



Gift for a Demon

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Description: Dave never planned on becoming a human gift to the dethroned King of Hell.

Overlooked and cast away, Dave had to learn how to protect himself and fight his own battles. Of course, no one taught him how to survive in Hell, if that was even where he was. Melchom had once ruled over Hell until a human betrayed and stole his crown. Now Hell's paymaster and with the scars to show for it, he's vowed not to make the same mistakes. But how could he say no to the most enticing man he'd ever seen? One who offered up his fear for Melchom to feast on so willingly?

It's not an issue of chemistry. Hell is a complex ecosystem, and there are more forces and prophecies in place than either of them could've ever foreseen.

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CHAPTER 1

DAVE

Demons were real.

It was either that or Dave was completely losing his mind—for real this time—and he didn't think he was.

It made no sense.

One second, he was at the stupid seance the friends of his best friend's boyfriend had organized. Dave had thought it was stupid, but seances were in now, and Jordan had insisted. He wanted to merge their friends groups and be a happy family or something, and Dave had never been good at telling him no.

Things got a bit fuzzy after that. He swore he'd just blinked, something had happened that had involved flames swirling beneath his eyelids, and he'd landed here.

It looked like a prison cell, only it smelled so strongly of sulfur that it was burning his nostrils, the bars in the one wall that wasn't just volcanic stones burned his hands when he touched them... oh, and he now had voices in his head.

Demonic voices.

How long do you think it's gonna take him to process?

Humans are stupid.

Do you think Melchom is going to accept him?

He's not really his type.

But he's a David. Melchom likes those.

Dave's eyes watered, hands clutching at the strands of wavy honey locks he'd spent way too long styling just hours before.

The voices hadn't stopped since he'd opened his eyes to... whatever this was.

He would've thought someone had spiked his drink or given him an edible without him noticing, but then he'd seen the shadows and the lanky red-skinned demon that reminded him of the cartoons he used to watch when his parents weren't home. His hallucinations were never so visual. Not to mention his hands still hurt from clutching the bars, and he thought he was going to pass out if the sulfur didn't burn his nose off first.

Was that even possible?

He's one of the dramatic ones.

Was that sass in the voice? And why did it have to be so high-pitched?

Dave would show them dramatic if he could except, apparently, demons didn't like to show themselves or something, instead preferring to play mind tricks from a safe distance.

Instead, he gritted his teeth and sat down on the volcanic stones that made up the

floor. He figured it didn't matter if his clothes got ruined by the jagged stones, or if his skin was scratched or even torn by them. A, his hands were already useless. B, if he really was in Hell, as the voices had oh-so-kindly explained when he'd first showed up there, the damage the stones could inflict would be the least of his problems, right?

Arms wrapped around his legs, head buried between his knees, Dave let out a faint whimper. After all, what was the point of keeping a strong facade? They could get inside his fucking head.

He'd never been known for acting tough, anyway. No one looked at him and thought he'd be a threat or someone to take seriously. Only Jordan believed he was the most likely to stab someone if left unleashed.

Dave sniffled. What would Jordan be doing now?

Was he also in a cell like him? Was everyone from the seance now trapped here? Or were they still at the warehouse, chanting words they probably didn't even understand? They would've realized he was gone, but... How? Had he just disappeared in a puff of smoke? What if they thought he was pulling some stupid prank, so they weren't even searching for him?

He shook his head. Thinking like that was not going to help.

How much longer was he expected to wait still, anyway?

Melchom is busy. Melchom will come fetch you when he finishes his duties.

He had a meeting with the Princes of Hell today, remember?

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Ohhh, that's right.

Dave's head spun up.

Princes of Hell. He'd somehow heard that right. His new reality not only included Hell, and demons with annoyingly high-pitched voices taking residence in his head, and scorched hands, and scratched skin, and ruined clothes. It also included a hierarchical version of Hell with Princes in it.

To be fair, he hadn't paid too much attention in church camp, but he was pretty sure the Princes of Hell weren't known for their kindness.

He was not going to last a day, was he?

The thought gave him conflicted emotions. He didn't think he wanted to die—given he wasn't already dead, because there was no way he could wrap his head around the fact that he was here—but... Did he want to live in... Hell? Where he may or may not be a demon's type, and other demons would be chiming in his head, non-stop?

Maybe if push came to shove, he could lunge toward the burning bars. The idea made him recoil, but it should kill him, right? If he pressed himself hard enough?

Or he could piss off that Melchom guy enough to make his death quick. That had to be a thing, right?

Should we tell him?

Will you shut the fuck up?

“No.” Hearing his voice resonate against the walls shocked his system for a second. His throat sounded too scratchy, the way he imagined it would sound if he’d just been rescued from a fire. Clearing his throat probably wouldn’t help, but he tried anyway. “What should I know? Tell me.”

Dave wasn’t sure if the voices would pick up on the false note of bravado or if it would make a difference. He’d lived most of his life by the motto of fake it till you make it, though. He didn’t see why that would have to change now.

Melchom feeds on fear. He won’t kill you right away.

“He what?” Dave murmured.

It shouldn’t shock him after all the new information he’d been gathering in the last... hour—hours?—but it left him shivering.

He hasn’t had a gift in so long, I’m sure he’ll want to enjoy you.

Dave trembled. The way the demonic voice said that made it sound bad.

Nope.

Not going there.

“What’s a gift?”

That would be more important—and maybe a safer topic. Maybe it would answer one of the main questions circling through his brain: why the fuck he was suddenly stuck in a prison cell in Hell.

Cassius, stop!

But he's finally talking to us!

Melchom is going to punish you if he finds out.

Why would he find out?

"Guys!" Doubt nagged at the back of his head.

Why did the voices sound so much like the kids he worked with at the daycare?

Dave frowned. Perhaps it actually was a hallucination, and he was losing his mind. If he tried to ignore what his body was telling him with the smells and the burned flesh... Him losing his mind was the most logical explanation.

It wouldn't be the first time, either.

So, maybe that was how he should look at it. He was still at the seance with Jordan and Jordan's boyfriend's friends. Or maybe they'd moved somewhere else, but Jordan would've told the others about his episodes, so he'd be... safe wherever he was, right?

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He'd just ride it out, then, until someone took him to a hospital or injected him with something that would make it all stop.

It didn't matter if his episodes had never looked quite this realistic or elaborate.

Take that, Ms. Being Self-Aware Is Really Important For Your Road To Wellness.

Perhaps he should issue an apology to his last doctor. He was now following her advice, wasn't he?

Is he scolding us? How dare he?

Of course, his moment of brightness wasn't going to stop the voices from storming around his head.

We'll let Melchom know. That'll teach him.

But that means admitting we've been talking to him.

Ohhhh.

We'll just keep torturing him when he's not there.

Yeah, I like that! He works a lot, anyway.

Shit.

Dave scratched at his forearm. He didn't want to find out what the high-pitched voices meant by torturing him.

“Or we can figure something out.”

He was definitely losing it, but it didn't matter because it wasn't real anyway. There was no reason to incite the voices to get meaner. That was never good, regardless of how safe he might be.

What the fuck had he done to burn his hands, though? Was that a mind trick, too? Usually he got scratches because he tried to jump fences, or he threw himself at a bush, but... Unless his eyes were failing him—and he was doing his best to focus on his outstretched palms—his hands were literally scorched. He wasn't even sure a stove would explain the carnage, and surely, someone would've stopped him before he could get away with that.

Panic tried to claw in again, but he shook it off.

No, this was all some delusion, some episode. He just needed to be patient and wait for someone to lock him in a ward. Then he'd have to fight with doctors who would want to increase his meds, but...

One thing at a time.

First, he needed to make it through the hellish maze his head had become as unscathed as possible.

What could you possibly offer us? No offense, but you're a mess, human.

Probably the messiest human I've ever seen.

“Gee, thanks,” he mumbled, eyes on the floor. “This Melchom... he’s a stronger demon than you, right? Or, more powerful?”

He used to be King.

We’re just minions. Of course he’s stronger.

“So...” Thinking back to every TV show he’d watched, Dave licked his lips. They felt dry as all hell, pun absolutely intended. “There must be something you want from him, right? Something you can use to your advantage?”

Why, yes, negotiating with cowardly demons who didn’t even show their faces seemed like a bulletproof plan.

...Or not, he thought, when no answer came for more than a few minutes. He needed to focus on the conversation, though. Otherwise his brain wandered to other questions and existential angst like, did time run the same time in Hell, if he was there? He remembered a show where they said one minute on Earth was like a year in Hell, or something like that. But what if it was the other way around? Would people still be searching for him?

Would Jordan, or any of the coworkers he’d never quite succeeded at befriending?

All right, human. We want a lock of his hair.

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“Okay.” Dave swallowed. He’d pictured grabbing something from a room when this “Melchom” wasn’t looking. A lock of hair would involve more stealth. He wasn’t sure he had it. “And how would I bring that to you?”

We have eyes everywhere. Something resembling laughter resonated within his ears. We’ll take it from you.

If you manage to do it.

“Sure, okay.” Dave nodded.

Did demons sleep? If they did, it shouldn’t be so hard. He’d just need to survive a few hours, tops. If they didn’t sleep...

No, it would be okay. He wasn’t going to stay here that long.

He couldn’t.

Dave had just managed to convince himself of that fact when a loud, screeching sound set him on edge. His head snapped up to see the bars sliding to the side.

Did grease not exist in Hell? Combined with the perfectly-tuned voices in his head, it could be the perfect ring of Hell.

Ohh, good idea! Note it down, sib.

Well, shit.

Did they ever leave his head?

“Kneel before me, human.”

Double shit.

Had they done it on purpose? Kept him distracted so he didn't notice when the looming body materialized?

Dave shook his head. There was no point in losing sleep over that.

Now, losing sleep over the demon before him...

He was pretty sure his gasp was audible when his gaze trailed upward.

Where the hell had his brain gotten the idea that demons were fucking giants? Dave would be impressed if he reached past the guy's waist. He didn't feel his knees would hold him upright long enough to test it out, but still.

The demon had the widest shoulders, too.

And those pecs...

Dave would totally be salivating over all of that if he wasn't fearing for his life at the same time. At least, if this was all his brain again, he'd given Dave good fodder material. The demon wasn't wearing clothes either, except for a piece of dark cloth covering his groin.

Which meant this had to be his imagination, because why on Earth would demons have any kind of decorum?

Are you deaf?

Huh?

The new voice in his head wasn't like the others. The opposite, actually. Low-pitched and gravely, it exuded power and made him want to submit in every possible way.

His delirious episodes didn't usually involve sexy times.

"I'm... I'm not deaf."

What stuck with him was how there had been no mockery in the question. Should he make the argument that Hell wasn't ableist when one of the local activist groups set up a new protest?

Then again, he imagined that if the person hadn't heard a sound in his life—or in years—and they suddenly heard that voice in their heads, it would be quite terrifying.

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So, jury was out on that one, he guessed.

“Then kneel.”

Dave didn't want to kneel—he never did, for anyone. At least, he didn't think he wanted to, but after a second of his muscles clamping down, his body just... shifted to a very unstable, very shaky kneeling position.

He hadn't moved, though.

Had he?

Dave gulped. Awareness of his own body was one of the things he clung to the hardest when he didn't know what was real and what wasn't. If he'd lost that last thing... His chin wobbled, fighting tears he didn't want to shed so soon.

Instead, Dave held his breath, forcing himself to look up again, to continue with the inspection of the demon commanding him against his will.

His torso and arms were covered in ink—or whatever the equivalent to ink was in Hell. He didn't think one would walk out of these cells and just find tattoo parlors in the middle of a street. It looked like the designs of thorns, crowns, tears, and symbols he couldn't quite depict. He thought they continued onto the demon's back, but the darkness and the red hue enveloping them made it hard to tell for sure.

Dave was soon distracted by an unfairly striking face. Framed by all that ink, it almost looked angelic in its sharp features. It reminded him of a Greek sculpture, pure

and solid. A scar traveled through half of his face, down one of his horns to his jawline in an almost perfectly straight line. Dave couldn't tell the color of his eyes, but they seemed to be reading into his very soul.

He shivered at the idea.

He shivered again when he focused more than a passing glance on the horns. Protruding from the demon's hairline, they were long, and thin, with ends that looked way too sharp.

Dave swallowed.

Sprouting around the horns and falling down to his waistline, luscious locks of white hair were styled in a thick braid. Despite the fear eating away at him, a part of him wanted—needed—to run a hand along that masterpiece.

It would be a good way to die, right?

“Who thought to offer you as a gift, human?”

“W-what?” Fruitlessly, Dave tried to lick his dry lips again while he attempted to figure out what that was supposed to mean. “No one offered me as anything.”

He didn't think so.

He'd definitely not been made aware if anyone had.

Dave breathed in and out. Breathing exercises were important, right?

Right?

And this was all fabricated by his treacherous mind for... reasons. The main issue he was beginning to see, though, was that when he was having an episode, he wasn't able to keep reminding himself it was one.

He didn't think he'd suddenly gotten so much better at managing himself to do it.

"You wouldn't be here if someone hadn't invoked me to accept my gift." The big demon with the perfect hair sounded almost bored as he looked him over, but a hint of a smirk betrayed that stance.

"I don't even know who you are."

"I'm Melchom," he said.

Did his voice echo louder? Did he grow larger? No, no, he didn't. But of course the hunk before him was Melchom.

"Oh."

"I'm sure some of the minions around here have already told you about me."

"Uh, I..."

Dave wriggled his hands together. No one had really prepared him for a conversation with a fucking demon who not only didn't sound like a child but also looked like he could crush Dave with his bare hands.

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Hands with sharp nails, his observational skills supplied oh-so-helpfully.

“Don’t bother lying to me.” Melchom raised a hand. “Just follow me to my chambers. We’ll sort it all out there.”

“Why would I follow you?”

He might not be the smartest, but he’d seen horror movies. He was not going to be the stereotypical twink who got himself killed way too early because he was thirsty for the bad guy.

Hell, no.

CHAPTER 2

MELCHOM

Melchom regarded the human before him. He looked fascinating, inside and out, even though he still would like to know who had decided to send him his way. If he didn’t know any better—and sometimes he thought he didn’t—he’d think it was a prank by one of the Princes, or maybe one of the neighboring kings.

It had been a long day, though, long enough that he was willing to let it slide and consider all of that another day.

“Cat got your tongue?”

Melchom scoffed. The tiny human had more bravado than he'd first thought, then. "You can follow me, or I can make you follow me," he stated.

The whiff of fear emanating from the human filled his lungs and traveled through his body, leaving the most tantalizing sensation behind.

It had been a long time since he'd found a human to play with—one he could keep all to himself.

This one had a plus, too; he wouldn't be boring. Between his looks and the imbalanced maze of his brain, Melchom could only fantasize about all the ways he could feed off him.

"So you did that? It wasn't in my head."

"Nothing is in your head," he said, knowing exactly what confusion the statement would cause. "Nothing and everything, I suppose."

"W-what does that mean?"

But Melchom had turned around already. They could talk more later, once they were in his chambers where no one would be eavesdropping.

He was pleased to notice that the human was shuffling behind him. After millennia playing with all kinds of humans, their reactions, their fear, became predictable. Boring, almost.

This human already looked promising. Refreshing.

The thought made him salivate.

“It means whatever you want it to mean. Now stick close. You don’t want to be snatched up by some of the other low-lives lurking around here.”

‘Here’ meant the cells they placed all new arrivals in until they were sorted, but the human didn’t need all the details.

No, he’d rather have him cowering with fear, not knowing which way was up.

“Uh, sir... Melchom... How am I supposed to walk through there?”

Melchom paused. He might’ve enjoyed it a bit too much when the human stumbled upon him. He’d already noticed his size, but he really felt like little more than a feather against him, his soft skin the main thing warning him he might be worth a second look.

“Walk through what?”

“All t-those flames?” The human gulped audibly.

Right.

The hallway. The minions loved filling it with flames to scare their arrivals. It had gotten old after the first couple centuries, but none of the higher-ups ever thought to say anything. It kept the minions distracted and happy, and that gave everyone else some respite.

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“I suppose I could carry you if you don’t want to walk,” he inflected the most disinterested tone to his voice.

“If I don’t want to—” the human spluttered, his arms flailing around in indignation.

Melchom smirked. That temper was good news to him.

“Fine.”

Melchom stopped himself from rubbing his hands together, but he couldn’t have been happier about the way this was progressing.

Or about the way the human’s face was flushed red, lips pursed like an angry little kitten. His ashy dress was askew, torn in a few places. Melchom guessed that was the minions’ doing while he was descending to their realm. The fabric still flowed a bit, moving with the sway of the flames, revealing patches of dewy, freckled skin underneath.

The scaredy human jumped back when Melchom took a step toward him.

Adorable.

“You wound me,” he teased. “You don’t want to be burned by the eternal fire, do you?”

“Uh, n-no, but...” The human shivered. “Why would I trust you?”

Melchom cocked his head to the side. “You can’t claim the privilege of trust when you have the need to survive.”

It was easy to tell his words had an effect on the boy. Man? He couldn’t be more than twenty-five.

Twenty-three, he mused after diving in the human’s brain.

He’d gotten oddly good at guessing their ages over the decades.

“Tell me where we’re going.”

“My chambers.”

“You don’t even know my name.”

“An odd thing to focus on,” Melchom chuckled. “But I do, David.”

“W-what?”

“Demons get inside your head, remember?”

But as entertaining as their conversation could be, Melchom had better plans for them—plans that didn’t involve being stuck in a random hallway. So, he took matters into his own hands and lifted the human off the floor.

For a second, he considered carrying him like that, at arms’ length, simply for the annoyed pout it pulled in the human’s face.

It was a matter of time until he started trying to kick or scratch, though, and that got really tiring after a while. So he pulled David close to his chest, almost choking him

in the tight hold he kept, and he started walking.

For the first few minutes, the tiny human stayed still—or as still as he could be when slight tremors still ran through his spine, the lingering scent of fear still exuding off his skin and giving Melchom a high.

After a couple of turns, the human started growing antsy, trying to shift in his hold.

“What do you have against me breathing?” he huffed eventually.

“Nothing in particular.”

It was true, for the most part. He just didn’t care too much about the amount of oxygen the human was getting, whether it was enough, too much, or too little.

Melchom chuckled. He’d remember to make a point about his breathing another day. “Here I was, thinking you’d appreciate my shielding you from the scary flames. Isn’t that what you wanted, tiny human?”

The human grumbled something. Melchom didn’t care enough to hear it. He wanted to see what was going through that messy mind of his. There was an intoxicating allure to it. Each mind looked and was organized differently. This one looked like a house of mirrors, its ceiling neurons and splashes of brain matter swimming around, some of them playing memories while others seemed to be full fantasy.

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The trick was catching which mirror glinted the brightest when something new happened: that was the mirror that revealed the most recent thought that was crossing his mind.

When he found it, he thought his human would be thinking about the blue and orange flames. Maybe he'd be considering if he should try kicking or scratching, or ways to run away.

No, apparently his mind was worried about his dress and what Melchom would be thinking of it.

There was a flashback to his father. Melchom grunted. They didn't seem to have a good relationship—although it was good enough to name his son after the king of Israel. Learning they didn't have a good relationship was disappointing, though. A big thrill of grabbing humans with that moniker was punishing the parents for worshipping such a figure.

He'd have to make do, though. The human had been a gift, after all, and he had to eat.

"I'm pretty sure I'm not that heavy."

"Huh?"

"You grunted." His human shrugged. "Is your place that far away? I thought demons would just teleport themselves, or... fly, maybe?"

Melchom huffed. "How do you suppose we could fly?"

No, that wasn't a sore subject at all.

"Uh, with... Oh." The human must've noticed the nubs in his back—he really was like a cat, climbing and sneaking around his hold. Melchom thought he'd done a good job covering them with tattoos of bleeding foliage, but it was obviously not a miracle solution. "Never mind."

At least that would shut him up. They weren't that far from Melchom's chambers, anyway. Only a couple more turns.

He'd clearly wished for things too fast. As he was taking the last turn, his human squealed, trying to hide within Melchom.

"What is it?" he almost growled.

Of course, the human didn't answer, so Melchom slid into his head.

There was nothing to see, other than that addicting fear, marred only by the fact that Melchom wasn't the one to cause it this time.

There was a lingering echo, though.

High pitched.

Melchom started walking faster. He'd already known the minions would be messing with the human's head—it was too tempting not to—but he was not going to let it slide if they were doing so behind his back.

The moment the gates to his chamber opened, Melchom breathed easier. He supposed the human would think him a bit of a hoarder, but being around his things was... soothing.

As former King and current paymaster of the realm, he'd held on to one of the biggest chambers, one he'd decorated with all kinds of luxuries.

The things he considered luxuries. Melchom didn't feel apologetic about sliding inside the human's head again, curious to see what the sneaky thing would think upon seeing the shelves filled with trinkets and weapons encrusted with rubies and emeralds. Some of them were bathed in gold, too, but those were only decorative—old presents he had been offered back when he'd had power in exchange for his protection or mercy.

Of course, the human was enthralled by those, his mind making a list of all the “sparkly things,” as he called them. Apparently, it didn't scare him that even the decorative weapons could cause him a lot of damage. Or perhaps they would have if his attention hadn't shifted way too quickly to the bed in the center of the big room.

Interesting, Melchom noted, following the almost colluding trails of thoughts through that delicious house of mirrors that now belonged to him.

Dread filled the human as he considered what could happen in that bed. The emotion was soon replaced with a strange sense of relief—or was it contentment? There was some thinking about how at least it looked like it had a high thread count so he'd die comfortable.

Melchom snorted. The human kept thinking that he'd be dying tonight.

“What?” the human asked, pushing away from his chest.

He must've finally noticed there were no flames inside of the room. Melchom had considered it once—they were aesthetically pleasing—but he'd dismissed the idea eventually. They were a lot of work to maintain, especially because he'd have to shield most of his collection.

Shaking that thought off, Melchom decided to set the human free and see what he'd do.

The answer was nothing. The human just stood there, glaring up at Melchom with his arms crossed. He thought the look would be intimidating, which would be endearing, if Melchom didn't need other questions answered first.

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“What did the minions tell you?”

“Huh?”

Flashes crossed through the mirrors, but they were too fast for Melchom to follow properly.

The realization made his eyes widen. That never happened. No human brain was that complex.

“I know the minions spoke to you, in the cells and then in the hallway. You can’t lie or keep things from me.”

He’d just discovered otherwise, but the human wouldn’t need to know. Besides, it didn’t look like the human was in control of what he was doing.

“M-minions?”

“They can’t hear you here.”

Melchom watched as the human’s Adam’s apple bobbed up and down. Repeatedly.

“They’re just annoying.”

“I suppose they are.”

Melchom wasn’t paying too much attention, instead focused on chasing all the stray

thoughts in his human's head. He caught something about hair, and being scared that Melchom might be worse than them and how he didn't want to pick sides.

His nostrils flared. The human's worry was sweet, if not incredibly naive. That wasn't what made him fume. He tried to dive deeper into the human's mind, but there was nothing else, no explanation about what they'd want his hair for—if that was what that flash of a memory had been about.

Melchom couldn't let the human know he was concerned, though, so he took a deep breath and focused back on his initial plan. Taunting and scaring him until his guts were full. Seeing how long it would take to make him cry.

“What do you think of King David, tiny human?”

The human blinked owlishly, as if he'd just been slapped. If he'd been slapped, though, he wouldn't still be standing on the same spot. The mental image made Melchom smirk.

“W-who?”

“King David,” he repeated as he began to circle him. Humans got very squirmy when he did that. “Your namesake. The person you're named after.”

“I... I never go by David, first of all, and I...” He tilted his head to the side, eyebrows scrunched up. “Are you talking about the guy from the Bible?”

“Who else,” Melchom growled.

More than two millennia old, and he hadn't learned to keep his chill when it came to the man who'd dethroned him—or the book that had immortalized the human king as a hero.

“Great, so my mind’s now decided I need to revisit my Bible study days.” The tiny human started shivering. It was easy to pick up that those Bible study days didn’t bring happy memories. “He... He beat Goliath, right? And became King and did something about Jerusalem? And... There was something about a brother?”

Melchom hadn’t imagined it would be a difficult question for someone who’d studied the Bible, but his human was biting his lip hard enough to draw blood.

The coppery scent was heady.

“Yes, that man.”

“I... I mean, I don’t know.” He gulped again, sweat starting to dribble down his forehead. Melchom wanted to lick the salty drops, but he refrained. Humans needed to be broken in gently, and he needed an answer to his question first. “I liked the Goliath story?”

“Did you believe it?” he taunted. “A tiny man, beating a giant? Or did it bring comfort? Do you relate to the usurper King of Israel, human?”

“Usurper? And no, I... I thought the Bible wasn’t real.”

Melchom laughed. Such sweet naiveté. “Not all of it is.”

“Right.”

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The thoughts crossing through the human's mind were easier to catch, then, fear about his delusions taking a religious angle. Something about how he was never going to leave a ward now.

“What did your parents think, naming you after such a pathetic man?”

“I...” His human was beginning to hyperventilate now. “I don't talk with my parents. I don't know.”

“Why?” The answer revealed itself before the human could speak his mind. His parents didn't accept the way he'd chosen to exist—they'd kicked him out when he started wearing skirts and makeup, thrown him to the streets because he didn't meet their expectations of masculinity. “The David they named you after was a twink. Power bottom, too.”

“Wait, what?”

Melchom hadn't meant to share that piece of data, but the way humans used religion bothered him. That was something else he still hadn't learned to completely conceal after millennia of seeing it everywhere.

“Are you not able to catch up, human?”

The human in question shivered in response. “You can just call me Dave, you know.”

“No, I will not utter that name or any variant of it. He doesn't deserve my acknowledgement of his ongoing legacy.”

“Is he... here? In Hell?”

“If he is, I’ve never had the pleasure to be informed.”

Melchom doubted it, though. He’d wondered about it for decades, his need for revenge consuming everything. Melchom had bribed, sneaked around, and chased leads through all of the realms.

No, David was most likely being guarded by angels, not allowed one ounce of movement. The thought brought him a strange comfort when wrath blinded him.

“Okay. So, let me see if I’m getting this right.” The human took a deep breath. Melchom noticed the human didn’t run a hand through his hair like many others did. He soon found out why—some self-imposed rule he’d enforced to not ruin his curls. Melchom wondered what would happen if he took him to the master bathroom and made him face the mirror. Would the slight disarray on top of his hair be the thing to break him? “You have some kind of beef with a character in the Bible who may or may not exist, and you’re taking it out on all guys with that name now? Because that seems petty.”

“All worshippers of that unlawful king will regret ever learning his name.”

“Yeah, sure, but I didn’t choose the name, I don’t even use it unless I’m filling an official document, and believe me, my parents aren’t going to regret naming me like that if it means you’re getting rid of me for them.”

Melchom grinned. He’d counted on that answer ever since he’d learned of the human’s parents.

“In that case...” Another thought occurred to him. “From now on, you will be Dove.”

Doves had meaning, and the human wouldn't be able to complain too much because it was close enough to his original name. Close enough he wouldn't put up a fight, but different enough Melchom could mold him into what the new name signified.

New resolve zapped through him. Yes, he'd do that. The human—Dove—was meant to be his, anyway, his gift. Melchom would make it so.

“W-what?” Dove—it really took no energy to start implementing the switch—spluttered. “Why?”

“Because I'm not giving power to the name of an usurper.”

Hadn't he said that already?

Melchom shook his head. Here he'd been, thinking Dove might've been smarter than the average human and could keep up with him.

“I'm not... Seriously?” Dove raised an eyebrow.

“Dove is a good name. It suits you.”

To that, Dove's cheeks heated. A quick look showed Melchom he'd thought it a compliment. The idea was cute.

“So, that's it? You're just giving me a nickname?”

“But it's more than a nickname.” Melchom could've left him thinking it was a nickname, but there was no fun in that. “It's a blank slate, a new identity I get to define, to make it as strong or weak as I want, as desirable as I choose.”

“Right.” There was an eyeroll, but Dove couldn't hide the way his body trembled, his

knees threatening to buckle on themselves.

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Melchom had a feeling he'd chosen a good name. "I'll explain more when it's time, don't worry." He winked, relishing the return of those waves of fear wafting out of the human. "For now, though, get some rest. I'll join you shortly."

"Rest?" Dove frowned. "I'm not going to bed."

"Are you sure about that?" Melchom crowded him easily, forcing Dove to take steps back until his thighs hit the mattress.

The human's light brown eyes widened, specks of gold visible in them. Melchom imagined they'd look even more stunning while reflecting orange flames and their eternal sparks.

"I..." His chin wobbled. Melchom didn't get inside his head; he had the feeling he'd get more enjoyment out of seeing it unfold live. "I never sleep when I'm having an episode. T-that's not a thing. It's... It's not."

So this was what it took.

"Go to bed, human."

"N-no."

Unable to resist the temptation of the human's mind, Melchom took a glimpse inside. The house of mirrors spun around, random items starting to trickle down from the walls that opened as it gave a 360 spin. By the time it was in its original position, the sky was filled with more flying objects and images than it had been

before—memories of doctor’s offices, of priests and adults talking about him or over him; a few friends, too, but those seemed to flutter away when the human tried to focus on them.

Outside of his mind, Dove was sitting down on Melchom’s bed, curled up with his arms hugging his knees. He was shaking his head, cradling himself for comfort while silent tears ran down his cheeks. He kept repeating that word. No.

Melchom felt strangely conflicted. Everything emanating off the boy made him salivate, want to devour it all. For the first time, though, he saw the wreckage in the human’s mind, the severity of it—one that he hadn’t slowly, safely, caused to ensure the human would last. It was strange.

He dismissed it.

It had been a long day, after all.

Without touching him—that would be way too tempting—Melchom nudged Dove so he was lying down against the bedcovers.

“Sleep,” he commanded.

CHAPTER 3

DAVE

Dave was alone, and it felt strange. He never thought of himself fully alone—either because his head wouldn’t stop spinning from one thing to another, or because he’d purposefully surrounded himself by people. It had always been his safest coping mechanism.

He blinked.

He was on top of a bed, but he wasn't cold. That might be even weirder. It took a while for all the memories to come back to him and start making sense.

Hell.

Minions' voices.

Melchom.

The fixation with his name.

The new name.

Falling asleep against his will because the demon's voice had just shut down his brain.

The realization that it was all real, not an episode or his brain going completely haywire.

Before the thought could sink him down again, Dave sat up, eyes scanning for a threat. There was no one in the room—not that it meant a whole lot. No one had been in the cell either, yet all the voices had been bombarding him.

Oddly, he couldn't hear them now.

Tentatively, he slid out of the large bed. He thought maybe his feet would burn the second he touched the stone floor, but it didn't happen. The smell of sulfur was less potent in the room, too, but it was still there, making him scratch his nose.

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His gaze kept flickering to the wall he thought they'd entered from. He swore he'd seen a door open, but all the walls looked the same to him—except for the fact that some of them were decorated with shelves full of weapons and trinkets.

Tentatively, he walked toward them. He kept picturing the demon materializing out of thin air and punishing or torturing him or whatever real-life demons actually did. It didn't happen, though, and the shiny shelves called to him.

He began with the one closest to him. It mostly had swords and a few daggers. All of them were glinting with the light that came from a window too high for him to reach. They were clearly taken care of, not a fingerprint or speck of dust to be seen. Their hilts were all covered in different gemstones—mostly emeralds and rubies, from what he could identify.

Jordan was the one who knew everything about stones and jewels. Dave just liked going shopping with him and trying on what he recommended.

Nope.

Not thinking about Jordan or anything about his life on... Earth? He got the impression that he wasn't on Earth anymore, even though he couldn't remember why. Perhaps it had been a snippet of one of the conversations the minions decided to have in his head.

He didn't know, and didn't care enough to try and remember. He could reassess once Melchom—or any demon—showed up again, but it would be too much otherwise.

The row of shelves in the opposite wall only had a few weapons—a couple of maces bathed in gold and one that looked like a samurai sword, except he was sure it had a different name.

The rest were trinkets. There were a few thick wrist bracelets and a couple of necklaces, but it was mostly full of tiaras and crowns of different sizes and patterns.

A—reckless—part of him itched to try them on, he wasn't going to lie. There were so many things to choose from. His fingers drew closer to a thin tiara in silver with small diamonds that created a soft line bordering the curves and tips. He figured it would be easier to cover up than one of the cooler ones with all the stones that looked heavy as all fuck.

This one felt light—scarily light, really. Dave wondered if he should take it off because Melchom didn't look like the kind of demon who would appreciate it if it broke into pieces because he got overexcited.

He was starting to lift his arms to grab it when he noticed a door.

All right, so maybe he was easily distracted.

The sound of the door opening made him wince at the way it needed to be greased. He didn't know if he should feel disappointment or relief when all it led to was a bathroom.

A bathroom with a giant claw bathtub filled with water and bars of soap on a stone stool next to it.

Yes, finally.

Walk in, Melchom's gift.

He's still alive! I told you so.

“No. No, no, no, no.”

A cacophony of high-pitched laughs filled his head.

Only the bedroom is off limits to us, human.

Come in, don't be shy.

And don't forget about the hair!

The last voice rushed up to his head as he shut the door closed and stumbled backwards.

The tiara clanked against the ground when his knees hit the mattress. It looked to be in one piece, he noticed from a distance.

The door to the bathroom seemed to grow larger as he kept staring. At least this time he knew it was in his head and not a real thing.

“What are you doing there, Dove?”

Dave sprung up, head snapping. He didn't have time to register the stupid nickname. He did register the fact that the main entrance to the chambers, as Melchom had called it, was oiled to the point it hadn't made a sound.

“I...”

Shit. The tiara on the floor.

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Dave swallowed down. He was so dead—maybe he could lunge at Melchom while he was distracted, though. Yank a piece of that hair he still wanted to touch, run to the bathroom, and negotiate with the minions so they protected him?

Was that a thing?

He should've grabbed one of the weapons he'd been admiring earlier.

Too late to notice that now.

Melchom growled.

Double shit.

Dave thought it would be because he noticed the tiara, but no. Those dark eyes hadn't left his since he'd walked in. He might not be the best at staying present, but being hyper alert in the background was kind of his thing.

“You think you can beat me?”

“Uh... n-no?” Dave flinched away. Melchom kept walking into his personal space, crowding him until he was pressing against the iron-clad headboard. “Where have you been? All this time, I mean.”

“Working.” Melchom smirked. He had to know that wasn't the type of answer Dave was looking for. “You know, making deals with minions isn't a good idea.”

“It isn’t?”

Dave frowned. There were moments yesterday—and even now—when he felt certain the demon was rummaging around in his head, learning about all his deepest secrets and the insecurities he could exploit. Other times, he wasn’t sure because Melchom asked about things he’d know if he’d gotten in his head. He didn’t seem to know things the other minions didn’t bother to pretend they didn’t, either.

“They’re not trustworthy.”

“I imagine no demon is,” Dave managed to say without choking on his words.

“You’re getting smart.”

The teasing in Melchom’s tone wasn’t making him feel too smart. Dave guessed it was purposeful.

“What deal, anyway?” He wasn’t sure what made him feel so brazen, or daring, but he managed to hold the demon’s gaze as he posed the question.

Melchom grinned before he licked his bottom lip. Dave didn’t know what he’d been expecting, and a snake-like tongue wasn’t that out there, but it still surprised him and made him recoil further.

“You tell me.”

“There’s no deal,” Dave lied.

Jordan had once teased him about what a good liar he was. Dave guessed there was no better time to test that theory.

“Why don’t you go to the bathroom, then?” Melchom inched back. “I’m sure you’d enjoy soaking in the tub.”

“I’m good.” That was another lie, but one he wished he didn’t have to sell. “I prefer walk-in showers. Do you even have plumbing in Hell?”

“Our own version of it.” Melchom shrugged, one hand going to his braided hair, fingers trailing over it, as if he was taunting him. “There are walk-in showers in the common area downstairs. I can take you there.”

The demon was definitely up to something. Those dark eyes twinkled as he watched him, as if Dave was a cool ride at an amusement park.

“Why would you do that? You weren’t nice yesterday.”

Melchom’s eyes widened, even if Dave noted that he tried to hide the reaction. “I can’t be nice?”

“You’re a demon,” he murmured.

“So?”

Dave huffed. The whole situation was suffocating. He couldn’t think, couldn’t come up with logical reasons to argue why he was better off never leaving this room when the gigantic demon was mere inches away.

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It would be great if they could hold a conversation without thoughts of the demon's attractiveness assaulting him.

He didn't see that happening anytime soon, as infuriating as it was.

Dave practically leaped out of the bed. The distance was good; it let him breathe easier.

"What am I even doing here?" He paced as he posed the question. He didn't think he should be too concerned about keeping up appearances after his breakdown. "You can't play me, you know. I know what you're doing."

"You do?" The demon had left the bed too, but he wasn't moving to crowd him. Instead, he stood too casually still. He wasn't even trying to flex all those damned muscles. "Enlighten me."

"You're..." Dave dug his nails into his palms before he could form a response. "You want me helpless, depending on you for every little thing."

Dave's eyes widened. He'd started unsure, shocked that the demon had seen through his bluff, but... He realized it made sense. It was sickening, but...

His throat constricted, bile coming up from his stomach. His hands flew to his mouth, but he knew he wouldn't hold it in.

Melchom didn't seem to like the idea of a vomit projectile, because he all but flew him to the bathroom. Being moved without feeling arms around him only pushed him

further. He was retching into the toilet before anything could really register—the fact that he was in the room he'd tried to avoid, for one thing.

Is he really not going to last a full day?

Tears fell down his cheeks as he kept emptying his stomach. He didn't even care.

I told you he looked too pathetic.

Melchom should just chop him up and be done with him.

Whoever offered him didn't really do him a favor.

