



## Faun & Games (Xanth, No. 21)

By Piers Anthony

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Packed with magic, mystery, and mirth, *Faun & Games* is the freshest and most exciting Xanth adventure in a month of Pundays!

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### Editorial Review

From Kirkus Reviews

What can a hapless reviewer possibly find to say about Anthony's Xanth yarns--here the 21st of that ilk--that hasn't been said before? Astonishing as it may seem, Anthony has found the present puns-and-anything-goes format too restrictive, so he's introduced a miniature planet called Ptero that contains (wait for this) everything in Xanth that is or ever could be! The future sure won't have been what it used to be. So: evidently, nothing much--but stay tuned for next year's adventure (according to reports from Ptero, it'll be about zombies). And, meantime, in the author's afterword, you can catch up on the latest news about Anthony's teeth. -- Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

About the Author

Piers Anthony is one of the world's most popular fantasy authors, and a *New York Times* bestseller twenty-one times over. His Xanth novels have been read and loved by millions of readers around the world, and he daily receives hundreds of letters from his devoted fans.

In addition to the Xanth series, Anthony is the author of many other best-selling works. Piers Anthony lives in Inverness, Florida.

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FAUN & GAMES

1

FORREST

Hey, Faun, how about some fun?" Forrest Faun rubbed what remained of his night's sleep out of his eyes and looked down to the base of his tree. There stood a fetching nymph with all the usual nymphly features: pretty face, flowing hair, perfect figure, and no clothing. But there was something amiss.

"What do you mean?" he asked as he sat up in a fork, still getting his bearings.

"What do you think I mean, Faun? Come down and chase me, the way fauns always do to nymphs."

Then he had it. "You're no nymph."

"Oh, pooh!" she swore, pouting. She dissolved into smoke and reformed as a luscious clothed demoness. "I am D. Mentia, out seeking routine entertainment or mischief while my better half waxes disgustingly motherly. What gave me away?"

"If I tell you, will you go somewhere else?" It was usually possible to get rid of demons if one made a suitable deal with them.

"Yes, if you want me to." Her bright yellow dress fuzzed, showing the vague outline of her body beneath, with almost a suggestion of a forbidden panty line.

So there was a catch. "Why wouldn't I want you to?"

"Because I have dreadful information that will puzzle and alarm you and perhaps change your whole outlook."

That seemed like adequate reason. Forrest, now fully awake, jumped down to the ground, landing neatly on his hoofs. "What gave you away was your manner. You weren't acting like a nymph. You were way too forward and intelligent. Much of a nymph's appeal is in her seeming reticence and lack of intellect. Now what's this dreadful information?"

"Follow me." Mentia whirled in place, so that her body twisted into a tight spiral before untwisting facing the opposite direction, and walked away. Her skirt shrank so as to show her legs as far up as was feasible

without running out of limb. But of course Forrest didn't notice, because nothing a demoness showed was very real.

She led him across the glade to a tree on the far side. "See."

Forrest stared with dismay at the clog tree. It was wilting, and its clogs were falling to the ground. That could mean only one thing: it had lost its spirit.

As it happened, the clog tree's spirit was Forrest's friend: Branch Faun. They had known each other for almost two centuries, because their two trees were in sight of each other. Almost every day Forrest would drop out of his sandalwood tree, and join Branch in the glade between them to dance a jig or two. With luck, their jiggling would attract the fleeting attention of a nymph or three, who would join in, jiggling. With further luck, jig and jiggle would lead to a pleasant chase and celebration.

But this morning Branch's tree was in a sad state. It wouldn't fade so soon if its faun were merely absent; fauns and nymphs shared an awareness with their trees that alerted them instantly if harm came to either. Let a human forester even come near such a tree with an axe, and its faun would have a fit. Let a faun split a hoof, and his tree would shudder. Such reactions were independent of distance; a faun could run far away from his tree, and still be closely attuned to it. They felt each other's pain.

"Are you trying to ignore me?" Mentia asked warningly. Demonesses could handle almost anything except that.

"No. You're right. I am puzzled and alarmed by this dreadful scene. Do you know anything about it?"

