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March 4th 2006 -- Desert of Fire  
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Colette had first turned up at the all too familiar Inn by the lake. She had just missed the angry mob that had formed from the young woman's tart disposition, and would have been glad, had she known this happened. Colette was one to completely remove herself from violent situations. Could she be blamed? Her father had turned her into a trembling shell of a woman, and she was much safer drawn into herself than involving herself in drama. Once at the Inn, she had settled down near the door for a drink.. that way she could listen to conversations that passed. It took nearly four hours, but she finally heard a man speak up, over his ale, about Hawker's Forte...apparently a harbor town. She loved the water. Perhaps there would be good. It took her a few minutes to decide whether or not she would ask the man to take her with him, as he was speaking of going there to trade, but finally decided against it, as his conversation revealed that it would be another week before he departed. She could not wait that long. She did hear, however, which direction it was. South west. She could find southwest easily enough. Eventually she would HAVE to run across it, or people going there.

Well, so she thought. But now, as the lands turned from lush and flowing to rippling grass, then to drier lands. If it was a harbor town, where was the water? Colette reigned the horse to a stop, then climbed down, which was awkward. She swore that once she did reach Hawker's Forte that she would buy riding pants before ANYTHING else. As the breeze drifted over the grass, she laid down in it, flat on her back, and closed her eyes. It felt good to be off of the horse. Three days of travelling, and not once today had she seen water. The stallion was growing tired, as was she, but she knew that stopping for too long would cause trouble. Not only would she have the possibility of running into some unknown creature, but they would starve. She was out of food and had no water. After a few minutes of resting, the dark haired angel closed her deep brown eyes, then heaved a sigh. She was never going to belong here. Whenever she was in relations with someone too long, they died or were forbidden to see her. Cracking one eye open to gaze up at the sun, she wrinkled her nose. She was cursed. That was the only explanation. Heaving herself to her feet, she worked furiously at brushing the dry grass off of her gown, then moved to the grazing horse, who at least had something to eat. Mounting once more, she settled in and urged the horse in the direction she had been heading. This land was strange...grasslands COULD lead to a harbor town, right?

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She knew it. Hell was here, in the present, right now. The horse had run off hours ago. Her mouth was sandpaper and her tongue was stuck to her palette. Grasslands had given away to blazing desert, and she had given up on the hope that she had gone in the right direction. She had climbed off the horse, hoping to get further away from the sun, and when she had turned to stretch, the horse had taken off. The pounding hoofbeats were the only thing she heard over her pulse in her ears. It took her a few moments, but she realized then...her pack had been on the horse. Everything she had owned, all she had left of Valis and herself...was gone. Had she tears to shed, she would have sobbed right then, but instead, she laid down on the sand. Her skin was blazing and her eyes were blurring. Curling up on her side, she tugged her gown down over her legs, trying to cover as much skin as she could, and tucked her head into her arms, giving a miserable whimper of agony. She was

dying. Did it matter? The only one who had worried about her existence anymore was dead. A sob tore at her raw throat, though no tears would come. The sun beat down, torturing her skin, her insides, her mind. A hazy, red fog flooded into her mind, causing a constant buzz. Closing her eyes, her heart racing and her lungs burning, she decided that she would go quietly. Soon, she did go...but only passed out due to heat exhaustion. Soon, the scavengers would descend on her and pick her clean.

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What was it he smelled? A scavenger of sorts did indeed lurk nearby. A handsome but verily odd kind of scavenging predator. Sweet this thing was that captured his olfactory senses, a soft scent like a feather which tickled the nose. It was repulsive and wonderful...an angel, but not the one which tormented and mocked his master's wits, no. Wyrvaust slid off of his grey desert steed's back and flipped a hand at him to shoo it away. The animal tossed up its head and bolted, to run off eastward, and there halt on the shoulder of the horizon. The demon, meanwhile, prowled towards the delicious smelling thing, the leathery soles of his bare feet not making a sound. He crept more slowly as the dried grasses and waxy leafed shrubs gave way to the creature lying on the ground, and as his gaze settled on her, an arched brow of ebony cocked with that curious cant of his head. A girly-bird...how unusual...A Nephelim it had to be, for no other sweet meet was inhabited by an altogether feminine mystique. It was a pretty birdie it was, though somewhat baked and reddened by the beating rays of the sun. He stalked closer, his posture lowering towards the ground as the gap of ground between them narrowed to nothing. His lips nearly brushed her cheek as he inhaled her scent deeply, and the notion of feasting on her where she lie tempted the beast in him. But no...this was his only master's kingdom...and such a rare orchid, as this being born of mortal and divine intercourse, was not his to devour. Claim it he would, as a guest in his lair, until Marsol could fetch himself to its company, and decide what to do with this third trespasser to have wandered haphazardly into his domain. Lithe but strong arms coiled beneath and around her, and he lifted her to cradle her in his arms against his chest. Lips pressed against her throat to taste the sublime temptation of her flesh, and as he walked eastward, razored teeth sliced into her flesh to draw blood. His saliva numbed the wound quickly as he nursed only on her blood, when he might as easily have feasted on her flesh. He savored the intoxicating attributes of her nectar as he strode across the rippled waves of the sand. When he reached his horse, lips puckered to beckon the steed with soft kisses, as the desert cracked open to a shadowy veil which the clan demon carried the beautiful female through, his horse entering astride him. It was within the lodgings he had made of a long forgotten gem mine that he emerged with the Nephelim, the chamber's stone ceiling low and supported by heavy rafters. There was a couch of sorts, a strong wooden frame covered with a leather mattress filled with sawdust, and covered with three layers of sable, black, and brendle furs, a table, and some oil lamps in the chamber. It was there on the soft furs that he lay the female, still suckling on her blood, and for awhile longer he fed on her delectable liquid, and then licked the wounds to quicken their healing. Hence he withdrew and went to kindle the hearth with a fire, put a stew on over the flames, and fetch her some water. Meanwhile, his mind whispered to Marsol. "Where is the great chieftain of the dunes? Wyrvaust has snared something in his master's western garden. It smells good like the warrior who seized your obsession, but a fem-swan it is, who was baking beneath the sun. So poorly prepared these precious beasties are, for the challenges of our beautiful terrain. Why come they here, these three, my lord? What tricks are the fates playing? Shall I eat it and be done with it, or save it for

your eyes?" The water was tipped to her lips, her head lifted by him, as he mind spoke to Marsol...who was his master by choosing who to serve. He would urge her to drink until she came around on her own, and then go stir the venison stew. If she asked him who he was, his gaze would pin her with a blank stare before lips would part to reply. "I am the eyes and ears of the desert westland. But you may call me Wyrvaust."

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The grey cloud of apathy that had descended on him during his current acts was pierced rather well by the whispering in his mind. Those dark pools narrowed drastically as his hands stopped in the middle of the gruesome deed they were committing. There was a mildly amused smile that threatened to tug up the corners of his mouth that was smeared in blood. The sight of him was nothing sort of appalling. His muscular figure rose to stand as his fingers loosened their grip in the mess of brown hair they were wound around. His head turned to the side, staring off into the distance of sand and winds where he stood with one foot on sparse but dying grass, and hot soil. Half in one land and half in another is how he stood, but it was also how he felt. The answer to the link Wyrvaust had opened would not be answered immediately, but it would be answered nonetheless. Time would pass in the way it always did as the desert beast felt the warm wetness trickling down the front of his body as well as over the tops of his bare feet. He was truly a mess. Soaked in blood were his black thin material pants. Splattered was his bare chest. Most of the blood his hands that appeared to have been dipped in was dry and already flaking. He ran the back of his left hand over his mouth, or his tongue rather as he licked it clean when he did reply. "Fate is mocking us," came the hiss of a thought sent to Wyrvaust with so much distain that it would be a true act of God for Wyrvaust not to feel even just a tinge of it. His mood was foul? It wasn't the half of it. The scene of carnage that laid behind him was testament to just how irritated he had gotten, but from what? People. People littered the ground much like garbage would in a village. Body parts were strewn every which way, the entrails of some spilled over the sides of small rocks and what was worse, there were children. Four little girls and boys, no more than three. Even these innocents had not escaped the horror that had befallen their once peaceful home that had been burnt to the ground. A head. A head of thick brown curly hair with the face that belonged in portraits was the object in the grasp of his right hand. The body it belonged to lay elsewhere, half eaten. A family of eight had been slaughtered in the time it took the female-birdie to lose her horse and for a predator of the most alluring proportions to find her. In that short time span this farmer's family with their livestock who had also not escaped his ill tempered wrath had been laid to waste. The only thing giving hint to the dead family ever having horses or cows, was all of the severed legs coiled in barbed wire that hung from the nearest tree like some sick trophy. The grass was over saturated in blood, much like his pants. Those feet with the prints of fingers stepped over a finger and what looked to be a strip of skin but that was questionable as flames burst into existence before him as he mused over why it was people thought the desert was passible, when it was not. They didn't belong there. Nicholai. Cirgoth. This.. woman, whoever she was, they all did not belong there, least not in his amber eyes. There were gashes and deep hole looking wounds all over his back and one in particular in between his shoulder blades were a bit of something shiny still lay embedded. The broken off blade of a knife no less probably. An arrow lay buried in the right side of his chest, just above the nipple as his slow walk brought him into and through the gate of fire that had roared to life at a moment's notice. The

head of one of the little girls remained in his right hand as he passed through it, just as the house that had been burning now collapsed in on itself, as well as the sleeping elderly couple in it that was tied to their bed where they had been screaming for quite some time now. Was it so surprising that he could do such a thing to people he didn't even know nor had ever seen before in his unnatural life? Or was it that shocking that he would do such a thing? As the tall tanned figure of murderous rage left the sight of gore, a big with wings as dark as ink landed on the limb of the dead tree that held all the cut off legs of the cows and horses. The bird was a raven if one could see the slick of different colors in the shimmer given from the light on its feathers. It cast a dark eye over the monstrosity passing through the gate of fire to go elsewhere, just as it cast an eye over the dead family and the burning large farm house. Dread suddenly washed over the area and it passed over it so quickly that a bit of it was caught by the desert cheftan as he slowly began to turn once his feet touched sand. Half way turned about, those amber eyes looked over his shoulder and spied the bird perched on the tree, nibbling at the sun baked carcasses of a dead cow. The bird perked up, shifting its sight on the inhuman man staring back at it through the gate as it started to close. The smell of burnt flesh and wood choked the desert air. The thing within had escaped its cage...again.

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I dream of angels...  
But I live with demons...  
"I need the combination," he said.  
"The combination to what," they asked.  
"To the safe. My soul is in the safe..."  
"Where is the safe?"  
"The safe is below the floor, in hell..."

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Colette's mind was wrapped in that thick, red fog. It rolled over her in waves and encased her entire being. She felt nothing of the desert scavenger lifting her up, and not one inch of the ivory teeth that sank into her skin. He could have drained her dry and she would not have sensed the danger in the least. But the creature did no such thing, and her heat tortured form was laid out on the leather mattress in his chamber. It was not until that cool water touched her cracked lips that the thick, dark lashes fluttered and parted, allowing her hazy brown eyes to form slits. Her lips opened to the liquid, then her leathery throat began to guzzle it until she nearly choked. When her head was lowered and the cup was taken away, an inevitable whimper of protest. The shadow that loomed over her moved away, the dim light in the room flickering. There was no blazing sun? She was not baking... Oh God. She was dead. Was she in hell? It was dim, and there were shadows... were there demons about? Eventually, she may find out that she was half correct. Her senses began to gather and her eyes shifted to slide down her body. The same dress...the dark velvet gown. It began coming back to her. That was Maria's dress. Her other clothing had gone with the horse. The dress was crumpled and sand clung to the folds. Her long, dark flowing locks were tangled, full of sand as well. It was the scent of food that tugged at her next sense, and she shifted on the mattress she lay on. Where had the water gone? How could she be in hell when something tasted so beautiful? Using her elbows, Colette fought to push herself up. As she did, her head swam violently, and she nearly wretched. Squeezing her eyes

shut for a moment, she gained her equilibrium, then opened her eyes once more. Her irises landed on the cup of water and she reached for it, her fingers clasping it and pulling it to her lips. She chugged it quickly, leaving no time to breathe. When the cup was empty she pulled it away, gasping heavily to let her lungs catch up with her stomach. Setting the cup aside, she let her eyes skim around, taking in the dim oil lamps, the bed she lay on, then someone standing over a fire. The scent of food made her nearly drool. It was a good sign though, as she was not completely dried out. Studying the individual, she finally spoke up, her voice soft, but a little rough still. "Tell me...who are you?" At his answer, she remained quiet. Wyrvaust? An odd name. "So, I am still in the desert?" That was her next question. After sitting up for a few minutes, she felt her head swim again. How long had she been out in the sun? She felt ill. Slowly stretching back out, she closed her eyes and laid an arm across them, blocking out everything around her. Her body pulled in two different directions. She was exhausted, but at the same time, starving, and she smelled food, so her stomach would not let her rest. "I never meant to come here. The sun...the moons...are confusing.." She whispered, nearly to herself. Was the woman mad? One would think so from the way she spoke to herself like that. She had no clue what was being called to them at the time, and what that creature held in it's hand. She began to drift off to sleep again, her mind pulling in dreams of hot baths and the lush grass of home.

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Date: 05:07 PM Mar 3, 2006

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Cirgoth woke from the terrors which had manifested in his sleep to bark a startled cry, his breaths catching and heaving before his lungs gradually steadied, and the constriction in his throat relaxed. Teeth gritted as a result of the stitching pain in his throat and lower body, and the back of his hand swept upward to brush away the sweat which dampened his feverish brow. His eyes pierced the darkness of the chamber Marsol had abandoned him to after depleting him of blood, some amount of flesh, and his physical strength. His eyes slammed shut and his body trembled as his mind was staggered by the horrifying visions that had been revealed so graphically in his dreams. Hands settled on the thick furs beneath him, his fingers recoiling as the sticky feel of blood, his own blood, met his fingertips. "Lord Marsol?" he called out into the darkness, but as silence alone replied, he stirred and lifted his bruised, cut, and throbbing body stiffly from the bed. He was still healing from the night of blissfully agonizing surrender. He could barely stand, much less walk...inasmuch as he had only mended for a couple of hours, when what he required was a day or two to recover. Marsol had tapped his blood supply out to taste what few ever could, or would...his angelic ichor...his 'sweetest nectar.' When his blood was completely drained, his ichor remained, and the strength, the stamina, it bestowed the partaker was incredible. After only three hours of regenerating his blood supply, Cirgoth was in no shape to leave that bed. "Marsol?" he called out again, his voice strained with anxiety. As he staggered and caught himself on a chair, leaning heavily on it, his fingers traced the chalky surface almost cautiously. Bone...the chair...or throne...was crafted of bone. His fingers curled to clutch a handful of the fur pelt layed over the chair, his brows knitting darkly. "Why...?" he whispered breathlessly, as his mind pieced three fragments together...Marsol's reluctance to claim him, the carnage he had dreamt of, the chair he leaned on now, the same chair from his prior dreams of Marsol. His cheeks

and jaws then clenched, and nostrils flared to draw his lips into a pained scowl. "MARSOL!!!!" He roared, only this time his internal voice shot outward to target the desert dragon's mind.

If Marsol does not hinder these actions: The moment Cirgoth locked onto Marsol's mind, the angel stormed naked through the quantum folds, locking onto Marsol by path of their mental link. Cirgoth's nude form emerged from the gate in a blur of speed to charge at Marsol, with both arms sweeping forward to embrace Marsol as he collided with him in violent tackle which his momentum excellerated. When their forms met the ground, Cirgoth's strength fortified only momentarily by fear and grief alone, his arms untangled him as he straddled him, and trembling hands grappled his shirt to shake him, his eyes burning with wounded tears of anguish and rage. "Why? Tell me why?" his voice gritty with the strain of his emotions. He was oblivious to anyone else but Marsol, even his own nude state lost on him, as he tried to make sense of it all. "Tell me the truth...Is this...the...price...of your love?" this spoken in a staggered whisper, his confusion evident in the shake of his head, then shaking him again, with wroth desperation, his green eyes pierced him through and through. "Tell me why! I need to understand, tell me why!" With a final frail tug against Marsol's shirt, meant to shake him again, lips parted to a shuddering breath, and his frame buckled ontop of him, the last of his strength depleted by the energy he expelled when he had no business doing so in his docile state of health. At that moment, Marsol could have tipped him over with a push of his index finger to send him rolling onto the ground next to him.

Post any actions hindered, and I will modify Post:

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Date: 09:30 AM Mar 4, 2006  
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It wasn't as if Marsol wanted to do half the things he did. He just did them. The brutalities. The killings. The unnessisary torture of held enemy captives by way of boiling them alive, just to see if they would be worth feasting upon. If one were to ask the beast why he said the things he said, or if he even thought about anything beforehand that came out of his mouth, he would answer them with something along the lines of, "No, I would rather hear it for the first time like everyone else." As the last of said gate made of fire that crackled with an eerie glee piffed into nothing but air once again, and the sight of the odd black bird gnawing at the joint just above a hoof grew smaller and smaller, he amusement grew by just a fraction. It wasn't more then a dune or two's worth of distance north of the particular shadow filled place the female birdie had awoken in that he came out of the fire gate to. If you measured distance in dunes that is, you might be a true desert person they use to say. The childs head was set atop a four foot high pilar shaped rock after the shirt and coat were picked up in its place. The silk like feel of the shirt kissed his sun and war torn flesh as his arms slid into the long sleeves. His eyes still stared off into the distance as his mind was still so completely overcome by the estacy the angel could give and that they had shared. Or had it just been him enjoying it all and Cirgoth had been in too much agony to do so too? The side of his mouth twitched at the task of keeping everything in order from the time he had caught him inside the cave, to their little tussle that enevitably led up to the mind bending passion that had howled between them amongst the bed of black furs. He was still so heavily weighed down by the calm Cirgoth gave him not from his body or mind alone, but just by his voice. As much as he

would not admit it, if Cirgoth were ever to want to talk him out of anything, all he had to do was just that. Talk. So very many things about the lost little angel confused him still but there was much, much more that gave him the peace his eternally enraged soul had been in dire need of. And after all this time... He had just been about to shrug on the over coat when the voice of the one he'd been thinking about ever since he'd laid his damn eyes on, invaded his otherwise blank state. He wakes, he would think to himself as his head turned skyward, those lids growing severely heavy but never did they close to block out the welcoming glare of the sun or heat. He should have sensed Cirgoth coming. He should have seen it a mile away and yet, he didn't. He did know something angered the angel the point of this shouting within the link he had opened up but the magnitude of what he had just done, to innocent people, must have eluded the desert cheiftans grasp. Or was it that he knew what ailed Cirgoth, but he didn't care? The latter would have been common place in a world where Death came in many shapes and sizes, much like misery. In a world where people dying every day was common place, and the talk of monsters lurking in the woods behind your home was not so unusual. In this world nothing was out of the ordinary now was it? The only reason he had even left Cirgoth to his fitful slumber in the safety of said lightless room was so that his own confusion, not to mention his hunger as well as whatever else was aggravating him wouldn't be taken out on the angel himself. The result was the loss of eight lives and numerous live stock. A burnt house. The end of a blood line. And two very homeless house cats that had been asleep out in the field as oppose to inside the farm house. These acts were not of lunacy, or atleast Marsol would swear they weren't. They were just the sort of acts he would do when faced with no out let for the moutainous pile of emotions that had never been there before. The demonic beast had not batted an eyelash at removing the feet and hands of the pregnant mother of the home who had been hanging the laundry out to dry when the tall tanned man in black had approached her and stole their lives like a thief in the night. If he did not fault at this, then why should he hesitate when he had relieved the children of their heads? He was still thinking of why Cirgoth sounded so angry that he was taken completely by the naked angel by suprise and indeed they both would colide and fall to the sand with Cirgoth atop with a loud thud given on how hard Marsol landed. A blink was given as his vision began to haze before suddenly everything bled into a red hue. The back of his head hurt. What was it? A rock? A knife? Had Cirgoth come to end the unnatural life of the abomination that did in fact, love him regardless of the atrocities he had just done? If it would ease the angels pain just by a hair, Marsol didn't think it so bad if... Damnit, he swore inwardly at just how easily he would give in to Cirgoth for anything. So unlike him. Yet, it was like him. When the question slipped from Cirgoth like a new born babe from its dying mothers womb, the expression on the thing underneth the angel was nothing. No trace of amusement showed in those amber eyes. However there was no anger in them either. There was simply nothing at all. Perhaps that was a good thing considering the circumstances. Except Marsol did not deal in chance. He spat at the foolish idea of destiny and moreover, laughed at the faintest inkling to this Fate business. He wouldn't stand for someone else having control over him nor his tribe or fellow clan demons. Everyone had a choice. Everyone was in control of their own lives and to give up such a right, a privilage, well you might as well have been dead. His arms had fallen to either side of them, far apart as the back of his head had indeed said hello to a sharp rock. No retort came to chase Cirgoth for his boldness, in more ways then one. No venomous smile was made at the nude form of the man sitting on top of him, shaking him like a ragamuffin. Not even a bit of a push was made to get Cirgoth off of him either. He was completely... passive. What in the world had happened? What had Cirgoth done to him? Or was it some trick? No it

couldn't be. The desert creature looking up at the angel from behind a few dark strands of hair was docile. He couldn't have been intimidating if he held a knife to the other mans neck. His body was slack and gave in to each pull made by his shirt or if he was pushed away. Why? He wanted to know why. Marsol made no gesture of hostility towards him. He didn't move at all really. For the longest time the only thing the murderer underneath Cirgoth did was look up at him with this look in his eyes that wasn't an unfeeling one. It was blank yet it wasn't at the same time. It held emotion behind it. In that fleeting second Marsol looked human. Just in the faint flicker that sprinted through his eyes to disappear into the never ending darkness that dwelled within him, he could feel. Oh how he felt now and it was tearing him apart inwardly, yet none of it showed on the outside. On the outside he just appeared extremely sleepy. Like he had just woken up, rather than Cirgoth. Finally he did move but it wasn't to shove Cirgoth away and berate him with words. Those sleeved arms moved around the one sitting on top of him. They circled around him and held him terribly close as the rest of his body moved to sit up and eventually, to stand. Weither Cirgoth struggled or not would determine if Marsol picked him up with him. Everyone had a choice, except Marsol. Even the blasted angels without souls had a choice. Yet he was always denied. No words came to answer Cirgoths question. Or was Marsol answering him already...?

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Date: 10:17 PM Mar 4, 2006  
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Love...what a mysterious and overpowering thing it was. It was terrible, and wonderful, soft and fierce. In that brief glimpse into Marsol's eyes, Cirgoth did understand...He understood that Marsol feared perhaps only one thing, and that being a creature that dared not allow anything to pierce his heart to make him vulnerable, that fear made a monstrous thing of him. A thing that would crush his own fear by instilling terror in those he took the lives of. The angel's eyes shut fast as Marsol embraced him...He had expected anything but that. He felt the wrath of his love in the arresting closeness of his embrace, and also...that disarming tenderness which he dared himself from time to time to betray. Cirgoth's mind and heart warred as his own arms wound around Marsol, the heat of the sun blazing down on the desert, and the Desert Dragon's own internal fire, smothering him with a feverish haze. "I heard their screams...the horror in their souls...I saw your image reflected in the terror stricken eyes of children...their innocence...their joy...snuffed by the horror." He was not even aware that he was being lifted by Marsol as he spoke, his voice listless with the oppressive weight of it all. His fingers dug into his muscles as his shirt was gathered against the sultry heat of his flesh. "How can you allow yourself to fear anything so much, that you would lay waste to life so coldly? It was a cowardly deed. To cover fear with murder...to fear what is in your own heart so much that you would try to strangle it with violence. Where is your courage, Marsol?" his voice was choked by passion as he spoke, still unaware of the motion of Marsol's form in stride, and even the cooler air which contacted his flesh as Marsol ducked out of the sunlight and into the confines of Wyrvaust's lair.

"I would rather you had stripped me of my flesh to the bone...than killed all those people. They might have served you...might have offered livestock for your protection...for allowing them to dwell peacefully in your desert kingdom. They



might have esteemed you as their Lord, had you only approached them as their king. Or is death your only law? Shall you lay waste to every village and oasis, until only the animals remain to feed your lust for blood? Until you and yours are outlaws in your own land, hunted by every creature who fears you shall bring your wrath and hunger for blood to their lands?" He was babbling now...but quietly, under his breath, as he attempted to purge himself somehow of the insanity which was growing in his mind and heart. Marsol was so like a god in his ability to take life with no regret for so little a thing. The angel shuddered against him and attempted to budge himself from Marsol's arms, and as Marsol's straps of hard muscle released him, he sort of climbed out of limbo and dropped to the floor, quite oblivious of the fact he was elevated when Marsol released him. Cirgoth landed on one knee, the ball of his bare foot, and ten steepled fingers, his green eyes peering around at the tunnel they traipsed through. As Marsol continued on ahead, Cirgoth called out to him. "I won't let you take my heart from me, My Lord," he swore, or warned, whichever way Marsol took it. The angel then unfolded his form to stand, and with a swaying stagger on the uneven floor, he padded silently on those bare feet after him.

Wyrvaust watched the female as she stirred to life on her own to quench her thirst with the cup he left by the bed of soft furs. He listened to her questions and explanations as they came while his eyes slid over her with a child-like intrigue. He ladeled the rich gravy and tender meat of the stew from the cast iron pot, into a deep wooden bowl for her, and then placed the bowl with a piece of stone oven browned bread, with a spoon on a copper plate. His tall, slender frame then rose to make his way over to the bed, where he sat the plate down on the same low table the water sat on. "Little swan's trespass, intended or not, shall be dealt with by My Lord, and the chieftain of these lands. He alone is the master of this domain, and of the fates of those who invade the solitude of the desert. The desert, yes, is where the swan has landed. Now, eat, and be at peace while you may." He moved away from her at that, and to a chair across the room by the wall where the doorway to the outer tunnel was. His lair had many rooms and tunnels, which extended for several miles underground. He sometimes held prisoners in his lair for Marsol...some left to rot if Marsol forgot about them...the rest either eaten, or held until their sanity was chipped away to nothing. Even fewer were released, if Marsol decided to show them mercy for whatever reason...even if that reason was a mere whim. His dark eyes observed her for a moments, then his arms folded over his chest and his eyes closed as she ate, his layered robes of light cloth the color of the desert itself. His coffee-and-cream colored flesh blended into the shadows, as did the robes he wore with the sandstone, mica, quartz, and pegmatite stratum of the cave. The mines were cool, and comfortable, but not cold, warmer than the desert at night, and cooler than the desert during the day. Soon he would sense his master's presence in the lair that was his master's before it was his, simply because it was in the desert...Just as he was Marsol's, because he too was in the desert. The math, it was easy.

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Colette began to drift back to her hazy, heated sleep, though now she was a little more comfortable, due to the fact that the cave WAS cooler than the desert. She had

been baking out there for hours, unbeknownst to her, and if Wyrvaust had not stumbled upon her, she would have dried out and been left as food for the scavengers. Just as her eyes flutter shut and her sore muscles began to relax, Wyrvaust drifted to her, along with the rich scent of stew, and placed the bowl beside her nearly empty glass of water. And as she guessed, her empty stomach would not let her rest with that smell wafting over her nose. In moments she dragged herself up to sit, trying to sit straight and maintain some of her dignity. As she reached for the plate, Wyrvaust began to explain in that odd tone of his that his Lord would be coming to deal with her as he saw fit. Her skin crawled as she dipped her spoon into the bown of stew. He made it sound like she had raped their land with her presence. Frowning, she glanced across the room but did not see him. Instead of looking foolish and trying to hunt him down with her eyes, she turned her gaze back down to her bowl. "Then all I can do is wait, I suppose.." She murmured. Only time would tell if it was a good thing that she was not left to bake under the sun. What type of Lords reigned in the desert? Colette hated it here, and she had only stumbled on it. Who lived here intentionally? The devil, she could imagine. Shivering at the thought, she bent her head over her food and concentrated on suplimenting her body. The bowl was empty in minutes, the bread gone as well, and she sat the plate aside and reached for her cup. Finishing off her water, she pushed it back onto the table. Her full stomach and quenched tongue decided to override her discomfort about her burned skin and sand in her hair, and she lowered back onto the mattress and closed her eyes with a soft sigh. She remembered to murmur a soft 'Thank you' to the dark recesses of the room before she drifted off to sleep.

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It wasn't fair. The phrase held a such childishness to it that it made him scowl inwardly. It wasn't as though he felt he was being childish, he knew it. Something he'd never done before, nor kill those that were innocent. The blood that marred his body had rubbed off on Cirgoth, no doubt leaving red finger prints over the angels hips and the bare skin of his back where he had carried him all that way to be out of the sun. The words that slipped from Cirgoth as he carried him from the comfort of the heat into that more welcoming dim lit liar appeared not to register at all with the Desert Dragon. Even the bit about being a coward for the bastard act of murdering that which was most pure in all creation, children. The very things that knew not evil or good. The things that were the future. He had killed these of the most cherishible and would not loose sleep over it. Or so he thought. He had to let go of him once they had reached the hive like mouth of the tunnel, or else he might do something else he would regret, if one could fathom that. There was a twitch to the right corner of his mouth as he released him, to step around and then continue on into the cooler air. After those tan fleshed feet covered in dry red flakes took a few steps, he paused. The mere idea of someone else seeing Cirgoth in his current indecent state not only made his blood boil but was less then appropriate.

Even if Wryvaust decided to do what he pleased with this new fangeled female birdie and now sat alone in there trying to reason a way to convey his apologies for having eaten the above. Not that Wryvaust Lord would care at the moment. At the

moment Wryvaust could very well do unspeakable things to the woman and rest assured he would receive no glare nor evil eye from Marsol. He could even berate her or let her go, scott free without a scratch.

At the moment, the desert cheiftan was a mess and it was getting worse by the seconds. What good was he to his clan if he could get become so easily thrown off like this? Cirgoth had struck a rather nasty cord in the dark browed beast that walked at an unhurried pace ahead of him, yet was so quick that he should have been jogging or even in a light run at just how fast he was traveling. The pause he had made was to shrug off the over black thick and heavey over coat of dense cotton so that it would be tossed behind him without so much as a glance.

"There is a lady present," came the words that were much colder then any manner of ice partical could ever wish to be.

He was hallow again. Unfeeling. Unkind. Unreasonable. Just like that. A switch had been flipped in him. Something Cirgoth seemed to be able to do well. The coat was tossed not in disgust but more of a gesture for Cirgoth to cover himself, that is if he wished. If not, Marsol wouldn't hold it against him. He too preffered to be out of the confides of his clothing from time to time however, this was not one of them. His face held no trace of emotion in it. Not even anger which often creased his brows and pulled the sides of his mouth downwards. Even that would have been more welcoming then the nothingness he now showed. As if the slaughter that had happened mere moments ago hadn't really ocured, and that Cirgoth was angered beyond all belief at the horror act. Normally Marsol would have been amused at how much Cirgoth cared for people he didn't know of nor had ever met or intended to. He would have find it very interesting that the angels heart was indeed as big as his head. He might even have offered to help ease the angels pain by way of ressurecting said family? No, no, that would have ruined the fun and such a thing as resurrection was scoffed at by Marsol. In his eyes, when it was your time to go, you had better go kicking and screaming. The idea of coming back once you had expired somewhat annoyed the beast. Then again what did he know. Did he know of mercy? Hardly. Did he know of compassion? Probably not. Did he want to know of this love? The questions suddenly pressed inward on him from all sides and shorted out of his train of thought as the smell of Cirgoth was momentarily set aside by something possibly not quite as sweet but sweet nonetheless. Of course nobody would ever be able to cover up Cirgoth. They couldn't replace him. He could never be slighted or erased. He didn't know this, he felt it in the marrow of his bones. He felt it in the knotting in his gutt whenever his eyes passed over the angels figure and he felt it all too well in his chest cavity.

Oh how it hurt now from the words Cirgoth had said, weither he had ment to or not. A deep hole had been made, and it had such a vengence of its own that it blocked out everything else. The mild constant stinging sensations of the arrow still burried in his chest, the blade of a hunting knife embedded in his back between his shoulder blades with the hilt broken off and discarded somewhere. The pellet holes making a semi circle to the left of his navel, the piece of ugly looking glass protuding from the inside of his right wrist, angled at a slant so that it cut tendons and veins moreso then actual skin. Quite the fight the family had put up. Even the pregnant mother of a baby girl that would now never be born. Not to mention the good aim of the oldest boy, who had tried to shoot the bad man that was ripping out the throat of his father but cried in terror at how the pellets did nothing to the him. A monster. That was how the now deceased people had viewed him

before they passed on to a better place, one much kinder then here he reasoned as body started onward again into the somewhat lightless tunnel to the particular cozy little spot Wryvaust had fixed for this woman. The hair on the side of his head was also matted due to how the father had gotten the element of suprise on Marsol, or maybe the dragon lord just wanted to give him a head start, by trying to bash his head in with a rock. Not that it did any good. It was funny how deep the blood lust had descended on him and held him in its grip for so long. It was abnormal this one. It was like clockwork. He didn't give hesitation to the deeds yet he didn't wonder why he committed the crimes even as they were happening. Strange he would ponder for a breif second before the nothingness shoved it and everything else aside so that the ache would not be felt. That ungodly pain that threatened to completely break him down until he really was just that, nothing. Why did it have to be this way? It wouldn't be long until the shadow that seemed not to be able to keep up with its owner rolled across the floor before the body became visible in the fire light that cast his amber eyes into a eerie goldish orange hue. His steps slowed until he came to a halt just at the edge of the fire light, bringing both bare gore covered arms up to cross over his equally covered chest. He had that ill tempered look about him again, yet that wasn't the case. It was the emptiness in him that caused his face to remain blank. Perhaps when Marsol showed no emotion at all was when he was most terrible? Or vulnerable? He did the only thing he knew how to do when trying not to loose himself in someone else. He shut down. To Cirgoth it had all been babble. For Marsol, it had been judgement....

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Her back was pressed into the cold, metal table, and a knife blade was used to tear open the baggy shirt that she had been using to hide her progress. It was then that he proceeded to slice her open, his ears muffling out the screams as blood poured over her belly and his hands. The child...a boy... and he looked at her with dark, hazy eyes before he was taken away. She never knew to where.

Colette awoke with a start, her neck and brow freshly streaked with sweat, her breathing irregular and harsh. What had woken her up? Taking in a shuddering breath, she knew then. The smell. The stew churned in her stomach at the scent. Blood. It smelled exactly like the carnage she had nightmares about, even though it had happened years before. As her blurry vision began to clear, she slowly dragged herself up to sit straight, her sandalled feet falling to the floor. It took the trembling angel a few moments to realize that someone was standing over her. Shifting her eyes up the massive form that had planted itself to where she could just see it, and she turned absolutely stock still. He was one of the most frightening creatures she could ever imagine. That stance, those eyes...and the wounds that littered his body. Her lips parted slightly in stunned silence, her deep brown eyes sliding over the different types of wounds. She had gotten educated on how to assess most wounds with Valis. He was simply staring at her. His demeanor gave a hint as to who he was. She should say something...show she was not intimidated... but her eyes gave her away. Finally, she cleared her throat and spoke up softly, in that same gentle tone. "I can get those out for you... if you wish." She offered, lifting one finger to motion first at the bullet holes that she could see. She would wait in strained silence for any type of response or answer on

his part. Had she not been in the middle of the desert, she would have tried to bolt. But she knew what lay outside of these stone walls, and never wished to step outside again.

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Marsol was not alone in feeling tangled up and out of sorts. Cirgoth truly loved him...despite all, and the fact that his murder of those people did not deter his undivided feelings for the desert dragon, caused him a great deal of inner conflict. The moment his last words escaped him...he was sure Marsol would misunderstand him...He muttered under his breath to himself as he strode after him, his pace varying between a lanky walk and a jog.

"He stole my heart...yes, but he cannot relieve me of it...I assumed too much...didn't I?"  
Fingertips were gnawed on, making his quiet utterances even more difficult to decipher...as his hushed voice whispered off the walls. "My soul is in danger here I think...and maybe the fact that I would sacrifice anything for him...is what makes me feel so...terrif-..."

Marsol's pause and that toss of his coat, halted Cirgoth's strides and murmuring. With a blink he startled and his hand snapped out to catch the coat, his lips parted in a rather stupefied expression as Marsol announced that there would be a female up ahead. Was it the woman he had gotten cozy with? He asked himself. He was not sure...he could handle that right now...His tongue whetted his lips, the taste of Marsol's blood lingering in his mouth where he had incidentally smeared his fingers with his blood and sucked it from his skin when he had chewed on his fingers. As Marsol started walking again, the angel jogged to catch up to him, and as he met his side, to slip into that blood caked coat of leather, his hand caught Marsol's arm just above the elbow, and his own arm laced with his.

"I don't think I could bear it if you could not forgive me..." The words falling breathlessly from his lips.

Cirgoth's sanity was balanced on a fragile edge, and though it was hardly the first time, it was the first time he found himself so willing to forgive and forget such acts as Marsol had just committed. He could not hate him...could not judge him. Indeed he had not...He had simply spoken what his heart felt, acted out some of the rage the dreams had shot into his blood. His love for him was too overpowering to condemn him. He would have unleashed wrath and fury on anyone else who had committed such deeds...slaughtered them as ruthlessly as Marsol had killed those people. That was not to say that he would not strive with all his strength to distract Marsol from such acts again, for he would try to convince him to focus his rage and violence elsewhere. The angel was not even aware of the tears which rolled down his cheeks as his arm tightened down on Marsol's tense muscles. The look in his eyes...that void...struck Cirgoth's heart hard...He felt his chest tighten and cave.

"I am terrified...Marsol...It terrifies me..." his dread and passion was so sincere

that his voice was constrained to a sweetly docile timbre.

He was incapable of explaining exactly what terrified him. It was all too tangled up in his heart and soul. Perhaps Marsol knew exactly what he feared, or perhaps he hadn't the vaguest idea. What Cirgoth feared was that he would be able to separate himself from what Marsol did...That he would isolate the part of Marsol that he loved, and damn his soul to condone the rest by apathy and acceptance.

"You should let me see to your wounds, My Lord..." he solicited quietly, that coat gathered more securely around his frame as the light from the chamber Wyrvaust inhabited pierced the dark tunnel from underneath the door.

It was amazing how much light even that sliver of fire shed, when it escaped into such a dark place. Cirgoth was uncertain if Marsol wanted him clinging to his side...and clung to him he would have had he not offended him as he had. He felt...he had no right, to tell the truth, and as the door was approached, his arm released Marsol's reluctantly, and he shrank back behind him. Indeed he was reluctant to even enter that chamber at all. He hung back...and when Marsol entered the gem vined room, Cirgoth slipped inside to stay by the door, across the threshold from where Wyrvaust sat with his chair tipped back against the wall. Unless Marsol gave him some sign that he wanted him by his side, Cirgoth would sit down on the floor with his back against the wall by the door. A nod of greeting was passed to Wyrvaust as the demon looked his way, and something about what Wyrvaust saw satisfied him, and he gave up a faint smile as he dipped his head in return.

Wyrvaust then addressed Marsol, to greet him and inform him of where he found the delicate little flower. "What a pleasure to see you, My Lord. You look like hell walked over you...Been out dining have we?" he grinned, and rose from his chair.

Whatever offer the lady and Cirgoth made to care for Marsol's wounds, Wyrvaust did not even bother to ask, and he strode up to him, and then thrust his nimble and very able hands beneath Marsol's shirt. His fingers were quick to locate broken shards of steel, stone pellets, and that arrow which he took a great deal of pleasure extracting with one, brisk, clean yank, after studying its angle and path through his muscles. He spoke to him as he tended his wounds, tossing the garbage he pulled out of his flesh into the fireplace. My the junk littering his flesh was flammable, wasn't it? Each article he flung into the hearth flared up with a crackling hiss. It was the blood which was so combustible. That gingery-cinnamon spice which Cirgoth was still dwelling on the flavor of, if not savoring it.

"It was nearly burned to a crisp when I found it, my lord. It's flowery scent is what drew me to the shrub of thistle-thorns which the swan had folded itself beneath. The Nephelim was but five miles west of my digs. Lost, says she...Confounded by the three moons and two suns," he snorted.

Cool compresses were applied to Marsol's wounds to dab away the blood, which the demon had snatched from the bowl of cool spring water he had laid them in.

"It was westward she intended to go, and east she came..." He explained.

Cirgoth meanwhile watched Wyrvaust almost enviously as he tended Marsol's wounds. He was very quick and able at the task, and for that Cirgoth was thankful. At mention of the female Marsol had 'claimed for a mate,' his eyes fell away however,

and his brow bowed forward to prop against his knees as he drew them against his chest, to hide the things simmering in his eyes. The mere mention of the girl made him feel wounded. He simply could not help it...His love for Marsol was intense to the point of an obsession. He knew it was no accident that Wyrvaust had mentioned her in his presence either...The demon was the sort who tested those who his Lord associated with. He had his own way of insuring Marsol's consorts were loyal to a fault. #

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There wasn't a moment when he had ever doubted the things he had done or said. Never in all the time he had held a breath in his body had he questioned the motives that drove the direction he took the clan in, or himself for that matter. Everything he did within reason. There was a purpose to even the most frivolous of actions, be it a simple smile and nod to a person passing by, or the unusually generous feat of letting a prisoner go so that they may limp back to whatever hole they crawled out of to relay the news that the desert would and forever would remain his and his tribes, and that the said interloper would do well in the future to remember such. However doubt crept into the hollow of his bones when his arm was caught and his pace brought to an abrupt stop. He knew he was being unreasonable. He was being irrational and furthermore, he wasn't being fair to those that mattered the most to him. Be it demon, or angel. The hardened expression softened by degrees throughout the short span of time Cirgoth spoke of the fears that plagued his mind and hissed to undo his heart and every part of him. Yes, yes indeed he had done something unforgivable. This too he knew, but he also realized that to let Cirgoth go on thinking that he himself were at fault would be the most unspeakable act he'd ever committed. The hand of the opposite arm came up to uncurl Cirgoth's arm that had wound around his so tightly, not that the angel wasn't welcomed. He would be lying if he said he didn't need him. Careful and slow was how the hand undid Cirgoth's arm, tugging it away and placing it back at the angel's side as his hand slid over the other hands, his fingers feeling between his and catching his pinky finger for a brief moment as those amber pools faltered yet again. That glimmer of something flooded into them, making Marsol appear so very human and make the idea of him being able to kill another atrocious.

"Fear is unfit for you," he said, in that uncharacteristically quiet way he had before. That docile like manner that made him appear sleepy, were it not for the various wounds riddling his body that continued to bleed for one reason or another.

Why hadn't he healed by now again? It had been enough time, wouldn't one think. His form then began onward but not at the servely fast but unhurried pace he had from before. Now he was slower, more time was taken in the walk to be by Cirgoth's side then the angel could possibly conceive. His bare feet that were marred with red tiny fingerprints finally came to a stop within the fire lit cozy little place Wyrvaust had carried the female birdie to, which sparked a faintly amused smile from the otherwise emotionless looking desert creature.

Those now eerily aglow orangish gold passed over the female and the look of contemplation slowly shuffled aside the gutt wrenching blank stare he'd had from

what Cirgoth had spoken only out of how he felt. He would never hold it against him though. The angel hadn't said it to spite him, merely voiced the anguish of the loss of so many innocent lives. Marsol admired that about him. How he cared for people so, even if they were just humans. In reality if Cirgoth had said it out of anger or such a frightening rage to hurt Marsol on purpose, well the desert cheftan still wouldn't have blamed him nor cared about him any less. He would have just... forgotten about it and went on with life.

The request to remove such bothersome trinkets of mayhem from his body was not acknowledged from either Cirgoth or the female who could very well have roasted under the heat and been picked clean by whatever mongrals roamed these parts of the world. He did not flinch as said trinkets would plucked from him by Wryvaust's very agile little fingers. The arrow being pulled free would cause a rather nasty spurt of blood to gush down the front of his chest but the compresses and application of pressure would ease all of it in time.

The broken off knife blade would be a task in and of itself however, if Wryvaust choose to go there that is. Unfortunately, the nimble little feline like man wouldn't get to do so for if Wryvaust so much as stepped around to his back side, Marsol would utter a low rumbling growl that wouldn't be felt in the air, but the ground they walked on. The desert dragon lowered downwards to kneel on one knee with the other leg bent up and an arm draped over the top of it as he turned his gaze to the fire that seemed to hold something interesting in it.

"Swans belong to the lakes," he said with that familiar indifference towards the general population as a whole. It wasn't a condescending tone he had, just a neutral one, "not in deserts."

There was a ghost of a smile that tugged the corners of his mouth as his eyes wandered absentmindedly back to Cirgoth where he sat by the door. If Wryvaust became so bold as to try to remove the piece of hunting knife blade still buried in between his shoulder blades, just to the right of his actual spine and nestled in between his ribs, Marsol would growl something fierce. The sound would come from all directions and reverberate off the gem encrusted walls like a giant horn being sounded for battle. If Wryvaust would venture that far, that would be the last warning he would receive. Marsol did not want the knife blade taken out of him. Why? Why would the desert beast want such a meaningless thing to continue to make him bleed and possibly do unseen damage. He had allowed everything else to be taken out, even the annoying arrow that had a hook like curve to its head, which had tore more muscle than would be known about. Not that Marsol would tell Wryvaust this, for he saw no point to. He let the crafty little Wryvaust do as he pleased, that is until he moved to try and remove the knife, and the above would not be allowed. Kneeling in front of the fire he would remain, with shadows that played with his own, melding along the floor like some twisted illusion as his gaze was fixated on Cirgoth for the longest time...

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Cirgoth sat silently for some time against the wall, Marsol's leather coat seeming



to swallow the nude straps of muscles beneath the blood stiffened leather. His Lord's scent encased him, and with each breath, he drew it in, ignoring the smell of blood which blended with the spicy body odor which had permeated the soft, but thick leather. After awhile his green eyes peered out over his arms where they swathed his knees in a laced fold. His gaze fixed on the lovely female who had gotten lost in the dunes. She should have turned around, he thought, when the grasslands began to give way to the scrub land and sandy patches of the Dry Lands, and most certainly when the semi-arid terraine gave it up to the dunes and rippling sands. Here she was, nevertheless, meeting up with Marsol when he was wounded and in a rather unsettled state. He considered offering to take her wherever it was she had wanted to go, but decided against it. He had no wish for Marsol to think he was trying to protect her from him...or to think he did not trust him with her life. Trust was important, and he wanted Marsol to know that he trusted him, even after the attack of the village.

Wyrvaust had said she was a Nephelim. One did not cross paths with their kind too often. Titans in disguise, some called them...Once referred to by apostals as the Terrible Giants of the Earth...meaning they were giants in power. This one did not seem at all terrible, or great in power, and somehow he doubted that she was hiding any arcane prowess in that sun-dried skin of her's. Obviously, whoever fathered her, had made no effort to teach her anything. Perhaps he did not even know she existed. Had the female any idea of what she could be capable of? Somehow, he doubted that too.

His gaze slid across the room to lock on Marsol...How he yearned to be near him...To sooth his muscles with a deep massage...to tell him another story...to make him...content. He looked so...detached...So far away from himself and those present. He wanted almost desperately to be close to him.

"My Lord? Is there anything I can get for you? Some wine? Water? Something to eat, perhaps?"

Like he needed anything to eat! He HAD just eaten an entire village and its livestock after all...well enough bits and peices to make a feast. Cirgoth hated being idle, even as weakened, hungry, thirsty, and tired as he was. His blood was restoring itself, the wounds closed and no longer bleeding, but he did not regenerate as quickly as he would if he released the delay on his body's healing fortress. He wanted the scars...every scar Marsol gave him...He treasured them as a part of Marsol noone would ever be able to take from him. They, with the rest of his scars, were like precious artwork to him. Well...if Marsol ever told him to cease delaying his healing process and dampening his flesh from knitting from the scars, he would oblige him...He just never really thought it was an odd thing to do. His body adjusted itself if a wound or arcane attack was critical to speed his healing. It had simply become a habit to protect him from betraying what he was to everyone who thought they knew what an angel was. His eyes trailed back to the girl briefly as Wyrvaust referred to her as an 'it' again. Cirgoth almost smiled at the look on her face, his eyes then locking on Marsol once again to gaze at him as he waited for his response.

Wyrvaust also noticed the song-bird's irritated look, and he abandoned Marsol's side to approach her as he surrendered all thought of dislodging that nasty broken off dagger blade which was nestled so close to his spine. He would not act against Marsol's wishes, not unless the injury was perilous. In that case, he would have

risked himself to mend him. The demon leaned down over the lady, his gaze absorbing Marsol over her shoulder for several moments, his long locks of jet black hair brushing her throat as he stooped lower to inhale her scent deeply.

"The swan belongs in a lake, says he. I had rather hoped my master might let me keep it for a pet. I could give the swan a name. Birdie has claimed no name of its own, after all, and besides...I might not like its name," he teased with a grin.

The demon then brushed her cheek and lips with his long fingers and swiveled around to face Marsol, even as Cirgoth soaked the desert dragon's form in from across the room. "Your angel is so smitten by you. Think you he shall bear sharing you well, My Lord? Dubious I am... Did you see the look which overcame him when I mentioned the other in your care? It wounds him, even knowing what little he knows. I am concerned...How can I not be? What he feels for you is more powerful than anything I have ere seen contained in a heart. If it does not frighten thee, My Lord, it surely frightens me," he laughed and then grinned. The clan demon then swept a hand towards Colette as he made his way back over to Marsol. "You wish her escorted to safety, whatever that may be? What lions await her elsewhere I wonder?" He pondered aloud, his look growing thoughtful, before his eyes cleared and he proceeded to speak. "Or will you entrust her to my care, Lord Marsol? I could use a tasty treat like her around," his smile a hungry one. His eyes shot on Cirgoth as a worried look overcame his face. "Oh look...another country heard from in the stunning features of an angel. Its scars hide its beauty no better than its green eyes cloak its concern. It thinks I shall mistreat the pretty child of divine loins. It would not assume so much, would it?" His gaze sliced from Marsol to Cirgoth, who drew in a deep breath, and then let it out with a nod.

"She is not my concern," he whispered, and Wyrvaust laughed.

"Such an odd thing to hear from the lips of an angel of your prowess. Who are you trying to fool? Me? Marsol? We cannot be so easily duped."

Cirgoth shuddered and hugged himself more tightly. "Myself...I try to fool myself..."

Wyrvaust was tickled and burst out laughing, slapping Marsol's shoulder as he did so. "So honest this one! He would confess anything to you, to confess so much as that, beloved Marsol!" He hugged the desert dragon and then leaned on his cheek on his shoulder to peer up at Marsol's eyes before his gaze lit on Cirgoth again. "Angels carry the world on their shoulders, yes, crimson falcon? Every innocent soul is your concern...Only now...You choose another to serve, and so the world becomes HIS concern, and less your own. Can you accept this? Hmm?" Wyrvaust asked the hard questions...Indeed he knew what to ask in order to dissect the angel in Marsol's presence. His wisdom made itself known in his craftiness. The fact that Colette was a stranger, made it easier for Cirgoth to suffer confiding in Marsol in her presence.

Cirgoth sucked in a deep breath before he answered, his eyes rooted on the floor in front of his bare feet as he dug inside of himself for the truth. "It is hard..." He admitted. His gaze then locked on Marsol. "It is hard to be apathetic for me. I don't even know if I can...All I know...is that I would forgive you anything...That...I will stay by you no matter what. I may not always agree with you...and I shall speak my grievances to you...But I am incapable of abandoning

you." His gaze then settled on the girl. "I shall speak my opinion concerning the lady, if my opinion is asked for." His final conclusion of where he stood on the matter of the lady Nephelim.

Wyrvaust's throat rattled with a purring chuckle. "His heart has made him a willing slave to your soul, Marsol. I believe he speaks the truth. I did not trust his intentions at first. But I see now that his word is as true as his heart's will." The demon fixed his dark eyes on Marsol at that. "Now what about the lovely swan of the lake over here?" he switched the subject back to the girl, whose own opinion did not count as far as Wyrvaust was concerned. Marsol's vote alone held sway in his eyes. She was in the desert, just like he was in the desert, and because of that, she, like himself, like Cirgoth, and like Nic, was Marsol's.

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Date: 12:20 AM Mar 8, 2006

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Colette's pert nose wrinkled softly as the odd one who had fetched her once again spoke of her as an 'it'. And in her company, nonetheless. Of all of the animals she resembled at the moment, a swan was not high on that list. Perhaps a lizard or a lobster. As Wyrvaust spoke to Marsol about her, her green eyes flickered from the kooky man down to the man sitting near the door. And the reason he caught her attention was only because he was mentioned as an angel. This peaked her interest greatly. People said she was an angel. She had been told that so many times, but never could believe it. Sure, she smelled good, the scent of lavender now pulsating around her as the men loomed over her, but other than that, what telltale signs could there be? If only she could get the angel alone for a moment...ask him a million questions. Sure, there had been angels about when she was in Octavian's care, but he kept her locked away in their chambers, never giving her freedom with the others. She yearned for answers...for explanations and understanding.

Colette's eyes were torn away from Cirgoth as Wyrvaust walked over to her, bending down so close to her neck that she could feel his hair brushing her skin. Swallowing dryly, her thick lashes widened at the prospect of becoming a 'pet' to yet another stranger. The swan belonged in a lake? She had been TRYING to get to water! If she was an angel, then God really had a sense of irony about him. Going stock still as Wyrvaust's fingers traced her cheek, she felt a muscle in her jaw twitch, and her voice protruded, soft and tense. "I do not have a name..." She offered without making eye contact. She had no reason to tell these people who she was or where she had come from...and really did not intend to. "And if someone would be willing to lead me to the port town of Hawker's Fort, I will be gone from your presence immediately, and will never return to this area again. I meant no disrespect by coming here. Where I am from, there was one sun and one moon, and the course never strayed. My navigation skills are limited." Way to go Colette. Nice job on not letting them know where you were from. Wincing, she folded her hands on her lap. "If you could even point me in the correct direction, I will leave at once." She hated the thought of going back out there...in the sand and blistering sun, but it was better than being locked away like some canary in a cage. Wyrvaust seemed to pay little attention to her, other than his amused sense of humor, so she fell quiet.

Her gaze flickered back to the scarred angel on the floor, and she gave a sympathetic frown as the strange man began nailing him with straightforward questions. The man was odd, but knew how to dive to the core being of someone in a hurry. Her eyes slid to the door. Could she try making it on her own? She had no idea where to go. At least before she had known to turn around, but now, she had no clue where she was. So fleeing looked bad. Sighing softly, she slouched on her seat, her attention distracted as she glanced over at Marsol. She decided that staying here would not be in her best interest. He was frightening to her, in all honesty. At least Wyrvaust she could be curious about. As all attention suddenly turned back to her, she paused in her curious peeking and shot her eyes back up to Wyrvaust, her lips pressed into a thin line. Another month, another roller coaster ride. Where was this one going to take her?

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The flames crackled and danced in their own uninhibited way, like all elements did. Without restraint. Without any consideration or second thought as to whatever else might live. He envied it but only by slight. Fire was untamable. It was raw, beautiful, and simple. It did not have to apologize for burning these to piles of ash, or heating dishes or other substances to feed the hungry or mend the sick. His eyes watched the way the light bended here and there, the way the flames favored a particular corner of the place they burned in, and how his blood made all of those little trinkets turn to charred remains much, much quicker being covered in it, for they couldn't possibly do so on their own now could they? Usually a chuckle would have been given to any manner of antics Wyrvaust made, whether they were friendly or otherwise. Yet somehow or another he could not even muster a smile as to the testing the clan demon did to the angel, regardless of whose company they kept. It had been ages since he'd heard of the race of female beings, those beauties who held such power in their delicate little forms. Of course it perked his interest, for about a minute. A prize was she? No, not quite. She would either be useful or not, it was the law was it not? A goldish eye was cast on Wyrvaust over his shoulder, somewhat beyond Cirgoths own form, like a glare from underneath all those dark strands. He wasn't amused.

"Does a swan know there is water, even in a place like ours," he said, his voice being hallow even to his own ears, "I wonder.."

His attention however never strayed from Cirgoth, if one were to look closely enough that is. 'So very interesting our unnatural lives were becoming, Wyrvaust.' would come a sigh into the feline like demons mind as Marsol muelled over what exactly it was Fate had up her sleeve for them now that it was clear there days would no longer be so lonely, well not lonely but dreadfully dull when he wandered along the outskirts of their domain, making sure no one got the bright idea that the desert that seemed so endless could be made into a home of sorts.

After a while of this kneeling in front of the fire the tall figure covered in wounds that should never have lasted this long, stood. His back to the lovely female who knew nothing of what she was perhaps, or what she was capable of, Wyrvaust as well as Cirgoth, both arms came up to fold around himself as he spoke,

in a tone that was hard and callous, "It is done, the swan is yours. Do teach her that there is more to life than the infernal forests and plains won't you?"

Would this mean the maidens fate was sealed? Surely she wouldn't be left alone to the likes of Wryvaust, right? What manner of creature would want to harm her? She appeared about as threatening as a sand spur, which could be irritating when stepped on with a bare foot but even so, she did not deserve the life that was about to put upon her. Nor did Cirgoth. Or Nicholai, or Cossette. None of them. And yet he would not let them go. They were a part of the desert now whether they liked it or not. It was as things were and as they would always remain. The soul was restless yet again. How... tiresome. His brows furrowed into a scowl as the air within the room suddenly grew terribly warm. That all too familiar bright orange glow flickered into existence forming an oval over the doorway Cirgoth and himself had used to come into the space Wryvaust had taken up to letting the delicate swan sleep in. Time seemed of the essence Marsol thought as his eyes slowly tore away from Wryvaust and his new fanged pet, to the male angel whose scent lingered on his lips like the ghost of... His head was shaken to protests that Cirgoth might have made, if any, on behalf of leaving the poor girl with Wryvaust and all the things he could do that could make one wish for death, or welcome the crafty demon with open arms. He was a cheeky monkey like that sometimes, Marsol thought amused, as the gateway of fire flared to life and ate away at the door to reveal another place in time altogether. To someone that had never seen it before or knew nothing about it, the gateway would be far more frightening than the desert dragon himself, wouldn't it?

"My apologies M'Lady, but there is unfinished business I must tend to," he said, his voice coming from the fireplace and yet... and yet, he was not there.

His shadow did not pass over Colette even though he now stood to her left like some phantom, looking down at her not out of malice but out of mild curiosity. Yes, a fine edition to the clan she could make, if it weren't for the truth of the matter he thought to himself as he had to keep a tight lid on his own animalistic desires that hissed inside of him. Then just as suddenly as he had seemed to appear out of thin air at her side, his steps were taking him away again, to let Wryvaust do as his little hearts content with her. Be it vile acts or otherwise. However, there had been something in his words, or perhaps his tone that ment she was not to be left to die here. Oh no, she was to be safe indeed. As safe as one could be in the company of demons that is. What had Colette gotten herself into this time, pray tell.

As the gateway wavered in and out, he approached it but in doing so, passed by Cirgoth with a hand to went down to the top of the other mans shoulder to let his fingertips pass over it. Just a faint touch. A brushing of fingers over the coat he wore that was Marsols. A bit of that cornsilk sweet hair was caught in between his thumb and index finger to which he studied with a childish contentment before he stepped forward, into and through the gateway to the other side and whatever it held for them. It would seem only Cirgoth was ment for the trip to another place. Why? Was Wryvaust not special? Did the crafty cad hold his own special place in the black muscle that beat in Marsols chest? Yes, yes he did but that was a different sort of spots. One that couldn't be replaced, much like the rest of the clan. The desert and his tribe were everything to him. They were his life. Marsol defended the things he held dear with his life with no regard as to his own safety, naturally. Nothing else was said. No gesture as to whether or not Colette would be

safe or if she would just survive whatever it was Wryvaust had in store for her. The dark haired beast of a man disappeared into the darkness waiting on the other side of the circular thin rim of flames that crackled with lives all their own. However he paused on said side to wait. And wait he would for the one to follow. How... touching...

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Darkness. He did not float in it, he was drowning in it. What happened? He wondered briefly as he forced his eyes open and they did but barely enough to see the faint outline of a pair of smooth skinned shoulders hovering above himself. Heat. What was the heat? Where was it... liquid. He felt... warm. The right hand twitched in the bath waters as the feeling slowly returned to his body. What Cirgoth had done had inadvertently saved the ill tempered desert creature from something that would have soon become a coma inducing bloodlust. The knife blade had indeed been enchanted alright. With the manner of sorcery in it it was a wonder Marsol had lasted as long as he had, and not snapped and gone into a fit of insanity that would have been brought to Wryvausts door step. Quite the good timing Cirgoth had had indeed. The angel should have gotten a pat on the back for probably saving Wryvaust, Colette, Nicholai, Cossette, and himself a great deal of trouble. It was the type of magic the blade had on it that would have put Marsol's logical side to sleep and awakened something best left alone. Thank heavens Cirgoth cared as much as he did. He did not move but merely look up at whomevers shoulders th-no, they were his, of course. He knew those shoulders just like he knew the feel of the skin against his own. The water wasn't hot enough he thought to himself absentmindedly as that delicious aroma, that tantalizing scent begun to invade his senses. He felt drowsy even though his body was perfectly fit again, thanks to Cirgoth as well as Wryvaust for their concerns, not that he wouldn't have pulled out the little trinkets himself. He just would have done it much, much later. Memories flickered across his minds eye as he begun to remember what exactly had led up to this pleasant experience of being pampered by the angel in such a manner. Course he had been awake the entire time Cirgoth had carried him from the prison castle of countless captives and moutainous piles of rotting corpses, to his own home in a part of An Morendor Marsol didn't care for in the least. Before he smelled Cirgoth, he had smelt moisture. Grass. So much damn grass! The trees, the freshly cut wood from piles of firewood. The crispness to the wind, it made his nose itch. The soil underfoot was soft and fertile. There was... humidity? No! Where were they! Where had Cirgoth taken him! he fumed inwardly as the angel washed his unruly bed head of hair, revealing that if brushed atleast once a year Marsol could actually look like a gentlemen. The bath would bring out that he wasn't as scruffy as he looked. The dirt that left his skin showed the healthy glow it held. That sun warmed flesh that had seen so much and held too much within. God forbid if he were to shave as well, he might even look younger perhaps. Hunger sparked in him so suddenly that it made his body seeth with heat within that tub and underneth Cirgoth. He did not want his blood, although every cell in his being screamed for it, howled to taste that heavenly fluid again. Inwardly he grimaced and it made the corner of his mouth twitch as he fought against himself and his unquenchible thirsts. A strand of hair clung to his face just over his left eye that was just as closed as his right now. Cirgoth had helped him. Healed him when he did not ask nor want it. He had done so but... why? Something like an ache rose up inside of him as he listened to the water swoosh whenever Cirgoth moved or if it was poured. Birds. He heard birds chirping. How long has it been since he'd heard something smaller then a bird like scavenger caw? Too long, for he had forgotten what a regular bird even sounded

like. had he been in the desert that long? He wondered with great annoyance as he listened to the angst in Cirgoths voice when he spoke. It hurt him he realized, to see the desert cheiftan wounded at all. Damn him. Damn him for caring so much Marsol mueled over in his mind as he tried to sit up but found that his body would not cooperate at all. It wanted to stay submerged up to his nose in that warm bath water, underneth Cirgoth and this offering of blood. "I need it not," he said quietly as his eyes opened just a hair. He looked so sleepy just then. That grogy look like most humans got after just rolling out of bed. A bubble was blow as his head started to sink further into the water. The water level was to his eyes now and he peered at Cirgoths chest curiously. Do you hate her? came that mental whisper in Cirgoths mind out of nowhere and everywhere all at once. It was dry and cool at the same time. He wasn't mocking or goating Cirgoth into a fit of rage, he just wanted to ask him the question that had been bugging him since Cossette had stormed out of the room. He himself was confused, but then again Marsol never took the time to devel in the matters of the heart...

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God hated her, Colette was certain of that. No one would listen to her calm proclamations that she would leave immediately if she was just shown the way out. Wyrvaust kept his back turned to her, and Marsol spoke nothing, until he questioned if she knew there was water. The angel stared dumbly at him, then at the empty water glass on the table beside her. Was that supposed to have a double meaning? Refreshment and rest in the middle of hell? There WAS none. Gritting her teeth, Colette felt her temper rising for the first time since she could remember. The quiet, demure angel was close to her boiling point.

And then, it was done. Just like that, she was given over to Wyrvaust. Every bit of her. Colette felt sick and hardly heard Marsol as he took his leave to tend to something else. After he was gone and all was quiet aside from the fire, she still sat in stunned silence, staring down at her dirty, sandaled feet. God hated her. She had done something terrible, and he was giving her over to hell itself. How DID God choose who to pass around like salt shakers? Did he roll dice? Pick a card? Close his eyes and point to a map? Tears stung her raw eyes and the angel squeezed them shut, refusing to cry. She absolutely would not cry. That would not help matters and would make Wyrvaust think she was weak. But wasn't she? She had to be honest with herself. She went from owner to owner to owner...should she even be HAVING owners? But she did, and that was how it stood. And now, still sore at heart from losing Valis, there she sat. A homeless and possessionless angel in a dead woman's gown. Sorrow washed violently over her, and fearing that she would be sick, she slowly stretched out on the bed that was made for her. Curling up, she closed her eyes and tucked her head in her arms, wanting to block out the world.

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Cosette knew Nicholaii had a lot she wanted to discuss with Marsol. She was not upset with anyone or anything. She was mortal so tiredness did come to her from time to time. She had politely kissed Nicholaii on the cheek as she left. Letting them talk about whatever they had to discuss. She did not mean to come off as rude or upsetting to anyone. She had yet to figure out her place. At least at the Inn it was obvious. Here in the desert not so much. Things were a little more confusing for her. Thing seemed so simple when it was her and Marsol. Now it was not that way. Not that she would change anything for the world. She quietly went to bed and laid down. Softly sighs as she quietly goes off to sleep. She would deal with things at they come. She knew Marsol had a kingdom to run and things to do. And she would not have it any other way. She remembered meeting Cirgoth once before. Softly smiles as she laughs before closing her eyes and drifting off to sleep.

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Cirgoth's lips skewed into a purse as Marsol sank deeper into the tub to send a bubble rolling to the surface. Brows raised slightly as he eyed him with an almost childlike curiosity. When the demon asked him if he hated Cosette, his brows knitted somewhat to narrow his green eyes. He shook his head. "I do not hate her. Hate is not something I pass around easily, Lord Marsol. I...feel...threatened by her," he confessed reluctantly. The angel relieved Marsol of his weight and climbed out of the tub. A towel was lifted from a tarnished brass rod and hence he leaned over Marsol to grip his upper arm and guide him out of the large, ovate bath-tub, at what moment he wrapped the towel around Marsol, then picked up another which he dried his hair with. He gave him all the attention a King would receive from a personal servant. Afterwards he would lace his arm with his, and lead him into the adjoining room, which was furnished with a large hardwood bench, like a couch, layered with furs from animals Cirgoth and Marcania had hunted for food. He fetched a hair brush from a table by the door which opened into the bath-chamber and returned to Marsol to stand behind him, and brush out his hair. He worked from the end of his hair towards his scalp, working the tangles and mats out without damage to his hair. Cirgoth was used to caring for his own long locks, and treated Marsol's dark mane as he would his own. As he groomed him, he spoke to him, in quiet tones. "I will return you home anon, My Lord. I brought you to my home only because I did not know where a bath-chamber was in your own stronghold. But before you leave...I think perhaps...That now is a good time for me to enlighten you about the parts of my nature that may most concern you," he related. His fingers combed gently through his hair, just relishing the texture of it. "I cannot explain why I feel for you as I do. I just do. My love...it is not easily stirred, and when I do love...it is a feirce kind of love. I cannot give...only a fraction of my heart...but my soul, all that I am with it. It seems to me, however, that my love is some kind of curse to you...Which fills you with a strange sort of madness and violence that I do not understand. Perhaps...in a sense my love is a curse to you, for I cannot love someone and bear to see them cling to another. It eats my heart out. I never...imagined I could love another male like this...feel this way for another man. But...I think angels and demons are not very distant, in that we love



what we love, with no attention to gender. The heart hath no gender...Nor does the soul, and we both, are perhaps creatures as much of spirit as of flesh...Dark or light, does not matter." The last tangle was brushed out, and after stroking his hair for a few moments, he seated himself beside Marsol, stretching his legs out crossed over at the ankles. The angel was clearly very comfortable with his nudity. His head took a bow with eyes lowered on the blue, ivory and amber marble tiles at their feet, his auburn hair spilling over his face. "I have sensed...so much conflict in you...My love seems unwanted by you." The pain that feeling caused him seeped into his voice to hush it. His intense gaze then pinned Marsol's eyes with a penetrating burn. "If...you do not want to be loved by me...If you cannot return it...or cannot...be faithful...If I ask too much of you...Please tell me now and end my suffering, before I become more lost in you than I already am. Understand...that if you embrace my love half-way...It would destroy me. I cannot love you half-way...Only with everything I am capable of giving to you. I would stay by you until the end of my time, with loyalty and devotion...all the passion my heart and soul possesses, yours and yours alone. Mind, heart, will, flesh and soul, is the only way I can give myself to another." His eyes were then veiled by his sun-kissed eye-lashes as his head bowed again faced away from Marsol. "The thought of you...holding another...just the thought is unbearable," he whispered. He sat quietly for awhile, and then lifted his head and opened his eyes slowly to carry his gaze on Marsol, who, in his usual habit, remained quiet so far. "You...surround yourself with so much that seems evil...But I sense no evil in you, Marsol, and I can see through appearances into the soul...I see no evil in you, and yet those people you killed so coldly...Those women in your stronghold...These things strongly suggest a creature who is malicious...sadistic, cruel...and wicked...So why can I not feel any evil in you, My Lord? Am I fooling myself? Deluding myself, or are you simply what you must be, with only the appearance of evil?" He needed to know the truth...So he could come to terms with his love for him honestly, without blinders on. He was not even really aware that his hand had clasped Marsol's where they sat hip to hip, his fingers lacing snugly with Marsol's. His eyes shone with his desperate need to understand and KNOW him, while his expression held a longing that only his heart knew the meaning of. His heart pounded in his chest in wait of a response...in wait of knowing his mind and needs. He felt almost faint in the interval of silence which held him balanced in hiatus between being crushed and relieved. He was terrified that he would cast him aside, or that he would not answer him at all and leave him stranded on the shores of his own confusion. He needed Marsol to talk to him, confide what he felt and what he thought, for good or bad...He needed to know, and his eyes betrayed everything.

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Wyrvaust smiled when Marsol wondered aloud if the swan knew there was water in the desert. Yes, there was water...the occasional oasis, or spring which bubbled up from a rock, the rains which formed brief lakes and rivers, or was absorbed almost the moment it touched the ground...The water stored in the cacti and waxy leaves of plants, in roots and underground water tables...in the flesh of animals, and there was the sea which met the desert to the east. "So few know of the desert's mercy until they see it with their own eyes, My Lord." His words perhaps held a double meaning, as Marsol's words often did. The faintest smile curled his full, plum-hued lips when he made his final decision concerning the female he had found in the desert. He did not need to tell Marsol he would care for her well. Marsol knew him well enough to know that Wyrvaust kept his guests and slaves with honor, and that prisoners were held with an approach which accorded to their crimes. When Marsol

made way to leave, Wyrvaust caught him up and pressed a kiss to one cheek and then the other. "Go with fortune on your heels, My Lord." The demon then stepped away just enough to leave him space to continue on his way, and as Cirgoth passed, he snagged his arm. "Take good care of him," spoken with stern quietude. The nod Cirgoth returned him satisfied him that he understood, and when the two had departed, the demon stood a moment in silent contemplation, then turned to face Colette. She wore her misery and anger like a blanket. The demon approached her and took her by the arm to urge her to her feet, and without a word, he lead her out of that small chamber and down deeper into the mine. The floors and walls alike were cut from stone, and the ribbed timbers which supported the weight of the ground were thick. Further along down the tunnel, stone pillars replaced the timbers, and the floors and walls grew more smooth and even. One doorway, and then three were passed, when the tunnel ended at a large door of dark, very solid wood. The door groaned hollowly as a silent command was spoken in his thoughts, and letting go of her arm, he gripped the large, bronze, handle, which was curved in the shape of a dragon, and heaved on the door to push it open. He gestured for her to enter, and strolled in after her, the door closing behind them with an echoing bang. The room they entered into was quite large, and at the very center was a fountain. Five bronze dragons, tarnished green, stood back to back with their tails curling one another, spewing water from their mouths in the center of the fountain. The room was circular, with the fountain at the center, and benches draped with carpets all around. Across from the lair's entrance was another door, which he lead her to, and onward down a vaulted stone corridor. More doors were passed, and when they reached the last three doors, he escorted her through the door at the end of the hall. They entered his own bedroom, which was quite spacious, a large bed against the far wall. The chamber was lit by four braziers in the four corners of the room. Four slender pillars around the bed formed its posts, while the bed itself was a mattress on a low stage of wood, only four inches high off the marble floor. The mattress was covered with silk sheets, comforters and furs. Curtains of deep crimson, black, and silver silk hung all around the bed, with ornate patterns decorating it. The Neffari tribe of people in the desert who were allied and friendly to Marsol, made the silk and wove it, as well as the beautiful, richly colored, carpets which covered the floor. Wyrvaust had been born of the same tribe many ages ago. Little in their lives had changed since then. Only their language and generations. There were scented oil lamps, and candles for reading, a shelf of books which covered and was built into one wall, two benches covered with furs and fine tapestries, and two deep chairs. The demon pointed to a door within the room to the right of the bed. "The bath-chamber is there. The water is heated by volcanic springs below the earth." He paused and then pointed to another door on the opposite side of the room. "Over there...Is the wardrobe. Anything you wish worn on your flesh within, you may. There is bath linen there as well," he explained to her. The demon hence sauntered over to one of the benches and took a seat, his head canting as his eyes absorbed her. "A name...Arilwen. It means...stranded bird. Arilwen is your name now." Just like that, he gave her a name. There were fine robes, house jackets, tunics, shirts, night-dresses, cloaks, turban cloth, and plain robes as well in the closet. There was also a jewelry chest full of necklaces, bracelets, earrings, cuffs, broaches, rings, arm, leg, and throat bands, and other various trinkets he had collected as plunder over the ages. "It has been many years since I shared my bed with a pretty...I will not...force Arilwen...But I will please her if she comes to me. I will sleep with her, but touch Arilwen I will not unless she carries my hand to her." A sadness seemed to fill him as he explained how it would be. He was lonely...so very lonely, but he did not rape women. He hated the idea of rape. His sire had goaded him into a raping a woman once, and Wyrvaust had slain and eaten

her later rather than leave her alive with what he did to her. Mendorin had shown him what rape truly stole from a victim...made him hate the act, and feel ashamed for ever having committed it himself. Oh the demon wanted her...wanted to feel himself inside of her so very badly...But he had great control of himself, and could sleep with her without forcing himself on her, or even trying to seduce her if he made up his mind not to. He wanted her to WANT him. He needed that...Needed someone to desire him. "After Arilwen bathes...I shall be awaiting her in our bed." The demon rose at that, and disrobed himself of the all the layers of cloth he wore, but a thin, indigo-blue shirt which came to just below his knees. Hence he went to the bed and lie himself down, lighting the pillar candles on the nightstand on her side of the bed. The pillows were many and soft, and the bed was large enough to accomadate six people comfortably. The desert-blood was very handsome, his face strong but not cruel, his nose broad and wide but not dominating his face, his lips full and sensual. His brown eyes were so dark they looked black unless direct light shone in them, and his skin was nearly hairless and the color of coffee and cream. His hair was so black, its highlights were indigo, and it was long and luxeriously thick. He was quite tall, just two inches over six feet, and slender with well toned muscles. The soles of his feet were leathery though, for he never wore shoes, and only rarely sandles. When Arilwen returned after her bath, he would seem to be sound asleep. He alone knew if he really was. Various weapons were at hand in the room. The schimitar, long dagger, and hunting knife, he had shed with his clothes, lie with the garbs he had left in a pile on the floor. There were also the fireplace tools by the hearth. Trust her? It was not a matter of trust. It was a matter of not caring. If she chose to try and kill him after he had offered mercy to her, then she would either succeed and spare him the pain of her attempt on his life, or he would overcome her and rescind all kindness.

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Colette did not realize how close Wyrvaust was to her until his fingers closed carefully, but firmly around her upper arm. She really had no choice but to follow him and see where he was intending on taking her. As she rose and let him lead her through another door, she realized that she had been too quick to assume that this small room was all that he resided in. Her frustrated and sorrowful emotions took a back burner for awhile as he led her deeper into the caves. Her brown eyes were wide with curiosity at each door and room they passed. When he released her arm to haul open a huge door, revealing a large room with a massive fountain. Her eyes lit up at this. Her home in Brazil used to have a large fountain in the courtyard, and she would sit by it for hours and read. Stepping into the room ahead of Wyrvaust, she went to peer into the fountain, watching the water spew from the mouths of the dragons for a few moments. Eventually, she would ask Wyrvaust if he had any books, and she could come here to read. It was underground, but, having experienced what was outside, she would rather lock herself away down here permanently.

Looking up as he moved on to the next door, Colette abandoned the dragons and followed. The last room they would enter would be Wyrvaust's bedroom, obviously. She had never seen such a massive bed. Standing just inside of the doorway for a few moments, Colette peered silently around, looking amazed. Noting both doors that he pointed out, the wardrobe and the bathing chambers, she nearly fainted with excitement at the thought of a hot bath. She would have darted directly to that room, but Wyrvaust took a seat and began studying her in a way that made her pause, as if waiting for something. And apparently, she was. A name. "Arilwen?" She echoed softly, then almost laughed when he explained it. She did not, but for the first

time since she had been with Valis, a small smile formed on her expression, and it seemed to lift a thousand pounds off of her shoulders. "Stranded bird. Do you call all females birds? Or am I just that lucky?" Wow, she even had a sense of humor at the moment. She might have MORE of one after a bath, if she did not collapse from exhaustion. Arilwen. It was going to be odd to adjust to a new name. She considered telling him her name, but it seemed too linked with the past. Starting over may be what she needed. So far, Wyrvaust had shown her unwavering kindness and patience. He was odd, but that could be looked over. Moving to the wardrobe, Arilwen cracked open the door and stepped inside. She was immediately shocked. There were more clothes than she had ever seen. Spotting the stack of bath towels, she nabbed one, then took a moment to peek inside of the chest of baubles. She felt like a little raccoon pawing around in there.

After scanning the racks of clothing, she pulled down a long nightshirt and tucked that on top of her folded towel. When she stepped out of the wardrobe, she was met with a very unexpected explanation. Wyrvaust proceeded to tell her that he would not force her to lay with him. This made her blink in confusion. He would not try to bond her and coerce her into it? That was strange. When the sorrowful look passed over his features, truly displaying how lonely he was, a strange feeling shot through Arilwen's chest. It was something she had never felt before. It felt as if his words were pulling her heart apart. All she could do was purse her lips and nod, then turn and rush to the bathing chambers, closing the door behind her. It was all she could do not to tear Maria's gown off and leap into the water, but she managed not to. Unwinding herself from the wrinkled velvet, she dropped it to the floor, then unwound her sandals from her feet. Sliding into the water, she let out a soft cry of bliss and sank down up to her neck. The bath that followed was the most joyful twenty minutes of her life. Arilwen scrubbed at her skin, her hair, and parts of her body that she forgot she had, her sore muscles now unknitting and relaxing. Once she was done, the angel stepped from the tub and began to dry off. She looked almost back to normal now. Her skin was still a light shade of pink, but her hair was back to its glossy tint and her skin was soft again. Tugging on the nightgown, she giggled as it fell past her feet and the hem pooled on the ground. Well, she didn't stop to try it on, and it showed. She could care less. bunching it up around her knees, she stepped quietly from the bathing room and went to the edge of the bed, standing over her side. There were candles flickering softly, causing the silk sheets to beckon her enticingly. She climbed onto the bed, sitting on her knees for a few moments as she peered down at Wyrvaust. He was sleeping. It gave her time to study the man. What was he? A vampire? A demon? She would have to find some polite way to find out. He had beautiful hair that she was jealous of, and his features were well proportioned. She felt suddenly sad for him. He lived here alone, underground. How long had it been since he had been with a woman. He HAD said years. Chewing on her lower lip, Arilwen leaned over to blow out the candles beside the bed. Crawling under the covers, she almost immediately fell asleep. It had been such a trying day. But before she passed into slumber, she inched closer to Wyrvaust and laid just inches behind him. Curling up then, she was out in seconds, her large gown twisting around her legs.

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For a moment he thought he was hallucinating. It was too much to take in all at once and yet he did. He had to. It was real. Just like the body that hoisted him up and out of the bath with the intention of making sure the desert dragon was presentible enough for any sort of court. As if he cared. Marsol would have continued on with his blood soaked appearance until he himself grew tired of his fingers sticking together and the irritation of flies wanting to have a taste of the red flakes clinging to the tops of his feet. The kiss Wryvaust had given just before he had taken his leave still lingered as a faint reminder that he was indeed very fortunate. Probably the most fortunate in the world, in the grand scheme of things. His alligences were iron clad. The people inhabiting the desert if at all any, were not just considered allies but welcomed friends for whatever haze of a festival one might celebrate in these parts of An Morendor. He did hold his clan and their well being above all else, even the urge to fight. Which was always like a war hammer beating in his chest at the bare hint of swords clashing or the battle cries from faces painted in the blood of their enemies. Yet he was not without intelligence. Good heavens, Marsol never leapt blindly into action. It would be on a good day if he was in a mood that allowed a small thoughtless surprise attack here and there but it was done with the greatest of cautions. Even barbarians had a sense of self preservation. He thought numbly whether the female bird would take an immediate liking to her new home, or if she would be difficult to Wryvaust by still holding on to the feeble idea that she could ever go back to her old life, if she had one. Who wouldn't want to stay here? Honestly, he thought to himself with an inward scowl at the notion anyone would want to leave as he felt the tiny tug on his hair and it was then that it registered Cirgoth was grooming him. He was no longer in the warmth of the tub, but in a towel and parked on a most comfortable bench of sorts. When had that happened? Alarm rose up within the ill tempered desert creature for he was painfully aware of his surroundings, even in sleep. How had he been led from the tub, towed and dried to a degree, and brought to sit after having all those bothersome tangles and knots removed? Crafty. So very crafty he mused over as the corners of his lips tugged upwards where he now sat by Cirgoth's side. However just because his mind had a bad habit of being everywhere all at once, that didn't mean most if not all of his attention rested with the angel. None of his words had escaped the dark haired man who had indeed murdered an entire village without so much as a sigh of guilt in his lungs. He is so... simple. Marsol said nothing as they left the tub, nor during their brief walk to the other chamber to rest where Cirgoth now confided in him nothing but the truth and what he felt in his heart of hearts. He is simple and yet... There was another one of those small seemingly insignificant twitches in his right hand as Cirgoth said it looked as though his love was more like a curse to him. The nerve! Anger leapt into the front of him like a coiled snake would to a rodent under a rock. "Why," came that voice that held an unnervingly large amount of annoyance to it, "why do you do that." It wasn't a question. It was a demand. One Cirgoth might be even more so reluctant to answer had the desert chieftan's hand not tightened around his own as the tanned skinned fellow leaned forward on said bench with his free arm bent so that its hand could support the weight of his head being in it, face first. It would appear the monster beside Cirgoth was in that odd state of mind. That quiet one that led towards where his true feelings lied. His reason and logic aside for the time being. What if they weren't meant to be together? What if Fate was doing everything within her power to make it unbearable for the both of them to even be with one another? So? So what! Marsol felt the way he felt, it was just when he did feel it was unforgivable. "You speak of you and yours as though it were a wrong you committed," he said, suddenly in a somber tone, those amber pools becoming dreadfully sleepy looking again. He apparently had had enough. Whatever that meant.

The free hand was quick in its task of being placed on the other side of Cirgoth on the edge of the bench as his body twisted to face the angel for his anger over whatever Cirgoth had said or done would not leave him. He was hurt again. Somehow or another Cirgoth had done something but it was not the sort of wound that was in the wrong. It would be now that when the furrowing of his brows was made and he leaned forward as an index finger pushed at Cirgoth's shoulder, he himself coming up onto a knee on the bench while balancing on his other bare foot against the cool feeling floor, that the angel might glimpse just where that wounded side of Marsol was coming from. He hurt because Cirgoth was selling himself sort again. He hurt because Cirgoth seemed to have little faith in the fact that Marsol would indeed give in to any sort of desire the lost little man had. Be it to be his own object of affection or otherwise. "Threatened," he fumed as his form seemed to tower above Cirgoth as he leaned forward, inching upwards however much that towel was beginning to plummet on his hips. His body still held beads of water sparsely from shoulder to shoulder, as well as over his chest and hands. "Threatened by whom Cirgoth," he raged in that betraying way. That way where his eyes were trying so desperately to keep locked up tight the extremity his emotions could go. Could Cirgoth follow? Could the angel keep up with the ever fleeing image of the real Marsol, wherever that might be within that corporeal form of muscle and stealth, and mind that was not as confused as it seemed. By now one hand was clamped in a vise over the angel's right shoulder and the other gripped the edge of the bench he had absentmindedly pushed him down on, if Cirgoth put up no fight that is. It was only for a few precious seconds that the angst in Marsol's eyes was seen. The angst that if Cirgoth ever spoke him leaving him again he would indeed fall into another fit of insanity and perhaps do something that was truly unforgivable. Selfish? It wasn't the half of it. Love. If the monster possessed such a thing it was nothing short of consuming. It was painfully ravenous and would not show an ounce of mercy to the one it was given to. As abrupt as the small temper tantrum had come it was blinked away by a now somewhat bewildered desert chieftan who had forgotten just how fierce his own heart could beat, when it wanted to. His body moved away to sit back in its spot where he had climbed from and over top of Cirgoth like a goating imp awaiting something to pick at. His head was up turned and to the side, his eyes squinting a bit. He fidgeted a tad before going perfectly still where he sat looking to the ceiling of Cirgoth and Marcanias castle. He had said too much he thought. He had gone off on a tangent that only Cirgoth seemed to be able to pull out of him at any given moment. Like provoking the horns of a bull he thought, becoming highly amused at how silly he had just acted, even if he was being truthful. His head was a little low between his shoulders where it now hung. Arms folding over his knees as he leaned forward to eye something on the ground. "It is ironic, how one's heart defies all reason to try to justify that they too can feel," he said, his tone being that like someone who was heavily sedated. Which wasn't that far from the truth when he was remotely near Cirgoth. He felt something calming in the angel's presence, let alone his touch. Something his soul had been craving unbeknownst to himself. Peace...

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Date: 04:23 AM Mar 12, 2006  
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Marsol had a talent for confounding Cirgoth. The angel's gaze tracked him as, with a push of the desert dragon's finger, he was rocked back a bit where he sat. His

gaze seemed to scorch Marsol's eyes in their intensity as his livid green pools pierced his dark recesses. Cirgoth could swear Marsol believed his very life was threatened by the way he spoke...and in a sense...it was. When asked who threatened him, he held his gaze a moment before answering. "I saw you with her...I knew right away you had stolen her heart by coupling with her. Her hopes hung on you like fine threads from a web...clinging with expectation of capturing your heart as you did her's." His eyes fell away from him in a detached hiatus. "I did not care if I lived or died at that moment...I just knew I could not witness it...I had no right to feel that way...but I felt it just the same. It made the task which lie ahead of me, so much easier...I thought now...I can be cold...but in the end, it was not Aman, but myself I could sacrifice without concern. I felt...my heart had betrayed me. That my own soul had betrayed itself." His voice was soft in its quietude, and whistful. The faintest smile then twitched at the corners of his lips and he locked his gaze with Marsol's eyes again, an almost meloncholic warmth swimming in them. "I cannot explain what is in my heart. It would be like trying to tell you what the universe holds. I can only tell you, what I know...and I know it would destroy me to see you hold another, or to know that I could not satisfy you." His gaze fell away again as Marsol released the pressure from his shoulders, his own hands having braced themselves against the back of the bench to prevent him from folding under the pressure. He had weakened himself healing Marsol. His hands relaxed once again, and his gaze shifted to stare at him as he spoke of his own heart's burden. It was hard for Marsol to love...Like drinking poison, and that was difficult for Cirgoth to understand. He so wished to understand...to understand everything which made him tick so he could serve him better, know how to soothe him, to please him, to make him content. Before he even responded to Marsol's last utterance, the strangest notion came to mind, which Cirgoth could not withhold relating. "I don't understand how Cosette survived your embrace..." He shook his head in wonder. "No human could take you inside of their body without bleeding to death. Why I have such thoughts to torment and bemuse me all at once, I do not know...except for knowing...that had I been human...I would have died beneath you..." It was riddling to him. The only way Cosette could have survived it, was if Marsol had diminished his monstrous proportions. He had to have. Blowing a breath his gaze then riveted on him, as he recomposed his thoughts to say what he had truly wanted to say. "There is a time to fight what stirs in us, and a time to embrace it. Why do you struggle so? I find loving you easy...Not at first...I was shocked by what I felt...But now, I embrace what I feel. What is hard...is loving you so blindly...Not knowing what you expect and need. If you need someone who will stand by you, offer all they have to give to you, willingly, eagerly, I am that man. But if you need someone who can share you...I am not the creature you seek. I hear you...and though you do not tell me in any way I can be sure...I could swear you mean to say I am enough for you...But I could so easily dupe myself with hope. I must be sure...I must hear it from your lips. Am I what you desire...what you need? Am I enough for you? Yes, or no? Press you I shall, for a straight answer, Marsol...whether it angers you or not, because I must. To guard myself from the worst kind of torment I must...Yes or no, Marsol, a single word spoken from your heart, is all I ask." A single word that infinitely priceless to Cirgoth. A single word that would make all other struggles with his heart's obsession a challenge he would greet with passionate determination. It was hard for him...the uncertainty, for all he truly desired was to beg Marsol to claim his body again...Then and there...to feel him overcome every nerve ending, to feel him manipulate his pulse through every jolt of pain and rush of pleasure. What would pleasure alone with him feel like, he could not imagine...He wanted to share it all with him...agony and bliss, tenderness and raging passion. His body trembled with the need to be intimate with him again...He had loved him before he had ever

been touched by him physically, but it was a love which spilled over the soul and flesh with a fierce need to be expressed carnally. He had such trouble quieting his mind around Marsol. He wondered too much. Cirgoth often did sell himself short...Had been rejected in ways that had left him doubtful of his own worth, and made him very dangerous to betray. He truly could not bear not being good enough for those few...those rare few he committed his heart to. God had betrayed him...His wife had been murdered...Marsol was the last soul he would ever love again...ever allow himself to love again.

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Arilwen slept deeply and dreamlessly, curled up beside Wyrvaust in that massive bed. She had never been in anything more comfortable, and the fact that she had been baked in the sun all day just added to her quick passing into slumber. When she awoke, her brown eyes cracked open slowly, then opened fully as she looked around in the darkness. What time was it? How could someone tell whether it was day or night down here? Rolling carefully onto her side to face Wyrvaust, Arilwen lay quietly, studying the man for some time. His hair looked so soft... Growing brave, she reached up and gently ran her fingertips over the dark tendrils falling across the pillows. It was just as soft as she expected.

Things were strange now. Who else could say that they were lost in the desert, plucked up by an odd man such as this one, and taken in as a pet? And how did it happen to HER? Now she had a new name, a new master, and a completely new location. It was enough to wear someone down, but it could also be seen as an area of opportunity. She could start over. She could try to forget every bit of her past. She could hide away in the desert and never see anyone but Wyrvaust again. Well, and Marsol, when he stopped to visit. And the scarred angel, since he seemed to tag along after him. A new, twisted type of family.

Retracting her fingers, Arilwen laid back down and sighed, wrapping her arms around herself. She felt a terrible ache sleeping alone like this. Yes, Wyrvaust was next to her, but she felt no contact from him and no warmth. Albeit, he had explained to her that he would not touch her without her request, but she was beginning to wonder if it would be easier if he HAD forced himself on her. Sighing, Arilwen looked over at his still form once again. Her skin was itching for contact. It was going to drive her mad.

Slowly rising up onto her knees, Arilwen unwound the nightdress from her form, peeling it off over her head to cast it aside. There was no light in the room to reveal her nude form, but she crawled to Wyrvaust on hands and knees, reaching up to gently stroke his jawline. "Wyrvaust..." Her hushed tone began trying to coax him from sleep. "Come to me and show me what pleasures you speak of..." Still speaking softly, Arilwen's hand would slide slowly down his chest and over his abdomen, and finally curling her fingers into his inner thigh. Soft lips would lower to pepper his neck with gentle suckles, and her hips would press up against him, coaxing him awake. She wanted to see what secrets lay behind those dark eyes and strange tone, and it made her anticipate it even more in the pitch black.



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## Desert Lair of Wyrvaust

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Her scent, and the feeling of her straddling him, stirred Wyrvaust's keen senses before her voice called his name. Thick ebony lashes flickered and then unveiled his gaze to penetrate the eyes of the lovely creature looming over him. Her invite stirred his loins immediately, and his gut hardened beneath her. For an interval he just stared up at her in wonder, the dark fathoms of his eyes so like cavernous corridors descending into unknown depths. That heart which was stone dead in his chest, moved only by Marsol's friendship and his loyalty and love for him, suddenly swelled in his chest to make a painfully quiet groan rattle in his throat. His hands then lifted and brushed her sides, arms encircling her afterwards to coil her as he rolled her over to place her beneath him. His gaze never left her own beautiful eyes as he began to dominate her with subtle gestures, which soon grew more demanding and manipulatively forceful. Hands pressed against her abdomen, palms flush against her belly, and then slid along her skin to explore her curves. He paused for a moment to remove the only article of clothing he wore, the indigo shirt of light cloth which he tossed aside. The demon then leaned down and began to lick her flesh in a manner which was very like having an animal lick gravy from your skin. He started by lapping at her belly, and worked his upwards to her throat, and back down to her breasts, which he not only licked with all the long strokes and hunger of a wolf lapping at blood, but also with sensate flickers and deep nursing pulls, raising himself to tug and hold her teets taut with those suctioning pulls now and again. His very massive gender meanwhile pressed down against her genitals, while his legs spread her, and with slow, sensually carnal gyres of his hips, he rubbed himself against her, his thick head prodding at her entry now and again to stir but not enter her. He roused her lusts with a slow, almost painful burn, kindling her desires with painstaking tides of pleasure. The demon was eager to bury his nineteen inch shaft inside of her though, so very eager. It had been so very long since he had been with anyone. He had not forgotten how though, oh no. Her legs were lifted as his body straightened, the tall desert blood guiding her legs over his shoulders. He gripped his own member hence, and began to thrash her clit with his head's satiny skin, as his eyes burned on her with the simmering heat of his desire. He wanted her to see how monstrous he was, to prepare her, though Marsol was even larger by three inches. There would be pain if he was at all forceful or untamed with her. That could not be helped. He had been well hung even as a human, and when he was reborn as a demon, his proportions became cruel. His head then pressed against her virgin snug slit, and his eyes rolled as he ever so slowly spread her around his thick heavy girth, while petting her well exposed bundle with perfect pressure applied to his circular thrashes. He was hard, and aching for her, and pressed himself deeper, pumping slowly to sink himself inch by inch inside of her tremendously tight tunnel with each upslide of his coiled gut against her. Her body felt like a pulsing fist of velvet soft folds clenched around his massive rod, and each pump grew more difficult to refrain his lusts from unbridling from. Indeed each rock of his hips grew less controlled and more urgent as he awakened her pleasures as intensely as the feel of her stoked his own. His body shifted to lower him against her, with her legs still hooked around his shoulders, which exposed her inner body even more fully to his penetrations. His mouth covered her's and his tongue dominated her own with ardently demanding

twines, strokes and seering suckles. Each thrust pressed and slid his body against her's, his abdomen now petting her clit with each slide and retreat of his body, whereof soon he felt that tell-tale pop of her pelvic bones which let him slide into the deepest part of her. Each thrust afterwards buried him as deep as her body would allow, the pressure of his head pushing against her diaphragm, but not so hard as to rupture her and bring agony biting into her out of the marvelous pleasures he had strummed her sexual nexus with so far. Oh he could have shattered her diaphragm and thrust five inches of ruthless mass inside of her womb's canal, but he had no wish to torture her, to ruin bliss with unspeakable agony. Teeth sharpened to draw blood and then dulled into human cuspids again, and he drank of her intoxicating nectar as he kissed her all the while he loved her. Soon his arm wrapped beneath her, and a fingertip was pressing against the pleat below that wonderful orifice he abused with pure untamed ecstasy. He filled her completely, stretched her around himself so taut that had he been any rougher he would have torn the membrane her walls. She was fitted that tightly around him. Oh but she was wet, so that each stroke was smooth and incited her nerve endings to excessive pleasures. As his finger slid in deep, until his knuckles pressed with each thrust against her cheeks, his other hand returned to that clit to thrash her. So the time was passed...Their bodies fueling one another's until finally, her orgasm exploded in electrified currents of sheer pleasure to make her body convulse beneath him. The exquisite bursts which crashed and stormed through Wyrvaust with her release, unraveled him completely, and his voice shattered as he was shocked with that enormous payload of blissful abandon. He had never felt pleasures that were so cruel in their potency, and he wept as those tides ripped through him. His burning seeds filled her depths, his body trembling as his cries of rapture broke on the air as her own voice sang out with his. He wanted it to last forever, and he prolonged her orgasm to brutally merciless heights and lengths. He sustained her orgasms, and his own erection, to watch her choke and strangle on her own breaths, to sob with her as she wept as he came and came again to spill his potently fertile seed inside of her numerous times. He absorbed her with his eyes as her body writhed and squirmed against his own trembling form. He experienced the blurring of his vision, and the hallucinations which began to overtake his mind as he overdosed on her utopian state. He loved her until finally she lie still beneath him, with exception of the uncontrollable tremors which made her muscles jerk and spasm. He sustained her orgasms even then, seeing her in vivid palor...on a dune of sand, with the sun beating down on his back, before clouds gathered above them and released the rains which poured down on them with cooling spendor. Mists rose all around them, and soon they were joined in a pool of vapors. He loved her until darkness swam into his vision, and all consciousness was lost, his body sinking slowly against her. For six hours without pause he had held her in thrall of his lusts, and imbued her with his bonding sperm countless times. He never once buried his entire length inside of her, to split her in two and spill her blood.

He was still inside of her when he roused six hours later. They had slept locked together. He stirred and shifted to gently roll her onto her side with him. He handed her a glass of water. It was cold and very fresh. It did not matter where he had gotten it, that he had seemed to pluck the water and the thick crystal goblet out of the air. It was refreshing, and needed, and that was all that mattered. For six hours he loved her again. He could not get enough of her. Then for eight hours they slept, and slept still coupled again, and when he woke, he gave her another goblet of cool spring water, and then he loved her once more, but only for two hours. He extracted himself from her reluctantly, after she had orgasmed for an hour and fifty minutes. He had slowed and stayed inside of her for an hour longer,

until her nerve endings stopped firing to throb against him. He slid out of her every so slowly, relishing even that for as long as he could, and then he lay by her, kissing and lapping at her flesh for forty minutes more. When he finally abandoned the bed, another Goblet of water sat on the low, bedside table. Or was it the same Goblet he had simply refilled? He went to fix her a hot meal, and returned to her in forty minutes, to wake the poor exhausted creature, and place the wooden tray by her side. The meal was a hearty one. There was fish, its flesh very delicate in flavor, flaky and firm but not dry. It was flavored with the mesquite he cooked it over, which was very common in the desert around his home. Where had the fish come from? It tasted very fresh, and was very fresh. There were delicious vegetable spears, much like asparagus, which grew also in the desert, and in his garden, and delicious sour dough bread made from the fresh, grains of grass which grew in the planes. The grains from the grass which grew in the central planes was packed full of vitamins and protein, and had a healing and curative substance in its starch. In the desert, he collected the wood, the roots, the edible, healing, or poisonous parts, of dying plants, which had surpassed their life-age, or he planted seedlings, bulbs, or rooted cuttings, to replace any live plants he took. He had a small plant nursery and a beautiful vegetable garden in another gully which another tunnel of his mine accessed. He had planted fruit and palm trees there too. There was a well there which he used to irrigate his garden. Why did he bother growing edible plants when he himself did not eat them? Because he had been a gardener before he had been a demon. He simply liked to grow things, and now he had a good reason to. "Eat, beautiful Arilwen, and strengthen my lover again. A walk I shall guide her on, when she is fed and well rested, into the desert I shall lead her, to show her its beauty and its bounty, and how to treat her delicate balance. The desert is much like Arilwen. If treated with kindness and respect, the desert gives back to us." The slightest smile twitched at one corner of his full lips, and he lifted her hand, and for an interval of three minutes he sat on the bed with her, lapping at her hand, and then rising, he left her again to dress himself. He did not bathe...He did not wish to wash her scent from himself. He too was hungry, but the life he sustained himself with, lie in the desert out there. He would hunt while he introduced her to her new mother, the desert of fire.

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When Wyrvaust's eyes slid open to take in the angel that was atop of him, Arilwen's breath caught in her chest. He simply seemed to study her for a moment, and when his arms lifted to encircle around her form, she felt a flood of relief and acceptance. It was when Wyrvaust rolled her onto her back that her heart leapt into her throat. She felt his desire pressed against her stomach as his weight was applied, and it made her pulse race. He was large... she could already feel him grinding into her abdomen. When the demon straightened to peel his shirt off, Arilwen took that time to gaze up at him with her wide brown eyes, studying every corded muscle that she could see in the dim light. He had a beautiful body...toned and creamy. Just as the angel was about to lift her fingers to run them over his chest, Wyrvaust's hands dropped to explore HER body instead, his fingers running over her hips and belly, her breasts and neck. Those hands were soon replaced by his tongue, and she felt a shock of desire shoot through every inch of her body. He was so much like an animal...like a wolf in human's clothing that was making a meal

of her skin. As his tongue smoothed over her breasts, Arilwen shuddered deeply, her coffee colored nipples stiffening under his touch. He had said that it had been some time since he had been with a woman...but he certainly did not forget his bearings in the matter. After her nipples hardened, his mouth caught those next, one by one suckling and tugging at them like an eager hound. Arilwen's whimpers and heavy breathing were floating towards the cavern's ceiling, however high it was, and her thighs rubbed slowly together, savoring the feelings of him, her womanhood growing damp from the anticipation. Wyrvaust only spurred this on as his hips ground against hers, the thick head of his member prodding at her opening, then pulling back. Her thighs parted to him, eager and awaiting what he had to offer. She was curious and eager and needy...and as Wyrvaust straightened to lift her legs over his shoulders, she saw exactly what she was anticipating...and she nearly choked on her own tongue. She had never seen anything so large, and her lips parted in shock. It was almost the size of her arm! Her shock dissolved into stronger anticipation as Wyrvaust used that massive rod to thrash at her already throbbing clit, and Arilwen's tunnel grew soaked at the action. When Wyrvaust finally did position himself to slide inside of her, Arilwen's cry rang out, her back arching as he pushed forward ever so slowly. It was an impossible fit, but he was slow and patient with it. Part of her wanted to beg him to just thrust inside, but her good sense told her that it would probably kill her. The angel's fingers clawed at the silk coverings and furs beneath her, her soft cries and gasps growing in volume as he thrust further inside of her. "P...Please...please..." Her begging whimpers sang into his canals as she pleaded for him. If he were to stop, she would probably burst into tears. Deeper and deeper he went, causing her to writhe in pleasure. It was when his arm wrapped around her and that finger slid into the only opening she had left that her body suddenly seized with an uncompromising orgasm. Arilwen's screams erupted from her throat, her body stiffening and rolling beneath him, her nails clawing at his arms. Eyes rolling back in her head, the angel began sobbing with pleasure. It continued...on and on...Wyrvaust not letting it die. Soon, she was choking for air and stiffening beneath him.

Hours later, Arilwen was dragged awake by Wyrvaust's movements. He still was tucked inside of her, and when he stirred, it caused her breath to catch in her throat. Hours dragged on, filled with the two making love and a mess of the bed. Each time that Wyrvaust would exhaust her, Arilwen would fall deeply asleep to rest and regain some strength. When she awoke, she would be presented with a goblet of the most delicious water she had ever tasted. She would nurse it down, then would go to Wyrvaust once again. The final time she awakened, Arilwen knew she was completely spent. She could not make love again if she wanted to. Her legs were limp and her thighs smeared with drying essence, and her stomach cramped from it's emptiness. She watched her lover leave the bed, and it gave her time to nurse another glass of water and rest some more. When he returned, Arilwen was dozing against the pillows, her hands laying flat on her stomach. He gently roused her, and the scent of food bit at her senses, forcing her awake. As she pulled herself up to prop her back against the pile of pillows, Arilwen laughed softly, her eyes sparkling. "How did you learn to become such a wonderful cook?" She implored, lifting her gaze to him. She genuinely wanted to know about him. The man was an enigma and she wanted to crack open the box. Lifting the tray into her lap, she paused as Wyrvaust lifted her hand to lick at her fingers. Her loins jumped at this and she shivered. No...not again. The man was impossible not to desire. When he released her hand, Arilwen lifted her fork and began working at the food as he spoke of taking a walk. For the next few minutes, the angel enjoyed eating the delicious food and watching her newfound lover dress. When they did go for a walk, Arilwen planned on asking

Wyrvaust a million questions...about himself, about the desert...and how in the hell he found fish in the sand dunes. When he compared her to the desert, she lowered her lashes shyly. He had been the first person to force nothing on her. The thought of that made her stomach tighten and her pulse race. Chewing on a vegetable spear, a tiny smile played at her lips. If she had to start over, this was a good way to do it.

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#### Unexpected Suprises

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What in the world had happened to a simple life with simple problems. For instance, theif takes something of yours, you cut off his reason to be a man. Woman seeks shelter, price be it her body or perhaps a craft she could be amusing for. He didn't feel his tinsy bit old way of thinking was of use anymore. Sad as that was, it didn't bother him. This held a sort of calming effect over the blaze that burned inside of him from being this far away from the green eyed one who claims it was he who had stolen his heart, when it had been the other way around the entire time. His brows furrowed a bit as the feel of cold stone greeted his feet within that darkness. He cared too much he thought to himself as his form begun to fall backwards, landing on something he knew would be there. A bed of black furs made out of the mouth of the beast. It was made from the blackest of stones, carved with the jaws of some monster that intended to eat the bed and the unsuspecting sleeper in it. It's teeth were used like stairs to walk up into it. It's serpent like tongue wrapped around the base of the enormous bed, curling up from the foot of it to hover above for any curtains one might fancy to hang. Or bodies. In the eye sockets sat raw pieces of large quarts from the countless mines underneth the desert. They reflected the light and oddly enough, the color of light that bounced off of them was always red. To this bed of mamoth proportions he fell into, letting the towel slip off of his hips so he lay as nude as could be. The bed was so soft it made him bounce once or twice before he settled in amongst the furr that had a nasty habbit of flinching. Something yowled to his left and he laughed, bending his left arm with his hand held up, and open. "Jealousy is a sin," he said as the head of orange and white striped fur was ploped into his head for petting. The animal was a domesticated of course, a small tiger marked kitten brought as a birthday present for someone Cirgoth had yet to meet and hopefully, never would. The owner of the kitten hadn't seen day light in so long, it might scorch their eyes from their skull were they to venture out into the afternoon. Still, some things were best left unsaid. He itched under the kittens chin a bit, content with the simplicity of it. The little furball meowed at the naked man occupying its bed and begun to gnaw at his fingertips. This brought a hearty chuckle from the dark browed desert creature as he lifted his arm, with the kitten still latched on to his hand trying to mawl him with its teeth that were sharp enough to through butter. "You wandered away from your mother," he laughed, setting the cat down but it sought to further invade his space by climbing up onto his shoulder where it curled up in the curve of his neck amongst his hair, chewing at his ear. Marsol did not mind. But that was only because the cat belonged to someone who was rather precious to him, and he would not eat the cat because of it. Now if that wasn't the case then the little flealess wonder would have surely been set on fire until its hair had sizzled away, its skin charred black and its bodily fluids steamed into nothing before he had cut it in two and swallowed them whole. Strange Marsol was, indeed. A link to another

mind was opened, reluctantly. He didn't want to disturb the demon in the mist of his happiness but he felt the matter was important. Dear friend, your help I am in dire need of. It is a case of principals. Principals that must be honored, and the wrong that had been done, set right... For now, stay with her. Your beloved. Soon, Wryvaust. Very soon, make haste. It was unfair to impeded on the sly one when he was so full of joy, for once. Marsol had doubts and even considered just doing the entire thing himself and spare Wryvaust any sort of time without the female birdie. But the desert cheftan had a nagging feeling things would go much, much smoother with the aid of the his most trusted friend. Wait... Most trusted? Two names sprung up when he thought of "most trusted." Shouldn't there have only been one? Wryvaust? No, no, Cirgoth. There was Cirgoth now. He didn't remind himself of this, rather he scowled and cursed himself for not thinking of the angel in the first place on the subject. He wondered briefly as the link was severed to let Wryvaust be with the one he cherished in peace, if Cirgoth was growing tired of how he never seemed to give him an answer for the confessions he made straight from his heart. His head swam with questions but mostly just how easy the choice was and that he had made it a long time ago. Question was, he just needed to voice it. Show it. So Cirgoth would know where they stood, if there even was a 'they'. Those lids lowered to hide the amber hued eyes behind them. A hand was lifted to tug a bit of fur over himself but when he stretched, arching a little in the process, it made the blankets shift and only cover his lap area, barely. A heavy sigh was made as the darkness in the room was more welcoming than that of the one behind his eyelids. "What has he done to me," he said, a smile pulling at the corners of his mouth as sleep begun to bog him down so quickly he only had time to pet the furrball that still gnawed at his ear one good time before the beast slumbered. The kittin purred as it chewed on a bit of his hair and sucked the few drops of water from it before it got comfortable being snuggled against the side of his neck. There was a small piece of green ribbon tied around its tail...

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Date: 12:50 AM Mar 15, 2006  
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Wryvaust's epicurean strides were like an aphrodisiac in their slinky fluidness. His body seemed more a thing of air, than the firm straps of muscle he was comprised of, when in motion, and when loving her, he had moved as if made of water. His arm stretched out, without so much as a glance towards Arilwen, and his long, spidery fingers laced with the nephalim's. They had left the bedchamber to pass the two doors on either side of the corridor, left and right, of his sleeping quarters, and proceeded down the long hallway to take the door to the left, which was east. The eastern corridor was long as well, and had only two doors off of it, one, a very large and heavy door, at the end of the wide corridor, and one on the north, the left side, midway down the vaulted tunnel. It was this door he opened for her, and closed behind her, and up a stairway which turned into an upward sloping tunnel that he escorted her through, leading her the entire time by her hand. His entire place was warded, even the gully he was taking her to...His miniature paradise, but she would never know it, for he had not selected her to be affected by the wards. Marsol had spoken to him while claiming her, bonding her without so much as a conscious or intentional effort, and as that door was opened

at the top of the tunnel, he asked his Lord what he needed, and as the sunlight and heat flooded into the tunnel, and he led Arilwen outdoors, Marsol conveyed his request to Wyrvaust. He never needed to demand anything. All he had to do was ask, and Wyrvaust would oblige him. Marsol had yet to have asked him to do anything he did not wish to do. That day would arrive sooner or later, but in five-hundred it had not yet. Odd wasn't it? But that was the way it happened.

Wyrvaust showed her his nursery and garden. It was tucked in another gully, a small one, between two high dunes. He showed her each plant and told her its name, and related each plant's use. He showed her the nut clusters which grew on the small desert palms which surrounded a small pond which filled a deep rock crater, and he cracked one in his hand to let her taste it's creamy meat. It tasted like a brazil nut, but the shell was not as hard, and it was shaped like a mini-coconut. He showed her the vegetable garden, and the pear shaped, gold tomatos which were called weroa in most of the native tongues. He showed her the beans, the starchy, nutty roots called giavae, the leafy pot herbs, the squash, and the desert apple trees, the apples small, very crisp, and tart. He showed her the fruit vines which grew on trelices which formed a tunnel over the garden path, where strange shaped fruit grew, with firmly tender skins, which tasted like melons, the only seeds forming a core at the center. If sliced, it would make a shape like a paw, which he showed her with a very sharp dagger that he pulled from beneath his layered robes' folds. He was wearing dark browns and twilight blues. At the pond, he showed her how to moisten her turban cloth, and how to wrap it so it stayed securely on her head. "This will help to cool Arilwen," he explained, and then he stood and waited for her to figure it out from what he had shown her. Whenever she asked him about himself, about why he was so skilled with plants, about why he lived in the desert, and in the mines, and how he met Marsol, Wyrvaust's only answer, was this, and nothing more; "I was a gardener before I was what I am now, and I learned to cook what I grew." When asked where he came by the fish, he only smiled a little and shook his head. "From water of course." He told her nothing else about himself, and indeed he seemed very uncomfortable doing so at all. Oddly, he never asked her about her past, about who she was, or where she came from. It did not matter to him. She was there now, with him, and she had a new world to learn about, one he teach her about more by example, than with words. The past was done, it was gone, and he would no sooner dredge up her's, than his own.

Afterwards he led her out into the desert. "The dunes are not for walking on unless you know your way, and are cutting across them to shorten a path," he told her as they skirted the base of a high dune that was like a mountain. It was cooler there in the shadow of the dune. He showed her also how to walk in a steady manner, that she not exhaust herself, nor move too slowly. She would find that it aided in her breathing as well, to cool her body. Water was offered to her only when they found a natural source. He wanted her to learn to rely on the desert, not on him providing what she needed in the desert. Why? Because one could never be sure what lie ahead. His eyes then narrowed, as at the base of the dune, in its shadows, he spied a mouse. The demon's posture coiled and lowered, and then he leapt forward in a blurring airborne spring, to land crouched on the balls of his feet, his fist closed with a tail flipping back and forth where his index finger was tucked coiled beneath his thumb. With a grin, he popped the mouse into his mouth, the crunch of small bones soon heard, and that tail was the last thing he swallowed, which he did with a slurp once the body was pulverized by his sharp teeth. With a slight pivot, he faced the dune, and leaned down to begin digging carefully at the hole the mouse had come from. He dug quite a deep hole in the sand. Soon he had uncovered a litter

of pinkies laying in a bed of small leaves and pieces of grass. The demon ate the pinkies too, which had been left helpless when he ate their mother. Killing the babies of any animal, man or beast, if the parents were killed, was one of the laws of the desert. It was the merciful thing to do. He needed something larger if he was to have the energy he needed to raise Thane. He glanced at Arilwen a moment, her intoxicating scent both heaven and hell to him. Hungry as he was, his hunger for her tempted him to be cruel. But as his dark brown eyes laid on her, he knew...He knew he could never be cruel to her. He smiled faintly and stood. "We must walk quietly awhile," he told her. He never made any sound when he walked. He would show her things without ever speaking. And that is just what he did. He showed her the cacti which stored the best and most water, and how to recognize where springs welled deep below the earth, by the types of plants which grew in those areas with the deep roots which tapped that water. He showed her how to extract the water from moist areas in the ground with reeds, and from sucking on succulent leaves, roots and cactus that were edible . He showed her what cacti and plants were edible, and how to leave enough of each plant behind for it to grow back. He showed her how to stalk animals, large and small. He caught rabbits and ate them in front of her, insects, even talking her into tasting one which tasted like a nut. They were very nutritious, unless they were poisonous or toxic, and he showed her which ones to avoid eating as well. Finally the demon caught a deer. It was almost nightfall by this time. He pounced it like a wild cat, snapped its neck, its death quick, and then skinned it with his knife, and tore into the flesh as any predator would, with long curved fangs and sharp teeth. When he was done with his meal, he licked the blood from his hands, and arms, and cleaned his face like a cat, licking his hands and wiping his face, then lapping the blood from his hands, repeating this until his face and throat was clean. He now had the strength to raise Thane. He rolled up the hide and carried it beneath his arm as he led Arilwen away from the sight of the kill. What remained would feed many other creatures. He would tan the hide later. Hence he began to gathered wood, and asked Arilwen to help him, and when they had a great amount of wood, he cleared a place to build a fire. And he was not satisfied until they had a great pile of dead mesquite, dead palm, dead white bone tree, and dead wire tree wood. He split the wood with his dagger and his hands, and ate any grubs he found in the wood, as he built the fire and lit it with a pair of flints. He could have saved himself the trouble, and used a spark flame command, but he wanted to save all his arcane energy for Thane.

Once the fire was blazing, he opened his arms to call her into them, and for awhile he just held her close, kissing her now and again, while he grew detached in his eyes and his thoughts as he tried to summon Thane's soul. It was hard...He had never met him, did not even know his real name. But he knew the name of Mendorin's progeny, and Marsol had informed him that Thane had died at his hands. After awhile, Wyrvaust's breaths grew labored, his chest and lungs beginning to feel as if they were being crushed as his metaphysical body and mind stretched as far as he could reach in the attempt to bring Thane's spirit to himself. The fire flickered, flared outward, and then almost extinguished altogether as he drew in a deep breath, nearly snuffing the air around the fire as he breathed in the life force surrounding him seeking strength. He would unintentionally drain Arilwen of some strength in the process...doing her some small damage as he temporarily drank in a restricted measure of her own life stream. It would not hurt. She would just feel suddenly, very tired. Locking on to Thane's soul was like trying to track someone at night in the desert with a blindfold on. Finally, he felt that tell-tale chill, and his mental voice and will strengthened as he commanded him to come taste life again, beckoning him to join Cirgoth again, who awaited him. This was what he



communicated to his spirit to call him forward. Finally Thane did come to him, and he breathed him into himself, at what time he grew deathly pale, his flesh chill to the touch. His arm unwrapped Arilwen at this moment, and he unfolded his tall frame to stand. He fed more wood into the fire until the little valley between the dunes where they were camped was bathed in the glow of the fire. The demon began to chant, his voice singing quietly in resonant harmonics for half an hour, and as his eyes turned into mercury spheres, his lids and thick lashes veiled them, and his voice rose to a roar and hands swept down and then seemed to push the fire upward with his palms, for each time his hands thrust upward, in that liquid motion Wyrvaust always manifested, the fire leapt higher. Things happened which were very subtle to visual perception. The ash pile heightened within those flames, was carried upward but never quite escaped the flames with the embers which went curling to the heavens in a curtain with the columns of white and blue-grey smoke. The wood he had chosen burned very clean, and the smoke was sweet, did not sting at the lungs and eyes. Soon the flames seemed to darken at their center, and then lighten again as the flames grew more liquid, more solid, and began to take on a human-like form. The wings...those wings which were folded against the body gave it away as something else other than a human. It might have been an angel or it might have been a demon. Indeed while it was still an embodiment of fire, it appeared much more like a demon. Wyrvaust's chanting grew almost frantic, as he called life back into the body he had raised, sparking the vital flame, and then function back into the vessel which began to manifest more clearly as the fire began to die out, flames weakening and then fizzling out altogether. Wyrvaust then embraced the angel, and cupped his cheeks with his palms to kiss him. Only it was not a kiss. He was breathing Thane's soul back into him. Those wings spread and shivered as he did this, and his lips broke abruptly from that seering hot mouth, and he stumbled back and then thrust his hands in the air as he shouted a final command. His arms dropped to his sides, and his eyes thinned as Thane dropped to his knees in a pile of deep, soft ash, the fire completely cold now, not an ember or charred peice of wood remaining. Wyrvaust started towards him, but Thane cried out and his back arched, his wings snapping out, to startle the demon, and as that brilliant burst of electric blue fire exploded around the angel, the demon's hands snapped out towards Thane, and he tried to arrest his form to keep him from getting pulled away.

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Date: 05:11 PM Mar 15, 2006  
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Wyrvaust's hands clapped against Thane's upper arms and closed around them with all the brute force of a creature who was desperate not to fail. Failing Marsol was just not an option, and the few times he had failed him, he had buried himself beneath the sand until Marsol drug him out again. It had to do with how he and Marsol had met. Yes, Wyrvaust had some very strange habits. Wyrvaust's own back arched and his feet slid against the sand as he strained and labored, both physically and with the telekinetic field of arrest he had seized Thane with, against the pull of that force which attempted to wrest Thane from him. Quite suddenly, Thane's body gave way and came with him. Wyrvaust had exhausted himself resurrecting the angel, and fighting to keep him there, and toppled backwards to fall flat on his back, Thane falling ontop of him as the gateway released him with

a sizzling crack and explosion of blue sparks. Wyrvaust attempted to roll over and spill Thane off of him, but lacked the strength he needed to manage it, and with a soft groan, his gaze fixed on Arilwen's stunned face, and anon, he promptly passed out. Resurrecting an angel was a very difficult task, and it was a miracle that he had managed it, and even more amazing was that he had defeated the force which had seized Thane with the intention of plunging him into rebirth.

It was almost at that very moment when Wyrvaust passed out, that Cirgoth stepped into the desert, approximately ten miles southeast of where Wyrvaust had just resurrected his friend. The angel could not quite get to where Marsol was, something interfered, whether wards, Marsol blocking him, or something else. He had been trying to find him for hours...lost in the shadow planes. Close...he was close, he knew it, felt it. He could have been right ontop of him, but all Cirgoth could see was the angry glow of the Ring of Fire, and the heart of the moonlit desert and its dunes stretching out of vision around him. He saw no sign of anyone, or anything in the darkness, but the waves of sand, the sultry glow of the red mountains to the east, and the few plants the moon bathed in its soft, silvery light. He could smell the sulfur now, and the poisonous fumes, ash and smoke, he was close enough, but far enough away for the toxins to be diluted by fresh air enough not to effect him. If the wind shifted, or if he were five miles east, he would be choking on those fumes. "Marsol?" the angel called out with his mind and voice alike, his coarse but dulcet tones swallowed by the desert.

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Date: 05:59 PM Mar 17, 2006  
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Amused. This was the mood that had seeped into him as it would appear to the naked eye that he was asleep, yet he was far from it. Merely resting, as those immortals would say behind one another's backs in the darkened halls or the fiery pits. Resting. Or preparing? Either way he never doubted the clever one no matter the task, even if Wyrvaust might have doubted himself at the time. He felt like he might have been boasting if he told Wyrvaust of half of the gratitude he felt whenever something that had to be done, no matter the horror of it or just how evil it might have seemed at the time, Wyrvaust never hesitated. He never wavered. His loyalty was absolute. Like his friendship. Yes, yes indeed their friendship was a strange one but that just added to the colorfulness of their lives, didn't it? Who wanted to be normal? Who wanted routine? Who wanted to be average? Marsol's brows narrowed in his unmoving state where he laid, engulfed in utter darkness amongst the softest bed of furs with a very tenacious kitten munching at a lock of his still wet hair. It wasn't that he wanted to put so much confidence into his friend, or that he wanted to burden him with the responsibilities he would not trust to another. It was just... What? Those brows continued to stay narrowed as his left hand twitched. He considered his clan his family. The desert his love. Yet his life, where did his life lie? With green eyes of course, he would think. A thunder of laughter would rip the silence and cast it away. So loud it was that it reverberated inside his own skull. He wasn't absent from his duties however. He never neglected the desert, even if he was rather curious of the place Cirgoth had bathed him in. The smell of damp earth as oppose to dry did have its charm, but nothing more. Another visit he would have to pay to that part of An Morendor, course only to see how fast the animals there ran. Probably not quicker than those in the desert. No open spaces. Nothing to obscure one. Just vastness that felt like

it went on, and on until it filled your heart with its purity. Nature was pure. It was untainted. Unspoiled. Unlike the beings that inhabited the world, who could be any of the above. There was a hurting deep within that he had been trying to quiet by the little resting place he had disappeared to, without so much as a goodbye to anyone. Wryvaust or Cirgoth. Sad as it was, it made the hurting worse. So very much worse. It was becoming a dull ache, one that dug its claws into his insides, knotting them up like piles of starving snakes around something fluffy and full of life. Why did it still hurt? He knew. He just didn't know whether it would cause more strife in Cirgoth's own life if he told him what he had been about to, before Marcania had entered the room and brought his grief and vengeance with him. That angel struck Marsol as truly strange as he forced his eyes to open, at which moment Wryvaust had begun the deed of bringing back a soul that had died before his due time. An unjust death. A death that had been wrong, even for Mendorin. The wretches name brought his sleepy looking form to sit up, so fast that the small kitten tumbled from his shoulder but scratching all the way down his backside in the sudden startlement of it all. A part of him was bitter. Horribly bitter that it had been an accident the vile fiend had been slain. That Thane had died and it was only because of that, that Mendorin had met an overdue end. He mumbled something along the lines of a curse upon whoever had murdered Thane, only because it had killed Mendorin. Nothing more. The bitterness did not last long before it was swept aside and bottled up as he slowly laid back again on his side, with a hand making a tiny dome for the hissing kitten to hide under, taking away its fright and giving it comfort. The tiger marked kitten purred as it arched itself up against the palm of his hand, demanding more affection. "Lucky you are. If he was here, I would hang you from the ceiling for being a nuisance," he murmured. It was the truth. He could hardly concentrate on keeping his own cravings under wraps, even when Cirgoth was across the damn room. He heard the lighter tones in Wryvaust's voice from being with the female birdie. She made him happy. Good, he would think for he was growing worried that if she didn't appease his dear friend her fate probably wouldn't have been all that far away from Mendorin's. Cruel? No. Justice was an oddity in the desert not many found. Still it was there. It was in the time span of leaving Cirgoth and Marcania in their castle in the more lush part of the world, to the time that Wryvaust passed out under Thane, that the cravings were taking their toll on him. Outwardly he appeared fine. Fit as a fiddle. No worse for wear. However on the inside he was becoming a mess at such a fast rate that even he was not so sure anymore he could stop himself for the death of him from the feeling that if he would go too far if he saw Cirgoth again. He knew during the time they had shared in the candle lit room that he had hurt him. He had inflicted wounds that no mortal could have withstood. Even Cirgoth had been rendered unconscious from such abuse. Why did he endure it so? "Why!" It was a roar that boomed within the hallow he seemed that he was rapidly becoming lost in. He wasn't used to that. Someone giving themselves to him without regret or restraint. Course Wryvaust was different, they had an odd relationship but that wasn't the same as what Cirgoth wanted. What that green eyed sneak of an angel asked for was something Marsol didn't think he himself had in him. Or was that just more of the self loathing that kept him so tightly locked away from everything and everyone, including Wryvaust? He was feeling too much again. Letting his emotions leak like that wasn't like a cheftan. It wasn't like the desert beast he was. The thing he had always been. Yet time changes everything. Fickle but true, even the most grand of canyons did not happen over night. Although some gossipmongers like to say otherwise. He couldn't stop what came next, even with Maelmorda's help. I am here... came that answer, as if it were carried on the wind itself as it rolled along the sandy ground, over Cirgoth's covered feet and onward to disperse. I was... always here. The

unimaginable ache in him eased just that little by hear Cirgoths voice, even though the angel was so close to his desert beast than he knew. Unfortunately, Cirgoths voice was not enough to lull the insatiable beast. Not now. He wanted more, he would always want more. The lightless place Marsol had vanished to would be cut as bright orange flames flared into existence directly in front of Marsols face, just an inch or so. Their ferocity that swirled wider just enough to be the distance between the top of his head and the line in his hips, made a flutter that ruffled his still drying hair. Outward he reached as his eyes closed, both hands dipping into the cool liquid feeling gateway before him, to the person standing on the other side. There wasn't enough time to blink. It just happened. It was like someone had just struck a small fire behind Cirgoth, even though he was alone. Fingertips came out of nowhere, but was it really that big of a shocker? A pair of hands slid over the angels sides and up the front of him, neverminding the choice of weaponry or manner of attire. As the right hand came to rest on Cirgoths left shoulder, and the left hand laid over his right hip, a chin dug faintly into the green eyed ones left shoulder. No words came. What was there to say? A sharp jerk backwards would take Cirgoth off his feet, into and then through the fire laced fateway that had been used to bridge the distance in space between them. That is, if Cirgoth didn't struggle...

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Date: 11:12 AM Mar 20, 2006  
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One thing that Arilwen would be taught that day, most of all, was to listen and learn. To silence herself and close her lips so that she might thrive under the watch of her newfound master. When the two first departed, Arilwen did try to pry Wyrvaust with curious questions...all to get vague and cut off answers. When she finally took the time to realize that she was getting under his skin, she abruptly silenced herself, feeling guilt flood her being. The hours that followed would soon open Arilwen's eyes to what was hiding in the desert...a place that she had met with a very bad first impression. She had even gone so far as to scorn the barren land. But now, as the day wore on, she saw beauty hiding where only few knew about it. Wyrvaust gently teased her about some things... her questions about where he found fish and even trying to taste a bug. Arilwen refused this at first, but with the dark eyes that cast down at her and the question about whether she trusted him or not caused her lips to part. She DID squeeze her eyes shut and WAS a little creeped out that the thing was wiggling around, but her teeth bit into it...and her deep brown eyes opened in shock as she chewed. It DID taste like a nut. Swallowing, she flushed light pink as he teased her, then moved on.

Throughout the course of the day, Arilwen learned where to find water and how to get to it. She even pointed out a spot or two that she suspected, and when told to investigate, she found that she was right. She was glowing at that, and really needed no congratulations from Wyrvaust. As curious as she was as to why he would not ask her about her past, Arilwen was also relieved. There was no need to dredge up what she wanted to forget. She would have felt ashamed to bear the scars that she had to him. Wyrvaust held her in rapt awe and disbelief when he attacked animals to eat them. She remained where he left her and watched in shock as his body moved so much like a wild cat to pounce on his prey. In no way was she disgusted, but amazed that he could be so much like an animal.

Once they continued on across the sands, the request for firewood sent the eager angel on a hunt. She returned with an armload of wood, then left for another. Once the fire was lit and Wyrvaust beckoned her close, Arilwen went happily into his arms, curling into his body to close her eyes. She felt so strongly about the demon, and she had no idea why. Never had she felt a deep connection like the one she held with him, and she had just been placed into his possession. Yet, this time, it did not feel like possession, but something equal...something sweeter. Arilwen was so lost in thought that she did not notice that Wyrvaust's breathing had become labored. She did notice, however, that she suddenly felt very drained and tired. She was about to ask if she could lay down on the sand to rest when he stood, leaving her sitting on the sand. Pulling her knees to her chest, Arilwen wrapped her arms around her knees and watched him curiously as he stood before the fire and began to chant. This did not help her exhaustion, and her eye lids began to grow heavy. Just as she was about to lie down on the sand, her eyes shot open as Wyrvaust's voice grew louder and stronger.

Now, what followed would be something completely new for Arilwen. Yes, she was now growing used to the talk of angels and demons and vampires, and she could handle that people hunted other people... but when her gaze fixated on the flames and she watched a human unfold, she could scarcely believe her eyes. As the fire died, leaving a naked man bent into the ashes, Arilwen slowly stood, but spoke nothing. When the man's back seemed to explode and wings protruded, she jumped in surprise, then clamped a hand over her mouth. Wings...she had not yet seen wings. He was an angel? Why did she not have wings like that? As Wyrvaust reached forward to grab the man, who seemed to be crackling with blue electricity, Arilwen wanted to help...she wanted to step in, but did not want to toy with something as powerful as this. She was not asked to help, so she simply stood by and watched. Suddenly, the electricity seemed to die and the two men fell back onto the sand. Arilwen watched as Wyrvaust lay limply under the angel, giving her one last faint glance before his eyes closed. And then, she panicked. Rushing forward, Arilwen fell to her knees beside Wyrvaust, her fingers lowering to his neck. "My lord?" She whispered, brushing her palms over his creamy skin. He was not dead. He was simply passed out. Swallowing dryly, Arilwen turned to the nude angel lying on top of him, who also seemed to be passed out. She was tired, but was the only one awake, so she proceeded to try and shove the angel off of Wyrvaust. Finally, after ten minutes or so, she managed to roll him onto his back in the sand. "I...I will get water." She whispered, then, digging the knife from Wyrvaust's robes, she rose and took off across the sand. It took nearly half an hour, but she finally found a cactus that she began to drill into, like she had been shown. Taking off her turban cloth, she soaked that in water, then started her trek back across the sand. When she reached the two, she knelt at Wyrvaust's head and began to bathe his neck and face in the damp cloth. All she could do was wait.

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Date: 01:04 PM Mar 21, 2006  
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What was that feeling? He felt something pulling at him, dragging him back, but back to where? The soul that was Thane was now being pulled back from the oblivian it was strange feeling to be ressurected! The angels spirirt gave a scream then it

happened and his soul was yanked from the world of the dead, and with godspeed his form was hurled into the world of the living, though he could not recount everything as things went black. Fire ther was fire and heat all around him, he could feel it upon him, in him.. Why was it so hot, was the devil coming to claim his soul for some misdeed he may have commited, what had he done to deserve his fate he had to wonder! And soon his eyes opened as he was upon his knees, his form was barely concious when he felt something taking hold of him, it caused his eyes to open as he was being drug back? Someone was there, working to keep him there with him, he did not know this fellow and with that he blacked out as he was yanked back and fell on the demon, the savior? Well atleast the person to give him life once more. And moments would pass, but eventually he would open his eyes as he laid upon the man who had brought him back it seemed, it was all so confusing really. Though upon feeling someone else coming towards them, he rolled off and crawled away, his wings up defesively... His tired form ached though he had no time to rest, he just stared at the female who was trying to wake the fellow on the ground, he looked to him and then her. "Is he okay...?" He asked as he kept his distance. The tall angel with his pale skin and lovel sapphire blue eyes would just watch her intently, as he ran a hand through his black hair that fell just passed his shoulders..

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Date: 01:37 PM Mar 21, 2006  
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Arilwen was so intent on waking Wyrvaust that she did not notice the angel in the sand stir and rise. It was only when he spoke that she jumped, leaping to her feet, her brown eyes wide. She studied the angel in awe, first his wings, then every other inch of him. "W..Who are you? How did you...come out of the fire like that?" The man's skin was unmarred. How was he not burned from the flames? Perhaps he was a demon in angel clothing! In a quick stoop, Arilwen scooped up Wyrvaust's dagger from the sand and straightened to hold it out. "Do not try anything funny or I will cut you to ribbons." At his question, she glanced down at Wyrvaust, looking uncomfortable. Anyone could see that she was not trained to use weapons. "He is asleep, I think. He just...fell over." After a moment of thought, she narrowed her eyes and trained her gaze on the man once more. "Pick him up. I want to take him back home, but I cannot lift him. You take him back and do not try anything funny, and you can stay there until he wakes up." Of all of the people in the world to give orders right now, Arilwen would not be the expected one. She was not used to it, but somehow, when it came to Wyrvaust, it was easy. If the man did agree and picked up her lover, she would lead them back the way they came. She was amazed that she remembered so well. With Wyvaust's tutoring, she remembered each turn they took, each dune, and every plant. They would soon be back to his dwelling and she would have the angel lay him on the bed. She immediately would tuck the silk sheets around him, then would wander back into the main room where the man was. "I suppose I should ask you if you want something to eat. Do you even eat food?" Peering at him, she tried prying to figure out exactly what he was.

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Date: 02:28 PM Mar 21, 2006  
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He just looked down at the fellow as she asked him question after question, it hit him then... This had to be HIS that evil bastard would not just let him be... He backed away slightly.. "I am.. I..." He just glowered up at her, then shook his head then and tried to deny it, it could not be.. "Call me.." He stopped as he stood then she had a dagger pointed at him, he frowned, he did not want to fight her.. He just looked away and shut his eyes tight then and drew in a breath, he was ready to summon his sword though if need be. His wings still out protectively... "I came from the fire?" He then looked to the fellow and nodded.. Moving to him then he looked down at him touching his cheek as if checking to see if he was hurt, he found nothing, and being exhausted there was likely not much he could do. As for the girl, he ignored for the moment, after his time with Mendorin a dagger seemed so... eh? And then he was gathering the demon in his arms and hugging him close to himself, he smiled softly and just looked up to the female then. "Where am I, and who is he?" He asked softly as he held the man close to his naked form, His wings came about to cradle the fellow, And then lifted him up and looked between the wings as they parted then, and he nodded for her to lead on, they should get him to somewhere safer.  
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Date: 02:37 PM Mar 22, 2006  
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"He is my lover... I refuse to disclose who he is. He will reveal that information to you. I have no idea how you got here or who you are, but I take no chances." Arilwen answered the first series of questions as the angel hauled Wyrvaust up and began lugging him across the desert. "And you are in the desert. I know no more than you. I was lost here in the very close past, and he found me." Her brown eyes lifted to study the angel, and then they walked the rest of the way in silence. Once they had entered the cavern home, Arilwen instructed the angel to lay her lord in bed, and she went about tucking the silk sheets around him. Afterwards, the two retired into the opening room of the home and she moved to the fire to stoke it and begin cooking the stew that Wyrvaust had cooked for her. Hers did not turn out as well, but she eventually carried a bowl of it and a glass of water to the angel, placing the items on the table beside the couch they sat on. "Here you are. Once he wakes up, everything will be straightened out. Until then, rest..." She spoke softly, now less defensive. She also had laid the dagger in the bed chamber. She had no idea how to use it anyway. With a slight nod, she would turn and retire into the bed chamber with Wyrvaust. Crawling into bed, she lay her head on his chest and closed her eyes. She was exhausted as well, but at least had mustered the energy to return. Giving a soft sigh, she would drift off into a deep, dreamless sleep.  
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Date: 11:10 AM Mar 23, 2006  
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Wyrvaust had never had a resurrection exhaust him as raising Thane had. Vulnerable he was indeed. Anyone could have disposed of him in those hours he lie in that unconscious state, but the desert took care of those who took care of it, and it guarded those who watched over the unfortunates who wandered into that domain. Thane had not wandered in though. He had been delivered there out of death. It was also fortunate that Wyrvaust had relaxed his wards, which he did from time to time, or Thane would never have been able to enter his lair past that necromantic wall of force. When Thane lifted him up to cradle him in his arms and wings, the demon's limp, dead weight conformed to his body, and when they entered the lair, the Smart Wards the demon had woven, were triggered by their master's vulnerable state not long after the angel and Wyrvaust's adored mate entered past the garden's entrance into the long sloping tunnel. He was never aware of how gently Thane laid him down in that enormous, low bed, or the sweet care Arilwen showed him when covering him with those thick satin sheets of rich crimson, and taking the time to pull the beautiful sheer bed curtains of silk around to veil him in privacy. It was not the day after he returned Thane to the world of the living that he stirred and came around, but the following morning. Arilwen's lavender fragrance bathed his senses to ignite his hunger fiercely, and his arms curled under and around her sleeping form to claim her in an oh so possessive and needy embrace. As she herself began to awaken, his lips brushed her earlobe. "I love you," he whispered to her, his voice laden with emotion, lust, and something beyond the mind's scope of comprehension. "Forgive me...Please forgive me," the waver in his soft, remorseful tones overspilled with emotion, emotions which made him want to cry for feeling them. The seering warmth of his lips then pressed against her throat, and he kissed her as he shifted to mount her. His legs spread her own, and his clothes and her's (if she was wearing any) dissolved away to leave his straps of lean muscles pressed up against her. He rocked and ground against her until he was hard, and then slid himself inside of her with painstaking care. He was amazed...She was just as tight as the first time he had coupled with her. As she spread to fit him like a second skin, he began to pump himself inside of her snug canal deeper and deeper, while human cuspids altered into sharp teeth and fangs. He held her firm as he loved her and then broke her skin to draw blood, and as he drank of her intoxicating fountain, he made love to her with ardent passion, each stroke and deep penetration an act of relishing the feel of her. Her blood aroused the darker side of him however, and he was rougher with her before...more untamed, and yet? He was aware of himself, and did not injure her. He was simply unable to deny himself the excitement she and her exquisite blood aroused in him this time, and despite the temptation to bury himself fully inside of her, and to eat her flesh, he did neither. He was starved though, after expending so much internal energy and stamina, and would love her, feast on her blood, until he had tapped into her immortal ichor as he drained her of every last drop of blood. He could not help himself...His thirst was fierce where he forbid himself of all else...of feeling the full length of himself inside of her, of consuming that sweet flesh. Had he not been so wise, so old, he would not have the control he had. He loved her long after she lie still, until he had spilled his seed into her time and time again, his backed arched, and muscles flexing over her still form. The demon's head bowed against her bosom, his body shuddering with sexual tremors, as he released himself inside of her one more time, and then rolling over, extracting himself as he did so, his arms still coiled around her, he wept, his face buried against her throat. For an hour he wept, as all the emotions he had caged for time out of memory, spilled over in himself. He loved her...Such an emotion was too much for his body to contain. His very soul swelled from his skin to manifest as tears and sobs. He finally quieted, as little by little, he regained some control over everything he



felt. He remembered...Thane.

He stared at her for ten minutes and then kissed her and climbed off the bed. He bathed in a hot steaming tub, and dressed himself in indigo desert robes, and braided his hair to one side, hence he left the bedchamber, the torches in the sconces on the corridor walls, and the large braziers of iron and tarnished broze erupting with flames to light the way as he passed. He walked to the end of the hallway, passing the door which opened to a dining hall and kitchen, and into the great hall where that fountain stood at the center, surrounded by comfortable benches, layered with fur. The water the dragons spewed from their mouths was very pure, cold, and refreshing to drink, and five dippers attached to chains hung from large bronze rings from the fountain, each dipper across from one of the five dragons which stood back to back with their tails entwined. Marsol had once mused at how these dragons which lie beneath the desert spewed water instead of fire. He though the irony interesting and of some deep meaning only a dragon could truly understand. Wyrvaust simply enjoyed their beauty...the exquisite artistry of them, every scale perfect, the talons and their teeth as sharp as bronze could be made. As Wyrvaust laid his eyes on Thane, a chill pricked his spine as he remembered feeling something very odd when he had resurrected him. A sense of forboding perhaps...He could not place it exactly, but it had not stopped him from obeying Marsol's wishes, or made him any less determined. He approached the angel where he sat on one of the benches with his back to him, and he cleared his throat to reveal his presence. Wyrvaust was stealthy without even trying. It was habitual. "Welcome back to the world of the living, Thane. I am Wyrvaust. Welcome to my home and my Lord's domain. Is the stork hungry, or thirsty? I am sure he must have many questions. Shall we go to the dinning room and discuss whatever he wishes to discuss over food and drink?" His voice was like a bewitched balm, placid, almost sleepy in its soft spoken languidness. The demon would show Thane the way to the dinning hall if Thane agreed to join him, or if Thane preferred to stay in the entrance hall, he would speak to him there.

Thane would have discovered if he explored the place, that some doorways could not be entered, while the entrance he came through to the garden, and the entrance to the gully, were accessible to him. The wards were set to identify friend from foe by certain triggers, and Thane carrying Wyrvaust's unconcious form into the lair had identified Thane as a friend. So he would remain unless Wyrvaust named him otherwise and set the wards against him.

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Cirgoth's eyes had just closed as a breath of very fresh air washed over him to sweep back his long, satiny locks of auburn hair. He breathed it in deeply, only as he exhaled, his eyes sprung open as Marsol's voice infiltrated his mind. His breath hastened just to hear him, and his abdominal muscles constricted taut. Just his voice filled him with gladness and the love which stirred his sexuality. He laughed softly as he said he was here...that he was always here. "I need you..." he whispered to the wind. Was it wrong to say what he felt...to say he needed him? Did he understand, or want that need, his love? How he ached inside with the need to know if he loved him. Words. Perhaps he put too much stock in words and was not paying enough attention to his gestures, his actions. A breath was blown, and his head bowed to carry his eyes to the ripples in the sand beneath his feet. Still...he needed to hear it...Hear him say he wanted what he offered. Yes, the angel placed great stock on what one spoke. His body stiffened as he felt those

fingers meet his warm flesh with a heat which excelled his own. Muscles quivered and flexed beneath Marsol's palms and fingers as they flushed against his body to slip beneath that leather tunic and guide those strong arms around the angel's muscular frame. His head tipped to the side to press his cheek against Marsol's as he nestled his jaw on his shoulder, and his arms wrapped around Marsol's limbs. Every gesture of physical contact, no matter how brief or how lasting, was priceless and relished by the angel. The yank which carried him into Marsol's lair within the ring of fire, was unexpected, and rather dizzying it was so quick. His breath caught and was not released until he felt the luxeriously soft furs beneath himself, and the embrace of Marsol, which the angel so relished. The place was sultry with heat, but not as warm as Cirgoth would have imagined it should be, had he known where he was. Still, the heat cocooned him, and not unpleasantly. Whatever craft Marsol applied to control the temperature of his lair, was very effective. A breath of blithe laughter escaped him, and he rolled over briskly to place himself ontop of Marsol, his arms coiling him with ardent passion as he sealed his lips with a feverish kiss. His muscles meshed against the dragon Lord's with firm urgency, and when his lips parted with his with teasing flickers of his tongue, his eyes burned into Marsol's amber pools. "I want to feel you inside of me again, Marsol...Let me ride you...Let me pleasure you," he begged him, his tones deeply laden with desire which overflowed from the very core of his heart. Fingers dug into his flesh and then began to explore him, tugging at those clothes he so desperately wanted to strip him of, with his own deer hides and weapons. Lust...Marcania had said...Yes, he lusted for him, but only because he loved him beyond any hope of every defining that love with words. Unless Marsol stopped him, Cirgoth would begin removing his clothing, kisses blazing trails on the desert dragon's hot flesh as it was exposed. Any scars would be traced by his tongue, and nipples would be sealed by his mouth, thrashed by that savory, soft muscle, and suckled with a hunger that matched the desperate need he had to feel him inside of himself again. The angel's entire body hummed and sizzled with surges of desire that just being near Marsol ignited in him, the fierceness of his lust betrayed in ever carress and tremor which coursed through his muscles. His frame would stretch and flex with feline-like sensuality whenever a sexual rush spilled over too intensely. Every kiss, every stroke and grip of his fingers against his flesh communicated just how tremendous his love for him was. Only when he felt four soft paws and the weight of that tiger cub pouncing on his back, and that sand paper tongue lapping at his flesh, would he cease molesting Marsol with his tongue and lift his head to glance over his shoulders at the adorable creature on his back, at the very moment it made up its mind and sank its teeth into the angel's shoulder. "Ahh...Cute, it wants to eat me," he laughed. Yes, demons and vampires were not the only things which found angels a tempting treat.

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Date: 01:05 PM Mar 23, 2006  
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Arilwen grew worried when she awoke the next day and Wyrvaust still had not stirred. She had straightened the sheets and dabbed at his head with a cool cloth once again, then had gone off to find the angel. The two really had nothing to talk about, so Arilwen told him small things she had learned in the desert, like how to find water or animals. After a couple hours of light conversation, Arilwen felt lonely and rose, excusing herself. She would return to the bedchamber with

Wyrvaust, climbing in to toy with his dark hair. Her heart ached for this man. It was such an odd feeling...something that had never happened before. This was not submission...this was something deeper. She had given herself to him willingly and was blooming beneath his care. It was so strange and it terrified her, but drew her in at the same time. That evening, she climbed into bed beside her slumbering lover once more, and drifted off to sleep.

It was Wyrvaust who awoke first the following day, and Arilwen stirred as she felt his arms tighten around her, drawing her close to his body. Her dark lashes fluttered open, her brown eyes blurred a little before focusing. His face...his expression was something so tender that it caught her heart in her throat. Lifting her fingers, she traced her fingertips over his cheeks, then buried her face in his neck as he whispered those sweet words to her. Her heart felt like exploding at them, and she would have let it to feel oblivion like that. Her eyes closed and she threw her arms around his neck, her loins heating as she felt her clothing dissolve away. It felt like damp cotton candy on a tongue. "Oh, Wyrvaust..." Her voice trembled with emotion that she could not understand. "I was so afraid for you. I was not sure what to do. I--" Arilwen cut off as her stomach lit on fire, the demon grinding against her. Gasping, her eyes widened and she arched against him, gyrating her hips to help arouse him. When he finally did enter, she wondered if she would ever get used to the size. She doubted it severely. Whimpering as he pushed and stuffed his way in, it would take only moments for him to unleash on her, dealing her blow after blow of that sweet, animalistic power that rocked her loins and entire body in endless bliss. Her shrieks and screams were soon cut off as Wyrvaust began to drain her down to the point of her body going limp. A choked whisper leaked from her lips just moments before she passed out. "I..I love you.." It was hoarse and hardly there, but she had never given those words to anyone. Her hazy eyes held her sincerity, and then she fell limp below him, out cold.

And with those sweet admittances of emotion that Arilwen had never felt before began something that she HAD. The countless fillings of her womb with that fertile seed would now be catching up with her, and it was that evening that she would start with child. She would not know and would be completely clueless to the fact as the rapid growth began, something at a speed that would amaze her if she COULD know. She would know soon enough...and it would terrify her.

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Date: 02:11 AM Mar 24, 2006 LOG

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Date: 04:46 PM Apr 1, 2006

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Of all the things he could have said, Marsol thought as he found himself quite the molested monster indeed by the green eyed demon in disguise. Or so he reasoned about the fallen and the entire ordeal of how no matter how much good Cirgoth did, he very well may not be welcomed back into the Haven he was cast out of. No, he had left it of his own accord hadn't he? Yes, he had left and for what? To prove something? To set in stone that we are all in control of our own destinies, and not the powers that be? To save a friend? To prove a point? The logic to Cirgoths acts

perplexed him when the angel spoke of how he tried to do good whenever he could. Marsol often questioned the motives of people that wandered aimlessly into his desert, without a purpose or name. Most of them he had given a purpose, oh yes. He gave everyone a purpose just as well as a name that suited the misery or contempt that was their lives. Almost without fail that purpose was to die in some fashion be it by blade, fire, or something else best left untold so as not to churn the stomach. Their names? The moment they set foot on those blistering sands they had no names. They never would. A name was befitting of something or someone of remote intelligence. To tread in a land that was not your own was pure lunacy. As much as he wanted to hear all those sweet nothings Cirgoth now said in between those hungry kisses that mounted in number by the second, now was not the time. As unfortunate, and agitated as that may make Marsol, he possessed the sort of self control that would spare Cirgoth that delicious pain he so sought to have over, and over, and over again until he either passed out, or worse. A smile pulled the corners of his lips a bit as the kitten who had been keeping him company wanted a piece of the angel. As if it wasn't the only one, hah. A hand slid over that marred flesh of Cirgoth's left shoulder to snatch the kitten up by its head, lifting it so its little tirade on Cirgoth would be put to a stop. "It forgets its place," Marsol said, in a tone that sounded as hallow as the part of him that was so well tucked away, hidden from all save the glare of heat coming from not only the skies, but the ground. It was not rejection that came from the beast underneath Cirgoth who was so lulled by the angels affections he was beginning to forget there was even an outside world at all. The hand that held the kittens held released it after his arm swung off to the side so it ploped on the other side of that giant bed they laid on. He knew if he didn't stop this right that very moment then Cirgoth and himself would just become lost in that mind numbing bliss like they had before not that many moons hence. The mere idea made his skin burn terribly but nevertheless, there were other matters of greater importance at hand. "There is business in the desert you need tend to," he said as his scar riddled torso rose so he could sit up while eyeing the kitten with a hawk like glare, just itching to fling it from the bed if it so much as looked their direction. Which it did. The cat was saucy, like its owner. It sauntered on up to Cirgoth for another nibble but what it got was not what it bargained for. A swift backhand sent the kitten sprawling at the very end of the bed where it rolled a few times before yowling. Whether in pain or from being batted away like a gnat couldn't be for certain. He would not take no for an answer. With a hand on Cirgoth's left shoulder and the angels right wrist being seized, that all too familiar crackling sound begun perhaps too close behind Cirgoth's body. No explanation. No reason as to why Marsol had brought him there simply to tell him he had to go somewhere. Why not open a link to tell the angel? Marsol had pondered over why he hadn't just told Cirgoth in first place but the answer was simple. He didn't want to tell the man anything unless it was face-to-face. Was that being a cad? No. It was being blunt, which is what Marsol was... when he wanted to be. An index finger started to poke the unique one in his shoulder, lightly but slowly pushing him backwards if Cirgoth didn't resist of course. "If you put a sword in his hand," his voice now held a somewhat haunting aspect to it, something that was out of place, or perhaps that was because Marsol was being honest again and to hear emotion, even if honesty, coming out of that monstrosities mouth was unnerving, "he is expendable. If you put purpose in his heart, you'll have a warrior." Who? What was the dark haired one talking about? Had he finally gone crazy from the heat? Was Lu right? Had Marsol finally succumbed to the horrible insanity that has befallen all of his kind? That void like state where all one could feel was nothing and everything at the same time? A mess of blood lust inducing rage? Surely Cirgoth would have seen such a thing coming... right?

Yet Marsol did not appear insane. He wasn't babbling obscenities or trying to do evil things to Cirgoth or anyone else for that matter, unless they wanted him to. He was just... a bit essentric like that. Where Wryvaust spoke in riddles, Marsol spoke in lessons. Or were they warnings? Backwards Cirgoth would quickly be pushed, although one of the angels hands would find its way to the side of Marsol's face to be leaned into for a moment before the dragonic beast let the angel go completely to have that gate of firey light transport him elsewhere. Of course all of these things would only be possible if Cirgoth didn't resist. Everyone had a choice. If Marsol was the spawn of Lucifer, or something else much worse, the would always be one flaw in him. Marsol would never take away anyones choice. Quite the opposite, Marsol destroyed so that those he held dear would forever retain their choice, be it for life ... or death...

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Date: 01:55 PM Apr 6, 2006  
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Cirgoth knew his advances would be rejected the moment Marsol plucked the rather large kitten off of his back and said that it forgot its place in those hollow tones of his. All the color and light seemed to drain out of Cirgoth's face at once as he rolled off of Marsol and crossed those strapping arms across his chest. He resolved then and there to make no further advances towards Marsol, but allow him to make his own desire and heart evident, or...not. Three factors made Cirgoth so immediately pale. Depression had slammed him like a freight train, and he felt sick, faint and strange...The vapors from the volcanos which he had been breathing had caught up to him perhaps, and something nagged at him...Had nagged at him since he left Mark. Something felt horribly out of place, he just had no idea what it was. His gaze darted on Marsol when he said there was something in the desert that he needed to take care of. The angel was not even aware that his voice rose out of pure instinct in a snappish bark at Marsol. "NO!" It was not like Cirgoth, not like him at all, but then...He did not feel like himself at all at the moment. The angel cringed visably when Marsol backhanded that kitten to send it rolling as it leapt at him, almost playfully, intending to take another bite. An uncomfortable silence fell for a moment, that discomfort Cirgoth felt relieved when he shifted and slid around until his warmth curled around that tiger kitten, his fingers stroking its soft fur. "Maybe if it gets to know me as something other than just something to eat," he whispered, and nuzzled his cheek against its face as he pet the animal. When Marsol spoke of swords and purpose, Cirgoth's green eyes locked on him with a steady burn, and yet there was a hollowness to his eyes, and while his muscles spasmed beneath each poke of that finger, Cirgoth himself did not budge. He wanted to tell him he had purpose...but was weary of trying to explain his heart and engratiate himself to Marsol. Marsol was all the purpose he needed, but he would not say it to him. It was Cirgoth's hope...that Marcania would learn to admire him as well. Angels...they belonged in the desert...it made sense, felt right. The desert was fierce and delicate at once. It was warm, and it was cold...It was full of life, and it was barren. It was so...like an angel. If Marsol welcomed them, then perhaps they truly did belong here...Even Aman...Perhaps he too could find a place here. He said nothing to Marsol about what made a warrior. Cirgoth KNEW, knew better than anyone, and the only understanding which he betrayed was in his eyes as

he stared at the creature who he loved beyond any bounds of sensibility or reason. The jabs to his shoulder bruised him, but he just lay there on his side, jostled by those prods, for he did not feel well, and was not accustomed to feeling sick at all, nor so tangled up inside, and depressed, and to feel all these things at once made him very unwilling to budge from the heavenly comfort of that bed, and even the silky fur of the tiger he had stroked with such tenderness that he had lulled it to sleep. The angel then found himself pushed, nevertheless, firmly enough to send him tumbling off the low bed. The tiger kitten was startled and skidded across his chest to claw him as it tried to hand on...It was not intentional, just a startled reaction. Cirgoth rose onto his knees, rather unsteadily, and his eyes thinned on Marsol as he pressed his cheek against the hand which the angel had swept upward to catch the desert dragon's shoulder with, to steady himself. "I love you..." he said it so quietly, that Marsol might not have even heard it. It was not even a conscious thing...the feeling had simply swelled and spilled over from his lips. As he heard the crackle and sizzle of the fiery gate behind him, a plea leapt into Cirgoth's eyes. He would go if Marsol propelled him backwards one more step...He would let himself be pushed backwards into that gate that would deliver him to Wyrvaust's, but it was his love for Marsol which would choose for him, for there was nothing he would deny Marsol, nothing. "Please...I am so tired..." his lips trembled as he said this, and again his voice was very hushed. That was the only plea he would make...He would give no further argument or protest. He would go through that gate if Marsol motivated him one more time, or he would stay where he was if Marsol parted ways with him with no further contest.

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Cosette and Niculaie at the Prison Fortress  
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Cosette was sure she was nothing but a distant memory to Marsol. Part of her knew Marsol would never be completely hers. Softly smirks and laughs at herself what was she thinking. Demon laying claim to a mortal. Who was she kidding? Herself perhaps. Then slowly thoughts of Nicholaii pass her thoughts as well. He was not such a bad guy. But, that was probably another empty road she did not want to go down. Softly she sighs as she wonders around absent mindedly. Thoughts of leaving did occur to her. She had no reason for staying. Was not like Marsol was returning anytime soon. She was sure he was busy with Cirgoth. Swallowing a little nervously as she collects her things laying them by the door. She knew she could not leave without explanation. Where would she go? Back to the Inn.

Remembering the Inn for the first time as she remembered her time there. Slowly the thought of Matthew came into play. And a frown came across her face. She knew he owed him a lot for the things he did. And she knew if she went back he would be on the prowl for her. Taking a deep sigh as she let it out. She was confused as to what to do. She knew if she left she owed Marsol and reason as to why. And if she went back to the Inn she knew she would owe Matthew a lot of money. She thought about him for a minute or two as tears ran down her cheeks. She was awful for what she did. Drying her tears. What the hell was wrong with her? She was much stronger before she met Marsol. Oh well. There would be another day of emptiness for her to figure that out.

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Date: 01:37 PM Mar 22, 2006  
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A hand ran through his dark hair as he lay in bed, a bed provided by the lord of the castle he now dwelled in. Marsol that demon, he made Niculaie so... Damn he was odd, and so he just sighed as he laid in bed naked and alone as his mind spun in thought, soon enough he would find his sire, if she was actually in this world. Nic though was hopeful, he had heard word of her, or a woman named Jules... From Cirgoth, so he had hope. For the first time since he woke up, he had hope, and it brought a smile to his lips as he laid there happily.

The minutes turned to hours as he laid in bed thinking, going over it all but he became restless and decided he should get up, and up he got! Throwing off the sheets he would look about the room he was provided and yawned, damn he slept good. Moving from bed he would grab some clothes, looking through the clothes he was provided he found some leather pants and lifted them, they looked like they would fit, and rather snuggly too! He shrugged and pulled them on, then he found a silken shirt, and pulled it on buttoning up a little over half way, then he moved out of his room bare footed, looking for the lord of the castle... "If I were Marsol, where would I be?" He asked aloud and smiled. After searching unsuccessfully he gave a bellowing shout, "Marsol where the hell are you!!!" He screamed and then 'hmp'h'd' Then he continued searching.

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Date: 11:28 PM Mar 25, 2006  
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There had been a moment when he swore he could have heard... He shook his head as his thoughts wandered over the well being of those in his care presently. Or maybe he thought of what uses could be from them? No, no the latter wasn't like him at all. Not in a literal sense. Marsol was possessive however. The extent of it was known only to Wryvaust and even that clever fellow had just gotten the tip of the ice berg. The dark browed beast posing so often in the form of a human that sometimes, even he forgot what he was. Only for a moment. He'd been brewing over just what to do with Cossette and weither or not to keep her there or to let her do as she pleased. Settling on letting the female have her freedom with no sort of control issue invovled, his tall frame of tanned skin and slightly scowled expression shifted to a ghost of a smile as his ears caught the frustrated shout of a man whose inpateince often rivaled his own. A hand came up to itch the underside of his chin as he moved throughout the lightless haze of tunnels and rooms, through door way after door way only to end up in another set of hallways until finally, he came to lean against the corner at the end of the cooridoor that Niculaie was coming down. Clearly there was a matter of boredom or Niculaie would not have beckoned in such a rash way for the Lord of the lands to present himself. He found the audacity in Niculaie admirable. Among other things. He was shirtless, yet again. The pair of oversized black thick cotton pants were held up by the cord tying them shut in the front. Perhaps a cheiftan should not be so indecent around

his guests? Then again Marsol never was one for politics. Or appearances. He did follow the rules though, even if they were all his own. His feet were covered, which was surprising because he liked the feel of the sand and rock rather than that of cotton or leather. He did appreciate the feel clothing had to offer just as much as the next person. He just knew the feel of the wind against his skin, no matter the area, felt a great deal better. "The treatment is horrid," he questioned Niculaie from the other end of the hallway, with his back against the wall and a nasty little group of shadows thrown over the left portion of his body, making him half in and half out of the torch light to his right. This brown shaded eyes regarded the interloper carefully but not with any hint of disgust or disdain. He wasn't glaring at Niculaie but one couldn't help the flesh boiling feel Marsol's eyes radiated. He pondered on what Cossette would be doing at this hour and if she wished to leave this place of sand and heat, to return to her more cozy home at the Inn. If she so wished it, Marsol would not stop her. Although he wouldn't leave her be either. She was his now, and always would be. Course the terms of "ownership" were nonnegotiable. If the human female wanted to marry another and start a family, that was fine. If she wanted to move across the continent till she was rid of her memories of the desert beast, that was fine too. The only thing was, she would never truly be rid of him, no matter if she despised him, or adored him. The love she had for him hadn't gone unnoticed. On the contrary, it was the love she spoke of that held her in such a high position as far as he was concerned. Cossette was free to come and go as she pleased. She would never wear out her welcome in his home and if aid she was in dire need of, he would not hesitate to lift a finger to assist. A funny relationship Marsol seemed to have with everyone, in reality. Be them friend or foe. He waited a few moments before turning his head so his face completely disappeared in the shadows as he said, "Come now, where is your tongue." He wasn't in a rush, oh no. When one got to be as old as Marsol was, they tended to not get in a hurry anymore. What was the point? There wasn't one, and that, was the point. Time would go on as it always had and it always would long after they were all gone. Nature had its quirks of working out even the most terrible of deeds. More waiting would be done to see whether Niculaie was angry with the absence of him, or if he would walk his inpatient rear down the hall to further the conversation he had started with a shout. For a moment, Marsol contemplated how long it would take Niculaie to realize he needn't shout to get his attention. Well, most of the time..

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Date: 04:40 AM Mar 26, 2006  
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And Nic had indeed been a bit of an unruly guest had he not? Oh well, he supposed it was his way of getting Marsol to take note of him, and well.. He trusted Marsol strange as it was, just something about him, the day when he pulled him from the sands that wished to devour him... It was due to his lack of respect for this majestic land, a respect he would remember to have from then on. The desert was his home, and even when he found her his sire, and lover? He would stay here to serve the desert as a loyal warrior for its wild beauty. When he heard that voice way down the corridor he smirked. "Especially the fool of a host." He jested as he looked to those eyes, god those eyes they froze him stole his breath.. He had never seen anything quite like it, and bit his lip as he stood still, if only Marsol knew how he affected others, even those who were not his lovers. His own gray eyes locked on



the desert dragon, and he grinned, taking a more dignified look to himself, as he was dreped in those lovely clothes. And when he was belittled of his lack of tongue? He smiled and moved close to the demon.. "Lets walk, show me the parts of the grounds I know not of."He said, and just patted Marsol on the back, the Demon of tainted blood would just lick his lips and sighed.. "Listen I am sorry I attacked your friend, lord Cirgoth, I pray he forgives me... I must confide something in you my lord. I am still yound as far as it goes with demons, and before those lovely females beneatht he castle, I had only ever tasted human flesh once." He said, as they moved about the castle, his tone with Marsol was a trusting one, like a a student did a mentor. "My... Sire I guess is the right word, when she made me what I was she too was young, and well she tried teaching me a few things but I was foolish and hardly listened. I wish I had, but I was more interested in other things, if you get my meaning... She is quite a looker as well, you would not blame me." He said nudging his well more powerful yet goldenhearted friend.. "But, I must find her.. My heart aches for her, as much as I am upset with her for leaving me to die, I cannot hate her. PErhaps I am odd or weak. But I must find her.. I will do anything you ask of me, if I must serve you I will do it with honor I will learn to be strong as any of your clan if you give me just the slightest aid." He said as he stopped and looked to Marsol. His eyes showed that he was very much serious, Niculaie had and intensity to him that was hard to miss, he stood out, always had stood out, his bold and handsome features made him different from those he had known as a dark templar, something that had seperated him from all others he knew, he was indeed a rare breed. The demon just gave a firm nod.

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Date: 04:18 PM Mar 26, 2006

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Albeit, he didn't see the point in letting Cossette leave the desert when she was safest here of all places in An Morendor, he wouldn't stop her. Course he would be there even if she didn't want him to be. As of late his thoughts wavered from each being that was in the desert and under his ever watchful eye. It brought the ghost of a smile to know the female birdie brought joy to Wryvaust. It made a tinge of contentment to hear Niculaie voice his woes to him the way he was now, promising his loyalty to the desert and that he sought aid in finding his sire, whomever it was that neglected him so. The clan wasn't in need. The desert was not in danger. Life was good. Save for the fact that he would have to relate the news to Cirgoth that he could be as angered as he wanted to be with him, but that Cossette, he simply would not give to the wolves. Course that didn't mean he was in love with Cossette. He did love her in his own odd way but he wasn't in love with her. The difference was as vast as the sky above their heads. He figured Cirgoth would understand, for wouldn't he do the same if he cared for someone's well being? A heart Marsol had, oh yes indeed. Sometimes it was too big for his own good and maybe, just maybe that was the sole reason why he hadn't gone insane like so many of his kind had. Perhaps because he guarded his emotions and those he held dear so closely, he had kept his sanity and his soul intact regardless of the horrors Maelmorda had put him through. Snapping his unusually depressing train of thoughts back to the present, he gave Nic a smile that made the rest of him seem so goddamn friendly that if one didn't know any better, they might say he wa smocking Nic. "To hear this, I am glad," he said as he motioned to a doorway that would lead them through a series of hallways till eventually they would reach the outside and the

sweltering heat. He contemplated how the most uninterrupted path would be in seeking out this sire of his. The time taken away from watching over the desert did not go unnoticed but he wouldn't deny Nic his hearts desires. Nic was a friend and that in and of itself, was a miracle. His help would be given to the still young demon in any way he deemed fit. Be it in combat or negotiating. He doubted Nic's sire would come to the desert willingly if that was indeed what the man wanted. She had abandoned him hadn't she? Why did he still seek her out if she so obviously wanted nothing to do with him again? Marsol could only shake his head in amusement at the unrequited love Nic seemed to hold for the one who had left him to rot. He never would understand the working of ones heart, least of all his own. Every now and then he felt a pang, an ache of being seperated from a particular green eyed cheeky monkey who insisted Marsol held his heart in the palm of his hands. Marsol showed Nic for the next few days just some of the countless secrets the desert held and what one had to find out for theirselves. For the next few days not a word would be known of the two. For those several days, Nic was all alone in the seemingly endless desert with nothing but the sorching temperature, and the tall dark and gruesome beast to keep him out of harms way...