Yeah, what were they thinking?

STOP.

Dave's body went rigid. He recognized the last voice as Melchom, but its booming quality was new.

And effective.

Wiping his cheeks, he turned around, expecting to see Melchom beside him. It was stupid, of course.

And a quick way to be disappointed.

At least he was in sight, but Melchom kept his distance, nostrils flaring as he leaned against the doorway. Dave didn't fail to notice how the demon looked perfectly composed—if a little angry—whereas Dave looked like a fucking mess of vomit, snot, and tears.

“I don’t wanna be here,” he murmured, voice impossibly raspy.

A sob broke down his throat again, the truth in his words feeling like he imagined one of the daggers in the room would feel through his heart.

“You’re terrified.”

What kind of answer was that?

Dave wiped his cheeks again, and used the sleeve of his dress to clean his nose. He didn’t know if demons had tissue paper, but he didn’t feel in the mood to be denied or toyed with. His dress was destroyed, anyway, and it wasn’t like anyone other than Melchom would be seeing him.

“Fuck you!” he roared after composing himself.

He tried storming past Melchom, but that was obviously not going to happen. The demon only needed one hand wrapped around his arm to keep him in place.

At least this time he was actually touching him, Dave noted. He’d figure out how he felt about it later.

Not so surprisingly, it turned out that demons ran hot. Fleetinglly, Dave wondered if the touch would burn his skin if he held him long enough. Wondering made him remember about his hands again. The skin was bright red, pulsing. He was amazed his brain had managed to keep the pain in the background. He couldn’t really trust the organ for much these days.

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“I could heal you, you know.”

“What?”

“I can rearrange every cell and molecule in your body,” Melchom said, his body way too close to him. Dave shuddered—at the words or the proximity, he didn’t know. “I can order your body to do anything. Healing included.”

He gulped down. “Why would you do that?”

Because he wants you to know you have no control.

It wasn’t a minion’s voice this time, but it was just as terrifying. Yay?

“Because.” Melchom’s hold tightened. Dave guessed that answered his question about whether or not he was in his head. “Because I’m the only one who gets to hurt you.”

Of course.

Should he scoff? Or maybe laugh hysterically?

He wasn’t sure, but he thought he settled for something in between.

“That’s not as romantic as you think it is.”

“It’s not meant to be.”

But Dave still heard the click of the bathroom door when it closed. The grip on his arm loosened, too. Tremors were still running through his body when he was spun around and lifted from his armpits.

“I’m not a kid.”

He didn’t fight when he was deposited back on bed. He couldn’t quite tell why.

“You are gonna have to take a bath now,” the demon spoke matter-of-factly as his gaze traveled over Dave’s body.

Dave tried really hard not to keep trembling under the scrutiny.

“I don’t want to go in there.”

“Because of the minions?” Melchom’s raised eyebrow seemed to be issuing him a challenge. It was just too bad Dave wasn’t interested in one. “Are you that easy to break, Dove?”

Not acknowledging the name Melchom insisted on calling him, he huffed out, “I’m not easy to anything.”

He’d felt quite breakable since he’d walked in these chambers, though.

“We’ll see about that.” Melchom winked. “For now, though, you’re going to ask me to heal you, and then you’re going to clean up after yourself.”

“What do you mean, clean up?” He frowned.

The demon seemed to always be in the mood for playing mind games, but exhaustion was starting to claw at the edges of his mind and pull him under.

“The tiara.” Melchom shrugged. There had to be more to it, though. “And the bathroom.”

“No.”

He shook his head. Hadn’t the demon just witnessed what had happened in there?

“No?”

Dave crossed his arms. “I’m not going in there.”

“They can’t touch you if I’m inside the room.”

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Which only meant it had been purposeful when the giant had stood by the doorway earlier.

Dave shook his head. He needed time to think, to put all the pieces together and strategize, to come up with something. But he couldn't. Not when he couldn't be alone with nothing to distract him or force him to remain vigilant.

“Okay.”

He didn't have much of a choice, but he kept the snark to himself.

Not that it made a big difference.

“Look at you,” Melchom teased. “Learning already.”

“I'm pretty sure getting inside people's heads without their permission is rude.”

Did demons even understand the notion of consent?

“Why would I need permission?” Melchom stalked closer, forcing his eyes up if he didn't want to be staring at a ridiculously toned set of pecs. “You're my gift. My property.”

“Because a bunch of idiots wanted to play pretend at a seance? That hardly seems fair.”

Melchom cocked his head to the side. He did that.

“The magick to deliver a gift to a demon is intentional. Whoever set the spell knew what they were doing.”

“The fuck?” he blurted out.

He’d meant to use his inner voice, but oh well.

For a minute or two, Melchom didn’t answer. He didn’t seem to care that Dave’s heart kept picking up speed, his breathing becoming more rapid, more irregular. He’d tried to block out how he’d ended up there, or assumed it was a stupid college party gone wrong. But...

They’d done this to him?

Jordan’s boyfriend?

...Jordan?

His fucking best friend?

Fury sneaked into his system, merging with the fear and the helplessness and every other emotion that had taken up residence within him ever since he’d woken up surrounded by putrid smells and flames and fucking demons.

“Heal me.” The strength in his words shocked him, but he didn’t care. He was going to need to be at his best if he was going to take his revenge.

And he was going to.

“That’s my tiny human.” Melchom smirked.

There was no warning after that. Dave's body convulsed, and his eyes rolled to the back of his head. It felt like a zap of electricity seeping through, seeming to catalog every inch of him.

It stopped in a matter of seconds.

Dave blinked as he gazed down at his body. There were no scratches on his legs. When he turned his hands, his palms looked perfect—soft and smooth, without a trace of a scorch.

He felt stronger, too, his muscles holding him up easier.

Melchom gave him a look meant to make him shiver. It was followed by a signal pointing to the floor. Maybe another day Dave would've been—rightfully—indignant, but he had more important things to focus on. Fighting over whether or not he'd grab a tiara from the floor wasn't one of them, so he did it, squatting down because it felt safer than bending down.

After it was carefully placed on the shelf he'd taken it from, Dave turned around.

“You're full of it now, aren't you, Dove?” Melchom noted.

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Dave ignored it. “How do I get back to Earth?”

“You can’t,” was the simple answer Melchom gave him.

“But they have to pay,” he groaned. He’d freak out about what that denial meant later when he was alone. “How do I make them pay?”

“You wait until they die.”

No. That wouldn’t do.

“What do you want from me, as your gift?”

Melchom smirked. “What are you trying to do here, Dove?”

Dave took a step forward. He was probably signing his death sentence but he couldn’t say he cared too much. There had to be an advantage to being stuck in Hell.

“Isn’t Hell all about making deals?” Dave blinked up at Melchom, working his best innocent expression on the demon, hand trailing through his—frizzled—curls included. “And weren’t you pretending to be nice ten minutes ago? So, give me what I want, and I’ll give you what you want.”

“You don’t even know what that is.” Melchom mimicked him in taking a step closer, Dave’s smaller body flush against his. Dave was going to do his best not to think about the part of Melchom’s body that was hitting his stomach. Nope. “I want your fear, tiny human.”

“Why?” Dave’s knees buckled.

So much for all that regained strength.

The demon shrugged, one thick finger messing up the curl Dave had been fidgeting with. “A demon’s gotta eat.”

“Huh?”

“Demons feed off fear, tiny human.” Melchom chuckled when the color left his cheeks. “And you’re particularly delicious.”

That was more than he’d thought he could chew. For some reason, he hadn’t considered that the minions were being literal the day before.

“So you want to scare me awake, or make me watch horror movies, or what?”

“I’m afraid it’s a bit more than that.”

For someone who was afraid, he looked pretty damn happy with himself. Dave was pretty sure that if he had a tail, it would be wagging.

Then again, that was how dog tails worked, and he was pretty sure demons would have cat tails.

“Your mind is fascinating,” Melchom murmured.

That voice shouldn’t have been getting Dave all hot and bothered when he said that, but...

Dave shook it off. No point thinking about it.

In fact, he really should not think about it. If he didn't think about it, the demon wouldn't learn about it, right?

“So, I let you do that, whatever that is, and you'll find out who was responsible and make them pay?”

“Why not,” the demon drawled.

Dave didn't even care about how ominous it all sounded.

CHAPTER 4

MELCHOM

His gift was the most enticing creature. When consumed by that newfound need of revenge, the most beautiful scents percolated in the air. Melchom could stay there for hours, breathing him in, but he wasn't surprised when his spiteful human had other plans.

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“Okay, so how do we find out who wrote the spell, or whatever?”

“It doesn’t matter who wrote it.” Not that Melchom thought humans had fallen so much they wrote spells now. “Everyone knew what they were invoking, and everyone wanted it.”

The human’s house of mirrors tumbled again—not a full spin this time, but enough moving around that Melchom saw Dove’s knees buckle as his body threatened to slump down. It was instinct to grab him—practicality because he didn’t want to heal him so soon after he’d just done it.

Flashes of a guy Melchom hadn’t seen in his memories flashed through the human’s head. He had raven hair and blue eyes, his face marred with acne scars and a few freckles.

“B-but J-Jordan,” Dove gasped.

“If he was chanting, he knew.”

Melchom could see that he’d been chanting, eyes never wavering off his human. There was a hint of fear Melchom could trace to him, but he didn’t look like he was in pain or regretful. That was enough for Melchom to justify bringing him in—and everyone else who simply showed a mask of indifference as they threw their friend into the abyss.

It might help him score a favor from one of the Princes. Astaroth especially liked souls guilty of betraying friendships and allies. Yes, that was why he was going to get

invested in this—no other reason at all.

“You’re sure?”

Melchom sighed. “If even one of the people chanting didn’t know or didn’t want to offer you as a gift, you wouldn’t have been offered.”

Humans really shouldn’t have stopped studying magick and demonology. Life would be way easier if he didn’t have to explain very basic concepts over and over.

“Right...” Dove retreated into himself. “So what’s the plan?”

Melchom huffed.

If only his tiny human knew.

“For now, the plan is you’re going to clean up the bathroom, as we agreed.”

The way he sulked and pouted was adorable. “But you’re going to stay inside this time.”

“I am.”

Not only did he not want the minions to break the human before he did it himself, but Melchom was not letting them anywhere near Dove until he figured out what the deal was with wanting to get a lock of his hair.

Perhaps he should guard the bathroom area as well. It was a lot of work, but the main reason he hadn’t done it was so he could have some entertainment on days he didn’t have more to do.

It really wasn't worth all the headaches those pieces of shit caused.

"Good." Dove nodded to himself. "You can start scaring me later or whatever."

Or whatever.

Melchom shook his head. The poor human didn't know what he'd agreed to. It really was on him for not listening when Melchom warned him that deals with a demon weren't a good idea. It worked for him, though. If his human was consenting to being drowned in fear, Melchom didn't have to worry too much about fully breaking him or leading him to a catatonic state.

Catatonic states were impossibly hard to break through, even for demons. Death was easy to fix—even if it took a while—but the deepest of catatonias? Not so much. That was why their gifts never lasted more than a couple of years... if they even lasted that long.

Melchom felt his human could be the exception, though.

He had the perfect balance of broken and strong. And, now, apparently, the motivation. Melchom would get a much sturdier gift, and all he had to do was a day of work—not even, if Astaroth wanted to take it on.

"Uh..." Dove hesitated as he was offered a toilet brush. "I know I should've registered this earlier, but... If demons feed off fear, does that mean there's no food in Hell?"

"Not unless it's part of a punishment."

"So... What do I eat?"

Melchom chuckled. He knew for a fact his human wasn't hungry, but he figured it was one of the rambling thoughts he sometimes focused too hard on. "You don't need to eat. I told you I can rearrange every molecule in your body. You've never been in better health."

“What about drinking?”

Melchom shrugged, even if he couldn't help but picture a certain human on his knees, gagging as he swallowed a different kind of liquid than what the boy had in mind. “You're perfectly hydrated.”

Technically, he could procure the food and the water Dove was talking about. It was less effort not to, though, and it gave Melchom more of what he needed: control over him.

“Huh,” he heard Dove mutter.

“Before you try,” Melchom breathed against the back of his neck. It was easy to see the directions Dove's scrambled thoughts were heading toward. “This deal doesn't mean you can now start negotiating everything or making demands.”

“Of course.” Dove huffed. “I knew that.”

It was pretty clear that he didn't know, but Melchom preferred not to mention it for the time being. He left Dove to scrub the toilet and obliged when his human asked for a rag to polish a bit of splatter that had fallen off the latrine.

“I'd just feel more comfortable if I knew what to expect.”

That was funny, Melchom mused.

“Kind of the point of making you fear for your life is that you won't know what to

expect, Dove.”

A frown etched into his expression, his new gift dropped the brush and turned to face him. It seemed rare that Dove dared to do as much. “You don’t know what fear play is? Seriously?”

Melchom paused.

He hadn’t seen much about kink in the human’s head, but that didn’t mean anything. He’d need days—weeks, maybe—to unravel the mystery of the young man’s mind.

“I know, Dove.”

“You really should just use my name.” He licked his lips. “The whole Dove thing is already getting tiring, and I’m not sure it’s getting you anywhere.”

Melchom smirked. Dove just loved displaying that bravado of his.

“It’s a good thing you’re not the one in charge here then.”

“Whatever.” His human sighed. “So, fear play?”

“What about it?”

Pretending not to know when the human asked something was hilarious. It infuriated his Dove to no end.

“Fear play is negotiated, and consented to, and it doesn’t take away from the experience.”

An experience that, Melchom was quick to note, the human didn’t possess.

“Doesn’t it?” Of course, the human didn’t have a response at the ready to Melchom’s question, but that was what Melchom was counting on. “I think the toilet is fine already.”

“Right,” the human mumbled. He was getting better at not stammering every few words. “So... now’s when you start scaring me.”

“Now’s when you take a bath.”

“Do I need baths?”

“No, but I like the smell.”

Melchom saw the way his human debated in his head. He wanted that bath so badly, but he was oh-so-self-conscious. In his head, he argued that the demon wasn’t going to leave him alone—he promised, he said—but that meant being naked next to him. A spike of lust flared through the human, one Melchom was more than happy to take note of.

“What am I supposed to wear?” The human fidgeted. “After I get out of the shower, I mean?”

“Do you think you’re going to be cold?”

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The blush that spread across Dove's cheeks and down his neck felt like heaven. "Uh, n-no? But..."

"But?" Melchom taunted.

"I don't usually parade naked around other people."

"Good thing I'm not people."

The human chortled. Melchom was not going to think about how the sound made him feel, because that was stupid and not a very demonic thing to do. "Okay."

The human was still scared, with fear coursing through his veins and coming off of him. It was subtle yet, just a hint of what Melchom could get if he stuck around and dug a little deeper.

His nostrils flared as Dove turned around, grabbing the hem of the dress to pull it off.

"Did I say you could turn around?"

Melchom heard him gasp. He knew the human would be swallowing down the dread filling his nerve endings.

"So this is sexual for you," Dove surmised.

"No." Melchom found the human alluring, but the lowly demons who thought assault was the only way to feed were just that—lowly. There was no need to wreck someone

like that if the mere threat of it happening led to the same result. “But it’s fun, isn’t it?”

“Sure.” Melchom could just picture the human rolling his eyes.

Dove didn’t turn back as Melchom had implied he should, but he took off his dress and the lacy underwear he’d been wearing underneath in one sweep. It was impressive that he hadn’t lost the garment sooner.

Now that the human was naked, Melchom observed the expanse of clear, smooth skin, the limber thighs as they flexed when he bent over. Blood rushed to Melchom’s cock as he pictured what it would be like to have him straddling him, readjusting his body to fit all of him.

No demon was as tiny as his human was, so Melchom didn’t have lots of options to explore his fantasies about completely covering someone’s body, someone’s soul, about completely destroying the most fragile of bodies and putting it together again.

“Are you just gonna stay quiet?”

Melchom looked up to see his human had already sunk inside the barrel and was now staring at him with a furrowed brow.

He noted how he was trying to keep his distance, too, back plastered to the end of the tub farthest away from where Melchom stood.

“Don’t you like silence, Dove?”

“I…” Melchom watched a few mirrors glinting, images passing by, as Dove hesitated. “I’m not used to it.”

Melchom guessed it made sense.

If only his Dove wasn't so naively eager to reveal all the insecurities Melchom could exploit. It would border on annoying if it didn't work so well in his favor.

"Does it make you uncomfortable?"

Dove squirmed, bubbles of soaped water popping on the surface. "You know it does."

"Do I?"

Hazel eyes met his gaze in response, then squinted. "I know you keep getting in my head." The human buried himself up to his nose in the water before he resurfaced again. "You know everything, don't you?"

Melchom wished. If he had the kind of time to really bury himself in that addictive house of mirrors, he would. Alas, his discovery had to be done in sections, little by little.

It was a good thing he had patience in spades, he supposed.

He was wondering how much he should disclose to his precious gift when he caught the tail-end of a passing thought.

His tiny human was full of surprises.

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“You’d like that, huh?” Melchom smirked. “You’d love to have someone who understood all of you, because not even you understand yourself. Is that it?”

There was no verbal response, but his gift flinched, eyes flickering to the side.

“Even if it’s a demon you’re selling yourself to for some petty revenge,” he added.

That was what made Dove’s breath shorten, his body curl in on himself. Melchom licked his lips, feeling the scents traveling through his body, filling him with the most exquisite fire.

“I need clothes. Please.”

The human’s chin wobbled. Something about it made Melchom pause and wonder how much he could push with their deal in place before the human broke. It would be a pity if that happened too soon.

It was a heady sensation. Melchom didn’t remember the last time he’d had such a feast. He’d definitely never had to face doubts regarding his feast’s wellbeing.

“What do you want?” he heard himself asking.

The human gasped. “For real?”

Melchom grunted. He’d have to come up with a plan to remind Dove of his place. “Do you want me to change my mind?”

Dove kicked around in the barrel, daring to edge closer to his side. The poor boy didn't seem to learn, but Melchom couldn't say he wasn't enthralled by the way the dripping ends of his curls stuck to his face.

He looked sweet, but not in a completely naive way. No, it was in a way that was begging for Melchom to pervert him.

“No. No, I don't, I mean...”

The human lost his trail of thought. Melchom peered in to see at least a dozen mirrors reflecting images of the human in different attires. Some of them were skirts and dresses, a few crop tops with shorts or leggings... Melchom was more interested in the couple of mirrors that flickered for the shortest time and showed the human dressed up in the most exquisite of lingerie sets. He was sure those weren't real memories, but it didn't matter.

“Cat got your tongue?”

“I... Can't I just have my closet?”

“Start smaller.” It was both a teasing and a warning, and Melchom was sure the human got the message.

“Can I... Can I send images to your head of the stuff I want? Kind of like all of you talk to me in my head?”

Huh.

No human had ever asked him that. He hadn't seen it done, either. Melchom shifted closer, squatting down so his face was mere inches from the human's, arms on the edge of the tub for the sake of making him more nervous.

“No one’s ever managed in all of history,” Melchom said. He was going to leave it there, but something compelled him to touch, to tuck his index finger beneath the human’s chin and hold him as he shuddered. “What do you want me to see so badly?”

“I don’t know. I mean, what do you even know about fashion?” His Dove paled as the words left his mouth. “No offense.”

Melchom snorted. It was a fair question, anyway. Most demons only wore fabric as a way to cover their groins unless they were readying for battle, wanted to do business on Earth, or for any other reason that involved other creatures.

“I think you’ve appreciated my fashion choices just fine since you arrived here.”

The poor human couldn’t rebuke him, blushing to the tip of his ears. He did throw some sudsy water at him.

“You have nerve,” Melchom murmured, droplets of water dribbling down his chin to the floor. The only reason he wasn’t unleashing every nightmare the human had of Hell upon him was that none of the suds touched his eyes. “Go to the main room, and I’ll go get you something.”

It would be game on from the moment he got back, but Melchom kept that piece of knowledge to himself. He was already planning which of those exquisite sets of lingerie to get him, and how to show them to him before he’d left the confined space.

“By the way,” he remembered to add, “don’t even think of leaving, or trying any more of my jewels.”

“O-okay.”

Good.

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Melchom could see the anticipation and dread already mingling and making his human's mind go in circles. That was exactly how he wanted him.

CHAPTER 5

DAVE

Dave was bored, which was the wildest thing he'd noticed since his life had taken this... turn. But hours must have passed since Melchom had locked him in his chambers, and there was nothing—nothing but his own head to get lost in and grow even more paranoid. Were those shadows? No, they were not, but his anxiety had already shot through the roof twice because he had no chill.

Then again, he'd rather think about hypothetical shadows on the walls, or debate about the merits of not actually touching the pretty tiaras, than other things.

Jordan.

The life he'd lost, without preamble.

The kids he cared for.

Would Jordan have called the daycare to let them know he wasn't coming back? His job had never been his favorite thing in the world, but even though he joked and said it paid the bills to anyone who asked... He'd ended up falling for all those blabbering kids.

Now he was never going to play with one or blow raspberries against their chubby little cheeks.

He guessed the minions were Hell's version of children, but there was no way he'd get anywhere near one if he could help it.

They couldn't reach him, could they? If he stayed in Melchom's good graces, and he never left the room, there was no reason for him to do anything. Then again, maybe he should still figure out how to get that lock of hair.

For emergencies.

Dave wasn't stupid enough to believe he could place all his trust in the demon—even if he was hot, and he had weird moments that made Dave think he wasn't a complete monster. He was still a demon, and Dave had his mind set on not becoming the cliché gay character in a horror movie.

Not having anything to do was weird, though. At home, he could distract himself by attempting to cook or bake something, or watching TV if there was something decent that wasn't a remake or way too complex to follow.

At this point, he'd even be okay with dusting or fixing the shelves, but there wasn't a speck of dust, and even if the shelves could be organized better, Dave wasn't going to risk the demon's wrath.

He didn't know what to do, only that he needed something.

Maybe he could work another deal with Melchom when he arrived—let him have things to do around the room, and he'd give Melchom... something.

It was hard to tell what the demon would be interested in or what Dave would be

comfortable offering—not that he had the luxury to consider his comfort.

He was not fully convinced yet that he'd be getting new clothes. There had to be a trick, something Melchom had seen in his head, or a game he'd thought of to mess with him further.

Dave groaned, letting his body slump against the mattress. It was a comfortable bed when he had the bodily autonomy to lean on it and could actually remember it.

Perhaps he could try talking to Melchom. The demon would be impressed, if nothing else, and Dave would have something to do other than stare at the ceiling. Not that he knew a lot about how mind communication worked, but distance didn't seem to matter, right? The minions might have been closer to his cell, but he couldn't picture a bunch of demons just waiting outside of the room all day long. He didn't think Melchom would've been a fan, either.

When are you coming back? He used his loudest inner voice while picturing Melchom standing right there in all of his almost naked glory.

He really should stop thirsting about him, but...

No, not going there. Dave shook his head and tried again.

And again.

He gave up by his tenth attempt, letting out a groan. Maybe mere humans like him just didn't have their brain wired for it.

He slid under the covers. It was weirdly not cold, coming from someone who wrapped himself up in blankets in the middle of summer, but he still didn't want to be completely exposed for the demon.

The demon he couldn't stop thinking about, his thoughts going in circles about what he felt or didn't feel when he was close.

“Summoning me, Dove? Really?”

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Dave shrieked, sitting up in one sudden movement.

No, he had no dignity left.

Melchom was there.

He hadn't been before, but now he stood beside the bed, looking at Dave with a mocking expression. Dave wondered if his heart could leap out of his chest and, if so, if Melchom could fix it or if it would be too much work.

"I didn't..." He paused, one hand on his chest. The blanket had pooled below his stomach, but he didn't care too much about his torso being exposed. "Did I really summon you?"

"You did." Melchom smirked. Whereas Dave was beginning to try and process the fact that he could summon demons, Melchom looked completely unfazed. "I didn't know you'd miss me so much."

"I was bored." Dave tried for nonchalance, knowing he was nowhere near achieving it. "I can summon you, then?"

"If you're willing to face the consequences."

Dave shuddered.

It was that dichotomy again, the one he didn't know what to do with. Melchom behaved almost protectively one minute, almost patient and caring, then he was

mocking and sadistic the next. Dave guessed it was a way to mess with his head, but knowing that didn't exactly help him.

“What consequences?” he croaked.

His throat felt slightly better as the levels of sulfur in the air had decreased, but Dave didn't think it would ever go back to normal.

“Put this on,” Melchom said instead, handing him a purple gift bag.

It even had the fancy paper inside.

Another day, Dave would've been hesitant or showed more resistance. Today, he didn't care.

He should have cared.

The contents of the bag made him start shivering despite the room temperature. Dave gulped, trying to suck in the air that had left his lungs.

The set was gorgeous, and softer than he would've thought, he realized when his hand dived into the bag of its own accord.

His fingers traced the sheer robe, the crotchless bodysuit with the pretty patterns in lace, the garter belt, the matching thong in the same material. All the pieces were in his favorite shade of emerald green. Tears sprung to his eyes; there was no helping it.

“Why?”

He'd seen sets like this before, of course. He'd dreamed and fantasized about them. He thought he'd feel so empowered when he gathered the courage—and the

money—to get one, like a pampered sugar baby who had the world at the tip of his fingers.

That was the opposite of how he felt now, when his dream had become a ploy for a demon to taunt him with.

“You like it, no?”

Dave clenched his eyes shut. He refused to answer, to give the demon more power.

No, he had to steel himself, to forget about the small moments that made him wonder about a softer side to the... creature. He forced his eyes up, then, focusing on the long, sharp horns, the red skin: the things that made him nonhuman.

“I’m not wearing this.”

“You keep forgetting I can make you do anything I want.”

He did.

Dave braced himself for the loss of control in his limbs and seeing his body do things against his will.

The moment didn’t come, but something must have happened because Melchom looked way too pleased.

It clicked, then.

Fear.

Melchom's threat had drowned him in fear. That was their deal. He was letting the demon use him to feed off him, off his fear and the emotions that scared him.

"Does that taste nice?" he dared to ask, even though he felt his voice shaking. He hadn't moved, but he held the demon's gaze from his position in the bed.

"You'd like to know?" The demon smirked.

"I aim to please." He didn't even stutter, this time shuffling closer to Melchom while keeping the duvet on himself. "Is that the best you can do, though?"

To be fair, Dave didn't quite know what took over him, only that he was running on adrenaline, and a stupid part of him had made the executive decision to stay on it.

"You don't want to see the best I can do, tiny human." Melchom touched him as he spoke, his big hand sliding down his hair to the side of his body, nails leaving the faintest of scratches behind.

Dave's body leaned forward, unable to stop the shiver that coursed down his spine. It had nothing to do with the—rising—temperature in the room or fear. It was all lust, and it threatened to drown Dave in shame later when he could think straight.

"Are you sure?"

“I am,” Melchom laughed. “I have to say, I like the fire in your eyes. It’s a good look for someone so... fragile.”

“Assuming I’m fragile is your first mistake.”

The demon seemed to take the words in, pausing for a second before his hold on Dave’s waist tightened, nails digging deeper. “Is it now?”

“Yeah.”

Melchom kept smirking at him. It was hard to remember why, or keep up with their banter—did it count as dirty talk?

“Put on the clothes I got you, human.”

A part of Dave wanted to refuse again. He didn’t, even though he felt... emboldened. The demon was probably laughing about how petty Dave was, but he didn’t care.

Of course, it would’ve looked prettier if it didn’t take him a couple of minutes to figure out where all the straps went. It would’ve also helped if he’d magically known how to adjust everything without asking for help.

He did it, though.

Would he be able to ask Melchom for a mirror?

It felt almost criminal to finally wear the kind of getup he’d only dreamed about and not be able to twirl around and see.

“Such a gorgeous little thing,” Melchom hummed, reminding Dave he was right there. Dave’s breath hitched as he looked back in his direction. “You look better than

I thought, too.”

“How is that meant to scare me?”

“It’s not.” The demon winked, though, and that couldn’t mean anything good. “I thought you’d noticed by now, part of the game is not letting you know when to expect anything.”

He had noticed. It paralyzed him with pure terror if he stopped to think too hard about it, though, which was why he didn’t do it. At least, that was the reason he’d give if asked—not that he got distracted by a million other things every time he tried to sit down and really analyze every word they’d exchanged.

A sigh left his lungs. It sucked to accept, but maybe he would be the cliché gay guy in the horror movie one way or another.

“You keep thinking about bad movies,” Melchom mused out loud, head cocked to the side.

The light from that high window reflected on his horns more when he did that. They looked shiny, like an onyx. Dave’s arm was lifting to touch them before his survival instincts could kick in.

“What are you doing, tiny human?”

Dave didn’t answer. There was no way he could utter fully-fledged sentences that were going to make sense. When Melchom took a step back, though... That made things interesting. It gave him the last boost he needed to stand up in the bed, to cut the distance between his reaching fingers and the horns.

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“Scared?” Dave felt bold enough to taunt.

He started at the base, noting the softness in the unruly strands of hair that didn’t stay in place inside the twisted braid.

“Careful, Dove.”

The words should’ve been scary, but Dave barely registered them. He was too busy tracing the thin horns. They were hard to the touch, reminding him of the marble countertops in a fancy store he’d accompanied Jordan to once. He’d promised he’d have a kitchen refurbished with stuff from there one day.

Dave shook his head. There was no point in revisiting the past.

Instead, he let the tip of his finger reach the pointy end of the horn. He was surprised Melchom wasn’t teasing him more or trying to scare him, but Dave wouldn’t look down. It would only get him lost in the demon’s eyes, the specks of darkness he shouldn’t be uncomfortably attracted to.

The tip of the horn was as sharp as he’d thought, scratching his skin. Dave’s eyes widened, pulling his hand back before blood could come out. Pain didn’t scare him, and a part of him was curious about what it would feel like and what would happen. What would Melchom do?

But something stopped him, a force bigger than himself taking over the reins and keeping him away before he could find out.

Dave was trying to figure out where it came from when he felt his airway constrict as he was shoved against the wall, a few items rattling behind him on impact. Looking down, he saw Melchom had grabbed him by the neck. The pressure wasn't enough to kill him, but it was enough to kickstart all his instincts.

“Who have you talked with, human?” The words were growled out, no teasing or amusement behind them.

Dave flinched. He hadn't missed the disgust in that single word. Dove sounded much better—like he mattered and was more than a discarded thought or a passing annoyance.

Dave had grown used to the hint of enjoyment in Melchom's eyes, too. He'd been using it to calm himself down, to allow himself room to tease and push back, to feel he had an ounce of control.

If that was missing, he was lost again, staring at a future where he was in an unknown place, subjugated to a creature that wanted him to doubt everything, to wallow in fear. And he was giving him exactly what he wanted.

The more Melchom's fingers squeezed his trachea, the more his heart rate picked up. Melchom's nostrils flared in that way when he was taking in all the pheromones that Dave exuded.

Spots appeared in his vision, his breath shortening and quickening. There was no point, but Dave's hands still flew up, wrapping around Melchom's wrist. Knowing the demon wouldn't budge apparently didn't keep his more primal instincts from trying. It just added to the despair building up, to the hopelessness clutching around his heart and holding it with a tighter grip than Melchom had on his neck.

He was sure he was about to pass out when the demon let go of him, letting him

slump against the ground.

Dave felt like he was on fire, his lungs screaming at him to breathe while his throat seemed unable to work right. Tremors ran through his body. “Why?” he managed to croak out, eyes glued to the floor.

If Melchom wanted him to be scared, he would be—no challenging him, no being the fiery human he so supposedly liked.

There wasn’t an answer to his question right away, only ragged breaths he wasn’t too keen to overanalyze right then.

“Astaroth wasn’t right about you.”

“O-okay.”

Melchom would never just tell him who that Astaroth person was, or what they’d said, right? Dave might as well preserve the oxygen he was still recovering from the unexpected assault. Where had that come from? And what did he even mean, who had Dave talked with? The only things Dave could’ve talked with were the minions if he’d ventured into the bathroom—which he hadn’t—and they weren’t his biggest fans. Not to mention, it wasn’t like he could easily keep things secret when everyone around him could read his mind.

Go to bed.

The booming voice in his mind startled him. It forced him to look up, to watch Melchom’s unwavering expression.

“You can just use your words.”

“Or I can make you do it,” the demon warned. “I told you, you’re not in a position to make demands.”

“Then make me.”

Was he glaring too much? Laying it on too thick? It wouldn’t matter, would it?

It was Dave’s luck, which he’d thought he had some of when he’d landed with a demon who didn’t jump at torturing him and would hold a conversation. But no, he’d landed the one demon who would be more paranoid than Dave at his worst moments, only he literally had all the tools to not be.

Dave fumed.

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“I’m going to take a bath.” Melchom didn’t wait for an answer before he was turning on his heel.

Dave hated himself a little more because he stood there, frozen still, watching the way the muscles in Melchom’s back rippled. He fantasized about the ink and the way that strength would feel wrapped up around him—in a consensual way, and in a parallel universe when the demon wasn’t the absolute worst.

CHAPTER 6

MELCHOM

Are you losing your touch, Daddy Melchom?

“Oh, shut up.” Melchom was never in the mood to deal with the minions, and that was especially true now.

Reading Dove’s thoughts so clearly with only a door between them wasn’t helping him, which was a new thing. He wasn’t one to care about humans’ feelings and emotions, but...

Melchom shook his head. He was being stupid.

We like the human. It’s a pretty gift.

What did they want in exchange?

“Nothing.” Melchom furrowed his brow.

Hell got gifts from time to time that weren't meant to be in exchange for anything else, but it was still rare. Combined with what Astaroth had been saying, and the fact that the human's best friend had sent him...

Melchom shook it off. He'd just been off his game all day. Dove just nonchalantly playing with one of the most erogenous parts of his body and almost binding them had thrown him, too. Who the fuck approached a demon and thought, I'm going to caress his very obviously sharp horns? Dove had no sense of self-preservation; that was a given. Melchom thought he'd find it amusing—something else to use against him—and he did, but... It infuriated him, too. Not to mention he would've been Hell's laughing stock for a year—at least—if he hadn't stopped him in time, before any bond could even begin to form.

Why don't you share your gift?

We want him too.

“When have I given a fuck about what you all want?”

Melchom sighed. He'd thought a bath—and even the distraction the minions provided—would help him get out of it.

If anything, it was only souring his mood further.

“Who are you talking to?” The voice was shaky, but it was closer than he would've given his human credit.

Melchom sighed. “Broadcasting to all the minions listening in takes more energy, and they can't get inside my head.”

He paused. Why had he said so much?

This day was a fucking disaster.

Ignoring the splash of water he left on his wake, he got out of the tub and yanked the bathroom door open.

“You’re—” Whatever the human was going to say, he bit his tongue.

Your gift is horny for you?

How are you going to feed off him now?

I told you all he was going to be a waste of time.

Melchom shoved the human back into the bedroom and closed the door to the bathroom. He wasn’t going to bother with answering the minions.

“I’m what?”

Naked.

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Even if Melchom hadn't slid into the mirror maze the human's brain was, he was projecting it loud enough Melchom doubted any barrier could hold it inside.

All the mirrors showed real life images of Melchom's body—his cock, to be more precise. His human was really zooming in on it. He didn't feel distraught or scared. Well, a little bit scared. Melchom saw one of the mirrors trying to compare it with some toys his human had played with. It was strangely flattering.

"Are you turned on, Dove?"

"Don't call me Dove."

"But it's your name." It was tough to focus on the words coming out of the human's mouth when his mind was just much more interesting, recalling every encounter he'd had when he thought he'd been stretched to his limits. What he thought were his limits, Melchom mused.

"Not really."

Melchom huffed. "I already told you how I feel about your birth name."

"Which is ridiculous."

"Is it?" Melchom stepped closer. He noted how the human took a step back. "I know you humans pretend to have forgotten, but names are important. They have meaning. They show your identity, the values you've been raised under, or the values you assert for yourself."

The human frowned. The fact that Melchom could see the human thought it was all a piece of garbage only filled him with more unbridled rage, his skin heating up as his insides begged him to let it out all out, to see his surroundings burn in the destruction.

Melchom wondered what the human would think if flames surrounded them both, filling the entirety of the room. His Dove hadn't complained about the smell in a while.

"Or it's just a word."

"If it's just a word, why do you care?" Melchom tucked a stray lock of hair behind his human's ear. "And why were you so hurt just before, because I referred to you by your species?"

Melchom got him then. He saw Dove swallow, gaze darting around almost erratically as if he needed a way out. It would be credible if his brain wasn't still so focused on Melchom.

He had to admit his body hadn't been admired so thoroughly in centuries. Melchom couldn't help but preen at the assessment, at the absolute knowledge that, regardless of how much the human hated himself for it—a delicious fact in its own right—he was enjoying what was in front of him way too much.

"Do you have lube down here?"

An interesting way to avoid an answer, Melchom would give him as much.

"We have oils."

"Oils," Dove repeated, nodding to himself. Apparently, the human had read about it in some smutty websites, but he'd never tried them. "Yeah, that could work."

“What could work?” He smirked, but the human didn’t find it so amusing.

Melchom didn’t quite care.

He would wonder what had happened in the last twenty minutes that made Dove go from a dejected, angry little thing to his fiery self again, but he knew where the answer lay. His human’s brain wasn’t good at sticking to one mood or one emotion, losing trails of thoughts and rules before they were fully formed.

“Uh, sex?” Dove frowned, bottom lip sticking out. “Demons have sex, right? Because it would be a crime if you’re that well endowed and...”

“We have sex.” Melchom shook his head. It was a good thing his human was as messed up as he was. “Do you want me to fuck you? Is that it?”

“What if I do?” Dove’s hands went to Melchom’s waist as he spoke. “You clearly want to too, right? You’re still naked, and hard.”

Melchom grinned. “I just wouldn’t want you to get the wrong idea.”

