



Kollaborator King (King's Kiss #4)

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Category: Action&Adventure

Description: Her face was the only card they were dealt.

And the moment Reuban saw it, the game changed.

She was the Angel of Mothers—created to protect,

and ruthless enough to take the power she needed to do it.

One kiss was all it took to ignite a Sinner's Bond...

and set off a chain reaction the Kings may not survive.

Because while Reuban wrestles with the fire she lit,

Josie has birthed a demon.

And the sacred bond that once tethered the Kings together?

It's splintering. Power is shifting. Loyalties are breaking.

And what once held them all together is now threatening to tear them apart.

This isn't just one love story.

It's the next war in a kingdom built on chaos, prophecy,

and the kind of desire that rewrites the rules.

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He nodded but Reuban didn't find it as adamant as before.

Reuban headed out of the hut, needing to be away from what was growing inside their Queen at a terrifying rate. He didn't need to see that Krave and Kildare followed hot on his heels. He marched a good distance away from the hut and turned, creating an impenetrable shield of privacy around them.

"Please tell me you know something that will help us," Krave muttered quietly.

"I would imagine you're wrong about that," Kildare assured, sounding bitter. "You can only prepare for the worst with free will. He'd know the stakes and he'd be counting on those he selected for the job."

Reuban nodded, seeing the Bellatore headed for them. "Here she comes."

"Whatever you're to do, do it as quickly as you can" Krave muttered, heading back to the hut.

"Anything else you know Kollaborator?" Kildare asked.

"Nothing useful," he said, his eyes on the Bellatore now.

"We must go now," she said as Kildare headed back to their Queen while stalking right past Reuban.

Reuban hurried after her. "And where are we going?" he asked, wondering if they'd need to drive.

“To the city. I will permit you to cover.”

The moment she spoke the words, his powers shot out to her so hard she stumbled forward. “Holy shit,” he muttered as she snapped pissed blue-green eyes at him. “I didn’t... mean that, you said the words and my powers just...”

“Nearly knocked me over, yes, I was there for it,” she said, continuing up the hill again. “Hurry, Kollaborator.”

He caught up to her, wondering over his extra chaotic powers that scrambled like a nervous teenager all around her... wait, was that a wall? Still?

“Are you back to blocking my gifts?” he wondered.

“Yes and no,” she said.

“What does that mean?” He really needed details if he was going to do anything close to right.

“It means I’ve opened a window for the parts of your power that will cover us and nothing more. I like my privacy.”

Wow. She was able to direct his power. “They’re still very new to me,” he said, easily keeping pace with her short stature. “I’m still learning how to control them. And they are still growing.”

“They are more powerful than seems fitting,” she muttered, sounding angry.

Fitting for what? Him? “What exactly are we going to do and... where is it that we’re doing it?”

“There’s been a change of plans, obviously.”

He glanced down at the small, shorn head on his right. “My powers are a little dense still. What’s obvious?”

“The Queen is the mother is what’s obvious.”

“The mother of...”

“The mother I must protect.”

Relief sent his breath out in a whoosh. “Thank God,” he whispered.

“But I’ve got only seven days to gather as much power as I can to face whatever is coming out of her. You are here to help me do that.”

“Of course, anything you need. Wait, did you see this in some kind of vision?”

“See what in a vision?”

“That I’m here to help you with that? Is that why you called me? It seemed you were calling me.”

She picked up her pace. “I don’t know about all of that, Kollaborator. I just know that I’m to protect her and you’re here with your gifts which I am in need of. I don’t need a vision or a road map to know I’ve been handed the tools necessary to secure this commission.”

Yeah. Logical enough.

“And since I do not have time to make another Nephilim, I’ll have to use other

methods. If we work quickly, I can obtain an equivalent. I'll need human clothes suitable. Do you have money?" she asked as they reached the top of the hill. "Is that your transportation?"

He looked in the direction of her single nod. "It is," he huffed. "And yes, I do have cash."

"Perfect."

He mentally organized the data she'd scattered about as he followed her brisk pace down the hill. Having her on their side had to be Raviel's intention. It was too perfect not to be. Too miraculous.

At the SUV, his die-hard-chivalry reared up and he hurried ahead of her and opened her door.

She smacked him with her fierce bright eyes as she climbed in and sat, yanking her gaze off him before pulling the door shut on her own.

He made his way to the driver's side, her curious scold still burning his face where those eyes had raked. She was brutally independent. Understandable given her role. He'd have to tread carefully around her toes while everything hung in the balance. She was the last person he wanted to piss off.

He again attempted to penetrate that wall around her, finding it maybe denser than before. What sort of powers did the Warrior of Mothers have? "Just point the way," he said after starting the SUV and getting it turned around.

"The city is north, fifteen miles. We'll need a room, and I'll need clothes. Do you have the means for these things?"

“I do,” he said, glad he’d brought plenty of cash. “When you say room, you mean a hotel?”

“Yes,” she said, sounding weary of his questions already. Or maybe just weary, considering what she’d just been through.

He allowed for a respectable amount of time before asking one of the questions burning in his Kollaborating brain. “So.... how is it giving birth to a Nephilim?”

“As horrific as you’d imagine,” she mumbled. “But the suffering it incurs is worth every drop of power it gives.”

He glanced at her serene expression in her window’s reflection, wondering over that equation. “How do you... measure such a thing? The power?”

“I don’t. But if I were to convert it into man-made energy, it represents two thousand megatons of antimatter discharge. Enough to erase a city and rewrite its map.”

Wow. “What do you do with this power exactly?”

“Purchase that which is rare in this hour. Mercy. And time.”

He studied the landscape, sending his own powers out to ensure they were well cloaked. “I didn’t know you could purchase such things. How much do you need to protect the Queen do you think? And... what about the other mother you were going to protect?”

“To your first question, I do not know. And to your second... I pray you will know that answer, for I do not.”

His gifts absorbed the power in those last words, producing something he’d never felt

before.

With every second, it grew dense and hungry.

When it got to be too much, he managed to release it around them and he discerned it racing in every direction, gobbling up time and space before turning into a wall.

Holy shit, he'd just built a massive barrier. No, a shield. Around her.

He considered her last statement and wondered over his role. This figure-it-out-as-you-go business with their mission was wearing on his every exposed nerve. And they were all exposed.

She placed a bare foot on the dash and released a quiet sigh.

The small sound and the sight of her dirty toes sent a shower of sparks along his powers.

He adjusted his grip on the steering wheel in wonder over it.

Was she causing all these things? Did she know she was?

He'd been testing her powers from the moment they'd met, partly on purpose, partly accidental.

She was an impenetrable fortress. Even more so than Kaos had been to him.

But could she read him ?

He wanted to ask but what was he supposed to say and not say to her? So much ignorance and zero bliss.

A full minute of silence began to feel like a sidewalk in a crowded city, making him twitchy. “How many of those things have you given birth to?”

“Over two hundred,” she murmured, keeping her gaze on the window.

His eyes caught on those dirty, tiny toes again. Flashes of her ripping the head from that beast reminded him she only looked helpless. Two hundred of those monsters she’d suffered through to gain mercy and time. For the precious few people worth helping in the world.

He again pushed against that fortress around her and found it as dense as ever. “I imagine your work must get...”

“I don’t need that kind of help, Kollaborator,” she said to the window. “I’m not one of your human jobs and it would serve both of us if you quit using your powers for the wrong things since we’ll be needing every drop we have for what’s coming.”

His power was suddenly an octopus with a million rebellious arms, whipping and flopping about inside him from her reprimand. “They’re new to me,” he said, fighting to pull it in.

“As you've said,” she reminded.

He sucked in a slow breath with his own reminders.

She had to be the most stressed-out mother in the universe and deserved a little vent space without worrying about grown men getting bent out of shape over it.

His powers made him hyper-sensitive to all things but that didn’t mean he had to act on any of it. “I’ll do better.”

He eyed his mirrors, getting her silence followed by a light “hmm.”

Still being locked out of her mind, he wasn't sure what it meant. Possibly doubtful. Or curious.

“I can't afford to let you in Kollaborator. It's not personal.”

Embarrassment licked along his neck at her soft confession.

She was reading him like a book. And that was the closest she could get to an apology over it.

“Given your position, I understand completely. I'm actually having a hard time not using all my new gifts.

Sometimes it feels like it has a mind of its own. ”

“More like more than one mind,” she informed the window again.

More? “What do you mean?”

“You share powers with three Kings. Which is why I cannot afford to let you in.”

He tasted those words, rolling them about his tongue for a few seconds. They were true but not entirely.

“I could read your thoughts but that would be a waste of power,” she said.

“Bad enough I have to use it to keep you out. As long as you're tied to that darkness, I cannot allow it.

If you were not tied to that darkness, perhaps I would.

Bad enough I will have to use my power to get a one-way syphon from you when I need it. ”

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She glanced at him and he regarded her all of three seconds before focusing on the road again. What was that curious look she wore on him? “What?” he decided to ask when she returned to staring out the window.

“I should prepare you that the exchanges we will make may be pricey to you personally.” She turned an otherworldly serenity on him. “It will hurt,” she said. “In all the ways you can ever imagine pain.”

“Why?” he blurted, instantly regretting the ball-sac question.

She faced away from him, and he caught the reflection of a soft smile on her lips. “Have you ever met one of those humans that clips coupons, or cuts every corner? Picks up every penny they find?”

“You’re saying you’re frugal?”

She turned a full smile at him. “To an angelic degree.”

Her soft delicate words sent a shimmer of power along his skin. More than words, it was a warning. A very sweet one. “If it helps you to protect the Queen, I will suffer whatever is necessary.”

“Your little human will need all the protection we can give her. Normally, what grows within her would try to rip its way out of her.”

He regarded her shorn head, his gifts seeming to constantly need to assess everything about her. Particularly her current human form. Did she get to pick those out? Like

humans selected clothing? Was it permanent or did she get to change at whim?

He returned to puzzle over her words. “Normally,” he repeated, curious.

“Well, dear aider of the humanities, there is not a single usual thing in this situation,” she explained with an ease that testified of the tenure on her job.

“The power of three Kings as well as their Kollaborator protects her as much as it endangers her. They and you and that which has now grown to the size of a basketball in her womb has the ability to both destroy and save.”

Alarm spider-webbed through him, drawing his gaze to each mirror on the vehicle as he searched perimeters beyond human eyesight. Aside from the impenetrable wall she kept just next to her person, all was quiet still.

Without looking, he felt her gaze on him, felt it pressing and seeking.

Or was that exploring? He held tight to the steering wheel, letting her have whatever she wanted.

He was an open book, at least with her. While he couldn't discern a thing where she was concerned, her job title alone gave her unfettered passage into him, whatever she wanted or needed.

She removed her eyes from him and turned them to the window, but her power remained. All over him. As if she'd set it on autopilot after deciding he needed a good frisking down in that second.

His grip on the steering wheel tightened more as he fought to give full access.

Fuck, she'd set a hundred probes in his mind, requiring him to focus on opening each.

She didn't need much. He felt her shimmying through the tiniest cracks.

Her path drew itself, showing him a map of her journey through corridors, like a curious child peeking inside rooms. He also saw that he was full of various energy layers. Fascinating.

The sensation of her energy was warm and then it slowed to an almost curious, careful pace. He thought he felt hunger in this curiosity but couldn't be sure. All the unknowns began to saturate him, building its own need.

She circled his mind that way for a full tormenting minute then moved down into his body. His pulse sped up as if his body knew things before he did. His hunger became less curious and more eager as he followed her leisure stroll through him.

The moment her journey went below his chest, his entire groin woke with a jolt.

Fuck. Alarm hit his blood stream like a scatter shot as the eternal hell-fire lust of Kaos woke.

A single, slitted eye watching as the sweet angelic mother dipped her desperate little toes in his perfect, dark domain.

"Stop!" he yelled at her, hitting the brakes as he did.

Her powers jerked out of him, and she grabbed hold of the dashboard, piercing gaze slicing him open. "You sense danger?"

He kept his stare locked on the windshield as every ounce of his strength was sucked up just to keep said cock-powers contained. "It's in me," he dared on a whisper.

"What is?"

Fuck. It was hot. So fucking hot. “The danger,” he gasped, unable to say more without losing his grip on the million mega-watts of lust pulsing in his balls. Wanting inside her.

“What kind?”

He steadied his breathing as her sharp command filled the micro-thin layer of control with a million tinkly cracks. “Don’t.... speak,” he barely warned around unsteady breaths. “Do not... speak.”

The silence soon felt like its own war as Reuban fought to extrapolate words from his brain that would explain in a g-rated way what boiled in his groin while not losing his grip on it.

She released an impatient breath, driving a power stake through him that slammed him into his seat.

Unable to move a muscle, he sat there as she dug through him with that bossy authority.

His jaws were tethered open by both powers now, hers and the dark one coiling tighter inside him.

She didn’t see it watching her. Waiting.

His eyes remained locked on the windshield as it now circled her slowly.

Inch by inch, spreading itself around her as she ventured further into its cavernous grave.

He got a glimpse of the plans it had for her and another round of panic, wrapped in

boiling lust hammered him.

Get out of my body , he yelled, praying she could hear him. It's a trap! It's a fucking trap!

Darkness slammed Reuban in a reverse explosion and the next second was filled with the sound of his own breaths as if he panted heavily in his ear drums.

“Kollaborator.”

He jerked his head toward the gasp.

It was the Bellatore. Fear colored her voice unrecognizable.

“I can hear you near me,” he said in the vast silence. The idea of her fearing anything was fresh panic to his muscles. “Call me again.”

The sharp jerk of her breaths fluttered not far away as though she struggled to get free of something.

He angled his head, following the frantic sounds. “Can you reach for me?”

“No,” she panted, her fear spiking. “I can't see. Something covers my eyes and bindings are at my wrists and ankles.”

“I'm trying to find you. Keep talking.”

“Where are my clothes? Why am I tied this way?”

He froze at her words the same moment his leg met a hard obstacle. He felt along it, his fingers tracing a smooth ornate structure. He reached further, encountering

softness. “I’m here, Bellatore. Are you... on a bed?”

“I think I am.”

He reached to his left and froze at her gasp. “Found you. I’m going to free you.” He moved his fingers along her calf and found what held her ankles. He fingered the silky material, not understanding how it was attached.

“What...are you doing?”

A boiling lust stirred in his cock till a groan of ecstasy built in his chest. “I can’t...” His breaths turned thick as the heat spread into his lungs and muscles. The darkness cleared in his vision, revealing what lay before him. “Oh fuck.”

The Bellatore’s breaths turned frantic. “Kollaborator.”

Pleasure detonated in his blood at the way she called his name this time. And the way she squirmed in the restraints. The way her shaved mound moved with the undulating flicks of her hips.

“Please,” she whispered, her head thrashing behind the blindfold.

There was no doubting what she begged for. She wanted... no she needed what snaked around his muscles and sent him crawling ever so slowly onto that bed, gaze locked on target. “Bellatore.”

A raging hunger burned his skin and bones till his every breath shook. “I fucking want you. God... help me.”

The only entity that heard was the God of Lust. It answered with a tongue of fire on the very tip of his cock, licking, licking, licking till he grunted and ground against the

bed, eyes on her begging, flicking pussy.

“Just do it,” she gasped. “Please. I... I want it!” she gushed, her breath catching and straining.

He latched his hands to her upper thighs, pressing her into the bed as his groans turned into low, greedy rumbles of diabolical intent. “You want it my sweet, Bellatore.”

He fought to give a single fuck about the real answer to that as he gazed at what he wanted more than air.

“Reuban.”

The decadent mewl suckled his balls and brought his gaze up the line of her body. He found her hands now free and squeezing her perfect tits, then nipples into tight points.

“Fuck yes,” he whispered as she snaked her hands down her stomach. “Bellatore,” he accused eagerly between guttural breaths, watching all her fingers move along her open folds. He moved his face right before the show. “You have such a fucking beautiful cunt, don’t you?”

“I’m begging you,” she strained, holding her lips open for him.

“Oh fuck, you are,” he whispered, kissing the silk of her inner thigh, never imagining a sight could be so pleasurable. “You didn’t know it could feel like this,” he realized, taking a single swipe at her clit with the tip of his tongue as he pressed his raging cock into the bed.

“Please!” she shot out. “Do it like that. I’ll do anything you want, just... please!”

He worked his fingers between hers and laced them in his tight grip. “Hold on to me, beautiful angel,” he said, eyeing her squirming hips till he burned from the delicious sight of it. “I’m going to give your pussy the most wicked kiss it will ever get.”

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He descended with a growl, gripping her hands tight as he ground his mouth against her open folds, sucking both lips, licking and nipping as he went.

Her shocked shrieks of ecstasy momentarily stole his breath then sent them out in feral growls as he rammed his tongue in her fucking perfect cunt.

He did that a good ten times, each assault marking him till he seethed with a possessive fury for her.

He released her hands and slid his under her succulent firm ass and jerked her clit against the rough surface of his tongue till her fingers pulled in his hair with angelic abandon.

Reuban's head banged against something, and he blinked, staring at the windshield, his breaths ragged and loud. He jerked right, finding the Bellatore panting with her eyes clenched tight, hands gripping the seat.

His hand went on a frantic search for the door handle and finally opened it.

His legs refused him service and he hit the ground before crawling a few feet and managing to slam the door shut with his back against it.

His lungs burned along with the rest of his body, the lust still as thick as ever along with the very vivid images of what he'd seen.

Hoooooly fuck, holy fuck, holy fuck. That... was going to leave one hell of a mark.

He heard the passenger door open and closed his eyes, bracing for what wrath might come next. He was suddenly yanked to his feet like he weighed nothing and got the broad side of a tiny fist of dynamite.

His back slammed into the vehicle, shattering the window.

Before he could fall to the ground, that same little hand held him up by the shirt, peering right into his gaze.

“I’m the Bellatore! The Angel of Mothers!

” she yelled in his face. “How dare you do that to me? Is this how you protect me, how you help me? You sexually violate me?”

“I tried to tell you to stop! I just told you I have these powers I can’t control, I told you, and there you go, shoving your fucking way in!”

He was suddenly sailing through the air and eating dirt a dozen feet away.

She stalked over to him. “You ever touch me like that again and I will rip your fucking head off and feed it to the next demon I fuck!”

He watched her storm back to the vehicle, her threat setting off a bomb of fury and dark lusts that hauled him to his feet and sent him psycho-stalking after her.

He intercepted her at the passenger door, putting his nose inches from hers.

“You surely will not be fucking a demon. Or a human . Or a human with a demon, not as long as I have breath in me.”

She plowed her knee into his balls, dropping him to the ground where he choked for

air.

“That was easily arranged, little nebulous trifacta boy.” She shoved him onto his side with a single punch of her little foot and in that second, he realized something very interesting.

With every second between them, trifacta boy was discerning new tricks involving the King’s abilities now roiling in his blood.

Like he could’ve easily caught that foot and detonated a catastrophic ecstasy that would render her begging on her knees before him.

The powers had slowed her movements in his mind, showing him exactly where to capture the delicate appendage and the pathways to use for delivering the wicked blow.

“Hurry up, we are late now!”

He was suddenly a flipped hourglass as he made his way to his feet and around the vehicle.

He climbed in, a quiet, eager student to the Three Kings now delivering clarity to his purpose.

He wasn’t a fourth wheel with the trio, he was the Kollaborator of their powers.

Every ability they had now came with a knowledge of how to mix them into inconceivable concoctions that would devastate unto pain or pleasure, both to be determined by context of a confrontation.

The Bellatore sought power and a very distant voice in his head said he should tell

her he had more than enough.

But when he attempted to do just that, the powers refused him with a vital clarification.

While he was Kollaborator of the three Kings, he was not free to use them as he saw fit.

He could only Kollaborate the powers unto another's will.

Whose will? Theirs?

Raviel's?

Their Queen?

Reuban snapped his seat belt on and threw the vehicle into drive, stomping on the gas.

If the context of the confrontation determined the power's flavor and will, then that meant what he'd do and how he'd do it would be determined by her.

She would decide whether he'd administer pleasure or pain, and she'd also decide how he'd deliver it.

She popped her tiny foot on the dashboard again and this time, the sight brought a painful throb to his cock.

Fuck, he'd never seen a more erotic vision.

The ridiculous amount of power in it made him question everything.

Was she some kind of test? Was he supposed to resist the inconceivable lust she'd waken in him?

Learn to control it? And it wasn't just lust ravaging him.

So very far from it. The idea of anything touching her body, besides him, called him to Kollaborate the three powers into unholy retribution.

He really wasn't sure which card their little sex-trip represented in The Hand they were dealt by the Pontis, nor did he know if it had anything at all to do with the prophecy they were fulfilling.

But he did know it meant something. And he knew the answer would be presenting itself very soon as they went about their immaculately aroused way.

Visions of what he'd done to her in that realm assaulted him till every muscle vibrated with the need to finish what he'd started.

And what had he started? Why hadn't he been allowed to complete it?

Who had stopped him? Reuban wanted to know that answer.

Both the who and the why. And maybe he wanted to Kollaborate the power of the three Kings to make them pay for not allowing him to bring his Angel of Mothers the pleasure she deserved. And the pleasure he craved to give.

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“Listen to me,” Kildare muttered after they were far enough from the hut. “I don’t know how fast this monster will grow and what it’s going to do to her but we’ll both need to be ready to keep her alive. Remember what you did with her heart?”

“You mean what I didn’t do?” he barely said, the terror in his gaze poking at his fire.

“That’s why you’ll start training now. You’ll learn your powers, and together, we’ll keep her alive. Reuban will return to help, and hopefully, Raviel will get here and show us what needs to be done.”

Krave went to pacing before him, the shake of his head becoming all too familiar. “How will she survive delivering it? Nephilim are monsters, it’ll rip her in half!”

“We need to trust,” Kildare reminded him and himself.

“Trust who?” Krave bit, the storm in his gaze bright red. “Who is really trustworthy? The only beings I trust right now are you , Reuban and...”

“I trust him too,” Kildare said, knowing he meant Kaos. The dark being had decimated all forms of doubt when he gave himself for their Queen without hesitation. Even while having that evil in him. “And I trust Raviel, because he made him.”

“I’m not there yet,” Krave admitted without remorse. “And I trust our Little Saint to do exactly what we don’t want her to do in this,” he added. “Did you feel her power? Where did that come from? I don’t know about you but every cell in my body was gripped by her will and nothing else.”

“It’s growing just like ours. When she needs it, she seems to have it. Pray it’ll protect her when it comes time to delivering that demon.”

“And Kaos?” Krave wondered.

Kildare eyed him, curious. “What about him?”

Krave clasped hands behind his head as he returned to pacing. “How the fuck did I go from despising a being to wanting to save him?”