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Date: 04:50 PM Mar 26, 2006  
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And so they walked and walked through the castle, the heat was not so bad in here... Nic often times when he was in the castle felt a sense of loneliness and such being as it was so large he saw no one, not Cosette, nor Marsol.. Or even Cirgoth since their scuffle. And it made him sad? No not sad it made the demon wonder if perhaps he were the only one who knew not the way of the castle, he just sighed and here they were moving at a leisurely pace, two men sharing together their thoughts and desires, or atleast one of them did... If Marsol wished it, wished to speak of anything the young demon would listen, be it a lesson or just man to man. And when they made it out into that desert Niculaie would take a deep breath not minding the heat under his feet, it was not so bad maybe even... Nice? He looked over at Marsol, strange fellow that so many were attracted towards, how many more would join them in this desert. His eyes lifted toward the range of volcanic mountains that made the ring of fire... He felt strange when he looked that way, as if he wanted to go there. Then his eyes fell as they began walking into the horizon vanishing, and through the lessons Marsol gifted Nic he just listened and tried the things for himself, Marsol's laughter at his failures and congratulations at his victories made him smile just slightly though, he was learning what it meant to be a part of something again, was this what it meant to be a part of a family? Could he even as a damned soul enjoy life and have loved ones to spend it with? So, there he was, beneath the sunlight basking in the middle of the dangerous yet beautiful desert... Accepting the trials. Marsol, was he with him? The dragon had left Nic or so Nic believed to fend for himself. Niculaie would just fall to his rear, his clothing a bit messed up, but all in all he was enjoying this, he laughed to himself as he sat upon the high dune of scorching sands.

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Date: 09:55 PM Mar 26, 2006  
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Niculaie was a quick learner, that much was obvious. Lessons not of survival, but of laws was to be taught to Nic in the days that would pass as they ventured out into whatever place Marsol deemed fit. He spoke so very little, as usual. Letting someone else talk felt more natural. Letting someone else say what they felt or thought, seemed more of the right thing to do, or so Marsol thought as the sun glared down upon Nic and himself, as welcoming as it was. The day was as gorgeous as ever there was one. There was a constant breeze that carried a bit of crisp coolness on it that washed over them from time to time from any given direction. But before all those little tid bits of knowledge would be passed from the ancient monstrosity parading around in the form of a human, for the sake of not wanting to loose what little control he held over his own dark desires, he would test Nic's pateince. Somewhere beyond the flat parts, amongst the dunes Marsol would test Nic's pateince severly by gesturing nic to sit on the crest of a particular dune that he told Nic that had a tendincy, to move. Marsol stood a few feet to Nic's left with his arms crossed over his chest. He gazed off into the distance at something that was either very intriguing, or very annoying given how a scowl began to crease his black brows. The distance he and Nic had traveled by foot until their shadows begun to enlarge behind them. Course marsol's shadow seemed two shades darker then everyone elses. Marsol's shadow had this feeling of something terrible that was about to occur. He found Nic's company pleasing, to say the least. Niculaie was as refreshing to hear as was the violent storms that sprinted across the desert from time to time. "They say pateince is a virtue," he said, where he stood motionless on the lower part of the dune, so that Niculaie had to look down just to see the desert creature. Nothing more was said but he didn't leave Nic by himself. He hated leaving people alone when he thought they needed company, any company. Yet for the life of him, he didn't know if he himself was more content with solitude, or people either. Cossette held her own amounts of pleasure and lovliness he found to be rare, even in humans. Cirgoth also had his own beauty to him, he was so desirable that Marsol doubted Cirgoth wasn't already attached to someone and that he just wasn't saying so. That would be just his luck he thought to himself with the ghost of a smile tugging at the corners of his lips as his eyes watched Nic like a hawk for any sort of movement. If and when Nic moved, Marsol would take a step away and would continue to do as such till he reached the bottom of the dune. If Nic moved and asked why Marsol moved away so, no answer would be given. Would it annoy Nic? Or would be make him curious? Only time would tell as the winds began to grow more forceful and the sun slowly became blocked out by something that was coming from not that far away on the horizons. The temperature in the air rose sharply and then plumeted to a comfortable 70. However that was with the gusts of wind that were getting stronger and stronger by the minute. "Mmm," Marsol said as his feet had disappeared by the sand that now covered them, "... and yet I wonder." Those amber optics looked upwards at Nic as the level of sand around his feet... it was... rising.

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Date: 10:14 PM Mar 26, 2006

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Cosette said not a word as she laid in bed for a moment or two. She was starting to get a little tired of being inside. Perhaps leaving was not the most sound choice.

She really had no other place to go. She had lost track of time since she seen Nic or Marsol. Leaving the room as she started to head toward the door leading to the outside. She knew the day would come when she would have to venture out. She almost forgot that one existed until recently. Reaching for the handle of the door as she opened it and stepped outside. It had been perhaps to long since she had any fresh air.

Closing her eyes as she thought about Nic. She was curious as to if he was even around. She was sure he had his own business to attend to and the last thing he needed was a mortal bugging her. Looking down to the ground briefly as her dark red curls fell in her face. Raising a hand to brush them away as she walked out upon the hot sand. Filling her lungs with that warm air as she smirked. Not really paying much attention to where she was going. Hands were behind her back as she walked. Not really sure what to think about anything. She was so confused and so sure of things at the same time. She was sure she was just a joke or something to be laughed at anymore than to be taken seriously.

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Date: 03:38 AM Mar 27, 2006

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Niculaie just liiked to his hand as he lifted sands, his trials of the day... His brush with her laws left him speechless, he could not tell what she was more: beautiful or deadly, but it was a fact that she was both. She was the desert, Nic in his long moment of silence came to a question... Did Marsol rul these lands? He smiled softly at that thought, Patience... as an immortal patience was all he had. "Marsol, tell me this, do you rule the desert, or does it rule Marsol?" He asked as he looked down to the desert reptile with a smile, grey eyes holding him where he be. A small smile appeared as he awaited an answer, if Marsol gave one? Wonderful... If not he would look for anysigns of an answer but he had one in his mind already, it was neither... You worked for the desert and she worked right back for you, he was sure that had to be what Marsol tried to teach him. You respect her, and she jus tmight let you live another day in her splendor. He then lifted a hand full of sand and as if gravity decided to defy him sand would no longer fall downward, no they began lifting from his hand, from beneath him! Niculaie did not move immediately just closed his eyes as he wondered what tricker was being played on him.

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Date: 12:34 PM Mar 27, 2006

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Cosette was minding her own business as she looked up the warm desert air filling her lungs as she walked. She took off her boots wanting to feel the warmth of the sand beneath her feet. She noticed something in the distance as she seen something dark. Still to far to make out exactly what it was or who for that matter if anything. She continued to walk toward it but was careful not to spook the person. Hands move down to her sides for the moment as she felt the warmth of the sun upon her face. Before slowly opening them and looking to where she was going. Softly the

name Nicholai was spoken. She knew it was not Marsol the hair was to dark but, she did not want to take his attention away from the conversation he was having. Once she was close enough to make out who it was but, still far enough that she could not hear anything she sat down and thought about things and waited. She had brought a canteen with her as she takes a drink. Being mortal had its downside about things. Looking to the sand as she re capped her canteen. Dragging her hand a bit as she plays in it for a little bit. Amusing herself as if she were a child or something.

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Date: 04:50 PM Apr 1, 2006  
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The amount of time that would pass as the ferocity of the wind would be shorter then Marsol expected. He wasn't ignoring Niculaie's questions. He was just waiting to answer them after wondering just how far his own little female birdie would venture till she stopped herself to sit and fiddle with her choice of supplies. She was so cute like that he thought, even smelling her coming long before she had caught a glimpse of Niculaie with her human eyes. He would wait until Cossette was a little closer before he turned just his head to look over his shoulder and back at the beauty of a human female. "Pateince is what seperates the living from the so very dead Niculaie," he said, yet his voice came from directly behind Nic's left ear. Something pricked Nic just under his chin and then Marsol said, still too damn close, "What I hold against your throat is a blade. A blade as normal as any other, except it has been dipped in a posion that errodes. Not the skin it damages, but the mind Niculaie, your mind is what it will turn to a boiling mess. That is, if you move." The tables it seemed have turned. The horizon was now darker then before. The light of the sun(s) had disappeared from something of a gigantic. A storm was coming their way. The faintest bit of its violent gusts could be felt even from this distance over their faces. A desert storm. Has Nic ever seen the fury the sands created out of sheer angst over not being respected as they should? Has Cossette ever witnessed an entire village become burried alive by the weight of the storms spite? There were many things in the world that people did not understand, nor want to for that matter. Marsol being one of them. The desert cheftian would show Nic how he must obey the desert or else. Even if it was against Nic's will to sit as still as stone as the roaring force of nature was racing their way, leveling everything in its path, or building brand new dunes like the hand of God Himself. That something that rested just barely against the front of Nic's throat was cold, which was suprisingly in a place like this. In a slight crouch behind Nic, that tall dark and gruesome one would remain in his black appearell consisting of the oversized breeches and nothing more. The blade was wide, double edged even with a mean curve to it and the head of the serpent for its hilt. Specks of red still stained its edges. No doubt anothers blood. Marsol did joke but only when the ocassion called for it. At that very moment he was as serious as a heart attack that if Nic so much as batted an eye lash, he would split the young demon from navel to sternum and not think twice about eating his entrails. Course he would toast to Nic's untimely death if the man tasted good at all but that was besides the point now wasn't it? He was conscious of Cossette and how close she was to the both of them. He wondered if she hated him for leaving her alone for so long, or if she just wanted to get the hell away from him and his endless sands. He wouldn't blame her if she did. The desert was treacherous at times, even for a human...

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Date: 05:12 PM Apr 1, 2006  
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The thought of leaving had crossed Cosette's mind on more than one occasion. Hating Marsol was nearly impossible for the mortal to do. No matter the cost. She looked up as she seen Nicholai but, was still probably to far to be heard. She sensed a change in the wind as she looked up. Slowly raising to her feet. As she made her way back toward the prison fortress for cover. She could feel a little of the harshness that a sand hand. As it had been blown in her face a time or two. She enjoyed the heat of the sand from time to time. But, now was not one of those times as the storm cam closer.

There had been many times that she thought about her options as far as leaving. But, that was not happening anytime soon. Where would she go? Not exactly like she had a home anywhere else. The desert was starting to feel more and more like home by the day. She had to get back to the fortress not only because of the storm but her canteen was now empty and she needed to refill it. Being mortal always had its downsides. She missed Marsol but, she knew he had things to do. It did not matter to her anymore if he thought of her. She knew with him she would not be easily forgotten. She looked over her shoulder as Nicholai was became harder and harder to see. She was a little interested in him. He was the only one in the castle for her to talk to.

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Date: 01:41 PM Apr 6, 2006  
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Wryvaust snuggled up next to Arilwen after tucking her in, deciding to tell her a bedtime story. It was actually a quick lesson about the desert. "This is a story I call...All about the desert.." he teased her, chuckling as he did. The demon then began to tell her the story, carressing her sweetly all the while he spoke to her.

"The sand, it is very hot, and can blister the feet unless one has calloused, leathery soles. The desert is called the Desert of Fire for a reason...it is very hot. The heat is miserable unless a person is well adapted to the desert, dressed properly, drinking enough water, or is a demon or creature that is immune to the heat. Even then...it is dangerously oppressive. Without enough water...the body will dehydrate, and collapse. Even the rain storms we depend on, can be very dangerous, causing violent flash floods which will pick up and carry away anything its path. Rain storms can form lakes in minutes, but the water never lasts long before the sand and dry soil swallows the moisture up again. The desert tends to be windy, but can also be deathly still. That is when the desert is so hot that the mirages form and the mind swims with a dream of someplace cooler. Wind storms can last a very long time, even days, while Sand storms tend to blow over quickly, within five minutes or less, although the monster Sand storms can last up to half an hour. Any mortal thing exposed to severe sand storms WILL die. Sand storms can

blow up at any given moment, and the large ones will kill almost any every living thing in its path, choking the breath, nostrils, eyes, and even skin pours with sand, the sand getting into everything...I mean everything...It stings the skin like it is being sand blasted, or rubbed with rough sand paper. Sand storms often bury those in its path under TONS of sand, sometimes entire dunes. Large sand storms can reshape old dunes, and form new dunes. Smaller sand storms, or wind storms, can still choke the lungs, blind the eyes, and even damage the ear canals if proper protection is not used. Dust devils are a type of sand tornado, and can be devastating in force, or just strong enough to pick someone up and carry them for a few feet, to set them down again. Some are even weaker, just strong enough to pick up sand and twigs and swirl them around. Arilwen saw some of the water sources in the desert, but they are hard to find, and springs can 'move' as one is choked with sand, and another is uncovered somewhere. People who have wells and springs in the desert, have to work everyday at uncovering them." The demon's lips quirked as he realized Arilwen had fallen asleep. He would give her more lessons later. He did try to make them pleasant for her.

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Date: 01:50 PM Apr 6, 2006  
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XReaperTakeMeX: Niculaie had been gazing to the stars cazed and spacey? Maybe, or was he thinking, he would just smile softly, Marsol down on that space below him on the dune as that sand storm began. The demons eyes shut tight as grains of sand  
XReaperTakeMeX: blew against his flesh, jagged little grains that did not have a love for him, though soon his breath was caught in his throat. Marsol moved faster the he could sense. Those words against his ear Marsol was a snake of a man, quick  
XReaperTakeMeX: and cunning, The blade at his neck was then noticed... He drew a breath and sighed. He would listen to that explantion of what was at his throat.. a cruel blade laced with poison as Marsol had said.. "My lord?" He asked softly as he  
XReaperTakeMeX: sat there, though the demon dragon mutant thing said nothing.. He felt rather odd right now, why did he feel this way? He lifte dhis chin so his throat was more exposed, Nic would hold as still as possible in this very position as  
XReaperTakeMeX: that man held a blade at his throat, why was his heart pounding? Death did not scare him.. maybe it was something else? He was not sure, but he did as this man he owed his life to threatened to take it. Niculaie would speak no more.  
XReaperTakeMeX: There was only them, and the silence as the desert did as it would.

Sporkitious: Now nature had its quirks and every species had its exception. True there were jumps in evolution and yes, even "mistakes" proved for the greater good. The category that Marsol fell in was none of the above however, how sad. The dar

Sporkitious: -k browed beast posing as a human for the sake of not having to devour every single stinking human that crossed his path, screamed monster and tried to poke him with a pitch fork was... rather tiresome. It wasn't so

bad in the deser

Sporkitious: -t when the occasional person wandered in, most uninvited, and wound up either chained to a bed of broken glass or in the belly of a beast, give or take a few appendages. The current predicament Niculaie found himself in was not of

Sporkitious: the norm, to say the least. Marsol didn't look through people to see what they were capable of, he merely saw it in the way they laughed. Most of the time in the manner they treated others but in Niculaie's case, he figured the los

Sporkitious: -t soul was just a victim of bad fortune to have ended up in the hands of whatever whench of a sire that had left him to die in a desert she most likely will not be greeted with kindness, should said sire choose to return to Marsol's

Sporkitious: desert. He frowned on abandonment, even if it was of the enemy. Even cowards had their place in the grand scheme of things. Everything had a purpose. A reason to it. The edge of the lengthy double edged dagger was laid lightly again

Sporkitious: -st the front of Niculaie's throat as the sound of a low rumbling animalistic growl was issued just over his shoulder. "It gathers strength with the more it eats," he said as those amber eyes of his scanned the horizons for somethin

Sporkitious: -g in particular that all desert creatures knew to look for. Then the blade slid just a tad to the left and barely pricked Niculaie's skin, not enough to make him bleed but enough to break the skin and be but a mere flesh wound. Sti

Sporkitious: -ll, his skin was broken and that was the point after all now wasn't it? Up and standing Marsol's tall shirtless frame went, now being a yard or two behind Niculaie on the lower part of the dune as he began to turn away. "Do not li

Sporkitious: -e to me when I say you eye Cossette. Liar is such an ill word for you Niculaie," he called over his shoulder as the effect of the poison would begin to course through Niculaie's veins, even though it wasn't a poison at all but a ve

Sporkitious: -ry potent medication that tricked the mind into seeing things that weren't really there. An unfortunate side effect but the original purpose of it was to stop the blood flow. Of course perhaps that is its effect but it was a medic

Sporkitious: -ation used by Marsol on his less appealing prisoners many, many moons ago. "Will you stay to face the storm and be buried alive," came that voice that seemed to have a deep mechanical hum underlying in its tones, "or will you face

Sporkitious: me for a chance for safety?" At his last words he came to a stop at the bottom of the giant sand dune he had made Niculaie trek up, half facing away. His facial expression was emotionless, but his eyes had a nasty habit of giving

Sporkitious: away his true intentions. Even though his words held a bite to them that could very well mean to strip the flesh from Niculaie's bones, much like the approaching roar of the sandstorm wanted to, he was not hostile in the least. Passi

Sporkitious: -ve. He was being docile again and it was so uncharacteristic of him to just be... quiett...

XReaperTakeMeX: Niculaie could feel that cool blade moving against his



throat perhaps Marsol had not forgivin' him for attacking his friend, that angel. But it was a frightening though he had not been able to control it, Marsol surely did mean

XReaperTakeMeX: for him to die down there with those beauties? He had to wonder, wincing slightly at his skin being cut god damn it.. He just wondered what he meant, the more it feeds.. was he talking about the desert, himself? Did he mean Nic

XReaperTakeMeX: himself? He took a deep breath and continued as he stayed motionless then Marsol leapt away? He would turn to the dragon moving to get on one knee as he felt strange.. The demon forced himself to his feet as Marsol spoke some

XReaperTakeMeX: non-sense... "Then what should I say? She is not my type, friend." Niculaie said as he stood there, what was that?! Some kind of demon coming to collect him? He looked to this monstrosity of sleek black muscle, and tightened his

XReaperTakeMeX: fists... then it was gone. "What the hell..." He would look to Marsol and nodded, breathing deeply. "Verywell, Marsol. I shall face you as you ask." He said as he leapt to the foot of the dune and smiled softly as the breeze hit him.

Sporkitious: It hadn't been his idea from the start to drug Niculaie like he just had and expect the poor guy to fight him. But Niculaie was a very funny fellow and he made Marsol laugh. Now Marsol saw fit to gather a bit of that laughter in a d

Sporkitious: -ifferent sort of way. A shake of the head and the ghost of a smile were given when Niculaie said he hadn't been eyeballing his woman and Marsol was pretty much being ridiculous about it. "Come now Niculaie," he shouted and then th

Sporkitious: -at dagger was spun downwards in his left hand to be caught in his right with the blade pointing to the ground before his frame just moved at the sort of pace that screamed inhuman, "there is something of a time issue here." The di

Sporkitious: -stance between Niculaie and himself was closed in three long strides that had to be floating in one way or another, right? Just before the tall bare chested desert man was upon Niculaie, that drug laced dagger was casually tossed t

Sporkitious: -o the demon as a means of defense. Now if Niculaie were to reach for it to catch it, Marsol would drive his elbow directly into Niculaie's mid section and then the back of his hand would slam into the front of Niculaie's face. If N

Sporkitious: -iculaie were not to reach for the dagger being thrown at him, Marsol would simply grab Niculaie by his throat, to take him off his feet without much else choice and bring him down with his odd dragon Lord to the ground, that meanin

Sporkitious: -g the back of Niculaie's head would inevitably collide with the sandy ground below them as Marsol would proceed to squeeze ever so slightly on Niculaie's neck. Why? What reason could Marsol have to be so violent with Niculaie? It w

Sporkitious: -asn't because of Cossette, that much was clear. Then what? Surely not his attack on Cirgoth... ? He hadn't given a hint as to why he sought a fight with the demon who had wandered into his lands, and he had taken in as one of his o

Sporkitious: -wn. He didn't even give an explanation as to the true meaning

behind bringing Niculaie out there in the first place. Perhaps the dragon Lord bore Niculaie ill will for another matter? The choice was Niculaie's to make. Either way,  
Sporkitious: there would be blood shed...

XReaperTakeMeX: And the demon stood still for the moment as he watched the one he had devoted himself to serve. He would be loyal to Marsol being as his sire was nowhere to be found he needed someone to teach him to help him become stronger. He

XReaperTakeMeX: just nodded to those grey eyes locked on the Nathrak Dirg (Spelling? lol) Then it started, the sands would be blooded? And he looked to Marsol as he moved at superhuman speed, as if on cue... or some instinct within him the tainted

XReaperTakeMeX: being would growl and in his own leap of haste he lowered his form, pushing himself to a blurring haste as he leapt at the dragon, the dagger making a line of crimson over his shoulder as he barreled on his forearm put horizontally

XReaperTakeMeX: in front of him with hat head low, he meant to slam into Marsol with all the force of a train! Well maybe not quite a train... but Nic was no weakling by any means, and crashing into Marsol he would plant his feet hooking his left

XReaperTakeMeX: arm around Marsol's legs he lifted with all his strength as the celerity ended and he heaved Marsol up and turned in hoped of driving him to the ground, if he could even lift him at all...

Sporkitious: Surprise, surprise. The demon who might have been someone else before was the clever one indeed. Even though no change appeared on his face, he was smiling. He knew Niculaie was capable of great things. He was sure of it. He could hea

Sporkitious: -r it and it was infuriating to him that Niculaie wasn't the behemoth he should have been by now. Or perhaps he hoped for too much on the young bloods part? Perhaps Marsol's expectations were too high and no one could ever really me

Sporkitious: -et them? The collision of Niculaie's body with his own resulted in a loud crack of something most likely in Marsol's body, given how he was stopped dead in his tracks, or did he just stop for Nic's sake? For a moment the amber eyed

Sporkitious: desert beast looked down from under the unruly mess of dark hair at Niculaie as he tried to heave and pitch Marsol over his shoulder, but to no avail. The dragon lord it would seem, weighted of an obscene amount and it could be safe

Sporkitious: to say even God Himself would have a terrible time moving Marsol's ill tempered ass against his will. "Such spirit," he mused as his fisted hands came down like sledgehammers directly in the middle of Niculaie's spine. Then he took

Sporkitious: the young demon by his head, wrenching him from his legs so that Niculaie could get a mouth full of Marsol's left knee before yet again Niculaie would feel one of Marsol's fists but to the left side of his face in the way of a mind

Sporkitious: numbing punch. Afterwards, Marsol would frown as he caught Niculaie by his right ankle if the demon resisted and continued to put up a fight, jerking his feet out from under him or rather, yanking Niculaie up to dangle upside down b

Sporkititious: -y his one foot as the dragon Lord eyed Niculaie's stomach for a few seconds for some odd reason....

XReaperTakeMeX: God damn he weighed ALOT! I mean christ he did not look more than two...eighty-ish, give or take a few. But Niculaie could not lift him, and the demon was not weak, nor was he overly powerful yet... He had always been really good

XReaperTakeMeX: with guns, never had to truly rely on his brute force. Not to say never, but he was dead accurate with a gun, especially his favored Single action revolver. But this was \*\*\*\*ing crazy and then he groaned in pain as his spine felt

XReaperTakeMeX: as if it cracked! "Ah!" He had heard the complement.. MAde him grin, well it would have had he not been nearly broken in two! then he felt his head jekred back and as he was jejerked back his black claws slid from the tips of his

XReaperTakeMeX: fingers, digging into his flesh as he was wretched from the hold he had leaving four log wounds on the back of the desert kings leg as he was not only kneed in the face but punched viciously sending him to stumble. Soon enough

XReaperTakeMeX: Niculaie's world was flipped upside down literally and he growled, he would not law down and give in not now, Marsol had to know Nic was not one to give up his weight shifted and he swund himself about a bit and his right hand

XReaperTakeMeX: slashed hard with those claws at his abdoman, and his free foot struck out at the opponents face as he thrashed about.. He felt something in him that just wanted out and it hurt so badly, those grey eyes becoming dark... red, then

XReaperTakeMeX: it reverted, Niculaie fought the change in him as much as he did Marsol, tugging his leg hard in the grip to get free!

Sporkititious: Those heat exhaustion inducing winds could be felt now against their backs from that sandstorm that was getting so very close they could even hear its howling. The tearing of his flesh along the back of his leg either went unnoticed

Sporkititious: or he simply didn't care. His leg did not bend hendered by Niculaie's clawing movements. Marsol was not a simpleton. He didn't think Niculaie would give up and had he, well Marsol would have just beaten sense into him the hard way.

Sporkititious: When Niculaie resisted his inner insticts to probably tear him apart, he frowned for the second time as to why Niculaie didn't. "If you mean to kill me," he said in a calm and even tone just before Niculaie's foot caught him sqaure

Sporkititious: in the face, thusly earning his freedom for the moment as Marsol's fingers uncurled their death grip around Niculaie's ankle to let the young demon fall to the ground. His head had been tilted back just a few degrees from the hit. T

Sporkititious: -hose dark brown almost black strands shifting around near his nose from their shagginess from the winds that now flowed down their side of the dune, bringing grains of sand to blind the unsuspecting traveler, or fighter. "...then

Sporkititious: do it," he finished as his left eye was seen now glaring down at Niculaie from between his middle finger and his ring finger. The dragon lords eyes were ablaze with the kind of animosity that almost always ended in

the deaths of man

Sporkitious: -y. Then his foot snapped forward to plant itself in the middle of Niculaie's chest and draw the poor man in an upwards arch so that Niculaie would unfortunately, become airborne if even against his own will. There was something Mars

Sporkitious: -ol was absolutely raging about at this point. Something he could only express in the violent actions he now undertook with how as soon as Niculaie's body got no more then waist high, Marsol would drive his elbow into the small of N

Sporkitious: -iclaue's back to send him face first into the sand. Vicious he became. So very vicious in how even if Niculaie was on the ground, Marsol would kick him in his ribs just to get Nic to his feet again. The desert creature would not le

Sporkitious: -t Niculaie be on the ground for more then a few precious seconds of rest before either he knocked Niculaie's legs or hands out from under him. Once he even threatened to eat Niculaie if he fell to the ground again after Niculaie ha

Sporkitious: -d managed to get several feet of space between himself and his attacker, only to have Marsol drop kick him in his chest not too hard but with enough force to send Niculaie back three yards and into an unfriendly patch of catus. Fro

Sporkitious: -m the last action Marsol would prop himself up on his elbows where he laid in the sand as the wind grew so terribly worse as the storm was now just a couple dunes away from them and still approaching. The dragon lord didn't seem wor

Sporkitious: -ried at all about his own safety. Why should he be? Now Niculaie's on the other hand... His brows begun to crease as he felt the winds grow in strength while eyeing Niculaie with all the makings of wishing to see what the young dem

Sporkitious: -ons entrails looked like...

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April 6th 2006  
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For the life of him Cirgoth could not sleep, nor even rest. His mind and body alike were so tightly wound that the very act of breathing was labored if not strangled by his anxiety. It had been many many years since he had suffered any kind of anxiety attack, but that was what it felt like he was having now...If not a panic attack. The cramping pangs in his abdomen were not helping either, nor was the unnatural faintness he felt when he climbed out of the bed to stand. For a moment he stood there, his head bowed, while he scratched his neck, when suddenly he realized how long it had been since he had eaten anything. Why of course that was why he was having such terrible stomach aches! It also explained the faintness. He had not eaten...since...since...Jesus...since before he had gone to Mendorin's lair...Since the night he shown Nic the map to his fortress in the north. Cirgoth had lost some muscle too, he just had not noticed it yet. Swiping the back of his hand across his brow, the angel decided he needed fresh air, and food...He would not ask Marsol for food...The desert would provide. The angel gathered his weapons, but left his armor there...shouldering his bow and quiver, he strapped his sword to his hip by its harness, and took a long step into a gateway of shadows. The cool shadows washed over him as he spanned the distance between that lair beneath the volcanic mountains, and the patch of desert he emerged on just five miles north-

east of Wyrvaust's lair. He was in fact, quite on the opposite end of that tract of desert from where Niculaie and Marsol were, with Wyrvaust's underground lair practically between them. It was on the north side of a very tall dune that Cirgoth phased out of those shadows to step onto the sand. Boots took him on a downward slide rather unexpectedly, for the sand storm he'd had the fortune to miss, had expired right there to drop tons of loose sand against the dune, even the foot of the dune Cirgoth had stepped out on, rather treacherous. He let the sand carry him down the slope until he felt the harder packed sand beneath his feet, and then skirted the dune widely for his own safety, while he followed it's angular slope east. He had not walked a mile when he spied something thrusting out from the dune, and as he closed the distance he recognized what it was...It was a deer leg...A desert mule deer. Either Cirgoth was one very lucky son of a bitch, or the desert was simply rewarding him for believing that it could provide. The good fortune which delivered the angel a very fresh kill which the desert had claimed, was seized by Cirgoth who began uncovering the deer and tugging it free, keeping a close eye and feel for any sudden shifts in the sand. He certainly did not want to bury himself in sand while making use of the life the desert had taken. Many angels could not eat red meat...Cirgoth was not one of them. He loved red meat. Soon the angel gutted the animal, using his hunting knife, but the act made him uncustomarily ill. He vomited twice before finishing the job, and then skinned it. He was feeling very dizzy by the time he got around to building a fire away from the unstable dunes. With no water in the immediate area, he washed the blood off his hands and arms using the sand like dry soap. Once he had a backstrap roasting on a makeshift spit over the fire, he went looking for water...Oh, he was SO damn thirsty now...and he could, if he really wanted to, tap a spring miles below the earth and bring it bubbling to the surface, but where was the challenge in that? He did not care for being dependent on his elemental or arcane abilities.

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Date: 04:01 PM Apr 11, 2006  
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Cosette was in the Prison Fortress wondering the halls. As she heard footsteps she was curious as to who else was there. For days now she had not seen a face and now she heard foot falls. Not a word was said as she noticed Cirgoth leave. Soft sigh would leave her lips as she returned to what she was doing. She tried to keep herself busy or something. She went to look for some fresh food and water. There had to be something within these castle walls. She was sure she was long forgotten. Stretching a bit as she walked. Before eventually finding herself back in front of the fire place. Occupying her usual seat. Wishing there was someone to talk to But, for her it would seem the only company she had was the help. And she knew even to them she was becoming a bother. Although noone would ever tell her. She sat in the chair as her attention was on the fire place.

(Cirgoth was not in the fortress, he was in the lair at the ring of fire, he never passed by her, I never posted that-Please nix that part will you? Also, she WAS in the desert, so why is she in the fortress now? She could run into Cirgoth and Thane, or into Marsol and Nic, who are all in the desert now. Cirgoth and Thane are just north of Wyrvaust's lair, and north of where Wyrvaust and Nic are. You might want to delete this post and try again lol-JD)

LOG

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Date: 01:54 PM Apr 15, 2006

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Cirgoth held onto Thane for some time, practically clinging to him, as if almost afraid to let go of him for fear he was just an illusion that would simply vanish as the sun went down. The angel then reluctantly sat up, his arms withdrawn from his friend to settle in his own lap. He was STILL holding that backstrap skewered on a stick in hand. He leaned back and picked the rest of the sand off of it, then took a bite, ignoring any grit that remained. He was still famished, and the sustenance was badly needed. "Mark was fine last I saw him..." he spoke quietly after swallowing a bite. "He is angry at me I think, and distrusts the man I have chosen to serve. My hope...Is that he will calm down and accept that I do not give my trust nor my love blindly to Lord Marsol. He thought I was dominated by him, which is not the case at all. I...cannot explain what I feel for him...Not even to myself, but to say it is the most powerful thing I have ever felt for anyone," he enlightened his friend. He ate another bite of the meat, offered some to Thane, and then proceeded to speak. "I dropped it in the sand...It may be a little gritty," he began by warning his friend. "Mark distrusts him...Because he is a demon, Thane. There is so much goodness in him though...He has a dark side yes...But I sense it is...trained on reason, on logic which is born of this desert. I am trying to understand him, but...It is difficult sometimes I admit. He confuses me...I fear... he may not want me...That he may believe he is some kind of curse to me." He shook his head and looked away from his friend. "I only know without a doubt that he is no likeness of Mendorin. If he were...He would not show such deep concern for his desert Kingdom, and for those he cares about. He is loved...and not because he enslaves and bonds...He is loved and respected for who he is. I have seen this. I need you to understand, Thane...to accept my choice to serve and love him with all that I am," his green eyes pierced Thane's as he said this, but a moment later the angel then grew pale and scrambled to his feet and away from the fire as a wave of nausea overcame him with a terrible twisting feeling in his abdomen. His body was changing very rapidly, in ways he was clueless of. He promptly dropped back down on the sand on the very edge of the fire's light, and sighed deeply, his head bowing as his friend came after him. "I have not eaten in too long...Not since I went to retrieve you from Mendorin's lair...Only to be told you had been killed," he whispered. "I just...forgot to eat..." That was the only reason he could think of for being so ill. That and the sulfuric fumes he had breathed earlier. Truth was, starvation did not make angels ill perse, it just weakened them. It was clear that he was exhausted as well, and in need of sleep. He needed to go somewhere and rest, but he had no sense of home...of feeling he belonged anywhere at the moment. He simply did not know where to go. It depressed him...Depressed him that Marsol had not made anything clear to him.

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LOG

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Date: 11:27 AM Mar 30, 2006

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Wyrvaust had traveled rather far to find prey. First he had killed and devoured a spotted deer, which was a small deer suited to desert life, sandy in color, with very large ears, cloven hooves that seemed too big for it, which spread over the sand, and rows of spots running the length of its sides, while a black stripe ran down its neck and back from the crown of its head to the tip of its tail. He saved the fur, and the lovely little branching antlers. He killed also several Springers, which looked similiar to a kangaroo but more deer like in the face and the slender frame of their bodies. They either walked on all fours, or bounded in leaps which could cover up to 30 feet of ground, on their very strong hind legs. Wyrvaust had had a time catching it, and saved the best cuts of meat for Arilwen, the very soft fur also preserved. Wyrvaust kept all the furs from his kills, along with any of part of his quarry that was of any use. On his way back, he killed and ate half a dozen rabbits, and when he entered the lair, he had quite a roll of furs, the pair of lovely antlers hanging over his shoulder from a strand of leather. His robes were full of sand, which he shook out before adventing the from the lair's tunnel through the doorway which opened into the corridor without. It was long after Arilwen had collapsed on that bench of soft furs, in defeat of attempting to protract her wings, and asked when the demon might return, that Wyrvaust entered the fountain room, and set the roll of furs, and the meat that he had wrapped in one of the skins aside, while he took the antlers in hand and carried them over to Arilwen. His head canted to the side as he looked at her, noticing how pale and out of sorts she was. "Wyrvaust has brought his beautiful love something pretty from the desert. Perhaps it shall cheer her up?" he slid onto the bench with her, gathering her in his arms to cradle her on his lap. "Does Arilwen feel unwell?" She certainly looked unwell. The demon then placed the antlers in her hand. They were delicate in appearance, but very strong, and looked very much like the branches of the desert laurel he had showed to her, which unlike mountain laurel, had paler green leaves, which looked like aloe in thickness and color, while they maintained the shape of laurel leaves. The berries of desert laurel, were also edible, although very sour until ripe. When ripe, they were firm, and very sweet, with a small group of soft, edible seeds at the center, which gave them an almost sandy texture, like raspberries. The demon smiled sweetly to her as he handed his present to her. "It is said they bring luck," he told her, and pressed a soft kiss to her brow, his hair spilling over to brush her shoulders and cheeks. His head then lifted and his dark brown eyes settled on Thane. "Wyrvaust thanks thee for looking the wonderful bird his heart cherishes," a smile curling his lips which reflected his sincerity. "Is all well?" he then asked, looking between Arilwen and Thane. If Arilwen confided what ailed her, he would leave her again, to go brew her a tea which would calm her stomach and make her feel a sense of well being. Two cups would make her feel sleepy. He would not be gone long, before he returned to her with the large mug of tea held in his hands. It tasted of delicate spices and flavorful sweet herbs, but it was steeped from roots.

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Date: 01:57 PM Mar 30, 2006  
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Arilwen felt drained, though she had just woken up not two hours ago. Her stomach churned and she kept having hot flashes, which caused her to drag her body up from the bench that she shared with Thane and go to the fountain for more cool water.

Just when she was about to excuse herself to go crawl into bed, Wyrvaust came strolling in, a massive roll of furs under his arm. Immediately Arilwen lit up, even though she still looked terrible, and smiled brightly as he sat his wares aside. When he neared her and questioned how she felt, the angel did not answer at first, only went eagerly as her lover pulled her into his arms. Settling onto the demon's lap, she nuzzled her face into his skin, enjoying the warmth and scent. "It is true, I do not feel very well, but I hope it will pass. Perhaps it is just my body acclimating to the desert?" She sounded hopeful with that. At the mention of a present and the gift that was passed into her hands, she looked curiously at it. Running her fingers over the small set of antlers, she then smiled warmly and looked up at Wyrvaust. Her cheeks would have been flushed with happiness, had she any blood in her face to do so. "They are so beautiful. I love them." She looked sincerely pleased, then lowered her gaze once more as she twined her fingers through the peaks of the antlers. Everything material had melted away since she had come to be with Wyrvaust, and the smallest things were so endearing. Holding the antlers carefully against her chest, she looked up as he asked if everything was well. "Yes...Thane and I went for a short walk and spoke of many things. I just wanted to come home because I started not feeling well. Do you think I could have caught something?" Which was ridiculous, because of her immune system. She had not been sick since she was a small child. Wyrvaust set her aside and rose to move from the room. She was not sure why, but smiled softly at Thane. "I was hoping that I could learn the wing thing before he got home. I think I am an exception to the rule. An angel born without wings." Looking down at her antlers then, she rubbed her thumbs over the delicate looking material. When Wyrvaust returned with the mug, she set her gift carefully aside and lifted the mug to her lips, taking a sip. It was delicious. After a few long swallows, her stomach began to slowly calm and she breathed out deeply in relief. "Thank you... it is delicious." Leaning up, she would kiss his neck and then return her lips to her cup. Once she was done, she would ask him if she could retire to bed.

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Date: 01:46 PM Apr 6, 2006  
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Wyrvaust was pleased that the tea helped to ease Arilwen's illness, but was concerned that she was at all sick. Wyrvaust was well learned in Lore and the Occult, and knew a great deal about demons, angels, vampires, dragons, liches, elves, and lycanthrope, in particular. He knew a great deal about animals, and though he was fairly well acquainted with shape shifters, witches, elementals, and other races, he did not know as much about them. The demon hugged her when she asked if she could retire to bed, and after placing a lingering kiss to her brow, he helped her to her feet. "Arilwen never need ask the desert fox to rest. Thou art the queen of his house, not his slave," he told her, and curling an affectionate arm of support around her, he escorted her to the quarters they shared, glancing back at Thane as he ushered her tenderly from the fountain hall. "I shall not be long from fire bird's company," he pardoned. Desert fox was Gilriael, Marsol's bard, had named Wyrvaust, whereas passers-through and the some of the natives referred to him as the raven. Wyrvaust saw to it that Arilwen was made very comfortable, and that a cup of fresh, warm tea would be at the bedside if she woke. It would seem as if it had been waiting for her, but not long enough for the pleasant tasting beverage to chill at all. Even if she fell asleep again without



drinking it, she would wake to find it there fresh and warm again. Wyrvaust was very subtle in his use of conjuration, and yet not so subtle as to leave no air of mystery around that which he caused to manifest. Mystery to him was an important element of life, which might explain why he was so content not to unravel all of Arilwen's mysteries all at once, if indeed, at all. The way he saw it...all animals, sentient or otherwise, shared a rather good relationship with their world, and the universe around them, even despite the abundance of mysteries which held so many in awe. Mystery was only unhealthy, in his opinion, when people went around making up answers to questions, or asking too many questions, instead of either seeking the truth, or just enjoying the enigma.

The desert fox snuggled up next to Arilwen after tucking her in, deciding to tell her a bedtime story. It was actually a quick lesson about the desert. "This is a story I call...All about the desert.." he teased her, chuckling as he did. The demon then began to tell her the story, carressing her sweetly all the while he spoke to her.

"The sand, it is very hot, and can blister the feet unless one has calloused, leathery soles. The desert is called the Desert of Fire for a reason...it is very hot. The heat is miserable unless a person is well adapted to the desert, dressed properly, drinking enough water, or is a demon or creature that is immune to the heat. Even then...it is dangerously oppressive. Without enough water...the body will dehydrate, and collapse. Even the rain storms we depend on, can be very dangerous, causing violent flash floods which will pick up and carry away anything its path. Rain storms can form lakes in minutes, but the water never lasts long before the sand and dry soil swallows the moisture up again. The desert tends to be windy, but can also be deathly still. That is when the desert is so hot that the mirages form and the mind swims with a dream of someplace cooler. Wind storms can last a very long time, even days, while Sand storms tend to blow over quickly, within five minutes or less, although the monster Sand storms can last up to half an hour. Any mortal thing exposed to severe sand storms WILL die. Sand storms can blow up at any given moment, and the large ones will kill almost any every living thing in its path, choking the breath, nostrils, eyes, and even skin pours with sand, the sand getting into everything...I mean everything...It stings the skin like it is being sand blasted, or rubbed with rough sand paper. Sand storms often bury those in its path under TONS of sand, sometimes entire dunes. Large sand storms can reshape old dunes, and form new dunes. Smaller sand storms, or wind storms, can still choke the lungs, blind the eyes, and even damage the ear canals if proper protection is not used. Dust devils are a type of sand tornado, and can be devastating in force, or just strong enough to pick someone up and carry them for a few feet, to set them down again. Some are even weaker, just strong enough to pick up sand and twigs and swirl them around. Arilwen saw some of the water sources in the desert, but they are hard to find, and springs can 'move' as one is choked with sand, and another is uncovered somewhere. People who have wells and springs in the desert, have to work everyday at uncovering them." The demon's lips quirked as he realized Arilwen had fallen asleep. He would give her more lessons later. He did try to make them pleasant for her.

Wyrvaust kissed his beloved swan's cheek and then left her to rest. The moment he was on his feet, his entire disposition altered, as he stalked out of the bedchamber in stormy strides, returning immediately to Thane, who his eyes pinned immediately as he returned the fountain hall. "Angels do not get sick...Thane must surely know this as well as I...So what is wrong with my swan queen?" he asked, gesturing passionately with his hands and arms, if not his very posture as he paced

a path in front of the angel. "Is the raven poisoning her in some way? Is my beautiful love suffering to have my darkness imbue her? Does such a thing happen? Tell me what can be wrong with her!! Tell me now!!" Yes, the cool, placid, calmly poised demon had flown out the door the moment he had returned to that hall. He was excessively protective of his mate, and targeted Thane as the one who should have all the answers. He was an angel after all, why shouldn't he? It never occurred to Wyrvaust that she might be pregnant with his child. He had never impregnated a lover before, though he'd had few lovers to tell the truth, before Mendorin had nearly ruined him for anyone.

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Date: 05:09 PM Apr 7, 2006  
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Arilwen was in a fairly deep sleep. Even as Thane entered the room and stood over her, closing his eyes to pry into her being and try to seek out what was the matter, she slept peacefully, her features relaxed and content. Now, when Wyrvaust leapt at Thane and hauled him up by the front of his clothing, demanding to know whether or not his little featherless bird was pregnant, Arilwen stirred, letting out a soft sigh in her sleep. But all the little swan did was roll over on her side and curl up, her arms curling around her abdomen, then settled back into sleep.

It was when Thane had left, closing the door behind him, and Wyrvaust had crumpled to the floor to sob quietly that Arilwen felt something stormy leaking into her dreams. Something was not right. Stirring, she shifted under the pile of furs and satin sheets, then cracked open her dark eyes. What was that noise? Sitting up slowly, she looked a bit dazed, but swallowed and rubbed her face to help her body get into motion. And then, when she lowered her hands, she saw Wyrvaust on the floor, his head bent into his arms, and his body shaking in quiet sobs. Looking stunned, she immediately crawled across the bed and dropped to the floor beside him. "My love? What is it that troubles you so terribly?" She asked softly, her dark eyes searching his face for answers. Reaching up, she raked her robes from her body, dropping them to the floor, then reached up to pull his head to her bare chest. Leaning down, she would brush her soft lips over his cheeks, kissing away all of the warm tears that streaked his face. "Please...tell me what has happened. It breaks my soul apart to see you so terribly upset..." The little desert swan begged, stroking her fingers over his hair and neck. "I love you... I can try to fix it, I swear. I SWEAR to you!" She spoke a little more firmly now, trying to calm the love of her heart as he wept.

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Date: 01:42 PM Apr 10, 2006  
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Wyrvaust tensed when Arilwen's worried tones infiltrated his tangled senses, and his muscles coiled even tighter when she brushed his tears away before her arms wrapped around him to pull him against her bosom. He remained rigidly detached for a brief interval as he adjusted to the notion of someone, anyone, even his dear lost bird, witnessing his emotional display. Cheeks clenched, and nostrils flared,

then his muscles slowly unwound as his heart caved with the compassion only she made him feel, those tender strokes to his satiny cascade of jet black hair having a calming effect on him. When she professed her love to him, his arms slowly uncoiled from himself and curled around her to embrace her as tightly, as she held him nestled against her body. "Her love takes his heart of stone and makes it soft and liquid as lava...makes it burn as fiercely, until the ice is melted away and makes a lake of his soul...But he...knows not how to swim...for not since he was a man, a priest, many ages ago, who worshipped the earth, and all he tilled from it, has the ocean of his soul been awakened. Until the beautiful swan stirred in him...until his soul was swamped with the love he felt for her, His lord alone has ever touched this spirit. This soul has vied only to sleep. Now another has come to pry away his armor...the armor which protects him from the night terrors and the fears he wishes only not to remember." His voice wavered now again as he spoke, and threatened even to crack here and there, and quieted to a thin whispered when he alluded to his nightmares and fears, but as he withdrew from her embrace to lay his gaze on her, his expression was once again placid, and the composed inner strength which nearly always represented him had been recovered. He truly was not a creature to allow anyone to see him at his worst, or in a moment of weakness. His eyes searched her's for a moment and then his hand grazed her back, her sides, then settled against her belly, palm pressing there lightly. "Arilwen is not sick...She carries in her pocket the tiny sapling of the creature whose heart she has caged. His heart breaks with joy and fear...Will she be...be happy? Or...shall she resent the presence of the seed which has spread its roots in her?" His gaze drifted away from her as he remembered the wife he had loved as mortal man, and how she had scraped his child from her womb when she had discovered he was a demon, only months after he had been sired. He had confessed to her what he had become, when her body began to change with a rapidness that was unnatural for a human. She had died in the process of removing the child from herself with a wire hook. His own people had driven him out of the village the very night she had died, stoning him and clubbing him until he fled into the desert. His sire had tried to tell him he could not live among his people anymore, but had allowed him the opportunity to discover that for himself, which he had indeed learned the hard way. His burnt amber eyes winced and slowly slid over her lap to rise and fixate on her captivating eyes again. "Does she want this life inside of her?" he whispered. "He promises to be a good husband and father...He never had a child, but desires this one with all his heart. Surely the child we made shall not loath him for being..." he shrugged a little as he searched for the right word. "Mad?" he whispered. Yes, he was worried...worried that their child would be ashamed of him for being strange, furthermore, he was afraid that Arilwen would not want to have his child, a child he loved already, despite all his fears and doubts.

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April 18th, 2006  
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Arilwen and Wyrvaust : The Oasis : Thane and Cirgoth : Reunited  
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Far to the northeast of Wyrvaust's lair, deep in the northern waste of the desert where Wyrvaust and Arilwen frolicked in the deep pool of clear spring water of the oasis, particular enemies of Marsol's crept silently towards the pool as the binary sun followed its better and vanished beyond the western horizon. Darkness fell around those men cloaked in black robes and turbans, and the even taller figure which stood behind them. In his hand was a gnarled, black staff, crowned with a

smokey, geodesic sphere of crystal. Dark ribbons of power snaked from the crystal to coil around the men who stalked the two lovers in the water, cloaking them all in an Aura of Shadows. Nothing about the men could be detected, not their presence, either metaphysical, or physical. Sammael had consented to Mekkor's request to attempt claiming the desert for himself, and the demon began by allying himself with Marsol's enemies, pretending for the time to serve King Besrah of the Nefarri Morgadi tribe. The large net held stretched between two of the men was also enchanted, against all elemental gateways and form phasing, and also with a sleeping enchantment. The net was weighted with stones and attached to each end were two thick ropes which acted as both draw strings and retrieval lines for the net. The men climbed onto the large rock which thrust out of the water across the pool from the two, and waited for Wyrvaust and Arilwen to surface as the demon dove under the water to take chase after Arilwen as she also dove under in a playful game of water tag. Mekkor's lips spread into a wickedly placid smile as he watched from the crest of dune. 'How sweet.' he thought, as other notions that were anything but sweet came to mind. The wonderful ways he would torment Marsol's faithful servant, and how the little angel would get to witness it all with no recourse to escape what they did to the demon she had fallen in love with. Marsol would witness it as well, through dreams and visions Mekkor would send to him. A trade would be offered, Wyrvaust and Arilwen, and others they would capture, for the Northern half of his desert domain. The scouts to the south had nothing to do with the Morgadi, but as soon as Wyrvaust and Arilwen were secured, Mekkor and the Elite Morgadi assassins would trek south through a gate and target Cirgoth and Thane as their next targets. Mekkor had located the angels already, via an Arcane Map of the Desert, which revealed to him who and what inhabited the desert outside of wards, and where. It was with this map he had tracked Wyrvaust and Arilwen. The moment Wyrvaust and Arilwen surfaced, the net was thrown with perfect accuracy over the desert fox and his nephelim lover, the rocks immediately weighting the net and its targets down as it draped them, whereof the ropes were drawn tight to close the net around them and pulled them to the rock where the men had gathered to collect their catch.

Wyrvaust was sputtering with laughter when he surfaced with his beloved desert swan, his arms wrapping her up as he captured her throat in a lusty kiss. His light-hearted and blissful demeanor altered abruptly as he felt the net drop over them, and as his voice boomed in a powerful command to gate he and his beloved angel to safety, the net closed around them and they were drug under water as they were heaved towards shore. The shadows failed him as the net's enchantments disjoined his power, and struggling against the net with all his strength, he had just began to break through the ropes, when the deep sleep overcame him. He fought it with all his will, but his will, like his powers, were no match for Mekkor. No, Mekkor was more in league with Marsol's arcane and demonic prowess. They were both far more ancient than Wyrvaust, who was ancient in and of himself, but compared to the likes of Marsol and Mekkor, he was a babe in the woods. "Ah...No...NO!!!!!! Forgive me...forgive me..." his voice cracked with those roars of anguish as they were drug out of the water, just before he succumbed to the powers of that potent enchantment of sleep. It was Arilwen and Marsol's forgiveness he asked for. The blinding blow to his skull was barely felt as darkness swept over and through him, he unaware of Mekkor's voice as he barked at the men below him not to touch the prisoners again. Brute pain was not what he had in mind for Wyrvaust, but glorious pleasures, and the kind of carnal agony that would tear his soul apart. He would break him with pleasure and depravity, not with pain. Marsol alone would hold the key to ending his servant's despair and torment. Arilwen's torture would come in watching all

which Mekkor did to him, and perhaps being forced to take part. That all depended on Mekkor's mood. Mendorin's evil was nothing compared to Mekkor's, when it came to dissecting the soul peice by peice until it unraveled completely. As the men drug Wyrvaust up the dune, a guardian gate was summoned by the sinfully handsome demon who served their King. The prisoners would not be delivered to his tent however, but to Mekkor's own lair in Hell. If they got Wyrvaust and Arilwen through the gate with no contest from Marsol, the party would travel through a gate produced by Mekkor to that second campfire by the dunes, where Cirgoth sat with his comrade Thane. The enemy party would emerged still cloaked in an Aura of Shadows.

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Marsol - May 9th, 2006  
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Strange. The dark brow, ill tempered, with the occasional homicidal tendencies one whose form stood somewhere around 5'11 give or take an inch or so thought, turning his amber gaze skywards as the sound of agony begun to filter through his thinking moments off to his left. The gory scene that had not been kept to just the group of four, but to eight more small camp sites that stretched out for a mile and a half behind them was something perhaps even Marcania could have found funny, had the righteous little angel been there Marsol supposed, he would not have laughed but tried to cut off his head. This idea alone made laughter bubble up inside of him for a split second, but it was not enough to push aside the gnawing sensation that something was still terribly wrong. At first he had thought it was the presence of the human scouts that had been the cause of his agitation, yet that had not been the cause. Surely if Niculaie and himself had gotten rid of the intruders, his mind would have been put to some fashion of ease? Or so he had thought. As the majestic demonic form Niculaie had taken on ravaged what had once been a man, Marsol's gaze remained fixated on the sky as if he saw something so interesting there, so alluring, so completely fascinating that he forgot about the head he held in between his sand and grit covered hands. The head of the last scout who babbled for mercy. The head of one who tried his luck for Marsol's better side. How sad. Marsol's better side, his good half, was not there at the moment but in a place that smelled of rain and sleepy afternoons in hammocks. Out of the corner of his eye he watched carefully how Niculaie disposed of these men or how quickly he put their sufferings to an end. A pair of hands that were wrapped around the kneeling mans head begun to squeeze ever so lightly. "Shhh," Marsol said as a faint warmth begun to spread from his hands and travel into the beat up scouts head who looked to be somewhere in his twenties, "your ruining the show." It would be just a matter of seconds before that comforting warmth would turn into a scorching burn that had the humans skin blistering apart, bleeding as he tried his best to scream yet found he could not. Marsol's fingertips dug into just behind his ears, tugging backwards just a bit so that some of that blistered flesh was pulled free, letting whatever puss like fluid to ooze forth unrestrained. It was at the height of using one of the numerous abilities Lucifer had so lovingly gifted him with, burning the mans face off, that he suddenly felt threatened. It wasn't himself personally but more like something that belonged to him was in serve danger. "And I wonder..." He sensed the feeling of alarm he had been plagued with was not from these humans but from somewhere else in the desert. Now Marsol wasn't one to jump to conclusions. He wasn't even one to assume the worst in the most dire circumstances but the idea of there being something wrong in his domain was not one he cared for in the least. He

did not want to drag Niculaie away from his cat and mouse game he was having so much fun at with the man whose legs he had bitten to the point of them being useless, letting the poor guy crawl away on his belly as he yelled for the monster to leave him be. Yet if there was trouble afoot he would think the attendance of young demon blood would be somewhat useful, right? Out of all the confusing sensations of distress and forlorn, Marsol had the innate, uncanny, unflinching certainty that it was Wryvaust that was the cause of it all. Now the idea of that sly one being in any manner of mischief he himself had not been the sole cause of, made the rage he was so well known for leap through him and spill its seething glare not into the skies, but into the man who he would have let go. If the fool had just turned and ran he might have made it back to whatever hell hole he had crawled out of. How unfortunate for him that Marsol's left foot was quicker than he as it snapped to the side then backwards to catch the human in the side of his face, breaking his neck and ultimately killing him as the blow sent him off his knees and face down into the sand a yard or so away. Sensations. Feelings. Gut instincts. These were not things that were common outside of the battlefield and to feel as such disturbed even the desert creature. As the dead scouts face hit the sand, he wondered of his better half and whether or not they were safe wherever they may have been right now. Marsol hadn't meant to put so much distance between Cirgoth and himself but it had happened anyway's. He supposed that once Thane was returned to his rightful place amongst his fellow angels and friends, that it would be some sort of small show of this insanity that was his love for the winged one whose eyes were the shade of green that didn't haunt the dragon lords dreams, but mocked him. As if Cirgoth wanted to be chased and demanded Marsol do the chasing, which wasn't such a bad idea he supposed in all likelihood. The ghost of a smile slid over his blood soaked kissable lips as he made an almost painfully slow turn around to find Niculaie had no more toy soldiers to play with. Cirgoth wasn't from the desert. No angel was he thought as he bent at the waist a little to catch the ankle of the one he had over looked, the last one still alive, dragging him as he made his way over to where Niculaie had become overzealous on his rampage of putting an end to the intruders of his new found home. The place he had taken him when he was wounded, this he thought was Cirgoth's real home. The forests. The smell of moist soil. Hay, he had smelled hay too even though he hadn't seen nor heard any horses. Or was it just dust? Wherever that cozy stone structure had been it was more of a home for the angel than anything the desert could provide Marsol thought, now becoming irritated with himself for even thinking he could try to convey just a hint of the beauty the desert held to someone who quite possibly had never set foot in a desert before. How sad, one might say, that the desert creature was now acting... childish. A hand with a few hairs that didn't belong to him tangled around his fingers, was laid on Niculaie's right shoulder after the youth had reverted back to his human form. "One would hope you have saved your strength for another fight," he said as the gateway of fire used for closing all those unpleasant spaces he didn't wish to go by foot flared to life before them. Its inner part shimmering without an image of their destination for once. He was amused at how intent Niculaie would become when he set his sights on something, be it killing or otherwise. Great courage this one had Marsol would mull over to himself as he thought of the greeting the rest of the clan would give to their new demon blooded brother who also posed in the vase of a human, like their Lord did... Like the angels did. Again he was struck with a horrible fit of guilt that was so alien yet familiar to him, it made his brows narrow into a most unkind scowl. Cirgoth... Where have you run off to this time?

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Mekkor  
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Wyrvaust was beside himself with rage and anxiety. He felt as if his heart would explode in his chest, and flames crackled and leapt from his form, his wings tearing through his shoulders as he threw his arms skyward and bellowed at the top of his lungs!! "BRING THE SWAN BACK!!!!!! SAMMAEL!!!! IN WHAT WAY HAVE WE WRONGED THE LORD OF ACHERON!!!??? WHY THIS??? WHY NOW???" He was furious and heart broken. Unless Marsol held him back physically, or by some other means, Wyrvaust would launch himself in flight and take off after her. After a shadow he could not even see. It did not take long for the dragon to pass into shadows of night and out of sight.

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Mekkor had received Sammael's message that he would be receiving a new 'guest.' The manor's wards would prevent anyone from leaving via a wall of force which only those who Mekkor selected could get past. Felix had returned from his little visit with Lavoy, and after raping him very cruelly, beating him black and blue, and shredding him with his claws, Mekkor threw him out on the streets with a demand for him not to return for a week. What did Mekkor hope to gain from this besides teaching Felix a lesson in obedience? His little progeny was now perfect bait for the empathetic Prince. Lavoy already knew Mekkor was the bad guy, but Mekkor had no designs on throwing Lavoy into his own path, rather the path of their cause. How? Because when and if Lavoy found Felix, mortals would be tormenting him. The formless ones would see to that. It would be another demon, rather a devil acolyte, who Lavoy and Felix both would fall in the way of. Mekkor was presently in the yard of his walled in manor, leaning against a great live oak tree. No one in the city would ever know a Shadow Dragon winged its way to his place, for those stealthy wyrms were sneaky that way. Had to admire them. All the dragons had their admirable qualities, didn't they? The only dragons Mekkor would like to have the hides of were those too-goodie bronze dragons. Regulators, blah. He hated the self-righteous. For that reason, the shadow dragon would make his drop and be off. If any dragon stayed too long in the citadel, out of human skin if they had one that is, a guardian dragon would drive them off, if not kill them. An angel... A pity she was a female. Mekkor's tastes ran along the lines of boys. Felix was second to his favorite flavor. His most favored had gotten away. Abraxas. He still obsessed over the one that got away. Female or not though, Mekkor would have his fun with Arilwen.

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What a shame one would think what with the little Swan being delivered into the hands of someone that wished terrible things for her, yet she would never be granted the bliss of death. Oh no, Arilwen was useless if she was dead. Had Sammael known of the extent of value Marsol had not just for Arilwne, but for this silly little fluff of a human Anna then well, the entire task might have changed to just being Anna and he might even have instructed Mekkor to send Marsol photos for christmas of the horrible acts Anna might or might not have been put through. Give

or take Sammaels mood at the time. The shadow dragon's landing was all pretty like what with carrying Arilwen as if she were the new born babe instead of Anwaar. Anna unfortunately would remain in the grip of its hind right hand as it settled onto its hunches to present Mekkor with this sweet smelling female by laying her all gentle-like on the grass before him where he leaned against said tree. The rather "hellraiser" looking shadow dragon bowed its head not out of respect but, out of something akin to appreciating Mekkor's taste in women. Well, tastes in general. "Does it please thee to know of how foul a mood this will put the desert in? Or perhaps how little Marsol will seek vegence when he finds where this one has been taken, or should we say by whom?" The coal black lime green eyed dragon's voice was not as cold sounding to Mekkor as it had been to Arilwen and Anna. Perhaps that was because Mekkor knew of its kind and was not that flustered by a mouth of teeth as sharp as barnicals on a pier out in the sea leering at this or that? The beast's mawl lowered to the top of Arilwen and something about it not revealing any teeth to the Swan was a good sign not to move, least it want to taste this angel cake. It sniffed at her hair again, just like it had in the desert. There was a moment where its back hand shifted to bring what it had been carrying up to hold in its front left one. Just a head of red curls was visible in between its leather feeling black scaled fingers. It settled back on its haunches again as it lifted the human to rest her against its chest as its unfeeling brightly lit green eyes remained on Mekkor, waiting for his acknowledgement of his new 'guest' so that it could be off to feast upon the red head in numerous ways. Its wings rattled with the thick chains that had been wrapped around them, and also looped through burned out holes near the middles, close to its body they were pulled as it sat before Mekkor and for the moment, the fiend looked content with its new chew toy...

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When the dragon arrived with Arilwen, Mekkor strode out from beneath the darker shadows of the tree and into the open to meet the magnificent beast. He stroked the great wyrm's black scales and scratched beneath his chin as he lowered his head. "You are a wonder among wonders, Sgaithard. As beautiful and impressive as ever. The night bows to your darkness, my friend." He smiled and dropped his eyes on the little bird he lie on the ground to sniff before his great talon unclenched and lifted to release her. She was trembling madly and sobbing. Mekkor's laughter rose on the air to mingle with her weeping cries. "Does not her fear taste delicious, old friend? Sweet it is as honeysuckle." His black eyes shimmered with delight and he patted the dragon firmly that he could feel his show of affection. "I advise you take your snack north to your lair that no one interupt your meal. Do have her soul for desert won't you? How long has it been since you tasted a soul so honeyed with innocence?" He chuckled deeply. He gave the dragon's long supine neck a tight hug and then knelt down by Arilwen. "This one shall be a tasty treat too... A pity I cannot pick my teeth with her bones. You are the lucky one, Sgaithard. I will come soon to see you and bring your favorite wine," he grinned up at the dragon as he gripped Arilwen's wrist when she gathered her wits enough to try to scramble away from him. His grip on her was like a vice made of ice.

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The shadow born one was oddly affectionate for one that was a heartless being whose sole purpose in life was to take it away from everything and everyone until there was nothing in the world but Death itself and then, and only then could it



rest. The scratching and itching was leaned in to. Sgaithard had a semi long but narrow snout with teeth that stuck out even when he had his mouth closed from the sides. Jagged as any sea creatures. It had been a long time since the black scaled one had had Mekkors company and it had almost forgotten how saucy Mekkors really was. Those lime green reptilian eyes thinned on Arilwen a moment as the words taste and fear were uttered in the same sentence. Had Sgaithard had a little less self control he might have snapped Arilwen's left leg off already out of sheer hunger. "You will know the time in which I will take in devouring the child's soul... You, who are so like heaven yet where is this grace you are suppose to possess? This unyielding virtue in your darkest hour? If only you had been born in another time Angel Cake, you might never know that the last person this human will see is you and how you... do nothing." The shadow dragons voice was now laced with venom as it spoke but to both Arilwen and Mekkors, for it sort of delighted in making Mekkors laugh from its hateful antics. One last sniff was made at Arilwen before the top of its scarred head was nudged at Mekkors left side, and if the dark one didn't stand his ground then Sgaithard might knock him over with the excitement that was about to ensue in its lair it now departed for in one quick haze of flapping its wings. Somehow the brute's grip had grown slack. So much that those thick goldish red lashes fluttered open for those pale blue eyes to see a man whom she remembered but only vaguely, upside down. Oh the pain hammered in her skull as she was shifted around to be held against the dragon's breast after a short time, for she heard nothing. She was deaf to the world now from how badly the creature had squeezed her chest and head. Her brains were so rattled that she barely recognized the air rushing underneath them but... hair. Brown. Blue. "...Arilwe...n?" It was whispered at first as she tried to focus the red vision on the Swan below as she felt she was being lifted again. The sight of Mekkors stung her something fierce and she twisted in the dragons hands. "...a ..ah ..ahh, ow! Y.. Arilwen!" Then the screaming set in. That gutt wrenching screaming resonated throughout the open space where Sgaithard had come to give Mekkors a treat. Funny how great a set of lungs humans tended to have. "Arilwen be not afraid," she shouted as the tree, the dark man who unnerved her, and the Swan started to fade below them, "Be strong my friend! They will come for you!" The screaming would not stop however as she felt something sharp pierce her stomach and white hot pain seered through her middle. And yet these screams were not ones of pain. Oh no, they were ones of fight. They those that Anna tried to give as a reassurance to Arilwen just before the dragon took her too high to be heard, that she shouldn't despair. How cute. She twisted over and over again in the shadow dragons hands but each time his grip would tighten until all she knew was red and blue spots and the roaring of blood in her ears that blocked out the whole world. Oh God.. help Arilwen...

It was madness was what the entire group would be thrown into as the amber eyed one felt no trace of Anna once Sgaithard took her, and then the same happened to Arilwen. His gaze became a glare that turned skyward as tiny Anwaar was then handed to one of his most trusted demon servants and ushered they and eight others into a gateway he called forth at a moments notice. He knew something had gotten Sammael's goat, it had to be. Why else or what else rather could come to the desert and snatch the women up so easily without any prior motive? Just as the eight guards gathered around the demon nurse who cradled Wryvaust and Arilwen's child as if it was the child of God Himself, Marsol's hands would catch hold of Wryvaust's shoulders and then coil the clan demon in his arms to keep him from taking flight. "Be still my brother," he said, knowing it would be difficult to calm Wryvaust seeing as how he had just been reunited with his son, let alone the desert itself. Marsol on the other hand was rapidly becoming numb to everything and one. He dare

not even begin to contemplate the level of evil Sammael may have inflicted on him, or even buried inside of him when he gave him back that which he had taken to end a futile battle in the Barren Lands. He would not release Wryvaust until he either calmed, or he had to take him away from this place. While he vied for Wryvaust's peace, he was bidding his kin, his fellow dragon clan to secure their home, and then the desert by any means necessary. However, he knew the foe lay not in the desert. They had already departed and were long gone. It pushed him to the edge so easily to tempt him into a murderous rage, one that would no doubt slay anyone, be they human or not. Over Wryvaust's shoulder Marsol watched as two people poured water over Niculaie's head to clean him, and declathed him right then and there to give him fresh robes and pants. It had to be linked he thought as he watched Niculaie's movements and the way the youth spoke. He had been honest when he had come back. For whatever reason, Niculaie was here again and that was all that mattered at the moment. "Death will not visit the female bird," he whispered as the fire was covered with sand by servents before they too sprinted into the giant gateway of swirling fire to return to their daily duties. This was no concern for common folk, and they knew it. Dare he ask? he thought to himself and he did. If Arilwen and Anna could be taken like this then... No, don't. His logical side told him to tackle one problem at a time and don't seek something that will kill you for good.

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Niculaie was for the moment in a state of shock. His eyes were unblinking as he sat there, his form covered in sand as he had been pulled out of the quickly sinking sands after he had been thrown from Anna, like a ragdoll he had been tossed, the young Abyssal reaver had no idea to the ends of treachery that were going on here, had he known his own maker was behind this, it could have drove him mad, why would anyone do this? Niculaie had spoken quickly, to Marsol to what had happened, not fearing the consequences of what he and Anna had been doing, the only thing he feared for was Anna and Arilwen, no doubt some evil had taken the female creatures from the desert. Young Niculaie glared hatefully down at the sands as he heaved breaths even as water was poured over him, was he cursed? He would not be uncooperative; he would disrobe and dress into the new garbs and snarled... "My lord, Marsol...! We must go now, time is short!" Nic said loudly as he looked to Marsol, the boy was very much hysterical it would seem and shook his head. and turned about to look into the distance as he reached down lifting his things up he then spun about and those eyes closed as he would soon be shitting himself off from anyone not here, he did not have it in him to talk to anyone, no there were more important matters to tend.

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Darkness tended to love darkness, only Mekkor was as incapable of actual love as Sgaithard was. Their affection was born of a common bond. They both hungered for souls and cherished corruption. Mekkor pulled Arilwen to her feet and wrapped his arms around her to pin her against himself as the dragon tormented her with his designs for Anna. He cackled beneath his breath so as not to interrupt his lovely illustration of Anna's near future. Arilwen started sobbing harder and Mekkor ticked his tongue. "Not polite to make such a fuss while someone is talking dear," he whispered in her ear, whereof his hand slid upward against her body and his fingers closed around her throat to choke her until she could not sob anymore. Only when she quieted did his fingers loosen enough to let her breathe. "This

nephalim child of an angel shall discover how much pain she can take. She underestimates the punishment she can survive I am willing to bet. She shall have the privilege of finding out," he smiled cool as a winter morning. Mekkora staggered a few long steps to catch himself with that nudge the dragon gave him to laugh with breathless amusement, taking Arilwen with him as he was thrown to the side. Dragons almost always forgot their own strength. "Fare thee well, Sgaithard. The darkness keep you well," he bid the dragon as he beat the air with his inky wings to take flight. He lifted Arilwen's hand to wave it at at the dragon, then snickered beneath his breath, gripped a fistful of her hair, and with his hand still coiled around her throat, he ushered her to the manor. She could wander as she liked (when she was able to stand) within the manor, for if she tried to leave, she would smack into a wall of force. Now, now. Mekkora had instigated this riot. He was simply doing his great and noble Lord's bidding. Mekkora was very loyal to his Lord and King. Was that not something Niculaie should admire in his maker? If he was loyal to a fault then so be it, but better to be loyal than to turn your back on blood at the first sign of trouble, yes? Indeed as Mekkora escorted the Nephalim inside the manor, his voice reached out to Niculaie. ~"Niculaie, my son...It is time you came home. You have played with your friends in the desert long enough, don't you think? You have explained to Marsol that you have returned to your clan, yes, and what your responsibilities are by now surely."~ If not, Niculaie would get to know how much agony and injury he could take as well.

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When Marsol caught Wyrvaust up and deadlocked him in his arms, the demon struggled against his hold. "He must go after her...He must...He will find her...He can feel her in his soul! Her pain... her dread... it is like a precious gift of poison..." he hissed acridly. He fought his master's embrace until Marsol squeezed him so tightly that he could not even breathe. The demon then slumped against Marsol, and twisted his head around to bury his cheek against his master's shoulder. "Why...Why would the beasts of hate take her?" He was clearly terrified for her, and had started referring to himself as he and I. "ARAHHHH!! LET IT GO!!!! Oh most Beloved Lord, PLEASE!! Let it find the white swan before her heart is taken from her... Before the unspeakable is done to her!!" hence his frantic struggles began all over again. Wyrvaust's insanity to Sammael was like a puzzle box he loved to play with to see if he could find just the right combination to see just how insane Wyrvaust could get. How else was he to discover the best use for the demon? It was simply a matter of trial and error and seeing where each peg fit the best yes? Well, taking Arilwen from him was a good way to see the depths of Wyrvaust's insanity. "It can find her... It can seek her in dark places and loathsome sewers... and in smooth walls and rough ones... Does not the only dragon he ever wanted to give itself to... trust its nose to find what it loves best next to him?" Marsol alone would be able to understand him at all soon.

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They the ones of darkness whose souls were black as night had so much in common, even if they had never met, Mekkora and Sgaithard would still have gotten along fantastically over a table of cooked elves or even decapitated infants or some such gruesome display of brutality. His goodbye came in a huff and throw of his head before he took the girl-child up high over this well spread of a manor and turned northward with Anna neatly tucked against its breast so that she wouldn't die on

him yet from the several trauma's to her head she had suffered already, let alone the broken ribs she surely had or the fact that everything she saw was red. The long tail flickered to and fro as it ducked under a low arch way, through one old pile of rock structure, curling its wings around itself as it did nose dive after nose dive just to scare the living day lights out of Anna. Yet Anna did not cry out in terror. She may have yelped in pain, but not out of fear. One had to distinguish the two and do it well if they were to take up the business of killing for sport. It spoke of chewing off her feet while dunking her into ice water, and it cooed smugly when it got no response out of the red haired fluff of a thing for whom life had so ill prepared and whose choice of a parent and lover would be her demise. A sound like a screech none the likes Anna had ever heard was what it made as it swooped down over a flock of what looked like balls of white cotton in a field, and the beast tore two of the small animals in half and then proceeded in eating the hind quarters right in front of Anna. "Try it child, you might like the taste of another's blood more than your own... The horrid version of laughter it emitted was nearly as terrible as its screeching just before it either killed or destroyed something like an old windmill that it slammed its tail into to cause the mill to topple over onto the woman hanging clothes that couldn't get out of the way fast enough. Blood rained from the skies to make a hideous path of red where Sgaithard was taking Anna. Parts of animal fur and feather alike. Now that it was away from Mekkora and his manor, it would still not come out of being cloaked. Odd? Tactful. It would not be but a few hours flight that would get them to his lair where Anna would make all sorts of friends.

She did not cry when Arilwen was taken away from her, or that she was in the hands of this man Mekkora, she knew him and yet it was just a dream. Right? So many questions and they weighted in on her again but she shoved them aside just to witness a goat have its hind legs chewed off and its blood splattered her front head to toe. Those pale blue eyes went wide as saucers of milk before that mouth opened to let out a blood curdling scream that got a snarl of satisfaction from Sgaithard to make him do it again, and again, and again until there were no more goats. Only hoof pieces to say that there had ever been a herd. She wanted to turn away, to look anywhere but at the gaping maw of this black dragon fiend that ate animals as if they were not food, but fun. "Stop this! Stop this madness-," and then that screaming was hushed by his fingers going around her head and she couldn't see or hear or even breathe again. She choked back the tears that threatened to come and if they did, well then this monster would have won wouldn't he? Yet how could she have known that the cold biting stone she was set down upon her feet by, and then released was not freedom, but damnation...? Through the marred vision of spots and hallucinations, the human saw something nobody should ever have to in their whole life. The entrance to the mouth of a cave that was big enough to fit ten of this black dragon type in, loomed at her like the mouth of a beast itself and just inside she could hear the cries of anguish, of pain and agony that begged for a death they were being denied. "Why...?" she whispered as she felt a talon begin to creep around her left hip to settle against her stomach. "... why have you brought me here foul beast." She then immediately regretted having said such as she wanted to crawl out of her own skin when she heard this cold soulless voice enter her mind and say, "For one so small, you seem so strong. Your meat must be extra sweet then." No more. She could not take it. With a shriek she would sprint to this opening of a cave for that was all there was because Sgaithard loomed like a tower of evil himself behind her, blocking out even the blessed moon light. "Help me! Someone help me, please!" Her screaming would echo into the cave as she disappeared into it, fleeing for a life she just didn't

seem to realize she no longer had anymore. More than once she would trip, land hard on her side and tear flesh over her elbow or knees until one final time she landed in something quite sticky and most foul in its stench. "Oh God... Oh g-," she gagged as fire flared to life under what looked like a long grate of iron over a pit of fire with steps leading up to it. The room was then cast back from the shadows and into the light, but she wished it hadn't been. Within Sgaithards lair there was a giant pit of fire with iron bars over it to make it so none could fall in. Or was it to keep them in? Her gaze shifted downwards to the gore she had trampled into. Body parts. Arms. Half eaten legs. With a gasp of dismay and horror, she backed into the first of her "friends." A tart yelp was made when she felt something move behind her and she fell to the side, peering up through a few red curls she saw a woman naked and whipped missing all of her fingers and ears. Anna just could not believe what she was seeing but that didn't stop her eyes from wandering to the man next to her who was enormous in his weight but he had no limbs! Where were his arms and legs?! She wondered at the pieces of white crystal and cords or string looking things that were tied around the mans bloody stumps. She shrieked as she felt a damp hand slap her forehead from above and all but fainted as her head turned upwards to see a third person dangeling by their... ankels? No. It was the... the.. bones in their legs and... "Oh my God," she said as tears blurred her vision, backing away from this trio of torture that looked to this short pale red haired youth for the hope of a way out. Any way but this. This was a nightmare! It had to be she thought to herself as a pair of hands patted at her ankles. Her nerves froze as her eyes slowly lowered as she trembled uncontrolably to see... a child. Not more than three, sitting in a circle of glass naked as the other three unfortunate souls with a thick iron collar with a link of chain that went off somewhere into the cave. "Father," she whispered as those tears fell one at a time as she knelt to gather this bruise covered pale child whose sex anna couldn't determine because of some inhumane plate of metal over its private parts. What the heck happened here?! "Forgive me Father," she cooed to the child who had started to cry because when the fire was lit, it meant only one thing, and yet she tried to sooth the toddler as best she could, "I fear I have wandered into Hell." A finger stroked down over the child's nose as she smiled to it even in her blood soaked attire. Yet the child's eyes would grow wide and it would start screeching again as it squirmed to be free. Something hot and wet dripped onto her right shoulder, making Anna's head turn to see what looked like black tar with specks of red in it but in reality, it was drool. Shadow Dragon drool...

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Marsol could not help but feel it to be his own foolishness in thinking Sammael would have any shred of word. It just frosted his cookies to think that bastard might have orchestrated this or what was worse, who he had enlisted to do it for him. Special instructions had been given earlier to retrieve these wayward siblings of Yorek's and to give them safe haven in the desert domain. They no doubt would be housed in the same vacinity as Wryvaust and Arilwen's child but he would not take any of his clan with him in this vendetta against whosoever had the fucking balls to come into their desert to grab the female bird and the human child. He would drag Wryvaust towards the darkening part of the sands as the last of the servents left through the gateway to leave no one but Wryvaust, Niculaie, and the Hell Raptors in the eerie silence the desert ensued. He himself was enraged that they dare take the Swan again, but Anna? What had the human to do with any of it? She did not belong anywhere but there, where she tended to the flock of lambs or other

pets she collected. "We leave as soon as we have our wits about us," he told Wryvaust as he finally did release him but it was to spin the clever demon to sit in the sand so as Marsol knelt befo-re him where he could be eye level with him. "We will find her," he said, his tone turning as hard as steel and almost as cold as Sgaithard's, "My friend, my brother, the female bird will be brought back to her Raven, but that black winged one need courage. Have courage, for her." He detested seeing bad things happen to good people, most of all if that person was Wryvaust or anyone of his tribe. It was truly getting out of hand and Marsol had had it up to fucking here with this lyrical bullshit Sammael had spoon fed him. And he had bought it! What a dope he felt to be as he took Wryvaust's head in his hands when he saw that there would be no hushing this one, to rest his mouth against the top of Wryvaust's head and he would remain in that position for several moments, or unless Wryvaust swatted him away, or one of the dragon's spoke. He could feel the out of control sensation cackle at the current situation. How it thrived on the pain of others. So unlike him.

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Niculaie fell to his knees hugging himself as his robes flared about his form, his form slouching ever so lazily as he did his damndest to keep everyone out of his head, but he should have known his maker was far to powerful to keep out of his mind, he would then let his thoughts go to the trouble at hand only to find his Maker's voice in his mind telling him to return, though Nic did not wish to disobey if he did obey he may as well cut his own heart out... Unlike Mekkor, Niculaie had emotions, he felt love, hate and a myriad of other emotions some one could not even put words to they were so strange. He gasped and shook his head. ~"I cannot return my lord, someone I love is in trouble I have to help them, forgive me, I beg!"~ Nic sent his maker, and then he breathed an exhale. ~"I have not had the chance yet, to speak with Lord Marsol." Niculaie said and for better or worse he would stay here with Marsol and go with them to retrieve Anna and the Swan. When Marsol said they would leave soon as they had their wits he stood up and looked to Marsol as he spoke with Wryvaust and nodded. He held those things of his still as he stood silently, Niculaie did not care what happened he would pay back whoever took them like this.

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Mekkor led Arilwen into that basement that bore deep into the ground beneath his home. Yes, Hawker's Fort was by the sea, but it was also on a high bluff with cliffs on the west side. The wharves were built against those cliffs. It was unusual really, for cliffs to take shape in a bay, much less a bay as large as Hawker's Bay. The sea had not worn these cliffs from the shore, but rather an earthquake had pushed the earth up and above the ocean many ages before memories could tell. The basement was neither dank, nor dark. It was well lit by large braziers which stood in rounded niches in the thick stone walls. The floor was smooth polished stone and woven patterns were carved into the stone crown molding. The architects which had built the place had blasted and chiseled the basement out of the bedrock itself. Mekkor had paid a mint for the manor for a reason. Mekkor hissed and slammed the false angel against a wall as he walked when Nic refused to come home. "That was not a request, Niculaie, that was the command of your, Sire. Say your goodbyes, and come home, NOW." There was no compromise in his tones. It was into a large chamber he led her by her hair and throat, and there that he shoved her down on a raised table of marble.

She was almost numb with fear by this time, but if she gave him any trouble, he would backhand her with force. He pushed, or wrestled her down against the table on her back, and clapped her wrists and ankles in steel shackles attached to the table by thick chains. Claws shot from his fingertips like so many switchblades and he proceeded to cut her clothing right off of her, snagging here, and giving a yank that sliced through the cloth, and hooking it there to shred more of her robes, until every strip of cloth was removed from her and tossed haplessly on the floor. His claws nicked her now and again as her body jerked or shuddered, but soon he would do a lot more than just nick the girl's flesh to draw wincing and catches of breath from her. When her gaze braved on him and her lips parted to ask why... Mekkora smiled, and there was not an ounce of sympathy or warmth in the expression. "Every strength, every weakness, every flaw and quality you possess in that pretty little wrapper shall be divulged to you, to me, and to our Lord, by me, sweetness and cherry pie. And through you, Wyrvaust's soul shall also be revealed. Two birds in one net you see? He gets the see it all, the lucky deserter." he laughed and then his arm swung around, and angled over to plunge down with force and punch his claws, all five of them, through her stomach. Her screams were intoxicating to the demon. He twisted his hand while applying pressure until his claws were raking her back from the inside. "I could do this for months and it would not kill you," he grinned. The demon then removed his hand and after smiling down on her, he began to cut into her flesh with a single bloody claw, his index claw in fact. His precision, even while she shook and jerked was skilled, as he sliced only her skin and not her muscle. "Let's see how truly beautiful you are, Arilwen. Nothing is more splendid to the eyes than muscles revealed without the flesh. Oh, you may think it will kill you, and even wish for death before it is over, but I assure you, you shall recover. Most of us have been through this." He meant most Hellions. "It will come to an end, eventually." He cackled and continued his precision incisions. One from her throat, across her sternum, down her center to her navel, a circular cut around her genitals, and he was done. The rest would he would skin from her inside out, like pantyhose. Mekkora really did take pride in his work, and was a master of torture and skinning. He learned from the best... Scream Hammer. "Do you know you can survive being skinned of your flesh, muscles, and vitals to the bone? Actually regenerate all that? We immortals really are amazing things, aren't we?" He was clinical... Like a doctor teaching a student how to dismantle a cadaver, only Arilwen was the student, the guinea pig, and she was quite alive while she was being dissected.

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Wyrvaust was full of enough chaos already, but when the visions slammed him... It was too much for him to take. A choked sob strangled in his throat at that very moment that Marsol released him, and he staggered three strides forward and then dropped suddenly to his knees. He began raking his own cheeks with his claws, and they were coming very close to his eyes. Words did not escape him, only garbled sounds, choking breaths, and tangled up sobs. Then something Marsol said cleared his mind a bit, at what time his breath caught, and then was released in a thin hiss as words slowly began to form. "Cur... Curs... cur... courage.... No...." he shook his head and then buried himself completely against Marsol, his arms shaking as they wrapped around him. "It has not courage.... The black one.... the foul fiend... he is taking the bird... her feathers... her heart... her eyes... her mind... No strength, no heart hath the Raven for this... Let him go seek the gentle one or he shall die... and lost the bird shall be... Fly away... fly too far away

to catch it shall.... Oh hateful life... Hateful monsters... The world is dying... All around it dies..." No, Wyrvaust could not take it... He had only to suffer the unbearable. "It crossed us once... and got the dove this time... Let him kill it..." That last a menacing breath of murder.

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It had all happened too quickly. Being snatched away from her beloved Raven's side, flown through the air, dumped with this man, this KIDNAPPER, and seperated from her newly found friend. By the time the dragon left her with Mekkor and Arilwen had realized who he was, she was shaking uncontrollably. Why was this man demanding on having her? When the Swan was lain on the grass before Mekkor, her blue eyes had widened in terror when they found him hovering over her. No... she had seen that man before. In the desert! He had been the one to hold a blade to Wyrvaust's throat. Arilwen's sobbing grew more severe as the dragon toyed with Anna, explicitly releasing what he would do to her. And as her voice screamed forth to let her go, Arilwen felt the man's hand clamp down around her throat, cutting off her screams. Choking, she wheezed and kicked, finally going still in his hands. It was only when he released her throat that she managed to gasp for air, sucking the breaths in desperately. She had not been tortured like this since she was a child, and it was about to get alot worse. Without being able to argue, Arilwen was dragged up by a handful of her dark, wavy hair, the man's hand still around her throat, and her feet stumbled to keep up as he pulled her inside. Tears blurred her vision and she nearly fell twice, but gagged when Mekkor's hands hauled her neck up to keep her on her feet. It was a brightly lit basement that she was pulled into, and the swan was still gasping as she was thrown down on a marble table, the man tackling her and pinning her while she kicked, then began screaming. "NO!" The word ripped from her throat, but her thrashing did nothing. Her wrists and ankles were locked with cold steel, and her back arched as she fought the restraints. Blue eyes, so wide and damp with fear, lifted to the man, a whisper emitted asking him why... and the reasoning he gave made NO sense to her. Shrieking as one of the man's claws suddenly knicked her slender waist, ripping through her beautiful blue robes that Wyrvaust had given her, Arilwen's mind was SCREAMING for her to get free. The last time she had been tied down to a table, it had been to have her child cut from her womb. She was about to find out that there were worse things. Once the clothing was free, the angel trembled on the marble, her nude and sliced skin dripping blood down her flesh. Horror movies could not compare to this, and horror was exactly what her face contorted into when Mekkor suddenly plunged his claws into her stomach, Her body arched and her screams finally found open air, her head falling back to the table as her soft lips stretched wider to get all of the sound out. Fire ripped through her, and her screams turned to choking screeches as he began to dissect her skin, cutting it carefully to peel it away from her bones. No... she would not eventually wish for death... she was now, for no matter of death could be this horrid. Her throat contracted and tried to vomit, but nothing came up. Her body dry heaved as it was being parted into sections, and her nails snapped off against the marble as she clawed at the table. Never could she wish this upon anyone... except, perhaps, the man doing this to her. And her sweet mind just could not understand. "I... I'm sorry..." Her raw throat managed to choke out, though extremely muffled. Who was she apologizing to? Whoever would listen, for if this punishment was being given, she had done something terribly wrong...

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Niculaie of course was NOT having a good time, he shook his head then as his maker spoke to him once more hissing commands Niculaie was between a rock and a hard place and would step backwards tripping and spilling over into the sands and let out a breath. "No... no, no. I can't, I cannot!" He shouted as he let his head hang, ragged breath past his lips and he looked to them, Wryvaust and Marsol... "Why is this?" He asked and then growled, "No I will NOT abandon my friends!" He bellowed, knowing Mekkora would hear his defiance, it had nothing to do with a lack of Loyalty to Mekkora but it had everything to do with his loyalty and love to his friends and he sat on his haunches in the sand as he spoke to him. "Why do you do this to me? I was going to tell you know... Is this punishment? I cannot bear it, I cannot do what you ask of me, Mekkora. I cannot abandon them." He said as he let a breath pass and shook his head then, was he a traitor to Marsol? deep frown he felt like he had tarnished their trust on some level... He just closed his eyes tightly clutching his things.

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Silly little humans and their silly little hopes and dreams. Poppycock! The long neck bent to watch the red head sprint away into the dark opening of the cave that had been its home for oh, four days now. Sgaithard moved so often that he really never did have a home, unless you called this one lone cave it. This place of rotting corpses it feasted upon even after the person had died weeks ago. The shadow dragon's taste for flesh was as broad as the colorful wardrobe Anna wore, which was pretty damn bright. It didn't matter if the person was dead or alive, he would do with them as he pleased all the same. The tail brushed over the two being bound by shackles to the wall as they thought they were slowly dying when in reality it was far from it. Its wings passed over the one dangling from pin holes in the bones at the bottoms of its legs in its ankles, rattling the poor guy worst than he already was as its behemoth size came to sit behind Anna while he anticipated just what the girl would taste like, and how long winded she was for he did so very much enjoy the screamers. It sniffed at Anna's backside without the girl even knowing it and it would have continued to do so had the child not seen the big black ugly thing over the girl that had picked them up by a shoulder and had a conaptionfit. Why had he kept that one again? Ahh yes, for the eyes. Those lips curled back to reveal all the crooked and voracious teeth as he snarled. The gust of hot putrid air that spewed from Sgaithard's mouth was awful and it did spur the little lady into running with the child although that chain was stepped on by his right hind foot and it leered at Anna as it watched fear creep into her still crying blue eyes. Snapping that chain along the ground into its mouth, it jerked it to the left and out of Anna's arms that toddler would come flying as it wailed through the air to be come to a halt by this infernal link of metal connecting to the child's body hanging it over a low lying rock that jutted out of the cave wall, which was fine but the spot the kid now hung over was the pit of fire with the metal bars that crisscrossed this way and that. Oddly, these bars would start to swing open like a lid after a series of clicks but he would not give the fluffy little human time to register where he wished to put that fucking kid because it cried to damn much. "Run... Please run, it's so much better when they ruuuuun!" The whisper came as a slimy something or other as the dragon launched its large self at the girl, whom it thought was so cute as she appeared to do cartwheels out of its way. Its foreclaws slammed into the stone cave, making the entire place tremble. It would chase Anna and oh how it would chase her right on over to that pit that, when the cave had trembled it had jarred the child loose from where it

had been trying to get to the wall and now... It fell freely towards a fiery death with the loud scraping sound of all that link flicking sparks against the stone floor and metal rim of this deep, well-like pit. She eyed it wryly before her gaze traveled up as she fumbled to pick up the child again. Just seeing the Shadow dragon over her like this, with just its neck in view because it was so huge, brought a shriek from her as she took off towards the opening of the cave with that child in her arms. "Shhh, shhh, it will be o-no! NO!" From her arms the child was ripped and it sent her sprawled to the floor, tumbling down a short flight of stone stairs to which she had a hard time getting up from. Yet up she had to be to climb them and see where this foul creature had thrown the child. "You... You MONSTER!" It was tearing her apart inwardly. These people. This child. Arilwen. Niculaie.... Niculaie. Her heart ached for him so much that it choked her.

To the side she had to dive to avoid being crushed again by the thing's hands. The people in pain looked on in woeful silence at this red headed young thing try to jump for the child that was stuck on the wall, only to watch as it fell just barely out of her reach with the quaking of the cave. So much was happening so fast that the shock of it all couldn't be felt, and this enabled her to keep going. Down she went to the side of the pit after the child onto her knees, reaching for this chain but in grabbing it, her hands would blister and burn until she could not hold it any longer from this fire, this unholy fire the child had been plunged into. Her eyes, she so badly wanted to believe that they lied. They were not her own and this was not her body. This cave with these pieces of gore everywhere, none of it existed. None of it, but it did. "Annnnna..." Instantly she began to cry as she turned to see this beast of evil, this creature of darkness leap at her again out of fun, no other reason but fun, and it would miss her again. Only because she threw herself down into the middle of those three poor souls that had had the rotten luck of being born into the wrong world. She looked up to the woman missing her fingers, her ears, and she cried even harder. Not the loud kind either but the mind breaking silent kind that racked your body until you really did want to die and be done with everything. A hand clasped over her mouth as she reached for the piece of rope that held the woman to a piece of rock, only to see nothing but red spray everywhere. Blood spurted from where the woman's head had been, and where Sgaithard's mouth had abruptly clamped down to eat it. Never in her life had she known of such fear or horror as this as she crawled backwards to bump into what used to be the carcass of a horse. She could make it all stop he said. She only had to stop this by ending their suffering by her own hands. Up and up she was lifted by the dragon's tail around her throat, choking her as it brought her to sit in between his feet where it sat back to eye its miniature trophies from different parts of the world. Anna felt like it was some sort of joke. It had to be right? Scrambling to her feet, she was then seized again and held in a death grip and made to watch as the shadow dragon took his time in picking apart the remaining two. Anna heard the words the fiend tore into her with as she felt the life being crushed out of her. "It is your fault these people have been suffering for so long." he hissed at her.

"No, no I.. irk... uh..." She couldn't even speak as he wove such tricky as to hold her body as still as stone in mid air and that she could not blink as he circled the remaining two, snapping at the large man until there was nothing left but the skin of his left elbow. "...please..." The sob was as ragged as her throat was raw. How could someone do this? Why? She didn't understand. It didn't make sense to her why evil existed and how true evil... always would.

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A look was thrown Niculaie's way and although Marsol thought it odd at first, now he wasn't so sure Niculaie was completely separated from Mekkora, even in this distance. "See how our enemies use our children against us," Marsol said quietly as his left arm extended to point at Niculaie and then it came to rest on Wyrvaust's head. It was heart breaking to see what only he saw, and others might have just viewed it as a drunken rambling when in fact, it was truth of many things. Past, present or future. He tugged at Wyrvaust's robes, brushing off the sand from them as he said, "Yes, courage. You have still your word. Is that not everything? Lord Niculaie speaks not to us, but to another that means harm against our home." Well wasn't he just talkative tonight? His mood would then shift as he jerked Wyrvaust to his feet and then eyed the abyss demon carefully. "Niculaie, with whom do you converse at a time like this?" he roared. It would appear, Marsol's patience with the situation had just run out.

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Wyrvaust started panting, feeling dizzy with all the agony and horror he saw and felt through Arilwen. He came away from Marsol abruptly enough to take his Lord off guard and stumbled back two paces to bump into Nic where he had stubbornly thrown himself down on his haunches to talk to Mekkora aloud. He stood for a moment with a confused look rumpling his face, then spun around on a dime as Nic spoke Mekkora's name. Wyrvaust then pounced on Nic like a cat, to pin his shoulders to the sand with two very strong arms as he rolled him onto his back, his legs straddling him. "Why does it talk to the fiend as a familiar?" The slits of his eyes lanced Nic's gaze as he asked him this. "The very fiend what cuts its precious life to pieces for sport and madness... Tell me!" His claws gripped into Nic's shoulders to shake him against the ground. He hardly gave Nic a chance to answer did he? Wyrvaust cackled like a mad man and bounced on Nic's legs a few times before jarring him violently again. "Tell him where it dens, tell the dying raven now and no blood shall be spilt on sandy ground. Be quick and tell him where the monster hides!!" Looney, yes, but Wyrvaust was even more crafty and dangerous therein his lunacy than at any other time. Wyrvaust slammed his eyes shut for a moment as Mekkora rolled Arilwen's flesh in his fingers and jerked firmly to peel it back from her muscles. "NnnngnnnAHHHRAHHHHH!!!!!" His own roar of anguish echoed with those screams in his mind, as his beautiful angel was divested of her flesh... her soft pelt skinned from her like a glove before his mind's eye. That vision then hit Nick as well as Wyrvaust projected it back to Niculaie's mind. His gaze then lanced Niculaie, flames leaping into his pupils. "Tell it where its stinking lair is or its rage shall find it in younger demon's flesh!!!" he roared again, only at Niculaie this time, while he pounded him against the sand by those shoulders he gripped. The vision of her cutting into Arilwen's muscles to begin peeling them back as well to expose vitals and bone was just too much for him. It did not matter that Niculaie had told him what he had demanded him to tell. He was just mad with anguish and torment at the moment. Wyrvaust had begun to lunge for Nic's throat out of sheer frenzy and hate, not for Nic, but his sire, when Marsol grabbed him by his upper arms and hauled him off of Nic. The pecking order of strength had come into effect. Wyrvaust was stronger than Nic, and Marsol was stronger than Wyrvaust, and a good thing too. Marsol would find even HIS strength tested against Wyrvaust's fury. His body thrashed and arched while coiled like a fat spring as Marsol drug him back a safe distance from Nic, and when Wyrvaust whipped his head around to snap at Marsol's face, he stopped JUST short of biting

him when his master's face filled his dark brown eyes. Indeed his fangs and sharp teeth just barely scraped his skin before tears filled his eyes. He started rocking against Marsol and then turned around and embraced him to cover his throat with kisses before he whispered in his ear. "The pain... it hurts, it hurts..." After a moment of Marsol calming him, the cloud of chaos in his mind parted enough to let his cleverness out, and he whispered to Marsol again. "Now its beloved master must take him to the city, for it knows how to end the fiend now... Its thoughts remember... It knows how to kill it and free the bird from its cage of horror..." Wyrvaust's lips then sealed Marsol's in a seering kiss of fierce passion, his tongue tangling with Marsol's, and his mouth capturing his master's muscle with lustfully provocative suckles. A gasp escaped the demon when he broke the kiss, then taking Marsol by the hand, he led him over to Nic. "It is sorry it... the Raven is sorry he tried to eat him... feast of Nic's flesh... Nic has done good... very good..." He was trying very hard to get his his mind to connect with his speech. He had to talk to people soon... and needed them to understand.

He took a moment to think, and to ward the area against interlopers... from sight and sound seekers, and to block Mekkora from his mind, which was no easy task. He let go of his hand and paced a circle around he and Nic until the walls were raised, whereof he returned to Marsol and hugged him from behind. "Who will accompany him... to... to the city... make sure... what it... he says... is understood by them who need to comprehend what he says? There is might more than the fiend has in the guardians of the Castlegard..." The name he remembered Hawker's Fort best as. "He remembers that... it is... unlawful... all these things the beast does... taking its mate by force to cut and horror... horror..." No, he was not stable yet, but it did not matter to him. He would end this thing forever. He would show the great mages of the walled in city what has been done... Let them see his own memory of it... and then Mekkora's wards would be torn down, and he would be arrested, then imprisoned in a warded cell, and then executed, destroyed by those who know how, for his crimes against an innocent in their place of many. "If we should take vengeance into our hands... our souls would turn black with the hate he would fill us with... His death on our hands would stain us with his evil..." he hissed. What did he mean by that? They would commit on Mekkora horrors beyond that which he even did to Arilwen, and by doing so, lower themselves to his level.

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Wyvaust.... Wyrvaust... her frenzied mind chanted for him, as if it would make her handsome demon appear from thin air. Arilwen's sweet scent throbbed in waves into the room as her body was being torn apart. Once a safe haven for her son and a gift to her lover, now being sliced apart. Her skin being fingered like a fine silk only to be yanked away from her muscles, the Swan fell into a state of hardly being conscious, her eyes rolling back in her head and her body falling limp just as her organs were exposed. A tiny part of her mind was still present, but flooded in a lake of fire that licked and blistered her skin. Her fingers uncurled against the marble, stained with blood, and her hair stuck damply to the table for the same reason, and her lips were slightly parted, tiny wheezing gasps of air puffing in and out. Her body was temporarily shutting down from the unwelcome intrusion of so much pain. She had been so comfortable, so safe in her new life in the desert... and then this onslaught of terror.

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And Niculaie took that pounce without a blink and looked to the man atop him he would when give the chance confess of all that had happened, how he went to his clan and all that. Niculaie told them as he looked up at Wryvaust who pinned him there, he was a wild man, seething as far as Nic could tell... And when that vision was then forced upon him he let out a choked cry... "No, what the fuck... WHY?!" He cried as he shook his head, Arilwen was a good person, why then was his maker so cruel to her and Niculaie would close his fists and nodded to the demon when he demanded to know where he was. "Though know this, I do not tell you for the threat on my life, but I tell you because she does not deserve that and you are my friends, my family." He said and would indeed divulge where their home was. Nic though did not fight when the demon came at him again he would have let Wryvaust mangle him if only to let Wryvaust feel slightly better. Though Marsol intervened and it would be a moment later Niculaie sat up then and close his eyes as those visions were etched in his mind. "How could you..?" He dared ask aloud as Wryvaust went about doing some arcane trick, when he was told he did well, Nic just looked up a bit unsure of it all. "I will go with you, Wryvaust... And tell me, can you find Anna? Is she there as well?" He asked as he looked to the demon. Niculaie was quite broken.

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For a bitter moment this one whose eyes reflected sometimes Hell, and in rare moments Heaven, stiffened in the midst of bringing calm or trying to, to a mind that seemed to have snapped more profoundly than he had ever seen it before. Something was terribly wrong and it wasn't just the whole kidnapping of the girls either. His expression were harden into a scowl that brought out the darker shade in these red scales that framed his face around the hairline, the middle of his spine as well as the middle of his chest on down to God knew where. He hadn't been able to reach Arilwen nor Anna since their abduction, no amount of mind speak of anything was able to pierce whatever manner of tric-kery that had been used in taking them from their home in the first place. This however wasn't even the half of what made all those ruby tinged scales bristle and his gaze shift into that of a glare.

Wryvaust in all his grief could see his beloved through his innate abilities at looking through time and space itself, into that place where no mere mortal man could ever wish to reach unless they attain the kind of power humanity was never meant to have. With the exception of a few, of course. Call it the cold sinking feeling that never ceased to fail just before something catastrophic occurred. Call it intuition. It had happened as Wryvaust and Arilwen were being netted like fish from the oasis waters to be dragged ashore by Mekkora and his henchmen. It only happened though when it was the worst thing imaginable that was to come over the horizon. Not being able to know anything of Anna was starting to take its toll on the tall dark and gruesome one who very much adored children and babies especially, except when they chewed at his eyebrows. He wished to ask Wryvaust if he could bend these horrible hallucinations, these images, these truths, to see how well the human child fared but he didn't. No more was to be put onto another's shoulders if he could help it but it nagged at him still that cold feeling in his gut and it just would not go away. "We make for the city," he stated, abruptly standing as he turned away from Wryvaust to force that smoldering passageway of liquid-like flames into changing its current destination to that of the one that would bring justice

to Mekkor who never ceased in getting under Marsol's skin the way Sammael had.

That glare would descend on Niculaie and for a horrible second, it looked as though the dragon chieftan desired nothing more than to have the youthful demon's head on a silver platter with his skull as an ash tray. But as quickly as that anger-filled gaze had been on Nic, it moved away and off to the side. "Niculaie," came that cold as ice tone he got right before someone had their tongue cut out, "you may be of his blood, but your soul is of the sands. The desert, she will have blood spilt for penance. Be it his, yours, or mine." At that the tanned and now faintly scaled Marsol would bring his hands together as that closing gap in the make of turning the gateway of fire towards this city that housed such animals and horrors as Mekkor and his bastard ilk in it. Still, he knew what they would find on the other side even with the aid and justice of the law swinging its axe will not quiet this overwhelming sense of doom...

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All. And none. The black colored giant that moved at speeds too swift for even most of the immortals to follow on account that it had spent most of its despised life span in darkness to better know the difference between a leap of faith, and a step of tragedy. Brushing the ends of its wings over the tip top head of red curls, it was simply tickled pink at how every single time it drew near, the girl would never stop screaming. The noise would grow in volume until it felt so excited that for a split second it grew terribly sad at the simple fact that it had nor ever could take the shape of man. Had it this capability well, that was a horror story best left untold. In any case, the image of man disgusted Sgaithard almost as much as the idea of them. Bothersome pesky little things they were. Especially the men. Now the women, oh yes the shadow dragon was a big fan of the ladies. Unfortunately this meant that any male to cross its path would die instantly, save the two gentlemen in its lair but they had done something especially wrong to warrant that kind of treatment. The pricks thought they could save the kid on the chain. What a bunch of blithering idiots! It cackled something hideous as its bright lime green eyes narrowed on this girl-child and as it lowered its neck first and then its head to the cave floor, the smell of fear that radiated from her was so sweet, so delicious that it very much wished to share it with Mekkor but he was fairly sure that crafty fellow was already having a ball of his own with the delicious smelling Swan. A grunt was made when its day dreaming was ended at a rock being belted right into the crown of its head. It wasn't that it hurt, for he barely felt the damn thing but, it was that Anna even had the nerve to try escape when all was futile. "You reap what you sow little Anna pie." Then he jerked the girl up by her legs just so he could hold her upside down as that lengthy thin dark blue tongue slithered out from jagged teeth to flicker at Anna's face to further provoke shrieks of terror from her until she either fainted or grew deathly quiet again as she had when it ripped one of the cave prisoners apart and then built a sort of huge charm piece out of their internal organs to wear around his neck. "They take for granted the taste of fear. Fortunate for I, your child are ripe with it." That voice that made ice in one's veins snuck into the human mind and crowded out all other thoughts she might have had to fill her fully with the kind of dread that might very well kill her before the creature holding her upside would...

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Mekkor had been correct. Arilwen was getting a twisted lesson in how much pain her

body could handle, and how quickly it regenerated. No introductions before the Swan had been chained to the marble table, stripped and sliced. Mekkora had explained everything up until the angel blacked out. He was mildly surprised, as he had expected the bird to pass out sooner. Washing up, the tormenter had left the basement, leaving the angel alone in the cold room. Four hours later, after her body worked hard at regenerating muscle, the bird's fingertips, with their ragged nails now having grown back to the perfect length, twitched, causing the chains to shift slightly against the marble. A trembling breath was emitted, and those blue eyes, bloodshot and blurry, finally opened. It was so bright in the room that her eyes shut immediately, and her throat tried to wheeze out a sound of pain, but nothing came. She was doused in fire. She was in hell, she was certain of it. The dragon had been an angel of death, or a demon, and it had dragged her down into the bowls of hell. Her beautiful body was now bloody, her flesh trying to stitch back together over the exposed muscles that were so carefully exposed to the open air.

She was in pain, but finally became aware enough to realize that the man was not in the room with her. Had he taken a break, the dark demon that plagued her? Those thick lashes fluttered open again, almost afraid to, then looked around, squinting at the light. No, she was alone... Shifting her legs, the chains scraped across marble and she immediately froze, both from lightening bolts of pain shooting into her thighs and the sound. She didn't want to attract him to the possibility of more torture. The angel looked like an anatomy chart that showed a body with half muscle and half skin, and she closed her eyes as she began to weep. "Anna..." The girl's name was whispered into the thick air of the basement, tears running down the still intact cheeks of the bird. She had been taken by that demon from hell, flown off somewhere out of her reach, punished for some horrible sin that Arilwen herself had committed. "Oh God..." Her voice trembled, thick with agony, choking with sobs as she arched her face towards the ceiling. "Forgive me... forgive me... do not punish others for my wrong doing..." Her dry, cracked lips formed the words, and she began to sob more violently, the chains binding her wrists and ankles jerking and clanking against the marble table. "Please... deliver Anna... deliver her from the demons that have snatched her from her home on my account. Deliver her punishment to my shoulders instead..." The words were choked and strained, and trailed off into her weeping, the tears mixing with blood and forming in rivulets on the marble table. Arilwen-  
had now come to the understanding that she was not going to get out of this place, and her punishment was to be eternal. Snow White had been awoken, and she was a bloody mess.#

It took Wyrvaust nearly half an hour to come to the conclusion that the great mages of Hawkers Forte would need to be sought out and notified of what Mekkora was doing. Whether or not it was by Sammael's command, it was twisted and he had taken the Swan, not to mention Marsol's daughter. The wrath of the desert could be cruel when used correctly. Had Wyrvaust stopped for a moment, he would have realized how terrified he was to go to the city. The desert was his element, and EVERYTHING about Hawkers Forte made his mind collapse. No one understood him, and he felt terribly exposed. They could see his insanity. But his wife to be was trapped by a madman. His guts twisted into knots and he wanted to claw through his mind to those visions, to where Arilwen was, to grab the monster and destroy him, then take his desert princess in his arms and kiss away her blood and tears. But it was impossible, and not a bright way to go. Oh, and dear, sweet Anwarr. He was passed over to his father from Marsol, and the raven folded his tiny nymph into his arms and wept. Feeling his unrest, Anwarr began to wail, fists balled and tears flowing.

The child was soon delivered home, to the servant of the household that Wyrvaust had accepted, and warned that she would need to try and feed him alternative food. Finally, at Marsol's side, he would step through that gate, numb with rage and desperation. It seemed as if no part of their lives would ever be safe. #

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PRINCE OF DEMONS  
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The word excellent didnt even begin to describe the temporary displacement of a certain Belorian. Mild Satisfaction trickled into the coy ones expression from time to time as he had watched from wherever near or far that perch of his vantage point was, at how they picked him apart piece by piece until he was nearly done for. Although he did say what had to be said in Belorian's ear within that lightless imprisonment, it only spoke what was necessary at the time and nothing more. No need to gloat about something that had just begun now was there? After the summoned parties and participants dispersed or slunk back to where they had come from, and he too, leaving one of if not the most defiant of the Morning Stars children to his own devices, Satan would unwind himself from that semi crouched position he had gotten into after having the image of Eoghan finally disappear in his gate traveling to somewhere quite far from the here, and no doubt amongst people who would aid him in his ailments. Pondering over the quickness of something, he would wait for several more moments in the empty space by the cool waters of the creek bed, one thick muddy brown boot in and one out. By this time Helel would have found something to amuse himself with, for he was a restless one. It was a pity he could see the distrust in the Morning Star's eyes, no matter how sickeningly sweet the smiles he might or might not have given him. It wasnt that he could read Maelmorda like a book per say, but that his thoughts clearly wrote themselves sometimes without the clever fellow knowing it. When the Anduain leapt from this world into one where he would be most welcomed and missed, Sammael would not frown. His frown didnt crease and his mood would not dim in the least. That despair inducing, among other things, curse had its adaptations and it also had its tiny imprints of just where the afflicted had vanished to. It wouldnt track Eoghan exactly to within a foot of where he stood, cause that would have been preposterous in a way to him. It more or less lent a generalized hes pretty much not here idea. It was all he had instilled after all, none of those bells and whistles here. Sammael had not a shred of doubt that Belorian had friends in high places, and the somebody would figure out a way around his unpleasant situation. The Anduain was a popular one amongst the immortals and mortals alike, who wouldnt lift a hand to help the big fellow?

With a brief glance around, probably to disconcert what he wanted to be there and what couldnt, Sammael too would leave the little creek and smell of fresh grass and soil by way of a shadow gate. The forest scenery melted away behind him as he was deposited not at the door step of the tavern he had left a very confused and fresh Helel in, but at the front door of the desert. More precisely it was just sneeze away from the Desert Ravens lair and the gentle Swan within.

Time was of the essence, it had to be fast.

Still musing over just who or what the Morning Star was doing at that very moment, he would trudge down the shorter half of the dune he had come out of the gateway on top of, sliding down half way and then walking in an semi jogging pace



to the beginnings of the mouth to Wryvausts lair. Stopping however, not to cross the threshold or even come so much as three meters closer to the mouth of the gem encrusted cave, he would seek the sly clan demon out in those great spaces of An Morendor to ask him in the only way he could.

Just a whisper, 'Where for art thou Arilwen, in your company I am in dire need of.'

If the Swan didnt recognize his voice as it brushed across her mind quietly, he would ask her again but only if she didnt answer him or so much as come to the cave entrance to see.

'I know the last time we met it was dreadful. I promise I'll behave this time. Won't you come outside?' Of course she could refuse him. She could say no and ignore his requests of wanting to see her. Then again, would she? Unfolding his arms from across his thin brown hide covered chest, his hands would dip into the pockets of his breeches underneath the deer skin strip of grayish brown fur covering his abdomen. It wouldn't be long before Wryvaust or Marsol, or both showed up and sort of complicated matters. Until then though he would ask Arilwen nicely to come outside to talk to him, and that he wished to show her something. On one hand there was the high probability that the Nephalim would call to her demon lover and say to him that the man who had taken and then given back their babe was here in the now. She could very well cause quite the upheaval with but a tear shed for it to be heard by those desert creatures, wherever they may be. On the other hand though, she could always cooperate. Do the simple thing and just come outside. Save herself the trouble of bringing down the entire clan and their chieftain who would not be in the least bit happy to see Satan in his neck of the woods. If Arilwen choose to come out of her cozy nook in the world to see him, he would be sitting Indian style on a low flat rock at the bottom of the nearest sand dune. He would bid her a slow wave and a smile from his spot, waiting till she had grown just a smidgen comfortable with the fact that he was there, and Wryvaust was not, before he would unfold himself to stand and meander on over...

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Since the episode with the dragons, being snatched, taken to Sammael, birthing her son, having him stolen and returned... Arilwen had refused to step out of the cavernous hole she was harbored in with Wyrvaust. He had sworn to her, vehemently, that nothing would happen to her. She trusted him fully, however she refused to step outside into the sand. As a result, her sun lightened hair returned to its rich, chocolate shade and her skin grew pale, setting off her violet blue eyes. The demons of that occurance still haunted her, twisting in her guts, around her heart, into her mind, but it did not deter her from doting on her son and lover. Still, in the dark of the night, Wyrvaust had to feed his little dove sleepy tea that would numb her dreams away, or she would awaken with horrific screaming fits where she would lash out at him, her voice, which was usually sweet and soft, sounding like she was possessed by some demon. Dreams were a forceful thing. Still, in the morning, she would question Wyrvaust about the scratch marks on his chest and arms, and he would simply assure her that she had a bad dream.

Little Anwarr was growing strong. He was trying to blurt out words, but was doing a terrible job, much to the amusement of his father and mother. He had learned to crawl a bit too quickly for the Swan's taste, but she was proud of him, nonetheless.

The evening that Sammael decided to pay a little visit just so happened to be while

neither Marsol or the master of the household were there. Wyrvaust was out hunting, from what Arilwen recalled. She stayed alone with the housemaid and their son, perfectly content where she was. She was curled up on the massive bed in their chamber with Anwarr, working on his hand/eye coordination by making him crawl and wiggle after her fingers, which she would race across the bed when he was close. The child was getting upset and squawking at his mother before wobbling off on hands and knees to chase them again. It was then, at that moment, that she felt her entire body freeze up. Oh, she remember that voice. Every dulcet tone. As it brushed across her mind, she shuddered and those racing fingers died in the middle of the bed, Anwarr finally catching up to them and clamping his teething gums happily down on her delicate fingertips. Arilwen did not even flinch. He was outside...she could sense it. Swallowing, she scooped the baby up against her chest and slid from the bed, moving into the hall to find their servant. "Take Anwarr.." She said softly, her violet eyes holding deathly seriousness. "Go into one of the rooms and do not come out unless I come for you or Wyrvaust or Marsol comes for you..."

Once the girl was gone, Arilwen grabbed one of her deep blue silk robes and wrapped it tightly around her body, bare feet making their way out to the seating area. Swallowing, she stepped to the mouth of the cave and did not even let her toes pass out as her violet gaze swept out to see Sammael sitting cross legged at the base of a dune. Her heart clenched and she gritted her teeth, even when he waved and stood. She had to be brave and turn him away. Even if something would happen, she could call for Wyrvaust, right?

"Pardon my horrific manners..." She murmured cautiously. "...but something tells me you are not welcome here." It was short and to the point. That man had tortured her when taking her son and she could not dismiss it that easily. Taking a few steps out into the sand, she winced at the light that hit her eyes and she reached up to shade her eyes, squinting at him. "It would do you well to state your business quickly. Wyrvaust will return any moment and I do not wish to see a tangle."#

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Wyrvaust was on his way back to the lair. He had a fine pair of rabbits and another pair of desert pheasants strung over his shoulder which he had already dressed, plucked and skinned, saving the fur and feathers alike. He had also come across a patch of king's cactus which had a delicate flavor like cucumber but without the seeds and gelatinous goo inside. Wyrvaust was approaching from the west so entered the deep ravine which led to his cave's main entrance, the same miner's shaft which Sammael loitered outside of with his wife clinging to the edge of the timber and stone entrance. There would without a doubt be a row when Wyrvaust laid his dark eyes on Sammael. His first instinct would not go ignored and his first impulse was to attack Sammael without hesitation or restraint. One might even think he intended to kill the Lord of Acheron. Wyrvaust had never been sane, anyone who knew him could attest to that, and his reaction to certain situations was unpredictable. In this case he would not stop to think. He would react to every emotion and animal instinct which boiled up inside of him the instant he saw Sammael. It was the reflex of someone who was answering to a direct threat to everything that mattered to him. He did not consider how powerful Sammael was, or why he might be there. All he saw was the Lord of Mekkor, who had tortured his wife sadistically. All he saw was the enemy who taken their son and tortured his one and only true Lord, Anwarr... Marsol. He did not even allow time

for a greeting, friendly or otherwise. He had no sooner spotted him when, in a flash he had drawn his sword and lunged at the Prince of Demons in a blind eye blur of speed, bolts of lightning streaking from his blade like angry fingers of white heat as he phased back into view to sweep the blade with equal momentum of supernatural speed at Sammael's throat. The potential consequences of his actions held no weight with the meek demon who had suddenly grown fearless with fear and rage. Fear when turned into courage was a powerful motivator. Sammael was a threat; A threat to his wife, his son, and his chieftain. His last concern was himself.

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The lack of sunlight would be noticed with a slight narrowing of the eyes, as well as a heavy inward sigh. She was a pretty little thing, and why she kept herself or Wryvaust maybe had, all couped up in the caverns under the scorching sands was unfortunate. Not that he didnt sympathize with her reasoning at wanting nothing to do with the outside world now. It was only natural after what she had been put through, to hide away where no one could possibly get to her. He had not ordered the gruesome acts Mekkor had committed against Arilwen, but he had heard of them. Vaguely if that, seeing as the fate Mekkor had fallen into. He wouldnt interrupt her as she stated that he should make haste with his business here and be gone. Folding his arms loosely across his chest, he tried to make himself as least menacing or aggressive as possible in appearance. For her sake. It wouldnt do well if the Swan was scared off again and that would only complicate what he intended, with her help of course. And others. "Mmm, no. I wouldnt suppose I was welcome here either," he said, not sarcastically but plainly, "Ive come not for your beloved of your child. Nor have I come to do any of those nasty things you might be thinking." A mild point and a faint smile were made as he tilted his head upwards to look at the light that hurt her eyes so much a moment before his dark colored eyes lowered back to her own. "To take you out for lunch, is what I desire. But if sitting and eating fresh fruit and breads is not up to your liking then, by all means.. Deny it. We wouldnt be alone however, you can even bring your friend. The young lady, ohh.. What is her name, it eludes me." His right hand laid over his forehead as he squinted just a tad at the sand and started to pace a large circle around Arilwen. "Ahh, believe its Anna, is it not?" His brows rose in awaiting a response from Arilwen to see if he was right or if she would tell him that he wasnt. Which he wasnt. No sooner though had he gotten out a few other sentences of eating lunch with Arilwen and Anna at one of his old friends homes northern than he could have sworn he felt eyes on the both of them. Even Wryvaust's scent curled in the air long before his feline like agility spurred him down the sands and across the short distance to the opening of his home within the mines, sword aiming for Sammael's throat. The dark ones eyes would narrow on Arilwen a split second before his body would half turn to the side, simultaneously unsheathing the long thin bladed sword from his hip and bringing it up so that the hilt was level vertical with his face, to hopefully stop Wryvaust's sword for the moment in one loud high pitched clang of metal grating against metal. "Speak of the devil," he exclaimed in possibly more delighted tones than either Wryvaust or Arilwen would have liked. "We were just talking about you, and my goodness you havent gotten any sun too," he said, shaking his head not in mockery. It was the truth in a way. Wryvaust and Arilwen didnt look the same but, who would after having been in Hell only to escape it and find yourself in it yet again? With his right hand holding the hilt so close to his face, he would be somewhat putting himself into harms way by sliding his swords blade along Wryvaust so that he could come within arms reach of the clan demon to

wrap an arm around his slender frames shoulders and pull Wryvausts back to his chest. Both of their swords were still clashed in front of them only now they were directly in front of Wryvausts face. With Sammaels chin resting on his shoulder of course. So that when he spoke, the demon would hear him quite clearly, he said calmly, "Ive no quarrel with you brother, just your tongue and ears I am in need of. No harm shall befallen you or your most precious ones. This I give you my word."

Like before he had not harmed a hair on Arilwen's head. He had not really be all that cruel to Wryvaust either had he? However he had taken their child. Oh that one he would have to work on but the baby had been safe the entire time! Besides, in the short time he had held the begotten offspring of the demon and his female birdie, he had found the child cute in ways. Perhaps Maelmorda had been right after all...

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Perhaps Sammael was just chilling and intended no harm to Wyrvaust, his heart's possessor, Marsol, or his son, but the Desert Raven reacted as if on a threat against his entire world. In that moment Sammael paid a glance to the clan demon's wife, even in that instant, Wyrvaust would have been phasing out of that leap of blind eye haste, and in the time it took for Sammael to clasp his own blade and begin drawing it, the razor sharp edge of Wyrvaust's highly accelerated heavy scimitar, was slashing clean through the muscle and bone of Sammael's throat to decapitate his crown from his shoulders, even as the lightning which streaked from the blade in stunning fingers of heart stopping bolts coursed through his body in advance of, during, and after the blow. The promises he would have liked to make, the intentions he would have liked to express, were lost by the fact that Sammael had not responded to accelerated motion in kind with an equal or greater speed (which he was quite capable of). A shudder passed through Wyrvaust at the sound of Sammael's head hitting the sand. He backed away as his head rolled down the slope towards the lowest center of gravity in the gully. His hand shook and he dropped his sword on the ground then fell on his knees beside it to cover his face. It was not regret or grief he felt, but shock...Shock that his attack had actually succeeded, and soon-after solid resolve. Being an Adramelech clan demon, Wyrvaust knew better than anyone what demons were capable of. It suddenly dawned on him what he had just done. He had pit himself as Sammael's enemy. He did not wish his Prince to corrupt him, his son, his wife, or his chieftain. He had never stopped being a Neffari Priest. His attack was not finished. These thoughts flashed through his mind as he contacted the ground with his knees folded beneath him. Wyrvaust clasped his hands together, his brown knuckles bleeding white, bowed his head down as if in prayer, and called out to Arilwen..."Quickly...my love...Go below...quickly now!" and he whispered to her telepathically on a select path..."Do not let me enter, do not trust me, unless I speak things to you that only I would know." The demon then quickly commanded his wards (mentally) to reject him if his soul reflected a 'shadow' that was not his own. He began immediately then to harness the powers to attempt to excise Sammael's soul, and plunge it into Acheron. He had not the power to attempt destroying it and would not dare endeavor it if he could. (Wyrvaust Level 30 MA, Level 32 Priest, 19 Swordsman, 32 Bestial Combat)

Total power of Soul Plunge: (if he has time) 6 Aces, 7 successes = 37 + 30 Level Used x Ten = 670, +2 Arcane Knowledge, +2 Occult Knowledge, +41 Priest = 715 Total Power vs. Power of Sammael's Soul (36 d6 +10 HB).

Sparky Witnessed Rolls.

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Fruit. She could taste it. Arilwen's lips parted slightly and her body immediately relaxed. It was amazing that something so small could take her guard down. But it was the taste of it in her mouth...melon, apple, grape... And to top it off, he mentioned Anna's name. "A..Anna? She is alive and well?" Arilwen's violet eyes widened and she took another step from the shaft of the mine towards Sammael. It seemed that she could trust him, at least for now. And besides, she had feared Anna dead this entire time. She missed her female friend. "But I--" She was cut off at the sizzling crackle of unsheathed sword of her husband and lover. She managed to leap back in time as she saw the two go at each other. And still, she had to try and intervene. "Wyrvaust! Stop! He means no harm!" She tried to yell above the fighting. And still, somehow the fresh-from-hell Sammael managed to miss something. She had no idea WHAT, but it was done. A hand clamped over her mouth as she saw his head seared free from his body and hit the sand with a blank gaze. A choked scream sounded into her fingers and the brave lass immediately backed up into the mine doorway, clinging to it. She could only watch in terror as Wyrvaust collapsed to the sand and just as she grew brave enough to step forward, his urgent tones filled her mind. He was telling her to go inside and do not come out...or let him enter until she was certain he held no darkness. Arilwen never disputed him, so she turned and fled inside, the thick doors soon scraping shut. She found herself in the cooking area where she paced, looking stricken. No. No. Terrible things would happen. There would be retribution for Sammael's death, but by whom? Now more than ever, Arilwen feared for their lives. Turning, she fled back to find her son with the servant, and she scooped up his sleeping form, tucking him into her shoulder and burying her face in his dark mop of hair. Her mind was reeling. They had just gained an enemy that no one wanted. Living in fear had meant nothing yet... but it would turn that way very swiftly.

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There would be a moment where it all became as they say, clear as crystal. That brief split second just before the Swan had screamed, but right after the lightning that crackled down Wryvaust's blade shot through his entire body that there would be this faint curl to his lips. However that small gesture would be lost in and of his head being removed from his shoulders to tumble to the ground and begin its long wayward journey where it rolled to the center most low part of the gully. Where it stopped it was on its left side with this odd look in its eyes where it stared up at Arilwen. For whatever little time before the birdie fled from the mouth of the mine she had come to call a home back into its depths of gem encrusted darkness where she could cuddle her son close to her bosom and try to reassure herself that everything was going to be okay. That she could comfort herself perhaps in the tuff of dark curls and cooing sounds from the babe. Whereas Wryvaust on the other hand intended to send the recently beheaded Satan back to where he had just came from. What a pity that would be. Being separated from the body allowed the him to go from being slightly ticked off to something in the neck of the woods of rage. He would not give Wryvaust the chance though to rid the world of another kind of evil. Actually he wouldnt give Wryvaust more then one or two seconds after Arilwen had left him that the clan demons spell was attacked with every bit of that anger that seethed in that very soul he was trying to cast back into Hell. It was not subtle. It was not quiet. What came next wavered in the appearance of wisps of

black mist that curled up from the sand underneath Wryvaust's very knees. The sands were burning under the clever demon Priest true but that spell was the first and foremost of things to end for Sammael, for today that is. As one might feel the pull of physics from a fall, he did feel the beginnings of the plunge at his soul but that was as far as he let it go. In a roar his own abilities would rise up against the spell and wrap their invisible limbs around it and make quick work of tearing Wryvaust's incantation apart. He would break it down from the inside out. Sammael's own anger alone would trample the invoked magic as it tried to take him back, but it wasn't the only thing that led to the spell being thing that was picked apart piece by piece until the last remnants were scattered to the corporeal winds in a spray of Wryvaust's own blood. The source of said red liquid being spilled in the sands along side his own from the long red trail of blood his head had made, and the stump his body had gushed after hitting the ground, were the sets of teeth that tore into Wryvaust's backside. Teeth of something that had suffocated the life out of a human once. The image of scales, he had watched them glimmer in the sunlight as it did as was told. It was now as he called upon the image of said long ago slain creatures soul, taking up the form of it while he still cut into the last bits of the spell that had wanted to drag him back down under. The energy spent in not just stopping Wryvausts invoking but utterly destroying was by far more than necessary but he did it to prove a point. It was over kill to say the least. The excess of his own countering to the clan demon came out in the form of those black wisps of smoke from the sand under his knees, and then there were those teeth that sank into Wryvaust's back before he could realize he was not getting the upper hand in this. Something hissed from over the mans left shoulder, and should he be brave enough to look he would find that the set of five inch curved pearly white fangs that had just embedded themselves in him belonged to that of a rather large serpent that lay in a circular coil behind him where he was kneeling. Why must you make this difficult when I've not lifted a hand against you and yours, came that whisper into the tanned skinned ones mind via telepathy, those teeth sinking in further till they hit the bone that would be called a shoulder blade. In the blink of an eye a thirty-five foot body of a serpent slunk around the desert creature to bundle him up near strangulation and roll the both of them down the side of the sand dune until they came so very close to where his old head lie. The tip of the beast that now held Wryvaust wrapped up so tightly in the embrace of its olive hued scaled muscles prodded at the demons side a bit. The head serpent lifted upwards and in doing so, jerked Wryvaust up with it seeing as how its fangs were still in the mans shoulder. The form of a giant snake that Sammael had now forced himself to become as he had ripped into Wryvaust's spell to send his soul back, he now used to rip into the mans body like a hyena would a wounded lion. Except with twice the energy seeing as how Wryvaust was so much more than a lion. The three feet wide hide of scales would drag the Raven to the eastern side of the gully, only to roll him up and use him like a yo-yo in the act of lobbing him away in a high arch, only to slither underneath him with a quickness and catch the man by biting his side. Sand was kicked up in how far the creature had to rocket itself to the other side to entangle itself with the Raven. Rolling about to cover them both in clots of blood caked sand for surely Wryvaust wouldnt go down without a fight. Sammael wanted to see the extent of the clan demons rebellion to him. This toying would go on for as long as it amused him, for he was rather enjoying this childish feat. Which wouldnt be very long at all sadly. When enough of Wryvausts muscles and tendons had been ripped and bitten to the point that he had no use of his arms or legs, much less he couldnt even sit up from how badly Sammael had mangled his abdomen, it was then that the Ravens mind would be assaulted with horrible things that Sammael was more than happy to make a reality should he not listen to him now.

Things pertaining to the pain filled cries of those he loved. Faces wrought in misery of those he cared for. And at last as the serpent had spilled enough of Wryvausts blood into the sands from the countless bite marks that covered the exposed parts of his body, minus his face, he relented. Uncurling itself only by slight, the giant snake that Sammael had become would level its heated reptilian golden eyes on the clan demon. Mere inches away from the flickering blackened tongue of the serpent that held the beaten, battered and broken body of Wryvaust within the circle of itself, seeming to be debating on if it should indeed bite the mans face off for what he had done. Its mouth would open to reveal those sets of fangs that gleamed at Wryvaust like a pair of knives. Yet it did not bite him. More its tongue would slip outwards to lick over the right side of the demon Priests face to clean it of blood. This is not your time, for I need you too much to let you go, heh, he said in that way he had when he was about to do something terrible, and you just knew it was coming. As if what he had done up until then wasn't. The sun warmed the serpent that held Wryvaust, and in turn cocooned him in it as he was lifted and would feel himself being carried away from his home. His beloved and his son. Sammael would take Wryvaust with him to a certain small castle not far north of his home. A place where enemies were kept alive or tortured, or worse in its bowels. It was there Wryvaust would find that Sammael's anger would extend itself if he didn't submit. Although he only took the clan demon after having asked the man to call to his beloved, to which he had no doubt Wryvaust would refuse. Or he should, if he was smart. Then again that too, was a double edged sword.

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The Swan certainly did think she could find comfort in the scent and feel of her son...and for a few moments, she did. And then there was pain. Shockwaves of horrible pain that blasted through her so suddenly that her grip tightened on Anwarr and she let out a horrible shriek, sinking to the floor on her knees. Anwarr startled awake and began to wail, the servant rushing over to fall to her knees beside her mistress. The angel was feeling every inch and ounce of pain that Wyrvaust was experiencing. Something was wrong. He had told her to stay inside...but something was going terribly astray. Dumping Anwarr into the servant's arms, Arilwen collapsed to the floor on her belly, clawing at the rug for a moment before she managed to drag in a rasping breath, sweat breaking out at her hairline, a few of the dark tendrils clinging there. She had to help. Her back arched suddenly and she screamed as she forced her wings out, the beautiful stretches of soft feathers exploding from her skin and ripping through the back of her silk robe. The servant was terrified and ran to take the baby to his own bed before coming back to her mistress. But by then, she was gone. Arilwen had stumbled to her feet, her violet eyes flickering with worry and determination as she made her way through the lair, reaching that mining shaft that lead to the outside. The one she had been too fearful to exit for so long...and now today, when she had, things had crumbled. Bare feet moved to the heavy door, which she unbarred, her wings stretching exquisitely behind her, tensing if the need arose. The door cracked, then paused. There was no sound. The sun was setting on the horizon, scorching the desert sand with bright, beautiful colors. And amidst that beauty lay ruin. Wyrvust was gone. The sand had been kicked up in the gully, and Sammael's body still lay where it was left, some sand clinging to the locks of his hair and his bloody cheek. Arilwen's heart was fluttering like a bird in a cage, banging against her ribs. "Wyrvaust?" The whisper went softly into the gully, but there were no answers. "M..My love?" One more try, one more fail. He probably had to go somewhere for his spell...to get something from the wasteland...This is what she told

herself, but her gut was torn into shreds. Swallowing, she took a few more steps out into the gully, only after closing the door behind her so that the wards stayed in place.

Blood soaked the sand. Of course it did...the devil had his fucking head lopped off, but there seemed to be more...and she smelled that familiar spice of Wyrvaust's blood. That made her face drain of color. He had been wounded. This was not neat, like he had drained a bit of his blood for a spell. It was a mess here. "WYRVAUST!" His name suddenly tore from her throat, echoing into the gully and returning nothing. Panic began to set in. They were not in a good situation. The devil had been decapitated on their front porch...by her husband's hand. Could there BE a worse enemy? He had not thought about his actions before he put them into play. He never did in severe situations. His mind did not work that way. Arilwen refused to start crying. She could not help that way. Her bare feet worked over the edge of the gully as she bent to retrieve the lone head that stared blankly at her. She was trembling, but she lifted the edge of her robe to try and wipe the face free of blood and sand, then, in those same delicate hands, she returned it to the body that lay flat on its back, putting it exactly where it used to rest on his shoulders. She was trying to make amends, to cover up for what her husband had done so rashly. Still shaking, she gently pressed the neck back together, then knelt over her work, her hands coming to wrap his neck. She needed to at least put the body back together...perhaps he would forgive them then. Keeping those violet eyes, thick with dark lashes, open, Arilwen began to concentrate on the mess before her. There would be no soul in the body, from what she could guess, but what else could she do? At least he would see that someone made an effort. A soft whisper and a tensed jaw, and Arilwen's fingers worked gently over the bloodied neck. Slowly, ever so slowly, the flesh, bone and tendons began to work themselves back together. It would take nearly an hour, but the angel never shifted...her knees ground into the sand, as well as her bare toes, her form bent over the beheaded devil, her glossy wings stretching into the air. Finally...FINALLY... the last of the skin stitched together and Arilwen fell back into the sand, looking winded and exhausted. Dark circles underlined her eyes and she looked pale as cream. Not to mention, her hands were shaking. She still had not harbored her spells perfectly, and was still learning thanks to her husband, but eventually, she would have the strength not to be exhausted after such a task. Reaching one bloodied hand over, she used the back of her hand to press down on Sammael's eyelids, closing them so that he stopped staring at her. It unnerved her. But her work was far from done. Arilwen rose into the air with a burst of her wings, and she saw a trail, mixed with blood, leading out into the desert. She landed back beside the body after a moment, trying to regain her stamina. Wyrvaust was taken? It seemed that way, but to WHERE? Once her strength filtered back in, she could go search for him. Yes, the only reason she would venture out into that godforsaken desert was to find her lover. Still, being dead on her feet would not help. Moving to where some of their plants grew in the gully, Arilwen knelt and folded her wings down against her back, then plucked up some fresh cucumber-like buds, chewing slowly on them. Water and protein would help the fastest...

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Crossing the Line  
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It wouldn't take the Nephelim all that long to locate her demon lover, and the rather furious massive amount of olive scales that toted him along. He who was the



old friend of Marsol. He the beloved of Arilwen and the loving father of Anwaar. From the air it surely was a sight to behold. An abnormally large snake would have been an understatement. Satan's current image was that of a mammoth sized serpent with a bad attitude. All the while as it propelled itself in the fashion much like a sidewinder would, the beast hissed something about how this was a minor inconvenience but it was not directed towards Wryvaust. Oh no, the one Sammael was speaking to, out loud just for added extra flavor, was not even there at the time. Relating all that was transpiring thus far was what Sammael was doing, and it didn't take someone fluent in Japanese algebra to figure out just who he was talking to either...

Half an hour. That is all that the angel allotted herself to rest. The body of the devil healed and cleaned as carefully as possible, the sand kicked away, and a small dose of food and water taken in. The lair was sealed, the wards in place, and the angel was rising to her bare feet, taking flight in seconds, fire in her veins. The path stretched out into the dunes of the sand, blood dripping intermittently. She knew the blood...the warm, cinnamon scent. Soft, glossy wings beat viciously through the air as Arilwen cut through the wind currents, her chocolate hair streaming behind her. And this, she did not expect, the sight she came upon. Arilwen's violet eyes grew huge as they fell upon the sight of her beloved raven enclosed in the muscles and scales of a creature that froze her blood and brought terror to her heart. Ever since it had happened...the dragons...the wyrms...Anna's death. Everything that weighed so heavily on her heart...it now had hold of her husband. No bravery was found, but perhaps a bit of the madness passed on from her lover. Two living together for so long could do that at times. In a split second, the angel was torpedoing at the snake and at the last second, her legs swung out in front of her, one large whoosh of a backstroke to her wings, and her feet plowed into the back of its head if it did not dodge. She had no idea that the serpent was a form of the one who had just been beheaded. If the collision was met, she would feel the pain in her legs, but would deal a significant blow to the snake's head before tumbling to the sand. And aside from the pain, she would be back on her feet, wings arching to take flight again. No matter what it takes...

Cloak wrapped tight the form stood crouched on a dune outside the fortress, had caressing through the sand as he stared intently, his form hidden utterly by his spell. The sequester suppressed anything that would give him away, his form invisible, scent suppressed.. And his presence veiled for the time being, his body wrapped in a wollen cloak he had donned before his journey here, to this forsaken patch of hell. His face hidden save from his forehead to the middle of his nose, he watched.. Though his senses tingled with the sudden emergence of more powers, the one was faint, the other was.. Well like his angelic, then the last one was and overbearing powerful presence that the angel could recognize. Beneath his cloak he hid massive powerful wings and in hand a sword.. His angelic blade that he had intended to lay Marsol low with had it come to blows, but his eyes shifted to the other scene as he crept on toward it, to peer at the scene just as Arilwen arrived.. What in the blazes was an angelic creature doing in this hell? He nodded to himself.. Lucky for her he was here. Did Arilwen feel lucky?

Yet again someone was trying to "take his head" so to speak. This time though he was not in the mood for more people doing what they willed with his noodle. The Swan's scent alone he had picked up way before she had caught sight of limbering slim lined self, so that when she did her quiet little dive to dropkick him in the back of his head, it would instead roll sideways. Not in haste mind you but the

speed with which was used made it still tedious to follow with the naked eye. Those dantiy feet of the Nephelim would meet with sand instead of scales but the top of her head would get thoroughly molested by the end of his ridged muzzle nudged her forward. The bump was more then enough to make anyone stumble forward, but it had especially a little more push behind it to knock her off of her feet as his head then lowered to the ground so that his large goldish snake eyes could level with her own optics. "I do say," came that all too familiar voice where as the beasts mouth didn't open. His yap didn't even flap. Only his long black forked tongue flickered out of his mouth to taste the air seemingly here and there. "I could swear your trying to kill me Gorgeous," he said in that odd way of speaking he had now that he wasn't in his usual human visage. However much it might have appeared the large snake creature was looking only at Arilwen, it wasn't. He was also looking over her shoulder to the shadow of the castle built of clay and stone about half a mile or so ahead of them. And wouldn't you know it, the little patch of rock statues that someone was working on with a ribbon in their hair... A tune was hummed loudly without any regard to the two bronze skined female servents helping her move the heavy piles of rocks into columns and miniature figures of people, and then coating them thickly with white puddy clay from several of the buckets they had all carried out there. They would laugh to one another and say she had her head in the clouds again and didn't care that she was getting her clothes filthy again. But what did it matter? It wasn't like anyone was going to see her? Something about a flower and a flying away? With white smudged cheeks, the head of unruly red candy curls tilted upwards to the head of what she was trying to mold and what it really looked like. "His nose isn't right is it," she asked one of the servents that doubled as a guard for her. The older woman's name was Mildred, but she called her M for short. It annoyed the woman to no end but she never said anything about it. Anna was like a daughter to her just as much as she was to the other older woman, Bendii. Mildred shouted that she needed more clay over his cheeks to even out his facial structure but Anna would only laugh in reply as Bendii tripped over gardening rake Anna had left on the ground and the pot of boiling water flew out of her hands so commicaly, spilling all over Mildred's small spot of potatoes. Oh the storm of curses that erupted between them, to which Anna nearly fell off of her stool by the almost finished statue of clay she'd been carving on for a week now. "M, Bendii, please," she said as she set her scrapping tool down in the sand and hurried to try and stop the squabbling before it got out of hand and the two demon servents didn't speak to one another for a month. How could they have known something terrible was coming their way...?

Arilwen's teeth gritted as she felt herself miss...the snake knew she was coming. She tried to turn but the momentum was too great to twist her body in time. The angel hit the sand in a poof of grains and skidded into a rut. As she swiftly flipped over onto her back, dark chocolate strands clinging to her cheeks and lips, Arilwen's violet eyes fell on the golden eyes before her, and suddenly, she couldn't move, her toes curling into the sand. That black tongue flickered out over her head, into the air, as if tasting for something and then...that voice. "S...Sammael?" Her voice whispered, and she didn't dare move. All she could do was stare at him with her lips hanging open, her eyes as big as saucers. "I d..did not know it was you..." Her lovely gaze flickered to the man of her heart who was trapped limply within the confines of the muscles and scales that frightened her so. "P..Please...release the raven of my heart. He did not mean to..to hurt you. His mind..it goes to mad places many times..many times.." She was stammering, trying to plead with him, and all the while, she did not move. "Release him...I have healed your body. It lies in the gully, full once again. At..Atonement for his

mistake..." How far would begging get? Hopefully very far. Still, she was too terrified to follow the snake's gaze to the horizon ahead of them.

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Marcania watched the scene and growled he could easily hear them, and he did not take heart in what he heard either and found himself having to keep himself from jumping to soon. But he watched the snake, of course.. Sammael, that Snake. It was funny if you thought about it, he smirked beneath his little veil. The angel though was beyond disgusted, he did not want to see her begging for her lover from that beast.. The woman seemed vaguely familiar bit truthfully he could not put a face to the name. But no matter, electricity searing through his blade up and down he would then with haste shoot forward, a direct attack could be his best bet or the last nail in his coffin, the angel decided his route would be that of insuring the safety, he broke from his spell and appeared between the snake and the swan slashing through the air the veiled fellow would glare daggers at the snake.. "Stay back, what right do you have to do as you please.. do sit please you to make them suffer for your.. amusement?!" The angel demanded, those tones familiar to Sammael maybe, "Girl, get up.. Quickly!" Marcania said to her, as he kept those eyes pinned on the snake before him, large snake too..

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Oh he had missed that look in Arilwen's eyes, to tell the truth. It was like an early birthday present, someone once said, to see and not only hear someone beg for the life of another. One who didn't truly deserve them but just the same, they loved them in spite of it all. It would not show in the massive serpents eyes but he was amused all to hell. It wasn't deminished either by the sudden intrusion of the self righteous male angel whom he couldn't have forgotten with the help of God Himself even if he wanted to. The nerve they had he would mull over to himself as his head snapped backwards and that mouth would open quite widely to reveal the four sets of some odd feet long fangs that lined either side of his upper and lower jaws. The saliva that dripped down into the sand was not clear, but an unsightly brownish black substance that sizzled upon meeting the ground. The hissing he gave towards Marcania was anything but friendly, however he did not attack him. He didn't even so much as snap at him, although in that moment he would have nothing more then to tear the foolishly brave angel to bloody pieces and then devour every part of his being. Take him home again even and let him soak in the darkest reaches that he had there and leave him to rot in its corruption and deceit. The vile, it was the vile that would poison him and Sammael would have loved to watch every second of it. As he entertained these thoughts, he would say, curtly, "She begs for her own piece of mind, and this affair does not concern you. Off with you, for surely your friends are in more dire need of you than she." Friends? Ohhh, that must hurt Marc on some level right? The fact he had indeed abandoned his friends in a sense. Well, in many ways but that was neither here nor there. It was the only warning he would give Marcania, and if the angelic fellow didn't at least step out of the way or lower his sword well then there would be a nasty tussling between them that would end in death. Pure and simple. He had no time for Marc's declarations of good and evil. He had a world to take damnit! And he wasn't gettin' any younger. "The Lady and I have someone to see," he half hissed, half cooed as his snake head pointed downwards over Arilwen and then wavered upwards at the distance. Could she see it? Could the Nephelim see the small cozy castle of clay and stone ahead of them, nestled against a giant dune of rock? Or could she see the

three people in the circle of stones just out of earshot instead...? The arguing between the two demon motherly figures ended with one calling the other a two-legged goat eater, to which the other would receive having their skirt set on fire. "Oh my g-ahh! Bendii?!" Naturally she would rush to a bucket of water and toss the entire contents all over Mildred as Bendii sat back near a cactus and laughed herself half to death. Oh the glares the servants would give one another as Anna dropped to her knees and patted at the woman's legs to douse what little embers there were and in turn, burn her own goddamn hands in the process. "Oh ow, ow ow," she would mutter but continue to pat Mildred until the female demon would reach down to take hold of Anna's wrists and pull her to her feet. She told Anna fire did not bother her and that this was her element. Of course that meant little to Anna for she had no clue as to what she spoke of. The human was but a child compared to the two far older creatures that she was in the care of. Every so often they would tell her of their heritage but not enough for the poor thing to get the big picture. Once they even informed her of how Marsol had acquired them, and it horrified Anna to the point that she had locked herself up in her room for two weeks. Not speaking to a soul. It would seem her Father did certain things that she could and never would agree with. However, that did not mean she would love him any less. Even if she wasn't his kin, had never fought by his side, had never met anyone but Arilwen, Wyrvaust and a few select inhuman beasts that kept her company in the forms of humans. "I know, I know but... your clothing is.." Tears started to sting her eyes and whether it was from the fact that what Mildred was wearing was something Anna had hand swon for her many moons ago for her "birthday" or that her hands were now killing her was unclear. What did cheer her up however was the arabian looking demoness saying in hushed tones that she had news from Niculaie and that immeiantly took the edge off the burning sensation in her hans...

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Before she even got an answer from Sammael's snakish form, a sizzling racket appeared near her. An angel...another angel, and he was threatening Sammael. Was he MAD? If the snake tightened any more, Wyrvaust would be torn in two. "Please...be gentle with him..." She whispered, her eyes brimming suddenly with violet hued tears. How could he be gentle? Wyrvaust was a mess of blood and sand...and he was unconscious. The hardest part? Arilwen had never seen him so helpless looking. When the angel told her to stand, she did not move, terrified to even breathe...especially when those multitudes of huge teeth flashed out. Arilwen slammed her eyes shut and looked away, tears spilling down her cheeks. She could be eaten in a moment, but she wasn't. Who WAS this angel? Once her lids parted again, she saw Sammael's neck craning down over her, then motioning to the horizon. He was telling her to look. At this point, she had no choice but to listen. Violet, teary eyes blinked to clear, then turned over her shoulder. Three forms running about like madwomen, one a girl with uncontrollable red hair with a ribbon. A ribbon... "Anna?" Her whisper was slow.

As if she were in a dream. Anna, whose blood still stained her hands in her own mind. Rolling to her belly, the swan rolled onto her hands and knees, then launched up, her wings taking flight. Certainly Sam would know she was not leaving. Right to Anna she flew, and from that sunny sky descended an angel...whose bare feet thudded into the sand beside her, leaving two indents. "A..Anna?" Again, another whisper. She was stunned to speechlessness."

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Marcania put the sword between himself and the serpent, that black hearted devil, the prince of Acheron. Once an angel, what a joke.. He was a mockery, corrupted to the core Sammael was, a sadist. The sword held shook slightly but the courageous angelic would hold his ground then. "You seduced them, Cirgoth I could not help.. but Thane, poor Thane you corrupted him! I will not let you ruin another, I will not let you TAKE another to twist and blacken them." He stated loudly, Marcania was not at all happy with the way the demon belittled him with those insults and remarks. And of course the woman's only worry was her lover, and she was STILL on her ass, figures, she would need his help. Though at mention of another he would glare deeply.. "Monster!" He hissed at him, glancing to see the forms prancing about and then he would shake his head as he was caught between a rock and a hard place, he could not let Ammael have those other innocents, and he backed away then before massive wings spread, that light shining bright.. "Abandon this foolishness!" He demanded as he would then take flight after the nephilemand he would land grabbing her hand and moving toward the others, "We must make haste!" He said upon landing..:

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Satan knew the little tart wasn't leaving, and even if she was there wouldn't really be a place for her to go that he wouldn't find her. Contrary to what others might think. He really didn't have much in the form of words for Marcania or his actions that were expected. It wasn't suprising. He wouldn't even give answer or retort to the male angels rantings, but rather arch over him in this unnervingly fast slither as he carried Wryvaust encircled with the end of his tail, making a nice on and off bloody trail after himself from the wounds that Wryvaust hadn't healed from, if any. Although Arilwen landed right next to Anna, and Marcania in turn landed by her to grab her by the hand and implore them to leave this place, the large snake would not be so blunt about joining the little party. Sammael would form with his long body a complete circle around the rock garden and all that stood in it. He was that big afterall to stretch himself around the hundred and some odd feet or so diameter and still have a few to spare. He was slow in his encircling of them all, so as not to draw so much attention, at first. That and not to disrupt any sand because it would become bothersome being in a big cloud of it again, not that he would have cared. Once the end of his scaled nose met with the bundle Wryvaust was wrapped up in, he would turn his head inwards to watch the spectral. Enjoying the chance to see Marcania get slapped. Cause that was another reason he had hoped Marc was in the area. Heh. A blink or two was made as Mildred went stock still, and Bendii stopped laughing. "Wha," she started to saw as she looked from one to the other as they looked at the sky for several moments. Then she felt that thud in the ground next to her and it nearly made her jump. But before she could even squeek out some manner of suprise, Arilwen's voice made her twist sideways and yelp anyways. "Eek gad," she would exclaim as she almost tripped over her own feet. But then once her pale blues had settled over her friend she had not seen in quite some time, both arms would go up into the air as she half screamed, half cried, "ARILWEN!" Tackle? That was a good summing up of what would happen to the Swan as the human pounced her and clung to her like a cheap suit. Whereas the Birdie was clean, Anna had smudges of clay all over herself, to which she would smear over Arilwen's left cheek as she embraced her rather tightly. "Mercy be, it is you is it not, how did y-," again she would be stopped in mid sentence as a man landed in the same fashion as Arilwen just had, out of thin air! She was startled and loosened her grip on the Swan as Marcania grabbed her hand and begun to pull her away. Away?

No. He couldn't! "Unhand my friend!" In the next instance Anna's right hand would rise and give Marc a pretty painful slap across his face for laying his hands on Arilwen. It was the first time Anna had raised a hand to anyone. Actually, it was the first time Anna had been angry too. The urge just suddenly struck her and she couldn't help herself. She didn't know Marcania, and for him to be yelling that they needed to leave or go or, whatever it was he was yelling and try to take Arilwen with him? She had just gotten there for pete's sake.

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Anna would think as she tugged Arilwen from Marcania's side and then step in front of the Nephelim as though she was trying to protect her. Hah! The scene must have been killing Sammael inwardly from the sheer hallariousness of it all. The two demon servents would catch sight of Marc and in the blink of an eye they apparently had pulled their own respective short swords from either the air itself or from a place that no mere human could conceive. Aiming their points at Marc as though he were the enemy. And in a way he was. He was an angel. Arilwen was too but Anna seemed to know the woman so they let that slide cause they had watched her fly to them. Marcania on the other hand, well Anna had already expressed how she felt about him now hadn't she? As the scene unfolded and the two old demoness servents said that Marc would do well forget what ideas he had once had for the Lady and be on about his business. That is until Bendii caught sight of scales surrounding them...

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Arilwen stepped forward towards Anna, but then felt a hand clamp down on her. Her violet eyes snapped in shock through a mane of chocolate locks. That madman was grabbing her now? And trying to make her LEAVE the raven of her blood. During all of this, she did not even sense Sammael surrounding them in the courtyard...or the women servants that had recently been bickering. Anna latched onto her so suddenly that Arilwen's mind lost sense of Marc for a moment. Her free arm locked around the girl, breathing in her locks of wild, fiery hair. There was the scent...still the same. She smelled of the hot, dry wind... the open air, the heights and the depths of the world. And hell was about to be paid. She dropped Anna to her feet and gently pushed her away as the petite girl began to hop around like Bugs on crack, then suddenly, she bitchslapped Marc. Arilwen's violet eyes widened and she almost...ALMOST...started to cackle...if it weren't so inappropriate. Hey, she had filters, unlike Wyrvaust. Still, she could not help but note how adorable Anna was before slowly pushing her away, her body turning to face the male angel that clutched her hand, trying to pull her away. She then saw the servants, for the first time, raise their blades. Madness was about to explode. "STOP!" The Swan barely EVER raised her voice, but her hand flew up in the air to pause them. She then turned on Marc with a lethal look. "Perhaps you should check your sources before you barge into situations. Do you see that bloody mess?" She thrust the finger to where Wyrvaust was collapsed with the snake. "That..is my life...my husband. And nothing...NOTHING shall part me from him. Not death...not hell and demons..not the devil...and certainly...not...angels..." She hissed the S on the end of that last word, her free fingers tightening, the sand below them starting to ripple, grains starting to raise around them in some strange, reverse beaded curtain. "Leave us be before you cause harm to anyone here." And the last sentence, through gritted teeth.

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Marcania would then find himself struck harshly across the face and though stuck so firmly he did not let go, and Anna could not force him, truth told the angel was leaps and bounds stronger than them both, he sighed softly in annoyance as he would lick his lips then, and gritted his own teeth as many voices shot at him, most of a disapproving but these women, were foolish. "Christ and heaven, you people.." His wings would flutter a bit then as his free hand pulled his cloak off and tossed it aside and the stunning creature with Auburn locks would look to them as his wings flared wide out, and the powerful angelic creature breathed deeply as his angelic presence and that light.. To the sensibilities of demonic evil things the light was something they wanted to be far from, his presence increased at an alarming rate filling the area of ten foot radius before him, a commanding aura that would soothe the mind of those taken by it. He watched them a moment looking to the demons with those eyes as he then nodded to the castle, "Fetch your master, I dare say you will need him!" He hissed then grabbed Anna to have hold of her as he began to gather power into himself, that Angelic force was grand, he was planning for a leap..

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Wyrvaust was quite aware that he had it coming the moment Sammael retaliated. He had attempted to send him back to Hell. He did not resent him for retaliating, for defending himself as all things had a right to do. The pain was so extraordinary that he felt as if he had been squeezed out of one world and deposited in another by the sheer pressure of his agony. He has seen those black ribbons of smoky power rising out of the sand like snakes of jet ether and had attempted to rise only for those tendrils to coil him like serpents and hold him in place. He felt his power shattered and the backlash of it struck him with a blinding headache. He attempted to plunge himself into darkness but there sheer power which surmounted him blocked his gateway into the shadow zone. Eyes as brown as rain saturated earth rounded as scales began to materialize on those tendrils and he struggled in vain against the massive coils which radiated their tremendous power even before they had fully formed. His back arched and stiffened at once as those saber fangs impaled his back from behind, the searing heat of the acid which invaded his body indescribable as his lungs were pierced. His melodious voice reported over the desert in a scream which unleashed his pain, his voice strangling afterwards as he felt the crush of the giant serpent's coils and his lungs collapsing as the fangs tore from his back. He ebbed in and out of faintness but still registered those words of Sammael's...He did not lift a hand he said. "Took its beloved child...attempt to seduce its only ever love...tortured its most loved chieftain...and with seductive kindness the demon prince tried to woo our loyalty. My loyalty is to Anwarr and the Desert Swan alone!" His mind spun as he was lifted and lashed like a rag doll and half way across the desert he muttered in cracked vocalizations..."This is his due...his due for fear...for witless courage...Oh gods...what hath he done...What hath the Raven done?" He thought only of Arilwen, their son and of Marsol suffering his mistakes. "Ask its forgiveness he will not...He loves him as his prince...What mercy is there for such a deed as it committed in wrath terror of losing all which matters...Does it not see that it fears his powers of corruption? That he should? Love is not enough...No wish hath the Raven to serve Sammael, only Marsol...only he who he willingly pledged its life to." As the horrible agony endured it shattered his mind and the world faded into black and out of it as he was carried across the sand. "Forgive me..." he breathed as he felt his vital organs rupture from the crushing pressure and his life's crimson font bleed out of him. It was the three he loved and who returned that

love that he asked for forgiveness. By the time Arilwen arrived he was unconscious, his body unable to heal as the injuries Sammael inflicted on him overran his regenerative powers. Sammael held him just beyond the grasp of death where his soul might escape him as a child of Adramelech's line. Wyrvaust was completely oblivious to the events which took place as Sammael surrounded his beloved wife and the company her strange circumstances had delivered her to under the clever machinations of Sammael.

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Sporkitious: On one hand there was an angel trying to take away the current object of his attentions and on the other he felt the tingling sensation in the back of his head followed shortly by words from a certain prince and the urgency with which he spoke of. Oh bother he would think, amused at the very least that it had taken them this long to even seek him out. Of course, he hadn't sought out Maelmorda or anyone else ever since having gone to the desert alone now had he? All in time. He had to go alone, so as not to make it seem so obvious as to his intentions. And now here came Marciana, with his fancy pants. "It seems that is all you fluffy bastards are good for nowadays, phucking everything up as usual," came that thick low resonating hiss from the massive serpent whose mawl was barely cracked. Although, perhaps he wasn't using his mouth to speak? Such things would have been odd right? "Be gone," he hissed, while the end of his tail whipped forward not to impale Marciana, but to stab into the ground perhaps too close to the angelic fellows feet and thusly cause a small area around it along with Marciana to be displaced as they say. He would beat Marc to that whole gatewaying people out of the desert and port his ass out first, even if it was forced and it would more then likely be painful to Marciana if he didn't use the majority of his strength and abilities to shield himself from the ferocity of the leap. It was almost like being yanked into another place in the world by black straps of smokey shadows and then flung through and out the other side. To the naked eye Marciana would be abruptly pulled downwards into the black ugly pool that had spread across the sands around him, and thrown head first out of the other side of the gate and into a stone wall of some tavern so far from the desert, so very far. As Marc disappeared into that darkened pool of energies and then that pool too, would disapate into thin air and leave not a trace behind, the serpents head would lower and level its eyes at the two she-demon servents that skirted Anna away before the young thing had a chance to start screaming or even slap her hands over her face. Pity he thought as the only answer Lavoy got through that link was a not-so-curt, "If your Lord Maelmorda can keep his head about him then he is more then welcome to come to the desert..." Those golden reptilian optics thinned after where Marc had gone, and at how the older she-demons dragged Anna back inside. No doubt Marsol would be there soon when he catches wind of his tid bit human crying, maybe. His head lowered towards the ground slowly as he brought his gaze back to the Nephelim. "We might have company soon... In the meantime, where were we?"

Arilwen was nearly going to find out that she had an ugly side...one she would be frightened of later. Her fists were clenched and violet eyes were blazing as Marciana, the arrogant angel who did not stop to think, plunged in to grab both she and Anna by the wrists, giving a bellowed, soapbox speech about how he was going to flee away with them. "Let...us...GO." Arilwen ground out between her gritted pearly whites. She had managed to yank herself free and pry Anna's wrist away just as Sammael decided -

that he, as well, was sick of the angel, Arilwen swept an arm around Anna's slight



frame and pulled her away just as that blackness opened and consumed the annoying angel. Anna seemed so massively freaked out that she clung to her, but before the swan could react, her two counterparts hauled her ass inside and slammed the door. Great. Here she was, alone with the three things she feared most: The desert, things with scales, and a wounded husband. As Sam's yellow eyes swung down to meet her, Arilwen began to tremble once more, but tried to straighten her shoulders to make her look proud and strong. She was coming off as a frightened child, unbeknownst to her. "Y...You must let Wyrvaust go. He was...n...not in his right mind when he attacked you. You...you can go back to your original body...I have healed you. Please...accept my atonement for his mistake."

His black forked tongue would slip out, giving off the appearance that he was tasting the air as any snake might be perceived to, when he actually wasn't. Not the air anyway. Just her. The coils around Wyrvaust would lessen and slowly the clan demons beat up frame would slide unhurried like into the sand where he would lay on his back. "If you have it in you, gentle one, it might be best to mend your demon lover now," he told her, or maybe he was actually speaking to her via telepathy? It was questionable.

Sometimes his mouth twitched or opened wider but then again at other times it was shut. He would move his head to lay his underside against the cooling sands as the sun was setting again. Casting that brilliant froath of reds and orange hues to blanket the world in its afterglow. So very much like an explosion of light and fire all mixed. Even in the twilight and fading hours, the faint glow his eyes had during the day, only intensified as night was approaching. The end of his tail would come to prod lightly

at the back of Arilwen's heels as he regarded her with quiet calculation and a growing appreciation of her body alone, not to mention everything else about her. "Did you want to fight him?"

Arilwen's thick lashes parted in shock as she saw Sammael actually begin to let Wyrvaust go. As soon as he slipped to the sand, the swan wanted to run to him, to throw her arms around him...but she stood there, stock still, unmoving. The sound of his voice filling her mind stunned her, but she swallowed against her dry throat and nodded, then hurried forward on bare feet to fall to her knees beside Wyrvaust. The hardest part would be finding the energy to heal her lover. She was still a bit drained from mending Sammael's body back together. Still, one hand came to smoothly cover Wyrvaust's bloody brow, the other to press to his belly, her soft wings lowering to cover his body as much as possible. She made soft, gentle whispers over him for a moment, then willed her energy, her health, her strength into him. As the angel felt the tickle of Sammael's tail against her feet, she jerked her feet away and dug them into the sand, squiggling them away from him. The girl was ticklish? Apparently. Her violet eyes lifted to Sammael as she pushed the sleeve of her robe back on her arm, baring it free. "The angel? Yes. His attempt was to take me from Wyrvaust. I would not allow it." Her voice was soft, back to normal now, and she lifted her wrist to Wyrvaust's mouth. Gently using her free fingers to pry his lips open, she sliced her wrist on his teeth, then pressed the wound into him. This was going to drain her faster, but heal him more effectively. Once she could confirm that the sweet blood was leaking down his throat, her tired eyes lifted to Sammael once more. "Of all people, certainly you know how it feels when your mind and soul are set on something. You refuse to give up...especially for the arrogance of others."

He would not hinder her in any way, merely he would settle his long thick scaled

beasty self around her in a slightly closer circle so that nothing really would distract her. That is if she could get past the twenty foot tall wall of muscles that moved every so often when he breathed. Did Satan breath? The scent that choaked the air when she cut her wrist to better heal her beloved, and yet weaken herself at the same time, tempted him towards inappropriate thoughts and acts. However he kept all those little ideas to himself for the time being. No use in scaring the female when she was only doing what she was meant to. For everyone did so. "But of course," he said, and half hissed faintly as those black pupils thinned to their vertical slits no thicker than a human child's arm, that being the eerie size proportion of just how large Sammael was in his current visage. He would only speak again if she said something. If not, he would remain silent for awhile. The serpent who could be viewed from over head by the creatures that inhabited the skies, if any, and kept their distance from such an aura of despair..

Arilwen slowly began to pale as her blood coursed into her lover, becoming his own lifeblood again. Ever so gradually, Wyrvaust's insides would begin to knit together, pulling back every fiber from the mushy mess they had ended up in and forming back into organs. She could feel it...she could feel his inner strength building. Her free fingers lifted, ignoring the fact that Sammael was closer now more than ever, and began massaging her arm, squeezing the blood out as fast as it would pump. Wyrvaust would return to his normal color, in the face and lips, the wounds on his back knitting together as well. It would still take some time for him to awaken and be alert, but finally, Arilwen knew she could not provide any more blood this soon. She wrenched her arm free and fell back on the sand, panting, soaked with sweat. She felt so weak that she wanted to lie down with her lover here in the middle of the desert, cover the two with her wings, and slip into sweet oblivion.

The scene was like out of a romance novel, well a really screwed up one where the good guy wins in the end, gets the girl, and then he dies. As he waited, listening to the internal workings of the Nephelim and her Demon, a part of him knew this would not last. Not if Maelmorda was coming there to state that he remove what Sammael more then just a little knew he was going to demand of. It was the only thing really worth coming after him for now. That or perhaps the Morning Star missed Satan's tongue or sense of humor? As Arilwen jerked herself free of Wyrvaust, so that she would spill no more of her blood for him, she would not fall completely into the sand. Her upper half would find what it flopped backwards onto was a coil of Sammael's, and how it was not cold, but warm. "What was He thinking when he made your kind, I wonder," he said as she was gathered up to lay on top of the smoother side of his bestial body, Wyrvaust too would be picked up. But not bundled as he had been before. More, the Raven was gathered in the same way the mother of his child was, slow and genteel like and raised a little off the ground as Satan had to fold his lengthy ass up a bit to bring them both closer to his face. A hill of olive scales is what one might call the sight...

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What was He thinking when he made them? Arilwen had asked herself the same question millions of times, but tried not to tear her mind apart. No matter how she was made, nor why...she had been dumped on Wyrvaust's front porch..and it had given her purpose. The Swan's eyes closed for a moment as she felt herself being lifted against the hard scales of Sammael, but was surprised to find them warm and

inviting. She did not answer his question, only managed to keep her fluttering eyelashes open long enough to watch him lift Wyrvaust in the same fashion. "Thank you..." The soft whisper leaked out just as her lashes closed, and the birdie went limp, falling fast asleep from the weakness and bloodloss of her day.

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Date: 12:03 PM Dec 12, 2007  
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And Marcania looked at the form of Arilwen when she yanked free, he of course let the girls go, and would hiss as he felt like these girls were.. Blind. "Fool! Do you so eagerly wish to damn yourself?! You think Sammael will not ask for a price?" He asked, then got a bit of a laugh as he felt the choking grasp of that spell that was meaning to tear him from this physical plane, to push him through that gateway, and by sheer will power he managed to resist the dark grasp as he looked at Arilwen, with a deep frown. "I won't let you condemn yourself, you read things with irrational mind clouded by love, I do not blame you. But take heart.." Then he was stuffed down with a scream, unable to resist anymore, and he was plunged into the vacuum. His howl of anger would fade, the angel was enraged as he spilled into the inn. Falling he smashed down onto a table and it fell over spilling him through patrons their chairs breaking under his weight, Marcania though got up quickly sword had been dispensed, as well, tip down in the floor some feet away he grabbed the sword and tore it free. "Damn you, devil!" Wings spread out filling the room with an intense light as he gathered his power, the presence radiating inducing the creatures within with an awe that would keep them from interfering and send evil creatures fleeing, it was brief though, for the angel was gone in an instant.

Just as Arilwen had thanked Sammael, which mind you Marcania would have found to be a pretty silly thing to do as he touched down in the sands. He had made a promise though, to Arilwen, he would protect her, even if she resented him.. He would aid her. Weaving together a seizure gate, he unleashed that arcane power that would blaze to life about the small Nephelim and then tendrils of archaic power would wrap about her, pulling her into the magic hole. Her form was drawn into the hole and dispensed in the haven Cirgoth had made for them, and any angel who would ever need protection. Cirgoth had lost his way, his purpose, Marcania vowed he would not. Then Marcania pounced, with and accelerated speed he would blink out of existence, well that's what the eyes would think, though not even a blink of time was spent before Marcania slammed into the serpentine form, his blade sank to the tip, as his blade of elements though would be used to inflict with something that would be kin to poison to a creature of darkness like Sammael.. "Does my lord Sammael remember what it was like before his heart was swallowed in darkness?" He hissed as his blade was using the element of light, to convert that dark power within Sammael, to light. Using the devil's own evil against him. Well that was the plan anyways. Though Thanas would blink as he saw the form of Arilwen dropped onto the couch he had been laying on napping, ouch! She might not look it, but when you were not expecting it, she felt kinda heavy! The creature off innocence would then squirm from under her and moved across the floor.. "Who are you?" Thane demanded, though his tones were soft, he recognized her though, "Oh--Arilwen? How did you get here?" Thane had thought he was alone.