A shiver ran through the human’s body before he answered, “Get the wrong idea about what?”

He could’ve left it alone, simply agreed to devour Dove’s body and pause all of his other games. Melchom didn’t want to do that. He didn’t want Dove’s beautiful mind to fracture further after it was done, or to have him regret giving his consent to somebody he’d thought of as a monster in his head not that long ago.

“About what will happen if I ravage your hole,” Melchom said. He took a pause to thrive on the visceral way Dove responded to his words, his whole body strung up. “Fucking you doesn’t earn you any favors. It doesn’t change the fact that you’re my

gift to torture and break into a million pieces.”

“I know.” His human’s voice faltered, though.

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Melchom was considering what it meant, trying to chase the fumbling thoughts in the flickering mirrors. That was why he didn't notice the human walking up to him, the nimble fingers tracing the skin above his hip bones.

"Will you tell me about your ink?"

"Another day," he replied distractedly.

"Okay." Dove nodded. "So what do we do? Have you done this with people my size before? Were they as intimidated? Because I don't think I've ever been much of a size queen, so... Any ideas?"

Melchom vibrated with the need to shut him up, push his body against his until he struggled to breathe and that fear ricocheted off him.

He held still instead.

"Size won't be a problem."

"How do you know?"

It was so distracting, the way Dove's heart picked up speed, the beat stronger and louder.

Melchom curled his fingers around his wrists. It took everything in him not to give in to the instincts to throw him against the bed and have his way with him.

“Remember what I said, about being able to rearrange your entire body?” That delicious fear made an appearance before his Dove nodded and exhaled a big puff of air. “Let’s just say it’s a very useful trick for this.”

A grunt escaped the human, his head slumping forward as he rested against Melchom’s abdomen. “That shouldn’t be a turn-on.”

“You’re the one who mentioned fear play, remember?”

“That’s fair.”

What wasn’t fair was the way Dove was blushing red when he looked up again.

Melchom couldn’t play it any slower, wait for more signs that the human wanted this. Without a word, Melchom lifted him, wrapping his legs around his waist before he was tilting his head, molding him to the perfect position to taste his mouth.

The human’s arms wrapped around his neck, using way too much strength.

Melchom hadn’t even touched him yet.

“Having second thoughts?”

He knew Dove wasn’t. His human was overwhelmed, lost in all the choices he thought available to him. He wasn’t quite believing this was actually happening or that he was allowing it to happen. Melchom supposed it was rather endearing, seeing as he went back and forth between everything he wanted to do—debating what positions might be best and worrying about his gag reflex coming back if he tried to fit Melchom’s cock into his mouth.

“No.” Dove licked his lips, eyes half lidded. Melchom’s senses tingled. “I want this.”

“What do you want exactly?”

Finding it in his head would take work, but it became easy when Melchom’s questions led Dove’s trails of thoughts. It became a simple matter of finding the mirror that flickered with the information and following it.

That didn’t mean he wouldn’t wait for his answers, to see what Dove dared to voice out loud. The skittish human had been surprising him since he’d arrived with the words he managed to get out, the tones he imbued, and the attitude he found the courage to fake.

“I want you to take me.” Dove swallowed. “Wreck me so I can’t sit for days or think about anything else.” Images flashed in the nebulous sky Dove’s brain portrayed—Melchom taking him from behind, coming inside of him, spurts leaking out of his hole... and Dove’s tears as he failed to fit all of Melchom’s in his mouth.

The demon groaned.

A new image formed. His human was wearing his new lingerie set, except for the robe which he clutched in his hands, over his head. Dove lay on his back, exposed and feeling no shame about the precum pooling around his stomach and drenching the lace in the set. He wanted to touch himself, but he held still for Melchom, waited until Melchom pulled apart the fabric covering his hole and breached him open. Fear spiked in his human, but Dove didn’t recoil. He chased it. Starved for it.

“Take off your robe,” Melchom groaned out the command, “and present yourself to me.”

Dove’s eyes dilated, pupils blown, before he hopped down and scrambled to obey. It was impossible to make sense of anything in his head now with everything rushing too fast and jumbled together, so Melchom cut the connection. His human was giving

him enough cues to where he'd have no trouble reading him.

There wasn't a moment of hesitation before Dove jumped on the bed, robe discarded as he settled on his knees and bent over, hands pulling his ass cheeks apart.

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“On your back,” Melchom corrected. He would take his human from behind before the day was over, but he needed to see that last image in Dove’s head, needed to make it a reality. “Jack yourself off. Prove you want this.”

The moment the words left his mouth, Melchom realized how badly he needed it. He needed to see the human was going wild with desire. He needed to believe sex wasn’t going to be a scheme or a way to achieve something.

It couldn’t be, not after the last time he’d bothered with a human.

“Hot,” Dove mumbled, a sharp intake of breath the only sound he made before he was once again obeying.

With his feet planted on the bed and knees spread, Dove fished his cock out of the thong with one hand. He stroked it slowly, holding Melchom’s gaze, until something shifted in him. Lust took control, his strokes more erratic, almost inexperienced—juvenile.

Melchom snorted.

It appeared his human was going to need help with something as simple as pleasuring himself. He’d use that to taunt him with later. Now, he focused on the human’s body, shifting it as he saw fit, until he flooded Dove’s brain with the right commands.

“W-what?”

“Enjoy it.” That wasn’t an order, but it might as well be.

There was fear in the air... and reluctance. Fear could be so interesting; it was usually just food, an emotion he fed off easily by visiting one poor soul or another. He could take it or leave it when there was no passion beneath it.

But then there were times when fear hid arousal, and both pushed and enhanced the other, creating an addictive cycle that had all of his neurons firing. Melchom's cock throbbed. It had been a really long time since he'd felt that push and enhancement so strongly.

Even struggling with his own need, Melchom knew what he was doing. Soon enough, his human must've realized, too. Dove's body relaxed eventually as Melchom kept commanding the perfect pressure and rhythm. He played with it, too, increasing both as the human got more and more desperate for release.

"W-wait." His human moaned rather obscenely. He tried to buck his hips up into the air, but Melchom stilled the movement. "Don't wanna come like this."

"Why not?" He smirked. Humans were so boring when they didn't have a little help. "It's not going to be the last time you do."

"Fuck," his human half-groaned, half-whimpered. "Please, I..."

"Quiet."

The order, Melchom realized, was pointless. Before Dove could even think about glaring at him for silencing him, he was overtaken with his first orgasm. spurts of cum flew up his torso, reaching the straps that framed his chest.

His human could only pant, his body otherwise frozen.

Melchom pressed the heel of his palm against his own cock. Being hard in the

human's presence wasn't a novelty, but he needed to stave off, needed to remind himself waiting made it much more worth it...

He'd save waiting for another day.

When he finally climbed into the bed, he easily covered the human's body. Dove hadn't finished recovering, but it didn't quite matter.

"You think you can service me?"

A grunt came out of those sinfully parted lips before a nod followed. Melchom considered turning them around so Dove could set his own pace, but he remembered the fantasies in Dove's head that he'd had access to.

His rebellious human dreamed of being overpowered, having all his senses overwhelmed.

Fulfilling that particular dream was not going to be a hardship.

Melchom's hand wrapped around the nape of Dove's neck, angling his head slightly before feeding him his cock.

The look on his face was complete debauchery, and Melchom hadn't even painted it yet. Eyes half-lidded, rosy cheeks, pupils that struggled to focus on one single thing... Melchom had to wonder if his human could take as much as he'd thought.

It didn't matter.

He'd agreed to this, and Melchom could tell he hadn't changed his mind.

"Let me take over."

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He could see a question forming in Dove's head, but he discarded it right away, apparently not quite caring to bother with it.

All that trust was going to be his demise—maybe for both of them if Melchom didn't find a way to keep it under wraps.

“Okay.”

Melchom fed Dove his cock then, rearranging and stretching his body until his lips wrapped around it perfectly. He let him gag on it for a few seconds, but Melchom wasn't a cruel lover. Well, he supposed he was, but not when it came to this. Not so soon, either.

Slowly, he opened up Dove's throat, letting the human get used to the intrusion, to the fact that his body wasn't his. It wouldn't be while fucking was on the table.

Nostrils flaring, Melchom thrust into the yielding mouth, losing himself in the scents surrounding him. The arousal of the human, combined with the lingering fear and adrenaline, was exquisite—an aphrodisiac like no other.

“You are a gift after all, tiny human.”

A whine escaped Dove, and his hands flapped for a second. Melchom dived into his mind.

No, he wasn't asking to stop, just struggling with another thought about his name. His poor human was confused, finding affection in Melchom's nickname when he'd

thought there could only be disgust.

His tiny, little human.

“My gift to tear apart and rebuild piece by piece.”

Dove found the idea arousing, Melchom realized with a start. The new particles filling the air boosted him up, made him fuck that willing throat deeper, rougher, until he was filling the human’s mouth with his cum. He didn’t let go until everything was swallowed, and Dove was drowning in his scent.

“One day, I’m going to use you as my portable toilet.” The fantasy made his cock twitch as it began to fill again. He hadn’t had a good bucket in a long time—not one he didn’t have to keep in complete control the entire time. “You’ll wake up excited I’m going to be drilling on your prostate, but instead you’ll be mortified to find I’m just filling your insides with my piss.”

His own little Dove blinked owlshly at him. “Why would I be mortified?”

His own little kinky as fuck Dove.

Melchom shook his head while he traced a thumb over the human’s bottom lip. “If you start liking everything I do to you, I’m gonna have to come up with other ways to keep you scared.”

More perverted, darker ways. Melchom couldn’t say he disliked the idea.

“I can like it and be scared of it.”

Dove’s usually messy brain proved that was true, too. Melchom saw images of him jerking off to amateur videos he’d found when searching for watersports in porn sites.

Other mirrors portrayed a scared Dove. Tear tracks stained his cheeks, Melchom's cock filling his mouth while golden liquid dribbled down his chin.

His Dove had a lot to learn, a lot he wanted to learn.

Melchom liked it.

CHAPTER 7

DAVE

"Why did you put me to sleep?" Dave grouched.

He realized he couldn't look too menacing when he was rubbing the sleep off his eyelids and his torso seemed to still be covered in cum. That didn't mean he wasn't going to try.

"Because your body needed the rest."

The demon wasn't even in the bed with him, and he hadn't given him all the orgasms he'd promised. Dave didn't remember anything after that threat-slash-promise to add watersports into whatever it was they were doing.

"Are you that set on giving me whiplash?"

Of course Melchom would be. But, fuck, that blowjob had been hot. He'd thought it would feel violating when he first felt the demon taking control over his body, but it had been nothing like when he'd forced him to kneel.

The closest he'd ever felt like that was at a party when he'd turned twenty-one. He'd decided it was a good idea to set up a gangbang for himself, and one of the guys

happened to know shibari. He'd been completely restrained for everyone to shift him around and move him as they pleased, and he'd felt helpless, and incredibly turned on because of that helplessness.

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The combo of handjob and blowjob with Melchom was that same feeling but on steroids.

“I’d answer, but I know you’ve already forgotten your question.”

It was supposed to be mockery, but Dave didn’t care. He cared about the distance, and how desperate would he appear if he instigated something already? He wouldn’t even touch the matter of his self-respect, or the fact that he should be hating the demon’s guts and being all dejected.

There was no point, right?

He might as well enjoy something while he was here.

While.

Right.

Dave swallowed.

“Long time since you last questioned this place,” Melchom mused. He just stood against a wall, flexing his muscles while he watched Dave with that glint in his eyes. Dave was certain the glint meant he was deep diving into his brain or however that worked, but it wasn’t like he could ask anyone.

There should be a book about demonic culture or something.

He'd never been a big reader, but...

"We should shower," the idea came as abruptly as he blurted it out.

Surely, Melchom wouldn't resist him if they were both in that tub, and it would mean not thinking about any of the other things.

The ones he should probably think about if he wanted to say he had any survival skills.

It didn't matter.

"Should we, now?" The demon raised an eyebrow, that annoying smirk in place, but he strode forward.

Dave considered it a win when Melchom's knee dipped into the mattress. "Yeah. I'm sticky."

"You can't possibly say that with a straight face."

Yes, he could, and he loved a challenge more than anything else. "Watch me."

Melchom watched him for a moment, that glint coming and going before it stilled, his eyes darkening with something Dave could recognize without a manual—lust.

"Lead the way, Dove."

Dave's breath hitched. It wasn't the first time, and he ignored it most of the time, but it still caught him off guard sometimes. The name, nickname, whatever it was, made him react in a way he wasn't used to. A shudder ran through him. There had to be more to it than simply changing a vowel in his name, and the uncertainty of what that

would be kept him on edge.

Probably the way the demon wanted him.

It didn't matter.

“Why did you leave earlier?”

He hadn't meant to ask, but it had been bugging him. Obviously, he wasn't expecting a demon who owned him to explain himself. It had still been unnerving, though.

“I was visiting your realm.”

“Oh.” Dave's eyes widened. Dread filled him. Demons never visited their realm for anything good, right? Granted, he hadn't even known demons existed two days ago, but he imagined most of the folklore around the species was right. “What were you doing there?”

Melchom cocked his head to the side, brows furrowed. The fact that he looked so confused while he was still naked was annoyingly endearing. Dave didn't want it to be.

“You said you wanted revenge on your friends.”

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“That was fast.” He needed to buy time because his heart started beating way too fast. His mouth felt dry, drier than it had when he was breathing all that sulfur. He couldn’t look in the demon’s direction when he braced himself for the answer to the next question. “So what’s happened to them? To Jordan?”

After all, Jordan was the only one in the group he cared about. He couldn’t even say he’d learned everyone else’s names. They were just the friends of Jordan’s boyfriend, and they’d never gotten along.

Dave gave a minute shake of his head. It didn’t matter now, did it?

“I can show you.”

“Will it make me throw up?”

Sure, he was curious, but he hated appearing weak in front of the demon, who would surely watch the kinds of images he was offering while eating a bucket of popcorn—if he ate human food. Dave’s stomach already felt queasy enough, though, and he didn’t want a repeat of yesterday and all the toilet cleaning.

That had been humiliating.

“Jordan is alive,” Melchom supplied.

“Oh.” Why, yes, that was the only sound that came out. “What does that mean?”

“I offered him to Astaroth,” he said, shrugging. Dave’s eyes threatened to bulge out

of his skull, but the demon didn't seem to notice. "You could probably see him if you wanted."

"I..." He struggled to catch a breath. His fists clenched and unclenched as he began to pace. "No. No, thanks."

"You sure, Dove?"

Dave sneered. "For all I know, he's being tortured and you just want to traumatize me even more. Or it's part of another deal where I'd owe you something else."

If he was honest with himself, he'd probably ask him about it another day. He wanted to see Jordan, to get some kind of explanation. How did someone throw years of friendship down the toilet like that? But he needed to be strong for that, and he...

He wasn't.

No, it was better if he just focused on making it inside the demon's chambers, and getting in Melchom's favor. The rest of Hell, with all the minions and flames decorating the hallways, didn't feel like they were within his scope. Perhaps later he could figure out other stuff, but he had to put himself first, right?

Funnily enough, Jordan was the one who always drilled that mantra into him.

"Here I was thinking you liked me now."

"I don't like you."

"No?" Melchom teased. "So you don't wanna clean up in the bathroom?"

"I want that." Dave fumed. "It's just sex, though. You're good at it, and I can use the

distraction.”

Shit, he cursed. He should’ve sweetened that more, maybe played Melchom’s games where he kept things vague to keep the demon guessing. It just wasn’t him. He’d never quite managed at it, too worried with the mess in his head to make anything else more complicated than it needed to be.

“Then come be distracted.” Melchom turned around.

Was it him, or did Melchom move more stiffly? Dave snorted. Right, because he now had the power to hurt a gigantic demon who collected weapons and pretty crowns under some misguided notion Dave hadn’t learned enough about.

Before the demon could drag him inside, Dave made his way to him. He may have taken a second to admire the body before him, too. It wasn’t his fault that Melchom’s muscles rippled like that when the demon bent down to sink into the tub.

“Take off your new pretty clothes, Dove.”

“You’re gonna get tired of that one real soon.”

“Am I?”

Dave shrugged. He was not going to fall for another one of the demon’s taunts. Instead, he focused on slipping out of the lingerie set. His cock hardened when he realized he hadn’t taken any of it off while they were in bed before. Having sex while in expensive lingerie sets like this one had always been a fantasy of his, but for some reason, today had been the first time.

And it had been with a demon.

In Hell.

Not going there.

Dave made quick work of getting out of the straps and undoing the laces and tiny zippers. The second he was fully naked, he noticed that shift where his body stopped being his.

Someone was impatient, he noted once the shock faded and his heart went back to beating normally when he was inside the tub, on his knees between Melchom's spread legs.

"Too slow for you?" Dave breathed out.

"Something like that." The demon smirked.

Dave wondered if he had any other types of smiles in his repertoire, or if he was one of those people who only had one setting.

It was probably the latter.

"Touch me," Melchom commanded, eyes flickering down to the just as impressive as the first time he'd laid eyes on it cock between his legs.

Dave swallowed. Trepidation and anxiety about its size churned within him before he dared to take the proverbial first step.

He trailed the length with his index finger, starting from the base. He noted the way Melchom's muscles clenched, his hips bucking up for more of that touch.

It was more gratifying than it had any business being. It filled him with a sense of control, of power over the demon—power that wasn't being taken away from him as he took his time exploring the veins and the darker skin of the soaked tip.

His fingers didn't meet when he curled them around it, but Dave didn't want to use two hands. It was hard enough already to stay balanced in the water, its tiny waves playing tricks on him. He imagined he wouldn't fare well on a beach then. Dave refused to get sidetracked, or to show that he was. He could still wing it with one hand, even if it made him self-conscious. Regardless of Melchom's little humiliation game taking over when Dave was touching himself, he'd just never been big on handjobs. When he was with someone else, he'd rather blow them, and when it was just himself, he'd rather use a couple of his trusty toys or go on a hookup app.

If he had the money for a therapist, he was sure they'd tackle all about why he couldn't spend time with himself. Alas, his insurance only covered visits to the psych ward and follow up appointments with a psychiatrist. At least she was nice.

He'd actually miss her.

"You're thinking too much."

"And you notice it now?" Dave snarked.

Lots of people complained about him going off topic at the worst times. It made him recoil. He didn't mean to stray, and it didn't even mean he wasn't into whatever else he'd been doing before. It was just another way in which his brain was wired differently.

Besides, he didn't think he could be blamed, given the circumstances. He was still processing everything, right?

"You're actually doing better than most humans."

"Shut up."

The fact that he was getting used to demons answering his thoughts was only slightly disturbing.

Melchom didn't say anything to that, but he smirked.

"If you don't want me to get distracted, you'll have to do better than that."

"Not a hardship," Melchom murmured.

Shit.

Dave usually used bravado and snark as a coping mechanism. People around him didn't just have an answer ready for it.

He wasn't complaining. His cock was certainly not either as he was grabbed and manhandled until he was turned around, his back resting against the demon's chest.

Dave swallowed. His heartbeat raced again as Melchom's arm wrapped around the back of his legs, bending him until he was completely exposed.

"So... you had oils?"

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“Yes.” Melchom didn’t say anything else—nothing about where they were or whether or not he was using them.

Perhaps having sex with a demon hadn’t been his greatest idea, regardless of the way his body was trying to plaster itself to Melchom’s. His skin ran hot, and it somehow spurred him on further, created the need to have more of that heat.

To have it everywhere.

Melchom shifted, and Dave was too aware of everything around him not to notice. Moving proved more challenging, but he noticed the bottle of what looked like clear oil in his periphery. Right, he mused. No need to move too much to reach places when Melchom was that size.

“Stop complaining,” Melchom reprimanded.

Dave chose to believe there was a hint of teasing in his voice, and the demon actually liked all of his rambling. A faint scoff was enough of a reply.

It was only a matter of time. Everyone used to tell Dave he had a way of worming himself into people’s lives. He’d been bothered by the statement in the past, but perhaps he could use it to his advantage now.

The sound of the bottle being uncapped brought him back to the present time. He grunted. Knowing he was going to feel whatever happened for days didn’t deter him, but he still bit his lip. That oil and Melchom rearranging his body or however that worked better work right.

“Trust me.”

Dave scoffed. It was mostly his nerves flowing to the surface. “You’re a demon.”

Melchom’s coated fingers trailed down to his rim, pressing against his hole without trying to breach it. “So observant of you.”

“Can demons be trusted?” Dave arched his spine.

He was going to try and not make a fool of himself by becoming a whimpering mess five seconds in. No promises, though.

“Not generally.”

“Exactly.”

“Hold still, little Dove,” Melchom murmured.

Dave tensed. It was an instinctual response, not that he wanted anything to stop. A shiver ran through his body as he noticed the tip of Melchom’s cock against his hole. Looking down, he noticed Melchom’s free hand was curled around the base of his cock, ready to lead it inside.

“Are you sure this is enough prep?” he forced himself to ask.

“Trust me,” Melchom repeated.

His voice sounded slightly strained, which was the only reason Dave shut up. The mix of the water and the oil massaged against his rim should help, he thought. He wished he had more experience with shower sex.

“Hold on to the edge of the tub.”

Dave obeyed, scrambling to wrap both hands around the edges, and he held on as Melchom slowly thrust in. It was so fucking strange—not having to wait or clench and release. A part of him had been scared he wouldn’t enjoy it if the demon was in charge of his body, but... fuck. He could feel so acutely, panting as he realized how impossibly full he was, how there was no way for Melchom’s cock to not drill into his prostate with every single movement. Dave was soon panting, groaning, moaning as Melchom increased the pace, his thrusts more punishing. His fingers clenched tighter against the edge of the tub as Melchom’s arm tightened around his waist.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” he kept grunting, whimpering.

His body slumped back and his head tilted to the side, resting against the demon’s chest.

“Not thinking about anything else right now, are you?” Melchom groaned, his lips caressing the top of his head. Dave felt them oh so close, vibrating against his disheveled hair.

Dave huffed, but he was also panting, everything being too much and not enough to put the fire pooling in his gut to rest. The demon was unrelenting once he had the green light, fucking him like he wasn’t breakable at all—or like he didn’t care about it. The image that created had him leaning closer, wanting to urge Melchom to keep going. He was probably out of his mind for it, but he couldn’t bring himself to care.

“So good,” he managed to breathe out between thrusts.

He had to look like a mess, head lolling up and down with the strength of the demon’s body he had nothing on. Dave didn’t care. He’d never felt so utterly consumed, so utterly aware of every nerve ending in his body and nothing else.

Everything was on fire and brimming on the edge, tortured and pleased to its limits in the most delicious of ways.

A mix of a cry and a shriek left him when he was lifted off the cock. His hole clenched without demonic influence, and he felt dizzy as he tried to look around. One second later, he was readjusted, positioned so he was face to face with Melchom.

The asshole really was gorgeous, even more so from up close.

“I wanna come in you.”

“Okay.” Dave nodded.

Had he really put a stop to things to ask for his consent? There had to be something else, but Dave was still too foggy, too horny and in need of release to even consider asking. Or trying to guess.

Melchom’s hands on his waist guided him down. Dave was just thinking about that cock in him now that he was used to the pace, the way it breached his entrance without rupturing him in a million pieces.

The rupturing would come later, once Melchom stopped worrying about hurting him.

Dave bit his lip, reaching down with one arm to grab the cock in question. It must’ve shocked the demon, how he took the reins and sank down on it. Dave didn’t care.

“Just fuck me.” The stretch still drew a low moan out of him. “Need you.”

Later, he’d hate himself for those two words. Now, his arms wrapped around the demon’s neck, grasping pieces of that white thick braid that shouldn’t feel so soft to the touch.

“Don’t even think about it, Dove.”

“Huh?”

Last he'd checked, he was only thinking about Melchom and getting his cum in him.

“The minions were wrong about reading the old books. It's not my hair they want. It's yours.”

Dave blinked, the fog fading instantly. “What?”

Melchom didn't answer. Instead, the demon started fucking him like there was no tomorrow, one hand gripping Dave's waist while the other jerked him off. He squeezed him tight, bordering the line between pleasure and pain way too closely.

Not that Dave could say anything.

He didn't even know what he wanted to say anymore. It was too fast, too punishing.

Too fucking good.

Dave didn't stand a chance. He couldn't even warn the demon when he felt his balls drawing tight, all that tension and fire building up ready to release.

His cum came out in spurts, ropes that flew out of him and coated the demon's hand.

The hand that went to Dave's face and force fed his own seed to him.

His cock twitched valiantly, whimpers leaving him as his tongue fought to grab all of him.

“Imagine that,” Melchom murmured. “I haven't helped you yet, and your cock's already getting ready for a second round.”

“Please,” he whispered.

“Please, what?”

Dave didn’t even know.

He only knew Melchom’s thrusts had slowed down, and he enjoyed feeling full, but feeling full wasn’t enough.

He needed to feel used.

“Good boy.”

“Why?”

It couldn’t have been more than a couple of minutes of Melchom thrusting into him, robbing him of air. Then he was coming, and Dave thought he understood why the heads-up earlier might have been necessary.

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Feeling Melchom come inside of him was like nothing he'd experienced before—probably because he'd never been with anyone even close to the demon's size. He felt... bloated, stretched in ways that didn't feel natural or even possible. Even more so when Melchom pressed a finger against his entrance, keeping his cum secured inside.

“Hnngh.” Dave would swear he was trying to say something.

He just didn't know what.

“Feel it, Dove,” Melchom spoke reverently. “You have a king's seed inside of you.”

That... that shouldn't be hot... should it?

Dave shuddered.

CHAPTER 8

MELCHOM

“What did you mean?”

Melchom frowned. He'd thought his human would be quiet longer after the way he'd fucked him in the tub.

He shouldn't be surprised. There was very little the human had done since he'd got him inside his chambers that had been predictable.

“What did I mean when?”

“You said the minions want my hair, not yours? But I...” Dove frowned. Melchom liked more and more the way that name felt when he thought of his human. “Does that mean you’ve changed your mind? You said before that a guy was wrong about me? It felt like you were saying I couldn’t be special or something, but... Now I am? I don’t want to be special.”

With Dove talking almost as fast as he was thinking, Melchom had to focus to keep up.

His human didn’t know it, but he was sharp.

Incredibly so. Melchom didn’t think another human would’ve reached the conclusions Dove was—not like that.

It took them longer to get used to Hell and its policies, the way it worked. Melchom was beginning to think his Dove was already halfway there.

“There are some old writings demons are obsessed about, minions included.” Melchom drained the tub as he spoke. “Full of prophecies, spells, that kind of thing.”

“Spells?” Dove perked up. “I wanna learn spells. Wiccans always looked so cool.”

“Of course you do.” Melchom would have to remember not to let him near any of the libraries. Who knew what kind of damage Dove could cause, and Melchom was not willing to pay the price for it. “Anyway, there are a few prophecies that Astaroth, and the minions, think concern you.”

“Fuck no.” The human scampered out of the tub and backwards into the room. “I’m not going to be the chosen one trope. Being the horny gay one was bad enough,

but...”

“What are you talking about?” Melchom shook his head but followed Dove, noting the rivulets of water pooling on the floor.

“You know, when the average person is suddenly snatched and the world’s future is at stake and it’s on their shoulders. I can’t handle that!”

“That’s a bit dramatic.”

To begin with, Melchom wasn’t convinced Astaroth had been right yet—or that the minions were, for that matter. The minions were even less right, to be fair. If there was any hint to hair having power in the prophecies, they quite clearly referred to its color, and it wasn’t Melchom’s unique pearly shade. Not that he should be surprised that they couldn’t even read something right. They were relegated to being minions for a reason. They couldn’t stop and think for two seconds if their lives depended on it—and they often did.

“You’re not reassuring me.”

Melchom focused back on the human. “You’ll have to forgive me, Dove. But no, you don’t have anything on your shoulders.”

“Are you sure?” Dove crossed his arms in front of his chest.

He seemed to have conveniently forgotten he was naked, even if it had been a big deal just the day before. Melchom liked that; he was already molding him, turning him into the kind of human he could play with without all the annoying traits they often clung to.

“I am sure.” Melchom approached him then, hoisting him up until the crook of

Dove's neck was within biting distance. "Then again, you probably shouldn't believe me."

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A pang of fear rang through Dove, just like he'd intended. There had been some hints of fear while they were in the bathroom, but they had been too faint. Not potent enough to leave him with his nostrils flaring, vibrating for more.

"I need to believe someone. Or something." His Dove gulped, clenching his hands in tiny fists that rested over his chest. "It's the only way I know to ride it out."

Melchom frowned. His human could spend hours without worrying about the reality of his situation, then all of a sudden, a thought would pop up. Right now, he was thinking he must be in a ward already and that was why he couldn't leave the room.

The way most human civilizations dealt with brain imbalances had never made sense to him.

"What do you need to believe this is the real thing?"

Dove snorted while he quivered with a much more potent kind of fear. "I can never tell something's the real thing for sure. Yes, before you ask, it's fucking exhausting."

Melchom had not planned to ask him that, but he didn't say it. What he did was grab hold of Dove's body and push him to the bed. He usually tried to avoid soaking his mattress, but he didn't quite care now.

Covering the tiny body with his almost felt like an instinct. He couldn't say the same about pressing his lips against the human's. His body vibrated as he held himself back, only exploring the chapped lips and the faintest hint of cherry-flavored gloss he must've been using before he was sent here.

He needed to be the only thing his human saw, the only thing he felt. He needed to mark him, to make it clear he belonged to him. It didn't matter what the prophecies said or didn't. Heavens, it didn't matter if the prophecy really was about his human or not.

Melchom didn't quite understand why he felt this urge toward the human—because he wasn't so delusional to believe it was just about having a convenient food source. Demons weren't about feelings and emotions and all the mushy stuff he knew Dove had had hundreds of dreams about. So he knew it wasn't that... but it was something.

“What are we doing?” Dove licked Melchom's lips before he asked, his body otherwise still in bed.

“A bit late to ask that question, no?”

Dove snorted. “I understand fucking. Not so sure about kissing languidly in bed.”

“Is that what you think we're doing?” Using only one finger, Melchom tucked locks of honey brown hair behind the human's ear. As soon as Dove started to relax, Melchom pulled at it, forcing him to arch his spine. “Never learn to anticipate me, Dove.”

The human scoffed. “Are you really gonna keep calling me that?”

“Yes.”

Melchom licked the side of Dove's neck. If the human didn't want kissing, he still had a million other things he could do.

“Will you tell me about it?” Dove struggled to speak. Melchom could see it in his head, the brute force to focus on the single mirror that had stayed stuck in the

meaning of the prophecy. “Please?”

“Why would I keep you on the loop of anything, my Dove?”

The human shivered, tears pooling in his eyes. He nibbled on his bottom lip before his eyes clenched shut. “Okay.”

Okay? Melchom frowned. That wasn’t the answer he’d expected.

“It’s fine. We have good chemistry, but I’m nothing to you. I get it.” Dove shifted to his side, his back to Melchom as he burrowed in the bed.

Melchom didn’t know what to say. What was Dove supposed to be, other than a human gift whose company he enjoyed? Melchom shook his head. This was why everyone in Hell agreed humans were a lot of work. He was just getting hung up on it because it had been a long time—and the human really was entertaining. He guessed he’d grown to admire Dove, and that was quite the feat when he’d been in Hell for so little time.

“I’m heading out.”

“Whatever.”

Melchom noted the way Dove’s voice shook. One quick peek inside his head showed him the human was terrified of being alone. He’d been planning to ask him, apparently—to even beg if it came to it so Melchom wouldn’t leave him alone. The notion was preposterous. Melchom was going to ignore the almost-not-there tug in his chest. Not leaving him alone at all was just not plausible. Didn’t Dove realize he had a job? Responsibilities? He couldn’t show up to meetings with the princes of Hell with a human in tow.

It would lose him the little dignity he'd managed to hold on to.

He wondered, though. He didn't know anything about caring for a human under his wing. He thought he'd been doing a good enough job so far, but doubts assaulted him when Dove got this despondent. Did Melchom need to pull him out of it? He wouldn't know where to start. Dove's head became disturbingly blurry when he got in one of these spells. The mirrors showed static, the sky moved in different lanes—some too fast, some too slow. It was dizzying just to be in there.

Melchom sighed as he covered his Dove with a Tartar cloth. He didn't think too much about what he was doing, or what it meant. Instead, Melchom strode to the shelves in the wall to his right. There was a hidden drawer there, covered by sharp axes that had once been gifted to him. There were two history books there. Nothing big, but he figured it would keep the human entertained.

Without a word—he didn't think Dove would hear him anyway—he dropped them next to him and left. He'd better hope no one caught sight of it. The last thing he needed was to give the Princes another reason to forget who they were talking to.

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He fixed his hair while he walked toward the hallway that connected with the mayoral building. At first sight, it looked like he was alone, but with a quick squint of his eye, he could tell at least four minions were tracking him.

“What’s up with you? No shiny object to fixate on?”

Daddy Melchom!

He didn’t bother to ask them not to call him that, or to point out he wasn’t a Daddy. That had been his first mistake when they started doing that.

How’s your gift?

You’re spending a lot of time with him.

Does he still taste nice? He tasted so nice in the cells.

Melchom paused. His fists clenched, fury building up and spreading from his gut. “You fed off my property?”

Usually, it wouldn’t be a big deal. Fear was fear, and he’d felt how strong the pheromones Dove was releasing that day were.

This time, though, it mattered. The human had been marked as a gift to him. As his. Even if Hell was quite lax when it came to protocols and rules, feeding off a higher level demon or their possessions was off limits.

Why did you have to open your mouth?

Melchom, we were just curious.

We haven't had a human in so long.

How do you think he's gonna care?

Shut up, he might! It's not fair we don't get any.

"You don't get any because you haven't proved you deserve it," he growled. "Now scram."

They all did.

Melchom took a deep breath. He glanced up at the paintings that lined the way to the west wing of the castle. As usual, the first in the row of thirteen paintings made him wince. Beelzebub's sense of humor was to thank for it. If it were up to Melchom, the other demon would be strangled and buried in cursed flames for the rest of eternity.

The image was disrespectful—not because of its sexual nature, but the fact that this row of paintings would begin with the depiction of Melchom's dethroning. In the painting, King David bent over a bed that had stopped being his more than two thousand years ago, one of his hands reaching back. Those disgustingly skilled fingers were curled tight around one of his horns. The dethroning was signified by the nubby thumb beginning to separate Melchom's crown from his head.

It was humiliating. His blood boiled, resentment still wreaking havoc through his system.

He'd been pathetic, falling for that coward's trickery.

Melchom shook it off, forcing his muscles to relax and his fists to unclench.

There was one reason why that painting was there: Beelzebub knew it was the path he had to take to reach their offices, and he wanted Melchom to not be thinking clearly, to be fueled by emotion.

You're going to be late, Daddy.

Melchom sighed. "Shut up if you don't want me to encourage the princes to cut you off."

He wasn't going to be late anyway. He liked to keep the minions in line though, remind them he still held on to some power. They needed a firm hand.

Melchom thought everyone around him did—new additions included.

As predicted, he wasn't late. Two turns, and he was walking inside the conference room. It wasn't much of one, he supposed, but given the long oak table and the dozen chairs with little else inside... Calling it a conference room stuck. In reality, it was just the place where everyone tried to prove who had a metaphorical bigger dick.

The answer for the literal one was Melchom.

The thought boosted his mood some. It was easy to lose sight of the fact that most of the assholes were just jealous of him—wary of what he had been and what he could come back to be.

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Only Astaroth was inside the room, sitting in the chair to the right of Flaga's, the demon currently presiding over their meetings.

"Brother." The Prince kept reminding him of their familial relationship. It had taken Melchom years to train himself out of giving a reaction.

"Astra. Are the others on their way?"

"In about twenty minutes."

Melchom had been about to sit down, but his body drew taut as he spun around to eye his... brother. "Then why was I summoned now?"

"I wanted to talk to you."

"About what?"

Astra waved his hand around. It had always been one of his tells; he had something to say, but he didn't know how to tackle it and pretended it bore no importance. It had been that way since they were tiny cherubs with no scars in sight.

"When are you gonna let me meet your gift?"

That was an easy question to answer. "Never."

Melchom was surprised when it was met with silence, though. Hadn't Astra expected that very thing?

“You’re stubborn.” Astra rolled his eyes but didn’t move from his seat. In fact, he adopted an even more relaxed stance. The next step to really sell his supposed nonchalance would be to stack his feet on the table. The other princes would kill him, though, and he knew it.

“He’s mine.”

“Yes, but tell me.” Astra fiddled with the belt in his tunic. Most demons didn’t bother to cover their chests, but he’d always preferred to. “How come you pass by a painting of your demise every day and still haven’t learned your lesson?”

Melchom’s nostrils flared.

“What lesson?”

As far as he was concerned, that painting held no educational purpose and never would. Melchom fumed just thinking about it. The idea that his family was trying to teach him something or thinking about his well being in any way was laughable.

“You didn’t let me meet your human back then either. If I had, we wouldn’t be here right now.”

Of course.

In the decades after his demise, Astra had rubbed his special talent in Melchom’s face every chance he got. All demons could read thoughts and feel and feed off emotions, but they had their own unique set. Melchom could command bodies to do their bidding. Astra was a master at reading future intentions in people. He could’ve known the unnameable would betray and dethrone him.

He would know if Melchom’s gift would hurt him or fulfill his prophecy

too—assuming that Dove was the gift in that prophecy.

“Don’t fret, little brother.”

Astra’s nostrils flared. Getting a rise out of him was still so easy.

“Honey shackles will tie the demon’s wrists,

They shall come as a present, the utmost sacrifice,

The gift shall be fractured, fluttering by,

He will make Hell his own,

And restore the place of the one who fell.”