"No. I just happened to note it in passing, so I looked for the closest creature who might be tormented by it." He glanced at her. "You're one crazy organism."

"Thank you," she said, flushing red with candy stripes. The color extended to her clothing and hair, and traces of it radiated into the air around her.

The clog tree's distress meant that Branch was in serious trouble, if not dead. What could have happened? Branch had been fine yesterday. In fact he had encountered a nymph from a lady slipper tree whose slippers gave her special fleetness, just as the sandals from Forrest's sandalwood tree gave him excellent footing, and the clogs from Branch's tree protected his hoofs. They had had quite a merry chase. Because that was what fauns and nymphs did; they chased each other until they came together, and then they celebrated in a manner that children were not supposed to see. Because it did tend to get dull just sitting in one's tree all the time. In fact, Forrest now remembered, the nymph, clad only in her slippers, had led Branch a chase right out of sight. Meanwhile her friend from an oak tree, named Kara Oke, had done some very nice singing to background music of wind through trees, so Forrest had had his own distraction. Naturally he had chased her, and naturally she had fled, but not too swiftly, because she was still singing her oak song. So he had caught her, and they had celebrated in the usual fashion, while she continued singing. That had been interesting, because she had sung of every detail of the experience they were sharing, making it a work of musical art. Then she had returned to her tree, satisfied that her song worked. There weren't any other nymphs around at the moment, so Forrest had returned to his own tree and settled down for the night. And now his friend was gone.

"So what are you going to do about it?" Mentia inquired.

Do? She was right; he probably should be doing something. But what? "What do you think?"

"I think you will follow their footprints, so you can find out what happened to them."

"Now that's really sensible," he agreed.

The demoness turned smoky black. "Darn!"

He set off in search of them. He had no trouble following their tracks: her slipper prints, which were hourglass shaped, in the manner of the nymph herself, and his clog prints, which were forceful and furred. They looped around other trees, as she made cute dodges and diversions. It was the chase that counted; fauns and nymphs loved to run almost as much as they loved to dance. The better the chase, the better the celebration at the end. Forrest remembered a nymph once who had been in a bad mood, because her tree was suffering a fungus infestation, and had simply stood there. This was of course a complete turn-off, and no faun had touched her. Any nymph who wanted nothing to do with any particular faun had only to refuse to

move, and he would leave her alone. Sometimes a nymph teased a faun, pretending disinterest, then leaping into pursuit the moment he turned his back. If she caught him, it was her advantage, and he had to do whatever she wanted. Of course that was exactly the same as what he wanted, but other fauns would taunt him unmercifully for getting caught.

Mentia, floating along beside him, was getting bored. "Are you ready for me to depart?"

"Yes," he agreed absently.

"Good." She remained where she was. He realized that he should have urged her to stay; then she would have been sure that he was up to nothing interesting.

The tracks veered toward the Void. That was the nearby region of no return. Of course every faun and nymph knew better than to enter it, because there was no way out of it. Anything that crossed the boundary was doomed. Only special creatures, like the night mares, could escape it, because they weren't real in the way ordinary folk were. They had very little substance.

"Don't float too near the Void," Forrest warned the demoness.

She changed course to approach the boundary, then paused. "Say, you are a cunning one!" she said with admiration. "You knew I'd automatically do the opposite. It almost worked, too. But I'm only a little crazy. You have to be a lot crazy to venture into the Void."

"Maybe next time," he muttered.

The nymph was clearly teasing Branch, by passing flirtingly close to the fringe of the Void. Her prints almost touched the boundary, then moved away, then came close again. The menace of that dread region added to the thrill of the chase. Forrest had done it too, and knew exactly the steps to take to be sure of never straying across the line.

Then his sandals balked. He stopped, perplexed; what was the matter? His sandals were magic, and protected his hoofs from harm, and if he were about to step somewhere harmful, they stopped him. Yet he saw nothing ahead to be concerned about.

"So what's with you?" Mentia asked. "Tired of walking?"

"I didn't stop," he explained. "My sandals did."

"Say, I'm getting to like you. You're almost as weird as I am."

"That's impossible."

