

Excerpt from *Bearskin* by Tannara Young

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The first thing that Henrick saw was a giant bearskin stretched out on a rack. The skin side had intricate patterns and arcane symbols painted on it.

“I’ve enchanted this skin to slowly extract the sylphyl and unravel the spells on you, while blocking the magical effects that have been warped. However, to do it without killing you will take a while,” the magician said.

“How long?” Henrick asked.

“Seven years,” Gottilf replied, examining his fingernails.

“Seven years!”

“It wouldn’t do either of us any good to go faster. It would destroy the sylphyl and it’s unlikely you would survive the process—you would go insane or die or maybe both.”

Henrick gritted his teeth. The despair he had pushed aside yesterday welled up again. But then, what did it matter, as broken as he already was? Seven years had an end, and looking crazy and dangerous wouldn’t be new.

“Fine,” he said.

“Before you agree, there’s more,” Gottilf said. “During those seven years, you cannot cut your hair, pare your nails, or even take a bath.”

“Seven years without taking a bath? People are scared enough of me already, without looking and smelling like a troll.”

“It’s what I can offer, my friend,” the magician said.