His voice boomed as he recited the verses. He’d always had a flair for the dramatic.

“Will the one who fell reclaim his crown?

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Or will he be suffocated by the one who loves?

Two outcomes shall come, both just and sound

A King will rise again

But will it be the fearing demon, or the soaring gift?

What shall happen to the losing part?

The winner shall decide.”

“I know the scriptures.” Melchom pretended to be bored, even though he was anything but. “How’s my human’s friend? To your liking?”

“Turns out he’s part of a satanic cult.” Astra scoffed. He’d never been a fan of those. “One with some wild ideas about the gift and what your ruling means.”

Melchom didn’t bother asking. It was always either getting in his favor to get all sorts of materialistic prizes—usually money and land, although sometimes they asked for women too... or an idea that he’d conquer their realm and rule over them all.

Westerners always thought every civilization, or realm, in this case, had a hunger for conquering.

The job of a rightful king went beyond all those petty games.

“Still doesn’t make the prophecy right, or about Dove.” Melchom cursed. He realized he’d run his mouth the instant before he noted the way Astra’s eyes widened for a quick second.

“Dove, huh?” Astra leaned forward, resting his elbows on the table and his chin on his hands. “Are you fucking him already, brother?”

“Have you ever had a human you haven’t fucked?”

Astra grinned, shifting his position so his chin was resting against his intertwined hands. “No, but I’ve never let one steal my crown, either.”

Melchom growled. “That’s the thing, though. Even if the human is the one in the scriptures... What can possibly happen? I’m already dethroned, nothing but the minions’ paymaster.”

“You could die.”

The warning didn’t instill him with the fear it should.

It made him curious, though. “That wouldn’t please you, brother?”

“You know the answer to that.”

Melchom didn’t have a chance for a retort. The doors opened, and more princes showed up to find their seats around the table. Even though he’d spend the rest of the meeting mulling over Astaroth’s words and attitude, he was a prince whose loyalty Melchom didn’t question. They might not tolerate each other, but Astaroth had respected him as King—and was tired of all the fights and pissing contests to hold the title.

Not quite an ally, but Melchom didn't think such a figure had ever existed in Hell.

CHAPTER 9

DAVE

If he'd had the ability to do so, Dave would've argued that reading wasn't his strongest suit, let alone a hobby of his. When he didn't get impossibly bored, he enjoyed it for a short span of time and developed a migraine afterward. Even when he paced himself and the book held his interest, there was the matter of growing paranoia that his brain would use the content in the book to fuel his next episode. It was the same reason he was wary about watching shows that went further than a romcom with their plot and special effects.

He'd seen too many warning stories in the wards.

He figured that didn't matter now, though. He was in Hell, after all, and apparently, it wasn't a Hell his brain had fabricated. So what if he lost touch with reality even more? And he'd just been thinking about how he wished there were books he could read on demonic life.

Nothing wrong with trying, he guessed.

The books looked heavy as fuck, though. Hadn't Hell heard of e-readers? Maybe comics or graphic novels? Simplified text? Both books resembled ancient Bibles—like the one his father used to have locked in a glass safe because he had airs of grandeur and thought their house belonged in a museum or something.

Dave had found it distasteful then, and he found it distasteful now.

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At least the tomes didn't look as dusty as that one had after his mother stopped bothering to take care of it.

Dave sighed.

The books were Volumes I & II of what he guessed would be a much larger encyclopedia collection. Hell: History and Hierarchies.

In other words: fun.

What he saw inside gave him even more flashbacks to his childhood. It really was written like a Bible, from the small font in columns to the convoluted language and notes every two words.

Dave shivered. At least he could put church camp to use, but he wasn't happy about that fact.

He made it through the very tedious introduction before he had to pause and get the books out of his sight.

That was when his gaze fell on the discarded robe.

Yes, one cursory glance down reminded him of the fact that he was still naked. For someone who never slept naked—let alone chilled around the house with everything hanging around—he thought he would've had a harder time getting used to it now.

Apparently, that wasn't a thing.

Now that he was aware of it, though, the need to cover up fueled him, had him speeding around the room to grab all the set pieces. Not that it covered him much, but he felt better with it on. Stronger, too. Dave had to be strong to own such an outfit.

There wasn't a mirror he could marvel about his figure in, but he knew he looked hot. The lingerie fit him perfectly, too. He didn't want to think too much about the demon, or what he'd have to do to get more of these... rewards, he guessed he could think of them as. He couldn't help it, though.

Dave didn't know what to think about all the mixed signals the demon gave him, and it wasn't like he had a manual or someone to ask for demonic relationship advice. He couldn't help it if he expected someone he was fucking to not behave like an asshole two seconds later. He was willing to accept partial responsibility because he got attached too quickly when sex was involved, but still.

An idea started to form in his head. Minions were just like annoying, but scary, children... and he could summon Melchom. Regardless of how shitty he could be, Dave knew he didn't want any other demons to touch him. He was Melchom's property, after all.

Taking that first step toward the door he always caught Melchom appearing from was one of the hardest things he'd done since he'd woken up in Hell. It was probably second only to accepting this was his reality now, even if a small part of him still worried he'd accepted that fact too soon.

It was strange, going back and forth all the time, and then he remembered he'd only been here for two mere days, and it all felt even wilder. More ridiculous, too.

Dave shook his head and shoved all of that aside as his fingers curled around a slight indentation in the stone wall. That was what had to open the door, right?

He was definitely losing his mind, venturing into the unknown where the minions and who knew what else could get inside his head.

There was an inner voice—one he, strangely, trusted—urging him to do it, though. To explore, and try to make sense of all the things that were going on.

He peeked his head through first. He remembered the hallway with all the blue and orange flames. They didn't look to be as tall as they had been when he'd first been forced to walk past them. They didn't crackle as loudly.

Dave had to wonder if it had all been one of Melchom's tricks. He'd gotten the flames going to keep Dave more scared, more dependent on him. It would be cruel, but how could he put cruelty past a demon who fed off fear?

There was a weird draft he didn't remember from the other day. He wrapped his arms around himself as he glanced to both sides. There was no indication about what lay to either side. He still chanced to go the opposite way he'd originally come from. There might be more things than the cell he'd been stuck in to his left, but he had no interest in risking it.

It was eerie. There was too much silence. He'd grown used to accidentally stepping alone into the bathroom and being assaulted by at least four minions before Melchom would kick them out—however that worked.

Dave still walked slowly, watching for every shadow, every spark of the flames that got too close for comfort. He probably should've read more of those books before trying to explore. Dave had just always been the kind of kid who learned things by burning himself. It had never mattered how much he read on a topic; it didn't stick until he experienced it firsthand. He assumed the same principle would apply here.

Summoning Melchom would always be an option if things got bad, too. Dave was

definitely going to get himself killed for putting that trust in Melchom, but doing so was the push he needed to stride in the opposite direction from the cells.

There were a few turns that he picked randomly, but there was nothing to see. No art on the walls, or even little stakes with fire like in the medieval movies.

Hell was strange from an architectural viewpoint. On the one hand, it looked modern. Everything looked like it worked, and at least Melchom's bathroom was fully functional. All the fire and the stone walls and flooring and the lack of actual, proper light, though, kept making him feel like he was inside of one of those soap operas set in medieval times. The fact that his demon only wore clothes covering his groin didn't help.

Dave rubbed a hand against his face. The images of Melchom, with all his bare chest and ink, walking around weren't helpful.

It was the opposite.

Distracting, too.

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Got lost yet, human?

“Shit!” He wasn’t so proud he wouldn’t admit to squealing.

Hand on his chest, he gave himself a minute for his heartbeat to slow down.

In hindsight, he should’ve one hundred percent expected the minions were up to something: scaring the shit out of him, to be precise.

Where are you even going?

Melchom is not going to be happy about this.

I bet you don’t know the way back.

Or did you come for our deal?

“There’s no deal.”

He ignored the way his breathing was becoming more frantic. He was definitely not sure he knew the way back, and he was certain there would be hell to pay once Melchom found out.

Pun one hundred percent intended.

Dave had just... needed to get out, to do this incredibly reckless thing. There was something calling out to him. He didn’t know what it was, but he wasn’t sure staying

in the room would've been an option.

After another couple of turns, he found a set of stairs that traveled down into complete darkness. Dave chewed on his lip. At least now he knew there was a part of Hell that wasn't engulfed in flames. Yay, knowledge.

Yay, to very quickly becoming the cliché gay character who dies in the first five seconds of a movie by doing something stupid.

"I'm really gonna head down there, huh?"

And now he talked to himself too.

Ohh, this is going to be fun.

Shut up, you're gonna ruin it.

"Ruin what?" He almost didn't dare to ask, one foot already edging onto the first step down.

Nothing, human. You keep going.

Yeah, just keep going.

It's not that many steps, really.

"Yeah, okay, no." Dave nearly jumped back, blinking. Whatever that had been, he snapped out of it and looked around. He was certain he had to turn right to head back to the room, but no guarantees beyond that. He'd been taking a bunch of random turns, following whatever had been trying to lure him down the stairs.

He shuddered. If it hadn't been for the minions, he would've one hundred percent headed down. The thought made him scoff. What would they say if they knew they'd accidentally saved him?

I'm gonna tell on you.

"To Melchom?" Dave added a nonchalant tone to his words. "What do you think he's gonna do?"

Maybe he should consider being an actor. From what he remembered, Melchom had a job, so that meant demons worked? He could contribute, and then... Dave paused. What then? Leave? Rent a studio for himself? Was rent a thing?

I always forget humans choose their jobs.

It's stupid.

I don't know, I'd choose my job.

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Yeah, what would you be?

An enforcer, duh.

You'd be a terrible enforcer.

“Guys!” Dave groaned, taking the heels of his palms to his eyes.

He let go only when he started to see bluish spots. He'd somehow managed to forget how annoying—and childish—the minions could be.

He's called us childish again!!

Why is he even walking around?

You'd think Daddy Melchom would know to lock the doors.

Tsk.

You know he's not been the same since—

“D-Daddy?” he almost choked.

Of course he'd focus on that one word instead of the impending panic because he'd gotten lost. Why not?

Heh.

He hates it when we call him that.

You should too. It will annoy him so much.

Yeah, do it!

Bonus points if you let us watch.

“Yeah, right.”

Maybe when he wasn't so confused with Melchom's tendency to ice him out every two seconds. Right now there was nothing Daddy-like about him, and Dave had never been much of a brat.

It was bad enough that Melchom was going to absolutely lose it when he found out what Dave had been up to, which Dave now realized would happen even if by some miracle he found his way back. How his brain had decided to forget the fact that Melchom read his mind was beyond him.

It angered him. Frustrated him, too. Anyone else's brain would just... work better, not make him do stupid stuff or distract him so much he'd forget basic shit.

Perhaps he should just head back to the stupid stairs. He was going to get himself killed, or worse, sooner or later. If it went too badly, he'd just summon the big demon and let him shove him back to the room. It would be a win-win, right?

No, Dave shook his head. His head couldn't be trusted. That was something he'd learned to identify early on. Look at him, using the words his doctors used.

There was still no chance that he could get it right, but he pushed his legs to keep walking—to keep blocking the minions' taunts, too. That part was harder.

Where does he think he's going?

Were all humans as challenged? I don't remember.

I think it's just him.

Stop underestimating him.

Underestimating him?

If he was so weak, he wouldn't still be here.

Huh.

Dave paused. Was it weird to feel proud because a minion he didn't even know existed thought he was strong? Yesterday, he would've berated himself and lamented how he was definitely losing it. Today, he walked faster, his chin lifting higher.

It was ridiculous, but ridiculous was the name of the game lately. No point in riling himself up or dwelling on it.

* * *

It was time to give up, right?

How long had he even been walking around for? An hour? Two? Would either of the books Melchom had given him say anything about the way time ran down here? Dave groaned, pacing the crossroads he'd found himself in. He knew for a fact that he hadn't been anywhere near here when he'd first walked out of the room. For one thing, the walls to the right were filled with rows of paintings.

He would've noticed paintings.

All the walls had been bare and dark and depressing. Until now, it seemed.

"The fuck, Dove."

Dave yelped, his body instinctively turning to the source of the sound.

Melchom was just there, blocking his view of the hall and the closest paintings to them.

“How did you get here?”

Dave hadn’t heard him—or seen him.

“I’m a demon.”

“Gee, thanks.”

“The question is, how did you get here, Dove?” Melchom didn’t look angry. He looked menacing, like a true predator, prowling around their prey.

Dave swallowed when the demon started circling him, one raised eyebrow and that annoying smirk of his in place. “Instinct?” he tried.

The demon, unsurprisingly, snorted. “You were scared earlier,” he noted, his hand gripping Dave’s waist with a scorching touch. “What happened?”

“Why would you ask?” Dave let out a shaky breath.

He hated how stupid he sounded in front of the demon and how insecure he became when he was asked questions he knew Melchom had the answers for. Dave wasn’t sure why it happened—probably because he recognized it as a game, one he didn’t stand a chance at winning. What were even the rules?

“Because—” Melchom paused, a frown marring that ridiculously gorgeous face. “Let’s head to the room.”

Melchom was already forcing Dave’s body to walk in the right direction. Dave

would've stumbled, if he'd been in any control of his body.

“Why?”

The demon sighed, walking before him. The way he didn't even glance back at Dave only made the whole experience more infuriating. He could barely pout about it, which made it worse.

Because I don't want others to see what I'm gonna do to you.

“What are you gonna do to me?” he shrieked.

Dive into your brain.

“Don't you do that all the time?”

“Not to the extent I'm going to now.”

“That doesn't sound ominous.”

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It did. It sounded very ominous. Dave struggled with the idea. He struggled even more with having to accept that there was nothing he could do about it. What was he supposed to do? Figure out a way to get the demon killed? And then what? He didn't think there was a way to escape Hell, and he had a feeling he'd been lucky to be stuck with the giant.

Melchom's shoulders stiffened. "You think too loudly."

"I guess it's one of my charms."

"Or curses."

"If you didn't leave me alone, I wouldn't have time to think."

"I'll keep it in mind."

Dave wasn't sure that was the reassurance he'd been fishing for. He just needed to make sense of what was going on, to have some kind of anchor to latch on to while he processed and figured out everything else.

One more blink, and they were inside the room. Dave blinked a few more times, feeling a migraine growing. Migraines were never a good sign for him. They usually happened when he was late for his meds, but that couldn't be the reason now. He'd gotten his monthly injection last week.

"So, Dove, you're going to feel this."

“Feel what?”

Melchom didn't answer, but his eyes glinted with blue sparks. It wasn't even the sparks that had him checking for exits. There was just this power emanating from Melchom. There was always power emanating from him, a sort of authority that both drew him closer to the source and made him recoil. It was massive now, though, expanding across the room until Dave felt like he was suffocating.

He couldn't not feel it when all that power was aimed at him.

CHAPTER 10

MELCHOM

The human.

Dove.

His Dove had considered killing him.

Melchom breathed through his nose, lips pinched tight. He should be coaxing the human to relax so he could work around his head more safely, but he couldn't bring himself to speak.

Astaroth's warnings kept playing on a loop while he worked his way through all the mirrors and illusions his Dove had built throughout the years. There was a reason why he hadn't done this from the start.

“W-what are you doing?” Dove's teeth chattered.

Melchom cursed.

The sort of fear weaving off him was the fear he instilled in humans he punished. He didn't want to punish the human that was making him perk up again. Not the one he had a deal with so he could do what he did.

This isn't a game, Melchom spoke into his brain. It was easier when he was this deep, and it would resonate further with the human. I need to figure out who drew you to the caves.

"The caves?" Melchom heard the human gulp. "Is that what was down the stairs? Caves?"

Yes. Melchom left it at that.

He'd finally grabbed hold of a linear sequence of events that recalled that morning. Melchom saw Dove in bed, curled up the way he'd left him, grumbling about mixed signals and not knowing what to expect or believe. He saw him trying to focus on the books next. He didn't think Dove read more than a chapter before he got out of bed.

Melchom dug around, convinced whoever was influencing him must've started there.

No, Dove took those first steps out of the room willingly. Melchom cursed. He hadn't realized keeping an adult human meant needing to baby proof all doors, but it might be worth looking into.

There were lots of thoughts swarming around the human's head as he started walking—exploring, as he called it. He basically went in circles for the longest time.

That was when Melchom caught the influence, though: a thin thread of silver that had snuck in while Dove had been busy talking to a bunch of minions.

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Melchom didn't think it was a coincidence, the minions being there to create the perfect opening. That didn't answer any of his questions, however. He tried to dive deeper into the thread even though he knew it was physically hurting the human. Melchom hated it. He hated even more that there was no reason for him to feel that way.

His heart missed a beat when he got to the DNA of the thread.

One of the hellhounds.

Gaz.

Melchom tried to remember anything distinctive about her, but nothing came to mind. She'd been only a pup around the time he'd been dethroned.

"Melchom?" Dove's heartbeat ran at a rapid pace, panicked.

He wanted to take the chance and learn everything left there was to learn about the human. He didn't do it. Instead, he pulled away and focused his sight back on Dove.

"Yes?"

"What was that?"

"I had to carve around in your head."

"And you had to do that why?"

“Because someone got into it that wasn’t me.” Someone he’d have to chase up the caves to have a word with. “Only I get to play with you. I thought we’d established as much.”

“O-okay, I...” Dove chewed on his bottom lip, one finger distractingly twirling a lock of hair. The human had been rattled earlier, and his anxiety was only growing. “So what are you gonna do now?”

“Now I’m gonna have a talk with her.”

“Her?” Dove dared to take one step forward.

He was the perfect mix of fragility and bravado. Melchom found himself struggling, getting distracted with the pheromones in the air. “Is there a problem?”

“No. I mean, I’ve only really seen you. Am I going to meet anyone else?”

“Why would you want that?”

“Because I can’t just be your bed slave?”

That was a nice image. Melchom smirked. He knew he was doing it. He didn’t care that he should be focusing on looking into the hellhounds. There would be time for it.

“Why not? It sounds... appealing.” Melchom let a finger trail up his arm. He enjoyed the way his little Dove shivered too much.

“You’re trying to distract me.”

“Would you rather I leave you alone again?”

“No.” He swallowed. “I told you, I don’t want to be alone. I don’t deal well with it.”

“So I’m noticing.” Melchom sighed. He wished he could be as exasperated as he wanted to be. Anything that wouldn’t make him act so unlike himself—like he suddenly had feelings. “I’m afraid we don’t have a human care building.”

“You should,” Dove quipped. “I can’t be the only human pet in here, right?”

“You’re not a pet.”

Melchom couldn’t pinpoint why he wasn’t, but the word left a sour taste in his mouth. Demons talked about human pets often. It was a thing. He’d had pets of his own—back then.

But his pets hadn’t agreed to let him feed off them. They hadn’t responded to him with so much hunger for whatever Melchom would be willing to offer. They hadn’t kept him on his toes when he was unsuspecting. They hadn’t ignited a fire in him.

His Dove might be a human, one he’d only just met, but he was nothing like the others.

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He guessed it couldn't be a surprise others in Hell had noticed as well.

Dove scoffed, bringing him back to the present. "Are you sure about that?"

One look inside his head showed anxiety he was trying to conceal—turmoil and dread for an upcoming migraine after Melchom's necessary digging.

The demon wasn't quite sure what to do about it. He could get rid of the migraine, but offering it out loud might spook the human too soon. He was just recovering, having thoughts of never letting the demon inside his head again.

If only he knew there was no way to shield himself, not from Melchom. He was the only thing standing between the human and the demons wanting to make a buffet out of him.

And there was one way he could cement that idea.

"We're going on a trip tomorrow."

"What kind of trip?"

"The kind where you don't get a say in it." He smirked.

There it was. That sweet drizzle of fear—the shade of fear he was coming to prefer wafting off the human, the one that could turn so easily to arousal. It only took a look, a well-placed touch, or a carefully chosen command.

His human wanted it, too, wanted Melchom to get him hard and fuck him until it overwhelmed all of his senses. Having Dove all for himself was already proving addictive.

“Tell me, Dove, do you want to choke on my scent?”

No answer came—not verbally. The human’s dilated pupils, and the racing thoughts, though, were more than enough. Melchom had worked with less.

So Melchom grabbed his human’s hand and pulled him toward the bathroom. There was no need to make a mess, and it was clear to him that his Dove needed to get out of his head—both from the lingering ache from Melchom’s invasion and the ongoing anxiety that kept building and building. Sex—and kink—seemed to be the most bulletproof way to achieve that with him.

“Get in the tub, on your knees.” He might’ve helped steer him in the right direction. The claws in the bathtub would help elevate him enough so that those parted lips of his were at the perfect height. “Open your mouth, Dove.”

The human acquiesced beautifully, eyes glassy but unwavering, watching him. Melchom noticed his cock growing beneath all that lace. He would get him more of those clothes after today, maybe have him put on modeling shows for him.

In that position, Melchom could’ve just shoved his cock in that willing mouth. Dove wouldn’t have complained.

He didn’t, though. He drew it out, stroking his length lazily in the meantime. He could see the saliva building up in the corner of his human’s mouth, but Dove didn’t do anything about it.

It was intoxicating.

“Will this be your first time drinking piss, Dove?”

He knew the answer to the question, but the trepidation and fear that wafted off the human was too tantalizing to pass up.

“I... I’ve only done stuff under the chin.”

Dove shivered. His human was smart, knowing that wasn’t what they were going to be doing. Melchom grinned. He didn’t have to coax Dove into accepting the intrusion in his mouth, Dove’s tongue teasing the head of his cock before flattening.

“Ready?” Melchom kept a hand tangled in the human’s hair while the other fisted the base of his cock. He could’ve come right then and there, with the way Dove nodded so innocently, fear mingled with that natural submission. “Just swallow, little Dove. That’s all you have to do.”

Dove’s eyes watered as Melchom pushed his cock slightly deeper. He was desperate for it, though, his hips humping softly against empty air, pheromones hitting the air strong enough that Melchom regretted not being an incubus.

He let the stream flow out of him and into the human’s mouth then. His nostrils flared as he saw the human’s throat work relentlessly, swallowing every single drop even as a tear tracked down his cheek and his face grew red.

Melchom could help him breathe easier, expand his channels so he could swallow faster. He didn’t, though. For one thing, it was too soon after he prodded in his brain. Another incursion would be risking it, and it would be painful for the human.

For another, there was something just so primal about seeing the struggle, about seeing him scramble to obey Melchom.

To be owned by him.

The dirtiness of the act.

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The acidic smell mixed in with the sinful hint of his human's precum.

Melchom clenched the locks of hair in his fist tighter, pulling the human closer. He only let up when his gag reflex was triggered.

"That's right," he hummed. He didn't mind letting the human rest against his thigh, his breath warm against it. He liked the way Dove's chest rose up and down as if he'd just had the workout of his life. Melchom made a note to build up his stamina. "You feel it, don't you? My piss running down your body, tainting every organ it comes across."

Dove only whimpered in response.

The sound was music to his ears.

"Do you need more, little Dove?" Melchom forced him to look up at him. The way his dazed eyes struggled to focus on him should be forbidden. "Do you want my cum in your ass, too? Can you handle all of it? Take it without my help?"

That last question caught Dove's attention, hazel eyes opening wide before that dazed afterglow took over again.

"Is that even possible?"

"If you want it enough," Melchom taunted.

His hand ran the length of the human's back, preening at the way goosebumps rose in

his skin. His Dove was intoxicating in all the best ways. Melchom only mourned having to shift around so he could snatch the bottle of oil from the stand.

Dove stared at it hungrily, his hesitation only showing in the way he chewed on his lip.

“Having second thoughts?”

Even without slipping inside his head, Melchom knew the answer. Dove was just so easy to read. He still enjoyed the uptick in his breath, the way his chest rose up and down, framed by all that delicate lace.

“No,” he breathed. “You should open me up. I don’t think my fingers are gonna do much to prepare me for... that.”

Melchom snorted. The way his human pointed to his cock, then got enthralled by it, almost enchanted... Melchom stood taller.

“It will be my pleasure.”

Stepping into the tub was a no-brainer. So was getting rid of that stupid, barely-covering-anything thong. Melchom appreciated the sight, but he couldn’t say he fully understood human fashion.

Later, once his cock was surrounded by his Dove’s warmth, he would turn the water on, fill the tub with suds the way he knew his human liked. For now, he sat against the cold surface and pulled Dove toward him. He rearranged him until he was to his liking—on all fours, between his legs, his ass at the perfect height. Melchom uncapped the bottle of oil and let the substance run down Dove’s glutes. He kneaded them, drawing soft groans out of the human.

The sounds he made when he didn't try to filter himself really were delicious.

Melchom felt his cock filling, growing in girth and length, begging for friction.

As out of character as it was for him, he practiced restraint. Instead, he poured more oil down the human's crack, straight into his hole before coating his fingers with it.

"Talk to me, Dove," Melchom breathed out the words, the pad of his index finger pressing against the human's hole. "I'm not in your head now. You need to tell me what you want."

His human whimpered, his hips hinging back. Closer to Melchom.

"Open me up, Melchom." His name sounded way too appealing when it came out of his human's mouth like that—as a curse and a plea, all rolled into once. "Please."

The demon sneered as he obliged, pushing his finger past that first ring of muscle. His Dove didn't take long to clench around the digit, to buck his hips around it.

"Stay," he commanded. "Or are you that desperate to be stuffed with my cock? To milk my cum?"

Dove gasped. Melchom doubted he was having an easy time with words right now, with knowing which way was up. The thought was invigorating, filling him with further resolve to completely own his human. He doubted there would be any more conflicting thoughts after he was done with him.

Especially if he did it right.

Melchom didn't know another way of doing things.

“You are mine,” he grunted, curling his finger inside the human’s channel, rubbing against his walls until Dove’s grip on the tub faltered. He added a second finger then. “You’ll always be mine. I’ll keep you mine.”

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His Dove keened. Melchom didn't care enough to break his promise about getting inside his head.

“Beg for my cock, Dove.”

It was clear to see his human was struggling to form words of any kind. Melchom enjoyed it way too much. He guessed it made sense. With two fingers thrusting in and out of his hole, and a third one teasing the entrance, it had to be the same stretch his Dove had gotten from other standard human hookups.

Melchom grunted. He didn't like the way his gut revolted at the comparison with other humans. There would be no one else for Dove. No one to think about but Melchom.

His Dove was his. No logical concern or worry about his dignity mattered now. Only filling Dove did, stretching him enough to take his dick.

“Still with me, Dove?” Melchom used his sweetest voice as he deliberately rammed his prostate.

The human's hands curled into fists, pants and grunts leaving his mouth. “Quit stalling.”

“I wouldn't dream of stalling, gorgeous.” Melchom chuckled. If only the human knew. “Lean back and guide my cock to your hole, Dove. Show me you're worthy of it.”

“Fuck off,” he groaned.

Of course he did. It would’ve had more bite to it if he wasn’t doing exactly as Melchom asked. On his knees, Dove rested one hand on Melchom’s thigh while the other curled around the base of his cock. Melchom held his breath as the human pushed himself down on it. To be fair, he wasn’t sure it was doable without his magick coming to play. He could feel threads of fear ricocheting off his Dove, too, traveling straight to his system.

His human did it, though. They both moaned when Melchom’s cock pushed past that first ring of muscle, Dove’s nails digging into his thigh. Melchom noticed the way Dove’s entire body drew taut, focused.

All of that to please the demon.

Melchom wrapped an arm around the human’s waist, keeping him in place and helping him unload some of that tension.

“I’ve got you, tiny Dove.”

He did. He only readjusted for one second to get the tub filled with water, but his focus was on the human. The human, and his cock as it was slowly encased inside of his Dove’s tight channel.

He didn’t know how he was managing to stay still, to not break the human’s ribcage as his arm clenched around the fragile form.

It took the human an excruciatingly long time to bottom out, a long time filled with groans and moans and whimpers—with the human playing with his cock and Melchom not being able to multitask enough to bat that hand away.

“Fuck,” Dove panted, circling his hips. There was sweat sticking to his hairline, sweat Melchom needed to lick.

To possess.

“My gift,” Melchom grunted, his voice more reverent than he cared to rectify.

His Dove seemed to be too far gone to even catch that. “Move,” he groaned. “Just, just fuck me. Please just fuck me. And don’t fucking hold back.”

The human’s voice sounded strained, but Melchom wasn’t so selfless as to heed the warning. No, he was going to obey the human. It soon became a need. Dove wasn’t the only one drowning in arousal, in desperation to get friction and all the pleasure that came from it.

But, fuck.

Melchom didn’t remember ever thrusting into a channel so tight, so unready, yet welcoming to his cock. Nostrils flaring, he knew he was giving the human quite a few bruises as the pads of his fingers pressed against his skin.

He didn’t care. He’d fix them tomorrow, but now... Now he needed to shift their angle, to grip the human tighter to piston in and out of him, thrusting against his prostate every single time. Even with his clumsy strokes, his human didn’t take long to come, emptying himself under the water.

It brought a new, primitive scent to the bathroom, one that only spurred Melchom further. If it wasn’t for the water, he’d shift him back to all fours and fuck into Dove’s hole until his human was jelly against the surface of the tub.

He might still do it.

Another day, when he could monitor Dove's thoughts. Now, he moved the human's hands to the edges of the tub, and shifted to his knees.

"Hold tight," was the only warning he gave him.

Melchom tried to draw it out, to get more of his Dove's pants and whimpers and groans. He couldn't, his need to come inside the tight channel superseding everything else.

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“That’s it,” he praised, the tiny human clenching and unclenching his hole rhythmically, milking him for all he was worth. “You want to be good for me, don’t you?”

“Feels so...” Dove panted, his body slumping backwards against Melchom’s chest. “Fuck.”

Melchom snorted. He guessed that was one way of putting it.

“You got my clothes all wet.”

“Too bad.” Melchom couldn’t say he’d even noticed, or that he disliked the way the sheer fabric now clung to the human’s skin. “I’ll just get you more.”

“Okay.” Dove sighed, relaxing against Melchom even as his cock was still inside, keeping him stretched.

Melchom knew it had to be painful, could feel hints of discomfort in the air. He didn’t think his Dove wanted him to pull out, though.

He didn’t.

CHAPTER 11

DAVE

“Next time we’re using your body magick thing,” Dave mumbled.

He was on the verge of falling asleep—or maybe he'd just woken up from one of those naps that left him more sluggish than he'd first been. The tub water didn't exactly feel cold—did that concept even exist in Hell?—but it felt... stilled, maybe, like it had been sitting there too long.

Melchom was still holding him, at least. His warmth helped.

“But I like how hard you work to please me.” The demon caressed his hair as he spoke. “How needy you get.”

“I'm not needy.”

There was no answer. Dave huffed. It was hard to stay mad when he was exhausted, though. He only stayed resentful because he couldn't help but think the demon had been banking on it.

He had questions—too many, really. He was just debating the merits of voicing them all. Melchom didn't have the best track record when it came to giving him answers. He'd rather save himself the disappointment of having to face that nothing had changed on Melchom's end. Dave was just his gift, the human who let him fuck him and toy with his head.

Earlier had been scary, though. It wasn't about where he would've stumbled if Melchom hadn't somehow found him—although that was scary too. Someone... Someone had gotten into his head and lured him to those caves. Dave couldn't imagine that demon had had any good intentions.

Melchom diving into his brain—or whatever that had been—had been... painful, in ways he wasn't sure he could describe. He kept picturing those black and white movies where people got lobotomized and they showed a—generally mad—doctor prodding at their heads with a metal stick. It had been kind of like that, except he was

completely frozen, and aware, and...

Dave whimpered, a shiver running down his spine. His eyes closed. He shouldn't be thinking about it, and he shouldn't be showing that he was, either.

"Anyone bothering you?"

"Just my head." Dave burrowed deeper against his neck. He restrained from playing with the demon's hair, but he still inhaled the skin there. Melchom smelled like what he imagined gold would smell like if it had a scent: warm and even with a hint of understated luxury. "Tale as old as time."

"Let's get you to bed, then. I'll fix your migraine tomorrow."

"I don't wanna sleep."

To be fair, he was mostly being contrary. He wanted to sleep. He was fucking exhausted, but he... Dave wanted to feel safe more than he wanted to rest. Feeling safe thanks to Melchom's presence was probably stupid, but he had to work with what he had. What if the demon disappeared on him while he was in the bed, under his spell?

No, there was no way he could risk it. There was nothing wrong with living in oblivion, or figuring out another way to get what he wanted. Didn't one of his supervisors say he was resourceful? He'd show Melchom resourceful.

"No?" Melchom sat up, making the water swirl around them. "And you think I care about what you want?"

"You do today."

“I do?” Melchom sounded amused.

“Yeah.”

“And why is that?”

“Because I’ve had a bad day.” Dave blinked up at him. Melchom really was attractive. He’d be even more attractive if Dave could play with his hair and the thin horns that somehow looked shinier now. “Traumatic experiences are bad for human upkeep.”

Melchom chuckled. “So, get in bed, and I’ll give you some other experience to focus on.”

“But not sleep?” Dave perked up.

He might be getting through to the demon after all. Sure, he was too sore to think of anything sex-related right now, but it was still better than the alternative. Besides, if Melchom used his powers—or whatever—Dave just had to sit back and...

Well, not think of England, because he couldn’t quite not think or feel what Melchom was doing to his insides. But he could enjoy it, right? Especially if Melchom finally let him experience that whole multiple orgasms thing.

Yeah, that would make the soreness worth it.

“You won’t ever find out if you don’t move.”

“Fine, don’t answer,” Dave grumbled.

Not that he was too angry about it.

This time.

“You take way too many liberties, Dove.”

“And you’re gonna get tired of that nickname.”

“You keep saying.”

Dave huffed. Was it immature? Probably. Did he care? Not really. He did get out of the tub, though.

Well, he started to stand up, almost fumbled, and then Melchom righted him and helped him out.

“Dry yourself off, and get on the bed.”

“How do I dry myself off?” Dave frowned.

He didn’t see any towels, or robes, or... anything.

That was, until Melchom let go of him and opened the door to yet another hidden door. What was it with Hell and hidden doors? Dave would be getting a headache from that if he didn’t already have one.

It had to be some kind of storage, right? Maybe a built in closet? Where else would Melchom get a fluffy towel from? Maybe he should really explore the chambers he was in properly before considering the rest of the... Castle? Realm?

Whatever.

The huge towel was really soft. A sigh escaped his lips as he wrapped his body in it.

He must look kind of silly, but the demon didn't mention it.

It was slightly unnerving.

Dave didn't know what it said about him, but he'd started to get used to the constant commentary to keep him on his toes.

"What are you thinking?" Dave asked.

Melchom didn't answer, but he walked back to Dove. Dave thought he'd trail a nail down his arm, or maybe grip his waist like he usually did. Instead, Melchom hoisted him up, forcing Dave to try and wrap his legs around his waist. It wasn't easy while wrapped up in a towel. He probably looked like a clumsy duck, squeals included.

"The fuck?" Dave yelled.

"Your size isn't always convenient."

"Yeah, news flash, I didn't choose it."

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Not that he'd had complaints before. He'd had friends who complained about it and wanted to build muscles and look bigger or more menacing. Dave had always liked his slim frame and the androgynous look it helped him achieve. Yes, it was partly due to society being shitty, but that wasn't the point now.

Melchom snorted before biting around Dave's jawline. And, fine, maybe that felt good. Good enough to forget what he was complaining about.

"Do you really want to turn everything into a fight, Dove?"

"Well, n-no," he spluttered, resting his hands on Melchom's pecs for... purpose. No other reason. "I'm just saying..."

"Just accept the break I'm giving you today," Melchom suggested.

That smirk was the thing that kept him from being convinced he'd be getting an actual break, though. Melchom always did that, leaving him with more questions than answers.

"Not a break from everything."

"Of course not."

Melchom moved them then, placing him on the bed before taking the towel from him. Dave frowned. He liked that towel.

It was weird that the demon didn't laugh or retort something. He guessed it must be

true he was leaving his head alone. For now.

He wasn't sure he fully understood why, though. Since when did the demon care that Dave was in pain, or confused, or on the edge of a meltdown? It hadn't mattered before.

Dave sat up on the bed.

"I liked it before."

Changing tactics for the win. He considered asking Melchom what had changed, or maybe get some intel. Melchom didn't talk to him when he did that, though. He talked when Dave proved to be a perfect sex toy. He could do that—focus on the steamy parts and let the bad demon's defenses crumble.

"What did you like, exactly?" Melchom looked intrigued, his head cocked to the side.

He wasn't joining Dave in bed, though, and that wasn't going to work. Dave rolled his eyes. It seemed he had to do it all himself—including coaxing a giant onto the piece of furniture. He usually didn't have issues getting men to crowd him against a mattress. Was he losing his touch? No, that was ridiculous.

Dave frowned, that train of thought stilled. It really was weird not to have a response to his thoughts now.

"Come and find out," he breathed out, lips parted.

His heart was racing, and a knot was forming in his throat. Was it really a good idea to offer him access? Probably not. But he... It was comforting—when it was Melchom.

Even with both of them horizontal, Melchom still towered over him, looming. “You want me in your head?”

“Yeah.” Dave ignored the case of dry throat he’d come down with. “Just you, right?”

For a few seconds, the demon stood eerily still. “Just me.”

Dave saw that flicker in Melchom’s eyes before he noticed a tiny zing in his head. It wasn’t painful—not even uncomfortable—but the awareness made him gasp. He hadn’t noticed it before, but he didn’t want to question it too much. Maybe he was just simply growing more attuned to having his brain prodded at.

“Do I just think things?”

“You can try.”

It felt indulgent, but Melchom was dreaming if he thought the teasing tone would discourage him.

So Dave pictured it.

No one could fault him for having an—at times overactive—imagination. Most of the time, it had complicated things.

Not now, he mused before he started bombarding the demon.