"Thank you." This time her flush of pleasure was purple with green polka dots, and it extended down her legs and out across the ground around her. "So why did your sandals stop?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe it was a false alarm."

Still, his sandals had never yet been wrong. So he dropped to his furry knees and examined the ground before him. It was ordinary. There were a few smiling gladiolas, the happiest of flowers, and beyond them some horse radishes were flicking off flies with their tails. He thought of asking the nearest horse if it knew of anything harmful here, but he didn't understand plant language very well, and in any event all it would say would be "neigh." So finally he got up and made a detour around the place.

"Oh, well," the demoness said, disappointed.

But now he couldn't find the trail. Both sets of tracks were gone. So he turned back--and that was when he saw it. A splinter of reverse wood on the ground. He was sure of its identity, because the gladiola closest to it was drooping sadly. And right across it was a lady slipper print. The nymph had inadvertently stepped on the splinter. It hadn't hurt her directly, because it was lying flat. But it must have affected the fleet magic of her slipper, so that she had lost her sure footing.

"You see something," D. Mentia remarked astutely.

Now he saw the clog-print next to it, and realized the awful truth. The nymph had lost her balance, because of the reversal of her slipper magic, and teetered on the edge of the boundary of the Void. Branch had collided with her, caught by surprise by her sudden stop. And the two had sprawled into the Void.

"Yes. They are gone."

It was a freak accident, the kind that would happen hardly once in a century. The reverse wood splinter might have been blown there recently by an errant gust of wind. It would have been harmless, except when it came

into contact with something magical. Then that abrupt reversal--

Branch and the nymph were lost. They would never get out of the Void. And their trees would suffer, for without its spirit a magical tree slowly lost its magic and became, O dreadful destiny, virtually mundane. It was a fate, many believed, worse than extinction.

"I'm sorry," the demoness said. "That means that you won't be entertaining me any more."

Forrest had no idea where the nymph's tree was, but knew it was suffering similarly. He hoped there would be another nymph free to join it and save it. Meanwhile, he did know where Branch's tree was. But what could he do? He could not care for two trees; the relationship didn't work that way. He was bound to his sandalwood tree. He knew of no fauns looking for trees. There were more trees than amenable fauns and nymphs, so that some trees that might have flourished magically became ordinary. It was sad, because the right trees had much to offer their companion spirits, but true.

Then he thought of something. It was a vanishingly tiny chance, but marginally better than nothing. "You're a spirit," he said to the demoness. "How would you like to adopt a tree?"

"You mean, become a tree dryad, so that I would live almost forever and always protect it?"

"Yes. It's a worthy occupation. It doesn't have to be a nymph. Any caring spirit will do, if the commitment is there. And the clogs would protect your feet."

"Commitment. Protected feet." She tried to look serious, but smoke started puffing out her ears, and finally she exploded into a hilarious fireball. "Ho ho ho!"

Then again, maybe the notion had been worse than nothing. Demons had no souls, because they were the degraded remnants of souls themselves. They cared for nothing and nobody. "Sorry I mentioned it."

"Oh, I'm not! That was my laugh for the day." The smoke coalesced into the extraordinarily feminine female woman distaff luscious shape of girlish persuasion with the slightly translucent dress. "A tree nymph! You are a barrel of laughs." She formed into a brown barrel with brightly colored pancake-shaped laughs overflowing its rim.

Forrest ignored her as well as he could, and headed for his home tree. How could he have been so stupid as to make such a suggestion to a demoness?

She followed. "The oddest thing is that my better half well might have agreed, were she not otherwise occupied. She has half a soul. But also a half mortal child, so she's busy. I'm the half without the soul."

As if he couldn't have guessed. "You could share the soul of the tree."

"The soul of a shoe tree," she exclaimed, her laughter building up another head of steam. "A clog sole.

Protecting my feet. Oh, hold me, somebody; I think I'm going to expire of mirth." Her body swelled until it burst and disappeared, leaving only a faint titter behind.

This time, it seemed she really was gone. But Forrest didn't chance it; he walked directly back without looking around.

When he returned and looked at the clog tree, his heart sank into his stomach. The poor thing was so droopy and sad. It was all that remained of his friend Branch. He had to do something to help it.