“The feeling is mutual and mutually astonishing.”

“Is there any way for us to help him?”

Kildare took a huge breath, his gaze scanning the multi-green forest around them. “This is all new, even to me. I wish I had an answer.” He leveled his gaze right at him. “We’ll do everything we can.”

Krave and Kildare flashed to the hut at the sudden increase in Josie’s pulse. While Kildare saw their Queen remained glued to Kaos’s body on the bed, Krave pinned the Bellatore’s giant servant to the wall by his neck. “What are you doing?” he demanded.

Kildare eyed the tiny possessive arm over Kaos’s chest, the sight stirring his passion for her.

“I was feeding her, she’ll need to eat,” the servant grit from beneath Krave’s chokehold reinforced by Kildare’s fire.

“I’m fine,” Josie said, looking over her shoulder at Kildare, then Krave who flashed over to them.

“How are you feeling?” Krave whispered.

She gave the barest smile. “I feel... a little tired. He’s growing so fast.”

The sight of pride in her eyes was the hardest thing Kildare had ever stomached. He watched as Krave lowered and kissed her forehead.

“Are you scared?”

“No,” she said, sounding curious. “I have no fear. Do you think... he’ll be okay?”

“Who?” Krave asked.

“Kaos? And... our baby?”

Fuck.

“I’m praying everything turns out the way it needs to,” Krave whispered.

Clever answer.

She studied him for a moment. “How do you want it to turn out?”

He slid his fingers along her cheek, adoring the silk. “I want it to turn out as amazing as you are.”

“You’re so good at avoiding the truth,” she said softly. “It’s sweet. But... I want this baby.”

“Little Saint,” he whispered or pled. “You realize Kaos did this to protect you.”

Kildare's fire reached out and caressed her face, catching the tears that fell from her eyes.

"I know he did." The deep pain in her voice brought heat to his flames.

"But... he's wrong about our baby. And me.

And himself. I didn't have time to show him.

I need to show him what he means to me. He needs to understand that...

I love him as much as I love you and Kildare, and I don't even have guilt about it. "

The emotion in her sweet voice nearly killed Kildare but he was relieved at least she had no guilt, much like he had no possessiveness when it came to the other two Kings. It was as if she'd splintered into three unique individuals, each created for them and only them.

"Our son will be good," she assured.

Krave put his head on her shoulder and the Rider's grief pummeled his fire. "Little Saint," he croaked, broken. "Don't do this."

Her hand stroked his head. "Don't be afraid," she wept hotly. "There is nothing greater than the light of my three Kings. Our son will learn that."

Her words brought Kildare to his knees next to her. He laid his head on her womb, willing all his angelic power into her words. Even while knowing what must happen, would happen. No matter what any of them wished or wanted or begged for.

By the time they made it to the city, the silence in the vehicle suffocated Reuban. Aside from barked directions every other minute, the gulf between them widened and filled with every manner of toxic substance. The last thing they needed in this prophetic storm was what brewed in their midst.

He realized she'd directed him to a mall. Great. Shopping to lighten the mood. He imagined her storming the department stores while he raced to keep up and treated him like a sexual predator hot on her heels.

She removed her seatbelt as he pulled into a parking spot like she might jump from the vehicle before he even stopped. "Before we go in, we need to talk."

"I do not have time, Kollaborator," she said, her voice cold with a restrained rage.

"Make time," he said, not about to do a single thing till they talked.

She jerked her hand off the door handle and slammed it in her lap with an eternally frustrated breath. "Speak."

"None of this can work if you're pissed at me. I'm..." He found himself unable to apologize for what had happened. "I didn't mean for any of that to happen."

"Oh," she said with a mocking calm, crossing her arms over her chest. "But you're clearly not sorry."

She seemed to know that for a fact. And it was a fact. He wasn't one bit sorry aside from being interrupted. Wonder what she'd think of that?

"And your silence confirms it."

"I'm not sorry," he decided to admit. "I wanted every bit of what I did and a whole

lot more.”

“That’s because you have no idea what’s at stake, what I do.”

He undid his seat belt and faced her more, his eyes on her heaving body. “Then show me what you do,” he said simply. “Help me understand.”

She kept her stone-cold face pointed at her window.

Just when he was ready to give up, her hand shot out to him, palm up.

He regarded the tiny thing with a keen awareness of all the painful things she could do with it right before his mind saw that same hand sliding along her body and gripping her tits in a hunger so potent it still rocked him.

“Take... my hand, Kollaborator. I will show you.”

There was no missing the utter warning in her quiet words, but he reached out and closed his fingers around it nevertheless. Their palms connected and the power inside him bucked.

She gasped, clutching him tight as her eyes closed. “Be still,” she whispered around labored breaths. She’d just begged his powers for permission, and it suddenly stepped aside, allowing her full control.

And she took it. Swiftly and without mercy.

Five seconds, five minutes, five days, weeks, years, he didn’t know how long the Bellatore soared him through centuries of her life with humanity.

From the desert days of old to the bustling cities of every major corner of the world,

the Mother of Angels filled his molecules with the hope and innocence of a million girls till his soul was bursting with their lives.

Then she sailed him higher and higher till they rose above the earth and hung immobile in some balance.

“See.”

The command whispered through him as her hand clutched his tighter and they soared back down. This time she dragged him through those same lives now ravaged with pain and hopeless despair. Millions of these girls crucified by inconceivable evil until his entire soul bled out of him.

And then she showed him the complexity and burden of her job. The war was lost. The Mother of Angels was out of time. There would be no more nourishing women into a beautiful motherhood. There was only keeping them alive long enough to hopefully save their souls.

The scales had tipped in evil's favor.

The end of humanity was imminent.

“Release me.”

Reuban wanted to but he couldn't. The agony of millenniums held him pinned in place.

He realized it was because she carried it.

She held all of it, used the pain as a sacrifice for more power .

To help those who could not help themselves.

To buy mercy and time while everything she loved burned around her.

He squeezed her hand tightly in his, listening to her lungs sucking in huge gulps of air and letting it go. “Now I see,” he said, forcing his hand to disengage.

Her breaths filled with flutters as if they’d grown wings to fly far away from him. “Then help me.”

The tiny words trembled with the rest of her body as pride and desperation battled inside her angelic heart.

It was a rare beseeching, he realized. “I will,” he assured, wanting to take her hand again and discover it with his.

She’d called him to help her with humanity.

But to do that required first helping her .

She would fight him, he knew. What he intended would go against everything she thought she believed to be right.

But she was altogether wrong. And he was more than happy to teach her all about the error of her beautiful ways.

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Larena kept at least four feet between her and the Kollaborator at all times as she marched from rack to rack in the clothing store, throwing items in a basket.

Why had she done something so foolish? In showing him everything she'd endured, allowed him too far inside.

She'd intended to brutalize him while opening his eyes to her plight.

Then she'd begged him for help because she'd been keenly aware of two things: he possessed powers she needed, and she was at his mercy.

Wouldn't be the first time she'd been at the sympathy of others for the sole purpose of securing power.

But with him, it was very different. She'd had sex countless times in her existence and scoured each incident for a single shred of the kind of pleasure he'd made her feel.

She was protected from witchcraft and sorcery so it couldn't be he'd used those things.

He was a good soul even if he was very inexperienced.

It had to be the dark powers in him that had caused it .

I'm not sorry. I wanted every bit of what I did and so much more .

Her body flashed to a thousand degrees as she barreled the basket to the checkout counter.

Once again, she experienced the odd sensation of trying to run far from him only to feel like she'd ended up that much closer to the flames.

Thank God he gave her space. She'd been physically, mentally and emotionally rattled to death in her existence before, but never like this.

He continued remaining disengaged in conversation while providing everything she needed when she needed it, all without question or comment.

Other than showing kindness and manners, which seemed to be characteristics woven into the fabric of his existence.

As though no matter what was happening, he would always be polite.

A few thousand years ago, she would have welcomed such a thing.

But not now. God, of all times, not now.

He was the biggest distraction, the biggest danger she ever remembered facing all while bearing no particular threat about him.

Other than his incredulous good looks and the manner in which he assaulted her with them at every turn. Obviously.

He was a trap. A divine one. She needed to avoid falling headlong into him no matter how tempting he was. And dear God of the highest heavens, never had she encountered a more inviting quarry.

By the time they made it to the hotel, she felt fevered and in need of a cold shower.

His silence continued like a plague now as she struggled to find a way to lay out the evening's plans to him.

Everything in her said telling him what she intended on doing was a suicide mission by itself.

She would have to find a way to hide it somehow.

He'd only ever seen her in her angelic form.

She'd have to do a human body double. Enter the location in one body and swap when the time came to need another.

Assuming his peculiar powers wouldn't be able to know the difference.

She could do identical twins but that would require more power than any demonic abuse would earn her.

Simply amazing that after she'd dragged him through the fires of thousands of years of human suffering he'd come out on the other end caring about her, rather than the humans she was commissioned to helping. She'd never experienced this kind of fury while being at the same time flattered.

She was again tempted to waste her powers to find out where his mind was with her.

Once she took human form, she'd be relying solely on experience of which she had plenty.

Knowing his intentions would surely help.

But then that meant running the risk of meeting those dark powers of seduction while poking about as she had foolishly done before.

She couldn't survive being sucked into that domain for another sexual playdate.

She'd operate blind as usual and trust her intuitions. They'd become nearly as accurate as her angelic ones.

When it came time to deciding on a body type to wear, she found herself doing more contemplations than usual. Every time she went to choose her innocent look for the purpose of tempting monsters, Kollaborator's opinion butted in as if it should matter.

Did it matter?

No...it didn't matter.

Mmm, no...that felt off.

She'd pick a middle-of-the-road body. Innocent but mature. Experienced.

She visualized a female and again paused at hairstyle. Short or long? The Kollaborator's silent judgment circled her with a hot, sky-blue gaze.

She forced herself to choose and closed her eyes, ordering the sequential shutdown of everything that made her limitless. She braced her hands on the bathroom vanity as her angelic reflexes waned and galactical awareness dimmed.

She was careful to take this part slow. The first time she'd attempted it resulted in physical injuries.

Having your eternal knowledge sucked from you was like forcing yourself to slowly

drown.

Panic was inevitable. And the further down into the darkness of fragile humanity you went, the harder it was to remember how to fight.

Even after it was done, it felt like she was living at the bottom of the ocean, the pressure making it difficult to breathe, the murky water limiting sight to nearly blind.

It was a blind kind of seeing. You saw but didn't understand that you were seeing.

Or what you were seeing. More like merely observing.

The crack in the angelic door had to be perfect.

Too big, and she would know too much and risk remembering her power and how to access it at the wrong time, jeopardizing her undercover work.

And if the crack in the angelic door was not big enough, it made her too slow, too weak.

In the hands of the wrong demon, the trauma they inflicted upon her could break her ability to return.

It only happened once and cost her dearly. She was eighty-two years old and on her death bed before another servant of divinity came and touched her forehead and opened her mind back up, allowing her to self-heal and reverse all the damages.

It had been a very slow death. But she used the failure as a foundation for her current craft.

She now worked the trick like a divine angel working the devil's corner.

She wasn't just spiritually frugal, she was diabolically prudent.

Crafty as a serpent, harmless as a dove wasn't just a core tenet.

It was her most deadly weapon—wielded with ruthless agility.

She focused on the air in her lungs, struggling to adjust to the decrease, controlling her adrenalin that desperately fought to flip her the fuck out. “Normal,” she breathed out loud. “It’s normal. You’re okay. You’re fine.”

Her knees nearly buckled in panic remembering who was on the other side of the door in the room. Oh fuck, fuck, that would be a new level of difficult. She'd only trained her downgraded self with demons, not gorgeous... seductive... whatever he technically was.

Just a different fight. That's all. Adapt. Adjust. Go slow. Learn quick.

She held up her hand and watched it tremble. The chaotic energy swirled inside her and a weird sound escaped her. The kind you heard humans make who were on their way around the bend in the road of no return.

She stared in the mirror at the long, silky blond hair and flawless skin. Angling her head, she studied the glowing cheekbones and clear blue eyes. She focused on her mouth next, touching the full lips that were so different from her own, grounding herself in her new reality.

She eyed the voluptuous body type she chose. So different from her efficient one.

She remembered he'd seen it. And what he'd seen.

The recollection while in her human body brought on a panting episode. Oh God,

what was she risking with him while in this form? And why was she wondering if he'd like this form more than her angelic one?

The shake returned to her entire body this time, and she closed her eyes. Breathe. Steady. Focus .

Time. Limited.

She quickly climbed into the sheer white outfit, her humanity beating frantically against her chest bone. The feeling was getting too familiar. It was the sword's other edge. And if she wasn't careful, she could fall on the wrong side of that blade and cut a door into herself of self-destruction.

She got into the heels that felt more like cliffs and moved toward the bathroom door, body on a buzz high. She'd have to ride it out as she went. She didn't want to be in this form any longer than was necessary, especially with her new friend/foe waiting for her.

She took several calming breaths, checking to ensure the crack to her angelic side was still precisely open.

She was officially a human sponge now, capable of absorbing all the evil she could ever need.

Then she'd trap the filth with her impeccable human inability of releasing it.

It was the perfect snare that required perfect execution.

She barely stopped herself from using anger as a shield at the very last second. Steady girl . She pushed it back. The last thing she needed was to gain power and have to use a drop of it to pay her own sin debts.

She opened the door and rounded the corner.

The room was empty. Her breath released with the need to collapse in relief. She spotted a paper on the table and hurried to it, her ankle twisting in the too-high white heels. Mercy.

Got a separate room adjoining yours so you can have your privacy. I'm in room 950. Come get me when you're ready.

Heavens, he was more foe than friend without trying. His kindness and consideration were weapons she was not equipped to fight.

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She sat in the chair, staring at the note.

The handwriting. Messy and yet uniform. Like somebody comfortable in their imperfect skin.

More like perfect skin. Perfect everything.

She'd gotten a good look at him while in that lust domain and there was no amount of power in all the realms that could remove him from her memory.

Before she could think herself into a little petrified corner, she headed out, struggling for a balance between calm and calamitous.

In the hallway of the semi-luxurious hotel, she found his door and knocked.

Taking a step back, she waited while attempting to strike a suitable pose, realizing there wasn't one.

She stood in the body of a twenty-year-old wearing tramp attire with a dash of purity.

What sort of look was she to wear on her face?

The door opened, ending one torture and beginning another. Her gaze devoured his black slacks and matching dress shirt while wondering when he'd gotten new clothes. Had he snatched them during her blind shopping rampage?

"Can I help you?"

She shot her gaze up to his heart-stopping blue one. “It’s me. The...Bellatore.”

He looked her over again, making her feel like a cheap imposter. “I wondered if you could do that,” he muttered, stepping aside and lowering his gaze to the floor as he did.

She entered, wondering what she’d heard in his tone.

Disappointment? Awe? Curiosity? Interest?

The fact that he didn’t recognize her meant she could swap out bodies if she thought it necessary.

She was already needing to hide from his hot judgmental eyes before getting to the job and it had nothing to do with said job.

She sat herself at the small table only to find him absent.

Water near the bathroom turned on and her century-honed lady manners took over, gracefully crossing her legs.

The imposter feeling returned like a nagging wrinkle in her persona she needed to iron out but didn’t know how.

Of all the times she used this form, she couldn’t recall a single one where she felt so put-off in it.

“I’m ready to know what your intentions are to gain the power you need,” he called from the bathroom vanity area.

She steadied her pulse at the question, remembering she needed to come up with a

decoy story. “The usual,” she said, racing to think.

“Right.” He was now heading toward her, all masculine grace and beauty.

He sat on the edge of the bed across from her, dropping dress shoes at feet hidden by black polyester.

She stared, wondering what sort of feet they were.

And why wonder such a useless thing? “You’ll need to be a lot more specific. ”

The daddy tone was the first sign of trouble.

Then came his stern gaze, making her forget the problematic topic.

Then came a look on his face that brought other problems to mind.

The place they were going, and what sort of attention he’d be subjected to.

He’d be mauled by both male and female. She remembered the stupid little door games they played at the little hell hole.

Without a doubt he’d be an instant attraction and likely end up on the auction block and sold to the owner’s wife for a snack.

Her blood heated with a mess of unholy chemicals at the idea of the woman all over him.

No. He couldn’t go there.

Could she hide him?

He placed his palms on the bed and angled his head at her, blue gaze hot and probing. Her human body reacted to the erotic, open-kneed position. Was it unintentional? “That bad, huh?” he muttered softly, making her swallow.

“There’s never anything pleasant about my work. I’m sure you realize.”

Her pulse hammered in her chest as his gaze moved slowly over her body, making her wonder again what he thought of it. “You like this look?” he asked.

Mercy. “It’s not about what I like, it’s about what they like.”

“So, you’re dressing to please,” he said.

Did that mean he found her pleasing? “I dress for the job.”

He was back to holding her stare, something she found impossibly powerful. “So... do you?”

Her mouth was suddenly too dry. “Do I what?”

“Do you like this look?”

“Do you?” It flew out of her mouth for lack of oxygen in her brain.

He leaned forward, placing his elbows on his legs, putting himself a foot closer. “Tell me what you intend to do, Bellatore.”

He was on to her. That was a warning. “I volunteer to be a masochist.”

He stared at her for many seconds before his eyes lowered to the floor, a careful cock of a hidden weapon. “I won’t let you do that.”

Shit. Shit, shit, shit. “You said you’d help me.”

“And I will. But not like that.”

All the stuff in between those words rattled her humanity. Focus. He’s but a... a... what was he technically? She wasn’t sure. “Then... how?”

She suddenly didn’t want to know but needed to.

Her gaze caught on his mouth and her brain went to work on its perfections and the message behind the slight tug at the corner.

“If you intend to use that body to get power from demons, I will never allow it. I could,” he said softly, before assuring, “but I won’t.”

Why should she be concerned about the body he referenced in the debate at her doorstep? “Would you prefer I use my angelic form, then?”

She was suddenly staked to an invisible wall with the tumultuous power brewing in his blue eyes now right on her. “Especially... and never... that body.”

An explosion of sparks popped off in her blood as she focused on breathing along with the utmost importance of the conversation, the one about saving humanity, not which body he preferred, her angelic one over this human one. And yet, vanity insisted the fate of the world depended on confirming it.

“What if I told you that I can give you all the power you need without requiring... this.”

He gestured at her with clasped hands, his elbows still on his knees.

“This... body?”

He only nodded, still staring at her with a million plans swirling in the depths of his passionate gaze. She definitely needed to know and understand all of them.

“What’s... wrong with this body?”

“I don’t like it,” he said without missing a beat.

“I can... take on any type I wish.”

“Unless they look exactly like the Bellatore, no.”

Oh mercy. So he was saying he liked her angelic form more. She remembered what they were talking about. This power he claimed to have. “Are you referring to... the dark powers in you?”

His stare boiled with a silent yes under raised brows .

She swallowed.

Then remembered to breathe.

“I don’t... quite understand.”

“I think you do.”

Flashes of what had passed between them in that dark-lust realm brought her pulse to a raging pound in her body.

She really needed to know exactly what this entailed.

But to ask felt like suicide. The sudden need for her angelic powers seemed most necessary to learn this answer without hearing him say it.

Because if he clothed these bright ideas with his decadent words and tongue, they would be a trap she would not escape.

Or want to. And yet, how would she find out?

She could not use power. She mustn't. She would have to use her human skills and work her way to understanding.

“You want... to use the dark lusts on me?”

He didn't answer right away. And she was very sure those dark powers prowled just beyond the stare-snare she was now in. “If by me, you mean the Bellatore, then yes.”

“But...” She licked her suddenly dry lips. “This power is greater if...”

His head shook slowly.

No?

“Not this power. It's created for the spiritual and humanity. And... I have zero interest in your human facades.”

“What...”

No, not what.

“Why...”

“You want to hear me say the words,” he said, or seemed to discern. His brows drew together in such a way that brought hot shame to her human cheeks.

“I just...”

“Yes or no, Bellatore,” he offered again, his patience silky. “Do you want the power I have to give you? Or would you prefer to gain it with that human body through demons? That question was purely sarcasm and in no way denotes an option. I’m offering you power, and I expect you to take it.”

Everything was off the rails in her human body now. There was only one thing left to do and that was ask a stupid question. “What if I say no?”

“It doesn’t matter what you say you want. It only matters what I know you want. And... if you need me to use force... I would be more than thrilled to.”

“Force?” she whispered, her chest on fire with every wallop of her heartbeat. “You can’t...”

“I can,” he corrected instantly, lust filling the space between them till the air crackled with it.

Pretty sure it was the knowing how right he was that created a brand-new shiny panic switch.

And her debilitating hunger for exactly what he offered is what flipped it.

There was no time to pray what her last second, hair-brained idea would cost her, there was only tackling the fire across from her before it burned her alive.

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Reuban surfaced through a thick fog in his mind to Bellatore talking to somebody, explaining something about not worrying. “I won’t allow them to hurt you more than is absolutely necessary.”

Who was she talking to? Where... the hell was he?

As one part of his mind blindly groped for a thing he needed to remember, his back began to itch along the seal embedded on his skin and soul.

His memory jolted.

The Kings.

His fusion to them.

The itch changed into a hot tingle that quickly turned agonizing. He bit down on his own teeth, seething out groans as the spiritual binding to the Kings overcame him again. Only different. More.

What was happening?

He gasped down lungful’s of air as a vision of a naked Bellatore brought a familiar darkness that coated Reuban’s tongue. He knew this power. And he knew to fear it, judging by the panic rising in him as it snaked along his tastebuds like a sinister lover.

Lust.

Oh fuck.

That lust.

It seeped into his blood next and coated his cells and bones before whispering the soul-changing words... “Quartus Rex.”

Holy fuck.

Fourth King.

Holy, holy fuck, what was happening?

The unknown thing he’d reached for earlier was suddenly in his grip and opening its power to him. A howling wind and fire swirled in his blood along with the most decadent desire that now pounded in his balls and cock.

This power located the once impenetrable wall protecting the Bellatore and cut right through it like butter, forcing her naughty, angelic foot to slam down on the brakes.

He made his way up onto the back seat as his lungs filled with wind and his eyes glowed with fire, locking onto his target now turned in her seat, staring at him in shock.

“Sit,” he ordered when she tried to leave the vehicle.

Her immediate obedience and gasp told him just how strong this power was, now snarling through him. He climbed out the back of the SUV and got into the passenger seat as her treachery came before him, burning his mind.

“You’re a King,” she whispered, confused and shocked.

He finally looked at her, unable to see anything but her sin even while wondering why he kept thinking of it in that way.

“You kissed me,” he said, surprised to hear his voice calm while chaos screamed inside him.