Bombarding was probably a strong word, but Dave focused on the memories he wanted Melchom to see, as if they were 3D screens he was lunging in the demon’s direction.

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Melchom's subtle rigidity meant it worked. His muscles bulged before relaxing again, that flicker in his dark eyes ever present.

Dave focused on the images playing as home videos in his brain. He could even picture it like one of those old movies with the timers at the beginning, a faint sepia hue distorting the end result.

He showed him what it had been like when Melchom had peed in him, using him as a bucket. Dave's cock twitched, too, remembering how owned he'd felt, how he'd wanted to choke but couldn't, how he'd been desperate to please. How intoxicating, and pungent, and dirty, the smell had been. How he couldn't have cared less.

Dave thought about later in the tub, showing Melchom how it felt when he stretched him on his fingers. How he'd fucked into him. Dave could tell Melchom had been holding back, his body betraying him with that slight vibration. He'd relished the moment when the demon's instincts had taken over. It had eclipsed all the pain and the effort of keeping his hole relaxed for him. It hadn't mattered anymore.

It had become a delirious game of chasing more, of needing that stimulation, that friction against his prostate, that kept driving his blood south.

Dave bit his lip. He didn't want to start whimpering wantonly and drive the demon's focus away from his thoughts.

Well, he wanted it, but he wanted to touch even more. To explore.

Melchom's eyes darkened, his nostrils flaring when Dave's fingers started exploring

his abdomen.

For a second, Dave held his breath, but the demon didn't complain, didn't push out of reach. So he let his hands travel upward, flicked the engorged nipples, and blinked innocently when Melchom squinted his eyes at him.

Careful, Dove.

“Doesn't it feel good?” Dave didn't know what made him feel so brazen, but he found himself curving up, licking his bottom lip.

You want to play, then?

The strain in Melchom's voice, even when it was inside his head, only emboldened him further.

“Always.”

Melchom scoffed, but he didn't fight him. No, what the fucker did was slide down the bed until he was breathing straight into Dave's cock.

His very attention deprived cock, thank you very much.

Why, yes, he was aware that he'd come less than twenty minutes ago.

“What are you—”

Melchom pinned him with that heated gaze of his. “No horns, Dove.”

“W-what?”

Oh.

Fuck.

Dave groaned, his body drawing taut as Melchom engulfed him in his mouth.

One hand flew to the demon's head, clutching a fistful of hair between the aforementioned horns. He cursed, his other hand clutching the bedsheets. When he'd first seen that slitted tongue, he should've realized how mind-blowing it would be when it slid around his length, almost covering it all.

He whimpered. Melchom had barely started, but fuck. His hips bucked upward. He would usually be more thoughtful. Dave figured the demon would pin his body in place if he didn't want him moving, though.

Melchom didn't do such things. Dave was clearly dead because there was no way a blowjob like that existed in real life. Right?

He didn't know.

Thinking was extremely hard when he was surrounded by so much warmth, and...

"Melchom, I—" At least he was trying to warn him, right? He still had some manners. "Fuck, this is so embarrassing—"

He thought Melchom chuckled around his dick, but it was hard to say. Even harder because he was shooting down the demon's throat, and he had that tongue lapping every drop of cum and oh fuck.

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Dave deflated against the mattress, his hands unclenching. He'd just come inside the demon's mouth. He didn't know why it felt so significant, but it did.

He swallowed a couple of times before he panted for air. When was the last time a total top had been so good at giving head? Dave couldn't think of anyone.

"You had really bad taste in lovers," Melchom grunted. Before Dave could blink his eyes open, he felt him drape his weight around him, holding him there. "But don't worry. You're mine now, Dove."

"Okay."

He was aware it was his orgasm-induced brain fog speaking. Dave didn't care. It was better for everyone if he just enjoyed the relaxed muscles and all those feel-good hormones coursing through his body.

"Can I braid your hair?" He apparently lost a lot of his filter after his head was blown out with an orgasm like that. "It's gotten all unruly."

Melchom only huffed. "Fine."

A smile stretched over Dave's lips. He perked up more than he would've usually been able to after getting head. "I'll need a brush."

"Of course."

"Now?"

Dave was pretty certain the demon rolled his eyes, but he didn't care. Giddiness filled him as Melchom lifted off the bed and headed to the bathroom. He guessed he'd get the brush from that secret closet—or whatever it was. Dave didn't have the brain energy to spend on figuring that out right now.

“There's no secret closet.” Melchom snorted. “It's a portal.”

“A what?”

Fine, he was back to being more alert—not fully sitting up, but leaning on his elbows and scrunching up his eyebrows. It was something.

“Don't worry about it.” Melchom came back to the room with a boar bristle hairbrush. “No one can come in from it, and only I can activate it anyway.”

“I wasn't worried.” He'd just been wrapping his head around the fact that portals were also a thing too. “Wait. Is that how you always manage to sneak in on me?”

“Sometimes.”

Dave huffed. He hated that knowing smirk etched in the demon's face. It enunciated his scar more, too, adding a hint of not danger exactly, but... something.

“Did King David do that to you then?”

Melchom frowned for a second before all glee faded from his features. “No.”

For once, Dave knew not to push. Instead, he grabbed the demon's wrist and encouraged him back on the bed.

He might have preened a bit when Melchom just handed him the brush and plopped

face-first into the mattress.

“No horns,” he groaned against the pillow.

Dave wouldn’t point out how non-threatening he sounded at the moment.

“I caught that,” Melchom said in that same non-threatening way.

“I don’t care.”

He didn’t. What he cared about was finally getting to run his fingers through the silky mane of silvery white hair to his heart’s content. Dave had always loved hair. It had always been one of his favorite things about church camp—he and a few girls from a neighboring town would run away, and he’d do their hair into all kinds of styles. The counselors either never found out, or they hadn’t dared to say a word.

After he’d gotten all the locks of Melchom’s hair free, Dave started brushing it, loving how shiny it got under his ministrations. He loved the sounds the demon made, too, probably more than he should have.

“Are you gonna fall asleep on me?”

There was no response, only more contented sighs and what sounded dangerously close to purrs as Dave kept brushing.

It was good enough.

CHAPTER 12

MELCHOM

“How often do you have to feed?”

Melchom paused. He’d just arrived to his chambers with a couple of bags full of clothes for his human, but he hadn’t taken that long. He groaned. It had taken hours until he could guarantee he could extricate himself from the human’s hold without waking him up to begin with.

It angered him that he hadn’t gotten back quickly enough to wake Dove up himself.

“Why are you asking, Dove?”

“I should know these things,” his Dove said. He was still wrapped around the bedsheets, just beginning to stretch his arms, but it looked like he’d been awake for a while.

“You should?”

“Well, yeah, I’m your food supply.” The human scratched his nose then, lost in thought. “Fear supply? I don’t know. It’s too early for this.”

“Is it too early for this too?” Melchom placed the bags of clothes—mostly lingerie, he

was not going to lie—in front of Dove.

His little human perked up, making grabby hands. Dove pulled the bag closer to him.

“For the record...” Melchom leaned against one of the bedposts. He didn’t want to think too long about the warmth spreading through his chest as he brought the human so much elation. “There’s not an answer to your question. I don’t think I’ve ever gone more than a few hours without feeding, but I’ve never fed because I was starving. Fear is always around these parts. It’s impossible not to consume it.”

“Right.”

He didn’t think the human had fully heard him. It was slightly annoying, but he let it go—for now, at least. If he set it under the right frame, he could find it amusing. The way Dove looked at all those lingerie sets with stars in his eyes helped.

“You shouldn’t pick anything white for our adventure today.”

“Why?”

Because he wasn’t sure how clean those hounds kept their paws. He also couldn’t ensure they wouldn’t try to scratch him once or twice.

“Because I said so.” Melchom snorted.

A quick sneak into his Dove’s head showed his pettier side coming through. Well, Melchom could just torture him with it when he realized his mistake.

His Dove settled on the last bag he’d grabbed. Melchom should’ve guessed the human would be enthralled by that one. Made of lycra, a tight crop top and culotte in white were covered in rather realistic flowers that popped out of it. It was the most

extravagant piece he'd seen, which was how he knew it had been made with his human in mind.

"I'm wearing this."

"Be my guest."

"You should get a full-length mirror."

"I should?" Melchom raised an eyebrow.

He wasn't against the idea; he could certainly picture a myriad of ways to use one to his advantage. He still liked to make his Dove sweat, though.

"Yeah. You do want me to model for you, right? That's the point of all the lingerie." Dove shrugged as if it was completely inconsequential that he could read him. "Might as well make the most out of it."

"You're getting more and more brazen with your demands."

A twinge of fear snuck past the facade his Dove was putting on. Melchom savored it before it disappeared, only to be replaced with more of that sass.

"It's only fair, isn't it? You're getting more use out of me, too."

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Was it fair? Melchom cocked his head to the side, observing his Dove as he switched outfits. He wasn't sure why the words stuck with him. There was no malice behind them. Just a casual statement Melchom couldn't even disagree with. It still felt wrong, though. He just couldn't pinpoint why exactly.

The idea made his mood sour. There were too many things lately he didn't feel in complete control of. It was unnerving. So unking-like.

“We'll talk about it later.”

For now, they had a hellhound to visit, and Melchom couldn't say he was looking forward to it. If he'd been in a better mood, and this wasn't Hell, he would've asked Beelzebub for help. He was the only Prince of Hell who could exert some kind of power over those beasts. Alas, he'd have to figure it out on his own.

“How do I look?” Dove stood on his toes, swaying his hips and posing in different ways.

When Melchom had first seen the set, he thought it would look ridiculous on anyone—even on his Dove. But Dove would be happy with it, so Melchom would figure out a way to live with all that protruding fabric.

Somehow, his Dove didn't look ridiculous. He looked ethereal, regal. It reminded him of one of those fashion Instagram accounts he'd perused in his rare visits to Earth. His Dove glowed, looking lavish. Expensive. Worthy of standing beside his throne.

The sight shouldn't be affecting him this much.

"Walk behind me at all times," he commanded, deliberately ignoring the question.

"Okay?"

"Don't think I won't chain you to my side."

Apparently, that was enough to have his human shoot some fear-induced adrenaline his way. It was also enough to make him... horny, picturing images of a collar and a leash Melchom would encourage him to revisit.

Later.

"Come on, Dove."

"Fine. But you promise no minions, or heavy head prodding."

"I promise."

Melchom was glad no one could hear them there. Him? Making promises to a human? A gift? It was unheard of. It would be centuries before he heard the last of it from the Princes and some of the most valiant minions.

"Why don't we go through a portal?" His Dove asked the second the door to the hallways opened. "Isn't it easier?"

"No." Portals weren't teleporting machines like the ones Dove was picturing. Melchom didn't want to waste time explaining, though. "Now quiet."

Of course, that wasn't a command his human was going to obey easily. No, he was

oh-so-ready with some kind of retort. Melchom used his powers to pinch Dove's lips together before he could utter it. Minions were watching. That meant every action would be broadcast to the Princes.

The surge of anger that flew out of Dove hit Melchom square in the chest. Melchom held off a grunt and the pang of disappointment in himself, too. He should've warned the human of the rules when they were outside of the chambers.

He kept getting distracted around Dove.

Stop fighting, he spoke into his mirror maze. There are too many eyes on you to give them anything.

Melchom gave Dove a second to process what he'd said. When he noticed Dove's eyes widen, and his throat bob up and down, he started moving. Fast.

He didn't let go of the hold in the human's vocal cords, but his Dove still followed, right beside him. Only a tremor racking down his spine every couple of minutes hinted he wasn't all right.

Melchom would have to be okay with it. Not being all right wouldn't be grounds for any commentary, anyway. They expected the gift to not be all right. They probably expected him to be in worse shape than he was.

It was too late now for any kind of glamour, so Melchom kept walking. No time to berate himself, either.

He had time, however, to notice the increasing fear that clouded his human the closer they got to the caves. As filling as it was, Melchom needed to make him stop. Going down there was already going to be tough enough.

Fuck it.

Yanking the human to his side, he set a guard around the two of them right by the stairs leading to the caves. Everyone keeping an eye on them would be wondering what was going on. Melchom would make up something about playing with him or tricking him into a false sense of security. It wouldn't be a complete lie.

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Letting go of the hold on Dove's throat, Melchom hoisted his human up, inhaling all that fear before pressing his lips to his. Dove squealed after the shock faded, but he didn't fight. That was good. It made Melchom feel good.

"I need you to not be scared down there," he said, their foreheads touching.

"I can't control what scares me, and you won't even tell me what's down there. I just know it pissed you off yesterday."

Melchom sighed. He needed to make the human understand. "Do you notice how when I'm feeding off you, I instill fear, but then I let go?"

His Dove nodded, albeit slowly. "I guess."

That was good. Melchom pointed to the gate down the stairs. "The creatures down there, they don't have that self-control. If they start feeding off you, they're not going to stop."

"But..."

"That's a bad thing," Melchom interrupted, reading that unspoken question in Dove's head. "You can't let them."

"What do I do?"

"Cling to me." His initial plan had been to suggest that Dove keep his thoughts on something else, a happy place of sorts. This would work better, though. "I'll keep you

safe, but I need you to not let go of me.”

So long as Dove did that, Melchom could funnel all that fear so it didn't spread out. Hellhounds were vicious, but not if there was nothing to feast on.

“Okay, now let's go.”

Melchom dissolved the guard and breathed out when the human's brittle nails dug into his forearm. Dove didn't always follow up his instructions without more of a fight. It was good to know Melchom was getting through to him.

Or not.

His Dove let go of him two seconds after he'd opened the door and the most strenuous of barks greeted them.

“You should've told me we were meeting dogs!”

There was no fear. His human was wafting off excitement out of every pore of his body and... The fuck was that about?

“Hellhounds,” Melchom corrected with a grunt.

His Dove was not listening, getting way too close and personal with the creatures. The only saving grace was that all hellhounds were chained by an iron collar attached with a leash shackled to the wall. The human was still standing way too close.

“Stop!” he bellowed, stopping Dove in place.

Melchom should've drilled into his head that hellhounds were not dogs, and things like offering his hand for them to sniff were not good ideas. He'd just assumed it

would be obvious—from the bigger heads and lolling, serpent-like tongues, to the sharp teeth and talons Melchom had first-hand experience with. Everything about the creatures was... demonic. The fact that they barked or that they held a certain resemblance with some dogs didn't turn them into docile, loyal best friends.

“Why?” Dove placed his hands on his hips. He didn't seem bothered by the cacophony of barks and the incessant yanking of the chains. “And don't try to give me some bullshit about breeds. There's no such thing as dangerous breeds, only shitty owners, and that is not up for debate. Also, you all shouldn't leave them chained all day. No wonder they're going out of their minds. They need stimulation, Melchom. Physical and mental. Otherwise they go all out with destructive behaviors. Because you're not meeting their needs.”

“They're—” Melchom was, admittedly, stunned. “They're killing machines, Dove. Not pets.”

Dove wasn't listening. No, he was heading toward a specific hellhound that started whining and yanking harder at her chain.

Gaz.

Melchom didn't like it, but he forced himself to stride forward, pulling his human close to him before he reached the traitorous hellhound.

“Don't take one step closer to her.”

Master. Master, Master, Master, Master. Let me go, Master. Master, Master, I love you, Master. I love you, I love you, I love you.

Melchom's eyes widened. Gaz wasn't referring to him. No, the stupid hellhound was calling out to... Dove.

“The fuck,” Melchom grumbled.

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“You can understand her?” Dove tugged at his wrist. “What is she saying? And why do I feel like yesterday? Like I’m being pulled? Does she need water? Or food? Is that it? Maybe some toys? Honestly, this whole place could do with some enrichment.”

Melchom’s head whipped between the hellhound and his gift going on and on about dog training knowledge. Melchom didn’t care to dip in to see where he’d gotten all that information from.

“Hellhounds are very primitive in their speech,” he said.

He was just making time to figure out what was going on. It had been centuries since a hellhound had last claimed a master. It was practically unheard of. Their masters were always Kings, though—or Princes, a couple of times, when they were destined to grab a crown.

Gaz’s tail kept wagging, talons wrecking the stone beneath them as she tried to unshackle herself. In the meantime, Melchom’s world felt like it was tumbling down.

Astaroth’s recited scriptures slammed into him.

“Will the one who fell reclaim his crown?

Or will he be suffocated by the one who loves?

Two outcomes shall come, both just and sound

A king will rise again

But will it be the fearing demon, or the soaring gift?

What shall happen to the losing part

The winner shall decide.”

Hellhounds bonded to Kings. Sometimes, Kings to be.

Melchom took a step back, faltering in his step.

“Melchom?” He heard his human talking to him, felt his hands on his sides, but it sounded distorted. In the background. “Are you okay?”

Melchom was face to face with another usurper. Again.

“Gaz is yours.” Denying that fact, or not giving her to him, would only lead to more trouble. The more impatient the beast got, the more havoc she would wreak. She would get out of the cave, one way or another. Melchom was just trying to lessen the damage. “She’d better not break a thing.”

“We’re... taking her?” Dove didn’t sound convinced.

Melchom couldn’t blame him. “It’s your lucky day.”

There were a few details he had to work out, but at least he would’ve held off a disaster. It would have been a disaster.

“Come on.” Melchom unlatched the leash from Gaz’s collar. “Walk behind me. Not a word.”

Melchom didn't wait. It wasn't like the hellhound was quiet. He heard her huffs and tiny whines and pants as she tried to get as much attention out of her human as she could. He'd have to have a talk with her, but not in front of his Dove.

You will respect he's my property. I come first.

Master first.

Melchom groaned out loud. He didn't care that the human heard him, or that Dove faltered in his step.

Come on, Dove.

Master! Good Master!

Melchom pinched the skin between his eyebrows. They were close to his chambers, but he was already getting a headache.

"You," he gritted out to Gaz the second they were inside, "are going to stay quiet." He whirled around to face Dove then. "And you are gonna keep her under control. Are we clear?"

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Dove nodded, but the way he was chewing on his lip showed how worried he was. Melchom could tell as much before he got inside his head to see what his human was actually thinking about this development.

“I mean, okay? But for the record, I’ve never really owned a dog?”

“Your speech said otherwise.”

“I’ve gone to lots of protests.” Dove avoided his gaze as he answered, his fingers buried in the hellhound’s short fur. “And I spent a couple of weekends at a shelter for extra credit before I had to drop out of college.”

He hadn’t seen any of that in his excursions through his Dove’s house of mirrors, but it didn’t surprise him.

“Then stay here while Gaz and I have a chat.”

“Is Gaz her name?” Dove wrinkled his nose. “Can we change it?”

Gaz let out a mix between a growl and a whimper before Melchom was guffawing.

“Hellhounds choose their names. You’d better apologize.”

“Oh.” The poor human paled, his freckles highlighted against the ghostly pallor. “I... I’m sorry? Does she understand me?”

“She does.”

Dove knelt down then, facing the deadly hound. "I'm sorry, gorgeous girl. Gaz is a beautiful name."

That made Melchom roll his eyes.

I forgive Master! I forgive, I forgive, I forgive.

Melchom winced. Her enthusiasm would be amusing if it wasn't so loud.

"You know he doesn't understand you, Gaz, and I'm sure as heaven not going to interpret for you every single time."

Gaz growled, but one look from his human made her sit down and lower her head.

Interesting.

"Get it into her thick skull that our agreement stands," he pointed in the human's direction. "Also, one scratch to my belongings or myself, and I'll make sure she goes down. Got it?"

Dove gulped down. "Got it."

Gaz just stood there, lolling her tongue and wagging her tail, watchful eyes drifting between the two of them. Melchom tried hard not to shiver or to run a hand through the scar he'd stopped feeling centuries ago.

It suddenly stung.

My pack attacked.

Melchom grunted. "Behave."

CHAPTER 13

DAVE

“Gaz, stop!”

There was a racket of barks in response, but it didn’t stop her from jumping around Dave and nuzzling him.

“She needs out.” Melchom sighed, sounding incredibly annoyed that he had to interpret for her, as he’d put it yesterday. “Go with her.”

Dave whirled around. “What do you mean go?”

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“No minion or demon will dare go near you. They’ll see Gaz is bonded to you, and hellhounds are feared by all demons. They’re the only creatures that can kill us.”

“The fuck?” His heart raced. “And why are you telling me? Is this another one of your games? Why would you give me something that can kill you?”

“Because you don’t want me dead.” Dave tilted his head to the side. He wasn’t sure why, but he didn’t think Melchom fully believed his words. “Even if you did, you need me alive. Having a hound will keep you safe from most demons, but you won’t be untouchable. And you still need me to provide for you. Demons will keep their distance, but they won’t bow to you because you have Gaz on your side now.”

That made more sense.

“And I am the minions’ paymaster. Don’t think I don’t have them in my pocket.”

“But don’t you want to come with me anyway? So I don’t see something I shouldn’t?”

“Demons seeing us together is riskier than you stumbling upon a painting.”

Dave frowned. Melchom had hinted at that the day before, but Dave hadn’t been sure what he meant then either. He’d been too occupied with the fear of what the cave might hold first, then with all the dogs—even if Melchom wanted to insist on calling them hellhounds—that were begging for attention.

Maybe, once Dave learned more about the way Hell worked, he could become the

hellhound trainer, or something. Spending his days surrounded by dogs didn't sound too bad. The fact that they could apparently kill demons had to be a plus, too.

“Why? I'm just your gift, right? You've been drilling that into my head over and over.”

Dave had begun adjusting to it, not losing sleep over it. The back and forth was giving him whiplash, though.

Gaz growled beside him, and Dave gasped. He might not have noticed a different day, but after all the time they'd spent in extremely close quarters, and with his focus on the demon... Melchom flinched.

Melchom was scared of the hellhound... but he had still told Dave she was his.

“You don't want me to spell it out. Not yet.”

“Okay, edge lord.” Dave didn't even try to figure out what Melchom meant. “But, actually, no, that doesn't fly with me. So, start talking.”

He felt the demon's anger spike, the air around them growing hotter. Gaz growled again, but Dave kept her behind him. Maybe he could figure out how to communicate with her the way demons did. That had to be a thing, even if Melchom said no human had ever managed. It was probably that no human had tried, though. Not that Dave believed he was that amazing, but he was pretty sure no other human was allowed to hang around like he was.

“Come with me.” Melchom spun on his heels, heading to the bathroom.

“Fine,” he huffed.

Dave would've just followed, but there was a hellhound he had to keep in mind, one that kept butting his hand.

“Okay, gorgeous, I know you need to go out, and you probably have for a while, and that's on me, okay?” Gaz just wagged her tail at him. “I promise I'm not the worst owner ever, and I will walk you all the time, and figure everything out, but first I need to go talk to Melchom, okay? And I don't know how long it's gonna take, but I need you to behave in the meantime, yeah?”

“Woof!”

“I'll take that as a yes.” They would both be in trouble if it wasn't, but Dave didn't say that out loud.

He remembered it was important to stay calm around dogs. They read their human's emotions or something.

“Wish me luck, baby girl.”

A hellhound's lick felt different than an actual dog's, but the sentiment was the same. It helped.

Dave tilted his head to the side, watching the hellhound who seemed obsessed with him already. He should've gotten a dog for himself a long time ago.

Then again, now that dog would be...

Nope. Not going there.

He left Gaz there and headed to the bathroom. This time, it would be him leaning against the door. Melchom was sitting against the edge of the tub, elbows on his

thighs. Dave was surprised he wasn't tipping the tub over.

“So...” Dave shifted on his feet. “Why? Why can I now walk freely?”

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“With Gaz,” Melchom amended.

“Tomato, to-mah-to.”

“You could’ve thrown her to my jugular the second I told you she could kill me.”

Huh.

Dave guessed he could have. He was also pretty sure that anyone else would’ve reached that conclusion right away.

“I didn’t,” he mumbled, gaze down.

He wasn’t sure he wanted to examine the ins and outs of why it hadn’t even crossed his mind. He wasn’t sure Melchom would let him get away with it, either.

“We’re both on the same train, Dove,” Melchom said, standing up to his full height. “We both know there’s something here that shouldn’t be here, and neither of us wants to give it a voice.”

“Huh?”

Melchom was crowding him against the wall, and it was making him short circuit. That was a thing. Right? Dave gulped, feeling his heart pounding against his chest.

“Good to know I can still get you scared.” Melchom tucked a strand of Dove’s hair behind his ear. “It would be a pity if I didn’t have a use for you anymore, don’t you

think?”

Dave trembled, but he didn't give it much thought. He knew when the demon meant something and when Melchom was saying what he thought he should. Dave didn't care that it was too soon to be so certain of that.

“You'd still want me.” Dave licked his bottom lip. “But I'm into it, remember? I told you it was a kink.”

“You said so, Dove.”

Dave shook his head. He was not going to wonder why the fuck he felt so fond of a fucking demon who regarded him as property.

“Why did you let me have a hellhound for myself if you're afraid of them?”

“I'm not afraid of anything.”

“Tell that to someone who believes it.”

Was that too much sass? It probably was. Dave chastised himself to tone it down a bit more next time.

Apparently, the idea made his demon laugh.

And... he'd just thought of Melchom as his.

A shiver Dave couldn't decipher racked down his spine.

“Go walk the hound. No demon's going to bother you if they stop for a minute and see what it means.”

“Which you are not going to tell me.”

“Not yet.”

Of course not.

Well, two could play that game.

Or not. Dave wanted to facepalm himself. He should’ve thought to ask that before.

“Where am I supposed to take Gaz anyway? Is there a dog park or a forest or...?”

Dave didn’t think they did their necessities in the cave. For one thing, it would’ve stunk if they were peeing and pooping all over that room.

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He thought it was a fair question, but apparently not since the absurdly annoying demon was rolling his eyes at his expense.

“She’ll show you.”

“B-but... Weren’t you all pissed yesterday because someone wanted me inside the cave?”

“Yeah.” Melchom crouched down until he could bite down on Dave’s jaw. “It was Gaz. She just wanted her human.”

“Really? But she’d never seen me.”

“She recognized your scent. Now, go.”

“Abrupt much?” Dave nearly squealed.

But fine. Dave would do it, and cross fingers that his new dog didn’t get him killed or traumatized him.

“Still not a dog.”

“A dog at heart, and that’s what matters.”

Thankfully, Gaz hadn’t moved from her spot. Dave would have to figure out treats to reward her with. For now, though, he patted his thigh and gave her a few scratches behind her ears. She liked those, he could tell.

“Okay, come on, girl.”

Gaz all but ran the second the main gate to the chambers opened.

Of course.

Why didn't Melchom grab a leash from the caves?

“Gaz!” he scrambled, running in her direction— and right into her. The gray hellhound stared at him, blinking as if she was questioning how stupid her human could be.

Dave couldn't blame her.

“Sorry, girl.” His heart still had to recover, though. “But try to stay close, okay?”

The creature that wasn't a dog but totally was tilted her head to the side. She really had to be questioning his sanity, but she obeyed. Dave could feel her vibrate with the urge to run around and exercise, but she stuck to his side.

“You're the best hellhound ever, you know that?”

“Woof!”

He took that as a yes—again—and let her lead him through a part of the... castle—was it a castle?—he didn't think he'd seen yet. One thing that stuck was how eerily quiet everything was. There were no cracking flames, or minions' voices or... anything.

“All because they're scared of you?” Dave asked her, because being quiet was not something he was good at. “But you're the sweetest, aren't you?”

Gaz only panted and kept a light trot down the hall. They soon found stairs. These didn't look as terrifying as the others, at least.

“Okay, you'd better know where you're taking us.”

“Woof!”

“Fine.”

They descended four more flights before Gaz started scratching her talons against a wide door.

“Is that outside?”

“Woof! Woof, woof, woof!”

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Dave held his breath. Over the past few days, he'd grown so used to the constant red hue and the scarce lighting that he'd stopped wondering if there was even an outside, or if Hell was just a bunch of hallways and chambers.

He was about to find out, he guessed.

“Woof!” Gaz nuzzled him from behind.

“Okay, okay.” Dave swallowed before he forced himself to take a deep breath. “We’re going. But you still stick close to me, okay, girl?”

The outside was not what he'd expected—at least, it wasn't once the sudden amber light stopped blinding him. Outside of the castle, Hell was bright. Suffocatingly hot, too. Dave guessed that had to be another reason for the demons' lack of clothing. He thought he was too clothed already, and his crop top barely covered an inch past his nipples.

In her defense, Gaz stood watching him while he got accustomed to the outside light, and he took in every scorched tree and fields of...

Bones.

Probably human bones.

Dave shivered.

Of course that was where Gaz headed the second he moved. And, of course, Gaz

grabbed one of those bones—maybe a humerus?—and brought it to him.

Because dogs played fetch. And they loved bones.

He was going to throw up.

“Uh...” Gaz looked so happy, though, wagging her tail and imploring with those stupidly big and round eyes. “Okay, fine, but please keep an eye out for me.”

Gaz tried to bark in response, which just sounded funny. She refused to let go of the bone. Dave guessed he could find it cute. He just had to ignore that what he was about to hold was an actual bone. It shouldn’t be too hard. He’d been ignoring many things since he’d arrived in Hell.

Adapting.

Dave took an invigorating breath and bounced on his feet. This was just something else to adapt to: human bones to play fetch with his new pet. It was funny how he was only starting to get the things he’d always wanted most now, when he was literally trapped in Hell.

Was he losing his mind if he was beginning to consider that maybe, just maybe, Hell wasn’t so bad?

Dave wrapped his arms around his waist after he’d thrown the bone for Gaz to fetch.

He had a warm bed to sleep in and someone that seemed to care about him. At least, Melchom didn’t want him to be too fucked up, and that was more than Dave had had in years. Now he had a dog, and clothes too. Fine, that was a bit materialistic of him, but... They weren’t just clothes to Dave. He thought Melchom knew, too. They were... expression. Identity. It wasn’t about expensive fabric or high fashion. It was

about twirling in front of a mirror and seeing himself. All of him.

Gaz was not quiet when she ran back to him. This time, though, she didn't take her bone to him.

"Tired, already?" Dave crouched down to give her better pets. Gaz couldn't get enough of them. "Should we head back, then?"

Gaz tilted her head to the side. Dave guessed she must be confused. To be honest, he was, too. He should be trying to figure out a way out now that he had protection. But...

He wanted to go back, to be with Melchom. Dave wanted to tease him and push buttons until he was left trembling in fear, overwhelmed by everything that was Melchom.

"I know, I know." He patted her head before starting to trace back his steps. "I should be running away, or telling you to attack him, but... Don't do that, okay? He's... He's nice." Dave frowned, the words not sounding quite right. "Well, he's not nice, but... The way he makes me feel is? I think?"

The hellhound huffed, nuzzling him behind the knee.

"Okay, okay. We're heading back."

If Melchom looked surprised when the gate opened and both Dave and Gaz walked in, he didn't mention it. None of them did. But Dave decided to take the chance and curl around him when he slipped into bed next to him. He'd tired himself out before he'd managed to tire out the hellhound.

Melchom didn't utter a word, but Dave was sure he smiled when Dave forced himself

to show fear, thinking about how the demon would react if he tried to touch his horns again. It wasn't hard. His fingers itched to do it. The urge kept growing larger, for some reason. Dave didn't want to think much about it.

“You’re going to be my demise, Dove.”

It was only a whisper, but it still made his heart skip a breath, still made him shiver.

“Why?”

No explanation came. Dave huffed, but he wasn't angry. He didn't think so. Besides, he had Gaz now. He wasn't... He wouldn't be defenseless. He refused to be.

“Melchom?”

There was something Dave needed to do. Or thought he needed to do. He didn't want to waste time questioning his brain over and over.

“I'll set it up.”

“Thanks.”

CHAPTER 14

MELCHOM

“For an entire week, your gift has been walking freely through the realm.” Flaga used her nails to scratch the flayed back of a nameless human as she spoke. “Why?”

“He's bonded with a hellhound.” Melchom forced his stance to appear relaxed even when their current leader would be able to see through it.

“So I've heard. That's unusual.”

Melchom nodded. It was. He was still trying to figure it out, chasing after every book

and scripture that could tell him more. It had to mean that the human was meant to be King, but that had never happened. No one would know how to make it work.

That was without stopping to think about what it would mean for Melchom. If his Dove became the one to claim the throne to Hell, and he became King, that meant the rest of the prophecy would also be true. Melchom's fate... his life... would lie in his human's hands.

It was a scenario that had no precedent. No human had ever held that kind of power over a demon. Melchom was sure the closest Hell had ever been to witnessing something like this was his dethroning. Even then, though, his life hadn't been at risk. His existence.

At a few thousand years old, it was a weird crossroad to find himself thinking about.

It was made weirder by the mellowness in his human. Nothing specific had changed. Their deal was still in place. The human feared him beautifully without that much effort from him. They still had sex, and Melchom had woken him up a couple of times to flood him with golden liquid.

But his Dove was happy with it all. He walked the hellhound and tried roping Melchom into buying shit Gaz definitely didn't need. Dove didn't question his place or think about ways to escape.

His only serious request had been the unspoken one the other day. But even that, Dove hadn't mentioned again. Melchom pinched his brow. To be fair, he hadn't been able to talk to Astaroth all week, but that in itself was strange—as strange as being summoned for a conference with Flaga alone.

“What am I really doing here?”

“You forget your place, paymaster.”

Melchom growled. He didn't care about sounding like a caveman. “I have business to take care of.”

“So do I.” Flaga's laugh was shrill. It had always bothered him. “You think you're more important than me?”

“No, Flaga.” His nostrils flared as he forced the words out, though. He didn't think the other demon would've missed it. “But you're the one who called me.”

“Keep your human affairs under wraps,” she warned. “Hell doesn't need another insurrection. Everything has just begun to settle down.”

“It's all under control.”

Melchom wanted to say his human wasn't the Israeli king, but he didn't. It would show weakness, and the fact was that he didn't know. He couldn't know. Melchom had felt sure of a human's intentions once, and... There was a giant painting depicting how that went down.

“It'd better be.”

“Did you want anything else?”

Flaga pierced the human's skin, gagging them before they could scream. “Scram. You're looking good, though.”

“Right.”

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 4:21 pm

Melchom couldn't wait to head back to his chambers. The only issue now was that he couldn't be certain if his human would be there or playing fetch with his deadly pet outside. It was a struggle between wanting to order him inside the room, and being wary of making the human hate him.

Even if hatred could taste delicious—under the right circumstances.

Melchom closed his eyes, tuning in to the activity around him. Minions passed him by, gossiping among themselves. He felt humans being punished, but didn't care enough to follow the trail. None of them were his human.

Melchom felt him then.

He must've just come back from walking the hound. Gaz was going to be so spoiled if Dove got more power, it would be ridiculous. Melchom didn't want to get in the middle of that, though.

He'd rather not add any more scars to his body, and he knew the hound would go feral against anyone and anything if given the chance. It was in all the looks she saved for him when his—their—human was not looking. She really had Dove wrapped around her talon, and Dove had no idea. Melchom just found it too cruel to destroy that utopia the human had built for himself. It worked for Melchom, too. His Dove thought he had a life in Hell better than his life on Earth, and that meant him lasting here.

* * *

“How the Heavens did you summon me again?” Melchom sprung up.

One blink, and he’d been pulled to the east entrance of the castle, a wide-eyed Dove surging toward him. Dove tried to jump up, but while the effort was cute, it didn’t help him much. Melchom hoisted him up until those soothing fingers wrapped around his neck. He wondered how he could get the human to do his hair again without showing all his cards.

It had been too nice not to take advantage.

“I heard a voice.” Dove mumbled.

Gaz was there, on her hind legs.

Why scared Master?

Melchom shook his head. He guessed he’d have to figure it out.

“That can’t be anything new,” he said before he got into Dove’s head to prod around.

“There had been no voices since you got me Gaz.”

Melchom smirked. He liked the sound of that—Melchom had gotten him the stupid hellhound. He focused on the other thing his Dove said a second later. Prodding, it was. He didn’t have to go too deep. Dove’s mirrors kept replaying the moment he’d heard the voice.

It was one of the minions Astaroth had hired as his personal assistant, saying something about how Astaroth’s new human kept asking about Dove.

That had to be the friend who’d betrayed his Dove. Melchom’s blood boiled with

anger. Maybe Melchom should've kept him for himself so he could make him really suffer.

“Let's go talk to my dear brother.”

So that Melchom could clock him for letting a human use his minion as a carrier pigeon.

He didn't say that.

“Brother?”

“Astaroth, Prince of Hell with a taste for betrayal and dramatics.”

Dove followed him quietly for all of two minutes before he was talking again. “Isn't that the one... the one who said I was special?”

Melchom's voice came out clipped, “He's aware of the scriptures, yes.”

It was hard to tell how much he should tell him or not. If his Dove was meant to be King, he should get a crash course on demonic politics, but... He was still Melchom's gift, his property. Not giving out intel was second nature for Melchom.

Gifts—humans—didn't get to know anything. The less they knew, the easier they were to break. The easier they were to keep scared, fearing every little movement in their periphery.

Kill? We kill Astaroth?

No! The last thing Melchom would need was to stand court because a hellhound in his care hurt a Prince of Hell. Stand guard, that's all you have to do.

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 4:22 pm

Gaz made her displeasure with that order known by growling, letting her talons scratch against the volcanic stones. Melchom figured it was the equivalent of a toddler throwing a tantrum.

Too bad.

“What did you say to her?”

Or, Melchom reconsidered, she’d been counting on her little human coming to her rescue. Melchom could see it so clearly in his Dove’s head. He was convinced that Melchom wished the hellhound wasn’t a part of the deal now, and what if Melchom was trying to scare her the way he did to him?

“Nothing,” he protested before his Dove could go on and on in circles, wondering if he should try to negotiate to state the hellhound was off limits.