He walked up and put a hand on the trunk. "Have confidence, clog tree. I will find you another spirit. Just give me time to do it."

The tree must have heard him, because its leaves perked up and became greener. It knew him, because he had been near it many times, and was the friend of its faun. It trusted him to help it.

He had promised, and he would do his best. Some folk thought that fauns and nymphs were empty-headed creatures, incapable of feeling or commitment, but those folk were confusing types. The creatures of the Faun and Nymph Retreat had no memory beyond a day, so every new day was a new adventure. But that was the magic of the retreat; any who left there started to turn real, which meant they aged and had memories. Some preserved their youth by finding useful jobs. Jewel the Nymph had taken on the chore of spreading gems throughout Xanth, so that others would have the delightful challenge of finding them, and later she had married a mortal man and become a grandmother. Many others had adopted magical trees, just as Forrest had. It was a kind of symbiosis, which was a fancy word meaning that the two got along great together and helped each other survive. The trees kept the fauns or nymphs young, because trees lived a long time and

their spirits shared that longevity. The fauns or nymphs protected their trees, bringing them water in times of drought and harassing woodsmen who wanted to chop the trees down. Nymphs had very effective ways to distract woodsmen, or to persuade them to spare their trees. Sometimes a nymph would even marry a woodsman, if that was what it took. But her first loyalty was always to her tree. Fauns had other ways, such as setting booby traps or informing large dragons where a nice man sized meal could be had near a certain tree. One way or another, they protected their timber, as well as enhancing the natural magic of the trees. But the sudden loss of Branch left the clog tree in trouble. Such relationships were not lightly made or broken. A faun who lost his tree died, and a tree who lost its faun turned mundane, an even sadder state. So he had to find a replacement.

"If only I had the faintest notion *how*," he said in anguish.

There was a swirl of smoke. It formed into a large pot labeled SEX. "I should have thought a faun already knew how," it said. "But I suppose I could show you, if--"

He should have known that the demoness hadn't really gone. She was still hoping he might do something entertaining. "How to find a suitable spirit for the clog tree," he clarified. "Naturally you have no better notion than I do."

"Naturally not," the pot agreed, its label changing to KETTLE as it turned black. "I would never think of going to ask the Good Magician Humfrey. The last time I suggested that, I had to guide a stupid gargoyle there, and he wound up saving Xanth from whatever. Actually that adventure did have its points; it certainly was interesting." The kettle formed back into the luscious lady shape. "So there's no point in suggesting it, especially since the Good Magician charges a year's Service for an Answer. So you might as well abandon all hope and just let the stupid tree die."

"I'll go see the Good Magician!" Forrest exclaimed. Then he realized that she had tricked him into reacting, just as he had tried to trick her. He had said it, and the clog tree had heard; its leaves were becoming almost wholesome. Now he had to do it. But a year's Service? "I can't leave my own tree that long," he protested belatedly. "And I don't even know the way there."

"You need a guide," Mentia said. "I need to go bother my better half some more, but I can find a friend to show you the way to Humfrey's castle."

"I don't want any friend of yours!"

"Excellent. You will find her just as lusciously annoying as I am. I'll be right back with her." The demoness popped off.

Again, he had said the wrong thing. But he was now committed to going. How would the trees fare during his absence? He didn't want them to suffer, but there didn't seem to be much of an alternative.

But there might be a way to get some help on that. There was a cave nearby, where a nice cousin of Com Pewter dwelt. She was Com Passion, and she loved everybody, because a love spring flowed in her cave. Her powers were limited, but she would do any favor she could manage for the local folk. Maybe she would be able to help the trees.

Unfortunately, there was a complication about dealing with her, which was why he normally stayed clear. But at the moment he didn't seem to have much choice. He would just have to hope that it would work out all right.

He fetched his knapsack, which he always used when going far from his tree, and ran through field and dale until he came to Passion's cave. Lovely purple flowers grew at its entrance, and the scent of the air was sweet.