“What is your name?” she demanded.

“Drive 2.6 miles to our intended destination.”

She complied with wordless sounds of consternation. “What is our intended destination?”

“A lovely hotel,” he said, adding a dose of lust to the announcement.

The huge gasp she gave told him she understood one thing. No, two. Make that three. One, the Bellatore had never experienced sexual pleasure. Two, she’d thought herself incapable in her angelic form. And three, she would soon know how very wrong she was.

“What’s happening?” she whispered between hot breaths.

“Since I’ve fused with my three Kings, I have a portion of all their powers as you know,” he reminded. “Rest assured the divine winds and fire won’t let the unholy lust misbehave. More than is necessary,” he added, his cock raging hard with the directive now cooking his blood.

“This isn’t... this isn’t permitted,” she gasped.

“Really,” he said, his cock’s grin reaching his mouth. “My Donec Bellatore can fuck devils and steal power with a most delicious kiss, but she can’t permit a Kollaborator

King of the Pecto Tuta Veritas to give you ecstasy until you're weeping for me to fuck you?"

She pulled into the parking lot, her breaths labored like she fought an army of demons.

"Keep fighting me," he urged, her earlier sins ever before him like a whipping post. "Right now, your power feels like a hot tongue on my cock."

"Please," she gasped, putting the vehicle in park.

He turned and looked at her, his gaze moving over the black robe she now wore. "Your fear has found sympathy, my Donec Bellatore." He leaned across the space between them. "I will consider mercy for another kiss."

Her gaze fell to his mouth then shot back up to his eyes, her terror a grip on his entire groin.

He was about to pull away when she leaned in then stopped just before his mouth.

He watched her brows furrow as she pressed her lips against his for a microsecond.

A microsecond that felt like the worst sin of all.

"Just enough to enrage my lust... Larena," he muttered softly.

Seeing there was no escaping this being's power, Larena moved on to surviving it without incurring permanent scars.

Whatever he intended to do could be survived but its aftermath was what she feared.

This power he wielded was not unheard of, but it was surely new to her.

Not once in her existence had she ever feared a fight, but this one was massively different.

It wasn't his power that was the threat, it was him.

From the moment she set eyes on him, she knew he was the source of her help while simultaneously being her greatest threat.

She'd tightened her shields hoping to get what she needed from him and be on her way, but he had other plans.

Things she had no time for, nor could she risk enduring.

To open herself to such needs would be a fatal blow to her already low powers.

Why hadn't she just explained it to him?

Why had she panicked?

Why do you ask such foolish questions while knowing full well the answers?

He was the most beautiful being she'd ever met.

Inside and out. He was spirit candy to her weeping inner-child and holy water for her parched spirit.

She'd panicked with his offer to give her power.

Not knowing what he'd require of her to get it had sent her diving into the flames to take it.

And like a fool, she thought she could take all of it and he'd just be at her mercy.

Now she was a prisoner.

His prisoner.

And he was angry with her. Furious, to be perfectly accurate.

She couldn't use her powers against him but was able to know such things. And it was a torment to know and even feel the wound she'd inflicted on him. He left it wide open and oozing blood as if to remind her who was responsible for what was coming.

She sat on the hotel bed right where he'd ordered her to, all showered and clean, waiting for her execution.

He'd called her a Donec Bellatore. She tried to be offended, but there was nothing that fell from his perfect mouth that her body and mind found offensive.

And it wasn't the sexy warrior title that made her quake in her eternal skin, it was the my that preceded it.

He had the power to own her if he chose.

Either way meant certain death. To be owned by him meant the death of her as a Bellatore Matre.

And to not be owned by him meant the death of her as a woman.

Which death she would suffer was entirely up to him.

She was hardly a stranger to suffering and this needed to be seen like any other casualty of war. The only consolation was the carnage would be her own and not one of her earthly mothers.

She would find a way to survive and continue, she always did. Whether he punished her once or punished her for eternity with his delicious glory. She must find a way.

The sound of the shower ceased and brought blood to pound in all those new places she'd never experienced in her entire existence.

Her heart pumped too quickly and her skin prickled.

He'd told her to get naked and she had, marveling over the feeling of such a state of being.

It was the way he'd commanded it. "Get naked." It meant remove everything.

All her protective walls, every stitch of clothes.

There was no disobeying him and she sat there utterly exposed.

The door opened and she closed her eyes to focus her strength then quickly opened them when visions of her kissing him wrecked her. She turned and her gaze fell on him. A death had never been swifter as she sat there, pierced through by his beauty now standing exactly before her.

"Lie back and open your lovely legs, my little warrior angel."

The command came with images in her mind of the exact position he wanted her in.

Beholding his massive, perfect cock was a war of the ages as she moved back onto the bed and remained on her elbows with her legs drawn up.

Dropping her knees to the bed would be the equivalent of laying down all weapons before her enemy.

In a final desperate attempt to shield herself from what was coming, she struggled to imagine it as any other sex act performed for the sake of gaining power.

“Digging your grave deeper, my warrior angel,” he warned softly, reminding her she was utterly exposed and naked before him, thoughts and body. “Look at me.”

“I’m sorry,” she gasped, not even sure for what as her gaze landed on his penis now gripped in his hand and aimed at her.

“Do you know the three sins you committed, Bellatore?”

Breathe. Carefully.

Her head shook.

“You’ll love the irony,” he assured. “First, you created a powerful King with your world-shaking, scarring kiss—thank you for that,” he said softly, his hands gently settling on her knees still drawn and glued together.

“Second, you foolishly stole power from that King. And third, you sinned with it.”

His hands glided along her outer thighs and suddenly eternal hell felt like the safest place to escape to.

“And do you know what this bought you, my beautiful warrior?” His fingers were at

her knees again. One little nudge and all hope fell through the gap he created. She stared at his beautiful face now aimed between her legs he slowly pushed open. “It bought you a Sinner’s Bond.”

Those words and the sudden nailing of her legs open against the mattress brought a parade of strangled gasps.

A Sinners Bond.

Oh God, oh God, oh God.

That was four death sentences in one. A death to her career as the angel of mothers. A death to all the work she’d done over the millennium. A death to the work that yet remained. And a death to the angel that she was.

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And for all the agony and horror of this sentence, of this epic fall from grace, she could scarcely breathe from the lust on his beautiful face and the utter joy it brought her.

“Knight,” she croaked, unable to get enough air in her lungs as his hands slid slowly toward her womanhood.

“I understand why you panicked,” he whispered, his gaze not moving from his target. “But you should know... even though I wanted to devour your delectable body and all that is attached to it...” His gaze finally moved up and locked on hers. “I had decided to give you power through a hug.”

His confession set her heart ablaze and filled her with the power in them.

“Because you needed one of those like the world needs a savior.”

“Reuban,” she panted, clenching the covers as tears overflowed her eyes from his crushing words.

Her cries erupted when his finger glided slowly along her opening.

“There isn’t a single part of me that isn’t rejoicing over your treachery,” he whispered, twirling the tip in her opening. “And that it falls to me to tend to your punishment.”

Lust belted through her at those words as his power made her watch him carry out his unholy pleasure sentence.

She was riveted to the vision, no longer fighting, giving herself to it.

Ten seconds and she was reaching for it with her hips as his wet touch moved up toward the heat pounding at her clitoris.

“Knight!” she shot out, her mouth opening more with every increment toward that spot.

“Larena,” he whispered, moving along the perimeter of the desperately pounding bud. “My beautiful angel has many lessons to learn. And I will teach her all of them. The first being to never tease her Kollaborator King.”

The rage in Reuban’s cock was visceral. The sight of her squirming hips had his undivided attention even while clauses and loopholes danced in his head regarding the Sinner’s Bond.

He understood enough to know it would not physically allow him to violate it.

Which left him to explore his appetite while praying he was permitted everything he craved to do.

He was also aware of a very interesting clause in regard to his position as a Kollaborator King.

He had to remain untainted by sin. And she had surely sinned.

But the fun part was his options for dealing with it.

Depending on the crime, he could simply judge it with punishment.

Or he could cleanse it if he was feeling merciful. And in her case, he was all merciful.

She'd taken his power with a kiss that unlocked his Kingdom. And that gave him the key to use the other King's powers. The Dark Lust, and the Divine Fires and Winds. They were all his for this. To wield however he needed.

She'd provoked the Dark Lust, and the Fire and Winds were merely guarding the door while he used it to discipline her. They were do not disturb signs that came with lethal consequences if you tried.

"Confess to me, my Bellatore," he breathed, working half his middle finger inside her. "Tell me why I'm punishing you."

Her pleasure came in shocked bursts as her head fell back then came forward to continue watching. "I... I kissed you and... and..."

"And?" He pushed the rest of the way inside her, his powers picking up every detail of what she'd endured at the hands of the wicked. He closed his eyes, forming the exact concoction of fire and divine winds, then infused his aching need to heal her with them.

"Reuban! Oh!"

"Look at me." Her tormented gaze found him as he touched every inch of her. "How does it feel my Bellatore?" he asked softly.

Her brows pulled together harder as his powers directed him to a spot inside her. "Oh God!"

"Answer me."

“So good.”

“You want me to touch your clit?” He stroked his thumb all around the sensitive bud.

The agony in her eyes built as her perfect mouth went wider. “Please. Please, yes.”

Fuck, he’d intended to deprive her of an orgasm but that meant depriving himself. Why should he be punished for her sins? He asked himself the cute question merely for the fun of it.

He lay between her legs, deciding he wanted to both feel and taste her glorious breaking.

“Reuban, what are you doing?” she shot out as he lowered his mouth.

He paused just before devouring his dessert.

“Kissing your pussy.” There was something niggling in his memory about the etiquette of talking to a woman, but this power said his words had to match the crime.

Filthy. “And licking it,” he added, moving his finger along that spot inside her.

“Do you want my lips and tongue on your perfect, naughty pussy my Bellatore?” He needed to hear it while she was burning alive.

“Oh my God,” she panted, the words shaking as she fully realized her utter end and helplessness.

He stroked his face against her inner thigh right as her taut nipples became a fatal attraction.

He moved his other hand up her tight body, greedily claiming the perfect mound.

Her hot gaze snapped to her breast as he slid his thumb over the hard nipple.

“Oh my God, oh my God,” she barely said, her hips jerking frantically for what he dangled before her.

“Answer the question, Bellatore.”

“Yes!” she half yelled. “Please, I want it, I want it more than anything!”

“I want to hear the words,” he decided, his own breaths thick as he lowered his mouth back to her pussy. Fuck. He closed his eyes, letting it consume him. “You smell fucking divine.” He traced the hot silk near her clit with the tip of his tongue, groaning at the jolt through her body.

“I want it, I want your lips and tongue on me. Your beautiful mouth all over me.”

The unexpected confession rocked him. He licked over her clit once, barely a flick as he squeezed her plump breast hungrily.

“I’m not sorry,” she panted.

That confession hit the pause button on his power.

He drew his finger slowly out of her, only to add a second before gently pushing back inside.

“I wanted it,” she shot out between breaths.

“I wanted to kiss you. I wanted it more than anything.” The cry wrenched from her

chest, and he pressed his mouth on her clit with a victorious growl, moaning and sucking her orgasm from her.

She forced his mouth tighter to her pussy with every finger latched in his hair.

His dark powers showed him the perfect way. The pace, speed, and pressure for the longest, hardest climax she was capable of.

And while she rejoiced to every entity in the universe, he felt it. Her signature on some dotted line, binding her to a contract he only vaguely understood.

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Krave's cock gave a throb as Kildare's fire suddenly engaged with his Divine Winds. At the same moment, Kildare shot up from the small chair next to a sleeping Josie, looking around. Their gazes met then they both looked at Kaos when his dark lust licked all over them.

"What is this power?" The Bellatore's Parvor demanded to them.

"What the fuck is happening?" Krave whispered at Kaos' cock tenting the thin blanket over his waist. "Is he waking up?" Please don't let it be that demon in her.

Kildare gently shook Josie's shoulder and she gasped, fighting to open her eyes as she looked at him. "What are you feeling?" he whispered, stroking her face.

She took his hand and Krave's cock jerked when she moaned and sucked his middle finger.

"She's feeling it," Kildare shuddered, pulling his finger from her lips with a pained sound. "Remain outside," he ordered the servant.

"Krave," she moaned, the lust and need in her voice commanding his divine winds. He hurried to her side, kneeling. She took his hand and brought it between her legs. "I need you."

"Fuck," he gasped, stroking her pussy and sliding his finger inside her while eyeing Kildare and shaking his head. "Reuban," he whispered.

"Take care of her," Kildare said, hurrying to the door. His fire trailed behind him then

the air shook as he shifted then filled the hut with a blast of heat when he shot into the air.

“Oh God, yes,” she moaned, drawing Krave’s attention. Her hand latched behind his neck, and she pulled him in for a hungry kiss, both of them gasping on the waves of potent lust. Holy fuck, what was happening?

Kildare locked onto the source his fire came from and soon stood before a hotel room door.

He angled his head, turning all his powers on high, finding two people, both of divine origins.

Everything seemed wrong and yet nothing felt wrong.

He rapped on the door with a knuckle then stepped back at hearing footsteps approaching on the carpet.

The locks disengaged and the door opened to Reuban, eyeing him with a look of surprise then glanced around. “What are you doing here?” he whispered.

“I’m coming to find out what the hell is going on?”

“I’m here with the Bellatore. She was... coming to get more power in the city.”

Kildare eyed the Kollaborator’s disoriented appearance.

“What’s going on?” he quickly asked. “Is The Queen okay?”

Kildare glanced behind him into the room then back at him. “Where’s the Bellatore?”

“She’s in the shower.”

“What are you hiding, Kollaborator? I can sense it.”

He suddenly stepped out and shut the door. “Something... may have happened. Or is happening.”

“Explain quickly,” he ordered, not needing another mystery with everything going on.

“The Bellatore... kissed me,” he said, finally meeting his gaze head on. “And I think it...”

“Holy of holies,” Kildare muttered, unable to believe what he could now clearly see. “You’re a... King. How?”

His eyes widened, only half clueless. “She needed power, and she kissed me to get it. Apparently it... unlocked another mysterious level in our little King clan.”

Kildare considered the cards in the Hand, trying to fit this in.

“She wanted me to set her up on dates with demons to sacrifice her flesh for more power for what’s coming with our Queen.” His head shook with adamance. “I wasn’t about to do that. I was going to just give her the power she needed. My... powers showed me how.”

“With a kiss,” he said, still not sure what exactly happened.

“No, with a hug,” he barely shrilled. “Before I could, she attacked me with a kiss and

drained me of everything. I woke up on the floor of the SUV while she's on her way to do dirty devil work, thanking me for all the power I'd given her.

"He nodded at Kildare's expression. "You couldn't have been more shocked than I was.

And as I'm lying there, my seal starts itching and burning and I see it in my mind.

Her sin. And that... it needed to be punished.

That the Kings' Kollaborator could not be stained by wickedness, and I had to handle it.

It gave me options. To punish or to... teach her.

"He eyed him for many seconds before confessing quietly, "I chose the latter. To cleanse her."

Kildare crossed his arms at seeing it. "What is this but, I sense?"

He stepped closer to him, his astonishment hinting at divine complications. "She confessed... that she wasn't sorry for kissing me. That she wanted to, more than she wanted anything."

The divine dots connected, stunning Kildare. "You just defined a Sinner's Bond. That means she's eternally bound to you. And the only thing that can break that bond is death, Kollaborator."

He stepped back, his gaze sharpening. "You accuse me like I had a choice."

"If you did, what would you have chosen?"

His indignance melted away, revealing an oddly proud guilt. “I would’ve chosen her, one thousand percent,” he confessed, his brows narrowed on him. “How did you know something happened? Did you feel it?”

“We all felt it. Even Kaos somehow. He had a massive boner while resting in the nether realm. Even our Queen was affected by it. The lust seemed more potent than all the powers and that’s a massive concern since she’s got home-grown-hell, speed-growing inside her.”

“God,” Kollaborator muttered, looking at him. “What does this mean? For our mission? The Hand? Do you think this was part of it?”

“Let’s pray it was. But we need to all be in one location, now. United, not scattered around. What does the Bellatore have to do before we can focus on protecting our Queen?”

The dark clouds on his face cleared. “Nothing. She’s changed her protective directive to Josie.”

“She’s going to help protect our Queen?” he asked, getting quick nods. “Thank God. We need all the help. How are your powers? Anything new?”

“You tell me,” he said, clueless.

Kildare considered with an angled head. “Try to get through my defenses. I’m thinking of a memory.”

Kollaborator’s brows shot up instantly. “You stole your father’s crown when you were three?” he shrilled, shocking Kildare.

“That’s a lot of power,” he said, relieved. “Find out from the Bellatore if we can all

return together. We have six and a half days to prepare before Hell's Spawn arrives."

Josie's pulse raced as the baby in her womb jerked around.

She pulled Kaos's hand to her, holding it to the miracle.

After seeing he'd been aroused during that weird sex storm earlier, she realized he might be able to hear and feel.

She began talking to him and touching him. Humming to him. And to the baby.

"He's growing by the hour," she whispered to him, stroking his perfect forehead. "Our son will be strong and good and beautiful like you. And stubborn like me," she said with a light smile. "I'm not scared," she thought to tell him.

"And I was thinking of names. I noticed all the Kings have K names and so want to keep it in the family. What do you think of Konstantine? With a K of course. We could call him Kon for short," she said with a light giggle.

"To mock any and all things in heaven and on earth that would try to touch him." She leaned closer, pressing kisses along his face.

"I like having you stuck here with me," she barely murmured.

"Imprisoned to all the thoughts in my head."

Her heart clenched as it always did when she thought of what he'd done and why.

He was still growing, she'd remembered. Learning.

He'd barely had a day with her. "You gave yourself to protect me and I want you to know I would do the same for you. And our son. But I'm not a fool to think you would not harm our child if you thought it meant to harm me.

But...if you can have this evil you fear living inside you and choose to be good, then so can he?

We can teach him. Together. With our other Kings.

Uncle Krave and Kildare and Uncle Reuban. "

She twisted a strand of his hair around her finger.

"I have so many questions. He's growing so quickly.

I wonder how quickly he will grow after he's born.

Will he be a genius like his father in one hour?

Will he be beautiful like you? I think that's going to be impossible to accomplish since you've used up all the beauty in the world.

" She sucked in a breath. "That was a big kick." She pressed his hand to her womb. "He's lusty for life like his father."

She stroked her fingers over his silky skin, softened in sleep. That's all it was, a deep sleep. "I know you're healing," she whispered, petting his face and snuggling her own against it. "I can't wait to kiss you again. To feel your lips...all over me."

A dense ache filled every part of her as she let herself relive what he felt like.

“You are overwhelmingly magnificent, Kaos. And you are my husband. And I love you more than my life. I’m in agony without you,” she gasped, tears falling.

“I’m in agony that you don’t know, you might not know this.

You have to live. If you die, all that is worth anything inside me will die with you.

I won't survive. You are the air my soul breathes, I don’t know why or how this happened, but it has.

And I can’t live without air, can I?” she strained around the sob lodged in her chest.

She angled her head at hearing Krave and that Bellatore’s companion murmuring.

“The Bellatore is a divine being and even she must have proper nourishment,” the dark man mumbled.

“Get everything you think she might need then.”

Her heart fluttered at Krave’s worried voice.

“What will you do once it is born?” the Bellatore’s servant whispered.

“I have no idea anymore. We’re waiting for Reuban to do whatever he was supposed to do for the Bellatore, so we know what’s next.”

“I see that I am permitted to ask how will you know?”

“How do you know you’re permitted to ask, what does that mean?”

“It means before I could see I was not permitted to ask certain things and now I am

permitted.”

“What changed?”

“I do not know,” the man muttered. “Something with the Bellatore and this... Kollaborator King.”

“Hopefully something good.”

Josie smiled at Kaos’s ear. “Do I smell romance in the air? For Reuban?” She pressed her lips against his temple, finding it difficult to keep from always touching some part of him. She felt like she was a lifeline to him as much as she was to their baby.

“I forgot to say we don’t have to name him Konstantine.

In fact, I want you to name him. And as soon as Reuban and the Bellatore get back, I’ll learn everything important regarding all of this.

I know these circumstances are... the understatement of rare, and as a doctor, I know I have to prepare however I can, to ensure me and the baby are safe during whatever this procedure will look like.

I don’t even know if it will be a common birth.

You came in a giant shell ,” she recalled in soft awe, then smiled.

“I wonder what color his eyes will be. I wonder if he’ll have our other King’s traits since you’re fused.

Fire and divine wind and... mind blowing lust. Ew.

Let's call it love for our son. Mind blowing love and pleasure. ”

Her mind switched gears. “I'm still wondering who or what the cards are.

Was all of this supposed to happen? Who is the Ace of Diamonds this time?

And the Queen of Spades? I think maybe I'm the Queen of Spades for some reason.

And that maybe our baby is the Wild Card.

But who is the Jack of Clubs and the King of Hearts?

And what must they do?” She planted kisses along his face with each question.

“I do hope you can hear me. And know how very much I love you and am desperate to have you back. But... take all the time you need. While hurrying back to me.”

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The second the vehicle came to a stop, the back door blew completely off with a blast of red fire followed by Kildare shifting into his dragon form.

“Something’s wrong,” Bellatore gasped the obvious, flying out the vehicle and sprinting toward the hill as Reuban finally escaped his seatbelt.

He ran to the top of the hill and forgot all about the sharp decent on the other side. Two cartwheels and a somersault later got him to the base, right as a scream split the air.

“Josie!” Reuban scrambled to his feet and raced into the hut. “What’s wrong!” he yelled, his powers gushing out everywhere.

“She’s having the demon!” Krave shouted.

Josie screamed Reuban’s name, and her commanding power ripped through his muscles. He shoved through the giant man blocking his path.

“I need to destroy it!” Bellatore demanded.

“Don’t let them hurt our son!” Josie cried between a long scream.

“Move!” Reuban roared, yanking Larena away from their Queen, the single word blasting everybody several feet back.

“Reuban!” Josie screeched, his heart hammering his chest.

“She’ll die!” Bellatore yelled at him.

“Kildare!” Reuban called. “Krave! Help me!”

They both hurried to him as Reuban knelt next to Josie.

“Tell us, Kollaborator!” Kildare half begged.

“Keep her alive,” he ordered, waiting for his powers to show him exactly what needed to happen. He only knew that he knew and was waiting for what the fuck it was that he knew!

“Krave, I need your winds,” Kildare urged.

“Take it,” he gushed, heaving. “Hold on Little Saint,” he called. “We’re here.”

“You must not allow it to live, Reuban!” Bellatore ordered behind him.