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Marcania Gate Seizure Roll - Power of 261  
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Wyrvaust felt dazed and disoriented when he finally came around. He did not betray his awareness at first, but lie perfectly still as he listened to the voices around him. It was all he could do not to shudder when Sammael's suave yet chilling tones of honied peril reached his ears. The clan demon could tell that his health had been fully restored and could still smell the scent of his beloved wife's blood on the air. He could also feel the scales of Sammael's coils curled lightly around him, even tenderly, where before he had all but crushed the life out of him. His gaze then shore open in slits to behold of Arilwen who lie nestled against him in those glossy, jeweled coils him. His gaze then thinned beneath a knitted brow as he felt the air charge around him and a second later his brown eyes leaped wide and round as Arilwen was seized by a force he could feel as well as see the aura of. Seizing his wife at once in a bear hugging grip; he barked a string of fluid and rapid commands which his mind blazoned like a storm. His own power exploded outward from him even as he was still speaking and shredded the forces of Marcania's gate, and hence another power forked out to create a Dead Magic Zone in a two hundred yard radius around them. No magic and elements could be cast within the zone. The zone would last until Wyrvaust dispelled it, or until someone defeated his power. As Arilwen was unconscious when he cast the spell, she would not feel the strange tingling and brief sense of vertigo the rest of them would feel.

When Marcania attacked Sammael, the demon growled furiously and with his eyes aflame, the demon speared Marcania with his eyes. "Dare you try to steal my wife! To attack the Prince of Acheron! Stand for it the Raven shall not! Of no concern is this affair of ours to thee! A personal matter this is between the Raven, his family, and Prince Desert Wind! Slew his human form it did and failed to send him back to his Kingdom. What punishment awaits the demon ranger and shaman is not for the interfering bird to say! Go you back to your nest before I slay you and use your feathers to stuff my beloved's pillow! No second warning shall I give the trespasser who invades his master's lands and business!" Wyrvaust was obviously enraged and held tight to Arilwen all the while he spoke. Having to contend with Sammael was enough without having to have to guard his wife from a meddling angel he did not trust as far as he could throw Sammael in his titan snake form. Watching the angel with dagger eyes he pressed kisses to Arilwen's brow as he drew on his shamanistic abilities and the desert around them to recover the stamina he had spent and to revitalize his wife as well. The ring he wore, an abysmal ring of warding (LoD of 391), allowed the Raven to use magic within a dead zone. As soon as his stamina was recovered, he silently cast an unseen and cloaked shield around Arilwen and Anna which would prevent Marcania and anyone he did not select for bypass, from laying a hand on either one of them. It would also protect them against energies of any kind if they stepped outside the dead magic zone. The moment Arilwen awoke, Wyrvaust smiled to her with a sweetness and warmth which his defied the situation he and his wife were in. "Beloved swan of the desert...Here in these coils of might are we, better cradled by Satan than divided. Together we must remain." He could not bear the thought of being without her.

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Active Negative Force Command - Power Shred - Necromancy, Wyrvaust Special  
Power of 375 succeeds vs. Gate Seizure

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Dead Magic Zone, Abysmal Seal - Abyssmancy - LoD of 378 to bypass

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Resilient Sphere of Arrest - Sorcery - Protects Arilwen and Anna from physical  
contact and arcane - Contact Bypass Selection - Himself, Sam, Marsol, Anna, Arilwen  
can contact spheres, LoD of 378 to bypass

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Had Wyrvaust not awoken when he did, Arilwen would have been yanked through that mighty gate and fallen unconscious into the same room with Thane. And then, she would have gone mad, screaming, attacking him, demanding that he take her to the desert...or send her back. Luckily though, the Raven's arms locked around her like steel bands, her relaxed facial features rolling to rest against his neck, under his chin. When she finally DID start to stir, she felt groggy and hazy, but her energy was quickly returning. Her violet eyes fluttered open and focused on the Raven of her heart, to which her lips melted into a sleepy smile. "There is no need for attacking the Lord Sammael..for I already did..." What? Dear sweet Angel-cakes had attacked a snake that huge?! "I did not know it was him.." She explained sheepishly, now more alert, but looking embarrassed. "I saw the Raven of my world in danger and I flew at him. I may have scared him momentarily with my rage, but it was temporary..." Har har. Little cute birdie scaring the big snake? Not hardly. Sammael would find that hilarious. Starting to uncurl herself, Arilwen's stiff wings stretched out behind her, then she rolled her head to take it all in. The massive snake lord was still there, and the impertinent angel. Arilwen's violet eyes narrowed to vicious slits and she leapt away from her lover, immediately flying at Marc. "YOU TRIED TO TAKE ME FROM MY LIFE! MY RAVEN!" She was going to try to kill him...if she could get her hands on him.

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Maelmorda kissed and embraced his dear wife and then stepped away from her momentarily as the shadowy fissure of Lavoy's gate yawned open to invite his journey to meet with Sammael. His gaze weighed her attentively for an interval and then his lips tugged into a complacent smile. "Trust me Galaxy," he stated tenderly. He could tell she was dubious and brushing a stray lock of curling gold from her cheek his gaze averted to Lavoy, and with a deep bow of thanks he marched through the penumbra to lapse between stone walls and hot sand. He felt Corwyn's shadow at his back as he stepped out of the cool gateway into the blazing heat of the desert. A hand swept upward to shade his eyes from the glaring gaze of the sun. A faint smile etched his lips as his jade green eyes settled on the supine massiveness of Sammael's form. What should he find when they approached the throng but a conflict? A pretty nephelim in a state of violent outrage was lunging at a fallen angel. Like it or not, Marcania was fallen. He was not in Yajmha's kingdom of Haman anymore now was he? The devil laughed when Wyrvaust threw up a wall of force between the two and his pretty wife slammed into the wall before he retrieved her and pulled her back to the safety of Sammael's smooth, immense coils. Wyrvaust whispered to his beloved a reminder that he was giving the angel a chance to retreat before they made a banquet of him. "Seems we have come into a bit of fun," he said to Corwyn as he paid him a glance and a subtle wink. He strode across the rippling sands of the wind swept desert to meet his reigning son. When he joined the Prince of Demons his hand met his scales flush to brush against them with tantalizing affection until he reached the reptilian head to gaze into Sammael's serpentine eyes. He knelt down and bowed to him to show him the proper respect; an act of etiquette and common courtly protocol the others surrounding him seemed to disregard. The look he paid Corwyn urged him to follow his example.

"Dear Prince Sammael. It has been a long time since I have seen you in such a magnificent vessel." His tones were seductive in their appreciation of his marvelous snake form. The Morning Star then stood and gestured towards Corwyn with

a sweep of his hand. "I give you my son Corwyn, My Lord," he introduced. Once that was out of the way he curled an arm around Sammael's throat with affection and whispered into the tunnel of his flat ear. "I am hoping, My Lord, that as I have freed you of Acheron's confines, that you shall honor me with a favor in return. This curse you have challenged me with is most aggravating. I cannot hope to achieve even the simplest objectives. Why I can barely walk without tripping over my own feet or robes. Surely you realize that I could have asked another with the power to do so to remove this hex, but I prefer to be freed of it by you out of respect and love. Have I not been a loyal and attentive servant to you?" His tones would reach Sammael's ears alone for his voice was as much a silent whisper as it was telepathic. He knew better than to broach such matters in the witness of others without Sammael's express command to speak openly.

If Sammael refused to break the curse an aggravated tick would tug at Maelmorda's inviting lips and he would point out that whatever Sammael's objective for the curse was, he could simply ask it of him, for if it was something he could not ask for, then his goal for the curse would not be achieved at all. Meanwhile, as he waited for Sammael's response, his gaze absorbed the others in Sammael's company. A brow rose slightly as his intense eyes absorbed the others in his liege lord's company. The sight of Wyrvaust was a familiar one but the others were strangers to Lucifer. Despite this he could smell Belorian in Arilwen. Another bastard of Belorian, how interesting. Not one of them but Sammael and Wyrvaust would even know who Maelmorda was. Marcania would not recognize him either for his memory of any acquaintance in the Upper Kingdom would have long been forgotten by him and Maelmorda did not appear or feel the same either. "I can see you and Wyrvaust have things well under hand here, My Lord, but if you would like me to relieve you of the bother of this angel which ruffles the feathers of your company I shall be happy to play with him," he grinned. ~"That is if the curse is removed,"~ he added telepathically. He could not take on a rattle snake without getting bit while cursed with black luck. Not that such poison would harm him, it would simply give him a buzz, but that was not the point. If Sammael ordered him to tangle with Marcania while cursed, Lucifer would give it his best shot, but it would not be pretty for Maelmorda and it would certainly set Lucifer at odds with his prince. Hopefully Corwyn would lend him a hand in that case, heh.

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Arilwen's rage was bubbling in her veins. She had nearly been taken from Wyrvaust against her will. Nothing had ever shaken her so badly. However, when she lunged for Marciana, she slammed into an invisible wall. Letting out a soft cry, she stumbled backwards. However, before she could fall, Wyrvaust had her wrapped back up in her arms, back where she had woken, whispering against her ear that there was a REASON that angel was not being attacked at the moment. Arilwen was shaking, her rage turning into fear when suddenly, two others joined her that she never had seen. Her violet eyes misted and she lanced her husband with them. "A caged bird is not always unhappy...aching to be free..." She spilled in her fierce tones, her voice nearly trembling. "I want to be home...with my husband and son... not amongst the company of strangers and theives. We must go from this place now." And it seemed that Arilwen was just about on the brink of some type of mental breakdown. She pulled from Wyrvaust's arms and stood, but reached down to grab his hand, trying to force him to stand as well and follow. "We must GO now!" Her voice was starting to grow louder and tears began to spill down her pale cheeks. She could see how this other man that had just arrived kept glancing knowingly at her, as if

he recognized her, but could not quite place it. Arilwen had never met her father, she also had no clue who he was...or that this man knew him. Digging her bare feet into the sand to plant herself, Arilwen continued her rising tirade. Finally, she let go of Wyrvaust's hand and spun on heel to stalk to Sammael, barging into a conversation she heard nothing of. "My lord Sammael! PLEASE! Let us return home. I swear that you shall never see my face again! I cannot swear the same for my Raven, but I fear what may happen if we cannot leave this moment!" The bird was shaking violently, tears flowing, her fingernails dug into her palms. Things were unraveling.

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Date: 12:23 AM Dec 16, 2007  
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Corwyn couldn't say exactly what had prompted him to tag along after his father in such a split-second decision. Curiosity, maybe. Boredom. Perhaps that worried look on his mother's face that made him think he ought to go play chaperone with his father, especially in his present cursed state. Unsure of his final destination, though, he would step into the gate moments after his father, to emerge on the other side and come face to face with (surprise of surprises!) a splendid conflict. And a bloody huge serpent. Not nice. Snakes in general were okay with Corwyn. But ones that looked like he'd make a lovely meal for them? Not so much.

Corwyn glanced sidelong at his father at the comment that they'd stumbled upon a bit of fun. He had to admit, it was certainly more interesting than bumping around home. And with that thought in mind, he answered that statement with a flash of white teeth.

He would follow after Maelmorda as they approached the group, though he hung back a little. Come on, he wasn't nearly as confident as his father in approaching the serpent, especially. Still, not too far from his father, he would quite gracefully sink into a properly respectful bow, following Maelmorda's lead. Corwyn so rarely got to bow to anyone, it was surprising he still remembered how. He would remain silent as his father spoke to the other, though his blue eyes were quite alertly watching, hinting that he had his ears pricked for any word he could catch. He would spare a glance towards the other people gathered, but since none of them seemed especially familiar, he would return his gaze to watch his father. He seemed ready enough to step in if anything went in a direction he didn't like.

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Date: 11:50 AM Dec 19, 2007  
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When his beloved Arilwen began to come apart, Wyrvaust embraced her tightly and shut his eyes tight as a hiss exuded between his teeth. His gaze then shot open to spear Sammael intensely after paying a glance at Maelmorda. It was so...odd to witness him behaving as a servant rather than the lord he was born to be. It did not feel right at all and unsettled Wyrvaust. It truly did feel as if the world had been turned upside down, and Arilwen seemed to sense it without having a clue just who Maelmorda really was. When his gaze locked on Sammael he addressed him with all the pieces of his heart spilling out to the Prince of Demons. "Here in the lap of his protective helix of jeweled scales languish we, as the great serpent of Acheron coils us now almost tenderly. If in innocence came the dark Prince, why

would he come at all to the secret and secluded domain of the Raven and his family? Mad is he as its wife claims, yea, but only in despair and terror of what may come with thy advent. What can be thy agenda and how shall I hope thy desires to circumvent? If truly ye wish our love and fealty to be thine, then take us not from ourselves, our home, and the service of the only chieftain I have ever desired to be defined by. Corrupt not our hearts and souls...thee who with ferocity and vengeance rivaled the rebels of Haman only to become one with the fallen, and the leader of them. Be just and follow thee shall we all." Wyrvaust stood then in the center of those massive coils, carrying Arilwen with him embraced in his arms. "Let us walk away, and see the Prince of Acheron and its many we shall again, as loyal advocates and friends. Hold us as prisoners of thy might, and kill the Raven ye must as surely as day becometh night."

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Maelmorda witnessed the pleas of the nephalim and her strangely poetic clan demon mate with attentive interest. His gaze fell in the way of Sammael and he was tempted to speak on behalf of Wyrvaust but held his tongue. Anything he might attempt would only backfire on him somehow. His gaze diverted to study Corwyn and with a faint smile he waved him over and as his son arrived at his side he draped an arm around his shoulder. He was patient, and Sammael would reply to his request when he had settled his prior engagement. "Corwyn, the demon there who speaks is Wyrvaust Amed'Dumhal Allamaa, the desert Raven. He is a clan demon and shaman of chaos. I am not acquainted with his beautiful mate, albeit her blood carries the scent of someone who is quite familiar to us both." That bit of information did not slip out accidentally, but for Sammael's, and perhaps for Arilwen's benefit. Why everyone should know who their father was, particularly if their father was one as noteworthy as Belorian was. "Will you do the honor of introducing us to the Nephalim, Lord Prince Sammael?"

If asked what he implied, Lucifer would smile and swing his arms out expressively. "Why she is the daughter of Belorian. Had I faculty of my power I could explain just how that came about, the obvious union of he and her mother aside," he chortled. Mischief was in Maelmorda's blood. He simply could not help himself.

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Date: 11:50 AM Dec 19, 2007

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Corwyn would step forward as he was beckoned to do so by Maelmorda, coming to stand by his father's side, to have an arm draped around his shoulder. He would listen with rapt attention as his father pointed out who those gathered were. He arched one blonde brow, though, at Maelmorda's remark on who the lady was.

"What do you mean, the scent of someone familiar?" Corwyn, it seemed, was not so in tune with his senses, since he picked up no such scent. Then again, he'd grown quite used to not picking up on such things, given that he barely blinked now when someone commented on his own particular scent. He would look vaguely surprised as that statement was explained. Hell, Belorian did tend to get around.

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The head of the serpent would lower near the sand as he felt an arm loop around



some of his neck, but not entirely all of it. For he was a bit of a monster now wasn't he? No attention was spared to any one soul for very long, for his gaze had this odd way of encompassing them all when his head was canted to the side at a certain angle. It was starting to irritate him as the angel came at him, sword drawn, aiming for his head again probably. Although at this sudden change in the atmosphere, due completely to Wryvaust and his area of expertise, Marcania would only succeed in getting four sets of fang-like teeth embedded into his right shoulder and a fifth set buried into his gut. Whether the enlarged serpent that had been holding the Raven and his Swan had to indeed mirror this hastening in speeds or simply be the quicker naturally didn't matter. What did was that the male angel would feel every bit of his annoyance at his interfering with how many times he would tear out a chunk of flesh or bone from the angelic one's body. Half of Marcania's collar bone was bitten out and four of his ribs would be crushed just on account of Sammael rolling over onto him, and then dragging him along the ground a little ways away from the group of gathered souls. Still being not out of ear shot, and hardly out of sight, the tangle that Marcania would get caught up in appeared quite the painful one, if not felt. To every thrust or swipe, Sammael wouldn't only dodge, but reciprocate in twice the blows and blood loss. To every hit landed by the fallen angel, be it by luck or charity, Marcania would have a part of his body bitten, ripped, or crushed. This bloody display of insanity would only last several minutes and no longer though. As much as he would have delighted in mere small talk with the Morning Star, Corwyn, Wryvaust and Arilwen, and continue to beat the shit out of Marcania until he was a gurgling mess of incoherent twitches and muscle spasms, those slit pupils burned like coals when he felt the faintest belt of something hard in his right temple. Eh? There it was again! But now from the left side. Was someone serious in their death wish? One had to wonder as the snake's head swiveled round to see older women on either side of him holding piles of small rocks and pebbles in their gathered aprons. Both were not of human blood, or maybe they had once been. They surely did not smell it now as their eyes glared at Sammael with every intention of stoning him? As if that wasn't bad enough, he could see out of the corner of his eye a head of red zipping past Corwyn, just from behind the Morning Star to where perhaps Marcania lay or stand. It just kept getting better didn't it? Those coils that had been winding into tight springs now released and the end result was blood spilling over the desert sands in one nasty spray. The scene being viewed from above would have been that of an unsettlingly large snake ripping into a woman who appeared to be in her mid-fifties, removing her throat for starters. Was it Bendi that Satan now tore to pieces, literally? It was so quick the way he unwound himself from Marc and the dark brown stained sands they both had tussled in, to pounce and wrap the more-than-ready-to-die she-demon servant. Slamming them both into the ground where dirt and rock flew everywhere, while at the same time that he bit into this female that was only doing as she was told, the rest of himself would lash out to latch onto the second one and yank her off of her feet and into the heap of withering scales and flailing limbs. The sight was truly horrific if not for the howls of pain then for the pieces of flesh that were tossed outwards here and there. Then one had to realize that the screaming was not coming from the two she-demon servants that had been charged as their punishment for crimes that they had been convicted of ages past, to safeguard someone, but from that someone they had been sentenced to keep safe. It was Anna that was screaming where she was trying to pick Marc up from the ground or, help him walk if he could still stand with only having his right leg to stand on, seeing as how from his left knee down was missing. Maybe Arilwen was stronger in her will to cope with horrible things. Maybe the raven had taught her how to get past that. Perhaps even Wryvaust wouldn't get sick to his stomach as the human female did now at having watched from

a distance what the massive snake creature did to the crazy angel guy, and now to her friends? Pity she didnt know to the extent of Mildreds and Bendis loyalties to Marsol, for they now expressed them as they distracted the seething body of scales and distain by hitting him with rocks, and then dying gruesome deaths from it. Had someone asked the two mid-wives though they would have not changed their minds given a second chance. It was a risky thing what they did, and they hoped that their ends would be answered by Wryvausts old friend coming if not now then sooner once he heard the cries of the human he had grown very fond of over the years. There had been words exchanged before Satan had come to the hot sands of the Raven and his Swans home. A deal of sorts had been struck and it was being honored, or, it would have been had Wryvaust not gone and lost his head. This was not a place for a mere mortal to be. And yet there one was, plain as day. Covered from head to toe in dried clay and bits of rumble from the lessons previous during the wee morning hours that day. Those pale blues would stare wide at how the two older women were cut down, and then cut up so to speak. Sammael was picky when it came to food but, there was a certain flavor to meat that tried to rebel against you that was just so sweet. Anna would try to help Marc up, seeing as how Arilwen was now safe with her beloved and away from this thing that had been fighting with him, but it was not to Arilwen that she would look to for help. Rather those sheltered eyes would jump from her face, to Wryvaust, and then to Maelmordas for a brief second before they settled on Corwyns, if she could even see him that is amongst all the sand flying around. She didnt say anything. Merely looked at the son of Lucifer over her shoulder, and knowing she had met him before even for that short time at the tavern, somewhere far from here. A place that smell like moist dirt and fresh grass, she remembered that much. But she hadnt seen Yorek since then. If Corwyn was here, perhaps Yorek was too? If Corwyn recalled the unruly head of red and pale complexion, then he might place her now tanned one at having been brought back home. Would he remember her? Would he even try to tell her that this wasnt her fight and to move away from Marcania? Or would he help her in her futile struggle against something that was beyond her understanding. Reality was a biitch though, and it did not deter the fact that Satan had just killed two clan demons of Marsols, eaten most of them, and was not arching upwards and wanting some more Marc pie. If anyone, anyone at all cared two fractions about the female by the angels side they would tell her to leave him. Of course, the faint sound in the air wouldnt distract anyone except the Morning Star perhaps. For everyone knew that was the sound wings made just before being pulled to the body, for a nose dive...

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Arilwen's violet eyes shot open in shock as Marc attacked Sammael, and all was going to get worse for him, it seemed. Her arms circled Wyrvaust's neck ever so tightly as he held her up off of the ground as she watched in horror. Had Sammael done some of the same things to Wyrvaust when he had been taken? Luckily for Arilwen, the once woosy birdie had been on hunts with the demon and had seen the nastiest of guttings. However, the scream that exploded when the women were attacked made the angel's back go stiff, exploding with goosebumps at the sound. Anna. It was a heartbreaking scene to see the red-haired pixie go streaking across the sand to fall at Marc's side, trying to help him up. It was useless. Arilwen turned her gaze to Wyvaust, then slowly slid out of his arms, squeezing his wrist to ensure him that it was okay. Everyone here knew that Sammael would not hurt Arilwen. Errr...or at least that is what she hoped. As her bare feet touched the sand they started to close the distance between her friend and her, clean sand turning to blood-caked mud. "Anna..." She said softly, tensing slightly under

Sammael's shadow. He had the power to do that to her too. What was stopping him? A snake could love a bird, but where would they live?

"Anna." It was more firm this time, Arilwen calmly locking her violet eyes on the girl as she grew more hysterical. Her arms and chest were smeared with blood. "Come here." The bird had been hysterical just minutes before, but now she had Anna to keep calm. Finally, she reached out and snatched the girl by the slender arm and hauled her away from the bloody mess, yanking her against her chest. She tucked Anna's red hair under her chin and slowly made her way backwards, taking her from the bloody pit, speaking softly and gently. "Listen to me. Come stand by me, okay? Maybe in a bit you can come and see Anwarr. He misses you. He is crawling, you know." She was murmuring to her like a soothing mother, stroking her back as she finally landed beside Wyrvaust again, keeping her face against her chest so that she could not see the carnage. Anna had doted Anwarr like mad, so Arilwen was hoping to fill her mind with images of the baby instead of the gore. Violet eyes lifted quietly to Sammael, watching him wordlessly. Now what?

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The conversations and exchanges of words from Maelmorda and Wyrvaust did not come during the conflict of course but would mingle with the silence which would come before the storm exploded to unleash the fury of Sammael and the rivalry he contended with. That wall of force Arilwen had collided with had been withdrawn the moment his wife was safe in his arms again...at least momentarily. During that engagement Wyrvaust stood protectively by Arilwen, the words he had spoken previously seeming to have been picked up by the wind and scattered over the desert like so much sand in an ocean of sand. Despair struck him as he witnessed the carnage that followed and projecting his mind outward he called for the dragons, called for Marsol. Wyrvaust had gone and done it now for sure. He had summoned the Hell Raptors, not so much against Sammael as to protect what remained of Marsol's servants...That is how the Raven counted it in any event. It was too little too late nevertheless, but perhaps not for Marsol's fortress and the others who were still sheltered there. Balancing himself between his stamina and exercising his powers by breathing in the life force of the desert around him as needed, he continued silently to weave protective forces. He sealed the fortress so that those servants and advocates of Marsol's within did not involve themselves in a futile attempt to drive off or kill something that was too incredible and dangerous for them to comprehend. The ring on his finger emitted a black aura which bled into twilight blue and a sort of refraction extended from the ring to whatever thing he targeted as each pocket of magic was formulated. It was subtle unless you stared right at the ring from close range and the refraction imitated the heat waves so commonplace in the desert. Anna like Arilwen was protected by the shield momentarily, even in that dead zone, but if they acted in violence against anyone the shields would be disjoined. The ring he wore projected his power from himself to those he used his arts on to create a magic pocket around them within an arcane void just as it did the doors and windows of the fortress. The ring caused his powers to bypass the void in otherwords.

Wyrvaust let Arilwen go when she urged him to do just that, and as she moved off to join Anna, Wyrvaust walked across the sands into the eye of the storm. When the dragons came his voice lifted like thunder to resound over the desert and silence even the screams of agony. "Surround the serpent and guard!!" he blazoned to the great dragons as they plummeted towards the ground one by one or in groups of three

and five from the plane of blue sky above them, their scales glistening like gems forged of fire in the hot sun which they relished. Sammael was powerful, yes, but even he had enough respect for dragons to know that he could not take on the entire tribe and get away with his life. Even he would be daunted by the possibility of being ganged by Hell Raptors. With them came Cirgoth.

"Cease all violence!" Wyrvaust roared. "The King of the Desert comes, and it is for him to decide the fate of us all! This is his domain! Anwarr shall meet the Prince of Acheron and decide whether peace, violence, or strife follows each and every one of us!" His gaze fell raptly on Sammael. "Even thee, my Prince," he stressed. "For the red dragon tribe answers only to him, and to the Raven in his absence." In stating this Sammael would know that had it been Wyrvaust's wish, he could have commanded the dragons to attack him. Instead the dragons surrounded him in a tight ring, titans circumscribing a titan with Wyrvaust's small form standing a stone's throw from the main bulk of Sammael's supine body. Marsol knew he could trust Wyrvaust to be wise and responsible with the authority he invested in him where the dragons were concerned. Dragons which also trusted Wyrvaust. He had not been reckless with them yet. Indeed it was Wyrvaust's duty to summon them in light of Marsol's servants coming to harm. Had it not gone so far, then perhaps the matter could have stayed between Wyrvaust and Sammael, but it had surpassed that prospect.

Maelmorda had indeed identified that sound of flapping wings and knew exactly what it meant. Had he been able to he would have extended a warning to Sammael, but as he had left Corwyn's side to race across the sand with the intention of doing just that, he had tripped over his robes and fallen flat on his face. He could not have warned him telepathically for his own mind would have only backfired on him and given him a ringing headache and no more. When Maelmorda picked himself up he spat at the grit in his mouth and brushed the sand off of his black robes of silk he waved at Sammael and pointed towards the sky, but Sammael was rather distracted, what with all the crunching and tearing apart of bodies. His eyes lifted to the sky to follow the forms which went from crimson specs and splashes to grow larger and larger until they dominated the atmosphere. A brow raised and his gaze shifted to follow Corwyn as he went to assist the ladies...He was valiant like that, a true hero and gentleman at heart. Maelmorda took pause at the top of a low dune that had been half smashed by Sammael's tail. There he watched as the dragons dropped from the sky to surround Sammael, cutting off all retreat. The Morning Star blew a breath and folded his arms across his chest. Wyrvaust had guts when he finally got up the nerve, and yet Maelmorda knew that he would rather have taken his wife and fled the scene altogether. His love for Marsol gave him the courage to stand fast. Blowing a long breath, Maelmorda boldly stalked over to the ring of dragons, and lifting his gaze on the oldest, most temperamental, and slyest of the wyrms, he cleared his throat loudly and shouted at the beast, so that it would hear him clearly. "I am with Lord Sammael, so do permit me to join him at the center!"

The dragon stared at the small form and thinned its eyes as he inhaled a deep breath of the devil's scent. "Whose side does the Morning Star stand on...Is he not the guardian of Marsol?" Krigaheth's gruff voice having a puzzled quality to it.

"I stand on both their sides!" Maelmorda waved his hands as he declared this. "Now let me stand with Sammael that I may talk to he and Marsol when the desert King arrives." Ancient Fury crowded against the dragon abreast of him to make a gap for Maelmorda to pass through. Maelmorda dipped his head to the dragon and walked

between them with as little anxiety as one passing through a door, and approached Sammael to stand beside him where his body joined his throat. A brow rose slightly as another human form squeezed past the press of dragons and his gaze followed the auburn haired angel curiously.

Cirgoth had felt the powerful bonds Sammael had tied him up so neatly with the moment he had arrived, only the sight of the Desert Wind in that tremendous snake had confused him immensely. It was when Wyrvaust had named him as Sammael that Cirgoth's bewilder was dismissed and no sooner had Maelmorda settled in place at the Prince's side than Cirgoth pushed through the ring of dragons and raced across the sand to meet Sammael. Asogdan had tried to snag the angel but the angel slipped through his large claws and dashed over to Sammael before the dragon could stop him. The dragon knew that Marsol would not be pleased. When they had left the oasis they had all been lounging around to answer Wyrvaust's call, Cirgoth had been with them, and had tagged along in case he could lend aid. Cirgoth often sought adventure, and had hunted quite a few Alamascan since returning to Marsol, at times tracking and slaying the soulless ones in company of Marsol. They were tasty treats for a dragon or demon and Marsol was both. Cirgoth had not expected the powerful and uncontrollable feelings he had for Sammael to be rekindled by the mere presence of the great demon, and having that intense love...intense passion and longing suddenly spilling over in himself again shattered his wits entirely. Cirgoth's presence there would complicate matters without a doubt. Proof lie in the way he recklessly and fearlessly threw himself at Sammael to embrace that huge form of his. "Sammael! Oh Lord Prince, how I have missed you!" Yes, Sammael had him bound that tightly to himself, that not even his snake form daunted Cirgoth's immense love, fondness, and attraction to Sammael, nevermind the many eyes which gazed at the spectacle Cirgoth made of himself.

Seeing Cirgoth attach himself so immediately to Sammael, Wyrvaust scowled darkly. "Cirgoth! Get thee away from there!" he demanded the angel as if he were a child.

"Fuck you, Wyrvaust!" was Cirgoth's reply. He could not help it, he was overwhelmed with his need to be with Sammael in any way possible.

Wyrvaust gritted his teeth and snorted an angry breath. Cirgoth was going to make a bloody mess of things to be sure, he feared. He wanted peace...always strove for it, but Cirgoth would make that damn difficult. "Release him of your bond, Sammael! Else I fear this situation shall end in carnage! Please, for the good of us all, the Prince of Demons included, release him!" If Sammael agreed to release Cirgoth of his bonds, Wyrvaust would withdraw the dead zone so that Sammael could shatter or revoke his bonds with Cirgoth. And here came Marsol...With the advent of Cirgoth; Wyrvaust exercised another feat of power and plunged Anna, Corwyn, and Arilwen into a shadow gate which delivered them to the fountain room in the depth of his underground lair. Let the son of Lucifer look after the women there, in relative safety. Safety was always relative.

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Arilwen was nearly passed out, however she had managed to stay alert enough of her surroundings. She felt Anna come to her, kneeling, pulling her partially onto her lap with her scrawny arms. Her violet eyes, blurry in vision, lifted to that mass of fiery hair and blue eyes. She felt so drained that she wanted to slip into oblivion for days, but too much was going on for her to do that now. This was a day

of nightmares, not only for Arilwen, but for Anna. The last time that they had experienced the desert and dragons, they had been snatched away. And here came the calvary. Arilwen heard their wings, the snorting of the air from their nasal cavities... she immediately forced her limp body to roll over, her robe tangling around her legs, and she peered upwards to see them landing. Her gaze swiveled in panic to Wyrvaust, who seemed to be taking control of the situation. If the dragons were coming, Marsol would not be far behind. "W..We have to leave..." Arilwen whispered, but she stayed where she was. Wyrvaust had taught her that when she was in the presence of the dragons, she was to bow. Well, she was already on the ground, but she lowered her head slightly, her mind racing. She was not going to dare getting up, so her fingers snaked over to curl into Anna's dirty shirt sleeve.

They didn't have to wait long. Anna, Arilwen and Corwyn were plunged suddenly into a gate, seized into that strange vertigo feeling, finally dumped onto the floor in the fountain room of their lair. It immediately smelled familiar. Arilwen rolled over, her head spinning, and she pushed herself upwards, clinging to the lip of the fountain for help. Once she was standing, she looked across the fountain at Corwyn, both girls silent at first. "Who...who are you?" She was not afraid, really. Wyrvaust would not send someone dangerous with them to his home. Arilwen looked then to Anna, who looked very shaken...not to mention dirty. This was her home as well, she couldn't just sit there. "Make yourself comfortable." She nodded to Corwyn. "We are going to go bathe and change...and check on my son. Please don't leave. We are here for a reason." She then took Anna's arm and escorted her back into their main bathing chamber where she began to fill the pool with water. "You are safe here. Marsol will be pleased to keep you here. Just do not leave, okay?" She motioned for Anna to undress, Arilwen immediately stripping and climbing into the water. The bath would be fast, but effective, and as soon as the two were cleaned up, Arilwen climbed out and fetched herself a deep indigo silk robe, giving Anna an emerald green one.

Arilwen sorely missed Anwarr, so she went into the back to let the servant know she could sleep, and she scooped her son up into her arms, littering him with kisses. "Hello sweet pea..." She murmured against his cheek, grinning when he blurbled at her and drooled on her shoulder. Bringing her back out into the main sitting room where Corwyn and Anna were, she smiled and leaned down to dump the baby into Anna's arms. If anyone could soothe Anna, it would be Anwarr. Anwarr's eyes grew big as he recognized her red hair, screeched happily, drooled on himself and reached up to grab a fistful. Arilwen watched them, then settled her exhausted body into a chair and closed her eyes. She wanted to sleep, but couldn't let herself. "Now, we wait..." She murmured.

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Corwyn looked none too happy to have been plunged into the gate. He had been watching the whole spectacle more as an observer than actually having any involvement. And the moment he seperates himself from his father to lend a hand to the ladies, like the gentleman he was? Seperated. Plunged through a gate, and now he had no idea where he was. The whole reason he had been tagging along with his father was to keep an eye on him and make sure he didn't get him into trouble, given that nasty curse, but here he was in an entirely different location.

He sighed, though, and looked around. Chin up, right? He realized that one of the ladies was looking at him a little suspiciously, and he helt up his hands in a sort

of "I come in peace" gesture. "Ahh, my name's Corwyn. Son of Maelmorda, the man I arrived with. I'm harmless, no worries." Well, mostly harmless. He could be plenty mean if he wanted, but he tended to be kind to most of the women he met...hated hurting ladies. After all, he'd been raised to respect them, hadn't he? He flashed them what he hoped was a disarming grin, though a hint of wariness still lingered in his expression. He knew enough ladies who could kick his arse if they felt threatened that he wasn't about to completely let his guard down around one he didn't know. Still, he remembered Anna...and Anna seemed to trust her, so he wasn't too worried.

He would make himself as comfortable as possible in the sitting room, but he seemed to keep bouncing up out of his seat and pacing the room restlessly, occasionally taking a lean against a wall or perching on the edge of a chair. He perked up when he saw the lady return with a baby. He loved children...had a ball with his twin brothers, at the age they were now. Though he did worry at what they would be like when they started to walk. "How old?" He asked, indicating the baby. "Absolutely adorable baby. What's its name?" He seemed to welcome the distraction from his own thoughts.

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Arilwen seemed to physically relax when Corwyn asked about Anwarr. His smile seemed genuine. The baby was a lot less chubby than the last time Anna saw him. He was now crawling around like a demon. Currently, he was plopped in Anna's lap, babbling to her as he propped his bare feet up on the crook of her arm and played with her hair. Arilwen seemed to weigh Corwyn's question, then frowned. "I am not sure how old he is. Aging in this world is strange. It is different for different types of people..." That seemed to unnerve her a little. Still, when she heard Anwarr shriek, she laughed. He was taking the end of the belt on Anna's robe and pushing it over his eyes, peeking out around it and giggling. "He is trying to hide from you. He likes that game now." Her attention soon returned to Corwyn. "His name is Anwarr, after our Lord Marsol." Marsol. Marsol would be there..out in the desert with the dragons...and Sammael. She feared for her husband, for his land...and for herself. Sammael seemed on the hunt, and she was not sure what for. Sighing, she rose and slowly paced the room, toying with the edges of the tables or the flowers she had put out, which were tiny flowers from some type of cactus here. "I hate sitting here, waiting." She finally groaned, throwing her hands up in the air. "I want to sleep, but I don't dare sleep. Not at a time like this. The desert is suddenly exploding, and I have no idea why." This land had always been strange to Arilwen, but she stayed because she knew that Wyrvaust could survive no where else. At least not in a healthy way. That is why she never ventured out without him or unless it was necessary. "I wish I could turn into a giant dragon and just go sit on them until they calm down." This was grumbled mostly to herself when she finally returned to flop down in her chair.

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Anna's memory of that short time span of days leading up to her death was very foggy. Why she didn't know, for the events had been very important. She knew they must have been, because she had ended up somewhere made of wood and it smelled like wet dirt. Such was the description she used for the outer lands, the places not of the desert or barren terrain she had grown up in. Had Mekkora been there, she wouldn't have recalled his face either. But the dragon she still awoke gasping for air in

the middle of the night from. The black fiend that had carried Arilwen and her off and somehow delivered the beautiful Nephelim into the clutches of a mad man. Panic constricted her heart as she felt the air around them suddenly grow terribly hot and then the sun was blotted out by wings. They were all swallowed up in the ancient beast's shadows and their towering forms nearly sent the human into cardiac arrest. Had they drawn any closer to her friend and she, she might have had a seizure and died a second time. A.. Arilwen, came that shaking whisper as her pale blues went wide and then she crowded herself beside Arilwen with her face hidden in the crook of her own left arm, and her right hand dug into the dirt by the other woman's knee. Her breathing came in quick short gasps as the hair on the back of her neck stood on end from the sound of fire being belched and the non-too subtle quake in the ground caused by the tribe's landing. With eyes closed she whispered some kind of prayer, being in the middle of it even as Wryvaust took the three into a plunge where they would be deposited in his home far from there. The dizzying sensation that gateway traveling gave her was staggering. However before any real terror could set in she felt the sand underneath her hands and bare feet much cooler than she remembered, and then her stomach turned as Arilwen and Corwyn spoke. Rolling over onto her side where she would press her mouth to her shoulder a moment, and then she was quickly standing and looking for something. She was going to be sick whether Arilwen pointed out a bathroom or not. The latter was the case as Anna stumbled to the furthest corner and then relieved her stomach of its contents by vomiting. Hands on knees and all, the only thing keeping her from falling forward to hit her face on the wall was the fact that her knees didn't buckle. She didn't do well with this whole motion sickness feeling. On earth a roller coaster might have killed her. It would be a few minutes before she could collect herself enough to come back to the middle of the room, or where Arilwen was. "I'm so sorry Arilwen, I (hiccup) will clean it up," she said, laying a hand over her chest a second before sitting on the ground. Yet she would only sit for a minute or two before Arilwen hauled her off to the bathing chambers. For what? A bath? A bath! The youth would rather have sat and soaked in the water then be up and about, and Arilwen probably felt the same. No matter how good the hot water felt to their naked flesh, there were many strange happenings occurring around them. To their loved ones, and those they knew not. Without even thinking about it, she shimmied out of her clothing before Arilwen could tell her twice and climbed into the tub after her. She was modest but only so far as dressing. She was not a glamorous one, although in another place and time she could have been. She was comfortable enough in her own skin to walk around naked, compliments of her father figure not really caring who saw him when he got out of the bath too. The traits went hand-in-hand. For the short time that they washed their wry bones, Anna tended to washing Arilwen's hair whether the new Mother wanted it or not. Running her fingers through her friend's hair after getting it all worked up with soap, she said, "I'm glad they found you." Late yes, but she had been wanting to tell her that since they had gotten separated at that arsehole's estate way back when and it had been many moons in between. Her hands paused in their combing through Arilwen's gorgeous locks to slip her arms around the woman's shoulders and hug her from behind. She didn't have many friends. In fact, two of the three friends she did have had been mauled to death today, so Arilwen was pretty high up on the ranking for good. Her hands rested on the opposite shoulders of her friends as she squeezed her in that hug and then slowly let go of her. Reluctantly at that, and she went back to washing the woman's hair. She was usually a chatter box without a lid. In normal circumstances she would have rattled off Arilwen's ear about this and that and everything under the sun. But this wasn't any normal situation. She was jittery from half watching, half choking on the need to look away from what Sammael had



done to Marsol's servants, and then the sudden appearance of all those brilliantly red shaded dragons surrounding them and the giant snake monster. The green robe that she was given would be tugged on over her head, although she would get stuck with it on her head and flap her arms a few times before the fabric cooperated with her and allowed her to squirm into it. Of course she did put it on sideways and that could've been half the problem right there. Try and tell her that? Heavens to betsy no. After they had dressed and looked so very much human now then before, Anna would try to strike up conversation with Corwyn while Arilwen was with her son. For the short time that passed before the Nephelim's return, Anna asked Corwyn how he was and how Yorek and his siblings were. If they were still in the desert or, had Yorek traveled back to his own home? She had numerous questions for Corwyn, partly because she hadn't gotten enough time to get to know him better when they had all been at the tavern those couple of days. She would also ask Corwyn what that man had meant when he had said son. She was in the dark about what a Morning Star was, or that Corwyn was the offspring of and yet brother to Marsol in a way. That might give one a headache.

As if by magic, though the mere sight of little Anwaar being given to her, chased away all that icky feelings and put a smile on the disheveled girl. "Hey, don't I know you?" she said, her voice strained now from the horrible rancid taste in her mouth and the burning in her throat. She mock nipped at the ends of infant's feet, or was he bigger now? After all, he was about as human as a rock could swim.

In the descent of the majestic beasts the sands would quake and set the air around the quickly growing number of those gathered to a fine edge. It was unfortunate, the timing of the tribe and the Morning Star's desire to be rid of the curse that has been plaguing him since they had returned to the world above. Or in between, depending on how you viewed life. The olive scaled serpent Sammael had become did not seem to be dwarfed however as the contrast of red was splashed into play. He should have been in physical terms to some degree, and yet he wasn't. That though could change like the wind. Those black vertical slit pupils thinned as they jumped from one to the next amongst the dragon kind and then to Maelmorda as he was allowed that little space to slip closer into the circle of wings and hot breath. The fact that the Morning Star had come so far and would not relent until the confounded contraption of trickery he had been dealing had been lifted would satisfy Sammael's own objectives. For now at least he didn't entertain the idea of letting Maelmorda go but was actually about to go through with it when something roared from directly over Sammael's head, cutting him off to the reply he had been about to give Wryvaust and Maelmorda for that matter. In the long shadow that passed over Wryvaust, Marcania, the Morning Star and himself and then the abrupt thudding made as whatever it was seemed to land just past Ancient Fury's wing span, the serpents coils would twist and curl around Cirgoth and gather him up so that the angel was just in front of his snout little more than three feet from the ground, and just to the left of Maelmorda. Another anger filled roar would come as the ground shuddered under Marsol's claws where he came limbering quite fast like from the semi crescent shaped skid he had made. This time the word, "YOU!" was all that could be deciphered before he was nearly upon his own and someone was going to have to make room or else he would run right into their rears. There really was little to reason with as far as Sammael and Marsol went. Nothing that was worth talking about. Even less that could keep calm between them, much less bloodshed. It would be the sight of Cirgoth having his cheek licked with this giant snake arching just a hairs distance over the Morning Stars head that would stop the charging frame of red and teeth. Most of all it would be the tightness with which Cirgoth clung to said snake that would cause a frowning of

his ridged brows and a tilting of his horned head.

Of course it was him first, came that hiss from Satan as his reptile eyes settled on Wryvaust with a knowing grin before they came to rest on Cirgoth," I came to talk." The situation was now officially screwed, Sammael thought with a mild inward shaking of the head. It didn't dampen his mood but it did certainly make what he had come here for all the more tedious. Satan did not miss the sharp glare in the desert chieftain's eyes at just how warm and cozy Cirgoth was becoming with his enslaver, and he certainly didn't miss the way Marsol's mawl was beginning to curl into a snarl.

"The path taken to leave the throne behind does not concern these lands or our tribe," Marsol's voice had that deep mechanical hum to it now that he was in his full on demonic dragon form, giving it the faint haunting of many voices underlying his tones. A ghostly quality he seemed to have picked up upon being released from the lower kingdom.

"Leave this place and never return, for all too gladly would I be to deliver thee back to it." Marsol did not hide his hatred of Sammael; just the intensity of it. How deep that rage ran in him was what he was now using his will power not to just act on compulsion alone.

"I offer you and yours a place in this world and you threaten death," Sammael said, his voice now taking on a carefully honed bite as his coils tightened around Cirgoth's ribs.

"You live out of respect for the Morning Star. Nothing more."

Sammael's eyes narrowed and oh how quick his tongue was to say, "Careful Anwaar. It would do the world a great disservice if there were no more of your kind in it."

Marsol's jaw clenched and one could smell the black smoke that just howled to be let out from between his teeth, nearly begging for fire to erupt from his insides to burn and destroy.

"Your death will be heard by all, and no one will miss you," even as he said it, Marsol's front claws were extending just enough to enable him to lurch forward towards

Sammael even as he held the auburn haired angel in his grasp, and the Morning Star in a loose loop of scales and bone. Yet at the last second Cirgoth was let go of, and Sammael even went so far as to sort of roll and toss him off the end of his tail like a child would a ball to the ill tempered beast coming towards him. The toss was so fast that as Cirgoth left that half of his tail, the rest of his coils pooled all around Wryvaust and moved as far away from Marcania as possible.

"If you'd be so kind as to clear up this depressing atmosphere, then I could release Cirgoth of this bond you speak of and perhaps lighten the burden of the Morning Star," Sammael said. The end of his forked dark red tongue flickered dangerously close to Wryvaust's mid section as his large snake head leveled with the clan demon's face. So in the end it seemed Satan was giving in, right? The old cad was letting go of Cirgoth as well as clearing up the black luck for Maelmorda. Without a hitch? Hardly.

Marsol would not hesitate or faultier at pausing in mid lunge to extend his left

wing and scoop this air borne angel out of the air and bring him close to his under belly where he would hold him still in one clawed hand. Somewhat pinning poor Cirgoth to his belly in a sense so he didn't go and get himself into further trouble or be man handled by Sammael again.

As soon as Wyrvaust begun his retracting of his zone, Satan would hiss that the Morning Star must remain in the desert until such a time has passed that a messenger comes for him. That was the only condition to all this nicey nicey crap that Sammael apparently was dishing out at the moment. If Marsol didnt agree to it then there really would be carnage and someone was going to die. If Maelmorda, Wyrvaust, Cirgoth or anyone else for that matter except Marsol had anything to say about it they would receive a good and long tongue lashing literally. Satan's tongue did get around after all...

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Maelmorda observed the tense encounter between Sammael and Marsol's own with composed interest. If he was at all worried, he gave no outward or inward sign of it. He was fascinated by Cirgoth's display of affection for Sammael, the angel completely in his power even as Sammael tightened those coils around him. The angel seemed to bask in Satan's snaky embrace. 'My my the games Sammael plays' Maelmorda thought with some amount of fatherly, albeit knavish pride. A brow arched when Sammael actually submitted to the presence of Marsol and his dragons. He wondered if Marsol or Wyrvaust were aware that Sammael could have called in reinforcements quick and silent as a thought and made a blood bath of the desert if he had so wished? Sammael had many supporters in Morashtar, all of them powerful. Fortunately, so did Lucifer. Would the Morning Star have interfered by choosing sides and beckoning his own devotees in the event of a conflict? Hopefully, no one would ever know. He really did hate it when his sons fought among themselves, but boys would be boys, heh, or should he say, hell boys would be hell boys? Whatever train of thought occupied the devil; he was fascinated by the ultimate choices Sammael made. He was very clever, and by opting to cooperate, he was establishing a stable foundation of power beneath himself. The fact that he released Cirgoth of his bonds and he of his curse, almost at the moment that Wyrvaust dispossessed the area of the dead zone, did his ancient wisdom great justice. Lucifer was far more valuable to him with his power intact, and less than worthless to him cursed as he had been only a moment ago. Maelmorda dipped his head to Sammael when he named his price for being so generous. Maelmorda would be only too happy to linger in the desert until this messenger arrived. Curiosity alone was enough to appease him. Besides, he had Corwyn's company and looked forward to spending some time with him.

No sooner had Sammael released Cirgoth of his embrace and bond and returned him safely within the folds of Marsol's daunting arms, Maelmorda clambered over that coil which snaked around him without threat and took a stance between Sammael and Marsol as the Prince of Demons coiled Wyrvaust. Even as he did so, two things happened; a wave of visions stormed through him, revealing all which had occurred between Sammael, Wyrvaust, and the others. This was no accident of course. Next; he noticed the emergence of Arilwen, Corwyn, and Anna through a quantum gateway which Corwyn had formulated. Seemed the three had grown restless and decided to return to the scene of controversy. His eyes burned on Marsol as he gazed on him through the haze of divination, and when it cleared; he addressed the desert chieftain.

"Your brother and Prince has graciously given Cirgoth back to you, dear Anwarr, and in doing so made a gesture of peace. You may think that he had no right claiming Cirgoth in the first place, but perhaps you do not fully understand or appreciate the complex relationship between the fallen ones, which both Sammael and Cirgoth are. They are brothers; and angels are like jewels to demon kind, a fact I am sure you have experienced for yourself, and as Acheron's king; Sammael has every right to attempt to lay claim to any unspoken for angel he chooses, if they give themselves to Acheron willingly. Cirgoth struck a deal with me, and gave himself to Acheron in exchange for the freedom of those angels he gathered beneath him. He did not include himself in the bargain. Thane and Marcania are the only angels he has chanced to ally with. Sammael was unaware of this pact until now. Thane did charge in on Acheron's territory with the rest of you, which negated his protection, so it is Sammael's right to keep him or release him as he wills. I advised you to bond Cirgoth to yourself and warned you of the possible risks if you did not. You did not bond him thus he was up for grabs. If you bonded him afterwards, I can assure you that Sammael's bond is stronger. This gesture on Sammael's part is gracious. Understand also, that as a clan demon, Wyrvaust is his if he so chooses, and the fact that Wyrvaust attacked him and beheaded him gives him even more leverage to choose the desert raven's fate. Acheron's policies are often harsh but they are also fair. If Sammael chooses to release Wyrvaust, it would be a tremendous act of mercy and good will, and if he chooses to control him, that is his entitled privilege, one which you must respect. He attacked Sammael for no other reason than laying his eyes on him. You can choose Sammael as an enemy and war with him, as an ally and support him, or remain neutral to him as you choose, but be careful at the choice you make. I gave you the freedom to choose your own path long ago, Marsol. I pray you use that freedom wisely." Sammael had removed his curse, and Maelmorda gave something back to him, his mediation skills.

Cirgoth meanwhile was in agony. Having such a powerful bond yanked from your soul, and the matter that made you what you were, was akin to being swallowed by the abyss and spat back up again. He clung to Marsol when he swept him up, confusion, waves of dizziness and agony surging through him. Sounds buzzed in his ears and when the awful sensations cleared; Maelmorda's voice invaded his senses somewhere half-way through his diplomatic speech. The next thing he felt was body tearing shame and he shuddered with a choked sob. He felt perfectly treacherous for all he had felt for Sammael. He was not even sure what he felt anymore, but for the love for Marsol which filled him now with shame and guilt. He forced himself to gaze on the immense serpent he had moments ago clung to like a sycophant. Tears burned in his eyes like glass and he gritted his teeth as Maelmorda made Sammael's rights with Wyrvaust known. There was something he could do to make amends to Marsol. "Please..." he implored Sammael. "Let him go...and take me in his place. Let him remain with his chieftain and family, and I will give myself to you willingly."

Maelmorda shook his head and laughed dismally. Always Cirgoth's impulsive nature got him into trouble. He had jumped the gun with his offer. Sammael might have released Wyrvaust without his sacrificial gesture.

Wyrvaust remained cool in his stance as Sammael coiled him once again in his smooth scaled muscles. He stood as a prisoner awaiting the judgment of a high court. Hearing Maelmorda's words his heart pounded in his chest and his expression paled. The true gist of his error hit home to quake his senses. "Is the Raven his to govern?" His voice lifted with a faint waver. "Is the ranger not Beroth's and Adram's to command? Are they not the Raven's clan?" he posed.

Maelmorda smiled. Wyrvaust was clever, even when he was as terrified as he was at that moment. "What you say would be true of course, Wyrvaust, had you not attacked their Prince with full intention of sending him back to Acheron. You jumped on a land mine when you took it upon yourself to relent to your basic instincts. Now you must rely on Sammael's mercy, his choice, and accept the consequences of your actions."

Wyrvaust bowed his head and nodded. He could find no fault in what the Morning Star ascertained. As the others spoke his gaze caught sight of Arilwen and locked on her. He felt as though his heart was being squeezed between a clawed fist and was bleeding into his body cavities. Everything in his looks implored her to forgive him for his atrocious error. He was shocked that Cirgoth had offered to take his place. He had never trusted the angel...and here he was making the grandest of all gestures. A deep sigh compressed his lungs. He did not want to voice the only conviction his heart could make, but he had no choice in the matter. It was the right thing to do. "The Raven refuses to let another stand in his place. Stand down, Cirgoth."

Cirgoth smiled sadly at the demon. "I will not," he refused to refuse. "The offer stands, Prince Sammael."

Maelmorda cackled. "Seems the choice is yours, Sammael, inasmuch as these stubborn fellows will have it no other way!" He seemed to revel in the fact that Cirgoth's virtue and Wyrvaust's honor clashed like a pair of deer antlers which only Sammael could pull apart. He could only imagine what Marsol thought of Cirgoth's proposal. He empathized with him in having so little power over his two dearest persons presently. Maelmorda regarded Sammael with a cagey smile, his arms folded across his chest, as he waited for his Prince and son to untangle the last conundrum, curious to see what the results would be. When his gaze ventured to Marsol he whispered to his thoughts on a path that not even Sammael could intercept. ~"Patience, Marsol...Hard as this is for you, keep your head,"~ he advised.

Now before the restless trio had ventured through that gate Corwyn had provided, Anna had asked after Yorek. Corwyn would be well aware of Yorek's circumstances, for until Corwyn had gone to check on his mother he had been in Yorek's company. Yorek was rebuilding the city that Marsol's dragons had destroyed. He had gathered his scattered people to help in the crusade. Yorek had perhaps impressed the desert chieftain by simply not resenting him for the destruction of his homeland's city, and the deaths of many people, including his father. War was ugly, and whatever his father had done to spark the dragon tribe's wrath, Yorek had no intention of repeating his wicked father's mistakes. He wished only to rebuild the city, ensure his people a good life, and maintain peace with Marsol.

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Unrest had followed the threesome that now lingered in Wyrvaust's cavernous home and poor, sweet Anna... Arilwen felt her heart pulled at the fragile girl's state. She had quickly assured her dear friend that vomit was hardly something to worry about and before they even finished their conversation, their servant had cleaned it up. She was used to Anwarr spitting up and such, so it really had no effect on her.

The baby only held their attentions for a short while and soon Arilwen was squirming in her chair. She was exhausted but there was no way that she could sleep... and FINALLY, she coaxed Corwyn to take them back to the area. This was a large leap for the angel, as she was terrified of the group of dragons that circled. But she could not just sit here while her husband's fate was being decided. Corywn finally agreed to take them back. Arilwen just did not have the energy to fly, even walk back to the area. It was too far. She tried to convince Anna to stay here, but the spitfire was just not having it.

And so, the three appeared amidst the chaos that they had left, just in time to see Wyrvaust hearing truthful words from Maelmorda... and standing his judgment before Sammael. Arilwen's violet eyes shifted nervously up to the great dragons above them, but she forced her rubbery legs forward as she slid over Sammael's scaly tail and slipped to her husband's side. He was giving her such an apologetic look. All she did was reach down, slide her fingers into his and with her grip tight, lifted her gaze to Sammael, imploring him to have mercy on her husband...but ever so silently.

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Such a spectacle, indeed. The eyes of a serpent seemed not to know if they should watch the angel or the demon as they spoke their desires to own a punishment that in reality was no longer theirs to own. In time they would realize that he supposed but for now the giant snake would show a mild amusement in the bicker batter Cirgoth and Wryvaust exchanged back and forth. Out of the corner of his eye he could see the immense shadow belonging to Marsol edging closer to the squabbling duo and that would just not do. Maelmorda must have been having as much fun watching as he did. Surely the Devil had a limitless appreciation for the fool-hearted, the brave, the honor bound and then the terribly gullible. A moment was spent in the appearance of contemplation over this offering both of Marsol's closest there, but in the end it was really him chewing on a bit of Wryvaust he had bitten off earlier that day. The clan demon had a certain tang to him, an intense spice really but if Wryvaust didn't know that, bad joo-joo for him. He had nothing personal against Marsol or the company he kept. He didn't even fault him when he knew in the back of his mind Marsol couldn't even fault Wryvaust in what he had done or committed rather. Marsol would have done the same, and Sammael knew it. That forked tongue would flicker through the air as it followed the Nephelim as she climbed over his coils, to be by her demon lover's side.

"I've no desire to bring either one of you where I'm going, so feel better in that you get to stay here; Home, with the sand and the heat, and cacti," the sarcasm slipped out like a wisp of air through a crack in a door. It was said on purpose however, and the giant snake was satisfied by the faint giggle somewhere behind Corwyn. In the Morning Star's son bringing the worried lasses back to the massive circle of teeth gritting tempers and heart wrenching guilt, he had also brought back the sole reason Satan had come to the desert in the first place. It was so cliché. His head lowered towards this pleading gaze Arilwen held, and she would get her request, at the expense of an exchange of course.

"There really is no need for theatrics dear," came that quiet semi-hiss of a voice from over Wryvaust and Arilwen's head as Satans gaze settled on the Ravens wife. "There'll be no more bloodshed this day. My business with your husband and your..." at

this part Sammael's head tilted sideways and he dare not say of the manner of relation Cirgoth had with Marsol. There just weren't words for that kind of insanity so he would leave that batch of thorns alone. However it wasn't the auburn haired angel that the large snake fixated its eyes on. More it passed over the male angel yes, and continued beyond Marcania whom he would be dealing with shortly, just over the Morning Star's head to where his son Corwyn stood and the head of red curls by his side that had not taken her eyes off of him since Corwyn had brought Arilwen, himself and she back. They really had been better off in Wryvaust's lair.

With his eyes still on Annandabah, Sammael said, "This vessel possesses a great inconvenience Arilwen. Dont you think? Were I of your stature I could ring this ones neck with my own hands. The envy, it kills me."

A glare of discontent was cast in Marcania's favor before he brought his contemplative stare back to Annandabah, whom by now had quickly come to stand in front of the fallen angel. As if her short self in her deep green robe could act as a shield to the deepening in Sammael's eyes he held towards Marc.

"Arilwen and I have a previous engagement to attend," he said, matter-of-fact like, and the glare Marsol shot his way he could just feel it boring holes into his scales like invisible go-phuck-yourself-you-piece-of-shiit knives. It wasn't a statement, but more of a truth. One that all rested with if Arilwen would come with him to avoid further mayhem erupting in the desert. Or was it just for Arilwen? No, it wasn't. The second victim to fall for the trap that had been set and sprung by Cirgoth and Wryvaust, in more ways then one, visibly swallowed hard before they spoke. Oh how sweet sounding it was the offer she made as opposed to Wryvaust or Cirgoth's.

"You can't take her!" they shouted from way down there in the sand just off to the left of Corwyn, somewhere in the circle of the breath taking beasts that safeguarded these lands, and comfortably far enough away from the Morning Star. (Which was hilarious by itself and that would be figured out later.)

"Oh," replied Satan as he wound himself around Wryvaust and his love dovey-ness but not tightly. His head hovered a foot or so from the cooling sands as the sun was beginning to set in the distance and oh the way their home became bathed in the reds and oranges, it needed to be painted. At last, one of several conversations that were bound to get under Marsol's skin.

"Miss Arilwen has yet great a many roads to travel," said the human as she carefully knelt by Marc's side to see if his forehead was still bleeding, which it was but shouldn't he have healed by now?

"Perhaps the Mother would rather her child come with her along her travels?" Sammael added in suave tones.

"Her child is of no concern to you, but if a use is what it seeks then let this body be a tool and I the fool." Anna couldn't help the shiver that crept up her spine as she made her offer.

"Then come, and show me this unfortunate soul you speak of."

"Not unfortunate," Anna said as she turned to stand and start to walk a wide circle around Corwyn, so that she didn't get any closer to Maelmorda then she absolutely had to. The man just unnerved her to no end some how, and she couldn't meet his

eyes either. At least with Sammael being in his monstrous snake form she knew he was suppose to be scary. Maelmorda was just...inexplicable.

Sammael hissed as he unwound himself from around Wryvaust and Arilwen, working the end of his tail through the sands to wrap it painfully tight around Marcania's throat and head after Anna who had come to stand next to Arilwen as he dragged Marc with them.

"Misunderstood," Anna said quietly, placing both hands on Wryvaust's left arm gently, having to tilt her head upwards because for some strange reason everyone in the world was at least a foot taller than she. Ridiculous. The look and squeeze to the Raven's arm was meant for some kind of reassurance but seeing as how she hadn't been able to stop Arilwen from being skinned alive before, it had very little weight depending on how he looked at it. Nonetheless, Anna gave the Raven that warm shaking smile and pat on the arm before she looped her arm into Arilwen's because if Arilwen was as smart as she was gorgeous, she had already known they were leaving here with Sammael. Without anyone else. Well, except for that crazy angel guy but he was probably going to be arrested or something for laying his hands on Arilwen. That or getting smacked around a little and then sent on his way.

Marsol could just not believe what the phuck he was seeing! Had he raised a bipolar daughter or something? Was she suicidal?! Yet he knew the girls were the bait that Sammael was using against not just himself but Wryvaust, and even Cirgoth. Satan had used both the angel and the demons virtuous traits against them. He had laid a trap for them, and they had fallen for it. Marsol naturally blamed himself for not shutting them up sooner but it was too late for that now. He had to reel himself in painfully tight as he watched Sammael's shadow cast over the tiny frames of Arilwen and Anna as they started to walk away after the Raven had said his goodbyes and I love yous to his Swan. Anna did no such thing. The gentle soul she was, she knew there was no room for goodbyes with Marsol. There wasn't even enough air to breath out the words I'm sorry, but that was alright. Most things didn't have to be said to be heard. Maybe in the future Anna could inculcate Cirgoth those lessons, for they were invaluable ones in a place where life was scarce, and the terrain was onerous. Nothing good would come out of the maul Marsol had so he said nothing. What was happening now was that the Nephalim and the human were taking Cirgoth and Wryvaust's places. Was that right? Is that what was really occurring right here and now? Yes, in a way it was. Marsol saw the logic to what Maelmorda had whispered to him on the sly but, it was so hard to follow something you wanted to object to.

When the Raven's birdie and the human had been taken by Satan, and that shadow gate had closed behind them with the crazy angel fellow in tow, Marsol had given orders to several servants at their cozy hot home to prepare the master bedrooms for they had two guests to house for the time being. He would not speak of any of it to his kin, should they ask. The majestic dragons were free to do as they please. Their chieftain made no additional demands of them nor had he any desire for them to take action on this whole matter. He did however open a portal to which he would tell Cirgoth would deliver him home to the twins where he could keep them under close watch. He did not shift out of his dragon form until all of his tribe had left them to do their own will elsewhere. It was a painful regression because he wasn't sure he should even bother being in his human image anymore. It did little good did it? He addressed Maelmorda with the carefulness one would show when handling a railed up starving wolf in a cage' Very, very carefully.



"Quarters I have for you and yours," Marsol said, trying to be as calm as possible from where he now stood completely naked due to his changing back.

Course dragons didn't wear pants. Who does that these days? Psssh. The desert creature was more than comfortable in his own skin and not wearing clothing didn't bother him. Although he wasn't all that concerned with how it made Cirgoth, Wyrvaust, Maelmorda or Corwyn feel at the time, or how uncomfortable it might make Corwyn feel to see someone he didn't know completely nude. Anna wasn't the only one that became uneasy with the Morning Stars presence.

Marcania would feel his body slowly being crushed for a short time as he was dragged through the sand to a high arch of shadow gate goodness; through which the lovely Arilwen, Marcania, Sammael and Anna would be on their merry way to a place of both pleasure and pain. However much Sammael wanted to rip Marc to pieces he resisted those delicious urges, only because he wanted to show the girls that he was merciful. Or, he could be. Big difference. Arilwen would be taken through that gateway of darkness and brought to a garden of flowers ranging the entire roy g biv spectrum. Sammael would whisper to her mind that he had to find himself something more suitable for the public than a giant snake costume, for then he might scare the children. Anna had come through behind the other three just in time to see how Sammael pushed Marc back through the portal to disperse him somewhere else entirely before the portal zipped shut with a mean crackling sound. Pale blues looked from where this trickery of magic had been and then up to the monster form looming over her best friend and she. Unconsciously, she stepped in front of Arilwen and put a hand over her friend's side. "Now then," Satan hissed as his head begun to lower towards the two females, "...about that new body..."

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Arilwen felt as if she were locked in a Nightmare on Elm Street remake that was MUCH more real and MUCH scarier than the originals. This is what it felt like to be completely out of control in a situation... to have your fate lay in someone else's hands... or scales, in this case. Still, the angel steeled herself as she and Wyrvaust stood stock still beside each other, their fingers locked together. They knew that no matter what, the punishment to come would not be delectable.

The verdict stunned them all, apparently. It was vague... Arilwen had a previous engagement scheduled with Sammael? Her blood began pounding so violently through her veins that the sweet smell she emanated seemed to pulsate obnoxiously through their group. Her fingers tightened in Wyrvaust's hand as others began shouting their arguments. She had to force herself to think. Swallowing against a dry throat, the angel's violet eyes skittered over the group, then up to Wyrvaust. At some point, Anna would join them and she would be thankful for her support as well. Sammael was actually going easy on them. Wyrvaust was permitted to stay in the desert...which is where he needed to be. His home would remain his own and he would be safe. Arilwen just had to go with Sammael for an undisclosed amount of time... and when he revealed that it would not be back to that horrible place where she first met him, the angel squared her shoulders and looked up at Wyrvaust to finally speak in a soft voice. "Fear not, my love. Lord Sammael is gifting us with a very lenient punishment. It could be so...so much worse." At least the girl had a steady head on her shoulders. A dark lock of hair dragged across her brow and she reached up to tuck it away in annoyance. No, Anwar would stay home... in the cave with

their servant and his father. She would not dare drag her precious son to wherever they might roam.

The goodbyes were harsh, but Arilwen seemed to be the most levelheaded of them all. She was quiet and felt as if her heart were shattering to a million pieces, but she held those pieces in her ribs as her arms locked around her Raven, murmuring that things would be fine and she would return before he knew it. Wyrvaust was a complete mess and seemed to be unraveling, but before anything could be done, Arilwen hung her head and linked arms with Anna, the duo following Sammael to where they might end up next. After the gate was completed and they were in a garden of some sort, Arilwen collapsed against the young girl and allowed her own self to unravel, weeping uncontrollably into the lithe girl's neck.

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Shock and horror collided with rage within Wyrvaust psyche as the worst he could imagine unfolded before his eyes. Blind, agonized courage displaced the terror of Sammael's judgment and as Maelmorda felt the power building in the demon, and sure he meant to unleash it foolishly on Sammael, the Morning Star hit Wyrvaust with such a mind crush as to shatter his ability to command the forces at his bidding. It was subtle. The devil merely flicked a speck of sand from beneath his fingernail in an idle gesture as he inflicted the clan demon ranger with his cruel solution.

Wyrvaust cried out at the pain and dropped to his knees, clutching his head tightly between his palms. It might easily appear as a display of the overwhelming despair he actually felt to the many witnesses surrounding him. Subtlety was one of Maelmorda's most powerful tools and talents. "Arilwen..." He plead with his wife even despite the mind shattering crush he felt, which would linger as a migraine for hours to come. "Refuse the Desert Wind's invitation, the Raven begs. Life without the Swan is an empty waste...to have her and lose her is worse than death and eternal torture," he pleaded with all his heart. His eyes darted meanly on Maelmorda as the devil ticked his tongue in a chiding manner.

"You do not spare your ruler the opportunity of faith or trust, Wyrvaust. What assumptions do you make on his behalf that make you fear for her so? Has he ever mistreated her to your knowledge?" The devil challenged him.

"He is Satan, what else needs the Raven to know?" The demon hissed in return.

Maelmorda's lips curled smugly. "Many would say the same of you, Raven. As a clan demon you must surely be evil. As an Abyss Demon you must be twice as evil."

"Corrupted by the abysmal blood the Raven is! Arilwen alone tamed the demon. Even in finding the bird lost in the desert his intentions were black. Her goodness touched its cold heart and the Raven was no longer caged or blind. Take his wife from him and he shall be blacker than ever he was before."

Maelmorda laughed. "Perhaps that is what he hopes," he risked speculating aloud. "But if you wish to play into his hands as you already have, then it is no concern to me.

Wyrvaust shook his head and speared Arilwen through and through with his eyes

again. "Fear Not? Fear for thee thy mate must! Leave not willingly with him for thy consent alone can bring thy life and soul into his embrace. He hath no claim on thee, for it was the Raven, not thee who wronged him! Of his blood and ties the Swan is not! Thy body alone can he command by force!" The demon had never felt so helpless, and with Maelmorda's power intact, he stood no chance of taking a stand to protect his wife from Sammael. He had bound Arilwen to himself alone, and had never changed her as to make her one of Acheron's own. His gaze then zeroed on Marsol. "We shall fight for her, will we not, My Lord?"

It was then Maelmorda extended another warning and reminder to Marsol, telepathically. ~"I will not ally with you to save these two women if they cannot save themselves. Only if it comes to war shall I choose sides, and whose side I shall support I alone know. What Wyrvaust says is true. Only if they offer their souls freely to Sammael can he claim them. There are times when you must trust in the strength of others, and if not them, then rely on the intentions of those you trust least. Assume nothing of what you believe Sammael to be about. Even if his intentions are wicked, which you cannot possibly be sure of, your presumptions will in all likelihood be disappointed. Let this be an ordeal that they alone own. If they choose to accompany him I advise you not to interfere. If they refuse and he attempts to take them by force, I will not involve myself if you choose to fight for them. If however he threatens your entire Kingdom, I shall take a stand."~ Though he never made it apparent whose side he would stand on, he hoped that Marsol would entrust his faith in him. He had never let Marsol down, even despite all the pain he had made Marsol suffer to condition and strengthen him.

Wyrvaust was clinging to Arilwen's skirt, and if she did willingly place her trust in Sammael and leave with him, his voice would grow gritty with despair and warnings. "Promise him nothing! Clever he is at winning souls! Promise him nothings!" The Desert Wind would have to tear the sweep of her dress from his fingers, in what case Wyrvaust would grieve in the tradition of the desert people he had sprung from, and raise his voice in passionate ululation of lament. If on the other hand she refused to go with him and Sammael took her by force, his sword would hiss from its scabbard with an angry hum and he would attack the demon for a second time, oblivious to the fact that he was a leviathan snake.

If it came down to Wyrvaust attacking Sammael, Maelmorda would hit him with a powerful but visually imperceptible spell which would lay the clan demon out in a lasting sleep. Wyrvaust would hit the sand face down as if he had simply fainted dead away.

When it came that Marsol extended his invitation to him, Maelmorda smiled and bowed graciously to the naked chieftain. His nudity did not bother the Morning Star in the least. Indeed, he appreciated the firm tones and beautiful pigment of Marsol's sun browned skin. Maelmorda straightened and curled an arm around his son. "I appreciate your hospitality, Marsol, but Corwyn and I shall explore the desert in wait of this messenger Sammael is sending my way. I have every confidence they shall find us, and that if my services are needed by you, you shall have no trouble tracking me down either. As I must remain in this dauntingly beautiful land presently, I wish an intimate interim with my son. We have much to catch up on. You are welcome to join us any time you wish." That said, Maelmorda dipped his head to Marsol and retreated with his beloved son, his arm still coiling his waist.

Cirgoth in the meantime obeyed Marsol as he made it clear where he wanted him. He

was terribly depressed by all that had happened, and his shame burned inside of him like brands of hateful fire. He was not sure how he could face Marsol in the shadow of those bonds he had displayed so publicly without any avenue of resistance. On one hand he was relieved to be free of Sammael's bonds, on the other he felt like a traitor to Marsol. Cirgoth had never in his life betrayed any one he committed himself to, and it was the hardest things he had ever had to confront. Those twins Marsol wished Cirgoth to guard had in fact been present at that meeting all along, only they had disguised themselves as the desert itself, their chameleon cloaks one of many innate talents the little dragon-angel-demon beasties had already learned. Their foremost instinct above all others, even at their young age, was to guard at all times their progen, or angelic father. They learned as rapidly as they grew, which was daunting for their fathers at times. The Paragon twins appeared to be twelve years old now, but were in fact only twelve weeks old. They matured mentally as propitiously as they did physically.

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The way the Raven protested to the Swans leaving was heart breaking. Never has she seen so much hurt in one person to the extent that the clan demon now exerted. She sympathized with Wryvaust to the point that when his voice changed, becoming raw with anguish, Anna found the back of her left hand wiping at the fresh tears that fell from her eyes. Why did there have to be so much pain? She would think this as she watched Wryvaust drop to the ground and hold his head, as though he either had a really bad headache or he'd just realized something terrible. The Raven meant a great deal to Marsol, this much she knew from what little he had told her about the clever clan demon. Even so, Cirgoth meant a lot too. She'd never actually spoken to Cirgoth for a long length of time, just a simple hello and how are you when passing by. But Arilwen was the world to Wryvaust, and it seemed that this giant snake, thing, creature was well aware of this. In hopes of making it easier, the human would stay by the Nephelim's side until she was either forced away or Arilwen told her to be gone. Between the mighty dragons that had surrounded them, the giant snake and the man with the dark hair and knowing smile, for a moment Anna thought that it all must be a bad dream. Marsol had not made it known to the human female that he had brought home and taken care of all these years that, Cirgoth had bore him children. The twins were after all something fresh and new to the demonic beast, and it wasn't that he didn't already have offspring of his own. His horned head would turn to the side at the exclamation that they defend the female flock from their would-be oppressor. To raise a hand against Sammael now would surely be pure and utter idiocy if ever there was any. It was not that he didn't want to raise more than just a hand to the Desert Wind, mind you.

"Contact will be kept with the women, we would think," Marsol said just before Sammael's elongated form started to slither into the frothy portal of shadows with Arilwen and Anna.

"Naturally," came the reply from the giant snake as he coiled Marcania's unconscious body closer to himself, casting a most evil eye over the male angel and one couldn't help but get the feeling that Satan had nothing pleasant to show the fallen angel.

"Then go, and return when our Lord sees fit to release thee of thy service," Marsol stated hollowly to the females.

The smile that curled over Sammael's lips was immediate and complete as he ushered Arilwen and her friend through the gateway unhurried like. That is if Wryvaust would let go of her clothing for her to proceed of course. Upon Arilwen's acceptance, and oh she would because what other choice did she have, one last look would be cast sideways to the Morning Star and his most beloved son. It was a look that spoke volumes although he didn't actually say anything. Maelmorda had single handedly stopped all further advances on Sammael from the desert and her peoples. The Devil had held Marsol's tongue, and kept the Raven at bay for the short time that they convened there in the fading light of twilight. Sammael was pleased, if you could call it that.

Marsol would not look at anyone but the large serpent leaving with the Nephalim and human. He would not have the look in Wryvaust's eyes or Cirgoth's from what he had said. And for the moment he meant it. Was this entire ordeal to prove a point? Well point in case or not, he had called Sammael their lord and it was finished. Much to his dismay, his insides felt like they were about to rupture from the horror that was probably written all over Wryvaust's face by now. He'd heard Maelmorda when he cautioned him of the repercussions to his and his fellow demons actions should they act rashly. Although he didn't like what he was hearing, he heard him loud and clear. It wasn't that they didn't have options; it was that this was the safest for the females, kind of. After the two angels, Satan and the human were gone, and he was in his human image; Marsol came to stop Cirgoth from departing through the gateway of fire he had made with a small hold to the other mans right elbow and a lowering of his head to tell him something in his ear. Then he would move quickly to Wryvaust's side and haul his brother up to stand.

"Something tells me he will leave you here for a very long time," Marsol said, not loudly or too quietly, but Maelmorda would hear him as he heard everything. "Come, he'll not hurt them, he needs them too much," he told Wryvaust as he carried the Raven with an arm around him if need be over the sands. A large part of him simply wanted to take Cirgoth and the twins and go away, not from the desert, but deep within the Ring where the heat was most fierce and bask in it in a haze. Another large but not quite as big part of him sought to calm Wryvaust before he did something else to provoke more torture upon his soul. The rest of him however, wanted to follow Mael to wherever it was he was meandering off to with his son. He had not seen his creator for a time now, and he would always be curious as to what the Devil has been up to all these years. Marsol would never admit it, but he did have the Morning Star in his thoughts often. The demon would raise his head from his long time trusted friend, to the green eyed angel and then downwards at the sands. He didn't want Cirgoth to be further than a couple of yards from him right that very moment, but he also wanted nothing but peace for Wryvaust's heart. It may have appeared that he seemed not to care for the well being of the human that the Desert Wind had invited along with Arilwen, but he never was one to show too much emotion around others. The chieftain's brow creased in concern for Cirgoth's mental state. It was not his fault, damn it. How he could make the angel understand this? He mulled over as they started to walk.

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The Plots and Intrigues of Demons

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Arilwen felt as if she were choking on the pieces of her heart; as if they were trying to dislodge from her chest and hollow out her insides so that she could simply stop hurting this badly. She seemed as helpless as the day she ended up lost in the desert...when Wyrvaust had stumbled across her and taken her in. He had to feed her small doses of water, then food, to bring her back to life. She had been completely reliant on him. Now, she clung to Anna in the same way, her face buried in the slim girl's neck, tears flowing like a fountain. In a spectator's point of view, it would be a beautiful image. The raw emotion, the two beautiful, terrified girls clinging to one another, Arilwen's sweet scent pounding out waves of bliss into the canopy of flowers around them. On top of all of this, her body had been drained of energy from the day. She already missed Wyrvaust tremendously, but she kept playing his words over and over in her mind. He had warned her to promise Sammael nothing. She could only commit her soul and mind to him if she decided. And that would just never happen. Finally she managed to pull her soaked face away from Anna's robed shoulder, only to take a few steps back and collapse blindly onto a marble bench beneath an archway of violets. They matched her eyes... setting off the beauty of her agony even more violently. "Things could be so much worse..." She whispered, her fingers folding the silk of her gown on her lap. "But why do I feel as if nothing could be worse?"

The petite thing of a girl would keep her arms tight but lovingly loose around her dear friend as she listened to her cry and looked over her shoulder behind them to the walls of green leaves and yellow blooming buds. This was terrible, she thought, as she gently pet the back of Arilwen's head while the Nephelim sobbed her heart out into the side of her neck. She minded it not. Arilwen could cry forever and she wouldn't think any less of her. When the female's grievances had subsided enough to allow her those few stumbling steps backwards onto a bench, Anna would follow suit and come to kneel before her where she took Arilwen's hands in her own over the other woman's lap to hold them. "Do not let him see your tears my friend," she said quietly as she squeezed Arilwen's hands within her own. Still, her mind was fuzzed by the sweet aroma that soaked the air like Arilwen had soaked her shoulder of tears and heart ache. Anna knew not what Arilwen was, but she knew just being around her lightened her heart and made the troubles of the day seem so trivial and meaningless. "I'll not let him or anyone else hurt you," she told Arilwen as she moved upwards in her green robe to perch on the edge of the bench beside her, sliding one arm around the Nephelim but still holding her hands with her other one, "I promise. Now chin up. We are not dead. We are not mortally wounded. And we will remove ourselves from this lunacy that has sprung up around us." She was so foolishly optimistic. All the while she could feel eyes on her back and she vaguely remembered the giant snake creature disappearing into the bushes behind them. The thing was probably delighting in watching her friend's sorrow over the whole thing right now, Anna thought, disgusted with the mere idea that someone could derive pleasure from another's pain. Oh the things Arilwen and she were going to learn in their stay in the house of Satan.

Anna's words actually brought a small bit of comfort to Arilwen, and under that sheer cover of tears, she gave a tiny bit of a smile to her. The girl was naive and hopeful about everything, but Arilwen didn't mind trying to trick her brain into believing it all right now. The angel reached up and tugged her robe sleeve over her hand, dragging it across her wet eyes in an attempt to dry them. A deep, shivering breath followed and she sagged on the bench, her bare feet touching the grass below them. Anna was right about one thing. They weren't dead or hurt. She

had to stay strong for her husband. "What are we to do here?" The angel sighed in exhaustion, digging her toes into the grass. "I do not suppose that I will be allowed to sleep until it is all over, hmm?"

She was well aware that she knew very little about the happenings of the world; that there were terrible things in it, some of which she had already seen and died from. But that didn't mean life had to be about pain and misery! "We can sleep when we are dead," she said as she used her own robe's sleeve to wipe at the angel's cheeks and then fuss over her hair, "...as my Father use to say." It wasn't that hard to trick your mind into believing things that weren't real. It was just a matter of will power really. Anna's mouth opened to say something when she felt something cool and smooth rub along her back and she immediately stiffened. Fear prickled the hairs over the back of her neck but she tried her damnest not to show such things to Arilwen. "I think our host wants our attention," she stated, although her voice was now shaky.

Indeed, indeed the beast had been watching the two lovely birds since they had been brought to this simple garden maze. Partly for amusement purposes and part because he was still undecided on just what to do with them now that he had them. There was quite a lot entailed as to what he needed from Arilwen alone, but from Anna as well. That price might not be so easily met. "Forgive me for being so hasty, but there is this small get together I must attend this eve," came that smooth as silk voice from above both of the women where they now sat on the black marble bench with the legs that ended in claws gripping crystal orbs. "It would be greatly appreciated if you would both accompany me to it."

He was still in snake form yes. Half of him winding through the maze and the other half curled up in the enormous bush behind them with his head hovering just a foot or so over their own. Anna's lips set into a line. She didn't like people being bullied or tricked into something. Before she could stop herself, she said defensively as her arms went around Arilwen's shoulders and she tucked the Nephelim's head under her chin, "And what offering of comfort hast thou shown us to trust in? Give us a sense of peace and perhaps we would more then willingly venture off into whatever lands thou speakest of." Angry? A little. Confused? Of course. Terrified? Strangely, no, and that was always Anna's down fall.

Arilwen coaxed out another tiny smile as Anna helped with the mopping of her face, but before she could even thank her, she saw the girl's facial features stiffen. This caused the angel to look up and her stomach plummeted into her toes as she saw the looming form of the snake above them. She made no argument when Anna pulled her close again, yet this time she was not hysterical, and her violet eyes sneaked up to peer at the massive serpent. When Anna was done speaking, it was the angel's turn to pipe up with a fearful question. "Wh-what kind of...get together?" She echoed. Of course she was scared. What if it was some crazy...torture ball or something?!

The large head of the dark olive green serpent lowered until it was underneath the wide seated bench that the females now sat upon. It would seem Satan was amusing himself with the little pleasures of life. "Heaven's no. It's not something crazy and I don't know about you but torture would not be my cup of tea tonight," he said with a waggle of his head and a soft cuff of a laugh. It was so disarming how he could be passive or even mild mannered when he needed to be. Even in his leviathan

form he appeared far less threatening but still a threat, if that was understandable.

Anna would not be convinced with just that. Her fingers combed through Arilwen's hair as her brows narrowed a bit. "If you desire our cooperation, take a more human vessel and be done with this one of nightmares! Thou give us no pause for breath for thou attempt even now to instill fear!" Anna was becoming flustered at how upsetting Sammael was for Arilwen. No matter how simple it could be for the creature surrounding them to just gobble her up in one bite. Relief faintly washed over her when she heard the click over their heads and the rustling of bushes behind them. The sound of something most heavy and lengthy could be heard dragging over the ground, leading away from them towards the brightly lit mansion just up the hill from their little garden of colorful flowers. She waited until she could barely hear the old cad leaving to look up at the night skies, and then around slowly. Anna couldn't let go of Arilwen until she was sure Sammael was far enough away, and only then would her skinny arms release the beauty by slight. "Its name is Sa-ahm-uel," Anna said slowly, having her own native accent to the name and making it sound completely different. She asked Arilwen this as Satan sought his new body. He was actually finding it all funny the way the human was so protective of the Nephalim when the she-angel was vastly more powerful and far better equipped to defend them both. Humans were a silly frail bunch weren't they? From the ten acre flower maze Sammael would move his serpent self uphill towards set of open double doors in the ground where he would dip his head in to see the lost angel found by intricately crafted chains to a thick stump of stone in the ground. Demons that had served for many years all stood at the ready with their clawed hands full of sharp objects and half full bowels of dark liquids. They had prepped Marcania in wait of their lord's return from his little visit to the ladies in the garden. The golden reptilian eyes gazed over the creature that had fallen from heaven, but unlike himself, still tried to return. One of the grotesque creatures closest to Marc hissed 'where is your god now?' before they all converged by the door on either side of the neck of the large snake that only lent his head inside the room. "His God," Sammael murmured as he gathered the innate abilities within himself and quite the amount of power for what he was about to do to Marcania... or rather take from him.

It was ironic as hell, wasn't it? Even Arilwen did not know the full extent of her power and capabilities, yet she could far outweigh Anna in that respect. Still, the little adorable chicken of a human was clucking over the angel like a mother hen. It felt nice, she had to admit. Arilwen's body physically relaxed a little when Sammael seemed to read her thoughts and a dark blush crawled across her cheeks. Still, Anna and Arilwen had reason to be terrified of dragons, serpents and the like. They had been kidnapped by one and dragged away once already! It was déjà vu. Arilwen's violet eyes followed as Anna demanded that he take a human guise then he turned to comply, not wanting to ruffle the birdies' feathers anymore. Just as it silenced around them, Arilwen's stomach let out a horrid sounding growl and she immediately clamped her fingers down against it, blushing. She realized that she had not eaten since yesterday afternoon. "I wonder if this...get together...will have food..." She whispered guiltily, as if she did not want to be overheard.

She would always fuss over Arilwen, and no God or Devil could make her act otherwise. Arilwen was Wryvaust's wife. She was a mother. She was favored highly in Marsol's eyes and she seemed kin to the male angel, oh what was his name. Sea



Jot? Sea jolt? Sir..."Cir... goth," she mumbled, thinking aloud as she stared at the skies a moment. "Ah hah! It's Cer-goith!" Of course, she never pronounced certain names correctly but she was trying. Cirgoth's name was a funny one she had to admit. But who was she to judge when hers was a paradox? She laughed when she heard Arilwen's stomach demons acting up and her words ask if there would be food. Her eyes watered from the sheer silliness of it and she actually fell off the bench and into the grass. "Ahah-Ar-Arilwen your belly is talking!" Annandabah's laughter was genuine and it wasn't forced to try and comfort the Swan. Maybe the human was crazy for laughing at a time like this but damn it, it felt good. Sitting on her rear, she would roll backwards into the grass as her hearty laughter eased into a mad fit of giggles. Toeing at the end of Arilwen's robes, she gestured with both hands for her to come lay in the grass. It was the little things Anna wanted Arilwen to notice that would get them through this. Or so would go the girl's way of thinking.

Arilwen's sheepish smile broke into a grin, and then she tried to stifle giggles as Anna bounced into the grass on her bottom, snickering up a storm. Arilwen clamped a hand over her mouth, but the giggles started to come. And thank the stars, it felt good! For a few moments Arilwen was forgetting how heartbroken she was and she was basking in the glow of her first friendship here. Giggling even harder, Arilwen surrendered and slid down onto the grass on her knees, the soft breeze in the garden sneaking to tug at some of her stray strands. "This...is ridiculous. We should not be laughing..." Arilwen tried to say in a straight face, but it came out as a squeak among her giggles. Laughing, she finally collapsed into the grass beside Anna, lifting her violet eyes to the sky.

A scoff was made when the angel said that they ought not to be laughing in a situation like this. Laughter was the spice of life! Her hands plucked up some grass blades and she flicked them into Arilwen's hair after she came to flop down beside her on the ground. "There is no law against laughing," she said, chewing on a blade of grass herself while she turned her gaze skywards to try and see what Arilwen was looking at. She didn't see anything particularly exciting up there in the heavens but maybe she saw things that Anna couldn't? She thought on that as she turned to lay on her side, propping her head up in one hand while the other tugged idly at the ends of Arilwen's sleeve. "If you don't stop laughing Missy I'll be forced to resort to drastic measures," Anna said, getting a mock stern Fatherly tone as she sat up and put both hands to her sides. She was trying to mimic Marsol in a way but failing miserably at it. She made a fish face as she shook a piece of grass at the Nephelim. She just wanted to lighten the air for her friend. Before they went with this Sammael to wherever it was he had to be tonight and whatever manner the circle of people it was he ran with. Had Anna known then the kind of sinful night that lay ahead of them, she would have grabbed Arilwen by the hand and started running then.

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When Marsol stirred Wyrvaust from that oblivious state by pulling him to his feet; Arilwen's divine scent lingered heavy on the air to fill Wyrvaust's lungs and taunt his tortured nerves. A breath shattered in his lungs when Marsol spoke of Sammael not harming his wife. "Not harm her? There are things worse than death, My Lord, and corrupt her the beast shall," he hissed, his voice gritty and bitter. His legs shuddered beneath him as the sudden craving for violence and the taste for blood in his mouth ignited his hot blood. He did not care who he murdered and made a feast

of as long as their face and name was unknown to him. Without his wife to tame the fiend in him the demon within him awoke like a bear from hibernation, ready to cleave tender flesh with his claws and fangs. Even as he followed his master of his own volition his lean hard muscles coiled against the robes he wore with the raw tension of a demon which needed to be unleashed.

As Marsol whispered to him; Cirgoth inhaled a dragging breath and dropped onto the sand kneeling to clasp Marsol's hand and press a kiss to his knuckles. The seraphir twins shed their chameleon cloak as their father knelt to Marsol. The eldest of the two by three minutes, Amaru, which meant trustworthy in the dragon tongue, laced his fingers with Marsol's free hand.

"Ardwyr and I would never have let him go with the dark Prince, My Lord," he assured his father. Ardwir was his twin, and his name meant valor.

Ardwir spoke up as well. "We were ready to seize him and gate him home, father," he added.

They both felt it was important that their father knew he could count on them. Twelve weeks old in the bodies of twelve year old boys and they could speak and reason better than many adults. Even one as powerful as Sammael would beware paragon seraphir born of angels, only few even knew of their existence and what it meant as yet. Lucifer knew. They were the angels of defiance, born to protect their progen from the Alamascan and anyone else who threatened their first father. They could not retract their bat-like wings as other paragon could but could generate a suit of scales in place of flesh, a trait they inherited from Marsol. Amaru favored Marsol while Ardwir more closely resembled Cirgoth, while both of them had brunette hair streaked with auburn. They both had one green eye and one amber eye. Even at age twelve they were an impressive pair to behold.

Cirgoth shut his eyes as their sons addressed Marsol, and pressing the dragon lord's hand against his cheek; Cirgoth begged his forgiveness in his own way, although his resign might disappoint Marsol. "All my hopes were in vain. How could I be such a fool as to think I could unite the free angels much less protect them? I watched helpless as he took Marcania...Never a thought even paid to his capture. I am so ashamed of losing my heart and will to him. I live now only to serve you, Marsol. Please claim me that I cannot be commanded by another again."

"Only if it is to protect you, father Cirgoth," Ardwir piped up.

"Yes, our progen shall be a slave to no one, not even to you, father Marsol," Amaru joined fearlessly.

Wyrvaust followed them at a short distance. His breath tasted the air hatefully and he gritted his teeth as they came to a pause where Marsol did his best to console Cirgoth. The angel's scent of wilderness and botanical gardens made his nostril's flare and the bestial characteristics trapped inside of him stretch against the flesh caging them. The tips of his fingertips ached to extend his claws, his human canines lengthening even as he stood victim to his other half. A set of impressive flaring goat horns began pushing up from his skullcap to part his lengthy jet locks and his dark brown eyes ignited with the otherworldly flames of the pit as his flesh blackened and grew leathery. The bony fingers of his wings and their leather membranes tore through his sides and shoulder-blades and with a

cry of anguish his cloak snapped as he spun on a dime and attempted to depart into the desert with haste, before the angels and any humans present should witness the uncaging of his beast. Marsol, The Adram clan, Lucifer and the Raven's victims alone had ever seen Wyrvaust in full transition of his demon form. He denied that part of himself unless on the hunt or in a battle which demanded his stronger side, the dark side.

Before parting ways with the desert chieftain and when a brief swap of regard passed between himself and Sammael, Maelmorda bowed deeply to his Prince in a silent gesture of being at his disposal. As he and Corwyn ambled across the sands which demanded far more exertion of legs than more solid terrain, the devil addressed his handsome offspring. "Keeping the peace is just one of the many duties which makes demands on my time, Corwyn, and My Lord Sammael and my friend Marsol are just two of Acheron's own among countless I must make myself available to. I am seldom idle, and even then my mind watches...and listens. In Acheron as on Morashtar little escapes my knowledge and attention unless I wish it to. It is as imperative for me to know when not to involve myself, as being aware of when I must take an interest. This is but one of countless duties which keep me away from you and your mother so often. I am fortunate that she understands and accepts it, nevertheless I am sure it bothers her a great deal." He was explaining all of this to his son for a reason. It was time for Corwyn to take a more active part in Acheron and its affairs within and without that great kingdom.

"By volunteering to accompany me here, you have opened a door and stepped through it, whether you realize it or not; in life, particularly for us, a simple act can sometimes result in a tremendous change in one's fate. You shall not leave my side Corwyn, unless I dispatch you or give you leave, and then you shall return to me as I command. Your training has commenced and I am your only teacher." As it had been with Mordreig, who had perhaps learnt and observed Acheron's policies too well, a fact which surely pleased Sammael, for if Sammael asked Acheron's Arch Master of Ceremonies to betray his own father, he would. He was loyal to Acheron's prince, period, and would always be unless a Prince ruled which threatened to ruin Acheron itself. Maelmorda was actually proud that Mordreig could be counted on by Acheron's high Prince, whoever he may be.

"I have a responsibility to this world, Corwyn. I am this planet's overlord. All who reside on Morashtar know that the Morning Star is the sovereign deity of this little galaxy and its planets. As Maelmorda I am not associated with the Morning Star with exception of those Elites of Acheron who are privileged to know Maelmorda and Lucifer are one in the same."

"The key religion here is the Order of Chaos. They are followers of Chaos and it was I who introduced those concepts, the truth. Earthlings and a few misguided fallen angels have brought their God here and in doing so brought disharmony inasmuch as the faithful of Yajmha are fanatics who condemn those who follow their own dogma and name them heretics or demon worshippers. They are the minority but belief can spread like a disease if left unchecked. Chaos simply is. It is not a demon or a god, but the force which created us all and defines the laws of the universe. It created me, Yajmha and all others gods. It created this universe and all the rest. This simple truth is what set Yajmha and I apart from the beginning. I tell you this because you need to fully understand it to fathom me, the duty I shall command you to fulfill, and this planet's people."

"Most people on Morashtar are content with revering a force rather than a God, but even Chaos is corrupted by some into a being, an almighty God whose wrath is seen in storms, floods, earthquakes, and other natural wonders. The symbol for Chaos is Erisetki, half man and half elephant, and it has been perverted from a mere symbol into a god by the Order of Erisetki. They are a warped offshoot of the Order of Chaos. Erisetki was meant only as a symbol, not to represent a god. I was wise to the fact that people would pervert the symbol into an idol nevertheless. Introducing an icon that could be distorted was my idea after all. It is a way of weeding out those who would snub the truth and give rise to the dark side of chaos. It is they and followers of Yajmha whose souls shall be Acheron's, whose lives and souls you shall claim for me as the second stage of your training. The first stage shall rely on you mastering those forces which surge in your blood. I and a high priest of Chaos named Aglloth shall teach you to master yourself Corwyn."

"Oh, you may attempt to persuade them to see the truth, for all the good it will do, that gods, no matter how supreme, are simply beings not unlike people, who have extreme power. I am a god, yes, but I am still a being created by the same force which gave life to all else. Even those I and Yajmha created could not have been engendered without utilizing the aspects of chaos to make them."

"Men have risen to gods, Corwyn. Not in Haman, for Yajmha allows no other gods but himself, sees all others as inferior and not of godly status. To him, I am but his servant along with all other life forms in this Universe. But in Tuatha, The Underworld, Annwn, and all other kingdoms of the upper and lower kingdoms, with exception of Haman, mortal creatures through glory in life and death have ascended into gods."

"Do you know where the truth that Yajmha is not supreme lies?" He paused a moment and then answered his own question for his son. "For one, it bodes in the fact that he cannot rule Acheron. He could not even if he wanted to. Its darkness harms him as Haman's light harms me. Also, proof lies in those other universes where God does not preside. Indeed Yajmha would deny any other universe but our own exists. I happen to know otherwise. I have seen those universes myself, Corwyn, not with my own eyes, but through the mind and knowledge of a great and terrible alien known as The Abysmal Darkness. The few who know of this terror call it TAD." He paused and laughed at the mere thought. "Unlike all the beings of this universe, it has the ability to surpass the great barrier of nothing which separates each universe. In the universe it comes from it is revered and feared by a great number of people as a supreme God, a notion it finds perverse and amusing."

"People invent gods for three simple reasons. They are imaginative and ignorance spurs them to formulate answers they come to believe as the truth, no matter how preposterous it is. Lastly, a powerful immortal actually appears to them in order to gain followers."

"Fact is, the actual truth would terrify them far worse than any awesome god they can devise. They make their gods flawless and above error, when in fact Gods, despite all their wisdom, can make mistakes, even terrible ones. For this reason gods remain elusive to people. If people knew that gods were actually just aliens or immortals with omnipotent powers they would never feel safe. If they knew gods were as capable of being as irrational as humans, people would be in a constant state of panic, questioning whose wrath they had invoked every time they spilled a glass of milk. By introducing the concepts of chaos to the masses, they grow

accustomed to the idea that gods too are children of the true maker, of chaos. It gives them confidence in the knowledge that their lives are as crucial to their environment as any god. It is crucial that people understand the truth, so that when a god does appear to them, as an occasional deity makes the mistakes of doing, they do not bow down immediately to worship and enslave their wills to such a figure. In this way, all gods are made equal in the universe, and people have the option of worshipping who or what they will. Do you understand?"

Maelmorda listened to his son but answered to his foremost quandary first. If people were as crucial as gods, why did he require the deaths of the followers of Erisetki and Yajmha? "Because I am the overlord of this world, Corwyn, and they are polluting my people and this planet." The rest he spoke telepathically to Corwyn on a path which could not be trespassed on. His secret was safe with Corwyn inasmuch as his son was immune to mental tampering. If someone wanted to infiltrate Corwyn's mind, he had to permit an intrusion. It was an immunity Maelmorda had passed down to him and one which Maelmorda alone could transcend to take away. ~"I share now with you my most guarded secret, Corwyn and you alone shall possess this knowledge beyond Aurelius and I. Aurelius is the only other one I have trusted with this agenda. Morashtar is my greatest experiment and for this reason I take such an interest in this planet and its inhabitants. I created this world and its galaxy, and I want to prove to myself and to Yajmha, that the people I engendered are capable of gaining true wisdom. I wish to accomplish what Yajmha never has, but even more than waving a middle finger at my greatest antagonist, I do this because I wish to create a magnificent world. For this reason I have worked towards persuading people to understand that invention is only beneficial if they foresee all the possible consequences before they develop their innovations. It is my agenda that the majority of this world's people, the mages, scientists and inventors in particular, think before they act, to put it simply. Those who threaten this scenario are my enemy, and I shall deal with them accordingly. You shall be my right hand of justice, my angel of reprisal. You shall slay those who will not relent to the voice of reason, wisdom, and truth. But before I command this of you, I must first have your consent and your pledge to serve Chaos and to serve only me. If you cannot embrace me, chaos and the truths I have told you, then this duty is not for you."~ If Corwyn declined to undertake the task Maelmorda intended for him, he would wipe his memory clean of the telepathic end of their conversation, then pick up the conversation with him from the point where he stated that he wished the Followers of Erisetki and Yajmha dead because they were polluting the planet and its people.

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Corwyn had, amazingly, kept his silence through most of the events that had gone on around him. For somebody who was normally so talkative, it was pretty impressive that he managed to just listen for that stretch of time. And even as he walked away across the sand with his father, he remained quiet. He'd nod when it was expected of him, to show that he understood, and his eyes were ever-alert, focused mainly on his father as he spoke (though he would occasionally glance down to make sure that he was not about to trip on anything hidden in the sand). He wasn't sure what to think of the things his father told him. It was a lot to absorb, especially when he got to the part about killing those who were making themselves obstacles in the path that led to his father's vision of a perfect world.

This troubled him, and that much was obvious by the way Corwyn's eyes, which had

been almost too intense, they were so focused, grew distant. Even as trained in battle as Corwyn was, he always did have problems with taking a life. Maybe it was the way he had been raised by his mother, but he tried to avoid bloodshed wherever possible. He knew that to his father, these deaths were necessary. But he tended to try and kill only in self defense, and the idea of setting out specifically to kill someone, as punishment for their unwillingness to see things a certain way didn't sit well with him. At the same time, he hated disappointing Maelmorda. It was a strange thing for him to think, grown as he was, but a part of him still hungered for his father's approval.

Where his silence before had been attentive, the fact that this silence had grown uncertain should have been warning enough that something wasn't settling well in Corwyn's mind. He'd pause and turn to look at his father, a hand moving restlessly through golden curls. "I do embrace you, and you know that. And I do fully believe what you've told me; even support the majority of it. As for embracing chaos, it seems like one of the only constants in the world, so yes, I embrace that, too..." He paused, and then shrugged his shoulders. "But I'm not certain if I'm the right person for the task you'd envisioned for me. I hope you won't think less of me for refusing the offer...I'm just not sure whether I could find it in me to be the angel of reprisal that you were imagining...I'm not sure whether I could be that, and still be who I am right now."

And that was the sore point for Corwyn; he'd had that gentle, good side of him threatened so many times, often with things his father had him do. He'd been able to come out of them all with that side of him intact. But imagining what came with the tasks his father had thought out for him in this instance, he felt himself falter. He could see himself turning into something that he couldn't live with if he took up such a task. Part of what made him who he was, he thought, was that reluctance to take life. And if he could distance himself enough from the one he was taking it from, he thought he'd have to lose some of that goodness that made him who he was.

He glanced sidelong at his father, as if trying to judge whether or not he had upset him. The part of Corwyn that used to hero-worship this man was still in there; that part of him still worried that if he upset Maelmorda, he'd be cut loose, forgotten. It was a silly, insecure part of him, so he tried to squash it down, make it as small as possible.

He knew as well as Maelmorda did that the offer was going to have to be erased from his mind, and while he hated having people tinker in his head, he would offer little resistance to the wiping of his memory.

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The moment Corwyn declined the crusade his father had chosen for him; Maelmorda closed his eyes and expunged the telepathic end of their conversation from his son's memory. Corwyn would feel a brief moment of vertigo and a sense of confusion, but both would pass quickly. When the fallen star opened his jade-green eyes on his son again his face was expressionless and the recollection was gone. Maelmorda smiled to his son thereafter. He saw Corwyn's anxiety and felt it, but did not bother to console him. He merely expressed what he himself felt. "I am glad you are willing to embrace chaos as the true creator, my son, as you are willing to embrace me. Seth shall take your place as my right hand of reprisal."

Despite your rejection of my proposal; a door has opened to you. Change is inevitable and not something you can escape."

That said; Maelmorda clasped his son's shoulders and stood square with him, his intense gaze burning into Corwyn's baby-blues, so like his mother's. "I love you, Corwyn and as you have embraced me as your father, it is time for you to fall." Maelmorda kissed both of Corwyn's cheeks then embraced him, and as he did so he slid a long dagger from beneath his robes. "Your greatest journey awaits you," he whispered, and plunged the dagger towards Corwyn's heart.

If Corwyn was unable to retaliate; (which was likely inasmuch as Maelmorda had used his son's trust to an advantage, unless Corwyn escaped his father through a quantum leap) or if he did not attempt to; the blade pierced his breast plate and sank to the crossbar as the dagger cut through his heart. Maelmorda continued to hold his son in his powerful arm as the power of that blade ripped Corwyn's life from him the moment the crossbar was shoved against his chest. The plunge which came of his temporary death thereafter proved simply terrifying as Corwyn tailspun through a black vacuum into the pit of Acheron where he would be reborn as a fallen angel. Because he would self-resurrect in a matter of hours or days, depending on Corwyn, he would not be trapped in Acheron. His body was a gateway back, something the dagger Maelmorda had killed him with guaranteed.

There in the pit, Corwyn would face all his regrets, doubts, fears, and sins in the form of alter realities, livid visions, demons and or wraiths he would have to defeat to save his soul. It was not so much a physical battle as a mental one, although if he feared pain, or if the things he faced injured him, then agony was one of the factors he would experience. If he failed in his trial and was defeated by his shadows, he would become an angel of the pit, a soul eater, otherwise he would be reborn as one of The Fallen, which simply meant that he was an angel which served Acheron, namely The Morning Star who had claimed him by plunging him by his hand, in which case Corwyn's embodiment would darken somewhat. His soul and mind would dictate his alignment, for altered states very rarely took one's virtues and goodness away from them; one's choices decided that. When Corwyn collapsed, Maelmorda caught him in his arms and then carried him to a small canyon where he laid Corwyn's body out on top of a thick layer of furs which materialized on the soft sand as he lowered his son to the ground. That done, he began the task of building a fire and then wove a protective ward around Corwyn's body to guard it in case he was attacked and separated from his son in his helpless state. Even a few yards between them during an attack could spell disaster if Corwyn was not protected. Maelmorda then settled down to wait until his son resurrected. The canyon was part of same system which Wyrvaust's lair joined, but great sand dunes had long disconnected the northern canyon from Wyrvaust's south canyon. The desert gorge would protect his son's body from the sun. If he was reborn as a pit angel, the sun would aggravate him terribly; even repel him, though it would not injure him. Otherwise he would have a great tolerance and resistance to heat and fire. Like many fallen angels, Corwyn would have powers and abilities that were unique to him and to his destiny as one of The Morning Star's own. As Maelmorda had commanded his transition; Corwyn was bonded to the Morning Star and claimed by him as one in his legion by a mark which would manifest on his left breast as he was reborn. It was the mark of Lucifer, a black baphomet pentagram which bore the Morning Star's seal on its outer ring.

"So," came a voice not all that far to the Morning Stars left, a little behind him and his currently not-all-there-son too, coming around into the light to stand perhaps way too close to said fire with both arms crossed over his bare chest, "you did it after all." What exactly he eluded to was a given. Marsol's tone was neither curt nor condemning in what he had said to Maelmorda. That is if his Maker had it his way and his pretty courageous thing of a offspring had been sent with a quickness down below to face his own version of Hell. That is only if and when the Morning Star was sitting in his comfy position with the fire going and the protective barrier cocooning Corwyn.

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When Marsol joined Maelmorda between or after those other events at his little camp in the canyon by the fire, and commented that 'he had done it'; the cat eyed devil lifted his jeweled gaze of jade on his friend and smiled. "Of course I did. My mark of possession shall be within and without him when he breathes again. It is how I guard those I love most. Otherwise I bond them so tightly that they forget where they end and I begin. Perhaps that is why my wife is so tolerant of my absences. We do miss one another desperately when we are apart nonetheless," the last stated with a sigh. "You might follow my example, you know, with those you value most, Marsol. It would calm your angel, and protect Wyrvaust and your daughter Anna from the clutches of others."

"Come, and join me by the fire, beloved Marsol, and tell me what is on your mind," he invited thereof, patting the soft, sandy ground beside him. He was still comfortably reclined against the canyon wall which gave him the added advantage of guarding his back while his son and the canyon floor north and south were well within his sights.

Maelmorda had sensed Seth's presence in An Morendor and wondered if he too might track him down before he returned to his quest. Though Seth was bonded to and marked by Maelmorda, the Morning Star had not forbade his leige from meddling with his vampiric progeny. Seth needed to learn for himself the dangers of tangling with Lords that were not your own, and to stand up for who he belonged to. If he failed to do so, then he might find himself belonging to Sammael. Seth had betrayed Maelmorda once to Sammael, thus Maelmorda tested his loyalty now, and if he lost Seth to Sammael, it would be as much his doing as Seth's. By permitting Sammael to take certain liberties with Seth, he was granting his consent. It was up to Seth to support Maelmorda's claim on him, or to chose to serve Sammael. Admittedly Maelmorda was hard on him, but he expected a lot of those who served him. He had once expected as much if not more of Marsol, who had long ago proven his strength, courage, and his loyalty. Only now was he wavering, in light of Sammael's rise to the throne. Many shifts in loyalty were to be expected with a new Prince, and those who remained true as Maelmorda's advocates were truly worthy as children, allies and friends of the Morning Star in the devil's opinion.

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If Corwyn did manage to escape Maelmorda; and the fall into Acheron by taking a leap through a quantum gate, a very angry Maelmorda would hiss darkly beneath his breath and stalk off eastward. A gateway would open in his path to deliver him far



more rapidly than his feet could to Yorek's yet un-warded city. Not a good sign, that, in light of his fury and Corwyn vanishing on him.

If all had gone according to Maelmorda's plan; The fire he built was welcoming and lit the canyon's narrow throat. If Maelmorda got bored he would hunt some warm blooded creatures, be they unfortunate trespassers on Marsol's territory or dune rabbits. Maelmorda would not take the life of innocents, but few people were innocent, were they? If Marsol decided to join him, he would welcome his company and try to make a celebration of it in honor of his son's second coming. Marsol and his lot could use a good binge as far as Maelmorda was concerned. He might even spike their drinks on the sly with a powerful drug called Ahnri. Its effects resembled opium laced with mild LSD. It was actually the dried dung of a rare moth caterpillar, a very large moth in fact, but despite that, it had a very pleasant musky scent and flavor and was prized by priests as incense. The orchid moths which produced Ahnri could only be found on the upper slopes of high mountains in Morashtar. Ahnri was very addictive if abused.

When at length Corwyn did awaken from his life altering transformation; Maelmorda greeted him with a smile and gathered his son in his arms to sit him up then offered him a flask of refreshing water. The act of resurrection left one tremendously thirsty. "I did not do this to punish you," he had his son know, in case Corwyn believed he had aroused his father's wrath. "It is simply what comes of embracing me. Now try out those new fangs of yours, and drink my blood to regain your energy," he bade and extended his arm to his son. All of The Fallen had retractable fangs, claws, and wings. It did not matter that Corwyn was not reborn as a blood drinker; his father's blood would replenish him regardless. Maelmorda withheld his blood's bonding properties from his son. He had no wish to bond his son and influence him by a false sense of obligation. As Corwyn fed on his delectably ambrosial blood he continued to address him. "As you are unwilling to kill unless it is to defend yourself or those you love, I must assign you a duty which does not conflict with the passive side of your nature. You are willing to kill to protect another, are you not, Corwyn?"

If Corwyn refused even that noble feat of violence; Corwyn would indeed witness his father's evil side as Maelmorda backhanded him with enough force to break his jaw and draw blood. "You are not my son, not yet," he seethed; hence he promptly plunged him once again, only this time through a fiery gate which would dump him on his ass on the floor of Valis Urik's palace by the Lake of Shadows. Corwyn would find himself at the mercy of a trial his father made immediately clear to Valis, who was always happy to oblige his Lord's every whim, particularly when he was not the one being tested. Corwyn would find himself trapped in a warded castle, which was hidden within the shadow realm, yet accessible to the lake land it stood on the edge of. Either way, Valis also had orders concerning Seth, when he returned from his quest. He was to join Seth as Maelmorda's Hand of Reprisal. If Corwyn just happened to be Valis's slave in the meantime, then Corwyn would join Valis and Seth in that crusade, at whatever capacity the demonic vampire saw fit.

Otherwise; that is to say if Corwyn did not disappoint Maelmorda by refusing to stoop to any kind of violence, the devil decided on a duty for Corwyn to perform as he continued to feed on his blood. "This I command of you; you shall return to Yorek and there in the City he is rebuilding; tell him to make his youngest brother Valkar his heir. He will refuse to do this because Valkar is so young and wish to name Rafee as his heir, and he shall ask you to stand as his regent. Accept this

offer to be his regent, but convince him to make Valkar his ruling Prince and heir. His brother Rafee cannot be trusted. If he refuses to make Valkar his heir then you shall simply have to deal with Rafee. Soon, the people of Hawker's Fort shall petition Yorek to rule over the western alliance. Their present king shall fall. I cannot say what leads up to this exactly, only that it shall be so. I shall call on you as I need you Corwyn, so inform Yorek that you are as much at your father's disposal as you are at his."

Maelmorda reclaimed his arm as his son finished feeding and cupped Corwyn's cheek with his palm. The lesson which he spoke thereafter he imbedded in his son's mind to be remembered. "You already know this Corwyn but I shall recap regardless, so that you will not forget. It has been years since I taught you this. Supernatural Power is quantum, a matter of achieving pure thought and focusing it to transfer physical energy to the forces which you harness and channel or project. What your mind imagines and then believes, becomes real. Imagery is essential. You must first see within your mind's eye the sphere of energy you wish to tap and you must know that it is real. Once you can envision it, you can harness it, bring it through yourself as a dormant energy and then project it outward as an active power which your commands manipulate the effects of. When a backlash occurs it does so because we channel active energies through ourselves, or because active powers bounce back on us when a command is unclear. Words and gestures can aid in achieving the results you desire, but once you have mastered your mind and powers, they are unnecessary; the mind can do it all. Still, gestures and utterance can make a power seem more imposing once we become accomplished in the art of acting out such gesticulations and vocal commands. It gives us an added advantage to unnerve an opponent," he smiled at this. "Now, open your mind and allow me to show you what you are presently capable of. You are physically and mentally adapted to command any three elements of your choosing, any three additional paths of your choice, and any three limited paths you elect. You can also learn to command any arcane skill you adopt. You have only to embed the essence of the paths you choose within yourself, in your flesh, your soul, and mind. If the essence of a path weakens you or makes you ill, it opposes you and you must abandon it immediately, else it might destroy you. In time, as you grow stronger, as the essence of these powers strengthens you both physically and mentally, you may learn other paths and ascend towards godhood, lest you choose to maintain the level of power you have achieved. Some creatures are born with their paths already imbedded within them. Not so you, Corwyn. You have only to seek and embrace your paths. If you choose to become a priest of chaos, or an apostle of chaos, you can learn as many paths as do not oppose you, unique paths learnable only by followers of chaos. Tell me if it is your wish to become an advocate of chaos, and I shall send you to a master. The same master Seth shall be learning under. You must dedicate yourself, however." That said and done, Maelmorda leaned back against the canyon wall in a relaxed pose. "Now, tell me your hopes and dreams, Corwyn, with all I have imparted to you in mind," he invited as he clasped Corwyn's arm and pulled him into his lap to coil him in an intimate embrace. Even as Corwyn spoke, his father's fingers brushed and massaged his flesh wherever it was exposed. It was innocent in truth. Maelmorda had gotten over certain evil tendencies, albeit Corwyn could hardly be aware of that. Maelmorda was ever changing and evolving; like the universe.

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Corwyn had always had mixed opinions regarding change. It could be necessary all it

wanted, he thought, but it was seldom any easier because of that fact. Change, at least when it pertained to Corwyn, often brought an amazing amount of craziness and uncertainty with it. And this turned out to be no exception, really, when a kiss to his cheeks by his father came accompanied by a dagger plunging into him. He certainly had not been able to manage a leap away from his father, since he was far too trusting of Maelmorda by half. He didn't quite manage to utter any great last words before crumpling against his father, but the look in those deep blue eyes was enough to suggest that he wasn't exactly pleased about this particular turn of events. This was the kind of change Corwyn would rather rebel, kicking and flailing, against.

And then he fell.

What came afterwards would be something that he'd wholeheartedly try to repress, bury beneath other memories. For someone who didn't want to lose the self he'd come to be, facing such life-altering things could be devastating. Everything he'd come to regret came back to haunt him...that first pair of deaths he'd been ordered to cause and all the turmoil that came with them. Lives he'd left behind. Innocence he'd lost. People he'd almost forgotten, that he'd once cared for. The doubts would speak of great distrust in himself, uncertainties that plagued an otherwise confident person. The fears were the worst. For someone who acted so arrogant most of the time, he certainly had a lot of fear lingering below the surface. All those "what if"s came tumbling out of his subconscious, to materialize in the form of disturbingly realistic visions. It was like being plucked out of all things safe and reassuring and being dropped in the middle of a nightmare. The worst of all those was Corwyn's fear of what he had the potential to become. Perhaps because it had been the fear that had been foremost on his mind, it also seemed to be the most realistic and vivid hurdle to overcome. He'd had to come face to face with that person, that being that by all means could become him one day...or who he could very possibly become. Whichever way one wanted to think of it. That person he had to face was everything he never wanted to be, but knew was tucked somewhere under all that persistent goodness. Angel face, black soul. It horrified him.

In pure Corwyn fashion, he would stubbornly overcome. Phased only momentarily by the things he saw, the things he faced, he would ultimately push through. It would be a good day and a half before he managed to break through to that final obstacle...one could only imagine how long a person who'd lived a longer life would have spent in that state. Corwyn was relatively young, and hadn't managed to build up many regrets. And being the fairly confident person he was, the fears and doubts were not as many as a more insecure person would have tucked away. When he awakened, he'd stir as if rousing from a deep sleep, eyes opening so he could blink blearily up at Maelmorda, who had gathered him into his arms. He was ash pale as he drank from the water that was offered him, and remained silent a little while after that. The way he eyes up his father perhaps suggested that he remembered that little breach of trust and maybe resented it a little. He felt changed, knew the change had happened. That goodness of his was still there, but there was something...kind of jaded about him now, dwelling where a certain amount of innocence had remained. Nothing too startlingly different, but one could not face such things and come out the same.

Corwyn glanced at his father and then shrugged his shoulders at the assurance that the transformation had not been an act of punishment. "I know," he murmured, voice a little husky, throat still dry. He'd leave it at that. He didn't resent the transformation itself, just the method of setting it into action. One had to wonder

exactly how accepting Corwyn would be of shows of affection from Maelmorda after all that...it wasn't often that a kiss on the cheek resulted in a knife through the heart! He wouldn't even hesitate before accepting the arm that was offered to him and beginning to feed, head bent over the extended limb and fingers curved around his father's hand to hold it in place. Normally he rather thought he'd be squeamish about something like that, but something instinctive urged him to take advantage of the offer. He didn't seem to be willing to separate his lips from his father's arm even as that question was asked, but he'd make a sound of agreement in his throat. Poor form, Corwyn...it was not polite to speak with your mouth full. Tsk, tsk. Still, that was one definite instance in where he would not mind the act of killing. He wouldn't even hesitate to start hacking and slashing if it meant the one he was protecting made it through something alive.

Corwyn would listen intently as he fed, though he actually paused at the mention of Yorek. He'd even avert his eyes, perhaps not before his father noticed the way they lit up when that name was spoken. Was he embarrassed? Probably. It seemed silly to be suddenly eager to do a task, just because it involved a certain person. The thought of being regent did make him pause for a moment, but the task was one Corwyn heartily agreed with anyway. He remembered Yorek's brothers well, and of them, the youngest was the one Corwyn would have picked himself for an heir. He definitely held no fondness for the other brother, after all, though he wondered if he would be able to convince Yorek to see things his way. He would certainly try. He'd finish up feeding, delivering a last little lick to the puncture marks he'd left, before wiping the back of his hand over his lips and sitting back. "I'll accept that task." He wondered if Maelmorda knew more than Corwyn thought he did regarding his feelings for Yorek...was it a coincidence that Maelmorda had touched on a task that Corwyn would be willing to throw himself fully into, without regrets? Corwyn tended to be kind of closed-mouthed about his feelings for Yorek, but he likely wasn't nearly as cool as he thought he was about it. It didn't take a genius to know that Corwyn had been dividing his time between the twins, Gala and Maelmorda, and Yorek and his kingdom for a while now. And it certainly wasn't a stretch of the mind to assume that Corwyn had invested a little more into his interaction with Yorek than a healthy friendship.

He'd listen as his father explained a lesson he'd learned once, but refreshed him on the details. He remembered that lesson vaguely, and nodded as he listened, committing it to memory. The idea of becoming an advocate of chaos was one to consider. But of course, knowing Corwyn, it was unlikely that a definitive answer was forthcoming right away. These things needed to be thought out. And he rather thought that if he was not able to dedicate himself at the moment, it was likely that he was not ready to make that sort of commitment, at least at the present time. He could see it being a path that he might choose to travel in the future, in all honesty. He looked a little startled as he was tugged into his father's lap...and of course, he had no idea the intimate embrace he was wrapped in was, in fact, innocent. After all, he had become well-acquainted with a certain side to his father over the years, had even grown to enjoy that side, no matter how his mind had rebelled at times. He'd shrug at the request for his hopes, dreams. "I hope that I can be what you think I can be." He responded honestly. "I hope I can be as strong as you see me being. And I know I'll try hard. I'll explore the powers that have been made available to me. And eventually, I may take you up on the offer of a master to train me..." He announced thoughtfully, hand moving to lightly brush over the back of his father's, more of an idle movement than anything he was really conscious of doing.

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Marsol would be long gone by the time Corwyn struggled to the surface of his immortal coils in resurrection. Maelmorda always regretted it when Corwyn suffered but his regret was like a sigh and pain was unavoidable. The way Maelmorda saw it, the fall was a constructive experience which opened one's eyes into their own soul; and suffering built character as he understood it. Few things annoyed Maelmorda more than an eternal optimist. It was a word he had proved fraudulent time and time again. Eoghan had once been an optimist, but reality set him to rights by and by. At length the Morning Star smiled to his son as his ability to obligate himself to violence for the right reasons was communicated. His gaze immobilized his son as he expressed his hopes and a light breath of laughter breezed from the devil's lungs.

"You have only ever disappointed me, Corwyn, and only superficially and just once failed yourself to my knowledge." He referred to Corwyn's transient murder of his friends at his command. "That, I would say, is quite an achievement. I see in you the kind of strength I have only seen in Belorian and a lean few others. That strength comes from your determined ability to follow your own heart. Why else would I have forced your fall, my son? You never would have consented to it had I requested it. It was imperative to me, more so than to you. Now no one but I can command your fate or resolve. I cannot bear the thought of another controlling you, or getting their greed oiled hands on you to make a slave of you. I shall be content to see you as a student of chaos if that is what your heart chooses. You have darkened physically, but that does not mean you have to lose sight of your true disposition. You might be surprised at how many good hearted, beneficial, and benevolent devils, fallen angels, and demons reside even in Acheron. I cannot be counted among them, for I am only as good as a given circumstance permits me to be. I have decided to be faithful to your mother; however, barring job related instances." He pursed his lips and chuckled at that. The method of his speech was as chaotic as he himself was. Language was a transition of one thought upon the other rooted in logic to Maelmorda. Some found him difficult to follow despite his coherent associations. His gaze then traveled around the low gorge they were camped in.

"It appears Sammael desires to test my patience by leaving me to pass the time in this lovely patch of desolation. Why the desert? Why not Castleguard, his estate, or my Inn by the lake, rather than here? It isn't as though he cannot traipse any distance as easily as crossing a street. If this is his idea of trying my loyalty then he has a great deal to learn. Or perhaps he is attempting to keep me from something?" His gaze bent on Corwyn. "Indeed, why does he squander his time in dissipation with Wyrvaust? The raven is but a crazy clan demon recluse who barely has any contact with his clan. He serves Marsol as a solitary creature whose vision and counsel alone benefit the desert chieftain. Unless he intends to use Wyrvaust as a tool to detain Marsol's loyalty, he is misdirecting his energies. If he is not careful he shall make a fast enemy of Marsol." He rather liked the idea of that though nothing in his demeanor was telling of the fact. Maelmorda tossed a loose length of desert dried wood on the fire. "If I decide I have been forgotten by him; we shall move on to a more comfortable location." Indeed if he had not heard from Sammael or the unnamed party he mentioned that was supposed to meet him by morning, they would pick up their few belongings and withdraw to the fortress

Maelmorda had secured via mind speak through a close acquaintance. The ancient beast which reigned over the castle and lands was a solitary creature, much as Wyrvaust was, only he was even more insane. He seldom left his sanctuary unless it was to chase trespassers away. He was a shapeshifter whose forms often got tangled together. He had long lost sense of what his true form was. An immense scaled elephant with a dragon's tail, which breathed an assortment of elements, was his most formidable form and the one he most often defended his isolated territory with. He just could not quite register that it was his bizarre albeit impressive form which attracted curious intruders now and again. The castle was between a high cliff and a secluded beach, its grounds terraced before it met the sheer precipice of the cliffs or sloped to the pale sands which leveled to greet the sea. It was south of Hawker's Fort on the shore of the Wild Horse Grasslands. The guardian's name was Sarku. He had no middle or surname. Strangely, Maelmorda was one of the few creatures he trusted. His fortress was as much the Morning Star's as it was his.

Maelmorda's gaze drifted into a hiatus which gave him the appearance of one whose mind was wandering; when in fact he was receiving a great many visual and auditory impressions all at once. His hand slipped out from beneath Corwyn's and his fingers met the bridge of his nose between his eyes to brush up and down lightly. His gaze then became concentrated for an interval when at length his focus sharpened and he fixed his attention on Corwyn. "Fate is liquid, you know? It is carried by currents and turned by the storm. A deluge has caused a shift in Yorek's path. He is on the move and shall not return to the ruined City of Inaaksu in the Kingdom of Hassim until he has the power to conquer what rivals him. The forces which oppose him are too great," he informed his son. "Go to him quickly before he is found and see that he arrives in Castleguard safely. If you do not reach him before his enemies he may be lost to you." Maelmorda would not speak of what exactly had defeated the Prince. That was for Yorek to tell. His father was not dead after all. Demons were hard to kill.

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Arilwen and Anna were pretty much left out to dry for the time being. Anna had taken her stance on making sure that Sammael let them be to go and change into a more amiable form. Not that big giant snakes scared them. ...Oh wait, they did! Arilwen had been impressed by that, as she did not know that Anna had it in her. After the girl tried desperately to cheer the angel up (and did a fairly good job at it, considering the circumstances), the two lay in the grass, staring up at the desert's darkening sky. Arilwen knew why her husband adored the desert so much. It really was beautiful, if you knew how to look at it. However, her view of the sky was suddenly blotted out by a head. The angel started and swung herself up into a sitting position, trying to figure out who it was. There were three young women there, all with content little smiles on their lips. Oh man... Arilwen remembered these three now. Sammael's daughters. She slowly rose to her bare feet, her robes clinging with grass, and gazed at them, waiting for what was supposed to happen. At least she did not fear them. During her last run in down in the Toasty Pit, they had been nothing but kind to her, encouraging her to relax, rubbing her feet, giving her baths... Jerking her attention back to the here and now, Arilwen's violet eyes shot open when one of the girls...what had her name been? Kermit? Ashanti? Damn it. She was terrible with memory... but the girl grabbed her arm in a gleeful manner, the next one going to hook her own arm into Anna's, and the crew

would seem to be leading the pair of girls up to Sammael's manor. It was impressive, but that was lost on Arilwen at the moment. Obviously they were being fetched...but for what?

For reasons yet to be known, the evil one was being gentle with the female bird and her mortal friend. For what purpose could Satan have in playing nice with them? Too many to count. The tuff of slightly tanned skin and mess of red curls found that protecting those she cared for came much easier than breathing. It was all in the head she sometimes thought, a will to force yourself into one mind set and just go with it. Although, it was no simple task not to scream and flee in fear from the sight of the giant snake that had loomed over their heads with its row upon row of fang teeth and long black tongue that he flickered at them a few times. Even so, that terror could be blinded by the sheer need to keep safe someone that ought to have been shielding her instead. It was a funny thing between the Nephilim and the human. How the human was so ready to stand nowhere but in front of her should harm come their way. Mortals. Who could ever figure the lot out. Those pale blues would squint at the shadows thrown over them by the new appearance of females other than themselves and she startled to a bolt upright sitting position. But before she could really get a good look at these three beauties, she would feel her arm become hooked and then tugged off along behind the other two that fawned and circled Arilwen with every intention of making the Birdie shine after another one of those pampering sessions the new Mother so very much loved. "Excuse me but who are thee three that lead us away so," she asked, not pulling away but not letting them be pulled away without at least knowing where the heck they were going. Much less if this was even a good idea. What if that oh, what's his name. Saml... Samnel? Sam something or other. What if he had not sent for them? What if these women were just leading them astray and to God only knew where?! But then again this place probably belonged to the dark lord and nothing every really escaped the eyes of the ancients now did it?

Arilwen's violet eyes widened and she bit her lower lip as the gaggle of girls led Anna and herself through the gardens and towards the manor. Arilwen peeked at Anna through her dark curls, remaining as relaxed as possible. "Sammael's daughters..." She said softly in answer to the lithe girl. "No need to be afraid. I have met them once and they were very kind to me." Giving a nod to seal her suggestion, she turned to face forward again as they entered the manor. It was the perfect temperature, even a bit chilly inside, and the angel ran her gaze over the artwork, statues and tapestries that adorned the wall. Within seconds she was lost, the girls leading them through a maze of corridors, and finally into a massive bathing room with steaming tubs dotting the middle of the floor. A bath? The thought actually made Ariwen's body cry out with excitement, the back of her neck prickling, but she chewed her lip and kept quiet. The trio of sisters would immediately fall into habit, going to dig out warmed towels, brushes, scented soaps and hair lathers. One of the girls, the youngest, came to Anna and Arilwen, clucking at them to start undressing, her fingers coming up to untie Arilwen's robe lathings to hurry her along. "I...I'm sorry, are we late for something?" She finally piped up, looking uncertain.

The word "late" probably wasn't one of Sammael's favorites. If in some far fetched way they did happen to be running behind, well there really would be hell to pay. But not for the Swan and her friend. Just the sisters and all the flesh that would be stripped from their bones. Arilwen said that she knew them, that they had been good to her once before and for now that would have to do, Anna thought as she

tried not to drag her feet about keeping up with the brisk pace the three in front of she and the one holding her arm set forth. The mansion was massive in and of itself, let alone how it could have easily doubled as a fortress or something larger. It took them awhile to get to the cobble stone walk way winding to the set of intimidating double red oak doors at the front. The rose garden had been set far down in the middle of the front lawn it seemed, so old English styled. Even the circular pillars wrapping around the front of the manor were in the images of various people and all of which, were doing various acts. Some holding pitchers and out of such poured wide streams of water into a river that trailed down the lawn to the garden there. Others held their hands together in silent prayer, and even still a few held their hands heavenwards, as if supporting the weight of the house on their backs. All of them wore different apparel, if any. But all of them shared one common thread. They all looked stricken. Each and every single painting and portrait the mortal laid eyes on once inside also shared the same fleeting sensation that something terrible had happened to the person being depicted. Subtle it was, so very feather light was the brush stroke or the piece of charcoal that danced its way across canvas or parchment to make the photos framed and hung on nearly every wall available. At one point Anna had to turn her eyes downwards to the black marble floor so as not to feel a sense of loss, from just looking. It was that creepy. Like a fake smile or a nervous laugh. She did not get why someone would want to fill their house with such oddities of eeriness but she said nothing of it. Her eyes would remain glued to the floor as she counted the paces they took from corner to corner, one leg of a table there, two grandfather clocks nestled along adjacent walls here. It was a little OCD sure. But you would be a little off too if you had seen what the human had nightmares of now. Her head only lifted when she felt the coolness of the marble fade; and the heated black and white, checkered, wide-squared tile begin. The heat of the bathing facilities initially made her huff a breath on account of how thick the air was with humidity in there. Not that she minded. It was just the desert had a dry one. As she watched the three females fuss over Arilwen and begin to de-cloth the kind soul, the corner of Anna's mouth tugged upwards in a silent laugh. Was he trying to win them over with hot baths and smelly good stuff? A bit lost in contemplating just what exactly was Sammael's angle in all this, she didn't notice that one of the darker skinned beauties had started undoing the buttons at the top of her robes. "Het," the human barked, accidentally swatting the other girls hands and stepping away quickly. Her lips setting in a line as she faintly glowered, holding the front of her robes with both hands. The girl just blinked, dumbfounded as to why the human would do such a thing, and speaking Russian at that! The free girl laughed hysterically, rattling off a slue of Russian that had Anna's brows coming together and confusion all over her face. "I... am not fluent," she said slowly, side stepping to stand by Arilwen's side as the girl started inching closer to her. "I only know a few words that Niculaie thought m-aahhh!" Ker pounce. The red head in all her hesitating stubbornness would get thoroughly clomped backwards into a pile of wet towels by Isis and Ashyet. Her green robes would not be ripped from her but somehow or another they would manage to roll the mortal out of her clothes and have them folded up by the time she stood in her birthday suit with her hands on her hips and a huff of, "Now see here!" Of course that warm air would hit her bare flesh and she would with a start, eyes widening before, peer down at her quite nude self. "...?!" One arm would slap across the chest and the other would cover the other important places and she would scamper a bit backwards to kneel behind one of said large garden style black tubs with the four feet being claws holding crystal orbs. "This is quite unfair," she piped in as she stared hard over the edge of the tub to the sisters and Arilwen. Never in her life had she been de-clothed like that! The



nerve! Although it was a tad on the funny side, Anna wouldn't find it until later on in the night. Her blue optics darted from one sister to the other, both of which had done the de-clothing. "Stay back," she exclaimed, making fanning motions with her left hand as well as a faint hissing sound. Seems Anna was terribly self-conscious about her body, even if the body was only temporary. "I said stay back! Hey! Put me down! What're yo-stop!" Oh the yelling and how loud it would be. The human squawked as she was wrestled somewhat to the floor by the far stronger, and taller, females and then hoisted up and carried kicking and hollaring to the nearest tub. Of which, Anna plus three she-demon slaves would hop on in. Clothes and all. Naturally Kemsit would giggle as she prodded Arilwen's side, telling the Nephelim that her friend was a silly lot and that was all in good fun. Although it took Isis and Ashyet to both bath Anna at the same time while they sat submerged up to their armpits, washing the girls hair and scrubbing her back, the only thing Anna did was scowl where the water came up to her flipping nose. The tubs were that deep. Or were the sisters that tall? Maybe it was a combination of that and Anna was a bit short. Mumbling something that came out as a bunch of bubbles in the water, the females eyes shifted to look up at Arilwen with that classic "Please... help me" look, before a bucket of hot water was dumped on her head. Which of course had her spitting like a cat, a little flailing involved. Kemsit giggled as she folded Arilwen's robe after the Nephelim stepped out of it, laying it on top of Anna's robe off to the side and then taking Arilwen's right hand and leading her to the tub so she could start cleaning the less troublesome of the two. Kemsit pitied her sisters as she watched them both have to fight to scrub the girl clean...

Arilwen could not help but start to hide a smile as Anna was 'attacked' by the evil strippers o' the deep. She had not even noticed she was naked until afterwards, in which she squawked like a chicken being gnawed on by a fox and scuttled behind a tub. Arilwen lifted her arms and allowed the one remaining sister to pull her robes off, leaving her nude as well. Her grin cracked into a giggle as she stepped into the waters, watching Anna being hauled in like a freshman on orientation day. "Anna...ANNA!" She spoke a little more loudly over the splashing. "It is alright. They do not mean to hurt you. They are just trying to help. Relax. I promise, it feels lovely." The angel sank down into the depths on her own side, her muscles unknitting almost instantly and crying out with some type of all over orgasm. Grinning still as she watched Anna thrashing around like a wounded fishy, she reached over and splashed water at her. "Anna please. They do not speak of this outside of the bathing chamber. Get used to it. I don't think they intend to leave." She sat up straight as Kemsit waded to her and began dousing and scrubbing her luxuriously dark curls with some type of sweet honey and almond soap, though the angel's pure, sweet scent would quickly override that.

Still glowering mildly, Anna would tilted her head upwards when asked to allow her face to be scrubbed by something harsh and filled with suds. Keeping her eyes closed as a pair of hands rubbed the brittle cloth over her face; she wondered where it was Arilwen had met such females if they were in cohorts with this Sammael. This worried her on many levels, that Arilwen already knew the man, beast, thing, and Arilwen was a really good person as far as she could tell. Good people didn't mix with bad ones... right? Many things would start mingling in that tinker the human had, and many more would confuse and thusly the seed of distrust had been planted.

Somewhere within the manor the previously spoken of dark one watched. Not literally but in a figurative sense. He sort of liked the fact that although he had not

ordered Anna to be taken way back when in the desert, it did supply a profound amount of fear in the girl. Fear of everything. She was even afraid of her own shadow now he speculated, with a slight chuckle. But that would only be the beginning of the long road ahead of the two females.

With a muffled noise, Anna shook her head before hands came to gather up all those unruly curls and begin the semi long process of washing away the sand and dirt from them. As that happened she would have to cling to the side of the tub as her left leg was pulled out of the tub by the other sister so she could wash Anna's foot. She grunted, wrapping both arms around the edge of the tub as she peered at Arilwen over the other girls shoulder. "Perhaps if they weren't so insistent, I'd be more inclined to coopera-aaaa! That tickles! Have you no toes of your own! St-stah hah. Hahahah-no seriously st-ahahahah!" The serious tone was evaporating as she felt her toes being the next target of the attack of bath-time. She laughed as she sunk in the tub and then tried to pull her leg back, much like little Anwaar had when his tooties had been gotten. After her eyes started watering from how terribly ticklish she really was, Isis relented and stood from the tub, her gown soaked, to step out of it and track a long trail of soap and water to Arilwen's tub where she helped Kemsit bath the Nephelim. Although it was a tight leash Sammael kept his pretties on, they were still demons. And they had a great time resisting that sweet aroma that the Birdie was filling the air with. Ashyet paused in washing Anna's hair as she tugged the girls head downwards to rinse it clean of the jasmine smelling suds, her pupils dilated till her iris's were almost gone. Isis had to bite her lower lip now and Kemsit could only bite her tongue. It was so hard for them not to have a little angel cake of their own but that would not do. She was not theirs to spoil. What a shame. If Arilwen had only known just what she was doing to the three sisters with her presence. Isis begun washing Arilwen's face after telling her to close her eyes, least it burn them, when Ashyet's fingers tightened in Anna's hair and tugged the mortals head underwater. Now with the size of the tubs and just how deep they were, it wouldn't be that hard at all to be fully submerged and not even notice someone was there. Kemsit begun the short task of massaging Arilwen's shoulders and working those knots out of her back as Isis washed the front of the woman's neck, utterly blocking out the view of the other tubs.

Had Arilwen known that Sam was oogling them from somewhere in the household, she would be a bit more modest. She had no idea that when it came time to be dressed, little was to be left for the imagination on her part. But now she stayed sprawled out in the tub, water lapping at the swell of her breasts as Kemsit gently rubbed and prodded at her. The angel could not completely relax though, as she watched the assault on poor Anna's little ducky paddles. Desperately attempting to keep the corners of her mouth down and out of a smile, she tried to speak soothingly to Anna. "See? Not so bad, hmm? It was a little strange for me the first time as well, but they are all very nice. And they think you are quite the cute little thing, squirming about like that." It was true. The sisters were snickering and cooing over Anna. They found a new, adorable pet. And they showed it as the ducky paddles were suddenly under attack, being tickled and causing the little duck to thrash about. This set Arilwen into a dissolved fit of giggles and she clamped her hand over her mouth to try and hold down the snorking. She only forced her hand down when Isis came to join their tub. She really was naive, not knowing why her scent was so alluring to those, especially demons and...err...well, the devil, obviously. She leaned her head back allowing Kemsit to rinse her hair and Isis to start working on her face. She really had no clue how much self control the girls had to

have around her, as well as others. They had a free meal waiting in front of them and they held back from it. A soft, relaxing sigh escaped the Nephelim as fingers began to work out the kinks in her shoulders. Her head and body rolled to wherever the firm fingers coaxed her, her chin tilting upwards, eyes closed, as Isis washed her neck, surely feeling the distinct throb of her pulse there.

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As the Ducky would slowly be coerced into the skilled hands of a demon to be bathed from head to toe, elsewhere there was a certain ill tempered desert lizard that presently moved swiftly through the hot sands after their fellow clan demon; their brother; their friend. Before he took off after his friend however, he spent the time to let his amber eyes reflect Amaru in them as the youth linked his hand in with his own. The older creature's hands were callously hardened by scars and time, much like the rest of his tanned body, out sizing the young paragons but it wouldn't be all that long before his fingertips matched theirs now would it? Not that long at all considering just how frighteningly fast they had grown thus far. Running his thumb over the back of the hand he clasped in his own, his stubble and bed headed self would come down to be at that level Cirgoth seemed to think he lived at, which irritated Marsol to no end the way the angel did not think higher of himself, but he would never say as much. He knew who, or rather what, he was. He also knew he would never really command Cirgoth or the unique children begotten of him. The pride the demonic draconian had for the twins always showed, if not any it was ever constant in his eyes whenever he looked at them.

"I'll see myself turned inside out and frozen for a mantel piece before that happens," he said, noting how quick the twins were to state where they stood as far as Cirgoth was concerned, or that Marsol would be roped into the same lot as Sammael should he choose to enact such a thing on the angel.

Not letting what exactly it was he was thinking about cross his face, still holding Amaru's softer skinned hand, he untangled his fingers from Cirgoth's so that he could reach up slowly to hold a handful of this auburn hair that sparked many urges in the beast the angel had knelt to. A loose hold he held that bit of hair in as his forehead came to lean lightly against Cirgoth's. He did not enjoy seeing in this one in pain, well not this type anyway. But with that offer of wanting to be taken, how was he supposed to say no? To tell the object of his ever growing affections that that sounded all too sweet to his now twitching ears. Did Cirgoth know of what he spoke? Did the angelic fellow have any inkling as to just how badly Marsol would have loved to do such a thing, if only to protect him, of course. However those kinds of matters were never simple and sure, were they?

"Have faith in them," he said as his hand slipped around to the back of Cirgoth's head to tilt it slightly downwards so that when he leaned forward just that little bit, he could press his nose through that perfect hair and settle his lips against the angels forehead.

He wasn't sure of just how exactly to comfort an angel, for that just sounded unnatural when it was suppose to be they that did the comforting; the saving; the healing of the world and of all its peoples and non-peoples. But how could someone believe in the return of so few when in the company of one so evil? Or did Sammael not care whether he was labeled evil or not?

A slight rubbing of his fingers over the back of the angel's neck was done as he said, "You have to go. You have to go now. Take our sons with you back to your ruins of stone and dirt. You will be far from me, and I need to know that you'll think of me from time to time. But I cannot carry through with this if you are within his reach." The words were quite calm for someone whose insides were in knots. He was telling Cirgoth to leave and take the boys with him, but why? Wasn't the desert far safer than his ruins? Or maybe the angel was better equipped to handle himself and the boys on familiar turf? Even though he was still very much without covering, Marsol would untangle his hand from the angel's reddish mane as well as his fingers from Amaru's hand, to turn quickly and fall into a dead sprint after his dear friend whose heart surely felt as if it were wrenching out of his chest by now. Hard it would be to keep sight of the tanned naked man running at clearly inhuman speeds along the ridge of a neighboring dune to move parallel to the transitioning clansman of demonic descent. Dark brown, almost black, unruly hair became further rumbled as he slid through loose sand to land eighteen feet, give or take one, behind Wryvaust on his departure into the desert. He had no intention of wrestling his friend to the ground to subdue him or anything of the like. But he would reason with him in words first before he had to resort to less gentlemen like measures.

"Wryvaust!" he bellowed as he seemed to be chasing him rather than anything else. "Control your pain! We won't be able to get to them if he can sense your sorrows. I'd lend you my strength and everything I am the same as I would our clan and kin, let me take you to her. WRYVAUST!" His voice rose in its tone, a pitch of anger but it was not aimed at his current friend in his crazed state of mind. He had a vague idea what Sammael was up to when he had first hinted to Arilwen and how he desired her to go with him, wherever it was he was leaving to. He had felt it in his gut that Sammael would use Arilwen against Wryvaust, no doubt on that front, but Anna too? Had that been part of the arseholes plan from the start? He was doing a fine job of trying to rob Cirgoth of his virtue and replace them with emptiness. Marsol had glowered in his heart of hearts at how terrible the damage Sammael had caused to the green eyed angel's mind and the fears that he may or may not have put into him. He would call after the tall form of demon hood running in front of him before he would spring through the air those several feet that distanced them and tackle the other man with a loud grunt and a whole lot of skidding through the sand. In this couple of rolls he did to hook an arm up from around Wryvaust's left side and then clamp his left hand over the other man's right shoulder, and then link his right arm around his friend's mid section, he did all he could not to provoke him but ended up being head butted by that set of horns that topped his head. The skin over his left cheek would be cut easily as he turned his head to the side from hitting the ground again after flipping them both over so that he had to straddle or sit on top of his friend. Or try to at least to get his attention. Sometimes the only way to get through to these two was sheer violence. He hoped it wouldn't come to that.

"You have to calm yourself before we can leave to find her," he shouted, now both arms crossed over the front of Wryvaust's neck, all too aware that if his friend wanted to he could inflict some potentially fatal wounds at the moment and Marsol would be in no position to stop him. Marsol would stay with Wryvaust until he either gained enough awareness to safely tune his darker side and its urges, or changed back to his human form. Either way Wryvaust chose, Marsol would be seeking out Satan in his own way.

The once fair but now tanned human would sit, mildly sulking as she had her hair brushed while it was still lathered with soap. It would be a little while till Arilwen and her human companion were guided from their tubs to be wrapped up in towels and left to sit on warm oak benches while the girls fetched various assortments of dresses and gowns for them to look at, saying yea or nay to them at their leisure. Some of their choices had her brows lifting at how tiny they were or how little material the dress actually had to it. One such item was brought to Arilwen in which the slave insisted she try on.

Turning her head sideways, she said, shocked, "My napkin is bigger than that." Which was true to her. The black thin slinky dress couldn't cover much of Arilwen as Anna took it slowly from the girl that held it up to lift it to eye level and then turn it over in her hands. There was no back to it! Even less of a front! Two wide bands crossed over the chest to link behind the neck maybe? And there was a bit of silver chain but where did that go? Shaking her head, a bit confused, she turned to sit back down when she felt her shoulders get tugged backwards and the towel being prodded at.

"Now don't start that again!" Swatting at the prodding hands, she would be taken around the bench to sit on the other side where those inhuman females would start to work on the Nephelim and human's hair and such. Jewels the size of apples were brought in trays and laid at their feet. They had the choice of anything and everything to wear from diamonds to the reddest of rubies and whitest of pearls. It did all look so shiny and pretty to her as she peered down at the spindle of rings and bands. Maybe those went around your neck she thought, leaning forward on the bench to get a better look. But they were a little too tiny to go around your neck. Maybe your arm then she pondered as her blue eyes traveled to the side and then up to Arilwen.

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Wyrvaust blinked his lids hard over his darkly reptilian eyes as the cool air of the dark desert prickled against his feverishly hot skin. Marsol's voice reached his senses as if some deafening sound had compromised his keen hearing to muffle his bellowing and make it sound distant and illusory. As he had stalked across the undulating sands he had focused his mental faculties on his wife and locked onto her presence in doing so, and just as he was about to summon up a gate trained on her presence and step through it to join with her, Marsol collided with him to knock him flat. Only when his Master had him pinned and after he had head butted him as an instinctive defensive response; did Wyrvaust realize that Marsol had come after him. His breath thinned and he struggled for a moment then quite suddenly his lord's pleas reached him and his hard muscles slackened against his hold until he lie quite cooperatively beneath him with the sand against his back and the hard pressure of Marsol's arms against his throat. Even then, his lock on Arilwen remained, and when he answered his friend and liege, he did so with a sound voice whereas his eyes remained distant with distraction as his mind was in three places at once, albeit now that part of his attention was paired off to Marsol his mind was owned by a fourth concern. His mind was trained on these four things; Arilwen, a shadow gate locked on her, his own physical prowess which was focused on his planned endeavor, and Marsol.

"I am calm now, My Lord, I am," he promised, his voice coarser in demon form, and just like that; he was composed. That small amount of violence on Marsol's part

with his commanding voice had returned the demon to his senses. The words he chose afterwards proved he had finally come to process Marsol's stringent warnings. Gazing up at his Lord he knew he would be worthless to Arilwen if he could not control his emotions, an art Wyrvaust was a master of typically. He had come undone, yes, but now he had found the cold hollow in himself and drew on that as he must to achieve his objective. "I have her in my sights," he spoke in a low hiss which never reached beyond them to carry on the breeze which shifted the sands as the air cooled. A sphere of silence called up by the demon guarded their voices. "Let me go alone that ye not suffer the consequences of my resolve, beloved Anwarr. Let me retrieve them as the darkness steals away with the light, silent and furtive as the shadows which are ready to answer to my beck. If I have not returned by the time the moon crests the great northern dune, our fates are thine," he proposed, the time allotted a mere ten minutes. "But haste is a must...all haste," he urged him to decide quickly whether to permit him to carry on. For reasons unknown to most; when Wyrvaust was in full transition of his demon form his speech improved immensely. His personality was split between his two key forms it could be said, the darker side, the colder side, the more confident side, the strongest side of him, encapsulated within his demonic being.

If Marsol allowed him to proceed and let him rise, Wyrvaust would act immediately to access the gate he had prepared, which was safeguarded against anyone entering it with exception of himself, Arilwen, Anna, and Marsol, and in the next instant he would step through the shadowy fissure which would open between Anna and Arilwen. If his goal succeeded according to plan, he would haste himself the moment he emerged from the gate to seize first Arilwen by her arm, and then Anna, and pull them by brute force if necessary through the shadows. If the demon women attacked him, he would roar a command to release a shielding force which would block magic and physical attacks alike as he pulled his wife and her mortal friend through the gate. The gate would deliver them to his warded lair, uniting mother and son, where Wyrvaust would inform Marsol of where they were. If Wyrvaust came up against unexpected obstacles as he attempted to seize the two women, he would deal with them as they arose with iron determination.

If Marsol insisted on joining him, Wyrvaust would offer no further protest inasmuch as he felt it imperative that they waste no more time. He would carry out his plan in company of his Lord, but suggest he remain cloaked within the shadow gate just within its plane of exit until a time he was needed, as a hidden weapon. If one of them was to be seized, Wyrvaust preferred it was he, and not Marsol, whom so many depended on.

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Arilwen hid a tiny smile behind a cough as Anna finally and begrudgingly gave up her fight and let the demon girls coax her from the tub. They chattered over the two like mother hens, ushering them to a warmed oak bench and tucking them in thick towels while they proceeded to fuss about their hair. Anna's locks were being twisted and spiraled up to be pinned with beautiful diamond pins to her head. Half of her hair would go up, then the sister would change her mind, take it down and start over with something a little different. She was like the cutest, most amusing Barbie doll ever.

Arilwen's dark locks were a different story. They sprayed them with a glossing agent and vigorously brushed them out, leaving them flowing. And it was a good

thing; because partway into their little dress up series, that soft napkin of a dress was presented. Arilwen's lips set to a fine line and she frowned as the demon girls coaxed her to try it on...stating that Sammael would be VERY pleased. Well of course! He could count her thigh muscles and ribs in it! But the reason Arilwen was here was for her beloved husband. Wyrvaust was 'getting off easy' for the beheading of Sam this way. Arilwen played his toy for a bit and hopefully soon she could go home. She just had to be a good little China doll. Heaving a sigh, she rose, dropped her towel away and wiggled into the dress with the help of two of the sisters. It was a soft black material, halter type with two strips of material just covering her breasts enough to hide the nipples. The curves were a free for all though. Her waist and hips were bare, the material running down her belly, and connecting to a skirt...a skirt that looked like nothing more than a thick belt! Her cheeks flamed a deep red and she tried to spread her curls out over her chest to cover it some more before tugging at the dress to be sure that it stayed over her butt cheeks. Oh boy, there would be a lot of tugging tonight.

If indeed Marsol would allow Wyrvaust to go and fetch the girls, Arilwen would not know what hit them. One moment she was standing next to Anna, trying to fold her arms over her bare middle and the next she would feel static around her. What? Blinking, she would not even have the opportunity to yelp as someone's fingers crushed into her arm and yanked her backwards, Anna following as well. Arilwen had never been a fan of gates and she always clung tightly to Wyrvaust. This time was no exception. The angel grew dizzy, felt as if she were falling. One thing she DID recognize was his scent... the spicy scent of her husband. Therefore, she would curl herself against the man who had hold of her, squeezing her eyes shut until they would be dumped to the floor of his much quieter lair. If Marsol decided against Wyrvaust's wishes and the demon complied, Arilwen would simply go about sulking as she slid silver snake-like arm bands up both of her upper arms, followed by some hopping to squeeze into black spike heels that were just a LITTLE too ridiculously high.

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Wyrvaust succeeded in his retrieval of the two women. There had been no wards on the area where the Prince of Demons had taken Arilwen and Anna and why should Sammael bother to guard his little paradise? Who would dare to trespass and steal his guests from him? Wyrvaust would dare. He would dare because he had the right to, just as he had every right to attack Sammael when he had invaded the Raven's domain; so it was written in the Book of Acheron; so was the Standard of Possession known in Acheron. Perhaps Sammael judged that he stood above the ancient laws as Acheron's Prince; he had always believed he was a law unto his own; but not until he had crossed Wyrvaust had he broken the line of those ancient practices and been called out as an outlaw. It was something very new to Sammael. Arilwen was Wyrvaust's wife, and she bore his mark of blood bondage. That made her Wyrvaust's by Acheron's standards and practices, its laws and Wyrvaust relied on those standards to protect his wife, and his son, who was also bonded.

Arilwen had never seen Wyrvaust in demon form, nor had Anna. He was barely recognizable. He was taller by a foot and far more muscular. His flesh was leathery and jet black and his face was goatish with human characteristics. His goat-like nose was flattened and curved over to a slightly elongated maw. He had no lips and sharp rows of teeth and wicked fangs were exposed when his mouth parted. A pair of impressive flared horns crowned his head to part his hair in two

places. The straight locks of ebony which tumbled over his shoulders and down his back was the same and was perhaps the only human constant with his bipedal posture. His dark brown eyes had turned a burnt orange color which radiated with an otherworldly glow and rounded pupils had narrowed into reptilian slits. His upper body was naked with exception of the cloak which lay between his massive pair of dragon or giant bat wings, each wing tip equipped with a sharp, curved talon. His hands were larger and clawed and his arms longer, while his powerful hips turned out and his legs had elbows like a four legged animal's. His feet had taken the shape of large cloven hooves and he had a long powerful tail tipped with spikes which could coil like a snake's as opposed to a lizard's rigid tail.

His massive wings shifted to spread slightly as his dark orange eyes trained on the two women. A grimace snarled his lips and nose as he gazed on the state of their dress. Whores...Satan had dressed them like slave whores. The disrespect and innuendo behind the slutty clothing, the sparkling jewels, stilettos, perfumes, and make up they had been provided sickened him and he raised a clawed hand to point towards the corridor which led to the bedroom, whereof he spoke in a course voice deepened and rasped by his bestial traits. "Please...change into something less...provocative," he bade almost pitifully, his heartache and grief apparent even as he was. If Arilwen so much as touched him he would shudder and close his eyes as his flesh absorbed her presence and the feel of her. His imagination did not have to leap far to figure what Satan had intended for his wife and Marsol's adopted daughter. His own loins throbbed to see so much of his wife and so little covering her. Before they had turned to leave he sent Marsol a telepathic vision of the two women to show him how Satan had adorned them for his pleasure, and afterwards his voice infiltrated Marsol's mind. ~"I have secured them in my lair, My Lord. See how he has dressed them; is there any question what he intended for them? Why else would he have them clad like carnal slaves? Think they in their innocence would have suspected the depth of his sins, his lusts? What right hath he to make a whore of my bonded wife?"~ The last he hissed. He would have said the same of Anna but he did not know whether she was bonded to Marsol. ~"I must keep them from him, I must! I will not have him corrupt them with his lusts! If he will not see to reason I shall take this matter by projection to Acheron's courte!"~ He ranted to his Lord. Sammael was the demon of sin after all, what else was Wyrvaust to believe in light of their appearance?

Wyrvaust felt sick inside and paced the floor, the click of his hooves echoing off the stone walls as he crossed back and forth before the handsome foyer's dragon fountain. At length he made his way towards the bedroom to stand guard outside the door, his ears, nose and supernatural senses trained for the slightest sound or evidence of magic. His wards were powerful, built on for years, but with assistance from those who were loyal to Sammael, and with time, the Desert Wind could break his wards down. He was trapped in his lair in a very real sense with his wife, Anna, their servant, and son. Was there a place where Sammael could not reach them? Wait...He thought. If Sammael refused to observe The Standard of Possession, then he was at very high risk of forfeiting his throne. Would he dare if he was reminded of that? Would he dare? He might, if he decided to rebel, but he would need the legions he commanded to do that. Or he might strike a deal with Yajmha and get the Alamascan behind him. Many were the possibilities, and the only good one was the prospect that he would see to reason and yield to Acheron's standards. That was the one path to peace. Every other possibility was quite disturbing to consider.



~"Prince Sammael,"~ his mental voice projected in an attempt to make a connection to the Prince of Demons. ~"If thou art able to hear the Desert Raven he beseeches thee to give ear to his position. By these claims I stand righteous as a child of Acheron in all I have committed. Arilwen is my wife, and by marriage, and my mark and bond she is twice protected by the Standard of Possession and Marriage. United were we in wedlock by the traditions of Chaos, Acheron's sovereign faith, king and maker. Within my rights was I by all of Acheron's standards and practices to attack thee when thou trespassed on my property, for once already thou stole away with my wife and son, who art mine by all standards of Acheron. Within my rights was I to take back my wife, and to protect the daughter of my overlord while doing so. By what right do you take what is ours?"~ He put to the demon, and if Sammael did not receive his message, he would call on his shadow raven familiar to deliver the message in a letter to him personally. Indeed if he was ignored he would immediately write the letter and dispatch it by his familiar, which would emerge from the shadows closest to Sammael and wing its way to the Prince to perch on his shoulder with the missive bound to its leg, written exactly as Wyrvaust had spoken his claims telepathically. For all Wyrvaust knew, Sammael was testing his knowledge of the Standards he spoke of. Unless an apostle or Lord of Acheron stood on those grounds to proclaim them to those they were wronged by, an interloper could get away with crossing those taboos as often as they pleased.

When Arilwen and Anna finally emerged from the bedroom, Wyrvaust wrapped his wife up in his arms and wings alike to cocoon her, at what time he led her to their son's nursery, where Anwarr lie napping with his nurse watching dutifully over him. If Wyrvaust was addressing Sammael or listening to him as he went through these motions nothing in his expression betrayed what his mind and thoughts were up to. The nurse startled when she laid eyes on Wyrvaust and took a protective stance over the sleeping child. "Thou hast no need to protect Anwarr from his own father," Wyrvaust spoke gently. Her eyes thinned on him for a moment, then recognizing certain features which were unmistakably Wyrvaust's, her eyes softened and she smiled.

"Forgive me, My Lord," she stated humbly and curtsied to him.

Wyrvaust nodded to her as a gesture of forgiveness then hugged his wife against his very warm body then released her to see that Anwarr was safe...for now. His gaze fixed on his son who lay so oblivious to the terrors of the world around him. Wyrvaust released a shaky breath. If only he could protect his family, if only they could live in peace and his son never had to experience the horrors and pain that came with being tied to Acheron. His son was born a child of Acheron. He had not had a choice. Anwarr was born bearing his father's mark, and Wyrvaust had fed his blood to Anwarr like milk to bond him further. Wyrvaust was all too aware that there were so many ways Sammael could make him pay for his defiance, whether the Raven stood within his rights or not, without the Desert Wind ever breaking a single standard, and he felt sure the worst lurked, lie in wait for him like a snake hunting a rat. Watching his wife caressing their son, he felt how terribly unbearable it was to think his wife would continue to suffer and that his son might suffer as well at his young age. Wyrvaust's clawed hand swept upward and his finger pads brushed his face with anxiety and in the next moment he was stalking out of the room. "Arilwen," he called to her. He decided to create a shadow keep to protect his family, and to insure he had the strength to use his full power to build the keep; he needed his wife's invigorating blood.

When his beloved mate met him he clasped her hand and led her into the bedroom, where he pulled her down on the bed. Wyrvaust lost himself in that hour...Lost himself in her blood, in her body as he introduced her to his demonically enhanced sexuality. Twain members, one massive, the other modest, a pair of snake-like tongues joined her lips north and south, invaded her to bring her to brutal heights of ecstasy. He hungered as much for her pleasure and the shared rip-tides she sent rushing through him as for her blood. He could not stop himself, could not force himself to cease perpetuating her intense climaxes and he sobbed as they erupted together and the image of Satan doing to her what he did now tortured his mind. He sustained her so selfishly because of that vision...Because he could not bear another ever touching her in any intimate manner. When she was too weak, too exhausted to do anything but twitch beneath him, he extracted himself from her and kissed her deeply. He had kissed her all the while he loved her unless he was nursing on her plump breasts. Now he sat up on the edge of the bed and just stared down at her, his wings still shivering. "How can such an unspeakable love be so painful?" he whispered, sure she was passed out. "I shall not survive it if I should fail to protect thee...If I should fail to prevent another from raping thee." He spoke not an empty belief but a fact. He could not live with failing her. He could sooner fail his own son than he could her.

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Arilwen felt a heaving, dizzy sensation as she was dumped from the gate beside Anna, and she staggered on unsteady feet as her spiked heels hit the ground. For a moment she clung to the arm that supported her, but she felt Anna jerk away, shocked by what she saw, and that forced Arilwen's violet eyes upwards. What met her was a creature she had never seen. It had SMELLED like Wyrvaust... she felt Wyrvaust inside... but this thing looked nothing LIKE him. Backing up slowly and never blinking, the Swan put an arm out in front of Anna, as if she could protect her if they were attacked. That was funny. Maybe she could take off a spike heel and sink it into the creature's eye. Her form slowly and cautiously relaxed, however, when she realized that it was indeed her beloved husband in a form she had never seen. She seemed speechless until he snapped her out of it and motioned for the two of them to go get dressed. Anna darted off ahead of her but the angel stayed for a moment, taking in a slow breath as she stepped forward, reached up and gently ran her fingertips along Wyrvaust's new features. "My love?" She whispered, looking deeply into his face. Without asking questions, she finally forced herself to follow Anna and once she was in the room, she shed the clothing she had just been squeezed into and slid on a dark blue robe. Anna was given a scarlet one to wear that would fit her a bit better.

Arilwen finally opened the bed chamber door and found Wyrvaust waiting patiently for them. She made no sound as he swept her up into much more muscular arms, tucking her against his chest. His scent, his presence... it was him without a doubt and she tucked her face under his neck as he carried her away. Her heart was a battlefield at the moment. She was so terribly glad to be home, but she knew that Sammael would have plans looming on the horizon and she feared for her husband much more than herself. In moments she felt her heart leap into her throat and her eyes sting as she saw their sweet son napping in bed with the servant. She commended the girl for being so alert, but once she was gone, Arilwen left her husband's arms to go to the bed, gently lowering to the edge. Now that he was learning to walk he had lost most of his baby chub and was starting to look like a startling version of Wyrvaust. Reaching forward, she softly touched his cheek and his dark locks, then

gave the quietest of shivering sighs. She couldn't stand to be away from them... either of them.

Only Wyrvaust's words called her away and she went dutifully, rising and padding on bare feet to his side. After taking his hand, she would disappear with him down the corridor and into the bed chamber, where an entire new world was awakened to her. She had always loved every moment her husband and her had spent tangled in each others' arms, but now, it was like it was HIM, but in a different body. He began delivering the most rash and extreme bouts of pleasure on her that she had ever felt, and the next hour was spent with her neck gashed open and her legs splayed to her eager lover. Not to mention her vocal chords were just about worn out. He tapped her to the point where she finally fainted beneath him, exhausted and spent, her skin and muscles lighting with tremors as he gazed down at her. She was home and safe, but for how long?

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Wyrvaust brushed his wife's flesh ever so delicately with his claws, his gaze following their feather light journey over her curves. He was relieved that Arilwen had accepted him as a demon, even allowed him to love her. The demon then stood and went to the walk in closet where he slipped a large, rectangular cloth of earthen colors and elaborate weave from a hanger and wrapped it low around his waist below the wing membranes which joined his flesh from his shoulder blades to the back of his hips. Taking a tightly knitted belt from a hook, he secured his knee length skirt then returned to the bed chamber where he stood between the bed and the doorway. There in his stance, he began to summon the shadows to his beck and to weave a structure into his lair that was tangible only to those he selected for access. It mirrored his lair exactly thus creating a sort of shadow mirror of his haven, where all within phased into the shadows and were only detectable to others who were permitted access. In doing so, anyone not permitted to enter the shadow keep would see the material lair but not the shadow lair and those paralleling it within. The moment any of them stepped outside of the protective barrier within or beyond the underground habitat, the mine and its corridors, they could be seen by others. Only those with a master's knowledge of Umbramancy could step out of the shadow keep within the lair to be seen; otherwise they had to leave the shadow keep to withdraw from the shadow zone that Wyrvaust built. The only visible difference between the shadow keep and the lair and all within it to those protected by the shadow veil, was an impression of a deeper gloom as if seeing everything, including the fires burning in the braziers, candles, and torches through tinted glass.

Wyrvaust's arms and hands moved now and again as he lifted the shadows into an area or item, or pushed them through and over a corridor, and wove its protective force throughout his haven. Wyrvaust's eyes rolled back and he began to chant as he poured and imbedded more power into the shadow keep to ward it against invasive powers using sorcery factors. Hours had passed by now and when he opened his eyes he found his wife staring at him curiously. His lipless mouth curled at the corner with a faint smile and he swung his imposing frame around to meet her gaze. His wings spread to stretch and then folded against his back again and in a few long strides he met her at the bed. One hand clasped hers and the other lifted up, palm towards the ceiling and holding her gaze he uttered a string of commands which unleashed a vibrant sphere of ultraviolet light from his hand which spread out and then dispersed as he sealed all of his combined powers. The haven was now

protected by layers of arcane power; the abysmal wall of force, the shadow keep, and the warding factors, all geared towards preventing invasion, and in case of the wall of force, retaliating against it by draining life, power, strength and stamina. He had selected Arilwen, Anwarr, Marsol, Anna, and his slave sired servant Bella for bypass (from the wall of force) and entrance (into the warded shadow keep). Wyrvaust as the architect of those powers was automatically bypassed and permitted passage.

Sitting down on the edge of the bed; Wyrvaust addressed his wife, caressing her seductively all the while he spoke. "My desert swan is so beautiful, so like the birds of paradise which frequent the oases with their lively songs. No wish hath the Raven to cage thee in our fortress beneath the sand; but until this conflict is resolved how shall I let her spread her wings? I fear thou shalt remain imprisoned with our son, and his nurse. The Raven contemplates and in that is in dire need of advice from his goddess. Shall I leave thee in the protective womb of this cavernous safe-haven and with courage face the Lord of the Evil Dead, in hopes of achieving a pact which satisfies us all? Or bide my time with the other birds here caged with wings clipped in hopes that the sand storm shall pass and forget us?" He genuinely sought the counsel of his wife, who he respected and trusted as much as he adored her. "The Prince of Demons transgresses a key Standard of Acheron in his attempts to lay claim to what is not his to take. By what is just and honored in the Kingdom Below I have not stepped off the path of justice, whereas he hath twice broken the scepter of Acheron; and in doing so passed the torch of retribution to me. Can the Desert Wind foil the flight of the Desert Raven when the Raven hath two legs to stand on and the Wind none? With this principle on my side, have I anything to fear from the Prince of Acheron, or hath he simply been sowing this fear and then feeding on it owed to my distrust in his integrity?"