Oh, no! He had in his haste forgotten something important. It was usual to bring a little gift to Passion when visiting her. It wasn't exactly to put her in a good mood, because she was always in a good mood. It wasn't just protocol, either. It was that a gift tended to make her feel that she should do something in return--and he really needed that return favor.

What could he find for a gift? Passion's main weakness was that she couldn't do anything physical. She couldn't walk out of her cave and see the sights or pick the flowers. So sometimes folk brought her stories of the things outside, to keep her informed. But he suspected he would need more than that.

Then he remembered something. The chips! Passion loved chips. What she did with them no one knew, but she truly valued them. He knew where some nice chips grew.

He ran to the glade where the chips were. Sure enough, there was a nice new crop of them. Chips of every kind grew in profusion. Which ones would please her most? He pondered briefly, then went for a Potato Chip. The moment he harvested it, he felt the urge to speak, and his words were really salty. He also felt extremely thirsty. He quickly put it into his knapsack and sealed it shut.

Across the glade was a brown region. He went there and harvested a Chocolate Chip. It smelled good enough to eat, but he didn't dare take time for that now. If he ate one, he might get a hunger for more, and be unable to stop. So he popped it quickly into his bag.

One more should do it. He looked around, and saw an old block in the center of the glade. So he went and took a chip off that. It was very stubborn and didn't want to turn loose, but when he touched it he got stubborn too, and finally did pry the chip off the old block.

Now he was as ready as he could be to face Com Passion. That wasn't nearly enough, but it would have to do. He ran back to her abode.

He nerved himself and entered the cave. It was very nice inside. He knew that it was really a rather ordinary cave, but the overflow from the love spring ran through it, and some of the water evaporated and suffused the air. That was part of the complication. He would have tried to breathe through a cloth or something, but that would be impolite, and impoliteness was bad form when one came begging a favor. So he took it in stride, and his stride was good. He reached the center, where reclined a device fashioned of passion wood. He stopped and took a breath.

Before he spoke, a screen lighted. Who is there? it inquired in neat cursive script.

"Forrest Faun," he said. "From the nearby sandalwood tree."

Why dear boy, how very nice to see *you!* the screen said, with a sweet row of hearts across the bottom:

"Uh, likewise, I'm sure," he said. This wasn't going well. "Uh, I brought you a gift."

The screen glowed brightly. Why how very thoughtful of you, dear boy! And the hearts grew larger.

Not well at all! "Uh, here they are." He fumbled in his bag and pulled out the Chocolate Chip. "A sweet for the sweet." He found another chip and fumbled it out. "A salt for the salty." Oops; that wasn't right. So he rushed on to the third: "And a chip off the old block for the stubborn." Worse yet!

*Why dear boy, I believe you are flustered* the screen said, smiling.

"Uh, yes," he confessed. He was two centuries old, but felt like an adolescent elf.

How very sweet. The screen turned Valentine pink. And what is your request of me, dear boy?

Forrest launched into his story of the fate of Branch Faun and the need to save his tree. "So I must go ask the Good Magician what to do," he concluded. "But I can't even leave my own tree that long, safely. So I thought maybe you could, well, sort of change reality to make the trees all right, for a while, if you wanted to, until I get back." Suddenly it seemed rather stupid.

So all this is just to help a tree?

"Yes," he confessed, feeling woefully inadequate. The whole notion was ridiculous. He would have to find some other way. "But I guess you have more important things to do. I'm sorry I bothered you."

*Dear boy, you have such a generous spirit, I really like you. Of course you must save the tree. I will help you.*

"You will?" He was amazed. He had thought it so trivial, as far as anyone else was concerned, but now it seemed important again.

*Yes. Of course I have my price.*

Dread surged back. What changed reality would she require of him? "Yes."

*You know I have a romantic nature, but that I am a machine. I can only dream of love, not actually experience it.*

"Yes." This sounded worse.

*But I can on occasion approximate love, if I have a cooperative partner.*

She could? What was she going to make him do? But he was stuck for it. "Yes."

*Kiss my mouse.*



"But you don't have a mouth, Com Passion."

*Not mouth. Mouse.*

"What?"

*I have a mouse, she explained patiently. I want you to kiss it. What term do you not understand?*

"But--a mouse?"