“Shut up, Larena!” he yelled, eyeing Josie then Krave and Kildare. “He must live.”

“The head is there,” Kildare declared, shaken by the sight.

“Use your fire to pull him out, King,” Reuban ordered, his voice quaking with fear and power. “Josie,” he called loudly. “You need to give us a good push. Krave, hold her hand.”

“Brother, control your winds,” Kildare begged.

The child’s cries shattered the air, his tiny body contorting as Kildare held him, his

flames flickering and twisting with panic.

His gaze snapped between the child and Josie, her skin pale and slick with sweat.

Krave knelt next to her, gripping her hand in both of his, tethering her life to his feral winds.

“Give him to me,” Josie choked, her voice weak and trembling.

Reuban’s powers shook as he joined with Krave and Kildare to heal Josie.

“Please,” Reuban begged her. “You’re not strong enough.”

“Give him... to me.” The command was broken in a whisper but seared through them all.

Kildare glanced helplessly at Reuban, his own power raging.

“Give him to her,” Reuban said, his words strained but firm.

Kildare lowered the child into Josie’s waiting arms and the infant’s cries softened the moment his cheek pressed against her chest, as if the nearness of her heartbeat was enough to ground him.

Josie wept softly, stroking the child’s dark hair, her trembling lips pressing words of comfort. “You’re safe. You’re safe with me, my beautiful boy. No one’s going to hurt you.”

Bellatore’s voice slashed from the other side of the sheet barrier. “He’s not safe, daughter. He’s a danger to everything we’ve built.”

Reuban's gaze snapped when he felt her power cutting more than the air. She was hurting the baby. "Enough Larena," he ordered. "Do not speak another word."

Bellatore's breaths shuddered out and Reuban felt the angelic rage that demanded the elimination of the child at all costs. "You all knew what Kaos intended when he created that child," she said in an ancient language. "You knew he meant for it to be destroyed. Yet you sit here pretending—"

"Not here!" Reuban ordered in the same tongue, the power of his command rippling through the air. "We need to all discuss this outside."

Krave shot him a wild-eyed look. "I can't leave her."

Reuban's gaze locked onto Krave's, his own power surging with brutal intensity. "You will have to trust me on this one and come with me. Right now."

He'd strapped as much authority as he could to his words and delivered it in the bond of their brotherhood and friendship. His red eyes flared with anger, but he recognized the critical demand in the message.

"Five minutes," Krave bit out, pressing a kiss to Josie's forehead before hurrying out.

"You too," he said to Kildare as he exited the makeshift barrier. "And you," he said to Larena, snatching her hand and pulling her with him.

"Now you will explain," Bellatore demanded, her voice raw and brittle when he led them a short distance from the hut. "Why do you insist on letting that thing live, when you know what it is."

Reuban pinned her with his gaze, his fury slipping.

“Because he is not the kind of evil you believe him to be.” He regarded Krave and Kildare.

“Kaos created the child to save Josie. To purge the darkness from himself and put it into a vessel that could be destroyed. He was willing to die with that child to protect her. But our Queen said no,” he said right at Lenora. “And we’ve all obeyed her command.”

“That child is a walking apocalypse,” Larena whispered to him. “Kaos poured every shred of his corruption into it.”

“Yes, he was given the darkness in Kaos,” Reuban agreed, his words biting back. “But that’s not all he holds.”

“What do you mean, Kollaborator,” Kildare demanded.

“That the child inherited all of us. I felt it,” he assured, eyeing the Kings. “Krave’s winds. Kildare’s fire.” He looked at Larena. “He even bears your gift. The purity of your protection of mothers has somehow passed to him.”

Bellatore’s eyes narrowed on him. “How do you know this?”

“Because I am the Kollaborator King,” Reuban reminded her with a pointed emphasis.

“I see what others can’t. The child’s power is not just his own, it’s a tapestry woven from all of us.

And right now, that power is fighting to tear him apart.

That’s why he appears human.” He regarded all of them. “He’s hiding because he’s

afraid.”

“What does it fear?” Kildare wondered, his words cautious.

Reuban loaded his tongue with the fullness of his power then muttered carefully, “He fears us. Those who seek to destroy him because they see only the monster in him. He’s known it from the moment of conception and has known it to this very second because he’s part of us.

The important question now is understanding why this happened. ”

He aimed the question at Kildare who immediately picked up what he was very carefully laying down. “What are you saying?”

He nodded once. “Exactly what you think I am.” Reuban regarded Krave, now finally tuning in as well. “You’re saying this was supposed to happen?”

“I’m saying it is happening, and right now, the child is battling for his existence. We have the power to destroy him or help him, and we are not destroying him,” he said, right at Larena before regarding Kildare and Krave. “We are helping him. We are supposed to help him.”

The revelation fully dawned in Kildare first then Krave who hurried back to the hut right as the Paladin’s voice cracked the air. “Help me!”

Their powers clashed as they bolted for the doorway, sharp dread cutting through Reuban.

Krave’s roar shattered the air. “NO!”

Kildare’s fire disintegrated the sheet, revealing Josie on the bed, lifeless with her

arms out at her sides, eyes vacant and staring while Krave held her face, begging her to wake up.

“Where is the child!” Bellatore demanded as Reuban felt Krave’s winds building into a bomb.

“Kildare, control him!” Reuban hurried, looking for signs of the baby right as the heavenly King’s wings erupted to subdue Krave’s agony.

“We must find him!” Bellatore ordered, hurrying out the hut.

Reuban turned all around, sensing something nearby. He finally recognized it around the roar of both Kings. Fear. Clawing against his powers, trying to hide itself within the fragmented remains of Kaos’s void.

Reuban turned to the bed where Josie lay, moving closer. He felt it again, a splintered thing, desperately trying to make itself small.

“Remove him!” Reuban ordered Kildare, when Krave’s winds pummeled his ability to sense and hear.

Instantly, Kildare flew him through the roof, leaving the hut in a sudden silence.

Reuban lowered to the floor, stretching his power into the shadows under the bed.

He narrowed his focus at the darkness, then stilled.

He blinked at the impossibility. Pressed into the far wall, not an infant, but a child of nearly five years old.

Reuban’s seal instantly informed him of the being’s incredible makeup.

Where Kaos had evolved into a genius within an hour, his acceleration was a physical one. And much more.

Reuban's pulse thrummed with additional knowledge and awareness as he very carefully threaded his words with whatever authority he possessed, and called to him, gently. "Come to me, little one."

The sound of his breaths reached him, sharp and scared, his small body locked in place.

"Nobody will hurt you. I'm here to protect you."

His breaths suddenly slowed in the darkness. "Are you... Uncle Reuban?"

Reuban's heart lurched and squeezed at the little voice and the careful way he spoke each syllable. "I am. How do you know my name?"

He waited in the silence, noting an immediate drop in his fear. "Mother told me you were safe. W-where are... my fathers?"

Fathers?

"Mother says they will protect me but... I fear them."

His pitiful little voice brought a sizzle to the King's seal on his back, then promptly got loaded with every manner of wrath to meet any threat formed against him. "You have nothing to fear. Your mother is right, we are all here to protect you."

"What about..." his little breaths quickened for many seconds. "Kaos?" he barely whispered, his name stirring a great anxiety in his tiny body.

“Kaos is my brother,” Reuban said, infusing the words with undeniable peace and truth. “He’s as kind as a teddy bear and won’t ever harm you.”

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His fear twisted inside of Reuban. “But... I... hurt Mother.” His words fragmented between shallow breaths. “He will be very angry... because I am not to hurt Mother. I did not know I hurt her. I never want to hurt her.”

The seal demanded immediate ramifications as if his fear was an enemy. Given his makeup, it likely was. “Would you trust me and allow me to hold you?”

“I’m... a big boy, now,” he breathed, the words sounding scripted, making Reuban wonder how aware of himself he was. “Mother said I am to grow fast like... Kaos.”

Why didn’t he refer to Kaos as his father?

“Uncle Reuban?” he whispered, voice thin and shaking.

“What is it, little one?”

Whatever his question was, weighed very heavily on his being and took him many seconds to voice it. “Do I... have to be a monster?”

Reuban’s heart splintered with his fear. “Little one, do you trust me?”

“Yes,” he said after a moment.

“Then come to me. It’s important that I touch you.”

“Why?” he asked, curious.

“Because I have gifts in my hands that will make you brave. And to answer your question, no. You indeed do not have to be a monster.”

By now, Reuban made out his shape and appearance. Alabaster skin like Kaos, clumpy appearing black hair and big dark eyes that shimmered with his emotions, moving between multiple shades of red and green. Reuban realized then... like his father Kaos, he too was the first of his kind.

The moment they returned to the hut, Krave realized he and Kildare couldn't move.

Reuban. He'd placed some kind of power-net all around them and one wrong move meant... something Krave couldn't even identify or care to when every part of his being was in a perpetual state of shattering.

“Do not move,” Reuban called out, the words tight. “I found the child. I have him and he's afraid of both of you, so do not move until I say.”

Kildare's fire wings wrapped Krave in a prison when his winds kicked up again, ready to obliterate on reflex. “What is going on, Kollaborator?” Kildare called out, his flames chaotic and unstable.

“He grows quickly like Kaos,” he announced. “Only physically. He says both of you are his fathers. And Kaos. And he would like me to tell you that he wants you to help him... to learn how not to be a monster. I told him both of you would love nothing more than to teach him that.”

The power in Reuban's words was law, not suggestion, and both of them felt it in the divine bond between them.

On top of that, his tone acted like a dial, turning both their powers down to a level Krave had never recalled feeling.

The abnormal gentleness clung to his mind like a sticky skin, making him want to fling it off.

The only reason they'd returned was because Kildare reminded him that they were part of something larger than death, and their faith was a blade they could not permit to be dulled under any circumstances.

"We're here to assist," Kildare answered while muttering in annoyance, "What is this sticky darkness?"

"It's a blindfold over your perception," Reuban half warned like he could make it permanent if he wanted to. "Are you ready to meet the Little King?"

Little King? Five minutes ago, he wasn't ready to do anything but kill. But if this Little King was part of The Hand, then he was ready to play him however he was supposed to be.

"Krave?" Reuban called with a testing tone.

"You have my word I... will not be angry."

The black goo in their minds slowly cleared to Reuban standing a few feet before them, holding an actual child on his hip that was larger and more human looking than he'd imagined.

He wore only a piece of sheet over his midsection and his head lay on Reuban's shoulder, thin arms and legs clinging, wary, galactical colored eyes contrasting sharply against his Kaos-white skin.

“He’s grown at least four inches since I found him,” Reuban said quietly as the boy continued to stare intently at Krave.

“Why is he only staring at me?”

Kildare’s fire gave him a mocking ass-pat. “He clearly likes you more.”

“Can he talk?” Krave asked, realizing his nose reminded him of Josie’s. “With words?”

“He can,” Reuban said.

Krave’s tongue tied up with a list of questions and how to ask them without pissing off his protector.

“Do you know how old you are?” Kildare went first.

He gave a nod without lifting his head. “I’m six years old and forty-five days. In four hours and thirty-two minutes, I will be fully grown.”

His knowledge stunned them while his voice stirred something in Krave. It didn’t sound like Josie, but he spoke like her. “He speaks...”

“Like his mother,” Reuban said, in the same awe. “He’s learned her cadence, her enunciation. Every syllable is sculpted with her precise measure from his conception. She talked a lot to him.”

Hunger stabbed him in the chest at the memory of the adorable little motor-mouth human trait.

“Remarkable,” Kildare said in awe.

The boy informed them with mild interest in his voice, “I am learning many things.”

“What are you learning?” Kildare asked.

“Measurements.”

His small mouth formed the word with precision and Krave noticed the curvature on his upper lip was identical to Josie.

Something in his wind and blood beckoned him a step closer. “And what are you measuring?” Krave asked, his tone softened by wonder while captivated with his lips.

“I’m measuring if I’m worth the blood they have spent to make me.”

The words were a sword in his chest as he watched him squirm out of Reuban’s arms and walk up to him, angling his head up. “You are measuring like me.”

Krave was still stumped by his first statement while realizing there was something he knew intimately in the child. He lowered to his knees, getting eye level with him. “What am I measuring?”

He lowered his eyes to his chest then brought them back up. “The pain you’ll require yourself to suffer to deserve Mother’s love.”

A chill passed through Krave’s winds as he stared at him. Even without contemplating it, he knew his observation was perfectly accurate. Then it hit him. He smelled her blood in him. The sudden craving for it sent him leaning back, right as the boy raised his wrist to him.

“You can have some if you want,” he offered, his perfect articulation wrinkled by the newness of performing speech.

Krave's heart squeezed as he realized what stood before him. Not just a new being, but a part of him, a part of her. Of them.

He leaned back toward him, closer to his pure, curious gaze. "What else are you measuring, Little King?" he asked softly, his fingers reaching up and touching the strand of long hair next to his perfect little face.

"My power and authority," he said, his voice breaking a little on the words. Krave marveled over what he'd said. He wanted to look at Reuban to see what he thought of them, but he was too busy realizing he was growing from a baby into a man and Josie was missing it.

"Your mother loves you very much," Krave said quietly, daring to stroke the skin along his face as he nodded with knowing.

"She gave her blood for me," he murmured. "And Father too." He lowered his gaze, his tone changing when he spoke about Kaos. Like he knew that one gave blood to save him, and the other to kill him.

Krave realized how the boy... his son...

felt about that, and it punched the breath from his lungs.

"Your Father had no idea about you," Krave swore softly, his winds blowing gently over his words.

"And if he had known, I promise you with all the divine blood in my body that he would tear a million galaxies apart to protect you."

Kildare slowly knelt next to him now too. "Do you see this?" he asked, holding his finger up.

The boy watched, his eyes almost crossing in earnest as he studied the mesmerizing fire leaping and dancing from Kildare's fingertip. "This is Sir Harold. And he told me that you have a friend he wants to meet very soon."

The boy's brows tugged together, his eyes suddenly swirling with green and red as they locked on Kildare in wonder.

"Sir Harold knows Mother," he marveled. "And loves her very much." He slowly reached up and put his hand on Kildare's face.

"As much as you do." He kept his hand on him, his little fingers twitching before they lowered. "What friend does Sir Harold mean?"

Kildare smiled slowly. "He says he's sleeping in your bones. And will wake up soon."

The boy's gaze remained fixed on Kildare, as if still processing. Then his chest jerked with a sharp breath, his perfect mouth opening with his widened eyes. "I feel it! I feel it right where you said." He jerked his gaze up to Reuban. "He's in my bones!"

Reuban chuckled then knelt next to the boy, the sudden concern in his face bringing a tension Krave didn't like. "What other things are you measuring, Little King?"

His chin slowly lowered till it touched his chest. "Distance... depth... weight and time."

They all exchanged brief looks, Reuban's expression strained with something close to fear. "Do you know why you're measuring those things?" he carefully asked.

The boy nodded but didn't say more, his gaze still lowered.

“Does it have anything to do with you measuring the worth of the blood your mother and father spent?”

He nodded again, without hesitation.

“Are you allowed to tell us why you’re measuring those things?”

He stared at Reuban for many seconds then scratched his cheek with a slow shake of his head. “It’s not safe,” he said in a tiny voice, his fear reaching straight into Krave’s blood and strangling him.

Reuban pulled him in his arms and hugged him tightly. “Do not fear the unknowns Little King.”

The boy hugged Reuban’s neck. “The Dark One is not kind and good like you and my fathers,” he whispered, his breaths shaking. “And... he wants to make me into a monster.”

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The sadness and terror bit through Krave as Kildare's wings emerged, forming a warm band around all of them.

"We will surely not allow it," his heavenly brother vowed.

"For you are our son," he whispered, his wings growing firmer and hotter around them.

"Any weapon of darkness that dares come against the heart of the Kings—against you—will face our wrath in a war like no other."

The boy's breaths heaved and stuttered before he turned and wrapped his arms around Krave's neck, flooding his winds with breathtaking power.

"I am not measuring the battles coming or the bloodshed, Father," he whispered then quickly wrapped his arms around Kildare's neck, now.

"I'm measuring the worth of what Mother and Father gave the whole world.

" He flung himself on Reuban then, weeping fully.

"And what I must do to ensure it will not be wasted."

Divine power erupted between them at this confession—Krave's wind, Kildare's fire, Reuban's authority and the powers of Kaos and Josie infused into their son.

Reuban's breath released sharply as a light slowly filled the space between all of

them.

“Raviel,” Kildare whispered.

Krave closed his eyes and the single card from the last hand appeared in his mind.

Agony shredded him as he stared at the face of the shorn woman that stood halfway between light and darkness. No longer the angel of mothers—but Josie. Their Lost Saint.

“The Bellatore’s sacrifices for all of motherhood was manifested in Josie’s choice,” Raviel’s voice whispered in their mind.

“In the face of great darkness and evil, our Lost Saint boldly demanded life. Mercy. And love. She made a mother’s choice.

And that choice gave birth to a new hope for humanity.

A child of Heaven and Earth. A vessel of wrath and mercy.

A flame bound by will and for the will of mankind. ”

Raviel’s light softened, moving around the boy. “He is not a sword of God. And he is not the full fury of Hell. He is the choice ... made flesh . And his eternal name—is Kross.”

Reuban silently summoned Kildare and Krave outside the hut while riding the razor’s edge of a cognitive collapse.

Once alone, he plugged them in to what he was feeling with the child and judging by the jolt in their beings, he succeeded.

In the hut, their powers had buffered the potency of the boy's agony—all perks from being fused by three Knight Kings, a Lost Saint and the Angel of Mothers—but they needed to understand it with the same intimacy that Reuban did.

“He'll need clothes,” Reuban muttered after he was done saturating them, glancing back at the hut. “Adult clothes.”

Please may I lay with Mother before I finish growing?

A sharp breath escaped him as he closed his eyes, barely containing the pain of his heartbreaking request. The only thing connecting him to his very short childhood was his dead mother, and a dead father, whom he feared, while wanting with all his big heart to love.

“I don't understand,” Krave said, pacing. “How is he supposed to survive what he carries?”

Good. He felt it.

“Raviel is coming tonight,” Kildare reminded, his wings blazing with the same crushing anguish.

“What did he mean about measuring his authority and powers?” Krave asked.

Reuban released a sharp breath with that question. “From what I could gather—because he's got a galaxy thick shield—he intends on waking his Mother and Father.”

Krave and Kildare came to instant halts and Reuban nodded about it.

“Yes, you heard exactly right.”

“He can do that?” Krave’s whisper came like a prayer.

Reuban slowly widened his eyes at him. “Oh yes.”

Krave slowly dropped to his knees, covering his face, breaths heaving. “Fuck,” he gasped, hands sliding down to his lap.

“Without a shadow of a doubt,” Reuban added with firm nods.

“What do you know of his powers?” Kildare wondered. “I can barely see them.”

“I see pieces,” Reuban whispered, frustrated. “Enough to know he has a chilling amount.” He eyed both of them. “He needs us,” he stressed. “Do you both understand what I’m saying?”

“I understand the risks any being with great power and free will, poses,” Krave assured.

“His bonding powers are otherworldly,” Kildare said, still in awe.

“Which is exactly what terrifies me,” Reuban stressed. “His bond is his heart, and that is bigger than this entire fucking planet. That means everything and everybody he cares about—which will be everything and everybody—will be leverage used against him.”

“Raviel will tell us what he’ll need,” Kildare said, his wings out and twitching along the ground.

“Your woman is here,” Krave said, snapping Reuban out of his thoughts.

“Good, she can take me to town. We’ll get him clothes. I’ll call you when we’re returning—he should be fully grown by then. Stay right with him,” Reuban ordered, heading toward a panicked, empty-handed Larena. “And call me if anything happens,” he hurried over his shoulder.

“What is going on?” she demanded as he neared, sensing what was in his mind.

“We found the boy.”

She shot past him and Reuban drew a lungful of authority. “Larena. Come here.”

She jolted to a halt and gasped, head whipping left, eyes stabbing into him.

“I said... come here.”

Her jaw clenched as she physically fought to disobey, rebelliously testing his powers, daring to look for weaknesses.

Really.

He wrapped a mental fist around the Sinner’s Bond and yanked, turning his hostile prisoner into a projectile that slammed both of them to the ground.

“Fuck,” he groaned as she fought to move off him, grinding on his dick in the process. His cock thanked her with a full-on erection, which earned him her infuriated gasp.

“Tell me what’s going on,” she shot out. “I can tell something’s happened with you. Why are you groping me!”

“I’m... looking for a release on this fucking hold I have you in.”

“Well it’s not on my ass,” she guaranteed with much gasping.

He dug his fingers into the tight flesh, eyeing her. “Well, your ass is grinding on my dick and unless you want me to fuck you right here on the ground, you’ll let me figure out how to disconnect.”

“Disconnect what, is there a literal chain around me?”

God, she was killing him.

Reuban moved his hands to her face and pulled her mouth to his, kissing her.

The shock to their system created a crack but the dark lust shoved in it before he could use it to escape.

Five seconds of that unholy fire had her pinned under him with his tongue stabbing and his teeth biting into his soft angel.

The Sinner’s Bond demanded he punish his delectable prisoner with unspeakable pleasure, and he couldn’t think of why he shouldn’t.

“Reuban...stop!” she begged right in his mouth, punctuating the weak plea with a moan that brought his fingers clamping on her ass.

In a frantic final attempt, he swore to the law in his blood that he’d carry out her judgment while on their shopping spree and that appeased the lusty overlord immediately.

He managed to pull Larena to her feet, getting his hands slapped when he tried to dust

her off.

“What is wrong with you?” she strained, her raging arousal refusing to stay hidden behind her righteous indignation.

He snatched her hand and tugged her with him. “I’ll tell you everything when we’re in the vehicle. Pull away again,” he half begged, “and I’ll stop and sketch your coming discipline right in your slick cunt with just one finger. Then I’ll make you thank me for the fucking love note.”

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The clearing held a stillness that hadn't settled yet. Krave stood near the edge with his arms folded, staring at the path Reuban and Larena had taken, the wind inside him at a low idle. It no longer pushed and shoved at him but waited. Restrained. But not controlled. Not hardly.

"She's missing it."

Krave angled his head over his shoulder at Kildare pacing as he eyed the hut.

"Missing what?" Krave turned, eyeing the restless flicker of his fire just beneath the skin at his neck.

"Him. The boy." He leveled a simmering gaze at him for a few seconds. "Her son."

The term lodged in his chest while the unspoken things made it burn. That he was their son. And he was lying with his dead mother. Their dead wife.

"Do you think he's done... measuring?" Krave asked, holding him down with his stare.

Kildare barely angled his head at him. "We could ask," he carefully suggested.

A flame fluttered at his pulse and Krave's winds stirred in response. Their powers were like illegitimate lovers now.