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Arilwen slept deeply and dreamlessly, unaware of her husband's claws running over her shivering body before he moved away to dress and begin his ritual. It was good that she was exhausted past the point of dreams, because she would have terrible ones. She had the good sense to know that Sammael was going to be angry. It was a horrible ping pong match. Wyrvaust beholds him, he snatches Wyrvaust's wife, Wyrvaust snatches back... She wished there was a way to meet with Sammael and beg him to just forgive her beloved. She wished for peace. But wasn't that always her way? Hours later, when Arilwen's still form finally began to stir, she heard chanting through her foggy mind. Violet eyes cracked open slowly and took a moment to focus before they settled on her husband, in that strange demon form, chanting to the ceiling. Slowly and quietly the angel rose to settle on her knees in the middle of the tangled blankets, her dark hair falling over her pale breast as she studied him, watching him unabashed. Not only was she curious about what he was doing, but she had tumbled into bed quite quickly with him that night, and she wanted to study this alternate form. She had never seen anything like it. The horns scared her, just slightly, but she easily reminded herself that her husband would do nothing to harm her, and that helped her to calm down about it.

When Wyrvaust's eyes finally opened and his gaze met her own, she offered a tiny, curious smile, then waited for him to move to her. The wings just amazed her. They were nothing like her own. They were gigantic. She allowed her hand to be taken up and she chewed on her lower lip once the Raven began to chant the strange words. Her body twitched with shock and her eyes widened when the rich light filled the

room in a brilliant flash, causing her to squint for a moment. Afterwards, he lowered his huge form to the bed and skimmed his claws carefully over her bare skin, lighting up the nerves under it. Arilwen shivered, then met his gaze with a somber one of her own, listening carefully to his worries. He was in a horrible situation, she could not fool herself to think otherwise. He wanted to keep his family safe, but at the same time, he was toying with the anger of someone bigger than them... one that had held their despair in his hands before. After a moment of silence, Arilwen rose on her knees to slide her bare backside onto Wyrvaust's clothed lap, curling herself against his torso, leaving her fingers to walk softly up and down his arm and her cheek to rest on his chest. "My selfish heart wishes to keep you locked up here forever." She admitted quietly. "To stay below ground and be with my husband for all time. But both you and I know that we cannot live in such a way." To be honest, Arilwen could probably HANDLE it, but the Raven would go mad instantly, chomping at the bit to be set free. "We cannot hide. I want to be able to take Anwarr to the oasis... to go swimming... to watch you teach him to hunt and run and track. He cannot grow up locked away in a cage, as much as I would like him to. This land is no longer the land you adore if you have to hide away in it." She pointed out carefully, then sighed. "I cannot begin to judge the Dark One's intentions. Perhaps he IS just testing you, toying with your emotions to teach you some type of lesson. I do not think he would purposely jeopardize his rule over having something. On the other hand, perhaps he has grown an obsession, much like we all have over time, and it is clouding his judgment." Arilwen heaved a sigh, falling quiet for the time being, and then closed her eyes and turned her face to bury it in his neck, breathing in his familiar scent. "I believe that the two of you should meet and speak together, as much as it kills me to say so, to discuss terms and happenings. You cannot remain the rabbit and he the lion..." It was killing Arilwen to speak so honestly. She wanted to snatch him up into her arms and lock him away forever. She was tired of fearing that this would be the last day she might see him. "If needed, I can go with you. Sammael was not unkind to me when I was at his residence. I do not think he wishes us harm... only some type of test, much like when our son was brought into this world."

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Wyrvaust's breath quickened as she crawled into his lap and the weight of her nude body bore down on his loins. She would easily feel the daunting erection she induced beneath her. He necked her deeply as he absorbed her advice, his undying hunger for her evident. Arilwen's words told Wyrvaust what he needed to hear. He had to face this and not hide from it. It was the only way to settle matters once and for all.

"I must make thee aware of some things, beloved swan." She was his goddess, plain and simple. "If I act on Acheron's laws I give him equal leverage to do the same. He is the Prince of Demons and I am a demon of Acheron, out of the blood of Muustala, progeny of Prince Beroth of the Adramelech clan. Lord Ardam alone can oppose Sammael's command over his clan bloods. If Sammael commands me, I must obey, while he cannot trespass on what is mine by law of possession to do so, but that does not mean he cannot punish me by some other means. I can refuse him nothing outside of what is mine alone to command." His eyes sharpened on her when she offered to accompany him in meeting with Sammael.

"No, stay here you must. You do not understand the way of demons, particularly not one as ancient and clever as Sammael. He is the demon of sin. That is what and

who he is. He claims souls and lives by tricking them into committing sins. The manner which he clothed thee and Anna was indicative of a demon intending to take carnal pleasures with thee if not make sexual slaves of thee, and either act is an absolute trespass over my claim on thee, and I pray Marsol's claim on his daughter, if he hath bonded her. If not, she is in jeopardy. If she is not bonded and Sammael demands to have her back, I cannot disobey him, for she is not Marsol's child by blood. He adopted her. I would like to build genuine trust with Sammael, I would like to love him, but he has thus far proven himself untrustworthy."

"His kind treatment of thee is how he seduces thy confidence. Think, Arilwen. What business hath he with thee, what can he possibly want from thee? Young are thee in thy powers, in thy ability to fight or to even act as a diplomat, and indeed thou art passive, of a peaceful resolve. What can he want with thee other than to corrupt thee and claim thee by path of sin; to use thee against me and perhaps me against Marsol? Would ye not relent to him to protect me? If the swan was to give herself willingly to him, then her bonds to her husband would be broken. My claim on thee would be lost. These are the ways of Acheron, ways ye must guard all that ye are against. If he hath some other motive, it cannot be good, else why would he isolate thee from thy clan? Had he wished to, he could have claimed Cirgoth. He placed Marsol in his debt by returning the angel to him by breaking bond. These matters are complicated. Trust me to protect thee and our son as best I can. I will do all in my power to do so."

Wyrvaust held his hands up in a bowl with his arms wrapped around her and summoned a magic item from his trove of valuables whereof a black sphere of crystal appeared in his hands. His muzzle then brushed her ear as he continued to speak. "When I go to him...Ye may see us and hear us through this item. Thou hast only to speak my name. Ye may also project thy form through it to stand as if with us by telling the orb to take thee to me. Thou shalt not truly be there, but it shall feel as if thou art until ye ask the sphere to return thee. Nothing can harm thee in this way, for thy presence shall be an image of ether and nothing more. I will not risk having thee there in the flesh. I shall not." That said he lowered the obsidian globe into her hands. It was heavy, nine inches in diameter, but not so heavy that she could not easily carry it.

The demon then separated the fold of his skirt where it overlapped and shifted beneath his wife as he penetrated her. He groaned deeply as he slowly sank himself inside of her, relishing the feel of her every inch of the way. His hands covered her breasts to knead them, his claws never contacting her flesh but to barely brush her. He maneuvered her to swing her around on her hands and knees and made passionate love to her again. He dominated her completely as he pumped her with his tremendous member, explored her flesh with his tongue and fingers, and aroused her bud with thrashes which pressed deep against her bundle. When her orgasm was achieved so was his to fill her once again with his hot seed. He sang out in ecstasy as she pulsed against him and coiled her with his wings and arms. He pressed hard inside of her as his release came to hold himself against her deepest limit. His breaths puffed like a winded stallion as he let his need for her ebb. He could have loved her for hours...days...but he wanted to put an end to the madness. He kissed her for a long time then finally uncoupled from her and rewrapped and tied his skirt. When Wyrvaust withdrew from the bed; he did so reluctantly. He turned for a moment to gaze on his beautiful wife. "I want to be worthy of thee. I love thee...I cannot tell thee how deeply." That said he withdrew without further word. There was no need. She knew he was going now to

seek Sammael. As he left the bedroom the Abyss Demon phased out of sight and into the shadows. When he emerged, he was standing exactly where Arilwen had been standing when he snatched her back with Anna.

"Lord Sammael, Prince of Acheron and Demons, Wyrvaust the Desert Raven hath come to settle matters with thee!" he beckoned. When and if Sammael did appear, Wyrvaust knelt to him in a respectfully proper bow. "Was my message to thee received, Lord Desert Wind?"

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Anna barely saw what grabbed her arm to haul her away in her silver reflective squared dress and black mid calf high boots. However once within the safety of the lair and behind Arilwen, those pale blues would lift to see something right out of a nightmare. Her initial reaction was to scream, and she would have had her voice not failed her. Perhaps it was a good thing, otherwise she would have woken up little Anwar. She would lay her hand over the spot that Wyrvaust had held her, the area of her skin that his inhuman hand had touched. She felt cold and her stomach knotted up as her eyes just couldn't peel away from the sight of him. The fear, that frigid fear that she had felt when in the desert and the great red scaled beasts had gathered round along with the giant serpent, this was the third time she had ever felt fear such as this before. The first time, well she crumbled at remembering the first time she had tasted true fear. The human would shy away behind Arilwen and when the demon bid them to change, she would shrink away from him completely as much as possible by fleeing from the room. For the few minutes that Arilwen stayed to give those tender reassuring touches to her beloved, Anna would cross her arms over her head in a corner where she would lower to her knees, where her chest would be heaving with the threat of tears. Her eyes would burn as she squeezed them shut and shook for that brief time before Arilwen came into the room to get into something less revealing and more comfortable. As soon as she wasn't alone, she would rub her face and stand up, turning around to offer Arilwen a smile; even if it was forced and it didn't reach her eyes. Peeling off the dress, for there was no better term for it, she slipped into that scarlet piece of cloth and smoothed out the material over herself. For the time being as the Swan and her mate would leave to do whatever it was people in love did, Anna would come to kneel by the sleeping baby and as she folded her arms under her head, she would watch little Anwar sleep. And after awhile, the fear would tire her out and she too would slip into an empty sleep.

If not, then Marsol would stay half in a gateway of frothing flames and/or darkness where his left foot settled on soft soil and lush grass. The smell of Cirgoth's castle caused the beast that came in the image of man's nostrils to snort, a threat of sneezing too. He had come to see that Cirgoth and the Twins were indeed okay but he didn't venture forward or seek any out. Merely he decided to watch from the shadows of the trees and bushes for a few moments. He had exited a portal of his own conjuring to the castle, right after he had agreed to accompany Wyrvaust in his rescuing of his most beloved wife and mother of his child, and the fae like human that she had befriended. Marsol had stayed behind after Wyrvaust had departed with both ladies. The dragon blood remained in those black marble bathing chambers not only to ensure that Satan's hussies didn't try to attack Wyrvaust, but also to keep their Master off Wyrvaust's heels as he surely thought would be the case once Sammael caught wind of the snatching-back jaunt. As the gateway his fellow clansman made diminished, the not-so-imposing frame of nudity (yes, still in his birthday

suit ladies and gentlemen) would turn to the side slightly with his eyes fixed on the three darker skinned beauties and his attention elsewhere. One of them whispered something to the other, the third would just smile up at Marsol from where she still sat in the tub full of bubbles and hot water. It almost seemed as if they were bidding him to join them as they had decided to cleanse their selves while awaiting their Lord's return. His expression was hard to read, but it was far from pleased as one of the slaves glided towards him with a pair of folded dense trousers and an oversized tunic, both as black as night. It took him a measure of self control not to just unleash on the giggling wenches Sammael kept in his house, especially these three that were closer than most. They were only trying to dress his uncooperative self, but he didn't care to be touched by them either. And oh how they found it an exciting game to paw lightly over the scarred sun bronzed flesh of the desert creature in their company. Tracing the marks that marred his back as his brows narrowed when two gently took hold of his upper arms and lifted them so that the third could slip the tunic on over his head. One busied herself with tying the cords at the front and down around the ankles to keep them on him, giving the pants a baggy and puffed look that was akin to the ones often worn in the desert by its peoples.

"That's enough," he said flatly and jerked his left hand out of two of the girls grip to cause all three to skirt away from him quickly to the furthest corner of the room where they lowered to sit on their knees with their heads bowed.

"No need for violence," said a whisper, a voice as smooth as whipped cream and dangerously more sweet.

"If you were trying to see the real him, you could have done it another way," Marsol said, his amber gaze burning into the ceiling above him before it settled on the blank face of Sammael sitting across the room in an old Victorian styled chair with plush purple cushioning and tassels.

"And have him risk disappointing the both of us," Sammael replied, still not amused although his tone held a bit of laughter to it, "Never."

"What if he hadn't come for them? What if he had done what I had first thought and left her here? Would you have done it?"

"Would he have been steadfast in his resolve if I were anything but what I am?"

"You'll not reach a common ground with him if you cant with me Sammael," Marsol's voice came out deathly serious, the muscle in his jaw clenching from just how much hatred he had coursing in his veins for Satan and everything associated with him.

"I beg to differ; these dirty looks you're giving me Cousin, they are quite uncalled for. Have I harmed a hair on his wife's head? Have I? Perhaps he should rethink his own actions before he commits something more then what he already has.

"If you hadn't ordered Mekkora to do it, then it was you that had sent that black heart after the girl. Or do you deny having any part of the child's death too?" The glare Sammael received didn't phase him, although it made the three female slaves hurry out of the room in fright.

"My, my, aren't we talkative tonight," Sammael said, his head turning up a little



as he started to stand, a question looming in the glint of his dark eyes.

“Don’t bother,” Marsol retorted, the vision of Anna wearing something so tacky and exposing to her gentle natured self made it difficult to be around Sammael anymore. Had he tried to taint them? Had he really? His concern then bent on just what all had transpired between the three and he wished to see the human personally so he could see for himself if she was truly alright. Marsol was painfully aware of many ways sin could ruin a person without them even knowing it. It could seep into your very soul and mirror itself as one’s conscience, acting as you normally would, however giving you that extra little push in the end. Anna was awfully gullible and if Sammael told her something sweet, she would believe it even if he bore fangs and scales. Putting up a hand as he summoned a gateway of fire to transport him to the castle ruins of the green eyed angel, “He’ll be here soon to compromise and you’ll have none of it, I’m sure. Otherwise, you wouldn’t be what you are if he doesn’t.”

And with the last turn and step away, Satan’s eyes would thin where he still sat in a chair, left hand holding the left temple and cheek bone of his angelic facial structure in the body he had brought back from the desert. The one that Wryvaust had beheaded and his pretty mate had healed. You know the one. He was fond of that form after all. He had not been eyeing the spot Marsol had been standing in a few seconds before when Wryvaust’s words filled his mind to get a good furrowing of his brows as he didn’t like being disturbed when he was plotting. Yet for him hearing the Raven’s words, he did not answer his requests nor give hint to acknowledgment. He knew Marsol still wanted a piece of him for what had been done to Cirgoth, but he had given the angel back after awhile had he not? Marsol would want to do terrible things to him for the torture of Arilwen. But most of all, above every glowering and toothy sneer, Sammael had a pretty good belief that it would take a miracle to get a calm audience with Marsol after the death of his young adoptive daughter Anandabah. Maybe it was because the young strip of a girl knew not the ways of the world. Maybe it was that she hadn’t even lived yet, hadn’t even experienced her first true love before her life had been ripped from her in a most brutal way, in the jaws of a shadow dragon. His head would cant sideways to the bird that took up residence on his silk shirted shoulder. Of which he would raise his left hand to run his fingers along the bird’s head and back, smoothing its feathers as he took said relayed message. Unfolding the piece of parchment, Satan’s eyes floated over the letters and curves they had, the choice of utensil used for the writing, and the tone of the letter. All the while petting the bird on his shoulder where he sat in the cushioned seat. Those lips would curl into a smile as the paper was set down on the small oval shaped red oak stand to his right, uncrossing his legs to stand.

“They got me all wrong you know,” he murmured to the bird, as if it would talk back. Which he didn’t expect or require it to. It was just one of those things one did to pass the time between the calm and the storm. His nose would wrinkle at the bird’s beak as he ran his pinky finger under his breast and then back up under its beak again. Then it occurred to him one more time the reason why he had brought the Swan to one of his outlandishly furnished and richly handsome estates. It wasn’t her that he was waiting for, not at all. As time went on into the night hours, and the Raven had his many ways with his Swan, he would slowly but surely be surrounded by new flesh bound to bone as the bathing chambers filled. Women so exotic, so completely beautiful that it couldn’t be humanly possible, adeptly filled the tubs and shower stalls as they giggled or snickered about the party tonight and who the

new guest of honor was suppose to be. A few inquired that they were some aristocrat from the east coast. Someone else disagreed as they danced their naked self around Sammael while washing her hair, saying it was some ungodly gorgeous man with dark hair. Yet again someone protested and said it wasn't a man but a beast with eyes like the Pit and all of them would pause in the midst of their bathing and washing to look up at their Lord for the real answer to all their curious questions. His dark optics played over the countless bodies moving in and out of the massive room of black marble and tile, with the only thing covering them being soap bubbles or their own long locks.

"Ladies, ladies," he said, leaning against the edge of a tub where there were currently four women scrubbing each others backs in, who stopped to turn and curl around his waist as he spoke, contently, "please hold your tongues. You can ask him when he gets here."

In due time Wryvaust came into the lavished house where he had snatched his Swan and her friend from, and nearly bumped into one of those naked beauties. Sammael could be found standing on the other side of a long narrow black rod iron table with many papers strewn about. Seven figures clad in deep red, seemingly crushed suede robes stood in a semi circle around Sammael where they pointed at many a thing on the table of papers and oddities. They all however stopped to look up at this being in full fledged demon form, in Satan's house, seeking to settle affairs that was of no concern to them. They all were so very hidden in the hoods that covered their heads, so when they turned to look at Wryvaust where he stood electing that he needed to speak with Sammael, their faces remained hidden within the shadows cast by their low drooping hoods. It had not been his initial intention to stay in the bathing chambers so long but, he had gotten wrapped up in the latest news his minions had to relate to him. All but him. The robed figures stood still where they were close to their Lord, slightly defensive as they were not yet familiar with the goat like demon they now beheld. All of the females however occupying the room would gasp their surprise and shock but not one of them would try to make their self decent. The commotion of the bathing chambers would come to an abrupt halt once Wryvaust had come, and everyone stayed where they were, a few moving away from Wryvaust to sit in chairs or tubs as they held audience to this conversation now being held.

"Received both messages I have," Sammael's voice cut the silence as warm and silky as ever, "But its better that you have come in person. Come. Sit. Stay awhile." The Desert Wind gestured to the chair across from him at the table as he lowered into the opposite one. Arms draping over the cushion covered arms and one leg folding over the other. His black suit pressed to perfection and his bare feet seeming to complete his suit in an odd way.

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Wryvaust avoided those beauties like they were carriers of a demon plague as he made his way to Sammael and knelt before him. When the arch demon replied that he had received his message and bade him graciously to sit; the Raven rose and seated himself in the chair offered. His rapt burnt-orange eyes settled on the Desert Wind and he folded his muscular black arms on the table, long claws levitated by his forearm's cords.

"I am grateful for thy hospitable reception, My Lord," he began by saying, as

polite as his host. "I am certain the Desert Wind is accustomed to having his way, but in concerns to my wife and son, I would appreciate it if from this point forward, thou wouldst refrain from involving them in any plans thou mayst have, and from calling on my mate outside of my presence. The whorish manner in which thou clad my beloved and her friend hath given rise to many dour speculations on my part, none of which spur my heart to place my faith in thee. Why, why doth thou commit these acts of despair? If there is something thou wish of her, thou mayst request it of me, but by the Standards I am supported by Arilwen and my son are mine alone to command thus thou must accept my refusal to comply if I decline consent. I refuse for her to ever be touched by thee or any other in any intimate manner, and I intend for my son to choose his own path when he comes of age."

Wyrvaust sank back in the chair, his hands sliding back until his fingertips and claws were posed on the edge of the table. "What is it thou require of me, Lord Sammael? What motivates thee to break my heart and invite my hatred in place of love and esteem and the potential devotion which trust grants promise of?"

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Cirgoth had remained kneeling on the sand when Marsol commanded him to leave; to return to the Ruined Fortress far to the north. Tears swelled to sting in his green eyes as he watched Marsol withdraw swiftly to chase after Wyrvaust. The devastation of his mind battered his constitution like a hurricane and he trembled violently. When Amaru laid his hand against his shoulder, Cirgoth shrugged it off so vehemently and stood so fast that his son stumbled back a pace in shock.

"No...no! What have I become?! I have failed in everything I have set out to do! What is this weak, frail minded, pathetic creature I have become? I am not the man of courage and strength Marsol came to respect! I am nothing!" he howled in grievous fury.

"Progen..." Ardwir spoke gently. "We must away as father commanded...come, things shall not appear so grim when you have rested." The boy cringed as his father's fierce green eyes flew on him.

"Rest? I cannot rest! I must find myself again...I must purge myself of this corruption which tempts me to surrender my soul to the very kingdom which tears us apart! This barren soul filled only with despair. Of course he sends me away...How can he respect and depend on what I have become...I am unworthy of him...of you all." he hissed the last in a low whisper. In his mental devastation Cirgoth could not see things clearly, only through eyes painted with the terrible pain in his soul.

"Progen...You are unwell...Your pain confuses you. Father has no desire to reject you. He intends only to protect you, as we wish to protect you." Amaru tried to reason with him.

"I want no protection!" Cirgoth howled wildly. "Why should I be protected when I was unable to protect Thane, Marcania, even that angel the Alamascan slew..." He had not known Avery's name. "Whatever...innate purpose binds you to me, I wish you to unchain yourselves from me! I wish you to grow and live as you choose! To be free and choose your own paths!" He gestured frantically with his arms as he spoke.

"We...we can't..." Amaru whispered.

"He is right, we can't," Ardwir supported.

"You can and you must!" Cirgoth raged, and for the first time, the twins feared their father. There was a rage in his eyes that was not like him...He looked mad and indeed he was at the moment. Cirgoth then lunged at Amaru to catch him up, backhand him and shove him hard and away to spill him against the sand. "I will hurt you," Cirgoth growled, shaking. "I will hurt you if you cannot find it in yourselves to cut ties with this instinct to protect me," he warned. He regretted that he had hit his son, but he wanted to turn them against him, to make them despise him as he hated himself. Tears then ruptured from his eyes and he bolted, to race across the dunes heading dead west.

Amaru picked himself up and started to go after him, but Ardwir seized his arm to stop him. "He is dangerous now...to us and himself. We must go to the Ruined Fortress and wait for Father. We will tell him of this when he returns."

"But progen..." Amaru began to protest.

"The Dragon would not have freed him if he meant him harm, I am sure. He will be all right for a little while on his own. Come..." He urged as he summoned a gate of flames as their father had taught them. The twins learned very quickly. Amaru stepped reluctantly into the gate after his brother.

When Marsol finally did come around to showing himself at the half ruined castle, it was Ardwir who met him. Amaru had cried himself to sleep. Ardwir embraced his father, practically tackling him, his voice muffled by Marsol's stomach as he reported the situation to him. "Progen is unwell, father. He threatened harm to us if we continued to guard him. He called himself nothing, and a failure, said he was unworthy of you, and of us. He stalked off into the desert. We left him alone because he wished it...but I fear for him. He is not himself, but consumed by a violent pain. He struck Amaru, father...He adores him..." Ardwir then filled in all the details for his father and then waited for his command.

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What greeted Marsol at half ruined castle was a very upset Ardwir whose first string of words were slightly hard to decipher from his face being meshed in his stomach. Both bare arms would slide down to encircle the spitting image of Cirgoth, ruffling the youth's hair as he did so. However the glad-to-see-you expression on his face would crack at the words that came from Amaru twin. What? Cirgoth was sick? Huh? He didn't think himself worthy of them anymore? Just as he was about to quiet all this nonsense, Ardwir said that Cirgoth had struck Amaru. No, not Cirgoth. Not the green eyed angel whom had inadvertently tamed a dragon, in a roundabout way. Marsol did not doubt the unsettling news that his son told him. But it was just something he never would have dreamt of in a thousand years. Why would an angel hit a child? It made no sense to him; none whatsoever; because he was angry? At what, for whom! The matter of whether Cirgoth truly one-hundred and ten percent loved the twins was not the question, for Marsol knew better. It was just he couldn't grasp why he would do such a thing, not at the moment.

Given a little tracking down and time to stew, he would get it out of Cirgoth; some

explanation. For now however he would lower to crouch before the young one, resting both of his sun and time worn tanned hands on Ardwir's shoulders to face him square like.

"You are right in saying that there is a violent pain in him," he said, standing as he picked Ardwir up under his arms to lift him up and over his head. Setting Ardwir on his shoulders before he spoke again, holding onto the boys feet as he did, "He's been through many a horrible thing, and at this point the might be doubting his worth. Ardwir you mustn't take to heart that this is done to spite you or your brother."

He would reassure Ardwir that they would find Cirgoth and ease this hurt in him, show him that he was not alone in fighting whatever inner demons he might have had. Some people talked to their children like children until they came of age. Marsol did not. He spoke to Ardwir as though he were fully grown, which he was in a literal sense. Besides; the twins were far more intelligent then most of the people he had ever met, even at their tender age. As Marsol carried him on his shoulders, he talked with Ardwir of the circumstances of how Cirgoth had become so caught up in the affairs of Sammael. Perhaps it was strange but Marsol felt no need to hide things from the twins either. Maybe it had been best not to speak of such things but he wanted Amaru and Ardwir to know everything so that they could make a sound judgment before acting rashly. Like their Progen and himself were known to do from time to time. What he told Ardwir on that short walk back to the castle was not the particulars of Cirgoth being bonded to Sammael, but of how Cirgoth and he had met. Well the first time. It would seem Marsol was in a very talkative mood, so much that every now and then when he told Ardwir something that he found very frustrating or highly delightful he would automatically switch to broken English. His sentences would shorten themselves, and his overall demeanor would slacken even though inwardly he was terribly worried that Cirgoth had lost his damn mind. As they made their way into the castle, down the hallways or through the rooms to where Amaru was sleeping, Marsol would lift Ardwir from his shoulders to set the brave one on his feet. Taking a seat on the edge of a chair, he folded his arms over his knees and watched Amaru sleep for several minutes; then though his parental instincts would take over, as bestial as they were. In the bed hopefully that Amaru had found sleep in, he would scoop the slumbering twin up in his arms and cradle him in his lap along with the blanket that had been around him. Mindful not to jar Amaru awake, he would hold Ardwir's brother in the folds of his arms as his gaze traveled sideways to the doorway then to Ardwir himself.

"He's much healing to do," he said as he rested Amaru's auburn streaked dark colored haired head on his left shoulder. One arm around the boy's back with the other under his legs. "But we will find him, help him confront his fears and love him."

Wow. What a mouthful. Expressing his feelings was a very tricky matter for Marsol, on many fronts. It would appear though that he did it rather easily with the twins. Even with Anna he was not so open to this part of his life, and sometimes he wished he had been. He would then change the subject to what exactly has Ardwir and his brother been doing with their days here in the castle to busy themselves. Had they been practicing anything? What about chores? Surely they would know what mopping a floor or doing dishes felt like. Of course Marsol only teased Ardwir with his blunt flat questions, and he would break into a smile if the youth tried to explain himself. He would raise a brow if Ardwir said he didn't do any of these chores he

spoke of, and then he would reach over to start a tickle fest. Amaru would not be left out either as Ardwir surely squirmed out of his reach, he would set his sights on the sleeping boy. Aiming first at his feet and ankles, prodding lightly and poking. Moving on up to the boys sides and ribs where his fingers moved like wild bandits to poke and prod him all over till he either woke up laughing, or woke up to get out of his amber eyed father's long arms. He smiled, not saying a word when Ardwir leapt at him when he wouldn't stop once Amaru was yelping. The three would tumble backwards and Marsol would fend his best mock surprise face as the sons would in turn start to tickle their father. Naturally he would go slack jaw before hearty laughter filled the entire castle.

Marsol wanted the boys in high spirits before the three of them sought after Cirgoth. It was important to him that they know how loved they were, how much both Cirgoth and he cared for them regardless of what they may or may not do for them. No matter what, that would never change. 'Or so help him,' he thought a split second before he received a pillow to the face, whack! and down the desert dragon would go. Body all limp like a noodle. Face down on the floor. He would give the boys a few minutes to ponder and peer at his unmoving form. Let them draw closer and get within arms reach before he sprang up to catch them both and give a bestial growl. His nostrils flared however when it didn't seem to work. Ardwir merely looked up at him as if he had just leapt off a cliff and Amaru just snicker fitted under his hand. A slight scowl would cross his face a second before a smile broke out and went all the way to his eyes. It wasn't often one of demon decent could be this silly. It was new to Marsol. Not unlike how he would play with the dragon kin begotten of his own tribe's member but here he had to be much, much gentler. Not that it bothered him. It was just nice for a change. Being nice that is. Once the snickering and are you going to be okay? looks were over with he would gather Amaru in his arms to hold him with one hand under the slightly heavy child's bottom and his free hand would come to the top of Ardwir's head. While he told the twins one more side splitting tale about something their Progen and he had done in the past, maybe a blunder or something Cirgoth had found hilarious about Marsol's blunt mannerisms, he would seek Cirgoth out via telepathy and intrude on whatever train of thought the angel might have at the time with.

"And where is it you wish to go without us?" He would engage Cirgoth verbally until Cirgoth relented to let them come see just where he had wound up. If not, he would make the subtle but non to idle threat that he would box Cirgoth's ears again if he didn't come to his senses and quick.

After the angel had been reunited with his handsome paragon seraphir sons, the demonic one would be wherever it was in the desert the Morning Star was. Having that small chit-chat with Maelmorda was an odd feeling after not having seen him for so long. He had countless questions for Lucifer but, Lucifer's affairs were his own. As curious as Marsol suddenly but always became whenever the Morning Star was around, he instead would slacken his currently black breeches and vest covered form to lower to the sands and sit a couple feet from Maelmorda in the sand. The drink the Morning Star offered him was taken after an eye was cast on it, and a certain 'this could become inappropriate' look was given. To say his mind was a bit busy was an understatement. His heart was down right in knots over everything that had occurred since the angels had all been released from the lower kingdom, Wryvaust had escaped and he didn't like thinking about how he had gotten out of there. Mulling over Maelmorda's words of possession and the like, he would taste the certain type of drink he was offered.

Saying in a very annoyed tone which was so unlike him, "It's not like he even likes the sands." He grunted as he shifted to lay on his back. With legs still bent and feet flat on the hard packed dry sand, and his head closer to Maelmorda's left knee. He had been there through the Morning Star's exchange of words with his son and then he had watched from a ways off to the side as Lucifer's son turned to leave and go to the aid of his beloved Yorek. The name was caught with a twitching on his left ear. He'd been told of Yorek's kingdom being burnt to the ground, and most if not all of its people being murdered. Or were they? Dark locks fell over his eyes as he looked up at the night skies where Maelmorda had made the fire and hunted those animals or people earlier.

With the departure of Corwyn, he said, "The blood that runs in these veins is Cirgoth's if he tries to accept it. Wryvaust already does but Anna. She would never understand. She is human, but I fear her heart is too gentle for the path of the warrior I wanted for her to take." Although he wanted to toughen the frail thing of a human up and give her the tools in life she would need to defend and protect herself and those she loved, he just couldn't picture Anna holding a sword much less taking a life. He had never considered the mark before for those Maelmorda named, but now he did. Lucifer had this way with putting things, and he found it a little funny that he hadn't thought of such a thing sooner. With one arm folded under his head, and the other hand holding the container for this drink the Morning Star had offered to him, the chieftain was loosening up already. Perhaps he was becoming too talkative but damnit, he did enjoy the conversations Maelmorda and he use to have way back. When things were a lot simpler, but less colorful

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When Corwyn found Yorek he would encounter the Neffari prince on the run as he was being pursued on horseback by a mob of thirty men who were being led by none other than Yorek's brother, Rafee. Yorek was alone. He had been unable to get to his younger brother and sister when he had been targeted for seizure. The rabble was hot on his trail and closing on him fast. The Prince was twenty miles west of the city of Inaaksu and still well within Hassim territory, both of which had been seized from his control by a clan of demons which answered to Sammael's command through others he had granted authority to. Yorek had not recognized his own father Saaed Kassim in the demon form he had taken. Saaed had returned to reclaim his kingdom for the Desert Wind and he intended to do so as a demon.

When Corwyn emerged from his gateway he would see Yorek barreling towards him on his desert horse, riding hard, and almost within archery range of the mob which closed ground on him from the east. Rafee was the first to loose an arrow, which just fell short of his brother, whose reborn race as an Arcador was still unknown. A volley of arrows followed, two of which struck Yorek in the back. He jerked and almost fell from his horse but recovered and asked for more speed from his winded horse. Those steeds the party rode were demonic animals which had greater stamina and speed than Yorek's mare, which as a mortal animal was impressive. Yorek had no wish to run her to death but he was given little choice in the matter.

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When Marsol contacted him; Cirgoth stopped in his tracks. He looked around at the desert spreading out in every direction to find himself quite alone. It took him a

moment to register that it was Marsol's voice alone which spoke to him. "I am going to walk until I find myself...until I feel I have the strength not to condemn myself to serve as a fallen one..." his mind whispered back as if afraid someone else might overhear him. "I shall return when that time comes," he told Marsol. If Marsol asked why he had struck Amaru, Cirgoth would start walking at a brisk pace again as he answered. "He needed to see me for what I have become, a broken, bitter man." That said he closed off his mind to further incursions, unless someone broke his mental wall down by force.

Though most would have been flummoxed by Marsol's comment about 'an unmentioned party not even liking the sands' the clever devil knew exactly who the dragon man was referring to. "Angels are a pain in the a\*ss but well worth the effort. I am willing to bet he likes the desert more than you assume. My guess is, he is just suffering a brief lapse of insanity. Hell's own has that effect on most people," he cackled. "It is what an angel does with insanity I always find interesting." He grinned at that.

Maelmorda was happy to refill Marsol's cup (it was oak) whenever he wanted a little more of the tasty drink which was like a fun house in a flagon. He smiled at the dragon lord when he spoke of who he shared his blood with and who he did not. "I know demons that are as gentle as lambs. The nature of a thing is only altered by demonhood if they let it reshape them or if certain influences take place. When one becomes a demon because they make the plunge of sins, well that is different. That is their nature reshaping them. My nature shaped me. If Anna remains human and unbonded, she is up for grabs then, if some demon, vampire, devil, or werebeast decides to make a cookie or vessle of amusement of her. That is the chance all humans must take though, eh?" he shrugged and drank from the flagon himself, which never ran out of its contents because Maelmorda wanted it that way. His gaze then cut on Marsol. "So what do you think compels Sammael to target Wyrvaust? I don't get it. Your boy is not exactly high profile or connected with exception to you. Is he desperate for allies or is he using him to torment you, who my mark protects?" He figured if anyone knew what Sammy wanted with the Raven, Marsol would. Maelmorda was incredibly wise, but he did not know everything, nor would he want to. He knew enough as it was.

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(I am NPCing Sammael for this scene. Spork, if you disagree with Sammael's end, let me know and I will delete the post, otherwise, have oceans of fun playing off of it!)

Wyrvaust suppressed a shudder as Sammael's gaze bore into him. He could not shake the feeling that what he most feared was about to be delivered by the Prince of Acheron. It was in the way his eyes penetrated him and the all too sweet way that he smiled.

"I am quite aware of the few standards Acheron demands of us," Sammael promised the younger demon, whose form he took in with appreciation. "You broke one of them by coming onto my property here unannounced and even by taking your wife who agreed willingly to come here. Had I forced her, then yes, I would have trespassed on your right of possession, but she consented, was that not clear to you?"

Wyrvaust frowned. "In fact that was not and still is not clear to the Raven. How



is she willing if fear induces her to act in a way contrary to her true will?"

Sammael laughed. "Her fear is not within my control, nor are her assumptions. If she chose to protect you, that is her choice, not mine. She has been cooperative, you have not. She is not mine to command, but you are, and if she wishes to make some kind of pact with me to ensure your happiness, that is also her choice, by her own will."

"What did you intend for her?" Wyrvaust demanded to know.

"That, my son, is between she and I. Whatever she consents to is her concern and mine unless she resolves to confide in you. What I command of you is your concern and mine. What I demand of you now, is to bring me Prince Yorek Kassim. When you have returned with him, or without him, you shall remain here with me and do my bidding, or suffer the consequences, and I warn you, they shall be harsh. You will obey me, your sovereign Lord, or you shall be punished. I gave the chance to serve Marsol and you chose instead to trespass on my land and seize my guests. Now you shall serve me, and only me. Is that understood?"

Wyrvaust stared at him a moment then heaved a harsh breath. He saw no way out of it other than defying him, and that was just not an option if he wished to protect his family at all. "I understand," he relented and it was obvious that the situation depressed him.

"Oh, and if you do not bring Yorek to me, you had better have a damn good reason, otherwise, you shall be punished for your failure," Sammael had him know.

Wyrvaust stood and bowed to him. "I shall return with him or die in the attempt," he vowed and turned to take his leave.

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Reflecting back on the words Cirgoth had said, before he walled himself off and stalked to wherever it was that angels with hurting hearts went, the dragon man's brows began to furrow. The twins he had brought back to the desert just before coming to see Maelmorda, seeing as how Cirgoth did not wish to speak to him or the boys at the moment. He'd almost been compelled to find him but what good would it really have done? It might even have made it worse that Marsol wouldn't respect Cirgoth's need to be alone so he could find what he thought he had lost. But he trusted the angel regardless of how strong the urge was to go hog tie his skinny white arse and drag him back home. He trusted that the angel would find it in himself to forgive whatever it was he thought he had done wrong. Those amber optics shifted from the sky overhead to look at the Morning Star upside down like. He was grateful that he didn't have to spell out anything or be so blunt as he was known to be, for the Morning Star to catch his drift. Had he ever told him that? Did Marsol have to tell Mael that though? No, he didn't. He had indeed asked Cirgoth why he had hit his son but it was from the frustration of not knowing just exactly what he could do to help the angel. Marsol said something when Maelmorda said that angels were all pains in the asses but it came out in broken English. A slew of heated words and a long swig of that very fun liquid that was working its way quickly into loosening him up all to heck. His face would squint just slightly at the mention of Anna becoming a toy for someone or a cookie thing, cause it was very possible. Nothing was ever really constant in life, except one and that one

thing was what was making it difficult sometimes not to lock Cirgoth away where he would be safe. That little four letter word that was as bewildering to some as it was uplifting to others.

"'Es wand er' ang," Marsol said after a particular long downing of that liquid, and then several blinks of the eyes.

He had been inching closer to the Morning Star the more he drank, and the more he drank the more he talked in broken English and became slightly excited. Now his head would settle on Maelmordas knee, if he let him, with his right arm folded over his own belly and his left hand holding the wooden cup on the sand. He wasn't sleepy, but he looked it. The Morning Star was not wrong when he guessed if Marsol knew just what the hell Sammael wanted. Marsol had known for a long time, he just couldn't believe it; until now. If Sammael had just left them alone, Marsol thought with a mild resentment. Things would be different. Not for the better mind you, but different. For in the end they all might have come under the Desert Wind to serve him and do his bidding, but at a far greater cost than what they have already paid in blood, sweat, and tears. He decided in his head, as he began to ramble to the Morning Star, that he would do that there bonding they had talked about from before. Maybe even request for the Morning Star to come and see his tribe. His family had gotten awfully large by now. Perhaps Maelmorda could see what all his dragon man of a son had been doing with all his time here in the desert. He also wanted to make it quite clear to the Morning Star that he did not forget where he came from. And of whom he served and vowed his soul to; just in case that had been forgotten over all these unfortunate events that had befallen the desert and her peoples. So different was Marsol when he "loosened up"; quite free with his speaking and telling of ideas. Very literal in his intentions towards certain individuals, and they knew who they were. He would have called on his servants he had enslaved of their own free wills to bring them things of comfort but he did not. The desert provided a soul comfort of its own.

As he sat up, sand clung to his back and hair to make his once clean self very dirty. He made no move to brush himself off as he turned about to sit with one leg bent up and the other extended, facing the Morning Star as they talked of things great and small. Every now and then when he calmed, his language flipped back to regular old common tongue, he would say something that would probably either get a rise out of Maelmorda or just raise him into a chuckling bout. Unintentional really; Marsol was just being what? What was he being? The concern that something or someone would happen to Cirgoth plagued him even though he showed no signs of it in his facial expression and/or movements. He'd sent for his best and quietest to follow after the green eyed angel and be quick with word should the angel man get into trouble. Other than that the trackers were not to engage Cirgoth at all. Merely to watch, with two of the six demon spawns at a great distance and the other four keeping to the shadows and such for coverage as they practically stalked Cirgoth as the man traveled. Just before Marsol was about to tell the Morning Star that he was positive Sammael fancied the Ravens mate on some level, when he abruptly faintly felt that warm and fuzzy feeling creeping into his middle. Been a long time since he'd had that sensation he thought, with a laugh, as he looked down at the cup in his hand.

"Sam also wants what he can't have," Marsol said with a canting of his head to the side as his amber eyes thinned on Maelmorda, "and I intend to keep it that way." Oh? What was this? How could the Swan be protected if her Raven now served another?

The answer was quite simple actually...

Bit of a heated argument that took place between Wyrvaust and Sammael was. Although it wouldn't end in bloodshed or death, perhaps it had been better if it had? Surely being maimed would have been better than taking orders from him right? With that having been done and knowing Wyrvaust was a man of his word with exception of Marsol's safety aside, the dark eyed one would watch the muscles in the other man's demonic form coil and strain underneath his outer shell. He wanted Yorek where he could see him for what he wanted to give the young fellow. That and he wanted to see for himself again just how far Yorek was willing to bend for the sake of his kingdom and its peoples, his sister, his youngest brother and his other sibling who was not all that fond of him right now probably. However as much as he wanted to know the limits and depths of Wyrvaust's calm insanities, he contemplated something.

"Did Marsol put you up to this," he asked as he picked up a thick metal cup which he drank of when it hadn't been filled by anyone near. The question was nothing of too much importance. It really had nothing to do with the Raven's current situation although one would think it did. As he sipped from the cup his eyes burned over the rim, remaining on Wyrvaust for as long as the younger demon would hold his gaze. That is if... the Raven could hold the gaze of Satan.

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As the Angel of Swords walked eastward his shoulders shifted to stretch against the tunic he wore, separating the slits. It became apparent to those stalking him that he intended to take flight as his back arched over and wet feathers broke from his flesh. He groaned softly as their tight folds lengthened and gradually unfurled into a pair of massive wings which he spread wide. His spine arched backwards now to carry his gaze to the endless blue sky and he stood motionless. His feathers dried quickly in the desert sun without need of an enchantment as he stood motionless gazing up at the blue plane above him, his verdant green eyes thinned against the sun. "I love you, Marsol, as I love our sons," he said with a force which the winds over the desert seemed to echo.

The angel then sprang into the air and his wings beat against it in powerful flaps to carry him above the rolling dunes and rippling sands. It made him difficult to track and of those Marsol had sent to watch over the angel; it was Gilriael who was able to follow him in flight unseen. The moment the weredragon spied the celestial bird shifting he also transformed himself within the shadows he cloaked himself in. Among the tribe he and Wyrvaust alone had the ability to weave the shadows. His red and black scales went unseen as they covered over that Elven body which swelled and broke through physical barriers to become the massive beast which inhabited him as surely as his heart did. A pair of tangerine eyes flecked with black pinned the angel and followed him as he winged his way west to change direction to the north whereof he took to the air within the edge of the shadowplane himself and tracked the angel by air. If Cirgoth landed, Gilriael would convey the angel's location to the others Marsol had dispatched to guard the auburn haired immortal whereof they would be able to travel by flame gate to the given location. Gilriael observed the way Cirgoth glided over the desert, flapping his wings only when the thermals failed to support him.

"He is searching, My Lord," the shadowflame dragon transmitted to his Lord telepathically. "Scouting thy lands." He seemed tickled by this discovery. It

was obvious to Gilriael inasmuch as Cirgoth had gone to the western edge of Marsol's territory then changed course to fly north. The two of them flew right over Sammael's secluded, desert sanctuary, the tall palms and verdure of the gardens on the oasis hiding all but the tallest pillars and part of the structure. Gilriael was amazed inasmuch as that oasis had not been there before. He knew every inch of the desert. It seemed to have just materialized from the badlands. Already Cirgoth's aerial search had uncovered something new, new to Gilriael at least. What Marsol knew of the desert that others did not the weredragon would not dare guess. Surely his chieftain knew of this place that had remained hidden for so many ages.

Before long; Cirgoth met the mud flats where the desert met the edge of the swamp. This territory the entire tribe was familiar with; it was the domain of Wyrvaust's clan, the Adramelech clan demons. Their castle was beyond the dangerous flats at the edge of the swamp itself, its keep built of wood. The log castle was supported and raised above the black water by massive wood pillars that acted as stilts. It was the only wooden castle Gilriael had ever seen. Soon Cirgoth was heading east for the coast. Gilriael began to understand what the angel was doing. He was scanning the lands in a circular pattern which he bet would spiral in until he had covered the entire Kingdom and those bordering it with his eyes. The dragons did the same thing from time to time, particularly if war threatened them. The reason they did not scout the lands frequently is because it made people nervous to see dragons gliding over them. Nervous people tended to react by slinging arrows and spears by ballistae at the wyrms. Their fears were not unfounded. Dragons were known to swoop down and snatch up livestock, even people from time to time, if game was scarce, or if they simply hated people. There were dragon slayers who hunted the wyrms for their valuable scales and magical carbuncles after all. Gilriael himself had a black and red opal imbedded in his brow in dragon form which had powerful arcane qualities. Cirgoth on the other hand did not seem as intimidating, more of a curiosity he would bet. Demons only feared such displays if angels flocked in numbers which was indicative of a hunt. "He has made himself thy land's guardian, My Lord," He informed Marsol after they left the mud flats behind them and headed southeast.

Only when darkness had long fallen did Cirgoth swoop down towards the land as he spied a man being pursued by a mob of other men. Gilriael wanted to warn the angel that he was in Neffari territory, twenty miles from Marsol's border, but Marsol had warned Gilriael not to betray his presence to the angel. Instead, the weredragon informed Marsol that Cirgoth was landing in the kingdom of Hassim to investigate a man being pursued. As Gilriael himself landed, things got a lot more interesting. "Chaos is working overtime with parallels, My Lord. Prince Yorek, The Morning Star's son, Wyrvaust, Cirgoth and I have all come together like moths to a flame, and Yorek I vow is the flame." Gilriael's harmonic voice once more infiltrated Marsol's mind to keep him updated. Something was up to be sure, something which had brought a lot of very different creatures together. It was the sort of fluke that would have made even Sammael and Maelmorda raise a brow in wonder.

Not long after the cloaked dragon and Cirgoth had landed; the trackers would catch up to Gilriael who was exhausted by that time. The angel had more flying stamina than he did which amazed him.

Maelmorda scoffed when Marsol said Cirgoth was wandering. "Of course he is wandering. He is an angel of swords, which is an angelic version of a ranger.

It's in his blood. His wanderlust led him to you, didn't it?" he smiled.

When Marsol laid his head on his knee the devil combed his fingers through his tangled locks of chocolate colored hair as they spoke to one another. It brought back tempting memories of more intimate times with Anwarr and he had to remind himself that he was not that devil anymore. Well, he was, but he was forcing himself not to be and Maelmorda had a strong will. When Marsol said that Sammael wanted what he could not have Maelmorda chortled. "I suppose you mean you and what is yours. He is not called the Desert Wind for nothing. It is where he feels most at home. If he cannot have you, I imagine he shall try to take your desert and everything that is close to you. I will never permit him to have you, not even if you begged me to allow it, no matter what the reason was. Call me selfish or possessive if you will, you would be right."

Maelmorda took another generous swallow of the mixture and hugged his friend, son, and bondee. "Wyrvaust was in a very insane state when you claimed him, yes? He may not even be aware that you marked him as yours, and inasmuch as his sire Muustala and his clan did not challenge that, he and his clan as good as gave their consent. Wyrvaust may only be aware of the bond as a feeling which makes his love and devotion to you even more powerful than his heart alone can sustain. Sammael can only take him from you if you let him, as Muustala allowed you claim him. He may try to confuse Wyrvaust by preying on his weaknesses. Wyrvaust has a very chaotic mind. He has trained it well but he is not accustomed to dealing with the likes of Sammael, or people in general for that matter. Who besides you did he mingle with at all regularly until Arilwen was claimed by him? He was a hermit for so long for a reason. My advice to you? If Sammael tries to command him, command Wyrvaust to your side immediately and remind him who he serves, then tell Sammael he is not his to command. Otherwise, he may try to claim him for his own. It works like this...Once you know a claim is being challenged, you must forbid it without delay. Delay too long, and inaction becomes consent. Until a transgression is known it can continue until discovered and defied."

Maelmorda tossed a few more logs on the fire. "Sammael has many legions which bear his mark and are his alone to command, but most of them are sealed in Acheron, not all mind you, but most. If he is wise, he shall attempt to claim as many as he can, those hellions who wish to resist must simply act on the Standard of Possession to deny him the opportunity of claiming their own. If they fail to do so, all the more power to Sammael for his efforts. You cannot blame him for trying, can you?" he smiled. "Wyrvaust seems a complete waste of his efforts to me, because I cannot imagine him thinking you would ever allow it, unless he plans to be sneaky about it, or intends to use him against you somehow. You and your dragon legion are quite worth a great deal of effort."

Before Wyrvaust departed as he came, through the shadows, he turned to answer the question Sammael posed. His speech had taken a slide to its usual backwardness. Depression tended to have that affect on him. He held the terrifying one's gaze, but nervously. He was all too aware that some demons could possess and dominate others with their very eyes, even burn their mark into another's soul by their eyes, and doubted that Sammael was incapable of those feats as a God among Demons. "Believes the Desert Wind that the Raven needs to be told or even asked to protect his swan, his mate?" He shook his goatish head. "Put himself up to the task he did and on his own two feet stood up for his rights. The Raven seeks Yorek because he has no other choice. If the Raven had seen that Marsol counted the eastern Prince

as a friend he would refuse to seize him for the Prince of Demons, but only in brief acquaintance did they meet and on shaky trust part ways." He was unaware that he did have a choice and that Sammael was cleverly using that ignorance as a tool, otherwise he would have refused him whatever the consequences would have been. If Marsol did count Yorek as a comrade and close ally, Wyrvaust was unaware of that as well.

Whatever other questions Wyrvaust answered for the deific demon, he would rendezvous with Yorek and the others in that fluke encounter of three parties just happening to meet up at that place and time. It would definitely complicate Wyrvaust's task. He remained cloaked in shadows as he emerged from the deeper, colder, marches to watch as the grey horse carrying Yorek bore down on Corwyn as he materialized from his quantum gateway. His eyes then darted upward as a flurry of feathers breaking against the air brought Cirgoth gently to earth not far from Corwyn and the earth Yorek's horse dug up as the animal slid to a halt short of the angels. Gilriael he did not see for he too was cloaked by a separate path of shadows. Wyrvaust moved around Corwyn unseen towards Yorek. He had already formulated a plan. He would get as close as possible, dart out of the shadows, grab Yorek, and dash with him in his clutches back through the shadow folds to deliver the immortal Neffari to Sammael. That was his plan. Whether he could pull it off, or something changed his plans remained to be seen.

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Corwyn, of course, blanched at the scene he came upon. He rather thought he knew his own limits (although with his recent fall, those limits had likely been expanded some), and he knew that trying to take on a mob that big all on his own was just not going to happen. Four or five, yeah, he could maybe come out of all right. But thirty was just a teensy bit too much.

With this in mind, his options were limited. Yorek's horse could only run for so long, before collapse, and the mob was closing in. Outrunning them was definitely not an option. So, he'd just have to work within his known strengths. He had noticed one figure coming to land next to him in a flurry of feathers..he kept a wary gaze on him out of the corner of one eye. What he didn't notice was the presence of another.

Deciding he had waited long enough, he'd move into action. He would keep the gate he had come through up behind him, and move forward when the horse came to a stop in front of them, grabbing a handfull of reins and steering the horse towards the gate at as swift a pace he could convince the creature to move. He had only moved a horse through a gate once before, and he had no idea how this creature would fare in such a situation. A free hand moved to close around Yorek's wrist...he didn't need him slipping off the horse without him noticing.

Now, if he had managed to get the horse and its rider into the gate, he'd shut it immediately once he was inside, delivering them smoothly to the desert where he'd left his father. If they had been interrupted in the few paces between where he had been standing and the gate that was behind him, he'd at least try and keep the grip on the wrist he had been holding. If Yorek was spirited away somewhere he could not follow, Corwyn would curse loudly and use the gate to return, expression thunderous, to the spot where he'd left his father.

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## Battle Plans

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When chance agendas collided, as they did on those salt flats which glowed blue in the dispersed light of the fingernail moon; hectic mistakes were apt to occur. When Corwyn seized Yorek's mare by the reins she spooked and balked to rear up. Because the animal was so winded, she twisted around and foundered to come crashing down to the ground, throwing Yorek onto the hard packed salt as well. It was as he fell that the demon cloaked unseen in the shadows lunged out of the darkness into view, albeit he was hard to see in the black form he manifested. Cirgoth glimpsed Wyrvaust nevertheless and his right hand thrust out to unleash a powerful bolt of damaging light which lit up the area briefly and revealed Wyrvaust unrecognizably as an eight foot tall, jet black demon with flared horns; capran facial features; a serpent tail and massive wings; which moved towards Yorek in a blur of speed. When the bolt struck him it stopped him short to expose his visage vividly before the blinding light faded. Before Wyrvaust could recover from the stunning effects of the attack on him, Cirgoth seized him with a holding force. The angel had no idea that he was attacking Wyrvaust. Because Yorek was also spooked; he rolled to his feet and drew his curved scimitar from his sheath and swept the weapon at his attacker. The moment the blade struck Wyrvaust to slash into his side, the holding spell was broken. Meanwhile; those who had been chasing Yorek came thundering down on Yorek even as he wounded the demon. Wyrvaust dove out of the path of the charging horses to save himself from being trampled and Cirgoth threw up a wall of force between the riders and Yorek. When the horses collided with the invisible wall it refracted in ripples whereof animals and riders alike piled on one another in a train wreck of horses and men. Rafee barely escaped being crushed as he frantically rolled out from under the steeds which crashed into his own. When he tumbled to his feet he was facing Corwyn with the wall between them.

"You are in Hassim territory and I am king here! Stand down and allow us to seize my brother or declare yourself our enemy!" he demanded. He stomped a foot in anger and frustration as Corwyn grabbed Yorek and pulled him through the gateway he had standing ready to receive he and his comrade. Corwyn was answering to the king of all An Morendor, his father; whose authority in Morashtar superseded the command of all other kings; a fact Maelmorda had made known to Corwyn when he was a child, just as he had told Corwyn he intended to remind the people of the Shadowlands of that fact. Maelmorda had no idea that he was rivaling Sammael's plans. That is what happened when there was a failure of communication. Wyrvaust meanwhile dove back into the shadows from whence he came as he failed in his first attempt to capture Yorek, who he immediately tracked. The Raven found himself standing in Maelmorda and Marsol's company, albeit he was cloaked, as he followed Yorek's presence to the site Corwyn had taken him.

The moment Corwyn, Yorek and Wyrvaust vanished; Rafee turned his rage and new kingship on Cirgoth to spear a finger at him. "You are under arrest, angel! Bring down this wall so that we may take you into custody. Cooperate and you may live, defy me and you too shall be marked as an enemy!"

Cirgoth laughed. "I answer to only one King, and he shall hear of this attack on

the true king of Hassim!" That said, he took wing, the wall of force dismantling the moment his feathers caught the desert night thermals high in the star lit sky; hence he continued on his mission of wanderlust, heading south, the arrows which followed him falling short of his range. The men who were standing then ducked down as they felt a great wind on their heads which nearly knocked them off their feet as Gilriael rose into the air in his shadowy dragon form to beat the air with his great wings to follow after Cirgoth. The angel's other trackers retreated deeper into the plane of fire where they had remained hidden to watch everything that had occurred through a curtain of flames which had never been revealed inasmuch as they had not breached the elemental plane of fire to carry its inferno into the desert.

Gilriael reported all which had come to pass to Marsol as he trailed Cirgoth unseen through the sky. Thirty minutes later; when Cirgoth crossed over into Marsol's territory again at day break, forty miles southwest of Hassim; he landed by a small oasis where he climbed beneath a shrub between some palms and slept on the sand. Gilriael camped not far away with his comrades, two of whom hid from sight and kept watch over Cirgoth while the others rested. Gilriael was exhausted and could use some sleep.

When Yorek stumbled out of the gate with Corwyn, his arm caught around Corwyn's waist to steady himself as his horse came trotting out after them to brush by him. The usurped desert Prince straightened and fixed his bewildered gaze on the dear man who had come unexpectedly to his aid. "I have lost my kingdom...and I barely know how. I believe I would have lost my life along with it had you not come to my aid. You have all my thanks, Corwyn."

Maelmorda smiled and an arm swept out with a palm extended open juxtaposed to the right of Yorek. "Take a seat by the fire and clear your thoughts then tell us your confusing tale. Perhaps I can help make sense of it." Pulling his hand back as if tugging on something, Wyrvaust came stumbling out of the shadows which Maelmorda had intercepted and seized the demon from. Wyrvaust had yet noticed Marsol there where he lolled back against the sandy canyon face, flagon in hand by Maelmorda, whose shadow eclipsed him from the fire light.

Yorek startled slightly then thinned his gaze on Wyrvaust. "That demon attempted to seize me," he had them know, a fact Corwyn was already aware of.

Maelmorda leaned his jade green eyes on Wyrvaust and pursed his lips slyly. "Is that so? Why, Wyrvaust, would you wish to capture Yorek? Surely you are not so hungry that you would eat a Prince," he mused.

Wyrvaust sighed deeply. "The Raven would not have harmed him. He was so commanded to deliver the Eastern Prince to the Prince of Demons."

Maelmorda arched a brow. "I see. Well, it appears we have claimed him first." His gaze fixed on his son hence. "Corwyn, bond him immediately," he commanded his son. "You have seen me do it many times, and been bonded by me yourself. Just follow in my example," he instructed. "Just be quick about it."

"I am willing," Yorek stated emphatically, sure that Corwyn would not bond him without his consent. Yorek then seated himself by the fire, his gaze riveted on Maelmorda. He looked so familiar. Where had he seen him? He had never met



Corwyn's father before, or at least did not recall his face clearly as the one who had attacked him and sired him by force. He had barely got a glimpse of him, but seeing him now, he wondered.

Maelmorda expressed a cool smile. "Tell me how you misplaced your kingdom, Yorek, while Corwyn tastes of your savory blood," he solicited.

"Who are you, Sir?"

"I am Corwyn's father, Maelmorda Arghyle Kilcanoragh, High King of An Morendor," he introduced himself. He elbowed Marsol as the dragon lord laughed at his introduction, high as the southern star which shone over his desert by now. Maelmorda took a turn at laughing when his dear Marsol grabbed Wyrvaust by the ankle and jerked his cloven hoofed feet out from under him to land him on his ass beside himself, thus announcing his presence to the Raven, who stared at him dumbfounded.

"M-my Lord...Forgive your servant. He-he did not see you there," the demon blubbered where he lay on his back facing his master with his ankle still in Marsol's grip.

"Seems to me like you forget who it is you serve, Wyrvaust," Maelmorda reprimanded him.

"Never," Wyrvaust swore.

Maelmorda scoffed. "Why don't you remind him, Marsol, while I give ear to Yorek's tale." Hence he pinned Yorek with his gaze.

Yorek sucked in a deep breath. "I had gathered the people and tribes which had escaped the attack by Lord Marsol's dragons." He glanced at Marsol as he said this then met Maelmorda's equally unnerving gaze. Between the two of them; he felt like he was being secretly devoured by their eyes through no fault of their own. "We had rebuilt many of our homes, and were still restoring the palace when they came. It was late and I was asleep. All was peace one moment, and havoc the next. A horn sounded to wake me and I rushed out of my chamber to a balcony which was only partially intact. I saw in the streets many demons...and more being belched up from fiery gates and shadowy fissures. Some rode on the backs of young dragons, others on spectral steeds, elephants, even great dire wolves and lions. Doors were being broken down and people were being dragged from their houses. Those who resisted were murdered, those who relented were chained and taken away towards our own dungeon."

"Four of my own men rushed into the room and grabbed me to escort me through the palace to the very dungeon those demons made headway for. I trusted these four men. They had been my guards before my father died, and had always served me loyally as my knights. They showed me to a tunnel which led out of the palace and to the streets on the outskirts of Inaaksu. I told them I would not leave without my sister and my brothers. They bade me away, and to wait by the end of the tunnel for my siblings. Two of them left to find them, while the other two stood to guard the tunnel which they closed to leave me in darkness. I made my way through the tunnel and two hours later came to the edge of the city, where all of the buildings but a spare few were still in ruins. It was deserted, had been since I returned."

"I waited...I waited for seven days. I saw things...Spirits...wraiths, phantoms, demons, undead warriors; a veritable legion of hellish things led by demons. A demon, or maybe a lich, grey and gaunt as death, clawed and horned, his face like a hyena, bat wings carried by furred shoulders, wearing a crown who carried my very own scepter, which is in the shape of a snake, led a company through the streets. He was dressed richly, in the very clothes my father was buried in I swear. Dead knights followed him, and behind them came se'irim, goat demons, red and black, and came after them, one of them carrying Hassim's snake banner, wraith warriors. What most shocked me was that my own brother Rafee rode beside the demon king, he also wearing a crown on his head and dressed in the royal fineries of an eastern king. I could not leave Valkar and Safiel, my brother and sister. I searched for them, hid in every crack, crevice and shadow I could find, and combed the city for them. That hidden tunnel became my home for a month, and it was only when I reentered the palace through that tunnel that I found my brother and sister, and my missing comrades. When I pushed open the door at the end of the tunnel, which appeared like the wall, I saw the men who had stayed behind to guard the door." Yorek paused to cover his face then continued as his hands dropped into his lap. "In the cell which could be seen from the tunnel; I found them chained to the walls. They were no longer themselves, but changing into some kind of monsters. In another cell I found Valkar and Safiel. I could see that they too had been tortured...My sister...barely a child herself, was heavy with what could only be a demon's spawn. I tried to free them. Valkar turned on me. He too was changed, into some kind of vampire who they had starved into a blood lust. He could not see me but for the blood my flesh promised. I...I killed him...to put him out of his misery, and because it was the only way I could get to Safiel. Only as I touched her, I triggered something and was set upon by a pack of wolf demons that were used to guard the prisoners. I fled...I had no other choice. I closed the door on the hounds of hell and raced blindly through the dark tunnel. I see well in the darkness now but not when there is a total absence of light. When I reached the end of the tunnel, I was met by my two guards. They had three horses with them, one of them my own mare. She is the swiftest horse in Hassim. They told me Valkar and Safiel were dead to spare me the pain of the truth I had seen with my own eyes. I told them I knew and we mounted up and rode like the wind. We were followed soon after. Gargoyles had been posted as sentries all over the city and they alerted those who had taken control of the palace, including my own brother who had thrown in with those who took my city and people so cruelly. They cried out as they pursued that they wanted me alive, but I knew...I knew they would change me into whatever monster they needed to suit their goals. The two men with me fell to spells and arrows, but me they wanted alive. I would rather die than become one of them...than do the things they did to my people...The horrors, my gods...It was as if they had brought Hell into Inaaksu." Yorek leaned forward and drew his legs up against his chest, his hands covering his face. "Is all of An Morendor to become like this?" he wished to know.

Maelmorda frowned. "Not if I can help it!" He barked. Sammael had thrown the gauntlet down and Maelmorda intended to pick it up and throw it right back at him. He understood now what was happening. Sammael intended to take An Morendor. Worse yet, it was obvious to Maelmorda that Mordrieg had unsealed Acheron. Sammael had his legions now to call on and had done just that. Well, Maelmorda had his own legions to call on if Sammael refused to back down. An Morendor, Morashtar was the Morning Star's, and he had every intention of fighting for it!

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Things didn't go...exactly as Corwyn had envisioned they would. Such were the hazards of having to make rash decisions in so little time. He hadn't even considered how the horse would react in its frightened state, so when the horse (and its rider) came crashing down, Corwyn was inwardly kicking himself. With as much as he had been around horses, he rather thought he should have anticipated a reaction like that. He would have looked startled, of course, by the sudden appearance (or rather, the revealing) of Wyvraust...but didn't remain startled long enough to hinder his movement towards Yorek, his gaze swiftly moving towards the riders bearing down on them. Where Wyvraust was smart enough to dive out of the way of the oncoming mob, Corwyn seemed to be intent on getting to Yorek. It was lucky for him that the wall was thrown up when it was!

He would pause only a moment to glance at Rafee with a single raised brow. He wasn't used to being given commands like that. Granted, he was in their territory. But he knew that being under Maelmorda's orders at the moment, those orders outclassed the ones given by this particular king. He didn't bother speaking to Rafee...he would have dearly loved to taunt him a little, but he didn't have the luxury of the time to do so at the moment. So, he would stoop to help Yorek to his feet, an arm coiled around him to help support him, and lead him towards the waiting gateway.

Corwyn actually looked startled at the words of thanks that came from Yorek the moment they had stepped out of the gate. "Your thanks is appreciated, Yorek, but I could have certainly blundered fatally there...what if the horse had fallen on you, directly? Or trampled you in its fear?" He shrugged his shoulders. "Being the delivery boy was basically the one thing that managed to go right." He'd flash a smile at him. "Still, though, I'd risk all that again, if there was even a chance you'd be safe." He confided...and then immediately looked a little flustered. Surely there was a better time for conveying such sentiments.

He would move to help Yorek sit by the fire, lowering himself to sit down next to him. He'd look a little surprised to see Wyvraust come stumbling out of the shadows...he hadn't considered that they would be followed so quickly. Still, he remained seated, just watching as his father questioned the man's motives behind his attempted abduction of Yorek. He'd snap to attention when the order came to bond Yorek. That was something new...he'd certainly been bonded, and seen his father bond others, but he'd never actually bonded anybody else. He'd look almost comically flabbergasted at how quickly Yorek would consent to that! He did appreciate the consent...while in the end, he would feel obligated to do as his father said, he certainly would have hesitated over the act. As it was, with the consent so freely given, he would nod and move in the moment Yorek made himself comfortable to begin the process.

As he tasted of that "savory blood" (and it was...Corwyn hadn't thought he'd be able to handle the taste, all those times watching others go through the process, but he didn't find himself repulsed by the act) he would listen intently to Yorek's story. It pained him to think of all Yorek had gone through, and hurt to think of

that sweet younger brother and sister, tormented and changed. Their deaths truly were a release, and though he wished they could have been saved, remembering them as they were the last time he had laid eyes on them, he wouldn't have wished them to live on in their current states either.

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Maelmorda pinned Marsol with his gaze as his son drained Yorek to a swoon (which took awhile owed to his immortal physique and regeneration) and then figured out how to administer his own blood to the fainted man. "Feed him until your mark manifests on his throat," Maelmorda instructed him before addressing the desert chieftain. Yes, Corwyn had a bonding mark which his father apprised him of albeit Maelmorda did not know yet what his mark was. It was a phoenix swallowing a snake. It was symbolic of his spirit's true disposition. "I wish to know, Anwarr, if you shall align yourself with me, Sammael, or remain neutral in any opposition which may arise between he and I and those legions we command. I will meet with Sammael of course and try to talk him out of rivaling me, but he may refuse to back down. If you vow your allegiance to me I will expect you to honor your loyalty and obedience to me. You have my word that I shall not force you to commit any acts which are in opposition to your principles and honor." Though Marsol had a very dark side, he also adhered to his own strict code of ethics. Everyone who was close to him was proof of that.

If Marsol pledged himself to support Maelmorda as a loyal ally: Maelmorda was very pleased that Marsol resolved to support him. He clasped his hand and squeezed down with firm affection. "Thank you for your fealty, Marsol. Do not hesitate to call on me if you and yours come under attack." The Morning Star then informed him of where he would be residing. "Do you remember Sarku, the shapeshifter who found you wounded and took you into his home to heal you all those years ago after you conquered the dragon lord of Castle Rock Island? Well, though you probably would not recognize him now owed to a fusion of animal mutations which are always changing, he still dwells in the same castle south of Hawker's Fort which hugs the Wind Shorn Cliffs and its beach. It is in Castle Vilfior with him that I, my clan, and those dark angels and devils I plan to summon as my knights shall reside. You and those who serve you loyally shall be welcome in my home and on my territory at any given time. Indeed we shall withdraw there as soon as Corwyn is done bonding Yorek. Sarku, because he is so distrustful of people, has the place warded like a high security prison," he chuckled. "Wards I shall improve and add my own flair to," he added with a cavalier smile.

If Marsol informed him that he preferred to remain neutral: Maelmorda would sigh. "I am sorry to hear that. I would have been honored to have you on my side. I wish you well regardless, my old friend."

When Corwyn fulfilled the process of bonding Yorek, and Maelmorda and Marsol had wrapped up their conversation to whatever conclusion; Maelmorda took his leave with Corwyn and Yorek. The desert sand on the canyon floor defied gravity to gather and pour in streams upward to form an archway of flowing sand particles which would dissipate and shower down on the ground after they had lapsed through the refracted plane between the sandy arch of the earth gate and the canyon floor.

In the two days which followed; Maelmorda went to retrieve his wife and twin sons and relocate them to Castle Vilifior. He told Kael to thank Lavoy for everything

he had done and to keep in touch, inasmuch as Lavoy was not available when he arrived at Black Lion Manor. He assigned impressive albeit dusty quarters to Corwyn and York which were adjacent to one another. The place was dismal with layers of dust, drawn curtains of heavy material which shut out the sunlight, cobwebs and clutter. Sarku had not bothered to keep the place up for ages living in isolation as he had. The outside walls of the Castle's high ramparts were clean however as a result of the wind against the cliffs and the absence of plant life. Ivy covered the walls of the keep on the other hand, and the gardens were a wild tangle of weeds and cultivated plants gone feral. Run away roses, greenbrier and grape vines rambled to weave in and out of overgrown boxwoods to create a snarled bramble which had covered the hexagonal cut stones which had once defined the paths. Maelmorda intended to see the place was restored to its former magnificence.

Though Sarku was shy and detached of Maelmorda's family, his knights and the handful of servants which invaded his home with his consent, he would come to be fond of Galaxy and the twins. Indeed, with exception to Maelmorda, she would be the first the ever changing shapeshifter would speak and warm to. Though his appearance never remained the same for longer than a couple of days, he was easily recognizable by his transitional animal and somewhat humanoid features nevertheless. He could be hideous, fascinating, or even appealing, depending on the combination of creatures which shaped him. His voice remained constant unless he manifested a purely animal form. Corwyn and Yorek he would treat with reserved respect but remain aloof of for some time, simply studying them on the sly as he tried to form an opinion of them. The presence of the knights and servants he simply tolerated with apathetic disinterest. Galaxy would find him very odd, even daft at times, but amiable and intelligent despite his lapses of peculiar gibberish and animal-like behavior. He was harmless to the castle residents, but a feral menace to enemies.

Maelmorda was thrilled to share a bed with Galaxy again and made up for lost time with her, but had business to take care of three days after they arrived. He kept busy those first days at their new haven as well, reinforcing the wards and adding select powers to them until the castle was an impenetrable fortress against all but those who could match or best his power and cleverness. Before he embarked to the citadel, he sat down with her on a comfortable bench, in an atrium where a variety of ancient fruit trees grew that were tolerant to partial shade. The native fruit they bore off and on all year round were delicious and their flowers colorful and delightfully fragrant. Maelmorda was dressed in elegant but rugged clothing; a black tunic with bone toggles which covered a suit of blued chain mail, a knee length vest of dark brown leather, a black cloak, dark green leggings and knee high, black boots with steel buckles up the sides. At his hip was a sword with a black hilt and blue and black marbled star sapphire lapped into a large cabochon set in the pommel.

"Galaxy, things are sure to get hectic in the days to come. Sammael is attempting to take An Morendor and I intend to oppose him. Mordreig has unsealed Acheron and he has his legions now to call upon. I have received word that I am needed in Hawker's Fort and must leave immediately after we speak. After I have seen to affairs there I am going to arrange a meeting with Sammael and attempt to persuade him to abandon his plans. If I am unable to convince him to stand down, we shall declare our terms of war. If it comes to that, it means something that has never before happened in Acheron, a civil war shall take place which pits his legions against mine in battles which shall be waged on this planet, hopefully reaching no

further than An Morendor. I cannot stress the dangers of such a war. It shall extend beyond the physical into the minds and souls of people. Sammael shall add to his legions, he already is, by recreating chosen victims as he sees fit and controlling their actions through domination and mind control practices. He is killing those who oppose him and enslaving the rest. Everything that is happening indicates that he intends for the immortals of Acheron to rule this country under his reign, making slaves and monsters of any mortals that relent, and allies of those immortals who join his side. He may not stop if he seizes An Morendor but endeavor to create an empire of the world. As I obey him in Acheron, this is my world he is trying to seize and I shall do everything in my power to stop him. It is my right to do so as the creator and High King of this world. If he refuses to renounce his objective he too shall do whatever it takes to accomplish his goals. Do you understand what that means? You must be very careful, for he will be sure to use those who are closest to me against me. I will not surrender this world to him, Galaxy, no matter the cost to me, so do not let him get his hands on you or our twins. I love you and would die for you, but I would not condemn an entire world to save you. Please keep safe. You are my goodness." He embraced her and kissed her deeply then smiled as they parted. "I would be ever grateful if you would get started in the chore of getting this place in order. The knights are at your disposal to help you. Like you, some of them have an elemental knack which would be beneficial in the gardens and courtyards, as well as assisting in cleaning the place. I will help when I return, if you have not already accomplished the task to surprise me with a beautiful home when I advent," he grinned. Galaxy would find that Sarku would be very willing to help her in restoring the place to its former splendor as well. He was also enthusiastic about playing with the twins. Surprisingly, he was very good with children, though at times he gazed at them sadly, and the twins took to him like he was a kitten. Now and again he would change into a lion cub, puppy, snake, fox kit, or other small animal for them to play with. He played them with gently but as an animal might, and the twins loved it. At the same time they learned how to behave around different kinds of animals. The castle was magnificent; all the stone and wood molding, arches, frames, cornices, crowns, pedestals, braziers, pillars and more in the place was beautifully decorated or carved; it was just neglected. Creatures of all kinds lurked around every corner and from above as statues and friezes that were part of the predominantly stone architecture. Maelmorda embraced his beloved wife again then embarked for Hawker's Fort through a gate of ether as the sun dipped into the western ocean.

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Marsol had this ghost of a smile on his face when those words selfish and possessive came out of Maelmorda's mouth. It was an unusual feeling when one was told again just whom they did and would always belong to, no matter their side. A slightly son-to-father pride didn't quite seem to grasp just what it was that Marsol thought about in that head of his.

As was the norm for him, he said, "Some would tell me to act indifferent to his... charms." On the last word the dragon chieftain's eyes narrowed into a small glare at his wooden cup.

It hadn't been all of that long since they had started talking and drinking around the fire that he got a most unsettling feeling in his gut. Like a cold knot. And he wasn't all that fond of things cold. Maybe it was intuition. Maybe it was just

wishful thinking. Whatever it was though, he felt that the little bit of lead way he had given by the one he was reserving all his hatred for was being pushed. While he enjoyed the Morning Star's company and they awaited his angelic son's return with his beloved neighboring Prince, he mulled over the news that Gilriael relayed to him. Some of it was amusing. Some of it not was so amusing. He didn't think Cirgoth's wanderlust was as strange as others might have. Even though Maelmorda had said it, did Marsol not go walk aimlessly? At random? The smile that played over his face was hidden as he put his arm up over his eyes when he caught the bit about Cirgoth helping Corwyn and Yorek escape their pursuers; Even as the gateway Corwyn had made burped the young ones out and then shortly after the very impressive demonic frame belonging to Wyrvaust appeared to be yanked out. It might have gone unnoticed to the Morning Star's son and the young Prince, but not to him. Time had taught Marsol to pay attention to even the smallest of details; Maelmorda's time, of course.

He remained quiet as possible, what with being two sheets to the wind, until the Morning Star introduced himself. Oh how that got the laughter out of the dragon lord despite being elbowed which nearly caused him to sit up. It was just so funny to him, but maybe that was on account of how much he had drunk before the trio had arrived to their little camp fire. Or maybe he naturally found it comical of the Morning Star to say such things; no matter their importance or relativity to the current situation. Although his laughter was short lived the instant those cloven hoofed ankles grew close enough, he would be of the grabby nature to bring his fellow clansman down to their level. The bronzed frame in the black loose fitting breeches, dense of cotton, bent as he rose up onto a knee with a leg bent under him. The terms for Wyrvaust's punishment, no matter how shallow or deep they may have run; would now be thrown out the window with this latest predicament. To put the Raven in harm's way, which he was sure would have been done, was one thing, but to send him hounding after the young Prince? For what? He would shake his head at that thought and let it pass. Yorek was more valuable then first thought, and not just to Corwyn and Maelmorda, whom no doubt had grand plans for the desert prince.

And surely because Arilwen still held that most magical orb in her hands, or maybe she set it down, she would see how hard an eye he was casting on Wyrvaust before he let go of the demon's ankle and then sat back on his haunches. He knew Wyrvaust only did as he was told because, at the time, he really had no alternative. None that would let him come out in one piece anyway. His anger wasn't directed at his friend, it was just that direction it was currently turned to. Now seeing as how he was two sheets to the wind, he couldn't hold that hardened gaze very long before a small smile broke out and he patted the goat-like demon's shoulder. A bit hard, but it was all in good fun. He would have lowered back onto his keister but with the smell of blood in the air, those fine tuned instincts of his sparked. Even though it was a bonding act, it didn't lessen the fact that this was testament to the changes coming. He wanted to ask the Raven why, but he kept silent for now. He wasn't sure he wanted to know, because it would just make his hatred of Sammael all that more vibrant in its intensity. However, that didn't mean Wyrvaust would get away from this scene unscratched. Wyrvaust would know in the tight hold Marsol's hands took on random places over his ankles and wrists that the dragon lord would rather the Raven was dead then serve Satan. Anyone but him; It wasn't just about honor or code anymore.

"Since when has it been okay to look and go for another?" he asked, getting hot under the collar now all thanks to that tasty drink possibly, "Who so ever can

command the Raven? Who else can spur you into movement than I?"

He would not have any words Wyrvaust may or may not have said. He put up a hand if Wyrvaust tried to speak. Cutting him off with, "Be it pain or death, you would do his bidding; you, my clansman, my brother, my friend? You would do what all he asks of you? Catch Yorek and bring him back? Back to a hell of an existence surely awaiting him, if he isn't living one already! Never again, Wyrvaust. Whatever business you had with Sammael, it is finished. Consider your ties with that miscreant burned."

He was seven different kinds of pissed off by the time Corwyn had finished bonding Yorek, and Maelmorda was posing to him that age old question of just whom he was aligned with. His cup he had dropped in the whole jostling of Wyrvaust's shoulders and then hauling the demonic man to his feet. He released his hold on the Raven's shoulders and half turned away from him, taking a few steps around Maelmorda and to the edge of the fire light. He was pacing, because it was all he could do not to just go find Sammael and kick his teeth in.

"To side with you have I always," he asked Maelmorda, which was his own version of an answer. "Your breath is wasted if you think you can reason with him. It has been in the works for a long time, but it surprises me that no one has noticed until now. There'll be war, but you already knew this. Didn't you?"

From where he stood his eyes burned on Maelmorda, as his maker's greens pinned him. They were old enough to know a catastrophe in the making when they smelled one. Marsol was just too tired to be more polite with his words about it. He had heard the rumors; of people doing strange things. Things they would never normally do in their right mind; humans attacking humans and their immortal neighbors alike. Some of the villages bordering his territories had had such ruining. When questioned, the culprits were all in bouts of either insanity or a calm calculating that shocked their questioners. He had most of the men executed without a second thought for killing the innocent villagers, but a few he had imprisoned for further interrogating. Not that it ever did any good. Some babbled about horrible things they knew these killed people would have done. While others simply babbled. What was happening? He was sure it was Sammael's doing, even though he had no real proof of it. It was just a gut feeling at the time. Now Maelmorda just confirmed the unsettling feeling in the pit of his stomach. An all out war? Between two he never would have thought to. Maybe he was being callous with his verbatim but he didn't really give a hoot anymore. The Morning Star asked him a question, and he answered; to the best of his ability.

"I remember that one whose shape was more confusing than his words," he said.

Although it would have been amusing how his brows furrowed and it could have been considered mockery on Sarku's part because Marsol himself became confusing in his own hellish way.

"Give my regards to Sarku," he said as he turned back to the fire to give his farewells to the Morning Star and watch him and the two young ones depart from the desert.

He knew that smile the Morning Star made and that he would perfect the safety of Sarku's castle in no time at all. Good thing too. After Maelmorda, Corwyn and Yorek



were gone, his gaze thinned on Wyrvaust wherever it was the clansman was. If he was still near. At first he wanted to ring his neck but, that was just from frustration and from him playing into Sammael's hands. He reminded himself it could have been worse, much, much worse.

"Go home," was all he said as he came over to the fire and crouched down by it.

He seemed not to have anything further to say. Or maybe he was just keeping silent because he had nothing good to say? If Wyrvaust tried to talk to him he would bark the words go home again, and the fire in front of him would burn three times brighter than normal. The flames reflected in the amber of his eyes as well as the agitation there in. He may have been overly harsh but it couldn't be helped. The world was on the verge of something unspeakable, and he did not like the nagging sensation in the back of his mind that there was something he was missing. Something he should have done, but hadn't. It annoyed him. Toying at the edge of his consciousness like that. Part of his mind was splintered between the desert and the Morning Star's news, and the green eyed angel flying to wherever it was he did out there in the sands. If Wyrvaust turned his back for even an instant and then decided to try one last time to talk to the desert creature, he would find his friend was no longer there. His outline could be seen up high on the sand dune running east and west just barely within sight of the canyon they had all gathered in. He was walking, but he was walking alone. There was nothing in the direction he was heading, nothing for miles; but he wasn't seeking anything, so that served its purpose. He would walk for hours until the sun peaked and the desert glowed with the early morning light. He walked until the heat rose to unbearable heights and his own high wore off. Or so he thought. While he moved though the desert he spoke to those red scales wryms. He related the ominous truth of what he now knew and what they needed to prepare for. Word was sent and in just a few days time the desert was in an uproar. The people that had made towns and small quiet villages there in the harsh terrain were all informed of what was what. Being the people of these lands, they had a right to know. They were offered refuge in way of being whisked out of the desert to safer and greener parts but to some of the messengers and mages surprise, most declined. They would be told that there were many cities in the world, some wondrous and rich like Hawkers Fort for instance, but that too was turned down.

Few actually did leave the desert when the officials of their reigning Lord came with their scrolls of parchment and talismans, and those that did were the young and old; those that could not fight and those that their families didn't wish to. There was a pride in them, and it was upheld by them staying. It was the only way they could show that this was their home. They couldn't just simply leave it, no matter how dire the circumstances. It made it all the more easy for the people to arm themselves, not just with swords or shovels, but with knowledge. Although dismaying as it was, knowledge was power too. As the desert and her people tried to work out just how to handle the danger they faced; he returned to his hot caves within the depths of those lively fissures and spewing mouths of the volcanoes to enhance the protection of his home. All those under his command Marsol bid them to various meetings he conducted to give quick but brief instructions.

Scouts were sent on an unofficial looking convoy to Hawker's Fort. They were of the highest ranking demonic divisions as well as their overseeing leader, which could be considered their general. This chief was old and battle hardened. He was missing his left eye and had a nasty scar that ran from the right corner of his

mouth all the way to the side of his neck. The squad of eight plus the old one were on the move to Hawker's Fort to meet with the authorities there and to find if any new situations had arisen. Most of all though, they had been sent bearing gifts as was rare custom to the supreme governing bodies and to inform them that they had the support of Ríosh es Aerseoi and all her people. The desert dwellers all clothed themselves in simple dark grey clothes that wrapped their forms loosely as well as the coverings for their heads. Red sashes tied at their waists and draped over their right shoulders and hooked underneath their arms. If asked of Prince Yorek's domain, they would not hesitate or give pause to telling the horrid fate that had befallen the young promising one's home lands. That is, if someone asked them. If the convoy remained in Hawker's Fort longer than two days they would ask one of the governing bodies available if they had heard news of Yorek's home. One way or another they made sure that this city knew that the atrocities were not just secluded here but were happening everywhere probably. The gifts they brought were naturally of the finest jewels mined from the caverns running within the deserts belly. Since the city would have more use of them than they would, the jewels splendor was hardly given a second glance when the obsidian chests were opened to reveal their contents. A long rack of fine weapons ranging from sword to spear to halberd alike were also brought in on that caravan that came out of the crackling gateway of flames at the edge of the city. These weapons were reserved for only the select few of Hawker's Fort that were even remotely familiar with Marsol's lands; that being all those important folks and you know who they were. Especially crafted and made in just a few days time, each piece of lethality given out to their designated possessor. The small squad of eight came to bring news and take it. Sharing and lending no sympathy if terrible truths were revealed. It wasn't that they were ordered to be so flat or unreadable in their expressions and movements. They just had no time to be so flimflam. As they gathered, if they were able to, the leader and oldest of the bunch conveyed all he heard and saw to Marsol.

The desert creature left Anna not in Wyrvaust's care, but as company for the Raven's beautiful Swan. He knew the human was quite fond of the new mother and she had spent every waking moment with her for the short time they had been in the desert before she had died at the claws of the shadow fiend. He could see it plain as day through the human's movements when she fussed over the Ravens son, and how she wouldn't really let Arilwen do any of the wife duties. She insisted on helping to clean if there was any of it to be done. However, he fetched Wyrvaust as well as Anna for something he had to tell them face to face. He related, just as Gilriel did over Cirgoth and the convoy in Hawker's Fort, by way of telepathy that he wished to bond he and Anna. And as soon as Cirgoth had had enough of his fluttering about, him too. He said to Wyrvaust that he could refuse it, and he wouldn't think any lesser of him, although he wouldn't be as understanding with Anna. She had no real choice in the matter. As soon as the Raven came, along with the human he had taken into his home to raise all those years ago, he would find the dragon chieftain sitting in one of his personal chambers he reserved for when he was in his dragon form. Why? He wanted not only to bond the both of them, but to show the little tuff of a human who he really was. Just in case this war that was coming really was as bad as he felt it was going to be. He wanted Anna to see that not all things big and small were terrible, despite how they appeared on the outside, and he wanted to offer her the choice of having abilities far beyond those of a mere human. To better arm herself in the future. Maelmorda had really struck a cord in him when he talked about those close to him. Even mentioning the human could and very well would fall into the hands of something most vile again, he would rather not think about that right now. Those brownish golden pools looked up from where he

sat on the edge of a wide and long slab of stone positioned in the center of the enormous space he had called the Raven to. It looked like the inside of a cave; and yet there was a giant hole somewhere above that let the soft glow of fire filter in and illuminate the room. He had a bit of a soft spot for the humans. Did it show now as the young lady with the fiery red head of unruly curls rushed over to greet him with a bear hug and two kisses to his cheek? He smiled as a hand was placed on top of her head where she slid downwards to sit on her knees to his right. Where he wore a deep green suit over a dark brown tunic and breeches, he wasn't hindered where he drew up his right leg to lay its ankle on top of his left knee. He was bare foot though, even though he was wearing that suit of leather and bits of over metal as if he was about to head out for war.

"Have you thought of your answer to what I have asked of you," Marsol asked Wyrvaust, that is if the Raven had not answered him already...

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Wyrvaust was caught unawares, for he had barely arrived to see whose company he had joined, when he was yanked forcibly from the shadows to hear Maelmorda's scathing words. He had barely registered that Maelmorda was there when he was promptly spilled off his feet by Marsol's quick jerk on his ankles to land with a thud, his wings folding up beneath him. Only as his gaze leapt forward did he realize Marsol was there as well. As he was pulled this way and that by his fetlock ankles and wrists until he seated by his master, he felt the dragon chief's fiercely possessive disposition through the hardness of his grip on him, which did not relent when his thigh and arm were held in a way which told him just where he belonged. He bowed his head deeply to his king in a submissive posture of respect. "My Lord...Forgive your servant," his voice wavered as he asked forgiveness for numerous reasons.

The silence which followed held Wyrvaust captive to his shame. Despite the tempting scent of blood and the presence of the Morning Star himself, the only presence he was held in arrest by was Marsol's. When the Lord of Red Dragons addressed him to ask why and how he could possibly allow his loyalties to stray shame bit so deeply at Wyrvaust that he felt feverish and as if his chest was caving in to engulf his heart. Shaming himself in the eyes of Marsol was worse than death to the Raven. "Went the Raven to..." Marsol silenced him and Wyrvaust tensed to listen to the demands which followed. Marsol's words both stung at his heart and uplifted him. He wished only to be commanded by Marsol, and resolved he would defy Sammael against any risks rather than serve him again.

Wyrvaust swung around to settle on bent legs, his posture bowed over with his head pressed against Marsol's legs, his wings spread and curved inward in worshipful reverence to his lord. "Went your friend to the snake of sins to uphold the standard of possession to protect what he loves. Retaliated the serpent to lift up his right as the Prince of Demons to command your faithful servant. Said he that if the Raven defied him, the standard of possession would be forfeit to the Raven, and knowing the standards and practices of Acheron as his sire taught them to him, the Raven knew his words to be terribly true. No wish had your loyal servant to yield to his command, but no choice could his mind grasp. Still, the Raven refused against any threat the demon god could make to ever act against the Lord of the desert he loves with all his heart. Never shall the Raven submit to Sammael's command or beck again, on his life he vows. I beg your forgiveness, for without

it, life has no meaning to the Raven."

If Marsol tried to stop him from speaking his shrift, Maelmorda would encourage Marsol to hear him out. He wanted to know what kind of tactic Sammael had used to woo Wyrvaust's cooperation. When Wyrvaust was done spilling his heart to the only man he loved; Maelmorda's jade-green eyes thinned into slits. "You caved to bogus claims, Wyrvaust. Sammael was trying to swindle you. Marsol had claim over you long before the Desert Wind knew you existed."

"He...unaware was he of that...or never would the Raven have..." He gasped as Marsol grabbed him and pulled him down beside him roughly to silence him once again. Wyrvaust shut his trap. He could see that Marsol had head enough.

As Marsol sat swilling on that tasty mixture and churned in his own violent thoughts, Wyrvaust curled against him to nuzzle and paw at him with desperate affection. The demon was like some huge winged kitten with eyes only for the dragon he loved. Despite all of Wyrvaust's strengths his mind was a fragile piece of machinery which could easily be cracked wide open when his place with Marsol was threatened. Maelmorda knew that when push came to shove, there was no one Wyrvaust could love more deeply than Marsol. He loved Arilwen and his child with the rest of his heart but Marsol owned his soul. It was simply the way it was, no devices necessary. Devices in their case were to protect their genuine bond.

When Marsol jarred him by his shoulders he straightened and had barely done so when he was dragged to his feet. He looked stoned the way he stood loose in posture and expression. His eyes traveled between Marsol and Maelmorda as loyalties were declared. Maelmorda rose with them and shrugged when Marsol made his opinions of trying to make peace with Sammael known and alleged that the Morning Star already knew the war at hand was coming. "Oh I noticed, trust me, but until now I had nothing substantial enough to call him on it. Sammael is damn clever and we had better not forget that. Now that it is known, and Acheron is unsealed, he shall no doubt desist in being sneaky about it and charge in. Many thousands shall die and worse before it is done. How many people were in Inaaksu, five thousand or more? And Yorek is the only true survivor. Those who still live are already either slaves or monsters he controls." There was no use in dabbling with maybes when the facts were as lucid as the dunes under a cobalt-blue sky.

Maelmorda chuckled when Marsol related how he remembered Sarku. "Well, his guise is as motley as it can possibly get and permit him to still walk now. Whatever jumbled form he takes, and despite how bizarre his behavior can be, he is awesomely powerful and on our side. He is a good friend to have." Maelmorda smiled when Marsol said to send the ancient shapeshifter his regards. "He will be pleased that you are thinking of him." The morning star then embraced his beloved Anwarr and kissed both his cheeks before he embarked with his son and Yorek via that earth gate.

Wyrvaust was standing right beside Marsol when his gaze met those amber slits. The Raven said nothing when Marsol commanded him to go home. No, he embraced Marsol instead and kissed him with a fierce passion. The spicy flavors of their tongues joined in that kiss which Wyrvaust stole which was brief but deep and raw with love and devotion. The moment Wyrvaust released him; the Raven vanished into the shadows which his silky black flesh partnered with so perfectly. Wyrvaust was determined never to disobey Marsol. Never.

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When Marsol's divisions arrived at Hawker's Fort; the walls and towers of the citadel were well manned with archers, crossbow-men, mages, and spear men, while standing inside the city at eight points were catapults, trebuchets, and ballistae for firing large spears. Amunition dumps were beside each war machine and they were all manned. It was King Aurelius Emrys, the black dragon lord of Noct'maire and acting steward of the citadel, who met Marsol's men at the gate with a slew of mages. Aurelius greeted them to introduce himself to the standing leader, then explained that no one could enter the city until they had been scanned for possession and domination. He reported that it was a necessary precaution owed to the denizens of Hawker's Fort being preyed upon internally and the turned against each other. Hence he encouraged them to state their business while those who intended to enter the city were being probed efficiently by the mages at hand.

Once those who were fit to enter through the gates had received a clean scan, the massive gates were spared and Aurelius led them to the palace on horseback. The tribute of jewels and weapons were received with thanks and assurances that the treasure and arms would go far to equip An Morendor's people against the scourge which threatened to corrupt and lay ruin to their country. It would be used with their own wealth to build up stock piles of food and weapons and to pay the brave souls who joined the fight. Four knights of the Castellarn carried the treasure off to the palace vault, which was a well secured chamber where wealth was stored for safe keeping until it was distributed. The weapons were placed in the armory by Aurelius' Black Dragon Knights.

Marsol's men were hence led to a huge hall with a massive table at the center. There the leaders would sit. Food and wine was offered to the allies who had come to their aid, and any who remained outside of the city walls would also be served a banquet which would satisfy all races. Food was imperative to an army. As Aurelius was informed once more of the attack on Hassim, its villages, and its city of Inaaksu, he gleaned any new information that he could. He was not surprised to hear of the spiderweb of assaults on the villages scattered throughout the desert and stressed that the same kind of conflicts were widespread in An Morendor. He gave examples and also informed them of those who had not been touched and had a large map at hand which covered one end of the table, marked where the attacks had taken place and where the powers were. There were those whose power was too daunting to risk just yet; those whom the enemy had either not gotten around to or had overlooked, those whom could be aligned with Sammael; and those whom Sammael might attempt to ally with him. He had also marked where people who could not, or would not fight, could hide. Shrines were also marked, for they were often targeted for the powerful priests who resided in them. Aurelius informed them of those Lords who would stand to protect the people within their domains, such as Valis Urik and Mernaph Morash who had armies of their own. Large Divisions of elves were also marching from the northeast and south to vulnerable areas to protect the people there, while other divisions were marching to the Citadel and Cliff City. Each elven territory also kept a standing army on hand of their own. Blockades were being set up at passes through the mountains, at bridges and on roads. Between Marsol and Aurelius whose men were as unequalled in battle and tactics as their leaders, the country's defenses would quickly and masterfully be raised. The Nether and Maelvanor elves seemed to be building their own defenses but not bothering to lend support. "Valis is trying to convince the Nether of

Gothhelm in the Lonely Cavern Mountains to join us," the king reported. He had a friend there, the King of Gothhelm, Dunngoth. "The bad news is, Goblins and dragonkin, who believe they have been untreated unfairly by humans, have united with other creatures and are marching in force to join up with Sammael's legions. There is no telling what he has offered those kinds. I have also heard that they took the Ghazi Clan fortress and that the vampires have allied with Sammael to save themselves. Their fortress is being used as a base, a very well fortified and easily defended base. The Ghazi vampires were just absurdly overwhelmed." That moved Sammael's divisions all too close to Aurelius's territory in the north.

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The moment Wyrvaust got home he stalked into the nursery where Arilwen and Anna were doting over Anwarr II and there embraced his wife ardently to lift her off her feet and kiss her with a passion that was almost ravenous. The taste of Marsol's desert spice still lingered on his tongue and lips. As he held her; his form shifted. Wings withdrew into the long slits torn in his robes and the shoulder blades and sides beneath, claws retracted, his face and body gradually melting into his handsomely browned and far leaner human features again. When he set her down he lowered himself with her until he was on his knees, his hands firmly cupped around the womanly curves of her hips which he worshipped. "The Raven has done his Lord a great injustice and shall make amends. A shamed man kneels before his beauteous swan. He shall not rest until he has regained his honor." And this was the man Sammael wanted for what reason? He could only want to amuse himself by watching the Neffari Demon Priest's mind and heart crumble and his shame grow so intense that he would go to any lengths to take his own life. If he believed he could win Wyrvaust's loyalty, he was mistaken, and since he was rarely mistaken, the former scenario would be the only truth. It was a stroke of merciful fate that Sammael was unable to keep him tied to his deception long enough to claim that the Raven was his. Wyrvaust picked up his son and tossed him lightly in the air to catch him gingerly. The boy gurgled with happy laughter. The demon's arm then swept around Arilwen and after bowing his head to Anna in a belated greeting, he ushered his wife to a bench in the chamber and sat down with she and their child. Wyrvaust did not know what Marianna had or had not seen of his mishaps. He was not even thinking about that. The demon who had come to be so many things; ranger, scout, spy, priest, demon, husband, father and above all things Marsol's friend and servant; played with Anwarr and doted on his wife until Marsol's command came to call him his presence with Anna. His gaze drifted briefly as Marsol's voice infiltrated his senses with an offer to bond him and made it clear that the choice was his. The fiery gateway which roared to life to beckon them thereafter did not have to stand long in his son's nursery to mesmerize the child. Wyrvaust rose, kissed Anwarr on the cheek then handed him to his mother and kissed her deeply. He brushed his fingers briefly through her hair and then Anwarr's then linked his arm with Anna's and strode through the flaming fissure.

When Wyrvaust met his Lord; he released Anna's arm and dropped down on one knee with his other bare foot planted against the stone floor as his back bowed over in a deep kneel of respect within easy reach of Marsol. He remained bowed with his eyes lowered while Anna embraced Marsol and would not rise until Marsol beckoned him to do so. When Marsol asked Wyrvaust if he had arrived at an answer, the Desert Raven's head lifted to level his dark brown eyes with Marsol's amber ones. "There is nothing to think about, My Lord. The Raven is thy man until he dies," he pledged with his heart. "He would be honored to receive thy bond." If Marsol had

not been sure if Wyrvaust was unaware that he had bonded by him before all those ages ago, he knew now. Wyrvaust did not remember. He had been out of his mind and very ill when Marsol had bonded him. It was a bond which required strengthening, for Marsol had not laid his everlasting mark on him when he had forced his blood into him as a result of the clan demon being too frail to drink it himself. Indeed his simple blood bond might have faded by now altogether. Wyrvaust had been with Marsol for over six hundred years, for what might as well have been all his life. A terribly pained look then knitted his facial features and darkened his eyes. "My Lord...The Raven suffers so for disappointing the Lord he loves. How can he rectify his terrible errors?"

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Gilriael emerged out of the darkness eclipsing the desert to approach Cirgoth in elven form as the angel threw some more sun dried branches on the fire. It was the second night of the angel's scouting venture. Three demon scouts had spotted Cirgoth shortly after noon and taken wing to engage the angel in an aerial assault. Gilriael and the others had not even had to defend him. Cirgoth slew all three of them with nothing other than his sword, his arcane endowments never ever called on. "Cirgoth, may I speak to thee?" The angel regarded him a moment then nodded his head whereof Gilriael sat down across from him by the fire. Cirgoth made a good fire, something desert and native people appreciated. "Do you trust in my wisdom?" he began by asking the Malezar.

"You have proven yourself wise to me, Gilriael the Bard," Cirgoth replied honestly.

"Then take my words to heart. From thy Lord hold thyself not apart. What came of Cirgoth was the fault of his enemy. His broken faith in himself is gravely empty. His hand at the sword is that of legend. His will to protect proves his heart a godsend. He loves so violently that where there is no blame in him, he sees the failures his enemies forced on him as his own demons. Repudiate the demons within thy soul, and return home where thou art cherished as a whole. Fear not love and forgiveness, where thou hast the courage to be so magnanimous. Too proud is he to admit aloud that he needs thee as the desert needs the sun's flame, but we that know him see that without thee he is not the same. Thou and only one other have ever been able to tame him, thou and the morning star alone have ever taken his shame from him."

Cirgoth's gaze thinned on him. "What reason has he to carry any shame?"

"What reason hast thou to carry any blame?" Gilriael riddled.

"I...I have failed everyone..."

Gilriael shook his head and cut his hand across the air. "No, they failed themselves. Marcania rejected thee because ye loved what he perceived as a monster. Alone he challenged powers he could not possibly conquer. He chose to meddle in affairs, he had no business taking a share of. Thane chose his path as well, to serve the master of hell. Did Wyrvaust relent, did Marsol, did thee despite being dominated and violated? Did Cirgoth permit himself to subvert his true loyalty and offer the lord of demons his fealty?"

Cirgoth shook his head. "I very nearly did..." He whispered.

"Very nearly but thou resisted a god few can oppose, when in the clutches of the mighty will he imposes. Instead of feeling guilt and disgrace, thou shouldst rejoice in pride thy escape."

"I am not sure I did escaped," Cirgoth confessed quietly.

"What do you mean?" Gilriael searched.

"I was weakening...and he let me go. He showed me mercy."

"What is thy opinion of that?" Gilriael asked.

"I remember him from Haman. We were like brothers once. I fought at his side during the first rebellion, when Lucifer led his host against Haman. When Sammael led the second rebellion, I refused to fight against my fallen brothers. I am not sure, but I think he let me go because he remembered that he once loved me as a comrade."

Gilriael stared at him. "That is a dangerous assumption, one he may be hoping thou wilt make. If he finds thee alone in this desert thou mayst find that his mercy has a limited life. He might decide Marsol is taking poor care of thee. Ye know not yet how the ancients think!" he warned.

Cirgoth's eyes fell away into the fire and as he stared off into the flames Gilriael's eyes hardened on him. "I can see what thou art thinking, Cirgoth. Dare not test the Prince of Demons! He is no friend to thee! If ye believe can protect Marsol by offering thy friendship to him, thou art sadly mistaken!"

Cirgoth pinned the elf with his verdant green eyes. "How can you presume to know Sammael's mind. Perhaps he is not as evil as everyone believes. Maybe all he needs is someone to place their faith in him to steer him the right way. I must know if it is possible."

"And that is why ye patrol the desert? In hopes of proving or disproving this insane and preposterously dangerous theory of thine?" he saw right through Cirgoth.

"In part, yes. In the meantime, I can do what I can to gather information and defend innocents."

"And what if ye disprove thy hopes in the worst way? What then?"

"Then I shall prove my true courage and loyalty to Marsol by resisting him if he wants my soul," Cirgoth told him flat.

"Go home, Cirgoth and let Marsol bond thee. Ye implored him to bond thee and he wishes to do so now. Go to him immediately, Cirgoth. Sammael could be watching us from afar as we speak!"

Cirgoth scowled. "Think me a fool if you wish, wise bard, but I shall not return to Marsol and my sons until I can prove to myself than I am worthy of Marsol!" At that the angel sprang up and beat his wings furiously against the air to launch himself into rapid flight. Before Gilrial could begin to shift back into dragon



form, the sky lit up in a rippling vortex around the angel and Cirgoth vanished in a quantum leap.

"Marsol!" Gilriael cried to his Lord telepathically. Hence he explained everything that had passed between him and Cirgoth to his great dragon lord.

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It aggravated Halen that Argal was so calm; so hard to shake. He could not recall ever having seen the cabalist lose his temper. Not that Argal was a stranger to anger; it was just that few ever actually witnessed it. Once again the mage left Halen standing in a puddle of his own frustration unable to offer further protest. It did occur to the magistrate that the mage achieved his satisfaction in that way. Argal was a professional and it showed when it mattered most. His screwy habits never interfered in his duties. Halen both respected the man and was wary of him; as he was most immortals. "Cold fish," he hissed after him beneath his breath.

The man sat down to work the moment Argal withdrew. His case against the spies was already prepared so he unlocked the top drawer in his desk and pulled out his maps, which he then unrolled on his desktop. One was of the citadel, another of the kingdom itself. Red marks signified the residences and properties of dangerous (powerful) immortals. Blue marks distinguished all other immortals, those that were known anyway. He added one more red mark on an isolated tract south of the citadel in the Wild Horse Grasslands by the sea. It was owned by an ancient shapeshifter turned hermit ages ago. Little did Halen know that it was now the shared property of Maelmorda Kilcanoragh. The last two blues marks were added to the homes of a long time resident, and an angel's home he had been hesitant to include in his plans. The first blue spot marked an angel named Gehennor who had been very helpful as a seer, advisor and enchanter for some twenty years. He was an independent but he worked very well with Argal. The last blue mark he added dotted Argal's tower. The location of every last known immortal was now specified.

A knock fell on his door and he quickly rolled up the maps and locked them in the drawer then told the officer to enter; whereof a letter was delivered to him by Kedrek. He nodded to the man who waited to be dismissed while Halen read the dispatch. A frown darkened his facial features. A demon legion had sacked Prince Yorek Kassim's kingdom. It was all the fuel Halen needed to pursue his convictions with avid determination. The immortals had to be segregated from the Western Kingdom. "Take this dispatch to Argal Mortiari and the Castellarn Knights immediately. Tell them they are to meet with me in the palace counsel hall directly after affairs of courte have been settled." Argal would receive the dispatch with Halen's message inside half of an hour.

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The expression on Maximus's face drew a blank as Marianna gave him another noncommittal answer. "If that is the way it must be; I must guard myself then," he said frankly and he sounded a little pissed off. Hence he sat up to relieve her lap of the weight of his head. His eyes lit on her with cool self-possession as he cut himself off emotionally to her and himself. "I have been cautious for a long time, but I never allow fear to command my heart. Fear will make a slave of you as no creature can," he had her know. Indeed if anything, fear released him. "But I do not believe it is fear. I believe it is more simple than that. You do not love

me. I would know it by now if you did unless you lie so well to yourself that even I am convinced by it. I can live with you being unable to return my affections, Marianna. I do not fall apart so easily." The man regarded her speculatively for a moment then continued to speak plain to her. "Do not mistake me when I reform my demeanor to its prior state of droll conviction towards duty. It is for the best for both of us with your disposition as it is." The sudden apathy which dominated him was a direct result of the defenses he raised so efficiently. He could not afford to let his heart get in the way of his head and his obligations, including those to her. Just like that he was the old Maximus who had been so familiar to her; steady, reliable, a rock of constitution which seemed unbreakable. "I sense that the thought of being enslaved disturbs you. Do not concern yourself if it comes to the Castellarn claiming us as servants. These men are honorable and shall treat us with respect. If you have not noticed, they have gone out of their way to protect us, and to stand on our side. I must believe that it is because they know we are innocent. If they have some other agenda for doing so; we shall deal with that when it becomes clear to us. Now, have you any questions or concerns about our trial tomorrow? Is there anything you do not understand?" He was perfectly amiable now but his heart was caged. Maximus was not a man who let a woman screw with his heart and his mind, no matter how devoted he was to her or deeply he loved her. The man would answer all of her questions but dismiss any apologies she might make as a concern that was no longer on the table to be discussed.

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It was early morning the day before the trial and Argal had just returned from the magistrate's office and received the dispatch and message from the court officer Kedrek. Marco entered the tower as Kedrek left, stepping aside to pull the youth he had in hand with him as the officer vacated the tower. When the doorway was clear; Marco entered dragging a very feeble young demon (by his looks at least) with him. Marco had been up all night trying to heal the fellow who had been in a coma-like sleep for two years. Felix was pale as a high moon, extremely thin, and obviously barely recovered. Lavoy was supposed to have been informed of Felix's state two months after he had been wounded but it had never come to pass. His clan brother Nic had been thrown in prison for killing a man and wounding another, both of whom, with three others had ambushed Nic for being blood to Mekkor. As a result, Felix had been laid up for two years and a month in his bed with injuries a wounding splinter prohibited from healing, injuries his sire had ordered no one in the clan to heal. It was supposed to bait Lavoy by preying on the fact that he cared for the attractive young demon that was smitten by him. Marco had a devil of a time detecting and identifying the necromantic splinter which made Felix impervious to healing powers, including his own powers of regeneration. Marco had found the splinter nevertheless and healed Felix of as much of the damage as possible given the time limit they had. The rest of his health Felix would have to recover over a span of time on his own.

Felix was too sick, depressed, and tired to be afraid when he was taken before Argal. He looked like Hell frozen over. When he was offered a seat he took it and looked around the room vacantly while Marco addressed Argal.

"The kid has been laid up in his bed for over two years with wounds no one bothered to heal or have healed. His guards would not let me enter the manor until I told them I had a writ which would allow me to bring down their wards and take him by force." Marco held the writ he had forged up for Argal to see then tossed it into

the fireplace. "Gehennor and I broke down the mark and seal on a necromantic splinter which held him in stasis of near death. They bore Mekkor's signature. He own sire enchanted whatever weapon left the splinter inside of him, and I have no doubt Mekkor ordered that no one touch him. For two years he has been haunted and tormented by the spirits of the dead realm as his spirit was held on the very edge of their domain. I cannot imagine the damage done to his psyche. Indeed he feels so betrayed that he is ready to talk." His gaze trained on the boy immortal. "Isn't that right, Felix?"

Felix nodded, his body trembling as he did. He no longer cared if he lived or died, or whether he betrayed the demon who had ordained that he suffer such horrors. He had always been loyal, done everything he was asked, no matter how terrible, and what was his reward? Mekkor used him without a thought of how much and what terror he agonized. He had already lived his own Hell, and could care less if Hell gave him its worst.

Marco was not without compassion for the boy and crouched down in front of him to peer up at him with empathy. "Tell us everything you know about the troubles in Hawker's Fort," he urged.

Felix met his gaze then glanced at Argal. He swallowed a dry knot in his throat and his gaze drifted off as Marco stood and backed away to stand beside Argal. "It is not just Hawker's Forte. It is An Morendor." A fact Argal could now verify. "But because this city is so strategically and economically important, the conflicts are concentrated here." His gaze then pierced Argal's eyes with a wounded look. "What you must understand is that the immortals are as much the victims here as the humans. A demon named Aze came to me and I was told by my sire to obey him. I could not tell that he was a demon. He seemed human by every sense I own but I was told that he was a demon. He said that they would lead an attack on my home, that it had already been arranged. He told me to do nothing to prepare for it other than maintain our routine defenses. He said that when the attack came, I was to go to the Palace and seek the aid of the Castellarn Knights. Aze said he and his men would do the rest when the knights came. The attack came unexpectedly a month later. They caught us off guard to make it look real. There were so many. I could not say which of them was controlled and which were not, but not all of them were. I gated to the palace as told to retain the knights and rode back with them. By the time I returned with the knights the conflict had risen into a chaotic riot. They came with torches, pitch forks, swords, axes, whatever weapons they had gotten their hands on, throwing the torches at warded windows which they bounced off of. The stables and trees caught fire however, and they cried out; 'Death to the fiends! Death to the spawn of Mekkor the foul, Mekkor the infamous! Death to their iniquity!' I dominated as many people as possible, reserving enough stamina for myself as I drew more stamina from our attackers. The attackers who used magic I rived to dismantle their power. I took up a position with the knights to defend them against those who had attacked my home. I got separated, crowded away from the knights by a mob of human warriors which all assailed me at once. I imagine some of them were dominated or possessed as well, I cannot say. I was only told what I needed to be told." Felix paused and drew in a dragging breath which made his lungs tremble.

"They almost decapitated me, almost dismembered me of every limb, gut me, cut me to ribbons until I was left hanging on the last thread of my life. The last thing I remember thinking as I was butchered alive; was how many of these men trying to

kill me was I helping? Had I helped in their secret agenda? I was aware of only one phucking thing after that; I was so near dead that my spirit drifted in and out of the dead realm. They wanted me...but could not take me, so they tormented and tortured my soul in an attempt to weaken me."

He shut his eyes. "I took a part in it. I was a willing party to a plan that was never revealed to me but which needs no explanation! I am as guilty as they so perhaps I deserved what I got and what shall come of my guilt. I turned humans against immortals so that the immortals would have no choice but to fight back. As I myself had to fight off such attacks before I even knew what was happening. I cannot say how many demons did the same thing. Six came to my house and gave me those orders I obeyed like a god damn sheep. I was attacked at least three times by people their influence had touched before they ever came to me. Still I obeyed them. I knew it was wrong, but I did it anyway, to prove my loyalty and love to my sire, whose execution meant nothing. His voice, his presence, his will reached me still." These things he spoke bitterly, tears escaping his dark brown eyes to roll down his cheeks. His tear glazed eyes then pierced Argal's intense green mirrors. "Acheron is rising up against An Morendor. That is what is happening here. If it is not stopped soon, it will be too phucking late. Do you understand? There is no telling who they turned to their side, or how many they have possessed, dominated, or influenced. Their attack is an internal one, a recondite assault on the very integrity of the people!" The youth slumped into his chair and covered his face with his hands. "I was supposed to bring the Black Lion Clan to Sammael's side...I couldn't...I just couldn't. Tell Lavoy not to give in to him...Beg him not to give in!" he sobbed.

Marco blew a long shaky breath as the demon confessed everything he knew. The bastards were clever. They had drawn him in without exposing who the hell they were. They still had no names but one; Aze, and it was very likely an alias. His eyes trained grimly on Argal. "If this gets out it will cause a panic. We must call all of An Morendor's long standing chiefs and lords to a meeting immediately and come up with a plan of action. Distrust and prejudice must be set aside if anything is to be accomplished. In the meantime, we must place Felix in protective custody here. I can think of no place he would be safer than your tower. His testimony will aid in convincing the others that we must unite against the nemesis we are up against, or fall to the Prince of Acheron." His eyes thinned when Argal informed him of the take over of Inaaksu and Hassim by demons. "It has begun already then. They shall use many of those they capture or assault to make more legions of, dead warriors and the like. Every hour we delay the more their legions shall spread. We must act quickly. I must go now and inform Aurelius and Maelmorda of these tidings. I trust you to inform those who you place your faith in." The demon-angel eyed Argal a moment; sure the mention of Maelmorda had to made him edgy, hence he took his leave without further word, abandoning Felix to Argal's guardianship. The arch-mage had several chambers in his tower for detaining prisoners, two of them very comfortable, the others bare for those who might prove dangerous to others, or even themselves.

Even as Marco stepped outside of the Palace gate; he sent a sending of Felix's confession to his sire and Maelmorda and informed them telepathically that a demon legion had sacked Inaaksu and the eastern kingdom. Aurelius was still in An Morendor presently and if anyone could find a resolution to the attack their country was under, Aurelius could. Had Marco known that Maelmorda was in An Morendor as well, he would have felt even more confident. Much as Maelmorda made

those who understood who and what he was nervous, he protected An Morendor and Morashtar with fierce cunning and devotion. Morashtar was his favorite child. As Marco walked down the street, making a mental list of the Lords which needed to be contacted; he wondered if it would all come to a head as a war between Acheron's legions and the people of An Morendor.

An entire day had been wasted in the trial; meanwhile Sammael's legions were spreading their poison by making monsters and slaves of their targets. Black Camelot would be under siege by morning, as another legion emerged from Acheron through gateways to surround the castle. The Ghazi clan would either have to fight and risk perishing, or join forces with Sammael's legions.

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Maximus retired to his bed early and suggested that Marianna do the same. If she showed signs of being unable to sleep because of nerves, she would be administered a mild sedative on the sly in a glass of wine by Vesh to help her sleep. Had Maximus known of the meeting which took place with Marco and Argal, he would never have been able to sleep himself. Knowing that an infernal war was taking place would not be of any benefit to him or Marianna until they were clean of their present situation.

Morning came quickly as did the trial. It was held in the City Park just west of Tyr Cadarn Palace. A stage had been set up which resembled a court room. There were two heavy chairs for the defendants, a large table across from them for the magistrate on one side, and on the other side a chair where each witness would sit while testifying. Guards and Knights surrounded the prisoners on three sides, including those who would be called to testify. On the grass below the platform, every last citizen of the citadel that was available had turned out to judge the spies, immortals and mortals alike, and the mortal population far exceeded the immortal one.

Halen had done his homework, whether through questioning the right people, or divination factors, their lives were layed bare before the court and citizens who filled the park around the stage. Two jury booths were set up to the right and left of the stage, where each citizen would cast his or her vote for judgment on each charge; guilty or not guilty on four counts of murder, each count on a separate ticket (Max), or of espionage (Max and Marianna); and the sentence; execution, acquittal, or imprisonment. Among those who showed up for the trial were Aurelius and Maelmorda. Maelmorda was well dressed, a nobleman by all appearances, and had slipped right past the city's guards unnoticed. Aurelius on the other hand rode in with an impressive escort, flying his dragon banners. He made no secret that he was coming to witness his progeny, and future progeny's trial.

All of the Castellarn Knights testified on behalf of the accused. They had gathered as much evidence to acquit both of them as time allowed. They proved Maximus a reliable ally with an exemplary record of service for his kingdom and their allies alike. They proclaimed that he had been targeted for no other reason than being a vampire, pointing out that his attackers had no way of knowing that Max and Marianna had posed as Dimtri and Naomi as independent investigators sent by their king to aid Hawker's Fort in a time of need. When asked what the need was, Morgrym stated that the conflicts in the citadel and surrounding areas had led to

many concerns that their kingdom was in danger of a disastrous civil war. A war between mortals and immortals which would pit neighbor against neighbor, friend against friend, and brother against brother. He cited several examples of mortal family members attacking sired brothers, sisters, or sons, sometimes in an attempt to kill. Two young vampires had lost their lives to a mortal family member over the past year, and several mortals had been killed by the related demon, werewolf, or vampire they had attacked. Both the Castellarn Knights and Argal presented cases of human races attacking immortals for no apparent cause other than fear, prejudice and hatred, while immortal attacks on humans had not risen but as a direct result of the persecution they had suffered over the past five years. The escalation of those conflicts was also pointed out. It was made apparent that Max had attacked no one, but defended himself from violent aggression.

Those who testified against Maximus pointed out that the vampire had killed all of the men who had threatened him. They claimed he had used unnecessary force, particularly in the case of the guards and mages which had entered his house, not to harm, but to seize him. Their claims could not be disproved, but it was stressed by those defending Maximus, that he was wounded and poisoned when the three he had killed at his house tried to take him into custody. The details of that incident were related by the Knights, who pointed out that the guards had no business being at the vampire's home in the first place. The guards and Qojo then testified that they had every right to be there, inasmuch as someone had reported that Maximus was dangerous. A neighbor who lived next door to 'Dimitri and Naomi' took the stand to give evidence that she was the one who reported seeing the vampire in a raving state of madness and reported it to the guards, afraid the vampire would hurt or kill someone. Because it could not be proven that the guards had anything to do with poisoning Maximus, and because they had a witness to excuse their presence at the house, the guards could not be held suspect as being responsible for Maximus' condition or for being where they were not supposed to be. On the other hand; when Morgrym took the stand and stated under pledge that the men who had entered the home to seize Maximus had acted irresponsibly, he did cast the guards in a poor light. He pointed out that they had been trained to approach blood crazed vampires with extreme caution, and in methods of disabling vampires in that state without harm to the vampire, themselves or others.

"They acted recklessly," he said. "They should have also known the risks going in. It is not the fault of Maximus Caerellius that he was very poorly handled while he was delirious with a blood rage brought on by a poison which threatened to bleed him out and caused him no small amount of agony. This man has murdered no one. He simply defended himself. He did not kill the elf Druvas either. His body was examined with other evidence, and it was exactly as Matthew Marcus claimed; he poisoned himself when he was captured. These are very strange circumstances which we all must question. It becomes all too obvious that someone, or a group of people, wanted to persecute this man, and perhaps even make him appear guilty of murder, when in fact, he is innocent. Look at the evidence people. I would not defend this man if I was not positive that he was innocent."

The knights played the Independent Investigators card hard when the charges of espionage were addressed. Their card was trumped by the king of spades which Halen played. Had Maximus and Marianna, or Lord Aurelius informed the king or magistrate of their intentions, then they could have proven themselves innocent of espionage. Because they had acted independently and covertly, Max so much as disguising his true identity from the very authorities, while Marianna took an alias, they could

not prove they meant to gather information against the Western Kingdom. He pushed hard for the charge of espionage to stand and won the people's vote. Morgrym had advised Max, Argal, Marianna and his knights not to bring up the fact that the two did not reveal themselves to the king or magistrate, because they suspected outside influences might be controlling authorities on high levels. Morgrym stressed that it would only be taken as an accusation against the city's most beloved leaders and pit the people against them. He was right about that. The people would have wanted to see them both executed if they smeared their leaders reputations with unproven suspicions they would have taken as accusations to undermine their kingdom.

When Maximus took the stand he claimed that he had forced Marianna to act as his partner by domination factors without either his Sire's or Marianna's consent or knowledge. It was the only lie he had told in taking the stand, in all else he was blatantly honest. When Argal, shocked by the revelation and suspecting it was a fabrication asked why, Maximus told him straight faced that it was because of personal reasons.

"I am in love with her and had no wish to be parted from her. I felt I might woo her from the father of her children if we worked together on a mission of intrigue. I wanted her to see that I was confident in her, and believed in her. I want her for my wife. I never intended for her to face prison or such accusations as face us both now. I never imagined that by attempting to help this kingdom, either of us would be accused of being spies."

While Maximus spoke, Marcav leaned over to whisper in Marianna's ear. "Do not dare disclaim him, it will only make him look like a liar," he warned for her ears alone.

"Why did you not just force her affections as you forced her to go along with your task, rather than risking her as you claim you have?" Halen asked suspiciously.

"Love has no value if it is not honest. I knew she would never leave her children to take part in an investigation without a little push from me. And as I mentioned, I was blinded by selfish desires and failed to see the dangers I placed her in."

When all was said and done; and all the votes had been accounted for and recorded, Maximus was acquitted of all charges of murder but both he and Marianna were found guilty of espionage. Because they served Noct'maire, charges of treason had been thrown out immediately. Espionage carried an incontestable sentence in Hawker's Fort of either execution (if intention to harm a kingdom or its leaders was proven) or twenty years imprisonment in the Citadel Dungeon, twice that for an immortal. The claims Maximus made of having forced Marianna to take part in the mission were thrown out because he could not prove his influence over her. As such, Marianna was sentenced to twenty-five years imprisonment, and Maximus a term of fifty years. Halen made it known to Marianna however, that if it could be proven at a later time that she had been dominated; she could appeal her sentence. Maximus had taken a shot in the dark to get Marianna off and it had failed. One thing alone stopped the people from imposing the execution penalty on Maximus by finding him guilty of murder; The presence of Aurelius and his well armed escort. They feared the dragon lord of the north and would not dare risk signing an order to execute his eldest progeny in his presence, where he could see the faces of those responsible. Maximus and Marianna were clapped in irons and led away by the guards

and several knights to the dungeon; where Maximus was locked up in the high security level of the prison, the bottom level, while Marianna was taken to the first level where human females were immured. It was nightfall by then.

"Everything will be alright, Marianna," Maximus promised her with a smile just before they were separated and taken to their cell blocks.

Morgrym approached Aurelius when Marcav, Callum, Penduyn and Kemen of the Castellarn escorted the prisoners to the penitentiary with a handful of guards. "Lord Emrys," he greeted him with a bow. "I am Morgrym, First Knight of the Castellarn Eagles. I regret that Sir Maximus and the lady have been so unfairly imprisoned. I have no doubt of their innocence. The judgments were taken out of our hands when Magistrate Halen Deward ordered a public trial and jury. I and my knighthood have plans to remove them from their prison terms with the Prisoner Slave Act. By our authority, and with thy consent, we, the Castellarn Knights, shall claim them as our servants and hold ourselves responsible for their actions thereafter. The act demands that they serve their self-appointed masters as slaves for a duration equal to the term they would have served as prisoners. When a claim is made, the prisoners have the right to refuse enslavement. Both of them shall receive duties that are equal to their talents while serving under us. I am confident however that this situation shall be resolved long before their term is up," he assured. "There is a matter we are now called to address, and I request that you join us. It concerns the Kingdom of Hassim, the territory that was until recently ruled by Yorek Kassim."

Maelmorda had watched the trial with interest while standing in the shadow of Aurelius and his tall war horse. When Morgrym approached, and with him Argal who stood quietly listening to the man as he spoke to An Morendor's most powerful King, his gaze shifted to lock on Argal. The devil who was known in An Morendor as Maelmorda Kilcanoragh, a powerful immortal of unknown kind, who some recognized as the sorcerer which ruled the continent itself as an elusive high king, dipped his head in a silent greeting to Argal and smiled. Only Acheron's own knew he was the Morning Star and the father of Acheron and its first generation legions. At the moment, half of those legions and all the rest were loyal to Sammael. "I am acquainted with the situation in Inaaksu the desert region of Hassim. Prince Kassim is currently under my protection."

Morgrym leaned his gaze on the man who spoke with crisp tones. "And who are you, Sir?" Though Ikael, the formless one possessing the knight, was quite aware of whom Lucifer was, Morgrym had never met him. Everyone in Morashtar, unless they were totally isolated, had heard of him. If Ikael was unnerved by Maelmorda's presence, Morgrym did not show it. Maelmorda, Sammael, Behemoth, and Raziel were the only beings who could identify their presence. The beqidum had nothing to worry about though. Maelmorda did not expose his own to outlanders of Acheron. No, he would make use of the positions they had taken, seek them all out, and if they defied him, he would send them back to Hell's Pit.

Maelmorda's lips curled as he met the man's gaze with unnerving acuity. "I am Lord Maelmorda Arghyle Kilcanoragh, and I expect to be asked to attend this meeting you have invited my best man to," he had the knight know.

Morgrym paled as he would be expected to do in the presence of An Morendor's high king. The knight bowed deeply to him. "Please, Sir, your wisdom in the matter



would be greatly appreciated." At that, the knight led the way to the hitching posts which had been set up in the park for the trial, the remainder of his knights following after Aurelius, Argal, Maelmorda, Morgrym and Aurelius' escort. After mounting their horses (Maelmorda rode double with Aurelius) the knights escorted the two kings and their envoy to the Palace and the council hall on the first floor. On the way to the hall; Aurelius was told politely that his escort could wait for him in the banquet hall or palace court yard as they pleased. The council chamber was a large hall, well lit, and at the center was a large, rectangular table which could seat up to forty people. Halen was already seated there with his Internal Affairs officers, Denfel and Broden. When everyone was seated; they were attended by servants who brought wine and food, whereof the serfs were dismissed. Only after the knights who had escorted Maximus and Marianna to the prison had arrived and also taken their seats, were the doors locked from the inside so that the private meeting could commence.

Halen's eyes immediately settled on Aurelius and Maelmorda who sat together; hence his gaze pinned Marcav. "What business has King Emrys and this other man being here? Who is this other man?"

"They have every business being here. We are in trouble, Lord Deward, terrible trouble, and these two kings may be the only two men who can help us," he related gravely. "I give you Lord Kilcanoragh, Sir, High King of An Morendor," he introduced hence with a sweep of his hand towards the devil in their midst.

Halen's lips and cheek twitched noticeably and his gaze shifted nervously on Maelmorda. "What proof that he is who he claims to be?" he asked, his voice weaker than he would have liked.

"I would say your instincts are telling you it is the truth," Maelmorda voiced with a scoff. He grinned when Aurelius vouched for his identity. "There you have it, from the mouth of a king who never lies. He is too fearless to lie." He clapped Aurelius on the back and took a sip of his wine.

Halen shifted in his seat, tugged on his collar, then got on with it. "The Kingdom of Hassim has been seized by Acheron's infernal host." He glanced at Maelmorda as he cackled amusedly. Halen blew a breath. "They may target this city next..." he began only to be interrupted by Marcav.

"Argal has a report I believe you should listen to before you go any further, Sir," he advised.

Halen looked to Argal expectantly for him to explain. The magistrate was extremely unhappy about the presence of the two arch-beings and doing his best to pretend that they were simply kings who had come to offer their aid. He dared not allow himself to think too much in their company.

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Mariana felt a muscle in her jaw tick as Maximus sat up, his tone turning to quite a different note as he prepared to make it plainly seen that he was fed up and finished with her short run of confusion and uncertainty about the situation. Her dark eyes remained on him as he spoke, out of respect for him as an individual, but she had to look away ever so quietly as he told her that he doubted anything bad

would come of slavery for them. Well, wasn't he ever the optimist? It was true, the knights HAD been kind, but men changed when power and ownership was laid in their hands. She could not be blamed for not being on the same page as him regarding the possibility of being owned by the knights. He easily told her not to concern herself regarding that matter. It took everything inside of her not to lash out at him. Pushed and then dismissed. She felt a large lump form in her throat and chest that didn't seem to budge when she swallowed, so she simply didn't answer until he asked if she had any questions about the trial. "None." It was one word, given in a dead voice before she rose and disappeared into the small back bedroom, closing the door behind her.

Mariana moved quietly to the window, looking out into the darkness over the garden. Her entire life, she had been rushed, pushed, ordered... her life and future in the hands of everyone but herself. After she ran from her life of slavery, her days and survival depended on others. She had been caught stealing at the convenience store and it depended on the kindness of the old owner to keep her free and give her a life, what little it was. After that, it was Tiber forcing a pregnancy on her. Then Seth. They were leaving. Now. After that, his decisions caused her to be shipped off to live at Noct'maire. She had been happy, raising her children and being taught things... things she had never experienced before. So much so that she agreed to this mission. And now, a man that not only claimed to love her, but know quite certainly she was feeling, had pushed for the last few days in a flurry of emotions, expecting her to jump into his arms, carefree of anything they were facing. And when she tried to explain to him what she was feeling... her confusion and the strange new feelings he had give her... he had become fed up and dropped it completely. And now, her life was to be handed over to the mercy of the courts, and possibly after, the knights of the city. The knot in her throat tightened as she gazed blankly out the window, her arms wrapping around herself. She rarely received concern about how she was feeling, and had no guidance, save from Aurelius and Melissant. And here, the man stating his love for her, his need for her, had dumped quite a load in her lap and given her a few days before snatching it away. Mariana was quite certain, especially now, that love was something imagined, and that Maximus, among others, was still blind to that fact.

Stripping down to her undershift, Mariana lowered to sit on the edge of her bed, the only sound in the room being her quiet breathing. She barely remembered Vesh coming in to check on her and coaxing her to drink a bit of wine. After that, she curled up on top of the made bed and was out within minutes, later being thankful for a dreamless sleep.

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Argal was thrilled when Felix was delivered to his messy study, but immediately was concerned at the man's state. Marco had to explain how it happened and what had occurred when he went to pick him up, causing Argal to glance at the writ before it was burned. Marco really was an irreplaceable ally.

Felix looked like he had been run over by a gang of horses... over and over and over... and starved in the desert for decades. Argal immediately ordered him some weak wine, to be gentle on his stomach, and thanked him sincerely for coming. The story that followed was as shocking as it could get. It wasn't just Hawk's Forte. It was An Morendor in general. Acheron was rising against An Morendor. If it got out, everyone and their mother would have an absolute meltdown. Authority would not

longer matter. While Felix spoke, Argal scribbled notes like a madman, making a messy transcript of what was revealed. When Felix began sobbing about Lavoy, Argal took a separate sheet of paper and scribbled out a note to Lavoy, which he would rewrite in awhile and have messengered to him.

Once Felix was done, Marco immediately played the task keeper, explaining what they must do. And Argal completely agreed. "Of course. Felix, you can remain here. No one is getting in without my allowance. It will give you a chance to heal... to recover from what you have been put through. Thank you for all of this. You may be helping thousands." He would have the servants immediately make up one of the comfortable rooms for him, and would order that he be brought whatever he wish to eat or drink every three hours. Once Felix was settled and Marco and Argal spoke privately, Argal got to work, remaining at his desk for the day, preparing all of the information he needed. The trial was upon them, much more swiftly than he expected, but he was prepared.

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The morning of the trial, Mariana woke early and slipped into the bathing chamber to take a warm bath. Who knew when or where she would get the next one? After that, she disappeared back into her room to dry, brush and neatly braid her long, dark hair, then dress in a dark blue gown and sturdy slippers for the trial. She had to dress carefully, as her breasts were growing sore and tender from no longer feeding her daughter. She knew it would pass within a week, but it didn't make it less painful. After she was ready, she sat on the edge of her bed and waited until she would be fetched for the trial.

When she and Maximus were brought to the area for the trial, Mariana stepped carefully up onto the stage, glancing out at the crowd that had turned out for them. This was much more massive than court in America. Then again, the charges were more serious. She went without a struggle and settled into the large chair where she would remain for questioning, her fingers folding meekly on her lap once she was still. Her back remained ramrod straight, her gaze not meeting anyone's. They especially distanced themselves when Aurelius showed up to watch the trial. She felt as if she had failed something very important and knew Max probably felt the same.

Since Mariana knew she didn't have the freedom to argue with anyone testifying or giving their opinion, she remained quiet, listening to anyone who took the stand. Halen annoyed her the most, but she knew that nothing she did could sway them for the better. Any time she was questioned she spoke honestly. What else was there to hide? It was Maximus' statement that he had lured Mariana into the mission that shocked her, but she knew she could not argue otherwise. Besides, how would she know it wasn't true?

Relief was given in a warm dose to her as Maximus was declared free of any murder charge, but the cold boulder returned to her stomach as they both were found guilty of espionage. And when the sentence was given, Mariana forced herself to take in a trembling breath. Her hands were shaking. Every PART of her was shaking. Twenty-five years. Fifty for Maximus. She remembered her legs feeling numb as she was pulled from her seat, heavy irons clamped onto her wrists. They were so heavy she couldn't lift her arms without a struggle, so she let them hang limply in front of her as she was led away behind Maximus. When they reached dungeon, Mariana looked

at Maximus with a deadpan expression as he tried to encourage her, then she was turned and taken to her own cell, had her irons removed, and was locked inside. Once the guards were gone, Mariana went to the hard bench bolted to the wall and sat down on it, staring at the dim room. She felt dead. She was thankful for the feeling of shock, because it numbed everything else that she had been feeling prior to the last twenty-four hours.

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After the trial, as Maelmorda and Aurelius met up and retired to the meeting room with the rest of the bunch, Argal was shuffling together all of his documents, graphs and written accounts and rushing to catch up. The man was NEVER on time, and it was amazing he had made it to court on time. Luckily, he slipped into the door last before it was bolted, his arms spilling over with things that he had to juggle to keep in his grasp. He grinned at Halen (oh gods, how he LOVED to tick Halen off), as he passed, shooting out a hand to pat him on the arm, then moving to dump his things at an empty spot on the table. There was no way Argal was going to sit during the meeting, unless asked, and he began shuffling his things out before greeting all of them and thanking them for their time.

The report that unfolded was a drastic, but obviously well-prepared one. Acheron was making the moves to take An Morendor over as a whole. He read Felix's confession very carefully, then began pulling out graphs he had neatly constructed (yes, he COULD be neat, when he had to be), showing the rise of attacks (strange ones at that) in the city against immortals, as well as reports they had from other areas. He also explained about when he had probed the knights and guards of the city and found Sorrek's little 'visitor', who had fled upon being detected. Argal had been a busy boy over the last few days, and it paid off to have that type of information. It would have paid off MORE if he had those damn maps Halen had locked in his desk!

"As you can see," He finalized. "This began as an investigation on the city. It has since been discovered that this is much more widespread and is placing thousands at risk. Nothing has been spoken beyond my study and this room, for obvious reasons."

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Maximus wished he could express what he truly felt to Marianna in a way she could understand, but love was a foreign thing to him which flummoxed his sensibilities. What he felt for her was so powerful that if he did not shut it off until she knew her own heart and mind; he would truly drown in his need to be loved by her. He had grown impatient over the months because his heart ached constantly and it was not a feeling he was accustomed to. He did not allow himself to be threatened by his own emotions; he detached himself from them. He had to, because his heart surged with a fierce and passionate force which the kind of love he felt for Marianna only aggravated. It was the same passion which drove his convictions so ardently and even his ferocity in battle.

He had loved Rome and watched the greatest empire ever there was fall apart from dissipation, decadence, and torn heirs which had made the empire vulnerable to enemies. He had seen the people and culture he had given his heart and soul to massacred by enemies that poor leadership had opened the gates to. In essence he had seen a kingdom he had dedicated his entire life to fall owed to the mistakes of

a few men. Rome had broken his heart until he met Aurelius. He had loved only one women in his life before Marianna and his mortal wife had betrayed him because she could not tolerate competing with his devotion to his duties. She never saw that when he was with her; he was hers completely. He had loved a man who promised to be the greatest king Britain had ever known only to see him poisoned by friends he had trusted and esteemed. He had killed men who had once been as brothers to him and been hunted by them. Aurelius had been his only constant; the only reliable being he had every devoted himself to who had not betrayed his trust, faith, and love. Despite all his struggles he had the courage to love Marianna. He was wary of love, even feared it, but he had defied those fears and exposed his heart to Marianna.

It was his instinct to survive and to protect others, and if uncertainty and longing plagued him; he could not perform at his best. He had not rejected Marianna by any means, he had backed off because he believed that is what she wanted. He was stepping back during troubled times to protect her and protect anyone else who relied on him. Marianna believed he was finished with her when he had only just begun to love her. Maximus had never expected her to jump into his arms. He had only hoped that she could tell him whether or not she loved him. He would understand if she was not ready to submit to any feelings she owned. It was that simple to him. She either loved him or she did not. He believed he had given her plenty of time to think about it. He had first professed his feelings to her many months ago; he had not pressured her for months afterward but patiently waited only to receive no response whatsoever. He had expressed his love to her at Noctmaire a second time, and still no response. He had confided what he felt for her a third time, when Seth had returned, and still she wavered to give him any kind of answer he could place his hopes in. Now she rejected him out of fear of the future, of what tomorrow may or may not hold and he backed off. He thought that is what she wanted, but her expression seemed to reflect resentment.

Maximus realized that he saw things differently. He was a hard man with a cold heart and had spent enough time with Marianna to know that he loved her. If he; who was so closed to emotion could fall in love, surely she would know by now if she loved him or not. What she was or was not ready to embrace had nothing to do with it in his opinion. He could wait a hundred years for her if he only knew that she loved him. It was the uncertainty he now protected himself from in order to keep a clear head.

Maximus could only be insensitive to her fears of slavery because he was unaware of her past experiences and the dark period in her life when she was a child who had been sold into slavery by traffickers. When she answered his question to say 'none' with that flat lined voice, his eyes thinned on her. When she stood; he stood with her, but as she began to retreat he seized her upper arm with his hand to squeeze down tightly enough to stop her without causing her pain and pulled her square with himself. He well knew his own strength. She was not the only one who was tense about the trial tomorrow and wondering what the future held, only his tension came through like static through his temper. "You know, Marianna; if I am wrong about something, you could just point it out to me. I thought you wanted me to back off and yet I sense you resent me for something. Why...what is it?" He did not want to be locked in a cell with nothing but time to think and unanswered concerns. It was a bad combination.

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Felix knew that his memories of his tortures would fade all too quickly to leave him with the guilt and regrets of all he had done. He had betrayed Mekkora, and by betraying him he had betrayed Sammael. No one could protect him from the Prince of Demons. He did not kid himself. Hell would have him sooner or later and he saw no sense in delaying the inevitable agony, if not eternal agony which he was sure waited with arms open for him. "I do not expect you to understand, but I have no wish to remain here. So either arrest me, or permit me to leave. I know you think I am on your side now, but I am not. I only told you the truth. I do not have a choice in who I serve. I never did, do you understand?" An executioner's axe or turning himself over to Sammael, either way Hell would have him. If Argal released him he would contact Sammael immediately after he had left and confess himself to him, which could possibly result in the Desert Wind unleashing his legions on the city. He left Argal little choice but to arrest him, and the mage would have to impose formal charges on the demon to do so. His only other option was to hold him in custody as his own prisoner and attempt to reform him. Felix was the progeny of one of the most corrupt, evil and depraved demons in Hell and had been claimed by Mekkora as a baby. He was totally mind phucked, had been for a very long time, and he had truly never had a choice.

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It would have pained Maximus to know that Marianna doubted whether his story about dominating her was a lie. He would hope she knew him better than that. Aurelius certainly knew he was not capable of a such an act nor would he dare. Aurelius had known Maximus for most of his life though. The dragon lord was pissed that they were sentenced at all based on the evidence he heard. He was also furious that a public trial had been called. He knew when people were being railroaded. It also angered him that his progeny's upstanding reputation was being damaged, as was Marianna's reputation before she could even establish herself. Like Maximus he controlled his emotions when necessary and his expression was stone cold throughout the trial.

When Maximus was locked in his cell he just stood at the steel door, peering out of the small, rectangular, barred window which gave air to the bare stone walls in the corridor without. Marianna's cell had two bunks with thin mattresses stuffed with sawdust, a bench against the wall, and a toilet. She also had a cell mate. The girl was in her mid-twenties, cute as a button, and a helpless thief. Her kleptomania had been forgiven for as many as ten petty counts, but then she stole a valuable horse, whose beauty she could not resist, and finally got a term of five years. Maximus had a bare floor and a bucket and no cell mate. Immortals were always held in isolation because some of them could combine power. "I am sorry, Marianna...So very sorry," he whispered, his voice echoing against the naked walls. At length he turned to examine his cell. It was spacious enough to exercise in. He was glad for that because exercise would be the only thing to release him of his thoughts. With a deep sigh he retreated to the far left corner and sat down to lean against the wall. He had never imagined how painful it would be to be tried in the presence of his sire. Maximus shut his eyes. "Aurelius will get us out of this. It should have been me though...I should have been able to disprove their weak ass evidence."

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Aurelius sat relaxed in his chair as Argal read Felix's confession then showed them the charts. Maelmorda meanwhile was laid back in his seat, legs stretched beneath the table while he trifled with his curling locks of brunette hair and stared at

the table as he soaked in the Annwn demon's words. Maelmorda knew Argal was a demon yes, but a nether demon of Anwnn after Maelmorda's own heart. His jade green eyes locked on each graph he held up to absorb the details. "Chaotically Systematic," he uttered as Argal concluded. His gaze was then drawn on Halen as he spoke up.

"That demon, Felix, he must be placed under arrest and stand trial for treason, conspiracy, murder, and domination practices immediately," he spoke sharply.

Maelmorda scoffed. "You don't want to do that."

Halen's eyes pinned Maelmorda. "And why not? He has confessed to all these crimes."

"Exactly, which means his sire shall come for him if he is at all threatened by you. His progeny is his to punish as and when he sees it. Hold him privately, but dare not draw attention to him by placing him on trial or sentencing him."

"His sire is dead," Halen pointed out.

"That's what you think," Maelmorda had him know.

"Well, we can handle him," Halen assured.

"There you go, thinking again. Did I say he would come alone for his child?"

Halen turned red with anger. He did not appreciate being insulted by this elusive arch-sorcerer who showed up when he pleased to remind people that he ruled over An Morendor if not Morashtar. "We shall cut him loose then, banish him from the city," Halen decided.

Maelmorda shook his head and trained his attention on Argal. "You want to explain the dangers of that to the man?" he asked.

After Argal had set the magistrate straight, Aurelius had some matters of his own to lay on the table. "I demand that you release Maximus and Marianna and give them quarters either at the palace or in the knight's keep. And before you make the mistake of saying they were found guilty, you know damn well that the charges against them are bogus and that they have been tried unfairly. Let this court say otherwise here and now."

Knowing he would be outvoted by everyone else there, Halen did not protest their release. Everyone else expressed their agreement with the northern king. "I shall release them but you must take them back to your kingdom with you. They have no business being here, much less at the palace," the magistrate negated.

Aurelius pierced the man's eyes with a seething eye. "Marianna is registered as a resident and Maximus is registered as a provisional resident. They have every right to be here. Marianna shall serve this kingdom as an ambassador of Noct'maire, and Maximus shall act as her guard and advisor. As such you are required by custom to provide them both with quarters within the palace walls. In return, I shall aid this city against any and all aggression. Now where is King Helder, I wish to inform him personally of my plans to safeguard this city."

It was Marcav who answered the king. "He sailed to Sea-eagle Roost Island to lend support to Chieftain Nundor against an uprising."

Aurelius nodded. "That explains where the rest of your knighthood is."

Yes," Marcav confirmed.

Aurelius contemplated for a moment then locked his pendragon eyes on Halen. "Under the Act of Temporary Stewardship I am taking control of this city until he returns."

"What?!" Halen barked, at what time Maelmorda refreshed his memory concerning the act.

"Under the terms of the Act of Temporary Stewardship, an allied king, in times of extreme upheaval or threat, and in absence of a king, may claim temporary stewardship over a kingdom he supports in order to quell said uprisings and threats. Unless at least two of the available chapter members of said kingdom refute his authority, he may then occupy the territory he controls for the protection of the kingdom and its people, until the king returns. Yada, yada, yada."

Aurelius chuckled. Maelmorda's oddities often amused him. "Lord Kilcanoragh knows this country's laws and customs well."

Halen's attention flew on the knights. The chapter members included the knights and Dumarc (regent). Callum was both knight and Dumarc, thus the entire available chapter was seated at that table. "You men cannot allow this! Protest it, I implore you! What if he means to usurp us?"

Aurelius trained a cool eye on the man. "If I wished to usurp this city, I would have no trouble doing so with the arms I now have available. Nor would I go to the trouble of declaring myself obligated to the Act of Temporary Stewardship. I would simply take the city. The legions which threaten you might as easily claim this city, only not as a friend, but a very dangerous foe. Acheron is rising against you, do you not grasp what that means?"

"I understand what it means," Marcav growled. "You have my consent."

"And mine," Morgrym voiced.

Halen interrupted before Callum could cast his vote. "And under that act, the part Lord Kilcanoragh did not cite, are you not obliged to uphold the king's convictions as Steward in his absence?" he asked.

"I am," Aurelius attested.

Halen smiled. "Then you have my vote as well," he consented to the knights' amazement and no small amount of suspicion on the parts of some at the table.

"Heh, he is up to something," Maelmorda recognized scornfully.

"Yes," Aurelius agreed speculatively and his eyes lanced the man. "What are you up to? Why the sudden change of heart?"



"I simply intend to insure that you uphold your duties as steward is all, and as I have no vote, it does not really matter if I offer it or not, does it?" Halen assured.

Aurelius gazed at the man. He was obviously avoiding a truthful answer. "You will find me more cunning than yourself, Deward, I warn you. If you have a trick up your sleeve, I shall rip your shirt off. My conviction stands, gentlemen, do conclude with your decision." Hence his gaze turned away from Halen and locked on Callum. If Callum voted against the act, despite all the persuasion against him doing so by his comrades, who would beg him to reconsider and cite all the reasons for doing so, then Aurelius would be denied Temporary Stewardship, because Hughveld voted against the act. Hughveld just could not bring himself to let an outsider take control of the city, no matter how well trusted he was by his fellowship. He was not sure it was not a plot by their enemy to seize the kingdom. If Callum agreed with the majority and voted for the act, Hughveld would fly solo as the one man who voted against, and Aurelius would seize control and command of the city as acting Steward.

The Beqidum were backed into a corner. On one hand, Sammael had commanded them to take the city from inside, and they were close, closer than even they knew, for Semmet had possessed Helderdras two hours ago unknown to his formless brothers. On the other hand, Maelmorda and Aurelius of all creatures were interfering in their plans. A change of strategy was therefore in order for the Beqidum. They would either have to throw in with Maelmorda, or Argal would have to be possessed in place of Halen. Through Argal, they could control his powers and the city wards with them.

The beqidum felt indebted to Sammael because he had cut them loose of the pit and allowed them the opportunity to live again in the bodies they possessed. Maelmorda had not freed them for a very long time; thanks to Mog. Mog was an incessant trouble maker. He thrived on corrupting those he possessed, laying their souls to ruin to prime them for Acheron, and because he enjoyed it. Good people turned into cold blooded killers, rapists and other evil doers, tended to draw attention. Mog drew attention to himself, while the others were far more elusive and careful. They liked to keep their bodies, whereas Mog liked to go through as many as he possibly could. The formless ones tended to grow resentful if only one or two of them was released to claim a form, thus they were typically all released at once, or not at all. Usually they spread themselves far and wide, were commanded to do so, despite their tight sense of unity. This was the first time they were commanded to unite in the flesh, and they cherished it. Mog was the only one who could care less. He was too damn evil to even love his own brothers. He served himself.

Three minutes after abandoning Sorrek, Mog had possessed a horse. He had then possessed the secretary of Community Affairs, Jaemus. Jaemus was a kind, intelligent, amiable, light hearted young man whom everyone loved. Mog as Jaemus had murdered three people in cold blood already; an eight year old boy, whose limbs he had cut off; a pretty young woman whose face and breasts he had mutilated; and the kind shop keeper Marianna had bought the chocolate from. He had drowned him in a vat of chocolate liqueur. The bodies had just not been found yet, but they would be soon enough. Mog also left subtle evidence behind like puzzle pieces which led to the killer. The moment Jaemus was caught, Mog would vacate his body and possess

another. Jaemus' loss of memory might make Argal suspect that he had been possessed, but it proved nothing, whereas there would be plenty of proof that Jaemus was a serial killer. Who knew how many bodies would accumulate by the time Jaemus was nailed as the killer.

If Aurelius was elected as Steward until the return of the king, Halen would immediately make the convictions of King Argrym Heldras known to the dragon king, and he had orders written, signed and sealed by the king as proof. "So you will support Argrym's agendas now, Lord Emrys?"

Aurelius eyed the man hard and nodded his head, still staring at him.

"It is my King's wish to route all of the immortals in the city and to relocate them to villages outside of the citadel, and within a deadline of two years, to remove them from the western kingdom altogether. It is in our plans to restore this kingdom to its prior state of human and mortal cultures."

"When did Argrym lose his mind?" Aurelius asked the man. "How did you manage to influence your intelligent young king to be so foolishly rash and stupid?"

Halen's eyes burned on the man with contempt, despite his fear of him. "He is none of those things!" he snapped. "I have been collecting data for twenty years. Argal is not the only one who can make graphs and charts. I have researched violence in all races, divided those acts into subdivisions of unprovoked brutality, defensive actions, quarrels gone wrong, and domestic disputes. Immortals are dangerous as a whole, barring the exceptions, which in the case of certain races are rare. Vampires, demons, werewolves, devils, and infernal angels, among others prove statistically to be cold blooded killers and predators who cannot fight their nature. They belong among their own kind or among other immortals. Those who feed on raw flesh and drink blood can feed on many other immortal kinds without doing permanent damage to them. Not so when they target a human out of hunger, anger or even to defend themselves. Those who feed on livestock or wild game are the exception. Mortals fear dark kinds and with good reason. Look at what they have done to this city and what they are still doing without being seen. They are not the first to have stolen the wills, the hearts, the very flesh of our people either. There has always been tension between the ancients who are so difficult to kill and control and the ageless but still vulnerable and short lived humans. We should not have to live in eternal fear. One man and the king who supported him once opened this city to trade with and inhabitation by the immortals, why shouldn't one man and those who support him make this city a safe place for mortals to dwell by closing those same doors? We can ward this citadel by paying powerful mages for their talents. We can conduct trade with the immortals at our borders and by our ports, where their economy and ours shall not suffer for the change. You are a good man, Aurelius Ambrosius, but you are the exception, one we are grateful to and for, but an exception nonetheless," he delivered his testimony with the passion of a man who believed deeply in his convictions. It took him years to finally persuade Argrym to believe as he did, and the king was now only twenty-six years of age.

"And this is how you influenced Argrym?" Aurelius asked him.

"With the truth, yes," Halen confirmed.

"And when did you first introduce these ideals to the king? Was it before all of these conflicts arose?"

"Yes, I have spoken to him of these matters since he was a youth. The knights always persuaded him against me, but he has finally come to accept the hard facts. People and immortals cannot live together in harmony."

"That is such garbage!!" Marcav barked. "You have poisoned the ideals of my grandson by scores with your fears, paranoia and prejudice! If your concepts are so righteous why then is this the first we have heard of this? I vow you are treacherous and I would charge you with treason if I could find a way to make it stick! If you had not the love of the public on your side to protect you! Have you envenomed their minds behind our backs as well? How did you get away with this without us knowing?" he fumed.

Maelmorda waved a hand to both gainsay their attention and dismiss their argument. "Men, this quarrel only stands in the way of actually accomplishing something. All that can be settled when the threat to your kingdom is eradicated."

"Aurelius, you must stand by my king's conviction!" Halen insisted.

Aurelius shook his head. "I must support his convictions while I stand in his stead, not carry them out for him. I will not oppose his standards in his absence, but I shall confront him about it face to face when he returns. If you believed I was obligated to do your king's dirty work for him and for you, you are mistaken, Dreward. I am constrained by duty only to protect this kingdom, its throne, and its people, and that is what I shall do. At what time your king returns and wishes to doom his kingdom by putting your plans in action, I shall either take Castleguard or abandon you all to suffer Hell's reproof for your terrible errors." Aurelius stood at that and trained his gaze on Argal. "Argal, see if you can talk this man down from his beliefs and into reason. I advise you to persuade the king against this insane folly when he disembarks as well. Argrym always looked up to you, his immortal friend. Oh, and one more thing; open the wards to allow the telepathy guards to bypass me, my knights, Halen, yourself, the Castellarn Knights, Vakus Urik, and Marianna."

Halen paled. "Not Valis! He must not be allowed to breach the wards. He is dangerous...unpredictable, a monster!"

Aurelius shot his gaze on the man, he felt for the last time before he killed him. "Speak ill of Valis Urik again and I am liable to rip your head off and stuff it down your throat," he warned in cool tones. "You cannot even spit in his shadow."

The Noct'maire king grabbed a quill from the table and wrote the names of all his knights on the back of one of Argal's graphs. In order of rank they were; Maximus Caerellius, Roary Connemara, Senen MacKennagh, Vaeren Ruindor, Mickey Muldoon, Kent Cavannagh (who was still in Mephais but he wanted him included anyway), Matthew Marcus, Luecrotia Amduscias, Cavan MacKennagh, Gormath Aelbah, Haleth Torandor, Domath Galgar, Elemon Kassmor, Mascen Kilcanoragh, Mekkan Gothhelam and Trent Kilcanoragh. Every last one of his knights was an immortal; demons, vampires, elves, fallen angels, werebeasts, and Vaeren was an elwion.

His gaze then locked on Callum. "Dumarc Maheren, will you write the pardon and

order for Maximus and Marianna's release right away and do the honor of liberating them and bringing them to me? My men and I will be at Young Blood's Tavern." Halen would sign and seal the documents as promised when Callum drew them up and sealed them with his ring.

Maelmorda then stood as well. "You will see enforcement at its best when the army of King Ambrosious occupies this city, which should be in about an hour," he grinned and then pivoted to follow Aurelius out.

The moment Aurelius was outside of the palace with his escort, Maelmorda riding with him double again, who had clearly come to the city horseless, he contacted his men and told them to muster half of their arms and gate en-mass to Hawker's Fort then set up patrols. The Castellarn Knights would divide and assign the city guards to the Noct'maire ranks and patrol the city as usual themselves; three at a time on shifts. Half of the city guards were already posted on the walls and watch towers as ordered two days ago by Marcav. Aurelius intended to post some of his best mages on the walls, north, south, east, and west, and one at each point in between.

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Mariana whipped around to face Maximus as his hand clamped down on her arm and her dark eyes lanced him with a searing look. He wanted answers. Answers that she really couldn't even figure out herself. Her mind had been in a haze since this all started, and she had floods of emotions washing through her that muddled each and every one of her five senses. "You are a smart man. Much smarter than I could ever hope to be. I am glad that things come so easily to you. You understand what happens inside of you and out as well. I'm sorry. I don't understand any of it. I don't understand these feelings, because I have never HAD them before. And if you so easily understand them, then that means you have had a crash course in them at least once. I'm sorry. I haven't. I don't get it. I don't know what to say and I don't know what to think. I am in some kind of fog. And if my worries and fears seep in to keep me from leaping at a conclusion, I can't stop them with just a word or a thought. I am not a strong person like you are. I haven't yet reached the high plane of understanding that you are on." It was hard for Mariana, mostly because she was frustrated. Frustrated with herself for not understanding, frustrated that he seemed to just KNOW. Know EVERYTHING, for that matter. On the streets in America, she knew things. She could survive, teach others, know exactly what was going to happen. This place was completely different. She was the dumb girl in the corner who couldn't spell or read long words. She didn't know about Rome or how to cook or anything other than very simple math. She didn't understand their races and species and... whatever they all were. She could clean stalls and raise her children. Well, until they outgrew her level of knowledge, then she was back to just mucking stalls. "Be proud that it comes so easily to you... to be brave and laugh at fear. I, on the other hand, didn't have centuries to learn to do that." How old was Mariana now? She was seventeen when she left to come here with Seth, but she might be eighteen now. She couldn't remember her birthday on her fake ID. "Seventeen years. Of that, I had six years free of worry. After that, the rest of my life was spent trying to survive and 'figure it all out'. Call me a slow learner, but I haven't done that yet. And I am sorry if that throws a wrench into your clockwork, but you have to deal with it. And if you can't, then just give me a holler." She left on that biting note, pulling away and disappearing into her room.

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Ugh. Argal was hoping it would be easier to keep Felix at the tower without having to imprison the youth. "You are one tough safe to crack." He pointed out as Felix gave him his two options. He would choose to imprison Felix here in the tower, as his own prisoner for the time being, but would still keep him comfortable and well supplied. Aside from that, he would be cut off from trying to contact anyone aside from Argal or Marco on the outside. He would have to figure out where to go with him later, but now he had a trial and a meeting to deal with.

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Marianna settled quietly on the bench in her cell, her fingers half-heartedly pleating the material of her gown, then smoothing her fingers back over the wrinkles to flatten them out. She didn't even realize that someone was in the cell with her until she heard something rustle. When she lifted her dark eyes, she made out the form of a girl who had obviously just woken up from a very fulfilling nap. She had lines on one side of her cheek from the mattress and her short hair was sticking out in every direction. "Hi!" The girl chirped, shocking Mariana with her dapper mood. "I'm Rania. Who are you?" Mariana hesitated then spoke. "Marianna. I didn't know anyone else was in here." Rania grinned then hopped her tiny form down to plop down on the bench beside Mariana. The two were about the same short height, but Rania was bony as a pole. She seemed happy to have a cell mate and launched into chattering like a magpie about why she was here. When she asked Marianna what she was in for, the Romanian youth hesitated, but finally told her, causing Rania's eyes to widen. "Whoa, and you aren't dead? Someone must like you!" She laughed like it was the funniest joke ever, but Mariana could only force a tiny smile. She didn't really FEEL like laughing, and this girl seemed so chipper that her head would explode from all of the sunshine filling up her skull. WHY? She was in a damn jail cell! Marianna supposed it was because the girl knew she would have Marianna as a cell mate until she left her own five year term; unless something drastic happened. Within two hours, Marianna was pinching the bridge of her nose, praying that someone would come and get her and shove her damn head in a noose.

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Even though this meeting was reaching high in tensions, Argal looked amused and was grinning at Halen, who looked the color of a tomato. He wasn't a fan of Maelmorda; that was for certain. When Maelmorda turned it over to Argal to explain, the mage left his papers in a pile on the table and walked around to stand behind Halen's chair, patting him on the shoulder. "Dear dear Halen. We all know that your main concern is the safety of our city, no?" He would continue even if Halen didn't answer him, or made a smart remark. "Felix's poppa is not a nice man. In fact, he has the resources to completely take over, defile and flatten this entire city and the surrounding villages if he sneezes too hard. Now, if we launch Felix out into the world after he just divulged Acheron's little plan to us, his poppa is going to try and snuff us out to keep us quiet. And I am pretty certain that you don't want all of the citizens running around on fire, right? Well, at least the HUMAN ones." His words bit hard at that one then he tweaked Halen's cheek with his finger before leaving his chair to return to his own spot. "For now, I have Felix contained in captivity at my tower. He has no contact to the outside, but he is being treated comfortably, as the youth looks like Hell turned into a citadel and ran his ass over a few times."

Now, it was Aurelius' turn. Forcing himself to sit, Argal grabbed his goblet of wine and hid a grin behind it as Aurelius advised that Marianna and Maximus would not only be released, but given quarters to remain in the city, due to unfair charges. Halen's panties were probably twisted fifteen times over already. This was not helping. Argal had not thought of the Act of Temporary Stewardship, and he had to keep from choking on his wine at the face that Halen made. Putting down his goblet after spilling some on his robe and ignoring it (just about every piece of Argal's clothing had stains on it), Argal leaned forward and steepled his fingers on the table, watching as the knights took vote. Callum was quiet, but agreed on behalf of the other knights when they concurred.

Argal rolled his green eyes as Halen questioned the terms of the act stating that the steward had to uphold the King's wishes. He was like the bratty kid on the playground, always trying to steer things his way. "Of course he is up to something." The mage agreed easily, turning to grin wickedly at Halen. "I was in his office looking through public records and he nearly had a stroke; like he was hiding something." The man was a snake and Argal always knew it. He just had to deal with him. And of course, Aurelius placed the responsibility in his hands of talking Halen down from his high horse. Fantastic. "Of course, my Lord." He nodded, then rose and collected his things, now stuffing them haphazardly in his leather book. His first order would be to bypass the telepathy guards to bypass the list he was given, and that would be done in moments. After that, he would motion for Halen to come with him, once his work was completed, so he could try to sit down one on one, bore into the man's mind, and try to get him to see the error of his ways. He might even go so far as to test brainwashing the little bastard, as he was a stone in their shoes with his ideals. "My Lord, if I may..." He spoke to Aurelius, obviously having something important to say. "You intend to call your arms here. I would like to be allowed random probings of them, as we found that one of our previous guards was inhabited by a darker force. I want to ensure that it doesn't happen to your men as well." If agreed, Argal would thank him. If not, he would at least request that if any of the men were reported acting different in ANY way, he be allowed to meet with them.

Callum was immediately presented parchment to write up the pardon for Maximus and Mariana, which he was glad about. He had felt terrible for the two as they stood trial, having Halen drill them like they were monsters. He would agree, write out the dismissal from their punishments, and have Halen seal the dismissal before he was off.

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Mariana was going to kill herself. She was certain of it. It had been five hours since she had been locked up. She was supposed to wait five YEARS to get rid of this chattering idiot?! Rania went on... and on... and on... and ononon. About everything! Her family, where she came from, her favorite foods, different people she had stolen from. When she started on the sex stories, Mariana was on her feet and at her cell door, grabbing onto the bars to press her face between two of them. 'FOR THE LOVE OF GOD!' She bellowed into the hall. "THE DEATH PENALTY! I WILL CONFESS TO SHIT I DIDN'T EVEN DO! PLEASE! TORTURE! ANYTHING!" She heard the girls in the cell across the corridor guffawing. Rania was alone in the cell for a reason. Every time she got a roommate over the last two months, they had gone nuts, started acting out and screaming to get moved. Rania was sitting on the bench,

huffing in indignation when Callum showed up. He hid a smile when he heard Mariana's yells down the corridor. He had first gone down to fetch Maximus, who was sitting in a corner looking just pitiful. He explained, briefly, that Aurelius was now steward while the king was gone and he had ordered their release. He looked all too happy to get out of the cell and come with Callum to get Mariana. Callum glanced at Maximus, trying not to snicker as the two entered the corridor, Max looking distraught at Mariana's cries. "Don't worry." He said softly. "They put her in with an impossible cell mate who never shuts the hell up. We have had a handful of girls crack like that. She didn't last very long." Callum appeared before the cell first, unlocking it, causing Mariana to spill hurriedly into the hall and fall against him. "I don't care how you do it. If you want to lock me up in a damn coffin for the rest of my sentence, just DO it!" Callum lost in then, snickering as he patted her on the shoulder and locked the cell, helping her straighten. "Actually, you have been relieved of your sentence." He mused. Blinking, Mariana straightened and looked at him like she wasn't believing it, then glanced over to see Maximus standing a few feet away. "Wait... really?" She looked shocked, but Callum briefly explained it to her as well then told them both he was to bring them to Aurelius at Young Bloods'. He would turn to lead the two out of the dungeon from the shortest stretch of time for espionage that the palace ever did see. Mariana walked silently beside Max, glancing at him and the back of Callum's head like she was getting ready to hear that it was a joke and she was going to be put back with Rania. But sure enough, the two were walked across town to the Young Bloods', and once they entered, they were lead to the corner where Aurelius, Maelmorda and a handful of his cohorts were enjoying drinks and discussing the recent situations. "Maximus and Mariana, my Lord." Callum bowed then would leave the two standing in front of the table to face the mass of eyes fixed on them. It made Mariana squirm and she wondered if it would be easier to be here or back with Rania the Chatterbox.

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Maximus was astounded by Marianna's opinion of him and her poor evaluation of herself and it showed in his stunned expression. He considered her a very intelligent woman, moreso than himself, and had never confused her lack of education for a want of acumen by any means. Nor had he ever thought of himself as an all knowing person, and had she voiced that notion aloud he probably would have laughed for his amazement. "I...Marianna...dear lady, you underestimate yourself," his words stumbled over his flabbergasted mind. She left him speechless otherwise. He had no idea how to respond when she reminded him quite vividly of the age difference between them and the distinctions between them which came of it. It brought to mind how for awhile he had been afraid to profess what he felt to her because he imagined that one day she might she grow too independant and make him feel inferior. Was that how he made her feel? Inferior? Were they so alike in mind that they were actually wary of one another for the same ridiculous reasons? It had taken him quite some time to acknowledge that his reason for keeping aloof of her were quite unreasonable when he had lost the true reason he should have waited along the way. He had meant to take care with her, to be patient so the very feelings she was battling with now would never have to arise. He began to realize that he had made a terrible mistake by forgetting that she needed time, needed to be free of emotional pressures so that she could discover herself, find her way in the new world she had found herself in. Aurelius had warned him to have a care with her. Maximus did not know everything, indeed he made mistakes like anyone else. He was poorly equipped to take on the emotional arena and Marianna made that quite evident to him. When she stormed into her room

he stood motionless to stare off into space for some duration then after a time he approached Marianna's door, knocked twice and opened the door to step just insides of her chamber. "I ask your forgiveness, Marianna. I meant to be patient with you, to give you all the time you needed. I do not know at just what time I forgot my resolve to stand back and watch you grow before I dared impose my self-indulgent feelings on you. What I feel astounds me and I have stumbled over it to be selfish without even knowing it. Please forgive me for being so blind and stupid. I promise you, I will not pressure you again. I will let you come to me, even if you approach me a hundred years from now to tell me that can you only ever love me as your brother. I am content to love you as my sister until the future decides otherwise." The man spoke to her from his heart and when their conversation drew to an end he bowed to her. "Good night, Marianna. Sleep well." He withdrew thereafter and went to take a bath, then laid out his clothes for tomorrow and retired to his bed. He went to court the next day clad in a poet shirt, a dark brown leather jerkin (which was like a long vest) brown leather boots and knee-high deer-skin boots. His clothing was simple but pleasing to the eye.