*A small living creature, useful for going where I am unable to go. In this case, romance.*

She thought it would be romantic for him to kiss her mouse? "I--if I have to--"

*Be thankful I managed to exchange the donkey I had recently for the mouse. It was an asinine creature.*

He certainly wouldn't have wanted to kiss her asinine creature. "Okay."

Then the cave chamber shimmered, and he knew she was changing reality. It became a lovely glade surrounded by red, green, purple, yellow, and orange trees, with their assorted round fruits of similar colors, and flour plants growing in the center. From the far side came the prettiest nymph he could remember seeing, with thick lustrous brown hair that spread out to form a cloak for her body. But it could not conceal the elegant curves of that graceful form as she walked.

She came up to him as he stood somewhat bemused by the change. He had not expected a reality shift of this magnitude. And what was the nymph doing here?

"I am Terian," she said. "Kiss me."

"But I'm supposed to kiss a--a mouse," he said.

"I am that one. I am the Mouse Terian. I am older than I look."

"You're the mouse?" He stared at her. "But you're beautiful!"

"Thank you. It has been forty millennia since I have had a compliment like that. Others have thought me to be primitive or crude."

"Oh, you are neither of those things! You are the loveliest creature I can imagine."

"Thank you. Now you must kiss me, for I can't kiss you. I don't know how."

"Like this," he said enthusiastically. He folded her lithe and softly yielding body in his arms and kissed her firmly on her luscious lips. At first she was hesitant, but then she got into the feel of it and kissed him back. What had been a halfway experimental effort became a full-fledged delight.

After a wonderfully long time he felt obliged to break it off. For one thing, he had forgotten to breathe. He looked into her deep brown eyes. "Oh, Terian, that was the greatest kiss I ever had!"

"Thank you." Then she turned and walked back across the glade. Astonished, he just watched, not knowing what to make of it.

The scene shimmered, and the cave returned. He was staring at the screen, where the words *Thank you* were scripted.

"I don't understand," he said.

*Mouse Terian could not stay. I can alter reality only so much. Perhaps some day someone will go out into the field and harvest me a cereal port so that I can make better use of the mouse. But she did enjoy your kiss.*

*And so did I.*

He was slowly and uncertainly recovering his grip on reality. "She--what is she like, really?"

A mouse ran up on top of the wooden frame holding the screen and stood on its hind feet for a moment, facing him. *Here.*

So Terian really was a mouse. He truly had kissed a mouse. Transformed by a temporarily local change of reality, but nevertheless a mouse.

Yet a detail didn't fit. "But she spoke to me! In sound."

*I am rather proud of my sound system. As the words appeared on the screen, they came in sound too. I was the one speaking.*

So it could all be explained. It had been crafted from sound and temporary reality. It hadn't really been a lovely nymph. Still, it had been impressive. "I think you are getting close to the feeling of romance, Com Passion," he said sincerely.

*Thank you. Wait until I complete my next upgrade. Then more than kissing will be feasible.*

That was somewhat daunting. "Is--is that all?"

*Yes, unfortunately, for now. Take the two disks beside me and set one in each tree. They will alter the trees' reality slightly, so that your absence will seem like only a day. They will not wither or wilt. But you must be back within a month, or the effect will fade, and then they will suffer.*

"Thank you," he said gratefully. He picked up the two small wooden disks and tucked them carefully into his knapsack.

*Any time, dear boy. It was a pleasure.*

He made his way outside. The fresh air cleared his head of the fumes from the love spring. He realized that in that ambiance he had wanted to experience the romance, and that must have helped the effect. What a woman Terian had seemed to be! Some day she would surely make some male mouse excruciatingly happy. And once Com Passion was fully compatible, she might make the notorious Com Pewter happy too.

There was a swirl of smoke before him. Two parts of it descended to the ground and formed into feet. The rest became a smoky nymph figure. "This must be the faun," she said.

"Of course it's me, Mentia," he said. "Who else would it be?"

The dark face frowned. "I am not Mentia."

Oops. Demonesses could be troublesome when annoyed. "I apologize. I thought any creature that lovely had to be Mentia."