"It's only been fifteen minutes."

Kildare turned his gaze to the door of the hut. “Well... if he’ll be full grown in four more hours and he was six when he went down for a nap, then... he’s growing thirty-six days a minute.” Kildare brought a quirked brow back to him.

“He’s seven and a half now?” Krave marveled, getting Kildare’s nod. “So in fifteen more minutes, he’ll be—”

“Eight and half,” Kildare said, crossing his arms over his chest and eyeing the stone abode again.

“What are you thinking?” Krave asked, the stir of his fire tickling his winds.

“I’m thinking we should capture his childhood. Or what’s left of it.” He eyed him again, this time, purpose sharpening his gaze. “My phone is in the vehicle. I’ll be right back.”

A massive dust storm slapped him in the face as Kildare shot out like a rocket. “Okay,” Krave muttered, swiping the dust away with a hand while wondering what he could possibly need his phone for. Anybody that could be reached by such a means had absolutely no value to their situation.

Kildare landed behind him, kicking up a dust storm again as he approached with his phone, clearing the air with a single flap of his wings before tucking them into his skin. “Video,” he announced, showing Krave the screen.

“For?”

He stood next to Krave, holding the camera up. “To capture what’s left of his childhood,” he reiterated. He flashed his perfect grin at the screen.

“Any logic to go with that re-run?”

He gave Krave confused brows. “Because she’ll want to see what she missed,” he slowly articulated right at him, holding the phone back up before them. “Say hello to our Lost Saint,” he instructed, making Krave wonder.

“You know something I don’t, brother?”

He lowered the camera and muttered quietly near his ear. “I know she’s not supposed to die. Not now. And while he’s growing, we can capture memories for her and speak to him while we’re at it.”

Krave realized. “You think he might be done measuring.”

“Would be something natural to ask while gathering memories.”

Krave hurried for the hut, a flaming red wing hitting his chest and jerking him back. “What are you going to say?” he whispered.

“What do you mean what am I going to say?” he wondered back quietly.

“You want to video him sleeping next to his dead mother?” he said with silent exasperation.

Krave shoved his wing off, glancing into the hut. “So we wake him up, tell him we want to talk.”

“About what? We need some kind of plan.”

Krave snatched the phone from him and held it up. “What you said is the plan, we want to get memories for her.”

Before he could protest, Krave hurried in only to be sledgehammered by the sight of

his Little Saint and the boy's skinny limbs curled up tight against her dead body—scared and seeking warmth in just the memory of her fire.

His steps slowed as he raised the phone up, careful to only video the boy, now inches bigger in every direction.

Kildare's hand suddenly slammed down on his shoulder in a painful grip, jolting his winds awake. His mouth pressed at his ear. "Kaos is gone."

Krave whipped his gaze to the corner, his powers swirling with Kildare's fire.

"I woke him."

They both spun back to little Kross, now sitting, sad eyes staring at them before lowering. "He asked me to."

"Where is he?" Kildare asked carefully.

The boy stood and made his way out of the hut with them close on his heels. Outside he looked around, but his eyes were closed. "He's looking for Raviel." His eyes found Krave's. "He's... also measuring."

The sad defeat in his tone caused their powers to jerk erratically. "What's wrong, Little King?" Kildare asked.

"He's angry."

They stared at him, his little gait shaky as he headed toward the large oak at the edge of the clearing, fighting to hold his makeshift sheet-skirt around him. The sight of it brought a protective instinct that Krave felt in both of them.

“I’ll go search for him,” Kildare said when they finally exchanged looks.

He turned his fiery gaze to the boy now sitting cross legged under the tree, head bowed with more power than any being had a right to carry let alone one that bore the frailties of humanity.

“Go talk to him,” Kildare said before shooting into the air like a pissed off missile.

Krave resisted the pounce of his winds that hungered to follow Kildare’s fire into whatever confrontation coming. He made his way to the boy and sat next to him without a word, letting the silence reveal to him what words couldn’t.

“He’s angry that I’m alive and she’s dead,” the boy said, his voice tight. “He wants to kill me, but he’s not allowed.”

The quiver in his final words brought spikes in Krave’s blood, but when those big tears spilled over his cheeks, it was officially fucking war against that black, throne-sucking whelp.

He scooped the boy up and cradled him in his lap, holding his head to his shoulder while rage boiled his powers. “Nobody is touching you,” Krave forced out quietly, holding him tighter when the boy’s sob burst through his lungs.

“He thinks I’m a monster,” Kross choked between jagged breaths, his confusion cutting deep.

“That’s because he’s a moron,” Krave said between clenched teeth, one arm curled protectively around him.

“He’s not,” Kross wept, too brilliant and innocent to recognize insult.

“He reads the room before he enters it. He mirrors words back—to open people.” He sniffed between small, shaking huffs.

“He can shift tone... like temperature. Just enough to make you question your own,” he carried on, with undeserving admiration in his voice.

“He doesn’t raise his voice to be heard,” Kross added, barely above a whisper. “He modulates it. To be obeyed.”

Krave snorted lightly, brushing his hand over the back of Kross’s head. “Modulate,” he muttered through his teeth. “Let’s see how he modulates after I teach his voice box the impact of my fist.”

Kross blinked up at him, puzzled. “But his vocal control isn’t anatomical,” he explained through a snuffle, utterly sincere. “It’s neurological. Pre-trained modulation algorithms. You’d have to disrupt his prefrontal cortex.”

“Perfect,” Krave growled. “I’ll microwave his frontal lobe and hit him with a tuning fork until he apologizes to you in Morse code.”

Kross sniffed again, his breaths staggered. “But... that wouldn’t work either. He has neural shielding. You’d need a harmonic destabilizer, or maybe a sound field generator—if you could get close enough.”

Krave stared at him. Then, with absolute seriousness, “Then I’ll carve symbols into a stick and tape it to his spine. And hire a banshee choir to scream until his teeth fall out. In alphabetical order.”

Kross pulled back and blinked up at him. Krave held his perplexed gaze before a tiny laugh snuck out from between his heartbreak.

Krave's entire chest loosened at the remarkable sound. "That scientifically accurate enough for you, professor?"

Kross wiped his cheek, still smiling faintly. "...What sort of stick?"

Krave went dead serious. "Eldritch birch. Grows once a century under moons that shouldn't exist." He angled his head, peeking at his sobered little face. "Very exclusive."

A small smile settled on his perfect lips as he leaned in, just a little, and rested his forehead against Krave's collarbone.

Krave went still, then curled his arm tighter, holding him like something sacred. "You're not a monster," he murmured, voice barely above a breath. "Now, let me hear you say it." He tucked his hair behind his ear then traced the small shell, waiting.

"I'm not a monster," he finally mumbled against his chest.

Krave scoffed. "I didn't quite hear you."

His fingers flexed against Krave's neck before he repeated it a little louder.

"Now tell the trees," Krave instructed, firmly.

"The trees?" he worried. "Are they afraid of me too?"

Krave stilled and angled his face at his upturned one. "No," he assured firmly. "Not even a little."

His brows furrowed. "Father says I'm not safe."

Krave eased him away a little more, studying him. “What else did he say to you?”

The green flecks in his big eyes overtook the blood red, making them shimmer. “That... I mustn’t wake mother until I’m fully grown.”

“Why?” Krave asked, his heart soaring at hearing he fucking could.

The boy stared at him for many seconds, his breaths turning shallow before casting his eyes to the right.

“He fears...” he barely whispered, finally returning his compassionate gaze on him, swimming in tears.

His mouth opened and closed as he struggled with an agony that crippled Krave. “He fears I may hurt her soul.”

The wind in Krave surged through him as he enclosed him in a tight embrace.

“I think he’s right,” the boy confessed against his chest between hot breaths. “I hurt people when I don’t even mean to. I’m... I’m hurting you now.”

Ah fuck.

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“It’s not a bad pain, Little King,” Krave breathed, his voice shaking against the shell of his ear.

“It’s the kind of ache that only belongs to gods—those burdened with a power that could end worlds.

.. or cradle them.” He held him tighter, grounding him with his wind.

“That’s you. Do you understand? That’s what you carry.

” He pressed his mouth to his head, stroking reverently in his hair.

“That’s your unbreakable, breathtaking love.

” He swallowed, forcing air through his burning lungs.

“It clings to life when all that is wicked demands it be burned.”

He pulled back just enough to meet his eyes, cradling his head in both hands.

“No matter how vast the darkness inside you, Little King—your love is profoundly deeper and far greater. And your mother is so proud of you. When you wake her, she will be filled with your power just as I am. And she will know that everything she gave to protect you was worth a million deaths.”

He threw himself against him, his tiny arms clinging tightly.

“I love Mother very much,” he wept, his body jerking with soft sobs.

“I never want to hurt her. I want to protect her. Just like I want to protect Uncle Reuban and the Angel of Mothers, and all the mothers that she longs to protect. That’s what I want, Father.

I want to protect all of you, but... what if I can’t? What if the monster won’t let me?”

“The monster has no authority over you, Little King,” he swore, his fingers gripping the back of his head tightly against him.

“Each of us, your fathers , will fight with you. That’s why you’re with us,” he said.

“So we can help you fight and defeat any evil that dares come against you. We will not fail, my Little King. We will be victorious, do you understand?”

He nodded quickly against his chest. “Father is coming now,” he whispered, his body locking up.

Krave stood with him right as the air kicked up with the arrival of Kaos and Kildare in the clearing, Kaos heading for the hut and Kildare making his way toward him.

Krave’s winds had formed a dense lattice of power around every inch of the boy while he eyed the hard lines on Kildare’s face for signs of what the fuck was going on.

“How is he?” Kildare only mouthed.

Krave shook his head in answer before whispering, “What’s going on? Did he find Raviel?”

“Nobody finds Raviel if he doesn’t want to be found,” Kildare informed.

Kross lifted his head from Krave’s shoulder. “I know where he is.”

Kildare angled a curious look at him. “You do?”

He nodded. “I always know where he is. Just like I know where Father is and both of you and Uncle Reuban and the Angel of Mothers.”

“That’s quite the jurisdiction,” Kildare mused at Krave.

“What did Kaos tell you?” Krave asked.

“He fears things.” Kildare eyed the boy and Krave nodded to show he understood what he couldn’t say.

“What did he need Raviel for?” Krave wondered.

“To verify.”

Krave caught the layers in Kildare’s tone, eyeing him for more details.

“Allow me to spend time with our Little King to assess his gifts and growth,” Kildare said, signaling he go see Kaos with a tilt of his head at the hut.

Great. He’d have to exchange words with the ungrateful cock-god. “You okay with that?” Krave asked the boy, getting his immediate nods.

He set him down, realizing he’d gained more inches. “Soon you’ll be as tall as me,” Krave murmured, rubbing his head.

“I’ll be seventy-six inches tall in two hours and sixteen minutes,” he informed quietly. “This will make me three inches taller than you,” he informed Krave, then, “two inches taller than you,” he said to Kildare. “And one inch taller than... Kaos.”

Krave met Kildare’s gaze, wondering if he noticed the change in names from father to just Kaos. Personally, Krave was glad. He deserved the demotion.

“How’s that for a growth spurt?” Krave squeezed Kross’s shoulder, discovering a layer of muscle padding the boney frame. “I’ll be right back. Be gentle with Kildare,” he said. “He’s delicate.”

This got big eyes promptly investigating Kildare as Krave grinned and walked off.

“Don’t listen to him,” Kildare said. “He’s all hot air.”

“Only when you’re around,” Kross educated, bringing Krave’s laugh.

“That’s right, hot pants,” Krave called. “You’re the heat up my ass.”

“Your fire saturates his pressure system,” Kross further explained. “Without it, he’s a cold front. With teeth,” he added, his fond tone tickling Krave.

“More like a down draft with denture drama,” Kildare shot back, smacking Krave’s ass with his fire.

“Now you’re just flirting,” Krave teased, just before entering the hut and looking around. His steps stilled at finding Kaos kneeling next to Josie, holding her hand against his chest with his head bowed.

The sight brought his winds to a low growl, slowly weaving its way through the thick blanket of power his broody brother filled the hut with.

With every step, an odd and unfamiliar sensation twisted itself around him. Standing behind him, Krave's gaze landed on Josie's still face and the sight of her, lying there dead, stole the strength from his legs.

He sank to his knees next to Kaos, realizing the usual mile thick wall he hid behind was gone. Or maybe it was the suffocating agony emanating from him that couldn't possibly be contained.

"She was never meant to survive the three of us."

Kaos's words slammed into his chest as Krave looked at him, winded. "What are you saying?"

His dark gaze moved toward him then paused between them. "Raviel will reveal the meaning tonight. Along with the boy's full purpose. And ours."

Krave's breaths were too thick as he stared down at Josie. "Do you realize that... the boy... sees you as his father?"

Kaos rubbed Josie's fingers over his lips with his eyes closed. "Because I am."

Krave wished he understood his mind in regard to the boy. "As in a real father," he whispered. "The kind that should love his son. The kind that our Queen would expect you to be to him."

"I will be whatever I must," he muttered, his answer one of defeat.

"She's not going to put up with begrudging duty," Krave whispered. "And neither will I. Neither will Kildare or even Reuban. I'm not sure what's coming but I'm damn sure that whatever it is, we've been designated as his personal ass-kickers to any threats—and his heart is included in that."

And for some mysterious reason, how you feel means everything to him. He's a part of her and you, and us, but especially you, I think. I mean, have you seen him? He's got her lips, her nose, her ears. And her huge heart."

"Giving him love requires that I have it to give," Kaos said quietly. "I have surrendered all that I am to protect My Queen."

"And she did the same for you. Her son's father—Mr. Perilous Pants." Krave leaned in, eyes narrowed. "You know damn well she's not going to let you brood around in that tacky doom bullshit, so you better find a way."

Kaos lowered her hand to the bed, keeping his hand over hers. "I am a vessel of wrath," he said. "Designed to fight in a war that demands a precise mix of this tacky doom bullshit. And unless otherwise commanded, I will continue being what I was created to be."

Mild disgust twisted Krave's mouth. "Good grief," he muttered. "A martyr with a God complex." He leaned in again, his anger catching up. "Listen... Wrath Daddy—this war you're so eager to fight isn't just about destroying. It's about protecting what survives it too."

Kaos didn't look at him.

Krave moved in closer. "Whatever weapon you think you are? It belongs to her. And if she decides to use you to plant flowers and braid the boy's hair, you better start sniffing daisies and learning to part straight lines.

" Krave watched his stone profile for a beat.

"Because if you don't... I swear to all that dwells on high, we'll pin you down and fuck the father into your pasty white ass with a cock made of fire and divine winds.

And I bet Reuban would happily use his servants touch to make sure you orgasm lullabies.

” He angled his head at him, silently daring him to resist.

Kaos finally turned his black eyes right on him as a flicker of something dark curled at the edge of his mouth. “You just got my cock hard.”

Krave’s grin came out to play as he eyed his brother before clapping him on the back.

“ There’s the black bastard I love so dearly .”

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Larena needed a human body to survive Reuban.

Being subject to him while in her angelic form was like being a lightning rod in a thunderstorm.

Every word, look and touch, reduced her to quivering, desperate molecules at the mercy of his lust. It wanted to punish her, and God help her, she wanted to beg for it.

She wasn't sure what was happening anymore. The archangel would have answers, but she wasn't sure she wanted to hear them.

"Can I stay in the vehicle?" she asked, breaking the thirty minutes of silence when they arrived at the mall.

He pulled into a parking spot and put the vehicle in park. The measured breath he took seemed to suck it directly from her own lungs. "Of course you can't," he said softly, turning in his seat.

"I don't know what help I could be, I tend to mothers, not men."

He shifted in his seat and placed his arm on the rest between them, leaning only a few inches toward her.

Her pulse galloped as she leaned toward the door.

"I think we need to establish some rules," he announced, his voice gentle. She hated his voice gentle. Because she loved it too much. She wanted to bathe in it while

naked. Oh God, the Sinner's Bond was overtaking her, changing her, corrupting her.

"Larena?"

Her gaze snapped to his. "Yes?"

His eyes lowered to her chest. "Why are you panting? Remember lying only makes things worse. For you."

He liked tormenting her. And she loved that he did. He wanted to slowly take her apart. She wanted him to hurry and do it. Slowly.

"I'm waiting," he murmured.

She fought with herself and her words. "I think you know why, you know what this... bond does."

"I have some ideas." He held out his hand, palm up. "Tell me while you hold my hand."

She sputtered out several gasps and looked around. "Shouldn't we go before they close?"

"We have an hour still." He flicked his fingers, beckoning for her hand.

She slammed it down on his palm with a huff then closed her eyes as his hot fingers closed over hers. So gently.

"You're panting more now."

"I don't like touching you," she shot out.

“Hmm,” he murmured, curious. “You just spoke the truth. Explain how you can not like me touching you while I know that you in fact love it. Ah... is that it? You don’t like it, you love it?”

There was no fighting him, no point. “Yes,” she forced out. “Happy?”

He released her hand and returned to his side, taking her breaths with him as she stole glances at his groin and all that he packed in his black slacks.

“I’m not happy, no,” he finally said, bringing a round of worry to mix with her insane arousal, causing her brain to glitch. “This Bond requires things of me that I don’t like.”

This sobered her enough to free her tongue, needing to know what exactly he didn’t like being required to do. “What... things?”

“It requires punishing .”

Her female parts fell to pieces at the way he spoke that one word. She couldn’t even care that he didn’t like it, she could only care about what that meant. “I don’t... understand.”

“The Sinner’s Bond requires disciplines and punishments,” he informed, his tone laced with a mix of dark knowing and hunger and... regret?

The idea of him disliking having to engage in sexual intimacy with her finally found purchase in her brain and produced a bitter bile in her stomach.

One after another, retorts hit her tongue then died in silence.

There was nothing to say about it. Nothing she could do to fix it. To stop it. To

change it.

“Right now, it says I need to discipline you and at this very moment, it’s hit me, exactly what is required of us.

Of me and of you. A daily dose of sexual disciplines that can go either way, me giving you pleasure in the form of punishment or discipline or requiring you to give me pleasure in the form of punishment or discipline. ”

He looked at her when her breath sucked in all by itself at his last words.

Her pleasuring him? Oh dear. Ohhhh God, she couldn’t breathe at the thought, the delicious thought of being...

made to pleasure him. “I...” she gasped, then cleared her throat, looking out the window.

“If I had to choose, I would prefer... the latter.”

“ Had to choose?” he wondered, his sex-syllables rubbing between her legs as his blue eyes wrecked into her. He held her tightly with his stare, teasing along her panic button. “What if I let you choose?”

“Same,” she blurted, not even considering what that implied.

But he considered exactly that, and whatever foolishness had just fallen from her lips now burned in his eyes. “You’d prefer I make you pleasure me than me pleasure you ?”

She had a full body malfunction, brain shorting out, mouth stuck open in shock, breaths coming and going like a panicked spirit stuck between realms. “Yes,” she

blasted, praying it was the right answer, the one that served the fire that blazed in his perfect gaze.

That gaze began to move down. Like a slow trickle of liquid fire. It stopped at her chest and the anticipation had her panting again. “It seems I am required to punish you first,” he murmured, gaze moving lower. “You’ll need to raise your skirt for me. And open your legs.”

The power in the command brought on a panic of many breaths. “I thought...” she sputtered as his hand covered her knee. “I don’t understand...”

His hand moved up, dragging the skirt with it. “It seems... it’s the way the law works with your sin, Larena,” he whispered. “Taking a kiss from a Kollaborator... demands punishment by the same pleasure.”

“Reuban,” she gasped, watching his hand move closer to the point of no return. “I didn’t... do it for...”

His fingers reached her panties, and he exhaled long and slow, barely pressing and feeling.

“I don’t know what will happen if you add lies to your sins,” he murmured, gliding his touch along the length of her.

“But it seems perfectly acceptable for me to hope for the very worst. Something that demands I bring these sounds you’re making.

That makes your body beg for it like it is.

Do it Larena,” he whispered on a hot shaky breath as he lifted the edge of her panties.

“Lie to me.” His fingers explored her naked flesh.

“Tell me how you didn’t do it because you craved it. ”

His finger dipped between her folds at the very bottom then slowly moved up. Panic brought both her hands to his wrist, clutching tightly as she fought back the moans pushing in her throat. And then she did the unthinkable and pulled his finger deep inside her.

“Oh baby,” he whispered, feeling every inch of her with a thick groan. “You’re so fucking hot and silky. To think I get to punish you with my cock...”

The hot eagerness of his words sent her over the edge and splintered her. Sharp cries flew and he gripped her jaw, turning her face to his beautiful mouth. “Come all over my hand.” He nipped at her gasping mouth. “Suffer the retribution of your eternal denial.”

She obeyed with all her angelic might, devouring his perfect lips now, sucking and biting and gasping as that eternal need tore through the divine food that he was.

His pace began to slow as his breaths clashed with hers.

The low groan in his chest was thick and tormented, reminding her of the other food she’d die without.

His pleasure. She needed it as much as she needed hers.

No, more. Much more. He grabbed her wrists and moved her greedy hands away from his zipper with a tormented groan. “Not now, sweet Larena.”

“When?” she begged, holding his face, settling for eating his delicious mouth.

“Your punishments seem to require a particular kind of perfection, my hungry Angel,” he breathed, teeth scraping her lip. “The kind that requires all night.”

She closed her eyes, sliding her lips along his as the tormenting need for him built. She didn’t want to wait hours or even a second more.

His warm fingers touched down on either side of her face, the gentleness a painful contrast to the hunger raging through her. His lips pressed along hers, a careful measurement. “I can feel what burns in your veins, Larena,” he murmured, lips carefully tugging at hers. “And I share it.”

His fingers slid to the back of her neck then moved up along her scalp.

Her breath caught at the scrape of his nails along her scalp and the sudden plunge of his tongue with a hungry groan.

Three seconds of that ecstasy stripped her down to pulsing, aching pleasure points.

Then just as suddenly, he retreated to his side of the car with a soft, “Ready?”

Larena panted with her eyes closed, her mind still sizzling as her body and breaths shook.

He was taking her apart. From the inside out.

Unraveling her. All her powers were gone, her strength flicked aside with mere touches and looks.

The closest thing to the feeling was when she assumed a human body.

That’s exactly how he made her feel. Small, helpless, fragile.

Weak. All while being far too alive. More than she'd ever been in all her existence.

She opened her door and got out, needing to escape the thick blanket of rapture crushing her lungs. She looked around at the nearly empty parking lot, finding it all so strange. Like she no longer belonged on the planet.

Reuban appeared and wrapped his arms tightly around her. "You're okay."