It was honestly offensive. As if a hellhound’s fear would ever be appealing, or it could be taken without consequences. Hellhounds rarely showed fear, and if they did so next to another creature, it meant there was trouble.

“She’s the best doggo ever. I don’t know what your issue with her is.”

“I don’t have an issue with her.”

Not with her personally, but it wasn’t the time nor place to talk about his—or any other demon’s—history with hellhounds. For one thing, it was complicated. For another, there were minions listening, and none of them knew the details. Melchom

would appreciate it if it stayed that way, regardless of everything else that might change in the upcoming... What? Days? Weeks? Months? None of the scriptures mentioned a timeline or anything that could be interpreted as such.

“You never give her scratches.”

“Believe me, she’s fine without them.”

Melchom ignored his Dove’s pout and kept on walking. It wasn’t as if Dove was complaining too much. Dove had just realized he had the perfect position to play with Melchom’s hair while pretending to be subtle about it. He’d have to consider carrying him like this more often. His human wasn’t heavy, and there were clear perks to it.

Not smiling about it was hard, but he thought he managed.

Astaroth’s chambers were one floor above Melchom’s, two doors beside the King’s chambers—the ones that had been his. It was why Melchom never visited, and why it angered him further that he had to go up there now. That was what he’d say if asked about it.

“Remember. Not a word with other demons around.”

“But you said he was your brother.”

Melchom’s nostrils flared, his arms tightening around the human. “I said, not a word.”

He’d force his Dove to be quiet if he had to, but Melchom thought they were past that by now. It might be better to play it safe, though... Or it would be, if Astaroth hadn’t intercepted them as they got to the floor.

“I was about to call you.” Astaroth had a big smile on his face, but his eyes told a different story. They were stuck on his Dove as a true apex predator’s would be.

Melchom squared up instinctively as his human huffed and puffed and insisted on being put down. “You’ve always been good at anticipating me.”

“It’s a curse.”

Melchom still kept the human behind him, aware of Gaz beside him. “What’s going on with your PA and the human traitor being in cahoots?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Astaroth waved his hand around. “But please, follow me. I’m sure this can all be worked out around a cup of tea.”

Melchom shut Dove up before his ever-curious human could make any remarks about having tea in Hell. It had been on the tip of his tongue.

“We’re not doing that.”

Enemy?

Maybe.

This time Gaz didn’t growl, proving him right about her doing it earlier to set Dove against him. The thought would perk him up more if Astaroth would stop staring at his human like the prey he was.

“Tragic,” Astra drawled, his black curls bouncing as his head bobbed and his eyes squinted.

Melchom showed restraint and didn't roll his eyes, but it proved a challenge.
“Answer my question, Astra.”

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 4:22 pm

“I don’t know the answer to your question. Jordan is just another boring human who believes in demonic favors and rituals. I’m almost done with him.”

Melchom squinted his eyes. Astaroth was lying, and they both knew it. Melchom didn’t have a leg to stand on, though. Not without evidence, and not without starting a war he couldn’t win. It would be the word of a Prince of Hell against his.

“Well played.”

“Oh, come on, Mel... Don’t be a spoilsport. You like the game as much as I do.”

“You’re too old for games.” Melchom didn’t stay around for more banter.

He forced Dove to go with him. Gaz would of course follow.

* * *

“What was that?” Dove lunged at him the second they were in the chambers.

There were more pressing matters at hand, though, things he’d started to plan ahead for the second they’d been out of reach of Astaroth’s minions.

Things they probably didn’t have a lot of time for.

“Gaz,” he used his outside voice on purpose to address the hellhound this time, “bleed.”

“What?” his Dove—predictably—shrieked, immediately turning around to shield the hound with his body. It didn’t quite work. “No, don’t listen to him.”

“She’ll heal right away, and you need to drink her blood so she can talk to you.”

“Talk. To me.”

Melchom didn’t need to get inside Dove’s head to see that the human didn’t believe him. Dumbfounded would be an apt adjective for what Dove was feeling. Ninety percent dumbfounded, ten percent horrified at the idea of his little puppy getting hurt.

“Yes.” He sighed. “You need her protection, and she can protect you best if she can tell you what to do.”

“That makes no sense.” Dove still tightened his arms around Gaz. The hellhound was playing her role, trying to lick as much of his face as she could reach. Melchom would have to shove him into the bathtub. Later. “Protect me from what? The guy upstairs? The Prince?”

“Maybe.” For once, Melchom wasn’t holding information back from his human, but of course Dove was already growing irritated with his knack for secrecy. “I thought you’d be more excited about getting to understand her.”

“I...”

That was it.

His human was terrified. The whiff of pheromones hit him before he could reach into his deeper thoughts. Dove had just started to grow used to Hell, to develop a routine, to start feeling better. That part was too jumbled to decipher. Now, this threat, this new voice... Terror didn’t get to properly describe it.

Melchom acted without thinking. One second, Melchom was half there, half trying to be ten steps ahead of whatever was cooking in Hell. The next, he'd pulled the human back into his arms.

Dove was still giving off bucketloads of fear as he clutched his limb fingers against Melchom's roughened skin. The emotion filled him, but Melchom wasn't focused on it. It wasn't what drove him to shield Dove.

"I need you to be safe, little Dove."

The human's eyes welled up as he pushed so he could meet his gaze. Not many humans dared to do that. "W-why?"

"Because," Melchom grunted.

Hadn't they just agreed they weren't ready to talk about those things? Anger fueled Melchom, blocking him from saying what was on his mind. The idea that his Dove could get hurt, though...

Melchom saw red, literally and figuratively. He shouldn't have given him so many liberties just because Dove was going to be protected and Melchom was dealing with all those feelings and all that uncertainty. Maybe then Astaroth—or any of the minions who might've brought the intel to him—would've missed him.

It was on him.

"That's not an answer," his Dove grumbled, punching his chest. It was a cute gesture.

"I want to know."

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 4:22 pm

“Too bad.” Riling Dove up was still second nature. “I don’t have the power I used to have, Dove, and I refuse to lose my gift.”

Slowly but surely, his Dove nodded.

“I still don’t want Gaz to hurt herself for me,” he mumbled, gaze down.

I’ll save him, Paymaster.

Melchom’s eyes locked with the hellhound. Under any other circumstances, he wouldn’t have just taken her at her word. Dove was her master, though. Protecting him was her number one priority.

Thank you.

“Okay,” he said to his tiny human. “Let’s get you bathed. You reek.”

“Rude,” Dove scoffed.

He still let Melchom kiss him, though, still let him nibble and bite down his jaw to the crook of his neck until he was close to tearing skin. That spike of fear in response was the most delicious thing he’d tasted all day. Throughout the years, Melchom had somehow allowed himself to forget he had preferences when it came to the fear he’d rather consume.

“Say you’re mine, Dove.”

“I... am?” the poor human kept himself from stuttering.

Melchom placed him in the large tub before he answered, towering over Dove with his cock in one hand. This time he'd even bothered to get the human's clothes off. “Do you need me to mark you more?”

Dove's Adam's apple bobbed up and down. The lust in his gaze was clear, though, pupils dilated as his eyes focused on Melchom's length. His cock twitched, arousal hitting him in all the right ways.

The stream hit his human on his collarbone first, the pungent smell invigorating for the two of them. Melchom painted all of Dove's front before he was grunting at the human to turn around. He watched, mesmerized, as golden rivulets dribbled down his back, pooling above his glutes before descending down his Dove's crease and sliding beautifully down all that smooth skin.

It was an exhilarating sight, made even better by the spikes of intertwined arousal and fear drifting off his human.

His.

Melchom's nostrils flared as he grew more and more resolute.

No one was going to take his gift, or even look at him wrong.

Dove was Melchom's to defile and corrupt. Only his.

“I don't know what's going on between us,” his Dove murmured while Melchom scrubbed him down, rubbing his cock against that delicious skin.

He didn't either, but it didn't matter. Melchom didn't need to know so long as his

Dove let him be in charge—in charge of him.

“Rest, tiny Dove,” Melchom brushed the hair off his face.

He’d wake him up later to drill him into the mattress and let go of all that pent up angst and uncertainty. Later, though.

His Dove was also only his to take care of and keep in pristine condition.

CHAPTER 15

DAVE

“Melchom?” Dave rubbed the sleep off his eyes.

He’d gotten used to waking up with the demon’s warmth threatening to suffocate him over the last few weeks. Gaz breathing down on him because she got excited about going out to play had also become his norm. There was none of that, though. It confused him, but there was a weight in his brain that made properly opening his eyes harder.

“Gaz?” he still managed to call the hound.

His mouth felt cottony, though. He was used to it sounding lower and scratchier because of all the sulfur in the air, but cottony was new.

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 4:22 pm

Realizing that made him more alert. Dave guessed it was a good thing. He could say he had some survival instincts left, after all.

The first thing he noticed was that he was still in Melchom's bed. He recognized the soft sheets, and there was still some residual heat from the demon lying there. Where the fuck was he? Fine, Dave woke up often to him gone for his meetings or whatever, but Gaz would still be there. He couldn't picture his big bad demon walking and playing fetch with the hound.

Dave sat up, rubbing his eyes some more before he finally opened them.

He screamed, then covered his mouth with both hands. "Astaroth?"

He... There was no way he was seeing things right. Right? Dave swallowed. Astaroth, the demon with the scary eyes—the one that had Jordan—was in the room, leaning against the door as if he owned the space.

Dave looked around. There was still no sign of Gaz or Melchom, but he... Melchom wouldn't leave him alone with the other demon. Dave refused to believe that. Fear still shot through his veins, though. He... He'd started to relax, but he should've known not to do that in Hell.

Shouldn't he?

No, he refused to start drowning in worst case scenarios.

"You think you can address me that casually, David?"

Dave shivered, his voice betraying him again when he asked, “Where are Melchom and Gaz?”

“Melchom was called in for an emergency meeting. He took the hellhound with him.” The demon shrugged, waving his hand around. “That was impressive of you, I must say.”

“Why would he take Gaz?”

Melchom never did. It didn’t make any sense.

“I’m pretty sure he was ordered to.”

“Why?”

“So many questions,” Astaroth trilled, still moving around the room before finally pausing by the foot of his bed. “You’re intriguing.”

“Uh... Thanks?”

Thinking about something smart to retort with was hard—especially when Dave still had no idea what was going on, and he couldn’t get his body to fully cooperate.

Huh.

Was Astaroth controlling his body? Like Melchom did? It didn’t quite feel the same way. Dave just felt... groggy, like there were a few walls between him and the rest of the world distorting the air. It was unnerving in its strangeness.

“You’re sharp.” He guessed that answered his question. “Tell me, David. Why haven’t you gotten Melchom killed already? It’s never been so easy.”

Now, Dave knew there was a game here he was missing critical rules of, something at play he hadn't been made aware of. But he knew enough to know he was safer if he didn't speak. That was what the good guys did in the movies. They didn't speak, and they waited for their opportunity to run away, or to be rescued by someone else.

Not going to lie: Dave was banking on the latter.

Melchom would have to leave his meeting at some point, and he knew the demon went straight to his chambers when he was done. Gaz would... She would feel he was in danger, right? Dogs could do that.

Dave was pretty sure they could, at least.

No, he had to convince himself that they did.

"I don't need you to talk," Astaroth snorted. "I just need our dethroned King to show up here and listen."

"Oh." So much for just thinking he'd stay quiet and wait. This felt important, though. "So you're not gonna kill me?"

"Me?" Astaroth hissed. "I just got my hair done. As if I would ever."

That wasn't reassuring. It sounded like those villains who wouldn't get their hands dirty.

“Right.”

Oh.

He could call for Melchom.

He’d summoned him twice before. He could do it now, too.

He didn’t know how to do it without drawing attention to it, but maybe that didn’t matter.

He needed Melchom here, and it didn’t take a genius to know the demon liked it when he was needed.

Dave was aware this might be a trap—well, he started to think about it now, after he’d called for his demon to save his ass.

“Heavens, Dove, if this is going to become a—” Melchom stopped his tirade the second he noticed Astaroth. Just as quickly, he screamed for Gaz. “No, Gaz!”

Dave’s eyes darted to see what was going on. It looked like Gaz had been getting ready to jump at Astaroth.

“Why would you—?” Dave frowned.

Then, a... creature... materialized. He wasn’t sure he’d seen anything like it before. It reminded him of one of those gargoyles at the top of gothic cathedrals, with wings

and horns, a peak, and stony skin covering it.

Gargoyles can kill hellhounds, Melchom spoke into his mind. That's Astaroth's pet. He built it for just that purpose. Keep Gaz off them.

Dave gulped down, eyes shifting again toward the hound. Gaz looked confused—and stressed. Her body vibrated as she hunched down, probably unsure about following Melchom's warning or her instincts to protect.

"It's okay, gorgeous girl." His voice shook, but he forced himself to try and look relaxed. "Just stay there, okay? Daddy Melchom will take care of it."

He hoped so, at least.

Call me that again, Dove.

"It's not what you—!" he spluttered. Fine, he understood how it had come out, but it wasn't meant like... It was just doggy talk. "Whatever. That's not what you should be focusing on!"

"I know." Melchom's gaze darted to Astaroth then. "Care to tell me what you and your pet are doing here, Astra? You know I hate how dusty everything gets when it's here."

"I'm going to ignore that uncalled for remark." Astaroth—Astra?—scoffed. "And I'm here so you can finally see reason."

"Reason?" Melchom repeated slowly.

Dave tried to move—maybe whatever hold he was under would let up—but no luck. It was the strangest sensation. Dave thought his chin would be wobbling if he had full

freedom of movement, but instead, his eyes just watered with the desperation to do so, to let out his fear in a more controlled manner. A slow shiver ran down his spine.

“I had to take matters into my own hands. You know, after you kept refusing my offers to come check out your human.”

“I doubt that’s all you’ve come to do.”

Dave whimpered. He really didn’t understand how this hold worked, but he could talk, and make sounds, and shiver. It was strange. Disconcerting.

He guessed that was the Prince’s intention.

“You’re right, of course.” Astaroth chuckled. Dave shivered. “Why isn’t he dead yet, brother? You can’t tell me you still don’t think he’s the one the prophecies talk about.”

Melchom’s muscles bulged, his nostrils flaring. “It doesn’t matter what I think.”

“No?” Astaroth really looked like a caricature of all the cartoons Dave had never felt too drawn to with all the hands waving around and gesticulating. “And, I heard that, human.”

“You’re bored.” Melchom recaptured Astaroth’s attention. “It happens every few centuries. You get bored, and you want blood and drama spilled all over the castle. So it doesn’t matter what you’ve seen in him, or whom you want as King.”

Dave could hear his heart thumping against his chest way too loudly. Bored for blood? That didn’t... It didn’t bode too well for him. Dave’s eyes focused on Gaz. She looked so scared and confused, cowering beside Melchom. The gargoyle wasn’t doing anything other than keeping its unblinking eyes on her, but that was apparently

enough.

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 4:22 pm

A tear slipped down Dave's cheek before he could help it.

"David 2.0 here wanted to kill you, brother. You can't tell me you missed that. He didn't just think it once, either."

"I don't want to kill you." Dave mumbled. He didn't know if Melchom had actually heard those thoughts. Surely, though, Melchom would've done something about it. He wouldn't have just let Dave be, knowing he was wondering about killing him. "I—I don't."

Dave loved him. But that was stupid, and not something he was going to say in front of an audience. Probably ever.

People in group therapy said acknowledging their true feelings was a great feeling. Dave felt sick to his stomach, so he wasn't too sure that had been true.

"He was sent here without his consent." Melchom sounded bored, even though those thunderous eyes of his told a different story. "I would've been disappointed if he didn't have some kind of backbone."

"Huh." Astaroth kept circling around the bed Dave felt trapped in. It... It didn't help keep his heartbeat at any regular pace. "How's this for backbone?"

The slash across his back came without warning. Dave screamed. Gaz started whining, and Melchom had to keep her to his side. The demon didn't visibly react, but Dave thought he was vibrating.

It didn't matter.

Dave was too busy catching his breath, feeling beads of blood sliding down his back. The sting was sharp enough he almost didn't feel it when the demon grabbed a fistful of hair and yanked until it was torn straight from his scalp. Blood flow ran to the area, pounding against it.

Dave didn't bother hiding the tears anymore, pain flaying and piercing through him everywhere he looked. His body trembled. He apparently had more movement now, but he didn't care. What was he supposed to do? Melchom had said only hellhounds could kill demons, but the demon in question had a gargoyle that could kill hellhounds. Even if Dave tried, the weapons Melchom treasured were too far away. He would never be fast enough. Not with all the blood he must be losing, getting him dizzier by the minute.

"This will do," Astaroth spoke.

A part of Dave wished he could lose consciousness and wake up... wherever, whenever. He forced his eyes open, though. Blurry vision showed the smaller—but more sadistic—demon walking up to an angry Melchom. Astaroth waved the lock of hair in the air with one hand while he grabbed Melchom's wrist with the other.

"You know sometimes the scriptures are quite literal." He was... He was wrapping Dave's hair around Melchom's wrists, cuffing him. For some reason. "This is for your own good."

"Your gargoyle is not going to be protection enough for what's coming for you."

"Pfft." Astaroth clicked his tongue. "You'd never risk your human's beloved pet. He'd never forgive you."

Threads of... something—anger?—traveled up and down Melchom's biceps, making him look wider, bigger. Dave didn't understand why he wasn't fighting. He groaned, nearly convulsing when a conveniently placed draft hit his open wounds.

"Tell me, David." Astaroth was back by his side, forcing him up, one hand circled around his neck. "Don't you wish him dead now? Wish you'd never met him? I can assure you, your stay down here would've been way less painful."

Dave shook. He didn't know exactly what he was feeling, what was coursing through his veins. The words barely registered, disdain toward the demon tainting them all.

"See the way my brother's skin here is almost glowing?" Astaroth turned his head just right, forcing Dave to be eye to eye with the demon who owned him. Melchom was glowing, tendrils visible. "He's feeding off you. I don't think he likes it, granted, but while you're here in immeasurable pain, suffering, terrified, he's never been stronger or fuller. A big part of him is enjoying that I have you like this, David. You've certainly never tasted better in all the days you've spent in Hell."

Dave didn't have control anymore over the tears that spilled down his cheeks, or the choked breaths when Melchom didn't deny it. Somehow, he could tell Astaroth wasn't lying. Melchom had fed off him enough times already to where Dave just knew.

So he didn't know what took over him when he forced himself to speak. "My name isn't David."

The words—or maybe the hatred imbued in them—shook Astaroth enough that he loosened his hold on Dave's throat.

"Well," the Prince recovered, "you mean because you go by Dave?" he tsked. "My apologies. I assumed our relationship wasn't quite there yet."

“No.” He coughed out a blood clot before he could continue. The world seemed to turn on its axis around him, and there was nowhere to grasp to stay upright. It didn’t matter. He had to do this, even when he wasn’t sure what this was. The air crackled around him, though, full of energy—energy he instinctively knew could belong to him. Perhaps he made use of it as he roared out his next words, “My name is Dove, and I belong to Melchom, King of Hell!”

“W-what?” Astaroth let go of him right away.

Dove caught his owner’s eyes widening, but there was too much going on as everything fell into place. That energy in the air started shaking everything, all the trinkets in the shelves falling, crashing against the stone. Dove closed his eyes. It was safe now. Things would be safe now.

Somehow.

Master.

“It’s okay, Gaz,” he still forced himself to say.

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Dave wouldn't know what had just happened, or what to feel about it, until he stopped hurting everywhere. He didn't know how he could now hear Gaz's voice in his head, and recognize it, but it didn't matter either.

"He's crowned you."

Had he? Opening his eyes was annoying, but Dove forced himself to. Melchom hadn't moved, but a crown sat on his head. He didn't think it was any of the crowns in the room. It was made of the same material as his horns, intertwined tendrils protecting all kinds of quartzes and rubies.

It shouldn't look good, but he just knew it was the part of Melchom that had been missing all this time.

"How did you do it, Mel?"

"Kneel." Melchom's voice boomed.

Like a true King's, Dove supposed. This name fit him much better. There must be something after all behind all of Melchom's insistence about the importance of names. Being Dove made everything that hadn't fit before fit now.

Being Melchom's, too.

CHAPTER 16

MELCHOM

I'll stave off the gargoyle for you. Be quick.

Gaz didn't answer him.

There was no need. The hellhound had been itching to draw blood the second she felt her human's fear. By now, Melchom would bet she stood a chance against the gargoyle.

The two of them leaped at the same time, in opposite directions. Melchom blocked out the shrills and the squelching of organs being yanked out of a body, while blood pooled on the floor. He blocked out the gargoyle's high pitched screams and the bony ends of its wings flapping and tearing Melchom's skin apart.

Astaroth had signed his own death sentence the second he thought to step foot inside Melchom's chambers.

A wiser man would've told Melchom to keep him alive and get some answers, but Melchom never claimed age made him wiser.

He'd get the answers, anyway. There was no doubt in his mind that the other Princes had been in on it, too. That was why he'd been called in and forced to take Gaz for a checkup—one they never did to hellhounds. He hadn't bought one single word about the safety protocols they'd spewed at him. Now he knew why.

Melchom pushed the gargoyle up and against the wall. His strength was waning, but it was still more than enough. He wasn't going to think of the reason why, but he was going to take advantage of it.

King?

Melchom tuned in. His Dove remained unconscious, but the sound of the carnage

going on in the other side of the room had stopped, too.

Gaz had taken it seriously when he'd said to be quick. She was going to be a good pet, after all. A good pupper, as his human would say.

Gargoyles don't last long once their bonded demon is dead. Go to Dove.

The hellhound made a whimpering sound. He heard the mattress dip under her weight, and paws—talons, dammit—circling until she found a good position to shield her human. The annoying pest was probably licking him, too. They'd need to talk more seriously about that going forward.

It wouldn't matter if Melchom didn't find a way to fix Dove. He would, though. Melchom refused to consider another possibility. His Dove was going to survive, and... He'd figure out how not to make him despise him later. Melchom flinched, recalling the human's face when Astaroth had pointed out the way Melchom's body was absorbing his fear. Self-hatred had run through his veins like it never had before.

Melchom had been sure Astaroth was the one Prince he could count on, but he wasn't terribly sad he'd died.

The flapping of the gargoyle wings stopped minutes later. He got the thing off him with a grunt, his torso full of lashes and bleeding gashes. It didn't matter.

Gaz moved to the side before he had to make her, and he cradled the human's head with one hand, the other splayed across his stomach. He wasn't usually in charge of extensive healings. Minions were called in for that. Melchom discarded the thought as soon as it appeared. No one would lay a hand on his human again. Ever. Only Melchom would get to see the inner parts of him.

He focused first on the external injuries. He stitched up the skin, trying not to think

about how deep the whip had dug, how much blood the human had lost. He rearranged each cell meticulously until there wouldn't be even a hint of a scar. White rage forced him to take pauses, clench his fists, and fume until he was able to refocus on his task.

His Dove would need a bath to get rid of all the cakey blood on his scalp, too. For now, he helped his hair regrow, adjusting it until all of it reached the length the human fantasized about when he imagined himself in front of a mirror. He had the most beautiful hair. Melchom remembered running his fingers through it that morning, while Dove slept. He should've woken him up then and got his fill of him before... Before Dove was taken from him like this.

Something wet bumped his arm.

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Gaz, looking at him with those annoyingly big eyes. The hellhound was covered in blood and bone dust.

“Go take a bath,” he commanded. “He’ll be scared if he sees you like this.”

Gaz lowered her ears and whined, sniffing around before she hopped off the bed.

Melchom breathed out when she left the room. He hadn’t realized it at first, but he needed to be alone for this. He couldn’t have anyone—not even Dove’s hellhound—see him break down when he got inside the human’s head.

He needed to prepare himself for... anything. A crumbled house of mirrors. Fire. A constant replay of Melchom’s body betraying them both.

It would be okay. It would have to be, but it would wreck him. Melchom hadn’t been in a situation where such pain could lance through him in millennia. He’d forgotten how paralyzing it could be.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered, for whatever it was worth.

Objectively, he knew Dove wasn’t listening. He was unconscious, all that energy he’d woven earlier taking its toll on him. Melchom would’ve been proud of his feat if everything else didn’t take precedence. It didn’t even matter that his human had given him what he’d been longing for all this time. He had his crown, and all of his power had been restored.

It didn’t quite matter, not as much as Melchom thought it would. It would matter

more when he started exerting revenge over everyone who had conspired with Astaroth.

Now, he shook those thoughts away, sliding into his Dove's house of mirrors. After the couple of weeks they'd been together—a fragment of time that should mean nothing to him—being inside the human like that was as easy as breathing. Second nature.

Dove's house of mirrors was there, the same but different all at once. Melchom noted the slight breeze around him. It was warmer, sunnier, even though the sun wasn't a thing that existed in human's inner worlds.

One glance above—where fragments of memories and fantasies used to float around, transforming his reality into a sort of kaleidoscope—revealed a clear sky. Clear-ish, except for the flights of doves filling it. Melchom frowned. A sense of peace settled within him the longer he stared at the birds, but it didn't make sense. Melchom shouldn't feel that way.

He hadn't earned it.

Melchom?

Huh?

Spinning around, he came face to face with... with his own human Dove. He had his wavy locks framed by a flower crown, a golden corset Melchom hadn't bought him highlighting his cinched waist.

My gift.

Dove had to be using the remnants of energy he'd absorbed to get inside Melchom's

consciousness. Right now, Melchom was inside the human's head, though, which meant the human got to see his own house of mirrors for the first time.

What's this?

Your brain, Melchom answered while materializing a form of his body to appear in front of the human. I've healed everything else already. You're safe.

Melchom went down to his knees as he spoke.

I know. Dove didn't move. I don't understand what I did, but it makes sense.

I'll explain. Not here.

His Dove laughed. It was a beautiful, bittersweet sound. I really am losing it, aren't I?

Melchom shook his head. Go back to your body, little Dove.

Why? Dove rested a hand on his hip. Melchom could tell he was fighting not to fidget. You're King now, right? Isn't that what I did?

You did, yes. Melchom wasn't sure he was following, though.

So that means you don't need me anymore, right? You got what you wanted, and I... I can just stay here, can't I? It seems peaceful.

Melchom shuddered. He couldn't... That wasn't...

No. He rose up to his feet. You're mine.

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Dove furrowed his brow. His chin wobbled. I don't know what that means.

I can't show you if you don't wake up.

Dove's answer came after minutes of eerie silence. How do I do that?

The same way you've kept summoning me, little Dove. By making it happen.

Melchom thought he saw the human's lips curl up into a small smile. It didn't have to mean anything, though.

What if what you show me isn't enough? Can I get back here?

Melchom's heart pounded against his chest. Every fiber of his being wanted to scream his refusal. He couldn't have that. He wouldn't reign or live in any realm where he didn't have his feisty human beside him. Melchom couldn't handle it.

I'll find a way.

Because maybe Melchom wasn't as selfish as he'd grown to believe after he'd fallen. And maybe Melchom deserved an eternity of pain for the one that got away... the dove that he should've cherished.

Do you promise?

It physically hurt to nod, but he still did it, bobbing his head up and down. His teeth ground together, his fists clenching. Melchom wouldn't cry. He hadn't done that...

ever. Not even when he lost his crown.

Why? Dove asked.

Melchom thought Dove had moved closer. He must be getting used to the way bodies moved in there, which meant Melchom was running out of time.

A sense of urgency filled him, forcing him to look the human in the eye. He ignored his body's itch to touch, to tuck a finger beneath Dove's chin and force his gaze up.

Because I now understand it when you thought of me as a monster. The truth in his words was like a punch to the gut, one that would leave a deeper scar than that hellhound ever had. I don't deserve owning you, little Dove, but maybe I can compensate you.

Melchom saw his human's eyes well up with tears before the image of him faded.

Melchom didn't know what that meant, and he didn't think he was ready to figure it out. Dove's body still lay motionless against his body, dirtied with blood and tear tracks Melchom should probably get cleaned.

Melchom didn't move. Instead, he started digging around, opening mirrors and finding all the memories that had once been important to his human. Melchom needed to at least have this. Another look at his Dove, another minute of marveling of his courage, his bravery.

Maybe Melchom could convince himself he wasn't as selfish as he'd once thought, but he wasn't selfless either.

He felt called to by one of the mirrors more than the others. It showed Dove about three or four years ago. He was with his then friend, Jordan. They were trying on

clothes. Dove had run away from his parents' house not so long ago. Jordan had been helping him navigate social services, and he was sharing a room with him. Dove had just been hired at a daycare for little kids, and Jordan insisted they go on a shopping spree to celebrate.

"You should try this," Jordan showed a cute sundress in lilac.

"No way," his Dove snorted, but a blush crept up his cheeks. "Don't be ridiculous, J."

"The kids would love it."

"And their parents would get me fired," Dove shot back.

Jordan stood silent for a few seconds. "You could still wear it outside of work."

"Why? So you can patch me up every night I get home with a busted lip?"

"We're safe here." Jordan walked up to him, grabbing his wrist. "This is not your father's town. And you have pepper spray."

"I don't know." Dove chewed on his lip. "What if I freeze?"

"You won't." Jordan chuckled. "I know you. Besides, what's the point of living if your wardrobe doesn't make you twirl around with happiness?"

"I could think of a few." His human had already been convinced. "But fine. You're paying for it, though."

“Deal.”

Melchom wiped the tears off his cheeks. It was stupid to cry over the first time his human was accepted as he was, or the first time Dove saw himself wearing a dress. It was even more stupid that Melchom was crying over the friendship Dove had lost for reasons he didn't know about yet.

Melchom walked away from the house of mirrors, focusing his blurry vision on his physical surroundings. All the shelves in what had been his chambers were empty. Minions had already moved them to the King's room. He must've granted them permission, but couldn't care less about it. Gaz was there, nuzzling his face.

“Get off me,” he tried to scold her before he was standing up, carrying the human close to his chest.

There was no movement, no activity, but Melchom wouldn't stop to think about it. He'd take him to their new chambers—the chambers of the King of Hell—and he'd figure it out from there. He'd lock the doors, and he'd wrap his arms around Dove the way his human liked. Then maybe he'd watch more memories until Dove decided to wake up.

If he did.

When he would.

Melchom still made everything burn as he walked to the stairs. The chambers where Astaroth's body lay. The hallway where minions had stood without moving a finger.

Everything but a bubble around him and the hellhound burned with his rage.

Hell would never be ready for what was coming. He was going to take everything down, and he wouldn't care about the consequences.

He was King, after two thousand years of not being treated as one—after their politics had consumed his gift.

No one would leave unscathed.

Gaz opened the door for them. Melchom read the worry in her rigid movements, the utter sadness and despair for her human. As surprising as it was, Melchom wanted to help her, and not just because it was what Dove would've wanted.

He just didn't know how.

Melchom placed Dove's body on the bed before he could take in the room around him. He covered Dove with blankets because his human liked to be covered—even when they were in Hell and temperatures never went below toasty.

Can you project me into people's heads?

Melchom startled.

He'd slipped in his Dove's head before he'd finished getting comfortable on the bed. And there he was, in the same ensemble he'd worn before, looking expectantly at Melchom.

Not just expectantly. There were sandstorms brewing behind his usually light eyes, with pain laced within the words he wasn't speaking.

Gaz misses you, Melchom said before he could process the question.

He thought his Dove would like to know, that it would make him happy.

I wanna talk to Jordan.

I know. Dove had said as much a week prior. Melchom hadn't managed to make it happen. Another time he'd failed, even if it hadn't seemed so important then. Astaroth is dead. I can take you to your friend.

I wanna do it now.

Melchom frowned. He wasn't sure he understood the urgency. The human would remain untouched until he said so, but he didn't think that was his Dove's worry.

It can be done.

Okay. His Dove nodded to himself.

When he'd first seen him, standing around his own memories and core values, he'd looked airy. At peace. Melchom didn't get the impression he was at peace anymore. He also got the impression he'd lose the human if he tried to point it out.

Melchom trusted his gut.

I'll burn it all down for you.

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The human laughed, but Melchom didn't think he found it funny. And how would that help?

Melchom itched to touch him, to hold him, to rest his lips against his soft skin and promise him it would all work out. Melchom would keep him happy, and warm, and...

Loved.

His Dove's eyes crinkled. My life sucked, you know? Is this what happens when you die? You're stuck with all your memories, and shit?

You're not dead. The mere idea made Melchom want to throw up, as illogical as it was. You'll never be dead, and you had a good life.

Please don't gaslight me.

Melchom shook his head. I'm not tricking you. You have more happy memories than you do sad memories. That's a good life.

Not if the sad memories carry much more weight.

He'd been about to dismiss it as a human thing, but he guessed it made sense. His main bad memory—being betrayed and dethroned by the first human he'd thought to love—had shaped so much of his existence.

Build happier ones, then.

How? I'm in Hell.

You're with me. Melchom groaned. In the physical world, Gaz climbed up to the bed—his not-made-for-hellhounds bed—and moved his arm out of the way so she too could hold on to the pliant body on top of him. You can rule with me.

Why would I be interested in ruling?

Melchom didn't know. To be fair, he'd never had a huge interest in it, either. It was just part of his reality, what was expected of him. The thing he'd been born to do.

Melchom. His Dove sighed, his hand caressing his cheek. I don't know what I'm doing any more than you do. I want to wake up.

Do it, then. Hopeless tears mixed with a new bout of anger.

This shouldn't be happening. None of this.

Just take me to Jordan.

Dove was gone after that. Well, he wasn't, Melchom corrected himself. He'd just stopped showing himself to Melchom, and finding him inside the maze Melchom had just begun to familiarize himself with wouldn't be precisely easy.

I will, little Dove.

He just needed to stay cuddling him a little longer, breathing in his scent.

Master? Gaz whined while she nuzzled all over Dove's beautiful body.

"I'll fix it, Gaz." He had to. "He just... He needs some time."

CHAPTER 17

DOVE

It had been good at first. He'd watched the images playing in the mirrors, and they'd been good. Melchom had been right—partly. Dove had felt happiness. He'd felt happiness at his birthday party when he turned ten and his mother had rented one of those blow up castles for him. He'd felt it too when he'd been fourteen, and the captain of the football team had kissed him under the bleachers, as cliché as it all sounded now. The guy had been a terrible kisser, but Dove had felt desired.

Even then, he'd known that was a thing to be savored slowly. Even before he'd dared to let his hair grow, he knew not everyone would want him—not even the people who should.

The bad memories had started to overwhelm the good ones when he turned seventeen. That was when he'd had his first psychotic break. He'd been pushed into a ward, and his father had blamed his mother for allowing him to keep his head in the clouds.

To this day, he wasn't quite sure about what that meant. None of the doctors he'd seen had, either.

He'd left his house one month after leaving the ward. He hadn't quite turned eighteen yet, and a classmate had housed him until he graduated. Then he left town... and he met Jordan.

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Jordan had been a ray of sunshine he hadn't thought he'd find. He'd taken Dove under his wing, introduced him to everything and everyone. Jordan had bought him his first dress, had pretended to be a referral for job interviews, had cooked for him when he was sick. He'd had this ability to give a positive spin to everything—even when Dove had been strapped to a hospital bed or running around to escape whatever voice had gotten in his head.

Dove would've never walked away from Jordan. He followed him like a moth.

Perhaps that had been the problem. But he would never know, never have those answers. It was hard to put a positive spin on any of the other mirrors after that.

But... if Melchom, his demon, took him to Jordan, if he got those answers... Maybe Dove could rest easy. Maybe he would stop questioning everything. After all, if Jordan had sent him to Hell, banishing him to a life of servitude to a powerful demon he didn't know... Who said Melchom wouldn't turn on him, too? Who said there would ever be anyone who wouldn't leave?

At least, anyone who wasn't his new puppy. Thinking of Gaz sent a pang through his chest. It felt like a thread, pulling him down, perhaps toward her. He should know more about the way these things worked.

Dove sat down against one of the thousands of walls, pulling his knees to his chest. The sky here was full of white doves flying in flights, without a worry in the world. The sight made him smile.

There was something in his head that was good, that was just right. He was glad for

it. Calmness washed over him as he stared at them, wondering if one of them would ever fly down to him and let him pet them.

Melchom had given him that sky. Dove's smile grew bigger. He didn't know what it meant for him, or the two of them, moving forward. What Dove knew was that he found himself wrapped up in warmth, a type of warmth that felt a lot like that time Melchom had carried him around all afternoon. Melchom had given him some kind of excuse—a reasoning that hadn't made any sense, something about not getting Dove out of his sights because his minions were spewing nonsense. It hadn't mattered then. It didn't quite matter now, either.

Dove wished he had more control over the way time ran when he was in his head. He wished he could always be material. He thought that Melchom wouldn't leave then.

His head soon grew lonely, another cell he found himself trapped in.

That was when he started crying. The tears flowed freely without an order or logic behind them. He cried for what had happened in Melchom's chambers, for all the fear he'd felt, and the pain, and the anguish as he'd waited for Astaroth to strike again. He cried for Melchom because he was now King again, but he'd never looked sadder. For the pain etching all of his features while he'd been feeding off Dove.

He cried for his old self too. The kids at the daycare. The friendships he hadn't built and the dates he hadn't gone to. The dreams he'd never fulfill.

He cried for... everything. For his mother, too, because she was never allowed to see him past his father's lens. The family members that had visited in the summer who never heard from him again. The neighbors he'd baked cookies for when he first rented his own place.

Dove?

There was urgency in the voice.

Melchom's voice.

Only Melchom could visit him here.

Dove glanced up. The demon was kneeling before him, one arm reaching out but not quite touching. Dove smiled. Outside of the shitty lighting—was that something Melchom could fix now that he was King?—his demon was even more gorgeous.

His ivory crown shone, the jewels there glinting. He really looked good. If Melchom had been human, Dove would've been salivating over him. He still was.