"Oh you did, did you? Mentia's crazy. Consider this."

The form shifted and reassembled, becoming so exquisite that it was difficult to look at her without flinching.

"You're right," Forrest said, shielding his eyes with one hand. "That's twice as lovely as she was."

"And only half as lovely as I could be, if I cared to make the effort. Well, come on, faun; I don't have all week."

"Come on? Where?"

"To Humfrey's castle, of course. Where else did you think?"

A dim bulb flickered. "You're Mentia's friend!"

"Hmph. An exaggeration. But yes, I am Demoness Sire, and I did owe her half a favor. So I'll guide you there. But that's all. No round trip; that would require a whole favor. And I'm not going to make you deliriously happy enroute, so forget about that too."

"I wasn't even thinking of it."

She looked disappointed. "You weren't?"

This could be more mischief. "Well, I was trying to suppress the thought of it, with imperfect success. I am a faun, you know. We're related to the satyrs. We have similar urges, but more self control."

She considered. "Suppose I looked like this?" She became somewhat more luscious.

"Please don't, because then I would be thinking of it all the time."

"Suppose I became like this?" The scant clothing on her form shrank, causing parts of her to bulge dangerously.

"Then I would be so overwhelmed I'd be constantly grabbing for you, just like a satyr, unable to help myself."

She nodded, satisfied, and sagged into a lesser form. He was learning how to handle demonesses.

"But first I must see to the trees," he added. "Then I'm all yours--or would be, if I weren't struggling not to think of it."

D. Sire looked even more satisfied. She drifted beside him as he wended his way back to his home glade. "Is it true that nymphs & fauns have very little magic, apart from their longevity, empty-headedness, and insatiable urge to pretend to summon fleets of storks?" "Flocks of storks," he responded shortly.

"Flocks. So it is true, cute-horns?"

"Not exactly. The magic of nymphs is to become phenomenally attractive to males when they run and bounce, so that any male who spies a running nymph is compelled to pursue her though he knows he can't catch her. The magic of fauns is to run fast enough to catch the nymphs, and to make them desire to celebrate

when there is physical contact."

"Fascinating," she said, sounding bored. "Does it work on other females?"

"Why, I hadn't thought of that. I suppose if they removed their clothes and ran--"

"I mean the animal magnetism. Do real women get hot when a faun touches them?"

"Well, we don't chase real women. They know too much, and they aren't as well shaped. In addition, they often regard fauns as misshapen, and are repelled. So there's no way of knowing--"

"So they tend to avoid contact. But if it should happen, what then?" She dropped to the ground and put her arms around him. Her upper section pressed into his chest in two firm places, and her lower section pressed his fur in one firmer place. "Is this sufficient contact?" Then her eyes grew large and dreamy. "Oh, it's true! Suddenly I want to get much closer to you." The three places increased their pressures.

Forrest struggled to disengage. "You're not a woman, you're a demoness. If I tried to celebrate with you, you would just dissolve into laughing gas."

"True," she agreed, dissolving into puffs of vapor that spelled out HA HA. "But nevertheless also true that your touch inspires a certain lust. So I shall make sure not to tease you from too close."

"Thank you." It had been all he could do to stop from trying what she had been teasing him to try.

"Unless I change my smoky mind," she said, reforming into something luscious.

He went to the two trees, and tucked a disk into the lowest cleft of branches of each. The trees did not seem to change, but he trusted Com Passion. They should be all right. He fetched a spare pair of sandals, just in case, and put them in his knapsack. "Now I am ready to go. Which way?"

"South. He lives below the Gap Chasm."

"The what?"

"Don't tell me you don't remember! The forget spell wore off it years ago."

"It isn't that I don't remember. It's that I never knew."

"Oh. Well, it's a huge cleft in the ground that is impossible to penetrate unless you know how." She pursed her lips as she spoke the words "cleft" and "penetrate," as if suggesting something naughty.

Forrest had no idea what nuance she was nuancing, so he ignored it. "Will you tell me how?"

"Of course not. That's more of a favor than I owe Mentia."

He had thought as much. Still, limited guidance was better than none. Maybe he would be able to ask along the way.

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