She shook her head, clinging to him. "I'm not ," she strained, pressing her head into his chest. "What about the mothers? " she choked, his arms tightening around her.

"What if I told you that I think this is all part of Raviel's plan? That it was supposed to happen?"

The possibility alone shocked her and she pulled back, searching his face. "You're being serious?"

He nodded at her then blew apart her focus with his lips on her forehead. "Very. I think the war has changed and the boy requires something special from us."

She was back to perplexed, digging for understanding.

"Raviel will explain it," he assured.

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That's right. He'd mentioned he was coming that night. She struggled to maintain her train of thought while her body remembered what else was coming that night. All night.

"Your arousal is the most intoxicating thing I've ever experienced," he said, the soft confession licking along her skin. "And I no longer care that it's forced."

The violation twisted inside her, wrong in several ways. "What if... not all of it is forced."

Her gaze caught on his perfect mouth spreading in a seductive smile. "That wouldn't be much of a punishment."

She considered it from that angle, now wondering exactly how he felt about all of it. His forced part included. "Unless... you... maybe liked performing the punishment."

His mouth covered hers as he breathed her name with his aching "Mmmm," that demanded she return the glorious pleasure back to him. "I do like it," he swore against her lips, missing her meaning.

"How do you know... that's not forced too?"

He angled his head as if spotting something in her gaze. "What if it is?"

She realized there were too many meanings to answer that question but wasn't ready to clarify, not out loud. "I don't like that I forced anything on you."

The mall's fluorescent glare stung Reuban's eyes, a sterile cage of glass and tile that hummed like a dying star.

Late hour, nearly closing, and the place felt hollow—scuffed floors swallowing his steps, the faint whiff of stale pretzels clogging his nose.

His empath senses twitched, catching flickers of life.

A janitor's mop sloshed in lazy arcs, its rhythm a dull pulse...

two teens shuffled past, hoods up, their giggles sharp against the quiet.

A woman in a red coat hustled toward the exit, bags thudding like heartbeats.

Reuban allowed the click of his black oxfords to ground him as the Sinner's Bond burned low in his veins from the SUV's inferno.

He'd ordered Larena to stay close and she obeyed him in inches, maintaining a distance he could span with a flick of his wrist. The submission was expected but the arousal it brought him required its own discipline.

Every dark corner presented itself as the perfect confessional where he punished her for every clever misdeed his cock could construe as sin.

He was beginning to realize the Sinner's Bond didn't exist to merely punish her for moral crimes but also came with erotic reparations for the victim—him. And his ever-hungry cock.

He stepped into a department store and headed for the racks sprawled out like a

battlefield. In the men's department, his fingers grazed a black leather jacket. Kross filled his mind as he lifted it. "For our soon to be Big King," he said smoothly, eyeing Larena. "Substantial and befitting a King."

Larena gave a light snort, leaning against a clearance bin, her boot tapping a jagged rhythm. "Perfect for a spark in a powder keg," she said, green eyes slicing the jacket like a threat. "Leather'll make him bolder."

She said it like he itched to crack the heavens. But her words were laced with ghosts of Nephilim she'd fought, so he let it slide.

He handed her the jacket, and she took it then snatched a gray hoodie from a rack and tossed it at him. "Something plain. To remind him he's also human, not just your shiny new King."

Reuban caught it, fingers sinking into the fabric, a smile tugging his lips. "My astute little mother," he murmured, slicing his gaze at her, wanting to suddenly nurse from her breasts. He draped the hoodie over his shoulder as her pulse spiked in his senses.

She tossed him black cargo pants next. Reuban eyed the rugged build then checked the size. "Find me this with a thirty-four waist and same length."

She moved with that angelic proficiency, whacking through the selection. "Human or not, he's got eyes like hers, but... sharper," she murmured. "Like he's seen too much." Her words softened, a confession slipping through her barbs.

Reuban caught the cargos she tossed at him and added them over his shoulder.

"Eyes like hers, yes," he said, moving to a shirt rack.

"...carrying love, not ruin." He added a black ribbed sweater to his pile then made his

way to a display of boots.

He lifted a pair, testing their heft. Perfect.

He found a size thirteen and tucked them under his other arm, crossing the aisle into the men's undergarments.

"Sir, would you like a basket?"

"Yes, please," Larena answered the female clerk before coming to stand next to him.

"Nice to have a buffer between me and the women."

She gave a tiny huff and eye role. "You likely have a long list of women at your beck and call."

Reuban's cock jerked at the hint of her jealous fishing while she absentmindedly stroked her hand over a pair of black underwear. "I assume you're molesting those underwear because you'd like to see me in them?"

She snatched her hand off and he grinned as she shot out to intercept the clerk heading their way with a basket. Stopping her before she could get too close or running from his all-knowing eyes. Both, he was sure.

He tossed in five pairs of the black underwear, getting her curious look.

"For the rest of the Kings," he explained.

"Just remembered we're meeting with the Archangel.

Think I'll get us all fresh clothes." The second he said it, he had the dire need to dress

her too.

After backtracking and adding outfits for all of them into the basket, he made his way to the women's side of the store.

“What are you doing?” she wondered, sounding panicked.

“Josie will need clothes—which you can pick. While I find yours.”

“Mine,” she gasped quietly, already busy at the rack of dresses for Josie.

“I want to dress you, and you have nothing to say about it other than thank you,” he said, grinning at catching her hot, two-second glare. “Get used to it, angel. You're stuck with me.”

She passed him and he grunted from the flash-grip she gave his cock as she did.

He stood there, rigid and boiling for several seconds.

He scanned the store before turning and cornering her.

With one hand, he gripped her entire jaw while cradling the back of her shorn head, stabbing his tongue into her gasping mouth, his lust coming in growling breaths.

“That was bold, Larena,” he said, finding the top of her skirt and sliding his hand in. Her fingers locked on his cock, blasting heat through him as he shoved her panties out of his way. He slid two fingers over her, groaning. “My angel is dripping?”

Her hands clasped his neck as she kissed him back in answer.

He stuffed two fingers inside her and devoured her soft cry, moving his thumb

knuckle against her clit.

“You’re fucking my hand, naughty angel? Is that all you can think about?”

“Yes,” she gasped right in his mouth. “I can’t stop needing you.”

He turned with her, hiding her better as he filled the quiet corner with the sound of her drenched pussy getting hammer-fucked till she came.

As soon as she was done, he grabbed her jaw with the hand he’d just fucked her with, sliding her juices along her cheek while he kissed her, a filthy groan wrecking his breaths.

“That’s going at the top of your punishment list, young lady,” he promised, winded as he shoved his fingers in his mouth with a painful moan of ecstasy.

“Fuck, I love the taste of your pussy,” he swore, nodding to the clerk passing the aisle they’d just desecrated.

“Let’s finish this bullshit,” he muttered, ghosting her swollen lips with his before heading to that emerald dress he’d spotted a few steps back.

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The dusk sky bled orange over the hut, casting a warm glow across the gnarled limbs of the big oak tree. Kildare stood near its trunk, arms crossed with his head cocked at the boy standing before him. “So you’re twelve now,” he said. “Around five feet?”

He angled his head up, squinting one shimmering eye with a nod.

“I’d like to see what’s in you,” Kildare said, placing his hands on his hips. “Your powers. They’re a mix of all of us, and I can help you understand them. May I?”

He nodded again, firmer. “Okay.”

Kildare took another step closer and released his wings, getting the boy’s wide-eyed gasp as his gaze swung left and right at the span. Kildare flexed and revealed all six wings with a flash of fire, laughing at the boy’s huge breath and grin.

“Can I touch them?” he asked, his innocence as sharp as his hope.

“Yes, you may,” Kildare said, smiling at his awe as he traced the lower span, then drew his fingers back.

“It’s warm,” he said, voice soft. “But not hot. It feels like... pressure and permission at the same time.”

Kildare tilted his head slightly. “Go on.”

The boy’s eyes narrowed a little, focused not on the wings now, but inward — like he was sorting what his body was telling him.

He looked up, reaching for the top wings, stroking them, his smile spreading.

“These push,” he said, lowering to the middle set.

“And these steady.” He squatted down and angled his head at the bottom wings.

“These absorb.” He angled his head up. “That’s why you can fall without fear.”

Kildare smiled, his fires heating in his blood with excitement.

The boy reached out again and touched the seam where one wing folded. “They’re made of memory. But...not just yours. All of it. Everyone you’ve fought for, everyone you’ve lost. The fire... it pulls from that. That’s how it burns.”

Kildare’s breath caught in his chest at the depth of his knowledge.

“Not really power,” he continued, voice lower now. Almost reverent. “It’s like... discipline. Like you made something dangerous behave.” His hand hovered over the final arc before pulling back. “They obey you,” he marveled.

Kildare stared at him, no longer seeing a boy, but a mirror of everything he’d once hoped would outlive him.

“You can feel all that, Little King,” Kildare said, not needing the answer.

The boy nodded slowly, eyes glowing faint in the dim light. “And it makes my chest feel... too small.” He angled a squinted gaze up at him again. “Do I have wings that will obey me like this?”

“I would have to look and see,” Kildare said. “May I?”

His nod was immediate and eager.

Kildare reached out and hovered his palm over Kross's head.

A sting, like frost bite bit his fingertips.

He pulled back, his fire flaring in his chest. "You've got a shield up, Young Lock.

It's hiding what's in you—like a wall you've built to keep things safe.

Can I show you how to drop it, so I can see what you've got? "

Kross's brows furrowed, and he nodded again, his voice small but curious. "Yes."

Kildare knelt before him and took his arm.

He held it up and gently touched his wrist. "Do you feel that shimmer—like a wall? It's your instinct, protecting you.

Push it down, just a little. Let it go, like you're opening a door," he encouraged, his voice steady as he watched Kross's face tighten with focus.

The shimmer around Kross wavered, then fell with a shudder, bringing a roaring gust of wind, slicing through the grass with a flicker of flame that cracked like a whip, making Kross gasp with wide speckled eyes.

His shield snapped up tight again and the boy stumbled back a step, hands flying to his chest, breath coming fast. "What—what was that?" His voice cracked, high and startled, as he looked at Kildare, then at the sliced grass, the faint scorch marks on the ground.

Kildare chuckled, his fire coiling protectively as he stepped closer with a reassuring hand raised.

“That’s you, Star-Eyes. You dropped your shield, and your powers spilled out.

You put it back up without even knowing, didn’t you?

That’s your instinct, keeping you safe. Let’s try again—I’ll help you control it, one gift at a time. ”

Kross nodded, still breathing hard, his hands trembling as he lowered them. “It... it felt big. Too big.” His eyes darted to Kildare, searching for guidance, a flicker of trust in their depths.

“It is big,” Kildare said, folding his wings around them like a shield. “But you’re bigger. Let’s start with Krave’s gift—the winds. Drop the shield again, slow this time, and isolate the wind. Feel for something sharp, moving, like a breeze you can hold.”

Kross swallowed, his small frame steadying as he met Kildare’s gaze.

After a moment, the shimmer wavered again and dropped more slowly.

His brows furrowed, his hands clenching at his sides.

A gust came, softer this time, rustling the oak leaves, but still sharp enough to nick the grass.

“It’s... fast,” Kross said, his voice small. “Like it wants to run.”

Kildare’s fire hummed, guiding the boy with a gentle warmth. “That’s Krave’s

wind—fast and sharp. But you can guide it. Push the other feelings behind it, let the wind surface. Imagine it like a cloak, wrapping around you, not lashing out. Can you make it softer, like a breeze?”

Kross’s face tightened with focus, his hands unclenching, and the gust softened further, swirling around him in a gentle spiral, lifting his hair. He grinned cautiously, a spark of awe in his eyes. “It’s... lighter now. I can feel it moving, but it’s not trying to cut and bite.”

“Good,” Kildare said, his wings flaring with pride.

“That’s control. You can make it protect or cut, depending on what you need.

Do you feel how it listens to you? That’s Krave’s strength in you—his winds can shield you, or strike like a blade.

Try pushing it out, just a little, like you’re nudging the leaves.

” He pointed to a pile near the firepit, his fire flaring briefly in encouragement.

Kross’s eyes widened, and he extended a hand, the breeze swirling from his fingers, nudging the leaves into a small spiral. His grin grew, voice bright with excitement. “It’s... it’s moving them! I can feel it—like it’s part of me!”

“That’s exactly right, Young Lock,” Kildare said, his fire singing with warmth. “That’s Krave’s gift, alive in you. Now let’s try my gift—the fire. Push the wind back, let something else surface. Feel for something warm, flickering, like a candle flame.”

Kross’s breath hitched as he focused a flicker of flame sparked at his fingertips, red specks glinting like embers. “Wow,” he gasped, eyes darting from the fire to Kildare

before he yelped. “It’s hot!” He shook his hand, his voice a mix of surprise and excitement. “It... it burns, but it’s... alive.”

Kildare chuckled, his own fire humming with a soft warmth. “That’s my fire, Young Lock. It burns, but it can heal, too. Push the other feelings behind it, let it surface. Imagine a candle flame, steady and warm. Can you hold it without letting it grow?”

Kross held out his hand and watched it. The flame returned, smaller this time, a steady glow at his fingertips.

His eyes widened when the red specks danced in the light.

“It’s... warm,” he said, his voice soft. “It feels... strong, but... safe. Like... it wants to help because...” His breaths quickened.

“Because it knows I’m scared,” he realized with a tiny smile of awe.

Kildare’s own awe stirred at seeing his fire in the boy. “That’s my fire in you. It’ll protect you. Heal you, if you learn to control it. Try letting it grow, just a little, like you’re warming your hands.”

Kross’s hands trembled slightly, but he focused, the flame growing into a small, steady fire, red specks glinting brighter. His breath hitched, his voice a whisper. “It’s... it’s warm, but... it’s heavy. Like... it could get bigger. Too big.”

Kildare’s wings flared in response. “That’s good, Little King. That heaviness is its power—it can grow, but you decide how much. Pull it back now. Make it small again. You’re in control.” He watched as Kross’s flame shrank back to a spark, the boy’s face lighting up with a grin.

“I did it!” he said, his voice bright, his eyes shimmering with pride.

“You did,” Kildare said, squeezing Kross’s shoulder. “Now, what else do you have in there? Push the fire back, let something else surface. Something deeper. Feel for it. Like a tug in your chest.”

Kildare felt the air shift—a deep tug, like a current pulling at his own fire, stirring a truth he couldn’t name.

Kross’s eyes widened, a flicker of fear in them, and his shield snapped back up, his hands clenching.

“It’s... heavy,” he whispered, his voice trembling.

“Like... it’s too deep. I... I don’t think I’m supposed to touch it. ” His head shook quickly. “Not yet.”

Kildare’s wings shuddered slightly, his fire coiling protectively at the boy’s fear.

“That’s Kaos’s power—a pull that draws out what’s true.

It’s deep, like Reuban’s warmth, but it’s got a dangerous depth to it, doesn’t it?

Something dark, something you’re not ready for.

” He kept his voice calm, reassuring, as he met Kross’s gaze.

“You’re right to pull back, Star-Eyes. That’s Kaos’s strength in you.

But it’s not time. Let it rest—we’ll come back to it when you’re ready.

What else do you feel? Push that tug back, let something else surface.

Something warm, like a light in your heart. ”

A pulse of warmth spread, naming Kildare’s pride before he could speak, overwhelming in its rawness. Kross’s brows furrowed, his voice small. “It’s... it knows things. Like... I know you’re... happy, but... worried too.”

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Kildare smiled softly. “That’s Reuban’s gift. It can name what others feel, like a light in your heart. Push all the other feelings behind it. Let it come. What else does it tell you? About me, or about yourself?”

Kross’s hands clenched, his green specks swirling in his dark gaze. “It... it says I’m... scared,” he whispered, his voice trembling. “But... I’m happy too. Because you’re here. And... it says you’re... proud, but... you’re worried about... something big.”

Kildare’s wings folded closer, his fire humming with a protective warmth.

“That’s good, Little King. That’s Reuban’s warmth in you—knowing hearts, even your own.

It’ll help you understand others, and yourself.

It’s right—I’m proud of you, but I’m worried about what’s coming.

That’s a big truth, and you felt it.” He angled his head now.

“What else, Little Spark? You’re full of so many gifts,” he bragged with a grin. “You feel anything else?”

Kildare waited, watching him get earnest again, his breaths turning shallow after a moment.

“I feel something,” he whispered, brows pulling together sharply before he looked

right at Kildare.

“It’s the Angel of Mothers,” he whispered in quiet reverence.

“Her power... it’s... holding me. Soft... but... so strong .”

“That’s Larena’s heart,” Kildare said, his voice thick with reverence.

“Her love is in you. Like a song that protects.” Kildare took both his hands in his and stared into his gaze.

“Now,” he urged, allowing his fire to help with this one.

“I want you to search for something special inside. Something that feels like... gravity. Pulling at your insides, squeezing and embracing all that you are.”

Kross held his eyes for many seconds before his own filled with tears.

“Mother,” he barely whispered, his chin quivering as he moved their hands to his chest. “It’s hot,” he breathed, tears falling freely.

“It burns and hurts,” he strained. “It’s everywhere inside me. Humming. Like a special secret.”

“That’s your humanity, ” Kildare whispered with awe, catching the fresh tears that fell. “The blood that she gave is part of that. And it is your most holy and powerful gift.”

Kildare’s heart broke when the boy lunged on him, hugging his neck. “I didn’t mean to, Father. I didn’t mean to hurt her. I love Mother.”

“I know you do,” he soothed, his wings wrapping around them. “It wasn’t you, My Little Fire. It was her gift. And it was hers to give. But you must never be sad about it, you understand?”

He nodded, and released his neck, wiping his eyes. “Then I will never be sorry for it,” he swore, his voice an octave deeper now.

Kildare stood and spread his wings, seeing the stretch that had taken place in Kross’s frame. “You’re growing so fast, Star-Eyes. Soon, you won’t have anything from childhood to remember. How about we fix that?” He regarded him curiously, and Kildare opened his hand. “I’ll need your arm.”

Kross gave it to him without hesitation and Kildare held up his finger, showing him the sharpened flame he’d created.

“Little biting sting,” he warned, lowering it and began etching onto his forearm.

“A star for your father Kaos,” he said, watching his fist clench.

He moved the fire over and etched again.

“A crescent for your Mother,” he murmured, then created a single line.

“A slash for your father Krave,” he explained, lifting his finger and touching down briefly with a grin.

“Just a... red dot for me,” he said, before swirling the fire again.

“A gold spiral for Reuban. And...” he added lightly, moving his finger over.

“A pearl teardrop for the Angel of Mothers.” He smiled and held his finger up before

Kross. “Blow out the candle.”

Kross touched the marks, his gaze soft as he raised his gaze and blew the fire.

His breath acted like gasoline and created a torch. Kildare jerked his hand back with a laugh. “Little King!” He put the fire out with a single swing of his hand.

“I didn’t mean it!” he cried in shock.

“Let me have a look at those records,” Kildare urged, taking his arm and eyeing the etchings with a proud nod. “And the Heavenly Kissing King looked upon the impeccable marks adorning the skin of the Noble Young King of Four Kings and saw... that they were good. They were very good.”

Kross’s smile beamed as he touched them softly. “They are very good, Father,” he breathed. “Thank you.”

The dusk light barely reached the shadowed patch behind the hut, where Krave paced, his boots kicking up faint clouds of dust that clung to the damp air.

His divine winds churned in his chest, a restless storm that hadn’t settled since he’d left the hut thirty minutes ago, unable to stand the suffocating weight of that dark tomb with Kaos prostrating over Josie, his snow-white frame draped across her still form.

The air out here was cool, heavy with the scent of damp earth and oak, but it didn’t do a damn thing for the biting tension in his gut. His fingers twitched with itching winds, needing to lash out and break something, anything just to ease the storm inside him.

Kaos had asked for time alone, red and green eyes shimmering with a depth Krave hadn't seen before. "Leave me with her."

Krave had stepped out with a fragile hope that maybe Kaos could raise her.

Because something in him was different since he'd returned from the grave, as if he'd come back with more than he'd left with, yet lacked something he once had.

Krave felt it in the way Kaos's power moved.

It had a new weight, a new will. Like he held a key to something Krave couldn't name.

Krave's head whipped around as a deep laugh sliced through the dusk that he didn't recognize.

He hurried toward the sound and rounded the hut, freezing at the sight beneath the oak tree.

Kildare was in dragon form, scales glinting like molten fire and the boy —nearly a fucking man now—was climbing down from Kildare's back, laughter bubbling up again as he slid to the ground.

Something similar to pissed envy surged through his winds as the front door of the hut creaked open. Kaos stepped out, snow-white frame rigid, black hair spilling like ink over his shoulders. A faint hiss escaped his ashen lips as he eyed Kross.

Krave's winds pulled him toward the man-child like a magnet, and Kross snapped his head toward him. The second his dark gaze hit him, it lit up and filled him with the kind of heat that belonged to fire.

He held his sheet around him as he ran toward him, long legs eating up the distance.

“Look!” he said, skidding to a stop in front of him, voice deeper but bubbling over with excitement.

He stretched out his forearm. “Kildare gave me these.” His grin rivaled the fucking crack of dawn.

“Scars,” he breathed, flashing his galactic lit-up eyes to him.

“For when I’m older.” He pointed at one.

“That one’s yours. And look at everything I’ve got inside me,” he hurried, hands moving outward and stirring a breeze with flickers of flame glinting at his fingertips.

Krave’s winds surged as he grabbed his wrist and pulled his arm to him, looking at the marks. “What the heck did our Flaming King do to you, kid?” He glanced at Kildare, now in his angelic form, wings buried in his skin.

“Just logging the greatest event of all time, Bluster Boy.”

“So, tell me,” Krave urged, flicking a wind-ball at him. “What you got inside that killer vessel growing faster than I can keep up with?”

Kross’s laugh tumbled out with excitement. “Everything! Your winds—they can cut or protect—like a cloak, and Kildare’s fire is warm, but it can heal, and Father’s pull is...” He paused, eyeing Kaos. “Don’t worry, I didn’t touch it.”

Kaos answered with a growled, “Don’t ever touch it. Not until I train you.”

Kross nodded quickly with a serious, “Yes, sir,” before his excitement returned to

Krave. “I got Uncle Reuban’s power—and it knows things,” he said lower, with his twinkling gaze.

“Oh boy,” Krave chuckled, crossing his arms. “This mean you know all my secrets?”

He laughed at that. “Not yet!” he warned. “But I know that you’re happy right now, and...” He stepped in closer with a quiet, “and that Father is not as angry as I thought.” His smile beamed with that. “I even have Larena’s powers.”

“Uh-oh,” Krave said, side-eyeing him. “You in love with all the mothers now?”