I love you, Dove murmured, cutting the distance between the two of them. He didn't care if he got snot all over him.

Melchom's eyes widened. Dove laughed.

You do?

He thought it all looked like it belonged in one of those romcoms he sometimes watched. He didn't care.

Why are you here?

You're here. Melchom's mood soured. Dove felt it like an arrow piercing through his gut. The pain made him curl down, letting his forehead rest against the demon's chest.

There was a heartbeat there. He wasn't sure he'd noticed before.

I don't know how to leave.

Your brain is not ready to wake up yet, Melchom explained. It's fine.

It wasn't fine. His demon wasn't that good of a liar. There had to be something else, some reason why he couldn't stay here like this. But he knew Melchom wouldn't say, and it was... It was okay. Melchom could be idiotic sometimes, but Dove would show him.

I think I need to talk to Jordan, he said—repeated.

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He didn't understand how Melchom was dealing with him. Dove wouldn't be as patient, and he'd needed to have patience in spades when he was on Earth.

I know. We're there now.

Oh.

For some reason, Dove looked around. Of course, he didn't see anything other than his convoluted version of a brain. He'd have to ask Melchom about it one day.

Hold my hand, Dove. So I can take you to your friend.

He didn't know if Jordan was still a friend, but Dove did it anyway. Melchom's skin still ran hot, even in this... dimension. He didn't know what lingo the demon would prefer.

You're not responding to my thoughts.

I can't hear them here. Melchom flinched, like Dove had just reminded him a part of him was missing. He felt bad if that was the case. It's hard to explain, but when you're here, your brain is focused on your survival, not creating new pathways to showcase trains of thoughts or relevant memories.

Dove frowned. He'd just been watching his memories, but he guessed it was one of those magick things he just had to accept. He didn't want to be argumentative, anyway. That would be reserved for the future, if he wanted to annoy Melchom.

If there was going to be a future with him. He remembered Melchom saying when he'd first visited that he still wanted Dove. Dove would have to trust that was real.

Are you ready?

No. Yes.

He didn't have a choice. That wasn't anything new. It was his reality. He felt like it had always been his reality and always would be.

It didn't matter. Dove glanced up again, letting that peace calm him as he took a deep breath. With his eyes shut, he let the gentle breeze cleanse him.

When he next opened them, he was in a completely different setting. The room was dark, only a couple lanterns in the wall letting him see more of its inside.

A man hunched down against a corner. Jordan.

His friend—old friend—looked up.

He scrambled upright when he saw Dove, but that wasn't quite right. Jordan would never be scared of him. At least, Dove never would've thought that would happen.

"It worked?" Jordan's gaze focused on him, but Dove got the feeling he wasn't seeing him. Not quite.

What worked?

"Are you still delusional about your satanic cult, then?"

Dove lost his footing. The voice was Melchom's, but he couldn't see where it had

come from.

Easy, tiny Dove. You're in my head, and I'm in Jordan's cell.

Oh.

Dove felt cold. It had been a long time. He guessed it had to make sense. He was unconscious, after all.

"Your Majesty." Jordan kneeled quickly before Melchom.

His Melchom.

Dove would've growled if that was a thing he did. Alas, he was better house trained.

"Stand up." Dove could feel the anger rushing through Melchom's body. "Your sycophancy repels me."

Jordan paled. It didn't look like he'd had a good meal in days. He was more clothed than Dove had ever been in Hell, though.

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“Your Majesty, we... you were usurped. We wanted to restore your glory.”

“And what about your friend, Jordan?” Melchom circled him as he spoke. Dove thought he could see dried blood on Jordan’s clothes, but it was too dark to be certain. “What was your plan for him?”

“Where is he?” Jordan swallowed.

It was the first sign of vulnerability Dove had ever noticed in him.

“He’s here.” Melchom said nonchalantly. Dove wished he could be as collected as him while his heart was breaking. “What do you have to say to him, human?”

It hit him, the disdain when Melchom spat that word. As much as it had bothered him when that was the only way Melchom had addressed Dove, that disdain had never been there.

Not really.

“This was his purpose all along.” Jordan held Melchom’s gaze. Dove wasn’t sure how he did it. “I didn’t know it at first, but then it clicked. He is meant to be here, beside you. He wasn’t happy on Earth, but he had a chance here.”

Dove froze. How long?

“So when did this nonsense start?” Melchom leaned against the wall. Dove felt the solid rock behind them even if he didn’t really see it. “When did you accept your

friend's life was worth the gamble?"

"It was..." Jordan paused, but it didn't look like he was regretting anything. He was just thinking, trying to recall the moment Melchom had asked him about. He'd always had a terrible memory. "Two years after I met him. I'd joined the Society a month before when my leader saw him picking me up."

"Just like that?"

Dove gulped down. He wasn't sure he wanted to be here anymore.

Trust me.

He nodded. He hoped Melchom saw him, but another part of him hoped he didn't and this all stopped. It had to stop—before he was even more broken.

Dove felt himself propelled forward. One blink, and he was in a different room. Looking down, he saw himself, wearing that same corset his brain had somehow conjured when he'd first woke up inside this... place. Reaching out with his hand told him he had that same flower crown, too.

The room he was in looked like what he assumed a bank safe would look like. Pristine and metallic, with well labeled tiny doors filling the walls. A bench sat in the middle of it.

Jordan was there.

A rush of wind, and Melchom materialized too. It was instinctual when Dove reached to hold his hand. Dove gripped it tight. If they weren't here, he'd worry about hurting him. But then, he didn't think hurting Melchom was possible. At least, not physically.

Well, this is disappointing.

Where are we? Jordan and Dove asked at nearly the same time.

Dove refused to acknowledge that synchronicity.

Jordan's head. I figured you'd want him to see you.

Dove glanced around to the different safes. It looked nothing like his head did. It was so orderly and secure.

Show him, Dove didn't know what pulled him to ask that. If—if you can do that, show him. What happened to me. Everything I've gone through.

It will be my pleasure.

Jordan didn't get a word in, but Dove saw when images started to assault him. His body sprung, his eyes widened, pupils moving quickly as if tracking every frame and movement.

Dove was deep in thought. Another day, he would've felt bad about putting his friend through this. Were they friends, though? He replayed Jordan's explanation. Dove must've been twenty when Jordan had turned on him, but he couldn't remember any shift in their relationship. That year, Jordan had joined a book club. Dove guessed book club was code for the satanic cult Melchom had mentioned.

Dove had sometimes walked there with him, or picked him up so they could go have bubble tea at a shop near the old bookstore. It had never made complete sense, why Jordan had joined and seemed so invested in a book club. Dove had never thought of him as the nerdy type. At the time, he remembered thinking Jordan must be trying to get someone's attention, or maybe he was insecure about not being as smart as his

siblings. Dove could understand that—all of Jordan's siblings were doctors and engineers. Jordan had once confessed to feeling like the black sheep in his family because he was only a PE teacher.

It had hurt, back then. It was why he'd always had an excuse ready if Jordan's family was visiting, or they invited him somewhere. If they'd thought their son was a disappointment, Dove didn't want to guess what they'd think of him. Now he had to wonder—had he rejected the notion of a family based on a lie? Because Jordan knew what he was going to do to him?

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Was it worth it? Silence had settled in the room. It looked like the visions had stopped. Dove didn't care, and he still didn't do well with stretched periods of silence.

Dave... Jordan looked happy to see him, once the shock faded out.

It made him sick.

Something else made him sick.

That's not my name, he groaned out. He was only beginning to understand why he felt so feral about it. Melchom had said names were important, they spoke of who someone was and was supposed to be.

Dove wasn't a traitor, like King David, or like Jordan. He wasn't a big biblical figure, either.

No, he was Dove. He brought peace to his King. He met his needs, filled his days. That was who he wanted to be.

Oh. Okay. Jordan took a step forward. You look good...

Dove. Dove held his chin up, his nails digging into Melchom's palm as he held his stance.

I like it. And you do look good. Hell suits you.

Even after what you've seen? Dove's eyes welled up.

His friend never would've been happy after he saw him suffer like that. Many nights, Jordan had soothed him after an episode, or canceled his own plans for Father's Day to have loads of ice cream with him.

It didn't make sense.

I can tell you love him. Jordan took another step closer.

Put one finger on him, Melchom spoke, taking a step closer, and I'll burn you from the inside out until you're only ashes to be discarded and forgotten about.

It was a bit dramatic—Dove would have to teach him about human ways of persuasion and threats—but it did the trick, freezing Jordan on his tracks.

Bringing back the King of Hell was important. The world would've fallen apart if we didn't all play our part.

You took everything from me. Dove shook with feelings he wasn't ready to process yet, shifting from anger to utter sadness and a sense of unfairness he couldn't quite shake out. I trusted you. You were the only person in my life whose support was unconditional.

It still is. I did this for you too, D-Dove.

No, Dove wasn't just going to accept that. He couldn't.

Dove turned to Melchom, imploring without words.

He's too brainwashed to reason with, his demon said what Dove hadn't dared to

think. I can order the minions to revert the process, but there are no guarantees.

Why? Dove swallowed, then started again. Why did he let himself be brainwashed?

I keep telling you humans are strange creatures. Melchom's attention shifted away from him, though. His eyes flicked. They seemed to be reading through all the boxes in the room. Dove wasn't sure how he knew that. Maybe it was the pinched brow in Jordan's face. He still remembered how that hurt. He fell in love with the leader. Part of his initiation was to drink from a chalice. He thought it would just be wine, but it was the blood of his sister. That event broke him. He spent that week being nursed back to health by the leader.

Dove's eyes widened. He remembered Jordan had been sick—it had stuck out because Dove had never seen him take a sick leave before that. Dove idolized him as the person who was just there, always solid, never faltering.

So... that was it.

It was strange. Dove wanted to feel bad. He did. Saddened. But... But it didn't feel like that explanation was enough. It shouldn't be. Dove had seen, had been certain of feeling worse things, and he'd... He'd pulled through them. He wouldn't have abandoned Jordan.

Ever.

What do you need, brave Dove?

Brave? The preposterous concept brought tears to his face. Take me away from here.

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Something clouded Melchom's face, but he nodded. He was gone then. Darkness wrapped around him for a minute before he was back in his head, surrounded by the mirror maze that was such a stark contrast to Jordan's head.

Jordan's head is normal, right?

It's boring. Melchom appeared behind Dove, wrapping his arms around him. Dove didn't bother to mention that their size difference made that kind of uncomfortable. Breathing was not the most comfortable thing to do with a giant arm wrapped tightly around his chest.

Because it's not broken into a million pieces?

Because it's afraid to see beyond. Melchom turned him around and cupped his cheek with one hand. Dave let out a shaky breath. You wear everything on your sleeve, showcase everything. That's brave. Courageous.

Dove snorted. It didn't matter that he couldn't believe the demon, though. Demons didn't always have to be right. How can I trust in anyone's unconditional love?

You can't, Melchom seemed reluctant to admit. But you can be my Consort, own the power within you.

And what if you turn on me, too?

You have Gaz.

Dove balked. It wasn't the first time Melchom hinted that Dove could use Gaz to kill him, but there was no way in Hell he would traumatize his dog like that. Ever.

He guessed he saw what Melchom was saying, though.

I don't want to be trapped here, he whispered. In my head, I mean.

Melchom was going to say something. Something sad. Dove could tell. His eyes snapped up before he could open his mouth, though. Dove followed it to a thread that hadn't been there.

I don't understand.

Follow that thread, little Dove.

Okay.

CHAPTER 18

MELCHOM

It felt like an eternity crammed into minutes. Dove's eyes started fluttering beneath his eyelids. Melchom held his breath while he saw his human come back to himself. He would've wanted to have a quiet moment, to let his Dove adjust to being in his body again, but Gaz had other ideas. She cried and huffed the second his Dove shifted, nuzzling every inch of skin she could find.

Easy. That was his mistake. Gaz's growl made it clear, and Melcom grumbled in his head, Fine.

Having Dove back down here was only the first step, though. Melchom wished he

could feel differently, forget everything he knew about human healing, or the pain that had been reflected at him last night. Or his own pain, the deep scars that had been built around his very heart.

It was stupid, but stupid things weren't any less real. Melchom had learned that lesson a long time ago.

"Melchom?" Dove grumbled sleepily.

His fingers rubbed his eyes slowly, but probably more harshly than what was deemed healthy. Another day, Melchom would've let him, and he would've healed the abused flesh after. Today, he carefully slid Dove's hands off his face.

"I'm here," Melchom said, bringing Dove's hands to his lips.

Master! Master, Master, Master!

Gaz started wagging her tail before his Dove had really opened his eyes, jumping around and bumping him with her snout. Melchom wanted to roll his eyes but didn't. It wouldn't be a good look if that was when Dove decided to take a peek.

"Good pupper," Dove mumbled, arms blindly leaving Melchom's loose grip and reaching for the hellhound.

It was enough for Gaz to cover his body fully, her tongue poking out to lick all over his cheeks. Melchom wanted to lash out at her, but he showed restraint. He'd have to shower Dove anyway to get rid of all the caked blood.

"Ew," was of course Dove's first word after his eyes opened fully, "I'm disgusting."

“It’s just dried blood.”

That was the wrong thing to say, too. Melchom would have gone back in time if it was possible. Then again, that heated glare and contained huff was...

Everything.

“Why are you smiling?” Dove punched him on the chest. “And what do you mean it’s just dried blood? I want it off.”

Melchom grinned wider. “I’ll draw you a bath.”

The offer wasn’t one his Dove had been expecting. Melchom hadn’t appreciated until now how visceral Dove’s reactions were or how expressive he was at all times, whether it was because something pleased him or caused the opposite reaction.

He had his human back. He was going to take care of him, pamper him until he couldn’t remember a time when he’d felt happier. Or safer. Or healthier.

Melchom would make sure of it, would do anything to make it happen.

“W-wait.” His Dove’s chin started wobbling before he could leave the bed. “Is it real? Everything I saw?”

“Yes.”

“So... I wasn’t enough for Jordan. Why did I wake up, then?”

Dove looked so lost as he posed the question and waited for an answer. Melchom didn't have one for him and hated himself a little more for it.

“Seeing Jordan wasn't about reassuring yourself that you were loved.” You already know you are. Melchom kept that tidbit of knowledge to himself. “It was about freeing all the energy your brain was wasting on trying to understand.”

Dove took his words in, his reactions sluggish. Melchom had to remind himself it was to be expected. Humans called it brain fog after an almost catatonic state. It would be fine. Melchom wasn't failing—not again.

“But why wasn't I enough?”

Melchom burned with the need to avenge his human for that. He had to squash it down, though. For now. “Come with me, tiny Dove.” He sensed the human's hesitation when he wasn't given a straight answer.

Dove still took his hand, though, and let himself be carried to their new bathroom. To be exact, he clung to him like an octopus and refused to look up from where his face was buried against Melchom's chest.

The demon guessed he should feel compassion, or maybe tenderness. Amusement at his human's antics.

There was a bit of that, but he mostly felt possessive. It fueled him to hold him tighter, to promise once again that no one would ever lay a hand on what was his.

He didn't coax the human out of his hiding space. He just walked into the jacuzzi all Kings and Princes had in their bathrooms and started the water. He took off the human's clothes, discarding them on the floor. It had been a cute bodysuit, but Melchom had no interest in salvaging it.

It had been a long time since he'd last felt those jets working the strained muscles in his back. Melchom sighed. It was a good feeling. He'd taken for granted the luxuries his human didn't hesitate to demand out of him at any given chance.

"It's a jacuzzi?" Dove glanced up shyly, eyes full of worry and wonder in equal parts.

"Only a jacuzzi is fit for a King."

"Your crown is beautiful."

Melchom preened. It didn't matter that Dove's filter wasn't fully turned on yet. In fact, that made it better.

"I healed your body," he said. "There's not a single reminder in it of Astaroth's arrogance."

Dove nodded. "You're not like him. Like them."

Melchom's head cocked to the side as his hands started massaging the knots in his back. "What do you mean?"

The human nibbled on his bottom lip, but Melchom stopped him, not wanting to see more blood on him today.

It was enough that the water in the tub browned with the dried blood before it was pulled down the drain.

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“You’re a big bad demon, but you’re not a monster. I remember you said something about that before.”

Melchom snorted. He couldn’t bring himself to accept those words, but he didn’t want to fight them, either. “Do you also remember when I said you were my brave Dove? This is why.”

“I’m not brave.”

“We’ll agree to disagree.”

“You’re weirdly soft,” Dove... complained? It literally sounded like he was complaining about the development. “How long was I... out, or whatever?”

“A day?” Melchom wasn’t entirely sure, either.

“B-but—” Dove’s eyes widened before he finished his sentence. His hands shot out to Melchom’s shoulders. “What about Gaz? She needs four walks per day. Poor girl must be desperate to—”

“She’s been heading out as needed.”

That switched something inside of Dove, activating the mama bear in him. “On her own? Since when can she do that?”

“Hellhounds aren’t dogs,” Melchom said for what he was sure wouldn’t be the last time. It wasn’t the first time, either. “She is completely independent.”

“But that first day, she kept jumping at me and crying, and you said it was because she needed to go out.”

“She prefers going outside with you,” and she’s an expert manipulator, but his Dove didn’t need to hear that last part. “You’re her Master.”

“That’s still weird.” The explanation calmed him down, though, enough to wrap himself around Melchom again. “Can I convince her to call me hooman or something like that instead?”

“Probably not.”

“I will.”

“Okay.”

* * *

Keeping a human shielded from feeling fear while in Hell was more challenging than Melchom would’ve imagined. When Flaga wasn’t knocking on his door to demand something or another about her businesses on Earth, there were sudden noises or fires starting somewhere. His Dove was strangely attuned to those. Even Melchom provoked fear in him sometimes, when he hoisted him up too suddenly or their kisses turned into more.

Melchom was resorting to holding his breath more often than not around the human. He was sure his Dove was starting to catch on, too. No words were exchanged about it, though, so Melchom kept on doing it.

He’d just come back from another tedious—and quite unnecessary—meeting with all the remaining Princes. His Dove was up and about, Gaz keeping watch over him from

the ridiculously fluffy bed Dove had insisted on getting her.

“What are you doing, little Dove?”

Of course, Melchom knew what he was doing. His human was—again—curious about his trinkets and crowns. He was apparently wondering if he should own one now that he was the King’s... something. His thoughts came to a halt every time he tried to label his dynamic with Melchom.

It wasn’t the first time Melchom had noticed that happening. It was something else that went unspoken, another way they didn’t want to disturb the easy routine they seemed to have fallen into.

“If I wear a crown, should it match yours? Because none of these do.”

“The King of Hell has always been a lonely title. There’s not a precedent or a protocol for...” Melchom paused.

“What would my title be?” Dave faced him, heading toward him. There was mirth in his eyes. “I’ve always been partial to Consort. It sounds fancy.”

“You’ll be King Consort of Hell, then.” Melchom didn’t need to think about it.

He couldn’t have cared less about it. He cared about his human’s happiness. That was all that mattered.

“Really?” Dove’s nose wrinkled. It looked adorable. “We should hold a coronation, then. For you, too. Hell should know their King is back.”

That, however, pulled a groan out of Melchom. Big spectacles had been the last thing on his mind. He’d rather keep it that way, too. “Believe me, they know.”

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“Do they?” Dove moved closer to him. Melchom found it endearing—the human thought he could pose some kind of threat if he widened his stance and placed a pointed finger against his upper abs. “Isn’t it important that you’re all feared and respected?”

There.

He almost missed it, but he clung to that tendril of thought flying through his Dove’s mirror maze at the speed of light.

“You want them to fear and respect me, because you think then you’d be safe?”

With someone else, maybe he would’ve thought the idea ridiculous. When it was his gift thinking it, though, it tugged at his heartstrings. Melchom had even forgotten he had those.

Dove chewed on his lip. “Yes?”

“Then you’ll have your coronation.” He’d make the minions organize the whole thing, and maybe it wouldn’t be so painful.

Anything to keep that fear from his Dove’s eyes. Melchom would take care of the actual threats in the meantime.

The adorable human bounced on his feet with excitement. Melchom caught him before he ended up hurt by trying to reach his height. His Dove was lucky Melchom was so attuned to the way his head worked. Melchom guessed he couldn’t complain

when the human was just overenthusiastic with the urge to kiss him.

Kisses were nice.

Everything that followed them was even nicer.

Melchom was slow as he explored his Dove's body, caressing with his hands and licking whenever his Dove cooperated to let him shift positions.

Their clothes disappeared in two seconds. Melchom caught a defeated huff from Gaz. She walked in circles until she curled up again on her bed, her back to them. She'd been doing that the past few days.

"I wanna ride you," his Dove mumbled.

Melchom didn't know if he noticed, but Dove did this thing when he was on top of him. It reminded him of those human memes about cats making biscuits. His human did that when he rested his fisted hands against his pecs and... massaged? Melchom wasn't sure what the move was about, but it felt soothing, so he didn't draw attention to it.

"You do, huh?" Melchom pulled him close. "You want me to open you up? Hold you and let you enjoy my cock for as long as you want it in you?"

A moan erupted from deep within Dove. "Uh huh. That."

Melchom didn't waste time. Their few clothes discarded already, Melchom lowered him until the tip of his cock was perfectly lined with his Dove's hole.

"This still feels weird," Dove hummed.

Melchom didn't feel one ounce of complaint, though, so he kept pushing the human's muscles to stretch wider.

"Ride me, tiny Dove."

His Dove moaned. He always made a spectacle when he was told to do something instead of Melchom just manhandling him into it. He loved frustrating him like that, especially when that led to the human thinking of him as a sadist.

Melchom hadn't shown him sadism yet.

He wasn't sure he wanted to.

Definitely not now.

No, he'd much rather have his human moaning around his cock filling him, his hips bucking in circles as he took more and more.

Dove didn't take long in losing himself in lust, and it was beautiful to watch. Hot, too. Melchom's grip tightened on his waist, knowing it would leave quite a few bruises. It couldn't be helped when all he wanted was to thrust up into the human until he was completely ravished, until he couldn't form a coherent thought and everything in that mirror maze of his revolved around Melchom. Around the way his body felt like it was breaking apart and being pulled together once again.

He let his Dove set the pace, though, anticipating it and helping him through it. He focused on the way Dove's reddened cock bobbed against his abdomen, perfectly hard and glistening.

A better Melchom would've wrapped his hand around it, jacking him until all of his human's seed coated their torsos.

Melchom wasn't better, though; the thought of his human coming untouched, of Melchom being that good for him... He needed that. He needed to see his Dove drowning in pleasure until he was howling, releasing himself because there was just no other option.

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“Faster,” Dove panted. “Please, please, please, faster.”

All the begging drew a groan out of Melchom. He obliged, of course. Tilting his angle just slightly, he thrust faster, hitting his human’s prostate harder with each shift of his hips.

Dove dissolved in moans and what he thought were babbles of gratitude, his nails digging into Melchom’s chest.

One of his favorite things about bedding the human was how primitively possessive he got. Knowing that the feeling was mutual settled something in him.

Melchom was close to filling him with seed. He felt his balls draw up, his whole body clenching right before.

“Fuck me hard,” Dove breathed. “Fuck me so hard it gets scary. Please.”

Melchom unloaded all his cum then. It was bittersweet, leaving him groaning and panting, watching as his Dove did the same. His human—his gift—was perfect, and forcing his hole to close down so that he didn’t lose any of his seed was one of the hottest things. Melchom wouldn’t change a thing about him, but... But Melchom had to atone for his sins, for the pain that he’d caused him. The one he had to be careful not to inflict again.

“Please don’t ask me that,” he managed to say after minutes of ragged breaths and faint moans every time his human wiggled his hips.

“Why?”

If Melchom didn't know better, he would've said it sounded like the question brought the human to tears. That would make no sense, though.

“Just don't.” He sighed. He wasn't ready to unload his reasoning on Dove. He knew Dove wouldn't get it, anyway. It was fine. “Just get some rest.”

It wasn't a command spoken directly to his nervous system, but Melchom thought maybe the soft kisses Melchom was peppering him with might lull him into it, anyway.

* * *

“Daddy! You're back.”

Melchom walked through the portal to the human realm as usual, his armor clanking and being way too noisy for his liking. He should get a few minions to research lighter armors that didn't warn off their presence so easily.

“I'm here, human boy.”

David ran to him, scrambling to get rid of the flowing fabric covering his body. It mussed up his dark, short hair. He'd always been annoyingly clumsy, but Melchom thought it wasn't too bad of a flaw to have.

The second he was naked, before Melchom had time to get rid of everything, David was presenting for him, on his knees and elbows. His eyes glinted with something. Arousal, probably.

Sometimes Melchom wished the human hadn't learned to shield his thoughts from

him. Human witches were a pain in the ass to deal with, and too low on his list of priorities.

“Fuck me, Daddy. Need to be filled every day, remember?”

Melchom grunted. He'd said that in the heat of a moment. He'd thought it would be hot, but lately it kept feeling like more of a chore. He didn't dare say anything, though. It kept David happy, and that was what mattered.

Getting rid of all the pieces of steel, he grabbed the human's waist and kneeled down. At this point, it was routine. First, Melchom pounded into David's lithe body on the floor until he'd drawn that first, desperate orgasm out of him. Then, he grabbed the human and moved him so he was on his back in the hay bales he used to sleep in.

He thrust into him there, loving the discomfort mixed with the adoration in David's face. It made things better. The niggling feeling at the back of his head that he was being used disappeared, too. He was King of Hell. A meek human wouldn't be able to hurt him.

The human's hands wrapped around his horns right away. They'd been doing that for the last couple of months, too. Melchom moaned, a shiver racking down his spine. The human wasn't shy about it. He seemed to love how sensitive they were, how he could bring him to his knees. Melchom shot his seed inside the human. It didn't matter that he'd just come before shifting them to the bed.

Usually, David gave him a break then, cooed about how good Daddy was for him. He didn't this time, squeezing the elongated shells as if he was milking him. Orgasm after orgasm was drawn out of him. Melchom groaned, blinked hazily. He didn't lose control like this, but the overstimulation threatened to be too much. Spots formed in his vision. David's moans and whimpers and pleas for more were the last thing he heard before he passed out.

...

To this day, he wasn't sure how the traitorous human had managed. Witches, he'd learned years later, but he never got the specifics of that spell. He only remembered waking up surrounded by the smell of blood. His own blood. His hands had gone to his head, expecting to feel ivory and perfectly cut rubies.

There was nothing.

His crown had been... yanked off him.

David wasn't there, either. He'd soon learn he was at his own coronation. The King of Israel humans would marvel at for generations, just as Heaven had promised him in exchange for the crown.

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Melchom gasped. Nightmares weren't something that happened to him. He'd never known of a demon suffering from them.

His heart racing, he glanced to his left. His Dove was there. It was the middle of the night, and the human was a heavy sleeper. Melchom forced himself to watch him. He looked so sweet when he slept, so vulnerable curled up into him. Melchom breathed him in. Sleep didn't claim him easily, but he didn't think it quite mattered. His gift was safe

He'd remain safe. He had to.

CHAPTER 19

DOVE

"What's wrong?"

Dove woke up disoriented. That was, sadly, one thing his big bad demon couldn't help him with if he woke up first, or when the demon wasn't nearby.

This time, though, he was right here. Dove had felt him hit his arm, which had woken him up.

Melchom's eyes were clenched shut, a bead of sweat rolling down his forehead. For a second, Dove thought to check his temperature, but then he remembered the demon always ran hot. He looked strangely sick, but... Dove didn't even know demons could get sick. He also doubted he could get answers anywhere. Even if he'd still

kept the books Melchom had given him what felt like an eternity ago, he'd bet one of his demon's crowns that there would be nothing about it.

Gaz climbed onto the mattress. Melchom didn't like to have her on their bed, but Dove didn't mind. He appreciated the extra weight—and comfort.

It spoke volumes that the dip in the mattress didn't wake Melchom up.

Dove shuddered. What if he was really sick? There was no one he could trust to ask for help here. He was alone outside of the... creatures in these chambers.

Why not fed? Gaz whined after nuzzling him for a while.

Dove frowned. "Not fed?"

Sometimes the hellhound wasn't the most articulate, and he needed to double-check. Not this time, though.

That didn't make sense, though, right?

Why wouldn't Melchom be feeding? It clicked slowly—Dove couldn't remember one instance of feeling actual fear since he'd come back to his body. That didn't answer why, though. They'd made a deal. He thought Melchom knew he was into it.

Gaz drove him out of what would easily become thinking in circles for hours.

"Good girl," he muttered, burying his hands into her admittedly short fur.

She let him hug her like that for longer than usual.

After that, he forced himself to act determined and wake Melchom. He'd refrain from

calling him an idiot for now, but he wouldn't refrain from pouncing on him and straddling his abs. It was kind of a workout. He definitely didn't need yoga when he practiced his flexibility every time he wanted to wrap himself around his... lover?

Were they lovers?

Dove hummed in question. He wouldn't be derailed, though. Answers awaited.

Melchom roused slowly—way too slow for the demon to try and pretend he was okay.

“I know you're not feeding.” Subtle, Dove was not. “Feed.”

“What?” Melchom frowned, his eyes darting down his body before they flickered.

“Why are you not feeding? We had a deal, and now you're getting sick, and you can't get sick.”

“I'm not getting sick.” Melchom sighed. “And I'm not feeding from you.”

“Why? Make it make sense.”

After a few seconds of silence that were becoming more and more tense, Melchom spoke, darkness clouding the usual heated glance he pinned him with. “I told you. I'd rather lose my crown again than hurt you.”

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Dove stopped breathing. “You don’t hurt me.”

He didn’t. Dove appreciated the sentiment, though, which was where the knot in his throat came from.

Melchom, however, was shaking his head. “I have to evoke fear in you to feed.”

“Which is hot as fuck.”

“Don’t joke about this.”

“I’m not!” Dove huffed. “Do your mind reading thing and find out if you don’t believe me.”

It hurt that Melchom needed to do that, but Dove didn’t say that part out loud. He could be supportive, or something.

“D-Dave...”

Unprompted, he leaped out of the bed. It shouldn’t have, but hearing that... It was worse than being slapped across the face.

“Don’t you dare!” he shrieked.

He acted on instinct, even though he was sure he looked frantic, pacing across the room.

Melchom was up in an instant. “Stop.”

“No!” He jumped. He was wielding one of Melchom’s weapons in one hand. He didn’t remember grabbing it, but he still pointed it in Melchom’s direction. “What’s my name, Melchom?”

“You know your name.” Melchom didn’t seem to see the threat in the heavier than he’d expected sword, walking toward Dove despite its sharp looking end. “I’ve taken too much from you, tiny human.”

“Dove,” he groaned. His hold on the sword weakened, the tremors visible, but Dove didn’t care. “You... You said names have meaning, and you gave me a new one. Dave doesn’t exist. Dove is my name.”

The only response he got for a few moments was a quirked eyebrow. “Okay.”

“Okay?”

“Lower that, my Dove. It’s too heavy for you, and it would barely scratch me if you tried to attack me.”

Oh.

Dove glowered. That wasn’t fair, but fine. He let the sword clatter to the ground, the sound bothering his ear drums more than it should.

It wasn’t over, though. He cut the distance between them and started punching his chest. “You don’t get to call me that, even if you’re sick. I’m Dove.”

Melchom... smiled. Not a smirk, or a knowing grin. A soft, no bullshit smile. It didn’t last long, soon marred by a hint of sadness, but it was there.

“When I gave you that name, it had two purposes.” Melchom caressed his cheek with one thumb as he spoke. “One was to stop you from pestering me about using your name. The main one was to brainwash you, to mold you into the perfect gift I wanted you to be.”

Dove gulped down. “I don’t care.”

He kind of did, and the mention of being brainwashed scared the shit out of him, but... This was the time when he made a point, right? And Melchom hadn’t succeeded. Right?

He wasn’t Dove because he’d forgotten who he used to be. He was Dove because Dove got the things he wanted, the safety he’d longed for his entire life. Dove could build a home without doubting his every step.

“You do.”

Dove noticed then that Melchom had gone completely still.

“Are you holding your breath?”

Melchom totally was. Dove knew before the stupid demon had time to react and look all chagrined.

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“I fed off you,” he groaned, eyes darting away. “You were being tortured, and I was feeding off you. I don’t deserve you after doing that.”

Dove’s eyes welled up with tears. Shit. He’d been doing so well not thinking about that specific thing. All the while, his demon had been torturing himself with it.

Who knew Melchom could be so sweet?

“My understanding was that you didn’t have a choice.”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“No, it does.” Dove gulped. “Because... because you still put a stop to it, right? Well, I suppose I did, but you wanted it to stop, right? I... I know you wanted to get him out of there, and that... that matters.”

Melchom had been shaking with fury, with rage. There were so many things about that evening that were hazy, but Dove remembered that. It couldn’t have been his mind playing tricks. That wasn’t how it worked.

“But I... It still felt good.”

“Why, yes, I’m delicious.”

Melchom shook his head, smiled wryly. “I told you not to joke.”

“Stop being stupid, then.” Dove let out a shaky breath, curling his hand around the

demon's wrist. "I'll just find a way to force feed you if you don't start scaring me right about now."

The demon snorted. Dove didn't think it was funny. He'd figure it out. Being scared of his own shadow wasn't precisely hard or something he wasn't extremely familiar with.

"But you're my responsibility and I failed you. I need consequences for failing."

Dove tilted his head to the side. He seemed stuck on that. Dove was going to assume it was a Hell thing.

"You need consequences?" Dove shifted his face slightly so he could place a kiss on the demon's hand—just because. "Fine. Mark me all over then. Like you did."

"What are you talking about?"

"You say I'm yours, so mark your territory. Reclaim me." Dove held off a groan.

It wasn't fair that his head decided to bombard him with all kinds of images when he was trying to make a point.

The way Melchom's eyes widened, he saw all the images, all the fantasies where every orifice and inch of skin got drowned in Melchom.

"You really want that."

It wasn't a question, so Dove didn't answer it or treat it as one. Instead he lifted his arms so Melchom could lift him up. It was just weirdly comforting when he was picked up. Maybe because Melchom's strength was something solid to hold on to.

And seeing all those big muscles in action was hot as fuck.

“My feisty little Dove,” Melchom sounded surprised, and... adoring, which was strange, but touching, too.

It made him feel all warm while Melchom took him to the bathroom. The jacuzzi was a very nice improvement, Dove had to say. It didn't matter if it made him vain. Dove had always dreamed of having a jacuzzi, or booking a hotel with one, but he'd never gotten to do either.

“I'm innocent.”

“You mean the only human being who'd beg a demon to make him fear for his life.”

When he put it like that...

Dove wrinkled his nose. “It's not all selfless, you know.”

“I know.”

Because Melchom could read into his every thought. Dove didn't have to explain that fear made him feel alive, reassured him that he was here and that Melchom was not leaving.

“Please,” he breathed.

Melchom’s nostrils flared. He did that a lot. It made Dove’s heart skip a beat.

“Get in the tub, tiny Dove.” Little by little, Dove saw the demon come back to his senses, stand more confidently. He resented having missed that lack of confidence in his stance before. “Let’s see how hot and bothered you still feel when you’re bloated with my piss.”

A whimper left his lips before Melchom had finished speaking. It didn’t matter. Dove needed it all—everything that the demon was offering. Dove needed everyone to see him and know that he belonged to someone: to their King. There couldn’t be any hesitation, any room for doubts to arise.

“No one but me debauches you,” Melchom growled, probably following his trail of thought. “No one but me gets to fill you with their fluids.”

“No one but you,” Dove repeated, his head burning it to memory like a mantra.

“Open your mouth.”

Obedying came as easily as breathing, Dove’s head clearing as his eyes hooded and Melchom helped him fit his cock into his mouth.

“That’s it,” Melchom mouthed the words, pushing until Dove had sucked his entire length, his trachea fully open for the demon. His nostrils burned, already itching to catch more air than was physically possible. “Heavens, I’m fucking starving, Dove.

You know what that means?”

Saliva dribbled down the corner of his mouth. Dove didn't bother answering. He didn't think it would be heard over his heartbeat picking up.

“It means I'm not going to help you swallow. You're going to do it on your own or drown.” Dove squeezed his thighs together. He wanted to whimper, but no sound really came out. “It means I'm not going to stop after you come once. No, I'm going to keep you coming, keep you guessing my every move until you reek of me and you beg for this to stop. I'm going to feed off you until I'm so full I'm bursting, Dove. And you're going to let me.”

Fuck yes.

In his head, Dove was a wanton whimpering mess, bobbing his head up and down non-stop. Melchom chuckling pulled him out of it.

The stream of acidic liquid hit him then, with barely any time to prepare. Dove rushed to swallow, to put his throat to work. It was fine for the first minute. Exhaustion took over fast as the realization sank in.

Panic started to settle in. What if he couldn't drink fast enough? If the smell made him gag and he couldn't hold it in? Would Melchom really let him drown? He'd said he could put him back together, but Dove had never quite learned what that meant.

“You taste delicious,” Melchom growled, one hand curling around Dove's now longer hair. “Begging for it when you know it's going to bring you to tears. You are going to hurt, and yet, you want me to push you further, don't you?”

The words broke through a dam Dove didn't know he'd built, letting his tears free as he nodded. This was what had been missing for the past week. The adrenaline, the

helplessness, the utter submission he found himself more than willing to live for.

Melchom's biceps bulged. Ever since Astaroth brought attention to it, Dove found himself able to follow the tendrils of his fear traveling through his body. It was mesmerizing.

It made him feel powerful. He was the reason his demon was so big and strong and... so Melchom. It was a heady feeling.

"Don't lose focus, Dove. You don't want to know what happens when your mouth gets filled with piss you can't swallow, do you?" The demon smirked. He sounded almost cooing, but that was wrong. "It will burn. A lot."

