldn't define my headspace as 'childish'. My personality, from my gestures to the way I spoke, to even how my mind rationalized things, were identical to those of *Sothis* – but the girl was not *actually* a child. She had some more immature traits, but she typically conducted herself with the emotional maturity of an adult.

Which made sense considering her background as a goddess. Sothis was not a child mentally. Which, ultimately... **“If the point was to turn me into a child, then why...?”** Why turn me into a child that wasn't childish? I didn't have any of that naivete that made Christmas as exciting as I found it as a kid. Rather I had the body of a kid with the mature mind of someone that saw through Christmas' gimmicks.



I was now stuck between *both*
of my issues when it came to the holiday!

“Erm... kid? What are you wearing? Where are your parents?” Before I could dwell on this any longer though? A clerk had walked past and noticed me. Dressed as I was, with my long ears and exposed tummy, while looking like I was around the age of twelve, well... It was only natural that someone would be concerned. Even though nothing nefarious had happened here. Well, *technically* anyways.

“Oh gods... It isn't what it looks like, I promise!”

But there was no way anyone would believe the truth, right?