Felix said nothing when Argal made his remark and then ushered him to a well provided room to lock him inside. Felix was unaware that the heavy mirror on the wall was enchanted to collect and record his very thoughts and image, and that it was factored against breaking. Argal had magic items of all kinds scattered all over the tower for various reasons. Some of them, items as simple as a lamp or book, sucked intruders into dimensional holding cells. When the powerful man had taken his leave Felix plopped down on the edge of a very comfortable bed and gazed off into a hiatus of his own reflections. He wondered what his life would have been like, what he would have been like, had he been raised and mentored to by such men as Argal, Lavoy and Marco in place of Mekkorr, men with good hearts and a high standard of ethics. Felix was quite aware that Mekkorr was evil, perhaps even one of Acheron's most degenerate and corrupt of all fiends. Mekkorr had controlled his will for so long that he could not separate where Mekkorr's influences began and his own will ended. He was quite aware that he was a slave, a lap dog to be used to any evil or corrupt purposes Mekkorr devised, or disposed of if he was no longer of any use, but it was not within his control to free himself of those chains. Mekkorr spoke often of how fiercely he loved Felix, but the man did not know the meaning of love. Felix doubted that he did either, though he hoped that what he felt for Lavoy was honest and not some emotion implanted in him by his sire. Felix could not force himself to walk away even if he could rise out of the muck Mekkorr trapped him in to want to. He was a prisoner of Mekkorr's will, plain and simple, and knowing it changed nothing. Felix had been able to confide in Argal and Marco only because he had convinced himself that he was not betraying Mekkorr or Acheron by telling the truth. He was simply tying a noose around his own neck. By placing himself in a state of mind to deceive himself, he had been able to break a link in the chain of loyalty to confess himself. He was no longer deceiving himself though. He had betrayed Mekkorr and Sammael and would pay the price for it. The Arcane Reaver swung his legs around and laid himself down on the bed without removing his boots, which were hard core gothic and made to last. Scars riddled him beneath the fish net shirt and black leather pants he wore. Even beneath his spiked collar and bracelets his flesh was deeply marred. He'd had so many injuries and been held in stasis of near death for so long that it would take some time to regenerate completely. Felix closed his eyes. He did not think about what the future held. He already knew the answer to that. Acheron would tear him to pieces, whether by Mekkorr's hand, Sammael's, or by demons he had never met.



Maximus would have thanked the devil that he was alone if he had any idea of the cell mate Marianna was suffering. He would have stuffed a sock in her mouth, gagged her, and tied her up using the bedding, and that is why his cell was bare, why all immortals' cells were bare. Someone else might do much worse than what Max was capable of if they had the chance. Max laughed to himself as he sat there and realized that he and Marianna had their first fight last night. Somehow, he felt relieved that they had laid their reservations and concerns out on the table. He still felt terrible that he had wounded her as he had when that was the last thing he had wanted. Maximus would have enjoyed seeing them make Halen sweat at that meeting. He was beginning to hate the man who he had only really known in official capacities, without crossing him. If not for Aurelius and Argal, Maximus would have faced an executioner's block and Marianna would have been released once his influence was removed. Fear of Aurelius kept people from overstepping lines of justice with his clan members. Maximus was legendary as a warrior but few people knew anything about him beyond his prowess and reputation as a knight. In Hawker's Fort he was known as a dragon knight who assisted the guards and Castellarn knights occasionally in petty disputes or to deliver messages from Aurelius to the king. He was not feared. He was an enigma with a reputation for being loyal to Noct'maire. He did not flaunt his arcane power and only practiced it when necessary, most often on the battle field to harm, kill, and to heal.

Halen had not realized just who he was dealing with when he had ordered Dimitri and Marianna's arrest. When he was told it was Maximus he had arrested, he had felt cornered. The people wanted him to pay for his crimes regardless, so he had plucked up the nerve and pursued every legal action he could take. He had used the law to protect himself while prosecuting the spies by maintaining a perfectly legal stance. That is why he had left it up to the people to judge the vampire. It took the heat off of him. He could not control what the people believed. Now here he was being harranged by two of An Morendor most terrifying men and Argal. Halen had never feared Argal until now. He had always known that Argal was powerful, but it never occurred him until then that he might be as powerful as these other two men who distrusted his motives. The man tensed when Argal clapped his shoulder and his gaze shot on Argal as he addressed him. "Of course I am acting in the interest of the people. Their welfare is always my main priority," he declared, sure that Argal was evasively challenging his honor. Halen truly believed in his causes and believed it was in the best interest of his people. Trouble was, he had never seen the immortals as his people, a fact Argal was about to allude to. "Do not speak to me as though I am a child, Argal. I know the man is pure evil. Mekkora cannot even enter this city however. Your wards will prevent it, wards you, Marco and Hellor have recently improved." When Argal pointed out that wards could be broken down given enough power united to pull it off, Halen frowned. "That takes time though, and they would have to gather outside the walls to do it. You have range guards, remember? They have to show themselves to break the wards. We could break their concentration with a constant assault that could also take some of them down. Catapults, trebuchets and arrow volleys have a lot of sway against mages, even powerful ones." The man did have some virtues, he had a decent tactical mind. Still; being of an intelligent mind trained as a cabalist, Argal stressed that shields went a long way to deflect such attacks. Halen's expression darkened when Argal informed him, that while their city had a handful of magic wielders, nearly ever hellion was equipped with arcane talents. "What are we supposed to do then?" Halen jerked his head to relieve his cheek of that annoying pinch. "You go too far, Argal. I never once wished the immortals dead. Distrusting their presence is not the same as wanting to see them perish. I have no such desire. I respect

them, I just don't trust them, and can you blame me in light of recent incidents?" He raised a brow when Argal informed him that he would keep Felix in his tower. "But if what you say is true about the wards, the boy could draw Mekkora and whatever host he has to call on directly to the palace by keeping him in your tower. He must be removed from the city and imprisoned elsewhere." He had a point there. "So if you know anyone who would be willing to hold him, I advise you to place him with them right away."

Maelmorda raised his hand half-mast and waggled his fingers to draw their attention. "Lavoy Garceaux knows him. He might be willing to keep him."

Halen's gaze leaned on the sharp tongued man. "Does he have wards that can hold against the boy's sire?" he asked.

Maelmorda smiled. "I will make sure that he does."

"I will hold him at Noct'maire if Lavoy refuses," Aurelius then offered.

Halen was unnerved by the state of affairs in his city to the extreme. His underwear were not only twisted into knots, they had imploded to burn his ass. When the vote came to Callum, the magistrate slumped into his chair as the knight cast his vote. He stared off into his own thoughts as each knight cast in with Aurelius there, all but Hughveld. He smiled when the man voted against. Though it did not make a difference, Halen was glad that at least one of the knights placed their loyalties in the right place. The man rolled his eyes when Argal alleged that he might be hiding something. "I just did not expect to see you there, Argal, and I am accustomed to people going through the proper channels to retain records, rather than skulking around in my office like a sneak thief while I am away. How would you like it if I went into your tower and started rummaging through your things?" When Argal muttered that he would wind up in a lamp or ashtray, the man raised a perplexed brow. "You are crazy, you know that, Mortiari?" He could not possibly know that Argal meant it or even know what he was talking about. Maelmorda snickered in the meantime.

When Argal asked if he would allow him to probe his men, Aurelius nodded. "Probe away, man. I shall conduct random probes of my own if I suspect anything. My progeny Marco has long suspected domination and possession practices were taking place in Castleguard, so I am not surprised you uncovered something. Could you identify it?" When Argal stated that he was unable to, Aurelius raised a brow. The man was as well as he was to uncover intruders and it surprised him that whatever he had found had evaded identification. He was even more surprised when Argal informed him that the powerful elf who had combined power with him had been unable to mark what it was either, other the evil of its presence. His gaze fell on Maelmorda. "What could elude him like that?"

Maelmorda shrugged. "Beats me. A phantom maybe?"

Aurelius gazed at him for a moment. Maelmorda knew what it was, he was sure, but because he trusted his Lord to know what he was doing, and knew that his interests lie in protecting An Morendor, he said nothing. If he decided to question him about it, he would do so privately. His gaze then trained on Argal. "There is something else you must do. Your wards allow three individuals to gate into the city at once. I want you to close off supernatural gate access to the city. Leave

the ability to gate within the city walls though. If anyone wants to enter this city, they shall have to come through the city gates which shall remained closed to all but known allies and residents,. and no one will enter until they have been probed. The citadel must be locked down. I will meet you tomorrow morning at day break at the East Gate and together we shall improve the wards and add extra defenses."

Maximus was in a gloom one moment, and so happy to hear the news which Callum delivered the next, that when the knight liberated him, the vampire clapped his hands against Callum's shoulders and kissed his cheek. A smiled beamed on his lips and he jostled the man thankfully. "Never has Aurelius failed me, never," he proclaimed reverantly. So much for being an emotionless rock. Until recently, he had not failed Aurelius either. He intended to make up for it, and when Callum informed him that he was to remain in the city as a residence of the palace with Marianna, he was thrilled to have the chance to make right all his errors.

Maximus broke his strides to a dead standstill as he heard Marianna's bellowing. He was bewildered at first, wondering what on earth drove her to say such things as reached their ears from the end of the corridor. When Callum explained what had set her off, he chuckled, and was laughing richly by the time they met her at her cell. His amusement shone in his eyes and face as much as in his laughter which deepened to shake him when Marianna fell against Callum blubbering her hysterical demands. Marianna was so funny sometimes. "Want me to cut the girl's tongue out for you, Marianna?" he asked wickedly. He was joking of course, but the verbose little thief did not know that and paled where she sat pouting. He smiled when Callum informed her that Aurelius had retained their pardon. "Didn't I tell you it would be alright?" He winked at her at that. Maximus the know it all, yes, that was him. What was he supposed to do, play dumb?

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When the two arrived at Young Bloods it was immediately apparent that Matthew had cleared the place out to all but clan and those they invited to join them. Maximus bowed to Maelmorda and then Aurelius. "My Lords, I am ever thankful for whatever steps you took to achieve our release." Maximus snagged Callum by the arm as he turned to leave. "Join us for a few drinks, Callum, you have a earned a moment of leisure. You have plenty to occupy you in the days ahead I am sure." At that he pulled him into a chair beside Aurelius; hence he pulled out the chair beside Callum for Marianna. When she hedged to sit down, he tipped his head towards the seat to urge her to sit. When she got over her momentary loss of courage to lower herself into the chair, he sat down beside her.

Vaeren, who sat across from them, was still trying to position his wings so that he could sit comfortably. His huge, furred wings and chairs did not get along. Few people outside of the Noct'maire, Decasey and Urik clans had ever seen an Elwion before. Elwion were usually mistaken for vampires, and in Vaeren's case he was also a vampire, sired by accident by Valis Urik who had meant to kill him in a blood rage. Vaeren was the only living Elwion vampire in existence. He had finally gotten over the violent act Valis had perpetrated and even come to respect Valis, though he was still instinctively wary of him.

"We shall all have a great deal to occupt us, Maximus," Aurelius had his progeny know to solicit a questioning eye from Maximus. "Acheron is rising against An

Morendor, this city included." It was all Aurelius had to say for Maximus to understand. The moment Max was told his mind started turning like a well oiled engine. Lord Emrys then trained his dark gaze on Marianna. "I am reassigning you and Maximus. You will be residing at the palace as my ambassador with Maximus as your personal guard, either in Tyr Cadarn Tower with the knights, or in the Tyr Cadarn palace itself." He pursed his lips as a look of panic overcame Marianna's facial features. "Calm yourself, Marianna, your duties are ones I have every confidence you can handle. You will act as a mediator between my people and theirs, and as a messenger for me. You will take information I send to you to those I refer you to, and deliver information from them to me. You can do this yourself or send one of the Castellarn Knights or my knights with the reports. You are also to report any conflicts which arise internally. You will otherwise speak your mind when any contest between my people and theirs arises and attempt to resolve those conflicts to the best of your abilities. If you are unable to resolve an issue, report to me immediately. Men can be terribly stubborn so do not take it on yourself if they will not listen to you. You are a good person, Marianna, who has my trust. That is all you need to be an ambassador of Noct'maire. The rest you shall learn and conquer along the way. If you choose to reject this occupation it shall not reflect poorly on you. I shall send you home to be with your children. If you consent to this task, you have the option of bringing your children to the palace with Naomi. It is your choice if they remain at Noct'maire or stay here with you."

While Aurelius let Marianna chew on that, his gaze pinned Maximus. "If she agrees to take on this position you shall stand as her personal guard and advisor. You shall not offer your advice unless she asks of it however. It is she I am offering ambassadorship to, not you."

Maximus drew in a deep breath, closed his eyes for a moment, then met his gaze and nodded. Aurelius knew of the mistakes he had made with Marianna...Of course he did. He seldom let clan members out of his sight with so little protection, unless he was keeping an eye on them, and two against a city of hatred definitely counted as being left vulnerable. "I understand, My Lord. I am grateful for this opportunity to rectify my errors during this mission, any personal mistakes on my part included."

Aurelius held Maximus in his regard for an interval then leaned forward; his leather and plate arm guards coming to rest against the table. "I am not even sure that you made any mistakes in concerns to your investigation, Maximus, but if you did, we all make them. It is not often you make oversights in your duties, however, not since you were a young man, and even then it was usually the men you devoted yourself to that erred by failing to listen to you. Still, all men must make their own mistakes. It is our personal mistakes we learn the most from, so do not despair your mishaps, embrace them for what they are, food for growth."

Maximus bowed his head deeply to Aurelius. "I am ever grateful to receive your wisdom, My Lord." Everyone who knew Maximus was well aware that he esteemed Aurelius above all others and always would. It was not blind devotion either, Aurelius had earned it. Aurelius had never made a mistake or committed an act that Maximus could not forgive and that trust was mutual.

Maelmorda poured Callum a stout from a pitcher and then lifted his own glass of cognac to take a sip as he regarded the knight. When he sat the snifter down he

smiled at the man. "It is good to see you again, Haashi," he addressed him openly by his beqidum name, yet despite appearances; Maximus and Aurelius were the only ones who noticed that Maelmorda addressed him by a different name. Maelmorda was using a mental deception. Everyone heard Maelmorda talking to the knight about horses, swords, past battles and other macho things that were unrelated to the genuine conversation they were having. Not even Aurelius knew the formless ones by names, with exception of Mog, who as mentioned drew attention to himself, so the name Haashi meant nothing to he or Max other than not being Callum's name. Maelmorda's following statement changed that. "How many months did I reside with you and your brothers in the pit?" That comment grabbed Aurelius and his eldest progeny's attention. "I enjoyed your company very much in that interim. Phaux is such a card," he chuckled. "Are you enjoying your new threads? He is quite handsome this one. I wonder if Callum would resent being taken over. No harm done though eh? Just a great deal of confusion if you decide to abandon ship, what with remembering the last thing he did before you possessed him and being at a complete loss from that point forward. Then again, if you keep him until he dies, he will never be the wiser for it. It is a merciful way to die when you think about it, unless Mog possesses someone." He went on.

"Maelmorda..." Aurelius began to interrupt, intending to ask what was going on, but the Morning Star shushed him with a flippant wave of his hand.

"It is a terrible thing being without a form. I empathize with that, have been there myself," he gave a dour shake of his head then pierced those beautiful green eyes the formless angel had stolen. "I would not have you lose Callum, unless you intend to turn him over to Sammael. That I will not tolerate. You have two choices here, Haashi, the same choice each of your brothers shall be given. Pledge your loyalty to me and Aurelius, and keep the body and identity you possess, or I shall plunge you back into the pit; where you can wait for Sammael to call you back to him and whatever body he has waiting for you to possess. Serve two noble lords," he pointed to Aurelius and himself, "...or one who would lay ruin to everything that is good and majestic about this world to make it his own second Hell. The choice is yours. I believe in free will, remember? I am after all the one who gave all the angels of my creation free will, including Sammael." Maelmorda then sipped his liqueur and leaned back in his chair. "No one here will betray you. You have my leave to meet with the other Beqidum and relay my message to them. I will be here at this Inn for three more days. Those who I do not hear a decision from before I leave; shall find themselves in the abyss again, only I shall seal anyone in who tries to avoid informing me of where they are placing their loyalties." No one could say that he did not give them fair warning or a fair deal. They were free to choose who to serve, but would pay the price if they tried to steal away without making their loyalty known.

Maximus and Aurelius looked to one another and then Maelmorda when he and Callum had finished their talk and the knight got up to leave at a rather hurried pace. "Just let me handle this," Maelmorda told them before they could even express whatever was on their minds. "You two keep it under wraps. Tell no one about this. If they betray us then you may seize them secretly and report to me about it. You have to trust me. Those who pledge their loyalty to me shall maintain their present identities unless I command them otherwise. If Mog chooses to serve me, I shall take him with me and use him against our enemies." Mog was evil, but if exploited in the right way, he could also be very useful. Mog would not side with Maelmorda however. It was Sammael who set him free of the pit, so he would

pay that debt by serving Sammael.

The two men of Noct'maire nodded their heads. "Yes, My Lord," they both vowed one after the other. That done Maelmorda placed his index finger against his lips and dropped the veil of duplicity.

Aurelius drained his pint and regarded Marianna warmly. "I am curious, Marianna, if you would humor me, what is your opinion of Maximus as a spy? I would like to hear your assessment of his strengths and weaknesses as a man under cover." He intended to ask Maximus the same thing about Marianna when the lady had reported her opinions. Max did not appear put off by Aurelius' want of an assessment. He sat drinking his whiskey and talking to the men. He laughed now and again as they made fun of Halen and cracked on his attempt to make Marianna look innocent. Matthew's comments on the matter sobered him however.

Matthew ribbed his sire. "Did you really think they would believe you capable of being so smitten by Marianna when you are in love with a Goddess? I mean damn, Marianna is hot, but that temptress you screw off and on is the Venus of babes!"

Maximus pursed his lip. "Nice try, Matthew, but I am not screwing anyone. Nor have I engaged in that act for longer than I care to share," he stated sternly.

Matthew quirked a brow. "Uh...yes you have," he said. "You do not need to hide it, I mean damn, she is phucking hot!"

Max's brows knit and his eyes keened on Matthew to thin. "If this is your idea of a joke, I am going to beat you silly," he warned.

Matthew shook his head. He hated it when Max threatened abuse, because he backed it up. Matthew was a little afraid of his sire. He also realized that Max really did not have a clue that he had been with the beauty rather frequently for the past year. "No joke, My Lord. You really do not remember all the times you have..."

Max shot him a cutting look.

"...Been with the woman," he concluded without being vulgar.

Aurelius was now staring at Maximus as he shook his head, his attention then fixing on Matthew who met his gaze. "What did this female look like?" he growled.

"Pure sexy, I mean kaboom kaboom. Long hair like black asian silk, dark eyes, she got all the moves, arabian sex pistol and wet dream all in one to drool over package. Candy phucking hits me every time she walks in the place," he laughed.

Aurelius was both amused and infuriated by his description. "Lilith," he hissed. "That bitch is gonna pay." Aurelius had his own run in with the demon temptress of Acheron. She was dead if he got his hands...gloved hands on her this time.

Maximus shook his head again. "Hold on...Are you two saying I have been...been with someone without even knowing it?"

Matthew scoffed. "Oh you know it, at least when you are with her. The two of you are all over each other like..." He shut up when Max burned him with his gaze.

"You have chased customers away, My Lord," he relayed sheepishly.

"What?! This took place in public?"

"Sometimes you could wait to get a room. I thought it was just pent up warrior shit you know? I mean, we all know the last woman you bonked was your wife, and Sir, that is just being cruel to yourself. I worshipped you for getting a piece of ass like that. Damn shame you seem to have been fogged by her and don't remember it." He shrugged.

Maximus rubbed his face and his hand almost covered it. There were times when he wished he had refused to Sire Matthew, he was so tactless and vulgar and took pride in being that way. Modern kids, he thought.

"Did she ever try to get him to leave with her?" Aurelius asked Matthew.

"Yeah, but he wanted to stay here."

"Thank fortune for the man's survival instincts," Aurelius breathed.

Maelmorda stood and stretched out his back. "Lilith does not know the meaning of the word surrender unless her victim is dead and beyond the grave. Someone wants him to get to you, Aurelius. There will be a lot of that going on. Of course there is also the chance that she wants him for herself. He is just her type and she did appear to him in her true form. That is unusual. She never went for the pretty boys and it turns her on when they can resist her will. Few can," he shrugged and headed for his room. He had to contact Sammael, and had decided to project himself rather than meet him in person. It was not a precaution; He did not feel like going back to the desert.

"Resist my ass," Matthew said.

Maelmorda did not have to tell Aurelius about Lilith. He was all too aware of how she worked. "He means by resisting her every wish and command. No man can resist her body if she gets close enough to touch them," Aurelius warned and informed in one breath.

"Please do not isolate me because of this, My Lord," Maximus implored.

"Don't worry, I wont," Aurelius assured him. "Just avoid beautiful women, she can take other forms. What you saw and do not remember is her true guise."

Maximus elbowed Marianna who seemed out of sorts. "Too much to breathe in all at once, isn't it? Welcome to our life. Just take a deep breath and pretend you don't know a thing," he advised.

"Let her handle it her own way, Maximus. Adapt to letting her come to you," Aurelius advised him.

Maximus slumped into his chair. He felt suddenly like he was being tested all over again. He had come through countless battles, treachery, Hell's ordeals with his dignity intact, but he was not sure he would surface from this emotional war with his confidence, his pride, or his self-respect. It was not a test that Aurelius or

anyone imposed on him, but one he could not stop from imposing on himself. The Lilith thing had shaken him, forgetting his own convictions concerning Marianna had shaken him, and his recent failures had shaken him. Was he losing himself because he was in love, or was there a lot more to it? He had no answer.

"My Lord, I am tired...Where would you have me sleep tonight?"

"You have been tired a lot lately, Maximus," Aurelius stated with concern.

And Marianna thought Max was a know it all? Try living with Aurelius or Maelmorda the rubber-neckers from hell...literally. "Sir...I..."

"Have not been getting enough sleep?" Aurelius pointed that excuse out as an obvious lie.

"I was going to say I cannot explain why."

"How soon they forget," Aurelius muttered. It had been a long time since his progeny had been depressed. Max's emotional state was an enigma to him but Aurelius knew exactly why he was so depressed. "Get a room here for the night."

Maximus nodded, rose and headed for the stairs, taking his whiskey with him. Matthew grabbed another bottle for him and followed to escort him to one of the last two available rooms. They were full up and most of the knights there were sharing a room between three to four men. Max as first knight always got his own room, as did Aurelius. Matthew would kick people out of their rooms for them.

When Maximus vanished up the stairs Aurelius focused his attention on Marianna once again. "Are you alright, Marianna?" He wanted her to unload on him. She had been through a lot and Max had not made it any easier for her. He did not blame Max, he was just aware of it.

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Mariana felt shy as they approached the table full of people, some whom she knew and others she didn't. She stood beside Max, brushing elbows until they greeted Aurelius and Max presented her with a seat. She hesitated then mumbled a thank you as she slipped into it, folding her fingers tightly on her lap.

When Lord Emrys turned on Mariana to speak, she felt her face drain of color and her mind scramble back to her reading lessons. Ambassador. Ambassador. She hadn't learned that word yet! She was seconds from throwing Aurelius a desperate look when Lord Emrys continued on to explain, causing her to let out a slow breath and listen carefully, trying to soak it all in. She nodded, but gave no answer yet as she assumed she was given time to think.

Callum looked surprised when asked to join the group, but he warmly smiled and agreed, taking his offered seat and stout. It was Haashi who lifted borrowed eyes to face Maelmorda when spoken to. A smile peaked when questioned about how long they had been in the pit with one another, his brothers included. "I do not recall exactly," he said easily. "Time bleeds together there, does it not?" He looked pleased when Maelmorda spoke of how he enjoyed his company, then grinned and patted his thighs at the compliment of Callum's good looks. "He's luscious, isn't he? And



sweet to boot.” Haashi fell quiet and drank his stout as he pondered Mael’s thoughts on whether he should abandon the body or stay with it. It was a fair question that he didn’t rush to answer.

It was the choice given next that would give him more to think about. Haashi was one of the more levelheaded formless ones, so he pondered his decision seriously. Turn Callum over to Sammael or turn to Aurelius and Maelmorda. Haashi glanced at Aurelius, then back at Maelmorda before speaking. “Some of my brothers, I am quite sure, will have to deliberate long and hard over it,” he answered. Really, the deal was a good one in Haashi’s eyes, but he had to convince his brothers of the same. “I will meet with them tomorrow and we will hopefully have that decision within two days,” he vowed, then rose and was soon darting out the door.

Mariana’s coffee brown eyes lifted as Aurelius asked about Maximus as a spy. She glanced at Max, who seemed to care less then cleared her throat to address Aurelius directly. “He’s stubborn,” she answered honestly. “Which is good and bad, I suppose. He tries to take on the world alone. I can tell he has a hard time lying sometimes, but he does it pretty well anyway. I thought he did a good job. He was very alert.” What else could she say? She wasn’t big on critiquing people.

It was Matthew who caught the table’s attention first, much to Mariana’s horror. For a moment she was shell-shocked. A million and one things exploded through her mind. Flashbacks of the seemingly sincere speeches that Maximus had given her. He loved her; he wanted to marry her; he was thrilled that they might love each other without the physical aspect of things clogging up the works. It was no WONDER he said all of that! It was easy to encourage the homeless when you lived in a donut shop!

Not only that, but Matthews comment stung more deeply than she cared to admit. Max had done a good job pretending to be smitten by her, alright. But why settle for a brain dead peasant when you could have the queen, right? He obviously had the choice right in his lap, from what it sounded like. Mariana’s lips pursed gently shut as she fought showing any kind of emotion on her features, and only gave a rehearsed laugh as Max nudged her to mention that this was how things were with them. Ugh, she wanted to throw up. Literally. She felt nauseous and dizzy. It made her realize that everyone at the trial thought Max to be a fantastic liar about his feelings for her. And here he was, advising her to pretend like she knew nothing. Oh, she could pretend that alright. She could pretend she never heard any of it, including all of the ridiculously sweet nothings he had spent the days crooning to her.

Mariana felt like she had been beaten senseless and left in the bottom of a garbage dumpster. The last few days had been a train wreck. Her head buzzed as she contemplated having a drink, but when she remembered what happened last time, she stopped even thinking about it.

Minutes later she was vaguely aware that Matthew and Maximus had taken off upstairs, and she shifted uncomfortably in her chair. It wasn’t strange that she felt slightly out of place among the chocolate box of people here. She WAS pretty curious about the fellow with the fuzzy wings that sat across from her. She wondered what they felt like then almost smiled when she thought of the field day that Elizabeth would have with them. She adored soft and furry things.

Her attention snapped back to Aurelius as she heard her name. The question made her feel guilty. She had hardly faced anything that anyone at this table couldn't easily handle, so why was she any different? She hardly wanted to talk about her personal feelings, but she also knew better than lying. She decided on half-truths. The majority of this table didn't need to hear anything more anyway. "Overwhelmed," she admitted quietly. "But I am thankful to be free and to have been provided such an opportunity." Ugh, she sounded like she was interviewing for a job in a cubicle. "I would like to accept, but I also decided that I would rather my children stay at Noct'maire." It was true. There was too much going on that she had no hand in here and she would rather miss them than put them at any kind of risk. She would wait for any questions he had then would ask one more of her own. "Is there a library I could go to?" She wanted to read up on her new job so that she didn't feel like she was leaping blindly into it. She couldn't study with others there because she felt embarrassed. Every other word had to be looked up in the dictionary. If it was agreed to and Aurelius asked if she would like an escort, she would refuse. If he demanded it, she wouldn't argue, of course. She desperately wanted to be alone at the moment. Could she be blamed?

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Maximus entered his room and turned inside of the threshold to face Matthew as he started to enter his room. The vampire blocked the way with his arm his hand pressing against the door from. "Matthew, I am tired."

Matthew skewed his mouth in a purse. "Sir, I know it may seem that I disrespect you at times, but the truth is quite the opposite. What you need to do is get wasted and bare your soul to me. This whole Lilith thing really pisses me off, you know, so I know the dragon in you must be steaming to get out."

Maximus smiled at his progeny and rested a hand on his shoulder and shook him lightly with affection. "I appreciate your concern, my son, but I really am fit for a good night's rest. I will be all right. I always am," he promised.

Matthew could not argue with that. His sire was a strong man who Matthew had never seen any weaknesses in. Even his flaws were strong ones. He handed Max the extra bottle of whiskey. "Good night, My Lord."

Maximus took the whiskey from him. "Good night, Matthew." Maximus closed the door around as Matthew left him then withdrew to sit down on his bed.

For an interim of half an hour he chugged the whiskey he had been provided until both bottles were empty. He tried very hard not to reflect on what Marianna must think of him. During that time he wondered how Cezar and Stephanie were and decided to pay them a visit and sleep at the cottage. Before shadow stepping across the street he informed his Sire of his change of location. When he arrived at the place he found his squire asleep on the couch. All the blood stains and damage he had done to the place had been cleaned up and repaired. He went to the kitchen when he heard Stephanie rattling around and looked in on her. She was putting dishes away.

"You are up late. Have you two been all right here?" He inquired and smiled when she startled slightly then met his gaze.

"My Lord! We are well, even better to see you standing here. Cezar will be so pleased. Have you escaped?" she chirped in amazement.

"Marianna and I were released. Aurelius retained our pardons."

"Oh bless that man with all the good fortune he deserves! Our dear king be praised!" she lauded her overlord.

Maximus smiled. "Indeed, he is an amazing man. I am going to take a bath and catch some rest. I will see you and Cezar in the morning. Is there anything you need?" Those vampires of Noct'maire like Maximus, who resisted the sun, performed their duties during light of day. By choice the young bloods were night owls.

"We have everything we need, Sir," she assured.

"You and Cezar have a done a good job here. Good night, Stephanie." When the woman reached out to clasp his wrist he suspected nothing but a gesture of thanks. Maelmorda had not been exaggerating when he said that Lilith was determined.

She frequented Young Bloods in various guises as customers and had heard stories about Maximus, his troubles and his alter identity. It had not taken her long to discover where he resided. She had gone to his trial as well. She also had friends out of Acheron who could spy on him for her or arrange for her do so at will by arcane means. She had learned of his love for Marianna and was furiously jealous. Marianna was a pitiful human and Lilith felt it was her duty to spare him the shame of such a weak alliance. Maximus was far too good for the pathetic girl in Lilith's opinion whose passions could never equal those of Lord Caerellius. It would please her to claim him just to spite her.

Lilith had not harmed Stephanie, but placed an enchantment of sleep of over her and cloaked her presence in the cellar, then emulated her presence to project it and her guise. Cezar lie in an unnatural rest as well. The moment her fingers closed around Maximus's wrist, he was under her power. The method of escaping her incredible physical domination was to avoid being touched by her altogether. Her power over her subjects lasted for some little while after contact was broken but then faded until she managed to take their will into herself to enslave them to her every desire and command. No man could resist her sexually, but those with strong wills could resist her ability to command their resolve. Given time she could wear them down. Maximus thrilled her because he was a challenge as great as his sire. She had never met two men with stronger wills with exception of Sammael and Maelmorda. Because she wanted to claim Maximus as hers, she shed Stephanie's guise to manifest a form she had come to choose just for Maximus as she pulled him against herself. The demoness was strong, stronger even than Maximus whose might was impressive, and if she needed or wanted to, she could overpower him physically as well. The moment she had touched him; his dynamic passion and exceptional carnal knowledge was hers. She thrilled at the feel of his powerful arms around her, his hands groping her with rough urgency, and the feral kiss he arrested her senses with. If anyone was to see them together they would think it was true love. Lilith wanted him to be able to remember her this time, as the neffari beauty she had become and named just for him. She wanted to make him believe that she was his chosen lover. Only until she had won that part of his will would she permit him to remember her and reveal her true carnal talents to him. Lilith could alter her physical and carnal physiology at will as she pleased. Maximus sang out

breathless and desperate as she took his member in hand to squeeze and stroke him. Oh yes, he would be hers and the magnificent female she had made for him would be his. Lilith's confidence was unshakable.

Aurelius chuckled when Marianna said that she was overwhelmed. "How could you not be, my dear? I imagine you have been overwhelmed since you met Seth. We are all so old and strange in our ways and you are so very young. You have yet so much to learn about yourself, the world, and those around you. Try to be patient with yourself, even when others are not, and not to feel guilty for being human. Youth is nothing to be scorned either. It is so wonderful and so brief. Sadly we only ever embrace and cherish it when it is gone. You are a delightful woman, Marianna, whether you acknowledge that fact or not. We are old and our minds brim with knowledge and we recognize virtues in you that you cannot yet see. Do you think my Eldest progeny would have fallen in love with you otherwise?" The dragon lord smiled at the expression she tried to hide. "I know all about it. What he feels for you burdens you further and that is a shame. A shame for you both. Wise as he is, love is difficult for him. He has been an island for so long, Marianna, which no eyes could touch. Now that you have cracked him open, he does not know what to do. You meanwhile bear the cross of having opened a vault you never intended to breach. I feel for both of you. Perhaps your duties will distract you and allow the turbulent waters to calm between you, hmm? You need not be grateful for the assignment I have offered either. It is you who are benefiting me by accepting it." Aurelius was more concerned about the situation with Max and Marianna than he let on, as much for Maximus as Marianna. If he suffered the unrequited love he felt for her for too long, he would grow vulnerable, and it was a bad time to have an Achilles Heal. His need for her was desperate, too damn desperate. If Aurelius had to, he would interfere and put a stop to it.

Aurelius nodded when she expressed her resolve towards her children. "A wise choice, My Lady." She had the means to see them whenever she wished as readily as if she was there. He was pleased that she chose to leave them in the safety of Noct'maire's island and castle. His brow raised slightly when she asked where a library might be. "Yes, there is an impressive library by City Park on the north side. Vaeren will escort you." When she tried to refuse the Elwion's escort, he shook his head sternly. "I will not be swayed to leave my people unprotected with times as they are. Vaeren will escort you and he shall wait for you outside. The only way I shall permit you to go unescorted is if you have mastered your dagger and can gate there and to your next destination, be it home, your prior residence at the cottage, at the knight's keep, or the tavern here, avoiding the streets. Maximus is under the same orders, as are all of my people when they are alone. These are strict orders, Marianna, and if they are defied you shall lose the privilege of being alone altogether. Are we understood?" He wanted to make it clear that very real dangers were present.

If she consented to accept Vaeren as her escort and at any time brushed up against his wings, she would find out just how soft they were. It was like brushing a cloud you could feel, the pelt covering the outside of his wings dense and softer than milkweed silk or down, while the underside was like mole skin. He would comment on how nice it was to get some fresh air. Half of the Noct'maire Knights smoked something or the other, tobacco mostly and Vaeren did not smoke at all. His only bad habit was to drink his own blood. It tasted fantastic! It was his blood, why shouldn't he get to drink it? He was discreet about it, but could be caught occasionally sucking on his own hand or arm, and he did so more openly if he was

hungry to still the hunger pangs for blood until he could sink his fangs into someone, usually a blood serf. Otherwise he fed on game or enemies with safe blood. Other than his sincere remark about the air, he would not talk unless she engaged him in conversation. If she mentioned that it sucked not being able to be alone, he would laugh and say he could make himself invisible if she liked, so she could pretend he was not there. By invisible, he meant he would track her while cloaked in shadows.

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Mariana's lips pursed as Aurelius began to, quite openly, discuss her position with Maximus. She hated to hear it out loud. She hated to think of him and suffer that painful clenching in her throat and chest, but she couldn't cut her keeper off. She simply lowered her dark eyes and pondered the way he put it. Perhaps duty WOULD allow them to calm themselves. The few moments she had been allowed to think in the dungeon cell brought misery... She missed him, she felt horrible for snapping at him the night before and she wished to apologize. Perhaps she would have... had she not heard the conversation about this Lilith chick at the table this evening. It wasn't his fault, and she vaguely remembered hearing that, but it hurt far more than some unknown mistake he might have made. Smoothing her fingers over the velvet on her thighs, Mariana took a slow breath and nodded, meeting his gaze once more. "You can see everything around you, My Lord. I can only hope to be so observant in the future."

The mention of the library relieved her, and though she tried to protest Vaeren going with her, she was cut off immediately and dropped her argument. "Of course, My Lord." She finally answered. "I appreciate your concern." At least she could be alone at the library. Rising quickly, she thanked him for his time and wisdom then would shoot out of the tavern like her backside was on fire. Poor girl never did well under so many eyes... eyes that could see what was happening when she herself was so confused by it.

She didn't mean to be rude to Vaeren, so when he joined her, she slowed her pace and took in a deep breath to calm her jittery nerves. She fully agreed with him when he mentioned fresh air, but because she was not under a spotlight any longer. "Thank you for coming with me." She said after a moment of silence, then hid a smile as his wing brushed her hand. It WAS soft. "You looked about as uncomfortable as I did." Of course, his was due to his wings and unforgiving chair backs.

Once they reached the library, Mariana promised not to take too long, and she would spend the next two hours smearing her fingers with ink as she poured over a few books the librarian had suggested on the topic of ambassadorship. She took copious notes, taking care to write slowly, as she had been working on her handwriting skills too. After two hours her eyes blurred and she gathered her notes, rolling the papers in a bundle before exiting the library. Sure enough to his word, Vaeren was sitting outside, and she greeted him with a warm thank you.

Now, where to sleep? She didn't want to go back to the tavern; that was for sure. Max was there, along with Aurelius and about a billion knights and clans members, so she wanted to stay out of the hot pot. She decided to sleep at the cottage, where she would be able to bathe and change in the morning. Filling Vaeren in on her decision, Mariana headed to the cottage with him beside her, and she did her best to make small talk. It was hard after the long day she had been through. The

thought of a warm bath and her familiar bed upstairs fueled her slowing footsteps, and once they reached the cottage, she thanked Vaeren again and bid him a goodnight.

Once inside, Mariana saw Cezar on the couch and smiled softly. He was out cold. She walked quietly over, taking a quilt from the back of the chair to spread over him, then straightened and laid her papers on the tea table beside her. Noises from the kitchen drew her attention and she found herself relaxing and smiling at the thought of being able to sit down and talk to Stephanie... hopefully over some of her delicious food. She realized, only now, that she was ravenous. Skirting around the tea table, she pushed her way into the kitchen on a scene she would never forget.

Lilith had coaxed Maximus in with Stephanie's guise, but she was absolutely hell-bent on making the man realize who he really wanted and would benefit from. So after the two had shed their clothing, the dark haired beauty dissolved Stephanie's appearance to her own...and would, for the first time, dissipate his memory block; only after things were in full swing, of course. She could sense when Mariana entered the cottage and she found it all too perfect. The girl would be crushed and hopefully this would be the end of whatever might have dallied between her and Max. Lilith's lips brushed Max's ear as she drew him down on top of her, on the kitchen table, her thighs locking around his hips. They were in full out, table-leg scraping humping when the door swung open. The look on Mariana's face was priceless, in Lilith's mind. She looked over Max's shoulder with seething, lecherous eyes to see the human's face drain fully of color. She looked ill! And of course, when Max would look up to see her, he would realize now who he was with... and would believe that it was his conscious decision to take Lilith, yet again. As soon as Maximus looked up and saw Mariana, Mariana found her legs moving. She swung from the kitchen, lifting her skirts and darting through the living room to the door, her wake blowing her bundle of papers to scatter the floor around the tea table. She was going to be sick. She had no idea what to think... what to feel... but ill. She had seen the look in his eyes. He recognized her. He knew what he was doing. Had he been LYING about it? Putting on a ruse that he didn't REMEMBER ever being with that woman?! She had been beautiful. Stunning. Perfect. And she knew it.

"Vaeren..." Mariana's voice cracked horrendously as she spilled outside, but he was gone. She had said goodnight nearly twenty minutes ago. She found herself standing in the middle of the street, her head spinning worse than when she had been hung over, and she promptly leaned over and vomited, right in the middle of the street. She couldn't go back to the tavern. Shaking like she was latched to a tree in the middle of a hurricane, Mariana forced her feet to go. And she just ran. Her eyes were blurred and she wasn't really certain WHERE she was going, but she would eventually end up at the knight's keep, where Callum would find her begging for her old room where her things were still neatly packed.

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As Marianna's expression was priceless to Lilith, the expression on Max's face when he glanced over his shoulder would surely imprint an image in Marianna's mind that she was not soon forget. He looked sex-drunk at first but as his eyes met hers; his eyes filled with anguish for the briefest moment, but as Lilith inserted a finger inside of him to spread his virgin pleat and her slick walls locked him in her depths to suck, pulse and grip against him in ways which arrested all of his

senses, he gasped and his face filled with stunned ecstasy at the foreign and very invasive sensations which caused his body to tense with the sudden heightening of his sexual furor. She plunged him head long into the trap of her carnal charms and effective albeit effusive carnal talents, and Marianna saw the force of her effects over him painted vividly on his face. Lilith meanwhile could feel it. His eyes rolled back and he turned his head away from the woman he loved to unveil his glazed eyes on Lilith. His hips ground against her as if he was trying to bury himself body and soul inside of that amazing body she dominated his physical being with. The pleasure was unimaginable. Many men fell to her physical endowments alone and anyone who had ever experienced her would understand why. Max had a hard shell to crack though, and much as she respected and admired him for that, she was also tired of waiting to chain him, to complete him as she saw it. Max was not completely clueless of the trouble he was in however. She let him remember and what he remembered tore him apart inside despite the fact that he could not stop himself from ravishing her with all he was. He was all too aware that Marianna had fled in hurt and anger as he gritted his teeth and drove himself inside of her ravenously hungry cunt again and again while his fingers thrashed her with a keen awareness of what made her body fly apart. He kissed her deeply and his breath caught as she bit his tongue then nursed on the blood which seeped from his muscle. His arm wrapped around her to pull her hard against himself with each thrust which buried him in those undulating walls. When her throat was offered he almost made the mistake of sinking her fangs into that soft flesh. He had not fed since being restored. He necked her and his fangs grazed her but then he groaned and went for a breast as he reminded himself how dangerous demon blood was. The higher she made him the deeper he fell into the chasm of her charms and as an orgasm threatened he arched his back to toss his head back. He pumped her slower but deeply and his eyes locked into her pale-blue-green eyes. Beautiful eyes, amazing eyes. He spoke to her, his words breathless, rasped with pleasure, broken and raw with tortured emotions. "Ah...r-release me...Lilith...How can I hold the woman who tried to...oh god...kill my queen, who is an enemy of the Lord I love and serve loyally? I love another...How can I...can I love her and still feel this fierce...need for you? Why can I not resist you? Would you see me...see me broken...would you? The spirits help me...I...I love you..." He sobbed the last words miserably and his body shuddered and locked against her in heaves as he orgasmed. He choked on his own breath and shattered cries when she sustained him for longer than any man should continue to convulse and for a time he held her locked in his arms trembling with spasms as she milked him of all he had to give. He spoke the words she had wanted him to spill for nearly a year. He had betrayed everyone he loved to say them. She had achieved stage one. Now she would capture him as another no one would mistake as an enemy. He would be hers through Tulaave, and once she had him, he would be Lilith's again, forever.

Maximus was hardly aware of her leading him upstairs to his bedroom by his arm, while her other hand roved over his muscular body. He fell into the bed with her and groaned deeply as she guided him to his back and impaled herself with his shank. When morning came he would not remember the wine he had drunk or the hours they had spent satiating one another. Wine Lilith had poured. It had tasted strange, but she had encouraged him to drink it anyway. He would not remember Marianna walking in on them, the wine he drunk, his pleas to Lilith, none of it. She had let him remember long enough to weaken him, to despair the sight of Marianna, his treachery, and to enjoy her as a man whose mind and will could not defeat his body. No, when Maximus woke an hour late for his duties, Lilith was gone and he found himself naked in his bed. He was clean, as was his bed. He felt

extremely out of sorts as he rose and went about his morning ritual of bathing, getting dressed, and riding to his post. Having no need to enter the kitchen he did not find Marianna's papers on the kitchen table where Stephanie had picked them up placed them. Instead, the girl, who'd had a very good night's sleep, met Max at the door with the stack of papers. "These have the Lady Marianna's name on them. They were all over the floor but I figured the wind must have got them." she said as she hurried up to him. Max's gaze fell on the papers and an uncomfortable feeling squeezed at his chest. After a moment he snatched them from Stephanie's hand, and slid the stack inside of his leather jerkin which was buttoned up and laced as he hastened out the door. He withdrew to the stables to mount his black horse, which Cezar had ready for him.

He kept feeling like he was forgetting something every step of the way. When he arrived at the palace the grooms met him and took his horse when he dismounted in front of the main keep. He walked through the corridors in a daze, passing guards and knights without a glance, and just before reaching the Court Room where Aurelius had told him Marianna would be found, he gasped and turned off quickly into a narrow hallway which led to the bath chambers. It was empty at the moment. Tears pooled and spilled from his eyes and his back struck the wall and his entire body shook. Max never wept, never. His face knitted, lips trembled as did his hands as they covered his face, and breaths jumped in rapid shudders in his chest which felt as tight as his legs felt liquid. His tongue formed words as harsh whispers and he rubbed his face as if to try to wipe something foul from it. He did not notice Marianna coming out of the chamber at the end of the hall. She had been on time but had needed a brief bathroom break. "Someone help me...Oh help me...What is wrong with me? I feel so...tangled...violated inside...Why? What is happening to me?" Maximus was sure he was going insane and the man had never looked so pitiful. He truly thought he was losing his mind and for the life of him did not know why. The feeling would pass when he met the 'love of his life' at Young Bloods, but at the moment the undefinable sensations of being terribly used and exploited were wreaking havoc on his mind and constitution.

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To say that Lilith was a deviant was largely an understatement. The girl had set her bewitching eyes on Maximus some time ago, during her tangle with Aurelius, and finally decided to have him. There would be no question. Though she might be jealous of Galaxy and Melissant for holding the love of the other two men she longed to have, she was not in the same state of mind about Mariana. The girl was a human and most likely had no idea how to make Maximus live to his full pleasure. Lilith could. She had REASON to be confident about that matter. She just had to make Maximus forget about the annoying little maggot. He was a man of heart and virtue. Ech. So she just had to sway his heart and virtue to her! Simple enough, right? Still, she had to proceed with the utmost caution. If Aurelius caught wind of what she was doing, there would be quite an issue on their hands.

Lilith knew how to dig under the skin of females as well to pry them away from the side of her wanted lovers. With Maximus and Mariana, she started with location. After doing her homework, she decided that baiting Maximus not only in public, but in the privacy of the little cottage that she was certain Mariana doted on, was the best way to ensure complete shellshock on the girl. Once Mariana had stumbled on them and fled, Lilith had once again sealed up Maximus' memories, suffocating him with pleasure before leading and coaxing him upstairs to take him to bed. The wine



had been the trick, and at first he refused, but after her sultry voice drifted around his groggy mind to convince him, he finally took the bait. The next morning, Lilith would be gone. But that same afternoon, Kamila would be frequenting his favorite tavern, playing coy and unknowing, waiting for him to lock his gaze on her. It would be bonus if Mariana was with him so that she could see him immediately falling for yet ANOTHER girl. It would destroy the young woman, most likely. But if Mariana was not there it was no bee in her bonnet. Max would be in love and there was no WAY for him to separate them forever. Perhaps the girl would fling herself off a bridge. All the easier for Lilith. Less distractions!

Mariana had stumbled to the knight's keep a complete mess, not even sure where she was going. She wasn't sure where in the city she started sobbing hysterically, but by the time she fell through the gates and into Callum's arms, her eyes were bloodshot, her face and neck soaked, and she looked like her entire world had fallen apart. The images... the images playing in her mind wouldn't leave. She saw the two of them over and over, as if she was still standing in the kitchen of the cottage she had adored so much when they first arrived together. She saw their hands, his face, her glare... the way they moved. Callum immediately was panicking, asking her if someone was attacked, but she tearfully promised that she was just upset for personal reasons and asked if she could go back to the room she had shared with Max during their imprisonment. He left her with a hefty carafe of strong wine and a warm hug. Callum was such a sweetheart, but he didn't even know that tomorrow, Haashi had to use his body to meet with his brothers about a very important decision.

That night was the longest in Mariana's life. She stumbled about the room, her head throbbing and spinning, skipping the goblet and drinking wine from the glass carafe instead. She ended up in the bathtub, her dark hair loose and floating about her in the water, the empty carafe in the tub by her hip. How... how could something so simple break her like this? She had once eaten nails... felt for no one and gave no one an opening to her heart. Maximus was not hers. Did she have a right to be upset? SHE had kept HIM at a distance while she tried to figure out her feelings. He was a free man to make his own decisions, wasn't he? Then why... WHY did this hurt so badly? How could she be so crippled emotionally? He said he loved her, but maybe he was just as confused as her...

Mariana had eventually passed out in the tub, the water going cold as the evening passed, and when morning came, she awoke to find herself shivering violently, her head slumped over the side of the tub, her body clammy and pale. Her eyes weren't doing much better either. They were underlined with thick, dark looking circles. She managed to climb from the tub, dry off and brush out her long hair, then slide into a warm velvet gown in a brilliant forest green color.

After searching for her notes for nearly half an hour, she sighed, her head throbbing as she dug up a small notebook and charcoal pencil to take with her. She intended to settle in at the court room today, get adjusted to the feel, and try to remember some of her notes that she could not find. If she remembered nothing she would eventually head back to the library.

The wine caught up with her by the time she reached her destination and gotten settled, so she rose and took a trip to the restroom. The last thing she expected to see was Maximus. She had been hoping not to see him at all today. Surely not so soon. She nearly swung around to run away before he saw her, but she froze, her

cocoa eyes softening. He was sobbing. She had never even seen him mist up, let alone cry like a lost child. Her heart wrenched in her chest. Maybe it was all a mistake. Maybe Aurelius could help him. Maybe it wasn't over. Forcing her mind to stay free of the images of last night, Mariana reached into the waist of her dress where she always kept a clean, folded handkerchief (Naomi had suggested it. It came in very handy with kids!), then slowly moved to stand in front of Maximus. Lowering to her knees, she reached over his bent legs and gently pressed the hanky to his wet cheek. When he would look up at her, she would speak first, in a soft, pleading voice. "I think you should speak with Aurelius. Promise me... promise me you will today." It was obvious that she was desperate. She was desperate to hang onto what strings were left for the taking. Aurelius always made EVERYTHING better. He could fix this. Maybe burn the witch at the stake and erase the bad visions in Mariana's head and things would be fine. She looked on the verge of tears herself. She needed him to take the initiative in this and get help... to fix it. Mariana couldn't, and Max obviously couldn't do it alone. "Promise me..." She repeated softly.

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Lilith was a witch by every meaning of the word and for whatever reason, she preferred honorable men for mates. Was it because she could rely on them once she had them completely snowed? Or because she enjoyed corrupting them? Was there another motive in between? Whatever the case, Maximus was in very serious Trouble.

Maximus could not look at Marianna at first when she approached him. He was a proud man and was humiliated to be seen in the condition he was in. His eyes closed when she pressed the kerchief against his cheeks and softly dragged across his flesh to absorb the tears he had been unable to restrain. He strove with all his will to regain control of his dignity and strength and it was only when the sound of her voice reached his ears that he lifted his gaze beneath a brow knitted with confusion that he met her gaze. He gazed at her in a peculiar way as she implored him to give her his promise that he would speak to Aurelius. "What shall I tell him? That his first knight is falling apart because the woman he loves is slipping away from him? That his eldest progeny and lifelong comrade may not even be fit for duty because his heart feels as though it has been taken from him and dashed into a thousand pieces? I told you I was not a man who falls apart. I was not lying...so why am I in this state? Why am I coming apart?" The vampire took her by her shoulders suddenly and shook her once firmly. "I love you with all that I am and there is nothing I can do to change that. Do you understand that I would rather die than betray those I love? Yet I feel as though I have done just that, betrayed you, Aurelius, my queen, my kingdom, by falling into Lilith's clutches in the past unknowingly without even knowing how! It rattles me, Marianna. How can I defend myself against something so intangible? What if it happens again? I will go to Aurelius and ask him to probe me for domination factors. Perhaps she has gotten inside of me, or perhaps another demon has possessed me. I must have surely done something terrible to feel this way. If it is my own demons I am warring with, then I am not fit for duty, and at such a time as this. To shame my Lord in such a way..." He shook his head.

"To shame me in what way?"

Maximus's hands leapt away from Marianna to unleash her as his King's grave voice gainsaid his attention from the head of the corridor where he stood. A number of the dragon knights were with him, whom he dismissed with a wave of his hand as Max

met his gaze with a wounded look. When the knights were gone the king entered the narrow corridor to stand over them. He noticed the way Maximus's muscles trembled as he rose to face him whereof he bowed to him before answering. "I am feeling unwell, My Lord, and fear that I am unable to perform my duties with a clear head and steady hand," his first knight stated humbly.

"Can you explain what you mean by unwell?" his king probed.

"I am uncertain. I am entirely shaken, My Lord..and have no excuse for it. I can only believe that is because I am losing Marianna and have betrayed thee, My Lord, by allowing myself to be tempted by that witch." Tears threatened again but he choked his emotions down.

Aurelius gazed at the man a moment, never have seen him in such a state, then bent his focus in the way of Marianna. "Is there anything you can tell me about his present state?" When Marianna related what she had witnessed last night, at least the gist of it, it was plain to Aurelius that Maximus was stunned by the revelation. His lips parted and his brows creased and he shook his head in disbelief.

"How can I not remember these things?!" The knight's voice nearly cracked.

"She is powerful, that is how, perhaps even more powerful than myself. If you recall Maximus, she very nearly had me." Aurelius sighed a deep breath. "Her domination is unlike other demons. It does not just overpower her victim but becomes a part of them, thus is it undetectable. I have also been told that her presence is what she makes of it wherefore she cannot be sensed reliably." In other words, a probe was useless. "She has perfected her art within herself and others. I told you to avoid beautiful women, Maximus. What happened?"

Maximus shook his head, bewildered. "I...nothing happened. I went home...I spoke briefly to Stephanie, then I went to bed, My Lord." That is exactly how Max remembered it, as clearly as he was standing there now.

"She took you last night, Maximus. She came into your home and in witness of Marianna she took you. Do you understand that?"

"I understand perfectly, My Lord, I just do not recall any of it..." his progeny's bitter voice wavered.

"I ask that do not forget that it happened all the same, Maximus. I imagine that she was thrilled that Marianna caught you in the act. She does not like competition." Aurelius was steaming inside. The woman had arranged many times for Melisseant to catch him with her in compromising positions. Despite himself, Aurelius laughed. "And here you two do not even have a relationship, only your all too desperate longings to be loved by her, Maximus." That last he stated soberly to draw his progeny's eye with a heavy sigh. "You will perform your duties, Maximus. You will brace yourself and guard Marianna with your life. You will not leave her sight or her side for any reason until it is Vaeren's shift to guard her." His gaze then trained with a burn on Marianna. "And you, Marianna, when you are in Maximus's company, shall permit no woman to touch him but thee and your queen. The knights shall receive the same orders. Now, we have much to do. Let us to court." Aurelius turned on his heels and withdrew swiftly, expecting them to come along the moment

they had snipped any remaining strings.

The moment his king had turned the corner Max trained his full attention on Marianna. "I am so sorry for all of this, Marianna. I would rather cut my own heart out than hurt you. You are the only woman I ever want to hold. You must never doubt that." The knight then bowed to her. He knew without a doubt that she loved him now. Her pain had spoken for her when she had told Aurelius of what she had witnessed. Her concern for him had also been too genuine not to have come from the heart. He would content himself with that knowledge and allow her to come to him in her own time. He was officially her guard now, and would not leave her side until three hours short of midnight, when his shift ended and Vaeren's began. Some knights would see the duty of guarding a lady of low rank as an offense, but Maximus did not. There was no duty Max was not proud to fulfill for his master, and guarding Marianna was a privilege. He was also well aware that Aurelius honored him by allowing him to guard the only woman he had ever chosen to sire. As it was, if Aurelius wanted to punish a man of standing, he assigned them to stable or kitchen duties.

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If Marianna sustained her stance of staying aloof of the love Maximus felt for her, it would play perfectly into Lilith's plans. Max would have the excuse of deciding not to be toyed with any longer. If on the other hand Marianna finally came to embrace his affection, it would make matters more difficult for Lilith. It was well known that Maximus was a very devout and honorable man. Either way, she had the advantage of Tulaave's exquisite body.

Aurelius intended to make it hard for Lilith but the demon goddess had done her homework. Tulaave Kamila was not a stranger to Maximus, not the real woman who had been killed by Lilith in recent years unknown to him. The witch had absorbed her presence and her memories in preparation of her plans to claim the second generation Noct'maire vampire. Maximus had found Tulaa near the lake of shadows after she had been attacked, raped, and forcibly sired by a wicked demon shapeshifter who had promptly abandoned her even before the process had completed to resurrect her in her new embodiment. Maximus had taken her to one of the cabins by the lake and looked after her. He and the beautiful Neffari shapeshifter came to be close friends, a friendship which had lasted fifty years until Maximus's duties and her desire to return to her family in the desert had separated them. There had never been anything romantic between them but they had loved one another dearly as friends. Maximus had not seen her since she embarked to the Desert of Fire six years ago. He did remember her fondly from time to time, and wondered how she was. He had always meant to visit her, but he had just not gotten around to it. Six years to an immortal of his age was like a month to a human in the scheme of things.

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Court that day would be a heyday that would no doubt add to Marianna's sense of overwhelm. Aurelius was not there for long. He gave his orders to the dragon and castellarn knights then withdrew to see the city's defenses. Maximus was everpresent to help Marianna whenever she had questions to pose, but as per his king's command, he offered no advice unless she asked of it. He seemed much better now that he had his duties under his feet to steady him. Men and women came and went throughout the day asking for Hawker's Fort protection for their villages or

homes. All who entered the court were escorted by guards and had been scanned at the gates. An Elven Prince with a well armed escort arrived at mid-day, his division camped on the grounds outside of the citadel. Aurelius had sent him to Marianna when he had expressed dismay at Aurelius taking over the city as steward and demanded to speak to Prince Heldras, who was present in the court. He demanded to know how he could have allowed a demon who was very likely a hellion himself to seize control of the city, and when the Prince explained that by vote of the knights, dumarc, and with his approval, Aurelius had been allowed to assume stewardship under the Act of Temporary Stewardship. Things grew rather heated when the elf accused the Prince of being too weak to take command of his own kingdom, and the prince defended himself by declaring they required the kind of power behind them as only Aurelius owned. The elf then proclaimed that he could have summoned his elven allies to his aid rather than entrusting the lives of his people to a Lord of Acheron, who might very well be aligned with the very enemy which threatened the world with disorder and chaos. Maximus called for silence to give Marianna the chance to speak on behalf of her king. Such were the quarrels which arose, some village leaders feeling cheated when they had no choice but to move their people into the city to receive protection. Others wanting to know if their armies would be paid and properly fed for taking up arms, still others who had no weapons demanding arms. It was late afternoon when Marsol's division arrived and Aurelius ushered him to the Great Hall across the corridor from the court. It was ironic that of all the people who had come to the Western Kingdom and An Morendor's aid, the demons which served Marsol were among the more gracious. Elves were high strung and distrustful of dark kinds, and though they were perfectly gracious to humans, ancients, and immortals unconnected to Acheron, they were extremely suspicious of underworlders. When night fell, Marianna was no doubt thankfully excused from her duties to enjoy the dark hours for herself. Until nine Maximus would be at her side wherever she chose to go, and even when Vaeren took over he was reluctant to leave her.

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The Castellarn knights and their brethren in the meantime met up by arranging to have those who were possessed ride out of the city, past the various armies which had united on the grounds without, to scout the lands, particularly areas where enemies could hide, such as copses of trees and rocky outcropped hills. Semmet, Mog, and the two formless ones possessing the knights that had sailed with their king were communed with telepathically on the matter at hand. Semmet informed them that the king had been killed by an assassin shortly after he had possessed him and that he had possessed the king's page Euren. Possession did not make those they took immortal by any means unless they were already immortal. All but Mog and Lucifuges chose to serve Maelmorda in Sammael's stead. The formless ones had always been loyal to Maelmorda as a general rule, whereas Mog and Lucifuges preferred to serve Sammael. Their split did not damage the sense of brotherhood they shared, it was simply a parting of ways. They would unite again when it was all over and decided. That was a common rule in Acheron, to be enemies until a dispute was settled then brothers again when it was done, with exception of the most spiteful who held grudges. Whether all of the formless who retained their castellarn embodiments could be trusted not to act as spies for Sammael remained to be seen nevertheless. It concerned Aurelius that Maelmorda had placed his trust in those who would choose to serve him, but he had faith in Maelmorda's wisdom. He always had a reason for his resolve. Maelmorda met them in the woodland east of the city at Morgrym's request to receive their answers. It would have been difficult to

divide themselves from the other knights to meet him privately otherwise. Maelmorda was pleased by those who chose to stand with he and Aurelius and held no grudge against those who sided with Sammael. Mael had the majority of them after all, and that satisfied him.

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From where he sat in that cell, the brown haired fellow had wandered perhaps too far from home this time. With legs crossed and an empty wooden bowl that cut his hands from its splinters, Niculaie began to think he might actually die here. For what it was worth though, he had hoped he would get to see her again before that happened. As fate had it though this dreary holding cell in one of the Forts jails would not be the tomb he made it out to be. Somewhere along the line the warden of the jail, being very fair and just for a human, had become swayed by something beyond his understanding. Was it Niculaie's doing? Did the young reaver know how to mold the minds of others in his hands as most immortals did? Or was it someone else working to aid him in getting him out of that place of little sun light and damp dirt? The demon's head turned upwards from where he sat with his back to the south side wall of his cell, to see the warden and the ring of iron keys jingling in his doors lock. Eh? Slightly confused by this, he remained where he was seated until the robust looking man in his late forties pulled the door open wide and that key ring was hooked back on its latch at his hip. Nic sat for a long while just staring up at the man and the man stared back down at him from the ill lit doorway of his cell.

"On your feet son," he said loudly, stepping aside, your times been served.

"What," Niculaie said, brow arching as his head started to cant to the side.

"Time served, now get up and go to the end of the hall to collect your things and be on your way."

"Your shittin' me right?"

"No I aint shittin' you, now get up and get the fock outta my jail before I decide to make you a trustee!"

"Alright, alright," Niculaie said as he sprang to his bare feet. The dark brown breeches and sleeveless shirt covered in dirt from him laying on the floor instead of his bed. As soon as he stepped through the door of his cell and turned to the left to look down the narrow hallway to the small wooden desk where the effects personnel sat, he saw someone that made his face drain of color and his palms become clammy. Standing with their arms crossed over their chest and leaning on the edge of the table, where a pudgy woman with glasses was trying to keep busy without staring at whom was leaning on her desk, Sammael smiled as warm as a hot iron being pressed to the tender flesh of a limb.

"Well no worse for wear I see," Sammael sighed, a little miffed that Nic had been arrested and had cost him time from his duties.

"If you're the one that paid to get me out of here, Id rather just st-," Niculaie started to say but was stopped by a pair of large hands on his shoulders shoving him forward with a few claws digging into him.

"Now is that any way to treat the only one that cares about their own," Sammael asked, mock hurt in his expression as darkness leapt up from the floor and flew from the walls to form a gateway in the middle of that path that Nic was shoved head first into. As the young demon blooded man was engulfed in those wisps of black smoky conjurations the dark one would look down over his shoulder to the woman scribbling things on old parchment and tying them together. She glanced up at

the man dressed in all black with the over coat and then down the hall to the warden that was itching his head from a slight confusion that was over coming him.

"Can I help you sir? Are you here on official business or visiting? Visiting hours are over you know, and... and," she said, although she couldn't remember what she was going to say after that.

"Let us forget shall we," he said, even as he spoke his boot covered feet carried him into that shadow gate and the memories of the woman and the warden were wiped clean. Every trace of Niculaie being arrested, processed, and conviction to spending time in one of Hawker Forts jails was erased. Niculaie's very presence was sponged from the few people in the facilities that had had actual contact with him, but only they and they alone. Outside of the jail though nothing else was done. Nobody with ties directly to the higher ups anyway. It wasn't that elaborate though that nobody would find out Nic had gone missing in the middle of the night. It was just a tiny cover up to get his demonic arse out of there and to a place he was better off never coming to. The officers and employees were left alone. Not one hair on their heads being harmed. It might have been fun but, he had bigger and better things to do with his time. Time. Oh yes, there would be time. Niculaie stumbled forward a few paces after being shoved, and then regretted even walking out of his cell back there. The shadow gate loomed up to meet him and although he put up both arms as if to shield himself from something, he was transported from the jail to a room of tables and chairs; of lavish furniture and hard wood floors. The room was as long as it was spacious, owning a ceiling of stained glass with depictions of many people doing various things of bravery or tom foolery. The windows that ran from floor to ceiling with their pointed tops each had the same kind of glass panels; people fighting for different reasons. It was at the wide hearth at the back of the room that he saw Sammael standing, using an iron poker to stroke the fire into being brighter. His brows furrowed as he glanced from side to side, and then begun to turn around when the other's voice caught him in mid stride.

"Leaving so soon," Sammael said, his dark eyes washed over by the light of the flames he prodded the logs of wood in. Not turning from it.

"I've got to get home is all," Niculaie said, and he cursed himself for not being able to keep his voice steady and his hands even on the chair he held at the moment. "Your home is here," Sammael told him, and as he turned the poker over in his hands the double thick oak doors to this room of paintings and statues were thrown open. A stream of dark red cloaked figures came pouring in, all of whose heads were bowed and murmured quiet prayers to the praise of the one they worshipped above all others. At the tail end of this odd parade of mumbling monk like people that all were human in appearance, there came three black furred bestial things. They too wore cloaks of red but their hoods were not drawn so as to hide their faces as the rest did. They were proud after all to be the hell spawns that they were, and they showed their demon hood proudly when in their Lord's company; a way of giving homage and thanks to where and from whom they came from. In the grasp of two of the tri-horned wolf headed creatures they carried an unconscious man barely covered in rags. The last of the horned wolf looking demons held a goblet in one hand and a long knife with a wide double-edged blade. It looked as though it was meant for butchering.

"Ahh," Sammael said as the human looking robed figures went to line the walls and stand in silence, while the obvious demon looking ones lifted the unconscious man and then dropped him on their end of the long table. They said nothing either, merely awaited their Lord's command.

"What the," Niculaie watched as these people poured into the room in a wave of red cloth and blank expressions, and then to the hair raising wolf headed ones with the three gnarled looking horns that curved forward slightly before turning their pointed ends turned to the heavens.

"This man tried to kill Marsol, did you know that," Sammael said as he came to stand at the end of the table and reached down a hand to take a hold of the unconscious mans chin, eyeing him carefully.

"No, I didn't know that. What does that have to do with anything?"

"Your not worried he'll try to take your life too? He almost succeeded on Marsol." He could see the twitch in Niculaie's hand even without turning his eyes.

"Well I'm sure he has his reasons. But Marsol isn't dead, so why are you telling me this?"

"There's no part of you that wants revenge? No piece of you that would want to prove yourself to that man by slaying one of his enemies?"

"If he's got beef with Marsol, then Marsol will deal with him his own way. I've no doubt he'll get what's coming to him."

Sammael started to smile. "What if this man lands the fatal blow first? Kills Marsol. And you had the opportunity to stop it before it even occurred."

"As tempting as that sounds, I don't fight with people I don't know. And I don't fight unarmed men." Niculaie glared when one of the wolf things snorted over his shoulder, ruffling his dark brown hair.

"If not for Marsol, then do it for Ann at least." His grip on the unconscious man's chin eased and he let their head drop to the red oak long table with a loud thwack sound.

"Don't bring her into this!" Niculaie's eyes darkened and his left foot took a step forward without him even thinking about it.

"He also tried to seize her from her home, along with the Miss Arilwen as she calls her, did you know that too?" Sammael's gaze fixed on Niculaie with a mild looking interest. But he studied the clenching in the young demon's jaw. The way the youth couldn't mask his emotions nearly as well as the dragon chieftain that had dug him out of the sands to save his life.

"No," Niculaie said after forcing himself to get a grip and he tried not to stare at Sammael directly in the face but, at his chest or his shoulders, "I didn't know that. Why are you telling me all of this? To gain my trust? Or to hurt those I care about?"

"I tell you these things to enlighten you as to just whom has been looking after you ever since your so called friend left you, and you ventured to reunite with your own clan. Your own kind, Niculaie. You do miss them don't you?"

"N-no, not in the least."

"I sense a but in there."

"I don't. I belong in the desert. With Marsol and his tribe. They are my people now."

"Mm, I see. Well then you won't mind if I grab a drink while you explain to me why you won't take what is yours," Sammael stated flatly, and the last horned wolf looking creature raised that mean looking blade to the blind folded and gagged man's throat. Before Niculaie could even shout his own protest or move to stop him, the demon made a small nick in the man's neck on the right side. Just a small cut. Niculaie thought the beast was about to slit the man's throat, which wasn't all that far off from the truth. However as the beast held the goblet under the mans throat, as he held his head up by holding a handful of his gorgeous dark locks, the blood would drizzle and then run in a steady river into the cup. Abruptly Niculaie



caught the powerful aroma that filled the room and the sweet scent made his nostrils flare.

"What the fu-," Niculaie said with a start, putting up a hand over his nose but it made no difference. He couldn't control just how badly his hunger rose up in him in that moment. Course he had been fed at the jail the time he had been in it but it wasn't the same as what he hungered for right now. It was something he couldn't begin to describe, and it showed how his whole body went slack and then his pupils dilated till they had thin rings of cool grayish blue. His insides twisted and his own inner dark side started to yawn; to waken to this potent scent in the air.

"Oh? Are you thirsty," Sammael asked as the wolf headed demon had bowed with the goblet raised to its Lord in complete submission fashion. His fingers laced over the underside of the goblet, taking it from the offered half paw and half human hands of the beast and then he brought the cup under his nose as if to get a better whiff of the blood that had been drawn from the unconscious man held down on the table. His dark eyes gazed at Niculaie over the edge of the goblet as he watched the young demon blooded man start to loose to the fight with his inner dark urges. Just as Niculaie shook his head and lifted his foot to take a step back, the two beast looking creatures would grab him by his arms and legs. They forced his starving body to his knees, yanking his head back and held his mouth open by the bruising harsh grip to his lower jaw. Niculaie grunted, and tried to twist sideways but that thirst to taste whatever this sweet smell was ate at his insides like a parasite. He could feel himself slipping towards his demonic side, even the threat of changing right there in the hands of these beasts. But as they held him down and that third poured the unconscious man's blood into his mouth to fill it, Sammael slapped a hand over it so that Niculaie couldn't spit it out.

"Now drink, know this I give you, and no other," Sammael said as he could picture how the blood must be electrifying Niculaie's veins right now. How that delicious nectar was setting his senses on fire and making his mind buzz with such a high feeling. He would force fed Niculaie three more cups of the unconscious mans blood, which he doubted seeing as how Niculaie could barely contain his craving for it. After the third cup the bound man would be removed from the table and carried away. To which Niculaie by this time would surely become vexed and demand more. Of course, Sammael would oblige him; for a price.

"No harm shall befall Anna, I give you my word. She can be brought here, and you both reunited. Live happily even. Have little humanoid babies running around with red hair and tails too," he waited a minute or so as he was sure Niculaie really wouldn't hear him as he gulped down the red life fluid from someone he didn't know, trying not to choke. "All I ask of you... is allegiance." Even as Niculaie heard this, and he tried to jerk his head away from the offered cup of blood, he couldn't quite manage it. It was so addictive whatever this was. He couldn't keep his thoughts straight as he felt his teeth sharpen and bite the inside of the hand over his mouth. He was over come by the need to taste more of that liquid, and it led him to sink his teeth into Sammael's hand. Not that it mattered now. Niculaie's taste buds had been subjected to the blood of the unconscious man moments before; the blood of an angel, a very brave and stubborn angel that had the rotten luck of crossing paths with Sammael not all that long ago. However, what filled Niculaie's mouth now was nothing like what he had tasted before. A chair was brought for Sammael to slowly lower his tall frame into where Niculaie crouched on the floor, still held in the solid muscular arms of the wolf headed beasts with the three

horns on their heads.

"Not the same is it," Satan asked Niculaie as his free hand closed around the front of the young demons throat. "But you'll enjoy it just the same." The sweet blood Niculaie had first tasted of the blind folded man was indeed from an angel. Unfortunately, Marcania's blood was quite different then that of Sammael's. Heh...

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The dispatched squad of eight plus one were all very well clean and went with the most respected and honorable King Aurelius at the Forts gates. Well, relatively speaking. These ones were so immersed in war affairs that most of the time their appearances weren't the cleanest. A few may have smelled up to high heaven, while others did not. The leading and most collected of years went by the name of Jedah, he was prone to not having not a bone of gentle in his body. As far as manner went with the introductions, all was fine. The others had remained outside of the meeting Aurelius held with their leader. It was not their place to be in the company of a King, no matter what territory they traveled in. Only Jedah met with the important figures, and that was it. As the old man had taken a human image before they reached the Forts gates, the rest of the team had not. They were either too proud or too comfortable within their full demon forms to revert back to such a bothersome state. As Jedah spoke with Aurelius inside, the rest of the squad all crouched in a circle outside the establishment. Drawing things in the sand with their claws, pointing and gesturing all the while they spoke in their native tongue. These eight all closely resembled their scaled demon blood lines, with respect to their heritage. Some had horns, others tails, while a couple had spikes running down their spines that protruded through the clothing of their backs. They made no effort to conceal just how inhuman they really were, but they didn't go out of their way to frighten the people of Hawker's Fort either. They kept to themselves, minded their own business as they awaited the end result of their mission. Not only though did they speak in that particular language, but also communicated mostly with the body and the faint click clacking of their claws at irregular intervals. The scene of them all crouched around in a circle digging shapes and symbols in the dirt with their claws and tails; it seemed almost more animal like then anything else.

"Is it surprising they who feel they had been harmed by the hand of a human would side with the Desert Wind. Personally, I would rather the goblins be wiped out in this war. But that's just me. As for the dragon kin, are being a sod of a lot. Joining he who would see us all bathed in a world of torment and anguish," Jedah said, his voice deep sounding to the ears, "Our beloved Chieftain suspects that many will rise to the Desert Wind's call, simply because his offers are too sweet tasting to the mind not to succumb to. It is a well known truth that the Desert Wind is being particularly troublesome to my Liege, and it has been brought to our attention recently that one of our people reside in your law offices? A jah-ale? A boy barely coming into his manhood, of dark hair and lineage he be. Unfortunate his ties are that connect him with the vile fiend known as Mekkora; most unfortunate."

At this Jedah would pause as his mind listened to the decisive solutions which those under his command were working on outside in the dirt, and those instructions his dragon Lord was giving him via telepathy. His dark brown eye did not flicker or waver as he took in all this information King Aurelius related to him, those of his squad, and that which Marsol bid him. Naturally should the dragon Lord tell him something he in turn told Aurelius the second he learned of it.

"After we've finished here, honorable King Aurelius Emrys, I am instructed to ask of the fate of the young lad being held. If you will permit me such information, I will tell of why it is important to know these things and much more." The old demon's arms would cross over his chest as his eye shifted downwards to the map laid out before him, taking in every detail as only he was well known for. He memorized it within seconds, and then begun calculating just how things would pan out for all these territories. But most of all he did not like how close Sammael was to Aurelius' grounds in the northern regions either. He scoffed at that once he saw it; slightly glaring at that spot on the map that might have served as a reference point for the Ghazis home fortress. The leader would share all he had been told to with Aurelius, which was everything as far as Marsol cared, about how their own borders were faring and how the surrounding parts were being sent word and able bodies, even if they didn't deserve it.

She would never get use to such means of traveling Anna thought to herself after saying goodbye to Arilwen and her nurse, and little Anwarr. Whom she got a little teary eyed over leaving again so soon. She loved the little guy to bits and became perhaps too emotional when parted from the only other friend she had in the world. "I'll see you soon," she told Arilwen before she felt her arm linked in with Wyrvaust, and then to see that flaming fissure that he walked her towards, into and through. When the Raven had come back home she had not noticed until she heard the difference in Arilwen's voice and the happiness in it. But as much as she willed herself not to, she flinched at the sight of the Raven. Something about seeing dragons and a giant snake, goat looking beasts with horns and wings, it could make someone a little paranoid and skittish right? As the Raven had sought his wife to be with her and relax, if he did in knowing she and their son were safe, Anna had turned her attention on their son and only their son. It wasn't just that Wyrvaust now scared her because she did not understand, but that in seeing the Swan so smitten with her demon lover she remembered how she had hurt her with her words and pushing in the desert. Yes, yes she still didn't forgive herself over that whole crazy angel guy trying to grab-and-s snatch them before the giant snake came and then the dragons. It was the second time she had seen such breath taking beings of might and grace, but it had been the third time she had seen a dragon. Not very fond of those creatures she was. Not after what she had seen, and then felt. But those memories of the cave and the horrors in it were fragmented and fuzzy when she tried to recollect them. Maybe it was better to forget. To be forgotten. As she squinted and then put up her free hand over her eyes, as if these flaming images that the Raven had used as a means to get them from his lair to his Lord's personal chambers in the cave would burn her eyes. It wasn't a conscious gesture, it just happened. But after they stepped onto warm dirt within the muggy cave, she would lower her hand from her face, turn to look up at Wyrvaust and then slowly over her shoulder. So those things just happen randomly then? Did Wyrvaust make that? Was it an illusion she wondered as she padded over to her Father that made her eyes light up. Hugging him and then sliding down to sit on her knees where her hands rested on his knee, and her cheek laid on top of her hands. She had no idea the way she acted so openly with the dragon Lord was informal, and to some rude and disrespectful. She was not of his flesh and blood. She had no offering of livestock or wealth and land to give him as homage and praise. She didn't even have a house actually. She had never knelt to anyone in her life either the way she saw Wyrvaust doing now. It struck her as odd, and just added to her growing confusion. Now Marsol had some sort of high standing in the desert she did, but she would have been shocked had she known she had been this way towards a King; a very temperamental king that took her in as a child, no more then two or three possibly, because his reasons were his

alone to know. Had he been in a good mood that day? Or just took pity on her? The nervous thoughts of her head cleared when she heard Wyrvaust speak of a bond, or maybe it was something about love? Those pale blues moved from a spot on the floor they had wandered to, to look at the Raven from where he had been told to come and to sit beside Marsol. Kneeling couldn't have been good for ones health she thought, with a silent nod of how Marsol would not let the Ravel keep such a position for more then a few seconds. It had been a long time since she had seen her Father in reality; once perhaps last month, and then nothing the previous months. This was a surprise and she was almost sick to her stomach that he had brought them here only to say he had to go again. Selfish? No, she just missed him something terrible. Just a little while ago she had been telling little Anwarr that he would be tickled pink when he got older to know Marsol when he met him; tickling his little tootsies and mock biting his hands with her lips.

"Do not trouble your heart with thinking you disappoint me, dear friend," Marsol said, making a sweep of his hand and then patting the stone wide step he sat on beside himself to the right. "You've yet to do such an act, and I doubt you have it in you to regardless."

His lips tugged upwards into a small smile and he could still taste the spicy flavor of Wyrvaust's tongue when he rolled his own along his lower lip. His left hand came to the top of Anna's head, petting through her wild tangle of red hair as he spoke to Wyrvaust. It was common place with the human. She had learned to speak without using words, and that was just what they were doing now. In the slightest of brushes with fingers through hair or tugging of his pant leg. Anna's eyes would take on a worried look when she saw the way Wyrvaust's face grew heavy with something. Whatever it was he and Marsol were talking about, it had to be very important. Had the Raven done something wrong? She silently shook her head, because she thought her Father didn't associate with disappointing people. And the Raven was someone who could not do such a thing anyways, period. Arilwen loved him. Marsol loved him. Anna had grown fond of him, but that fondness was fragile because he had scared her half to death when he had seized the Swan and her from the bathing chambers within the house of Satan. She kept those thoughts to herself though. Not wanting to trouble Arilwen with her nagging fears and unknowing ways. The human would peer over Marsol's leg as he bid the Raven to come and sit beside him, finding it unusual that the three of them would be here alone. It had never happened before, not to the best of her knowledge. Anna's brow arched however when Marsol commented that what he was going to do now to Wyrvaust, he would also do something similar to her. Eh? Would be the expression written on her face be noticed as she sat up straighter by her Father's left knee. But before she could ask just what he meant by it, the two demons were already doing something quite peculiar to her. From where she sat on the lower step, to the left, her Father was holding his friend and he had his mouth on his wrist? No, wait he had his mouth on the side of his neck now. Wait, why?!

Marsol began the bonding process with Wyrvaust without so much as telling the human what was going on. He would tell her later. Right now he felt he had to hurry through with this, and then not only bond but take mortal part of the girl from her and replace it with the strength of his tribe and the ability to act on all that foolish but kind hearted courage he knew she had deep down. The dragon had opened his arms to accept Wyrvaust into them, and then shortly after bite the inside of the Ravens left wrist. Then the right side of the Ravens neck would be nuzzled lightly, as if searching for the softest skin there before fang like teeth were

sunken in. He still had the ghostly feel of that stolen kiss Wyrvaust took back at the fire Maelmorda had made, but the taste of his mouth only paralleled that his blood held. It may have been alright with others, but he knew Anna would not understand the intimate embrace her Father did now to his most trusted and cherished of friends. He saw over Wyrvaust's shoulder as he rested his hands over the Ravens stomach and chest, that the human was perplexed by it; and then frightened to the point that she leapt off of the step to rush several paces away. He saw over his friend's shoulder, through strands of his silky black strands, when he moved his right hand upwards to rest it over the side of Wyrvaust's neck her brows rose even further. If he could have painted the look on her face, he might have. But only because it was comical to him. She must be thinking that this was a betrayal to Cirgoth, he thought, reading the humans face like an open book. Poor thing he pondered as his appetite was voracious and he would drain Wyrvaust rather quickly and then cut his own wrist. To give to the Raven as he held his friend where they sat on those wide stone steps. With Wyrvaust half held and half sitting in between Marsol's knees. He murmured things as his free hand held Wyrvaust's head should he need the assistance, and he just might, to have the other man's mouth cover his whole wrist better and to feed as soon as possible. His voice was low, and nearly like a hum in its steady flow of words. Or was he really humming to Wyrvaust? The desert creature may have been reminiscing with the Raven about how this felt all very familiar. Or perhaps he was telling his friend secrets of a dragon's heart? The only ones to know for sure the things that went spoken and unspoken between the two old beings were they and they alone.

Anna stood far off to the side as the sight of her Father biting and, seeming to drink Wyrvaust's blood, sort of made her stomach do a summersault. Blood never use to make her queasy but for some reason seeing the corners of Marsol's mouth leak out Wyrvaust's life fluid made her dizzy. She wanted not to look, but she couldn't pull her eyes away either. This wasn't something normal people did she thought, so sure of it that it was nerve racking to her to try and figure out. Her hands gathered the sides of her robe, knotting them up absentmindedly; though as Marsol cut into his own wrist and then gave his blood in turn to Wyrvaust, she cringed.

"Excuse me," she said, turning around quickly to hurry to the doorway to the cavern so she could leave.

"Annandabah," Marsol said as he licked the corners of his mouth clean, slowly looking up from how he had been looking at how Wyrvaust drank of him.

"Yes Father?"

"Think this not something so terrible that it would put fear in you my dear. It is a bonding, and one I will also do for you."

"Father I do not know if it is me or if it is the sight of blood, but I would rather not take part in it."

"Protect you this does, from those that would do you harm. It does not hurt, if you are worried."

"I-I'm not worried about the pain."

"Your eyes tell me otherwise."

"But how can this be when I know where your heart lies?"

"You question my love for you?"

"No I didn't mean it like that. I just, Father-,"

"My love for you can be expressed many ways Anna," he cut her off, knowing where she was getting at and not liking even her to be uncertain as to whom he cared for.

"This is one of them. I will instill in you a taste of my own. After this eve you will no longer be human, do you understand?"

"Your going to turn me into a monster..?!"  
"A demon Anna, but it is you who decides if you become a monster. Not I or anyone else."  
"But he said that demons could become monsters."  
"Who said?"  
"The man that...Um, he said that," her voice ended there as she thought on just who had said that. Getting a little annoyed with herself that she could recall his voice but not his face.  
"Was it when you were being bathed with Lady Arilwen," Marsol asked, and his hold on Wyrvaust's shoulder tightened just a hair.  
"Yes but she knew him too. Father I am sorry that I cannot think of his name or what he looked like. But he was quite nice to us."  
"Forget whatever he has tried to fill your head with. They are just that, lies."  
"Father are you angry with me? I only wanted to tell you this because he did not say anything ill of you, an-,"  
"Anna."  
"Yes Father?"  
"Have you not wanted to be one of us? Would not changing you to become like he and I, make you feel more at home?" He hated how well he knew her sometimes, and that her stubbornness made it impossible not to bring up how she longed to be like him. To be one of his kind, and then maybe she could be more useful to him. Oh he was well aware of what she hid behind her gentle smiles was the sadness that stemmed from just being human. Sometimes he wondered if it had been anything outside related but in the end he blamed himself for it, although the blame was nobodies really. His amber pools studied how the humans head lowered and she would look to the ground, quiet a moment. His arm slid further around Wyrvaust as Anna slowly but carefully came towards them. Small steps that would bring her back to sit by the dragon lord's left knee and lean her head against it.  
"You hide yourself in chores around the castle as though to shut out the world Anna. You have always been a part of this family, you know that," Marsol said as the hand to the wrist Wyrvaust fed from moved its thumb over the Ravens cheek. Feeling the nod against his knee, he glanced down to see the girl fold her arms around his leg and lightly fiddle with the stone around his big toe. Even though she was just a strip of a girl, he already foresaw the kicking and screaming that would come once he started her bonding, and then her siring. It made him kind of groan but smile inwardly...

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Sammael had broken Niculaie out of the well warded prison and bypassed the wards as easily as he had fogged the warden and his guard's minds when he infiltrated the castle-like penitentiary. He had broken in before Aurelius, Argal and a host of others mages had combined their powers to boost the wards to such might that even Sammael would be unable to shatter them without a united front of arch mages assisting him in the task. Aurelius had added an extra kick to the wards as well. If they were broken, it would trigger a dead arcane zone over and around the citadel for one mile. If Sammael attacked the citadel and broke down the wards, he and his legions would have to fight a physical battle of weapons and bodies. It would even the odds a bit. Aurelius was a tactical master and not to be taken lightly as a rival. Indeed the palace and prison was warded against arcane and supernatural infiltration, including gates and telepathy. Only very select members of court were permitted the use of telepathy and gates in the palace. When Jedah requested that he be permitted telepathic contact with his arms and lord without,

Aurelius permitted it temporarily by adding Jedah to the bypass. It was only after Jedah had made the request of retaining information on a prisoner kept in the Citadel's huge prison, and had informed Aurelius of Nicolaie's name, that the king would learn that the wards had been infiltrated. He sent Corev of the Castellarn Knights to gather reports on Nicolaie at both the magistrate's office and the prison and to find what cell he was being immured in. After a time Corev returned empty handed.

"Lord Emrys, there are no records whatsoever of a prisoner by the name of Nicolaie, nor of any prisoner of Mekkors's clan. I searched the cell block reserved for young immortals and there was no man there fitting Sir Jedah's description other than a young fallen angel arrested for solicitation, serving a short term." It was then a Castellarn Knight named Celebran spoke up.

"I recall arresting the man mentioned. He killed two men and in court claimed it was in self-defense but he was sentenced for two counts of murder by the public regardless. My Knighthood attempted to have the sentence repealed, but we could not get the King's support. I am certain it is because he is Mekkors's progeny. That clan is hated and distrusted in Hawker's Fort, and King Heldras feared that if he was released he would only come under attack again and stir more trouble. He did order a lesser sentence of thirty years be served, instead of the death sentence he received. He was imprisoned, My Lord, Sir Jedah. It was Hughveld and I who locked him up."

"In what cell?" Aurelius asked.

"Cell B-10 on cell block three," Celebran reported.

Corev shook his head. "That cell was empty and right next to the angel's cell, Sir."

Aurelius frowned then met Jedah's gaze. "It appears someone infiltrated the prison wards before they were improved, or someone on the inside broke him out. One of the guards or wardens could have been dominated or possessed prior to the break and been under command of Sammael, Mekkors, or one of their people. What is his importance to Marsol? Argal or one of my people may be able to discover exactly what became of him by means of divination." Unless Sammael had guarded against that as well. "Otherwise, there is no telling where he is now."

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It was true that Wyrvaust was incapable of every betraying Marsol or even acting against his wishes of his own will. He would die first. He had even asked Marsol's consent to keep the beautiful angel he had found in the desert who had later become his wife and second soul mate. Marsol would always be his first soul mate, and nothing short of final death could change that. All of the parts of him that could love a woman, Arilwen owned; all the parts which could love a man, Marsol owned; likewise, any children he had would own the facets of him that could love his own blood. When Wyrvaust gave himself to someone, he gave himself completely, and for that reason, he would only ever love a few. He wanted to have more children with Arilwen, when the future was more decipherable, but he did not want more than four children, ever, and he had no desire to have any progeny. His was not a rare line which relied on him to sustain it, so he saw no point risking

others to his blood, Acheron blood. Despite all his insanity and chaotic flaws, Wyrvaust was also a very reasonable and logical creature.

Marsol forgave him so easily. It pained him, made his heart ache with love and deepen the disgrace he felt towards himself, for how he could he have obeyed even a single command from Sammael when such a being as Marsol was the master of his heart's convictions? Wyrvaust was always far harder on himself than Marsol ever was. It was how he never forgot the mistakes he made. He moved immediately over to the wide stone step his master invited him to with a pat, barely unfolding his bent posture as he relocated his lean human form. Wyrvaust's cheek met Marsol's chest to nuzzle him with animal affection, his fingers toying absently with his chocolate colored hair. The Raven hence exhaled a deep breath of what could only be elation when Marsol sank his fangs into his wrist and his gaze followed his Lord's lips thereafter until they passed out of sight and his throat arched to the heat of his mouth against the curve of his neck. A soft cry breathed past his lips as he felt those dragon fangs puncture his skin and sink in until his blood pulsed freely to those strong pulls which siphoned his life nectar from his arteries. Wyrvaust could no sooner help the way his gut tightened and his pelvis curved beneath that warm hand than he could stop the euphoria he felt at having his blood drained by his most beloved friend and Lord. Immortals were a strange lot when seen through mortal eyes. Wyrvaust craved intimacy with Marsol, he always had, and it was so rarely they ever shared such moments. Nuzzling and caressing his master was hardly anything new for Wyrvaust. He had always shown him such gestures of affection.

Bonding a demon of another's blood was no small endeavor, but Marsol was patient. He could have drained him of his blood a lot more quickly if he had been violent about it, but Anna would not have understood that at all. Thus; it took awhile to drain the demon of as much blood as his veins had to give. He had to, to bond him permanently. A human would have long been dead. A different kind of immortal would have passed out a long time ago and six times over, but not Wyrvaust; he was a demon. Even with his blood drained until all that remained was trapped in tiny capillaries and tissue, the demon was conscious, light headed, but conscious. Oh he would have passed out in a moment if not for Marsol's offering up his own blood to both restore and bond him. Because Wyrvaust did not activate the bonding or enslaving properties in his own blood, by calling the arcane power in him into his blood, the blood Marsol drank from the Raven would not bond him. Wyrvaust would not dare unless Marsol demanded it of him! The demon bit into the wrist offered delicately; not that Marsol couldn't take roughness, but it was out of respect he caused him as little pain as possible. Wyrvaust was sure Marsol would use some sort of numbing power on Anna. He had promised her it did not hurt after all while he was feeding from him. Wyrvaust was rooting at that blood before long without really realizing it. It was powerful blood, tasted like Marsol's tongue a hundred times over, like the wild spices the plants in the desert produced, heady, tasty, bewitching to the Desert Raven. In truth, he wanted to go for Marsol's throat, the demon in him could not help the desire, but contented himself with the wrist he had been offered. Laying in his lap as he was while he fed on that syrupy liquid that was like pure ambrosia to him, Wyrvaust was in his kind of heaven. There was only one greater paradise he could ask for, and it was something he dared never voice. It was an old wish he had never confided to anyone, not even Marsol, and now the wish had altered to include the addition of the only other one he would want to share his ideal utopia with. He was not ashamed of this secret wish, but rather afraid that his all consuming love would be misjudged as a degenerate's fantasy. Those particular parts of his body which hardened and the very telling clenches of



stomach and pelvic muscles gave away certain secret desires to Marsol nevertheless as the demon suckled on that wrist and caressed him nearly everywhere he could reach perhaps all too intimately. Marsol's blood, its flavor, heat and the incredible strength of its bonding powers were having a very compelling and distinct sway over Wyrvaust. There was no question that the bond was taking. He was nearly oblivious to the talk Marsol and Anna were having. It was not his business anyway and nothing was said that he could benefit anyway. When Marsol's mark began to burn though him his lips broke from his flesh to tear him slightly with his fangs. The pain had come on gradually, like a flame heating water, but at length the ocean that was his soul began to boil with the heat of his mark as it scored him through and through, soul to flesh and bone. His breaths hastened and he shut his eyes to lap at the blood and torn punctures he had inadvertently left against Marsol's flesh. The mark would not have manifested if he had not ingested enough blood to complete the bond. Wyrvaust had not expected Marsol to mark him. The Raven had never been marked before, not even by his Sire Mustaala. Wyrvaust had marked his wife, even his son, but it had never been done to him. The pain swelled up like an inferno inside of him until the mark lay bare and livid on his navel beneath his belly button, whereof the pain began to ebb. When the pain had grown so intense that the demon could focus on nothing else, he curled as much of his tall frame up in Marsol's lap as was physically possible, his head buried against his gut, his arms encircling Marsol's waist to embrace him tightly until the pain washed away. Laughter bubbled up inside of him afterwards, to shake him and Marsol with him. The Raven lifted his head to peer up at Marsol with his head tipped to the side. "I feel...better than I have ever felt in my life," he said, without once referring to himself in the second person, as happened from time to time when balance overcame his chaotic mind. If never lasted long and this was no exception. The demon then grinned and lifted himself just enough to bring his lips against Marsol's in yet a second passionate kiss. It was as raw with gratitude as it was with love. Depending on Marsol it would either be lasting or brief, for where Wyrvaust had forgotten about Anna's presence there temporarily, Marsol had not. If the kiss lasted too long, Wyrvaust might well get too damn bold in that embrace of his master.

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Mariana listened quietly and more sympathetically by the moment as Maximus bled out his questions. What WAS he to tell Aurelius? He was a rock and he was being chipped away by the moment. Mariana tucked her handkerchief back into her gown and remained kneeling in front of him in a pool of her gown. Her gaze softened even further as Maximus shook her by the shoulders, asking how he could possibly be betraying everyone he loved. Damn. Lilith was like AIDS. They needed a vaccine! When he trailed off, Mariana parted her lips to try and offer any comfort she could. All she knew was that Aurelius could fix things. He was a brilliant man. He had answers! But she could not even make a sound before she heard that very voice behind them, and she stood swiftly, turning to face him after dipping a bow with Maximus.

Aurelius sent the other knights away, leaving the three of them to speak, and Mariana remained quiet as she listened to Maximus answer each question he was asked. When her lord's eyes turned on her and that question was posed, Mariana felt the blood drain from her face, but she wouldn't hide it. She was concerned for Maximus and if her answers could help... "A woman... who I am assuming is this Lilith person... was at the cottage last night. She had Maximus." Her lips pursed

afterwards as she fought her mind's urge to remember the vivid images again. At least Maximus couldn't remember them, so the sex wasn't memorable to him! She felt a twinge of regret for the anger and resentment she felt against him last night when he was so obviously distraught over hearing this. Mariana was so terribly curious when Aurelius assured Max of how powerful Lilith really was, because the woman nearly had HIM at one point. Mariana found it hard to believe that this fortress of a man fell into the same trap. She pressed her lips together when Aurelius pointed out that Lilith did not like competition. Mariana was going to at least try to give her a run for her money. No matter how angry she was, she had to remind herself that Maximus was worth the fight. The next time she saw that witch she was going to grab her by the hair and beat her face into a wall. In all truthfulness, she would get her ass beat in a moment, but she wouldn't be able to hold it in.

Maximus was given exactly what he needed at the moment. Aurelius provided him with simple, clear orders, and it was easier for him to get a grip when he had duties in his lap. For the moment, at least. When he turned to Mariana to advise her that she was not to let any other woman aside from Melissant touch him, she hesitated, but nodded. "Of course, my Lord." She murmured. Court was calling, but before Maximus let Mariana go, he stopped her to apologize profusely for what was happening. Turning her dark eyes up to him, she spoke gently. "I am sorry this is happening to you. I have to remind myself that it is not your fault. We will spend time together after court, alright?" She touched his arm, leaning up on her tip toes to kiss him softly on the cheek, then turned and headed into the court room.

Chaos. That was the only word to describe it. Mariana tried her best to be seated and keep her features serene and understanding as people began protesting Aurelius' stewardship of the city. One of the elven kings that showed up began vehemently protesting, speaking angrily against the prince and declaring that he was a weak man for letting a hellion take over the city in such a time. When Maximus called for silence so that Mariana could speak, the young woman gave a warm, sympathetic smile to the elf. "You are right to be overly worried about the current situation." She said firmly, but gently, causing the elf to stop for a moment and calm down a little. "I would do no less if I was in your shoes. You have your people to worry about. But at no time has Lord Aurelius posed a threat to Hawkers' Forte or any of the people of the city. Have you ever heard of an instance when he lashed out against someone, whether it be for race or personal means?" When the elf admitted that he had not, she folded her hands and leaned forward on the table. "Exactly. Only defense. In the meantime, we have an extensive group of mages and elders scanning and monitoring Lord Aurelius, his knights, the guards, and anyone who comes into the city. The only instance of unnatural hatred we found that needed to be purged lay in a guard that was already part of Hawkers' Forte... a human. And if you wish, you are more than welcome to submit a mage of your own to join the ranks of the ones that we already have and if they sense anything, we urge them to bring it forward. The ones currently on staff come from all areas of An Morendor, so that there is no discrimination. If you would like to provide one or two as well, you can bring them to Argal for any questioning. He is right there." She motioned to Argal, who was seated a few chairs down and gave a welcoming wiggle of his fingers, then smiled gently to the elf again. "We are also urging anyone who has any concerns or suspicions to bring them directly forward for a full investigation. Nothing will be taken lightly or discarded due to race or suspected paranoia, for any reason. I can assure you that. We only ask that you try to hold back discriminations during this time as well." Once the elf was gone, Mariana would

meet with a few more village leaders, making sure to learn them all by first names and chat with them during breaks. The personal level seemed important to them, and to see a simple human steady in her decisions about Aurelius calmed a few of them.

Haashi had raised awareness to his brothers about their meeting, and once they were free for the evening, they were sent to 'scout' the area for enemies. The loyalties fell where they may, and right where Haashi expected. Mog and Lucifuges decided to remain on Sammael's side, but all the rest would side with Maelmorda. Nothing Haashi tried to discuss with them would change their minds, so they parted ways amicably and Haashi contacted Maelmorda via a private path to advise him that they could meet now, and the meeting went fairly well. Maelmorda seemed satisfied with the amount of the formless ones that he obtained, and eventually, the knights would return to the citadel to report their findings.

The Formless would be rewarded for their loyalty, and as Maelmorda had promised; treachery would land them in the pit for a long stay. Before Maelmorda parted with them, he kissed each of them, some on the lips, others on the cheek, including those who had chosen to desert them. Hence he withdrew to return to his room at the tavern where he awaited a guest he was expecting, and made contact with Sammael. If O'Braugh did not show up he was going to hunt him down and kick his ass.

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Jedah did not appear the least bit surprised when word came of the young one's disappearance. He himself had hoped they would retrieve that one before something else could happen to him but they apparently were too late. They raised a hand and ran it over the front of their face and then rubbed the scraggly unkempt salt and peppered beard for a moment as Aurelius, Celebran and Corev spoke. This would not fair well with his Lord the demon thought, and even he did not look forward at all to the temper that was bound to flare once he conveyed this latest news back home. A part of him would rather to just have left the lad wherever he was and be on about their business. It was his own damned fault he'd been caught by whomever Mekkora or Sammael had sent after him, was it not? Least that was the way he saw it. But that wasn't the way Marsol saw it.

"He is a good friend of my Lord Marsol's, and he is being tricked or used to whatever means by the vile fiend and his Master to cause strife with my Lord," Jedah said, and then much slower and with an annoyed look, "and he was to be the husband of our King's daughter." It was beyond Jedah's understanding as to why his Lord would permit this lad such a thing with the human he'd taken into his home. But then again, Jedah was not King, and he knew nothing of what went on in Marsol's head at times. Despite how many years he had served the dragon chieftain loyally. In the mental link between his Lord and he, Jedah carefully told of the circumstances at Hawker's Fort concerning Niculaie and his vanishing act. To Aurelius, Jedah's battle hardened face might have squinted a bit, as though he had eaten something most sour. In reality, he was getting an earful of just a fraction of his Lord's anger over it. If someone were to ask why his good eye squinted and then his jaw clenched just a little, Jedah would say that his own displeasure over this is out done by his Lord's. The demon leader would then request to the honorable and trusted Aurelius not to bother with finding out more of Niculaie's whereabouts. He stressed that his Lord would not want to bring the attention of Sammael to Hawker's

Fort anymore then it already is, for his methods were dark and sneaky as they were all aware of. Jedah also made it clear that this was being said because perhaps it was the lad's own fight to deal with this time. But the likelihood of Niculaie getting away from Mekkor or Sammael, or whomever had taken him was slim to nada. Even so, there was a chance if however small and grave it was. What Jedah didn't say, was that there was a big chance Niculaie would be released in time anyways, and sent back into the desert to do either what he was told or to cause more harm to the desert kingdom. And that was a probable out come seeing as how his Lord thought Nic like a son, and the dragon chieftain's daughter was quite taken to him, thus making it hard to just outright leave the lad to die and whatnots. The request was just that however, a request. If Aurelius choose to ignore it and pursue the matter Jedah would say nothing further to talk him out of it.

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Aurelius understood them wanting to keep clan affairs in their clan; he was the same way, thus he dipped his head to Jedah when he declined the search for further information. When he explained what the young demon meant to them; he nodded. "Mekkor is one of Acheron's vilest creatures. It is fortunate for Nic that he was spared at all. Those Mekkor claims he corrupts to the best of his ability. One of his is being held in the hopes of reforming him, but I place little confidence there. I imagine his fate shall be to suffer his Sire again. The boy demon is so fogged by domination and bonding factors that he cannot possibly know his own heart, but he believes himself incapable of forsaking his master, despite the fact that his sire left him for dead for two years, an act which breaks Acheron's Standard of Possession. We have explained that freedom is in his grasp, but he will not take it. He believes it is no use." And he could be right if no one was willing to protect him from an arch demon. His pendragon eyes then locked on Jedah. "I would advise Lord Marsol not to bring Niculaie under his fold and allow him to marry his daughter unless he intends to kill him, purify him, and over-sire him as his own. He has that right if the man was taken from him." Demons did not sire like vampires, their chosen had to be raised from immediate death by their sire's blood. "Do extend your Lord many thanks on our behalf, for his tribute to the cause. Tell him he is welcome here or at my fortress in the North at any given time, and that if ever he is need of armed support, I shall lend him as many good men as I can spare."

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Jedah nodded at the words Aurelius spoke, agreeing with him the entire time and that for some reason wasn't done very often. The only other soul he had ever fully agreed with was Marsol. The old demon was thankful that he had had such an audience with Aurelius. He had never met him before but, he had heard his Lord speak of this one very highly. Now that he has met the man beyond all that talk, Jedah felt a swell of pride for all immortals everywhere. It might have been silly but, he felt it anyways that there were ones such as his Lord and Aurelius to keep the true essence of evil within the world from the innocents.

The old man's good eye lowered as he seemed to fall into a deep contemplative state. Though he was only relaying every word Aurelius spoke to his Lord. "It is unfortunate that the young are the ones who suffer the most isn't it," he said. It wasn't meant to be answered. He would give a nod and a deep bow as he was told to give his Lord many a thanks for the items they had carted from their home. He

waited a moment before he said, "Permit me as to be so bold but, your company is sought after by many and yet here I am, feeling like a...human teenager at prom. Pardon the pun but, it is a sight for this tired body to see such souls like yours in this world. Oh, where is my head. It's run away from me. When this is all over and done with, there will be change. I can only hope it is for the best. Good King Aurelius Emrys, may you and yours be blessed with good tidings and fortune and never hold another day of sorrow in your hearts."

It was a rare thing that such a blessing came, let alone from a rough and tough looking battleaxe like Jedah. But it was the kind of words he would only say as a verbal and silent prayer for a close friend. For not just their happiness but to ask the powers that be for the safety of Aurelius's household from the desert herself. At that Jedah retreated from the meeting spot Aurelius had brought him too, unless the King had something further to discuss with the old cod. The leader would find his own way outside to meet up with his squad of eight and they would wait awhile where they all crouched to talk things over. They had actually come to like Hawker's Fort in the short time they had been there, and weren't all that happy to leave it. Jedah of course saw their point. The grounds had their own charm to them. The people were so much different then those of their homeland. The smells, good god; how their senses were bombarded with all sorts of delicious scents and savory aromas. However Jedah would have to make the small request to the only master he and his squad would ever serve to remain at the Fort a little longer. And that he knew would not be all that much of a good thing considering how angry his Lord was at the moment. In a short while they would depart for home then, to the groans and sour faces of his team.

"Now none of that," he scoffed, although they all chuckled at the sour face he made too. One had to laugh often at life, otherwise you could go crazy.

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Aurelius agreed with a slow nod of his head that it was unfortunate the young frequently suffered the most. Such trials usually turned out to be a learning experience, or the young were plain exploited by those who had every advantage over them. The only lesson to learn from that was not to trust others. There was a reason Felix, Mekkor's child progeny, trusted no one and nothing. The king's shadowy eyes settled on Jedah as he spoke of being bold. When he had professed his hopes and granted his respects, Aurelius clapped his hand against the demon's shoulder and jostled him with a warrior's brotherly gesture of affection. "We all of us hope matters shall unveil for the best but we shall endure the worst should it ever come. You honor me, Sir, with your commendation. May your hearts never be taken from you and remain as fiery as the desert which embraces you."

When Jedah retreated Aurelius informed him that he was heading back to the gate thus the dragon of Noct'maire accompanied him to the gate. His black and silver armor was almost Roman in style but clearly of a unique design. The plate shirt was black diamthrill, form fitting and followed his contours to his upper thighs in a leaf cut that was tassled with white diamthrill plates, which looked like silver. He wore leather pants beneath black chain mail and his black greaves and arm guards were etched with handsomely stylized dragons, outlined in white diamthrill. Diamthrill was the hardest and most resilient metal known and could only be forged and worked by elven smiths. Aurelius was the only Lord in Morashtar other than elves that had an elven smith in his service, and for such a smith to

serve demonic sorts was unheard of. The elf recognized Aurelius as a good man rather than distrusting him as a demon, a dragon, a shapeshifter, or a vampire and Aurelius had come to be all of these things, otherwise known as a Deluvian, a product of chaos. He was very nearly a god, and by the time this war was done, or the war in Mephais against Hestromeph of the Black Pike, he would achieve godhood status. It would change nothing. He would still be the same man. Aurelius noticed how Jedah and his men soaked in the city as he rode along beside the leader at an easy walk down the main streets and down Calvary Lane towards the gates. Calvary lane was the city's greatest unimpeded area. Three miles of the lane was an eighth of a mile wide and the rest of it was half that. Tents were set up on both sides of the road where allied divisions had come to the city. Had Marsol's regiments been ordered to stay in the city, they would have been granted the choice of camping on the grounds outside of the citadel, or on Calvary Lane. They passed men who were practicing with various weapons in preparation for war. Knights here and there gave instructions to those who were still green. The City Park and River Park were also being used as training grounds.

Aurelius could see that Marsol's men were enamored with the walled in city and its many stone buildings whose masonry was ancient and elaborately chiseled in places. He wondered if they would be so enchanted if they knew of the internal struggles which had always taken place between the mortal and immortal denizens of the kingdom, a distrust which Sammael's infiltrators had preyed on. "This citadel and its allied kingdom requires a good immortal king to lay to rest the prejudice which has longed taken precedence here," he mentioned casually. "My Lord believes Yorek Kassim is the man for it. I am of the opinion that he will not give yet on his far eastern desert kingdom to rule another. What is your opinion of the desert Prince?"

Whatever Jedah's response and discourse which followed, it would end by the time they reach the eastern main gate, where the immense double doors would be spared for Jedah and his men and Aurelius would bid him a fond 'until we meet again, good demon.' Yes, it was a pity that demons and dragons were so misunderstood by people. There were as many good ones as there were bad ones. Few races, if any, were all bad. Even Goblins could be ethical, clean, and even well mannered. Some of the filthiest creatures could be good natured beneath all the dirt. Aurelius only ever judged man or beast by their conduct. It was a good thing too, because though no one knew it, Aurelius was An Morendor's highest judge beneath the Morning Star.

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Jedah had been leaving to the right where he sat in his saddle where Aurelius kept him very appreciated company on his way back to the Gates, when he caught the words and it perked his interest like any time worn person might. Sitting up straight in his saddle, his one good eye turned from the ground where he had seemed to be studying something, to look sideways at the Deluvian. "Ahh, Mr. Kassim," he said as his right hand loosened its hold over the reigns of his horse and move to pat the fine animal on the side of their neck, "Never had an audience with him personally, but from what I've seen and heard of him he is worthy of the kingdom in the far east. A shame that father of his is. Couldn't stomach the lot of them that one housed while he held the people in what I think only to have been a strangle hold. Say this not I do out of where I come from and for whom I live and gladly die for." Jedah's unscared eye lit on Aurelius in case the good King might have

misread him on that, being Marsol and all. The leader's gaze relaxed though because he knew he did get a bit overzealous when it came to matters pertaining to his dragon Chieftain. "Fortunate we are, the young are the future," he said, and then he said no more not just because they had reached the main gate but that was all he had to tell of the matter on Yorek Kassim. Once the others fell into a line to pass through that set of doors to the outside, Jedah would chuckle as he gave a wave over his shoulder to Aurelius and Hawker's Fort as a whole. "Yes, yes," he bellowed as his squad waited for him a little ways ahead where they sat atop their own steeds, "you are not the only ones that wish to visit this place again." His brow rose but the demons would all begin to laugh because it always made Jedah's face look more menacing than he meant it to. Which they were use to but it still spurred them to laugh anyways. "Well, what are you waiting for ladies, breakfast in bed? MOVE!" Even as they urged their horses on and the tall white and brown animals kicked up dirt as they took into a gallop, Aurelius and his men would probably hear the old demon shouting things only a military hardened one would. Something about every meal being a banquet and every paycheck a fortune. A gateway of flames awaited them further up the path they took, and it was into this they rode to leave Hawker's Fort and the one named Aurelius that Jedah found most peculiar, with nothing but good feelings and the strong hopes of returning.

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A Devil's Offering  
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It was some days after Sammael had liberated Nicolaie, his reliably loyal but dangerously degenerate and corrupt loyalist Mekkor's progeny, and the same evening his disappearance had been discovered by Aurelius and Jedah, that Maelmorda paid Sammael a little visit, at least part of him. He projected himself from his room at Young Blood's Tavern and Inn in a livid illusion of alter-reality. He simply manifested in a decadently luxurious chair in the same chamber Sammael happened to be in. One leg was propped with knee bent and his leg relaxed over the arm of the chair, his arm draped loosely over the other. He was decked out in an ultra-sexy bondage outfit which revealed a great deal of skin, while heavy knee high boots of thick black leather, shining with steel D-rings, buckles and spikes clad his feet and lower legs. An assortment of dark but attractive jewelry adored him as well. He had slipped past any wards Sammael may have raised by a path of non-existence, because he was not really there for wards to even register. Maelmorda could slip past most any ward anyway via loopholes few ever imagined existed. But for the moment, he needed to be in two places at once. If Sammael needed him there in the flesh, he would oblige him of course, given the reason for it was a logical one. When the Prince of Demons laid his eyes on the Morning Star, he waved at him with a smile then laid his arm back down.

"Greetings, Sammael. You are looking particularly well. I might say like a fat cat," he grinned devilishly. Blah-dee-blah-dee-blah, cordial greetings and all that. "Everyone tells me I am wasting my time coming to see you, but when is it ever a waste of time having the company of my charming and beloved son?" A faint smile softened his sensuous lips. "I do wish to know, Sammael, why it is you wish to wound your father by attempting to make war on the people he Lords over? What have they, what have I ever done to you? Am I not your faithful servant in Acheron

and on the worlds if it concerns our kingdom? Why do you rival your father and friend? I would much rather we remained comrades and brothers." The devil then sobered and leaned forward to pierce Sammael with his jade-green eyes. "I really do love you, Sammael. Why are you trying to hurt me by mucking up my project? If Acheron is not enough for you; you should create you own damn world in your own image! If I must to talk you out of this war, I shall be your own personal phuck toy, and you may parade me before all of Acheron as your obedient bitch. I have no pride beside the ruination of this, my world, and its people, which I alone had a hand in the creation of!" Maelmorda loved Morashtar that much, and that he would offer himself in such a way was a first, and it was saying a whole hell of a lot for how much Morashtar meant to him. If Sammael was getting exactly what he wanted or was simply basking in self-satisfaction just to see Maelmorda turn belly up in a fruitless cause, Maelmorda could care less. He expressed what he felt and what he was willing to offer candidly to the fallen angel of demons. It was a lot to offer. No one had ever been able to claim Maelmorda as a pet before, and pets did not command legions. He was offering a lot more than just himself to protect Morashtar.

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Way out yonder where the liquor was as rich and thick as the thighs that bound his waist, Sammael was currently sitting on a feather stuffed cushion with his legs propped up on the flat belly of one slave, and then his back was supported by the thighs and bosom of another when the Morning Star decided to pay him a visit. It might have come as a shock but he was not in a lusty mood even though he was surrounded and covered with half naked women. The comment of a fat cat had Satan grinning in no time and he begun to laugh as black polished fingernails dipped down inside his unbuttoned black dress shirt, and even more nails toyed at the button of his black slacks. There had been a tie, but it had been loosened around his neck, and was presently being chewed at by a female with nothing but a pearl necklace on.

"And a very good hello to you too Morning Star," he said after Maelmorda had said all he had to say, and then offered something that was most tantalizing to Sammael's being.

It was so tempting the offering of flesh that was spoken of that for a split second he was quiet in contemplation. For why would the Morning Star do such a thing one had to wonder, but then of course it was out of love was it not? His frame bent and then arose to unwind himself from the exotic beauties that all pouted at him leaving, but shrank back and away at Maelmorda's presence thereof.

"Where's the challenge beloved Morning star," he said as he did not bother to fix his tie, or button his open shirt that revealed so much skin, or fasten the button to his slack so they wouldn't tip at a slant and expose his left hip.

He came to sit on the edge of the long rectangular table of rod iron just a little to Maelmorda's left, and then he folded his arms and leaned back to lay on top of it with his legs over the edge. "It is not my intention to be such a thorn in your side you know," he said, his head turning to the side to look at Maelmorda over his folded up arm, "It just comes with the territory. And just whom all have thee been talking to, to get such a sour statement from? Jealous sods. Mael, look I enjoy your company above all others. In offering all of you to me, you make a risky wager most would kill themselves for. Not that I'm not drooling over it, mind



you."

The jade-green gaze was then met with a stark black one which had no such love of anything in them; perhaps, perhaps not. He was contemplating over what Maelmorda had said again, but it didn't show in the emotionless void his eyes held the Morning star with. It was the stare he gave just after Maelmorda said that he loved him, and then he sat up with a grunt. Why so much emotion in him now? Why now and so suddenly? Again he thought back as to the heated conversation they had had a while ago over who came to the throne in the Lower Kingdom and what was what. "If the Morning Star feels this is an attack against him, then that is how he feels. All I want is all I want. If I wanted my own world within the image of me, then I will make as such in my own way, wont I?" At this Sammael's mouth curled into a most innocent of smiles, however how could innocence be conceived of in someone like him? Still, to have Maelmorda all to himself? Good lord, that was something he was seriously having to fight with himself over. Hopefully Maelmorda could see the little battle Sammael was having in his head by that twitch in the corner of his mouth, or the way his hands gripped the edge of the table a little tighter and tighter.

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Maelmorda got up from his chair after Sammael had expressed whatever opinions he had, and strode over to climb aboard the iron plane in a straddle of his Prince. His gaze pinned him and his nimble fingered hands fell flush against his chest. "What challenge is there?" he asked as if amazed that he had asked that. "Why, tap that wonderful imagination of yours, My Prince. If I give myself to you, does not what is mine become yours, my family, my legions, my power, barring the exemption of Morashtar? You shall have my carnal, physical, spiritual and mental limits to test, unravel and discover; my power to bring under your control. You shall have my legions united with yours to conquer other worlds with. While we are at it, why don't we up the stakes? Pull your legions out of Morashtar under these terms and you shall have such a challenge as shall make your blood roar; You vow by law of Acheron to forever leave my world alone, and I pledge in return that if you break me, I shall offer Morashtar to you without contest, to do what you will with, for my release from your control. Risk your legions being wiped out by mine, and losing Acheron's throne to me, or embrace me as yours to conquer. I shall obey you, but shall I not also struggle when you cross lines with me? Have you no desire to teach me to suffer and regret such a sacrifice as I am willing to make? And even if you cannot break me, I and all my power and all that is mine, with the sole exception of Morashtar will still be yours. You cannot lose if you accept these terms and shall have such challenges ahead of you as you never dreamt."

Maelmorda was sure that Galaxy would want to skin him if she knew what he was offering Sammael. He was not only offering himself and his legions, but her and their sons. Maelmorda only hoped she would understand. "I am curious, Sammael, as I have always been honest with you, and I am sure you appreciate being able to trust me, what do you want with Morashtar anyway? What can you possibly want to make of it?" The devil grinned impishly and ground his body with hard sensuality against those loins which could become so terrifyingly massive in an attempt to rouse him and an honest answer from him, his hands trailing over the hard plane of Sammael's body to knead deep into his muscles with tantalizing finesse. There was something very electrifying about his touch as if pleasure oozed from his pores. At some point he had transferred himself into his projection thus he was now there

with Sammael in the flesh. O'Braugh had come to his room and he had told the man to wait.

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Sammael had been quiet throughout the deal that the Morning Star posed to him. Not one protest or interruption was made. No words of this or that to sway the offering either way. He only listened for as long as the Morning Star spoke, even as he felt his maker climb on top of him to let him lay back down on top of that huge table littered with papers and maps, bowls of paints and tins of tacks. Dishes of tiny bone looking pieces and all sorts of other assortments. Those dark strands fell over his eyes as those thick lashed lids lowered till they were almost shut at the feel of Maelmorda's hands touching his chest. It induced such sensations in him as to merit raised brows and a slow spreading grin as he nipped at the hands that touched him, managing to catch one of Mael's thumbs to bite lightly but not enough to draw blood. He gnawed at the parts of his maker he could reach as he spoke. Finding this game too tempting and knowing where it would get them both if they continued. Satan had started to lean upwards when Lucifer posed his last question with that grin followed by the grinding of his sinfully delicious body into his own. Sammael couldn't help when he spoke that his lips just barely brushed over Maelmorda's. Or how shaky the breath was that he let out was as his black eyes looked so full of something terrible and sweet as he gazed up at the Morning Star.

"Something you will be impressed with, even if you doubt my methods of going about it," he said as Maelmorda could feel those grinding sensations being returned gradually and that toned abdomen would knot up. He had expected whatever visit Maelmorda paid him to be brief and not be of his actual body. So when all those touches and feels on his chiseled frame came, and that beginnings of all that need coursed through his veins he couldn't help but smile as his own hands came up to the sides of Maelmorda's face. His digits traced little shapes over the Morning Stars temples as their lips ran over one another's, but they did not kiss. Come damn close to kissing yes, but at the last second either Mael or Sam's head would tilt up or down, nipping or nudging at the other in this increasingly heated touches. Something so small was all Maelmorda had to do with his fallen son. Affection.

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Maelmorda's carnal beast was aroused by Sammael's responsiveness. His breaths grew more heated and his gaze smoldered on the other fallen one with feral desire. "So cryptic, Sammael. There is nothing you could do to my world that would impress me, piss me off maybe, but impress me? You would have to have the guts to take me up on my offer to do that." He meant it, and there was no doubt of it in his crisply passion quickened tones or those eyes which devoured the Prince of Demons. His throat arched slightly and his head tipped into those fingers which caressed his temples in elaborate little circles. The mental spirit encapsulated beneath that flesh and skull and the brain within a fortress of immaculate strength. As his body dipped and Sammael's rose to bring their lips together, Maelmorda's tongue grazed those luscious buds of soft fire. His almost naked pelvis meanwhile slid upward and then back in a hard, urgent press against him to feel and stroke with his loins the hardening groin so sadly immured by clothing. Fingertips dragged from the throat he had been lightly massaging downward across his chest to the snap securing his pants. The waste of his pants loosened and his zipper rasped to

unleash him a little bit. His eyes searched Sammael's black pits for a moment with what could only be called fiery love, then with a sneering smile of lost restraint; he captured his mouth in a searing kiss.

The Morning Star tasted like whatever most pleased one's olfactory and oral senses, and his blood and flesh had the same magnificent flavor which each individual's sensory cravings defined. To some he might taste like chocolate, to others like cherries, a candy store, steak, or the scent of roses, whatever floated their boat. His tongue tasted Sammael, twined and stroked his tongue and nursed on his oral muscle to send pulsations of decadent pleasure surging through his mouth and body straight to the demon's navel and loins, which his own abdomen clenched against. One hand thrust between the open zipper to fondle, pump and stroke that fabulous cock which Sammael could control the girth and length of, or branch into another member when he so chose. Every touch Maelmorda imposed sent ripples of euphoric rushes into the flesh.

Both Maelmorda and Sammael could morph their sexual embodiments as they pleased. Maelmorda had other carnal talents that few even knew about or had ever experienced. Talents mortals could not handle without their hearts exploding. The stimulating touch he was using on Sammael for example was a secret he usually kept locked up. He had only ever shared it with three people; Galaxy (who he had been with for years before he let her experience it), Caine, and now Sammael. It was the first time Sammael had experienced his currents of ecstasy. There was a time for all things, and this in Maelmorda's opinion was the time. Maelmorda's orgasm was just mind blowing to others, more so than any of his angels.

The devil shoved Sammael's pants down with his thighs, and then with those boots he wore, to send the cloth piling onto the floor, or around his ankles. Lucifer was accustomed to being the dominant one and it showed. His ass, cunt and leather caged loins ground against him as he was exposed. If Sammael decided to seize the upper hand, Maelmorda would put up quite a sex-impassioned struggle to maintain the dominant attitude. Where some vampires frenzied on blood, Maelmorda could attain a state of sexual frenzy. The leather cup of Maelmorda's bondage belt which contained his sexual prowess was supported by black leather straps joined by a clip on the left side of his hip. As he unbuttoned Sammael's shirt the fishnet wife beater Maelmorda wore seemed to dissolve right into the devil's flesh. As he continued to orally phuck Sammael's mouth and dry fuck his cock; his chest leveled flush against the demon's now naked chest and as he slid up and back against him to rub their nipples together. Sammael could feel the intense need driving Maelmorda in the sexual tension and quivering of every muscle which their pleasures stimulated in him. Indeed, Maelmorda's own arousal surged through Sammael.

The devil then broke the kiss and his cheek slid lightly against Sammael's whereof he nibbled at his earlobe then whispered in his ear. "No one has ever been able to phuck me blind, or banged me often enough to make my cunt and ass feel like a ten dollar whore's, Sammael. No one. Can you phuck me beyond compression, make a slut of me, can you?" He grinned at that. His dirty-talk challenge was as hot as the blood which coursed inside of the demon prince.

Maelmorda had manifested female genitals below that massive cock of his, a cunt as virgin as a teen girl's for Sammael alone to fit to himself; come pain, pleasure, or both. His rectum always regenerated to its former rigidity and few ever had the pleasure of sodomizing him anyway. He was usually the one committing that

deliciously dirty and invasive act, albeit Maelmorda's bowls, like all immortal hellions and angels, had no use other than pleasure, because their physiology processed everything they ate into raw energy and power. It was simply one throwback among many of assuming a human form. The immortals humans often referred to as the filth of hell were actually cleaner than humans in that respect. There were some foul demons mind you, but they were the exception rather than the rule.

His lips fell against Sammael's throat to suckle his flesh and nip his skin hard enough to draw a small amount of blood which he lapped up. Out of respect, Maelmorda only went so far. If Sammael wanted to have sex with Maelmorda, he only needed to unclip that bondage belt he wore to give the word. "Only with you will I be unfaithful to my wife," he had him know with a hiss between kisses to his flesh. Well now, if he was Sammael's, it would be up to his Prince who he shared him with now wouldn't it? Maelmorda was not thinking about that. Sammael did not own him yet anyway. It was out of love he was with Sammael now. He was wondering if Sammael was going to unclip that belt and strip him naked. He was wondering if they were going to phuck on that table if he did so, or if Sammael had another place in mind. He was wondering a lot of sexually oriented things. If Cirgoth interrupted the devil's offering to Sammael, Maelmorda was going to make a banquet of him!

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Sammael's lips curled into a smile as he felt the fingers that had once been at his throat travel down his body, past the shoulders and collar bone to touch his chest. He smiled into that kiss as the taste Maelmorda possessed or, what he could invoke from the desires of the one he shared such sinful pleasures with. Having to tilt his head upwards a little more and bit by bit as his own lusts were more than tempted by the Morning Star's touch. Or rather it wasn't only his touch. Quite the ache he felt inwardly with all that movement Maelmorda made against and into him, not hiding the shiver that ran through him again either; though as those very nimble and nibble-able fingers went lower still to loosen the zipper and such that barely kept his pants on him as is; Sammael's barely open black eyes followed Maelmorda's hands. Finding the way he pulled that zipper down to reveal all the inhuman need hardly contained in those pants now a little bit. When those eyes were brought back up to the Morning Star's as they had looked up his figure to find that the Morning star was looking at him, his eyes widened just a hair. Expressing just how pit like those eyes could appear as his fingers pressed into the back of Maelmorda's head at that kiss his smiling mouth took from his. It was so puzzling to him at trying to place just what Maelmorda's tongue tasted like as they kissed. No doubt in seconds Maelmorda or he would try to suffocate each other with those soft pink muscles hidden behind their pearly whites. But it would be a sweet suffocation if it did happen he thought, laughing silently in his head at the thought as his hips unconsciously pushed upwards into that molesting hand of his Father's. Yet as the demon craved many things often, there was really only one he truly craved with every fiber of his beings. One singular thing that if that was indeed what the Morning Star was able to taste like, Sammael would quickly lose any self control he might have had. Was it something Sammael knew nothing of though, despite all his wanting it so badly? Or was it unattainable? A combination of what the Morning Star's mouth was filled with, the way his body tried to mold itself into the Morning Star's as they played their hands over one another's bodies, and that look he had given Sammael that was doing him in. Let alone how he could feel that ache in his loins and how it was getting painful not to be touched

or to touch in return. With the removing of his pants, though he gnawed at the top of Maelmorda's right shoulder during it, he grunted when he had placed his hands over those hips Maelmorda owned to start to push him sideways to find that he would not be budged. He snickered as he pressed those lips to the front of Maelmorda's throat, then with the separating of those kissable tracks he licked from the top of Maelmorda's throat on down to the center of his chest. All the while pushing and pulling at the Morning Star's hips and shoulders to try to turn them over. Once he also managed to but they only ended up on their sides, sort of wrestling the other and Maelmorda resulted in getting his skinny sexy arse back on top again. "Sneak," Sammael said quickly, a little huffy as he caught one of Maelmorda's knee's between his. While his shirt was being unbuttoned, and that fishnet disappeared into Maelmorda, seemingly, the Prince of Demon's chest swelled. He could feel that raw need and he knew his own soul well enough to know that these awesomely soon to be mind numbing ecstasies were not of his own doing. So then, what? However he didn't care at the moment to think on why it was so indescribable the way Maelmorda tasted or how his slightest touch set his skin on fire and his blood boiling. To a mortal just the need behind the kiss would have bruised and then probably eaten them. There was as much hunger in Sammael as there was carnal urges his body showed the Morning Star with the clasping of both of his hands over his rear as he slid his cheek against his. To the nibble and whispered words in his ear Sammael made a low growling sound. His tongue escaped his mouth to snake over the top of Maelmorda's ear. "Would you let me do such blissful sin to you? Could you allow me that much free will over you who are so impossible as he is deep? It makes me wonder Father, what I've been missing all this time," he exhaled before his head turned to give more of his flesh to the Morning Star. His lips were dragging lazily down Maelmorda's shoulder when he felt that nip and knew he had drawn blood from him. Anyone else he could have been cross with. If it had been someone other than Maelmorda, he would have been in such a rage as to make that person's life unknown and their death legendary; for he may have been a whore in his own ways, but it was consent to harm the body which you worshiped. Even then, no one had ever gotten away with half the things Maelmorda could or have. His head lifted after those lappings of his tongue were made and he nudged at Maelmorda's head. Resting his forehead against Maelmorda's as he said in a shaky breath that was as quiet as the press of his lips to the corner of the Morning star's mouth were gentle, "Because of you, I could never be faithful to anyone." With that small almost chicken peck of a kiss that was perhaps too affectionate even for Sammael, Maelmorda would feel his son's fingertips pressing here and there down his naked upper body. Trailing like a cat's paws, his index fingers hooked into the band of that tiny piece covering Maelmorda's gorgeous cock and delicious clit. He gave it small tugs before he unclipped it from his hips. However the Lady Fate was a cruel biotch and kept strange hours. At that exact moment his fingers would catch the bands and hold them in place over Maelmorda's hip. Although it was unclipped now and held onto the Morning star's body only by Sammael's hand resting on his hip. Satan's head was tilting upwards when he stopped, and his eyes would darken. All that lust in them now fought with that darkening in his pools as his face turned away from Maelmorda's. His cheek pressed to the Morning Star's shoulder as he glowered at the open doors to the richly furnished chamber they had been molesting each other in. With his shirt open and pants on the floor, Maelmorda straddling his lap and wearing really nothing at all, the scene would be quite the shocking one should someone stumble in on them. And that was exactly why Sammael glared at the doorway. Waiting...

A throaty groan rattled Maelmorda's throat as Sammael nipped at his shoulder, hell, whatever he nipped at, his fingers, anything. Mael did not care to be feasted on like a steak, but he did enjoy the pierce of fangs and his blood being nursed on. The tussle for sexual dominance between them charged Maelmorda's need for his Prince to even more heightened degrees. There were six hellions who could physically overpower Maelmorda. Behemoth, with relative ease, he was just...a power house of muscle; Lilith, who was just ridiculously strong for her lean build; Sammael, who could best him in a match of strength if he really applied himself but he never had revealed that fact to Maelmorda; Magnus, whose dragon strength could be tapped to overpower him; Aurelius, whose strength had at length risen above his own; and Mordenta, the Morgrue General of Acheron's army. Maelmorda was the brains and magic among them, above them all. Indeed his knowledge of chaos, the arcane, and the elements was inconceivably extraordinary. No one was even sure if he had limitations in magic. Maelmorda knew what his limitations were, he just never shared that information with anyone; shared the fact that divine light elements fucked him up. He could even tap those elements, if he wanted to damage the hell out of himself. Maelmorda was unaware that Sammael was letting him win, for now. He laughed when Sammael called him a sneak. Maelmorda was slippery. "Damn it Sammael, free me of these binds so I can phuck you senseless, bury that magnificent rod of yours in my slick virgin tunnel and cover you over with ecstasy, oh demon of sin." His eyes rolled to a brief close at the feel of Sammael gripping his firm ass cheeks with both hands and squeezing down to gain some control of those bodily strokes which pleaded to be ravished by him.

When their whispers mingled to dip into the surface of their secret hearts' dark fathoms Maelmorda writhed against him in so sensual a manner as sent rushes like soft waves of bliss through Sammael. "Did I not offer myself to you as your carnal pet of desire if those terms proffered were embraced by you? What sinful delights and degradations you can bring me to is entirely dependant on what you crave, and your ability to overpower me when I struggle, if you should demand more of me than I am willing to give. Can you even find lines to cross? Or shall all you desire of me please me as much as you? You will never know unless you embrace my offer, nor shall I. As for what you have missed, no one unearths the carnal heart of me, Sammael. No one has ever dared. Like you, they have only ever tasted the edges of this dark god. I am sure the same can be said of you." Those oh so sweet kisses which Sammael stole from him made the Morning Star tremble with raw desire and the realization that there was someone in the world Sammael truly loved. The thing Sammael whispered to him afterwards, about never being able to be faithful because of him, confirmed his discovery. Why had he never seen it before? Why had Sammael never revealed it until now? Was it because Maelmorda was at last within his grasp to have as his own?

Maelmorda's breath caught as Sammael tugged on that belt to press it against that roused bundle, and he breathed a shivering breath as Sammael unclipped his belt. He tossed back his head and hair a moment to inhale an elated breath. His eyes then fell to rest on Sammael, thinning, and the next breath Mael held as Sammael hesitated to actually release the two sides of that belt he held together by his fingers. "What gives?" he asked then his gaze followed Sammael's to the doorway to catch that brief glimpse of Marsol's lover who ducked away and retreated the moment their eyes settled on him. Mael cackled. "The angel has guts, gotta hand him that." His hands then cupped Sammael's cheeks to turn his head so that their eyes met. "He has the good sense to wait us out, so let's permit him shall we? Don't

let his presence here ruin the moment. I have missed you, Sammael. How can I not when I love you so deeply? How many hundreds of years has it been since we joined in blissful acts of demonic rapture? How many more years shall it be if you decline my offer? Shall you take me up on this freebie or what? Or you could just stop dallying and agree to my terms and have me as often as you like." He grinned then kissed him with magnetic fire; whereof one hand went back to fondling his cock and the other to tweaking other arousal zones. He could not taste Sammael's tongue or nurse it with those delicious pulsations deeply enough. He pumped him against his wet slit and the slender strap of leather between them rubbed against his cock with slippery temptations and a hunger that could be felt in the sexual tension and tremors of Maelmorda's muscles. His body pleaded for him to drop that god damn belt! His thighs clamped against Sammael's lower body in those grinding slides which joined his body and pressed that caged clit, slit, and their cocks together in a desperate mingling of flesh and throbbing erections and feral sexuality. Many in Acheron craved Maelmorda, would cut out their souls to have him. Even Marsol had probably fancied the thought and Lilith desired to have Maelmorda for herself. That was her highest expectation. Albeit she wanted Sammael too. Lucifer shared himself with his children of creation now and again, few and far between, but no one had ever been offered the privilege of possessing his sexuality and no one had ever dared attempt to claim him by force as a mate. Caine alone had ever tried and succeeded at possessing his soul, but Maelmorda had in time liberated himself of Caine's control. It had been difficult though. Caine had never endeavored to claim Mael sexually. No one had. "I hunger to feel you buried inside of me, Sammael. To release my ecstasy inside of you. Please discard of that belt," he expressed a devilishly innocent smile, as only Maelmorda could.

There was a part of him that was agonizing that he had tossed the notion of being faithful to Galaxy out the door to offer himself to Sammael. Sammael was cagey, and there was no telling if he would want to keep Mael all to himself and forbid anyone else to touch him, including Gala, or share him with all of hell and make a whore of him, or decide on something in between if he claimed Mael by his terms. He might take Mael and Galaxy together, or leave Galaxy to Mael alone while he claimed all other privileges with him. Mael had no idea what to expect, but it did not matter. He had made the offer and would stand by it, come whoredom, twain fidelity, or absolute fidelity; if Sammael could own it. Love did play into Mael's offer to Sammael. He never would have made the offer if he did not love Sammael.

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Sammael clicked his tongue when Lucifer said that the merciful angel of swords had guts. His cheek would press more into Maelmorda's shoulder as he contemplated several things, considering their new guests and where there was an angel, a demon was sure to follow. Marsol wouldn't let the pretty green eyed boy get too far, much less enter his domain unknowingly. The desert creature would probably have gone mad and killed himself first before that happened Sam supposed. He bit Mael's shoulder rather hard for laughing and to taste him again. Although that bite that would have soon turned into gnawing was foiled with the cupping of his cheeks and the turning of his head. Those black optics still glared mildly at the door but they were forced to look upwards in a pair of green hue's the likes of which only a master painter could have envisioned in a dream. That discovery that Mael had hypothesized over may have been denied if confronted about it by Sam. But that too, was still not all too clear. Could Satan truly have someone dear to him in his heart? Was he even able to do that crazy little thing called love? Hell, did he even have a heart

to love someone with was the real kicker. Or was he just blowing a whole bunch of smoke up Mael? Perhaps the answer to all of those truly meaningless questions and more lied in the black eyes that gazed up at the Morning Star as they brought their face to his to seer those plush pillows with a kiss that had his hands roaming down their body again like a hormonal teenager.

Whatever he thought was kept to himself though as the fingers of his left hand did a bit of sneaking of their own. As his right tugged that belt and bit of covering away, his left hand dipped down between the both of them to run his index and middle along this female part that was as enticing to him as the male ones were. Lightly he ran his fingertips all the way up that virginal slit beginning from the front and having to lean forward into Maelmorda to see just what all he was hiding down there. By now he couldn't help just how painful his hard-on was or how it would be indeed terrifying in its girth and size in no time at all with all that gyrating of Maelmorda's hips and his own needs and wants. Of course everyone would want Maelmorda. He was the spitting image of everything one could ever want and hope for. Marsol had had his time with the wonderings of what it could have been like if and how could its. Though Sammael would have found that a riot to see the dragon chieftain admit to it. As two fingers dipped up inside that slick and sweetest of spots, he growled. His index had started to toy and tease at the only little area that most girl's found too sensitive. The only other hole really that wasn't moist with Maelmorda's juices covering his middle and ring finger, he would test just lightly at that puckered hole that was immaculate compared to that of a human's. He gave Maelmorda only a few seconds to know the feel of his index pushing into both of his holes before Maelmorda felt himself being tugged forward by that very hand moving and rubbing its fingers inside of him. "Mine will leave your pretty paradise alone Father," he said, now slightly gasping as he had pulled Maelmorda down on top of a pair of throbbing cock's that waited to sink inside him. "Not because you asked. Nor from the high chance of every legion I command being obliterated or even for fear of loosing the Throne," he grunted as he had to remove his hands to yank Maelmorda down onto both of his painfully large members, causing his hips to buck upwards from the sheer delicious agony of it being so sudden. He seemed set on telling Maelmorda things in the midst of their rising pleasures, and pain. Where one of his hands clamped over that arse his maker owned, his other hand went up to catch him by the side of his neck to pull him down so that he could rub his lips over his as he said at last, with a hard jerking to the side that would tumble them over to where he knelt on top of that table with Maelmorda's thighs around his waist. "I do thi..." His words though would trail off quite abruptly as he thrust hard into the Morning Star, where now his hands had moved to find a resting spot on the sexy one's chest and right wrist that he held onto tightly. Even as Maelmorda's right leg was nudged up to drape over his son's shoulder as his thrusts grew faster and harder, pushing in deeper each and every time he entered that corporeal body of a dark god's, he bit at the inside of that leg. Drawing blood from whatever part of Mael he could reach with his mouth when he was offered it, and even leaning down to take Mael's mouth with his own as the table shook and quaked with their increasingly insane phucking. Those dark brown, nearly black at times, locks hung in front of his face and swayed as he started to get lost in not in Maelmorda, but the need to see something in his maker that he wondered if anyone else ever had. If Maelmorda happen to start sweating, he would run a hand over whatever part of that tasty body was producing the moisture, be it his brow or chest. Or at times he was somewhat compelled and had to lower his head to lick it off with a loud moan. The sounds, oh god the sounds that would come from that room were thunderous. It caused the air within that lavished estate to grow



thick and uncomfortable with the sexual tension and otherwise porn star positions the two would be getting into on top of that table. Or against it. They never quite would make it to the floor, once they almost did but he had to push Maelmorda forward into a cushy chair where he spared no time in joining with the Morning Star again as close as two bodies physically could. "Tell me," he said and then his teeth sunk into the back of Maelmorda's neck at the same time he thrust both of his aching members inside him where they both knelt into the seat of that chair with Maelmorda bent over the back of it. Sammael never neglected Maelmorda's own divine cock. In the brow raising and thigh aching ways they had with each other, something would always covered and please the Morning Star's own tool. Be it a hand, a mouth, or something else. He just could not keep himself from being all over the Morning Star. Or in him rather. The terms of the offer and conditions were yet to be talked over between them but, best to leave that for later. Indeed, Maelmorda would like the catch Sammael would pose to his deal, and that there was only one. Maybe that was what Satan meant by impressing him? One could only wonder...

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Maelmorda groaned at those nibbles, even the hard ones on his flesh. His breaths quickened and his loins throbbed madly as his very sensitive female parts were rubbed and penetrated and Sammael would feel the devil's thigh jerk with spasms against him as he flickered the nub of his clit. He was harp string tight even against that index finger and then the other which thrust inside of him. Maelmorda had never before altered his sexual physiology to that of partial female characteristics. He usually morphed in other strange ways to cover all the bases with angels, including hellishly pleasing mutations in his gut to engulf and stimulate cocks with while he double banged them, as Sammael was soon to do to him. New sensations stunned him at Sammael's fingertips. For Sammael and none other Maelmorda had offered himself in his present state. There was a first time for everything and in a sense this was Maelmorda's test. Could he hold up against the Demon of Sin's lusts as he was? He would find out. It might have been a secret to Sammael that the Morning Star was offering him something new, but for the telling way Maelmorda responded to the Prince of Demon's explorations and ravishing of his body. Heavy breaths were stolen between gasps and lips parted with lust as Sammael teased his deliciously rigid ass with his fem sex. His breath caught and he squirmed when Sammael heaved him upward by that snug cunt his fingers were wedged inside and when Sammael spoke a pair of jade eyes steeped with intoxication rolled on him to find focus on those fathomless black mirrors. His eyes cleared somewhat of that fog of lust and penetrated his gaze as he pledged to leave Morashtar alone. Mine will leave it alone, he said...Mael would only be satisfied when he included himself. Oh he could haunt the planet all he liked, as long as he did nothing to change it. They would cover the details of the terms...afterwards. His gaze held his all the while he spoke of why he was not consenting to it, but before his Prince divulged the reason for doing so, he buried himself inside of both pencil thin orifices to spread him around his girths in one feral thrust. Maelmorda's harmonic voice lifted in a cry of blissful agony and his body nearly collapsed against his lover...possibly his master, depending on what Sammael had to relate when he got around to finishing what he had started to say. In that moment when he was held in arrest of that shocking overfilling of his body, Sammael flipped him before he could even react to put up a fight. The Prince of Demons was opening him like a toy box and splaying all his goodies to play with. His gut tightened as his limber legs were hooked over Sammael's shoulders and his body lifted to heave into that next bestial impaling of his body. Blood began to

coat his members to add to the slipperiness of the tunnels he fit to himself and loosened with each end of all limits thrust. It was in the way his pelvis ground in hard slides against that oh so needy clit that pain crashed into ripples of urgently craved pleasure and he was gradually building towards an orgasm that would only end when Sammael let it. He had caught every word he said, the brief one left hanging included, but was lost in the abandons of Sammael's unquenchable lusts so that words escaped his mind altogether and all his awareness was trapped in the demon screwing him. Every kiss they shared Maelmorda returned with hungry abandon. Between kisses and suckles on Sammael's flesh; Mael filled his Prince's ears with growls, groans and tremulous gasps blended with the sexiest dirty talk that ever came out of a devil's mouth. Maelmorda egged him with the hottest kind of vocal come-ons. Flesh rose against the bites and the impossible grindings which made his body feel as if Sammael was interring himself inside of his entire body. In that human seeming body Maelmorda did sweat and it tasted like his blood, his breath, and his tongue, like something tasty to Sammael. Perhaps something different because Sammael expected it to. He did not perspire a lot however, but dampened slightly on his brow, cheeks and chest. Regardless, Sammael was seeing many things in Maelmorda no one else ever had, if he was able to recognize it. Frenzied cries of bliss sang from him as Sammael lifted him up with his legs still wrapping him like a starved python, supported by those massive rods rammed inside of him. He rode him hard, stealing hard kisses from his flesh where ever he could reach, on the journey from the table to the chair, and fought him like a wolverine gone insane when he peeled him off of his hard body. A cry escaped him at the feeling of Sammael evacuating him. It was the weirdest got damn feeling, like giving birth, only Mael did not know what that felt like, he could only imagine. He seemed surprised; because he was surprised, when Sammael overpowered him to wrestle him around and pin him chest and cheek down against that chair. His ass arched to shove back against him as he impaled him again and he sobbed with elation and perhaps relief and a long moan exhaled from his as Sammael sank his teeth or fangs into his neck to taste the ambrosia which pulsed hard to each pull he took. Ever shock of pleasure Maelmorda felt the entire time rushed through Sammael and gathered force as Maelmorda's own body heightened. Now when those little surprises began to stimulate those places neglected just long enough to drive Mael mad with need, his body fell into a feverish rhythm with Sammael. With every moment that his body quickened nearer and nearer to an orgasm, his muscles grew more shaky, and his legs trembled with those clitoral flickers and the delicious strokes and squeezes on his cock. When Sammael said 'Tell me' Maelmorda answered him in a tremulous voice. "Tell you what...that I have never done this for anyone before...That I have never felt these things before?" When at length Maelmorda did orgasm it was violent, like a tidal wave which swamped him and Sammael at once. Maelmorda could last as long as he wished when he was dominating the situation, when his masculine body was in charge, but the way a female orgasmed was something quite different. How many times had he forced Galaxy and other women to suffer endless orgasms, even until they passed out cold. Well, suffice to say; Maelmorda had it coming to him, only when he orgasmed, he shared it, like angels did. A pity Sammael had given up his angeldom to become a hard core demon, or he and Mael could tortured one another with bliss together. "Wh-what...t-tell you w-what?" his words shattered as he spoke them, his slender frame trembling with violent spasms against his Prince.

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The movements of Mael's body were relished. From every quiver of muscle to each

spasming jerk that meshed their bodies together, Sam's cravings merely grew. The intensity with which Mael's human like body was molested also climbed the closer that he drew to that hair raising orgasm. Course the more that Lucifer was craved by Satan, the more deliciously painful the demon's lusts became. It was truly, a vicious cycle. About the time that Sam had pushed Mael down into that chair that they could both kneel on the seat of, the demon was aware of not being able to stop himself even if he had wanted to now. Not that he would have. It was like he wasn't able to have his fill. Even though this body he now sought to pleasure beyond understanding was what he wanted, what he had been wanting for the longest of times, he couldn't get enough of Mael. The more he touched him, the more he needed to taste him. He fiended for those gasps and pushes of his hips when he sank those parts of himself into him perhaps too hard or maybe too deep. He pulled his teeth from the back of Mael's neck just to cover those bite marks with his tongue, licking over his creator's wounds before he started to suckle on that tender flesh. His hands had roamed over the skin of Mael's hips to feel up the front of his chest where he pinched and tugged at those nipples where they both phucked each other senseless in that chair. Mael might have been more vocal about everything he felt being done to him, or inside him rather, and Sam would voice his own ecstasy had he not always had his mouth on some part of Mael's body. Be it biting him, suckling or licking. Sam was too obsessed with that to make the loud groans and moans of pleasure that ripped through his body even before Mael reached that limit and sent them both tremblingly over the edge. He could feel how his cock's throbbed for Mael, how he not only hurt his maker with his insatiable hunger but also himself and that too, was the loveliest part of it. All that dirty talk brought a snarl of need from him, making it so hard to focus where he had been gnawing at Mael's shoulders again. The chair was made to withstand numerous things, but what pray tell could stand up to the lusts of ones such as they? The cushioned chair wobbled and threatened to tip to the side before he planted his feet with a grunt to haul Mael out of the chair and carry him with him as his hands dug their talon like nails into Mael's hips to lift and lower him onto those twitching dual veiny pieces of flesh eager to be burried in that seething hotness in his body. "...." Sam's mouth had started to open to answer Mael's broken question but his own voice failed him as he felt his entire being begin to implode with that raw euphoria of Mael's own bliss. That sweet, sweet surrendering that only angels and their demon cousins knew of, and of which could only withstand. Nothing a mere mortal could handle without death coming for them. Poor things. He had carried Mael from that chair as it toppled over from a bump of his hip, across the room to the wall where he would harshly slam Mael's back to the wall. It was that orgasm Mael had that was making Sam do this. To become so feral and rough with him, regardless if he had been that way all along. Both of Mael's arse cheeks would be grabbed and spread slightly apart as he pulled that fine toned body down against him, and onto both of those throbbing shafts that ached to be fully inside him. His head had come to rest his chin on top of Mael's shoulder where he had brought them painfully against that wall where he stood with those tasty legs around his waist still, or maybe he had to fight Mael to keep them there? Though when his head tilted upwards as he slammed into Mael, he exhaled a shakey breath where his lips just barely brushed over his maker's. Those thick lashes having the same blackness of his eyes lowered till they almost hid them from view. As his lips parted to make a wide O shape with his mouth he too was forced to that aching wave of pleasure that crashed from Mael into him, no matter how hard he fought it. The muscles in his back tightened like the rest of him, and he murmured something as his hands slid off of Mael's perfect arse to trail his fingers up the sides of that body which so many worshipped and had come to love. Over the outsides of those arms which he felt for Mael's hands, and if he

managed to get his hands he would raise both of their arms a little out to the sides and intertwine his fingers with Mael's while he stole hungry and most needy kisses from him. Where he held his hands, they were kept against the wall that he held Mael to as well. The harder Mael fought him for those kisses or the way Sam was getting unnervingly forceful with him, the crazier his want for the Morning Star would get. Oh he would not let Mael get off easy by no means. He would keep him in those heightened pleasure states that he had tormented so many others with for how many years? Maybe Gala would have thanked him in some perverted way for giving Mael a taste of his own medicine?

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Deep did not describe the inner limits which Sammael pounded that pair lust berserk enormities into. He could feel his heavy mass of throbbing famish inside of his gut, and beyond that shut gate he had battle rammed and entered past into the forbidden depth of his female canal. He had surpassed mere pain into that euphoric sense of physical oblivion which collided with the absurd onset and ruthless perpetuation of violent orgasms. His mind exploded with the brutal convulsions which rocked his body not only from the pounding waves of that continuous orgasm, but the damage being done to his body. Maelmorda had in the past attempted to get others to dominate him sexually, but no one, not even Caine, Sammael's own son, had had the nerve to prepare Maelmorda as he had wanted to be prepared...conditioned to cope with just such a circumstance as he now shared with Sammael. But could anyone have prepared him for Sammael's lusts, anymore than anyone could have prepared Belorian for Lucifer's lusts when he had try to break him by sexual exploitation, and very nearly succeeded? But whose lusts in Acheron truly had no bars? Could not be sated but for a moment? Sammael's. A fresh shock rocked him as Sammael jerked those branched rods out of him and grappled him to twist him around then lifted him up wedged his thighs against his hip bones, facing him. "Jesus, phucking jesus..." Mael hissed as that long ass gut tongue of Sammael's continued to thrash his clit to perpetuate his orgasm. Maelmorda's trembling legs coiled around him but they dropped when Sammael slammed him with sex-raged violence against the wall. "Sammael..." he breathed his name as the demon prince pulled his legs upward to spread his legs wide to him. Sammael's beast had truly got away with him as Maelmorda's very spirit lashed him with those riptides of ecstasy, so like apocalyptic shockwaves of fatal pleasure, and a flash of anger leapt into the devil's eyes and he thrust his palms forward against the hard plane of his chest with the intention of shoving him away until he could grasp his senses. His hands met his chest like a carress against Sammael's enflamed strength and desires. A vocal gasp escaped the devil as Sammael pushed forward to trap his arms between them, brushed his hot lips against his and spread his a\*ss cheeks. His lips had parted to hastening breaths but his jaw gaped as Sammael impaled him with unbridled force to shock him with fresh splinters of agony which shot through his body to crash with the relentless orgasm. How Sammael held those legs around his waist was a mystery Lucifer had not even the mind to contemplate. Perhaps it was a spell that gripped his ankles, or maybe Sammael had grown an extra pair of arms or a couple of snake tails to bind him against him. Regardless, Maelmorda rode each thrust and wave of pain and bliss with his legs wrapping him tight. Sammael would feel Mael's well pedicured toes curl against each ass cheek every time penetrated him and shoved past all normal or acceptable limits. It was not like Lucifer had not done it to others before, but typically the Morning Star tortured his subjects with brutal overdoses of pleasure, capable of filling them with his own monstrous members with very little pain.. He caused pain to those he wanted to punish.

Between thrusts, as a brief gap between them opened, Mael's arms dropped loose as his sides, his body hence collapsing against the demon trembling for a moment as Sam's chin came to rest over his shoulder. His hands did not rest by Sammael's thighs long for Sammael laced his fingers with his and spread his arms by them. His navel coiled and his cunt and ass cramped down on Sammael's engorged cocks as fresh rushes of excitement perked in his body at having his hands pinned with arms spread to expose him further. Maelmorda captured those urgent kisses with submissive need, his voice mewling against Sammael's tongue like a pleading kitten, at first, but his lusts raged in him as well as his orgasm shot to new heights with Sammael's utter and complete domination of his body, with each ramming thrust of those cocks inside of him, those cruel thrashes of his clit, and every deep throated suck and stroke of his cock inside of that naval orifice of oral delights. All of it milked his orgasms beyond sanity's tolerance and likewise spilled all that pleasure over into Sammael. A vicious cycle it was indeed. The Prince of Demons spread him whorishly tight around those ridiculously huge sex-muscles every time he pounded him and filled him so completely, so cruelly that the devil nearly sobbed to feel him so god damn intimately. It was like having a pair of arms phucking you. Sammael's gut milked his cock of the seemingly endless supply of semen and would not let his male or female orgasms relent. Mael's ass and cunt coated him with that ambrosial blood and with each contact of his lips against his flesh or his own lips, new rushes rippled through his entire body. Every time Maelmorda tried to take control, by kissing him, or setting a rhythm by heaving up and down on him with his hips, Sammael overpowered his attempts to take control. Maelmorda was too sex blown to really realize anymore that Sammael was gradually forcing him to submit through carnal domination, purely physical acts of sexual domination.

Hours passed...eight hours of non-stop phucking...and time was lost to Maelmorda and perhaps Sammael too. All that existed to Maelmorda were the endless explosions of orgasms, the pain, the feeling of everything Sammael did to him, however subtle or violent, which he remained so insanely sensitive to. He lost count of the positions Sammael wrangled him into, only ever permitting his orgasmic state to ebb for the briefest moment, if even that, only to quicken him in moments all over again. Sammael's lusts were tireless, and as much stamina as Lucifer had for it, it was the perpetual tides of body quaking orgasms, crashing with the out-of-body pain, which wore the devil down. It was when Sammael pinned him a second time in the missionary position, with his feet flushed against his shoulders to open him wide and folded his legs backwards with each thrust, that Maelmorda actually broke down sobbing and imploring him in the same breaths. The pain of frontal sodomy was also very intense unless the one doing the ass fucking was very careful, and well...sex and careful did not seem to be in Sammael's vocabulary. Sammael could not make Lucifer loose enough to take the edge off of the pain. He healed as he was being screwed therefore he was always at least as tight as one who freshly lost their virginity and had only been fucked six times since. "Enough...ahhrrah...Sammael...t-time to talk terms...Oh...fucking-god damn jesus christ...So this is wha..." He sucked in a deep breath. "...what I have...to look forward to," his voice raw and husky as he groaned the last words.

If Sammael refused to cut him some slack, Maelmorda would gather what strength he had left and try beating and wrestling Sammael off of him, starting with a reflexive punch to his face. Unfortunately, violence seemed to turn Sammael on, as did overpowering his dark father, and Lucifer could not physically overpower Sammael. Even at his best Lucifer would fail such a contest unless he got lucky,

and Sammael had been sampling his blood the entire time, weakening him very subtly whether intentional or not, and Mael had lost even more blood to those incredible phalluses. If Sammael subdued his endeavor to liberate himself of his sexual domination, Lucifer would slacken his body and just lay there. He would try to bore him to death, albeit he could not control the orgasms Sammael roused in him and drank into himself at once. His body as he lie there would continue to twitch, coil, and convulse while only hints of the agony and pleasure he felt would play on his facial features. If this tactic of trying to bore Sammael into a retreat failed after an hour or so, the devil would wind up imploring Sammael to stop again, so they could talk, admitting that he could not talk in the state he was in. Even that he would have great difficulty relating in a coherent way. Maelmorda was not willing to admit that he did not think he could take anymore without losing his mind, or that the possibility of Sammael actually breaking him into true submission by fucking him was even imaginable. No, it was far too early into the game to even entertain such ridiculous notions...and yet on some level...one buried very deeply in his vast soul, Maelmorda did wonder. The last thing Mael would say on the matter before giving up and waiting Sammael out...Curious as to how long that would take, was; "Beloved Sammael, I think you have the hungriest dicks, mouths and tongues, in Acheron. You are going to tire of me quickly..." he paused to pant as Sammael pumped and stirred himself at once inside of him. "...if you keep this up..." He concluded breathlessly. He played with Sammael's hair as he got up the control to speak coherently for a moment. "Let me fuck you next time...so I can remind you what brutal pleasure is without pain..."

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Sammael's body stiffened when he heard his name pass from those lips that were flawless. His black pools traveled up to that face and even as his body wanted to be all but entered completely inside Mael, he took a few seconds to watch that face it just seemed to mesmerize him. How Mael was able to be this way, with him of all people and to allow him to show him a little of how deep his fiery lusts could run. He couldn't keep the corners of his lips from tugging upwards as he pushed hips upper half into his maker while keeping his hips somewhat away. For this he had drew most of those enormities out of Mael's tastey holes but it would only mean that his own cock would get kind of deep throated by that mouth that had formed in his belly. Tongues, yes not one but two is what it felt like licking and flickering all over Mael's male parts. It may have been two or more tongues, or it might just be one ridiculously skilled large one but the only real way to find out is if one could see. As time escaped them while they escaped in the estacies of each other, Sam's tentiveness to Mael's body never deminished. Not in the least did he spend too much or too little time here and there over the Morning Star's body. Course sex and careful weren't in his list of verbatim, but pain and pleasure were. Perhaps he mingled them too well and the one couldn't be distinguished from the other. But he wasn't trying to seperate the two for Mael. He wanted to show Mael that, and that he choose not to. Just for Mael's enjoyment. Or maybe abuse. The tasks he had been planning on doing that day would have to wait, seeing as how his inner beast was getting all over the place what with having to pleasure Mael the way he wanted to do for him. Sam had his hands full of gripping Mael's thighs, one mouth of that fantastic cock of his and the other mouth suckling painfully hard on the side of his throat when he said no more that it was time to talk of the terms to this deal he had offered. It would take a few moments for the demon of sin to lift his head and level his black seducing eyes on Mael, and when he did he would nip at Mael's lips heatedly. "Maybe," he panted as he leaned over his maker to lightly rest his

forehead against his so that they could both look down in between their compressed and squirming bodies to those inhuman parts of themselves having at the other. "Maybe not," he half panted and half grunted as he felt Mael beginning to struggle and foresaw there was a fight coming. "Just a little more," he said, and he did not mean the growl that crept into it to be so demanding. So the fight would start with that saucy punch to his face? Was Mael even thinking of how much harder that would make his son for him?! Apparently the whole violence and him had slipped his mind. Silly Maelmorda. The hit would cause that head of dark brownish tressles to whip to the side, accompanied by a barely audible laughing sound. Good lord Mael knew all the right buttons to push didn't he? As his body was struck and perhaps pushed and shoved at, they would wrestle a little sideways and then back to where they had been. The movements Mael's body were answered by the unmistakable sound of masocistic groans and affectionate biting at the limbs Mael assulted him with. He took the fight as part of the whole experience rather than Mael's anger at being had this way. It might have been different had he not been fiending to pleasure Mael, and drink of him till he couldn't quite think of anything else without getting annoyed for the interruption to his perverted train of thoughts. "Why Maelmorda, why," he said, so out of breath as he foiled Maelmorda's want of freedom by pressing ever closer to him where they rolled over a few times and then he tightened his arms around him as he sort of clung to him. He would find all the resistance and angst in his maker to be rid of him also a turn on. However with the new pose Lucifer's body, Satan would quirk a brow at that in mid thrust. With the body underneth him going limp as a noodle, his curiosity perked like that of a wolf on the scent of a wounded animal. As Mael became unresponsive, all save those twiches and coils of his body, he would carefully tug him upwards as he withdrew both blood and juice soaked cock's. With the slackened body that belonged to Mael held by their hips in his hands, he would maneuver to hug Mael from behind. And then kind of roll them both so that Sam was on his back on that lush thick fur rugged floor with Mael's back against his chest. Now with Lucifer laying on top of Satan, and those twin veiny throbbing shafts rubbing along their inner thighs, he said in that same out of breath voice he had had from before, "Pain arouses me. Like you, who does not try to hide from it." Those bulbous tips were nudged at the slickened entrances of Mael's holes as he ran his hand up and down Mael's own cock. Starting to stroke him slowly while pushing in those tips first, and then sinking the rest of his monstrous cock's inside Mael quickly as his free arm crossed over Mael's chest to hold his right shoulder. He loved the feel of how Mael didn't deny him anything. He didn't play coy. He was what he was, and it excited and thrilled Sammael to no end that he was able to please the Morning Star the way he had been aching to for ages long past. He suckled on the side of Mael's neck about as hard as his thrusts abruptly became where he bounced him on top of himself where they both were out stretched on those fur rugs. That over mouth formed in his gutt also licked affectionately over the small of Mael's back, nibbling at him feather light and being the only gentle part of Sammael's entire body. "Can you imagine anyone in all creation I would hunger for more," came that smooth as silk voice in Mael's left ear just before he nibbled at his ear lobe, grinding his hips upwards into his in that position they had gotten theirselves into, stroking Lucifer's cock a little faster...

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The things Sammael did to him...It was impossible not to respond. That brief moment of relaxation made his body even more susceptible to the teasing partial extration of his cokks...the oral pulsations of that or those incredible tongues

and mouth on his own phallus. It was all mind numbing and body electrifying. He tried to keep steady, but was quickly losing the reason why. Why...Sammael asked. Why did he want him to stop? Why was he trying to play dead, unsuccessfully we might add? That was the sex intoxicated devil's best guess. Well, wishing to speak was the excuse but the real reason was that Maelmorda was realizing that he was in all kinds of danger here. Not danger in the normal sense either, but the kind that really kicked life to the curb and made you start all over. He could feel himself being dominated, possessed, phucking owned in but one interlude of sex, and why? Because Mael had never, never ever been phucked by his equal before, and here he had met his carnal equal in Sammael. "Why...." Maelmorda breathed in a murmur, hardly aware of his own voice for all the marvels he was feeling. "Because I am falling..." that was as close as he would get at the moment to admit to anything. What was the fallen god falling into? In love, but that would probably be Sammael's last guess. Oh Maelmorda was being abused without a doubt but the secretively masochistic side of the devil savored that, and the fantastic abominations which pleased him all phucking over where most needed, all the while the pain of his size and forcefulness broke through thresholds, battling with the bliss for which was more potent.

It was the hot, dark fudge on top of the butter rum icecream (phuck cherries, Mael hated cherries unless they were inside of a cunt) when Sammael rolled Maelmorda's limp but spasming body up and over on top of him. Mael tried to stay languid, he did, but it was useless when that pair of rawly possessive arms wrapped his chest and his Prince teased those thick branches of throbbing meat just inside of his slippery walls, the quilted rigidness of his body pulsing against Sammael's knobs and girth as they penetrated him. A windstorm of explosions erupted in Maelmorda's naval and spread throughout his body to arch his back with involuntary violence and expell a shattered gasp from his lungs. A cry of bliss strangled by pain sang from Lucifer anon when Sammael thrust his hips up from beneath him to ram his impressive cocks into the abyss of his body and phuck him like no tomorrow would ever come. Those jade mirrors to his soul lit on that hand which gripped his throbbing cock and began to pump, stroke, and squeeze him so deliciously. The sight of his hand on him, then the glimpses of that hellishly worshipful tongue lashing his clit sent a new tide of physical elation roaring through the Morning Star, and of course every ripple, however intense or subtle rushed into Sammael. He could hide nothing of his pleasures from him while his pain Sammael felt as a heaviness, like a huge wave rolled onto the shore or how the body swam before a swoon threatened. It was as equally as intoxicating as the buoyant riptides. It was like phucking heaven and the abyss at once to induce such sensations in Maelmorda when he did not hold back his spirit. He had to with most or drive them insane, but Sammael he knew could not only take it, but drink as much as he had to share. Why had Sammael never proved himself so able to ravish the devil before? Maelmorda imagined that it was because the only time they had ever had sex, he was controlling the situation and Sammael dared not unleash his greatest power of all on him. His natural demonic ability to seduce and without aid of any arcane advantage, make sex thralls, sex junkies of those he pleased and abused. Of course this was a situation where they might become addicted to each other, only Sammael was the master here. Maelmorda had given himself to him as a swap for Morashtar.

In all this the dangers lie. Every time Sammael bore down on his chest to heave him against each thrust, all the while pleasuring every sexual center he owned to stimulate, Maelmorda could see himself falling more and more deeply in love with Satan and giving more and more of himself to him. Love and possession, want and



desire were all the same to Maelmorda. Love was need and possession in the devil's eyes. He knew that becoming his thrall in every true sense of the world was quite in the realm of logic. Sammael had pushed him beyond wanting to defend himself, to hold back when he had refused to stop and continued to exploit him for all he was worth. The way he phucked him in whatever position he took fueled Maelmorda to a sexual rage only when he had pulled him face up on top of him, it was like the final act of; I am in control here bitch, you are mine! Maelmorda's body was so profoundly and tremendously thrilled by the feeling of being so dominated by Sammael's mere physical presence, that he did not want to fight it. It might have felt that he was struggling the way his chest locked against Sammael's arms each time his back and throat arched, and dramatically so whenever Sammael buried his limb sized cocks inside of him. Maelmorda's feet met the floor at Sammael's hips and he began to rock and heave his a\*ss and c\*unt against each upthrust, while his hands molested Satan's body wherever he could reach, gripping hard those instances that jolts of carnal electricity surged through him. When Sammael pinched and tugged on his mushroom-stem hard nipples as if nursing on him with his fingers a feral growl that was rawly carnal rattled in Maelmorda's throat. His nipples were very sensitive and each rub and tug shot bullets of pleasure straight to his clit, the pulsing walls Sammael hammered, and to that extremely erect cock. Sammael would feel the hard palpitations in both male and female sex and the blissful waves that came of it whenever he aroused such sudden or intense pleasures in the devil he phucked so brilliantly. When Maelmorda let slip his guards and tore down the walls which restrained his sexual embodiment, his body hid nothing. His body was a sexual teacher as a stand alone. Sammael hardly needed lessons in sex though. The demon of sin knew things about sex, greed, murder, envy, and all the seven mortal sins as no one else or another thing did. It was when Maelmorda attained another orgasm, the most violent of all yet, that he grew truly feral. He lurched against Sammael, throwing his body against each thrust to shove him even deeper, a fresh spill of aromatic blood spilling on the cock Sammael had buried in his c\*unt as his canal was further ruptured. He twisted around with a shout of, "My equal at last! Phuck me into god damn oblivion! Phucking undo me with your cocks, hands and snaky a\*ss sexy tongues until I am blind and lost in your sex driven beast!" he was nearly roaring and twisted around as he did so to try and mount Sammael. He had not ridden him yet and was wild with the need to, crazed with the need to hump Sammael, KISS him...his mouth craved his tongue with a hot fever hunger. Maelmorda would wind up sobbing hysterically and phucking him violently from where he was if Sammael constrained him, and he would find the Morning Star's strength had returned like lightning with that thunderous need to face him. Sammael would actually have to put up a hell of a fight this time to have his way, unless his way was to permit Maelmorda to eat his cake and have it too. Yes, Maelmorda knew he was in danger of losing himself to Sammael, but at the moment he did not care. He was actually beginning to fancy the idea of being Sammael's sex bunny. "I am impressed already damnit! Impressed that I shall phucking crave you as I have never wanted to phuck another when this is done!!" he howled all the while he shoved, ground and stirred viciously against all those things Sammael entombed in him and him within. Yes, Maelmorda was a hard nut to crack alright. Sammael had broken through his carnal barriers, but breaking his will or mind was another thing altogether, if indeed Sammael had any desire at all to. Perhaps it was enough to be able to phuck him, and control who he phucked, and who phucked him anytime he like?