He paused as his brows slowly locked together in contemplation. Then they loosened with his astonished gaze at him. “I am, ” he whispered, getting Krave’s big laugh.

“You’ll definitely need to train him,” he warned at Kaos now, remembering he was missing somebody. “And what did our Lost Saint give you? Your mother. ”

Krave’s wind heated at the huge smile that lit up his face. “She gave me her life essence through her blood!” he marveled, like it was his wild-card power. “Do you realize that it makes all of humanity my family?”

No. He hadn’t realized that.

“Don’t expect the Earthly Kissing King to appreciate that one,” Kildare chuckled next to him. “He hates all humans that aren’t your mother.”

“And me,” Kross bragged.

“You’re not human,” Kaos muttered, stomping out the joy in the moment.

Krave eyed Kaos then advised Kross, “Just ignore He-Who-Hates-All-Joy. Show me

what you can do with that fire King Hot Pants gave you.”

Kross’s grin widened, and he extended both hands, producing flaming fingertips while a gentle breeze stirred around him and made the tiny fires flare.

“He’s a quick learner,” Kildare bragged as Kaos turned and headed back toward the hut, his dark wake blowing out Kross’s flames before disappearing through the door.

Krave blinked as he regarded Kildare, then Kross, then the door again.

“Did he just slurp up our powers and leave?” Kildare wondered, his voice a mix of amusement and irritation.

Krave propped his hands on his hips and shook his head. “Brat.”

Kildare snickered and Kross burst into laughter, his dark eyes bright as he realized the humor and removed the urge to murder the black bastard from his winds.

“I’m just glad he doesn’t truly hate me,” Kross barely said, like Kaos might get the idea to still. “He just hates that he made something he doesn’t know how to keep.”

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It was dark as Reuban guided the SUV toward the hill hiding the hut, headlights cutting through the shadows.

Reuban gripped the steering wheel as they got closer. Kross would be twenty-eight and then some. Which also meant he was able to wake Josie.

He regarded his angel in the passenger seat, filling him like a steady hum of power, grounding him despite the chaos in his chest. He felt her craving—her desire for his touch, for everything he gave her.

She locked it away behind a wall of power but not one he couldn't easily penetrate now.

He had direct access to all of it. To the heat beneath her resolve and the way her energy pulsed with a need she'd never admit.

He pulled the SUV to a stop at the base of the hill, the engine's rumble fading into the quiet. He reached for his phone and dialed Kildare's number, the line ringing twice before he picked up with a, "Hello, King Know-It-All."

He quirked a brow at the odd name. "We're back," he announced. "Larena and I have clothes for everybody."

"Everybody?"

"Since we're meeting with an archangel tonight, I figured we wouldn't mind dressing appropriately. Is Kross fully grown now?" he asked when sensing an OCD anal joke

coming on.

“What should we expect when we get there?”

“Oh, he is definitely fully grown,” Kildare said with soft pride. “He’s nearly a head taller than Krave.”

“He exaggerates,” Krave accused in the background.

“He’s quite a force,” Kildare continued. “All of us in him, but more. And he’s eager to meet you. We’re under the oak, around a fire that he built himself.”

“Using my boy scout method or yours?” Reuban asked, grinning.

“What do you think?”

Reuban chuckled and exhaled, relief washing through him as his emotions remained a tangled storm. “We’ll see you in five minutes.”

He hung up and turned to Larena. “They’re under the oak, around a fire that Kross built himself. He’s fully grown.”

Larena’s blue-green eyes met his, fierce and unyielding, but her small hand reached out, gripping his arm with a strength that shouldn’t exist in her delicate form.

Her power flared, a sharp, angelic force that cut through the chaos of his emotions.

“You will be steady, Kollaborator,” she said, her voice a low command, her grip tightening. “For him. For all of us.”

Reuban steadied himself when his body demanded things that would require more

than a minute to have with her.

They stepped out of the SUV, the cool air hitting Reuban like a balm as he grabbed the bags of clothes from the back, their weight steadying him further.

Larena fought with him about sharing the load and he finally obliged with a goofy grin when she mentioned not wanting a bossy husband.

As they climbed the hill, he finally had to know. “Does this mean you think we’re married?”

She shot out a tiny laugh. “Married,” she mocked. “To a Kollaborator King? The Angel of Mothers?” She flashed glances at him, her perfect little mouth toying with a smile. “Do you even hear yourself?”

“I do hear myself,” he said, the descent down the other side of the hill suddenly a distraction.

“It was a joke,” she mumbled innocently. “My King.”

His cock jerked at her tone. “I see,” he said, wishing he was eating her pussy while discussing it. “My Queen.”

“Hmm,” she lightly doubted. “But you already have a Queen.”

He nearly tripped over his dick at the bottom of the hill at catching a tinge of something that boiled his lust. Possessive jealousy.

“What Raviel has ordained, I cannot undo. But I can assure you that the King you awakened and created belongs to nobody but my Angel of Mothers.”

“Your Angel of Mothers,” she dared, her smile reaching her pretty eyes. “You think you own me now?”

“I think I own...” Reuban’s brain and legs quit working when his gaze landed on the group at the small fire across the courtyard.

“Holy shit,” he whispered, seeing Kildare smiling next to Krave who threw punches at a tall, broad man’s iron-ribbed stomach.

His bright, exuberant laugh brought a rush of emotions that stole Reuban’s breath.

“Is he only wearing a sheet?” Larena fussed quietly.

He was. And the firelight picked up deep brown hair with hints of gold, dark eyes shimmering with joy.

His skin seemed to glow with a golden sheen, and his sharp jawline carried Kaos’s edge, but softened by a boyish grin.

And that chest and those strong legs... Wow.

“He’s a fucking god of radiant storms,” Reuban whispered, his heart pounding as he hurried forward.

Kross suddenly turned, his eyes landing right on him. His Little King froze for a moment then broke into a run with a booming, “Uncle Reuban!”

Before Reuban could steady the storm of emotions, the man who he’d held in his arms four hours earlier lifted him off his feet in a tight embrace.

Reuban hugged him back, his chest tight as fierce pride and love flooded him.

Kross pulled back, his grin wide as he turned to Larena and scooped her off her feet in a hug that made her sputter and gasp. “Our very own Angel of Mothers!” he praised. “Thank you for your gift.”

“What gift?” she demanded, her small frame stiff in his arms, blue-green eyes wide as he set her down. She shoved a bag of clothes against his torso. “Do take these into the hut and put them on immediately before the heavens lose another third of the angels to temptation!”

Kross laughed and clutched the bag, his dark eyes sparkling with mischief. Kildare stepped up, his red wings shimmering in his skin, voice warm with amusement. “You imprinted on him from birth, Larena. He’s carried your guardianship since the moment he came into this world.”

Kildare turned to Reuban, his smile widening while Kross hurried toward the hut with the bag.

Reuban felt his need to be everything they all hoped for as he went, and his desperation to do it all perfectly staggered his breaths.

Dear God, his pure heart was almost too much to bear.

As was the fear of what their enemies would do to him if they didn’t protect it.

Krave joined them, his divine winds a faint ripple in the air as he crossed his arms, a smirk playing on his lips. “Kid’s got spirit,” he said, his voice low, open pride in his tone.

Kaos stood a few paces away, his snow-white frame rigid, black hair spilling over his shoulders, eternal gaze fixed on the fire at his feet. He felt Kaos’s emotions—a deep, shadowed longing, and the shared anticipation of Josie’s waking. And something

more.

They were all gathered at the fire when the hut's door creaked open, and Kross emerged looking like a god-level-ninja in black. His shoulder-length hair was exactly like Kaos's and framed his face. But it was his mother that colored his skin with her life-warming blood.

The whoops and hollers erupted and brought a flush creeping up his neck as he approached. Krave pierced the air with a sharp whistle and Larena gave a sharp laugh.

That shy grin tugging at Kross's lips--that was the stuff heartbreaks were made of.

"Watch out, you'll light the wrong fire and burn the forest down," Kildare teased, his voice warm as he laughed.

Krave added, "Yeah, don't start a blaze we can't put out, Hot Pants." His winds rippled playfully, stirring the air around Kross.

Larena crossed her arms, her sea-colored eyes narrowing. "I believe he just wrapped up temptation and put a bow on it," she said, her voice sharp but tinged with amusement, adding another shade of red to Kross's face as he joined them at the fire with the fattest grin.

Kaos stepped forward, his galactic gaze locking on Kross. "It's time to wake your mother."

All talking stopped as Kaos turned and headed for the hut, his silent force drawing the group to follow.

Dear God.

This was it.

A tidal wave of anticipation led the way as they entered the hut behind Kaos. Inside, the dim glow of a single lantern cast soft light across the dirt floor, the air heavy with the scent of old wood and ash.

Everybody gathered around the small cot where Josie lay in perfect form, covered by a wool blanket, her still, pale face a stark contrast to the vibrant woman Reuban remembered.

Her dark hair framed her head like a halo, the sight bringing a surge of grief that sent him seeking the strength of Larena's small hand.

Kross stepped forward and Reuban felt the deep love and need to heal and protect his mother.

He knelt beside the bed and gently took her hand in his large one.

Reuban held his breath when the golden sheen on Kross's skin shimmered then radiated into Josie's hand, followed by his soft whisper, "It's time to wake up, Mother. "

Her chest hitched with a broken gasp — and Krave's breath tore free like a drowning man as he collapsed to his knees near the bed.

Her eyes fluttered open, the green of her gaze finding Kross's. She stared at him for several seconds, brows furrowed as she slowly moved up on her elbows, intently studying him.

“Hello, Mother.”

Josie’s gasp cut sharp, followed by a huge sob and gush of tears. “You’re...” She reached out and stroked his face, her mouth pressed together in agony. “You’re my son?”

He nodded and she sucked in lungful’s of air, pulling him to her with a sob. “How long have I been gone?” she wailed.

“Only eight hours,” he whispered, stroking her head with his hand.

She eased him back, wiping her tears, confused before her gaze froze. “Kaos?” she gasped sharply, panic in her shaking breaths.

Kross moved and Kaos knelt next to her, getting pulled into her sobbing arms. “You’re alive!” she wailed, petting his head then kissing the side of his face over and over. “How?”

“Our son is very powerful, my Queen,” he murmured hotly at her ear.

She reached for Kross again and pulled him into their hug. “He’s so beautiful,” she choked. “Just like his father. Who I love with all that I am!”

She suddenly released them and jerked her gaze around, searching. “Krave!” she half screamed, both arms reaching and shaking.

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Kaos and Kross stepped back, and he hurried in and pulled her into his arms, holding her tightly. “My Lost Saint,” he croaked around thick breaths, his agony a vice on Reuban’s chest. “How I love you.”

“I love you! I love you so much.” She pulled away, frantic. “Kildare!” she called, opening her arm for him to come. He sat next to Krave and kissed her cheek and forehead.

“My Queen,” he whispered hotly.

“Reuban?” she gasped, pulling away, looking.

Reuban hurried forward, keeping hold of Larena’s hand as Krave and Kildare made space for him. His heart battered his ribs as he dropped to his knees beside the bed, Josie’s trembling hand falling into his.

“Josie,” he said thickly, barely recognizing his own voice.

Her fingers gripped his with frantic strength, as if terrified she might slip away again. Tears streaked down her pale cheeks, but her eyes — God, those eyes — still burned with life.

“Thank you,” she gasped, her gaze darting to Larena. “And thank you,” she added, voice hoarse with wonder before she swept her gaze over all the faces around her. “Where is your Parvor?” she asked Larena, her voice breaking. “I want to thank him too, he was so very kind.”

Reuban tightened his grip on her hand, grounding her as Larena sat carefully on the bed and brushed dark hair from Josie's damp forehead. "I sent him home to his family, daughter," Larena said softly, her voice a soothing balm against the storm still trembling through the room.

She leaned and pressed her forehead lightly to Josie's, the gesture so intimate it tightened something raw in Reuban's throat. "And it is I who must thank you," Larena whispered, stroking Josie's hair with infinite tenderness. "For choosing with your mother's heart... no matter the cost."

Josie's whole body shuddered under the weight of those words as Kross edged forward, still cautious, still reverent.

Josie opened her arms without hesitation and pulled her son against her, burying her face into his chest with a sob so deep it ripped at the soul.

"You brought me back," she whispered, raw.

Reuban blinked against the sting in his eyes, feeling Larena's steady hand still wrapped around his own — grounding him.

"No, Mother," Kross murmured against her hair. "You never let us go."

A sacred ripple of their combined powers went through the room and Reuban bowed his head at the weight of it — the miracle breathing right in front of them — a love so fierce it had ripped a hole through death and dragged her back.

And somehow, impossibly, she was stronger for it. They all were.

Reuban stood near the panoramic window, his hands braced against the cool stone frame as he looked out over the endless stretch of cliffs and restless sea below.

The safehouse sat like a ghost etched into rock, half-hidden by mist — a place no one could ever stumble upon without a map.

And yet Kross knew the exact way there which meant he had it written on the walls of his mind. Something only Raviel could draw.

He exhaled slowly, his gaze resting on the misted line where moonlit sea met sky. Waiting. Raviel would come. And with him, answers they weren't sure they wanted.

Behind him, a single lantern hung from the ceiling, casting a warm glow over the sparse furnishings and the single, narrow hallway leading to private rooms.

An hour had passed since their arrival. Josie rested in one of the rooms, tucked into a simple bed in one of Kaos's healing sleeps. Larena was in the single large bathroom, following Reuban's orders—a long soak in the stone-carved bath.

The Sinner's Bond pressed down on his every cell, demanding pleasure punishments now—no more waiting. Reuban knew better than to ignore it. He had no doubt that if it was forced to take matters into its own hands, the punishment could turn public. And he couldn't permit that.

His body stirred in the building hunger, now less quiet than before his last breath. A threat. A warning.

Reuban caught the reflection of Kaos in the window, sitting at the head of the table in the black Henley sweater he'd selected for him.

The scarf Larena had thought of, remained in the bag after he'd regarded it with a

thousand degrees of dark disgust. His hair hung in chaotic strands to his shoulders, like glistening tar made of thick silk.

A picture of evil perfection. Personified.

“How much longer will she need to rest,” Krave muttered to Kaos. “She’s been dead asleep for three days.”

Kross stood at the wall, tracing his finger over a map then quickly blowing out the fire he accidentally created. “It’s only been seven hours and forty-three minutes,” Kross casually informed, still oblivious to sarcasm.

“She needs her strength for what’s coming,” Kaos said, his tone a dark grumble.

Kildare snatched one of the dining chairs and spun it around, sitting on it backwards. “And what’s coming?” he asked, propping his forearms on the chair top.

Kaos got up and walked to the window. “I don’t know. I’m waiting, like you, to learn that from Raviel.”

Beneath his anger for the unknown, Reuban felt a fear thick enough to choke a thousand demons. He couldn't decipher the context, but he understood, whatever it might be, was valid.

“Well, while we’re waiting...” Kildare said with a sigh. “When are you planning to update us on your marriage to the Angel of Mothers?”

Reuban stilled as he felt every eyeball in the room land on him. He made his way to the table and pulled out a chair, only to realize he didn’t want to sit. “You already know the details.”

“Well, your Sire doesn’t,” Krave informed, equal parts curious and offended.

Reuban’s taut nerves caught his blustery tone as he made his way back to the ocean view. “He refers to the Sinner’s Bond,” Reuban dropped.

The beat of silence broke with Krave’s, “The what?”

“Of course he doesn’t know,” Reuban said to the window. “Thanks to your level of non-commitment to our world’s rules and roles.”

“And I am still one thousand percent committed to that ignorance.”

“Maybe Kildare would like to educate you.”

“Big negative, King Emp,” Kildare smoothly declined.

The Dark Lust stirred at the smell of something close to sin in his selfish brothers and Reuban found himself wanting to dig into it.

“On its surface,” Krave began, accusation weighing, “it kind of sounds as if the Angel of Mothers is bound to you through sin.”

“It’s nice to see you’re not assuming I’m the guilty party,” Reuban murmured at Krave’s grinning reflection in the wall of glass.

“Not when I’m thoroughly aware of your anal rule-following ways. Which... leads me to wonder...”

“A connection of consequence was formed,” Kildare offered.

“And it’s judicial in nature, not optional,” Reuban informed. “And that’s all you need

to know.”

“A connection of consequence?” Krave quietly wondered, withholding laughter.

“I kissed him in order to steal power.”

Reuban turned and got blasted with the Dark Lust as Larena entered, her shorn, ethereal beauty coming at him wrapped in flowing emerald.

“Since when do your kisses have power?” Krave marveled lightly.

“Since he became the fourth signature on Raviel’s covenant of Kings,” Kross informed, dropping into one of the chairs at the table.

“You’re saying... he’s a King?” Krave asked in open shock.

“He’s the fourth King, not a fourth King,” Kross educated. “He’s the keystone. The hinge. Without him, the door doesn’t open.”

Reuban turned at this news, finding their now Big King, twirling fire and wind between his fingers like a fidget spinner.

“He’s a Triune King,” Kross further explained.

“Fire. Wind. Lust. But he doesn’t share it.

Or balance it. He unites it. And he can wield all three.

” He raised his gaze to Reuban, his own powers swirling in the depths.

“The Mother of Angels kissed him for power, but also engaged the dual transaction

of the Sinner's Bond. ”

Reuban stilled at that, feeling a great implication. “Dual transaction?”

He nodded as he used the fire on his fingertip to draw designs on the table.

“The Mother of Angels possesses a Mercy Matrix. It allows her to wield Empathic Transference. A power that converts emotional suffering into tangible spiritual currency. A necessity when empathy is required in vast quantities—as it is for all the mothers. And as it is for The Kollaborator King.”

Larena's gasp drew his gaze. “You made me want the kiss to take my power?”

“Uh... no,” Kross hurried, before Reuban could even process the question. “You... truly wanted to take his power and—”

“For a just cause,” Larena snapped, getting Kross's boyish grin.

“Yes, but... that's not what made it a sin, Aunt Larena.” He aimed his raised brows at her. “You wanted to kiss him.” He got extra hesitant, slowly lowering his fists to his lap. “More than you wanted the power you needed.”

Larena's gasp flew out as Reuban's gaze landed on her.

Kross went on, carefully now. “The uh... Sinner's Bond enacted a divine contract... which... allows him to borrow your power—whenever he needs it.”

“Borrow?!” Larena half-yelled, glaring at Reuban like he'd just robbed her in broad daylight.

“Well...” Kross bravely continued. “When you stole power from him, it...

technically defined the structure of the bond. So when he needs or wants power—the way that you wanted and needed it—he takes it. The same way you did.”

“Ho-ly shit,” Krave marveled in quiet glee as Larena’s sputtering dumped out everywhere.

She finally spun and hurried out of the room in an emerald fury while Reuban stood in a burning shock with the meanest, most vengeful lust he’d ever felt pummeling his cock. Go punish her. Right now. This fucking instant.

Reuban shot out to do exactly that while his mind fought to catch up.

“Oh hell,” Kildare mused eagerly.

“Now I want to know,” he heard Kross wonder behind him. “How do I get one of these Sinner’s Bonds?”

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Reuban slammed the room door shut behind him, the divine winds making the air ripple with his intent.

He locked his eyes on his divine thief, the source of his unraveling, standing at the foot of the bed, rigid, eyes wide with knowing, feeling the reckoning coming.

It wasn't just lust, and it wasn't even punishment—it was need—vicious and burning.

Hearing Kross say it out loud—that the triune powers were tearing him apart and she was his anchor had him lunging for that stronghold.

But it surely was a dual power exchange. And somehow, she needed as much as he needed, and combined, it created celestial power.

She watched him, bracing as he came for her, knowing there was no escape and not even wanting it. Her terror had everything to do with the meeting up of this pleasure wrapped in apocalyptic purpose and whether or not she'd survive it intact.

He stalked to her in three calm strides like a man preparing for communion.

There were no words as he pushed her onto the bed and opened her legs.

At finding no panties under the emerald dress, and her soft, wet heat glistening, he dropped to his knees with reverence and violence, gripping her inner thighs with a bruising force, yanking her to the edge of the bed.

He buried his mouth in her and she gasped, hands flying to his head, latching tightly

as he devoured with precision. No kissing or teasing, only taking. Just as she had done.

He licked, he sucked, he bit, he probed. Then he dragged his tongue in slow, filthy lines over her clit. He latched his mouth onto it with a low growl and sucked hard, the pleasure hitting her body like lightning up her spine.

“Reuban—!”

Fuck, yes. Gasp that again. Cry it, scream it.

He hooked his arms around her thighs, pulling her forward even more as he rocked his head slightly, working his tongue faster, rougher. Her hips twisted, trying to move and he locked her down harder.

The bond between them pulsed—alive. Hungry.

He felt it twisting in her body, her soul, strangling her throat.

He slipped a finger into her. Then another.

Deep and hard. He circled her clit with his tongue in savage figure-eights while his fingers curled up, stroking her g-spot with a perfect rhythm.

He paused just to judge, a low growl against her pussy. “You took. Now I take. Your power is mine, your submission is mine . Every drop.”

“Reu—ahh—Reuban!”

Her body shook as the orgasm pushed up like a divine eruption. She tried to close her legs, and he opened her wider, his fingers fucking deeper.

He flicked her clit with his tongue, cranking up the speed and pressure, forcing his little angel into his pleasure trap.

She came. So fucking hard.

It seized her body and stole her breath. A scream finally tore from her lips, raw and open, hands slamming the mattress, thighs trembling uncontrollably as she spasmed around his fingers.

And still, he didn't stop. He drove her like a bully, high on control and power. "That's one," he warned, licking her through it like a glutton who hadn't eaten in... ever.

Another shudder wracked her. She whimpered—hips grinding into his face against her will as she continued coming apart.

She watched him now, emerald eyes boiling and locked on his.

He flattened his tongue against her, watching right back as he lapped with slow, hard strokes.

Not stopping until she came again, and he fed his vengeance with her cries and confessions and begs.

He stood after and dragged her body downward. He lifted her then tossed his Sinner onto the middle of the bed where she lay with her legs open, body heaving with knowing whimpers. Her shaved pussy glistening as he unbuttoned his shirt with deliberate control, his cock bulging against his pants.

He removed everything, his clothes, his manners, his power's barrier.

He climbed onto the bed and stopped between her open thighs.

“That,” he said, dragging the back of his hand slowly over her pussy, “was your body confessing your sins.” He leaned over her, mouth at her ear, shoving his face against hers.

“And I haven’t even started punishing you yet. ”

She lay there panting in the echo of her orgasms, her body tense again from his threat. He pulled up and knelt before her, holding his cock—thick, pulsing—jutting out for his angel who stared into his eyes with a holy eagerness.