It already burned as the tangy liquid streamed down his esophagus. Dave resisted the urge to cough.

"See your stomach? It's distending already. I tend to forget how much liquid humans can take in one go." The demon chuckled, sliding his hand from his hair to his throat, wrapping around it easily and squeezing. Dove gurgled, his heart thumping wildly in his chest. "I've heard it hurts, when there's too much liquid. Maybe I should do that, fill your guts until they're about to explode, and make you hold it, hurt for me that way." A rueful laugh erupted out of his mouth. "And here I was, just the other day, thinking I didn't want to be sadistic with you."

Dove moaned; tried to, at least.

Melchom delivered on his promise, though. By the time he was satisfied, Dove's stomach was cramping to the point he was sobbing. He'd almost choked on the piss at least three times, so everything burned. Everything tasted too acidic. Everything made him recoil, every touch too intense.

“Ride it out for me, Dove. Catalog everything in that mind of yours.”

It was a harder ask than Dove would've thought.

It was harder every time Melchom insisted on moving him. This time, Melchom set him on his lap. That wasn't too bad, Dove guessed.

He regretted it the second Melchom's hand wrapped around his cock.

“No, please, please, I can't, Melchom, I swear I can't,” he blabbered.

It didn't matter if Dove was repeating himself.

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“But you’re so hard,” Melchom reasoned, a smirk plastered on his face. “And that panic that has just settled deep in your core? It’s the best dessert I could hope for. You wanted me to feed, didn’t you?”

Dove mewled, head falling against the crook of the demon’s neck. He didn’t fight, but a hoarse scream left his lips the second Melchom squeezed the oversensitive skin.

There was nothing he could do. His throat felt dry as he burrowed deeper against the demon’s skin.

“You’re gonna come for me, Dove? Show me how much you’re really enjoying the way I play with your head?”

Dove nodded.

He couldn’t form full sentences, but he could do that.

He did it, too, his body trembling with exertion as Melchom pulled more and more out of him, spurts of cum hitting the jacuzzi and their arms and chests in random, stray patterns.

“I’m not done, tiny Dove.”

“I know,” he breathed.

Swallowing down the knot in his throat became excruciating, every inch of his body protesting for what he made it go through.

“Melchom...”

“Ask.”

Dove blinked. He’d started to think of a question, but awareness came to him slowly.

“It’s not related to this.”

“I know.” The demon shifted his body until they were face to face. “But I can follow every one of your thoughts, remember? I understand the way your head works.”

Shit.

Dove shook his head.

No, he was not going to bawl his eyes out.

He would... later. When Melchom wasn’t watching.

“What happens when I need a shot for my meds? It’s coming soon, and I... I don’t wanna have an episode, or lose it, or...” he trembled. “Not again.”

“I keep your body healthy, remember?” Melchom sighed fondly. Or maybe Dove wanted to think of it as a fond gesture. “That includes your brain chemistry. Your house of mirrors will always be there, but it’s never been as balanced as it is with me here.”

“Oh.”

It was strange. Dove did feel different, but not as different as he thought it would feel like.

“If you feel better, I’ll go to Earth every month and get your prescription.”

“No.” Dove shook his head right away. “I trust you.”

He did.

CHAPTER 20

MELCHOM

“I have a question.”

Melchom shifted to his side. He’d barely stirred. “Another one?”

“Yes.” His Dove pretended to hit his chest.

He’d been full of questions the past couple of days. Melchom hadn’t anticipated that would be a side effect of settling down—Dove growing more and more curious about every single thing.

“Okay.”

Dove wasted no time, coming up to sit on the bed way too fast. Melchom took control of his body before dizziness could hit him. No one had warned him that taking care of a human—for real—was a 24/7 kind of job.

“What should I call you?” Dove bounced on the bed. “I want a nickname for you, but I can’t think of anything. Mel was good, but Astaroth called you that, so... Ew. But I don’t know... Chom? Melcky?” Dove’s nose wrinkled adorably as he rolled each suggestion over his tongue.

Melchom’s wrinkled for a different reason. “No.”

“No?” Dove’s eyes squinted. That was never a good thing. “You mean, no to a nickname, or no to those nicknames? The latter is fine, but I can’t just call you Melchom all the time. It’s not a cute look.”

How did the human have so much energy in the morning? Melchom groaned. “It’s my name. It doesn’t have to be cute.”

“But...” A finger rested against his bottom lip. “I mean, I sometimes think of you as

my big bad demon, but that's a bit of a mouthful."

It was. Melchom preened at that compliment, though. He wanted to be the human's big bad demon. He wanted the human to think of him as his, to feel that same possession toward him. It was a good feeling. Melchom didn't think he'd ever experienced it before.

Definitely not with David.

Ever since his hunger strike and the nightmares that brought up, he'd been reminiscing about his relationship more and comparing it with his Dove.

David didn't... Melchom thought he might've felt attracted to him at some point, but Melchom had been a commodity to the cowardly human—someone to please to get what he wanted, a task to do to stay alive or to gather more power or intel. David wouldn't have cared if Melchom didn't feed off him. He would've just nodded along and said whatever he thought Melchom wanted to hear.

David had never pushed him either. He wouldn't have fought Melchom to keep a fucking hellhound. David wouldn't have tried to bribe him because of a small thing that Melchom would've given him anyway.

He hadn't been invested, not really.

His Dove was.

"You can always call me King."

"And let it get to your head even more," Dove scoffed. "I thought you were smarter than that."

“Watch your tone.” It was a warning, but not really.

His Dove knew it. “I could call you Your Grace. It sounds more fun than King.”

“Sure.” Melchom highly doubted that would last, but he also saw beneath the ruse for a nickname. His Dove was anxious about the coronation ceremony. “Have you decided what clothes you’re gonna wear yet?”

It had been a challenge to narrow it down. His gift had an amazing imagination and could come up with all kinds of ensembles, but finding them on Earth wasn’t precisely easy. Melchom hated when his Dove fixated on it, too—it inevitably led to bouts of sadness and residual anger because he couldn’t join Melchom on Earth so he could find the outfit on his own. Melchom had even reached out to Beelzebub.

Not only because he was the only Prince of Hell that had been left standing but because Beelzebub had always been the most knowledgeable when it came to portals and magick in general.

This time, not even he had known of a solution.

“I was beginning to think you’d never ask,” Dove drawled. Right, Melchom had asked him. Melchom shook his head. “Ready?”

“Hit me with it.”

It was endearing, how he kept trying to send messages his way. Apart from succeeding at summoning him every time, however, the rest didn’t work. He just highlighted the image in his head, and Melchom sneaked in to see it.

“Really?” Melchom grinned. His cock was very much in like with the idea, but he hadn’t expected it. “Is this what my Dove wants?”

The human wiggled on the spot. “It’s hot, right? I’d considered a full on wedding gown, but it’s way too hot in here, and the ones with the short skirts are simply not as pretty.”

So he’d settled for the kind of lingerie humans wore for their wedding nights, covered by a sheer lace robe in white that did nothing to conceal any of his skin.

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“And,” Dove rushed the words out, “it won’t be that far out. I mean, all you demons just wear fabric to cover your junk, also known as lingerie, so no one should bat an eye. And I mean, it’s nothing they haven’t seen because it’s the only clothes you get for me anyway and I’m always walking Gaz in them, and—”

Melchom kissed him. He could’ve spent hours listening to his Dove’s ramblings, but Melchom rather liked the way the human gasped and the way his body froze in shock for all of a second.

“You can wear anything you want, and anyone who dares to say a thing about it will meet my wrath.”

“You’re a teddy bear.”

“Say that again,” Melchom forced his face to appear angry. “I dare you.”

His Dove, of course, laughed.

It was fine. Melchom would show him. Sometime. Probably after tonight. He had plans for the ceremony, after all. Plans that took precedence.

Plans that he, too, had to prepare for.

Damned nightmares, Melchom grumbled to himself. He’d been much better off without remembering how that could feel.

* * *

“Your Grace?” There was mirth behind Dove’s eyes, but also worry. “Why are there only like four demons at a table with twelve chairs?”

“Because I got rid of all the traitors and have only had time to anoint three new Princes.”

Beelzebub had only stayed because he hadn’t been involved, and he’d sworn to protect Melchom’s human. Beel had always been intrigued by humanity to a degree that had made Melchom suspicious at the time, but he trusted him. He’d used Gaz to help him with the decision, so it would be on her too if he’d gotten it wrong.

It wouldn’t matter.

“And none of them ever thought to decorate this place. Got it.”

Melchom rolled his eyes. “Behave.”

Dove didn’t answer, but Melchom saw the dozen retorts flying through his head.

It was a good thing he kept them in.

“Beel,” Melchom called out, his voice booming in the conference room.

“Yes, my King?” Beel winked, of course.

He’d always been a pestering know it all who didn’t know when to be serious. Or when he’d taken a joke too far—Melchom still had to get rid of that painting in the hallway. At least now he had the power to do it.

“Show my gift his crown.”

Beel had the nerve to bow. It was ridiculous. Melchom had never once seen him bow, to anyone, ever.

Then again, Hell had never had a coronation, either. He guessed he could let it pass.

Beel retrieved the carved wooden box and went down on one knee in front of his Dove. His gift looked regal in all that expensive fabric. Melchom had already noticed every demon they'd passed by zeroing in on all the expanses of bare skin. A part of him wished Dove would let him claim him in front of all of them, but he'd said no.

It didn't mean he couldn't fantasize about it. All that silk would look even better if his human was glistening with sweat and Melchom's seed was smeared all over the heated skin.

"I should be so lucky to get your help with my wardrobe, Dove."

Melchom growled in warning. He couldn't help it. The only reason he toned it down was that one look to his left showed Gaz hadn't even bothered to perk up. She was even more protective of their Dove than he was, and she hadn't reacted.

"Uh, yeah, right." Dove was only paying attention to the box, though.

He wouldn't have expected anything different.

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The crown he'd had crafted was perfect for his gift. Having noticed his Dove's predilection for flower crowns, he'd tasked his best team of minions to weld the perfect one. At first, he'd considered getting it done in mostly rubies and quartzes to match his own the way Dove would've wanted.

It wouldn't have been his, though. His Dove was colorful, exuberant, unpredictable. So he got each flower designed with different patterns and jewels until the light reflected the entire color spectrum wherever he moved.

Dove's hands shook as he covered his mouth with them. "It's... It's mine?"

Melchom grabbed it from its velvet seat. It was lighter than it looked, but not so light his gift wouldn't feel it whenever he had it on.

"Now it is," Melchom said as he lowered the jewels onto Dove's head, careful not to dishevel the honey locks his human had forced him to style to perfection for the past hour.

He should've never showed him that trick where he could curl his hair and mold it however the human wanted. Then again, he probably would've done anything to keep that wobbling smile on Dove's face. Melchom just had to figure out how to keep it from the other demons—how whipped he was for his gift, and how far he'd fallen.

There would be no way to recover from it, and Melchom was already standing on thin ice with them.

"Princes." He stood tall as he allowed his voice to expand across the room. "After

two millennia of usurpation, Hell finally has a King again. Bow before him and his Consort.”

The four demons did. To be fair, it was all theatrics for his Dove. Melchom would’ve still severed anyone who dared defy him.

“We will move out of the castle so all the minions and lower demons can meet their new Royals now.”

The Princes left the room first. Dove was heading toward the door too, but Melchom grabbed his wrist, bringing him to a halt.

“What is it?”

“There’s something else.” Melchom winced. He felt the tremor in his voice, the nerves he never allowed himself to feel. It was unbecoming. “Touch my horns, Dove.”

“W-what?” Melchom saw the metaphorical wheels turning in Dove’s head. “But you said that was a no.”

“It was.” He closed his eyes. He should’ve known his gift wouldn’t just accept a change of heart. “But I want you bonded with me.”

“B-bonded?” His feisty but sweet Dove almost stammered his way through the word.

“When we’re bonded, you can get inside my head. You have power over me.” Melchom went down on one knee, lifting his head to watch his human. “You’ll see everything.”

“What’s the catch?”

Melchom frowned. “There’s no catch.”

It made his stomach clench—the fact that Dove would think it a possibility. Maybe this wasn’t a good idea, or too rushed. Melchom was an idiot, really. Just because he’d been having nightmares about what went down with his first human lover didn’t mean Melchom had to do anything. Definitely not the same things that had led him to his demise.

He wanted to think his Dove was different; he was a gift. But maybe...

“You’re anxious about this.” Dove seemed transfixed by the fact. “Am I gonna feel it when you get hurt? If we bond, I mean? That’s a thing in some movies with bonded mates and stuff, I think.”

“I’m not getting hurt.” Melchom scoffed. There was a hint of fear coming off the human, though, one he needed to get rid of. “You can feel anything I’m feeling if you follow the bond connecting us.”

“Okay.” His Dove took a deep breath. “Okay, so... Why? Why now? Why do you...?”

Melchom sighed. He hadn’t wanted to do it, but he figured his gift would find out one way or another. “I’m going to show you something.”

Projecting didn’t come easily to him—or most demons, really. Because they were used to the exact opposite—guarding every memory and piece of information in an environment where trust couldn’t be freely given—projecting felt unnatural. Wrong.

Dove let Melchom sit him down on his thigh, and shift them so their foreheads were touching.

Melchom's eyes didn't waver as he showed Dove everything, watching every single reaction. The day he met a kind-looking human named David. The way he helped him defeat Goliath and tended to his wounds. The ongoing visits and the arrangements they made. David's fascination with his horns, with bonding to him. The last time he'd seen him. The hellhound who'd created the scar on his face because actions had consequences and his failure needed to be publicly shown and punished.

His Dove had tears pooling up in his eyes by the time Melchom stopped the stream of images.

"I couldn't let myself make the same mistakes."

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A shaky breath later, Dove's small hand was caressing his cheek. "I hate that you made me cry on my coronation day."

Melchom chuckled. "I'll remember to make up for it."

"Good." Dove tried to sound haughty while pushing the unshed tears away with one hand. "I love you, and I don't think it's just because I'm in a scary place and you're the only safe thing I can hold on to."

"You have Gaz." Melchom forced himself to say. "You could say you don't want anything to do with me again, and you'd still have her. You'd be safe."

"I know." Melchom wasn't sure how, but there wasn't a hint of hesitation in the human's voice. Ever since he'd been trapped inside his own head, Dove sometimes had these bouts of absolute calm wash over him. "That's the thing. If it was just about being safe in an unsafe place, I would've been thrilled when you weren't feeding off me, when you were protecting me from yourself. But I don't want that. I want to be safe, but I don't want you to keep me safe. I wanna fight my own battles."

"Of course you do."

His Dove really wasn't like any other human he'd ever met.

"I just wanna be rammed hard after I do, and I wanna challenge you knowing I'm one hundred percent going to lose. And I want you to fuck me up so badly I don't know which way is up, because then I know I'm alive, and I have everything I've ever wanted."

“A demon who needs your fear?”

Dove’s eyes glinted. “A demon who spoils me with the finest lingerie, and my dog even if he’s terrified of her. A demon who’s doing everything to build me the perfect home, who’s by my side. Unconditionally.”

Melchom cleared his throat. He was going to keep these mushy moments to a minimum. Starting tomorrow. “Is that it?”

His gift pretended to think about it. “And he’s really good with his cock. That matters, too.”

“Of course.” Melchom shook his head. “I hope you know I’d be filling you with that cock right now if you weren’t so insistent on having this ceremony.”

“I know.” Dove was way too cheerful about it, too. “But see? That’s another reason why I love you. Any other demon would completely disregard my wishes. Hell, lots of humans would, too.”

Melchom didn’t let his gift’s thoughts dwell on that impending darkness.

He brought one of Dove’s hands to the top of his hand. He felt electricity crackling as the human’s fingertips neared his horns. “Bond with me.”

Dove startled, but he let his fingers curl around the thin shell. He was tentative in his touch, almost scared of it. Melchom shivered. Even the barely there caress felt like too much after so long depriving himself of it.

“I will never hurt you. I swear it,” Dove whispered before he pressed his lips against Melchom’s.

Melchom breathed out into the kiss, giving up to his gift's ministrations. He didn't need to tell him what to do, with the human running on instinct. Melchom only moved so he was lying horizontal against the stone flooring and closed his eyes. Dove's hands explored this new part of him he'd been given access to. He was gentle but thorough, the pads of his thumbs running up and down Melchom's horns and cataloging every inch. It felt nothing like when the traitor had played with them, only focused on drawing an orgasm out of him.

His Dove wanted him to feel worshiped, to feel loved, to drown in pleasure. He knew it before the house of mirrors his thoughts lived in proved him right.

"You need to bleed for me," he remembered to say, his nails digging into his palm where he clenched his fists. "Pierce the skin in the pointy ends of my horns. That's how you bond to me."

Dove gasped, but of course the idea of a drop of blood didn't deter him.

Melchom felt it when it happened, but it was a new sensation, nothing like what he'd felt before. Back then, both he and his lover had been guarded, the bond something David had wanted to balance the scales but nothing else. His Dove would never shut himself off, though, even if Melchom taught him how. So Melchom didn't either.

No one had told him the way it would feel when both channels were completely open. He watched as a bridge made of the sturdiest threads formed between them, energy crackling around it. It was mesmerizing; the most powerful show of magick he'd seen.

"Do we really have to go downstairs?"

"You share my strength now," Melchom said, still dazzled over the beauty of the bridge. "Every demon alive needs to see it and be aware of your power."

“So you want them to fear me?” Dove frowned.

Melchom saw the reluctance in every mirror and running thought.

“Yes.” He didn’t care about explaining why. His Dove would know now without a need for words.

Master.

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Gaz's inner voice shocked him. Melchom blinked at the hellhound making her way between them.

Right.

They were bonded now, and she recognized the shift.

Keep your eyes on Dove outside.

Gaz drew her ears back. She really was nailing all the canine looks. Yes, Master.

Melchom nodded to himself. Nothing and no one was going to interfere between him and his gift.

Ever.

EPILOGUE

DOVE

"Isn't this pretty?" Dove twirled around.

"Gorgeous." Beel bowed teasingly.

Dove liked him. After a year in Hell as King Consort, Beel was the only demon he thought of as a friend. He reminded him of Jordan in a way. Maybe that was why he'd talked his demon into assigning Jordan to Beel's... care. Dove had tried to stay

on top of it at first, but he didn't ask about him anymore.

Beel didn't offer any information, either. He just hung out with him wherever Melchom wasn't around to keep him busy.

Gaz ran toward them then.

"You know who to give that to, baby girl." Dove did his very best not to grimace.

Playing fetch with actual human bones wasn't something he'd grown used to yet. Beel's friendship was definitely useful, though.

"Your Master still gets icky about some good old bones, huh?" Beel cooed at the hellhound, prompting her to give the bone to him instead.

Small mercies and all that.

"I wanna surprise your cousin, but it's hard."

Understanding all the family relations between the Princes had been hard, too. Dove was sure he'd made Melchom read him every book available on the subject, and he still didn't get everyone right.

"Because of the bond?" Beel snorted, but he couldn't hide his curiosity that well.

Beel just got so evasive every time Dove tried to ask. "Yeah. But I think it's just him, too. He's just... He reads every stray thought, every image."

To be fair, Dove did the same. Walking through that bridge and seeing everything was addictive. Unlike his own dizzying house of mirrors, Melchom's brain looked like a strangely unclustered jungle, full of memories and ample leaves that sparkled

when the sun hit them.

There was just so much to do there. Sometimes, it wasn't even about seeing old memories or being awed by the things that Melchom had seen throughout his life. Sometimes, he just sat down against one of the trees and felt the sun on his face and the tall grass caressing his skin.

Melchom had blushed furiously when he realized that was what Dove ended up doing more than half of the time.

Dove made a point of remembering all the times he made the demon blush.

It wasn't a common occurrence.

"I don't blame him. I find all human minds enticing, but yours is especially so."

"Ew."

Melchom had once said he could shield from others if he wanted. Dove had tried it, but in the end, it was a lot of effort, and it made him go back to feeling paranoid and doubting every single thing. He didn't love that every demon tried to feast on his past traumas, but... He had Gaz, and the demons respected him in a weird way after they spent a while there.

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Dove had decided to stop questioning it months ago.

“For the millionth time, it’s not a sexual thing.”

“You’re only saying that so Melchom doesn’t castrate you or something.”

Beel glared at him. It didn’t last long before he was dissolving in laughter. Dove had to admit he needed to master the menacing tone.

“So what’s behind wanting to surprise our King?”

“It’s our anniversary. Obviously.”

Beel frowned. “It’s only been a year.”

“Exactly.”

“We don’t celebrate those.”

It was Dove’s turn to be confused now. “What do you mean you don’t celebrate anniversaries?”

“Some celebrate their decades together,” Beel conceded. He didn’t look too happy about it. “I find that tacky, personally. Most celebrate centuries. It’s a big thing.”

Dove frowned. He kept forgetting everyone in Hell was inherently immortal from the moment they were born. It was strange.

“Well, I’ve never had a relationship that lasted more than a month, so we’re celebrating years.”

“Okay.” Beel raised his palms in the air. “So what’s the plan?”

“I don’t know!” he protested. Wasn’t he listening? Ugh. Demons could be so self-absorbed sometimes. “Because I can’t keep it a surprise, and that’s important, Beel.”

“You’d better not hear anyone call me that.”

“Melchom does, too.”

“Yeah, but I can’t tell my King not to do something.”

“And you can tell his Consort?” Dove tsked, one hand on his hip ready to go off on his friend.

He’d quickly learned that demons needed to be held with a tight leash, and a scolding was needed every once in a while. The last couple of years working at a daycare had definitely prepared him for the latter.

It was hilarious, really. He thought even Melchom grew... not scared, exactly, but wary of him when he started lecturing someone.

“Fine. You win.” Beel shook his head. “I’ll even help you shield the surprise from Melchom if you promise no consequences.”

“I swear.”

The grin that overtook Beel’s features should’ve scared him, but it didn’t. Only Melchom got to scare him. He’d mastered the fine art of controlling the pheromones

he released like that.

* * *

“Tell me.”

Dove fist bumped in his head. He knew Melchom would go all caveman on him the moment he realized there was a shield in place.

“Tell you what, Your Grace?”

“Don’t distract me,” Melchom growled.

“I’m not doing anything.” Dove even blinked at him in that innocent way that always made his demon more aggressive in his moves.

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He groaned when he was tossed on the bed with little to zero finesse. He allowed it because Melchom healed his body right away—and because it was hot. Besides, Melchom didn't cause him any real pain, really. He'd heard stories from Beel about demons who would break their gifts' bones and rearrange them later.

Melchom only tossed him around places or left him with a few too many bruises.

“Dove...” Melchom's nostrils flared. That always had his heart picking up speed. He'd soon learned Melchom meant business when he got all big and fuming. “Either you tell me, or I fuck it out of you.”

“Hmm.” He pretended to think about it. “I like it when you fuck things out of me. It's good for my gut health.”

He laughed when Melchom was on him in one single leap, his hand curling around his throat.

“Last chance.”

“Are you hungry today?” Dove teased.

It was fun.

“For you?” Melchom smirked. Maybe he was starting to get this was all gameplay.

“Always.”

“Good,” Dove breathed, his hand darting so it was buried in all that white, silky hair.

“Do your worst then.”

“I plan to,” Melchom said. “Starting tomorrow.”

“What?”

Dove couldn’t get anything else out.

When he blinked his eyes open next, he was still on the bed, on his stomach. His demon had put him to sleep.

“Coming back, my Dove?” the fucker spoke against the back of his neck, the vibration making his skin break out in goosebumps.

Dove moaned. “How long?”

Sometimes he tried to guess. This time, he was more disoriented than usual. The giant cock sheathed inside his hole didn’t help matters.

“A couple of hours,” Melchom said. “I’d had a long day.”

“You were trying to get past the shield,” Dove guessed.

That would explain why he felt like he’d been out for a full day instead.

“Maybe.”

“Did you manage?”

Melchom’s silence was all the answer he needed. Smugness filled Dove.

Two seconds later, that smugness vanished, replaced by something else. It wasn't the first time his ass had been used as a urinal, but it never failed to turn him on embarrassingly quickly.

"Clench your hole around me," Melchom ordered. One day, Dove had retorted that he could do it himself. He wasn't going to repeat the same mistake. "I don't want one single drop on the bed."

Clearing his throat, Dove nodded. "Not a drop."

He grunted, feeling the acidic stream hitting his inner walls, sloshing around every time that Melchom shifted his angle slightly.

There was a slight curvature to his belly by the time the demon started pulling out. Dove panted, whimpers scattered around as he tried to get rid of that fog clouding him. He needed his wits with him, but it was impossible when his cock was so hard he was about to burst.

From a demon peeing in him.

This was his life now, too.

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The plug Melchom used when he decided to keep his piss in Dove breached through those first rings of muscle with no resistance whatsoever. At this point, Dove didn't know anymore if it was the demon controlling his body, or his hole had just been completely wrecked.

It didn't matter.

"Go relieve yourself in the bathroom," the demon coaxed.

Dove had once joked that the effort of moving to do something so mundane should be beneath a King. Dove shivered. He remembered the spurts of cum that had felt like they'd been yanked out of his body in response. It had been hot, but so embarrassing too.

He could think clearer after dumping everything in the stupidly shiny toilet. Melchom sending him to the bathroom worked wonders for his plan. He'd have to be quick, though.

"Melchom?" he called after washing his hands.

"Taking your sweet time, aren't you?"

"I want to show you something."

Dove tried not to make a noise as he put on the new outfit Beel had helped him get. The wings were going to be a challenge, but he'd always been in love with those catwalks with the impossibly tall models.

“All right.”

“I’ll follow you.”

“You’ll what?” Melchom growled.

If it wasn’t Melchom, Dove would complain about how prone the demon was to growling and acting all grumpy.

“I’ll show you. In my head, I mean. And I’ll meet you there.”

“Why?”

Dove grinned. He’d fallen right into his trap. “Because you want to know what I’m shielding from you.”

The eerie silence that followed meant Dove had succeeded in getting a response.

“Take Gaz with you.”

“Of course.”

Before his demon could think more about it or get a headache with all the logistics, Dove let his mind build the picture of the secluded spot in the bone forest he and Beel had found.

“What does Beelzebub have to do with this?”

Dove chuckled. Now who was the one barking?

“Go.”

“I’m gonna make you pay for all this bossing around.”

“That’s the plan.”

This was so much fun already.

* * *

Okay, they should’ve realized the giant wings were going to make walking through the bone forest a challenge.

It was worth it, though.

Melchom stared wide-eyed at him as he made it past the last line of trees.

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“You’ve... You’ve walked through the castle, past every minion, dressed up as an angel.”

“A slutty angel,” Dove remarked, noting that the sheer dangling sleeves were the only piece of fabric that covered any significant length of skin. “Or are angels slutty, too? I didn’t get that from the books.”

“Definitely not.” Melchom scoffed, soon pressed to him, one hand on Dove’s lower back keeping him in place. “All us demons are rejects who didn’t pass angelic training, and you think this is acceptable?”

Dove hummed. “I thought it could be cathartic for you.”

“Oh, please explain.”

He wiggled before he could do as the demon asked. Another thing he didn’t consider was how sweaty the wings would make his back. What material were they? Definitely not a Hell-friendly one.

“You can chase me, yank the wings off me like they did you. Imagine you’re one of the enforcers in charge of it. Make me fear for my life for daring to dress like this, Your Grace.”

For a few seconds, Melchom didn’t say anything. Dove saw the storm brewing behind his eyes, though. One step deeper, and he saw the wind rustling every leaf in his forest.

“It will be my pleasure, Consort mine.”

Dove saw the shift in Melchom’s posture, the way his eyes glinted. He was letting his predator out, and Dove shivered with anticipation.

Sex was always better when Melchom had to quote-end-quote fight him for it.

Melchom even gave him the advantage, not immediately following the moment Dove started running. He let his heart rate pick up and his eyes focus on the bones around them, knowing he was leaving a trail of fear for his demon.

Melchom could never say Dove didn’t do things for him.

One of the wings got snatched by one of the tree looking things. Gaz barked at him. Beel had told him he simply needed to tell her to stay and behave, because she wasn’t a dog, but it was all lies. His hellhound saw him running, and she ran beside him.

At least she did know to turn away the second things turned sexual.

“It’s not my fault these fucking—oomph!”

Dove was yanked backwards.

He’d lasted longer than he’d expected, to be fair.

His heart thumped against his chest as Melchom held him, not saying a word. He breathed out against his neck, the hot air making him shiver.

“Had fun, tiny Dove?”

“I’m an angel.”

Melchom sneered—which meant that was the wrong-slash-right thing to say. Dove was thriving there. “So what is an angel doing down here?”

Dove swallowed. His demon was much better at dirty talk than he was. It made him self-conscious that one day the demon would realize he was all talk and no substance. He was pretty sure there was another expression for it.

It didn’t matter.

“I’m...” Dove gulped. Melchom moved one of his hands so it rested on his chest, and he dug his nails in. He wouldn’t be surprised to smell a hint of blood soon. His Grace wasn’t always the most careful. “I’m on a mission.”

“Yeah?” He could hear a hint of laughter in Melchom’s voice. “What mission?”

“Uh...” Melchom’s hand trailed upward, all the way to Dove’s throat. “An intel gathering mission?”

Was that how soldiers spoke? Dove didn’t know. There wasn’t a lot about angels he could find. Angels and demons were all born as cherubs, then tossed into a training facility. If they passed, they became full-fledged angels and were all about enforcing rules and whatnot. If they failed, their wings were cut, horns grew in their stead, and they sank down to Hell.

Quite inhumane, if they asked him.

“What intel would you possibly want?”

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“All intel.” Dove managed to worm his way so he was facing his captor, wings and all. “All, King of Hell.”

Trepidation ran through his veins as he let one finger trail down Melchom’s chest. This was fun, but he still vibrated, his heart racing, waiting for the moment when Melchom would pounce—when he’d be done with the playful teasing and waiting around.

“So brave of you,” Melchom hummed, “daring to go on this mission out in the open.”

“I am brave,” Dove breathed.

He lacked the patience the demon had in spades. He hadn’t kept that in mind when he forged this plan.

“I see that.” Dove felt Melchom slide inside his head.

He was probably checking in that he was okay with the public setting, because he cared more about Dove than he liked to admit.

“No one comes in here, and we taught Gaz to divert everyone in a three mile radius. I think she’s kind of looking forward to someone walking by.”

“I bet.” Melchom chuckled before he was frowning. “Who’s we?”

“Beel.” Dove rolled his eyes when Melchom started to grow agitated. “He helped me with the shield to set this whole thing up, so be nice.”

“Are you ordering me, tiny Dove?”

“Well, I... if you put it like that?” It was so hard not to laugh. “And I kind of promised him he’d face no consequences, so...”

Melchom grumbled something he didn’t catch. Dove guessed it didn’t matter.

“Take it down.”

“That’s not fun.”

“Take it down,” Melchom repeated. The next thing he knew, Dove’s back was hitting a tree, the demon pressed against him. “Take it down, and let me fulfill all the fantasies you’ve had about this game.”

Dove guessed he couldn’t argue with that logic. “Fine. But I’m gonna rate your performance now.”

“I dare you to try.”

Dove would try. The issue was that he had no words left. His throat definitely wouldn’t work right to let anything out.

Melchom had scratched his back raw, nails piercing his skin each time he tore one of those fake wings out, spreading them in a makeshift circle around them. They looked pretty, and it made him tear up in a weird way because Melchom knew he liked pretty things.

Just as much as he liked being overpowered and fucked with little to no finesse until he was crying and begging for a stop he didn’t want. Melchom would stop if there was the smallest concern that he meant it.

There was not one fiber in his being that didn't want to feel this for a week. He didn't even want Melchom to heal the scratches and his dirtied hair—not yet, at least.

“I don't think you've gathered enough intel yet.” Melchom grunted. He too would be sweating if he wasn't feasting on more energy than he was spending. Dove's body spasmed as Melchom shifted him to his knees and elbows. “I think you need to be milked completely dry before you can make a proper assessment.”

Dove panted, a groan escaping him as his hole was breached again. He thought he'd come three times already, each time more painful than the previous one.

Four, Melchom's voice in his head was a shock to his system. But did you think I'd have any mercy for an angel?

There was clear hatred in his voice. Dove shivered.

No, he thought, projecting his voice to the bridge. It didn't work as well as when Melchom spoke in his head, but Dove liked to think he was getting better. It's our anniversary. I want you to feast. It's my gift to you.

He knew Melchom was already doing it. Even if he was fucked almost daily, the demon's strength, the way he played with his head, never letting him predict his next move... Those things would always send his heart racing, put him in overdrive as survival instincts kicked in.

Dove loved it, loved that his body would never get used to living with a royal predator.

Melchom bottomed out—again—with a groan that intertwined with Dove's sob.

“Please.”

“I’ve got you, tiny Dove.” The demon whispered, his tongue licking the shell of his ear. He loved covering Dove with his body, regardless of the position they were in. “I’m gonna keep fucking you until you pass out, because you know I love the taste of that spike of fear right before you do. Then I’m going to cover you and get you to our bed, and I’m going to show you your anniversary gift.”

“I get a gift?” Dove tried to sound excited about the idea, but thinking about anything that wasn’t the cock drilling relentlessly into him was a struggle.

“You can’t honestly be surprised.”

Dove supposed he wasn’t. But he was burning, itching for more and for all that stimulation to stop at the same time. “Now faster, please.”

His demon seemed happy to oblige.

Dove was aware of the moment he started to lose consciousness. Spots filled his visions, his body going completely languid and out of his control, only soft tremors running through it after more of his cum landed on the discarded bones on the ground. If Melchom kept it up, they could open up a pool there soon.

Thank you. He hoped Melchom heard him.

* * *

“My beautiful gift.”

Dove blinked his eyes open. He was in bed, as promised. He stretched, checking the limbs that hadn’t been working quite right the last time he’d been awake.

“You patched me up?”

“For the most part.” Melchom smirked.

Dove didn’t need to ask. The demon let a finger rest against his rim. He screamed. It was pure agony, the way that sensitive skin was swollen and sore.

“You kept thinking about wanting to feel it.”

Keeping a whimper under wraps—Dove couldn’t always give him everything—he nodded. “Yeah.”

“Let me know when you change your mind.”

Dove huffed. That was one way of making sure he wouldn’t ask about it. Even though it didn’t feel that nice after a bit. Ugh. Dove should’ve listened more when Jordan talked about being a size queen. Maybe he could ask Beel. The demon looked like he enjoyed all that size difference, too.

“Don’t even think about it,” Melchom growled.

Oops.

Dove squirmed. “Too late?”

His demon only sighed, but he was running his fingers through his hair and

scratching his scalp the way Dove liked it.

Dove guessed there were worse things.

“So what’s my surprise?”

“You remember.” Melchom nodded approvingly.

It took a lot not to snort, or chortle, or make any unbecoming sound. Seriously, though, there was no way Dove would have forgotten. Melchom was the best being he’d ever met when it came to gifting him things. They’d now had to add a closet room to the chambers for all of Dove’s lingerie sets and sexy loungewear.

“Obviously.”

“Don’t sass me.” Melchom lost the warning look in less than a second, though. He’d definitely done a better job at looking menacing when they were in the forest. “Now close your eyes.”

“Not fair,” he grumbled.

He obeyed, though. He still hated when Melchom took over his body—unless it was for sex or health-related reasons.

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With his eyes closed, his hearing engaged better. He heard his demon shuffle off the bed. He was sure he was heading to the bathroom, but Melchom was a master at playing with his senses so it was never a sure bet.

There was some... clinking, involved? Dove frowned.

His mouth watered before he registered the smell hitting his nostrils.

It... it couldn't be, right? A moan escaped him before he could remember he was supposed to obey Melchom, and he opened his eyes.

"You..." Dove's eyes darted from the demon to the tray he was holding.

He must've gotten it from the portal, Dove's head supplied in its usual oh-so-helpful fashion.

It was a giant tray with... everything, from fries and cheese rolls to Chinese takeout—cartons included—to biryani and a glass of horchata with way too much cinnamon. Probably because his demon had been diving in his head to find every meaningful meal Dove had ever had.

"But..." He blinked. When that didn't work, he rubbed his eyes. This had to be some kind of illusion, right?

"I know you don't need it, and you haven't really craved it, but I thought it would make you happy."

“I didn’t even know I could have food.”

“It’s not an everyday kind of thing,” Melchom warned while placing the sinful tray in front of him.

“But it’s possible?”

“I’m not going to become your maitre d’, tiny Dove.”

Melchom probably would if Dove asked, but he didn’t say it. Besides, as weird as it was, Melchom had been right when he said Dove hadn’t craved anything. It had been strange at first, but food had been the last thing in his list of priorities. Probably because he’d never really reached the point of adulthood when food became a habit. Dove had missed way too many lunches—and breakfasts—because his head was everywhere but in the present moment.

This, though...

It was thoughtful, and fuck, now he wanted to have all the nice meals.

“I’m sure you can assign me a minion or two, though.”

His demon grunted. Melchom could be so grumpy when he thought it could get him out of the mushy stuff.

“Within moderation. I don’t wanna be cleansing your body every day.”

Another thing he would totally do, but Dove shrugged. He saw through it, caught the inner grumbling about all the poison and chemicals in human’s food in recent years. It was adorable.

“Deal.” He grinned while he snatched one of the cheese rolls. “I’ll even brush your

hair for an hour straight after.”

The look in Melchom’s face. He reminded Dove of a cat that was loving their human’s touch but they were too proud to show it.

“I expect all the brushing.”

“And you shall have it, Your Grace.”

Melchom loved calling him and referring to Dove as his gift. He didn’t know Dove felt the same way. He didn’t even care anymore if it had been a misguided cult or the universe, or pure randomness, but Melchom was the best gift he could’ve been given.

Hell and all.