If Sammael allowed Maelmorda to ride him, he would find himself covered in every possible way by Lucifer, by his new tide of unrelenting orgasms, his c\*unt and a\*ss, a delectable snake-like probe of his own that he would sodomize Sammael with,

the pleasures that appendage would induce incredible, and the kisses...the hungry, worshipful kisses of true love coupled with rabid need, nipples teased with incredibly stimulating tugs and pulses of that mouth when he offered his throat and his awesome blood to Sammael for the taking. His flesh and Sammael's would tangle and rub together in a mingle of all this. If Sammael's body pleaded for pain or pleasure or both, Lucifer would read him by how he moved, how he responded and oblige him with the perfect blend of what he needed. His serpentine phallus would engorge and lengthen and fill him up until he felt like he would burst, as Sammael did him, only the way Lucifer phucked, even with massive members, harnessed excessive pleasures by teasing, probing, stirring and thrusting in just the right manners and rhythms, beit hard, violent, or just plain sexy and feverish with love. If Sammael opened a c\*unt for him he would phuck and thrash that too.

If Sammael however maintained his bridle of control over Lucifer, the devil would continue to phuck him oh so like a wild thing trying to break loose of its tethers.

"Damnit...cum in me, Sammael...why won't you cum?" the devil would plead either way at last. "I need to feel your hot seeds in me...What good am I to you if I cannot make you cum?!" he pleaded, sobbed and shouted in the same string of vocal breaths. Lucifer was that way...hard to make cum, but Sammael had managed it with all too relative ease and kept him orgasming. It made Maelmorda wonder. His own release always resulted in tremendous orgasms in others, but for over nine hours now, Sammael had not once orgasmed! What the phuck was with him??! Maybe he had not met his sexual equal, but his better. That notion crushed the devil's pride and ego and he clung to Sammael. "I can take the sex, anything you can dish out...but I cannot take your holding back on me. Release yourself Sammael...climb into this ruthless state of perpetual orgasms with me...please..." His voice, the way his body moved as he implored him to climax was pure, raw sexy with an overdose of seduction and need.

If Maelmorda had not been so oblivious to the inner workings taking place inside of his own body, he would have told Sammael to keep holding back and not to cum unless he did so on his belly or in his mouth. Oh yeah, Mael would get around to deep throating him eventually and introducing him to his oral talents. As it was, the rapidness and perpetuation of his orgasms had made the female embodiment he had awakened in himself quite fertile. Maelmorda was neither male or female in reality, he was both, one or the other, or even none, as he chose to make himself. He was a creature of spirit and chaos and of making his own reality, only chaos shaped things its own way as well. If Sammael had ever wanted to phuck a tiger, or whatever, he could find out what it was like through Mael. Presently Mael had become fertile to Sammael because chaos dictated it should be so. A dominant and sexual equal or better meant incredible offspring. The instinctual triggers in Maelmorda's body had told his flawless dna that, whereof those activated strands relayed the message to the female parts of his body, and presto. Now those ripe eggs were just waiting for Sammael's extremely fertile semen to complete the process. It was chaos at its best. Maelmorda did not feel it taking place because he was so sex drunk, and his arousal had even been intensified by that instinctual need to procreate which all creatures able have. Hopefully Sammael noticed, sensed it, felt the slight cushy swelling in his abdomen that was not there before, since Maelmorda did not. Maelmorda had never been pregnant and he would not fancy the thought either. He had too much male pride, regardless of his gender bender attributes. At least it would be quick. Maelmorda and Sammael were dark gods

after all. Such offspring developed very rapidly.

Of course, maybe Sammael had counted on that happening, maybe he knew something Maelmorda did not about himself, or was aware of his fertile state but had no notion of telling Maelmorda. Maybe he wanted to knock him up with a silly grin on his face and surprise him! Or maybe Sammael was as clueless as Maelmorda was; who knew. Maybe if he did knock Mael up, he would just want to eat the thing, or love it to bits as a demon god knew how to love; 'your ass is mine'. The hours ahead would tell or they wouldn't.

Whatever the case, on top backwards or forwards, underneath or upside plucking down; Maelmorda was desperate to make him cum and would plead with him to tell him how to accomplish that feat if he did not fill him with his fiery cum and fast!! He needed desperately to feel their orgasms crashing together...to feel the force of Sammael's orgasms in his body. He could imagine nothing more sublime. If Sammael did not orgasm soon, Maelmorda would go back to being a limp dick, he would relent to total lethargy and mean it this time. His pride would make it so. Whether he could force that total submission against Sammael even with his pride tangled up remained to be seen however.

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There may have been depths to him that only a privileged few and the Morning Star knew of. Or quite possibly, and perhaps by some twist of fate, soon to be revealed places in the dark haired demon that nobody could even conceive of. Who knew the inner workings of the inner heart than their possessor? Who could have known that Mael was not the only one revealing the unseen and unheard of? How was anyone to foresee that there was in fact a tenderness just as extreme as roughness underlying everything the two shared throughout the time that had passed, being counted by some as hours and by others as something else. The whole event was unexpected, but not regretted. As much as he was more than willing to please Maelmorda above all others, and maybe beyond anyone else's abilities, there was that now present fact that he had indeed been restraining himself from filling both of Mael's tasty holes of his hot juices. Through all those body shaking orgasms that had his arms tightening around the body he was fiending for and using every single bit of his will power not to succumb to the delicious wave of bliss that threatened to do him in every time Mael reached that limit. It was so he could watch Mael in his current perverted state without getting distracted by his own body's insane needs to practically die in him, or with him, from the abuse and how mouth watering it was. Course he couldn't hold out forever. It was the Morning Star after all. Even upon first entering that devilishly handsome body he had fought the urge to spill that sticky fluid in Mael's awaiting canals. Yet in time his will power to pleasure his maker to unimaginable heights crept away from him little by little, just like his inner beast got away from him to have Mael every way possible. So it was when the Morning Star lit up with what felt like a renewed source of energy and demanded as well as fought his way to twist sideways to get on top of him that it was the first time he relented to anything that his Father asked for. His brows drew together as his arms squeezed Mael one good time before he couldn't hold him still anymore, and just let the one true Devil do as he wished. Well, what Sam wished for him too but he didn't say as such.

"One could only hope for such thin-ngs," he said, and then grunted on the last word as the last bit of his self control was leaving him and in it's place rose those

tantalizing shockwaves of both pain and pleasure that Mael offered so perfectly blended. To his unending horror, it was the gentler side of Mael that set him on fire more than the ecstatic agony he had shown him from the start. He would have cursed, had he not abruptly felt like he too was being impaled on something most achingly sweet and hard. With his hands gripping Mael's hips, and his own bucking upwards with increasing force and speed, he watched from behind a few brownish black curls at the trembling his body was now doing in response to Mael's new entrance to his body. It was like clockwork now that he had a part of Mael inside him, thrusting along with himself as they screwed each other towards senselessness and possible brain damage, but only for a second. Sam found the pressure in both of those arm-sized cocks of his too great to bare much longer, and the fresh electrifying sensations that Maelmorda sent rippling through him just from entering his arse the way he had caused his chest to tighten and his insides to tense up like crazy around that snaky appendage. To that statement of needing to feel him getting off too, Sam would leave his left hand gripping Maelmorda's hip firmly but move his right to catch his Father over the back of his neck to lightly tug him downwards to him. If Maelmorda let him tug him downwards with those fingers kneading at the flesh of his neck, Sam would run those lips over his own as he said, so out of breath that it sounded as if he were running for his very life,

"Do not be gentle with me Morning Star... Save that for som... uhn... someone else." But why would he voice such a thing when he was feeling that hand from Maelmorda's hip to take one of his hands and guide it down to a newly made sweet spot for Maelmorda's molestation? Even as Sam said it he had difficulty keeping his eyes from closing and his body from arching upwards into each and every one of Maelmorda's grindings. Especially when Maelmorda was more soft with him, gentle. Kind, even. It would seem Sammael spoke a warning to Maelmorda but, it was empty and meaningless because he couldn't have acted on it even if he had wanted to now. Or ever for that matter. He said something else again, perhaps a "no" or maybe it had been "not like that, damnit!" but all his words became nothing more than out of breath moans as he started to fight with Maelmorda like a rape victim. So cute were his bites that he delivered to the Morning Star's chest to feed from him, however only for a second before his Father could feel him squirming with uncontrollable need underneath him. Had anyone ever made Satan cum before, would be the question to entertain now what with all how he became rougher with Maelmorda when he felt that all too sexiness stir inside his needy holes and burn through his veins. His mind was barely thinking of how Maelmorda implored him to fill him with his hot seed. He was too tangled up in his own urges to do it anyways, and the little gut instinct that drove him to please him every way possible. Now he had started to say something as he pushed four of the Morning Star's fingers inside that cunt he had made, gnawing at his chest as he did so, when he felt with one of those demonic tongues in his gut that were suckling like a bunch of high priced and highly capable hookers on Maelmorda's own cock(s) the slight difference in his belly. At first he thought it was a hallucination and that his sex hazed mind was not all there anymore. But the more he pushed into Maelmorda, and the more he felt those painfully awesome tightness of that body bouncing on both of his cock's, he thought otherwise. What was this? Those black eyes swiveled up to Maelmorda's own, and he saw nothing of recognition in them. None that he could see anyway what with being so obsessed with wanting to phuck him silly. It was subtle at the begging that he sensed something was different. Something had changed in Mael, whether it was his doing or Maelmorda's was yet to be known. So if the Morning Star didn't say anything about it, then he sure as shyte wouldn't. Cause Sammael knew the ins and outs of the body like only he could. Completely perverted and without a shred of

remorse. What he was feeling rub against his own hard stomach was not strictly dicky. And oh how he did love the ladies and their cushy plushieness, very bite worthy and lickable. With that want being voiced of needing to be filled with his seed, that softening in his body, and not to mention the loss of his will power not to give in would prove to be his final undoing. But he would be pushed even faster to that first of numerous climax's if Maelmorda choose to ignore his raspy threat and showed him the far more gentler side of carnal acts. It wasn't that Sammael couldn't be soft, it was just he couldn't be soft with Lucifer without just exploding everywhere and working to smother the both of them with his orgasms. However it would prove futile either way to fend off that mounting blissful inner ache he had for the Morning Star. Be it the fondling of his dripping cunt that pulsed for every attention given to it, or the tensing up of his ass at each stroke made into it, it didn't matter anymore as Satan's eyes flew open with a start. If Maelmorda decided not to be kinder to his son's rough and hungry ways that was fine. Sammael would still be pushed to filling him with that hot semen in just a little while longer after Lucifer's asking for it. It would have just made him come faster if Maelmorda had chosen to go that route with his little beast of a son was all, and oh how painful it was going to be if he did. He groaned so loud and bestial like that it caused the very floor they rolled around on to quake, with a few nails raking down the outer side of Maelmorda's left thigh, he sat up to curl both of his arms around the Morning Star and nearly suffocate him with how tight he held him close to his chest as both those ravenous cock's and cunt started to shoot and spill ungodly amounts of hot cum inside the body he had wanted since before he could remember. With one hand gripping an ass cheek and the other on the back of Maelmorda's head, he tilted his head upwards to seek out those plush pinks to press his own to them in the most needy kiss he had ever given to someone in his entire long life, moaning so loudly as he did. His hips moved to continue bouncing Lucifer on his lap, driving those twin members in and out of that brow raising fine ass and cunt till his entire body started to shake and his teeth clamped down on Maelmorda's lower lip.

The muscles in his arms tensed like the one in his gut, his ass hole and cunt squeezing ridiculously tight around anything Lucifer filled them with if he was at the time. "Maelmorda, I ca..." Lost as that sentence became, his sense of needing to desperately pour every part of himself into smothering Lucifer was not. His own tongue was cut from just how sharp his teeth became with his urge to both hurt and please his Father, and this slipped out to lick over Mael's chin before he licked it clean; then laying his lips to the side of his maker's throat to suckle damn near like a starving vampire, but without breaking the skin of course. Nipping at Maelmorda's flawless skin, nuzzling hard at the spots he did bite him, so out of breath again as his thrusts into the Morning Star suddenly grew erratic and his eyes filled with lust. It was as if Lucifer had opened a flood gate of something most pure and raw within Satan. It didn't hammer, but thundered through him to smash through this corporeal form he took to wrap around Maelmorda with its literal insatiable appetite. A few minutes of that coming and it was leaking out of Maelmorda's holes, drizzling down those two dual cock's and from that feminine spot in no way a mere human could. But it didn't stop there, he continued to come inside Maelmorda as hard as his grindings were becoming along with that gut opening that he deep throated the Morning Star's cock in. He paid extra care to slip one of those tongues down south into Maelmorda's cunt, even if he had to force it into that wet entrance with his cock. Rolling over Lucifer's clit all the while he flickered around his own cock where it was buried so deep within that incomprehensible space in the Morning Star's body, and then pushing that too inside

so he could taste what Maelmorda's pussy was like. In doing so, and Sammael having been known to be sick and perverted as he was, he would capture Maelmorda's lips so that they could both for a split second know just what it was Lucifer's puussy tasted like from the tongue in Sammael's mouth entering Maelmorda's to coil around his oral muscle in there. Heh. Had Satan known ahead of time what would take place in Lucifer's body? Had he planned all along to do this, just to have this result? Was he doing this to hurt Maelmorda in the all too near future? Or was he doing this because deep down he wanted something that he thought only Maelmorda could show him? Were Sammael's wants so unattainable? Maybe, maybe not. Question was now, just what the piss were his wants?

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When had Maelmorda last been physically unchained like this? It had never happened, not like this. Sammael had unchained him quite unexpectedly and what a phenomenal surprise it was to the Morning Star and Sammael both. What was Sammael planning? The devil was not even thinking about it. All of his awareness was encapsulated by the physical and emotional sensations Sammael awakened in him and carried to merciless elevations. Maelmorda felt truly liberated when Sammael permitted him to straddle that lap and all the magnificence it contained. Oh but the Morning Star's passion could be ever so violent without causing but the most exquisite surges of pain, like creeping waves engulfed by sheer pleasure rather than splinters, and so when Sammael begged him not be gentle; he breathed in an intoxicated gasp and pushed his independent member oh so deep inside of that exquisitely tight ass to fuck him with delirious plunges of depth rooting bliss. Pain, oh no, he did not want to cover him with agony, only the most wonderful kind of pain, the kind the body could not even discriminate as pain. It was perhaps Maelmorda's way of retaliating, for did he not receive enough physical punishment for them both and shock Sammael with those waves as well? No, Lucifer wanted to undo Sammael with ridiculous pleasures, torturous and excruciating ecstasy. Did this not blend them oh so perfectly, bring the sexual chaos in them both to berserk summits of carnal intrepidity? Such daring was only in devils of their like and Mael's only hope of overwhelming Sammael sexually in return. Oh that delicious cunt the Prince of Demons opened up to him and led eager fingers to. How he thrashed that clit with deep pressure on that palpitating node and wedged his other hand beneath him to thrust fingers inside those taut cushions then finger fuck him deliriously to send explosive spasms through his beloved demon. Fingers were quickly replaced with a third phallus which extended directly from his flesh penetrate that slit of Sammael's and spread it ever wider and deeper each time he rose and heaved on top of Sammael. Oh, there were so many sexual secrets Maelmorda had yet to share with Sammael which only the future would reveal that had nothing to do with sprouting extra goodies from his flesh. Their bodies so completely filled and gripped by one another, Maelmorda's ass and cunt began to shiver against Sammael's twin pair of cocks strangely, like tidal vibrators to increase the pleasure dramatically. Those same odd bizarre vibrations began to ripples from his cocks as well as he rode him furiously without causing him but the mildest pangs of pain despite how he swelled inside of him to make those walls clenching him ever so rigid. When Sammael paid Maelmorda that glance as he felt something different in the morning star, beside those pulsating vibrations, all he would see in the Morning Star's eyes was euphoria, sexual awe, and adoration; yes adoration. Mael had never made it a secret to Sammael that he loved him but perhaps until now Maelmorda had not know how deeply. Sex and love like need and possession were

intricately entwined, particularly in hellish kinds. A devilish tongue replaced his fingers to flicker and thrash Sammael's clit so that he could touch and caress his carnal master and as their bodies pressed together with crushing embrace his very nipples met Sammael's as oral manifestations which nursed deeply on those pert teats. Oh but it was nothing seen, only felt, for if Maelmorda's chest should part from his, his nipples would appear quite normal, rigid as all hell but normal.

Breaths leapt and panted each time Sammael introduced a fresh feeling and he squirmed against him as those uncontrollable spasms quaked through him oh so constant as the ebb and flow of the ocean's tides. He groaned deeply as he spread his ass with his hand for even deeper penetrations. Quite often cries and wails of shattered ecstasy lifted from the morning like a primal song to fill the chamber. When Sammael captured Maelmorda's lips in that steaming kiss the Morning Star, son of chaos returned it with love sick and intoxicated delirium; feverish, stunning passion, and unfathomable, aching need. His voice mewled against their meshing tongues with such covetous need that his voice pinched as if pained, and such wonderful desire was painful the way it tugged and ripped at the heart. When Sammael bit down on his lip his head rocked back, lips parted blissfully to that sort of beautiful, mild pain, and he pulled against the bite with each fucking lurch of his body while his tongue lapped at Sammael's upper lip.

When his lips parted from his to speak, his breath warm against his mouth as he had barely withdrawn, still brushed against his soft buds of pinker flesh, Lucifer's gaze weighed heavy with sex wasted gravity on his Prince. 'I can't?' He began to say? There was something he was afraid to do, but why? What could Sammael possibly be afraid of? Whatever it was he seemed to get over it quickly as those beautiful hips of the devil's rock and rolled, heaved and ground against that luscious lap to fuck every part of him with no bars held. Oh how deeply his phalluses were buried inside of his ass, cunt and oral cavity, each thrust and unbridled heave pumping Sammael as deeply as the demon penetrated him. Mael's eyes rolled drunkenly as Sammael lapped the blood his own tongue had drizzled on his chin and arched his throat to the heavy necking with a lung rattling groan. Oh but when the demon unleashed his orgasm to fill every orifice with his cum and even spill his cunt and ass over with his hot seed, Lucifer sobbed with elation and clung to him, fucking all the more wildly, even losing control to feel those heart pounding pulsations inside of his body and Sammael's own angelic quickening, for be he a demon now by his fall his shared riptides were even more potent than before. When Sammael's thrusts grew erratic and he began to lurch as he finally came undone; Lucifer eagerly bridled his Lord's lost control by pitching his body into an insanely hungry rhythm which only amplified their insatiable orgasms' collisions. The devil's back arched wildly as that tongue penetrated his cu\*nt with Sammael's cock and he howled madly at the feeling of Sammael's extra tongue coiling his own cock inside of him to pulse those walls he swelled and stretched ever more. Those hands that had been feeling him all over gripped onto both of Sammael's hips and claws bit into his flesh to hang onto him for dear life as he body was rocked with virulent shudders that he could no more control than those relentless orgasm which made his head spin and his body reel with every feral crashing together of their bodies. It was as if through raw need and hunger their bodies tried to outdo each other, but they just couldn't, instead they become as one sexual organism in two bodies. Life sprung in Maelmorda womb to spoil its virginity, and so Sammael had taken all but one thing that was virgin to them both. The life which Sammael sparked with those fertile and so seldom experienced seeds an incarnation of Sammael's determination and Maelmorda's logic, with the

intelligence of them both. This was a being of pure logic and will.

Oh how tempted Maelmorda was to cover Sammael over and imbed him with his carnal embodiment now, make them one instead of two, but he restrained himself. He wanted to save that secret for him for later. That kiss Sammael claimed from him which was flavored by the tongue still buried inside of him, revealed to Sammael just how severely he had unraveled the Morning Star and betrayed much the same to the Morning Star about Sammael. It was the first time he had ever tasted himself and growling he sucked hard on Sammael's tongue but he could not stop the shivering of his tongue against that delectable muscle, which now mingled their flavors together, nor the tremors and intense convulsions which rolled through his body, chest cavity, gut and navel. The chamber sank away to Maelmorda's vision and nothing and no one existed but he and Sammael, but that was all in his head, a result of those orgasms exploding through them and from one to the other like rolling booms of thunder that never ended.

Someone then entered the room. He was unaware of his presence at first, for the room was no longer there was it? Not the floor which scraped him with nose nails he was oblivious to, not the walls, nor the furniture, not even that door Cirgoth raced through to advance and halt within dangerous proximity of the two orgasm fraught devils, maker and Prometheus, thrall and master. Marsol he did not notice at all as he entered cautiously, far more wisely than his lover. "Stop! You must stop this now! You have to kill it! You have to kill it NOW!! Before it is too late!" Cirgoth shouted like a mad man.

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Marsol's Best Men - #  
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Marsol had learned to forgive with time, but to forgive so easily well he might have gotten that from the green eyed angel. Or maybe his time spent with his own had done it? The desert creature had a vague idea as to the Raven's affection's and how they at times could be perceived by someone else as far beyond friendly. But he did so love his tribe and the people within the desert in his own way. Yet that friendly love appeared to be tested every time Wyrvaust's frame was too close and his hands wandered too far. What he might have thought was a simple hug, may have came off as something else entirely for the Raven. He was either absentminded about the slight arching of the Raven's neck when he let his lips linger a little longer then necessary, or he just didn't care to think about it. Or the way his fingers felt the muscles underneath Wyrvaust's clothing constrict. The dragon in him had been distracted by the taste of the Raven's blood still in his mouth as he first intercepted the unfortunate news of Nic not being where he had hoped he would be. And then even mere moments after that he felt his middle rumbling with laughter that spilled from Wyrvaust and how his old friend spoke not of that third, but first person. He saw the more then just a little confused expression on Anna's face where she had come to sit beside them, and couldn't help but laugh a little too. Although he had not told Wyrvaust out right that he had indeed wished to bond and mark him, he did not regret it. His mark was not given out so freely, and few if any ever had received such a thing. He had held his friend through the height of that pain that burned within him, but he had no thought as to wanting it to be lesser for him. Marsol wanted Wyrvaust to know what it felt like. To feel what



possibly very few if no one else ever had. Most of all, he wanted Wyrvaust to understand that he would never let him go. Not now or ever. It was a mixture of love and pride some would say. A part of him had a thought that for a fleeting second the Raven would resent him not asking beforehand. But that thought would pass when the Raven spoke of how well he felt, and then delivered such a kiss as to sort of catch the dragon blooded one off guard with just the force behind it. There was a side of him that actually felt surprise at how Wyrvaust didn't end it but rather left it up to him. Now a collision of thoughts and feelings would take place within him, some bad. Others not so bad. But a pair of hands would come up to the Raven's shoulders regardless and give a light but firm shoving away so as to break such a heated display of affections. It was funny how at the same time that he pushed Wyrvaust away that Gilriael's cry reached him and it just added to the push, turning it from light and airy to a slightly forceful one. One he had not intended and one that would send Wyrvaust down those stone steps had his hands not went downwards to catch his friend by the waist with one hand full of the Raven's robes and the other squeezing their side. Those amber pools then darkened as he pulled Wyrvaust back to sit on the step, yet he himself stood and took a step down them, one bare foot being placed in between Wyrvaust's legs as he moved away to pace through the dirt. He had also received Jedah's news and it just turned his once good mood upside down. Several minutes passed before he spoke, and when he did his tone was a very irritated one.

"Cirgoth left Gilriael in a leap, and he won't be coming home," he said, his brows furrowing as his right hand clenched into a fist, "and Niculaie is not in the jail as informed, but taken and to where no one knows." Which was a lie; He knew exactly where Mekkor's progeny was, he just didn't want to say it. He wouldn't bother hiding the truth from Anna either, but it made his mood all the worse to see the hurt her blue eyes now held from his words.

"What? Why is he in jail? Father, Father what has he done," Anna asked, standing from the step she had been sitting on beside Wyrvaust, her hands gathering bits and parts of her robes as she did.

"For taking the lives of men, Anna. He has killed people."

"No, he couldn't. He would never. He... He only does what you ask him to."

"He has not been here in months my child, and he has been in the company of those I would sooner see dead than keep."

"Nic isn't a bad person! Father you must believe this."

"Niculaie is a demon, and he is as bad as he allows himself to be. Just like I." Her brows raised, taking a few steps sideways on the stone she stood on.

"Yes, me and others like me." He then moved towards her.

"Did you turn him? Did you make him a demon?" She moved sideways a little more.

"No, Anna I was not the one whom made him what he is. But welcome him into our home I did. And now he is among his own clan or worse."

"So we'll get him back," she said, all too quickly as her shorter frame was overshadowed by Marsol's taller one, "if we take horses we can g-,"

"Anna stop," he cut in, placing his hands on her shoulders, and not moving them even though she had started to squirm, "he may already be beyond saving, and this you must come to terms with before we seek him out."

"What are you saying?! This is Nic we're talking about. He isn't capable of whatever it is you speak of, Father let go of me. Father!"

As the human became emotional and fought the dragon's embrace, the desert creature could only feel sympathy for how little she knew of the world and the evils living in it. While the girl pushed and shoved, and even begun to curse at him, he would whisper something small and quaint over the top of her head. In the next instant the girl's body would abruptly go slack and he would have to catch her and hold her against the front of him as he spoke to Wyrvaust of the things he knew. But not those that bothered him. He would rather spare the Raven his own heart's discontent and deal with it himself, even if he wasn't sure how. A female demon slave that had served him for many a year came into the chambers after being called, and took the human away to carry her back to her own living quarters. Marsol then turned back to Wyrvaust to ask his friend, "Is it wrong of me to not go after him? To let him find what he searches for?" Not that he would. He just wasn't sure he had it in him to not find Cirgoth as quickly as possible, beat the bloody snot out of him and then drag him back home. The idea actually made him laugh silently. A disgruntled housewife is what that thought was he figured, a little perturbed by it.

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The shove that broke the kiss and spilled Wyrvaust down several steps caught him off guard, but he had no sooner began that tumble when Marsol snatched him up and pulled him back to that wide step again. Something inside of him plunged as confusion overtook his comely facial features which shot upward for a moment as Marsol stepped between his legs. He was sure he had gone too far and Marsol was letting him know. His mind and heart did not tangle for long for as Marsol spoke; his dark eyes, so like the desert at night, fixated on his Lord as he reported that Cirgoth and Niculaie had gone astray. Wyrvaust heaved a breath which came from the frustration he aimed at himself. Marsol had many to look after and to spread his heart around to. Wyrvaust had only Marsol, Arilwen, and Anwarr II, and he rather liked it that way. Cirgoth he had never trusted, and not because he believed he was capable of treachery or deceit, but because angels were plain trouble in his experience, wanted by too many in the highest and lowest of places. The sons he had given Marsol were beautiful but troubled as well. They were desperate to protect their progen father, even young as they were, and Cirgoth was independent and willful as a Mumaak, which was a desert mammoth. He waited to speak, mulling these things over while Marsol dealt with a very upset and naive Anna. The Raven's gaze fell in the way of his contemplations and what he overheard as he confronted his daughter. Niculaie was Mekkor's, he had chosen that path for himself, and the most evil of all Mekkor was Sammael's, and that meant that Nic was trouble too. He glanced at his Lord. Marsol had never feared trouble, though had he? He faced it down like the dragon he was and most times chewed it to bits and spat it out like flem. Wyrvaust could not help being protective of Marsol, anymore than Marsol could him. At length Marsol arrested his attention and his dark pools of logical insanity to solicit his advice. Wyrvaust thought for a moment, his eyes twitching slightly as he decided to speak as one who placed himself in Marsol's shoes and at

once confide what he felt.

"Believes the Raven Marsol knows his servant has never trusted Cirgoth's presence here. Divine beings are what they are, no matter how far they fall, and as such are chained to fate, often a dark one. But if the Raven stood where his master does now, he would either let him go, forever, or claim him as a bird can only be claimed. He would retrieve the sword bearer and enslave him so tightly that joy and contentment is all he could ever feel. A demon's stance would the Raven take, for freedom can never be in a divine one's grasp. It is sad, but true. If not tied to one demon or another, chained to inexplicable fates are the birds which they cannot control. Lost fledglings are they, ever seeking a home which no longer exists to them. A place for them must be forced, or forever shall they wander lost, no other way is there that the Raven knows."

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Marsol was not pleased at all with what he caught from all directions. From Gilriael, Jedah and most of all the logic in Wyrvaust's words. It had started to make his head hurt a little. He had paced, all the way around that long stretch of stone piling that had created steps to a top flat part where he laid on when in his full dragon form. As the Raven spoke and the dragon listened, the air within the chamber heated just a few degrees. He was about to walk by Wyrvaust again when he said he himself knew no other way to keep such birds content other than slavery. He felt all things had their placement. Even slavery wasn't such a bad thing when used correctly, although that in itself was irony. But a part of him simply wanted to avoid caging the bird that way. Granted the rest of him was all too eager to induce that bond with the father of his children, course that sounded funny didn't it? There was a down side to that, Marsol could feel it in the core of his being. That he might not just want to chain Cirgoth to himself, but to go even further. To what extent he wouldn't allow himself to think about right now but he knew himself just as sure as he knew the deserts ridges and the creatures living in them. Cirgoth tempted so much in him, but none so hard to control than his darker side. He found it often barely within his grasp to not consume him the way he heard the angel sometimes murmur to him to do, when in the height of their sweetest of surrenders or just eating a normal meal with their sons, or others of the tribe. It may have been the darkness in his soul that wished nothing more then to chain Cirgoth to him completely, but it was the dragon in him that vied to let the bird keep his freedom and wandering ways; that wanted his most loved of all to know no bounds and to run as far and fast as his heart's content. Marsol knew no confinement. His walls were the wide open spaces of the desert. His ceiling was the sky and her tiny glittering smiles in her hair. The wind was his only companion when he flew, or the sand was the only tall tale of his passing. So he wished no such thing for Cirgoth. It was some time that he was quiet. Standing just a foot or two in front of Wyrvaust with his arms crossed over his chest and his face upturned to the roofless ceiling. From where they were by the stone piles used for steps, they could see the sky outside once they looked past the fiery cave walls above and the black smoke being generated from the lava below. But again, he was just using those thoughts as excuses from what he really wanted, and knew he had to do. With the faintest of frowns, he sighed.

"You are as wise as you are kind old friend," he told Wyrvaust, half turning to give him a smile while he kept his arms crossed over his chest. Though he told

Gilriael to cancel his pursuit and to return to his previous engagements he had had before taking up this task, he thanked the Bard for having kept on the angels trail for so long and that it was very pleasing to see him in action, even if he hadn't particularly done anything special. Or had Gilriael? He ordered a servant to bring him his boots, and his sword and daggers. He was taking weapons, but why?

"I know you have many a thing to tend to but, thank you. For everything you do for this tribe," he commended Wyrvaust even as he gathered all those tumbling emotions in him, putting them to good use as he searched for Cirgoth through every single ability he had. Whichever it took or if it took everything in him, he would find the angel. Somehow the dragon would find his angel, if and when he did he would bid Wyrvaust to return to his mate before he disappeared in a most angry burst of flames and shadows to go after the one person he was sure would be the death of him if he let them go.

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Wyrvaust had expected his words to dismay his Lord and hated that he had to be the one to disturb him. It was a terrible truth after all. The demon bowed his head to Marsol when he complimented his wisdom. "He is only as wise as his teachers, My Lord." Marsol, the world around him, and experience were his mentors.

When Wyrvaust saw that his master was preparing to leave, and armed himself, his brow knitted. "My Lord, permit thy servant to accompany thee. Great though the Hell Raptor Lord be, he should have a man at his back. If not me, than choose another as able," he implored. If Marsol permitted it, Wyrvaust would accompany him and obey his every order doing so. If he chose another Wyrvaust would return to his lair and his wife as commanded, but if his Lord chose to go alone, Wyrvaust would be a bundle of nerves in Arilwen's presence until Marsol returned safely.

When Marsol located Cirgoth, able to break through the angel's doused presence, his shadow had already fallen over Sammael's palatial estate in the desert oasis and by the time Marsol got a lock on him, he was approaching what looked like the main entry. If the place was not warded, or existing wards bypassed him, and the door was unlocked, he would enter of his own volition. If he could not enter uninvited, he would knock, which would leave him standing there, perhaps long enough for Marsol to catch up to him. The angel tried to steady his hammering heart and high nerves in the meantime regardless. He truly believed that Sammael was not the monster he was out to be, but the monster others made him. Cirgoth had seen it before. If someone was treated like a monster long enough, they became one.

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Marsol was tying a lengthy bit of cord tighter around the tops of his boots when Wyrvaust implored him to take someone with him. The desert creature paused in the last tie of his left boot. He seemed to consider something, or maybe he was just thinking on what Wyrvaust had said. Even if he had bathed, his unruly tangle of thick dark hair and scruffiness would have still remained. It was not like him for his actions to be so impulsive as he felt they were right now while his body took to moving again to secure his broadsword at his side. The favored dagger rested just underneath his sword. With two other daggers, though shorter in length, bound in deer hide sheaths over his outer thighs. "This will not be for any other," he said. His frame now complete with the few weapons he let himself carry, the

clothing with which to hang such objects from, and the slight nagging sensation in the back of his head. "If I am in need of a man to have at my back, you'll have that call," he told the Raven, and it was the truth. With a point in the general direction of his lair and a fond but firm "Go." the chieftain would leave his fellow clansman to walk into and through that fiery path that would deliver him to a place he had not expected to be. There was no one standing there, and from where he stood several yards from the open front door, he recognized footprints in the sand leading to them. To his dismay, his amber pools jumped up the front entrance of a certain manor spreading before the oasis, then that nagging sensation in the back of his head was finally understood.

Whatever manner of wards and protective barrier's that may or may not have been placed over Sammael's little oasis, they did not activate upon Cirgoth's entrance into his domain. Quite the contrary, Cirgoth was always welcome in Sammael's house. Odd as it was. Or maybe it was just tactical? Marsol on the other hand, well he would have been repelled except for the condition of such wards permitting Cirgoth complete and utter entry to all but a few of Sammael's grounds. So long as Cirgoth was on the premises, Marsol could also enter. Should Cirgoth decide to leave, Marsol would be hit with all the wards that were in place, along with a slew of other nasty ones that had been made especially for Marsol alone. Those of which were very damaging, even fatal to Marsol just on the principal that all of those contain ice elements. "Cirgoth," he shouted before he rushed inside the open doors after following the set of foot prints in the sand.

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There was no question that Wyrvaust missed his wife so he had the comfort of his beloved to sooth his worries while Marsol was off on his own in the dangerous world of chasing after Cirgoth. The demon slipped into shadows to vacate Marsol's enormous chamber and out of the darkness again to emerge in the fountain chamber. The water acted like an air conditioner which not only cooled the already cool, underground air, but humidified it. He walked to the fountain and held his hand out cupped to let the cold artesian water fill it then drank it. He repeated the process until his thirst was satisfied. Hence he meandered through the haven until he found his wife. Sitting or standing, he swept around behind her and coiled her in his arms to steal tender kisses from her throat before he spoke gently to her. "The Raven feels often as though he has caged his beloved and oh so beautiful swan and yet advises he, his Lord to make, this same painful decision with the bird he adores. Wonders he if his wife feels imprisoned. Such dangers have found us in the desert when we roamed in the shape of powerful demons. How long shall these fears hold us captive? What dreams does the Raven crush which Arilwen holds dear in her heart?" He trembled against her and held her tight. "No wish has the Raven to bury he and the ones he loves in stone walls 'neath the sands and wide places above. Misses he the hot wind of day and the chill wind of night on his face, the warm hand in his as his beauty walks at his side to explore the secrets of the desert. Am I not powerful? Have I not always a gateway of escape at hand if danger threatens? Let us walk free in the wilds again and meet with the tribes who still control their own destinies. With our son let us embark and become one with the desert and her peoples, and camp in dark hours where we will. Let us make love with the endless plane of the sky and stars above us. Would this please Arilwen, or has she another dream she would have fulfilled?" Some freedom with him as his family's guard is what he was offering. He truly missed being Marsol's eyes and ears by simply roaming. Unlike Cirgoth he would avoid danger however and answer to

Marsol's every beck and call. He had always roamed and stayed safe but for that one incident with Mekkor. He would guard against such an invasion again.

Cirgoth made his way through that palace where the corridors and doorways were wide. It had a definite atmosphere of air and space, even ironically, of freedom. Perhaps Sammael's freedom from a world encapsulated beneath the ground where only the barren lands stood between the middle kingdom and Acheron? What was the strange light source which bathed the barrens? Was it ever even night there? Or were the Barren Lands day and Acheron the night? Oddly Cirgoth had nailed the night and day aspect as his mind wandered with his feet through those open aired corridors. He peered past this threshold and that, every arched doorway he passed standing open. He came at length to the end of the hall of stopped dead at the vision which captured his eyes. The last thing he had expected to see was Sammael and Maelmorda getting it on. Sammael of course knew he was coming before he ever reached the door. He backed away then turned and withdrew down the hall. He would not interrupt something so personal, particularly when it was taking place between two of the most powerful persons known. He made his way to a very comfortable bench, which was as much a couch as a bed as a bench, the furs and mats covering soft beneath him when he sat down. He would wait until Sammael was ready to receive him and meanwhile pondered what he would say to the devil. As Acheron's prince he was that, the devil. It was doubtful that whatever Cirgoth planned to say would pan out. One could plan all they liked but conversation took turns of its own. Speech was a chaotic thing. All Cirgoth knew for certain was that he would try at his best to find the goodness in Sammael he was sure existed, and if Sammael could only find it in his heart to confide in Cirgoth and expose his virtues, Cirgoth would offer him his friendship. Not his will, not his fealty; his friendship. They had once been friends, brothers; had Sammael really changed so much that he was incapable of that now? Cirgoth did not think so. If he was wrong, he might find out the hard way, or he might simply find out. Thus Sammael would only catch that glimpse of the angel of swords before he politely withdrew to wait for him. There on the bench down the hall Marsol would find Cirgoth, if he decided to enter the Palace of Sammael. By and by some servants would happen along and offer Cirgoth some wine which he graciously accepted, the same courtesy of course shown to Marsol if he joined the angel who loved him enough to brave proving his beliefs concerning Sammael.

Marsol had just barely entered the open entrance when his nostrils flared at the scent of blood and sex. Not that they were bad smells mind you, and he would be the first to say so. It was just if Cirgoth was here, and that scent was too then. Course he was only thinking of the most horrible of things to befall the green eyed angel. He was after all, in Sammael's territory once again. Something he still had yet to really understand because of what the bastard had done to them over time. It would be awhile of fast walking and quick jogs from one door way to the next, and upon one inspection Marsol found a room full of naked women all sleeping on the floor. His brows furrowed and he turned from the room to hear little whines of where was he going, and what was the rush. Bah, he thought turning from the room to move down the hall on his way and to eventually find Cirgoth sitting where he appeared comfortable. "What are you doing here," he said, perhaps a little too loud as he came across to where the angel had seated himself. He was relieved at the sight of him seeming to be in one piece, but he didn't let that show on his slightly ticked off face and the steadiness of his hand hovering just above the hilt of his broadsword. It wasn't just that he distrusted Sammael and everything to do with the fallen one, but that he might be trying to do something terrible to

Cirgoth again and preying on Cirgoth's good nature. In that respect though, did Marsol not have every right to be paranoid? To worry over the bird's state of mind for having come to the prince of demon's home? Though for most of him wanting to knock the angelic fellow senseless and carry him out of there, he moved his hand away from the hilt of his sword to cross his arms over his chest. Sand made a thin blanket over his boots and dulled the gold band around his throat. Even a coat of the dirt lightened his unruly thick locks.

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Arilwen had remained in Anna's company while her husband ventured out to meet with Sammael. He had left her a perfectly smooth, round orb, telling her that she could see what was happening and interject with it... but Arilwen's fear overtook her. She didn't want to hear it... not if it would be horrid. What if he was taken from her? Punished? Sent away? She had left to sit in the nursery with Anna, who would later be taken to her father by her husband, who seemed to have survived the meeting.

It was quiet after Anna left, and Arilwen found herself missing her dear friend. She showered her son with hugs, then worked on walking with him. The boy could stand and toddle a bit, but fell more than he walked. Still, he never once cried when he took a tumble, he just grunted and hauled himself up and tried again. Arilwen had never been more proud.

When Wyrvaust returned the second time, the kisses he delivered to her neck were met with a thrilled wife whom turned in his arms and returned her own set to his mouth and cheeks, obviously happy to see him again. She blinked her violet eyes and listened quietly as he projected his worries, then smiled softly and touched her forehead to his. "I could not be happier, as long as I have you and our dear son. I admit, it does get a bit stuffy here at times, but I would remain in our home until the end of my days to keep you two safe. Still, no matter where we are, I feel safe if you are there." It was true. Even after they had been taken to Hell... Arilwen had been snatched by a horrible dragon (those things might always terrify her now) she knew that Wyrvaust would do everything to protect her and his son. Still, when he proposed his plan of their trek across the desert to meet the people of the tribes and to camp together in the wild, her face absolutely lit up. "We could do that?" She looked excited at the aspect, then locked her arms around his neck and leapt up, wrapping her legs around his waist as she squealed, covering his cheeks with sweet kisses. "I could think of nothing more to make me happier. And I am certain our dear son would love to as well. We could take him to the oasis...teach him to swim..." Ideas poured out and she wanted to start packing; now. "My dearest Raven...his valuable heart...What would I do without you? Your family has nothing but pride and love for you..." And it was true. Arilwen would see him as the gem of her soul, even if he did wrong...multiple times over.

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Cirgoth straightened his posture as Marsol approached him, and it was clear by the rise of his auburn brows and the cant his head took that he was surprised to see him there. Lips pursed and were chewed on a moment after Marsol asked him what he was doing there. "Trying not to hear the sounds at the end of the Hall for the moment." He tried on a saucy smile but only made it to a wistful sort of curling of his inviting lips. Cirgoth was one rough around the edges angel and the sexiest

things about him were his lips, his eyes, his build and that androgynous embodiment of his. He was otherwise scarred all to hell, hard edged in his facial features, and scruffy looking; a diehard warrior in other words. The look Marsol gave him was so damn serious and stern that he laughed a little bit. "I have come to find out if there is an angel still hiding somewhere in the Prince of Demons," he confided at last. "I cannot explain it, Marsol. I feel as though Sammael is misunderstood, and that if given the chance, he might not be as evil as everyone supposes. Am I misguided, deluding myself? Maybe...but as my heart tells me otherwise I must find out. It could mean the difference between never ending personal and clan conflicts, and a lasting peace. I am willing to risk being mistaken. If you believe you can talk me out of it, don't throw effort after futility. I will not be dissuaded." Not willingly anyway. The angel then stood up and pivoted to face Marsol. He regarded him for a moment with what could only be recognized for unrequited longing. The angel then embraced his demon mate and captured his lips in a kiss that was as lusty as it was loving. He heart swelled inside of his chest as their tongues joined and when their lips parted he was trembling. "I have missed you...You know not how much, for how long, or how desperately. There are times when I wonder...Do you desire me as I need and crave you, or is it my friendship you truly value?" this he spoke quietly. Marsol had never made his heart clear to Cirgoth, only hinted and let rare moments of physical contact stand in place of more definite, readable signs. Words were not altogether necessary, but Marsol was so emotionally aloof that Cirgoth was in a constant state of wonder...painful uncertainty.

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Marsol would not miss the way those lips were chewed on. His amber eyes fell from those lips though as the angel spoke of what he wanted to do in this place, and while his laughter lightened Marsol's heart in many ways he found himself wondering just what was he doing there now then. As Cirgoth explained his reasons for traveling so far to see the prince of demons and to see if he could expose what he felt in his heart to be true, that Sammael was in fact not the horror others proclaimed him to be, Marsol saw that goodness in Cirgoth that almost made him so goddamn attractive even if he hadn't been an angel. That kindness, even able to give forgiveness to Sammael regardless of what he had put him through when they had all been throw head first in the Lower Kingdom, and afterwards. He made no comment as to how he himself viewed the situation concerning Cirgoth coming to make peace with the baastard. Although his face was as unreadable as ever when he was told he could not talk the bird out of speaking to the evil making lewd noises in the other room. His gaze had wandered to the ground as he fell into deep thought. Such was the way when his tinker was tinkering over something either very important to him. So in looking at the ground he did not see that longing Cirgoth's greens held. The demon's breath caught, which was rare unless the angel was involved, when the angel came to him to take his lips hostage with that kiss. All his thoughts and everything he felt seemed trivial when Cirgoth said that he needed him. His arms would come to curl around the angel, with one hand going to the small of his back and the other to rest over the back of Cirgoth's neck. The angel's words however were cause for alarm, well in him at least they were. He doubted what he meant to him? He did not believe that his demon mate's love was just as, if not more so, consuming and possessive as his was? The dragon in him burned at that, but he knew deep down that it was his own fault for Cirgoth having the thoughts he did. Marsol was not the overly affectionate type, not in public anyway. Not the way angels could be, or how Cirgoth was so freely. But little by little he was opening up. It



would take time naturally, yet he did not mean to be so distant with his feelings. That was just how he was, and he hadn't thought anything of it, and had been for years. "Can I not have you and your friendship? Is that so out of our reach, even for being what we are," he asked, meaning that he didn't just want Cirgoth in bits and pieces. He wanted all of the angel. From every great flaw to the simplest of virtues. He wanted Cirgoth completely and he would not have anything less. It was a little relieving though to speak so plainly to his beloved, and try to get him to understand what raged within the beast's heart he now held. His head leaned to bend or tilt so that he could leave big slow open mouthed kisses that trailed from Cirgoth's cheek to his left ear where the angel could now clearly hear the loud murring he was making. "I was told once that if you could not be with me, and I you, only then there could not be anything. To this I pose, do I not show the same? Cirgoth, all that I am... all the blood that flows in these veins, the heart that beats in this chest, the mind that entangles itself with ways of how to make such a heavenly creature happy, it is and always will be for you." It was more than a little difficult to get all of that out, it had been stirring around in his head for days. He had just not been sure how to put it into the right words to get his point across. Quite the stubborn pair the angel and his demon were. One finding the matters of the heart easy to express and doing so often. The other finding it like a rose maze to which he would rather take a pair of shears to and cut his way through the damn leafy walls. He would not give Cirgoth the chance however to reply to his statement of how he felt for him, his mouth seeking out the angel's to show just how possessive he could be by not letting him talk and forcing his tongue into his mouth to curl around his beloved's. It surprised him the ache that suddenly hammered in him for the auburn haired fellow. So much that he almost jammed his tongue down his throat in that increasingly desperate kiss...

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Cirgoth shook Marsol with great affection when he asked if he could not his friendship with all else that he was. "Oh indeed you can, all that there is of me is yours but perhaps for my will. That I have always clung to, and when Sammael took it from me, I knew for the first time what it was to have my heart taken from me. My will to love you, to serve you and your kingdom, and to make you proud is yours completely nevertheless." The angel nearly squirmed with need when Marsol's lips and tongue trailed across his face to his ear. By that throaty growl Marsol made Cirgoth was sure that his lusts were perking with as much steam as his own. The things Marsol said then almost made Cirgoth feel ashamed, disappointed in himself at the very least. "Have I been so blind...so lost in the fog of my own struggles that I have not noticed?" he asked quietly, fighting with himself to find the answer in his own mind and heart. "Or...is it that part of me that is afraid, afraid to fail you as I have failed everyone else, that is afraid of the shames I..." Cirgoth was caught into that stunning kiss which silenced him and made him forget what he had been trying to say. His frame melted against the dragon lord. Marsol's possessiveness could not be missed when he dominated his mouth and all that went with it. His body shuddered in that hard press of their equally well muscled frames of sinew, and in that embrace which Cirgoth coiled more tightly in and around Marsol to cling to him as if afraid to ever let go. Cirgoth was fearless in matters of facing enemies down, but his heart had developed a crack where doubts, guilt and shame crept in; a fissure made by the physical and mental violations and torments Sammael had played on him. Yet he did want to forgive Sammael, it was true, but his forgiveness would give lightly like candy to a child. Sammael had to prove something to Cirgoth first; he had to prove that

Cirgoth believed of him was true. It was a hope as much as it was a suspicion, that there was more to Sammael than anyone could possibly know, and that part of what he concealed was a vault of hidden virtues.

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Marsol could not only taste Cirgoth in that now crushing kiss, but all he could think of was him. He did not care for any doubts or reservations Cirgoth might or might not have had about the matters of the heart, Sammael or anything else. The angel was better than that. Now Marsol either had missed if Cirgoth had related that he thought there was still goodness in the prince of demons, or he had just not known at all. But if he did have time to think on it, he would have laughed. Him? Capable of something other than evil? It sounded about as tangible as Marsol going to the Upper Kingdom when he died. He would even tell such a statement to Cirgoth if ever he told him his thoughts, and then shake his head. But until then, they had each other. From down the hall a very loud guttural moan was heard along with obscene smacking sounds. So if you put two and two together, someone's mouth was pleasing someone's hm-hm. Except Sammael's mouth was all over Maelmorda's neck at the time. Heh. Marsol would break the kiss on account of all those loud lewd noises coming from down the hall, Wyrvaust's request to depart into the desert with his family, and all those carnal urges he was suddenly getting for Cirgoth. Oh yes, all that body shaking bow chicka wow wow down the hall was infecting the atmosphere. Even back at the caves within the Ring of Fire where servants slept, and the human Anna had been making clay pots on a spinneret, they would get a taste of it. Further out where two demons and an angel rode on horseback, the "love in the air" would hit them perhaps harder. Who knows what might happen with them, seeing as how only one of them were still pure and virginal. The request made was given with a husky blessing and to call on him should he be in need of anything, anything at all. The Raven couldn't mistake the tone even in that telepathic link to not be deep with need. Perhaps it might have come off the wrong way? Seeing as how that dangerously close kiss he and his dragon chieftain had shared previously had only been broken by the news Jedah had sent and such. Cirgoth would feel nibbling down along the side of his neck and in between them Marsol said, "Sorrow and death are the only things offered by the one you seek. I come to keep you from knowing the pain you've already felt once. Do not make me beat this sense into you, no wish I have to raise a hand to the one I'd draw my last breath for." At this he would pause in his nibbling to nudge at Cirgoth's chin a little; breathing in deep as he rushed his nose through the angel's hair. Was he right though in his assumptions? Marsol was right where he told Cirgoth that no good could come from trying to speak to Sammael again, to see if there was indeed that hidden place deep down that nobody knew of to be untainted and most noble? He had to be. It wouldn't make any sense if Cirgoth was hitting the bull's eye a hundred times over. It just didn't go with anything the dark one did. The acts of horror he had commanded others to do, his bidding and will carried out in the most gruesome of manners. It was nearly blasphemy! Unfortunately, Cirgoth's intuition was as correct as Marsol's temper was terrifying. And yet one would wonder. What was Cirgoth trying to do if he did prove his point? Wouldn't that just make Satan a wee bit pissed to have someone try to figure out his own head? It would appear the green eyed angel and his demon mate were treading on dangerous ground with their findings; heh.

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Cirgoth was on fire for Marsol, and had the demon dragon he loved wanted to throw

him down right there, he would not have been able to find it in his heart to stop him. The kiss they shared was as urgent as it was passionate and Cirgoth found himself wanting more...to feel Marsol filling him while they explored every pleasure they had to pull from one another. But this was not the place was it...Or was it? The wait would be a lot longer than Cirgoth had anticipated. If Sammael had done to Cirgoth what he was doing to the devil, his mind probably would have melted down permanently. It was enough that Sammael had ravished him for three or four hours at a time, albeit rather frequently, and it had been pleasure he was trying to tempt Cirgoth with, which really had screwed with the angels head badly, he believed far worse than pain would have. Pain would make it feel more like...punishment or rape, and that was easier to shake than a confusing mess of pleasure, right? Not the way Sammael was going at it with Maelmorda. Hell, he even had the devil doubting himself! Who could shake the devil? That was just unheard of. Had Cirgoth known all that he might have taken Marsol's advice right then and there. Sammael had screwed Cirgoth's mind up severely, only the angel could not see it. As it stood, when Marsol so much as threatened bodily harm to him if he went through with his search for virtue in the new devil, Cirgoth trailed his fingers across Marsol's handsome face, then embraced him tight. "I have to do this...For you, for me, for us all, even for Sammael. It might show him that there is a better way. Isn't that worth some risk?" Some risk, more like a whole helluva lot of risk to Cirgoth, and now Marsol since he was there. Cirgoth did consider that. He kissed Marsol deeply, desperately, hardly aware that he rocked and ground against Marsol with sensuously feverish need as his tongue explored his mouth in heady strokes and twirls before he suckled on his spicy oral goodness with all too arousing pulses. The angel gasped, breathing hard as their lips parted. "Please leave here, Marsol. I wish to risk no one but myself, particularly not you. Please...I am begging you," he implored with all the pieces of his heart. Cirgoth was insane, without question, only he did not recognize it. If Marsol stayed much longer Cirgoth was going to beg him to take him with all he had.

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Marsol would come to find it more difficult to will himself not to just throw Cirgoth down there on the floor and have his way with the bird than imagined. Oh it was more than tempting, what with the smell of him being so strong let alone the flavor that could be found in him. The hand that felt its fingers over his face brought a deep murring faintly so animal like as his eyes sort of had to fight to maintain their seriousness and stern aspect. Cause Cirgoth made it all so damn irresistible to just forget about the world and everyone in it. To get caught up in those eyes when he looked at him the way he did now. The angel taunted the demon in him nearly as much as his love did to want to make him happy. Though try all he liked he just didn't see any logic to his angelic mate's words. None whatsoever. It was lunacy, to think someone could try to talk to Sammael and get inside their head and work him the way they wanted to. To have any sliver of hope that Cirgoth would come back from this endeavor in one piece was even crazier. But all that concern and distrust of the dark one having his way with Lucifer in the other room, quite loudly we might add, the demon dragon nuzzled down at the shoulder when he was embraced. Running his nose from that clothed shoulder up the side of the angels neck while the bird said his convictions and that this had to be done. He heard the goodness in Cirgoth but it was so misplaced here he thought as his heart grew heavy, but not just with the sad thought that he was going to have to beat the ever loving snot out of him and take him home, but that inner need for him was climbing and clawing its way to be let free. With those lips finding each other the demon

was again fighting with himself to stay or to go. To take Cirgoth even if it meant by handfuls of his gorgeous auburn locks and hog tie him if that's what it took to get him out of harms way. Or to stay and just be with him, even in the house of a monster and at any moment they could be separated and/or killed. Well, nothing like that would happen to Cirgoth he thought as sure as the desert was hot. Sammael would have too much damn fun with the angel, and furthermore he had probably taken on a morbid fascination with his once heavenly brother. He on the other hand, would probably be made to suffer until his last dying breath only to get resurrected into the form of a toad or some hairy shyte. If that was even possible. He wouldn't put it past Sammael either to do phucked up things like that to spite him. They did want to kill each other after all. So where the hell did Cirgoth get it in his head that he could make peace with someone that hated him? His tongue felt like it was litterally alive with it's own brain the way it coiled and pushed around inside Cirgoth's mouth. Vying and damn near wrestling with the angel for own-age the only way they were known for. When that kiss was broken, it showed how he didn't want it to and his lips sought out other places on the angel to nibble and suckle on as he was asked to leave. Or was that pleading? He would admit that the sound of Cirgoth pleading with him could have been like a sinfully sweet melody, but this kind was half-and-half. He paused in mid nibble to bite Cirgoth's collar bone, rather hard, before he straightened up with his arms very tightly around the green eyed fellow. "I'm not leaving without you," he said, a tiny droplet of Cirgoth's blood on his lower lip from how he had bitten him just hard enough to break the skin but not to cause any real trickle of bleeding. His voice dead serious again, so stern like from before. The muscles in his arms tensing like the rest of him, although one of Cirgoth's knee's had slipped between his so he kind of held the bird in place slightly. However his eyes betrayed just a fraction of how badly he did want to give every inch of his love to the angel. "You can either walk with me out of here, or over my shoulder. It is your choice Cirgoth. It has always been, your choice."

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It was true that Cirgoth was crazy, a lunatic to be sure, but that did not make him wrong, did it? SOMething had compelled him to come here, as strongly as anything was drawn by instinct. It was a belief, yes, a belief that Sammael was only the monster people made him to be because that is what they expected from him, but that belief was only the beginning of why he had journeyed there and stepped past the threshold with maniacle confidence. Even being in that palace for the first time triggered echoes of a dream nearly forgotten and abandoned as a mere night terror. Cirgoth had never been there and yet sights, sounds and even smells rang familiar; the scent of two devils dancing in a carnal embrace of souls. Yes...of souls. Cirgoth seized shaken breaths through his nose as Marsol's tongue took possession of his senses, oral and otherwise and his hold on him tightened and melted him at once. The feel of his hard frame pressed so fervently against his made his heart and soul reel as if to capsize, but after the kiss was broken and Marsol bit him, a startled look of surprise mingled with the sting of unexpected pain muddled his expression. When Marsol stated his terms so unconditionally to call it a choice, Cirgoth's eyes thinned beneath a darkly knitted brow to fixate on the overlord of his heart. Things began to become clearer...Marsol had been there in his dream as well, looking exactly as he did now. Cirgoth had trouble breathing suddenly and paled slightly. His hand lifted up and the balled heel of his thumb pressed against that scarred, creased brow. For a moment he looked about to faint, then he forced his senses and addressed Marsol.

"My Lord...I cannot leave..." His hand dropped to drape his arms over those powerful limbs holding him, his hand falling at rest against the underside of Marsol's elbow. An angel was strong, but a dragon? No contest there. "If you take me from here something very bad will happen. I cannot explain it...I will know more when I...I get a better feel for things. I am meant to be here and to remain here until...all that I feel and cannot remember has been settled." He was not making much sense was he? "I had a dream once...long ago, and it was so surreal, so misplaced that I could make nothing of it, and it was long since forgotten, but I think it came to me from this place, and this time. You are meant to be with me too, My Lord. Forgive me for ever asking you to leave. I was upset and feared I lacked control in your presence, but I believe I have regained my poise now. Let us choose option three, the one you neglected to mention; and stay here together until I have seen Sammael. I am begging thee...please trust me."

Cirgoth bowed his head deeply to Marsol and slipped through his arms to kneel at his feet as he awaited his final word. Cirgoth's right hand meanwhile came to rest lightly against his mate's left knee, the brow of his head leaned against his thighs. How could he could define himself better when phantom memories of a dream and very powerful beliefs which Marsol thought were lunacy alone held him there? He was having difficulty to be sure but hoped that Marsol might understand his one reason for being there even better than himself. Of course it had not really come to him until Marsol threatened his being there, which perhaps was fated to happen as well so that he could recall what needed to be remembered. Most angels and their visions were very strange, far more enigmatic than priests like Wyrvaust or true oracles who saw things in a more decipherable manner, or like Belorian who envisioned things vividly. Cirgoth did not look well though. He wore a pall and his breaths had grown thin as if he had been hit by some kind of contagion. A slew of unchained dark spirits with a single determined purpose were closing on that palace and it was their advent which shook him. Cirgoth alone could sense them however for they were as the wind and the air to all but those who shared their one and only objective. Cirgoth's dream, as gradually as it was coming back to him; connected him to their goal and permitted him to perceive of their advance, but only as a cryptic shadow which made him feel feeble at the moment. Who was in danger from these spirits? No one. It was what they were after that was the danger. To everyone.

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Marsol wasn't prone to leaping off the deep end, not without a reason anyway. But that had no bearing on his own level of insanity that he kept a tight lid on. He did not close his ears to what all the green eyed angel had to say. Listen intently he did, but before he did that his own brows would arch at the abrupt lightening in his angelic ones facial structure as well as the shift from his breathing of being that of pleased to that of something unwanted. Had it been something he had done? Was he holding him too tightly, in all ways? Did the bite perhaps pierce through too much and cause severe discomfort, if not pain? Was he being over bearing, unfair and otherwise unreasonable in his conveyance? The few moments that Cirgoth appeared on the verge of a fainting spell, the demonic dragon's arms merely held him closer to himself. Protectively close. Yet as much as he stood there with his beloved held in his thick sleeved arms, his concern for the angelic fellow's mental state grew. That and how he knew Cirgoth only became this way when certain things would or could happen to his wording, Marsol's feelers all went on the alert. Sometimes the

only way a lunatic could be understood was by a fellow lunatic, if even a crazy person with enough gall to sit still long enough. It upset the dragon to see the angel so out of sorts, and to be trying to tell him something that was quite possibly far more important than what was being led on. If only they knew. Those amber eyes looked at how that head of auburn bowed so deeply to him, and then that body slid out of his arms to kneel so submissive like before him. Before Marsol had somewhat tolerated such acts of respect and obedience from those within their territory of the desert and even the neighbouring areas, because it was custom and one would be hard pressed to break with tradition. It was what people expected and what most kept them comforted so as not to give into their figureheadless social structures. Marsol personally probably didn't care for it all that much but, least of all he had grown to sort of hate it when Cirgoth displayed such things. Perhaps it was his ever growing love of the divine bird that battered against the duty bound part of him. Slowly he lowered to come down onto one knee to face the bird, taking the hand that had been placed on his knee and laying his other to the back of Cirgoth's neck. Sitting on his right leg that was folded underneath him with his left bent and drawn to his chest, holding the angel's left hand in his palm side up and running a few fingers through all those gorgeous locks he said, "Dearheart." A smile started to spread even if it was inappropriate, as he chuckled lightly, shaking his head before he leaned up a little to rest his mouth over the top of the angel's forehead. He would not leave him. Not even if Lucifer had commanded him to. Even if it killed him. He was cautious though with how affectionate he became with Cirgoth. Never once taking his eyes off their surroundings or how he watched that open door to the room that the two devils were having their way with each other in. The halls echoed with their cries and moans of whatever it was beings like they could do to one another, and Marsol wanted to shut his ears to THAT real quick. It was distracting damnit. Sometimes he thought he heard a woman screaming in there but no one had entered, not from their end anyways. Maybe Lucifer was making Satan hollar like a school girl? Or vice versa?

With his lips still lightly resting on Cirgoth's forehead, he asked, "What is it you think you feel?" It wasn't a demand, just a general how are you question. The type he usually posed to Cirgoth when the angel was experiencing something unusual or he seemed heightened. Not wanting to rush the bird at all, his head lifted at the message the Raven relayed to him at that moment in time.

His gaze wandered off as he considered it. Nicualie? Back in the desert? But why? With Marcania, what in the phuck would urge that self righteous horse's arse to be buddy-buddy with one of the "hated" kind?! If Marc had had a change of heart now, Marsol would get angry at the mere thought and have the strong urge to rip out the phucker's beating organ. He'd tried to stab him for phuck's sake, and now he was trolloping around in HIS neck of the woods with one of his perhaps soon to be killed and rez'ed son-in-law's.

To the Raven he said; A trap, most probable. No she-devil has been sent by my or any of ours for that wandering demon. And none would be sent ever for that angel, unless I've become senile. Still he is here and alive, is he not? By whatever means brought him here, they will take him no further. Do not get any more involved, old friend, a handful I'll send to escort Niculaie back with and a hardly welcoming one to help this Marcania be on his way. This... she-devil, will get neither.

Cirgoth locked his intensely green eyes on Marsol as he came down to his level and showed him his affections, the tender side of him so few had the privilege to experience. He breathed in the feel of his lips against his brow and wrapped his lover and lord in his arms to pull himself close to him. When asked what it was he thought he felt, he shook his head. "I don't know exactly...a shadow closing, but not from here. It is like an omen..." It was the cryptic dream that was an omen. He sank further into Marsol's arms as he repositioned himself to drag him into his lap. He said nothing for a long time, just basked in Marsol's warmth and presence, the feel of him against his own body. Time lost meaning as he just lost himself to his thoughts and Marsol's comforts. How much time passed he could not say, but it was at that moment that the dream's visions came flooding into mind that he stirred, slowly at first, as if waking from a sleep, and perhaps he had dozed off in Marsol's arms, it was hard to say. Then every muscle in his body tensed as he processed everything, made all too perfect sense of it. He stood quite suddenly to break Marsol's hold on him. "They are making a child..." he said breathlessly. "One that must not survive!" the later barked, and at that he took off like a demon out of hell's open gate and rushed to that chamber where the devils were locked in carnal fathom's embrace. His sprint carried him quite close to the two before he slid to a stop and shouted at the two of them. "Stop! You must stop this now! You have to kill it! You have to kill it NOW!! Before it is too late!" the angel shouted like a mad man.

Maelmorda thought he was hallucinating and ignored him. Nothing his illusory Cirgoth said made any sense anyway. Also, Maelmorda felt so inconceivably and insanely GOOD that a herd of wild Mumaak's (enormous desert mammoths) could have stampeded through the place and he would have ignored them, thrown up a shield, but ignored them. He continued to ride Sammael and the waves of their colliding pleasures, the pain didn't even exist to him anymore.

Cirgoth raged again. "Sammael, please listen to me! You have just made a child with Lucifer. If it lives, you shall lose the throne and great chaos shall follow! You have to kill it now, for it grows rapidly, even now, and shall be born within the hour! A MERE hour, a son of two gods, your determination and his logic, unstoppable! KILL IT NOW!" Now typically Cirgoth was dead against killing innocent life, but this life was not innocent. It was not evil either, it just was, and its logic and will would be like a hurricane over Acheron and any worlds interconnected with it, including Morashtar. "It is not meant to be," he then breathed with painful regret that such a magnificent being should have to die, for what could be more magnificent than a creature born of Sammael and Lucifer? Those spirits Cirgoth had sensed Sammael would now grasp the presence of too as they swarmed Lucifer, unfelt and unseen, in an attempt to drive out the soul possessing that bare beginning of a life to possess it, but the being within Lucifer with all too great ease batted those specters away and plunged them into the crushing black of the abyss with but its will. Why could Sammael sense them, perhaps even see them when Lucifer could not? Because they had trespassed on his domain, and Lucifer, well he was in a rare state of sexual oblivion. Well he was, until his delusion began to make sense and he registered that he was not a hallucination at all, but Cirgoth in the flesh.

The moment Lucifer processed Cirgoth's presence, and then Marsol's, his eyes thinned on Cirgoth like razors. "Do you phucking mind? If you haven't noticed, we are rather..." he groaned and breathed heavily as he bore down hard on Sammael.

"...intimately occupied..."

"There is a child in you Maelmorda, and it shall be the undoing of a great many things. Can't you feel it?"

Maelmorda didn't want to feel anything but Sammael, and was getting extremely pissed off. "If what you say is true then Sammael and I will handle it and decide what comes of it. You may leave us before I decide to eat your scarred ass. My Prince shall call for you when he is ready."

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Marsol's face became vaguely concerned to the events that were told to him occurring far off in the desert where Niculaie and Marcania and this she-devil were, but his real concern, his true worry showed in how he held the bird in that passing of time. Both kneeling or sitting on the floor to the hallway where not another servant crossed their path to offer them food or drink. One perhaps more awake than the other. The sand that had brought a dusty appearance to the dragon acted like a second coat, easily shaken off for he had no such need for sweating in the desert that made up his tribe and peoples homeland. For while his mate grew quiet, he himself kept a keen eye around them for anything that would disturb their little spot of peace in these times of war, as well as listened to the report being conveyed to him via mind speak from the group he had dispatched to take Niculaie back into custody, tell Marcania in a polite but firm way to leave these lands, and to kill the woman in their midst. These demon warriors would not take no for an answer, from any of them in their apprehending Nic or anything else. Course there would be a fight had they chosen to go about their mission with just brute force, but that was a route they would take if need be. Nic would be taken back for questioning and holding purposes to see just what all corruption the Desert Wind had done to him, Marc would be removed from the desert and by harsh means if it came to that, and the woman would be killed after the two men had been dealt with. For she might have been more dangerous of the three, if they were all together. Women had a strange unconscious way of complicating things, so was the case why they sought Nic out first, and then Marc to speak with before they turned their fiery sights on her. If she was still there that is. Back in that estate that seemed like it's own oasis in how it could be and not be on a whim, the desert creature had felt the moving form in his arms before he was left empty handed by the angel bolting to his feet. "God's be damned," Marsol started to say but he had to place a hand behind himself so he wouldn't fall backwards as Cirgoth exclaimed something so inconceivable, so unimaginable that his demon lover's brow arched in it's wake. A child he said. The two devil's locked in the most carnal of embraces just in the other room were creating offspring?! Now he had never known nor heard of the Morning Star even having the faintest urge to want to make children with the likes of Sammael, and neither seemed like the type to even carry one should they do such an unspeakable act. But before he could voice his own thoughts his amber pools watched Cirgoth take off to that room and he sprang to his feet to go after him. Not shouting anything of "stop" or "what the hell are you doing!", for that wouldn't have gotten them anywhere. And angels were very set in their ways once they decided on something of grave importance. He came up to stop just inside the room that was so intensely full of the scent of sex and lust that it made his nostrils flare and his face turn slightly to the side. The sight of Lucifer being stark naked and this jaw dropping display of demonic urges and needs, it was dismayingly tempting just to stand there and watch. But they weren't there for



that, and Marsol would never permit himself that sort of thing now. Maybe in another time long ago yes, but not now, weird and intriguing as it was. His concerned expression deepened the more Cirgoth made known what he felt and what could in fact be lethally true if the two devil's did not heed him here and now. The angel spoke only the truth, as far fetched seeming and insane as it was, he believed him. Not just because he loved him but because his mate was terribly right in these kinds of matters. They had learned that the hard way over time have they not? From a couple feet behind the angel, their dragon mate came forward to stand beside him at a slight half-turned posture, saying, "My Lord's, it would be wise to cease being "intimately occupied" and hear the words of reason. No harm wish he nor I to befall any of Acheron, for this alone you WILL listen." It would seem the tall dark and silent type that Marsol composed himself to be was not here, and in it's place was a Marsol that was standing by the ravings of one angel that wanted to come between Lucifer and Satan. As if to make matters worse the tanned skinned desert dwelling one would move forward more to stand in front of his angel, as though to make it perfectly clear if his ass was going to be eaten then the Morning Star would have to contend with his ill tempered demonic dragon son first. Metaphorically speaking did not apply here. Marsol was serious as a heart attack when it came to someone threatening those he cared for, and for those few that he loved he would truly become a monster if that's what it took to protect them. Was his heart so misplaced in standing by Cirgoth when in the face of the highest of all devil's and prince's in all known creation? Was he now just as crazy as that green eyed angel in the endeavor to stop what could possibly be the end of many things. This world included. His amber's lit on Sammael, now that he had voiced just where he stood on the matter, that old undying anger returning to him with all it's animosity intact like it always did whenever the little shyte was concerned. He averted his eyes from glaring too long at Sammael, cause then he might be too tempted to just lunge at him and wipe that sex crazed grin off his face. That too was getting under his skin, and he knew it shouldn't. Maelmorda's phuck toys were his own business and so long as he was happy then that was all Marsol would have cared about. But that wasn't it, Sammael wouldn't be the Morning Star's phuck toy. Not in a good way anyways. He would use that to hurt Maelmorda and that he could not condone. He'd save that pep talk for Sammael later though, when everything was more settled and his veins weren't boiling with the murderous rage to rip the fallen angel to pieces.

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Sammael found it comical that an angel such as Cirgoth would even bother to care what all went on in the Lower Kingdom with all its hellish delights. His black orbs taking in the frames that came barging in on Maelmorda and his' inhuman phuck fest. His tongue had snaked out to lick over the Morning star's shoulder to lick his skin as Cirgoth shouted, curling that pink oral muscle down the back of the Morning Star's shoulder to give example to its increasing length, sort of like how his patience was wearing thin with this interruption. That is until he sensed more company, or rather the room suddenly became crowded with those free specters that whirled around Lucifer like obsessive Japanese school girl's. Where had they come from? What were they really? Did Maelmorda know? Were they just as sick to be as close to the Morning Star as everything the dark god had created was, in their own ways? Sammael followed the movements of those phantasms as they came and then were dispersed like a shattered glass, being purged back to where they belonged in the depths below within the abyss. He knew it had not been his doing, cause he was too into Maelmorda to care about anything else. He would have liked an audience

actually to witness their acts anyways. He could see from the unchanged look on Marsol's face, much less how he hadn't moved in response to new appearance of the souls, and that Marsol would have been on the attack because he was so very protective of the Morning Star from those unworthy wispy piles. With Maelmorda not appearing to give hint or a hoot as to these things coming like the wind and just as quickly being plunged, he now gave pause in mid upwards thrust into his Father. If it wasn't him, and it sure as hell wasn't Marsol, and he knew he himself hadn't done it, then Sammael had to wonder about Cirgoth since that would only leave perhaps one other person to have done such a feat without breaking a sweat. It was a curiosity more than it was apprehension. "You saw them didn't you," Sammael panted loudly as his arms became tighter around the Morning Star to hold him as close to himself as possible. His jet black gaze set on Cirgoth, whom he had had the strong urge to ask Maelmorda to go ahead and devour his scarred ass just so he could see it first hand, and force Marsol to watch. His teeth grazed over the side of Maelmorda's neck as he waited for an answer, but as things sat now he wouldn't wait very long. That curiosity and his questioning gaze as to why Cirgoth had come here in the first place climbed in their intensity. He genuinely wanted to know if his brother had gone crazy or if he wanted to taste more of that toe curling pleasure he had subjected him to not all that long ago.

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CHAPTER 19 -- Wyrvaust and Arilwen's Journey  
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By the time Arilwen and Wyrvaust broke from that steamy kiss, her heart was throbbing quite quickly and she felt woozy with desire for her husband that never seemed to die off. She provided him a drunken smile before leaning down to scoop up Anwarr and carry him into their sleeping chamber, listening for instructions for her beloved Raven. She felt excited, but a bit timid, about going out into the desert, but she had full faith in Wyrvaust and tried to push the worries from her mind. She set about her tasks, first changing and dressing their son in a breezy little white tunic. He was popping in more teeth and immediately began to gnaw on the sleeve of it as he giggled and rolled over on the bed, finding that the pillows stacked there were much more fun to play with than to be good and lay still. He was a little demon in every sense of the word sometimes! Arilwen took her own bag and carefully chose three outfits, following Wyrvaust's example. A comfortable white habit and then one in a soft green color, and finally a dressier outfit...one made of more cool, gauzy material in a rich red color with gold adornments and trimmings that was a bit more flattering. She rolled them carefully and tucked them into her bag, followed by a pair of sandals and the things that would be needed over the course of their time together. Anwarr's things tucked in with hers, she closed the bag and then slid their son's carrier onto her back before going to nab him from the bed. Anwarr fussed at first, having a good time in bed, but immediately settled with a soft reprimand from his mother. Arilwen was sweet to their son, but did not spoil him and expected discipline in every way. She kissed his cheek as a reward and after Wyrvaust helped him settle onto her back, she lifted her bag and followed her husband out.

When the stepped into the canyon, Arilwen's violet eyes climbed up the walls,

looking surprised. When she wandered here to get food when Wyvaust was gone, she had somehow not noticed that it was so overgrown. Anwarr saw the berry vines, and being a huge fan of berries, reached with his small fingers and babbled, trying to explain to his mother that he would like some. She smiled and as the Raven collected food, she went to pluck a juicy berry from the vine and hand it back to Anwarr. Probably a bad idea, since he was wearing white, but it really didn't matter now. Licking juice from her thumb, Arilwen paused to see the group of horses come meandering up to the gate to be happily received by her husband. A brow quirked and she slowly approached, looking at Wyrvaust doubtfully when he told her to choose one and that they understood her when she spoke. Horses didn't DO that... did they? As she came to stand beside him, Anwarr reached his pudgy fingers over her shoulder and squeaked, "See!", which was his word for horsey... so far. The white mare with the black undercoat stretched her neck across and immediately lipped at Anwarr's fingers, causing the baby to shriek in delight and pump his bare feet against Arilwen's side. His mother grinned, looking quite amused before she reached up to touch the mare's neck, rubbing it softly. "I think I found one..."

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Wyrvaust was chuckling when Arilwen chose her horse, and at how she had chosen the white mare. "She is the boss dam and shall do very well for the Desert Swan and Anwarr. She has a very smooth gate and does not startle when she sees the dragons in flight. The chestnut is quite afraid of them. The Raven just cannot convince her that she is safe from their hunger for horse meat." He cackled. The dragons knew which horses belonged to the tribe and left them well enough alone, but the horses were sometimes difficult to convince of that, even those who understood their masters. Picking one last melon he stuffed it in the bag and swung the gate open until it met the fence. "Will Rose carry the Raven Clan's provisions?" He asked the horse, and she tossed up her head, nickered, then nipped Wyrvaust's chest for making fun of her dragon phobia. She put a small hole in his habit and broke the skin. "Ah, the Raven deserved that. Sorry is he for speaking so true of the Rose of the Dunes." The horse turned and swished its tail to swat Wyrvaust in the face, his eyes closing and his posture slumping a bit; hence the mare turned back broadside to him. Wyrvaust blew a breath and hurried to the tack shed where he took out a pack harness. "Can Arilwen saddle and bridle her horse?" he asked. If not, he would show her how, and explain the importance of checking the girth strap when the horse was more relaxed. Once they animals were saddled, he riding the stallion, he would guide their way through the desert. He avoided the dunes unless it was necessary to cross them, because the deep sand tired the animals more quickly. As they rode, the little colt followed after them. Wyrvaust would know to pause when the colt showed signs of needing to feed from its mother. The night was cool and before the sun rose over the flats and dunes to spread its suffocating heat over the land, Wyrvaust would lead them to a small cluster of palms which would guard them from the worst of the heat while they slept beneath their shade. The desert's expanse was extensive between the few oases and so Wyrvaust opted to ride at night while it was cool and sleep through the sweltering heat of the day. He protected their camps as well, to conceal their presence and to sink them into shadows should a threat arise in the form of evil doers (tribe members excluded). If Arilwen or Anwarr grew too hot, he would also protect them from the heat with an abysmal cooling shield. Wyrvaust was not only well accustomed to the desert, but was immune to the effects of heat, so never used such devices on himself. He was curious to see if Anwarr had inherited that immunity. If the baby boy broke a sweat he would know that he had not.

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Arilwen flashed a grin at her husband. It had been so stressful for him lately... and he had found reason to laugh. It was the most beautiful sound in the world to her. "I cannot say that I blame any creature for being terrified of dragons in flight. I am not a fan of it myself." She screwed her nose up, shaking her head as if to rid it from the image of the shadowy being. The Swan was amazed when Wyrvaust began to interact with the horses. It really DID seem as if they understood him and responded. It was the question about saddling her horse that made Arilwen turn to face the Desert Raven and she bit her lower lip, looking completely clueless. She had never done that before. Luckily he was a patient man and spent the next few minutes showing her how to do so. She puffed her chest out proudly once the task was completed, although Wyrvaust did most of the work, then finally climbed atop the patient mare.

Riding in the evening was idea. Arilwen forgot her nervousness about being out in the open sand, but once the sun rose, she felt as if she were baking. Dark locks of hair clung to her neck and she practiced the slow breathing techniques that her husband had taught her to keep her body cool. Anwarr, on the other hand, DID seem to gain the gene from his father for heat tolerance. He snoozed against his mother's back and when he awoke he seemed wiggly and happy as a clam with not a bead of sweat to touch his body.

Arilwen was relieved when they finally rode into a cluster of palm trees and she immediately climbed down into the shade, sinking down to sit on the sand for a moment and wipe her brow on her sleeve. Of course, once the unpacking began she would help, but until then she slid Anwarr from her back, helped him out of the carrier, and sat him on the sand where he seemed perfectly content to bury his feet and grab fistfuls of the grains to dump on his legs. It was a giant sandbox, in his eyes! If they ever traveled with him to the city, he would be uncomfortable and feel out of place, much like his father.

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As always; Wyrvaust was so very proud of his wife, the way she tackled everything new to her and made it second nature to herself, or at the very least hung in and got through the difficult ends. She always took the initiative to carry Anwarr on her back, and so on the third day of their trek, after they paused to eat; Wyrvaust readjusted the padded leather straps to fit him, placed Anwarr in the carrier and slipped into the shoulder straps to stand with his son nestled snug against his back. He smiled at Arilwen as his tall frame straightened. "Improper it is not for Anwarr's sire to carry him. There is nothing that cannot be shared between the Raven and his beloved ones which benefits us," he assured her and kissed her passionately. All the hours they rode together Wyrvaust kept close to his wife, often reaching between their horses or pressing them close to touch his wife with tender affections. At camp at night he nestled next to her, explored her mouth with lasting kisses and wrapped her protectively in his arms, all the while keeping their intimacy chaste, despite how urgent his need for her always was. This he did for eight days, exhausting his wife instead with knowledge. He was ever her teacher in the desert and now he was Anwarr's mentor as well. As they consumed their stores; they stopped wherever there was a promise of food and water and the Raven showed his wife and son what to look for and how to harvest it without

harming the desert's delicate balance. As such one quarter of their time was spent hunting, replenishing their water bladders, or gathering food. Because they supplimented the stores they left with along the way they never depleted them. He also taught them of the desert animals, of the dangerous ones and how to avoid them or not to startle them, of those which were good for game, and those which were poisonous or weilded weapons of elemental kind. Time seemed to flow on its own table in the desert. A month went by without a village in sight. Wyrvaust avoided the tribes that had been taken over by demons is why. He would head for a village, but sense the dark kinds before actually reaching them and change their course. Anwarr was growing swiftly. He had learned to crawl and then to walk in one month. Wyrvaust had tried to slow his growth when he was born, but the child had a mind and will of his own. He was going to outgrow his backpack soon. Anwarr still needed his mother's milk though and when the time did come to wean him, he would make it difficult. He craved the sweet milk as much as the bond with his mother.

They came across several kinds of poisonous snakes; The Ulg Mor Cobra, a large cobra that was seven feet long and which Wyrvaust explained could reach ten feet in length. He explained that it was the dominant cousins of the Sand Cobra, which was tan with with brown hourglass bands outlined with dark brown scales. Wyrvaust handled the snake which was extremely aggressive but he had a way with snakes and it seemed to understand he meant it no harm. He stressed to Anwarr that it was very dangerous to even get close to a cobra and that he should never try to touch one until his father showed him the secrets of charming them. The cobra was black with black hourglass bands outlined with two rows of tan and brown scales. He told his wife and son that its poison was often deadly, causing painful muscle spasms, paralysis, coma, then death and told them to avoid it. He said to take care around plants which could offer them and other poisonous snakes cover and to use long sticks to flush any potential snakes out. After collecting the cobra's poison in a phial, he released the snake then stooped down to tap the ground beneath the cactus the cobra had laid in the shade of, and with a reed of oasis bamboo, which could attain the size of a palm, he syphoned water from the ground. "Cobras, other snakes and animals tend to keep close to a water supply when at rest," he told his attentive wife and son between hard sucks on the reed. At length water bubbled up from the finger sized reed like a perked mini-artesian well and he filled two of their bladders with it. He could have taken more but did not. "There is nice pool beneath these rocks and cactus," he said as he extracted the reed and packed the hole to stop the flow. "But take more than our share we must not else we risk drying the spring out." He capped the bladder and stood to give Arilwen a leg up to her horse with Anwarr, who she carried at that time.

Wyrvaust led them north through the desert from there into the morning and then across the desert in the heat of the day. He explained that there was no shade and that they would ride into the next evening and camp in the open under the stars. They saw a herd of desert mammoths in the distant, which looked like large eared, hairless mammoths, the bulls having immense curving tucks and the female's ivory no less impressive for being less dramatic. Their calves walked at the center. They were obviously migrating across the desert and the heat was hard on them. Wyrvaust took pity on them, and using his sorcery and earth talents he formed a shallow basin in the sand with the hard ground beneath and conjured water from the river far to the west to fill it. It was large and deep enough for the herd to take their fill of water in and to bathe in as well. Anwarr was thrilled to see the mammoths and made every gesture that he wanted a closer look, but Wyrvaust told him how dangerous they were. "Humans hunt them for their fur and meat and as such the

great Mumaak were very aggressive towards and distrustful of all people.

As evening came they saw a sand cobra slithering across a rolling dune at dusk. Their horses skirted the snake widely and as night fell and the air cooled, they stopped as promised and spread their bedrolls beneath the vast plane of the star filled sky. Wyrvaust pointed out the constellations; the Morning Star group dead north, which spanned a large part of the sky in the shape of a winged goat-man with a pentacle on his brow and a sword held tip down against his chest; the Dragon Warrior Antellus to the west; the lord of the great eagles Midis to the east who battled Antellus forever in the skies; the snake god Naga to the south in the shape of a snake-man holding a whip, which made up its own constellation called the whip of naga. He explained that his queen Nagina, the snake goddess demon rose in the winter in almost exactly the same place as Naga. Wyrvaust laughed as Anwarr pointed to the sky and shouted, "Raven!" Indeed the group of stars his small finger pinpointed was shaped like a raven. "That is Pytheus, the God of the elements. It is said he takes the shape of men as a great priest of chaos when his true form is that of a demon man with a raven's head, wings and feet. When it is his time to leave, he feigns dying of old age and returns again from wherever he goes at will to teach men of the wonders of chaos." Anwarr giggled as he imagined what such a creature as that would look like. "Shomore!" Anwarr squealed. Wyrvaust understood that his son wanted him to show him more of what the sky had to reveal. "All the other gods sleep in the skys during the summer and wake during the fall, winter, or spring which only touches the desert as more rain or wind," Wyrvaust told his son. "Time for bed," he then told Anwarr who pouted as his father gathered him in his arms and carried him to his small ten of light animal hide.

After tucking Anwarr in with a kiss, Wyrvaust returned to Arilwen and laid back down on the bedrolls of soft furs which covered the sand with her. He began to kiss her and undress her, his fingers, mouth and tongue exploring her skin and female marvels with delicate carresses which gradually heightened into intense shudders, arches, and constrictions of profound need. He built her carnal fires as she fueled his and only when her body was pleading with every touch to be joined with his did he couple with her. He entered her excruciatingly slow with light pumps and stirs which spread her gradually around his demonic girth, until he was buried inside of her. He stroked her slow and deep afterwards as he pet her expertly to amplify every jolt of pleasure she felt. His need to unleash his beast was withheld as long as he could manage until she grew wild beneath him at what time he uncaged himself and loved her with forceful abandon. He lost himself in her thereafter and truly tested her stamina as he made love to her until dawn. When she rolled him over, and he let her, to ride him, he marveled at the sight and feel of her, his excitement too intense to deny. He pleased her beautiful breasts and needy bundle with rapacious desire and snuck his carnally adept abominations inside and on her to free his hands so that he could touch her and grip those wonderful hips. He licked the light sweat off of her body for angels like demons barely perspired. Wyrvaust was ontop of her again by dawn, her legs hooked over his shoulders for maximum penetration and exposure of all that he stimulated.

When the sun rose Anwarr crawled out of his tent to catch his parents in the act. He laughed and squealed at them as he found them wrestling together. Thinking that looked like fun he tackled them to announce his presence. Only then did he notice that parts of Wyrvaust were inside of his mother and that his father had parts he had never seen before. He began asking questions immediately. "Whuzat...n zat? Whyzallit snakies in mum? Duzit hurt?" Wyrvaust was so embarrassed and much

worse. He was a shy and private sort of creature and was oblivious as to how handle sex talk with his son. He was so open about everything, such a natural teacher and so intuned with nature that one would think such a basic matter would come to him with ease, but he had issues when it came to carnal relations as a result of the extreme abuse he had suffered at Mekkora and his lap dog's hands in the past. It made him skittish about sex out of context with the one woman he loved and craved as he needed only one other. He was definately sexually confused in concerns to Marsol, who he had always desired, even desperately but was often reminded of his place with him by Marsol. It was a constant pain he suffered secretly in his heart not to be wanted in that way by his Lord Master. Wyrvaust blanched as pale as his sienna flesh could get and he rolled off of his wife, those tongues and snaky things his son reffered to retreating into his flesh. He ignored Anwarr's questions, even as he repeated them or added more, and gathered his robes to dress quickly. Once covered he rose and stalked away from his son and out into the seemingly empty and endless north-central region of the desert. Chaos assaulted his mind to make him feel dizzy with confusion and self-loathing, loath for not finding it within himself to be normal and cope with his son's naturally curiosity. His body trembled and tears threatened to pool in his eyes. He gritted his teeth and stiffened as he heard Anwarr asking the swan what was wrong with his father. The desert felt suddenly small to Wyrvaust because he could not escape himself in his son or Arilwen's eyes. When at length he felt the gentle touch of his wife's hand on his shoulder, and that tug which meant to turn him to face her, he did swivel around, but he did not meet her gaze. Instead he embraced her to cling to her desperately.

"What is wrong with the Raven? Why is this so hard for him?" his voice cracked. How could she know? She had no idea where all the broken pieces inside of Wyrvaust came from. He never talked about it.

Marsol was the only one who knew...and it had been very long ago when he drug the horrors out of Wyrvaust. Wyrvaust had not talked about it since. He wanted only to forget it ever happened, but the soul and mind could never forget such unspeakable things, things which paled physical torture in comparrison. That Wyrvaust could forget, could get past with perhaps too much ease. He would not confide in Arilwen of his past if she did try to uncover what truly shook him. He was not ready for that yet. Regardless, by whatever means his wife calmed him, and she would manage as always to lift his spirits; he was relieved when the light camp was packed up and they were riding again.

He seemed different that day though, as if he felt the heat beating down on them which he protected Arwilan from when it weighed too heavily on her. He made for the next oasis without stopping to teach them things, or telling them about the few animals they crossed paths with. He was more detached than usual and distracted. All of his mental energy was focused on how to explain love to his son. It was not until an hour short of nightfall that Anwarr engaged his attention by asking something as he pointed just behind them.

"Fahray," he mixed father and raven together when addressing Wyrvaust, "...lookit...whuzat besty?"

Wyrvaust twisted around in his saddle to observe the massive head and body that were coming over a dune flanking their right. His brows knit and as the beast startled at the sight of them and drew in a roaring breath, Wyrvaust grabbed the reins to Arilwen's horse and dug his heels into his dusky violet stallion's girth.

The animals bolted forward as the immense salamander unleashed a massive breath of fire towards them. The monster was as beautiful as it was terrible with a brilliant red and black marbled skin which glistened in the desert. The heat blasted over them but the horses outran the flames themselves and the immense salamander itself as it took chase. The beast was fully mature, its thick body and tail thirty feet long, half of that its tail's length and six feet high at the ridge of its back. It was monstrous. As the horses began to outdistance it, the salamander made a loud, hollow popping sound behind them and Wyrvaust snapped his head around to gauge its aim, at what time he pulled the reins hard left to turn his horse and Arilwen's with it suddenly and then charge forward again as a flaming ball of lava plowed into the ground just ahead of their previous track. Had Wyrvaust not turned and done so quickly the lava would have hit their center directly and covered all of them in such heat as not even Wyrvaust could resist. Before it could attack again, shadows gathered distinctly against the sunlit sand ahead of them and Wyrvaust charged his horse and Arilwen's at his lead into the shadow veil. The mare Rose followed after them readily, following the other animals at Wyrvaust's right flank. When they emerged on the other side at within easy distance of the oasis they were destined for, Wyrvaust's stallion reared up suddenly, startled by the presence of a dragon soaring above them. The hell raptor was simply scouting its master's territory and was quickly diminishing in size as its flight carried it into the distant horizon of the east. The pack horse raced for the safety on the palms, tree sized bamboo and giant fern-like trees of the oasis.

When Wyrvaust's stallion calmed, the raven encouraging him with soothing strokes of his neck, he dismounted. "Let us walk the rest of the way," he suggested. When Arilwen slid off her white mare's back with Anwarr nestled wide eyed against her, Wyrvaust caught her in his arms in an embrace. He could feel her shaking. "All is well now, beloved swan. Many as the dangers are in this land, are not some of those dangers beautiful to behold? The great salamander of fire and brimstone must eat as we all do. Hate it not for seeing us as I see the deer and desert hare. Its magnificence is no less for being so terrible as a predator. The raven can only respect it for its might and marvel at its colors." He smiled and kissed his wife then led her by her hand to the oasis. When they reached the lovely desert garden Wyrvaust removed the tack from the horses, which kicked up their heels and trotted to the pool to drink of the refreshing water.

The sand heaped in mounds beneath the flora and around the deep basin of rock which contained the pool of deep, clear water. The basin was sand and rock but muddy at the shallower eastern side. Nearby, ten yards from the northern side of the pool, was a spring which bubbled up to form a smaller pool. As Arilwen had been singed by the heat of the salamander's very powerful weapons; he guided his wife and son over to the spring. Its water was perfectly clear and was tinted blue as a result of the pale blue rocks its ancient minerals formed. "This is a spring of healing. Restore the swan it shall and heal her wounds. Even almost fatal wounds are by this kind of water knitted. Alas, no magic found in rocks, plants, and water can recover the dead." Such springs were few and far between but scattered all over Morashtar's continents with exception of a few.

Wyrvaust bathed with his wife and son after Arilwen had drunk from the spring and hastened her natural healing processes, which would strengthen as she got older. The demon undressed his wife and let her do the same for him. As he relaxed, he began to speak to Anwarr, who splashed and played naked as his parents in a shallow



concave in a rock which the artesian water filling the pool bubbled up from. He giggled as the bubbles tickled him but soon found it very pleasant as he adjusted to the feeling. Wyrvaust almost envied him for being small enough to fit in the smaller pool which spilled into the larger one in trickling streams. Sand and pebble filled cracks in the rocks beneath the pool recycled the water back into the fissure of bedrock it was formed from.

"Anwarr..." the immortal child's attention was drawn immediately to his father's deep, serene voice. "What the Raven's son saw as morning came was...how Anwarr was made. It is an act of love shared between a man and a woman, and sometimes a man and another man..."

Anwarr interrupted him. "Cn mens 'ake Anwarrs?" He had finally learned to say his own name right.

"Can men make Anwarrs?" Wyrvaust repeated to teach him how to speak correctly, which was actually funny since Wyrvaust had a mental speech impediment himself. "No, there is only one Anwarr, and no men cannot make children, unless they are very special, like some angels are, like Cirgoth is. Women are the ones who make children from men who love them, almost all of the time, unless a man is very special."

"How speckle?" Anwarr asked.

"Special as in...they are man and woman at the same time, but look like men," Wyrvaust tried to explain.

"Howzat?" The child always conjoined words which easily blended on his tongue.

Wyrvaust started growing uncomfortable and his arm tightened around Arilwen. He took a moment to breathe and then lifted himself out of the water with his wife. His demonic member was hard to miss, even soft, and it was half erect from cuddling in the water with his beautiful swan. He pointed to his gender. "Men have this, a homis." Homis was shaamae for 'a man's prowess' which meant their member. He leaned over and lifted Arilwen's leg and pointed to her genitals. "Women have this, their flower of desire, and this," he pointed again at that slit he craved all hours of the day, "...her bliss," he explained in the shammae way and lowered her leg. "When a man's homis spills its seed into a woman's bliss, sometimes a child is made which lives inside of her belly awhile before being born into the world. That is how Anwarr came to be, and hopefully how his brothers or sisters shall come to be." If he was embarrassing her, he did not mean to. He just knew of no other way to illustrate the difference between the sexes and what they owned. He had thought all damn day about this to get up the nerve, until the salamder attacked.

Anwarr clapped his hands. "Wanem now! Makem now!" he squealed and splashed his legs excitedly in the water.

"Um..." Wyrvaust glanced at Arilwen then trained his dark eyes on his son again. "It takes time to make children. Besides, When men join with women or other men, they do so alone, with no one watching. Joining in love is so special that they wish not to share it with anyone else." That was how Wyrvaust saw it and he wanted Anwarr to believe the same thing. It was important to him to instill the values of

love and sex in his son.

"Does it hurt?" Anwarr asked.

"Not unless the joining is rough and the man's prowess is too big for the woman, no. Men should be careful not to hurt the one they love. Joining feels extremely good if done right," he explained to the best of his ability.

"Where's Fahray's snaky things go? Dhey prowesses too?"

Wyrvaust raised a brow. "Well...yes and no...Because of the kind of demon the Raven is he can reshape himself to please Anwarr's mother as he wishes. I willed the...snaky things to be."

"Can Anwarr make snaky things?" his son asked.

Laughter bubbled up inside of Wyrvaust and escaped him in cackles. "In time yes, Anwarr can reshape himself too, even as a demon, but perhaps Anwarr will be different and have his mother's beautiful feathery wings as well." He smiled at the thought.

Anwarr smiled as he imagined himself with wings and claws and hoofed feet, then he got distracted by a large, very colorful moth and watched it flutter around the edges of the pool. The naked boy climbed out of the pool and followed it. He tried to pounce it but missed.

Wyrvaust sank back down in the water and started touching and kissing his beloved wife. "Anwarr must not kill the moth unless he intends to eat it," Wyrvaust called out to his son between the kisses of water he stole from Arilwen's flesh.

Anwarr nodded and pursued his hunt. At length he crept up on another moth, snatched it up in his hands and ate it. His face soured. "Moths are gross!" he shouted, startling a hare which ran for cover. Anwarr grinned and gave chase.

"Anwarr cannot catch hares if he scares them," Wyrvaust instructed his son again, his lips still abreast Arilwen's nipple. "A hunter must sneak up on their prey, like Anwarr did the moth he caught, as Wyrvaust does with his prey." He went back to molesting Arilwen with his lips and tongue while petting her beneath the water. He loved to see her squirm.

Anwarr did not catch a hare. He kept saying they were 'tricky, furry t'ings' and Wyrvaust agreed, promising to teach him how to hunt tomorrow. "We will stay here for awhile," he decided. It was so beautiful and peaceful. Quite a distance east of the oasis he and Arilwen had nearly been captured at; would have been captured at if not for Marsol. Wyrvaust set up Anwarr's tent and put him to bed, telling him a bedtime story about Marsol and his legendary battle with the dragon lord of the north, whose island and lands now belonged to a good dragon king. "How come Marsol didn't keep the kingdom?" Anwarr asked.

"Because it gets cold there and giant trees close in the spaces. Marsol loves the desert and the great open places. He did not claim the land, only the life of an evil dragon man who made he and his tribe suffer."

Before long Anwarr was asleep and Wyrvaust joined his wife, who looked exhausted. It had been awhile since they slept. He pulled her down on the bedroll he had laid out not far from the tent north of the pool beneath the bamboo trees. He would not let her sleep just yet but roused her bliss again and made deep slow love to her until he had brought forth and sustained her orgasm for an hour. He let her pleasures subside gradually then held her dearly, still buried inside of her, as he pulled the shadows around them to conceal their presence. Sleep fell over them swiftly with fatigue and contentment. How he loved her...He truly could never live without her, he thought before drifting off into slumber's counter pane.

The nephalim-demon couple had not been asleep two hours when sounds alerted Wyrvaust and woke him. Someone was approaching the oasis. He was pissed really. He liked being exactly where he was, his body and prowess hugged by his wife. He slid out of her body and arms gently and then stood, still cloaked in shadows, and if should Arilwen arise, she too would remain veiled. He pulled his tan robe on regardless and crept across the level sand towards a mound that rose up beneath some palms then sloped down to the pool. When he reached the top of the hill of sand he crouched down and watched as three people and their horses entered the area. Wyrvaust's demon horses were asleep beneath the bam and booth on the other side of Anwarr's tent. Niculaie and Marcania he recognized, the desert woman with them he did not. After observing them for some time he identified the woman as some kind of demon or undead created of a neffari, perhaps a slave. Who was she? He immediately contacted Marsol telepathically, that is if he could get through to him where he was.

~"My Lord...The Raven haunts the Allamari Oasis with his beloveds. Others have come here. Among them are Nic the fallen one and Marc the angel and a female unknown to me. Knows his beloved Lord who the she-devil is? Or is this a trick of Acheron's Prince?"~

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The trek into the desert had been a wise choice for Wyrvaust. And it was a tool in showing the two parents just how much father and son were alike. While Arilwen struggled at times in the desert heat, Anwarr flourished. The days turned into weeks as they traveled and their son's back grew straight as an arrow and his legs strong. He never broke a sweat and seemed to be stimulated by all of the learning that Wyrvaust was feeding them. Arilwen learned through meticulous practice... Anwarr just seemed to catch on. His mother was filled with bittersweet feelings as she watched him follow his father around camp each night, kicking up sand and posing all of his demanding questions. He was growing up so quickly that it made her chest tighten, but at the same time, she could never be more proud of him. It nearly brought her to tears to watch father and son work together, one so like the other, and she knew that she could never have that type of pride if she ever bore offspring to another. And she would never WANT to.

It seemed that the desert erased thoughts of conflict with Sammael for the time being. As each day passed, the Swan forgot more and more about their recent meeting and immersed herself in her husband's love and knowledge. He relayed to them all he knew about the desert animals, dangerous and safe, how to find water and food without sapping the supplies in the desert. Never kill anything you would not eat, never empty a water supply, and never assume that you would be the only one there to do so. Respect for the land and the other members was key, though Arilwen still

had not seen anyone else living out here. As Wyrvaust gave a demonstration with snakes and other creatures, explaining what they could do to someone, she grimaced and had to nab onto Anwarr's arm. The child's violet eyes were bright with interest and he kept trying to creep closer... as if his mother wasn't watching if he moved slowly enough. The warm desert wind brushed his curly, unruly locks from his face, showing how eager he was to touch anything and everything his father did. HE wanted to handle snakes like that! HE wanted to suck water from the ground... though the first time he tried to do so, he choked on a mouthful of sand and spent the next hour having his mouth cleaned out by his mother. Each night when camp was set, Arilwen would settle herself on the sand and Anwarr would climb into her lap, his long legs akimbo as they stuck out on either side of her and his mouth latched on to feed. She knew that she would soon have to wean him, but these moments were so precious to her. She would bury her face in his warm hair, which was the exact rich color as his father's, and she would breathe in his scent. She often wondered if her heart would still be broken if Sammael had decided to keep him at birth. She decided that it would be.

After Anwarr had his fill, he hopped up and skittered over to dump himself in his father's lap, his wide, curious eyes lifting to the starry skies as the Raven began to explain the star formations to him. He puffed his chest out in pride as he pointed out the couple that he knew, then fell quiet to listen to the stories of their making. Soon enough, their son's eyelids were drooping and he tried to protest bedtime, but Wyrvaust rose and carried him to his small tent to tuck him in. He didn't even have time to finish arranging his blanket before he was out cold, exhausted by the day yet again.

The Swan was waiting quietly for him upon his return, seated on their bedrolls with her knees pulled to her chest and her curly locks brushing over her shoulders as she watched him, her eyes warm with love. She had thought the man crazy when she first met him, after recovering from her harsh introduction to the desert. Now he was beautiful to her. The previous nights she had been too spent to be able to lay with Wyrvaust, but this evening he gave her too much to refuse. The two tumbled into the bedrolls, undressing and groping at each other like lovesick teenagers, the angel's fingers skittering up and down his skin, marveling in the feel of him, her lips and teeth dragging across his neck and shoulder. She was in for a night of sheer exhaustion and delicious tendencies, and soon she had her thighs locked around her Raven's waist, her head tossed back in sheer abandon as she arched and begged him for everything that he could give to her. Sometimes it came out in words...sometimes just noises and actions. Just before dawn, the angel slid her fingers up her husband's shoulders and rolled him onto his back, straddling him as she had not had the chance to do in quite some time, and her body moved fluidly like the snakes they had seen winding across the desert. Her cries gave way to tell the night sky of the love she had for her sweet Raven, and would only allow her body to relent from its grindings when her husband rolled her to her back to take her again, her legs hooked over his shoulders. Her entire body was shaking violently, her eyes rolling back in her head, her nails digging into his arms as she worshiped him with her form.

And of course, as they locked together in such a way, their dear sweet son would decide that it was time to awaken and join them for a wrestling match. His violet eyes went from eager to concerned and confused when he saw what his father was doing to his mother, and after he had pounced Wyrvaust, he slid off to stand there, not sure if he should beg his father to stop it. Instead, he asked questions,

asking if it hurt. "Mum?" Arilwen's violet eyes rolled over to him and she immediately forced herself to clear her hazy vision. Wyrvaust was even more quick about pulling from her body, causing her to whimper and bite back the noise before she sat up quickly, grabbing for her robe.

She had never seen her son unnerve the Raven in such a way, and before she could say a word, he was off across the sand, trying to get away from them. She felt sympathy for him but did not have much time to do so as their toddler was gazing at her with a million questions, now asking what was the matter with his father. "Come here." She said softly. She had pulled her robes on hastily, but mostly to cover her lower half, as Anwarr was used to seeing her bare from the waist up. Tugging her son onto her lap, she brushed her fingers through his hair and smiled gently down at him as he worriedly took a nipple into his mouth, snuggling against her to feed as she tried to assuage him. "Do not worry about your father. We will explain it all to you. And no, mum was not hurt. I promise. You just startled us by the way you snuck up on the Raven, little minx!" She continued to brush her fingers over his curly, wild locks and Anwarr seemed to accept this answer for now. More questions would come later. She was certain of that. Once the nosey boy was full she slid him from her lap and told him to stay here while she went and spoke to the Raven. She finished pulling her robe up, caught up with him across the sand and touched his arm before firmly holding onto it and turning him to face her. It broke her heart to see the struggle etched on his features and she slid her fingertips up his arms to cup his cheeks as he poured out his confusion to her. "I cannot know that more than you, my heart. But I imagine that when difficult questions are posed to any father, it shakes them deeply. Please do not be saddened. I am sure that the Raven wishes to be truthful and thorough with his son regarding matters of the body and heart, just as he is with matters of the desert..." When he seemed to consider this, the Swan leaned in to kiss him softly. She was exhausted at this point, but her senses were buzzing from their all night interlude and the recent events.

Finally, the group would have camp packed and they would be set across the sand once more Anwarr was strapped to his mother's back, seemingly forgetting about what he had seen before. At least for the moment anyway. He chattered to Arilwen and Wyrvaust as usual, as well as himself, peering curiously out across the desert as his bare feet curled and flexed, hanging free in the warm air. It was when he noticed a new, very interesting beast that he piped up, proud that he saw it before his father. Both Arilwen and Wyrvaust twisted in their saddles to look, and Arilwen was certain that the bowels of hell had opened up to spew this creature out. It was even more terrifying than the dragons that roamed the skies, and she had beef with them! Her hands flew forward and she managed to nab her mare's mane as Wyrvaust grabbed the reigns and took off across the sand. Bending low over the horse's neck, Arilwen was certain that her heart was going to explode from her chest, and she held on for dear life. Luckily, Anwarr was safe against her back and seemed to be WAY more interested than frightened. He craned his neck to watch the fire spew from the creature and his mother's thighs were clamped onto the horse beneath them as if the angel and mare were now becoming one creature. She wanted to cry out in fear, but her voice was stuck. Besides, that would hardly help Wyrvaust's concentration, now would it? When they finally plunged into a shadow fold and leapt from the other side, the monster at their back was traded in for one of those horrible dragons overhead. The horses immediately reared up and it was a good thing that Arilwen was stuck in her saddle. In fact, she would probably have to be pried loose after this. When the horses' hooves finally did slow and Wyrvaust pulled them to a stop to dismount, Arilwen didn't move. Her legs felt watery and she was shaking like a leaf

in a monsoon. Anwarr, on the other hand, was wide eyed and wiggly, wanting down immediately. Wyrvaust had to help his poor wife from the saddle to walk for awhile, and she clung to him as he lowered her to the ground. He wrapped her up in his arms and assured her that all was well now, and that she must not hate the creature for looking for food. "I...I know.." She whispered softly, not wanting Anwarr to hear. "I wish I could be strong like you. Creatures like that...they frighten me." It was no wonder. The day she had been snatched from the desert by one of the mighty dragons had been the single most terrifying moment of her life. Scary monsters made her quiver now.

After a few deep breaths she let him know that she was fine to continue, and kept her fingers tightly wound in his as they made way for the oasis. At least THAT would be a breath of fresh air. Anwarr was babbling on her back about the close encounter, finally making his mother roll her eyes. "Fahray, dat besty tried to eatted us! Fahray, do wees taste good? I bet besty like mum. She taste good!" The boy was just too much. Arilwen fought a giggle and shook her head, reaching back to tickle his foot before she stopped to slide off the carrier and free him. She had not realized that she was burned until she did this, and she winced at the tender feeling of her skin. Anwarr seemed unphased and he tottered along the waterline, reaching in with his toes to kick at the water and giggle. "Anwarr, be careful." She warned as she began untying the latches on her robe. Wyrvaust would settle the horses before coming to lead her to the portion of the spring he spoke of, explaining that it had healing benefits as he took over undressing her. It forced her to calm a little more and she smiled softly, reaching up to undress him as well. The two would wade into the water after Anwarr was scooped up by his father and settled into the little indent in the rocks where he seemed absolutely happy to stay. He splashed and reached down through the water, digging up pebbles to throw with a splash, getting scolded once by his mother not to throw rocks near people, but away from them. Once their son understood the rules, Arilwen sank into the water herself, immediately feeling her body replenishing itself. Not only had she been exhausted and worn, but burned as well. And her thighs were KILLING her from clinging to the horse for dear life!

Arilwen was surprised as Wyrvaust brought up that morning to their son, who immediately dropped his wet pebbles and stood in the water, ready to fire off questions. She hid a soft smile as he took on the task, proud of him for facing it. And the gods knew that Anwarr would have a million questions. Her hand slid reassuringly onto his thigh under the water, and if she was needed, she would jump in. She didn't dare risk trying to throw off his explanation though. She blushed a bit as he rose and plainly pointed out what his member looked like, followed by her own womanhood, but she did not shy away from it. She wanted her son to know the truth, and there would be many uncomfortable moments as he grew. She HAD to giggle and relax as her son didn't start questioning why people loved one another, or who decided that this was the way to do it, but instead began demanding brothers and sisters. Biting her lip, she waited for Wyrvaust to finish explaining his body to his son, and that it did not hurt the woman, and that Anwarr would eventually be able to do the same. Anwarr seemed happy with this 'someday' response, though he gave his mother a pointed look and asked her when he could have brothers and sisters. It was Arilwen's turn to speak and she smiled warmly, her eyes studying her son. He was growing up so quickly. "How about this? Mum and Fahray will promise to immediately start finding time to work on making you a sibling, but Anwarr promises to stay in his tent early in the morning and call out for them first. Like Fahray said... we need alone time to make a brother or sister for you." Anwarr

seemed happy by this answer and gave an, "Otay Mum!", before his attention was swayed by the moth that interrupted their session. And off he went, plowing from the water to chase the thing. At that moment Arilwen hoped that they would never have to visit an urban area... the boy had never worn shoes and HATED clothing. That would cause quite a stir in the streets!

Her attention was brought back to her husband as she felt his hands slide down against her skin under the water, his voice calling out to warn Anwarr that if he caught the moth, he had to eat it. The Swan figured that he would forget the moth, but the boy had his father's determination and he finally snagged it, shoving the wiggling thing into his mouth. She hid her disgusted face and then snickered as he announced that he was NOT a fan of it before taking off after a startled rabbit.

Wyrvaust's mouth and hands forced her attention back to him and she felt her body ignite as he molested her in the water, their son distracted. Her hands slid slowly up his arms and she breathed thickly, looking at him with glazed violet eyes. "You mean to unravel my mind and body until I fall apart in this water." She whispered to him, turning to straddle his lap, her legs wrapped around his waist as they sat in the water. She delivered her own torture as she ground herself against him, and when the two were seconds from dragging each other into the sand to screw, they broke apart, trembling.

As darkness fell and Wyrvaust announced that they would remain at the oasis for some time, Arilwen looked pleased and climbed from the water. They had no need to dress now, as their son had been given the explanation of their nudity, so Arilwen took the time to spread out their bedrolls as he went to put their son to bed. She smiled softly as she listened to the muffled story coming from the tent. She had asked the same questions the first time it had been told to her.

After what seemed like a lifetime, Wyrvaust came to join his Swan, who looked ready to fall over. Still, the last few hours had been heavenly, so she gladly opened to him as they coupled yet again. He was torturous as he moved slowly within her and finally brought her to orgasm, her body seizing and locking up beneath him as he refused to let her down. Finally, when he did, the Swan immediately was lulled into the deepest, dreamless sleep, her arms and legs intertwined with her husband's. She was so far gone that she would not even stir when he rose not two hours later to investigate visitors in the desert. She simply rolled over in her sleep and cuddled against his spot in the blankets, breathing in his scent in her sleep.

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Wyrvaust gnawed lightly on his lower lip as he received his Lord's message; A trap, most probable. No she-devil has been sent by my or any of ours for that wandering demon. And none would be sent ever for that angel, unless I've become senile. Still he is here and alive, is he not? By whatever means brought him here, they will take him no further. Do not get any more involved, old friend, a handful I'll send to escort Niculaie back with and a hardly welcoming one to help this Marcania be on his way. This... she-devil will get neither. The clan demon heaved a breath which the shadows devoured and hunkered against the dune. He had meant for this little excursion to be something more than it had turned out to be. It was a long walk in the desert, metaphorically speaking, which he had intended to be a cultural experience for Marianna and his son; only every village they had approached within his sensory range had been occupied by demons and other fell things of Acheron.

And yes, Wyrvaust had considered himself one of those fell things for a long time now, only his will was his own and Marsol's, and Marsol had never commanded him to act against his nature. Strange as Wyrvaust might find it, the next village they encountered would be abandoned, trashed, but abandoned, as would every other village that had previously been occupied thereafter. At the moment though, he was sure most of the north-central and east-central desert had been claimed by Sammael's legions. He was right about that, only Sammael had ordered his legions to pull out and to return home to Acheron. Who but Sammael and Maelmorda were aware of that? No one else at the time. Perhaps Sammael meant to let people figure it out for themselves and let the fear stew.

Wyrvaust remained seated on the dune, veiled by the shadows until Marsol's men came. Gilriael was among them, as was Draemus, one of Marsol's demon progeny. Draemus was always around but rarely ever seen, Marsol's oldest blood son, sired out of a Shaamae warrior. He was an impressive sight. The demon observed the group of ten, whom Draemus commanded, as they hauled a very unhappy and confused abyss reaver away, with the woman they had tossed in a warded cage with a great deal of trouble, she was a hell of a fighter. Wyrvaust was amused when they gated the Yajmha loving angel to who knows where after warning him that he was banished from the Desert of Fire and that death would be the penalty should he return. That brought a smile to Wyrvaust's lips. Marcannia was the kind of angel he despised. Self-righteous, blindly judgmental, and worst of all he served a God who had kicked him to the dung hill. Wyrvaust was of the opinion that Acheron should have him. He had turned on Cirgoth for consorting with demons after all, after Cirgoth had done all in his power to protect him and Thane. So he failed, were his efforts worth so little? The sacrifices he had made? Wyrvaust rose and stepped out of the shadows to half slide, half walk down the sand hill to greet Draemus and Gilriael with a bow. "Grateful is the Raven to have this beautiful island in the sand for himself and his small clan again. May the sun guide the great warrior and bard to splendid destinies and the night cover their hearts in comfort." He bade them. Gilriael slapped his shoulder and bid him farewell with a poem, Draemus laughing richly as he followed him in departure. Draemus was a demon of few words. He spoke only when he had something to say worth hearing. When the two had gone he returned to his wife's bedroll, disrobed, and lay down beside her. He could not restrain himself from touching her and soon woke her with his intimate touches. He waited until her body was primed for him, steeping with the need to be filled, and coupled with her. He loved her for long hours, until the chill of the morning was shed was by the parching heat of the day, and led her with their son back down to the pool. For three days they lingered at the oasis. Not another soul stopped there during that time. On the fourth night; he decided it was time to try the next village east of the oasis.

They rode at night again, with bladders full of water and food enough to carry them across the next stretch of barren desert. When they arrived at the village, which had once been inhabited by Desert Elves that were friendly to demons and dragon kind which served Marsol, the village was deserted. He had sensed nothing approaching and entered the small oasis village cautiously only to find the skulls of the elves that once inhabited the area. They were raised on spikes and bore the remains of torches which had been lodged in holes cut in the cap of the skulls. Not one of them had relented to the domineering command of the legion's leader and they had all lost their lives for their courageous resistance. None had escaped because they had refused to leave anyone behind. Quite a number of demons and other kinds had fallen to the elves before they had been overwhelmed by sheer



numbers. All the signs told the story. It was depressing. Sammael had pulled his legions out, yes, but they had devastated many villages before being recalled. Wyrvaust prayed for the elves, that their kingdom receive them well for their courage, and then he buried the remains he could find. It was thankless labor and when evening came, he found the only house that had not been burned to the ground, the Elder's House which the demon leaders had sheltered in, and there they stayed for the night. He had to answer a lot of questions raised by his son concerning death.

When they left, he guided them towards home indirectly by a route which carried them to the most populated areas of the desert just beyond Marsol's borders. These were all part of Hassim territory. The elven village had been on the border. Every village they encountered in Hassim was either abandoned or inhabited by people who had been terribly abused by the demons before finally relenting to obey them. Slaves abandoned to suffer the losses of their families, the rapes, the mental torments they had agonized. They were broken people. Wyrvaust and his beautiful wife did what they could to help the people. Wyrvaust restored dry wells, hunted for them, and Arilwen healed them of their injuries. Even Anwarr helped in any way he could. The people were slow to trust them until they saw their good intentions were sincere. Those the demons had turned into various hellish creatures they took with them. The villages within Marsol's territory, which were scarce, had been protected by the dragons and Marsol's legions. Sammael would discover that one demon among those he ordered to withdraw would protest abandoning the kingdom he had reclaimed. It was Yorek's father who met with Sammael to protest his withdrawal. His claim was unfortunately logical in truth. His death had not been a true death, thus Hassim was his by right of blood. He was the true king and intended to maintain his rule, with his vow to serve Sammael faithfully in the meantime. Owed to this, the two largest villages Wyrvaust and Arilwen approached were still occupied by demons under King Saeed's command. Wyrvaust sensed their presence of course and turned their course away from the first village, but the second village had a barrier around it which doused the presence of those within.

It was late at night when their horses entered the village. It had been a long day's ride. Oil lamps burned low in the streets and it was quiet. The village was clean, well kept. A dog barked somewhere off of one of the side streets. Candles glowed in some of the windows of the houses crowded against one another. By all appearances it looked as if this particular village had been spared. Then the unexpected happened as they met the main square, where a handsome keep of sand stone rose above the tents where a marketplace were set up by day, and the earth opened up beneath an arch to an underground prison, and a handsome Inn stood. The moment they entered the center of that square; their horses startled as they met with a necromantic wall of force which damaged them when they contacted it. Swinging his horse around, and backing it up, he found they were surrounded by the barrier. His mental voice reached out for Marsol's attention immediately, and unless Sammael was blocking the demon's voice to Marsol, the dragon lord would receive his bonded friend's message. "The Raven and his beloveds are caught in a trap in the village square of Kahlibar in Hassim." His voice was a calm as he looked to Arilwen. Losing his head would not help anything! "It is a necromantic wall of force. I will attempt to bring it down and to escape it, but if I fail I shall need some assistance." Wyrvaust tried at his best to bring it down but could not best the power which had raised it. The Raven then freed the demon in him to empower himself, and to see if the wall of force had a roof on it. It did not, it

was a wall, not a dome or a sphere, but as he cleared the wall and was about to cry out for Arilwen to spread wing and fly with Anwarr, a net fell over him. His wings beat wildly against it but only tangled him more and plunged him back into the trap to collide with his horse which spooked, reared up, and the crashed down on him, breaking some ribs and puncturing a lung. He would regenerate of course, but at the moment he was in a lot of pain and was weakened by the injury. "My Lord...if you can hear me, I need your help," he called to Marsol again. The small family was soon surrounded by quite a large number of demons and devils of various kinds. Gabrian was one of them, whose service Sammael had 'lent' to King Saeed Kassim. Until the matter with Saeed's claim to Hassim was settled, Gabrian was to remain where he was and continue with his duties to Saeed. It was Gabrian who approached the unseen wall which had trapped the three.

He paced around the barrier, hands folded behind his back, the stumps, splintered bones, and few relic feathers of dismembered wings protruding from his back. He was scarred all to hell but was otherwise extremely handsome. "Well, well, what have we here? An Adramelech Clan demon, a Nephelim of Belorian's blood of all angels, and a lovely little half breed. Glad to see that my little trap's concealment worked. Who do you serve?" he asked them. He had clearly scanned them very well before showing himself.

"Marsol, now and forever," Wyrvaust snapped as he straightened himself and climbed with quite a bit of trouble to his feet, even when Arilwen climbed off of her horse to assist him.

"Ah, then you would be Wyrvaust. Yes, I remember you now, and you and your wife's daring little escape from Acheron. Bravo, not many would have that kind of pluck. I am afraid you are trespassing here though. You really should not make a habit of that you know; First the barren lands and now Hassim. What business have you being here anyway?"

"Doing what the Raven and Swan could to help the people in the villages your people devastated, we were," Wyrvaust stated tonelessly, doing his best to conceal the malice which broiled in him. Gabrian felt it nevertheless.

"It is for my present leader and yours to settle this matter I am afraid. In the meantime, you shall just have to content yourselves to be our prisoners. As you are our brother we shall treat you well, and you miniature little clan as well. Sorry to have to do this." Even as Gabrian spoke that last statement he released a powerful wave of energy over them which stripped them of their power, leaving them as helpless as...well humans, without the resistance to magic. The necromantic wall was lowered, their horses gathered by several demons in guise of men, hence the two adults and their child were escorted by armed guards to the keep, where they were placed in a warded room. Wyrvaust fought them all the way, biting, clawing, kicking with those cloven hooves, attempting to nail them with his horns, flailing them with those massive wings, until he gave them no choice but to lay him low with several skull cracking blows to the head. They could have used magic and just laid him to sleep or held him, but demons tended to be physical, and well, demons would be demons. Wyrvaust was tossed bleeding on the bed, the door was closed, locked by the wards, and there they would remain until Marsol and or Sammael could sort it all out. Wyrvaust had kept his word; he had called for Marsol. Whether his message had been received by Marsol remained to be seen. Gabrian meanwhile informed Sammael fully of the incident. He would always obey Sammael, his sire, over Saeed.

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Arilwen was awoken late the following night by the intoxicating scent of her husband rolling into her arms. She sleepily drew him against her and the two spent a sweet while together before untangling to break down camp and head out. It had been so long since she had been in a village or town that when they entered, she felt slightly nervous. Anwarr, on the other hand, was wiggling with excitement on her back to get down. He loved people... he wanted to interact with anything and everything! She was shy when Wyrvaust set about introducing them to the people and she felt their hesitancy too. At least the majority of the women seemed to be swooning over her dark haired son already, who was soaking up the attention. It was a good open door to gaining their trust.

Over the next few days, Arilwen felt fulfilled and also felt a massive amount of pride for her husband, who was working harder than ever to help the families and people get on their feet. She was able to help in her own way, visiting the sick or injured, Anwarr tagging along to help them feel comfortable. He was happy to work for treats, that was for certain! Arilwen would spend hours with different people, slowly healing what needed to be fixed. At night they would be exhausted, Anwarr passed out in her arms or his father's, but they would do it all again the next day. She finally felt comfortable with new people, sitting down to use her soothing nature to warm people up and assure them of their intentions... that they were pure.

On the path home, Arilwen was glad to have another village to stop in. Anwarr was sleeping in her arms, his cheek pressed against her chest as their horses loped into the center square. Arilwen was sleepy as well, but she kept one arm wrapped tightly around their son, cradling him close, her other holding lightly to the reins. However, her fingers locked hard onto the leather and she pulled back, gripping to Anwarr as the horses suddenly spooked. She looked horribly confused and only once she had the horse slightly under control, she shot her gaze to Wyrvaust, seeking answers. There was nothing here to spook them.. right? A necromantic wall of force? All Arilwen could do was nod and watch his demon features begin to break out... a sight she still was not quite used to, even as he started climbing upwards, trying to find the lip of the wall. Suddenly a net came crashing down on him, tangling around his wings and plowing him into his horse. Arilwen gasped, immediately grabbing the mane of her own mare to swing down, Anwarr stirring in her arms. She shifted him on her hip as her feet carried her as quickly as they could to her husband. "My Raven..." She whispered in a terrified voice and fell to her knees beside him, setting Anwarr to his feet as her hands began pulling at the nets around him. It was movement around him that caused her violet eyes to slowly lift, widening at what she saw. They were surrounded by a group of miscellaneous demons and devils. Anwarr stood beside his mother, his fingers clinging to the arm of her robe. It was the scarred man who stepped forward to address them who confused her... and that look was obvious as he mentioned her being of "Belorian's blood". Who in the hell was that? Turning her attention back to her husband, she managed to free him from his net and help him rise. The conversation continued between Wyrvaust and this man with bony wings, revealing that it was his fault that so many people suffered. And then it was revealed that the small family would be kept as prisoners...and as soon as that word was spoken, Arilwen felt her chest grow tight. The last time they had been prisoners together had been when she gave birth to Anwarr in that horrible place... and Wyrvaust had lost it. She immediately grabbed

Anwarr and scooped him up against her, swinging to face her husband with a desperate voice. "Please..." She said softly. "Do not fight them, Raven of my heart. They--" It was then that the strange force hit them. Arilwen felt suddenly sick and weakened...so much so that she had to clutch more tightly to Anwarr to keep him from slipping. She reached for Wyrvaust, but he was already being grappled away by a group of the men. Who were they? She didn't understand...what had they done wrong? Trespassed? They were only helping! Anwarr was making frightened noises in his throat, suddenly screaming out for his father as they began to be dragged away and Wyrvaust, of course, fought with every ounce of strength he had, causing him to be beaten down by their escorts. The sound of her son's distress made Arilwen's eyes heat with tears and she reached behind his head to press his face down into her shoulder, not fighting the men who took her by the arms to follow her irate lover. A sob caught in her throat as she begged the men not to beat him so badly, but of course, she was ignored. Minutes later, they were being dumped into a warded room, Wyrvaust unconscious and bleeding all over the bed he was tossed on.

Once they were left alone, Arilwen quickly kissed Anwarr on the brow and put him down before rushing over to kneel on the bed beside her husband. "My Raven...please wake up." She pleaded. She was trying to cast her healing strength on him, but nothing was coming, causing her to feel helpless. Why was he not starting to heal?! Why was there no regeneration? After minutes of trying with no response, Arilwen crumbled into a puddle of tears, sobbing as her face dropped onto his chest. She didn't understand who these men were... and that made the situation even worse. Anwarr was so unnerved by his mother crying and his father looking helpless that he was also crying, leaving his mother to scoop him up and hug him tightly, weeping into his dark hair. He asked who they were...why the bad men were hurting his father. And she had no answers.

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Wyrvaust was out for about an hour though he had lost all sense of time and woke with a screaming headache. His breaths were labored as a result of being stripped down to basics before he could heal from the broken ribs and a punctured lung and had been beaten rather severely afterwards. He came to out of strange foretelling dreams and his gaze meandered with hazy languor until they lifted on the visage of a beauty whose features were fuzzy. He felt nauseous, feverish, and his head swam; all signs he recognized as symptoms of having a concussion. It was an interesting sensation to him to feel human again, although he did not look human at all. He was trapped in his demonic shift for the moment though it was nothing he was concerned about. He sat up despite the pain and dizziness and peered around their cell. There was one door, two windows, a plush hand woven carpet which covered an unencumbered area spanning the center of the floor, two chairs, a table against the wall which a pitcher of cool water, squares of cloth, and cups sat on; and one large bed; the one Wyrvaust sat on with his wife and son. There was also a fireplace with a large, dense fur blanket by it, and a stack of wood, but no fireplace tools. The water pitcher had not been there before, nor had anyone brought it in personally. It had been gated or conjured by Gabrian. Food and even wine would appear later. Their captive accommodations were actually very nice; too nice in Wyrvaust's opinion. Such a prison meant one of two things; either a lengthy term of captivity, or a very brief one, a political imprisonment, the duration of which depended on terms and outcomes. Arilwen would know by the way he inspected their quarters that he was seeking an advantage, despite the fact that he thinned his eyes to attempt a gain on his blurred vision. He swung around but

lurched and inhaled a biting breath as pain struck a blow to his senses, hence he lowered his bestial legs to the floor more slowly; hence his gaze softened and settled on his splendid wife's worried facial features. She was so like a desert flower to him. "Prisoners of a latent war are we, captives of a king and politics. Bargaining things we shall be," he deduced with apt logic. "My beloved Lord shall not hawk with his enemies however, for to do so would weaken his position and kingdom. Our wits we must keep about us and pretense be played if we must," he whispered to her. Wyrvaust then kissed her, an arm and wing curling around her. He forgot his appearance and the fact that she might still shy from it. Afterwards he laid back down, his arms slipping away from her and stared up at the ceiling. He did not flinch at the pain or even move as Arilwen wiped the blood from his head. He fought the feelings of dishonor and shame which surfaced and threatened to smother him. He had been so certain he could keep them safe, but had failed them once again. It was a blow to the Raven which shook his already cracked confidence, which was now shattered. It was certain that if Wyrvaust made it back to his lair with his family that he would not be leaving it again for a very long time unless it was to hunt and scout the land alone just around his home, as he had done before he had met Arilwen and for quite some time after. Wyrvaust had isolated himself to his lair and the desert, shying away from all living things but the animals and Marsol for ages. He was headed to that place again, only with Arilwen and his son added to the one other he mingled with. Anwarr curled up against him seeking both mother and father's comfort and he cuddled him in an arm and covered him over protectively with a wing. "The Raven is not meant to see the world..." he spoke quietly. "He is destined to be a ghost to all but his chieftain, wife, and son." He hoped Arilwen understood for he felt very tired, sick, and terribly dizzy, his eyes drifting to a close. He was not sure he had the strength to explain himself at the moment.

Gabrian meanwhile contacted Sammael by path of mind speak, and had already communed telepathically with King Kassim. "My leige, three prisoners have we; names of Wyrvaust, Arilwen and their son Anwarr. Lord Kassim wishes them to be used as leverage to achieve a treaty with Lord Marsol. I warned him that Marsol would refuse to hear terms founded on the freedom or lives of his people, but he insists he can make Marsol play. What I wish to know from you, My Lord and Sire, is what you would have done with the Raven of Adram, the daughter of Belorian, and the child of them both. I await your response and shall act only on your word." Gabriel would await Sammael's command and act according to his decision. He served Kassim, yes, but second to Sammael who had assigned the infernal demon in service to the undead king. Kassim was sure that Gabriel was there as much as a spy as an ally, which was very true, but the demon was tremendously powerful and a clear asset to Kassim. The king had placed Gabriel in charge of the largest village in Hassim to get keep him at a distance. It was a waste of his time, for Gabriel had spies all around the king who would tell the infernal angel anything he wished to know.

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Arilwen's dissolving emotional state lasted for nearly twenty minutes as she kept her arms wrapped tightly around their son, her face buried in his hair as she tried to get a hold of herself. She felt as lost and confused as Anwarr was, who was clinging tightly to his mother's robes, his face buried between her breasts. Finally she managed to get her breathing under control and she wiped her cheeks on her sleeve. "It's alright, my little nymph..." She murmured to him, kissing his

brow and rubbing his back to calm his whimpers as she pushed one shoulder of her robe free from her body and allowed Anwarr to latch on, comforting himself to quiet as he suckled. She felt so tired. She had never felt her body at a human-like status and part of her just wanted to lie down and fall asleep in her exhaustion.

After Anwarr was finished feeding he snuggled against Arilwen and rubbed his sleepy face into her bare skin, quiet now that his mother was calm. Arilwen rose, keeping him tightly tucked against the curve of her body and began to slowly walk the room, humming quietly to lull him to sleep. Just as he was dozing off she heard the bed shift and turned quickly to see Wyrvaust struggling to sit up. Her feet carried her quickly across the room where she deposited Anwarr on the bed and knelt in front of her husband, her features set into a worried frown and her fingers settling on his legs. His deduction of their situation at least gave her a little understanding. They were prisoners of politics and he pointed out that Marsol would not weaken his position to free them. Arilwen nodded grimly, leaning forward to slide her arms around her husband's unusual form, closing her eyes for a moment before she rose and finally managed to coax him to lie down again. As she went to fetch towels and a pitcher of water, Anwarr crawled up alongside his father and gave him a tiny, frightened smile and kiss on the cheek before settling down into the crook of his arm, his face pressed into Wyrvaust's chest. The protective wing that wrapped him did a good job of covering him in darkness and in minutes, Anwarr would be fast asleep, sucking on his fingers and breathing softly. Arilwen, on the other hand, got to work, climbing up to kneel on the bed and gently wash out her husband's wounds, tucking clean towels under his head to soak up the blood and water. How did people with no healing powers manage to pull all this off? It was so much easier when she could instill healing in someone... but towels and water against a cracked skull? And what about his ribs? There was nothing she could do there. The Swan shook her head when Wyrvaust struggled to speak about his destiny to be a ghost and nothing more, and a finger came down to press gently to his lips. "Quiet, Raven of my heart..." She said softly, her fingers continuing to clean out his head wound. "You are the same honorable man whether you are a ghost or a blazing light across the desert." She smiled warmly down at him, her heart swelling. He put far too much burden on himself... but he had always been that way, hadn't he?

Once she had cleaned him up the best she could, Arilwen sat beside her husband, stroking his cheek with her fingertips, murmuring her loving words to him until he had fallen back into cold sleep. The moment she knew that both her husband and son were asleep, she gathered the dirty towels and dumped them by the door, then made rounds around the room. She wasn't sure WHAT she was looking for. A way out? She knew that wouldn't happen. She stuck her head up the chimney, peered out the windows, even went to the door to try jiggling the knob. Nothing. Sucking in a deep breath, she looked at the door as she mulled over their situation. Marsol would not bargain for them, as well he shouldn't. He could not risk losing his place or honor. Her husband couldn't get out of bed, her son was terrified... and they had no powers to speak of. Adjusting her robes to make sure she was fully covered, Arilwen took yet another deep breath and proceeded to bang her fist on the door, her heart pounding. If no one came she would pound louder, and whoever DID come (if anyone), she would step back and give them a cold look, pointing to her husband on the bed. "Since you have taken my healing abilities, I want someone to fix him. Now. I also want to know who is in charge here and I want to speak with them. Immediately." Oooh, the angel suddenly grew a pair! Inside she was trembling and terrified of what they might do, but they couldn't just sit here and rot. Worst case scenario? Maybe they would beat her senseless and she would end up like

Wyrvaust.

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Arilwen and Wyrvaust's Journey Continued  
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It was a muscular cricket demon guard with powerful legs, a large scorpion tail, very heavy claws, and a pair of large, insect-like wings folded against its body, which answered that demanding knock of Arilwen's. His massive claws scratched against the door as he pulled against the latch and flung the door open to reveal its hideous form and the six eyes which peered as much at her as the corridor without with all around vision. If she had the nerve to try and step through the threshold, she would meet with a powerful wall of force which would halt her progression as surely as a steel wall. It surrounded the entire chamber, the windows and chimney included, albeit smoke could still escape the chimney. At her rather bossy demands the ten foot tall, spine and tentacle armoured demon sneered to further expose those menacing teeth which dominated his mouth with its venomous slobber and informed her telepathically that he would extend her request for an audience with Hiraad (lord) Gabrian. The demon then shut the door.

It was not long after that Gabrian appeared at the door, which opened to him as he approached. He walked through the wall of force which surrounded the chamber and took a lean against the wall by the door, his broken bits of bony wings popping at the joints and scraping the wall behind him as he did so. "As I failed to introduce myself before; I am Gabrian, Hiraad of this village, which in your native tongue would be the same as a marquis. This village and any prisoners we capture are mine until my Lord says otherwise." His lips pursed as she insisted that someone heal Wyrvaust immediately. "His immortality is intact, as is yours. He shall not die from his wounds and shall heal in time on his own despite his regeneration being barely above a human's ability to heal. Still, I shall permit the return of your ability to heal by touch. I have no desire to be cruel." Even as he said it he unlocked her healing ability.

His gaze fell in the way of Anwarr who slept by his father's side. His gaze then drifted off and after a moment a wooden box manifested in the corner of the room filled with various toys, most of them hand carved animals from wood, some with wheels and leather pull strings. Four of them were stuffed animals made of animal fur with quartz eyes. Gabrian had simply gated the toys from various homes in the village. It was false conjury and he was capable of fabrication as well. He was a quantum projectionist and chaosmancer. He was Sammael's most powerful and loyal progeny and advocate, the Princes of Acheron aside. One of the dolls he fabricated himself. It was made of black died leather with agate eyes, stuffed with spineless down, and in the shape of an abyss demon, complete with wings, a Wyrvaust doll it could be said. As Arilwen's back was to the corner he delivered the open toy box to, she would notice them later. Gabrian had a tendency to produce items when no one was looking, as he had with the water, cups, bindings, and compresses. Their meals would also appear when no one was paying attention to the table.

"I suppose you have questions for me. I shall answer anything which shall not compromise us." The infernal demon was honest at least.

Gabrian was not all evil, only as evil as he needed to be to achieve an objective, and he was reliably loyal to Sammael. If Sammael asked something of him; he

obeyed, plain and simple. He would murder, rape, kidnap, torture, steal, destroy, what have you if Sammael commanded it, otherwise he was mild in his temperament, even kind, albeit emotionally aloof. It had been Gabriel who had won the support Sammael needed to claim Acheron's throne. Gabriel was an able leader and very charismatic when he had a mind to be. He had legions of his own to command, albeit the Cricket Demons were Abaddon's, who had lent several legions of the frightening demons to support Sammael's efforts. Despite their monstrous mammalian-reptilian-and-insect-like mixed appearance, they were intelligent and well organized. Gabriel had received orders from King Saeed to torture Wyrvaust and his family in his presence to force the demon to tell Gabriel what the king wanted to know, but Gabriel was holding off on that until he heard from Sammael. Sammael might order their release, that they be delivered to him, or even demand their deaths, though Gabriel doubted that. The infernal progeny of Sammael's was not about to injure the prisoners if there was a chance that Sammael wanted them delivered to him or their home safe and sound. The injuries Wyrvaust had received were merely incidental, a product of his futile attempts to escape.

It was then Sammael extended his command to him, belated it seemed, he had contacted him over an hour ago. Strange things had been happening with telepathic relays in the desert lately. Gabriel suspected that someone out there was either attempting to halt them, intrude on them, or both. He pushed his own voice past any interference by bypassing distance through an alternate plane of communication he selected for his mental voice to follow. "My Lord, your message may have been delayed, but I am receiving you now. I shall deliver the prisoners to you immediately." His gaze then locked on Arilwen. "Never mind healing him now. He shall be cared for shortly." The demon then harnessed a path of travel, checking the planar path he chose selectively carefully for possible trespass and holes of interception before he thrust his hands out towards the prisoners in a sweep to plunge them with himself through a planar gate which would deliver them to the chamber Sammael occupied with his son and Maelmorda. Wyrvaust arrived sprawled on the floor by the pool, still out cold, Anwarr still snug under his wing asleep. Gabriel would appear facing Arilwen as he was before he transferred them until he smiled at Sammael and walked over to kneel by the pool and kiss his sire's cheek.

"It is a pleasure as always to see you, My Lord," he greeted him as a son would his father, and after embracing him; he stood at the edge of the pool. He bowed respectfully to Maelmorda. "Lord Kilcanoragh. You look...well..." he almost laughed at the vision of him all tangled with his Lord. He wondered about it, hence he swept a hand towards the three captives. "Wyrvaust struggled against the guards and was wounded," he announced. "Would you have them remain helpless, or have me restore their strengths to them? I stripped them all naked of their arcane and immortal prowess, with exception of the child," he informed his lord.

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Arilwen had seen some horrific things since coming to the desert, and this creature was suddenly added to it. When the door scraped open her violet eyes grew huge at the thing she saw. What in the HELL was that!? She did not try to leave. Oh no. In fact, she took one timid step backwards into the room, her fingertips falling to curl into the folds of her robe, clutching the fabric apprehensively, nodding when the message was to be delivered by the departing creature. Holy crap, that thing was from a nightmare!



Minutes later, the bony-winged demon who had ordered their capture appeared and Arilwen sucked in her breath, kicking up her stiff chin a notch. She felt scared but was refusing to show it. Bravery had to make its way into her heart when she had a wounded husband, no powers and a sleeping son. Ugh, but her spine shivered when those bone joints scraped against the wall and she felt a muscle in her jaw twitch at the horrid sound. What had happened to him? Had he once had beautiful wings like Wyrvaust? Wait... did she CARE? No!

Surprisingly, Arilwen immediately received SOME results from her demanding nature and was returned her ability to heal by touch. She gave a soft 'thank you' but did not move from her spot. She didn't trust this man... and why should she? Especially with the way he was studying her son! Of course she did not realize he was in the process of forming a toy box for Anwarr, who would be very pleased to find it when he awoke. Okay, she could do this. She could be ballsy. Her fingers relaxed from clutching her robes and her arms shifted to cross loosely over her chest as she studied the man in front of her, who gave her free reign to ask questions... no answer guaranteed.

"I want to know why we were taken in when we have done nothing wrong. My husband and I ventured out into the desert weeks ago for no other reason than for learning... he is teaching our son and I the important aspects of survival here. There was no intention of trespassing on anyone's land or intruding." Arilwen was trying to keep the desperation from her voice, but she wanted to throttle the man and scream at him to just let them go home. She had no idea what terrible things might await her and her family here. Of course, leave it to good ole' Sammy to intervene! But which would be worse? Torture or Sammael's attentions? Arilwen's violet eyes gained an air of confusion as Gabriel told her that she would need to worry about Wyrvaust's state later and lifted his hands. Oh no. Anytime someone did that then she was transported. Before she could open her mouth to protest she felt her stomach lift and the world blur, coming back into focus in another place. She blinked, seeing Gabriel still in front of her, but then immediately shot her eyes around to take in their situation. There was a large, sparkling pool... her husband and son lying next to it, eyes still closed... Sammael. Oh...God...

Arilwen turned pale as Gabriel went to greet Sammael and explain their current situation and she hurried over to kneel beside Wyrvaust, her fingers uncurling and moving to touch him. However, they stopped not an inch from his face and she hesitated. If she healed Wyrvaust, he would wake up... and when he saw not only Gabriel, but Sammael, he would be angry again... and probably do what he was best at in high pressure situations. Attack someone. Arilwen chewed on her lower lip, fighting panic. No. She had to try and make leeway before she woke him up. She had known for quite some time that Sammael was infatuated with her and as much as she hated to think of it, she might be able to use that to her advantage. Her violet eyes flickered up and around the room. What the hell had been happening here before she arrived? She saw Lord Maelmorda and he looked like a train wreck.

The angel pulled her hands away from her husband and promptly rose, stepping over him to stalk over to the group of men who currently spoke. And she was going to force herself to wait until they were done talking before she leapt in with her own words to Sammael, her voice controlled and pleading. "Send us home. We have done nothing wrong..." Okay, maybe that wasn't phrased the nicest way, so she added a hasty "please" to the end. Her racing heart was causing her delicious scent to pump out and fill the room in thick waves to the point where it was nearly suffocating.

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Arilwen felt her face and neck flood with heat as Gabriel shot her a horrid look and warned her that she was not to speak unless spoken to, and even then, she should kneel before Sammael for being granted that permission. Cold sweat broke out on her palms and prickled the soft hairs and the back of her neck. He called her 'prisoner'. It began to sink in that this was not like last time... this was not her being dressed inappropriately and dragged to a party. They were going to be punished. It did not help the situation that Wyrvaust had snatched Arilwen and Anna free the last time they had been here. Swallowing, she lowered her violet eyes and wrung her fingers before her, taking a few quiet steps back in the direction she came. Maelmorda's mention of a party, followed by his apt party planning skills, arose while he was nude and molesting Sammael, who was returning the favor quite happily. She had never been in a situation like this and she felt horribly uncomfortable. Especially with Maelmorda mentioning a NUDE party. Ugh.

It was then that silent movement caught Arilwen's eye and she darted her gaze to the poolside where she saw Wyrvaust slowly climbing to his feet. Her eyes lit up, but she made no sound when she realized what he was doing. Oh no. He was going to try and escape again. Could they be lucky a third time? Biting her tongue, Arilwen took their sleeping son when offered and tucked him against her body, hugging him tightly as her hand was caught up and she was swept away in their attempt.

What followed was terrifying. They ran down endless corridors and through unmarked doors. Some doors would not budge. Some halls threw up gates or walls in their face. It was when they plunged through a door and Wyrvaust nearly plummeted into a pit that Arilwen's free arm snapped out to lock around his waist and haul him back with as much might as she could muster. It was at least enough to help him get his balance so he could stumble back against the wall. The two both realized at the same time that this was it. Sammael was going to let them run themselves ragged and there was no escaping this time. No flying free... no plunging through gates. Their powers were gone. Arilwen felt her throat close but she took a deep breath when she saw her husband about to crumble into the darkness. "My Raven..." She whispered, pressing herself against him, her lips leaning to brush against his mouth. "All is not lost. There was no way for you to avoid this. We were trapped... like animals. Now our task is to keep our son safe and to work with Lord Sammael in hopes of being set free with minimal issues. You must keep your wits about you...for our family. I will not return home without you." She kissed him feverishly, then dropped her face to the crook of his neck, Anwarr still tucked between them. "We cannot keep running... and our son must understand that he cannot flee from every situation. We shall show our bravery... for him..."

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Wyrvaust closed his eyes as his beloved Swan told him that all was not lost, that there was no way he could have avoided their situation, that they had been trapped like animals. His eyes fell on her with a burn as she defined that their present task was to keep Anwarr safe and to work with Satan towards freedom. He laughed dryly, which was very unlike him, when she said he needed to keep his wits about him. Shame bit hard at him when she vowed that she would not return home without him. His lips and breath trembled against hers when she kissed him and his head leaned over against her crown of raven hair as she nuzzled her face against his

throat. His thoughts were dark, oh so grim, so he kept them to himself; until she said that they could not keep running and had to keep up their courage for their son. "Acheron's Prince of Demons has spared the Desert Raven too many times. Satan shall not spare this demon again. He has a limit to his tolerance and the Raven has twice exceeded it. The Raven was never the bravest of demons. His courage came from madness. Fearless is he as is a rabid dog when cornered. Torture the Raven can bear, but knows what he cannot bear the Desert Wind does; the loss of those he loves; rape, shame and disgrace. Destroy this soul and darkness is all that shall remain. What is Wyrvaust shall be no more. Thinks the Swan Satan is not capable of this? Oh he is, he is, when crossed the Desert Wind has been, and thrice has the Raven crossed him. This demon has cut the dividing line. Came I in his reach one too many times and has the Prince of Demons the Raven's treasured Swan to use against him. One means alone can save the Raven now, and he cannot grant it. Devote his loyalty to him he must, and that the Raven can never do. Marsol alone owns the Raven's heart and commitment and ever shall he possess it." Wyrvaust did not even realize that his hand was pressed up against his rib cage which ached tremendously from the broken bones and torn muscle within. His fatigue he felt heavily though, and he was as much jaded in spirit as in body.

The demon then flinched as a blend of familiar scents mixed with the unfamiliar caught his attention, and taking Arilwen's hand in his he began walking down the wide corridor, following his nose. At length he came to a door that was spared by a crack and he peered through it, his huge black wings shielding the door and what he spied within entirely. Marsol was in a large black bed bearing hard down against Cirgoth who he brought a cry of bliss from as he pinned him by the sheer prowess of the cock he impaled him so deeply with that they were flush pelvis to pelvis. Wyrvaust's breath caught at the sight, a frantic uprising of envy and jealousy unbalancing his senses. He knew he should not feel wounded, knew he had no right to feel that way; but he did regardless of what he knew to be right and wrong. His heart and emotions had a mind of their own where Marsol was concerned, always had, and their bond had intensified it. It did not occur to him that Marsol would feel everything he did at the moment through that bond; see right through him without need of visual contact. Tears threatened but he blinked them back and his expression paled. His jet eyes then thinned as he saw Marsol sink a row of sharp teeth in Cirgoth's throat and tear a flap of flesh and muscle away whereof he feasted on the blood which sprang forth like a fountain. Wyrvaust startled as Arilwen's hand met his shoulder and he staggered back away from the door. He stood trembling for a moment then choked on his breath suddenly and sank against the floor, knees bent, his shoulder falling against the wall and a folded wing, the other loose against the floor, some yards away from the chamber Marsol and Cirgoth occupied. Wyrvaust's arms covered his face and he wept into them. He trembled violently and with him his wings when Arilwen stooped down and tried to comfort him and discover what had overcome him.

"The Raven is unworthy," his voice was raw and bitter as he spoke. "The Raven covets his own Lord...envies the dragon's lover...His heart forsakes the wife he adores and cherishes more than breath. He can no sooner stop what he feels for both his wife and master than the sands can stand still. He sees only hope and love in his wife and still he carries her recklessly and his only son into dangers he should have foreseen. Was the desert not fraught with war? What right had he to wander with her instead of keeping his beloved and their son safe at home? There is no punishment the Desert Wind can bring on the Raven that shall satisfy the disgrace the Raven has brought to all whom he loves and would die for. The Raven's

love is a madness, blinded by need and such violent emotion as he cannot escape." He lifted his head to reveal the anguish and the tears which left trails across his satin back cheeks and jaw, his eyes so like obsidian burning on her. What it was like to see a demon cry Arilwen now knew. Sammael as he watched him, watched all in his house through his inner eye, would think the vision a beautiful one. It was not often he had the opportunity to witness such an occasion. "Will she abandon the Raven now as he deserves, or love him regardless of his sins? Can the swan he loves save him from himself? Can she love him when he loves his master, has always loved his master? Can she love a demon who has failed her and their beautiful son? Can she love a demon who has not the courage to see her pain...to suffer his own shame?" Wyrvaust collapsed against her at that sobbing. It was something barely heard but made his entire body quake against her, his wings trembling. Anwarr grabbed onto the horns crowning Wyrvaust's head and started to cry fearfully and there was nothing Wyrvaust could do. His shame, fears, and despair had overcome him. It was the first time Arilwen had seen him truly break down emotionally. Marsol on the other hand had seen it many times before, had seen him completely insane, though many years spanned each breakdown. Wyrvaust could become so depressed that all he did was sleep, buried in some hole in the ground or even beneath a hill of sand, hoping he would just die there; or he could become dangerously deranged and feral, like a caged animal, attacking anything which came in sight with intent to kill. The only one who was safe from him during a violent breakdown was Marsol, and now Arilwen and his son. He was never safe from himself during these episodes. He always maintained an awareness of who he loved, but reality otherwise slipped further and further from his grasp. At the moment he so desperately wished that he was in Cirgoth's place that he longed only for physical pain or even death to make the anguish and disgrace of what he felt disappear. Often in was torture and imprisonment which Marsol had had to resort to in the past to break Wyrvaust of his self-destructive tendencies and to protect him and others from himself. His state presently could easily become violent, because he felt so threatened. His rage could be immediate if something or someone triggered the bare sense of self-preservation and will to protect those he loved that he instinctively maintained no matter how suicidal he became.

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It had been much easier for Arilwen to continue convincing herself that things were going to be fine... That Lord Sammael would be upset but would punish them for awhile and let the small family go home. She seemed to be clinging to the hope that he was kind on the inside... forgiving... but she forgot one important fact. Who he WAS. Her beloved husband was crumbling in front of her eyes and she felt helpless about it. She could suggest a way for them to escape. She couldn't try to talk Sammael out of it because she was a prisoner and unable to speak unless given permission... and the last thing she wanted to do was anger him.

The more Wyrvaust began spilling out about his punishments and what paths of punishment Satan was most likely to take, the more terrified she became. Would Sammael go so far as to take her away from her husband forever? And rape? The thought of lying with anyone but Wyrvaust was sickening. They had just been explaining to Anwarr that adults coupled because they loved each other... what was her son going to think if that happened? Arilwen's arm tightened around her sleeping son and her free hand lifted to gently touch her husband's hand that covered his battered rib cage. She could see the pain it was causing him and she slid her fingers beneath his own to concentrate. At least Gabriel had given her

back her healing power by touch. As long as he had not tampered with it again, Arilwen would have her husband's ribs healed in a few moments. She knew that healed ribs weren't really helping his mental state, but at least his mind could be a bit less distracted by the pain.

Arilwen was at a loss for words. She felt numb... she felt her body going into shock at everything that was being said. It began to sink into her mind that this could be the last time she was allowed to be with her husband... and they were trapped like rats in a maze. She was vaguely aware of his hand catching hers to lead her down the hall and her feet had no choice but to follow. Anwarr started to stir on her shoulder, whimpering and rubbing his face into her robes and she rubbed his back soothingly, making the soft clucking sounds that used to lull him to sleep as a baby as Wyrvaust ventured forth to peek into a room. Arilwen realized, moments later, that his body was locking up in a seizure-like way and she frowned, stepping forward to touch his shoulder. "Wyrvaust?" She whispered, then gasped as he staggered backwards and collapsed against the wall, sobbing as she had never seen before. Her violet eyes widened and she quickly knelt, only to see his face lift to hers and it caused her breath to catch in her chest. It was heartbreaking to see him in this way and it further instilled the sense in the angel that there was no getting out of this.

It was never easy to hear that your husband was in love with another, and that was what Arilwen was about to hear. Wyrvaust began sobbing, confessing that he loved and coveted Marsol in the same way he loved and coveted his own wife. The sobbing had finally awoken Anwarr and as soon as he saw his father in such a state, his own terrified tears and wails began, giant crocodile tears streaking his young cheeks. His little fingers reached out to wrap his father's horn and Arilwen felt her insides turning to liquid fire at the sight. All seemed lost and every member of the tiny family felt it. Sliding down to sit against the wall, Arilwen's arms stretched out and drew her husband's horned head to rest against her breast, their son tucked tightly between them. She couldn't get any words out just yet, so she clung to them, rocking them in unison as her fingers stroked husband and son's hair alike, her lips peppering comforting kisses against their wet skin. She breathed them in... memorizing their figures and scents that she already knew in fear of being parted from them. When she finally did speak, her voice was soft and as steady as she could make it. "My Raven must not feel torn..." She whispered against his hair. "The heart is an unpredictable wanderer and has decided to venture to another. This does not indicate that his love for me is any less. Feel no guilt over his love for Marsol... for Marsol is a man to be coveted. Arilwen feels no jealousy...no bitterness towards her husband for this... only understanding. I want for you to be happy in any way available. You must speak with Marsol regarding your feelings. He is wise and will know... will know what to do. Wyrvaust has never failed his family. They are proud of him forevermore. Even if they cannot be together." The last sentence caught in her throat and she squeezed her stinging eyes shut. No, she couldn't think of that yet... couldn't cross that bridge at that moment. Instead, she fell quiet and bent her head over her husband and son, her dark mane curtaining them from the world...at least for the moment. Her rocking motions never stopped and she hummed softly to them, finally coaxing Anwarr to calm down at least and he popped his thumb in his mouth, curling underneath his father's chin in a quiet little nest. Soon they would be coming for them. After that? Only Satan knew...

All which Arilwen said to Wyrvaust made the demon dare to hope, until she said...even if they could not be together. Anger flashed in his eyes then. "What does the Swan mean by even if they cannot be together? Does she think the Demon Prince shall take her from him? That I cannot bear! He better kill the Raven if he intends to take its wife and reason for living from it!" He was calling himself an it now to separate himself from himself as much as he could. The very thought of losing her made him want to prepare himself to cease to exist. He was tempted to relent to Satan, to offer himself if Satan would let him keep her, tempted, but he could never do it, never betray his promise to Marsol, or his love for him, which placed him in a position of being emotionally torn to pieces. By not submitting to Satan, he felt he was betraying Arilwen, but if he did submit he would be betraying Marsol. Gazing at her with a pair of scorching black eyes; he knew that she would not want him to submit. He just knew it, and suddenly he felt less torn.

He caught her hands in his, his claws folding over her fingers and gritted his teeth. "The Raven loves you...What must he do to prove how deep is his love for his wife? Ask it and it shall be his pledge." He knew he was caught in a downward spiral towards the abyss which yawned open in his mind as much as the house he was in. Who but Arilwen could be his savior, what wish could save him but hers? All thought then fled from his extraordinarily chaotic mind as Marsol's voice then reached him at last and his eyes fell away from her.

Brows knitted and his eyes leaned towards the door. He rose and went towards the door; thinking to warn Marsol against revealing his thoughts of escape in Satan's house, when the door shut with a bang in his face and startled the demon. Wyrvaust tried to open it, even forcefully, but it held fast, and as he heard that loud crash inside he began banging on the door. "Marsol!! Marsol answer me please!!" he roared, his voice fraught with panic. When Marsol did not answer his expression darkened and he snarled, then wheeling around he grabbed Arilwen by her arm and began pulling her along, hoping to find their way back to Sammael. "Lord Desert Wind!" he shouted. "What have you done with my Lord??!!! Be not a fiend! Has Satan not the courage to earn friendship in place of enemies?!!" he fumed furiously. Yet despite his anger he wished as Cirgoth did, to call Sammael a friend instead of an enemy. Yes, there was life left him in yet, if only rage, despair, and fear. But there was love too; for Marsol, for Arilwen and Anwarr, and buried deep down inside of him, perhaps even love for Sammael. His hand then tightened down on Arilwen's arm, little Anwarr gazing up at him from her arms with a curiosity was that could only be called morbid. "If the Swan has a wish of the Raven, she had best make it now. Try his best to own it her Raven shall." No, he had not forgotten what he said to her, he was sincere, he was always sincere to her. It would be useless if he lost her though. There were two people he could not withstand the loss of; Arilwen and Marsol, and both of them were in peril. Who could he blame but himself? Seemed he and Marsol carried a lot on their shoulders.

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Arilwen's violet eyes held the deepest of hurt, fright and sadness as she gazed up at her angry husband and her arms tightened around Anwarr who was cradled against her chest. He was demanding to know what she wanted from him... and questioning whether she believed his deep love for her. "Of course I believe it.." She spoke in a fierce whisper. "You yourself told me that Sammael was capable of terrible

things... and that he would not hesitate to do any of them. The thing I fear the most is being separated from you. Now you scoff at me when I tell you that this is what I fear and tell me that you will not let him do it. He CAN, husband. You know it as well as I, but I seem to be the only one trying to prepare myself for what might happen if it does." The whisper ended in a fierce hiss and she turned away. She had never been angry with her husband before, but after being drained of her power, having no sleep or food and already run ragged from dashing through hallways and listening to her husband spout his love for their master, she was finished. Had she the capability she would go and punch all of those crazy demons in the nose and flee with her husband and son... but the most frustrating part was knowing that she couldn't.

Wyrvaust moved to, once again, face Marsol, but the door was slammed in his face. This startled Arilwen nearly as much as Wyrvaust and she turned with a concerned frown, wincing only when her husband caught her arm up in his fingers and began dragging her down the hallway, ranting for Sammael once again. Her bare feet worked hard to keep up with his feverish pace, her arms aching from carrying Anwarr, who wanted nothing more than to look around and try to investigate for himself. This made him squirmy. She felt ready to drop on the spot and just tell him to leave her there. She was so very tired... her shoulders slumping as she hurried beside Wyrvaust.

It was when they swung into a long, narrow hallway that she knew something was wrong. It didn't feel right. "Wyrvaust..." She whispered, trying to get his attention, but the open door to the pool room at the end of the hall was what he had his sights fixed on. It was then that the loud crash came from behind them and when they both swung around to see the floor crumbling behind them... and giving them a very good, widening opening to plummet to certain destruction.

Obviously, their bodies knew what to do. The group took off down the hall, running for their lives. Had Sammael heard Arilwen's angry words? Did they anger him in return? Was this to be their punishment? Thoughts raced through her mind as they pounded down the hallway and by the time they reached the door, Arilwen was ready to give up and let the floor swallow her. It DID feel like her lungs were bleeding and a horrible, wheezing, rasping noise was struggling from her throat. She looked flushed and as they barged into the party room, she collapsed against Wyrvaust, her free hand clinging to him as her head swam. Though his wing wrapped her and their son, her violet eyes rolled upwards as the room spun. There were strange, short figures in holes in the wall playing instruments. Smears of violins rang in her mind. She heard sex... ROUGH sex... laughter... arguments... but she was so out of it that she couldn't place any faces. The figures were blurred. It was like being trapped inside of some sick fun house, not a party!

By the time Wyrvaust pulled his wife over to kneel in front of Sammael, she knew that she wouldn't be getting back up very easily. She slumped against her begging husband, still fighting to catch some sort of burning breath in her lungs. Visions swam in her mind. She saw forest...trees...water. She wanted to see these things right now...lie down in the cool grass and sleep. Her arms loosened around their son and Anwarr finally climbed to his feet but remained standing against his father's side, just glad not to be held anymore. The little nymph was quickly growing his own independence, and his wide eyes lifted as he studied Sammael, then swung around the room. If Arilwen had been in her right mind, she would have pulled him against her and blocked her eyes from such sights. They had just explained to

him, days ago, that sex was an act between two people who loved each other... and here was a room full of people swapping partners! Oh yes, that young mind was soaking up the sights and trying to make note of a million questions to ask later. Some of the people were so... INTERESTING looking! Some guy had a fuzzy face!

Arilwen vaguely heard Wyrvaust's begging words to Sammael... and his request to send them home. "No..." She panted, rolling her cheek against her husband's chest as she shook her head. "I told...you...I won't... go home without you..." She whispered between raspy breaths, reaching to cling to him. The tears began and she buried her wet face in his skin, sobbing. The thought of being home and wondering what was happening to him and if he was coming home nearly killed her on the spot.

Anwarr, in the meantime, had spotted the tables of food and drink nearby and was sneakily squirming his way over to them. The dessert table was closest. YAY! His eyes were huge as he stood on tiptoe and reached up tiny fingers for the colorful fluffy deserts. Anwarr had never eaten anything but desert food and meat, and he wondered how such pretty things could be food. But other people were eating them! Eyes glittering deviously, he managed to nab a yellow one, dark brown one and a pink one before he climbed under the table to sit, surveying his little collection. He tried the pink one first, licking at the fluff on the top and nearly jumped out of his skin. It was so yummy! The two that followed were equally as delicious and by this time, the sugar buzz had set in. Clambering out from under the table, Anwarr rose and started filling his arms with desserts...many of them getting crushed against his shirt. Once his arms were full, he turned and toddled off towards the people, coming first to one of the servants which he offered a pink dessert. "It's yummy!" He tried to explain, then frowned as the man ignored him. Shrugging, he popped it in his mouth, his cheeks covered in fluff, and turned to move on. It was then that Arilwen realized he was gone and sharply called his name, sending the toddler running for her, refusing to let go of his armload of squishy treasure.

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When Lilith said that another bastard of his had crawled out of the cracks, Belorian's pale blue eyes locked on the female Lilith's eyes had caught. His hand swept back to scratch at the back of his neck beneath his curling locks of strawberry blonde hair. It was not like he had slews of bastards, he thought. There was Niall, Maladin did not count, he was out of Selena, his wife, and there was Melisseant. They were not Nephelim exactly though, but their Dark Star equivalent. They were called Mogdim, and shared a lot in common with Nephelim. They were rare because they could only be born of the Anduain or the Mogduain, of which only one of each existed, so of course they were mistaken for Nephelim. The Dark Star were a complicated race. Because Arilwen was born of Belorian, she shared his way of death, imprisonment without a window to the outside world, fresh air and sunshine. That was something he knew and did not think about in present company. He watched her and her mate carefully as they approached Sammael, and it was clear the two of them were in deep trouble with the Prince of Demons and Acheron. He was not sure what he felt gazing at her, or when she gazed back at him, clearly confused. Seeing her; he remembered her mother. The French beauty had cured him of his loneliness for one night and in return he gave her a child. She was unable to have children and longed for a daughter. He had never expected to meet up with his alienated daughter.



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Arilwen's refusal to abandon him again tugged hard at his heart and he nearly broke down in tears but managed to hold it all inside, lashing his emotions down to keep them from spilling off his ship of sanity into the storm battered seas of his mind. When Sammael told Wyrvaust of what he had contemplated doing with Arilwen and Anwarr, every muscle in his body tensed and he visibly paled with dread, but said nothing. He had no idea what he would demand of Marsol to pardon their terrible crime of trespassing in Kassim's territory to aid war battered people. Sammael made it very hard to believe that there was anything but evil in him, but Wyrvaust clung to that thin thread of hope nonetheless. He had to or lose his mind completely, and if that happened, he would no longer possess the ability to freeze his impulses towards violence and madness. He felt like all the oxygen had been sucked out of him to make a vacuum in his lungs and very soul. Rage relented to emptiness, for rage would only endanger those he loved. He went vacant in his eyes and expression, and when the Desert Wind told the Raven and his wife to go and mingle, Wyrvaust nodded with dazed vacancy and rose, helping his shaken and exhausted wife to her feet.

Belorian watched them as they meandered across the room, as far from the sinful goings ons as possible. Wyvaust picked Anwarr up on the way, goodies and all, and shielded all the graphic things going on around him with his wings, so he could see none of it. This was no place for his son to be, and he wished to take him and Arilwen as far away from it all as possible. The things Sammael had conveyed as to what he had considered doing had shaken Wyrvaust to the core of his being. Arilwen in Gabrian's hands? Anwarr in Mekkor's hands? He could not bear to think of either scenario, it was just too painful and terrifying, particularly the notion of Anwarr in Mekkor's clutches. Unspeakable thoughts pounded his mind when that notion had been conveyed. Cradling Anwarr in one arm, and hugging Arilwen protectively tight with the other, he strode to the most isolated area of the immense chamber he could find. The demon was shutting down on so many levels as a last ditch effort at protecting his family. He certainly could not trust himself at the moment. Mingle, Sammael said...How could one as broken as Wyrvaust do that? He would have to force himself to, is how.

"Belorian," he called to the Anduain. "Doesn't the bird of a different feather think it about time he introduced himself to the Raven's wife?"

Belorian had considered walking over and talking to them of his own accord but felt he might further endanger them if he should. He was not exactly on Sammael's good side was he? Still, when Sammael waved him away, distracted by Maelmorda, Belorian made his way at length to the lovely quarter of that chamber the couple and their son occupied. When Belorian walked over to greet the two, Sarku trailed after him. Everyone else was...err...occupied with their carnal dispositions, even the Golden Lady. Sarku was uncomfortable with such open displays of sex.