“Suck it,” he ordered, his need wrapping the words in burning steel.

She quickly sat up and scooted closer, gasps and whimpers falling from her mouth as she stared at his cock, then up at him, burning him with her innocent fire.

He moved his fist along his shaft and her gaze dropped back to it. Lust beaded at the tip and her gaze held it like an offering as he stroked slowly. “Look at what you made,” he breathed thickly. “The King you created.”

She swallowed, breath hitching.

“You thought you could take... and just walk away from me.” He covered her head with a hand, his fingers gripping her shorn skull. “Now you take what I give, Larena.”

Her hot breaths shivered at the tip as she leaned and kissed—softly, reverently. Her first taste hit her like a drug—eyes rolling back, aching moan rushing forth with the drag of her tongue along the underside with a burning slowness.

He hissed through his teeth, cock twitching in his grip. She wrapped her lips around the head and sucked, letting her mouth ease forward, inch by inch, taking more of him with every breath, every tormented moan that reached into his balls.

He watched her. Watched the way her lips stretched around him, the hollowing of her cheeks, the tug of her brows as she worked with a reverent hunger. Her hands slid up to brace his thighs, fingers stroking his flexing muscles.

“Fuck... yes,” he growled, cupping her jaw with his other hand, feeling her divine work. He rolled his hips, pushing his cock deeper into her mouth, into her soft, eager moans.

Her nails pierced his thighs as he took her throat slowly. “That’s good,” he murmured, voice lava and thick. “You’re my angel now,” he whispered, feeding his cock to her, inch by inch.

Her throat tightened and she gagged slightly. He stilled, letting her adjust. She didn’t pull back. She looked up at him, eyes watering, lips stretched, body shaking as she swallowed around him.

“You serve your King’s cock,” he said with satisfaction, pulling back slowly.

She sucked harder in response, tongue flexing under the head.

The little move broke his control. He started fucking her mouth—sharp thrusts that made her throat slick and hot.

His hips snapped again and again, the wet sounds and moans working him like a temple rite.

He felt the Sinner’s Bond surge again—her submission a fuel, driving his hunger to

the very edges of it.

Her nails dug again into his thighs, not to stop the madness but to anchor the power and herself.

“You’re going to take every drop,” he hissed, breath ragged now. “You’re going to swallow my seed like sacred fire.”

She groaned frantically and pulled him deeper, her tongue and jaw shuddering on him.

Holy fuck .

He gripped her head in both hands now, jaw clenching as his break came with a stranglehold on his muscles. His groan squeezed through his lungs, deep and thick. She moaned her praises, swallowing every drop without hesitation, lips sealed tight, like a formidable vow.

When he finally pulled out, she was flushed, eyes moist, lips swollen and gleaming with saliva and his satisfaction.

He stared at her—his salvation and his ruin, thumbing the corner of her mouth then moving his touch along her lips.

“You feel it?” He rubbed remnants of his essence into her skin, scanning her expression. “It’s not lust... it’s law.”

She nodded once, dazed and radiant.

“Every time I come down your throat, your body confesses that it belongs to me.”

Her breathing hitched as he leaned down till his eyes bore into hers.

“Now I’m going to fuck the rebellion out of you.”

He shoved her onto the bed and flipped her face down with a growl, spreading her legs. Her arms stretched above her head, fingers gripping the sheets as her cheek pressed into the mattress. “You’re not just mine,” he murmured as he moved behind her. “You were made for me.”

He ran his hands down her spine—slow, reverent, but hard enough to remind her he wasn’t asking.

And she loved it.

He bent forward, mouth at her ear, cock sliding slowly, coating himself in the heat of her slick entrance. “You ready to pay me, angel?”

She moaned in answer, pushing her hips back toward him.

He opened his knees wide and slid his hand over her forehead and yanked her head back just enough to hear her gasp. He braced his other hand on her shoulder and drove to the bottom of her in one, brutal stroke.

Her scream rocked him. Shock, pleasure, glory .

He pulled back halfway and drove in again, and again, setting a pace that bordered on cruel. Her breath hitched with every thrust, her body jolting forward only to hit the iron wall of his hold.

“Take my power,” he snarled between thrusts.

Their bodies collided—wet, sharp, relentless. She panted into the bed, fingers fisting the sheets as he pounded with a ruining rhythm.

“Feel how your pussy grips me?” he growled, tilting his hips for a deeper angle. “That’s your body begging for mercy.”

She moaned—a high, broken sound as he grinded against her inner walls.

“But you’re not getting any,” he hissed, winded. “The Bond wants you wrecked. It wants you ruined. It wants you mine.”

Chest against her back, he slipped his hand under her and pressed against her womb. “That’s where my power is. Deep in you.” His fingers moved lower, finding her clit, rubbing with firm, tight circles as he kept fucking her, deep.

Her voice broke. “Reuban—oh— I—”

“Come for me,” he ordered, mouth at her ear. “Right now.”

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Her whole body convulsed, legs shaking, cunt clenching around him like a vice. The orgasm tore through her like a storm made of fire and grace, bashing every nerve, until she was a trembling mess under him.

He didn't slow. Not even a little. He fucked her through the orgasm, cock pounding her deeper, hand gripping her throat now as he forced her ass up, flush to his hips. "You think I'm done?" he growled, voice shaking with restraint.

She gasped for air, still pulsing around him. "Reuban—I can't—"

"I say when it ends." He dragged himself out, slow and thick, almost to the tip—then slammed back in with a growl.

Her moan cracked into a sob, and still she pushed back against him. Because this was what she wanted, what they both wanted. Her power easing his fire, his cock feeding her eternal hunger.

The Bond burned brighter with every thrust, every cry, every ragged breath blurring the line between sin and salvation. Her body twitched beneath him, aftershocks rippling through her thighs and abdomen.

He gripped her hip, hard enough to bruise as he muttered low, filthy things. "So fucking tight. This pussy was made to be taken— just like this. To be fucked hard and without mercy. By me. "

She moaned, her voice hoarse, her body quaking as he dragged her through pleasure and overstimulation. Until her body recognized the rhythm of being ruled. He made it

burn again. Faster than before, fiercer. A heartbeat thrumming through the Bond as it seared prophecy into flesh.

“You feel that?” he shuddered at her ear. “Your soul trying to come again?” He ground into her—slow and merciless—cock so deep it felt like he was pushing into her spirit.

Her mouth fell open.

“That’s it,” he growled. “Fucking take it.”

His fingers returned to her clit, and with three punishing, perfect strokes—she came again. And this time it was like glass melting in sunlight. Her body arched, back bowing as she let out a scream that felt like release and surrender all in one.

Reuban’s hips stuttered, cock throbbing.

“—Larena—” He slammed home. Then again. The third time was burial—his cock, his mind, his soul—to the fucking hilt.

He gripped her body hard, emptying inside her, his teeth clenched as the orgasm shredded him.

Divine, thick, claiming—pulse after pulse until he collapsed forward, body draped over hers.

They stayed like that—breathing hard, skin slick with sweat, the room spinning. But fuck... this Bond wasn’t done.

“Now I need to take your succulent ass.”

Larena fearlessly, even eagerly got in position, breath ragged, knees digging into the mattress as she presented herself like a loyal offering, glowing with sweat and surrender.

Reuban watched—his eyes burning with everything he was holding back—fire, wind, lust. All of it roared inside him, clawing to get out. Her Matrix power was open to him—not by her will but by the Bond’s design. “Stay still,” he instructed reverently. “Don’t move unless I tell you to.”

He got in position, rock-hard again and shining with her arousal. He slid the head between her slick cheeks, rubbing himself along the line of her entrance without entering. He pressed against the tight muscle then gripped her hips and very slowly drove into the impossible heat.

Her cry was loud, raw, pure. She nearly collapsed forward, but he wrapped his arm around her waist, holding her up. Reuban began to move, each thrust angled to go as deep as possible, dragging out slowly before taking everything again with authority.

Her moans were helpless now—half sob, half chant.

And fuck, he loved it.

He covered her body with his. “You feel that stretch?” he growled against her neck. “You feel how you open for me here, too? How you’re mine in every fucking way, angel?”

His hand slid up her chest, grabbing her breast roughly, thumb flicking her nipple until she gasped. He fucked her harder, deeper, each thrust pushing her closer to the edge again.

“Tell me,” he ordered around thick breaths. “Tell me who owns you.”

She choked on her own breath. “ You— ”

“Louder.”

“You, Reuban! You own me, I’m yours!”

He tightened his grip as power filled his balls.

“Fuck—say it again!”

“I’m yours —King, master— I’m— ”

He found her clit again with brutal fingers and she cried out, back arching hard against him. “Come,” he seethed, his hips moving like a piston as he ground three fingers on her clit. “I want all of you.”

Her scream was near silent when she detonated, muscles locking as their bond ripped through her like holy judgment. Reuban thrust once—twice—and exploded inside her, his groan long and guttural as he came deep in her ass, wave after wave, hips jerking as he forced her to take every drop.

Larena collapsed and Reuban fell with her, both sprawled over the bed, him covering her, still deep inside. He didn’t move. He just held her.

She felt their bond pulse once. Then it settled.

Like it had fed. Like it had been answered .

And the universe was now silent, save for the two bodies marked with sweat,

exhaustion and ragged breathing.

Heavy, warm, and pressed against her back, her savior's arms wrapped around her waist like a man afraid she might dissolve if he let go.

There were surely no words to speak. Not yet. Of all beings, divine ones knew to be quiet in the aftermath of a sacred event.

After a long moment, Reuban shifted, pulling out of her slowly, breath catching like it hurt to leave her body.

He didn't leave her though. He laid beside her, then turned her gently into his arms, cradling her like she was something rare and beloved—like he hadn't just wrecked her like a battlefield.

She blinked up at him, dazed. Barely aware.

“Did I...” she started, voice hoarse, raw from cries of submission. “Did I give you what you needed?”

She wasn't sure why she asked. She knew the Bond had been sated but needed to hear it from his perfect mouth. No, not needed. Wanted. Longed. Craved. As Kross had said, her want was greater than her need with him.

His fingers brushed her cheek, and she looked up, finding his eyes open and watching her. Her half mortal. Real. Reuban, the man. Not just the Kollaborator King.

“You gave me more than I asked for,” he said, voice rough and low. “And less than I deserve.”

That made her blink in confusion.

He drew in a slow breath and leaned closer, lips near her temple now. “You gave me peace. And that’s the cruelest mercy of all.”

She swallowed. “Do you... hate me for what I did.”

“No,” he whispered. “I hate how much I still want you because you did it.”

Silence fell again, thicker now.

The Sinner’s Bond hummed beneath their skin—less like a chain now, and more like a second heartbeat. Not demanding. Just... present. Permanent.

“Will it always be like this?” she asked. “Every time?”

Reuban didn’t answer. But his hand slid to her stomach, fingers resting there like instinct. Like territory. “If it is,” he said finally, “then you’ll always have to be ready to pay for what you took.”

She considered that and smiled. “Maybe I hope to never stop owing.”

“You surely won’t stop,” he murmured, his lips sliding along her forehead. “Because you took every bit of me.”

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The stone walls drank the lantern's dim light as the ocean growled through stone cracks.

Reuban stood near the table, fingers grazing its grain, breath steady but threaded with something... off. Like pressure humming behind the bones, a low pulse in the back of his jaw. And it couldn't be the Sinner's Bond, not after it just got finished obliterating his balls.

He adjusted the row of tin cups again for no reason other than to do something with the strange tension. Midnight hung close. The air, thick and real.

A soft creak slipped from the back—Josie stirring, likely. Kaos's healing sleep was fading.

Reuban flicked his gaze to the door's latch, wondering again over the manner of Raviel's arrival. Would it be the sound of boots? Wings? Chariots of fire?

Maybe that's what was bothering him. Having an Archangel over for a midnight chat invoked his psychotic obsession with detail to divine protocol.

Kildare warned about being careful with words. They were beings of few syllables and were known to cast judgments on any who uttered the wrong ones.

Kross's footsteps behind him journeyed along his frayed nerves. They felt like a hallucination of drunk rhythms that hid a secret map or code he was supposed to hear or see or taste.

“You do realize he’s not coming for dinner,” Krave informed, brick-walled in his chair as Reuban placed a pitcher of tap on the center of the table.

“It’s water,” he informed back, going around his Sire’s hunger for their Queen. And not just her blood. It was strong enough to stir Reuban’s appetite, even while he had no need or desire for his queen or her blood.

Kildare sat with hands clasped behind his head, body stretched out with his eyes closed.

The attire Reuban had purchased him was ditched for his celestial blood skirt and wing-webbing embedded into the rest of his skin.

In the light, it appeared like rubies crushed down to powder and gave him a celestial beauty that felt unlawful.

Reuban wanted to ask him about the Archangel’s visitation habits again. But no matter how he arranged the words, it felt like a childish are we there yet? query.

He blew out a steady, measured breath, only to run into Kaos’s dark aura.

He seemed the least interested in whatever hid in the shadows of the ticking time, but Reuban knew better.

He stood before the wall-sized window, locked down tight.

Not tight enough that Reuban didn’t pick up what seeped from the cracks.

And he surely wasn’t going to try and learn what it was.

Not because he feared Kaos but because he sensed whatever he hid was tied to the gnawing unease in his own spirit.

Reuban opened a chair and forced himself to sit and not arrange or touch another fucking thing. He felt Larena enter the room and then jolted from the heat of her hand on his shoulder.

Fuck, he was ready to get this over with.

She opened the chair next to him and sat.

He let her take his hand under the table while eyeing her serene face and the hint of joy at the edge of her mouth.

He remembered her mercy matrix right as it oozed from her palm into his, coating his nerves with something close to a numbing agent and yet not.

Like he knew what he felt but wasn't forced to drown in it.

The air suddenly cracked with Raviel's appearance and Reuban's hand slammed into a tin cup with his barked, "Fuck!" The dish clattered across the table into the others like a bowling ball and he shot up to fix the mess only to send shit spinning out of reach.

The archangel pulled the chair open at the head of the table and sat, entirely oblivious to the embarrassing welcome wagon.

"Everyone needs to be here," he announced as Reuban abandoned rescuing his pride, taking quick note of the angel's eerily familiar human form as he sat.

As if feeling his scrutiny, silvery eyes landed on him and jostled his memory.

The maintenance manager at their apartment.

The one who'd graduated from federal prison for cutting off his father-in-law's head

with dull scissors.

Mistook him as an intruder at his hunting cabin.

“He wore a ski mask,” he’d paused to say, a detail as important as a speck of dust. “Took me over an hour,” he informed with pride, gaze twinkling. “But I championed through it.”

Raviel could’ve been his older identical twin by fifteen years. He lacked the glint of insanity in his gaze, but had the same do as I say or die vibe. And rocked it.

Reuban realized Kaos was no longer at the table the second he returned with a wide-eyed, wary Josie clinging to his arm.

He felt her fear. The kind you had when you broke a million divine rules and Heaven was paying you a visit to chat about it.

Kaos sat her in the chair that put her between her four Kings. Himself then Kross on her left, and Krave then Kildare on her right. That put Reuban and Larena directly across and Raviel by the large window with the ocean view behind him.

Where was the Pontis? No longer needed? He was a being that wouldn’t be missed. Except by their Queen maybe.

He caught Larena’s gaze, soft and steady on the table before her.

He sensed no shame, no fear. No regret from their post-fuck apocalypse that lingered between them.

Everyone had heard it, no doubt there. He hadn’t cared then, and he didn’t care now.

Their Bond seemed to equate... a phenomenal weather event. Rare and catastrophic.

But necessary.

“Let’s begin,” Raviel said with a finality as he reached inside his burgundy overcoat and drew out a card. Plain and weathered by long possession, he flicked it across the table. It hovered in the air midway.

The atmosphere seemed to adjust around it, gravity making exceptions for the impossible thing as light appeared at its edges — first a faint ember, then a burnished gold.

Something darker laced through the glow. Then a hum followed, moving through his body — bone, breath, blood — deeper than sound.

The card spun slowly, each rotation revealing nothing on either side and yet something... something was coming. Something that caused every breath in the room to slow.

“The Earth King must drink the Queen’s blood and see,” Kross suddenly said.

Krave turned to Josie, and she moved her hair aside, giving him access. He cradled the side of her head with one hand and her jaw with the other. He stared at her neck, her vein a lifeline after he’d been dangling from a cliff for hours.

Josie’s gasp plunged through the air like a dagger as he took his eternal craving with a hunger that caused every muscle in Reuban to tense up.

Kaos’s hand closed over Josie’s shoulder, his nails piercing her skin as the card suddenly flared and light surged outward in waves.

The hum rose, moving across the stone and seeping through skin, mind, and memory.

The revelation arrived as a vision. A place, a symbol. No, a direction. A knowing of a

memory long buried, now burned into a place that existed before breath.

Suddenly the air cleared, and the card fell to the table, a blinding white fire burning it up until crystal clear air filled its impossible wake.

Raviel rose and all eyes turned to him, his silver eyes aimed at Krave.

“The Bond of The Kings shines too bright. Hell watches. The Savior’s Bond is the only tie that can remain.

” He regarded Reuban now. “Kross carries the truth.” He looked at Kaos next.

“And holds the burden of it.” Kildare was the last one to get his gaze. “And you must see that it is done.”

He stepped back and the air itself opened like an invisible mouth and swallowed him, leaving them with the wicked thing none of them could ever be ready for.

“What did he mean?” Josie asked quietly to every pair of eyes locked on the horrible thing the archangel had just left them with. “Reuban?” she pressed, when nobody answered. “What did he mean about hell watching? And the Savior’s Bond being the only tie that can remain?”

She looked at Kross. “What truth do you carry?” Then at Kaos. “What burden does he hold?”

“Who is going to tell her?” Larena whispered.

Josie stood now, gasping. “Yes, who is going to tell me? Kildare?” she demanded. “What must you see done?”

“The bonds must be cut, Mother,” Kross said quietly.

She looked at him. “What...which bonds?” She regarded Larena. “Which bonds, Larena?” she pushed, breathless.

“Please tell her,” Larena gasped, wiping the tears from her face.

“Kildare and Kaos can no longer be tied to you the way they are,” Kross said softly.

Josie stared at him then slowly sat, wiping her face. “Tied how?” she asked, the words small and frail.

“Intimately,” Kaos answered, drawing a jagged gasp from her.

“What?” she barely whispered, the word tight. “I don’t...”

“There must be another way,” Kross said, standing so quickly the chair flew back with a clatter.

Kildare finally spoke. “There isn’t.” She looked up at him staring down at the table, gripped in the nightmare. “If we don’t sever the bond, our enemies will find our son,” he breathed, his head shaking. “And we cannot permit that.”

“I can shield,” Kross demanded, pacing now. “I’m stronger than you know. I can protect all of you.”

“You cannot be a shield,” Kaos growled. “I see the purpose for your existence as well as you do, and we must be your covering. If they target you, then our Queen becomes a target. I severed my existence to protect her, and I will not hesitate to sever our bond to ensure she remains protected.”

Josie gasped as she hurried from the room.

“I have her,” Larena whispered, hurrying after her.

Reuban stood and did his own pacing. “Is this temporary?” he demanded, eyeing all of them only to see none of them had the answer to that.

“I will sever the bonds,” Kildare muttered, his wings unleashing from his body. He eyed Kaos. “If there is a chance that this is temporary—”

“It’s not temporary.”

Everybody eyed Kross, now facing the window.

“Once you’re severed, there is no going back. The triune bond was a one-time weapon. It’s been executed and it accomplished its purpose and now it is no longer, it is done and gone.”

“Do it now,” Kaos ordered. “The Darkness is already coming.”

Panicked, Reuban shot his powers into the perimeter and slammed into a dense wall of Dark power.

“Hurry,” Reuban urged. “He’s right.”

“Wait!” Josie cried, racing into the room, sobbing as she collided into Kildare.

His fire flared as he wrapped his wings around her tightly.

She held his face and kissed it. “I just want to say I love you and I will never stop loving you! I’m not afraid to do whatever we have to,” she gasped, pressing her head to his chest. “But you’re not leaving, right? Are you leaving, Kildare?”

“Little Saint,” he soothed, his voice thick and hot, hand glowing as he stroked her head. “Our fierce little warrior. You will never be alone. Our bond will be severed but never forgotten.”

“But will you be here?” she half shrieked.

“I will,” he whispered, the broken word suffocating Reuban because of what it meant. A sentencing. To be there, unable to forget. A living wound that never stopped bleeding.

She gasped and turned. “Kaos!”

Kildare released her and she raced to him, gluing herself to his white, rigid frame, now locked in torment.

“Thank you for loving me,” she choked as his white hand cradled her head to him.

“You’re not evil, you’re good! So good, just like our son!

Thank you for our son!” The words wrenched from her chest, jagged and piercing.

Reuban felt the darkness creeping closer. “Krave,” he urged.

Krave hurried to her, moving the hair from her face. “Little Saint,” he urged, tugging at her arms glued to Kaos. “It’s time.”

Reuban’s chest ached at the eternal torment billowing from Kaos’s being. The ice-cold rage and burning hot love sucked the air from the room.

Kildare moved away from them as light grew within him. He braced his legs apart, both hands together before him, his wings spread wide, pulsing with light and red fire. A sword materialized, its hilt in his clenched hands, tip nearly reaching the ceiling.

The air was silent but strained, like it might tear if Kildare breathed wrong. The light within him flashed, as if a door to heaven had cracked open inside him, and Reuban

realized in awe—it had.

Kildare closed his eyes, his face hardening as the light pulsed faster and began flooding out of him in strobed waves. He spoke in a heavenly tongue, “Awaken the Severance Flame.”

Reuban held Larena tightly as the blade pulsed once in answer, a darker hue of blood fire seeping from Kildare’s chest and lacing with the brilliance. Both coiled around him without touching the floor, a low, growing grumble now riding each beat, till the pressure slammed his ribs.

Kildare’s eyes opened, red and white fire filling them. “Sever the ties of flesh and spirit.”

His voice quaked with the command and the Severance Flame erupted from the sword and struck Kildare and Kaos in the chest.

The impact slammed Kaos to his knees and shoved Kildare back several feet. His teeth clenched, but neither King cried out or made a sound. The light detonated with a low whomp, rattling blood and vision then slammed back into Kildare’s chest.

The quiet room echoed with their ragged breaths, Kildare’s head and wings hanging, Kaos, a broken monument of grief too deep for anything human to touch.

Josie’s wail ripped through the silence, a broken sorrow for the ruin left in the room. Her beloved Kings. Both stripped from her soul.

Reuban knew — with the sick certainty of a man watching his own blood spill on the ground —that nothing sacred had survived the price they had just paid.

And all that remained was paying hell back for the cost.