Wyrvaust was explaining to Anwarr that the way these people shared their bodies was the wrong way. It was hard to explain, because Anwarr was sharp. "They look happy and like it makesem feel good," he said. Their son's speech had improved remarkably fast. "Some do share their bodies only for pleasure," Wyrvaust told him. "But it is an empty pleasure. Love makes it mean something and makes the pleasure even greater." By the time Belorian arrived Wyrvaust had urged his son to get into the water and play, to keep him occupied, always standing in such a way as to block his

view of the orgy. Then Wyrvaust caught sight of Marsol by another pool, wet to the bone; he snatched Anwarr out of the pool again. It did not take a genius to figure out that Marsol had arisen from one of the pools. Even those placid pools of water might have perils it seemed. One of the pools might have as easily swallowed Anwarr II up as another had delivered the Anwarr he was named after from those hidden depths. His eyes widened as they lit on Marsol who supported a half unconscious Cirgoth who leaned heavily on him. How long had he been standing there? The Desert Raven again shielded his son's eyes as Marsol killed the old demon. Anwarr tried to peer over and under his huge wings though as he heard that strange pop, cracking and squishy sounds, curious about what was making those sounds. He smelled the blood too. "Whatsthat?" he said. He still mixed words together.

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Arilwen felt hazy and exhausted, but she was clearly aware of how proud of her husband she was at that very moment. Wyrvaust managed to swallow his ranting and anger as a very frustrated Sammael spilled hints of what he had planned on doing to his family. She had expected him to start screaming and clinging to the ceiling like an angry animal. In return, her arms tightened around his midsection as she lay in his arms, her eyes closed. It was good that she had no clue who Mekkor was... or roles would have been reversed. The Swan may have leapt up with what little energy she could find and tried to choke Sammael. Obviously, that would have ended very badly, but had she known Mekkor, the fear of losing her son to him would have gotten the best of her common sense. The very notion of being handed over to anyone but her husband made her stomach churn thickly... especially because it was Gabrian. He had not been cruel to her, but he had locked them up in the FIRST place! Once again, ignorance was the best route. Had they been kept in their original cell she would have eventually had to encounter Gabrian anyway... but in carrying out orders of rape and torture.

...Mingle? Had the Desert Wind told them to go and MINGLE? Arilwen felt her chest twist tightly and she squeezed her eyes shut. Deal with it another day. Until then they were stuck here... amongst the debauchery and sin. The angel had no drive to argue and she rose with the help of her tense husband, her knees locking into place to hold her up as her arms rounded Wyrvaust's waist. She was thankful that her husband scooped a sticky Anwarr up and wrapped him to shield his young eyes from their surroundings, but that did not stop the little magpie's questions. The small group moved to one of the furthest pools where Arilwen would settle down with her back against the nearby wall, thankful to be out from under the immediate eye of Sammael, but uncomfortable as she heard her name mentioned by a naked woman climbing into the lap of a quickly naked man. Belorian. She had recently heard that name... but where? She tried wracking her fuzzy brain and even shifted her violet eyes towards the man to try and place him but she was certain she had never seen him before. Moving her gaze away, she met a moment of peace as she smiled tiredly, watching her husband slip Anwarr into the water after shedding him of his clothing. The sticky child was soon cleaned and splashing excitedly around, but something soon caused Wyrvaust to kneel and snatch him from the water as quickly as he had entered. She soon realized that it was Marsol... carrying Cirgoth in his arms. He was going to be angry. Sammael was angry. Everyone here was crazy. Motioning for Wyrvaust to bring their son to her, she slid down to lie on her side, facing the wall, and parted her robes to take her slippery, nude nymph of a son against her skin. Wrapping him closely in the folds of her robe, she would be able to block his view and coax him to finally stop wiggling and begin to feed. This, in turn,

allowed her to relax and the angel was soon dozing off, curled up around the form of her damp, drowsy son.

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CHAPTER 20 -- Beneath the Surface

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When Sammael asked Cirgoth if he had seen them, he nodded, knowing exactly what he was talking about. "I saw them, felt them, and some of those shades, wraiths, phantoms and what nots were damn powerful. It was that life in Mael that swatted them back into the down under places like so many gnats. Lord Sammael, Lord Lucifer, you must believe me when I say, that if that kid takes over...a lot of things will be fucked all to Hell. Acheron will be his...as will all the worlds connected with it. I am not making any of this up."

Maelmorda groaned with abandoned elation as Sammael continued to pump those wonderful muscles inside of him, on him, the distraction unwanted but hardly bringing anything to an end. "Well, Cirgoth...I have an idea about that..." He growled deeply as Sammael penetrated his guts again. "We give the kid to somebody whose really good with kids and..."

Cirgoth shook his head and interrupted him. "It will be an adult in an hour or so after birth, Mael, how do you intend to do that?"

Mael rolled his sex intoxicated eyes on Cirgoth and raised a brow. "Oh...well bite my left nut...So in three hours it'll be a manish thing?" Cirgoth nodded. It was funny, he was not asking him how he knew all this shyte. "In that case...we slow its phucking rate of growth and..."

Cirgoth interrupted him again, "And what if you can't?"

Mael's eyes shot on him with a hard burn. "What do you mean what if I can't? It's a god damn embryo for phucksake! That is the most absurd load of horseshit I ever..."

"You saw how it bounced those spirits. If it can do that now..."

"Wha? Huh? What spirits?" Mael asked, stupified.

Cirgoth heaved a breath. "Sir...how could you miss that? Sammael saw them...Jesus, how can you of all people being the one they were swarming miss that?" he was flummoxed by that fact.

Maelmorda laughed. "Its these other things swarming me...these cocks and tongues and cu\*nts and..."

"Time is ticking fast, My Lords!" Cirgoth stressed almost frantically. All the while Mael argued with Cirgoth he banged his beloved Sammael, harder and with more feral grinds and as each moment ticked by with Cirgoth confronting them he just

wanted to smother himself with Sammael again.

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As much as he wished nothing more than to just have Mael and get lost in each other as they had been doing so for the better part of an entire goddamn day, the mere notion Cirgoth posed was starting to work its way into his nerves and causing a tick in the side of his mouth that let its snake of a pink soft muscle slither and lick all over his Father's neck line. Through the arguing that the Morning Star and this valiant and most brave of angels stressed that this thing growing inside him was something that would ruin everything, take over all, and pretty much fuck everyone over all at once. Although Sammael wasn't all that hard up for someone else wanting a piece of his pie, there was that part of him as microscopic as it could have been that was so godforsakenly curious. A tiny spark of wonder at this turn of events that the green eyed Cirgoth was raving about and to which the Morning Star was battling away like he had better things to do with his precious time. Well he did but, that was besides the point. Sammael had no doubt, crazy or not as it may have seemed, as to the horrific truth to what all Cirgoth was shouting at them. Trying to get these two devils to stop this madness before it was too late and they would all regret it with every piece of their hearts. Inside an hour he said? By George that would place this little heathen at, he tried to think on that for a second but the feel of Maelmorda's skin against his alone was making it damn near impossible to think of anything else but him. Sammael's black pools glared over Maelmorda's shoulder as the angel's demon lover started to move towards their little phucking spot on the floor.

"Going to pry us apart by force are you Anwarr," came that snarl as he sunk his teeth into the Morning Star's shoulder, his gaze hardening as tightly as his insides did around those parts that Maelmorda entered him with.

Marsol of course would resort to violence if that was what it took to stop this act and prevent what Cirgoth was telling them to be not just some bad dream anymore, but a brutal reality that would make them all suffer for God only knew how long. Or perhaps Maelmorda. The sex driven beast that used his arms to hold the Morning Star close as his thrusts into him begun to gather him more into his arms. Marsol's brows rose at being told "nah nah, can't have him" pretty much by the smug grin on Sammael's face and all those tongues and cock's slipping in and out of all too many tasty holes. Insanity, that was what this was he thought as he turned his burning eyes on the Morning Star. "Morning Star, you must kill it now... or I will," Marsol roared, both of his hands closing into fists as his jaw clenched. Kill the child? That would mean lifting a hand against the Morning Star didn't it? Would he do such a thing? Could he? If it was to save Maelmorda in the long run, even though in his soul he would never purposely cause harm to his creator anymore then he would to his family, he would just this once do what he had never thought he could. The dragon seemed perhaps all too close to the bodies meshed together in carnal acts. A yard or so just behind Maelmorda to his left.

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Mael had surpassed pissed to complacency as far as Cirgoth and Marsol's presence there went. It was not like he had never screwed without an audience or was not turned on by it, albeit Cirgoth and Marsol were damned poor voyeurs. Why they seemed to ignore the fact that two devils were having a phuck carnival only feet or

yards away from them and it was beginning to ruin the mood. But not for long, Mael's body was a live wire still. He and Sammael both felt it. The Morning Star squirmed and raised his flesh against that tongue that was molesting him so delightfully regardless and his eyes rolled back and closed as he wished something inside of him had not gone all wrong and made him rue the moment of its conception. What was really funny, was that while Sammael was wondering if there might not be something worth saving in this godchild, Mael was thinking along the same lines. "Was it a dream within a dream within a dream...?" Mael asked Cirgoth with a languid quivering of his voice as his orgasm suddenly intensified and made him cling rocking and heaving desperately against Sammael with gasping breaths and fingers dug into his shoulders.

"It was not... I saw what I saw up to my warning you... and you refusing to heed it." Again, there was that alarm bell in Cirgoth's voice. Cirgoth's gaze snapped on Marsol as he moved his way, and in the way of the humping devils and the angel strode to intercept him and coil his arms around his Lord beneath his own limbs.

Maelmorda cried out as Sammael sank his teeth in deep into his shoulder and his lips captured Sammael's throat to suckle deeply then he whispered breathlessly against his ear. "So hard to kill a thing got of someone you love, but I once had to rip my own twins out of Gala and eat them to stop madness from being... But that was pure evil... pure... This... I feel no evil inside of me Sammael... not that is of someone or something else other than me. Do you eat it? Or do we hope Cirgoth's warning is enough to turn the tide of fate?" His entire body locked as spasms of pleasure and pain shot through him to constrict pelvic and gut muscles so tight that it arched his back, and made his thighs jerk against the flesh his legs gripped suddenly against. His eyes washed with ecstasy but as his chest reared back and he caught sight of his own belly; his jade eyes rounded like silver dollars and his jaw dropped in a gasp. Pain struck him like freight train from within as he felt for the first time the rapid changes taking place in that deified womb. It... their love child, had blinded him to it all up to that point, and that was rather alarming. "Powerful little bugger," he growled and then laughed, then collapsed against Sammael sobs... cackles, weeping, laughter all mixed up together. Those orgasms which hammered through him combined with the quickening of that unborn fetus, which had swollen his belly as if he was six months gone, were making him a little crazy, and yet... His logic was still intact, despite all this. He sank down on Sammael until all that Sammael was, and all that he was, were buried to the hilt in one another, and he just sat there on Sammael's lovely lap, maybe bouncing if Sammael was still pumping and heaving from beneath. "What did Cirgoth say it was awhile ago..."

"Sir?" Cirgoth asked, now clinging to Marsol, having lost a bit of courage owed to his fear that he was going to be ignored despite everything.

"What was it born of?" Mael reminded him.

"Oh... Your logic and his determination, My Lord."

Mael scoffed. "The one you call Lord has made himself a whore now, and is rather enjoying being one, but for this getting knocked up business." He would make damn sure that never happened again. "Marsol is your Lord, not I." His gaze had drifted off as he spoke. He probed himself, or rather the spawn inside of him. Emotion is what he was searching for... Determination had emotion but err... of the

ambitious kind... Oh shit, he was beginning to see Cirgoth's point. "Err... Sammael... what if we really can't control this thing?" His gaze then speared Cirgoth. "Why now... why did you say we needed to kill it now? Why not wait?" It was obvious that Maelmorda was having trouble with the notion of killing it. It was not compassion, it was possessiveness, it was fatherly instinct, and it was hope that whatever Cirgoth had seen could be changed.

"You may not even be able to kill it if it is born, or matures to a certain point inside of you," Cirgoth advised the two of them.

"Well that would just be a bitch of a thing if it turns out bad, huh? But all things can be destroyed, Cirgoth."

Cirgoth frowned darkly. "And if it senses that intention it could make things a whole hell of a lot worse. It is getting smarter by the moment, Lord."

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As the chit chat, or rather the heated words and hesitating movements were exchanged by devils, angel and demon alike Sammael's pace would slow just after he felt the Morning Star sink against him. He still moved oh yes he couldn't just stop on a dime from all that crazy sinful phucking they had been doing, but he gradually slowed to ease into mild grindings before he stopped completely. Every now and then his hips would lift to move against the Morning Star's, in an unspoken way he still needed to feel that this was real and that it wasn't all just a trick of his over active imagination. Though the more Maelmorda and Cirgoth spoke of the horror maturing within the gut that was firmly pressed to his own, his temper at being interrupted by all these goddamn people and then by the news that this child would be the undoing of everything and take his phucking throne to boot seemed to dwindle at the words whispered into his ear. Whether he had know about that fact Maelmorda shared with him about what he had had to do to Gala in order to prevent bad things, or if it had slipped his mind, he was not sure of, But in knowing it now it shed a different light on Maelmorda entirely; perhaps not a big shiny beam of sunshine, but a new one nevertheless. Sammael glared at the angel and his demon lover as his ear was bent to all of Maelmorda had to tell him where he held him oh so tightly against himself. All naked and loving every second of it. He didn't answer his Father at the time but suckled on the front of his chest orgasmed and in turn it made him orgasm too all over the place, inside and out. But he kept an eye on Marsol whom was finding it hard not to just tear him off of the Morning Star and beat the ever loving shyte out of his evil ass. But evil was relative, like most things. You either were or you weren't, or you lived in that gray area where most souls fell into. Indeed Maelmorda wasn't the only one having all that fatherly over protectiveness acting up like a wild fire. To the part of Mael saying if it would be a bitch indeed if it were bad, Sam just chuckled the only way someone such as he would; empty and scornful.

Marsol's steps weren't halted in his steps towards the two phucking devils on the floor until his brain recognized the limbs around him were not his own. Upon looking sideways at the angel, his mouth set into a line and his hand came up to rest on the middle of his mate's back. Running his thumb back and forth in a pacing type gesture to keep from leaping out of his beloved arms and onto the two on the floor.

"No evil hmm?" Sammael asked his Father as he nuzzled at that chin and then along the line making up the son of chaos' jaw. "If what the greenhorn says is true, then someone would have to teach it to be a bad arse, no? Would it be you, most adored Morning Star that blacks the wings of a child? Or is it I, that will bathe it in malice and stain it's heart with hate? If not you or I, then who? I wonder this because if this isn't the way of things, and it probably isn't seeing as how everyone wants to watch us phuck ourselves into a stupor, then... is this life nestled in your belly able to hide that from prying eyes? Hide just which side it may very well have already decided on? Even from you?" Even as Sammael spoke and his voice was raspy from all those delicious activities Maelmorda and he had been engaged in for so long, his eyes lied. They told of how he wasn't one hundred percent signed up for killing the thing living inside Maelmorda. Maybe he was ninety-nine point nine percent, but not a hundred. And it was that tiny fraction of him that not only wondered what a child begotten out of love and of the Morning Star could be like. That and it was a selfish need to have a part of Maelmorda all to himself. Forever and always. Damn. His moral compass was so phucked up now that he would surprise himself if he found his way back to a chair.

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Every stirring of Sammael inside of him made Mael's breath catch and his body shudder and lurch with bliss, even as he slowed. If anything; that seemed to amplify those waves thundering through him like the roll of tidal waves verses the violence of choppy surf roaring onto a beach. He wondered, as Sammael continued to rock him and perpetuate those heavy surges of orgasmic tides which stormed through him, if this child in him was not meant to be... If Cirgoth had perhaps missed something in his visions. How experienced was he after all, at deciphering such things? Visions could be quite complicated in the translation. He had known the twins that Gala had carried had to be destroyed. Just known it, without question or reservation. Why did he not feel that now? What if that dream was a test of some kind? Or even a trick? What if they killed a child destined to be born? What if Cirgoth meant well, but had it all wrong? At length Maelmorda kissed Sammael, and did so with deep, undivided passion, a true lover's kiss which expressed all which the mind and heart could not place in words. He made love to Sammael's tongue, and then phucked it deliriously, hence he barely broke the kiss to speak against his lips. "I have god damn good instincts, Sammael. I don't want to kill it, or even feel we should, but I will not defy you if you feel it must die." There was a certain lackluster to his tones despite the sexual breathlessness there, like it all weighed very heavily on him, but there was also the definite presence of trust in Sammael. He would trust his resolve without question; obey his master without question.

As Cirgoth felt Marsol's thumb trail along his back he shivered and it was a pleasant kind of shudder without doubt. He nestled snugger in those arms and tightened his own around him, his face buried against his chest. He craved him so badly, needed to feel him inside of him as those devils were feeling each other, that he ached all over. He looked faint for a second time that night, but now it was with need, desperate need. He watched as for the first time he saw something in Maelmorda's eyes he never thought he would ever see, as Sammael asked who would be the one to condition the child. For what; Cirgoth imagined well enough; for Acheron.

The wounded look in those intense jade eyes, so like oriental jewels, was deep and

yet there was a conviction there that all could feel wash over them like a storm blowing in off the sea. "Maybe that is the point of it being, Sammael, that we not stain our offspring, but let it find its own way into the heart of Hell." Such was the passion of his words that he sounded angry, but it was not anger, it was understanding. Maelmorda had come to understand something the rest of them missed. He straightened on Sammael's lap and bore down hard to drive Sammael inside of him while stirring his phalluses inside of Sammael in a way that was almost agonizing for the delicateness of the pleasures. "Maybe it is fooling me, confusing me to get me on its side, and if so, give the little bugger a cookie! God damn! Imagine destroying something that kick ass! What are you afraid of Sammael? I think... your throne is safe as long as you do not deny your true soul. That is what I think. The soul you have buried and pretended did not exist for so phucking long. The soul Cirgoth remembers. The soul that forgets how to make allies and keep them, how to run hell and have everyone in it love your ass." Okay, he was probably pissing Sammael off now, but if that was the case, he would shake his own hand. "The demons respect evil, yeah sure, but do you remember what evil is for in Hell? What its use is? Because when it's used wrong, all you do is get a lot of weak ass cowards under you by fear, instead of the real power which only answers to respect, confident authority and love. As I love you, Marsol, all of my children. And God damn if I could split myself into enough pieces I would be a whore to all of them."

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Marsol slipped his other arm over his beloved's shoulder to wrap it around his auburn haired head. Holding his head as his face buried on his chest, he took a handful of all those soft strands to have something to occupy his hand with. Least it get to traveling and have ideas from the jaw dropping scene Maelmorda and Sammael were still blissfully locked in. The demon was distracting himself with tugging Cirgoth to him to settle his chin against the side of his head as he continued to give the two devil's on the floor his stern glaring. Though he was gradually loosing his anger and want to do fatal harm to Sammael the more he smelled his sweet angel's hair; the feel of his muscles, even if they were scarred, underneath his clothes. The snuggling he felt that almost made him smile but he wouldn't let himself. Whatever else the desert creature had to say he would keep to himself now because none of their shouting and reasoning was given a second thought now. They had the facts as set forth by Cirgoth, and they could perceive them any which way they felt froggy to. Mael could be right, or he could be so completely wrong that when he figures it out he might grow a second arse so he can have that one kicked too for being deceived by the abomination growing inside him. Then again, Marsol thought with a bit of a faint laugh inwardly, perhaps this kid will surpass everyone's expectations and be better. Be good. Maybe that's why it posed such a threat to everyone? In a way Marsol wouldn't be surprised if the kid did turn out to be the best damn soul alive and kicking right now. That'd serve Sammael's evil arse right if this kid turned on him and drove him out of Acheron, though that idea just seemed all too appealing to the desert chieftain. But all that and whatever else he had rolling around in his head he did not speak of. Rather he remained silent where he stood holding the angel close to his heart where he belonged. Restraining himself from attacking Satan though was no easy task but having the one that you loved there to know that you weren't alone in this fight made it seem meager.

Sammael on the other hand however was getting seven kinds of pissed off from all



this verbage of just who he really was and what the heck was he fearing? He didn't like for people to try to get to know him more then he permitted them, least of all those more than capable of recalling just what he use to be like before all of this had happened. When had he changed? Could anyone recall when he had become this jaded? So bent that he allowed no one to truly love him and in turn, never love in return? Well that was all it took to permanently ruin the mood. No, more like torch, drown, and stab that sex carnival that had been spiraling and tumbling between two bodies of the most inhuman manners. Those slender brows would come together as a scowl started to draw its way over his handsome features. He shifted his hips to stir himself inside Mael a few more times, and those tasty parts that Mael had buried in both of his openings, before he held his tongue from snapping at Mael. Terribly easy his temper was to provoke, so akin to that of Marsol's in a way. Hopefully this godchild would not inherit that. Maybe the manish thing would get the better sides of the two devils that had conceived it, or maybe not. For all of the convictions Cirgoth had had in coming here to reveal what Mael spoke of now, there was a reason Sammael was the way he was. Why he did the unforgivable things and most vile to those that deserved it, as well as those that didn't. Least that was the way he saw it from his end of the looking glass. Purpose guided Satan as much as his wicked, cold and calculating tendencies did. It was just extremely hard to see past all the darkness he had submerged himself in. Or had he? Now what Sammael did next was viewed as a hissy-fit by Marsol but that was just brotherly hatred the dragon had for the Prince of demons. The demon of sin would start the painfully slow course of untangling himself and all those extra appendages from the Morning Star. Making sure those numerous tongues all curled and flickered within those holes Maelmorda had while he evacuated him for the second time since the start of their screwing session. He said nothing as he did this, taking the Morning Star by his squeezable hips and minding that pudge in his belly that had Sammael's eyes glued to it for several minutes before he lifted his maker off of his lap. Being careful as if Maelmorda were a baby chick and not the being that he was, grunting loudly as he pulled Maelmorda off of himself and it was only a few seconds of trying to withdraw from his maker that he started panting quickly all over again. "Weak ass cowards... uhn... would want pieces of you Maelmorda. Someone that loves you would not," he said, and oh how pissed off he was indeed.

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Some of things Maelmorda said to Sammael made Cirgoth think, and it all began to make more sense. He had dreamt the child took control of Acheron, of Morashtar, of other worlds too vague to place... but had he envisioned that to be a bad thing? He had not... He had not foreseen the outcome at all. Why did he see himself in the vision warning them then, if they were not supposed to be warned? Maelmorda was right when he said visions were difficult to decipher. It was like a puzzle and what if he had got the pieces in all the wrong places, or if the dream was only meant to get him there and nothing else? Or maybe he was suppose to warn them, but the reason why had yet to be discovered. Cirgoth had been so sure before, now he felt only doubt. "Shit..." he whispered as Maelmorda said those things that the angel knew would piss the Prince of Demons off. He felt like Maelmorda was blowing it for him. Cirgoth would have shown a lot more tact and never have ragged on who he used to be, but that was not what Maelmorda was about either. He was not trying to drag who Sammael once was out of a dusty old closet.

As Mael felt Sammael's sex drive just plummet he heaved an oppressively rueful breath and slumped against him, every muscle just collapsing to bear his body down

like dead weight on the demon he had peevied. God damn his belly had expanded like a helium balloon just in the course of their conversation. "It is only those who deny themselves the most who cannot tolerate the truth when I dole it out. You mistake me anyway, Sammael. You think I expect or even want you to be as you were? No. Not at all." He shook his head and just kind of suffered the tugging and extracting of those morphed parts, his cunt and ass tensed tight as a clam when those awesomely huge abominations were pried out of him. He growled at the emptying of his body and those members he himself had manifested literally plucked their way out of Sammael because he did not want to separate from him. It was painful... the ebbing of all that insane pounding and the ever rolling thunder of those tremendous orgasms in his body.

The parting of Sammael's orgasms from him, it was like all the oxygen in his body was being sucked out of him. It left him feeling jaded, sad really. He eyed Sammael as he lifted him up off of his lap only to start breathing heavy again. Maelmorda smiled at him and shoved himself back down on him and was about to start to phucking him like a wild man, when pain struck him like a bull dozer and he doubled over to smack his head against Sammael's chest. "Ahhrah... phuck!!!" Sammael would feel it, the pressure against that cock Maelmorda had buried in his cu\*nt all over again. A damn head of another kind pushing against his phallic head from the other side. "This is... a new phucking experience for me... Damn this bites at my pride... scars it all to hell... Marsol, Cirgoth, get the phuck out!!! Please!!!" his pride could not take them seeing him give birth to whatever waited to get out. "And by the way, Sammael," he said panting. "I know the demons are not cowards... I mean the others... the ones bullied into obedience... I experimented with that enough to know that those worth the getting cannot BE bullied! OWW PHUCK!!!!"

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Marsol's pupils became as round as the moon the instant Mael shoved himself back down onto the retreating Sam. How befitting he thought that Mael wouldn't let Sam run away from what the both of them truly wanted. No matter the demon's anger or what have you's. However at watching the Morning Star fold in two and became racked with what looked like the most painful experience known only to woman, that he was now going to suffer through, his left foot went forward without a second thought in the need to help. Deeply ingrained in him even to the smallest aid that he could offer the Morning Star, he would have, had his Lord and Sire not commanded them to leave. His hold around Cirgoth tightened unconsciously as they were ordered to leave not just by Mael, but from the black as death stare Sam gave them both that meant if they did not heed this, then this manor would be their graves. And Sam was in all sorts of a bad mood to kill the both of them without loosing any sleep over it. With the quick pull, whirl and rush out of the room that the demon and the bird made, Satan turned his seething pools back down to the head that had smacked against his bare heaving chest. Light as a feather were his touches to the Morning Star's hips as he begun to roll the expecting father onto his back.

"I wasn't talking about those demons Maelmorda," he said as pillows just so happened to find their very comfy way under the Morning Star's head and around his nude body to give him cushion, not that it would lessen the pain any. As he moved his maker to lie down, and he would bite Mael if need be, he couldn't get over the whole feeling of another head touching him. It was a crazy thought and one he entertained merrily with twisted humor. If Mael should happen to say anything to

his barked statement of how he hadn't been talking of the swine or the worthy back home, Sam would waved a hand to dismiss any of that emotional nonsense. He'd had enough with prying minds and hands dipping into his cookie jar. "You know," he stated as he placed both hands on Mael's knee's to slowly push them apart so he could see just what the fuck was coming out of that body of a dark god's, "I hear Marsol is great with children."

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Well now, Maelmorda melted against Sammael as he rolled him off of his body and his breaths shivered as they did finally disengage. He curled on his side snarling at the weird kind of pain only a woman should ever have to suffer as Sammael laid him on his back. Now Maelmorda remembered why he had chosen to take a male form!

Cirgoth just kind of freaked as the devil went all crazy on them, screaming at them to leave because of his pride, and man did Cirgoth ever understand from his own personal experience. While Marsol moved forward, he moved backwards... but before he knew it Marsol stepped back and embraced him damn hard. "You know... There is always tomorrow... I can come back when it is good for Lord Sammael," he stated rather breathlessly and was eager to vacate that chamber, in fact, his feet started moving of their own accord towards the exit, and out of it, then down the corridors, around those bends and curves and... wait... was the place different or was that his imagination? There was a wall where he swore he remembered a door. He looked to Marsol, who he was clinging to like a wild briar vine; maybe he remembered the way out, because Cirgoth seemed to have lost all sense of direction. Maybe he was crazy. "Marsol... I am sorry about all of this... I was so certain and now... I realize there were so many holes in what I saw... I mean the Morning Star... If he is willing to go through all that, how can what I asked of them... I feel awful, what if they had listened and I had been wrong?" he whispered deeply. "Or what if I was right and wrong at the same time? Because that is what I am beginning to think. Maybe it all depends on Sammael, and I think he will do what is right." He made sense to himself but he was not sure if he was making sense to Marsol.

Maelmorda could take all kinds of pain, but this whole female aspect of his being was so new to him. It was like a virgin getting pregnant and giving birth all inside of an hour! "This is fucking torture... Never let yourself get knocked up Sammael... I am sure our son is worth it, but damn, if you can avoid it, DO SO!!!! AHHHARRR!!" He knew the mechanics. Had assisted in many births, but damn it sucked from the other side. Mael gripped onto Sammael's arm. "Cast oblivion over me or something, or gate him out of me!!" Or maybe Sammael was having too much fun watching Mael suffer as women had to suffer the births of their children. It had to hold a certain amount of fascination to him. "Marsol? You want Marsol to raise our kid?" he raised a brow. "You would honor him in that way for being a thorn in your side? But of course you would... What can we do but respect those who have the guts to... to... stand... up..." He stopped talking and just started breathing. Teeth gritted as he felt that uncontrollable urge to push. "Please gate him into your arms, Sammael... My pride is taking a pounding. I would do it for you." He smiled up at him, his hands gripping his own belly as if trying to squeeze the kid out of him.

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Marsol gave no indication if he was as freaked out over Mael's shrieking and screams or if he empathized with the unlucky devil to be the one giving birth. His face was as contemplative as the desert was hot. He kept on Cirgoth's heels, letting the angel lead the way or what he had thought was the way out of this infernal place. Casting a few glances over his shoulder as though he were expecting something. What he didn't voice to Cirgoth but his hand steadied the angel's shoulder when he started to apologize to him, for this, all of it. He stared at the angelic fellow as if he had molted colors or something weird like having crocodiles for arms and flooding the room full of milk. "Don't do that to yourself," he said with a tug of the green eyed one into his arms to hold him pressed painfully close to his chest where the thunderous beating of his heart could be felt clear as day through even his thick clothing. "Don't put faith in something so empty as that one to ever do the right thing. If it is what you say it to be, the Morning Star will deal with it or send for others as aid is needed." Course Marsol was not as fluent in angel-gibberish as Maelmorda or Sammael was. All he could do was pick out the bits he could understand, and give Cirgoth his full support for everything else. Killing children was... not something he himself was proud to do either. But if it was to cause the uproar spoken of before, he would kill the thing quick and painlessly. Cirgoth was not as crazy as he might have looked. There had been a door there, a very pristine one with rubies fashioned around the circular door knob. It was no longer there. Not wanting to be here any longer than Cirgoth did, he said as he took the angel by his left elbow with him, "A door was there not more than mere hours ago, though none stand there now. Come. Away from here we will, and you will not come here again, to seek Sammael or otherwise." Oh he was not going to let Cirgoth anywhere near that rat bastard again, not if he could help it. He cursed himself for not getting here sooner to avoid his mate stepping foot on the tainted soil in the first place.

Sammael's laughter may have been inappropriate but it was funny that Maelmorda warned him against getting pregnant. "Now, now Mael," he said as he laid a hand gently over the one gripping his arm, "giving birth is just another natural part of life." He so did not miss teasing Mael whenever he got the chance, be it cruel as it was now or kinder in its context. Fascinated? Hell Sam was goddamn mystified as his black eyes watched that space where the child would surely coming plopping its newly made self out soon enough. Cast or gate for him? Did Mael really think Sam that kind to pass up this moment to witness something so profoundly unexplainable? Maybe Mael was the crazy one instead of Cirgoth now, silly devil. Fingertips trailed down those smooth thighs to where this feminine part of Mael's body would be nestling that child just beyond. Touching lightly as he did to the tender flesh of Mael's woman part, as he grumbled, "Honor him? Bah. He's like a pain in my sciatica." Then with both index fingers he would gently as possible start to slip them into that part of Mael that was about to do a whole hell of a lot of pushing cause there'll be no spells of pain killers or gating for his ass. Not today. "It is your pride that makes this more painful then it has to be, son of chaos," came that oh so silky voice of the demon kneeling between Maelmorda's legs where he was starting to slide his fingers into him. And then his hands, along with part of his arms if he had to. Was he going to pull the child out of Mael? Does the hard way ring any bells in this situation? "A deep breath Mael, if you please," he said with his eyes still fixed on that gorgeously pregnant belly of the devil's, and abruptly shoving both of his hands into Mael up to his elbows if that's how much it took to see just where this child was in him. "And hooollllllld it," he said, whether Mael took a deep breath or not didn't matter. The pain would be Mael's war badge. Heh.

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Cirgoth was feeling very bewildered and out of sorts. Thoughts of he and Marsol's sons crept in and began to wreak havoc on his senses. He had been a very poor father; he felt. He had struck their dear son. How could he have done that? Why had he done that? He felt Marsol's hand meet his shoulder calm and steadfast like the ballast which kept the ship from tipping over in the storm. His arms coiled him and gradually tightened around him as he embraced him. His hatred for Sammael was almost painful to bear. "Hatred will only feed his darkness, My Lord. I understand why... I saw what he did... to you, experienced what..." He exhaled a long breath because what Sammael had done to him, and what he done to Marsol, was paint one of them in agony and the other in bliss. "He wants to be hated, My Lord," he whispered ever so quietly. "He fears love shall make him soft, but if he sees that he is wrong..." He jerked slightly as if startled when Marsol announced that there had been a door there, but that it was gone, and that they were leaving and that he was not to come back. "I shall come back. I must!" he crowed and tried to pull away from his stronger lover. Marsol had a dragon's strength in him, and an ancient wyrm's might at that, and little else was more powerful else it be a titan. "Damn, Marsol, don't you see? If he was evil he would have killed the child... He would have."

Maelmorda laughed right back at Sammael as he refused to give him relief and claimed it a natural process. "A mandevil getting knocked up by a mandemon and the word natural do not exactly make a martini, lover," he scoffed. Mael gritted his teeth as those fingers so delicately brushed the inside of his thighs and teased along that clit to send shivers through his body. He really was one to blend pain and pleasure wasn't he? Mael could only laugh though it was cut with pain when he pushed those fingers inside of him to ignite a very bizarre blend of feelings. Heh, how often was one giving birth aroused to the point of wanting to be phucked? Never... until now. Oh maybe it had happened somewhere, but what were the chances unless you had Sammael's sexy ass doing the tempting? Or was it because Mael was such an impossible horn dog? He was actually shoving against those fingers which pressed inside of him, his breaths quickening instead of slowing, and as Sammael's hand spread him it was like having his cock inside of him again, except, all fingery. Well, the feeling was soon ripped from him as Sammael told him to take a deep breath. Mael lifted his head to eye him with askance then howled like a banshee when he thrust both hands inside of him with his arms up to his elbows. What he had mistaken for one hand was the fingers of two. "Oh fuuuuuuuuck!!!" he breathed and howled in the same breath as Sammael opened those hips wide. Mael was NOT built for giving birth. He had narrow hips which Sammael popped right the HELL out of place so he could get that infant's head cradled between both palms and pull. Mael did not scream thereafter, he was slackjawed and his breaths strangled with the shock of it all. He felt as if he had just been ripped in two pieces and he damn near blacked out, he kinda did for seconds at a time, like time strobed and he lots bits of it. What he felt then made him weep and sob like a war child. It was like his insides were spilling out of him in a flood of heat as Sammael's arms and the child evacuated him. He sobbed for more moments than he would ever care to remember and then curled into himself whimpering. He was not even really conscious of it. It was all pure, raw physical reactions. The bloody beast Sammael pulled out of him was winged and clawed, which is one of the reasons it had been so hellishly painful. The talons on those little wings and those needle sharp claws had raked him the entire way. Maelmorda's eyes rolled on Sammael and the pretty

little wild thing in his arms. Even painted in blood one could tell how beautiful it... he... he-she was? Male as far as Maelmorda could tell, but he had also seen a slit when Sammael shifted the curious thing in his arms. It was so small... "We have to slow his growth, Sammael," he said very seriously. "I haven't the strength... I am barely able to keep myself above the counter pane. Can you...?" He was clearly very concerned that its rapid growth rate would compromise his spirit.

"I don't need to grow slowly, fathers," the infant spoke up, speaking Mythemyn, the language of Acheron perfectly fluid. Mael's lips parted and he just stared for a moment then after glancing at Sammael he trained his feline green eyes on this... true miracle again. "Childhood is very important... It is how you learn of other beings, of what dwells within yourself, of fun and all sorts of wondrous things." He applied himself to the child's logic.

"I wish to be named Arasgal, after you birth father. It is a good name."

Maelmorda actually felt a pang of fear in himself. The child shared their experiences. "How much do you know about us?" Maelmorda asked him.

"Everything, fathers." Whenever Arasgal felt Sammael also wanted to know the answer, he answered to them both.

"Well I wish I had been a proper child, just once. Please let us do that for you, Arasgal." He was wondering what the hell Sammael was thinking, because he was blocking his own thoughts and feelings in case the child should grasp them.

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In those arms that were put around him, the angel would find their demon lover's stiffness ease and their body relax and slip their own arms around Cirgoth's head. Tangling what might have been perfectly kept auburn locks with how his hands gathered with the heavenly strands. His head canted at this going soft business. Cirgoth would never relent with this would he, Marsol thought being jolted by the angel pulling from a pair of arms that would not lightly be swayed to give. His eyes narrowed as the angel and he would begin to pull and tug, one trying to go while the other wanted to stay. "What are you saying," he said at last, his arms dropping but his hands catching both of Cirgoth's wrists as his eyes burned on him. He tried not to waste his energy hating Sammael but when Cirgoth seemed to side with he who had hurt them so terribly, well Marsol had to then wonder just what all had been done to his angel. He wasn't sure if he should incapacitate Cirgoth and carrying his ass out of there, or just stand there listening to things that were starting to get under his skin. The devil had that way of doing that he knew first hand. He pulled Cirgoth by his wrists forward so that they were face to face as he said angrily, "Evil is who he is, it is what he does. Why do you or the Morning Star for that matter think it wise to try and change that!" He was yelling but he wasn't really aware of it. His voice just dropped in its pitch to a growling rumble that reflected all the frustration time had buried in him from the horrors he had been bound to watch, and endure. Yes a great gap there was between the angel and his demon lover as far as wanting to understand the Desert Wind's inner workings. A gap that would not be so easily mended with harsh language and dirty revelations. In fact, it might not be something that could be fixed. This seething hatred he had for the dark lord. It was the only thing that had kept him alive through all the

agony and torture in Acheron after all. Take that away and what would he have left...?

Sammael smiled ruefully at that statement of a mandevil and a mandemon. "What do we know of natural? Honestly," he exclaimed with a wag of his head and a knowing glint in his eyes. He couldn't take his eyes off of Mael's body though in how the devil responded to every perverted touch to his clit and anything else he decided to molest. Like perhaps let his lips nibble at the top of Mael's knees while his fingers and hands got busy-busy-busy with the whole reaching in and taking out what was theirs. There was a brief glance of "You really should have listened" given to the Morning Star before all that howling begun. Ear splitting as it was, a part of Sam found it bone chillingly graceful. Had he not been thinking of how narrow those bitable hips were he might not have decided to go get the child himself with his own two hands. Er, and arms rather. But when those howls turned into cries and sobs of utter pain, Sam's smile faded. That delightful tone in his voice vanished just like his wonder to watch Mael and all his birthing glory. For long moments those black orbs held no shred of mischief or hellish intentions in them. Merely sympathy for the devil, and that certain something that Mael and Cirgoth had been nagging him about and had only ended up pissing him off over. There for no one but Mael, this bloody beast and he to see, Satan's eyes held that tiny four lettered word in them as he had pried the beastie free of its warm home. Blood soaked the floor probably depending on how much spilled from Mael's body. Taking a finger he would run it down over the outter edges of one of its wings and then prod lightly at the claws the child had. Oh not really being able to hold it in one position for very long, Sam was moving it up and then to the side. Turning it over and then bringing it up close to his face for further inspection. Almost like a child would a new shiny toy, except that wasn't how he was treating this new offspring of Mael and his. It just appeared that way. Surprise wrote itself all over his brow arching face at this infant speaking so fluid and perfect in the tongue of Mythemyn. But his surprise was pleasant and great, thinking it a very grand discovery that the child would be in no need of a teacher for that, and as the conversation progressed not for much else either. Sam's face was half hidden by loose dark brown waves and curls, but the part that was visible was gazing down at the little beastie in that adoringly curious way he seldom did towards anyone. Now his face may have been as calm and in a tinge of amazement, his thoughts were anything but. A storm of questions, of what ifs, of this and that's all swirled within the Desert Wind's head. A storm whose strength clapped like the dry heat lightning did in the desert during dusk, racing and pounding through all his train of thoughts to find answers to so many things and of what this child would mean for this world and the others. Sam was thinking of so much all at once, particularly which one of them this child would favor and it would probably choose Mael cause he was more plushy, that he actually squinted from the migraine he gave himself. That was how far his mind ran and smashed from the edges of his consciousness to perceive of what could be assumed of this child's destiny, and what deceit was hidden. Oh there had to be deceit lying in wait somewhere in there. Angels and their visions were nothing to trifle with. But misread Cirgoth's words, had they or had they gotten it all ass backwards? Time would tell. It always did. "Childhood isn't something to brush off like you did those specter's," he said as his black eyes raised to hold Maelmorda in them. "It teaches you things in a way that nothing else can, sadly..."

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Cirgoth slumped in those powerful and oh so possessive arms as he found himself

unable to break free of Marsol's embrace. "I do not know what the Morning Star means to do in concerns to the Desert Wind, but I have no intention of changing Sammael. I simply want to open him up to the possibilities which come from the good that is already inside of him. Yes there is evil in him, as darkness dwells inside of every last one of us, but that does not mean he cannot embrace the better side of himself and the advantages that would come of it should he uncage the virtues he has. Have you never been cruel to others, Marsol, for your own reasons? Should we really condemn Sammael, despise him for being a reflection of what we most fear may dwell inside of our souls? I struck our son... because I... I did not want their protection... Because I wanted them to be free to choose their own destinies. How does that make sense? Why could I not have just told them that instead of lashing out? At the moment I imagine it was because I knew no other way to express how serious I was about rejecting them as my guardians. Maybe Sammael knows no other way to accomplish his objectives and merely needs to be advised in far more effective methods. That is what I believe, My Lord, with all my heart. If you envy him for some reason, please don't. You are the only man I ever can or shall love. What I felt for... for him, vanished when he broke the bond. All I feel for him now is a kind of aloof brotherhood. I cannot stop being his brother just because he chose a different path than I, and do not think I was not tempted to join him and the others during the second great rebellion. But I still believed... in Haman and Yajmha and where did that get me? Cast out for who my maker was. I remember everything, My Lord, everything." And that was rare among the First Pentacle Tsetar who had been cast down. "I understand why Sammael is the way he is. He and the Morning Star both are like star students who were tossed out of school and rejected by their parents because their ideas were too innovative. The rest of us are like people whose country abandoned them. The temptation to embrace the Morning Star and Acheron is great for he offers what Yajmha never did; acceptance. Of course, it is easy to welcome those who you would make slaves and whores of, isn't it?" He was trying to make Marsol realize that he was not ignorant of what becoming a child of Acheron meant. He was also opening himself up to Marsol in ways he never had before. "I know I am naive about some things, Marsol. But not as naive as you may believe. Nor is my soul unblemished. I have a lot of anger in my heart, enough bitterness that I did offer myself to the Morning Star before I ever met you. I made a pact with him; I offered my soul to him, under the conditions that I would be his on the advent of my first death, if he would leave any angel I brought under myself alone, under my sole command, untouched by Acheron. He agreed of course. Hell, maybe he knew I would fail." A jaded sigh of laughter escaped him. "Or maybe he truly wanted to protect me and those I never was able to hold." His verdant eyes locked on Marsol and his fingers trailed over his chest, beneath the loose shirt he wore and against his skin while lips brushed his and his tongue grazed his plush buds of flesh. His lips then sealed his in a passionately tender press and his tongue flickered against his lightly and coiled his spicy muscle with amorous strokes and suckles of desire. His lips were still contacting his when he spoke again in needy tones, each breath of his voice carrying his scent into Marsol's mouth. "I don't care where we are anymore. We could be in the bowls of Hell itself. Take me to a garden, a bedchamber, anywhere in these halls and uncage your own needs on me. It has been too long. I need to feel you inside of me, smothering me in your lusts," he pleaded.

That tiny devil, which had already almost doubled in size, looked between his two devil fathers as they tried to convince him why being a child was important. Again words came from that small mouth that should only have been able to coo and blow



bubbles. "Proud father asks this of Arasgal out of fear, and Sinful father because it is what his mate and submissive wishes. Fathers, you need not fear this white devil you made of love, for your love is in my heart also, and vast it is as the kingdom you call home. Arasgal can do no wrong for he is what is best in both of you. He is a child always in his heart, so needs not to mature slowly."

Maelmorda curled into himself tighter and sank his head against that pillow and his body against the floor. He could make himself comfortable most anywhere. He was exhausted. Between the energy it had drained from him growing that child so rapidly and the hours spent loving Sammael; he could barely stay above water. And now that the child he had been so marveled with had come into the world, he was freaking the Morning Star out with his adult acumen. His innocence was sincere though... he was so damn pure, so flawless in his goodness. It terrified the fearless devil for so many reasons. What happened when that kind of innocence was corrupted? Or what if... he could not be corrupted? He scoffed quietly at his own thoughts. That was ridiculous, nothing was incorruptible, or so he thought. They were both so mystified by the arrival of this being. Sammael thinking his thoughts, and there deceit did not exist in the child who had named himself Arasgal. The Morning Star had not gone by that name since he had left Morashtar all those millennia ago, long after he had created the Arcanon. Lucifer had a lot more names to choose from which is why he guessed their son had chosen one of his names. It was the logical thing to do. He was right, that was exactly why Arasgal had chosen Lucifer's past alias, that and he liked the sound of it, and the nickname Aras that came with it. Arasgal had called him Sammael's submissive...It bit at his pride but that was what he offered himself up as to Sammael, his pet, his thrall, his whatever Sammael wanted of him. He also called himself a white devil and that was exactly what he was. He knew what he was. For how many ages had Lucifer attempted to create a white devil only to fail in each endeavor, and here he and Sammael had made one quite by accident? Would Sammael want to make a whole mob of them out of his extraordinarily powerful thrall? Keep him barefoot and pregnant until his family was quite large enough to content him? Could others even be conceived or was it a fluke occurrence? Perhaps others would turn out quite different. Either way, Maelmorda hoped the one son out of him was enough. Sammael had only one other son; Caine. He was not the seed spreading fiend Lucifer was. Or maybe he had just been waiting for the right mate. Who knew.

"I am hungry fathers and crave Proud Fathers blood. May I please feed?" He looked up at Sammael with those turquoise shot jade green eyes and then to his weary other father. So he was a vampiric devil, Mael thought, as a child at least. Lucifer wondered what his diet would be when he was older.

"Why not? Drain me dry for all I care, and don't mind me when I pass out," he permitted. When Sammael set him down he crawled in next to Maelmorda against his chest, nestling ever so close, and curled those small wings around him as possessively as if they were Sammael's arms, only with the innocent intimacy of hunger. Needle sharp fangs sliced through a nipple and Mael shut his eyes as the child began to suckle at his blood, hard at times, tugging to free his flow of blood, until each suckle filled his mouth with his father's incredibly delicious blood. Mael was beginning to crave the comfort of a bed as waves of sleepiness washed over him. It felt strange when Arasgal's fingers gripped against his chest to clench and unclench as he pumped that blood quicker into the wound. He was so damn...proficient. When Sammael lay down behind him and pressed his body against his back and ass, his arms coiled his as they wrapped both he and Arasgal. It was

such an intimate gesture on Sammael's part. Maelmorda had no idea just how possessive and protective Sammael was of he and his son just yet. At length he did pass out, although he could not have placed the moment when consciousness escaped him. When he did rouse again, he would feel two someones suckling at his throat and dizzying waves of faintness. His eyes rolled open just long enough to register the adult male tangled against him at the fore while he still felt Sammael at his back. A little over an hour had lapsed and Arasgal had achieved adulthood, his appearance of a youth in his upper teens, and ceased to age. Arasgal liked the way he felt and looked when he reached seventeen and had stopped his own aging process. He was beautiful, ivory skinned, hairless but for that brunette mop of thick, shoulder length hair on his head, huge wings covered top and underside with a thin pelt of mole soft fur the same color as his hair. His face reflected the gorgeous masculine features of both his fathers. His muscles were lean but hard of sinew. His scent was like a garden with no one fragrance to place, but rather an intermingling of all kinds of leaves and flowers, all pleasant. He was...perfect.

Mael roused sometime later to find himself alone. It startled the hell out of him and he climbed his feet, swaying on them for a moment, then sneered at the sight of himself. He was a mess, his hair tangled, dried blood streaking his skin, and as he walked towards the door all the birth and sex mess vaporized. He did not bother with clothes as he strode out of the door and got a lock on Sammael to follow his senses to a garden with beautiful bathing pools. There Sammael was with Arasgal, who was splashing his father and laughing. He really did have a child's heart and spirit...didn't he? And he seemed to lighten Sammael's spirit as well.

During the time Mael had recovered from everything that had drained him of his pith, and after Arasgal had taken from him all that he needed to grow strong, Sammael's son had talked with his father. He had told him he wanted to stay with his fathers, and begged him not to send him away. Who was Sammael to argue with that when he was so possessive of what was his anyway? If Sammael was studying his son he would find the youth perfectly genuine and guileless. There was nothing about him that was untruthful or treacherous. It had to amaze Sammael that such a creature came out of he and Mael. Maelmorda paused at the arched entrance to the garden to watch them play for a few moments. He laughed when Sammael snagged Arasgal's ankle and dunked him with a brisk pull of that leg. Aras came up sputtering and laughing then retaliated by splashing Sammael violently. Mael shoved himself off of that stone archway and approached the two to stoop down at the edge of the pool. "Mind if we settle a few things, Sammael? The terms concerning Morashtar? Do you, or do not agree to the terms I laid out?" If Sammael needed for Maelmorda to repeat them, he would.

Arasgal looked up at his Proud Father and then laughed as Sammael caught the side of his face with another splash. He splashed him back then fixed those disarmingly beautiful eyes on his father again. "I am awed father that you would make such a sacrifice for your world. Such courage as that and yet you fear me. Why?"

Maelmorda heaved a breath. "I fear what may become of you if terrible things should happen to you," he stated quietly.

"I can protect myself, father. If terrible things should come, as they do to most things at some time, I shall learn from it and not let it take my soul from me, I promise you. Why would you think dreadful things will happen anyway?"

Maelmorda smiled faintly. It was so easy to say that until the worse did happen. "Because of who your fathers are, Arasgal."

"I am not afraid of who or what either of you are. I love you," he said.

Maelmorda sank down to sit at the edge of the pool with his legs in the water. "I am glad to hear that, my son," he said and looked to Sammael to answer his former inquirer about their terms. He wanted the matter settled so he stop dwelling on it. He also wanted to inform Galaxy of what to expect, and of the unexpected birth of his son.

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Sammael's mood went from curious adoration to a mixture of awe and contentment at those words that came from a mouth that shouldn't have been able to utter such mature sounds. Truth be told a tiny part of him had wanted to hear those coo's and blown bubbles as only babies could. Even if for a moment, just hold a bundle of soft skin, grabby tiny hands, non-able feet with maybe a tuft or two or dark curls. Was he secretly yearning for something he did not deserve? Something more along the lines of that but he kept those passing day dreams to himself. Wouldn't do for Satan to be voicing such an upheaval as to the state of their son's corporeal form. As much as this quite unexpected miracle had happened, he did understand the reluctance in his maker at Arasgal not wanting to be a child but to be what he wanted to. Without the help of either one of them in that area. It was the control factor perhaps that they no longer had over their offspring? Was that what had the Morning Star cautious around the white devil? One could only speculate as to the inner thoughts of their maker, and even that was a stretch. At the time that Satan spent studying those clawed wings and the rest of the ever growing body of this new being, his mind was going into over time as far as the future was concerned. If he did have any ideas as to breeding more with the Morning Star to create a family of Arasgal's he said nothing of it. Matter of fact the only thing he did talk about was in his gestures and movements towards both the Morning Star and Arasgal. Would Caine get along with his new sibling? The thought was in the back of his head, but way far back. Would make family reunions a bit interesting now wouldn't it? Black eyes shifted downwards to the question posed and found that those turquoise-jade's were going to get his son into trouble with the ladies and men. Arasgal's eyes alone could probably enchant a person without him even flashing a smile. He had no doubt on that front. He smiled down at the questioning tike before his eyes went up to the Morning Star after he permitted in his weary way for the feeding Arasgal requested. In setting their son down so he could crawl on over to have his fill of Maelmorda, he watched with not a shred of detachment. The whole thing was first and he honestly felt like nothing should be missed. "His first steps," he murmured under his breath before he chuckled lightly, moving from his spot of blood and other bodily fluids to get all sorts of comfy behind Mael whom he curled his arms around just as well as their son. Just another thing to be discovered about Sammael as far as how he did indeed make it clear what was his was his. Maybe it would amuse the Morning Star when it was found or figured just how deep that protective possessiveness ran in his son. Or maybe it wouldn't. That wasn't for this telling but for another after all. During their feeding from the unconscious Morning Star, he would watch how Arasgal grew. And grew, and still yet grew into a brow raising, head turning, jaw dropping handsome little white devil. Marking that the fur covering his wings did him justice in being the same rich hue as the mop of hair on his head. Later they would cease this blood drinking of the father of both of them

and both sons and father, if you could comprehend that, would seek entertainment of another nature.

To tell the truth he couldn't quite place the last time he had laughed this carefree and genuinely. That alone made him tinker over just what Arasgal was, not in a sense of what he was in spirit and body but what he was in meaning to Maelmorda. To the world. To himself, most of all. It was a weird sort of feeling, maybe a revelation? He knocked the calculating thoughts from his head and he threw himself at Arasgal with the intent to make a tidal wave on him if he didn't move quick enough. It was all he could do in his wondering as far as this breath taking purity he found in Arasgal, considering the circumstances. A more than average dazzle really was what he felt every time he looked at his son, and found that that was something he had done; Maelmorda and he. He had done that, he thought with such a sudden swell of pride that it almost went to his head. But pride was a sin unfortunately wasn't it? Then what about fatherly love? Was that so bad if one looked at it that way? Sammael laughed when he heard the begging and laid a hand to the top of the young being's head, ruffling through those brunette locks, messing them up if they had been in place before. Course he wouldn't argue with that. It only pleased him more that Arasgal would want to stay with them. His son's desire not to be parted with them was very uplifting for his otherwise troubled seeming spirit. Oh he wanted to retaliate from the ankle nabbing eh? Sammael had just been able to grab both of Arasgal's ankles and dunk him again when Maelmorda's voice grabbed his attention and turned his head quickly as he saw the devil in the buff still. Well it wasn't like anyone would see these three anyways. Servants or guards if any knew when to come when called and to stay the fuck away when not.

Still even with Maelmorda's appearance he couldn't just stop splashing Arasgal all to hell whenever he got the chance could he? With relatively small ear for what Maelmorda and Arasgal talked about after being asked if the terms were acceptable, he really wasn't all that worried about something horrible happening to their son. It was more like a mild concern that yes if something wretched fell on this most pure being's shoulders then they would take it as it came and deal with it with a grain of salt. Such was Satan's conviction from the amount of not just pride, or love, but the faith he had in Arasgal as strange as that may sound. Naturally bad things happened to good people, and oh how bad things would become so attracted to their son over time. But that didn't mean it had to be stressed over and thought on so hard like the Morning Star was doing. Should someone mean to do Arasgal harm however, they would need to be on par with something of a God. For this fur winged youth of open eyes and bright smiles had two fathers that one would not wish to see when angered. He had a mouth full of water that he spewed in a fountain as his head upturned, aiming at Arasgal's shoulder as he waded through the water to where Maelmorda sat on the pool side. Was it this new found happiness that Maelmorda had brought to him by giving himself to him that made the demon-man seem far less menacing than he usually did? Or was it that happiness that Maelmorda gave him in the form of a son with turquoise-jade eyes? He snickered after making a wide fan of water and then all but making a downpour on Arasgal's head from kicking his feet so hard in the water.

"So persistent," he said where he folded his arms over Maelmorda's lap to look up at him with his inky black eyes, blacker than night. "A family we have to raise now anyways Morning Star, a war I will make the least of your worries. This Morashtar you love so much is still yours is it not; Mud puppies and all? Though I

find myself wondering what it would have been like; horizons of our legions coming to our call; magic slinging, sword clashing; beheadings. Possible extinction of certain races, but that's just superstition. Ah well, something better than that mayhem business is here now. You, all of you for this is a fair trade. And...I think you've avoided us long enough." On the very last word his arms moved quickly to encircle Maelmorda's waist and then haul his naked arse into the pool where they would both tip sideways and this demon-man would take the devil-man underwater for a few seconds before coming to stand waist deep in those thirst quenching clean waters. A victorious smile was given to Arasgal from where he stood, pursing his lips together in a "Daaamn that felt good" expression and then he erupted into laughter.

Between Maelmorda and Arasgal, Sammael acted completely different then what he use to around others. In fact he felt like it was hard to describe really what it was, sort of like really being himself but not so. Or maybe he had it right the first time. Unfortunately, the Morning Star was known not to take being dunked lightly. Sammael would move sideways and then across to stand either beside Arasgal or behind him as if using his son as a shield would stop any water onslaught the Morning Star might reek on him once he surfaced. "You know I was worried about mood swings while you were still in his belly," Sammael whispered in Arasgal's left ear as he looked over his head to where the Morning Star might have been. "You know, the whole burning villages cause he has a hot flash type thing. Seriously considered if he had asked for ice cream and I wasn't able to get it in time, if he would blow up something." Of course he was just joking with Arasgal. That and he loved to tease the Morning Star about this entire ordeal, to hell with the consequences and if it would irritate his maker. Then he would tilt his head back to look at the ceiling with a very thoughtful look. His thick lashed lids lowered till his black orbs were almost hidden before a smirk was made where he still looked up at the ceiling. As if knowing something or figuring something out perhaps? It was a knowing smirk, saturated with smugness. He chuckled as he shook his head; his gaze leaving the ceiling or whatever the heck it was he had been looking at. Seems that contagious atmosphere had finally infected their guests. To keep up with being the demon of sin, Sammael made it quite easy for the intriguing green eyed angel and the pain in his arse via some door unlocking by unknown means all too close to the angel and his demon lover.

Marsol was not aware of how his expression had gone from heated to dismay as he listened to the things the angel told him of, both of the Upper and Lower Kingdoms. It wasn't like him to give in to fear, and even uncharacteristic of himself to fear things he understood although sometimes he wished he didn't. But he felt like he was on the outside looking in at this situation. What Cirgoth told him, it just was too real. His sensible side wanted to chime in with his own opinion about it all but that side of him that had been injected with that poisonous fear of loosing Cirgoth for good, thanks to Sammael, seemed to find a cozy little spot at the front of his conscious and take root. The angel's story was as epic in the making as it was gut wrenching in its bitter sweetness. He knew his mate was only telling him the truth, to get it all out there that he stood here and Sammael stood over there. And maybe with a little luck they could all be standing side by side again. Then again with luck, Cirgoth could be kneeling or something with Sammael standing and we'll leave the details to the imagination. But he admired that about the green eyed one too though. It mattered not if the task foolish or smart, the angel's will to endure was a force all its own. However, it ate at him inwardly to now know that should death come for Cirgoth than he would no longer be his alone. But

Maelmorda's, to do with what the Father of them all wished. The notion was a double edged sword that pierced that hammering muscle in his chest and caused his arms to tense around his angelic mate. It wasn't a conscious thing really. It was just news to him to know all of these things Cirgoth told him now of all times, and what they had both suffered in their own ways in Acheron. Perhaps Cirgoth wasn't the only one Satan had done a hell of a tap dance on? He thought on that and immediately cast all those doubts away, or aside for now at least. He served Maelmorda utterly and it wasn't in his Lord that he held those doubts, but in a tiny part of himself. Even so he would sift through all that ugliness in himself, sort it out and get rid of it quickly because he wouldn't leave Cirgoth, their sons, his tribe or the desert to the mercy of the world; or the likes of Sammael for that matter. If it was Cirgoth's intention to sooth the beast holding him with his words or his voice alone, Marsol wasn't sure. All that hatred that had been brewing in him would ease and ebb during the angel's relating to just how alike he and they were, and by the time he commented on failure on his part and that the Morning Star was probably rooting for that, the only heat in him was his own and not from his anger. He resigned himself to speak no more in regards to Sammael when in the angel's presence. It would just complicate matters and he would rather just end Cirgoth's worries here and now over his demon lover's point of view for his fallen brother. He's been through there and here, he thought as the flesh covering his chest tightened at those fingers that touched him, meaning the above and below realms. And yet the real scars he carries are not on his body, Marsol concluded that thought with how his amber eyes lowered from Cirgoth's face to the part of his chest he had bitten earlier. But then his body coiled inwardly as he felt that faintest brushing of his angel lover's lips over his and it awoke that beast in him like nothing else ever would. Quick was his arms to tug Cirgoth back to his chest where he could hold him tight enough to boarder painful as his tongue didn't fight but firmly rolled along into Cirgoth's mouth to assert it's supremacy, which wasn't that firm at all because he took that angel's bottom lip hostage momentarily to suckle on it. It was with great difficulty that Cirgoth unlatched his mouth from Marsol's long enough to breathe those words of need. Words that made the desert creature holding him shutter ever so slightly. Every word that his beloved said just ignited the carnal urges he had to keep under constant restraint, fanning the fire that was already raging in him since the moment he'd laid eyes on him. The corners of his mouth were tugged by invisible strings as his hands moved from the middle and small of Cirgoth's back to take their full of that rear and squeeze it. Good lord he was more than aware of how long it had been for them. It hurt in a way but he wouldn't let that distract him from drowning this angel in pleasures, this time without any pain; unless that was what Cirgoth wanted. With his hands on the angel's arse his eyes spied just past the curve of that heavenly face and auburn tresses that there was a door directly behind Cirgoth, and that it was now open? There hadn't been one there earlier, just like how Cirgoth had said there should have been one here to leave through. Was Sammael mocking them? Or helping them? Oddly enough it was the latter that Marsol settled on as he started to move forward slowly while covering Cirgoth in a frenzy of kisses that spanned from the top of his head to the middle of his chest. As they passed the threshold the angel and his demon lover would see a room with one piece of furniture in it, that being an enormous bed as plush as Maelmorda's body had been, done in all black. From the cool floor whose marble was also what made up the walls and ceiling, everything was black. It was to this four posted bed with its silk looking sheets and fur trimmed blankets that Marsol backed Cirgoth towards. As they entered that room his unruly haired head canted so that as his tongue slipped out from between his lips he could lick over the spot where he had bitten Cirgoth from before. Was he trying to see if

the wound was healed yet or not? Or did he just not want to put another scar on this angel? "I will not lie to you and tell you it is only for your safety that which I pose to you now. It is possibly of selfish reasons that come from this love I have for you too," he said as the backs of Cirgoth's knees must have bumped the edge of that bed that sat waist high. His kisses and lickings did not stop as he spoke. "I want... to bond you, Cirgoth. To keep you and our sons together, this is one of many things I would do to stay the hand of those that seek our suffering. I'll not be swayed in how I feel for you if you deny me this, and I will respect your answer whichever it may be." It was Marsol's version of a plea, although it didn't come out that way. It was just a very heated kiss covered request of the angel. He knew his love, like his madness, was consuming at times. His head didn't lift to see the look on Cirgoth's face to his question. He would find that in how the angel's body moved in his arms and would take that as an answer before he replied.

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Maelmorda trailed his fingers along those arms which settled across his lap after he had recounted the terms in detail, and pierced those black eyes with his jeweled eyes of jade as they lifted on him. "Of course he is persistent. Look whose son he is," he grinned. "Oh, there are plenty of other worlds you can unleash our legions on, My Prince," he assured as Sammael expressed his ideas of the glories of a hellish war. He smiled warmly as Sammael agreed to his terms; binding the agreement by his word. It was the way of agreements made by Acheron's lords, particularly when Maelmorda had a hand in it. They both had to uphold their end of the deal; Sammael to pull his legions out of Morashtar and never again bother or attempt to change Morashtar again, and Maelmorda to give all that he was and that was his, excluding Morashtar, to Sammael, until such a time Sammael chose to free him. If Mael cut ties with Sammael's natural possession of all that he was and that was his, the one exclusion aside, Morashtar would be Sammael's without contest. Whomsoever broke the spoken contract, the eternal flame would exact its judgment and punishment on.

Maelmorda wrapped his arms around Sammael in an embrace, and had no sooner done so when the Prince of Demons decided to involve him in his horseplay with Arasgal. He was promptly embraced by Sammael then dunked and when he surfaced his eyes shot around the pool looking for Sammael, who had taken cover behind their all too handsome son. Arasgal laughed softly at the jests Sammael told and Maelmorda frowned as his master gnawed at his pride by making a joke of his traumatic conception of their son. "Oh, you are going to get it now," he growled, then dove under that shallow water, and cheating of course with magic, he streaked through the water like he had gone liquid lightning to come up behind Sammael a moment later. The second he rose behind Sammael his hands thrust out to shove Sammael forward into the water, and leap atop his back as well. He would hold him under water a little longer than Sammael had him, and then glide off of him. He waited for his Prince to surface and when he did, he attacked him frontally to embrace him and seal his lips with a fiercely passionate kiss. Arasgal bubbled with laughter and sank into the water, whereof momentarily he grabbed them both by the ankles to jerk their legs out from under them. As they fell back, he pounced them both by throwing himself down between them and swathing them in his wings. With wings and arms he swept them into an embrace to hug them both tight and lay a kiss to Sammael's cheek and then Maelmorda's. When he released them he was smiling. "He plays with us but is thinking of another," the white devil expressed. "His wife,

Galaxy and my half brother Corwyn. Where do they fit Father Sammael?"

Maelmorda sat up and eyed his son. "I would thank you, Arasgal, to permit me to express my own thoughts, or to allow Sammael to pick them up as he wills. It is the polite thing to do," he preached with an irate edge.

"As you wish Father Lucifer," their son obliged.

Maelmorda had already contacted Sarku telepathically the moment Sammael had sealed their pact with his promise. The shapeshifter was on his way to Galaxy's chamber about the time Mael had been dunked to inform her of the situation as had been arranged between he and Mael prior to Maelmorda meeting with Sammael. Maelmorda smiled as Arasgal agreed to respect his wishes and patted his son's shoulder. His gaze then cut on Sammael and he slipped through the water to wrap his legs around Sammael's waste and settle his water buoyant weight against his lap and loins. "So how does one raise a son who knows so much? Such as family as ours is rather unique, is it not?"

Arasgal nuzzled against Sammael's shoulder and draped an arm around Maelmorda. "I would like very much to see the world and Acheron, and the people in these places. I think I would like to see other worlds as well. Perhaps there is a world out there which needs Acheron to rule over it. I could find it for you, Father Sammael."

"You wish to leave us so soon?" Maelmorda asked.

Arasgal shook his head. "No need bides for me to leave to visit places. I can come and go through the walks of folded dimensions and space."

"Learning that takes time, Arasgal," Maelmorda pointed out, yet he eyed him keenly as if expecting the answer which followed.

"As you suspect, I already know how, Father Lucifer. I have the collective knowledge of both my fathers."

Maelmorda rubbed his face and his hands dropped into the water with a splash. "And how would you use such power, Aras?"

"For good, only ever for good, and never on the worlds unless great powers were doing harm or if I might be very subtle in assisting others."

"What is good or evil is often an opinion, Arasgal," Mael tested him.

"Only to those who deceive themselves, father of chaos. What is good and evil and all that is in between is like the truth. It either is true or is not. It is like you, fathers, and me, and is what simply is. If good, or evil is questionable, then it is neutral and a matter of choice. Father of chaos is evil when he feels he must be, and like Father of sin sometimes his logic is incorrect. At other times Father of Sin is evil just to see what others are made of and to test one's inner strength. At his worst he harms others because it pleases him to do so, but only because he and all his brothers were forsaken for hating the destruction of their true brothers, the demons. He hates all who give their love to Yajmha and hates himself for serving him still by collecting those souls he is demanded by the



king of Haman to take." His gaze leaned curiously on Sammael. "I wonder, father, why must you collect these souls? If they are meant for Acheron, will they not find their way home on their own? What if you refused to serve Yajmha even in this capacity? Perhaps it is time to free yourself of Yajmha forever more and cut all ties."

Maelmorda cackled with delight and splashed Sammael. "He has a hell of a good point, My Prince. What the devil does my arrogant and disgustingly self-righteous brother do for you anyway? He sure as phuck has never promised us peace. His damn Alamascan are always on the hunt for my children and your brothers." Mael was clueless that Yajmha had vowed that Maelmorda and any of those sired or created by Sammael would never be destroyed by Haman as long as Sammael served him. It was well known in Acheron that Sammael still served Yajmha and how, but no one knew why, no one but Arasgal, who knew better than to speak of what he knew about Sammael or Maelmorda concerning certain matters.

Arasgal yawned and curled against his fathers to nuzzle his head between their chests. He was suddenly very sleepy. Like a child, he required a lot of sleep and nourishment at his current stage of development. Though he looked like an adult, he was still maturing in other ways. All the knowledge and chaos he contained burned a lot of energy in and of itself, and he had not built up the stamina yet to cope with it for long hours at a time. He would crave Maelmorda's blood for some time yet to come as well; Mael's blood because the Morning Star was imprinted in his emotional being as the mother figure. Maelmorda sighed and carressed his son's wet hair as his fangs pierced his left breast and he began to suckle on his blood. His gut coiled and his loins quickened against Sammael. His lids veiled his jade eyes for a moment and when he opened them again they were locked on Sammael. It was through mind speak he expressed what was on his mind to his master. "Funny isn't it, Sammael? That out of the two of us, the father of chaos, and the father of sin, I am the one who cannot be trusted not to corrupt our son? It is not him I fear Sammael, but myself, and what I may make of him. I have never been ashamed of my thoughts or my tendencies before until now. Do not mistake me, it is not sex I am alluding to, that I can control where he is concerned, it is his goodness. His kind of goodness brings out the evil in me." It was true, where Sammael had no wish to corrupt Arasgal, Lucifer craved to do just that. He hated things too pure and too good. Yajmha had seen to that. He believed corruption was necessary, but in Arasgal's case he was certain an exception lived. "Can someone as pure and good as our son bleed black and white into all colors, Sammael, and survive Acheron doing so? Do you understand that I want to see if he is corruptible? Am I the wild card in this which may make Cirgoth's dream a reality? If so, you had better cage me from ever answering to my own compulsions where our son is concerned. I am sure it is the wrong thing to do, yet the desire, the need to corrupt him remains."

Cirgoth's body responded to that hurricane of hungry kisses with needy arcs of his muscles which lifted his flesh fully against each kiss while his fingers roved over the planes of his Lord's body. The angel's warm lips pressed against the crown of Marsol's unruly chocolate locks as he ran his tongue over the faint pink recess of new skin which had healed over the bite mark and as his fingers trailed along his arms delicately and then laced with Marsol's; he stole a hot kiss from his throat. His muscles were tense with desire as Marsol backed him towards that open door that seemed to manifest from nowhere and he laughed deliriously when Marsol backed him against the bed within to spill him off his feet and land him on that incredibly soft mattress shrouded all in black. When Marsol fell over him to cover him with a

fresh wave of kisses intermingled with a resolute plea to permit him to bond him, his breaths caught and he began to undress his lord with fingers trembling. His own body stretched and shifted to aid Marsol in the removal of his own clothing and when he felt the hot press of Marsol's bare flesh against his own he embraced him desperately and captured urgent kisses from his shoulder, upward his throat to his ear which he breathed a shivering answer to. "Please..." he implored; nearly wept. "...cover my will with your own. Bind me so tightly that I forget where I end and you begin." The feel of Marsol against him opened every nerve in his body with raw, extreme need and he gripped the dragon lord's huge cock to lavish him with heavy strokes. His legs wrapped his waste and his free hand's fingers traveled over his back and cupped his beautifully muscular ass to squeeze firmly while his tongue flickered against his lips and a shivering breath sealed his mouth with a zealously pleading kiss. The angel's hand and feet alike kneaded Marsol's firm cheeks as his tongue sought every pleasure and need Marsol's mouth had to give or take. Every shift, rise, heave and constricting muscle in Cirgoth's body begged to feel Marsol inside of him and with that need driving him he slipped his index finger inside of Marsol to stir him with heady pleasures. His body nor his voice pled for pain; only to join with Marsol and feel complete again. If pain came out of those pleasures owed to Marsol's size Cirgoth would bask in that.

Cirgoth no longer felt like the virgin body Marsol remembered, he could handle his mass better, for Sammael had ravished him so frequently and so completely that the angel rather felt like a well used whore now. Whatever enchantments the demon had used while claiming his body had hindered his regeneration selectively and molded his body as Sammael saw fit, to fit him. In the process he had made Cirgoth more responsive, more sex driven. Had Cirgoth actually dwelled on any of this he would have likely curled up and closed himself off altogether. Because he loved Marsol so fiercely he did not allow himself to reflect on any of that. He dared not else he lost his mind altogether and became useless to anyone. Cirgoth was stronger than that, but had Sammael kept him much longer he might have broken him beyond hope of recovery and rendered him useless beyond being a thrall and whore, a slave to his desires. Perhaps Sammael had known that and that was why he had set him free when he did. Yet if that were so; why did he keep him bonded for so long and let that attachment continue to torment Cirgoth if he had no wish to break him? Did he wish to break him a little at a time? Or break him just enough to make him more easily tamed? Yes, Cirgoth was strong, but like everyone he had a breaking point and a means to arrive at that terrible place. Sammael had found the means, and torture was not it, carnal pleasure, strong attachment, and cruel denial were, and in doing do he had discovered the angel's point of no return. He had nearly broken Cirgoth completely, very nearly, and had broken half of him.

"I need you so badly..." he whispered to Marsol in tremulous breaths. "I would thank Lucifer for making me every day if I could spend every hour of my life feeling you inside of me." The odd thing about that statement was that he meant it.

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Sammael found that when the Devil was irritated the right way, even his most blood curdling of glares could be on the verge of charming. If not something akin to cute. It may be weird, considering how he teased at one such as Maelmorda in good nature, only to get what he deserved with the cheater coming up behind him to shove him forward and then pounce on his back to dunk him like nobodies business. Both arms went out to the sides as if he were preparing to do a swan dive instead of the

belly flop Maelmorda caused him to do, sinking all those few feet to the cool stone bottom where he glowered for only a second or two. His right brow twitched just a tad before he brought his legs up underneath himself to plant his feet to stand. With dark locks plastered to the front of his face, any normal person wouldn't be able to see like that. But his eyes were closed as the water ran off the top of his head and down the bare flesh of his body, drizzling where muscles defined him in tiny rivers; beads collecting across his shoulders and face. He wasn't puzzling over something. He didn't tinker over this or that, how to lay ruin to the best laid plans of angel and demon alike. Another first was that Satan's mind wasn't all over the place dipping into the lives of others to bring to the surface just how tainted their souls truly were. His head shook from side to side to rid his face of his hair, and perhaps on the third or fourth shake he would feel Maelmorda's lips close over his and he in turn had to put his arms around his maker's lower back to keep from falling backwards again from the force behind the passion and his own needs. Course all his efforts would be snuffed by Arasgal grabbing their ankles so that he could pull their legs out from under them, causing Sammael to grunt as they fell anyways. So began the swatting fest. Blowing his own share of bubbles under the water that both Maelmorda and himself had been dragged into by their ankles. He even went nipped at whatever the hell it was that kept passing in front of his face, one time he nipped Maelmorda's shoulder and then the next area was perhaps the outer part to one of Arasgal's wings. He laughed though from all the horseplay and how ready Arasgal was in rising to it. Smirking as after he felt the kiss laid to his cheek his hands slunk to tickle Maelmorda and his son's sides as the white devil said something that made his brow quirk just a hair. The edge in Maelmorda's reply to his son's seemingly harmless words struck a silent chuckle from him. It was already going to be a terrible case of good cop and bad cop with Maelmorda and Sammael in concerns to Arasgal speaking his mind, and oh how his mind could speak. He had slipped out of the tight knitted circle of limbs and wings as Father and Son came to an agreement, running a hand up and over his face to let it disappear into all those dark locks and pull them off of his face. His other hand was idle in it's itching along the middle of his abdomen, and it stopped at this cheater moved towards him to wrap those bitable legs around his waist. It caused certain parts to become painfully aware of Maelmorda's presence and as such could he be blamed for how his hands went down to rest on those beautiful arse cheeks? Not one to break the quiet, even though it was just him maintaining it, he canted his head to the side as his black eyes looked Maelmorda up and then down and then with that hunger the Morning Star had tasted not all that long ago; That insatiable appetite that could be sparked from who knew what. He could have another ravishing of the Morning Star even if it was insane to want to pleasure his Maker again in such a short amount of time. But he wouldn't. Not with Arasgal there. Not yet anyway. To the other side his head would lean and take a moment to rest his cheek on top of Arasgal's head when he felt his son nuzzling at his shoulder. The affections Arasgal gave to both of his Fathers was very disarming. Like the white devil's smile. If he had been in a heated mood, no doubt a little steam would be cooled off just by being in his son's company for a bit. It was getting weirder by the second, but not in a bad way. The answers to the question Arasgal posed him, and then Maelmorda on the matter of him still serving his arrogant brother, were left unsaid for now. Or they would have been had Maelmorda not splashed him again and got a grunt along with a downwards slap to the water of Sammael's hand to soak all three of them in a wide curtain of water. Sort of causing a tiny wave effect. Then he prodded at Maelmorda's nose, saying, "You keep splashing me and I'll throw a blasted Alamascan on your head for dinner." It wasn't a threat but a promise. But wasn't it a good promise? An Alamascan for dinner if only the Morning Star

continued this horseplay? Or maybe Sammael hadn't meant it that way? With the sudden sleepiness that overcame their son however he wound his arms around the both of them carefully, minding those gorgeous furred wings Arasgal possessed, to hold them close to himself. With their son feeding from Maelmorda, he would move through the water slowly towards the nearest wall. Carrying the both of them as the three moved lazily about, making a circle or two on their way to the wall. Where Sammael leaned his side against the cool stone surface. As Maelmorda utilized mind speak to tell him of the things that perhaps troubled and enticed him as to do with their son, the Devil would get no surprised or miffed expression from his son. If he had not known the Morning Star as well as he did, he would have made such facial expressions, maybe even a little curt remark as to what Maelmorda was permitted to do and what not to. In reality however he did know all too well just whom posed the greater danger to Arasgal's purity, it was just a matter of how to go about avoiding such tainting that was thought on by the demon of sin. Maybe it was because of how the white devil brought out that closely guarded good side in him that made his lips set in a line before he blew a hot breath over Maelmorda's chin at the notion of caging him from his own inner urges. Maybe it was because Arasgal, and the insanity that Cirgoth had raged about, and most of all Maelmorda's mere presence that were bringing many things out of him that made him consider Maelmorda's words very carefully before he finally did answer him.

"What would you have me encompass these 'desires' in you with; Chains; Stone; A constant state of bliss so that the mind cannot wander? Or bury you in mountains of pain every time the thought even crept into your head? Maybe just this once we'll agree on that front, to not allow this spoiling of our good son be accomplished by you or anyone else, so long as we can help it; Or I rather. And what pray tell would you do if in fact you found him incorruptible? Pure to the very end regardless of the trials life might have in store for him? What if you proved there are those rarities whose place in the grand scheme was just that, to be the unattainable? To be that ray of hope for all us who could have forgotten how it was to be... He already sees how your mind strays to others even if he is right in front of you. Understand Maelmorda as I will do everything within my scope to stay your hand where he is concerned, but you will do all that you can to forget the world when you are with us. Call me selfish; Greedy; Vain; Fancy what you please of it, just don't make this into something none of us will be able to bare."

Not at the end of this, at first calm and then abruptly heated, spiel of his own take on what Maelmorda had related to him, he let out an irritated sigh and then turned his black eyes on the white devil nestled between them. He hadn't expected to get so touchy over talking about Arasgal. Let alone snap at Maelmorda the way he felt he had. Maybe it was unfounded and he should have faith in his maker's ability to control himself and all those unimaginable things he was capable of. Just with his pinky finger. Yet if he weren't as possessive and so damn awe struck by the arrival of their son and having his maker finally, he wouldn't have gotten so edgy with Maelmorda about all that. It just showed how he cared when it came down to it.

After awhile of looking over Arasgal as he fed and then drifted off into sleep whenever he did, he said to the Morning Star in that mind speak, "Don't make the mistake that I wouldn't agree with you if it was anyone else's son about turning him inside out just to see how long he could bleed. But he isn't Maelmorda. He is our son; ours. Where you have Galaxy and Corwyn, I have my own. Be it just one son, I do cherish what is mine in my own way. As you are well aware, you sneak. Moving through the water like a mad man just to dunk me, bad form!"

And as it was Sammael changed the subject for Maelmorda so that there weren't anymore mines hit by the dark God pertaining to Arasgal, Galaxy, Corwyn, Cain, and everyone else. Yajmha included. Did the demon of sin do this for Maelmorda's sake, to ease them into more comfortable matters and keep the mood in its upbeat state the way Arasgal had left it before nodding off? Or did he do it for himself; to keep his temper in check; to stop him from taking out the annoyance of those others that the Morning Star cared for so deeply, that he would permit another to take liberties with his Golden Goddess? It wasn't anything personal he had against them. It was just the cards they had been dealt, and it was not a fair hand sadly. It was not below him to cause discomfort to even Galaxy and Corwyn, although it was mostly looked on as a waste of energy by him because he actually liked Corwyn and thought he had the same smile as Maelmorda. It was just this child, no this being, Arasgal would take priority over a lot of things now. Hopefully the boundaries of that was handled delicately, else Sammael give Maelmorda many reasons to despise him. It was getting strange like that, he thought with a tinge of whatthefuckwasthat type of look in his black eyes. As Arasgal had asked where Galaxy and Corwyn stood in all of this, where then would Cain be? Would he not be considered too?

Eventually his thoughts were treaded on by the information Gabriel had. What was this? Birdies had been captured in the sands again? Oh my, he thought as he pressed his slowly smiling lips to the top of Maelmorda's right shoulder. So, the Raven and his Swan, and the itty bitty Birdie-Demon had gotten themselves into territory that was not their own? What in the world would spur them to go so far from their home to risk being taken by Gabriel and the arms under his command? A more than well thanks was given to Gabriel for any trouble he had to go through in apprehending Wyrvaust and his most beautiful Nephelim, and their son. This time around neither the Raven or his Swan would be spared. Last time he had asked her to accompany him for the exchange of words, or perhaps it wouldn't have been just words? The Raven had taken it upon himself to snatch her and the human back like a thief in the night. Since Marsol was probably seven kinds of tangled up with Cirgoth, he thought it pretty goddamn rude if the desert creature were interrupted now. Thankfully he had warded against outer influences into his little oasis manor near the start of both the angel and his demon lover barging in on Maelmorda and him screwing each other's brains out. Had it been a day? Two? A week? Time didn't seem to matter here where the word of the day was pain, and its uses were as limitless as the pleasure one could derive from it. As Sammael turned his head upwards to trail his lips over the Morning Star's, even if their son was right there in between them and making the scene quickly inappropriate. As he did, he asked Gabriel his own thoughts on what kind of pie he might think the Nephelim would taste now. Before had it not been apple? Or was it cherry? Where to put them, where to put them. Clearly Kassim had a part to play in what was to come, but did he matter more than a grain of salt to the demon of sin in the end? Did anyone in that kingdom matter to him? A place that had been burned to the ground, its people killed or enslaved, made into monsters, chased from their homes. Truly a horrifying fate had befallen the people of Hassim. But war did not come without its casualties, right?

To Gabriel he said this: "Ahh, the Raven brings his own little clan with him into teeming waters. It would do him a disservice to be used the way King Kassim wants. Bring the Nephelim and their child to me. No sense wasting his talent sitting around with four walls and a roof, make use of him in the manner you need. Indulge me Gabriel and bring yourself as well."

King Kassim wouldn't get the bargaining chips he so strove for in his insistence to the contrary. Had Wyrvaust, Arilwen and Anwarr been saved from a worse fate with that bastard arse father of Yorek's? Had Sammael knowingly pulled the three of them to him to keep them from getting man handled by the demonic king? Did Satan truly have more use for them under his own gaze than leaving them to the devices of Kassim and his horrors? Or was this what some would call rolling up a snowball and tossing it into Hell?

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Marsol didn't need his eyes to relieve the angel of his clothes. He almost tore Cirgoth's clothes off of him he was so intent on wanting to be with his mate again, in every way. He did snag a little of the angel's pants on his teeth because he had bitten the seam and pulled them down off those heavenly shaped hips of his. Skin so smooth and flawless, where he allowed it to be minus the scars he let himself have. Oh he bathed his angel in those hungry kisses. From his brows to the fragile skin of his eye lids, down the sides of his neck and over the tops of his shoulder the demon's lips traveled. Making slightly hard sucklings to both of those nipples, nipping them and then moving back down further. Lightly biting all over Cirgoth's belly as well as his hips. He sat up once he had the angel's pants undone, his shirt somewhere in tatters nearby and his own weapons slung to the floor, to pull off Cirgoth's shoes one at a time. It was a bit of a tug-of-war game between them to see who could undress whom the fastest. But if it had really been a game then Marsol might have become aggressive and just burnt Cirgoth's clothes off of him with a sexually frustrated snort. Kind of like the way he was doing to his own clothing even as Cirgoth was helping to get his tunic and vest and such off him. The thick fabric of his tunic smoked just the tiniest bit before it lit up from a spark somewhere near the nape of his neck. His suit caught fire yes and burnt into not even ashes within just a few seconds, causing no harm to come to his sweet bird. The tanned body pressed its hips down into their angelic mate's as the last part of his pants singe with the small bright red-orange glow. He was making it clear how badly he needed unconsciously by meshing his now naked self to the angel even though Cirgoth still had his pants on. Undone mind you, tugged a little off his hips, but still on. Only for a moment though. It was so that his angelic lover could feel how crazily aroused he could make his demon. Then with a few playful bites delivered to the angel's groin while he had his pants on, he would take to pulling them off quickly so that he could feel all of Cirgoth without the bother of clothing getting in the way. Constricting is what it was, damn it. His head lifted a little at that tone in Cirgoth's voice as he spoke. The angel's reply just fanned the fires already raging in him. The taste of his skin was only matched by that of his mouth. Or perhaps it was other spots on his body that could best the tantalizing lips that were so goddamn nibbible? One hand came down between them to at first molest Cirgoth between his legs before starting to stroke him. On those black covers in that big black bed the angel and his demon took and gave much from one another. Touches. Kisses. Heavy pettings. Even as that huge cock was moved by the way his hips shifted to nuzzle against Cirgoth's own divine member, and then downwards to see if the angel still retained his feminine parts, he murmured his love. A low growl if that but he murred with his lips close to Cirgoth's left ear of how much he meant to him. Did he have to though? Must he speak just a tiny fraction of what stormed within his heart of hearts? Were words really enough to express what dwelled inside a dragon? Probably not. But words did seem to hold a certain weight with this bird. And it was words, however few there were, that he spoke now. Although he shuddered as he felt that finger enter him and it made his

hips jerk forward unexpectedly to bury a little under half of himself inside Cirgoth. Quite the sexual being he had become Marsol thought to himself as he found the differences between the Cirgoth he remembered and the one he now wanted more than anything were striking. Maybe not so shocking to merit displeasure. It was new however to have someone entering you for a change. Well maybe not entirely new to him, when he thought back on it if and when Maelmorda had had his way with him. Cause the Devil would naturally have his way with everything in time. The hand that Cirgoth wasn't making his ass clench with each stirring was taken to lay a little above their heads on that bed as he licked up the side of his lover's throat. Marsol's other hand was too busy stroking Cirgoth and rubbing the angel's manhood against his stomach to be bothered with anything else at the moment. That hand just wanted to touch the angel's sensitive areas. To gently run the Cirgoth's tip along his muscle hardened stomach and such. He had just barely sunken in the rest of his demonic length into his mate when he said how he would thank the Father of them all for creating him in the first place, just to be with him. Ahh. Now if that wasn't love what was? He smiled as he ran his tongue across Cirgoth's chest to capture his right nipple to nibble on. "We can thank him later," he whispered in between nibbles to his angel's nipples. A little after that he had the nagging sensation in the back of his mind that something was wrong. Or maybe something was just off? It was only a tiny sensation. Like a fly that wouldn't go away. Constantly buzzing around just out of your field of vision to mock you with its insectile speed and agility to avoid your feeble attempts at swatting it. The feeling had no name. It had no agenda, no purpose or reason. It didn't even feel good or evil. Just... wrong and sort of off-ish. More like a gut instinct one got about something. But what?! It annoyed him now that he would get the heebie jeebies when all he wanted to do was love Cirgoth and pleasure him till they both passed out from it. His amber eyes shifted off to the side for a minute or two to give the nagging sensation a little thought but with the faintest movement of the angel's body he was ripped back into the thundering in his chest to be with him and screw everything else. Course... he had had that nagging feeling before. Only now it wasn't as easy to shake like back then. Now it vied to be heard. It needed to be acknowledged and dealt with. Sammael might have done a pretty good job of warding off his manor from paths of telepathy. But could he close off the path of blood bonds? Or better yet the interestingly abnormal relationships that could develop from them?

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Arilwen and Wyrvaust's Journey Continued  
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It was a muscular cricket demon guard with powerful legs, a large scorpion tail, very heavy claws, and a pair of large, insect-like wings folded against its body, which answered that demanding knock of Arilwen's. His massive claws scratched against the door as he pulled against the latch and flung the door open to reveal its hideous form and the six eyes which peered as much at her as the corridor without with all around vision. If she had the nerve to try and step through the threshold, she would meet with a powerful wall of force which would halt her progression as surely as a steel wall. It surrounded the entire chamber, the windows and chimney included, albeit smoke could still escape the chimney. At her rather bossy demands the ten foot tall, spine and tentacle armoured demon sneered to further expose those menacing teeth which dominated his mouth with its venomous slobber and informed her telepathically that he would extend her request for an audience with Hiraad (lord) Gabrian. The demon then shut the door.

It was not long after that Gabriel appeared at the door, which opened to him as he approached. He walked through the wall of force which surrounded the chamber and took a lean against the wall by the door, his broken bits of bony wings popping at the joints and scraping the wall behind him as he did so. "As I failed to introduce myself before; I am Gabriel, Hiraad of this village, which in your native tongue would be the same as a marquis. This village and any prisoners we capture are mine until my Lord says otherwise." His lips pursed as she insisted that someone heal Wyrvaust immediately. "His immortality is intact, as is yours. He shall not die from his wounds and shall heal in time on his own despite his regeneration being barely above a human's ability to heal. Still, I shall permit the return of your ability to heal by touch. I have no desire to be cruel." Even as he said it he unlocked her healing ability.

His gaze fell in the way of Anwarr who slept by his father's side. His gaze then drifted off and after a moment a wooden box manifested in the corner of the room filled with various toys, most of them hand carved animals from wood, some with wheels and leather pull strings. Four of them were stuffed animals made of animal fur with quartz eyes. Gabriel had simply gated the toys from various homes in the village. It was false conjury and he was capable of fabrication as well. He was a quantum projectionist and chaosmancer. He was Sammael's most powerful and loyal progeny and advocate, the Princes of Acheron aside. One of the dolls he fabricated himself. It was made of black died leather with agate eyes, stuffed with spineless down, and in the shape of an abyss demon, complete with wings, a Wyrvaust doll it could be said. As Arilwen's back was to the corner he delivered the open toy box to, she would notice them later. Gabriel had a tendency to produce items when no one was looking, as he had with the water, cups, bindings, and compresses. Their meals would also appear when no one was paying attention to the table.

"I suppose you have questions for me. I shall answer anything which shall not compromise us." The infernal demon was honest at least.

Gabriel was not all evil, only as evil as he needed to be to achieve an objective, and he was reliably loyal to Sammael. If Sammael asked something of him; he obeyed, plain and simple. He would murder, rape, kidnap, torture, steal, destroy, what have you if Sammael commanded it, otherwise he was mild in his temperament, even kind, albeit emotionally aloof. It had been Gabriel who had won the support Sammael needed to claim Acheron's throne. Gabriel was an able leader and very charismatic when he had a mind to be. He had legions of his own to command, albeit the Cricket Demons were Abaddon's, who had lent several legions of the frightening demons to support Sammael's efforts. Despite their monstrous mammalian-reptilian-and-insect-like mixed appearance, they were intelligent and well organized. Gabriel had received orders from King Saeed to torture Wyrvaust and his family in his presence to force the demon to tell Gabriel what the king wanted to know, but Gabriel was holding off on that until he heard from Sammael. Sammael might order their release, that they be delivered to him, or even demand their deaths, though Gabriel doubted that. The infernal progeny of Sammael's was not about to injure the prisoners if there was a chance that Sammael wanted them delivered to him or their home safe and sound. The injuries Wyrvaust had received were merely incidental, a product of his futile attempts to escape.

It was then Sammael extended his command to him, belated it seemed, he had contacted him over an hour ago. Strange things had been happening with telepathic



relays in the desert lately. Gabrian suspected that someone out there was either attempting to halt them, intrude on them, or both. He pushed his own voice past any interference by bypassing distance through an alternate plane of communication he selected for his mental voice to follow. "My Lord, your message may have been delayed, but I am receiving you now. I shall deliver the prisoners to you immediately." His gaze then locked on Arilwen. "Never mind healing him now. He shall be cared for shortly." The demon then harnessed a path of travel, checking the planar path he chose selectively carefully for possible trespass and holes of interception before he thrust his hands out towards the prisoners in a sweep to plunge them with himself through a planar gate which would deliver them to the chamber Sammael occupied with his son and Maelmorda. Wyrvaust arrived sprawled on the floor by the pool, still out cold, Anwarr still snug under his wing asleep. Gabrian would appear facing Arilwen as he was before he transferred them until he smiled at Sammael and walked over to kneel by the pool and kiss his sire's cheek.

"It is a pleasure as always to see you, My Lord," he greeted him as a son would his father, and after embracing him; he stood at the edge of the pool. He bowed respectfully to Maelmorda. "Lord Kilcanoragh. You look...well..." he almost laughed at the vision of him all tangled with his Lord. He wondered about it, hence he swept a hand towards the three captives. "Wyrvaust struggled against the guards and was wounded," he announced. "Would you have them remain helpless, or have me restore their strengths to them? I stripped them all naked of their arcane and immortal prowess, with exception of the child," he informed his lord.

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Arilwen had seen some horrific things since coming to the desert, and this creature was suddenly added to it. When the door scraped open her violet eyes grew huge at the thing she saw. What in the HELL was that!? She did not try to leave. Oh no. In fact, she took one timid step backwards into the room, her fingertips falling to curl into the folds of her robe, clutching the fabric apprehensively, nodding when the message was to be delivered by the departing creature. Holy crap, that thing was from a nightmare!

Minutes later, the bony-winged demon who had ordered their capture appeared and Arilwen sucked in her breath, kicking up her stiff chin a notch. She felt scared but was refusing to show it. Bravery had to make its way into her heart when she had a wounded husband, no powers and a sleeping son. Ugh, but her spine shivered when those bone joints scraped against the wall and she felt a muscle in her jaw twitch at the horrid sound. What had happened to him? Had he once had beautiful wings like Wyrvaust? Wait... did she CARE? No!

Surprisingly, Arilwen immediately received SOME results from her demanding nature and was returned her ability to heal by touch. She gave a soft 'thank you' but did not move from her spot. She didn't trust this man... and why should she? Especially with the way he was studying her son! Of course she did not realize he was in the process of forming a toy box for Anwarr, who would be very pleased to find it when he awoke. Okay, she could do this. She could be ballsy. Her fingers relaxed from clutching her robes and her arms shifted to cross loosely over her chest as she studied the man in front of her, who gave her free reign to ask questions... no answer guaranteed.

"I want to know why we were taken in when we have done nothing wrong. My husband

and I ventured out into the desert weeks ago for no other reason than for learning... he is teaching our son and I the important aspects of survival here. There was no intention of trespassing on anyone's land or intruding." Arilwen was trying to keep the desperation from her voice, but she wanted to throttle the man and scream at him to just let them go home. She had no idea what terrible things might await her and her family here. Of course, leave it to good ole' Sammy to intervene! But which would be worse? Torture or Sammael's attentions? Arilwen's violet eyes gained an air of confusion as Gabriel told her that she would need to worry about Wyrvaust's state later and lifted his hands. Oh no. Anytime someone did that then she was transported. Before she could open her mouth to protest she felt her stomach lift and the world blur, coming back into focus in another place. She blinked, seeing Gabriel still in front of her, but then immediately shot her eyes around to take in their situation. There was a large, sparkling pool... her husband and son lying next to it, eyes still closed... Sammael. Oh...God...

Arilwen turned pale as Gabriel went to greet Sammael and explain their current situation and she hurried over to kneel beside Wyrvaust, her fingers uncurling and moving to touch him. However, they stopped not an inch from his face and she hesitated. If she healed Wyrvaust, he would wake up... and when he saw not only Gabriel, but Sammael, he would be angry again... and probably do what he was best at in high pressure situations. Attack someone. Arilwen chewed on her lower lip, fighting panic. No. She had to try and make leeway before she woke him up. She had known for quite some time that Sammael was infatuated with her and as much as she hated to think of it, she might be able to use that to her advantage. Her violet eyes flickered up and around the room. What the hell had been happening here before she arrived? She saw Lord Maelmorda and he looked like a train wreck.

The angel pulled her hands away from her husband and promptly rose, stepping over him to stalk over to the group of men who currently spoke. And she was going to force herself to wait until they were done talking before she leapt in with her own words to Sammael, her voice controlled and pleading. "Send us home. We have done nothing wrong..." Okay, maybe that wasn't phrased the nicest way, so she added a hasty "please" to the end. Her racing heart was causing her delicious scent to pump out and fill the room in thick waves to the point where it was nearly suffocating.

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Maelmorda's affections for Sammael, playful or passionate, were not feigned, nor an act for his benefit. They were genuine, albeit his heart was hard to capture for the duration. Galaxy alone had ever possessed his heart so completely. There was where the greatest challenge of all stood for Sammael to dare if he had the desire to attempt to land the Morning Star's heart and soul. Maelmorda was beginning to suspect that it was his heart Sammael was after. Yes, he loved Sammael, but to give himself so fully to another came hard to Maelmorda. When their horseplay came to a pause and Sammael expressed his own position where their son was concerned, pride in his Prometheus and lover swelled in his chest. It was no secret to Maelmorda that Sammael did not hate goodness, but despised the pretention of virtue, the false mask of it, and self-delusion of goodness that so many if not the majority wore. For that very reason Sammael had preyed on Seth, who so aptly pretended honor and loyalty, or rather believed himself to be honorable and devoted when he was neither, whereas the truth was he failed both so frequently. Seth was the kind Sammael went after first. Maelmorda had intended on teaching Seth lessons in honor and loyalty in his own way, but Sammael had decided to play the vampire as

he saw fit before Maelmorda had done with his progeny. Both of them thought alike to prove him capable of what he wanted to be, or prove him incapable, in different ways. In mind, Sammael and Maelmorda shared a lot in common, in method they were quite different, most of the time. Occasionally they even resorted to the same methods. It was Sammael's later proclamation that he was to forget the world existed outside of he and Arasgal when he was with them which brought a hollow void to Maelmorda's flawlessly sculpted facial features. It was how anguish, rage, jealousy, any of the really powerful emotions manifested on his face. The more dangerous or upset he was, the less his expression showed. He had the feeling that Sammael intended to have him at his side at all times. He fell silent for awhile, just listening to Sammael, watching him as he gazed over Arasgal as he slept. His eyes closed as well when Sammael's voice infiltrated his mind with what Maelmorda took as a mixed message. Oh he understood what he meant, but he had also mentioned Corwyn and Galaxy being his. Did that mean he intended to let him have some freedom with his family? He could not shake the feeling that Sammael had no such plans.

"I surely would not refuse a constant state of bliss, but you have my promise that I shall not corrupt our son in any intentional manner," Maelmorda agreed to Sammael's suggestion of them simply agreeing not to corrupt Arasgal. "If the urge overwhelms me, I shall inform you and you may destroy the temptation howsoever you wish," he added.

The devil stretched his body, arms sweeping above his head until his back was arched and his chest thrust out with his fingers steeped against the back of his head above his nape. The pose was feline and magnetically sexy. "I do understand your feelings for our son, believe me, beloved Sammael." One hand then draped Sammael's shoulder. "I am glad you wish to protect him." His head canted over and his eyes smoldered on Sammael. "Do you understand that I love Galaxy, and that I could more easily forget that I have arms and legs than I can forget her? I get the feeling, Sammael...that you intend to keep me to yourself...and furthermore, that it is the whole of my heart you seek. I might be wrong of course, but if not, there is but one path to my heart for you, Sammael." Maelmorda realized the danger Galaxy was in, for if Sammael should see her as a true threat to his desires, he might decide to erase her life. How else could he possibly remove the single obstacle to Maelmorda's heart? It was illogical to kill Galaxy though. His jade green eyes, flecked with sky blue, pierced Sammael's eyes and his hands cupped his cheeks with that tenderness few ever had the privilege of observing in the devil. "Sammael...if you would but permit me to have her, my heart will be yours to conquer. What could my soul do but reciprocate such a gesture of altruism from you? Take her from me and I may accept it, but what can I be but bitter? Kill her and what can I do but hate you with all the shattered pieces of my heart? Let me keep her, and I can only love you. Can I ever love you with all my heart? I don't know...I just don't know. Do I even love Galaxy with all my heart? Would I have sacrificed her as I have if my love for her was true? Would true love not have tipped logic over? Am I just too damn ancient for my logic to relent to love? I only know that I love her as much as I am capable of loving another. Can I love you as much, more? I have not the answer. I know only what can lay ruin to any hope of love with me. Whatever you choose to do with those I love, I am yours. It is only a matter of what parts of me you want; my body, my heart, my mind, my soul? Injure me too deeply and my body is all you shall own."

If Sammael had asked Maelmorda where he thought Caine should be, Maelmorda would

have said Caine needed to be where he chose to be. Caine would resent anything less. Invite him to be a part of their family, then let him decide. He had lost Abraxas, Cassavant and that had been a hard blow to him. Casey's jealousy and need to be enough for Caine had finally drove him insane...well, utterly insane, and as such he had completed his transition into the creature he had begun his transformation into when Caine had taken his life transiently. As the Angel of Despair, Abraxas could not leave Acheron's antechamber until his way of death delivered him back into an angel of the pit form.

Maelmorda's head tipped back and he groaned gutturally as Sammael kissed his shoulder. His hand reached across their sleeping son and glided across Sammael's abdomen through the water to his cock which his fingers brushed lightly against before curling that thick rod to squeeze and stroke it until it was hard and throbbing. He gently slid away from their son to leave him curled against that wall Sammael had drug them both against, then tangled his limbs around Sammael. As he stroked the demon in his hand beneath the water, he guided him to his slit to pump him in and out of himself, groaning at the ache he felt for him and breathing with heavy need as he did so. He barely acknowledged Gabriel when he stepped out of that refracted pane of folded space and came to greet Sammael with a kiss and hug but to smile at him, or was it the pleasure he was feeling and giving that made him smile so sensuously when the fallen angel greeted him? Oh he noticed his demeanor, that smirk of amusement, and that he did not come alone and who he came with, but his physical and emotional focus was on Sammael. When Sammael brushed his lips against his, Maelmorda caught his lower lip with his tongue and tugged it into his mouth to suckle seductively on that spicy bud of flesh.

When Arilwen stepped forward to address Sammael, Gabriel cast a warning frown her way. "Do not speak to my Lord Sammael unless spoken to, prisoner. That is a privilege you must earn. And get down on your knees when he does permit you to address him."

Maelmorda's aching passion and need for Sammael oozed from him into every sensation he played on Sammael. So he looked like a train wreck did he? Why? because he was all wet in three different ways and sporting no clothing other than his fair skin? Or perhaps it was because for the first time; Arilwen had met him when he was not on top of the food chain. Whatever the case; Maelmorda was clearly not bashful about pleasuring his master in front of any kind of company. Just because Maelmorda loved surprises, the receiving of them as much as the giving of them, he sank his body inside of Sammael's just for a moment and only a little bit to give him a taste of his most intense and secretive of all sexual talents. Those parts of Maelmorda's body which sank into Sammael and literally fused with his groin area for a moment shot Sammael's muscles, cock or otherwise, tissue, nerve endings, blood vessels, everything that he was physically that joined with Maelmorda full of stunning pleasure, as if every cell and molecule that joined with him was being fucked individually and all at once. It was like a cellular or molecular orgy, only a small taste to jolt him and send him reeling for a moment before he withdrew his pelvic area from Sammael's and his body hardened to separate flesh again. Oh, he continued to manually pump Sammael inside of himself, and thrash his own fem node with his master and lover's cock thereafter, but that brief instant of carnal fusing lingered still. It was a talent Lucifer and Belorian alone in the Universe possessed and Belorian could only harness it in spirit form. He had not learned to incorporate the ability into his flesh yet. Belorian only possessed the gift of sexual fusion because Lucifer had passed it on to him when creating him. The

sample Lucifer had exposed to Sammael was enough to let his imagination fly wild with what it would be like for their entire bodies to join in such a way, and during an orgasm? The mind could never grasp the reality of what it felt like. After paying Arasgal a glance he shifted him into Sammael's bed chamber by placing him in the nearest bed that was unoccupied. It happened to be Sammael's bed. The white devil groaned slightly, contentedly as his body met that soft surface but he did not wake.

"Are we having a party, Sammael?" Maelmorda asked his Prince. He wondered how Wyrvaust had gotten himself and his family into the stew this time? Because a bond could not be blocked, and because pain, fear and the like were felt through a bond, he was surprised that Marsol was so distracted as to have missed any alarm signals Wyrvaust had put out. He was aware that Cirgoth and Marsol were caught up sexually in one another at the moment, that angel as mad with lust and need as his demon lover, but some selfish part of Marsol had to want to neglect Wyrvaust for him to miss real danger in his bondee. Well, demons were a selfish lot when push came to shove and sex was doing the pushing against the hassles. Problem was, Sammael would make Marsol pay for that selfish moment, and Cirgoth would pay as well, with an angel's guilt. "If we are, can we invite Galaxy, Sarku, Corwyn, Yorek, his father and brother, and Lilith and get a real party going? A surprise party. You know, deliver them all by surprise and get it all out in the open," he grinned. That was how Maelmorda moved. Take them offguard then let brutal honesty, choices, and dealings with the devils decide things. Maelmorda knew what was going on; everywhere he wanted to. "They are all dancing with the devil in one way or another, after all, so maybe it is time we threw a devil's ball," he cackled. Anyone who thought Maelmorda did not have an evil streak was pitifully mistaken. His motives on the other hand might not be as evil as one might assume. "Costumes...costumes..." he pondered aloud. "How about birthday suits?" he laughed and kissed Sammael with disarming passion.

Gabrian had settled in a chair which he drug to the edge of the pool so that he could lean forward and wrap his arms around Sammael's neck. His affections towards Sammael were always that of a close brother, son and friend all combined, never sexual, because Sammael had never invited him to. No one had, no one dared because he was Sammael's. One demon had made the mistake of trying to rape Gabrian once but had not gotten far when Sammael ripped his head off. Sam was saving Gabe for someone Satan had not found for him yet. Seemed no one was good enough for his first progeny. Gabrian meanwhile was content pleasing himself. 'Less hassle,' he said. Even as Maelmorda finally impaled himself with Sammael's huge cock to let Sammael feel the pain rush into him through that kiss, Gabrian paid no mind to it but to chuckle and kiss his sire's cheek. "I think the Morning Star is in luuuuuv," he breathed into Sammael's ear. "By the way, watch it, he is fertile right now."

Maelmorda heard that and his jaw dropped and he sank in a sudden slump against Sammael's lap to bury Sammael's mass to the hilt inside of his once again virgin tight cu\*nt. "What the fuck? Why am I so goddamn fertile?!" he snapped. "It is taking all the fun out of it!"

"Maybe Yajmha is punishing you for Satan feeding eve the apple and then knocking her up to make Caine," Gabrian joshed with a deep chuckle.

"Why punish me?" Mael wished to know.

"Because you made him. Destiny you know, father of chaos and fate? I doubt my Lord would mind you having his kids, thus you wind up bare foot and belly out with his spawn, your pride gets knocked unconscious, and Yajmha kicks back with a silly grin. Only that grin may just get wiped clean when your kids kick the shit out of him and his Alamascan ass skids."

"You tell an odd story, Gabrian," Maelmorda stated flat, his eyes thin on the angel.

Gabe shrugged. "Might all be true, huh?" he said, knowing Maelmorda was wondering if it was more than just banter.

"Just conjure us a glove!" Maelmorda changed the subject, grinding against Sammael as he made his request of the infernal demon who so enjoyed his chaste contact with his sire.

"He will just break it!" Gabrian laughed.

"Well enchant it so it won't!" Maelmorda suggested.

"Eh, I don't think so. Not my business. If my Prince decides to withhold being fertile he can do that for himself. You can do the same thing surely. So why don't you?"

"Because I am his," Maelmorda said.

"Say what?" Gabrian asked, not sure he heard him right.

"Because I am his to do with as he wills, Gabrian. We made a deal."

Gabrian laughed and hugged his Lord tight as he did so, then leaned back to laugh harder. "I get it now. You tried to trick me into helping you! Sneaky ass devil."

Maelmorda shrugged. "Had to try."

Gabrian kissed one side of Sammael's throat and then the other and embraced him as before to speak quietly into his ear. He had a serene and otherwise pleasant voice. It carried well when he needed it to, but was typically soft in tone. "So what would a kid with him and you be like I wonder?" He had no idea about Arasgal. It almost seemed like he was egging his Prince to knock the devil up. Who would not want to see the result of that, well, what hellion anyway?

"Don't encourage him, Gabe," Maelmorda grumbled and sat still on Sammael again. Of course Sammael could all too easily get him squirming and humping him hard again with a little stirring and pumping.

"Whose encouraging him? I am not the one monster cock deep in his lap," Gabrian berated.

Now during all this talk, and after Gabrian had warned Arilwen telepathically not to speak until spoken to; Wyrvaust had awakened, and while the three hellions were chattering away like old friends reunited, he gestured for her to be quiet with a finger to his lips, lifted Anwarr to his wife to take, took Arilwen by the hand,

and stole away with she and Anwarr silent as you please. Gabrian saw them sneak off but said nothing. Sammael and he could command the wards at will and they would not be escaping, not this time. Gates would fail them; Doors and corridors would appear and disappear, open and close, turn them around in circles, and at length deliver them exactly where Sammael wanted them. Wyrvaust knew a mazed gauntlet had been set for them the third time he backtracked and the corridor had changed. It was subtle the way Sam and Gabe played the labyrinth game with them. Dangerous too. Wyrvaust stepped through one doorway and the floor fell away right into an open pit he could not read the depth of. Arilwen had pulled him back from plummeting in head first. He had not considered until then that Sammael might want to punish him. It scared Wyrvaust and awakened the madness in him at once. When Arilwen pulled him away his back hit the wall on the other side of the door and with choked breaths his eyes cut on the doorway 'neath knitted brows to stare at the recess as if thinking about throwing himself in that abyss, which might have led straight to hell or a hungry dragon's open maw for all he knew. His sense of failure was so intense that he was borderline suicidal. He had always been that way. Many Neffari were like that, fanatic about honor, particularly noblemen, noblewomen, and priests, and honor always tied in to protecting those you loved, and if you failed at that, you failed everyone and yourself, and when you failed repeatedly, you were unworthy, and if you were unworthy, you should die. Suicide became the honorable thing to do. Remove the blemish. It was pretzel logic as logic often was when based on beliefs. Logic had no common ground with belief; logic coupled with faith transformed into delusion. Beliefs were harder to compromise and escape than ideas and speculations. Arilwen knew this about Wyrvaust however. She saw the desperate look in his eyes, the tension in his body, and coaxed him away from the peril. Her voice, the feel of her fingers on his arm and around his waist made him relent. He could refuse her nothing and let her lead him away. He loved her too deeply to defy her, to deprive her of himself, but the struggle within him remained.

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The physical relief Cirgoth felt when Marsol and he were finally in that bed together and pressed up against each other was tremendously intense and only multiplied with each moment. He could not get his cherished demon's clothes off soon enough, and when Marsol began to smolder and the cloth Cirgoth had not already removed burst into flames, the angel laughed deliriously then groaned deeply at the feel of his steeping warmth against his own flesh. He wriggled each time his lover tugged on his pants, trying to free himself of the confining leather and when at last Marsol had disposed of his boots, tunic, leather armor, and the second skin of leather hugging his hips, thighs and legs, his bare legs coiled his dominating lover's hips to mesh his aching cock and the fem aspects of his body which he could not banish if he wanted to against Marsol's belly, pelvis and hard member. His body was so hungry for Marsol that his lips, hands, and all which his lower body contained could not seem to taste and feel enough of him. Each heave and slide of his body rubbed Marsol's huge erection with deft eroticism, his own member and stomach pressing, rubbing, and stroking him with a true lover's desire only to induce pleasure as he finger phucked him with a passion that was as fascinated as it was determined to make him feel profound pleasure. The feel of those rigid walls against first one finger, then two, then three as he pumped and stirred inside of him, the heel of his palm shoving hard against Marsol's ass cheek with each thrust, amplified the sensation of Marsol's heavy phallus thrusting suddenly half-shaft inside of his cu\*nt's quilted walls of quivering want. His breaths caught and

quicken and legs folded back to open himself fully to his beloved Lord. Marsol's fingers had to but brush his clitt and his gut constricted dramatically to arch his back and muscles and his fingers thrust inside of Marsol to the knuckles in a hard press as an elated cry sang from his lungs. Cirgoth was unaware that Marsol had not been subject to acts of sodomy since Maelmorda had introduced him to the splendors of male on male sex as only the devil could. He had phucked Marsol quite thoroughly off and on for over a year before his enemies had called him away from his lover. That was the last time Maelmorda had dominated Marsol with his seemingly inexhaustible lusts. Sammael perhaps would be the first who proved capable of compelling his limits. Regardless, Marsol's ass felt quite virgin to Cirgoth. As Marsol pressed deeper Cirgoth's heart pounded in his chest and a sexual tremor surged through his body to stretch muscles and literally curl his toes. His hips rose and he wept he was so overcome with the feel of Marsol as he buried his massive cock in his cu\*nt to fill him and penetrate his limits. He had been conditioned by Sammael to fit a demon's sexual prowess perfectly as much as heighten his need to be exploited as fully as possible. Cirgoth was exceptionally responsive and his need to be phucked by his lover was as distinctly intense as the love he felt for Marsol. He noticed him glance away and his brows knitted but the feel of Marsol inside of him vanquished all other thought. Marsol's love for him could not be missed either, and every soul stirring word, demanding press, thrust and touch Marsol blanketed him in brought the pleasures he made him feel roaring to the surface. His legs spread wide to his petting and heavy penetrations and breaths caught, shattered and warred with groans and cries of bliss. His orgasm would not wait, it had been too long, and Marsol had barely thrust himself inside of Cirgoth half a dozen times when the slippery walls of his cu\*nt began to pound against Marsol's cock with spasms as violent as those which shot through that clitt Marsol flickered and thrashed so marvelously. Fingers dug into Marsol's hips and those fingers buried inside of Marsol halted while Cirgoth's breaths grew ragged as his lover perpetuated the orgasm that had come so rapidly. His eyes locked on Marsol, lips parted in euphoric shock as his very soul unleashed those crashing waves of utopian ecstasy through Marsol like a tsunami of bliss with each mind blowing palpitation of his orgasm. His cock throbbed hard against Marsol's fingers and cum jetted between their meshing abdomens with each convulsion of his climax. Tears of sheer relief and bliss tumbled from his eyes and he claimed Marsol's mouth and tongue to kiss him. His lips trembled and tongue trembled against his as their muscles laced and he suckled with loving abandon on that spicy soft muscle of Marsol's.

But those bonds with Wyrvaust tugged and gnawed with a greater and greater urgency at Marsol and Cirgoth noticed how terribly distracted he was as his thrusts slowed and he stirred inside of him while his eyes meandered elsewhere. "What is wrong?" he whispered breathlessly, his body trembling against him. When Marsol turned his attention back to him, his expression riddled with guarded worry as if trying to figure out the answer to his question, Cirgoth gently extracted the fingers he had sodomized Marsol with the entire time and embraced him. "Something is wrong...Bond me...Bond me, Marsol, before you chase whatever it is troubles you, please?" call it instinct, there was fear in Cirgoth's voice when he implored him to bond him. He suddenly feared that he would lose Marsol if he was not bonded immediately, while they had the chance.

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Arilwen felt her face and neck flood with heat as Gabriel shot her a horrid look



and warned her that she was not to speak unless spoken to, and even then, she should kneel before Sammael for being granted that permission. Cold sweat broke out on her palms and prickled the soft hairs and the back of her neck. He called her 'prisoner'. It began to sink in that this was not like last time... this was not her being dressed inappropriately and dragged to a party. They were going to be punished. It did not help the situation that Wyrvaust had snatched Arilwen and Anna free the last time they had been here. Swallowing, she lowered her violet eyes and wrung her fingers before her, taking a few quiet steps back in the direction she came. Maelmorda's mention of a party, followed by his apt party planning skills, arose while he was nude and molesting Sammael, who was returning the favor quite happily. She had never been in a situation like this and she felt horribly uncomfortable. Especially with Maelmorda mentioning a NUDE party. Ugh.

It was then that silent movement caught Arilwen's eye and she darted her gaze to the poolside where she saw Wyrvaust slowly climbing to his feet. Her eyes lit up, but she made no sound when she realized what he was doing. Oh no. He was going to try and escape again. Could they be lucky a third time? Biting her tongue, Arilwen took their sleeping son when offered and tucked him against her body, hugging him tightly as her hand was caught up and she was swept away in their attempt.

What followed was terrifying. They ran down endless corridors and through unmarked doors. Some doors would not budge. Some halls threw up gates or walls in their face. It was when they plunged through a door and Wyrvaust nearly plummeted into a pit that Arilwen's free arm snapped out to lock around his waist and haul him back with as much might as she could muster. It was at least enough to help him get his balance so he could stumble back against the wall. The two both realized at the same time that this was it. Sammael was going to let them run themselves ragged and there was no escaping this time. No flying free... no plunging through gates. Their powers were gone. Arilwen felt her throat close but she took a deep breath when she saw her husband about to crumble into the darkness. "My Raven..." She whispered, pressing herself against him, her lips leaning to brush against his mouth. "All is not lost. There was no way for you to avoid this. We were trapped... like animals. Now our task is to keep our son safe and to work with Lord Sammael in hopes of being set free with minimal issues. You must keep your wits about you...for our family. I will not return home without you." She kissed him feverishly, then dropped her face to the crook of his neck, Anwarr still tucked between them. "We cannot keep running... and our son must understand that he cannot flee from every situation. We shall show our bravery... for him...."

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Wyrvaust closed his eyes as his beloved Swan told him that all was not lost, that there was no way he could have avoided their situation, that they had been trapped like animals. His eyes fell on her with a burn as she defined that their present task was to keep Anwarr safe and to work with Satan towards freedom. He laughed dryly, which was very unlike him, when she said he needed to keep his wits about him. Shame bit hard at him when she vowed that she would not return home without him. His lips and breath trembled against hers when she kissed him and his head leaned over against her crown of raven hair as she nuzzled her face against his throat. His thoughts were dark, oh so grim, so he kept them to himself; until she said that they could not keep running and had to keep up their courage for their son. "Acheron's Prince of Demons has spared the Desert Raven too many times. Satan shall not spare this demon again. He has a limit to his tolerance and the Raven has

twice exceeded it. The Raven was never the bravest of demons. His courage came from madness. Fearless is he as is a rabid dog when cornered. Torture the Raven can bear, but knows what he cannot bear the Desert Wind does; the loss of those he loves; rape, shame and disgrace. Destroy this soul and darkness is all that shall remain. What is Wyrvaust shall be no more. Thinks the Swan Satan is not capable of this? Oh he is, he is, when crossed the Desert Wind has been, and thrice has the Raven crossed him. This demon has cut the dividing line. Came I in his reach one too many times and has the Prince of Demons the Raven's treasured Swan to use against him. One means alone can save the Raven now, and he cannot grant it. Devote his loyalty to him he must, and that the Raven can never do. Marsol alone owns the Raven's heart and commitment and ever shall he possess it." Wyrvaust did not even realize that his hand was pressed up against his rib cage which ached tremendously from the broken bones and torn muscle within. His fatigue he felt heavily though, and he was as much jaded in spirit as in body.

The demon then flinched as a blend of familiar scents mixed with the unfamiliar caught his attention, and taking Arilwen's hand in his he began walking down the wide corridor, following his nose. At length he came to a door that was spared by a crack and he peered through it, his huge black wings shielding the door and what he spied within entirely. Marsol was in a large black bed bearing hard down against Cirgoth who he brought a cry of bliss from as he pinned him by the sheer prowess of the cock he impaled him so deeply with that they were flush pelvis to pelvis. Wyrvaust's breath caught at the sight, a frantic uprising of envy and jealousy unbalancing his senses. He knew he should not feel wounded, knew he had no right to feel that way; but he did regardless of what he knew to be right and wrong. His heart and emotions had a mind of their own where Marsol was concerned, always had, and their bond had intensified it. It did not occur to him that Marsol would feel everything he did at the moment through that bond; see right through him without need of visual contact. Tears threatened but he blinked them back and his expression paled. His jet eyes then thinned as he saw Marsol sink a row of sharp teeth in Cirgoth's throat and tear a flap of flesh and muscle away whereof he feasted on the blood which sprang forth like a fountain. Wyrvaust startled as Arilwen's hand met his shoulder and he staggered back away from the door. He stood trembling for a moment then choked on his breath suddenly and sank against the floor, knees bent, his shoulder falling against the wall and a folded wing, the other loose against the floor, some yards away from the chamber Marsol and Cirgoth occupied. Wyrvaust's arms covered his face and he wept into them. He trembled violently and with him his wings when Arilwen stooped down and tried to comfort him and discover what had overcome him.

"The Raven is unworthy," his voice was raw and bitter as he spoke. "The Raven covets his own Lord...envies the dragon's lover...His heart forsakes the wife he adores and cherishes more than breath. He can no sooner stop what he feels for both his wife and master than the sands can stand still. He sees only hope and love in his wife and still he carries her recklessly and his only son into dangers he should have foreseen. Was the desert not fraught with war? What right had he to wander with her instead of keeping his beloved and their son safe at home? There is no punishment the Desert Wind can bring on the Raven that shall satisfy the disgrace the Raven has brought to all whom he loves and would die for. The Raven's love is a madness, blinded by need and such violent emotion as he cannot escape." He lifted his head to reveal the anguish and the tears which left trails across his satin back cheeks and jaw, his eyes so like obsidian burning on her. What it was like to see a demon cry Arilwen now knew. Sammael as he watched him, watched all in

his house through his inner eye, would think the vision a beautiful one. It was not often he had the opportunity to witness such an occasion. "Will she abandon the Raven now as he deserves, or love him regardless of his sins? Can the swan he loves save him from himself? Can she love him when he loves his master, has always loved his master? Can she love a demon who has failed her and their beautiful son? Can she love a demon who has not the courage to see her pain...to suffer his own shame?" Wyrvaust collapsed against her at that sobbing. It was something barely heard but made his entire body quake against her, his wings trembling. Anwarr grabbed onto the horns crowning Wyrvaust's head and started to cry fearfully and there was nothing Wyrvaust could do. His shame, fears, and despair had overcome him. It was the first time Arilwen had seen him truly break down emotionally. Marsol on the other hand had seen it many times before, had seen him completely insane, though many years spanned each breakdown. Wyrvaust could become so depressed that all he did was sleep, buried in some hole in the ground or even beneath a hill of sand, hoping he would just die there; or he could become dangerously deranged and feral, like a caged animal, attacking anything which came in sight with intent to kill. The only one who was safe from him during a violent breakdown was Marsol, and now Arilwen and his son. He was never safe from himself during these episodes. He always maintained an awareness of who he loved, but reality otherwise slipped further and further from his grasp. At the moment he so desperately wished that he was in Cirgoth's place that he longed only for physical pain or even death to make the anguish and disgrace of what he felt disappear. Often it was torture and imprisonment which Marsol had had to resort to in the past to break Wyrvaust of his self-destructive tendencies and to protect him and others from himself. His state presently could easily become violent, because he felt so threatened. His rage could be immediate if something or someone triggered the bare sense of self-preservation and will to protect those he loved that he instinctively maintained no matter how suicidal he became.

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It had been much easier for Arilwen to continue convincing herself that things were going to be fine... That Lord Sammael would be upset but would punish them for awhile and let the small family go home. She seemed to be clinging to the hope that he was kind on the inside.... forgiving... but she forgot one important fact. Who he WAS. Her beloved husband was crumbling in front of her eyes and she felt helpless about it. She could suggest a way for them to escape. She couldn't try to talk Sammael out of it because she was a prisoner and unable to speak unless given permission... and the last thing she wanted to do was anger him.

The more Wyrvaust began spilling out about his punishments and what paths of punishment Satan was most likely to take, the more terrified she became. Would Sammael go so far as to take her away from her husband forever? And rape? The thought of lying with anyone but Wyrvaust was sickening. They had just been explaining to Anwarr that adults coupled because they loved each other... what was her son going to think if that happened? Arilwen's arm tightened around her sleeping son and her free hand lifted to gently touch her husband's hand that covered his battered rib cage. She could see the pain it was causing him and she slid her fingers beneath his own to concentrate. At least Gabriel had given her back her healing power by touch. As long as he had not tampered with it again, Arilwen would have her husband's ribs healed in a few moments. She knew that healed ribs weren't really helping his mental state, but at least his mind could be a bit less distracted by the pain.

Arilwen was at a loss for words. She felt numb... she felt her body going into shock at everything that was being said. It began to sink into her mind that this could be the last time she was allowed to be with her husband... and they were trapped like rats in a maze. She was vaguely aware of his hand catching hers to lead her down the hall and her feet had no choice but to follow. Anwarr started to stir on her shoulder, whimpering and rubbing his face into her robes and she rubbed his back soothingly, making the soft clucking sounds that used to lull him to sleep as a baby as Wyrvaust ventured forth to peek into a room. Arilwen realized, moments later, that his body was locking up in a seizure-like way and she frowned, stepping forward to touch his shoulder. "Wyrvaust?" She whispered, then gasped as he staggered backwards and collapsed against the wall, sobbing as she had never seen before. Her violet eyes widened and she quickly knelt, only to see his face lift to hers and it caused her breath to catch in her chest. It was heartbreaking to see him in this way and it further instilled the sense in the angel that there was no getting out of this.

It was never easy to hear that your husband was in love with another, and that was what Arilwen was about to hear. Wyrvaust began sobbing, confessing that he loved and coveted Marsol in the same way he loved and coveted his own wife. The sobbing had finally awoken Anwarr and as soon as he saw his father in such a state, his own terrified tears and wails began, giant crocodile tears streaking his young cheeks. His little fingers reached out to wrap his father's horn and Arilwen felt her insides turning to liquid fire at the sight. All seemed lost and every member of the tiny family felt it. Sliding down to sit against the wall, Arilwen's arms stretched out and drew her husband's horned head to rest against her breast, their son tucked tightly between them. She couldn't get any words out just yet, so she clung to them, rocking them in unison as her fingers stroked husband and son's hair alike, her lips peppering comforting kisses against their wet skin. She breathed them in... memorizing their figures and scents that she already knew in fear of being parted from them. When she finally did speak, her voice was soft and as steady as she could make it. "My Raven must not feel torn..." She whispered against his hair. "The heart is an unpredictable wanderer and has decided to venture to another. This does not indicate that his love for me is any less. Feel no guilt over his love for Marsol... for Marsol is a man to be coveted. Arilwen feels no jealousy...no bitterness towards her husband for this... only understanding. I want for you to be happy in any way available. You must speak with Marsol regarding your feelings. He is wise and will know... will know what to do. Wyrvaust has never failed his family. They are proud of him forevermore. Even if they cannot be together." The last sentence caught in her throat and she squeezed her stinging eyes shut. No, she couldn't think of that yet... couldn't cross that bridge at that moment. Instead, she fell quiet and bent her head over her husband and son, her dark mane curtaining them from the world...at least for the moment. Her rocking motions never stopped and she hummed softly to them, finally coaxing Anwarr to calm down at least and he popped his thumb in his mouth, curling underneath his father's chin in a quiet little nest. Soon they would be coming for them. After that? Only Satan knew...

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Sammael's dark eyes only lifted from the Morning Star because Gabriel had arrived with the select clan of trespassers. To receive the warm welcome and raise his arm upwards behind him to rub fondly over the back of his Progeny's head, commenting on

how well he looked this day after he bid his hello's to Maelmorda so respectfully. It was just like Gabriel to be that way. And it was just another one of countless things about him that made Sammael obsessively protective of him. Cause that's how Satan operated with what was his. These captives that his Progeny gestured to with his hand brought his black eyes upwards but with a mild interest as to their current state of dress. Just a brief glance was made. Seeing just where Wyrvaust laid and how, Arilwen clearly riddled with worry for her family, and their bundle of joy Anwarr oblivious to all being nestled with his father. Such a sight the three of them were. "No, leave them as they appear before us now. They need to get comfortable with being helpless," he replied to Gabriel. As he spoke he was contemplating on everything Maelmorda had told him of just who possessed his heart currently, and to cause said one harm would earn nothing but bitterness for him. That was only natural though wasn't it? When you were or at least you thought you were in love with someone, that you couldn't just forsake them when asked to. Maybe he had been fibbing when he had hinted to having the Morning Star all to himself. Or maybe he hadn't. He pressed his nose to the bottom of Maelmorda's throat as the devil spoke, tracing the curve of the Morning Star's neck upwards to the back of his ear. Nipping at his delicate skin as he did after awhile of being too quiet from whatever it was he was thinking on, to ask him of Caine. That stretching that the Morning Star did made his lips curl as he watched it from start to finish, and then sort of began invading his personal space again. The loss his son suffered, the emotional upheaval, the separation of the two had been horrendous. Just another something he himself contemplated on along with everything else that he could puzzle his puzzler over. "Know this I do," he said as his hands wandered down to feel over those smooth wet arse cheeks of his maker's in the cool pool waters, "and still I ask." He smiled wider as he heard that guttural groan that his maker issued from him laying his lips to his shoulder. Pressing his lips down a little more on shoulder; he felt the Morning Star's hand move along his abdomen, causing it to tighten, to touch that cock of his that twitched from the contact and the need to be all over the Morning Star and inside of him. Maelmorda didn't have to caress or stroke his son more then a couple times to get that demonic length achingly hard for the man-devil. Naturally he craved his maker in every way imaginable. Dark wet strands of hair stuck to the sides of his neck like black freshly grown veins over his fair skin. Instantly his black eyes reflected the inner hunger he had for Maelmorda as the dark god felt those hips shift to push against that hand that was being used to stroke him. Damn Maelmorda could make anything look sexy and feeling perverted seem oh so good. All those senses the corporeal form had were electrified all over again with working that throbbing member in and out of him. One of his hands stayed on that arse cheek while his other hand mused its way over the back of Gabriel's head a bit. Was it wrong to lean into that seductive suckling the Morning Star was giving to his lower lip and at the same time, be petting the back of his Progeny's head? Did that make the scene any more indecent then it already was? Arasgal had been there nestled between both his fathers, moments before Maelmorda had moved him aside to let him curl against the wall so that he could be held more fully by Sammael. His hand though had left Gabriel when he went to go pick a chair to sit in and leave the man-devil and man-demon molesting each other in the pool. Though he was not prepared for the new array of sensations that coursed through his groin and caused his breath to quicken and then a loud groan to be made as his arms went around Maelmorda very tightly. That fusing of the Morning Star's pelvic area for just those brief seconds was enough to both draw out that beast in him and that rare tender side. What ever was his maker doing to him? He wondered as the blood in his veins ran hot with those orgasmic sensations. It made his gut tighten and his teeth nip at

Maelmorda's tongue, and then shudder all over. By god it was something he'd never experienced before, let alone heard of. As the fusing of those sensitive aspects of Maelmorda to him eased to an end it did not mean that the pleasure left behind would also leave him. On the contrary it stayed with him like the scent of a lover's body in one's sheets long after they had been there. It made him not off balance in a sense but it certainly crashed his train of thought and threw his body spinning in the aftermath of that strange joining of Maelmorda's body to his. Then his mind came screeching back to the present with all those tasty "What ifs" as his arms pulled Maelmorda closer to himself and he shivered a few more times, unconsciously. The mere mention of a party had him laughing as he rolled his shoulders to press them into that embrace Gabriel had around him as he felt that painfully sweet kiss deepen. His laughing was struck up again at how Gabriel commented on the fertile merriment there and how it caused Maelmorda to go slack jaw and slump till it had Sammael half grunting and half groaning in need for him. "A party is what I planned on having before the Raven stole my guests of honor. But it seems he came back with one of them, so she will have to do for now. I'll send out the invitations," he said this through all his snicker fitting during the tennis match Maelmorda and Gabriel were having. And he did just that; conveying to all above stated parties no warning. Not a word of "hey you, get over here" or any sort of sign that they were all about to have their arses gated here to the room full of pools that varied in shapes and depths. Gate, gate, gates galore sprung up throughout An Morendor to capture certain parties to bring them to a place probably none had ever seen before. It'd be a few minutes before anyone showed up, that is if they didn't put up a fight to make him seize them the hard way. Perhaps by biting Maelmorda's neck and then licking him as he said to bring his Galaxy and that Sarku here. They would probably pose the most problem with the whole thing anyways. What with how strategically the Morning Star had upped the wards over that massive home Sarku lived in with all its eye catching wonders and mysteries. But he would only ask Maelmorda to bring his wife and that ever changing shapeshifter if his test of the wards proved his hunch right in being unable to gate them there himself. Perhaps he wouldn't have been able to anyways because he wasn't entirely concentrated on getting all these characters there to them at the pool room. Or maybe it was from how he would rather see the look on Galaxy's face when Maelmorda asked her to come, inside of him.

So it gave the three fallen ones time to mingle some more and exchange their innocent and not-so-innocent touches or embraces, or other things. Maelmorda was being a sneak again but it was kind of touching the way he did it; in a perverted way. His head turned upwards a little at that first kiss Gabriel laid to the side of his throat, and then his face turned to the side as another kiss was lain over his flesh again on the opposite half. For having scoured the world and the lower kingdom for someone that was good enough for Gabriel, he did have to exercise a phenomenal amount of self control himself not to just have his Progeny and keep him all for himself. He wouldn't deny it if Gabriel asked him if he had ever desired him in that way. Oh he did. Who the hell wouldn't? He seemed to smirk at the grumbling that Maelmorda made and then how he went still. Was Gabriel the one encouraging him here? Or was it Maelmorda's reluctance? Smooth as silk came that voice as his hips would indeed start to stir that cock inside Maelmorda, and any other part of the man-devil that was touching his feminine parts. Seeking to rub all of their parts together, or inside one another a bit before he abruptly begun bouncing Maelmorda on his lap, driving that monstrous cock in and out of him with quickening pace. "You've seen our son, dearest Gabriel. He was here not more than a few moments ago. Nestled between he and I. He had a handsome set of wings," he

breathed back into Gabriel's ear as his breathing would get irregular with all that body jolting pleasure he wanted to give to the Morning Star, and what he felt in return.

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How could he explain those nagging sensations as the tall tell signs of imminent danger that his old friend was in? He couldn't just very well pipe up with "Oh Cirgoth, by the way, I'm ignoring my gut instinct that keeps yelling at me to leave, just so I can watch what pleasures and pains you". Oh yeah that would hold up real well wouldn't it. So completely and utterly into Cirgoth that it did indeed make him selfish towards everything else. He needed the angel so badly now though that it tugged at that beating muscle in his chest that had seen time rip itself apart and then somehow come back together again out of the darkness and back into the light. Never before though had he ever loved someone the way he loved Cirgoth. Sure he'd loved the dragon of the tribe whom he had begotten the hatchlings out of, perhaps the one mortal woman with the bright red hair and the scent of something beautiful, but he was not in love with them. He loved his tribe. His clan. His people. The desert greatly oh how he loved every inch of her. But all these beings, people, and things he never was or ever would be in love with. It was Cirgoth alone who had captured the heart of the restless beast that wandered the edges of the vast desert. This green eyed divine bird had seemed to tame the demon enough to give in to that all consuming emotion. And at times the madness that came with it. Once his beloved had spoken of the love he had for him being selfish. Hah. The memory stung him like a hornet in his spine. Cirgoth could no more be selfish or self centered then a rock could play the flute. Now Marsol on the other hand was a different story. However it was not done on purpose to harm the Raven, the urge to bury himself in his angelic lover fully. Had he truly known ahead of time what his actions would reap then he would have leapt out of that bed and flew after Wyrvaust and his small clan sooner. He would never have knowingly place his friend or his friend's family in harms way. That just wasn't the kind of demon Marsol was. Sure he could beat the snot out of Wyrvaust. But only if the situation demanded it and there was absolutely no other alternative. Those tugging feeling were now quite strong pulls that quieted the loud groans and panting of his mate reaching that mind numbing orgasm and sending them both crashing into the indescribable sea of bliss. Those hips that humped the angel like mad where he held him firmly pressed to the front of his body with his arms sometimes wound around him, or hooked under his legs, they would slow with the sudden sense of intense envy, of jealousy. And then most keenly, the emotion of depression that over shadowed everything else like a looming storm. His amber hued eyes seemed to cloud with many things as his gaze kept wandering away until finally his lover asked him what was wrong. Was it that evident? Just by looking at him, Cirgoth was able to see what troubled him? Well it wasn't that hard after all. Then after several moments of silence he would start that perhaps very painful but quick bonding of his beloved bird. Tearing flesh and muscle from bone as his need to taste Cirgoth's exquisite blood and flesh were barely rivaled by his need to pleasure and perhaps hurt him carnally. That sweet red liquid he drank from Cirgoth was done as fast as was comfortably possible. He had taken that fear he heard in Cirgoth's voice along with all the intense feelings he perceived from his long time trusted and closest friend. Gathering the angel into his arms; he knelt there in the middle of that sinfully comfortable bed. Sun browned arms held the greened eyed one close to his chest as he hunched slightly over him, sheets half tugged around Cirgoth's shoulders to cover him. But Marsol remained exposed. The muscles in his back, his arms, every part of him coiling as

he fed from his mate to drain him to the point he needed to be before he cut into his own chest with a hand covered in those brilliant red scales. Charcoal claws ran along his tanned skin slowly, just over his left nipple. Making a thin red line that trickled blood. Then that set of claws on his left hand, faintly clicking together, ripped into his chest creating a large wound that gushed blood down the front of Cirgoth and his naked body. A hole was gouged right out of his chest with the lightening fast digging and a few slices of those claws. With one hand showing the demonic side of him his face though did not constrict from the pain that the wound surely would have caused him. Amber eyes gazed down at the divine bird in his arms as he carefully wrapped that semi-larger red scale covered hand around the right side of Cirgoth's face and head, guiding his head to the large bleeding wound in his chest, directly above his heart. He parted the angel's lips with his right thumb if he saw that his lover wasn't able to do so himself, for he might have drained him too quickly than he intended to, but time was imperative here. There couldn't be any dawdling. "You are so precious to me," he murmured as he pressed his lips to the top of Cirgoth's head, letting his eyelids lower till his amber pools were almost hidden from view. He moved his nose through all those auburn locks as he held Cirgoth against him with his head in one hand and his mouth firmly covering the conveniently mouth sized wound. His other arm had slipped down to be around the small of Cirgoth's back, lightly rubbing his fingers aimlessly over the angel's spine in a massaging manner. The demon would keep the angel in that protectively close embrace kneeling in the middle of a bed of black that smelled of sex and love, for as long as it took to bring Cirgoth as close to him as possible without actually just melting together to become one literally. In mind speak however he reached out to the Raven, specifically choosing the most selectively closed path available at a moments notice. His tone was not angry as much as it was floored with his bondee's feelings towards him. Maybe he had never noticed it, or just passed it all off as a close friend's attentions. He knew it was his fault that Wyrvaust, Arilwen and little Anwarr had been brought here, and oh how it tore at him inwardly the danger they were in. It also felt like it was his fault that he had not seen the Raven's affections beforehand. But they had always had a rather peculiar relationship. So he had never thought much of the way the Raven tended to him when he was hurt or otherwise. Now he knew he should have.

To Wyrvaust: "Now is not the time. Bond the bird I am, and then from this confounded contraption we will flee unless we are already trapped."

Even as he said these heated words to his closest friend, Marsol could feel the bed underneath him begin to sort of shift; subtly at first, barely noticeable. The floor was also moving, or drizzling away. He saw all of this out of the corner of his eye during the last few seconds of Cirgoth drinking of him. It just made his arms tighten around the angel as he told Wyrvaust not to enter the room, and those were the last words the Raven received before there was a loud crash within the room and the door slammed shut...

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All which Arilwen said to Wyrvaust made the demon dare to hope, until she said...even if they could not be together. Anger flashed in his eyes then. "What does the Swan mean by even if they cannot be together? Does she think the Demon Prince shall take her from him? That I cannot bear! He better kill the Raven if he intends to take its wife and reason for living from it!" He was calling himself an it now to separate himself from himself as much as he could. The very thought



of losing her made him want to prepare himself to cease to exist. He was tempted to relent to Satan, to offer himself if Satan would let him keep her, tempted, but he could never do it, never betray his promise to Marsol, or his love for him, which placed him in a position of being emotionally torn to pieces. By not submitting to Satan, he felt he was betraying Arilwen, but if he did submit he would be betraying Marsol. Gazing at her with a pair of scorching black eyes; he knew that she would not want him to submit. He just knew it, and suddenly he felt less torn.

He caught her hands in his, his claws folding over her fingers and gritted his teeth. "The Raven loves you...What must he do to prove how deep is his love for his wife? Ask it and it shall be his pledge." He knew he was caught in a downward spiral towards the abyss which yawned open in his mind as much as the house he was in. Who but Arilwen could be his savior, what wish could save him but hers? All thought then fled from his extraordinarily chaotic mind as Marsol's voice then reached him at last and his eyes fell away from her.

Brows knitted and his eyes leaned towards the door. He rose and went towards the door; thinking to warn Marsol against revealing his thoughts of escape in Satan's house, when the door shut with a bang in his face and startled the demon. Wyrvaust tried to open it, even forcefully, but it held fast, and as he heard that loud crash inside he began banging on the door. "Marsol!! Marsol answer me please!!" he roared, his voice fraught with panic. When Marsol did not answer his expression darkened and he snarled, then wheeling around he grabbed Arilwen by her arm and began pulling her along, hoping to find their way back to Sammael. "Lord Desert Wind!" he shouted. "What have you done with my Lord??!!! Be not a fiend! Has Satan not the courage to earn friendship in place of enemies?!!" he fumed furiously. Yet despite his anger he wished as Cirgoth did, to call Sammael a friend instead of an enemy. Yes, there was life left him in yet, if only rage, despair, and fear. But there was love too; for Marsol, for Arilwen and Anwarr, and buried deep down inside of him, perhaps even love for Sammael. His hand then tightened down on Arilwen's arm, little Anwarr gazing up at him from her arms with a curiosity was that could only be called morbid. "If the Swan has a wish of the Raven, she had best make it now. Try his best to own it her Raven shall." No, he had not forgotten what he said to her, he was sincere, he was always sincere to her. It would be useless if he lost her though. There were two people he could not withstand the loss of; Arilwen and Marsol, and both of them were in peril. Who could he blame but himself? Seemed he and Marsol carried a lot on their shoulders.

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All this going on in the house of Sammael and Maelmorda was being humped by a demon whose lust could shame a bunny on speed. Oh no, Sammael would not settle for Maelmorda just sitting there and letting Satan cool his testis so he would not get knocked up. He had to start humping him hard from beneath to bounce him on his lap, those huge cocks plunging into the deep of him each time and driving the devil mad with lust in turn. "Sammael...please don't knock me up again, please? If we make a mob of little sam-mael's we could be in serious trouble. What if they turn on us? What will each of them take from us?" There he went, being all logical again, but what did logic, love, and the need to procreate have to do with each other? Nothing is what. Sammael had found his mate and wanted to make babies! It was nature and demons were beasties who answered to their instincts! The devil then groaned and arched his back as Sammael grinned and stirred deliciously inside

of both his cu\*nt and his ass. Maelmorda could tell he relished the feeling of stretching those immortally virgin tight confines to fit his massive rods of throbbing want. Maelmorda could not resist him if he wanted to, not because he was enslaved, there was not even any need for that! It was because he and Sammael had the same incorrigible drive for sex and pleasure and because they were so intensely attracted to one another. Maelmorda should have known...He had ignored him sexually for so long because of it! He had phucked him maybe three times ages ago, not long after he joined him in Acheron, and knew then it was dangerous, knew he was in danger of falling for him. That is why he had stopped being intimate with him altogether. He could not risk it. He writhed on his lap and rode him with purely lurid and provocative sensuality to stir and stroke him in those slippery wet confines. Squeaky at first, owed to the water, but Sammael had a way of getting Maelmorda all kinds of wet.

Gabrian smiled when Sammael told him that the stunning fellow that had been cradled between he and Mael was their son. "Bite me, when did that happen? He is perfectly beautiful, Sammael! I was wondering who he was."

Before Mael knew it Sammael lifted him up and carried out of the water in one swift motion to shove him onto that large chair Gabriel was lounging in. Gabriel's eyes widened as his sire, the only creature in the world he loved or had ever loved, heaved Maelmorda's body hard against him before he could move. His arms lifted as if afraid to touch the Morning Star and a breath caught as his own clothes just vanished to reveal his beautifully sculpted albeit ornately scar-scribed body. Every scar on him Sammael had given him with loving precision towards exacting pain and elaborately decorating his flesh. It was Sammael's way of saying 'This is mine, all of him, and keep your hands off unless I say otherwise.' Even Sammael's name, with the date he had sired him a long ass time ago, was carved in his flesh in Aramaic cuneiform. He waited for Sammael to tell him to move...to explain his intentions. This was a first for Gabriel. Gabriel laid his arms on the rests of the chair and inhaled a deep breath to hold it, eyes rolling shut with stunned pleasure at the feeling of Maelmorda's firm ass and Sammael's snaky love-muscle shoving, rocking and heaving against his own exposed cock as he phucked the bejesus out of Maelmorda. Gabriel wondered if Sammael just had some lusty need to give his progeny a hardon or if he wanted to get him squirming with brutal need for a reason? He dared not hope it meant he had chosen him. Gabriel never let himself hope that. He knew things about Sammael no one else knew. Things he would never tell anyone either, or even let escape his thoughts in the presence of immortals. Like; he knew that when Sammael screwed someone more than once, it was for keeps. When he phucked somebody that second time, it was like saying, you are mine until you die. Obviously, he intended to keep Maelmorda forever. Who could blame him? He rarely ever screwed the same person twice and he was extremely choosy about who he screwed period, unless it was a job, rape just to torture someone or mess with their heads. Rape was different, that was business. Gabriel did not let himself hope that Sammael could ever see him as anything but his progeny, brother, servant and friend. He did not want to wind up like Casey or Wyrvaust, going insane for wanting something he could never have. Gabriel was speechless. He felt too privileged to say a word as he was dry phucked by the passionately heated exploitation of Mael's body. His gut tightened to stretch his muscles now and again at the secondhand pleasure he found himself meshed in grew more intense. He wanted to touch Sammael intimately so badly, but would not dare unless his sire invited his sexual affections. Some might think that externally humping him with the devil would be an invitation but Gabe knew better. He did touch Sammael

regardless, with the usual innocent affections. He massaged him wherever he could reach, as long as it was not a sexually personal area. He often massaged Sammael, was a damn good masseuse actually, and those kneading fingers coupled with sex were perfectly delicious. When the guests began arriving Gabrian's eyes meandered to them to mark who had come and acknowledge them with his eyes and a brief greeting here and there. His attentions otherwise remained fixed on the only demon that actually mattered to him, and those tantalizing pleasures he was receiving. Gabrian was one of handful that answered solely to Sammael and only to Sammael in Acheron. Most answered to whoever was in charge; of Acheron, a circle of Acheron, or a faction of Acheron. Sammael had tried to make Gabrian leave to test his loyalty. Done terrible things to him in the process, but Gabrian's love and loyalty never wavered, it was unconditional, he was a rock of devotion Sammael could always rely on. He understood Sammael as well as anyone could and did not see what was not to love and support. He was Sammael's greatest advocate and Sammael knew it.

Now in the normal world, what those guests walked in on would have either disgusted people or made them uncomfortable, but these were hellions. Shocked is what some of them were, to see Sammael making a show of phucking Maelmorda, which meant only one thing by Acheron's standards. Maelmorda was his and he was making it known. Others were pleased to see it, and still others would be dismayed, angered or even jealous. When Mephisto arrived and took a gander at the pair, he was elated and laughed blithely. He was actually happy for them both. He was in his second key form, that of a handsome young man. He brushed back his plaited locks of long chocolate hair with long, light brown fingers, and fixed a pair of stunning pale grey eyes on the two attractive immortals. "Now this is a pair made in Acheron. I hope I did not miss the wedding," he grinned and helped himself to a large goblet of wine then settled into a chair within each eyeshot of the three men who took pleasures with one another in that large lounge chair. Mephisto was a dragon shapeshifter who could take many forms, but his immense dragon form, bronze, black and silver in color, and the comely human form he was in now, were his key embodiments. He was king of the 4th circle of Acheron and the Temple of the Dragons.

Gabrian laughed at Mephistopheles hint that the two should get married. "I am sure you shall be among the first invited, old dragon."

"Who you calling old, oh ancient bird?" he teased the angel, his brows then rose as Gabrian trembled and orgasmed all over himself. "Been too long huh?" he said sympathetically.

Gabrian just shook his head and held Sammael firm as he covered Mael's lovely ass with his cum. His breath caught and rattled in his throat as the two devils erupted in an orgasm shortly after him. "Goddamn..." he hissed. He could feel the soul sharing of the two of them in himself because of his meshed proximity with them, jarred by each thrust as Sammael banged the devil even harder. He so wished he was the devil right now. He wasn't jealous of Maelmorda. He was content for his Lord that he had snagged the Morning Star's awesome ass. It was just that taste of Sammael's internal orgasm was a helluva mean tease. He might be jealous of anyone else though. When Lilith entered she distracted him for a moment. His eyes cut on her hard. He hated her because she lusted after Sammael. Jealous? He had no reason to be. More like protective. He did not trust her. "Whazzup, bitch?" that was his usual greeting for her, although at the moment his voice was

shaky, and he could only get away with it because he was Sammael's main trustee and one of Hell's highest ranking fallen angels beneath the Princes. He had earned the right to be as disrespectful to her as he wanted to. Gabrian gritted his teeth as another feral impalement of Mael's luscious body broke off another piece of his relic wing. It still hurt. One would not think it would. Maelmorda was kissing him wildly with his breath shaking and his body convulsing from the onslaught of orgasms Sammael tormented him with, only it was not torment to Maelmorda. His body heaved violently against those thrusts as the dizzying waves of bliss hammered him. Gabrian was enamored by it all, the feeling of Maelmorda quaking against his body and his arms, and Sammael shuddering beneath his fingertips. It was all a wonderful experience to him which he counted the best stars to be a part of. He was amazed when Maelmorda started weeping, weeping! Was it because he so overcome with pleasure? Wait...it sounded a lot more...emotional than that, Gabe decided. He was right. It was more than the pleasure. Maelmorda was feeling torn, because 1; he knew he was pregnant again, 2; because he felt suddenly flooded with love for Sammael and it struck him hard, like an anvil of guilt, and 3; Galaxy arrived just as he was feeling all of this.

Sammael had not been able to gate her, the wards were too strong to get past. Maelmorda had gated her and Sarku with her. He had brought Sarku with her for emotional support. He wanted her to know what to expect, he wanted to know what to expect, he wanted to know what Sammael intended for her; if she could love him despite the fact that he belonged to Sammael now, and...loved him. If his method seemed cruel that was just a hard fact of how he operated and how Acheron itself worked. The truth was cruel and there was no room for denying the hard facts of life; Maelmorda would not put blinders on his wife. His eyes weighed on her with all the gravity of his lusts being fired to profound extremes and the rare exposure of emotions raging in himself. Sarku, who was in the form of a man, dragon, and lion gripped her arm with a clawed hand when he caught sight of Maelmorda and Sammael. His hair was a thick lion's mane; tawny fur covered his face and body to his torso, which was scaled from the waste down. His privates were not scaled and covered as usual with a loin cloth. His head was crowned with horns and he was sporting a pair of dragon wings. He also had a dragon's feet. His face was mostly human but for the fur which did not cover his lips.

"This is where hell visits this one's dear friend," he told her quietly. His eyes cut towards the entranceway as another entered. It was Belorian.

Sammael had tried to gate Belorian, aka Eoghan to his little soirée and failed implicitly, but Eoghan had felt it. Sick of running from Acheron's lords, he first took strides to protect himself, and then followed the arcane traces of Sammael's failed power across the planes and dimensions of space to his little palace in the desert, where he emerged from his planes-walk outside of the chamber the demon had intended to deliver him to. He had stood at the doorway for some moments, assessing the matters taking place within; then entered even as Galaxy arrived. He approached the Prince of Demons, glancing at Gala on his way with a dour shake of his head and when he met the right side of the chair Sammael banged the devil in; he broke his strides when he came to stand over them. "I cannot believe what I am seeing. You have fallen far indeed, Morning Star. Is this to be the way of things in Acheron now? The devil a whore? Were you forced to this?" he was saddened as much as he was disappointed.

Maelmorda growled at him. "Watch it, Belorian. You chose long ago not to make

Acheron your business and it might prove dangerous to start now. I chose to be Sammael's. He forced nothing and my choices are not yours to judge." His back then arched and he groaned as Sammael encouraged another intense riptide of pleasure, if just to spite Belorian.

"What about Galaxy?"

"It is my hope she can accept my place with Sammael," Maelmorda moaned.

"And if she can't?" the Anduain wanted to know. The way he was carrying on a conversation with Maelmorda while he was being phucked was telling that he was no stranger to hell's ways.

"Then she shall have to suffer me, because I shall never let her go, never; even if she must wait for me for a thousand years."

Eoghan winced slightly and looked at Galaxy who was clearly having trouble with everything she was seeing and hearing. Sarku had a protectively sympathetic arm coiled around her. Eoghan's pale eyes communicated that he was very sorry that she had to agonize the choices Maelmorda was making now.

Belorian then stooped down by the chair and his fingers curled Maelmorda's arm, gazing at him. "You are better than this, Maelmorda. You deserve better."

Maelmorda jerked his arm away from him, his eyes thinning on him. "You know nothing about what this is," he hissed.

Eoghan raised his startling ice-blue eyes on the demon that had slowed but who was still loving the father of them both passionately. "Tell me he is more than a whore for your pleasures and I shall not despise you with all that I am and seek a way to end you." He expressed fearlessly, and quite soberly. Belorian had guts, was too honest for his own good at times. "And while you are at it, how about explaining why you wanted to bring me here."

Gabrian shot a pair of wounded angry eyes on Belorian when he threatened Sammael. He was too damn aware that if anyone could pull off a threat like that, it was Belorian. "Threaten Sammael again and I shall rip your phucking head off, Anduain."

Eoghan eyed Gabriel speculatively for a moment. If Sammael was capable of attaining that kind of loyalty, maybe he had some virtues after all. But he would not stand for Maelmorda being used. He just wouldn't. "My threat shall be an empty one if he is not using our maker ill," Belorian assured him.

"How touching that you care," Maelmorda sneered, his voice thick with sex and sarcasm. There was obviously a lot of ancient history between the two.

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Gala had not been at all sure what to think when she had been summoned by Maelmorda. She could try and prepare herself all she wanted, of course...but none of that could have prepared her for what she was to come face to face with when she stepped from the gate. Her husband...and Sammael. She had been prepared to be faced with the both of them, naturally...just not like this. It was like a physical blow,

and she stepped back, nearly bumping into Sarku. A number of emotions...hurt, shock, despair...crossed her face before she managed to catch herself. And then she visibly started trying to shut down. Shaking hands were curled into fists to still them and then her arms curved loosely around herself. That was an old pose...she had done that plenty when she was younger. Someone had once commented that it looked like she was trying to hold herself together when she did that, and it wasn't far from the truth. It hurt. And not just because of the position he was in. No, what really hurt were the emotions she saw in him. No matter how unfaithful he had been in the past, she had always felt secure in the fact that it didn't matter, because he didn't love them. This was different. As much as she fought to control her expressions, something she had learned to be so good at, she kept slipping. Flashes of the hurt she felt would be visible here and there.

Somehow, seeing Belorian there, her beloved Eoghan, shook her even further. She didn't know what to feel about that. She felt humiliated that Maelmorda had chosen to be so public about that. Did she not even deserve privacy to react in? And on the other hand...Eoghan had always felt safe to her. He was a comfort. It was lucky Sarku had an arm around her when he did. She felt faint...she felt like she was going to be sick. Hell, she didn't know what she felt. Watching Maelmorda was like twisting the knife in her own wound...but she couldn't seem to look away. She visibly flinched when Eoghan looked at her...she didn't think she wanted his sympathy. But seeing the sympathy there, tears sprang to her eyes. She tried to blink them back. What was wrong with her? What the hell had she expected?

The worst part of it all was, in her mind, she could completely understand why Maelmorda would want to be with Sammael. It stung, but she truly felt that compared to Sammael, there was absolutely nothing she could offer Maelmorda. She couldn't dominate him the way he seemed to want to be dominated. She couldn't urge him to the same releases Sammael probably could, and now the pair of them could have children. What was she good for? And what the hell did he want to keep her around for?

She didn't know if she could accept his place with Sammael. She couldn't understand why Maelmorda thought she could. How could she, when looking at the two of them made it feel like someone was twisting her guts around inside her? Her expression changed as Maelmorda said he wouldn't let her go. Something sad, hollow. She didn't speak, but her expression spoke volumes. When had she become a prisoner, someone's to keep as they wished? The unfairness of it sat heavy on her shoulders. Was it either accept them or live miserable with their joining? The outcome seemed to remain the same, and really she felt like she was the only one losing. She'd never made him face a situation as difficult for him as this one was for her. What would he even choose, she wondered, if he had the choice between keeping her or staying with Sammael and losing her? Because she felt, at this moment, that she would not be able to stand for him remaining with Sammael like this without losing herself in the process. And that was her answer, wasn't it? She couldn't accept them. It would hurt either way. She unfolded her arms and shrugged her way out of Sarku's one-armed embrace. And she turned her gaze away from Maelmorda, staring instead at somewhere to the left of him. She didn't speak...Maelmorda could likely guess exactly what the chances were of her accepting him and Sammael. She was withdrawing into herself little by little, apparently trying to find a place where her thoughts weren't so loud and the pain not quite so strong. She listened to Belorian speaking with Maelmorda still, but didn't seem too interested in providing any visible reaction to this anymore.

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That look on Galaxy's face; the one Sammael could not wait to see; it devastated Maelmorda. Regret was a part of him very few owned, and Galaxy was among them. This was not the first time he was to blame for making her look that way, but it was the worst he had ever made her feel and he knew it. He loved her, though he all too often had a strange way of showing it. He had intended to be faithful to her, had truly intended it, but things had changed. The strange thing was, he no more wanted to hurt Sammael than to rub more salt in Galaxy's wounds. He loved them both. Maelmorda cradled Sammael's cheeks in the palms of his hands, embraced him tight with his legs, and leveled his soul's intense jade-green mirrors on him. "My beloved Prince, please...We have hurt her enough. I believe she understands the situation now. Let me go and talk to her. Let me assure her of my love. If you have any love for me, you shall allow me to do this. I love you both. Let me love you both. You shall not be disappointed nor suffer the absence of me." Maelmorda was willing to split himself in half for them, in a far more literal sense than just his heart. He was the devil, the dark father of all demons, devils, angels and so many more; he was a god; he was capable of this feat. His hope was, that given time, Galaxy would even come to love Sammael, as a brother or even a lover. Sammael and Sarku were the only ones he could ever share her with, but only if her heart chose one or both of them as a lover. Why Sarku? Because Maelmorda knew him and how pure his heart and soul was, despite how chaotic his mind was. He could tell that Sammael was reluctant to physically part from him and he began gently pushing against Sammael. "You can trust me, Sammael, in every way that counts, you can trust me. I may be a sneak at games, but not where my love for you is concerned. Let me go to her. Trust me to do what is right by you both." He did not address Sammael as a thrall did a master, but as an equal whom he loved and was devoted to.

Belorian backed away from the two; both to consider Sammael's response to him and because he could see now that Maelmorda loved Sammael. There was no doubt of it, and he understood better why Maelmorda had been defensive of his place with Sammael. The very thought of such a union stunned him. His eyes meandered Galaxy's way. He loved her, always had, and it pained him deeply to see her suffer as she did. She had chosen Maelmorda nevertheless, rejected Eoghan how many times? His strides carried him to Galaxy as Maelmorda implored Sammael to do the right thing for them all and he swept her hands up in his. "For better or worse, Maelmorda is the one you chose, Galaxy. I often wish you had chosen me, but you did not. You chose the father of Acheron. When has loving him ever been easy? Shall you give up on him and yourself now? Losing Acheron wounded him, you know, in ways few can understand. Yet he loves the son who took it from him. That is quite magnanimous on his part. All that he made he made in his image, all a reflection of some part of him. Consider that, the scope of it; Acheron, the demons, devils, angels, elves, this beautiful world, you and me, and so much more. You are the light he chose...Sammael the darkness. How can he not choose two mates which capture the darkness and light within him?" Belorian's understanding of things was always incredible and Maelmorda could not have said it better than he did, probably would not have thought of the spectrum of himself in explaining his love to Galaxy. No, Maelmorda intended to establish his love for her on a far more personal level.

Mephisto watched all this with rapt interest. The interaction of demons, devils

and angels wrapped in their heart's investments was fascinating to him. Listening to Belorian he understood why Acheron wanted him so badly and why Belorian resisted. How could he see both sides if he pledged himself to one side? He was the ultimate mediator between hellions and others.

Gabrian meanwhile was caressing Sammael with great affection as his Prince and Maelmorda spoke; his arms rubbing against Maelmorda's side as he did so inasmuch as he served as a backrest at the moment for the Morning Star. The infernal demon was arrested by his own thoughts as his fingers trailed and kneaded lovingly along his master's flesh. Love was such a complicated thing. Had he known Sammael was attracted to him he would have easily given himself to him, and loved him forever and only him, no matter how many mates Sammael chose...but would he have wound up like Casey and Malcomb? Driving himself insane with the need to be enough for him, Maelmorda withstanding. No one could compete with Maelmorda. Mael was often an exception to every rule. He was the one person Gabriel could never be jealous of.

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Quite the event this was turning out to be. Mephisto had come all smiles and interest for the man-devil and man-demon screwing the hell out of each other on top of Gabriel. Lilith would get a kick out of the sight probably whenever she got around to coming, and she would. She wasn't the type to pass up something like this. She was smarter than that. Though there were those here who would not take kindly to her presence being there when she did arrive. A very pleased smirk was given as he pressed his cheek to Maelmorda's chest in way of saying hello to Mephisto because he was currently too into the Morning Star to speak really. Thankfully Gabriel had enough sense to greet the king and even exchange some humorous banter with the dragon shapeshifter.

It wasn't longer by much more than half of an hour after the first guest or two showed up that more wine and food started popping up. Large triangular tables draped in dark red cloth of sheer thinness had been brought in to lay out the spread what was to be consumed by those whom wished to quench their thirsts or hungers in a less carnal manner. Only two servants were ever seen carrying in those wide angled tables of stone and even that was just a brief glimpse of the muscle carved bodies before they disappeared back to their normal duties. Male as ever their human bodies might have appeared, their heads were hidden by thick hoods the same shade as the cloth covering the triangular tables of stone, and those ground length skirt looking pieces tied around their waist by a bit of rope. They were not. These servants kept to the shadows, out of the way of everything and especially far from the immortals gathering in their Lord's house. Bowed heads in their backwards slow walk to retreat from where they had been called from after their minimal tasks had been completed, and that was when the uneven stone walls to the pool room felt as though they were shifting. Away from the sitting and standing occupants those seemingly normal walls and ceiling very carefully retracted certain large oval shaped pieces of rock in them. As if the rock were being pulled into the structure itself; the whole of the ceiling and walls moved outwards. The effect was to widen the room; to give meters where there had only been inches. More torches were struck to life, fixed into their holdings on either side of the newly formed oval openings that were starting to make many rows from corner to corner of the room. The floor itself did not change however, nor did the pools or the spots that everyone might be sitting or standing in, just the ceiling and walls. It was so faint in its change though, so meticulous in sinking those stones into the



structure of the place without even the tiniest bit of dust fall or sound of scraping. All of these and more were happening even as that none too bashful threat was made known as to if Maelmorda was indeed being used for anything but the greater good then it was Sammael's arse. His arse? It was the way Belorian was though. It wasn't surprising; the need to protect where you came from, or whom rather, even if you had chosen to go another way than they had. Eoghan wasn't so odd in that respect; there was no doubt many others that did not share the same urge to be a part of Acheron yet strove for the Morning Star's well being just the same. Now that was just plain love if there ever was any; maybe stupid for some, but love just the same.

Now through all those heated dirty looks and sneering words that Maelmorda, Gabrian and Belorian gave back and forth till the threatening one eased his arse back from them to await what he thought he wanted to hear, Sammael had a time making himself stop all his molestation of the Morning Star as well as nibbling at Gabrian's fingertips. Rearranging the room required far less effort so that was all in good fun. What did take part if not half of his attention from his current sitting arrangement was Maelmorda pushing at him to relent and let him go to his golden goddess, and bringing the wandering ones in the hallway back to the room of pools; that, and the quickly approaching torment and otherwise appalling dread, which two certain desert dwellers were about to be dropped into on their damn heads.

Oh yes, Wyrvaust and Arilwen with their little Anwarr would be brought back to the pool room. Doors would make themselves available to the small clan to help them find what they were looking for quicker. Just one door that stood wide open revealed a pool and the back of the chair that Mephisto had taken to sitting in. This door stood at the end of the long hallway Wyrvaust would soon be turning into any minute now since no other doors would open to his clawed hands jingling the knobs. As a means to coax the Raven and his Swan along to the room of angels and demons, the floor would do that all too familiar crumbling again. This time where there had once been darkness beneath their feet, there was now the roar of fire and the glint of tall spikes jutting up towards them. Eager the flames were to lick the flesh from their bones. Even happier it seemed were those spikes to impale them should they loose their footing. The sound of rock falling away into the fiery fissure cracked against the walls as it crumbled away and continued to erode as to let Wyrvaust, Arilwen and sadly even Anwarr know that they should really get a move on, lest they become crispy birds. Course Wyrvaust and Anwarr wouldn't really mind the fire so much as the endless field of spikes, but for Arilwen it would be perilous regardless. For added drama there were voices that could be heard coming out of those fires that caused the imagination to think of nothing but Hell. Voices full of pain, of sorrow, most potently of despair. Whatever it was they tried to say it always became drowned out by the roar of the fire that flared all around the death spikes. Perhaps they, whom ever they were, were trying to tell the Raven and his clan to run. Or were they whispering for him to join them? Picture frames and shelves rattled loose from the walls to plummet into the fire, burning or shattering into ash because of how deep the rumbling of the falling away floor was causing. With the incentive now present for Wyrvaust; the same if not malevolence would be directed into the room he had seen his Lord and the angel who Wyrvaust wanted to be at that particular point in time.

Back to the room of pools of increasing size, where against his better judgment Sammael relented to this pushing Maelmorda did, as he was asked, to let him go for now so that he could be with the only one who had truly captured his heart of

hearts. Who would have thought? With a resigned sigh he withdrew slowly from the Morning Star. First one huge throbbing cock and then another, then his arms unwound from around his maker's torso to sort of allow Maelmorda to slip on by but then after the dark father of them all had risen, he would just sink down in that lounge chair against Gabrian. Had it always been so dangerous for Gabe to dare the dream that was hope as far as Sammael was concerned? Did the 'old bird' indeed have that much he could loose from even entertaining the notion that he could be enough for Satan, Maelmorda aside? It was as Maelmorda was getting up from that too comfortable chair where he had been manwiched between Gabrian and him, that Belorian received his answer.

His voice was not heated and drunk with sex as one would expect from all that phucking he'd been doing since Maelmorda had happened into his house of sin. "I'm beginning to think you don't like me Belorian," said the man-demon as his black eyes abruptly lost all traces of that playful lust, and now they just held lust in them; And not the pretty kind boys and girls but the dangerous kind; The type that gave the illusion of pleasure and the promise of agony. It was something that brought one to their knees. He too rose from being all meshed painfully close to Gabrian in that lounge chair however, reluctant as all hell. His legs now straddled one of Gabrian's knee's where he stood in front of that lounge chair. His body still wet from romping in the pool with Mael and Aras. Water droplets still fell from his damp hair, rolling down his nude body to fall wherever. A few getting on Gabrian's inner thighs as Sammael's head canted to the side while he still regarded Belorian where he was over there comforting Galaxy the way no one should really get the privilege to. Shouldn't that be addressed now to? The glint in his black eyes said. The way Eoghan expressed himself so freely where Gala was concerned. How he was doing it yet again in front of others, the Morning Star specifically. Was that disrespect? It had to be right? Most would think so. But the immortals in this room weren't most now where they.

"Mephisto!" His eyes iced over Belorian a few seconds longer before they warmed on the king and his lips curled into a mischievous grin. "I trust you haven't eaten in awhile. That your fill runs deep and is not easily satisfied," he said to the dragon shapeshifter as one of those big muscled men with the hoods over their heads appeared out of thin air to set a ruby encrusted goblet in-between the up turned fingers of his left hand. The demon servant then disappeared just as silent as it had appeared with said goblet of whatever manner of poison Sammael chose to drink at the time.

Then suddenly there was the sound of music quietly filtering through the room of pools and inhuman bodies. Not so loud as to cover conversation, but not too wispy to go unnoticed for very long, something which sounded like violins at first. If any one them, any at all were to glance away to find the source of this soul calming noise they would clearly see that in those high arched oval openings in the walls and ceiling there were people. Well creatures actually, small in statue. On a closer inspection; the people were actually children all wearing the same white skeleton masks over their faces with the single off white short horn protruding from the middle of their foreheads. All those numerous child looking figures wore the same exact masks on top of red suits with black ties. For the short tikes that played the wide array of instruments created of man, or so it seemed, their fingers were nimble over the strings or sticks they used to make melodies with. For the larger pieces like the handful of cellos' and bass' two of those child like people would be perched in the little openings. One used their tiny hands for the top, the

other for the bottom strumming. Every single one of the little niches in the walls and ceiling were enclosed by a not so elaborate gate of three posts that differed in heights and one rail connecting them all in an outwards rounding way. It would appear he wasn't kidding when Maelmorda had mentioned it to be a party. And what was a party without a little music to move the body? Although these child-like figures were eerie in their silent playing, with their masks and empty eye sockets.

Then Satan turned his eyes to Belorian, and said, "Maelmorda's treatment will be whatever he makes it Eoghan. Be it pleasurable or painful. Think it wise to make enemies of those that considered being neutral do you? The middle of the road is more dangerous than anywhere else."

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Of all those Satan had invited to his party, a mere half a handful proved no shows. Who had dared to refuse? Only three; Valis at first out of circumstance and because he refused after he was informed of the party by no name; Dagon, god of the tempest, and Byron, both of whom like Valis would only answer to Lucifer. Mernaph, who was loyal to Maelmorda, and Malcomb did arrive, Mernaph leading his barely bondage dressed mate on a leash. Those of the fallen whose loyalty extended to Lucifer did come. They were the dark angels who obeyed Sammael unless he commanded them to act against the Morning Star, which Satan had not done yet. Those fallen who were invited came to the party.

When Sammael finally permitted Maelmorda the liberty of addressing his wife, the devil slid away, kissed him passionately then strode naked to meet Galaxy. Belorian immediately retreated from the two.

Belorian shook his head when Sammael addressed him, clearly at odds with what he had to say. "It is you who chose to make an enemy of me when you sicked your hounds on me, or was their attempt to render me helpless and seize me for you, your idea of a friendly invitation? I never stood in the middle of the road or straddled any fences, Sammael, though you may believe it. I only ever followed my heart. Oh, I considered Acheron, but it found my nature unpalatable and I found it equally ill suited to me. Then, when Maelmorda had finally evolved to be a great leader, one who could truly balance Acheron, you took Acheron from him like a thief in the night when the master was away. Do I despise you? I have no feelings for you to designate myself to loath. Do I distrust you? With all my heart. Do I condone your methods? They sicken me to be blunt. Do I respect you? My respect, like my trust and love must be earned, so no. If you want me, Sammael, you shall have to change your ways, which I doubt you are willing to do at this stage. I was almost ready to give myself to Acheron under the Morning Star's rule, but as you usurped his kingdom I turned my back on Acheron again. I follow wisdom, Sammael, and you are not wise. A wise and capable leader attracts loyalty through love, respect and competent leadership, not fear, terror, and force. These are the tools of one who cannot hold on to what is his by loyalty and determination. Put bluntly, you are a tyrant, Sammael, and I shall die before I serve a tyrant, as shall many others you would be wise to have as your allies and friends. I believe you are perfectly capable of being a great leader, but you cannot get past your lust to see others suffer to permit your potential to evolve. Do you ever ask yourself how many you truly have the loyalty of? Gabriel obviously. Mephisto I believe. Have you ever asked them why? I doubt it is the cruel side of you that they love, although they have probably been conditioned to tolerate it. If a time comes when you can embrace

your true potential, I may consider serving you, but I shall always serve Maelmorda first. Until then, I shall continue to go my own way."

Now while Belorian was talking to Sammael, Maelmorda spoke to Galaxy. He met her with an embrace which separated Sarku from her, and pressed a lingering kiss against her brow. His lips then covered her cheeks and throat with sweet sucklings until his soft buds of pink flesh met her ear. He nibbled and nursed on her lobe for a moment, ignoring the resolute stiffness of her body against his, and whispered into her ear. "You doubt that I love and desire you. How can you? How can I make you understand, my darling, that you complete parts of me he never can, as he completes me in ways you never can? Have I ever been whole in love? Have I? Has temptation not always wracked my body? Yet you have tolerated me through all that, the inconstancy of my needs. Now nothing shall tempt me away from the two people I love. I can be faithful, Galaxy. Not to you, not to him, but to both of you. Am I not ever evolving into a more and more perfect creature, however dark I may be? Can you not see that I have reached another stage of that evolution and that a pact with Satan to save this world and its people led me to love the one other I need as much as he needs me, and as much as I need you? I do need you, desperately. We can be happy, Galaxy, we can, if you will but trust me. As I evolved with your love, my love for him has brought me a step higher. Can you not see it, not feel it in me? Feel what stirs in this heart? I love you, Galaxy, with all my heart." And just as Belorian spilled his last dangerous truth, Maelmorda turned to gaze upon Sammael with a great fierceness of passion, and before all the party goes he lauded his heart's manifest. "And I love you, Sammael, with all my heart! You have completed me! I shall love you forever if you do not take my other half from me! Have Acheron! Your love is worth more to the Morning Star!" Did anyone realize how incredible it was that the Morning Star offered his love so completely? Even by Sammael owning a half of him, it was like possessing the whole of any other. By the awed, intrigued, or stunned looks on at least half the faces there, they did comprehend how epic the fact was. Did Sammael, or was he too greedy to share any part of Lucifer?

Gabrian, who had been caressing and kissing Sammael's back all the while Belorian addressed him, and Maelmorda vaunted his love, had felt his muscles tense and coil beneath his fingertips and lips, but despite everything Belorian said, Maelmorda's proclamation made his muscles battle one another most stringently of all, despite his master's outwardly cool demeanor. Was it because he could not tolerate the thought of owning only a half of him? Or because he wanted to ravish him so suddenly that his body reacted to that need. Gabriel thought it might be the former scenario. The broken winged angel climbed to his knees on the chair and whispered to Sammael, nibbling on his ear and molesting him with those delightfully ginger fingers in between to make it appear he was simply being affectionate, all the while guarding his voice from all trespass and Lucifer's seeing eye. "My Lord...if you want the whole of him, you must divest him of Galaxy. Maelmorda must believe you had nothing to do with it, however. I know of a way, a way it can be done without killing her, a way of hiding it from him, a way of making her content with it and not even realize what had come. Sarku can go with her. If it is your wish, I shall see it done." That was loyalty for you. There was nothing he would not do to see his master content. If he misread his sire's tension so be it, it never hurt for Sammael to know what Gabriel was willing to do for him. Gabriel knew killing Galaxy would be a mistake. If Maelmorda discovered it his malice and despise would be unconquerable. Gently removing her he was more likely to forgive, as long as no harm came to her. It was not a matter of whether Sammael might need her, they could

kill her and resurrect her as needed. Yes, Gabriel's dark side was very dark, on a coldly logical level.

Sarku glanced their way and Gabriel realized that his senses also reached far. He had sensed his name being spoken by him, as so many demons did, but he had only that sense of his name being spoken, nothing more. It was not enough to suspect anything, just enough to make Sarku wonder. Even that made Gabriel feel foolish for not having guarded his voice from Sarku as well. He smiled at Seth, that was Sarku's real name, and cocked his head. "I was just admiring your form, Sarku. How long since you took your true form?" He referred to his angel form.

"Many ages it had been," Sarku said. "But for the golden lady this one found the will to make that shape again."

Gabriel laughed and threw his arms around Sammael tight and press his face against his cheek to cheek. "He is in love. What nerve to fall in love with what is the Morning Star's to cherish. But Maelmorda does not seem to mind, does he, My Lord? Perhaps he trusts that Sarku shall never act on it?" his gaze alight on Sarku with a burn as he said this.

Sarku just shook his head. He was not about to discuss personal matters with anyone. Gabriel could fish all he liked. It was for he, Maelmorda, and Galaxy alone to know.

Wyrvaust and Arilwen in the meantime were running for their lives as a fissure of angry flames and spikes pursed them by their heels. They made for the pool room and that open door, which Wyrvaust half expected to slam in their faces as some kind of cruel joke, but the door remained spare as they rushed through it and slid to a halt some yards away from Sammael and Gabriel. Wyrvaust was somewhat out of breath, demons were hard to steal the air from, while Arilwen being young as she was for a Nephelim probably felt like her lungs were bleeding. Both arms and a wing shrouded her and Anwarr protectively as his eyes fell Sammael's way. "An interesting way the Desert Wind has of summoning his guests," The Raven said somewhat breathlessly. It was an unexpected comment wasn't it, almost humorous. The demon then moved over to the chair with his wife and son, and kneeled deeply to Sammael, bringing Arilwen with Anwarr cradled in her arms with him. His head bowed with as much respect. "Please, Lord of Acheron, let Marsol, Cirgoth, my wife and son go or stay as they will, I beg of you. Let them be your guests and not your prisoners. Such is the path to our hearts, My Lord." Why did he not mention himself? Because he knew he had overstepped one too many lines. He knew he had no right to include himself.

Now, if harm came to Marsol or Wyrvaust, Sammael would begin to feel terribly ill, unbalanced, as if struck with a sudden plague. The pact he and Lucifer made protected all who were born of Morashtar of any consequence, and that included farmers, smithies, fishermen, what have you, and it included all of the Lords. As Marsol was king of the desert, harming him was to harm himself, killing him was to kill himself. Such was the way of the binding pact Sammael and Maelmorda had made. If either of them broke their end, it could kill them. Maelmorda laughed quietly as Wyrvaust plead for what did not need to be begged for. Of course he could not possibly know that, and Sammael had only to figure it out the hard way, or realize it immediately as he began to sicken as he harmed those who were protected. Unfortunately, Cirgoth and Arilwen were not part of that pact, for neither of them were of Morashtar or consequential to it. Also, having entered Sammael's house

freely of will, Cirgoth had placed himself under Satan's power. He had forfeited the Standard of Possession. All angels were within Sammael's reach if the Standard of Possession did not apply. Children born in Morashtar were also protected, which meant Anwarr II was safeguarded by the pact as well. All Lords of Morashtar were also protected. Now the hellions who had not been set free of Acheron by Lucifer, Sammael could do with as he wished. People tended to forget just how clever the Morning Star was. Morashtar, its Lords, and most born of it were protected by their binding pact.

Now while Wyrvaust and Sammael settled matters, Maelmorda's green eyes settled on Lilith with a dangerous burn. His arms gradually uncoiled Galaxy, he leaned in to kiss her, then kissed Sammael, as a way of excusing himself momentarily, whereof he stalked over to Lilith, whose arm he gripped painfully tight. "You shall desist in your pursuit of my son and Yorek, or I shall have your skull for a candle holder, Lilith, and your soul swimming forever more in the River of Souls," he snarled the words almost as if he had turned half panther. It was hard to break the habit of being boss devil. "My son is marked and bonded by me. You have no right to so much as breathe in his space, do we understand one another?" Now, the only way she could pursue Corwyn was if Sammael allowed it. What was Maelmorda's was Sammael's, that too was part of the pact. With a vicious shove, he sent her sprawling, and then stalked back towards Sammael and Galaxy. On his way there, in mid stride, what appeared to be a translucent projection of him, split away from him in graceful stride, and as he and his other half advanced on his wife and mated master, his other self solidified. Which was the real Maelmorda? Why both of them were. He embraced Galaxy and kissed her possessively, urgently, his embrace dominating, and also slid into Sammael's lap to straddle him and kiss him with a more feverish passion. He was more whorish with Sammael, more depraved, a needy sex junky whose body begged to be ravished by him, while he was the opposite with his wife, his body exuding the wantonness of wanting to ravish her. Oh he could switch roles with either one of them at any time, depending on what signals their bodies gave out.

There was a crash near by where Mernaph shoved Malcomb down on a table and drove himself inside of the now naked fallen angel, whose leather straps he had removed with a mere dissolving groping of his hands. Malcomb's voice sang out with pain and bliss. Mernaph loved taking him in front of others.

Mephisto's grey eyes settled on Lilith and he smiled. He hated to see her brooding. "Want to have sex with an old dragon, beautiful Lilith? All this sex is making me very horny." He had eaten a huge meal, thanked his Lord for the bounty when offered, and drunk quite a lot of wine. He never seemed to gain any weight on that muscularly lean body of his.

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As Maelmorda strode to her, and even as his arms slid around her, she remained still, tense. Not a move made to return the kisses, and her arms remained at her sides, fingers lightly curling into the fabric of her dress. She was stubborn, that was for sure. She did not appear to want any affection at the moment, at least, not from him. There was anger there, as well. She hated that even while she hurt so bad, she had to love him so damned much. That feeling was not even diminished in the slightest. Why couldn't she hate him? She hated what he did sometimes, but never him. How could she doubt his love and his desire for him, he asked. How could she not? How could she help but feel that there was something lacking in their love

that he had to search for elsewhere? She hated that she couldn't be everything he needed. And she hated that she was having so much trouble accepting his love for Sammael. She wanted to. She wished it could be that easy. When she finally moved, it was to shake her head and shove at his arms, trying to squirm free. If he let her escape the circle of his arms, she'd take a bracing step backwards, so she could look him in the eye. Otherwise, she'd give up and let her arms fall to her sides again. "How can we be happy, Maelmorda, if it hurts to even look at the two of you? Even to think of the two of you?" She loathed the tremor that was present in her voice, and fought to steady it. "I have trouble believing that you would accept it so easily, Maelmorda, if you were in my position. If suddenly I decided to fork over half my heart to someone else. Someone I chose, Maelmorda, not someone you chose, because I know there were certain individuals you would likely happily share me with. Could you do that? And do you think you could be happy about it?" That anger was becoming a little more evident as she spoke, the colour high in her cheeks, and eyes blazing now through the tears that just refused to go away. She was genuinely curious, though. She knew he was possessive as hell. She had a possessive side of her own, though it only seemed to rear its head when her relationship with Maelmorda was being infringed upon. Still, the anger felt better than the crushing sadness. The fact that she was able to start getting pissed off about it suggested that she did understand what he had said. She truly did. She didn't like it. It tipped her world upside down. But she understood it. She actually seemed relieved when he finally uncoiled his arms from around her...she didn't like how there was a part of her that wanted to forget why she was sore with him, when he held her.

She felt like taking off for the other end of the room when she saw Maelmorda (or half of Maelmorda?) coming towards her...she even contemplated ducking behind Sarku as he neared. ...As if she could hide from him! She wasn't ready for another round with him! She hadn't even had time to calm herself the hell down from her last little exchange with him. The only thing that stopped her was the thought of how comical the others might find it, if the Morning Star had to chase his wife around the chamber in order to even get his hands on her. She resisted, of course, stubborn thing that she was, and even delivered a little whack to her chest as he kissed her. She'd finally get distracted from resisting, but would deliver a rather sharp bite to his lower lip, just to show him that she was still displeased. She didn't want him getting all full of himself because he was able to distract her from her anger. Her fingers clutched at him, one hand curling up into his hair.

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Gala looked positively floored when he offered her the chance to go. If she had expected anything from him, it certainly hadn't been that. Her anger was gone, just like that. She even seemed as though she had been shocked right out of her sadness. She just stared at him, speechless. And then her expression turned thoughtful. Could she leave him? She was sorely tempted, of course. But...could she? He was the center of her world. She felt as though without him, she'd have nothing to ground her anymore. She'd be freefalling, with nothing to hold on to. Yes, he hurt her. And they weren't little hurts, either. They were big hurts. The fact that he gave her the choice meant an amazing amount to her. It told her that he loved her enough to offer her an out. It said to her that he knew how deeply he hurt her. And maybe that was what swayed her mind to her decision. It was a reassurance, she thought, that he was thinking of her, and that he did care about what was in her best interest. Finally, her expression softened, and she looked on the verge of tears again. Different tears, though...there was just the hint of a smile playing at the

corners of her mouth. "How could I ever leave you, Maelmorda? I'd be leaving without my heart. I'd be...empty." Her hand slid up to lightly cup the side of his face, and she looked him in the eye. No more avoiding his gaze. "It does hurt, Maelmorda. I can't lie. But losing you completely? It would be like I'd lost part of myself...I'd never stop hurting, if you weren't there." She shook her head, and then paused, looking uncertain for a moment. "Would you let me stay, Maelmorda?" She inquired quietly, as if worried, for a moment, that she had misread his motivations behind offering her an escape route. As intelligent as she was, she could be absolutely blockheaded when it came to realizing that, yes, he did really love her as much as he always said he did. Even after all this time, she found it hard to believe anyone could love her that much. She knew staying with him would not be easy. She'd always known that. Eoghan had been right in saying that loving him had never been easy. But she couldn't help it. Loving him came as naturally to her as breathing. To show him that she was being sincere, that she would not deny his affections anymore, she was the one to slide her arms around him, tugging him in close so that she could press a kiss to his lips...the kiss was at once tender and heated, and she tried to ignore any of that hurt that lingered...it was there, and it wasn't going to go away all at once. But even just in those few moments, it had dulled. There was comfort in knowing he loved her enough to let her go. And there was even more comfort for her in knowing now that, faced with the choice, she could choose him again with no regrets. She most certainly had not chosen what she did for him...it was only for her. Selfish, but a person needed to be every once in a while.

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Arilwen's violet eyes held the deepest of hurt, fright and sadness as she gazed up at her angry husband and her arms tightened around Anwarr who was cradled against her chest. He was demanding to know what she wanted from him... and questioning whether she believed his deep love for her. "Of course I believe it.." She spoke in a fierce whisper. "You yourself told me that Sammael was capable of terrible things... and that he would not hesitate to do any of them. The thing I fear the most is being separated from you. Now you scoff at me when I tell you that this is what I fear and tell me that you will not let him do it. He CAN, husband. You know it as well as I, but I seem to be the only one trying to prepare myself for what might happen if it does." The whisper ended in a fierce hiss and she turned away. She had never been angry with her husband before, but after being drained of her power, having no sleep or food and already run ragged from dashing through hallways and listening to her husband spout his love for their master, she was finished. Had she the capability she would go and punch all of those crazy demons in the nose and flee with her husband and son... but the most frustrating part was knowing that she couldn't.

Wyrvaust moved to, once again, face Marsol, but the door was slammed in his face. This startled Arilwen nearly as much as Wyrvaust and she turned with a concerned frown, wincing only when her husband caught her arm up in his fingers and began dragging her down the hallway, ranting for Sammael once again. Her bare feet worked hard to keep up with his feverish pace, her arms aching from carrying Anwarr, who wanted nothing more than to look around and try to investigate for himself. This made him squirmy. She felt ready to drop on the spot and just tell him to leave her there. She was so very tired... her shoulders slumping as she hurried beside Wyrvaust.

It was when they swung into a long, narrow hallway that she knew something was wrong. It didn't feel right. "Wyrvaust..." She whispered, trying to get his attention, but the open door to the pool room at the end of the hall was what he had his sights fixed on. It was then that the loud crash came from behind them and when they both swung around to see the floor crumbling behind them... and giving them a very good, widening opening to plummet to certain destruction.

Obviously, their bodies knew what to do. The group took off down the hall, running for their lives. Had Sammael heard Arilwen's angry words? Did they anger him in return? Was this to be their punishment? Thoughts raced through her mind as they pounded down the hallway and by the time they reached the door, Arilwen was ready to give up and let the floor swallow her. It DID feel like her lungs were bleeding

and a horrible, wheezing, rasping noise was struggling from her throat. She looked flushed and as they barged into the party room, she collapsed against Wyrvaust, her free hand clinging to him as her head swam. Though his wing wrapped her and their son, her violet eyes rolled upwards as the room spun. There were strange, short figures in holes in the wall playing instruments. Smears of violins rang in her mind. She heard sex... ROUGH sex... laughter... arguments... but she was so out of it that she couldn't place any faces. The figures were blurred. It was like being trapped inside of some sick fun house, not a party!

By the time Wyrvaust pulled his wife over to kneel in front of Sammael, she knew that she wouldn't be getting back up very easily. She slumped against her begging husband, still fighting to catch some sort of burning breath in her lungs. Visions swam in her mind. She saw forest...trees...water. She wanted to see these things right now...lie down in the cool grass and sleep. Her arms loosened around their son and Anwarr finally climbed to his feet but remained standing against his father's side, just glad not to be held anymore. The little nymph was quickly growing his own independence, and his wide eyes lifted as he studied Sammael, then swung around the room. If Arilwen had been in her right mind, she would have pulled him against her and blocked her eyes from such sights. They had just explained to him, days ago, that sex was an act between two people who loved each other... and here was a room full of people swapping partners! Oh yes, that young mind was soaking up the sights and trying to make note of a million questions to ask later. Some of the people were so... INTERESTING looking! Some guy had a fuzzy face!

Arilwen vaguely heard Wyrvaust's begging words to Sammael... and his request to send them home. "No..." She panted, rolling her cheek against her husband's chest as she shook her head. "I told...you...I won't... go home without you..." She whispered between raspy breaths, reaching to cling to him. The tears began and she buried her wet face in his skin, sobbing. The thought of being home and wondering what was happening to him and if he was coming home nearly killed her on the spot.

Anwarr, in the meantime, had spotted the tables of food and drink nearby and was sneakily squirming his way over to them. The dessert table was closest. YAY! His eyes were huge as he stood on tiptoe and reached up tiny fingers for the colorful fluffy deserts. Anwarr had never eaten anything but desert food and meat, and he wondered how such pretty things could be food. But other people were eating them! Eyes glittering deviously, he managed to nab a yellow one, dark brown one and a pink one before he climbed under the table to sit, surveying his little collection. He tried the pink one first, licking at the fluff on the top and nearly jumped out of his skin. It was so yummy! The two that followed were equally as delicious and by this time, the sugar buzz had set in. Clambering out from under the table, Anwarr rose and started filling his arms with desserts...many of them getting crushed against his shirt. Once his arms were full, he turned and toddled off towards the people, coming first to one of the servants which he offered a pink dessert. "It's yummy!" He tried to explain, then frowned as the man ignored him. Shrugging, he popped it in his mouth, his cheeks covered in fluff, and turned to move on. It was then that Arilwen realized he was gone and sharply called his name, sending the toddler running for her, refusing to let go of his armload of squishy treasure.

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When Arilwen leaned to call for her son, Lilith was the first to study her and let

out a sharp laugh. "Belorian, it looks like another one of your bastard children has crawled out of the woodwork." She called to him, then would jerk her head in the angel's direction once he looked. Arilwen rarely ever saw her reflection and had no clue who Belorian was, so she would not see it... but everyone else could. She had the same beautiful facial bone structure and many of the same features as her father. It was then that Lilith saw movement from the corner of her eye and saw Maelmorda taking strides towards her, not looking very happy. Hardly ANYONE could make her stomach lock up, but Maelmorda was first on that list. Her blue-green eyes widened slightly and she winced when his hand came out to lock onto her arm, his growls spilling forth. Lilith had a short temper and everyone knew that, but her jaw tightened and she managed to bite back any quick-witted retorts to him as he threatened her. When Gabriel had greeted her with the 'bitch' comment as he wrapped himself around Sammael, her eyes had glittered as she piped up with "Still playing the lonely wingman I see. Maybe you should grow some wings first. Maybe then he will find you attractive." She knew that deep down, Gabriel was uncertain about the malformations on his back and she liked to grind salt into that wound. When Galaxy had arrived she grew even MORE annoyed. Of course there was no reason to hate the woman... she was just insanely jealous because she could hold Maelmorda's heart and Lilith never could... and most likely never WOULD. That was something that Lilith could never admit to herself though. She fought for his attentions like a neglected child, only to be rejected over and over.

Needless to say, by the time that Maelmorda finished bitching her out, she had ragged nerves and was ready to explode on someone. What she DIDN'T expect was to be tossed down like some cheap reject before watching him retreat. Lilith stumbled back and sprawled onto her ass and just sat there for a moment, watching him stalk off. A few things immediately jumped into her mind. Grab him and throttle him... grab his wife and shear all that pretty hair off... jump up and berate him... go and drown his brother. Oh, how her mind grew stormy with all of the hateful things she wanted to do. Luckily, Lilith DID have common sense when needed. She knew that she had to keep Sammael on her side. She also knew that Mael was now Sammael's little pet and if she harassed him, she was going to end up on Sam's bad side. And so, even a she bit into the insides of her cheeks to physically keep herself from spewing off at the mouth, she climbed to her feet and smoothed out the see through, gauzy green gown that wrapped her body. Bitch? Yes. Succubus? Yes. Impossible? Just about always. Lilith had a hard outer shell almost constantly, but if one thing...one PERSON... could make her insides feel like a rejected lover, it was Maelmorda. And she hated him for it...but loved him nonetheless. Sucking in a slow, raging breath through her nose, she stepped to take a goblet of wine from a tray and take a swallow to try and get rid of the lump in her throat. Yes, she WOULD be brooding... probably for weeks about it. She would return home and take her anger out on Mascen, since he was the closest thing she could get her hands on.

It was Mephisto's voice speaking her name that caught her attention and she turned, jutting a hip out as she studied the old dragon with a smirk. "If I let you fuck me, you better make me forget about everything this evening. ...At least for awhile." She pointed out plainly. No doubt that he would. She had never slept with the old coot, but she bet he had plenty caged up inside of him that could blur her mind out for an evening. Sauntering over, she swallowed the rest of her wine, plunked the empty cup down on the table, then immediately proceeded to unwrap her gauzy dress and drop it to the floor before climbing onto his lap to straddle him. "Any special requests?" She gave him that oozing, sultry grin... like a high dollar stripper in a VIP room. No doubt, whatever it was, she could fulfill it!

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Marsol's eyes looked up when he heard himself being asked what, probably what was he doing, by his beloved angel. What was it that he was doing? Isn't it obvious, he wanted to say to the barer of his children and keeper of his love. He was bonding Cirgoth the only way his inner beast would or could ever allow. The blood that raged in his veins could not be taken from just a wrist or a painful bite of the neck. It was as though he would rather the angel drink from the very muscle that hammered in his chest, to know that Marsol would only do this for he and he alone. It was an act of love it was as much as the dragon in him sought to show the angel by this seemingly primitive if not barbaric display of protective possessiveness. That beating muscle in his chest only beat harder at the notion of Cirgoth's lips being so close to it. Indeed Marsol had pierced his own heart to bond the divine bird. Nothing less would be acceptable in his eyes for Cirgoth if he couldn't be as close to him as possible; that being his heart.

The wound he dug out of his own chest hurt him more than he let on. But he didn't say as much. He wasn't the type to bitch about a meager little hole in his chest or the vulnerable exposing of his heart to the green eyed fellow. It was the first time he had ever let anyone get that close to him, all save Wyrvaust and even then he at times was emotionally aloof. Cirgoth alone had gained entrance into the heart of a beast like him. He only drained the angel as quick as he did because he knew their time together was going to be cut horribly short, and there was a high chance he wouldn't be seeing Cirgoth for a long time.

As the floor gave way underneath them, like it did formerly where it chased the Raven and his loved ones with the promise of fire and sharp shiny things, his one arm instinctively went around Cirgoth's mid section. The landing of them atop the bed did jar the angel horribly as it jostled him all to hell. Sheets and the one blanket were tossed over the both of them as that monstrous cock was forced too deep inside the divine bird's body, causing his demon lover to shudder from the extreme tightness. But did he shudder out of it hurting his aching member? Or because it just felt that fantastic to be that deep inside Cirgoth? With a great deal of will power as well as the already sustained injury in his chest still gushing, Marsol made his body crave the angel less and less. His need to have his mate eased gradually until he was into not so erect, and then he was able to carefully but quickly withdraw from the angel that drifted in and out of unconsciousness. With the hand resembling that of man and that of a demon; he pushed those kissable hips away from him as he jerked backwards, grunting as he did so because to end such a union was as much a relief for Cirgoth as it was a pity for the both of them.

It was so dark that no mere mortal could have seen two inches in front of their face. But he didn't need his eyes to tell him that they were not alone in that lightless space. The sound of teeth chattering could be heard just over his left shoulder; of metal grating against metal just ahead of him. And all too close was there the sound of heavy breathing, as if labored from a previous activity that had whomever spent. And just as Marsol's lips begun to part and his body seethe with the urge to seriously turn Sammael's cozy little phuck house into nothing more than a pile of rubble, all the noises stopped. They just stopped. The cold exhaling over the back of his neck also stopped, which he was rather thankful for because anything below 110 degrees was mighty chilly to him. At the same moment that all

those hungry little hisses and snarls ended and a light turned on. Yes a light. Like a switch had been flipped. Someone has said once that this manor, this estate, this rather palace like place was more of a sick fun house. Maybe they were right. At a very high arched doorway just ahead of the broken bed where the angel and his demon sat there stood a crotchety old man in dark brown robes barely able to hold up the torch in his age spotted hands. Quite human in his appearance, the man was demon nevertheless. For all the wrinkles his exposed face showed and the extra chin caused by all the extra skin hanging from his skinny neck, his body shook as he gestured with an index finger for the angel and demon to come. The doorway the old man with the slightly aglow red eyes motioned to was not dark however. It was lit up to reveal water on the other side. Not just a place made up of bodies of water, the space within the very open doorway was just that, a threshold of water. It was an impossible feat some people would say; physically impossible to walk through an open door into a wall of clear blue water. But some people had never seen Hell either.

Marsol's amber eyes burned hot on the demon posing as an old man. He didn't want to come hither like some dog with Cirgoth being weakened from being drained too quickly and then hurt the way he had surely been inwardly. He also didn't want to stay any longer then he absolutely had to in this place that reeked of all seven deadly sins either. He could feel his insides curling like the tentacles of some giant sea creature awaiting the unsuspecting sailor, a sinking sensation as it were. To stay and possibly battle unseen beasties and hope to God that he was strong enough to keep Cirgoth out of harms way; Or to go and possibly drown or something else perverse that might cross Satan's mind; these were the questions Marsol tumbled in his head. Seeing as how ole Sammy figured out rather quick-like the peculiars of the binding agreement the Morning Star and he had made did not mean he would avoid it. Sammael wanted to know the consequences of it all and how exactly dire they could become.

When the dragon lord refused to come at the first beckoning of the old man holding the torch, the man's brows drew together in a scowl that only the elderly could perform; scary and senile. Marsol's eyes thinned suddenly as he saw from the glimmering light of the blue water and from the orange glow of the lit torch in the old mans hands, that he could see the demon's breath when it exhaled; a small puff of fog, nothing that should have been a big deal. Yeah right. "Cir-," he was cut off as his naked body felt that change in the once hot room drop drastically. His skin became coated in the thinnest layer of something cold and white. It instantly made his body seize and lurch forward with the angel in his arms. Rolling three times across the bed to his feet with one arm under Cirgoth's knees and the other around the middle of his back, he snorted as the very thin sheet of snow had been wiped clean of his shoulders and arms by the bed sheets. But the bite of the snow remained with him even as he got to his unsteady feet. He hated the cold with the passion of a thousand fiery suns. He hated it barely more than he hated Sammael; which was a hell of a lot of hate if you let that sink in.

Depending on just how damaging a little snow on his tanned human flesh could be would determine if he could carry Cirgoth to that doorway with the damned demon in the guise of an old man. The cad had cast a meager snow spell on him? Needless to say that when Marsol did eventually make it to the door after a few more gentle blankets of unwanted snow fall over his backside and the tops of his shoulders; He took the old demon with him into that cool blue liquid wavering within the doorway, tossing the demon in head first into the door way after grabbing him up by the

scruff of his robe and pushing him through with a hard boot sole to his skinny backside. Marsol blew an angry breath as he took a step into the cool watery portal that rested within the doorway. From that room full of unknown beasties and cold, the angel and his demon lover would step into the doorway only to become completely submerged in water. Not too deep the water was however as it washed over their heated bodies, letting them be weightless for a few moments. Looking up he saw a roof of tiny skeletal masked people. Children playing instruments? It was blurry through the water of one of the pools that Cirgoth and he had been delivered into by that sneaky as phuck gateway in the doorway. But it worked well enough hadn't it? Getting his feet under he came up with more splash than he intended. Water spilled away as he had held onto Cirgoth the whole time by his right arm being wrapped tightly around him just under the angel's own arms.

When he came to stand though with his mate in one arm and the old man's face in his other hand, the sight that greeted Marsol where he stood in that pool was shocking. Not because it was Sammael's place, cause things like demons screwing angels would be natural. Those amber eyes lit first on Mernaph as he was taking Malcomb surrounded by a thickening group of gawking and most curious immortals. All too close by someone else was naked in someone else's lap. Those smooth thighs. That long hair. Was that Lilith sitting pretty in Mephisto's lap? The smell of sex was in the air. And then there just off to his left was the outline of Maelmorda with his Golden Goddess. Mere feet away there stood a proud Sarku, and Belorian? Just as he had wondered about all the ones that his eyes were seeing his gaze inevitably found Gabriel embracing Sammael. With a pained expression Wyrvaust kneeling by him along with his beautiful Swan and their son. Has the world gone mad?! It was more than he could stand. Eoghan wasn't the only one in the room that wanted to put Satan's arse out of commission. The old man in the brown robes was spitting and cursing as he tried to climb his short robust self out of the pool. Marsol helped him out by drop kicking him out of the pool and onto the floor. Pissed off and hurting? You bet your bottom dollar. Slowly now he would find his way through those quickly heating up waters to the wall and then climb out himself with Cirgoth in his arms. It was his anger that made the temperature of the roundish pool he waded through climb higher and higher. A servant appeared like a suit trying to sell something, they offered to take Cirgoth off his hands. But the only thing they got was a deep growl and the glint of sudden death in his eyes if they so much as laid a hand on the green eyed angel. The servant retreated quickly to cower elsewhere. Leaving the dragon lord to glower at Sammael from across the room where he stood all naked and wet like. His face did not share the same merriment and sex drunk expressions that everyone else did. Well, almost everyone.

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Sammael didn't interrupt Belorian through his tirade of what he thought Satan was and wasn't, and just where his own loyalties lie. Maybe he should have seeing as how the room had become so damn huge to be able to fill as much as it did with the large number of guests that came when called; albeit not all had come. Indeed his muscles betrayed that outward unphased demeanor of his. To Gabriel he could have felt like a wire sizzling with a wild current. At any moment it could surge violently and all those tidbits he may or may not have bottled up in him would come exploding out of him. He even shifted his weight from his right foot to his left as Eoghan winded down to whom it was he always would now and forever serve first and foremost. Arms coming up to cross his bare chest as he felt those seemingly innocent affections of his most marvelous Progeny dance over his body, reveling in

the tingling sensations it gave him. His black eyes smoldered on Belorian as he finished. He was half amused and then... half not. Of course when Eoghan said he would find a means to end him and then carry out the act, Sammael had no doubt he would without hesitation. It might seem strange to some that he had a sense of pride that someone such as Belorian would and even could make the threat he had in concerns to the treatment of the Morning Star. To even bitch him out as it were here in front of all those gathered under one roof. That kind of chewing out didn't come around often. Unfortunately there was a reason for that as apparently some people had yet to get it through their thick as shyte phucking heads. "Take the throne? Take the, I must be going deaf or something. Surely you don't suggest that I twisted the arms of the great Lords of Acheron? That I and I alone sabotaged the Morning Star's return to a thr-oh piss water. Why must I give you a schooling for things you already know. You flatter yourself, Anduain, to think that it is I that wants you," he said, his voice even toned as if he were talking to a childhood friend. "Feel better that you can keep all that disdain you hold so dearly for me. So you won't be wasting energy that could be used more constructively by loving others and making friendships all over the goddamned place. Give me your contempt then, brother, and I'll raise you to hatred that will blacken that pretty little soul that you so cherish as being good. The hounds of which you speak, did they bother you? I hope you didn't loose any sleep over all that. If you really want to get down to business, and I know you are quite a man for it, then I'll just have to try something different, something new, something just... for... you." On the last his tone had lost its calm friendly manner. It had taken on this edge. This white hot edge that was the start to a promise of many a horrible things to come. That is if this whole shenanigan continued. Or maybe it was too late for that. Maybe he so wanted to get his hands on Belorian that you could just hear the gears in his head grinding like something enormous cog with countless rows of teeth. So Belorian could kill him. Maybe many times over before he could retaliate. So? Point was there wouldn't be any of that nonsense if Eoghan was up shyte creek.

Though perhaps now that he had ended his own far shorter bout in a roar that had his eyes lit, Belorian and he had single handedly ruined the party? Many of the pool room's inhabitants paused or bulked at the sudden booming of the one that had invited them all there. Lost his cool? Just a smidgen; not very many could do that. Maybe you could count them all on one hand. Belorian sure as shyte could. Not because of what or who he was. But that he never disappointed anyone in speaking his mind, no matter what. Where some would exercise a sense of tact, a certain air of self preservation, Belorian sort of broke that mold. That didn't mean Sammael wouldn't admire The Comet's spunk; his pizzazz; his nerve. It was just all that fearlessness would make things a lot harder now what with the new "arrangement" Maelmorda and he had come to. That was alright though; nothing like a big ass challenge to spice life up every now and then. Certainly it would prove difficult to inflict direct damage to those he would like to. He wouldn't be in the least bit discouraged to still exact that terrible will of his that had earned him the title of a tyrant, a war monger, a vindictive bastard at times and cold hearted murderer at others. It also annoyed him to no end when others, that being probably Maelmorda only in all time, to speak of his "good side". The fact that Belorian even went there was like laughing while being eaten alive. Just a teensy teaspoon of it all came out in his last words and then it was all gone. Cool as you please his head would tilt forward and at a slight downwards angle as his eyes had not left Belorian yet. To waiting for a response but rather he was merely looking in the Anduain's general vicinity until his attention was pulled elsewhere.

The statement of love that Maelmorda made and how it had his whole body just a fighting itself all to hell. Was half of the Morning Star enough for him? Was half of a person ever enough for anyone? Who the hell could settle for that? His wife? Why certainly she would. The thought both enraged and sickened him to be quite frank, on many levels. The ones he would never speak of in mixed company the way Gabriel might have felt a fool for catching the unwanted gaze of Sarku the way he did by merely uttering the dream like shapeshifter's name. There ended any hope of conversing with Eoghan, the Comet, for the rest of the evening. Unless the angel had more threats to sling his way then the place really would get obliterated. Oh? Remove the apple of his eye? What his Progeny suggested sounded about as tasty as a ripe virgin. It had given him great pleasure in seeing the wounded process Galaxy had gone through just from arriving here and seeing what she had. Her husband all just a wrapped up to high heaven with the demon she probably hated more than anything in her entire life. Course it didn't make things any easier with Belorian professing his love for her in public, yet again. So many suitors after Lucifer's wife; and people were worried about Sammael chasing the Morning Star around the kitchen with a rolling pin? It never failed how phucked up people's priorities became, be it human or immortal. Cause in the end they all came from the same place. And even they had been made in the image of their creator.

"Love can destroy as easily as it creates," he whispered back into Gabriel's ear as he slid his left hand down the broken winged one's hip. Along that smooth flesh. Across the scarred angel's belly and down further to pause just above the base of his heavenly cock. Not touching him but still his Progeny could feel the heat of his fingertips where they were hovering over his skin. He found Gabriel's dark side as pleasing as his good one. Actually there wasn't anything about Gabe he didn't find pleasing, every taut muscle right down to the last scar, which was goddamn near impossible for him because so many displeased him sooner or later. Quite the picky one he was indeed. Maelmorda and Mephisto, maybe a few others might prove the save to that notion.

It was as he started to tell Gabriel that he suddenly felt all that good health of his come to a screeching halt like an abrupt unknown affliction, that his black eyes closed and he slowly settled himself down on the edge of that comfy lounge chair. Because he had indeed known something of what would happen should he cause harm to those born of Morashtar, he saw the wave of sickness coming. Didn't mean it wouldn't suck though. Right in the middle of the whole shindig and he has to go and get sick? In the middle of one of Wyrvaust's plea's to let his small loving clan and lord go, Sammael murmured with a hand coming to the cover his forehead, "Damn the bad luck." It didn't mean anything. His thumb and forefinger rubbed at his temples as his eyes shifted to the side to regard the Raven and those he spoke of, noting mostly that he did not include himself in the request. The idea of keeping the Raven to drive Marsol insane with rage was entertained a bit. Tossed around in his head as to what all he could do to, with and for the clan demon. Then of course he entertained the thoughts of what all Maelmorda and he could do and it all got a little out of hand real quick.

He remained silent awhile as his brain felt like it was going to pound out of his skull. His entire body became sluggish under Gabriel's hold. Outwardly he appeared as if he had a little headache the way he massaged his temples. While inwardly, and Gabriel could probably feel it most acutely if he was still molesting him oh so sweetly, he was growing more ill by the minute. Eventually though he answer



Wyrvaust. Perhaps not as quick as the handsome clan demon expected but he did. "I thought of offering your wife to Gabrian as a reward for all the trouble he went to of catching, caging, and then keeping you alive. The idea of taking your son and giving him to Mekkora to raise into his own perfection, it did sound good for awhile. A strong urge to cook you, and eat you alive almost won me over. But alas, Wyrvaust, I will do none of these things," he told the three of them in shallow tones. "What I will do however is take the matter up with Lord Marsol and see if he will satisfy the grave mistake you put your family and yourself in. Speaking of which, he should be arriving any moment now."

Not more than three seconds later there was a large splash and swearing in one of the pools. He gazed through his fingers at Marsol carrying the very wet and oh so naked angel that was Cirgoth out of the pool after giving the old demon in the robe a swift kick to the arse. His eyes glinted at how the desert creature settled his angelic mate into an unoccupied chair before he turned round to cross a few feet and literally wrap his still scale and clawed hand around the face of the old man that was clearly begging for his Lord's protection from this red demon. Sammael wouldn't spoil the fun though, so he granted no such wish. Instead he watched along with many others how Marsol tore apart the old man and crushed the life out of him. After the demon's body hit the ground and it's caved in head bounced against the cool stone floor, Sammael saw out of the corner of his eye what had happened to Lilith. How Maelmorda threw her to the ground without so much as a second thought. He did have the habit of treating her like the unwanted step child. But had she really earned such treatment? Was she not who she was because that was how she had been made? Or was it evolution to blame? He couldn't fault the Morning Star however for wanting to get in her face the way he had though. She was messing with his son and his son's boyfriend now. There was some serious family angst there. And then he was all just a tearing himself in two and sauntering just as graceful as can be towards Galaxy and himself. He'd never seen something like that before. Not that he could recollect at the moment anywhere. It perked his interest for about a minute before his head was engulfed in the mysterious illness that had overcome him. As that piece of the Morning Star slid into his lap and he in turn had to press backwards against poor Gabrian and pin the scarred angel a second time in that chair, he turned his agitated eyes on Arilwen, not Wyrvaust. "Go then. Feed your hooligan and enjoy yourselves. Let's worry about all this another day," he said flatly to her, although that other day could very well be tomorrow. In any case he told them to go on and mingle. Or eat. Drink. Do something; anything. Except sit there and kneel beside him with their hearts heavy with grief and despair that he would rip their family apart. Maybe he would; tonight, tomorrow, who knows. Point being; he wasn't doing that now so they had better listen when he told them to go have fun. Cause Satan was quite literal when he said something, as countless people had come to figure out the hard way; like Yorek for example...

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Now as Maelmorda sank down on Sammael, he felt the eternal flame attacking him through the will of the artifact pact Sammael had consented to the terms of. Binding honor pacts were powerful, but the artifact pact Maelmorda had used to bind himself and Sammael to their agreement was far more potent even than a blinding honor agreement. One needed to repeat the terms exactly as spoken and agree with them on a binding agreement, but an artifact pact was intelligent, had the same intelligence as Maelmorda, and it had a will of its own, driven by the will of the arcane master who manipulated the terms, and yet, that will was separate, its own.

It could reject the will of Maelmorda if conditions swayed it to. When Sammael had said 'You, all of you for this is a fair trade,' when Maelmorda asked him if he agreed with his terms, the artifact pact made that a solid 'yes, I agree with your terms.' Artifact pacts were far harder to fool than a binding honor spell and did not tolerate deception through slippery word play. Maelmorda had asked him if he agreed with his terms, and Sammael had said yes, in a round about way. Maelmorda's warm hands met Sammael's chest as he sank back against Gabriel, who coiled him with his arms. The fallen angel also noticed that his master was not well. "Sammael, you are unwell. What goes?" the edge of worry in his voice could not be missed, nor the fact that he spoke quietly to his Lord, for his ears alone. The only time he had ever seen Sammael sick was when he had been struck by some potent spell by an enemy, or Yajmha himself for disobeying him. As Maelmorda was so near to them, he heard Gabriel's asstance nevertheless.

As Maelmorda's hands groped Sammael he leaned into him as his hips rose and fell to pump the demon oh so deep inside of him. "I suppose now is as good a time as ever to explain the entire pact to you. My terms were as such; Pull your legions out of Morashtar under these terms; You vow by law of Acheron to forever leave my world alone, and I pledge in return that if you break me, I shall offer Morashtar to you without contest, to do what you will with, for my release from your control. And even if you cannot break me, I and all my power and all that is mine, with the sole exception of Morashtar will still be yours. Now I bound these terms by an artifact pact, which has intelligence, intelligence equal to my own, and a will of its own. Because its will upholds the pact, it also acts on honor, or against the breaking of it. When you agreed to the terms by saying; 'You, all of you for this is a fair trade' and by claiming me in every other way; the intelligence of the pact made that a resolute yes to the terms, and its will joined with the power of the eternal flame and bound us both to the pact, to itself in other words. Whatever judgment the pact decides to exact, and it is crucial that you understand that it can make decisions; it exacts through the eternal flame, which as you know is more powerful than both of us, than any being in the universe, perhaps with exception of The Abysmal Darkness, but then, even that planet devouring alien may not be a match for the eternal flame. You must be doing harm to one who is of Morashtar, or some part of Morashtar, for you grow ill, my beloved Prince. This I am willing to wager is a warning, for it could as easily obliterate you, or change you into whatsoever it wished to punish you for breaking your end of the pact. It might as easily decide to punish you for breaking a blade of grass as harming one of Morashtar's creatures if the pact decides it loathes you. My advice is that you release Marsol and Wyrvaust at least, and any other prisoners of war out of Morashtar, lest the pact grow angry. The pact also designated a grace period of time for pulling your legions out, for do you not still have legions scattered about Morashtar? If they linger too long, beyond the pact's patience, that too could be the death of you. Our terms permit you to stay in Morashtar, so long as you do not impact it, but not so your legions. Servants? Shall the pact allow them? What the pact will and will not allow is solely for it to determine. Being here is a risk to you; depending on how it decipheres your actions."

Maelmorda rode him hard all the while he defined the details of the pact to him; in an up and down heaving slide which meshed them together, brushed their nipples together, every motion bearing hard down on him to bury, press forcefully, and hold for moments before he pumped him again, sometimes fast, sometime slow and grinding him, in such a way as rubbed his clitt against Sammael's navel. Gabriel's arms meanwhile tightened around Sammael and he glared at Lucifer past his lord's

shoulders, far more hot and bothered now that it was Sammael rocking up against him. Just that near brush of his cock by Sammael's fingertips had made his guts clench violently with need for him. "You tricked him," the infernal hissed maliciously.

Maelmorda met those burning eyes and shook his head. "Trick him? Sammael, you are quite aware that I always seal my pacts with consequences, if not a handful of catches, are you not?"

"But you are only now informing him of the machinations, are you not? Did you so much as mention them beforehand?" Gabriel continued to accuse him of underhanded dealings.

Maelmorda shook his head again and groaned deeply at the feeling of Sammael. "No, I did not mention it. Like I said, I was confident that he would expect it."

"What about trust, did you expect trust?" the angel hissed darkly.

"I expected you to know how I operate, Sammael," Maelmorda said to his master, hating talking over someone as if they were not present. "What is done is done, and cannot be undone, Gabriel, for either of us," he added with finality.

Gabriel was pissed, whatever Maelmorda's explanations. He was exceptionally protective of his Lord, and the pact seemed a damn dangerous one to him. Two threats on Sammael in one night was too much for him to stomach. Sammael and those he could trust would have to keep Acheron on a tight leash to be sure, and disallow anyone who had control issues from visiting their sister world. It all seemed very unfair to him and he hoped Sammael made Maelmorda pay for being so damned clever. His hands ran over Sammael's flesh almost possessively as an instinctive result of feeling so defensive of his master. The kisses he stole from his flesh deep and passionate. Maelmorda then rocked Sammael so firmly against him that his erection was pressed hard between his Prince's ass cheeks. Every heave of Maelmorda's body thereafter against Sammael slid Gabriel's member between those awesomely firm buttocks. His breaths quickened and his body tensed with profound need against him and the groans which escaped him he could no sooner restrain than the lust he felt for Sammael. He also feared that his throbbing shaft would inadvertently be thrust inside of Sammael, for he would surely lose himself in the feel of him and he was not sure Sammael would appreciate such a personal invasion from his most loyal consort, even if was incidental. Gabriel had many doubts in concerns to how intimate he could be with Sammael. He was his servant, brother, friend, powerful though he was; and despite how many Gabriel himself commanded, he knew it was his place to be small in Sammael's shadow.

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Belorian laughed blithely in the face of Sammael's threats. "What can you do that has not already been done to me, Sammael? I have been tortured in every cunning and imaginative way possible, raped by all kinds, including Mordenta. I have been mentally bombarded with torments most would shatter into a thousand pieces to endure, been forced to watch the most horrible deaths and suffering of those I loved. Am I filled with hate? Hardly. Has my soul been tarnished? Perhaps; but not in any way which threatens to blacken my soul. I have been to the heart of Acheron and survived it with my soul unscathed. What has injured my soul has nothing to do

with Acheron." Not many could claim that. Belorian was strong of mind without a doubt. Love is what had nearly made him fall. Selena had broken his will and it had taken him a very long time to recover. A part of him never would recover. "What has not killed me has only made me stronger. Still, despite our canyon of differences, I would prefer you and I could call a truce between us, Sammael. We need not be enemies," He grinned, and it was as fearless and charming as it was cavalier. This was a creature that did not scare easily. That angry roar made him wince slightly and his brows knit however as his ear drums pounded from the vibration of it. Belorian had sensitive hearing. "Feel better, Lord Sammael?" he asked jokingly with a wry smile.

When Lilith said that another bastard of his had crawled out of the cracks, his pale blue eyes locked on the female Lilith's eyes had caught. His hand swept back to scratch at the back of his neck beneath his curling locks of strawberry blonde hair. It was not like he had slews of bastards, he thought. There was Niall, Maladin did not count, he was out of Selena, his wife, and there was Melisseant. They were not Nephelim exactly though, but their Dark Star equivalent. They were called Mogdim, and shared a lot in common with Nephelim. They were rare because they could only be born of the Anduain or the Mogduain, of which only one of each existed, so of course they were mistaken for Nephelim. The Dark Star were a complicated race. Because Arilwen was born of Belorian, she shared his way of death, imprisonment without a window to the outside world, fresh air and sunshine. That was something he knew and did not think about in present company. He watched her and her mate carefully as they approached Sammael, and it was clear the two of them were in deep trouble with the Prince of Demons and Acheron. He was not sure what he felt gazing at her, or when she gazed back at him, clearly confused. Seeing her; he remembered her mother. The French beauty had cured him of his loneliness for one night and in return he gave her a child. She was unable to have children and longed for a daughter. He had never expected to meet up with his alienated daughter.

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Arilwen's refusal to abandon him again tugged hard at his heart and he nearly broke down in tears but managed to hold it all inside, lashing his emotions down to keep them from spilling off his ship of sanity into the storm battered seas of his mind. When Sammael told Wyrvaust of what he had contemplated doing with Arilwen and Anwarr, every muscle in his body tensed and he visibly paled with dread, but said nothing. He had no idea what he would demand of Marsol to pardon their terrible crime of trespassing in Kassim's territory to aid war battered people. Sammael made it very hard to believe that there was anything but evil in him, but Wyrvaust clung to that thin thread of hope nonetheless. He had to or lose his mind completely, and if that happened, he would no longer possess the ability to freeze his impulses towards violence and madness. He felt like all the oxygen had been sucked out of him to make a vacuum in his lungs and very soul. Rage relented to emptiness, for rage would only endanger those he loved. He went vacant in his eyes and expression, and when the Desert Wind told the Raven and his wife to go and mingle, Wyrvaust nodded with dazed vacancy and rose, helping his shaken and exhausted wife to her feet.

Belorian watched them as they meandered across the room, as far from the sinful goings ons as possible. Wyvaust picked Anwarr up on the way, goodies and all, and shielded all the graphic things going on around him with his wings, so he could see

none of it. This was no place for his son to be, and he wished to take him and Arilwen as far away from it all as possible. The things Sammael had conveyed as to what he had considered doing had shaken Wyrvaust to the core of his being. Arilwen in Gabriel's hands? Anwarr in Mekkor's hands? He could not bear to think of either scenario, it was just too painful and terrifying, particularly the notion of Anwarr in Mekkor's clutches. Unspeakable thoughts pounded his mind when that notion had been conveyed. Cradling Anwarr in one arm, and hugging Arilwen protectively tight with the other, he strode to the most isolated area of the immense chamber he could find. The demon was shutting down on so many levels as a last ditch effort at protecting his family. He certainly could not trust himself at the moment. Mingle, Sammael said...How could one as broken as Wyrvaust do that? He would have to force himself to, is how.

"Belorian," he called to the Anduain. "Doesn't the bird of a different feather think it about time he introduced himself to the Raven's wife?"

Belorian had considered walking over and talking to them of his own accord but felt he might further endanger them if he should. He was not exactly on Sammael's good side was he? Still, when Sammael waved him away, distracted by Maelmorda, Belorian made his way at length to the lovely quarter of that chamber the couple and their son occupied. When Belorian walked over to greet the two, Sarku trailed after him. Everyone else was...err...occupied with their carnal dispositions, even the Golden Lady. Sarku was uncomfortable with such open displays of sex.

Wyrvaust was explaining to Anwarr that the way these people shared their bodies was the wrong way. It was hard to explain, because Anwarr was sharp. "They look happy and like it makesem feel good," he said. Their son's speech had improved remarkably fast. "Some do share their bodies only for pleasure," Wyrvaust told him. "But it is an empty pleasure. Love makes it mean something and makes the pleasure even greater." By the time Belorian arrived Wyrvaust had urged his son to get into the water and play, to keep him occupied, always standing in such a way as to block his view of the orgy. Then Wyrvaust caught sight of Marsol by another pool, wet to the bone; he snatched Anwarr out of the pool again. It did not take a genius to figure out that Marsol had arisen from one of the pools. Even those placid pools of water might have perils it seemed. One of the pools might have as easily swallowed Anwarr II up as another had delivered the Anwarr he was named after from those hidden depths. His eyes widened as they lit on Marsol who supported a half unconscious Cirgoth who leaned heavily on him. How long had he been standing there? The Desert Raven again shielded his son's eyes as Marsol killed the old demon. Anwarr tried to peer over and under his huge wings though as he heard that strange pop, cracking and squishy sounds, curious about what was making those sounds. He smelled the blood too. "Whatsthat?" he said. He still mixed words together.

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Oh Mephisto proved himself to be a very able lover for Lilith. His lusts were as fierce as his skill to induce pleasure was limitless. He was a creative and adventurous lover as well. When she disrobed and sank herself down on his lap, he laughed, his own armor, clothes, that long sword that was ever present at his side, all dissolving until every firm, rippling muscle of his beautiful mocha and cream body was exposed. "I will do my best not to disappoint you, my sexy Matriarch. Those who do not appreciate you are fools, you know, not worth the effort of scoffing at." That was enough talk for Mephistopheles. His hands lifted her by her

hips and he sank his immense member inside of her, a dragon's cock, and nursed hungrily on her breasts as he drove himself inside of her from beneath, and thrashed her with fingers trained to make the body collapse in bliss. Lilith of course could take any amount of pleasure, and he meant to test that rumor to its limits. The dragon shapeshifter in that handsome guise would not be disappointing Lilith.

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Now while Maelmorda was screwing Sammael he was also with his wife. When she relented to stay with him he tangled inside and bowed his head to rest his brow against her chest's upper sternum, his thick lashes veiling his eyes. His arms gradually wrapped her as she embraced him and tugged him oh so close. Some echo of Sammael's feelings reached feelings he himself buried and had tried to ignore on an emotional level and a part of him wished very much that she had refused to share him with anyone, rejected him flat rather than share him. His breaths deepened as an unexpected feeling of resentment reared its ugly head inside of him. "So you can share me..." he whispered every so quietly, his tone unreadable but not so the wounded look in his sky-blue flecked eyes of exquisite jade, albeit his hair veiled his face bowed as it was. Though he had arranged for Sarku to be there for her if she needed, even intimately if he felt he could love her, would he have actually gone through with it? Allowed it? Only if there was no hope of being with her for a very, very long time would he permit it. Ages could pass for him like days for others, while ages of separation were an end for most. His eyes shut as she lifted his chin and sealed his lips with the sweetest kiss, the kind which made one's heart cave in on itself. When he finally opened his eyes on her it was with gravity, his tongue still curling with hers. Was it his not his due to suffer as he made her suffer? He asked himself. He was chaotic as one could get, and was not chaos the greatest judge of what was fair? He would not confide what he felt and thought to her. So it hurt him that she could bear to share him on some level. Pay back was a bitch. His kiss deepened and his arms gathered her up even more tightly. He backed her towards a large, heavy mattress laid out on the floor Arabian style some yards off to the right of Sammael. It was no accident that it had manifested itself in easy sight of the Desert Wind. He carried her down to the mattress and tangled himself up with her. He was not about to expose her flesh to that crowd however. If they were alone with Sammael he would have, but he was the one exception, he was Sammael's. Maelmorda was not about to phuck his wife in mixed company. He respected her too much. It was different with Sammael, he liked that sort of thing, wanted everyone to know Maelmorda was his and how. No, instead, Maelmorda just lie with his wife, kissed and caressed her. Lucifer had a great deal of control when he wanted to. What Galaxy did not know was that he had considered throwing her down and ravishing her so violently that it could only be called rape. That was the disappointed side of him, the devil on his shoulder which of course the devil lived with all of the time. The angel which occasioned to show up and perch on the other shoulder, and which happened along a lot more frequently that it used to, owned him this time. He listened to the more rational voice; the one that said he deserved what he dished out. He and Galaxy had disappointed each other, it was that simple. Despite this battle between evil and logic being waged inside of him, he did not betray any of it for longer than that brief moment when his dark waves of hair had concealed his face and he had pointed out that she could share him vocally. Maelmorda was not always forthcoming with his feelings, even with his wife. He was too used to pretending that nothing could phase him. Normally it was even true. Galaxy was the exception however, and it seemed Sammael was turning out

to be an exception as well. In how many ways would he prove the exception though? Time alone could tell. Galaxy knew Maelmorda though, could read him like few others could. She knew he was bothered by the fact that she was willing to go halves with him, by those subtle signs and quiet admission. When she finally implored him to tell her the truth of what he was feeling his eyes locked on her with a rather alarming smolder. "Sometimes it is better to let the truth lie where the devil is concerned, Galaxy. But have it as you will. The truth is, that in such circumstances as these, we are forced to disappoint one another, and there is nothing to be done about it. We can either accept it, or let it overpower us. I am sure you were just as tempted to answer to the voice of havoc as I, but we both know it shall resolve nothing." Did he really need to say more? He would not tell her how close he came to raping her instead of showing her his loving and considerate affections.

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Someone caught his eye and his attention meandered in Mernaph's direction for a moment. Oh my, Mernaph was stripping Belorian naked with his eyes, not really, he could have, but it certainly looked like he wanted to, and Maelmorda was not the only one who noticed. Malcomb was pissed off. Belorian had been Mernaph's favorite thrall beneath his mate Malcomb and he was the one angel the demon had not quite gotten over kicking to the curb. With a surprising explosion of jealous strength, Malcomb shoved Mernaph off of him, howling in pain as Mernaph's twin masses were ripped from him. When the shadowflame demon tried to grab his mate, the slippery little devil ducked away from him slippery as you please and stalked some distance from him to glower at him. When Mernaph swiveled around Malcomb speared a finger at Belorian. "You want him, well there he is. Have at him!" he fumed. Mernaph stepped towards him, and for every stride he advanced, Malcomb retreated a pace, keeping the gap between them steady. Normally Mernaph would have consoled him, made him understand that yes, he appreciated Belorian's form, but had no intentions of touching him. That was what mattered, right? But in company of some of Acheron's best, he was not about to smooch Malcomb's ass. It always turned Mernaph on when Malcomb got jealous. Mernaph laughed as he stepped towards Malcomb and he backed up another step. "Shall I wipe that envy away with delicious agony, Malcomb? Come back to me and get over it, or I shall rid you of that little green monster the hard way." He grinned.

Malcomb ground his teeth then sneered. "You have to catch me first, my obsession," he had Mernaph know. The challenge was set; hence a determined chase ensued, with the swifter Malcomb as the prey, and the stronger Mernaph as the hunter. It did not surprise Belorian how many were on Mernaph's side and tried to trip or slow the naked Acerbus Seraphim to give Mernaph the advantage. Malcomb was damn fast and nimble and held his own amazingly well, despite the obstacles stacking against him. Their little lovers quarrel had livened up the party. Bets started going around on who would tire of the chase and give up first, or how long it would take Mernaph to catch him.

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Gala's hands tangled in Maelmorda's hair as he bowed his head with his brow against her chest, just over the spot where her neckline dipped to its lowest point. She felt her breath freeze in her chest a moment as she just barely caught his whispered words. She shook her head, finding herself blinking back tears again.

Hell, she was turning into a bloody damn fountain tonight. She'd have no tears left if she kept the waterworks up. "Maelmorda", she murmured, her voice cracking just slightly as she fought to keep it steady. "I don't want to share you. It's the last thing I've ever wanted. But I can't see any other choice...I'd rather lose half of you than all of you, you know? I'll hate every moment of sharing you...you're the one thing I would like to secret away, all for myself." She nuzzled her face against the softness of his hair. "You must know that if I had my wish, it would be just the two of us. Forever. I've never wanted anything more than you." She was struggling to find the right words to express herself. She felt like she was floundering...she just didn't want that hurt look in his eyes anymore...it was the last look she had ever expected to see there. "I'm just...trying to be mature about this...I have to grow up sometime, don't I? You have needs I cannot meet. I wish I could. I wish I could be everything you ever needed. How could I deny you those needs being met?" She shook her head again. "I'm being utterly selfish in this, as well, and I can't even help it...I can't help but share you, because I can't bear giving you up to him." She left it at that, and tilted his chin up with her fingers to catch his lips in that sweet kiss. When the kiss deepened, her arms wound themselves around his neck. She appreciated that he made no effort to unclot her as they lay there on the mattress. He knew her well, likely knew that although she'd go along with it, she would never be comfortable enough to let go of her self consciousness. Her hands slid over his back as he touched and caressed her, sweet little sighs escaping her between kisses and against his lips. If she had known that he had been thinking of raping her, it would have frightened her. The scars that would have caused emotionally would have been hard to make fade. When he finally admitted his disappointment, she allowed the thought of a pointed 'How do YOU like it?!' to cross her mind for only a moment before letting it go. She hated that she had disappointed him. She knew it hurt. She'd been disappointed as well, tonight. She had allowed herself, as she had said to Sarku what felt like ages ago from this moment, to get her hopes up. She sighed and pressed a kiss to his bare shoulder. "Maelmorda, I am so sorry I disappointed you." She felt like expanding on that, but she left it. It was there in her eyes, as she met his gaze. Her own hurt, the kind of sad bewilderment at her own reasons for the choice she had made. She had had such a hard time deciding...to her, walking out, choosing to leave, would have been so final. Despite how hurt she felt, despite how sometimes she felt like hiding away from it all, she loved him deeply, couldn't help loving him. Another little sigh, and she leaned to brush her lips along his jaw, until she was delivering the lightest little nibble to his earlobe. "I love you, Maelmorda." And that little whisper was just for him, far too low for anyone else to hear. "I'll love you forever. Please don't forget that." Part of her did have that concern...that maybe she'd be forgotten about, with Sammael in the picture. There was another reason she couldn't leave. She didn't want to vacate that part of Maelmorda's heart and make room for Sammael to move in. At least, that was how she saw it. There truly was a part of her that was amazingly possessive, and while she may not show it often, it made itself known in other little ways. Like the hand that rested against the small of Maelmorda's back, fingers all splayed. Something in the way that it was positioned just screamed mine.

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Arilwen felt hazy and exhausted, but she was clearly aware of how proud of her husband she was at that very moment. Wyrvaust managed to swallow his ranting and anger as a very frustrated Sammael spilled hints of what he had planned on doing to his family. She had expected him to start screaming and clinging to the ceiling



like an angry animal. In return, her arms tightened around his midsection as she lay in his arms, her eyes closed. It was good that she had no clue who Mekkorr was... or roles would have been reversed. The Swan may have leapt up with what little energy she could find and tried to choke Sammael. Obviously, that would have ended very badly, but had she known Mekkorr, the fear of losing her son to him would have gotten the best of her common sense. The very notion of being handed over to anyone but her husband made her stomach churn thickly... especially because it was Gabrian. He had not been cruel to her, but he had locked them up in the FIRST place! Once again, ignorance was the best route. Had they been kept in their original cell she would have eventually had to encounter Gabrian anyway... but in carrying out orders of rape and torture.

...Mingle? Had the Desert Wind told them to go and MINGLE? Arilwen felt her chest twist tightly and she squeezed her eyes shut. Deal with it another day. Until then they were stuck here... amongst the debauchery and sin. The angel had no drive to argue and she rose with the help of her tense husband, her knees locking into place to hold her up as her arms rounded Wyrvaust's waist. She was thankful that her husband scooped a sticky Anwarr up and wrapped him to shield his young eyes from their surroundings, but that did not stop the little magpie's questions. The small group moved to one of the furthest pools where Arilwen would settle down with her back against the nearby wall, thankful to be out from under the immediate eye of Sammael, but uncomfortable as she heard her name mentioned by a naked woman climbing into the lap of a quickly naked man. Belorian. She had recently heard that name... but where? She tried wracking her fuzzy brain and even shifted her violet eyes towards the man to try and place him but she was certain she had never seen him before. Moving her gaze away, she met a moment of peace as she smiled tiredly, watching her husband slip Anwarr into the water after shedding him of his clothing. The sticky child was soon cleaned and splashing excitedly around, but something soon caused Wyrvaust to kneel and snatch him from the water as quickly as he had entered. She soon realized that it was Marsol... carrying Cirgoth in his arms. He was going to be angry. Sammael was angry. Everyone here was crazy. Motioning for Wyrvaust to bring their son to her, she slid down to lie on her side, facing the wall, and parted her robes to take her slippery, nude nymph of a son against her skin. Wrapping him closely in the folds of her robe, she would be able to block his view and coax him to finally stop wiggling and begin to feed. This, in turn, allowed her to relax and the angel was soon dozing off, curled up around the form of her damp, drowsy son.

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Lilith had horrible chemistry with some and delicious chemistry with others. Mestipho was definitely compatible with her insatiable sexuality. The dark mistress grinned as he complimented her, his fingers curling against the soft curve of her hips to lift her and pull her down onto him, causing her to lock up in pleasure. What followed was probably the most delicious pony ride that the old dragon had ever received. Lilith had endless energy it seemed and they fell into a battle of trying to exhaust the other first. All of this while Mernaph and Malcomb launched into their OWN challenge. Lilith dug her claws into Mephisto as she rode him faster and faster, leaning in to growl some of the raunchiest dirty talk into his ear. Eventually, Lilith was finding herself thrown over a nearby food table, trays clattering to the floor as the dragon plunged into her from behind, her front slick with food as Mephisto's fingers locked into her hair, dragging her back into a vicious arch. Of course, not to be outdone, Lilith kept growling out those taunts

and teasing to him, her hand swinging back to lock her own fingers into his ass cheek, dragging him in more deeply. At least she would be tasty to lick clean afterwards, as she was covered in food! The two iron wills clashed and went at it like the most rabid of animals and Lilith remembered at some point throwing in her bet that Mernaph would win the chase. The trick was that Malcomb wanted to be caught eventually, so he had a better chance of letting himself be caught. No matter when this party ended... when Lilith finally returned home... it would be a strange night for her. After being brutally handled and threatened by the only one that could seize her heart, she would find Mascen, tempted to take her anger out on him as he DID look exactly like Maelmorda. But something strange would happen that would throw Mascen off. For the first time ever, Lilith would collapse into his arms and dissolve into tears, crying in front of someone and clinging to him until she fell asleep.

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### The Way Things Change

Seems Lilith nor Malcomb would be alone in their brooding and heated jealousy. Sammael would join them all too swiftly when the truth behind the sudden terrible bout of illness that had befallen him was revealed by a very clever Morning Star. The truth about this artifact pact sealing both their fates turned his mood dangerously. Come hell or high water the eternal flame was not something one could laugh in the face of; sort of how Belorian did now in mixed company. Not even batting an eyelash at danger. So not only had Eoghan made it known that he would kill him but Maelmorda on top of that brought to Gabriel and his, and whoever the hell else was listening, that this artifact pact could and would also kill him if he so much as pissed in it's wheaties. Hell it kind of seemed like if he moved sideways he would die from someone or something being mad at him, or something like that. For one he was angry that he had actually let himself do that. Yes he had trusted Maelmorda. That their agreement had been made solid as far as standards and Acheron was concerned. That neither one of them would break their end of the bargain because let's face it folks, Sammael was pretty goddamn excited about having the Morning Star. If not all to himself at the moment maybe in time he would. Before Maelmorda had come to his sinful little oasis in the desert he would have taken all of what he said with a little perturbed look but that would have been all. He would have even laughed along with Belorian and then stopped to give the man a cheeky grin. He would have done a lot of things before the Morning Star came to him with the intent of making peace for the world and instead ended up making something else entirely. "No I do not feel better, and just for the record I was going to introduce your daughter while you were both going at it but perhaps that prospect is ruined now. Congratulations on letting the cat out of the bag, Lilith," he said to Belorian and then Lilith as he shot a stern but teasing look across the room where Mephisto had her bent in such a way that it could make anyone's crotch throb with want. Hence he waved Belorian away to do whatever it is he wanted to at a party like this; which wouldn't be a whole hell of a lot if he wasn't screwing someone.

Those black eyes would begin darkening as Gabriel accused Maelmorda of not being frank with his Lord, to which of course Maelmorda voiced how he shouldn't have to be. He shouldn't have to spell out every little detail for the Desert Wind because they were after all big boys and they'd grown up together, so they should know by

now how the other one thinks. Even so Gabriel would now and forever rise to the occasion never to disappoint with the scary way he was right about things. Sammael had indeed trusted the Morning Star would be just that, himself. He knew it wouldn't be so cut and dry and that some kind of imminent doom would be put into the works against him. No matter how it was worded. But he had also had trust in his maker that the Morning Star would just take him for his word, because he too, had taken his maker at his word. It actually never occurred to him to even go where Maelmorda had with the whole artifact pact to exact vengeance in the case of one of them not honoring their agreement. It just hadn't. That wasn't like him though. Not to expect the absolute worse case scenario. Had he mistook the time they had shared earlier as something that was a first for the both of them? That it had shed the Maelmorda in a different light? That perhaps he had in turn seen a side of Sammael that possibly only Gabriel knew of, at best? Now he wasn't one to cry over spilled milk. But it hurt him just the same. It hurt him badly to be quite honest although outwardly the only visible sign that he was miffed by what Maelmorda said, was the way his eyes lost all that sex-driven excitement; though that tiny fraction of him that felt the odd and unwanted pain, the rest of him laughed at. It was a sort of 'that's-what-I-get' kind of sensation, which did not sit well at all in him. So to let all that, whatever the hell those feelings were, stay unknown; he buried them right down to the place where all the rest of the unknown tidbits of him were. Right down to his very center, his core where maybe with any luck and a little hope his true self lied in wait of discovery.

That burning look in his eyes evaporated to be replaced by that all too familiar empty grin he gave to the Morning Star. Whatever was left of those forces of his that were still stationed around Morashtar were given the barked orders by their commanders and higher ranks to pack it up and go home. Home of course was Acheron, even though a lot of them dwelled in this world between Heaven and Hell. Short work would be made of doing what he was told, and yes Maelmorda was still telling him what he can and cannot do. In a far fetched and close to home manner. Funny about that, wasn't Maelmorda supposed to be the one being bossed around here? Very humorous some would find that. Maybe Sammael would? Maybe he wouldn't. Speaking of things not being funny he placed a hand over Maelmorda's belly with his fingers feeling his flesh lightly. Whatever was Satan looking for?

"It's alright, Gabriel," he grunted, now feeling that thick inhuman beautiful hardness against his ass now as well as that tasty clit over his navel. It was the worst kind of tease they were doing to each other, these three. With Gabriel being so goddamn delicious and his member firmly pressed to his ass. Maelmorda's clit making his navel want to turn into a mouth full of teeth and bite the ever loving shit out of him, no pleasure included. Very close Gabriel was to slipping and whether by accident or on purpose invading spaces within Sammael's body he did not know the feel of. Of the pleasure Maelmorda was taking and giving to him even as they spoke. Why had he not been as lusty with Gabriel as he had been, was still, with Maelmorda? Because Gabriel knew how Sammael was. He knew better than anyone just who Satan screwed and why. But wouldn't Gabe be different? And what was so bad about that anyways. What's a little carnal pleasure between a demon or two, or six? And it would appear six was the magic number tonight. His left hand moved its way up the front of the Morning Star's chest, pinching those bitable nipples on the way, where his maker's chin would be held for a moment gently in the palm of his hand. His fingers rubbing gently over the flesh of his cheek before his grip abruptly became firm. Not hurtful, just firm. It made Maelmorda's lips make fish lips for a split second before his face was pulled forward to that Sammael licked

his lower lip and his chin. "It's quite alright Gabe, because you see," he said as his fingers begun to dig ever so slightly into the sides of Maelmorda's face, perhaps to cause only a mild discomfort and nothing more. "He knows how I operate too." Then suddenly he shoved him perhaps the exact same way he had shoved Lilith away, cold and extremely forcefully, to the ground. "Maelmorda, choose six out of all these handsome and gorgeous guests of mine that are gathered here in this room. So I can watch you screw them till they have cum oozing out of their ears. You can choose anyone you desire, except Gabrian and Galaxy. Unless the Golden Goddess would like to participate then that would be fine naturally. Don't try and argue about Gabe's exclusion. He'll be busy with other things."

Now that might unnerve some if not most of those gathered within the room full of varying sized pools. Touch the Morning Star? Maelmorda having his way with whomever he pleased so that Sammael could watch? Wait better yet Maelmorda having his way with six people at one time? Was that even phucking possible?! Honestly the party was becoming more perverted by the second. But who if anyone would the Morning Star choose, if he didn't get so angry with Sammael as to refuse this obvious dismissal of the shuddering sex they had just been having. Who indeed? Sammael still felt like dog shit from the blasted pact filling him with its sickness. Had Marsol not healed yet? Or was the desert creature's backside boiling off or some such ghastly thing from the frost he had been attacked with? He'd have to check that out later. Luckily he had pushed Maelmorda away when he had. Cause a few more seconds of feeling him riding him the way he did with those bitable narrow little hips and he would have orgasmed violently. With that being said to the Morning Star he would settle back against Gabrian with his hands coming to rest on the infernal's knees. He kneaded at his skin as he got more than just a little comfortable in his best and most obsessively lorded over Progeny's lap. Letting Gabrian's member press even more against that firm ass and snuggle almost painfully between those cheeks as Satan shifted around, unable to get comfortable for too long. Or was he just teasing Gabe again and merely wanted him to make a mess all over them?

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Yes, the Morning Star's belly was swelling again with the second and third child Sammael had impregnated him with, twin sons Sammael would sense. When Sammael's hand covered his belly, Maelmorda's hand covered his and he smiled a little, just because it pleased Sammael so much for him to have his children. He was trying to get over the humiliating aspects of it and he wanted Sammael to be content, even happy if that was possible. Such was love. The twins would be born quickly as well, but not quite as rapidly as Arasgal. These would be born three hours after conception instead of one, unless Sammael slowed their rate of growth. It was still an alarming rate of growth, but...it was an improvement Maelmorda would appreciate. Arasgal would always be the alpha, the strongest of his siblings. The twins were a complex mix of Sammael and Maelmorda which would be impressive devils by any standards. A daughter would come next if Sammael knocked Maelmorda up again.

The form he had split off was not with child. Maelmorda would not dare risk Sammael's children with such an experiment as that. What would have happened if he had, was that twins would have become quadruplets and their capabilities would have been split four ways. In which case Maelmorda would have been unable to bind himself together again until the twins were born. Maelmorda had no way of knowing this because he had never tried it before and was not about to start doing so now.

However deeply Sammael buried the fact that Maelmorda had wounded him, the Morning Star was not fooled as a result of those signs...the sudden loss of desire for him, the hollowed out expression, the way he addressed Gabriel. "It is not alright, Sammael, it is just done," the Morning Star hissed. Maelmorda felt...treacherous guilt. When he had bound their pact as he had; he had not anticipated the love factor, the potency of it, the way it would play on him as it had imbibed him even more deeply in chaos with Galaxy. He did love Sammael, as much as he did Galaxy, and when he acknowledged that he had hurt Sammael, he felt wounded himself. That hollow look was met with a pale expression from Maelmorda and his eyes smoldered with how deeply he had wounded himself with the pact when Sammael gripped his face in his palm to squeeze and pucker out his sensuous lips. Emotional matters often dawned on Maelmorda too late. It was habit, not letting himself feel anything and cutting himself off from emotional consequences, which was exactly what he had done when he had first come to Sammael with the pact. When Sammael shoved him viciously on the floor and commanded him to choose six individuals to screw blind, Sammael surely knew immediately that Maelmorda was not about to obey him. Maelmorda hit the floor and rolled over to land with a harsh thud on his ass and the moment he shoved himself somewhat straight he glared at Sammael with fierce defiance.

"I shall never willingly phuck anyone again but you and Galaxy, Sammael. I neither need nor want for anyone else. Do you think when I made that pact that I even once considered that I might fall in love with you? Oh I know how you work, and you know how I work, but neither of us counted on how we work in love, did we? I sure as phuck did not figure that into a damn thing, or how I would quantify my place with you. Do you think my love is so easily granted? Oh, I loved you always as a brother, a son, a friend, even a lover, but I never thought it possible that I would ever find that one other soul mate I could fall in love with." His temper rose in his eyes like a storm and in his muscles like a infernal rage he could barely restrain. "It was a safeguard..." that he stated hollowly. "Because I trust no one!" he howled anon furiously. His breaths quickened for a moment then calmed. "I have never been able to trust anyone but Galaxy...it was only after the fact that I began to realize that I might be able to trust you. If I did not love you I would not feel like a phucking traitor when I did nothing to betray you! I did as I always have, I sealed an agreement. I always do...always have. I have never extended my trust to anyone without a catch. I even tested Galaxy's faith, oh how cruelly I tested it, and why? Because my trust is so hard to give. She alone has never disappointed my trust, Sammael. Do as you will, call a thousand demons to rape me, neither they nor you shall have the satisfaction of seeing me respond to them, be it agony or ecstasy they induce. You and my wife alone can stir anything in me." That last he snarled for the gravity of the emotion behind it; hence he crossed his arms in a taut fold against his naked chest and sat with perfect prideful insolence.

His gaze then drifted off into a deep hiatus to stare off between all the wary faces gazing at him and Sammael. Maelmorda's other self retreated from Galaxy. First he kissed her deeply and whispered to her. "I love you, never doubt that." Hence his alternate id walked over to the Maelmorda sitting on the floor and stooped down to fuse with him out of respect to Sammael's one wish for who he did not want him touching. He did not want Sammael seeing her as a threat. Indeed, he saw no reason for him to, but he understood jealousy well enough. Envy in a demon as powerful as Sammael was a perilous thing, and he had to guard against it as well

as he could. Evidently, Sammael had not appreciated him splitting himself in two either. The moment Maelmorda withdrew from Galaxy, Sarku went to keep her company and lend her his support, as a devoted friend and a servant she refused to have as a vassal.

The air felt charged with danger to the guests, though they could not place what the threat was exactly, beyond being caught between two god types and their tempers. Emotions were a dangerous thing, particularly when they played havoc on powerful immortals. Some of them were clearly disappointed when Maelmorda refused to screw any of them willingly. Mernaph had secretly hoped Lucifer would choose him, as did Lilith, Belial, and most of the others there, but none as fiercely as those first three. Such a look then came over Maelmorda's expression...a deeply contemplative if not determined look which made his eyes shine. 'I could break the pact...take the heat...' he thought to himself. Such a suicidal notion of being the one to break the pact was a direct result of regretting having made the pact in the first place. He had only left one avenue for himself to break the pact. Maelmorda was clever that way, well, in countless ways, but at the moment, clever had been shoved aside by passion and love. His one path to breaking the pact quickly was to walk out on Sammael, refuse him anything he had offered to him. Of course, the judgment of the flame and pact would have its way with the Morning Star, and he would not be able to protect Morashtar from Sammael would he? He might be dead...or worse. At times, Maelmorda just had to depend on those under him to take care of matters. If he was unable to protect Morashtar, those he commanded would just have to do it for him. When Maelmorda finally lifted his eyes on Sammael again, the gravity of resignation painted on his face, weighing on his posture, and making dull his eyes might have been telling to Sammael of exactly what the Morning Star was thinking. "The last time anyone made me feel such regret as this led me to very dark places, Sammael." Maelmorda's hand swept up towards his face and a pair of fingers brushed delicately over his lips, a slight tremble evident in those slender index and middle fingers. "I just...cannot feel my way to where this remorse you have made it possible for me to feel shall lead me...I...I was actually considering breaking the pact if that is your wish, My Prince."

"Maelmorda, no!" Belorian cried, and surely Marsol was as shocked as the Anduain was. "The pact was wise! It protects all of those who serve you of their own free will! It protects those who cannot protect themselves from Sammael! He has no business meddling with affairs on Morashtar! You should not trust him! How can you? He has not earned your trust!" He was exasperated by Maelmorda's offer to Sammael.

Maelmorda's eyes cut on Belorian. "I will not warn you again to stay out of our affairs, Belorian. Do you know why I could never trust you?" Belorian shook his head, eyes thinned. "Because you could never trust me," he sneered. That comment shut Belorian up far more efficiently than his threat.

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Now by this time Mephisto and Lilith were on a huge lounge which Mephisto had carried Lilith astride his lap to, and laid her down to take the dominant position. She was so wild, her body begging for as much pain as his massive erection could give her, and where he had orgasmed twice, she had not orgasmed at all. He loved her almost sweetly as he pressed inside of her to bury his entire length and girth in her depths, pumping and stirring while he thrashed her with exquisite expertise. His stormy grey eyes penetrated her dark eyes and he kissed her with blissful

passion then parted his lips to speak softly to her. "What is wrong, Lilith? Why do you punish yourself with this body which so desires to grant you pleasure?" Shock and agony overcame his face as Lilith heaved upward to drive a massive cock inside of his ass to shut him up. Before Mephisto knew it he was on his back and being ravished by pure angry sex. He let her...Pain came and it went. If she needed him to take something out on, he was willing to be her sexual punching bag. He loved her as his Matriarch.

When Lilith did make it home at length into Mascen's arms, the devil's son would hold her as dearly as one who truly loved her. He was her second husband, and he did believe his love for her was true with all his heart. He wanted only to please her, reassure her, and make her happy, and would go to any lengths to do just do that.

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Cirgoth could barely stand, but he could stand albeit bent, with Marsol's assistance. His hazy eyes peered through his tangled auburn hair and beneath a brow where his head hung over at the decadence going on around them. He backed up two steps towards that pool they had emerged from instinctively, as if wanting to retreat, but found himself hard hung in Marsol's powerful arms. It seemed to Cirgoth that the evil Marsol had warned him of was bitch slapping him in the face now. The things he was hearing and seeing were making his head pound...It was all so surreal, the watery tunnel, the bizarre orchestra of children...the sex, the braziers and torches and their reflection in those pools...those who clearly did not belong in the muster, Wyrvaust and Arilwen simply trying to survive the experience with other, Sarku just waiting for whatever outcome...all of it like some pretzel nightmare. He dropped to his knees to hold his head, his face covered by his palms as Marsol released him momentarily to kill the old demon who had iced him. When Marsol gathered him back in his arms again he clung to him. It began to sink in that he did not belong there...not even his voice of reason belonged there. "I want to go home with you," he sobbed quietly against Marsol's neck. "Oh, what can be done to see us all home safe with you?"

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Wyrvaust looked as if he was about to fall apart at any given moment. He forgot about Belorian very quickly and seated himself by his wife's side when she sat down to nurse Anwarr. At the moment Wyrvaust felt he could live with that bond of feeding lasting forever between mother and son rather than seeing them parted for a moment. His eyes drifted between those three he loved; his wife, son and Marsol; and Maelmorda and Sammael. Things were spoken that made his heart sink even deeper into that sea that was turning into salt as the hope ran out of it. Madness...it was a madhouse truly. Wyrvaust had only been this terrified once in his life...when Mekkor had kept him his sexual prisoner for six years of his young life. Wyrvaust was in shock is what it was, and it showed the way his forsaken eyes followed those few voices which could seize his attention at all. Little by little he curled limbs and wings around Arilwen and Anwarr, and more and more his gaze followed Marsol with a desperate longing to flee this place with him, his angel lover, his wife and son. The very need to escape was so intense that tears dribbled from his eyes now and again, and at length his mental voice subconsciously reached out to the master he loved and pined for in the wrong way. "Can these two birds, the dragon and this horned winged thing flee together and get away with it? Or shall the Raven flap its

wings so the other winged things can fly away?" He spoke of sacrificing himself to be a distraction. He did not feel worthy of them at the moment.

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Cirgoth caught his mental voice as well, and he was sure Sammael had too. With a determined glint in his eye, he called out to Sammael, his voice finding its strength in his love for Marsol through a telepathic path. He did not want to offend Sammael by addressing him with private matters publicly. ~"Lord Desert Wind, please allow us to go home. We would be happy to come back and see you in a more private setting. These sorts of parties are not appreciated by everyone, certainly not Wryvaust and Arilwen, who must be mortified at their child witnessing all these adult perversions. There are things I wish to speak to you of, but they are matters of friendship, and this is just not the time for it. You have my word, that we shall meet willingly with you again, if you will just let us leave now, please, My Lord."

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Gabrian in the meantime comforted his master with doting affection; not sure what to think of the Morning Star's confessions of remorse. He was aware that the devil did not bear guilt at all well, however, much as he hardly ever let the emotion get a piece of him. He recalled the last time remorse got its hooks into him. It had made him rather insane, in a dangerous sort of way, awakened the evil in him one might say. It seemed to be having the opposite affect this time, however. The infernal one groaned involuntarily as Sammael teased him with those shifts of his body which rubbed his taut cheeks against his pulsating rod. The need for his master was great but he restrained himself from letting his member 'slip' into that rigid pleat which seemed to taunt the angel to invade him. A hissing breath pursed his lips and his fingers dug into Sammael's hips as he shoved backwards and he felt his head pressing against that imploring pucker. Closing his eyes, he pressed his warm cheek against Sammael's back and just breathed in his scent and the feel of him against himself like a breath of life. "My Lord," he whispered quietly. "My desire for you is a tempest roaring against a sea wall. Forgive me for wanting you more than physical existence or the ability to think. I understand the Morning Star in one way...If you were to ever claim me, I would never want another to touch me again." His voice was as sweet as his scent, which was reminiscent of roses and their hips. He kissed his flesh, tasted him on his tongue and shuddered with the rage of his need. When Sammael had spoken of him being busy with other things, did he mean for him to carry out those plans mentioned for Galaxy and Sarku, or something far more magnificent?

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Yes, jealousy was going around the room like a plague, an infection Maelmorda was catching too as Gabrian ran his hands over Sammael, covered him with kisses of passion restrained, and whispered his sweet words so no one else but Sammael could hear. It hurt deeply to watch him with another when he was not in physical contact with him himself. It enraged Maelmorda that he felt jealous at all, for he could hardly expect Sammael not to screw as many others as he desired. Color rose in his cheeks and his eyes burned as those arms tightened around himself. It was a hopeless emotion which would only torture him needlessly. Mael's lips parted to a deeply inhaled and then exhaled breath. 'Bury it, Maelmorda,' he told himself.



'Bury it were it shall never awaken again.' Oh, but that was far easier said than done. Once again he felt it was a pain he had bought and paid for a thousand times over. How many of his children had he loved and left feeling forsaken by him? Even Sammael once upon a time. His eyes wandered off and his muscles gradually relaxed until his hands dropped against his lap. "Love is a bitch," he griped quietly as one did when complaining to themselves.

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Galaxy felt strangely more at ease by the time Maelmorda kissed her and left the mattress. Maybe she was just too tired to feel any more of that confusion she had been feeling earlier. The emotions had dulled a little, and she wasn't entirely displeased with that...she was happy that the edge had been taken off the more painful feelings. She made no effort to stop him from leaving, just delivered a lingering little squeeze to his hand before letting him go. She had a rather good idea of why he chose to join the two parts again...she wouldn't want any of Sammael's displeasure directed at her at the moment, thank you very much. She was worn out enough with all that had gone on without having to deal with the jealousy of someone as powerful as Sammael. Although, she might have found that jealousy, if there was any, laughable. Shouldn't she be acting more jealous? She couldn't bring herself to act jealous right now, though...she felt too drained. Emotionally and physically, and though she tried to put a good face on it, the exhaustion was visible...mostly around the eyes and the way she held herself when she sat up. When Sarku joined her, she would lean against him, head resting against his shoulder as she watched her husband. She seemed to take comfort from Sarku's presence, because she remained like that as she listened and observed. Her gaze flickered to Belorian as he bade Maelmorda not to break the pact. She was inclined to agree with him, and this was a woman who trusted all Maelmorda's choices, no matter how she personally disagreed with them. She didn't trust Sammael. Not even a little. But really, he hadn't done much to encourage that trust. She couldn't trust people blindly anymore...she thought she had been able to once, but she had been a whole lot more innocent in those days. She tended to allow people to earn her trust now, and even then had a hard time sometimes giving that trust freely. There was always that fear of being betrayed. She was careful in choosing her own friends for just that reason. Those she considered friends were people she would entrust with her life. And she had recognized Maelmorda's pact with Sammael to be something that would benefit a great many. How could he break it? She'd watch her husband intently, expression unreadable.

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Some time during all the flurry of activities and the dramatic discussions that seemed to abound at this party, Sytri arrived. A little beyond fashionably late, this was true, and immediately regretting his tardiness as he caught sight of all that went on around the room. Not that he would have traded meeting Melchaiah for any of it...it was just that he hated missing out on all the fun! Still, he'd wander himself on over to find himself a spot to make himself comfortable, those dark eyes alert and absolutely drinking in the actions of the others that were gathered. The crowd was definitely not one he'd anticipated...so many familiar faces, and still so many he knew only by reputation. He seemed content to just observe at the moment, just try and catch up on everything he had missed. There was a lot of tension in the room, as well...and a good deal of it vaguely sexual or based on desire. He fed off this kind of tension, and could feel traces of it just

about everywhere, even beyond the obvious pairings. He could feel past loves, unrequited loves, all kinds of fun stuff. He wanted to lick his lips...this was just the kind of mixed crowd Sytri adored. Also the kind of crowd Sytri often preyed on, planting or increasing desire between couples here and there and resulting in insane orgies. But again, as he had done earlier that night, he held back. This was a party hosted by his own lord...he wasn't about to go causing trouble where he wasn't told to, was he? So, for now, he just watched, which in its own way was just as interesting as actually being involved in the events that were unfolding.

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Sammael would have been floored if the Morning Star had obeyed him in the demand that he choose a few bodies in the room to screw six ways to Sunday. He really would have. Then he would have torn apart anyone that dared to touch the Morning Star, naturally asserting that nobody could. It was only said out of the hurt he felt, not meant to be taken literally. Or maybe it was. It was that damn love the man devil had brought out of the man demon which spurred him into feeling wounded and caused him to lash out at his maker the way he had. Of course neither one of them had worked their emotions into the situation. Had they ever been in love with someone such as they before? Not likely; perhaps other people, Galaxy to name one for Maelmorda but had Sammael ever loved anyone else? That was a secret never to be told. As all that spilled out of the Morning Star the infernal demon in the chair would feel his Lord press back into him. He heard the need in Gabriel's sweetest voice, but he felt it even more in those touches that roamed over his body that caused the Morning Star to feel that evil little thing known as jealousy. Quite a room of contagious emotions it was becoming wasn't it? All the capital vices were there tonight, except sloth. Because that really wouldn't go over well with Lucifer and Satan now would it? Whosoever tried to get over with that crap would last two seconds, if that, before getting the stink eye and then a one-way ticket to Hell. His eyes remained darkened as Maelmorda fumed those fiery feelings of his and showed just how much havoc they were wreaking in him. For the better or worse the Devil's emotions were a force not to trifle with or underestimate. Yet it was his emotions that had Sammael questioning everything all over again. Why? Why did he allow himself to feel so much and still give in to those self destructive thoughts Sammael now saw springing up in his maker's head. His fingers dug into Gabriel's knee's with more pressure than the angel's hands did to his hips. He leaned forward slightly, causing that thigh trembling cock to press against his ass crack instead of that very inviting pucker for a moment, to give Maelmorda a less angry look, although he had to force that too. Because once hurt Sammael found it just a teensy bit difficult to let it go. Course there was very little that could hurt him on the level Maelmorda just had. Still and always could if he chose to. Who else had that kind of pull with the demon of sin? But his maker beat him to the punch by giving voice to what he was wry of.

Marsol may not have joined Belorian in his verbal protest but the demonic red one burned with all the protectiveness of an older child and scorned enemy combined. No doubt the desert creature felt that the Desert Wind had trapped the creator of them all with this sudden show of remorse and storm of emotions. Love was making monsters out of them both, is what Marsol thought with a tinge of bitterness because he knew all too clearly that he would let it do the same to him if it was to save his own mate. The corner of Sammael's mouth twitched at the offer Maelmorda made as far as breaking the pact and risking life and limb. Out of what, that

guilt? The notion that he had hurt his son, even though Sammael now knew where the hurt stemmed from, was strangely painful. They had hurt each other and not even known it till after the fact. Sammael's black pools lit on Belorian when he barreled into their dealings again and he was so very tempted to tell the Anduain to put a sock in it or he would put something up him. Of course Maelmorda breaking the pact would be a huge load off of his shoulders. Of course lifting the agreement would enable him to get around Morashtar like the demon he was, to work at blanketing the world with a little sin here, a little damnation there. Of course, it all did have its appeal. But this wasn't the way he would want to bring Morashtar into his blood soaked hands. That and Maelmorda too. To let his maker be thrown to the mercy of the flame, and all that judgment would entail, would have gone against everything he was striving for; All the turmoil; All the anarchy; That damn waiting game; The Holy Orders, figuratively speaking. It would all amount to nothing if he just let the Morning Star go to his uncertain fate with the broken pact and the wrath of the flame. It was that logical side of him that was keeping him from telling Maelmorda to give it a run through. That and this new fangled love he had for him; a love that had been there before Lucifer had gotten around to bringing his sexy ass to him, for some very mind numbing molestation. A very insane although sensible love that went so far as to perhaps, oh we don't know, ensure the Morning Star's safety from those soulless momma's boys upstairs, maybe. Sammael was too complicated though to understand half the shit he did. Let alone have an appreciation for how careful he was when it came to matters concerning the Morning Star.

The once divine and now fallen Sammael said after awhile of that shifting around in Gabrian's lap with the faint mm's he made, and still unable to get comfortable, feeling sick as dog-shit, "Don't be absurd..." His tone wasn't the jesting kind. By chance though would the Morning Star see that the annoyance and anger in his son's eyes now was not what it had been a moment before? Would he see there, somewhere in those black eyes, where the unsmiling lips and stone expression couldn't, that there was the distinct "Don't be a hero" kind of glare that only hellions gave one another?

Sure he was going to bring the Morning Star to his knees, one way or another. It was going to be his way though. Not the goddamn flames. Not some Alamascan assholes, and hopefully without Maelmorda's arrogant brother's commandment of it; just his way and no one else's. Sammael had this pride he took in everything he did and the ruination of the Morning Star's best laid plans, oh yes he would be taking great pride in that. Then again perhaps this love business would curve his lusts for now and let the man devil and man demon raise their odd and abnormal family till it reached obscene numbers.

He wasn't about to have all the hatred of Acheron down on him over letting Maelmorda saunter up to the flame to risk getting a kick in the nuts. He wouldn't let the devil go so easily. Besides, he was thinking not only of his own love, that he felt was as selfish as they came, but of Arasgal and the soon to be born twins. What would they think of their one father letting the other go to an uncertain fate? To something that could separate them all forever? Many things went into consideration on Sammael's end of that suicidal offering Lucifer made. However much he might have been curious as to see just how dark his maker could become from the pain such emotions gave him, it was in everyone's best interest that they not go there with the Morning Star. That and he was too delighted to hurt Maelmorda in other ways with these damned emotions he seemed to want to retain.

Sammael turned his head to the side at the feel of Gabriel's cheek on his back. The infernal angel was only second to the Morning Star. But did he know this? Did anyone know that? Sammael's reasons for keeping the tasty angel so painfully chaste was always wondered about by others but the Morning Star probably saw it for what it was. Sam was being a prude about who was good enough for Gabe, because in his eyes no one was. All that teasing he had been doing to poor Gabe was coming back to bite him seriously hard in the ass, and yes folks we mean it literally this time. His brows came together as he took his hands off of kneading Gabe's knees to rest them on the edge of the chair. His knees started to come together too as his back arched ever so slightly. As if Gabe really was phucking him from behind when all he did was nudge at that inviting pucker. It was getting to be very painful to feel his most prized and fawned over Progeny touch him and yet he held himself back from having his way with him all over the place. His concentration and focus was cracking again as it had under the weight of Maelmorda's devilishly fantastic hips grinding him into his inner depths and sweet spots. It was clear that the only two beings that could unravel Sammael in a sexual sense when he needed to be serious, were Maelmorda and Gabriel. Course Sammael screwed people; he had screwed a lot, but never without a reason and ultimate goal for doing it. What a shame Lucifer didn't seem to realize that. Or maybe the devil did and it was slipping his mind at the moment?

Sammael caught the requests of going home from Cirgoth right after he heard the Raven speak of the four plus child getting away from here. The clan demon even went so far as to offer himself which was admirable considering what he had done. It was the sensible thing to do wasn't it? To hand over yourself so that those you had placed in the path of danger could be unharmed. Wyrvaust had been watched very closely since being brought to that house of perversions, as Cirgoth put it bluntly. The Raven's mind was both unraveling and collecting at the same time. He was a mess from the guilt of bringing this upon his family but at the same time he was willing to do anything to correct that. Whereas some viewed Wyrvaust's trespassing into enemy territory to help the needy and heal the wounded as foolish in these war torn times, Sammael knew Marsol would find it a very rare trait in his fellow demon. It was an act that the chieftain admired even if he didn't show his respect at the moment. Of course on the flip side; Wyrvaust had actually done nothing wrong. One could argue that too. He was helping people. No matter where he and his lovely wife and handsome child had been they were there to give whatever aid they could to the grief stricken and heart broken. They had come to give back some shred of hope to a shattered people. It didn't matter if they had actually succeeded in this because the point was that they cared. That someone cared for those people. It could have been anyone, anyone at all. But it wasn't. It had been Wyrvaust, Arilwen and little Anwarr. They the unlikely few answered a call that had gone unheard for too long, they were the ones who had come to extend their hands in friendship and good grace. Not in want. Surely even these small acts of generosity must be noticed by someone and be smiled upon? Sammael might have declined Cirgoth's offer, snatched him up and man handled him again just for shits and giggles. But that was before Maelmorda had come and sort of vexed him with all these emotions, the pact, the child they already had and the ones on the way.

Was the Morning Star working at softening him up? Was he plotting at grinding down Satan's edge and toning him down just a smidgen so he seemed not so bad? Sammael didn't think about any of that nonsense but he would admit that since the arrival of Arasgal he was feeling very... uplifted; or something like that. Cirgoth had

said they would meet up with him again. He kind of promised now hadn't he? And he had said "we" instead of "me" which intrigued the man demon as to just how in the world this green eyed angelic fellow thought he was going to get that desert creature anywhere near him again. Marsol's hatred for him had developed over the evening into a murderous rage and it just got worse when those he cared for were threatened. The Desert Wind started to grumble to himself but his grumblings turned abruptly into long winded groans from all that affection Gabriel was still giving him. It was so goddamn distracting! But it was so god awful delicious at the same time. He couldn't fault Gabriel for it. His Progeny was only trying to comfort him in his sick state of being; yet all that comforting was getting to him and rather quickly too. Perhaps it was all that brow raising and blush inducing sex everyone was doing? Maybe it was that tasty game of cat-and-mouse that Malcomb and Mernaph were playing around the room? Oh and for the sake of appearances, Sam had his bet on Malcomb. Call it a hunch.

Sammael answered Cirgoth in that telepathic path: None of you are good to me as you are now, what a shame. I'll let you be right just this once brother of mine. Don't tell anyone or else I'll cut off your pecker.

Sammael said to Marsol in a heated link: You know, that angel will be the death of you right? He offers friendship to me as if it was a slice of cake. Does he not see the way of things? Or did you teach him that classic faith? Depart now. Our time will come Anwarr, you needn't worry about that...

In that link Sammael's voice was emotionless. Flat. Though he did not look in Cirgoth's direction the angel could still feel Satan's eyes on him some how couldn't he? His black eyes pierced Wyrvaust from across the room for a very blisteringly hot moment before he dismissed them altogether. One of those half clothed hard muscled men with the hoods over their heads appeared like some weird magic trick at Cirgoth's side, but just out of arms reach of Marsol; because it wouldn't be very nice if the desert creature killed another one of Sammael's servants. The same kind of demon slave popped up beside the Raven and his clan, gesturing for them to follow.

Marsol of course was wary of this demon slave of Sammael's motioning for them to come with him to the set of double doors behind him on the far wall; another one of Satan's tricks? But how could he leave when his creator was in such peril as this? The dragon was torn. Between taking those he cared very dearly for away from here and staying to perhaps join Belorian in kicking Sammael's ass up around his ears. He had heard his lover's words as his amber eyes bent on the nude Mernaph chasing Malcomb around. This kind of party was not his cup of tea either. It was making him severely uncomfortable just being there witnessing all the indecent acts. Marsol told Wyrvaust not to think such things and that he shouldn't feel one shred of guilt for going into Hassim territory, regardless of that bastard demon king wanting the domain of the dragons. The desert creature's arms encircled the angel tighter as the hooded demon slave got too close, causing him to utter a low rumbling growl. Possessive? Naturally. He was, after all, Maelmorda's son. The demon slave recoiled from him quickly, sinking back to bow with his back to the wall. That hand of Marsol's did not lose those brilliant red scales just yet. He was still pissed about it all but mostly he was just plain pissed at himself. To him, everything was his fault. He had ignored the warning signs relayed by his fresh bondee to be with the angel, and now he was quite sure Sammael had sent his minions into his own homeland to cause mayhem. But he would find out by contacting

his clan members as he turned his head to nudge his chin at the top of Cirgoth's head. "Let's go home," he said quietly with his lips pressed to the top of Cirgoth's auburn haired head, being slightly muffled from it. Marsol paused as that other man slave conveyed to Wryvaust and his Swan and their son to come. He made himself the last to go out that set of double doors, hanging back a little as he unwound his arms from around the angel to let him walk on his own to and through the door. Marsol was making sure that Sammael didn't try some back-ass-wards trick to keep his mate and clan there. But where he laid his concern for those that dwelled in his clan's turf, he had forgotten to include himself. It wasn't until Cirgoth, Wryvaust, Arilwen and little Anwarr had gone through the set of doors into a swirling shadow gate that would deliver them all just outside the Raven's lair; that Marsol felt the remorse of the shame tearing at him inwardly for having ignored Wryvaust for even those few minutes, and letting Cirgoth get too close to all the shenanigans in that manor nestled in the oasis out in the desert. This would not do; he thought as he stopped just before the two hooded demon slaves holding open the doors to the shadow gate that everyone had taken out of there. Goddamn him, Marsol thought with such a bitterness that it left a bad taste in his mouth. Even if they all made it back in one piece in their own home, who was to say something terrible was not awaiting them there? There would be no rest for them if they avoided the inevitable. Maybe he was being selfish when he put his hands to the edges of those doors and pushed them shut. Maybe he was a glutton for punishment. He just couldn't find it in him to let any of them, Wryvaust or Cirgoth, pay for something he himself owned completely. It was these and many more reasons that pushed Marsol to shut those doors and let that shadow gate fizzle out. Cutting off the last possible escape route before he went to face the music. Oh he was ready though. He would tear Sammael a new one before he ever went down, and never would he give in. Death would come to him a hundred times over before he even considered the possibility, and even then he would laugh in its face. Maelmorda though would make matters either really simple or really hard. It all depended on if the Morning Star had resolved his little tryst with the demon of sin; or if Satan was still in a foul mood.

He didn't get a chance to tell Cirgoth and Wryvaust that he would be right behind them, and that he wanted to apologize. He actually didn't get a chance to let out the hot exhale contained in his lungs. A slew of those half clothed demon women came to paw and grope at him all over the place. Now for a naked man Marsol handled himself pretty well. He grabbed wrists and gripped shoulders, pushing and shoving his way through until he was standing too damn close to the Morning star's backside. Yes he had been harassed around the room awhile but eventually he had been led to that spot. Along the way he had to side step and get out of Malcomb's way so that Mernaph didn't get the drop on him out of the lack of space. Those two always had confused him some how, he thought to himself as he looked after them. A very fair skin and haired beauty sat all alone over yonder and he vaguely recalled a name to go with that inhumanly gorgeous face. Marsol did not say hello to Sytri. The guy made him feel slightly uncomfortable somehow and he couldn't exactly place why. He turned around quickly when he realized where he was from the faces he saw, and when he swung round he saw the Morning Star sitting with his complaints that he made to himself on the floor. Marsol's eyes narrowed at the sound of Sammael's voice.

"Bit dramatic aren't we," Sammael said, his voice a wavering a little as his fingers dug into Gabriel's knee's from the feel of his cock against his ass.

"Skin me or beat me," Marsol snapped as his amber eyes scorched the man demon where he sat all cuddled up to Gabriel, "but get on with it so I can be rid of this place and be rid of you."

"As much as I'd like to, unfortunately, I can't. But the Morning Star could if he wanted to. Couldn't you...?"

Sammael said to Sytri in a faint sigh through a telepathic link: Ahh, so nice of you to join us Sytri. You're late...

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Sytri caught Marsol looking at him, and had to resist dropping a sassy wink his way. There were a good number of people who felt rather uncomfortable around him. He was used to that kind of thing by now, barely even noticed it anymore aside from that faint amused feeling he got from it. He rather thought they felt thrown off balance sometimes when they caught themselves desiring him, and couldn't decide why. And many of those who knew of him, his powers, he knew tended to be a bit wary around him. After all, he did make it so very easy to forget sometimes why they should not allow him to get his hands on them. When he heard his lord Sammael's voice filtering through his mind, those dark eyes would move to rest on him, and he would tilt his head in the slightest of nods, acknowledging him with a respect he seldom showed to others. The voice that responded by telepathic link was velvety soft, like a caress...it was the kind of voice that you could almost feel, like a trail of fingertips along an arm. I do most sincerely apologize for my tardiness, my lord, he responded. And he sounded as though he meant it, too. And why not? It looked as though he had missed out on a bit of entertainment! But I am most pleased to be here now. That voice took on a certain purring quality. Yes, even sitting alone as he was, he was quite enjoying himself. His gaze strayed after a few moments to watch Mernaph chasing Malcomb. Oh, now this was awfully fun. He didn't get to see high speed chases very often! Sytri was not so much tempted to trip one to set the chase's favor towards one of them, as he was tempted to snatch them both up for himself. Those were a pair he thought were rather delicious, and bizarrely adorable in their own way. But still, he sat back and watched, gaze drifting to Sammael occasionally...Sammael had even earned himself a faint smile with that initial nod, which spoke volumes about Sytri's willingness to serve this individual. He was not one who'd ever had trouble with the tasks set for him, and even performed them with an eagerness that many could never muster up. Sammael had been more than fair with him in the past, and so Sytri had complied entirely with whatever he was directed to do.

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In the midst of all that frowning Sammael made towards the Morning Star as he continued to shift in Gabriel's lap to only further excite the both of them, gesturing with open arms for Maelmorda to come back over here, he enjoyed the way Sytri's voice felt to the senses. Even if it was in an abstract kind of way. In that link he said to Sytri, "Do share what was so fascinating that kept you. I am eager to hear about your adventures." He was teasing Sytri of course with his choice of words. He could have easily said adventures in people which might have been more appropriate but he didn't. His black eyes may have been looking at Maelmorda as he leaned with an arch back against Gabriel, but his gaze was also on the fashionably late Sytri. Cause beings like Maelmorda and Sammael could do

that...

What had kept him? "Ahh, what normally keeps me, my lord? Flirtation, and teasing. Unfortunately, I was rejected." He managed to sound almost amused by it, although that still kind of irked him for unknown reasons. What irked him even more was that he was not so easily able to forget the incident! Normally, when his advances were turned down, he could quite easily ignore the person in question afterward; banish them from his mind entirely. He was, after all, a creature with a towering ego that demanded to be stroked. Which was why he never seemed inclined to chase after those who had no interest in stroking said ego. "I suppose it was refreshing enough, though. I'm not normally asked to keep my hands off things. Still, there was a distinct lack of adventure tonight." He even managed to sound a trifle sulky about that. Poor Sytri, like a child denied something sweet. "I am pleased my lord noticed my absence, though, even with his own hands so full. Did you miss me?" He was teasing him, now, his own way of showing a certain amount of affection. Nothing too outrageous, since he was trying to maintain a goodly amount of respect shown towards Sammael, too. It was hard to juggle both.

Oh well in matters concerning Acheron things always tended to be a sort of juggling act. He grinned where he was in that lounge chair with his skin feeling tingles underneath the Infernal Angel's hands. But that grin was not for Gabriel or Maelmorda, if the Father of them all decided to come to his testy son so that he could cuddle him all to himself, and Gabriel. It was from what Sytri said to him on that most secretive path even if they were in mixed company. "Declined were we? Who in their right mind would say no to that face, hmm?" He was joking of course lightly about that sensitive area concerning Sytri's inhuman beauty. "Of course I missed you like a plague misses people. Are you enjoying yourself thus far? Or are we to find other means of entertainment for you?" There was a bit of danger in that wasn't there? What could Sammael possibly offer Sytri for fun and devilish merriment tonight that the gorgeous young looking man couldn't find himself? What indeed...

"You know, I thought the same thing." He harrumphed over that telepathic link, as if he knew just how lovely he was. The beauty thing could be a touchy subject sometimes, but certainly not as touchy as the age issue. Now, that bothered him when people started picking on that area. Most people knew better than to bother him regarding his age, anyway, since it normally resulted in him getting all huffy. "I'm finding your soiree to be quite enjoyable thus far, my lord. I do so rarely get to see everyone all together like this, after all. It's impossible not to be entertained, is it not?" He would pause thoughtfully at that last question, and then respond graciously, "If you wish for me to provide entertainment, you need only ask, my lord. My wish is your command." This answer implied that he was quite entertained on his own at the moment, but always eager to please, even so.

If he asked? Well now that just splashed a whole new set of colors into the subject didn't it? It got a bout of fair laughter spilling out of Sammael and he wouldn't even try to contain it as he pressed his Progeny's hands to his chest some and then tug them downwards to his belly. He gave a shake of the head and shrug of his shoulders if anyone asked what he was laughing at, cause clearly what Gabriel was doing to him was not funny. Surely he wasn't laughing about the look on Maelmorda's face right? How his creator seemed to sulk there on the floor after he waved with his arms for the Morning Star to get his naked sexy arse back in the chair with



them. "It is so hard sometimes to get us together like this isn't it? Simple gatherings should not be, but they are regardless of rank or mutual differences. I am curious as to how you think you could provide me entertainment tonight. Curious and very intrigued..."

Sytri looked thoughtful at the question. "Hmm, well, there's the obvious. Seduce the pants off someone of your naming. Set an unlikely couple together. Encourage an orgy by turning the atmosphere all naughty-like. You know my limitations and abilities as well as I do myself, my lord. Whatever would most amuse you within my abilities, do allow me to arrange." And of course, all that would be for Lord Sammael's benefit, not for Sytri's, of course not. Not at all! Well, maybe a little bit...or a lot. He couldn't help it. Anything within his powers to arrange would most certainly be something he would enjoy.

The things Sytri was capable of were always looked on as exciting and enjoyable by him. From one fallen to another, they both sort of were on the same page as far as their ideas of what fun really was. Did they not share that fondness of the nail biting pleasure side of life? Of course they did! "Ah, I know you thoroughly delight in a good challenge. All of that actually sounds epic in the making; do you really feel up to it? A bit of a list you've made for yourself, heh. But there are party poopers here, much as I hate to say that. That whole orgy one sounds like the sweet scream of a virgin being taken. Not that there are any virgins in this room. Least we would hope not. Was that ill tempered lizard giving you the evil eye?" That meaning Marsol naturally. Was the desert creature still keeping a good bit of distance from Sytri? Yes, yes he was and with good reason. Hah!

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All which was in the Desert Wind's expression, tone, posture, muscle tension, even the lack thereof; the Morning Star imagined in his assessment of Sammael, who seemed to him overall; a perfect savage in love, ambitiously amiable as an opportunist, and as assiduously dangerous in his aggravation. In otherwords, he could count him as an unpredictable fiend, much like himself. Indeed, Sammael was more like the Morning Star than the devil himself...as he used to be not so very long ago, than Maelmorda expected him to be. Indeed, could he expect anything at all if what he calculated proved true? With the same ambiguous scrutiny he measured the countenance of his wife. It did not escape him that she was relieved to be unsaddled of him. This did not sit well with him one little bit and that jealous imp inside of him rose up and with him so did Maelmorda. He just stood there waiting Sammael's word, and when the devil of demons told him not to be absurd, not to be a hero, his gaze meandered a moment then came to rest on Wyrvaust.

"Wyrvaust? How long were you wanderlusting in the desert?" he asked the demon, his voice ephemerally tame albeit reaching the abyss demon easily, his beautiful jade lapped eyes all the while were locked on Sammael with a lust filled burn and all the jealousy of being so far from Sammael while Gabriel was so...intimately near.

"Several months," the Raven responded tonelessly from across the room.

The Morning Star smiled. So it was true, what he had suspected; what had seemed a week to him in this place did not apply to time in the world beyond Sammael's walls. Time in his Prince's haven was what he made of it. It was growing unbearable, being so far from his other mate any longer; particularly in the shadow

of feeling so utterly rejected by Galaxy, whether she knew it or not. When he noticed Sytri he smiled a little and waggled his fingers at him. Now who said Maelmorda phucked everyone in Acheron? He had never touched Sytri, thought about it, sure, but Sammael had controlled his fall and Maelmorda had not wanted to step on Sammael's toes. He had always respected Sammael's space and who was his. Sytri was Sammael's angel. He gave no reply whatsoever to Sammael's dismissal of his offer to risk himself to the heat of the pact, instead; and even moments before Sammael invited him back, those legs which had been naked for a duration that was enigmatic to his situation in Sammael's desert palace; carried him fastidiously to his Prince and Master, and one bare limb swung him over his lap which he settled on, hands gingerly coming to rest on his shoulders. "Why you are full of all kinds of surprises, most beloved Sammael. I had no idea you could order time into a pocket and make of it what you will. Very impressive." His voice reached none other than Sammael despite the regular volume of his compliment, inasmuch as he spoke through a singular pathway of his own.

It seemed his instructions to Acheron's Prince of Demons on manipulating time through quantum processes all those ages ago had not been lost on him, but taken by the reins and harnessed quite efficiently. Maelmorda then kissed him tremendously deep and with such an urgency of need and passion as could steal a dragon's breath and fire right out of him. As his tongue and heavy suckles delighted Sammael's oral senses, the Morning Star's female bundle elongated and altered state into a slippery, tongue-like tentacle. It wrapped around Satan's cock and slipped and slid and squeezed around his girth all at once to pump him with deliriously intense pleasures which stimulated Mael's sex jolting nerve endings as well, for that muscle contained all the same pleasure centers as his clit only multiplied many times again over the snake length surface which wrangled Sammael's huge cock so spectacularly. While phucking him in this unusual manner, and kissing him with all the abandon of a man whose heart had been hopelessly stolen, his fingers played with his hair and tits. Surely this was Systri's idea of prime entertainment, short of being between the two meshed devils. Despite this pretense of forgetting his wife to focus his desires on Sammael; Maelmorda was very closely in tuned to what Galaxy was feeling. If she was not raving mad inside with anger, hurt and jealousy; Maelmorda would truly feel crushed. Chaos was truly running wild in the Morning Star at the moment.

Thing of it was, whatever Galaxy was feeling, was being cleverly diverted by one ancient infernal angel whose only reason for living was to serve, protect, and please his master, and oh how those fingers, lips and tongue were trying to please him now, and seduce him into claiming him. It was the first time Gabriel had ever been so bold, and those who were well acquainted with Gabriel and Sammael's relationship noticed. It was not Galaxy's actual feelings Gabriel was tampering with, but rather the metaphysical presence radiated by her thoughts and emotions and he did not change them, but rather eliminated them specifically until only those he wanted Maelmorda to sense remained. It was not a matter of Maelmorda being more powerful that he was either, but rather Gabriel having the power to eliminate those emissions and being able to do so beneath detection. What Maelmorda felt, was her emptiness, her affection for Sarku, that hollow she drew on to hold herself together, her doubts in Maelmorda, and her resentment. It could be said that she did not radiate those feelings and notions which explained the other feelings. Gabriel acted without Sammael's knowledge so that if his tampering was discovered, Sammael would be guiltless. Sammael had not told Gabriel not to pursue his plans, so Gabriel was acting on his own accord, doing what he hoped Sammael would approve

of. That ring of Galaxy's had to go. It had prevented him from meddling with her actual mind, will and emotions. He would work on that or around that later. Now these tasks he performed on the side were not distracting from his affections towards Sammael. Gabriel like his master was quite proficient at multi-tasking. Now the next time Sammael rubbed that aching cock between his ass cheeks, Gabriel would grab his own rod out of brutal need and masturbate until he ejaculated his pearly cream all over that beautiful posterior; and his hard on was not going anywhere soon either, not even after he came. Gabriel was near tears his need to be plucked by Sammael was so incredible.

As Maelmorda felt only these things Gabriel allowed from Galaxy, he choked on his own breath while loving Sammael. Sammael would feel a storm of diverse emotions crashing in Maelmorda; rage, confusion, hopelessness, despair, and a tremendous burden of guilt. His eyes cut on Galaxy where she stood, arms crossed and hugging herself, one of them linked with Sarku's arm, who held her close and spoke to her in reassuring tones; "Never forget where assumption leads with him. What he seems never is. Trust his vows of love to his wife. He is confused as well...believe it." Sarku was absolutely right. The way he held Gala also fumed Maelmorda's devilish fury...close, affectionately protective. He tried to remind himself that it was he who asked Sarku to offer himself to her as a lover, if he could find it in himself to love her. It did not help; he suddenly wanted to eat the shapeshifter!

Maelmorda tried to ignore it, all of it, what he did not feel in her, and the madness he felt in himself. He concentrated instead on the marvelous things Sammael made him feel. When Sammael let Marsol and his crew go; his heart nearly cracked open with pride and love. His entire body rubbed up against Sammael with the sexiest of provocations and he could not kiss him deeply enough or touch him with enough affection or pleasure. The anguish though, it wore him thin and he felt suddenly unworthy of Sammael, unworthy owed to his divided attentions. He broke the kiss with Sammael quite suddenly. It was true, Maelmorda was terribly confused by his situation, and it was yet another condition he was not at all accustomed to coping with. He almost always knew where he stood, now, he was unsure about a great many things. Could he make Galaxy content despite their current position? Did she still trust him? Was he making a mistake giving her a choice not to leave him. Was he losing face with Acheron by loving Sammael? Did he even care if he was? No...he did not care...Shouldn't he care? Why could he trust no one but himself? Could he even trust himself now? But he was beginning to trust Sammael...truly trust him. Was he a fool for placing his faith in him? Did Sam really love him, or was he simply using him, plotting ways to hurt him? It was all the same to Maelmorda, use or hurt, the same. He felt suddenly as if he did not even know himself anymore. Normally these were the doubts which plagued Maelmorda..."---- ---- ----". Yes, none. Tears, real tears actually threatened to scorch his eyes and the devil moved suddenly off of Sammael's lap and backed away from him, so aghast of himself that he no longer knew how to act. Fact was, being pregnant again unbalanced him even more so. Almost as quickly as he stood away though, he dropped down on his knees in front of Sammael where he sat and bowed over so that his palms and brow alike met the cool stone floor. It was the posturing of a slave. "Am I your slave or your mate, Sammael? Which am I? I require a straight answer...Slave or Mate?" his question was as much a demand as a desperate plea. He made it clear that he needed to know.

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Mernaph had stopped chasing Malcomb and pulled up at a table to eat and drink. He figured he would get Malcomb when he relaxed his guard. Malcomb too mingled when Mernaph seemed to tire of the hunt. Being not the sociable kind, the fallen seraph also partook in the liquors and did so with a drunkard's thirst. Being wasted made him more sociable so he was warming up to the occasion. When Maelmorda bowed down subserviently to Sammael all eyes leaned in the way of Acheron's supreme rulers. Some of them hoped that Sammael claimed him as a slave, for the crowd was one who served Sammael for the most part. Mernaph was hoping that Sammael assigned him as his mate, and not a slave. He just could not imagine Lucifer as anyone's slave; it just wasn't right. His eyes then cut hard on Malcomb as he guzzled a drink. 'What the hell was this? His mate hoped that Sammael enslaved him?' Mernaph had bonded Malcomb to himself in such a way as no thought or feeling the very dark angel had could escape him, no matter how secret or how well he guarded himself. It really pissed him off that Malcomb wanted Lucifer to be a slave. Malcomb had been one of those who Lucifer did phuck...raped rather, frequently for awhile, because it had been against Malcomb's will he had done so. He had been trying to break Malcomb of wanting Mernaph all to himself. Malcomb had never forgiven him; and Satan...well Satan had been very kind to him. Sammael had invited Malcomb to stay with him for over a week, and had never laid a hand on him, or told anyone else to. He had simply asked Malcomb a lot of questions, and Malcomb had answered him honestly. He had asked whose loyalty he could count on and whose he could not, and Malcomb had told Sammael who served Lucifer and always would, Mernaph included. When Sammael asked Malcomb who he served, he said he served Mernaph and none other.

"And as Acheron's ruling Prince, would you obey me, Malcomb?" Sammael had asked.

"As long as I am not commanded to commit any act against my Lord, yes," Malcomb had told him.

"Even should Lucifer command you not to?" Sammael had asked him.

"I won't know that until the time comes," Malcomb replied candidly.

Sammael had learned that Malcomb would never speak a lie to him. In turn, Malcomb came to respect Sammael and even like him. Now here was Maelmorda, needing an answer to a very important question and the spiteful side of Malcomb could only hope Sammael proclaimed him as a thrall and a whore to be phucked by him and whosoever he chose. If he chose him as a mate, oh well, Malcomb would resign himself to the fact that he would probably never get any satisfaction. He did not think of everything riding on that answer. Usually he was very insightful, but he was bitter and bitterness had a way of clouding one's senses. Yes, his senses were clouded by that spiteful notion and as he soaked down another drink, his eyes locked on Acheron's paired princes, his eye suddenly rounded and he choked on his drink as four fingers and a thumb closed around his throat. The pressure was magnificent and cut off his ability to breathe immediately; and it was painful. He dropped his glass on the table as Mernaph jerked him hard back against himself by his throat. "Gotcha," he hissed with an evil grin which bared his fangs. Seemed as if Sammael lost his bet. His instincts had been right, until love had bowed down to him, and malice had reared its ugly head in the dark seraph's single-minded heart. Mernaph alone owned it.

Belorian meanwhile was being harassed by one Belial, his brother, his antithesis, and Belial had always wanted Belorian. Lucifer had always stood in his way though. Belial had introduced his presence there to Belorian by sneaking up behind him silent as a feather adrift on the wind, and embracing him to cup his loins and squeeze then rub. He laughed as Eoghan got an all too immediate hard on and gripped his arms to try and pry them away from him, but...as Belial was delighted to find out, Eoghan's power was still diminished and his strength was no match for Belial's in his state. He struggled against the Mogduain as he kissed his throat and molested his crotch. "I did not come here to be raped by my own brother, I hope!" Belorian called out to Sammael, and with but a whisper from Sammael's mind to leave Belorian be, Belial released him and let the Anduain wheel around to face that churlish smile he portrayed. "Your need to be phucked is incredible, Belorian of Tuatha. I would be happy to offer you the relief you so crave."

Belorian shook his head. "I would rather be screwed by a mule," he had him know.

His darkly beautiful brother laughed. "That can be arranged, Belorian, if you push your luck."

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Now when Sammael ordered their release and those slaves came to escort them out, the Raven did not trust his own senses whatsoever. It was a dream or a trick, had to be. If not for Arilwen rising then pulling him to his feet, then urging him along, he would have just sat there and chalked it up to a figment of his imagination. When that shadow gate yawned open in their path in the doorway's threshold, he hugged Arilwen tight and glanced behind his shoulder at Marsol, as if to say, well come the Hell on. And there he came, with Cirgoth. Now they were standing outside, beneath the canopy of stars which gazed down on the desert. Cirgoth came stumbling out of the gate behind them as Marsol had to shove him through to get him to leave without him. Wyrvaust turned around and took a swift step towards that gate only for it to vanish in front of him, as Cirgoth shouted out Marsol's name. "Marsol, no!! Damnit, I will not leave without you!" Well, Wyrvaust was of the same mind. Whatever the dangers, whatever terrors might await him, he would rather suffer all that than to part with Marsol and leave his fate to Sammael. He had spit in Sammael's face by doing so, and both Cirgoth and Wyrvaust knew it, and no doubt Arilwen acknowledged it as well. There was the definite flaw in Marsol's plan, unless he walled them in and forced a method which made them unable to return.

Belorian saw this chink in Marsol's decision and strode swiftly to meet the dragon lord as he turned away from that gateway to freedom and strode over to stand behind the Morning Star. Belorian met him there, standing behind Marsol in turn and addressed him in low tones. "You are a fool if you think your loyal comrades shall just wait you out, Sir. I know love when I see it, and theirs is fierce. They shall return and to do so shall be an insult to Lord Sammael's generosity." There was something else Belorian knew but he did not say it. Sammael very well could harm Marsol now. The desert chieftain had forfeited any protection the pact offered by placing himself willingly in Sammael's power, and should the others return of their own free will, so would they.

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Maelmorda straightened as Marsol came over and his eyes burned on him over his shoulder. He cackled when Sammael said that he could not tear him a new one but that the Morning Star could. "And I should for him making such a stupid and rash mistake. Marsol, he let you and yours go. What the hell is wrong with you? You wish to get something over with when you do not even have a clue what that may be! It may be something you cannot or will not offer. Has it ever occurred to you that what he wants may be your loyalty? Or...maybe the loyalty of those who serve you. Perhaps you do not even matter to him and they do. Who of them has he attacked, tortured? Cirgoth? He showed him only pleasure. Was it to torment you, or to win him? And has he not won Cirgoth over in his own way? Angels are coveted highly in Acheron, Marsol. Wyrvaust? He has not laid a hand on him, terrified him, yes, but harmed him? No, and believe me, he knows how to make him suffer his worst nightmares. Arilwen? He has shown her mild curiosity and attraction. Now, I cannot say what it is he does want, but my guess is that he wants them, since he cannot have you, if he ever did, and that you stand in his way. If he kills you, they are lost to him. Torture is...a pastime in Hell and means nothing, unless someone can be broken by torture. How many times have you proven that torture cannot break you? So why did you stay, Marsol? And please do not tell me it is to protect me. I made this bed and it is mine to sleep in, my friend. Now, be quiet a moment, all of you, I require an answer to my question." His eyes pinned Sammael again. If anyone spoke before Sammael answered, he would hit them with a spell which would seal their mouths with flesh, thus doing away with their maws altogether. "Slave or Mate, Sammael my love?"

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Wyrvaust and Cirgoth meanwhile were attempting to gate back, and since Arilwen refused to let them go without her, Wyrvaust sent Anwarr to Gilriael. Why him? Because he was good with children and he and the dragons could protect him.

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Gala didn't know what she should be feeling. She felt any number of things, of course, a roiling, churning tangle of emotions that stung just to begin to examine. She was hurt. That was the most evident emotion, there, or at least it would have been had the presence and projection of those emotions not been tampered with. The hurt was there, throbbing steadily underneath a cover of anger, resentment, and, yes, fear. She was frightened, perhaps because she could not foresee where all of this would lead. And she kept feeling stabs of jealousy! She told herself it was stupid to feel jealous. She should have long since become accustomed to such behavior. But she felt as if she was going to fall apart. She looked that way, too, standing there with her arms around herself. She looked fragile in a way she so rarely did, rather like she could shatter into a million shards if someone looked at her the wrong way. She would have hated herself for looking like that, if she knew. She clutched that emptiness close...it was a safer feeling than the others that plagued her. Her expression was that blank mask she so often affected when she tried to withdraw into herself. That mask would slip, occasionally, though, and the emotions that flashed through her eyes did not entirely match up with the emotions Maelmorda would be receiving, warped, from her. No matter how good she had become at masking her emotions, there was no way she could keep up at every moment with the rapidly whirling, panicked swirl of feelings.

Her gaze flickered briefly to Sarku when he said that her husband was confused as

well. Her gaze flickered back to Maelmorda speculatively. Could he feel as confused as she did, right now? She knew he loved her...she trusted him when he said that. But of course there were doubts, mostly brought on by her own insecurities. She seemed to be having trouble watching him with Sammael. Her gaze was lowered to some space on the floor by her feet, where she could safely look without feeling like she wanted to march over and tear Maelmorda away from him. You know, that or punch someone in the nose. Either would be immensely satisfying to her, if only for a moment. She wanted to speak to Maelmorda alone. That was what she wanted. Or some time to spiral downward into breakdown without dozens of eyes on her. This whole situation was deeply humiliating to her. She would have been upset to begin with, hurt, torn apart. But the fact that she was surrounded by people added a whole new level to it all. For someone who was embarrassed just to be seen crying in front of people, this was torture.

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Sytri had responded to Maelmorda's waggling fingers by blowing him the sweetest little kiss, all saucy and flirtatious. No, he had never had the pleasure of a tumble with the Morning Star. Not that he wouldn't love to! Could you imagine? Maelmorda would be one hell of a notch in this one's bedpost, wouldn't he? But, as Sytri belonged to Sammael, he also recognized that Maelmorda was not someone he ought to be seeking out on his own for that sort of thing. He had his boundaries in regards to personal seduction. One of the lines he never crossed involved seducing the "big fish" of Acheron. It was a little different if they sought him out, or if Sammael had directed him to seduce them. But on his own, such ambitious conquests were not wise. Still, Sytri did consider a little flirtation to be only polite. After all, one had to show their appreciation for the things that made their mouth water!

He sounded amused when he responded via mind link to Sammael. I'd say we're halfway to the orgy scenario already...you certainly seem to be enjoying yourself, my lord...how do you always find yourself surrounded by the tastiest of men? He was teasing, still. You seem correct about the party poopers...there seem to be a good number that would most certainly not enjoy being tweaked regarding desires. And I do believe I was being given the evil eye. Could you imagine? Being nervous of little old me. Oh, he was absolutely oozing amusement now. He fell silent, of course, when that oh-so-touchy question was posed by Maelmorda. It wasn't one you normally heard...the line between mate and slave were not normally so blurred. He found himself actually highly interested in the answer to that question. Goodness, so many interesting things were occurring here. He was awfully glad he had come in time to watch the show. And he was most entertained by that show. The two devils coupling had sent a delicious shiver rippling through him, and he had been hard pressed not to wander on over and squirm his sweet self in between the two of them! Surely that was considered paradise, wasn't it? All snug between two who oozed lust and desire so freely?

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Arilwen had taken to trying to keep things as calm and soothing in their little group as she possibly could. Not only for her husband and son's sake, but for her own sanity. For some reason she felt completely suffocated and crushed here... as if someone were sitting on her chest. With her back to the room, her violet eyes lifted and she watched Wyrvaust sit down beside her. As soon as he did and their

arms brushed, she felt the crackling tension seizing his muscles and she grew more worried. She knew that he was fighting everything within himself to stay quiet and contained. Rocking gently back and forth, Arilwen hummed softly to their son as she fed him and soon she managed to get him to doze off in the folds of her robe. Once he was asleep her free hand lifted to squeeze Wyvaust's arm, offering what tiny smile she could. "I am proud of you." She whispered. She had never seen him practice such self control and she knew it was killing him. Of course, she had no idea that both the Raven and Cirgoth alike were mentally pleading with Sammael to let them go... and she had no clue that he was ABOUT to.

When the hooded man suddenly moved to loom over them, Arilwen's eyes darkened and she tightened her arms around her sleeping son, readying herself to lash out at him however she could if need be. But the man wasn't there to hurt them she soon found out. Rising when motioned to, she reached down to tug her husband along, whispering his name to snap him out of his coma-like state. She didn't believe it either. Even when her bare feet stepped through the gate and sank into the cooling night sand she was tense, her body drawn up as she gazed around in confusion. Home? They were home? Turning, she parted her lips to beg Wyrvaust to tell her that it was true... but before she could utter a sound, the gate had snapped shut, leaving Cirgoth and Wyrvaust bellowing for Marsol. Her heart sank. Had some part of her naive mind hoped that Sammael would just let them all go back to the lives they had before? As soon as Arilwen and Wyrvaust kissed their sleeping son he was transported to stay with Gilriael which made Arilwen feel much safer. She would miss her son terribly if something happened but trusted their friend fully. She refused to stay behind while the two tried to gate back to fetch their Lord. Perhaps she could help? She wasn't sure how, but she definitely was not letting this be the last time she saw her husband. She would rather be slowly skinned over and over and bathed in salt than to be parted from him.

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It must have looked a strange sight to some of Sammael's guests when that beautiful daughter of Belorian's led that tall demon away as if he were a kitten, his wings and posture tense and on edge, as if expecting the walls themselves to leap out at them at any moment. It reminded Belial of the story of Beauty and the Beast. Who else, he wondered, but his wife and Marsol could tame him? Perhaps Sammael could, he pondered. Belial laughed when Marsol chose to stay behind. He laughed at his foolhardiness. What kind of fool chose a prison over freedom, he wondered. Maybe Marsol wanted to serve Sammael, deep down, and just could not admit it yet, he mused.

Wyrvaust fixed his eyes on Arilwen apologetically and embraced her tight with a feverish kiss just before they stepped into a shadow gate. Where did it deliver them? Nowhere, a mere two strides away from where they stepped through. Wyrvaust summoned another gate and tried again, then attempted shadow walking with them; hence Cirgoth tried several methods as well. Just who blocked gate access to their destination neither Wyrvaust nor Cirgoth could say, whether it was Marsol, Belorian, Gabrian, another guest, or Sammael himself, whoever was responsible; their gates and planar abilities failed to initiate owed to their destination being sealed off from them at the other end. After half a dozen failed attempts, Cirgoth attempted to see how close they could get to the palace and returned from a quantum leap to report that he could not get closer than one-hundred leagues (equal to three-hundred miles) of the fortress, which in and of itself was odd inasmuch as



the palace was barely more than that distance from Wyrvaust's lair, which meant Cirgoth's experimental leaps had taken him practically no where, or far beyond his intended location.

"Oh why did Marsol not come with his brothers and sister?" Wyrvaust lamented.

"I imagine he is weary of being meddled with. I wish...he would have just trusted me," that Cirgoth stated in detached tones edged with sorrow. "You two stay here. I shall fly my way to him," he then determined.

"Let his most beloved go his way alone to him? Has the bird looked at himself? Pale he is as sun bleached bone. Should the sword bearer not have healed by this time? Let this sick bird fly alone? Never!" Wyrvaust refused with a snarl.

"Suit yourself," Cirgoth deemed and exhausted himself further by tearing flesh into wings. The presence of so much evil and dark power in Sammael's palace had gradually drained him of his strength and health and slowed his regeneration. He was left feeling ill and fatigued. It was like being in Acheron, which had a similar affect on the angel, on all angels until they fell.

Wyrvaust held Arilwen close and pressed a lingering kiss to her brow. An agonized expression then darkened his facial features and he collapsed suddenly to drop to his knees. "The Raven is thinking we should not go...That Marsol would be angry if we should...angry at the Raven if he should let his falcon fly back to him with the Swan and the Raven...Is the desert Raven a coward, or are his instincts keen? Lost is the Raven..." His dark eyes then appealed to Arilwen for help. "Torn is your mate...How can he risk one he loves to save another and live with himself? How can he do nothing and live with himself?" Fact was; he needed to know that she was willing to risk herself for Marsol, and not just for Wyrvaust before he tossed her back in the frying pan with himself.

Cirgoth frowned and sprang into the air to take wing, heading north-east in the direction of Sammael's desert lair. Whatever Wyrvaust was struggling with was not the same as what Cirgoth tangled with in his mind. There were no what ifs, no confusion as Wyrvaust's mind was riddled with it, only being with Marsol through anything. As Wyrvaust would not let him fly alone, he urged Arilwen to equip her own wings and then after kissing her with all the passion and love he possessed for her, he took to the skies after Cirgoth. In an unexpected bout of playfulness, Wyrvaust began flying upside down beneath Arilwen, as if showing off his flight skills, facing her with a boyish smile. He flew dare devil circles around her, and played air tag with her. Unless one truly knew how hopeless Wyrvaust was feeling, they would never have guessed that his play was like a dying man's last attempt to make his loved one's happy and to have some fun while he could. At one point he embraced Arilwen as they flew, his limbs tangling her possessively to send them plunging headlong towards the undulating dunes far below them while he kissed her and practically dry phucked her mid-air before releasing her and letting her regain her altitude. Because Cirgoth was unsure of Arilwen's flight skills he doubled back when the two separated in case Arilwen should fail to regain her flight attitude. If she had trouble, he would help her, but of course Wyrvaust was not as reckless as Cirgoth believed and had her covered. Indeed should she need help, the demon would beat the angel to her.

Sarku, much like Galaxy, was growing more and more uncomfortable as each moment passed, albeit for different reasons. He was a solitary creature and was among a crowd of orgy happy demons. "This one is sure that the time has come we returned home," he told Galaxy, who was understandably faring very badly in this terrible situation she had found herself in. Sarku patted her arm and smiled to her reassuringly. "Wait here for a few moments." The odd fellow then took his leave of her and approached Sammael, who he bowed deeply to before straightening partially, leveling his now turquoise eyes on him, and addressing him as his bronze scales shimmered in the torch light. "It was kind of Lord Sammael to invite this one and the golden lady he serves to his party. Honored we are to have had the Desert Wind's company and the company of his esteemed guests. Take our leave now we must, however, for the golden lady's children require their mother's care and this one goes wheresoever the lady he serves goes. This one looks forward to seeing the Desert Wind and the Morning Star again. Good night, most beloved Prince of Acheron." He bowed again to Sammael and made to depart. If Sammael did not stop him, he would gate Galaxy and himself home with her the moment he met her.

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He asked if he was a slave, or if he was a mate. Slave or mate? After the Morning Star ended all those teasing touches and slid away so that he could not run his hands all over that sexy body, Sammael found himself once again not in the best of attitudes. The fallen angel slowed his body's movements to a stop. Those delicious grindings into Gabriel's lap, the ooh'ing he said in a perverted tease to feeling that pearly cum all over his ass, along with the squeezing of the infernal angel's inner thighs, all of that would unfortunately cease too. Sammael's black eyes took in the whole scene of Maelmorda leaving him to retreat to where he took up such a slave position on the floor, to Anwarr's coming to stand behind him and even Belorian doing likewise, on through the Morning Star's harsh reproof of the dragon lord's decision to stay rather than go. He watched the whole thing from beginning to end with a certain regard. It really was fascinating at times like these to watch who came together and who was pulled apart.

Had he known even a tiny sliver of what Malcomb was thinking across the room that had led to Mernaph's angry snatch of him and pulling him away from the choice of liquor the dark seraph had been guzzling; a grievance that was. Wasted liquor for a trist owed to one's feelings. Some would jump up at the notion of Mernaph having every right to be the way he was being with his beloved. However others would say it was Mernaph in the wrong, not Malcomb, and the demon lord should not let his own loyalties to whomsoever he served be the knife he would be using to stab Malcomb in the heart with. For were not one's feelings their own? Didn't Malcom deserve every bit of that distain he held towards the Morning Star, or what have you? Had the Morning star not earned the dark seraph's dislike through the horrible things he had subjected him to, like countless others? Or was Malcomb just sulking needlessly and it was up to Mernaph to preen him of that nasty habit? In reality though the opinions of others did not determine the two odd and most devilishly handsome, if not ungodly tasty, alpha demon lord and his ever faithful ascerbus. There might though be a handful who would always wonder how far Mernaph would go when he caught his lover thinking rare things such as Maelmorda's slavery being his just deserts. Just how much could Mernaph do to Malcomb or get away with. Or maybe until the demon's bondee had-had enough? Not likely. Those two were inseparable. Like peanut butter and jelly, we would reason. It was just a pity though that

perhaps nobody really knew those kinds of things about the two. What all made them tick; what got their goats; and what cooled their heels.

Surely the same could be said of Belorian couldn't it? Why would he come to a place probably full of people that would sooner see him Satan's bitch also, if not a phuck toy for Hell, or maybe just Belial? Seeing as how the handsome sibling of Eoghan took it upon himself to molest the unsuspecting a bit and get quite a few stares and gawks in their direction. Perhaps Sammael had laughed if he had told Belial to leave the sod alone for now. Or perhaps it wasn't the time right now for Belorian to get molested? Oh yes, it was in the works. This wild kinky and toe curling orgy amongst demons and fallen angels alike was getting underway. Lilith and Mephisto had seen to that, encouraging others to jump the bones of the nearest demon and such. Who wouldn't want to be screwing after seeing Maelmorda all tangled with Sammael, and both of them grinding and heaving on top of Gabrian? That right there was tantalizing enough, but Lilith and Mephisto? That was just down right beyond porn worthy. And even before all that Mernaph and Malcomb had been lighting a fire under some folks with their public display of sex, and oh how that fire had fanned to some individuals quicker than others. The only ones really not touching themselves, other people, or other people and themselves at the same time were Galaxy, Sarku, Belorian and Marsol. Well, now Sammael and Gabrian too as the demon had risen from that chair all covered in various juices. He liked the feel of it naturally as he well knew Marsol enjoyed the scent of that human woman on himself a long time before he had ever cared to wash it away. The same went for Cirgoth too of course.

Somewhere all those little malnourished looking children with the masks on their faces and instruments in their tiny hands had stopped playing. Probably the time Sammael had started to stand was when. For it went hand in hand with this seeming seriousness to the question Maelmorda posed him in the middle of their exchange of oddly formed pleasuring parts. Why do you have to think so much about all this? Would be the question Sammael might have given as an answer. Why indeed. But then again Sammael could see the trouble in those green eyes and read Maelmorda's body like possibly maybe a few could, if that. Was he suppose to get down on his knee's too and say in some cheesy love sick voice comforting things to the Morning Star? Spout some kind of poem about compassion and how Maelmorda hung the moon for him? In all honesty what was the difference between slave and mate when it came to Satan? Could there even be a distinction? Was one not overlapping the other with how unpredictable he was; Correction, how unpredictable a fiend he was?

That moment though was quite possibly one of the weirdest ones in his entire unnatural life. Nobody asked Sammael these sorts of things, damn-it! No one had the good sense God gave a piss ant to even go there with him. He was incapable of love. Evil people couldn't do such a beautiful thing. Evil people knew not the simple wonder of the emotion, the pure untainted feeling that swelled in the breast and caused the soul to sing in harmony. Most people would say that for evil beings, love was a misplaced phrase that they had no inkling to and it was really intense infatuation or lust that drove them. Then again if you put small coin on a map, most people would also say they had never traveled outside the circumference of that coin their entire life. If Maelmorda was viewed as a slave by him, what did it change? If the Morning Star was thought of as a mate, who would care? For starters, Maelmorda did evidently; otherwise he wouldn't make such a fuss about it and ruin some really damn good necking. Aside from that he was not one to share what was his with just anyone, if he ever did share to begin with. Galaxy could and

would not be over looked. Not in the least. She owned Lucifer's heart, if it was only but a part of it. Like it or not Sammael detested the notion of having one of his own lovers, mates, whatever thinking of anyone but him. Yes he was that selfish. Or was it selfishness born out of that little four letter word they had been tossing around this evening like hard liquor? Sammael let out a short heavy breath through his nose as his eyes glowered down at Maelmorda where he was on the floor.

"If it's comfort you seek in this term 'mate', then take it," he said as his glower diminished into nothing more than an unreadable stone of an expression. "Though you will find yourself wishing you were a slave instead. For a slave isn't given a choice as to what they can and cannot do. A slave doesn't have to think all that much as to what they should and should not do; who they could and could not fuck. Since you deny me the simple pleasure of watching you enjoy the flesh of others, and they you, go back to your wife and enjoy her then. For her bed is not the only one you will be warming this night. You can say you won't find pleasure in and of another, but you will do so because it is a desire of mine. I can only think you as a slave Maelmorda however, for no mate of mine splices their heart to love someone else. At the time you feel the birth is near then and only then may you come find me and we shall take our short leave to tend to it. After that we shall see about what entertainment we can find ourselves in."

His voice was even, cool and calm of all things. He said it all like one business man to another, as if Maelmorda's very important request was more like a bunch of overblown nonsense. But that was just the way it seemed to some, when it wasn't. Sammael was so tempted just to rape Galaxy in Maelmorda's lap till she couldn't walk for a week that he could taste it. But he wasn't about to give Maelmorda nor Galaxy for that matter any more ammo to hate him with. Not right this second anyway. Later he would. Oh yes. Later that night he would give Galaxy much reason to hate his guts and scream at Maelmorda to disown him. For now though he would distance himself from Maelmorda so that he wouldn't give in to such evil tendencies, born of jealousy or otherwise. He didn't give any word to Gabriel to stay or come with him, so the infernal angel was left to his own devices. Those gears were just a grinding in that head. It was any miracle that those gathered there couldn't hear the thunderous grating sounds or cracking of the teeth on teeth in the cogs. He had not stormed but wandered away without another word on the matter. As he walked two of those half clothed demon servant with the cowls hiding their heads popped in out of thin freaking air to lift a long black coat of fur over their lords shoulders. Draping him in the thick article as they then moved to the table that Sammael paused in front of.

Fetching him a deep and wide glass of liquor; he held up his right hand and as the stem of the glass was slid in between his index finger and middle, was about the time that his eyes beheld a certain shapeshifter whose turquoise eyes reflected darkly in his black ones. So he wanted to leave too then, and with the Golden Goddess no less. The thank you for inviting us was made. The bowing was done. Just a minute or two after Sarku straightened up from his bow was when Sammael said, "Sarku, Sarku, you'll have to pardon my rudeness for not mentioning it earlier, but it just would not do for you to leave us so soon; the 'Golden Lady' too. For you see; I need you both here for various reasons, but, none so much as the obvious." A free hand was swept around the room before he settled his rump on the edge of the table. Stop Sarku from gating Galaxy home; Home where her children were waiting for her? Home where she could be happy in knowing she was not in the midst of demonic

perversions and at the mercy of Maelmorda more so than Sammael, strange as that may seem. Of course Sammael would stop him. He would do it with words first though before he resorted to less gentlemanly measures. What did surprise him in the least was that not only had Sarku come to him where he stood by the table, but Marsol too. Despite the warnings Maelmorda and Belorian had given him and the strong sense that there was bad blood between the two hellions.

"Come to talk me out of wishing Sarku and the Golden Lady fond farewells," Sammael said, not one bit touchy about it.

"What you do and do not wish is your own business," Marsol said, coming to stand at Sarku's left side, still naked and wet.

"Or maybe you stay to kill me in my moment of weakness," Sammael asked, chuckling as he raised his glass and gazed at Maelmorda over the rim of it.

"I came to get a drink," Marsol scoffed, going forward to grab a cup.

"Ahh, but you also came for something else," Sammael clicked his tongue at the snatch towards a cup and he reached forward towards that extended arm and forced the dragon lord to take his arm back quickly. As if the "venomous tongue" had actually bitten him. Sammael laughed a little with his mouth full of whatever liquid was in his glass as his oversized, black-fur-coated-self meandered down this side of the table. Coincidentally it was the same table Lilith and Mephisto were having their way with each other on perhaps still.

"We'll talk after... all of this," Marsol said, now peeved that he had been brushed aside yet again by Sammael.

"Maybe there won't be a later," Sammael called from the end of the table where he dipped his finger into something dark red and creamy looking, bringing it to his mouth to lick clean. Marsol's jaw clenched just a little.

"I had hoped you would have been one of the ones he picked, Anwarr," Sammael said, ignoring the obvious I-fucking-hate-you glare he was getting from the dragon lord.

"Is that your version of torture," Marsol said after relaxing the muscles in his jaw enough to speak.

"Why yes for you, it would be," Sammael answered him with his index finger still in his mouth, and if one didn't know him any better they could swear that he looked like he was giving a perverted innocent glance at the shapeshifter and the desert creature.

That really got Marsol's goat actually better than any promise of being thrown into brutal screaming agony for all eternity could. Sick is what it was, Marsol thought as he then reach forward to pick up a cup. The thought of anyone there laying their hands on him at Sammael's command to ravage him disgusted as well as infuriated him. Because they just might do it. Cause it would be a hoot wouldn't it? But then they would have to go after everyone that refused to partake in the shindig wouldn't they? They would have to start with Belorian and oh the wrestling match that would be! Perhaps naked and in a ring of hot chocolates? Sarku wouldn't stand for being man handled either and if someone so much as looked at Galaxy wrong well

they would have to deal with Maelmorda's wrath if not Sammael's. But oh then why would Sammael stop anyone from molesting her anyways? He might delight in watching that too much to wave the checkered flag. Maelmorda though would have been the biggest hurdle to cross though. He had clearly stated he would derive no pleasure whatsoever from anyone. Save Galaxy and Sammael. Would he really? Satan would find out.

As for the oddity that Cirgoth, Wyrvaust and Arilwen would be running into with not being able to find their ways back to this house of sin, they had only Marsol to thank for that. He walled off the manor with no trouble from Sammael strangely. Marsol wouldn't allow them to come back into harms way if he could help it. Sammael knew this not because he sensed that powerful display of conjuration, but because Marsol let him know it. The dragon lord let him see how he not only reinforced a barrier to keep a select few out, but Marsol was also made aware that there had been ice spells that should have triggered upon Cirgoth's leave of the manor upon him. And yet... none had come. So much was being exchanged between the two demons. Share and Share alike. Sammael didn't interfere with Marsol warding off his clan and friends, and Marsol respected Sammael's space from not being turned into a human sized freezer pop. Though that image was humorous. Who wouldn't want to lick a Marsol popsicle?

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Galaxy was not sure why, but Sammael's response to Maelmorda's question left her feeling displeased. She wasn't entirely sure why it was bothering her. After all, shouldn't she be more worried about how she was feeling than about how Maelmorda might take Sammael's cool, unruffled response? Despite her own anger, her own hurt, she was still ultimately protective of those she loved. She didn't like seeing her husband hurt, and surely Sammael's response would be hurtful. This had to be more reason for her to go home, though, she thought. She was obviously not thinking clearly. She did want to get out of there, desperately. And so she was more than a little relieved when Sarku made his way over to ask Sammael's permission to leave. She did want to get out of there, desperately. Even just for a little while. She wanted to hold her children. She wanted some space to breathe. She didn't really even know what she wanted. It just wasn't this. And so, when she overheard Sammael denying Sarku's request, she certainly was not pleased. She hadn't thought she was a prisoner. Why did she need his permission to leave? She had other options, of course. Her wedding ring, for one. Far from being just for decoration, it was able to transport her to a chosen safe haven at a simple twist on her finger. But she was hesitant to use it just yet. She didn't want to make Sammael too angry...she'd rather leave without going against his wishes, if at all possible. But for now, it seemed that she was stuck there. She'd stay put for a little while longer, she thought. Just to see where all this was leading.

Round from the table of tasty deserts and even more decadent bodies of Lilith and Mephisto going at it, meandering back towards the chair he had left Gabriel in. Or perhaps Gabriel was no longer there now but elsewhere engaging in some act of merriment, no matter how sinful it might have been. He had paid no more mind to Belorian, Sarku, or even Marsol because for the moment his sights were set on someone else. In that blissfully oversized coat of black fur he would meander his otherwise naked arse towards Maelmorda, or rather by Maelmorda to stand a few feet away to his fair skinned wife's left. With both hands in some type of pockets at his sides, a very clever button being in its place to keep from the bottom most

part of his abdomen and down concealed, Sammael's black eyes glinted on Galaxy. His chest exposed as much as the comfy coat would allow, his head canted to the side as he regarded her but his expression appeared like a mixture between curiosity and a certain air of harmlessness. Could Satan be harmless? Was that word even in his vocabulary? After several minutes of gazing down at her he spoke, and his tone was more civil and even polite than he had ever been with her before. "Away from the floor Galaxy, it is no place for the wife of Lucifer to be," he said, his head nodding as his left hand came out of his pocket and extended towards her. It was given as a way to help her up if she would like to use it...

Now, what was she to make of that? Harmless definitely did not seem like a word one would normally use to describe Sammael, but there it was. He practically cloaked himself in harmlessness. And she couldn't figure out why. Exactly how was she supposed to trust that the harmlessness or well-meaning attitude was genuine? She stared at the extended hand after he had approached, and then turned her gaze back up to his face as if searching for some sort of ulterior motive. She seemed a little startled to find herself on the floor. When had she ended up there? It was evidence of how very involved in her own tumultuous emotions she had been. She didn't seem to know what to do. She didn't think she wanted to accept his help. But she also thought it would seem cowardly if she refused his hand and stubbornly rose on her own. It would be a form of running away. And so, she visibly reined in her emotions and tried to compose herself. It resulted in that cool exterior she tended to display when she didn't want to embarrass herself by letting her feelings have free run. She would place her hand in his, fingers curling around his hand slightly, and would use his hand to pull herself to her feet. The amount she allowed him to help her was minimal...she managed to get upright under her own power, mostly, and the moment she was steady on her feet, she allowed her own hand to fall back to her side, half hidden in the folds of her skirt. "And where is a proper place for the wife of Lucifer?" Her tone was neutral, but her eyes spoke volumes about exactly how little she was able to trust him. If anything, his unexpected show of gentlemanly courtesy made it harder for her to do so. She hadn't expected it of him, and that was enough to make her withdraw a little, and be wary of him. Well, more wary than she already was, anyway.

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The way she only let him help her to a certain extent and then take the rest of the movement under her own demeanor couldn't have gone unnoticed. She really didn't like him huh? His fingers would close around her hand too. The pressure light and kept to a safe and decent manner. Releasing her when she pulled away from him and everything. Or did he? "Well for one not on the floor," he said, and his tone was like that of teasing some old friend. As if he had been about to add the word "silly" at the end of his sentence but then had decided not to. If she had known that her outward appearance as well as that look in her eyes brought the smirk out of him inwardly, would she have slapped him? "Come," he said as he then offered her the same arm as the hand he had given her from before. "Talk with me." Oh good heavens what did he mean by that? What indeed. He would wait there, standing with his posture a little slackened from leaning on his right foot more, and of all the people to have his back turned to it was Maelmorda that got a full view of the hood outlandish coat he wore the most. Was he doing this on purpose? Was he being nice to Gala to spite Mael? Or was this perhaps a means to rub Gala out, bit by bit? Then again maybe, just maybe he was being nice just to be... nice..

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She wanted to respond with something childish, like "Maybe I liked the floor. Ever think of that?", but she kept her mouth shut. Wisely, too. It wouldn't do to start arguing with Satan like she was a five year old, as satisfying as sticking her tongue out at him might have been. And of course, she didn't like him. It wasn't as if the situations in which they met were the type to generally spawn friendship, right? Gala normally was able to make friends with people fairly easily under normal circumstances, but circumstances in which Sammael were involved were so rarely normal. If she knew that it was her expression that made him smirk, she would more likely have felt like slapping herself than him. No, in her mind, she thought she was betraying nothing of what she felt. And normally she did a pretty good job of keeping that mask from slipping, too. Tonight had been one hell of a rough night, though, and it shouldn't have come as much of a surprise that she didn't feel up to her normal level of being so guarded. She hesitated long enough at the offer of his arm that it was abundantly clear how reluctant she was to touch him. Still, her hand would curl around the arm that she was offered. Loosely, though, as if she might pull away any moment. It was a mystery to her why he was behaving so nicely. Her gaze would drift to Maelmorda briefly, before she would turn her gaze back to Sammael's. It was likely a mystery, as well, exactly why Gala was being so polite back. Her instinct was to be rude to him, call him names, maybe give him a nice punch to the gut. But she seemed to be minding her manners. Maybe she was just doing it out of self preservation. She had made Sammael angry in the past, and hadn't much liked the experience. Then again, maybe she was just trying to show that she could play nice as well, when she wanted too. "And what would you like to talk to me about?" She inquired, same tone as before.

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He could wait for her to take his arm. Oh yes, he could wait a few minutes, a couple hours, time did not so much annoy him as much as some would think. Being as old as beings like Maelmorda and he were, time became more of an old comrade of yours than anything else. He did not look to Maelmorda when she had, although if his creator had asked him as to his intentions for his wife Sammael would have told him. All he wanted to do was talk. Just like with Arilwen before Wyrvaust had botched that to hell and back. Like with Cirgoth, or rather they had only talked in the way of heavy pants and whimperish moans. With her hand on his arm, he would lay his free hand over the back of hers. Keeping it feather light so as not to spook her anymore than she might already have been. To let her keep her hope that she could pull away from him at any time and be free of him and his trickery. With her on his arm he would walk slow but leisurly away through the crowds of those who were loyal to him, the thickness parting of course to let their lord by. "What I want to talk about and what we will talk about are two different animals entirely, but if you must know right now I would like that our children be tolerant of each other. Friends, if that is even conceivable," he said as he nodded and gave a cheeky grin here and there to those he passed that stared or oogled the Golden Goddess on the arm of the one they served. Like day and night they were. Galaxy with her radiance, those gorgeous locks, that maybe once humble but now pretty attire she wore, the color of her eyes and the way the light of the torches and candles may have reflected off of them. Sammael also with his divine looks like Galaxy, completely contrasting to her glow with his terrible unseen will to rule everything, and we do mean everything. With his dark brown, or were they black, shaggy tresses. His eyes that appeared more like the pit from which Acheron was



carved out of. His flawless flesh walking abreast of her own, flawless flesh. Both the embodiment of heavenly beings, or rather one had once been and was no more and the other well... Could she remember that far back? Had she ever seen it? Witnessed the glory? Or was it the arrogant glory? His hair was tussled from all that hot and sweaty sexual relations he had been having with Maelmorda for quite a long, long time as well as that infernal angel who was more dear to Sammael than he might have known. The candle light didn't seem to reflect though in his eyes like it might have for hers. Almost as if he was too blackened inside and even something a meager as the light cast from a candles flame was consumed by his inner darkness. "Do you think that is possible," he asked her as a demon servant paused with their form kneeling before them both with a plate of fruit raised up for them like some offering to a pair of deities that walked among mortal men. "Our children not growing to hate each other but rather, to accept the other as family?" He gestured with the hand he had lain over hers to the fruit, perhaps they were grapes from the way they were round-ish and gathered on a green vine. But at eating them and the taste recognition, one would find them to be black berries instead...

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Gala would mostly keep her gaze on Sammael as they walked, sometimes looking at him with head turned so she could see his face, sometimes just watching him from the corner of her eye. She tried not to notice the eyes she felt on her. She didn't want to be watched. Normally she wouldn't have paid much attention at all to the others in the room, but tonight she could practically feel the weight of those gazes on her. And it felt uncomfortable. When you wanted to be alone, it was just that much harder to ignore the people there with you, wasn't it? She probably wasn't aware of the picture they made together. She always was woefully unaware of the way others saw her, with those loose, golden curls spilling down her back. And she contrasted him even more, in that dark coat of his, as the off-shoulder dress she had chosen was of a blue that was so pale it bordered on white. She tended to favor clothing like that...when she dressed in dark colours, it suggested that her mood was just as dark. One could only imagine that when she had dressed for the day, she hadn't been feeling the weight of sadness that she currently felt. Her gaze would still occasionally stray to her husband...she couldn't seem to help it. When he was in the room, her habit was always to watch him. It was something she barely realized she was doing now, didn't even register in her mind. Her gaze slipped back to Sammael when he mentioned his wish for their children to get along, to possibly even be friends. She would consider this, her expression thoughtful, before she responded. "I couldn't speak for Corwyn. He's old enough that that would be entirely up to him." And Corwyn, of course, was not the type to deny someone friendship over their parentage. He probably would not approve, exactly, of the fact that Maelmorda was having children with anyone but his mother, but that would only be because of his protectiveness of Gala. "Keir and Rain would likely have no trouble with it, I think. They would grow up with the idea in their heads, wouldn't they? It wouldn't seem like such a big undertaking to them, as it might to Corwyn." She would shake her head at the offer of fruit. She wasn't hungry right now. She still felt as if there were a cold weight in the pit of her belly. She didn't think she could quite bring herself to eat anything.

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She was quite the beauty wasn't she? Is what his eyes would have told Maelmorda should his creator hold his gaze, which wasn't likely, considering the mob of

demons that swarmed around the Morning Star for his attention; to coo at him with questions or to just fawn over him in general. Some were curious while others were deviant about it, but even so absolutely no one touched Maelmorda. No one dared come within three feet of him, as though he were carrying some kind of contagious disease they were terrified of catching. He watched her as she watched him. More experienced in this act perhaps than the kind heart at his side. He even watched her as she watched the Morning Star with that near longing look in those breath taking eyes of hers. He popped a blackberry into his mouth as she answered him, the servant immediately retreating out of the way with their head still bowed and looking at the floor, for that was a custom with the majority of the servants in that lavished oasis manor. Nobody was allowed to look upon those their Lord bid welcome to. Ah, but of course she couldn't speak for Corwyn, he thought with a brotherly silent laugh over that. Corwyn was very much protected by Maelmorda as he was protective over Galaxy. Who could really voice what that Adonis was thinking? The juice of the berry stained his lips an even richer pink color to give him a faint puckered look for a moment. They had started walking around one of the smaller pools where some of the guests had taken to jumping into when he said, "For those two, perhaps your husband and I could arrange that two of our children undergo the same range in growth; maybe even a few more to make a lot of them so that they find entertainment in each other and needn't rely on the rest of the world for it." Awfully deep thoughts for someone that could throw her down and ravish her right there, and the only ones who could or would even want to stop him would have been Maelmorda, Belorian, Sarku and Marsol, and that was stretching it. Course he wasn't that weak willed to give in to baser urges. Not unless it got something accomplished.

Abruptly a little man balancing on a single wheel peddled his way in front of Galaxy, clad in the classic red and gold attire of a mad jester. In his hands he had been playing a small square shaped piece of wood covered with thin strings that varied in lengths. The man looked like a child but he wasn't considering the grey beard that was braided down to the top of the wheel with the seat he sat on. This man bowed graciously to Galaxy and Sammael, head turned downwards before he straightened up and in his left old and age spot covered hand he produced a single lilly as fresh as can be. It was this that the man carting around the room on the wheel offered to Galaxy, and it was the offering of this dainty little flower that made Sammael chuckle a bit. "I think he likes you," Sammael said to Gala as his lips curled into a grin..

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Sarku was not at all pleased when Sammael refused to grant them leave. "This one had it on the Morning Star's good word that guests were we and not prisoners, Prince Sammael," he growled. "Part ways we shall when the lady is ready," he promised that the effort would be made. The shapeshifter then retreated and went to Galaxy whose gaze he met with a dark burn that showed a dangerous side of him she had never until that moment seen. "Say the word, and this one shall take the golden lady from here," he half hissed, half snarled, and he sounded more animal than man. When it came that she walked with Sammael, he accompanied her, albeit at a distance. He no more trusted Satan than she did.

It was often odd; the things which disturbed Maelmorda and the things which did not. Now when Sammael announced them mates and he not a slave or thrall; here was a devil that looked truly beautiful and divine as he sprung with the grace of a

panther to his feet. Whatever stinging end Satan spoke, Maelmorda seemed not to mind or to play into at all as his face shone and his body flexed and he breathed in all the air of the world with sudden strength and vitality. His arms thrust out and a smile that could charm Beelzebub beamed from the maker of angels to Sammael, and eyes aglow with an internal fire smoldered on the Prince of Demons. "Ah, Sammael, now I swell over with pride that you have proclaimed me your mate and equal in offering myself to you, to be ever as we were before the pact, and in that pact named me as your mate, as your equal! Here is true wisdom, here is true glory! Truly divine is our union 'neath Haman, the Middle Kingdom, and Acheron, for every choice have we now to love one another or to spurn one another, for this is the way of mates such as us, to be equal under the three kingdoms. How joyous the Morning Star is to have such a sacred union proclaimed before our friends and these witnesses, for now we are bound by love, loyalty and respect of a genuine font by their eyes and ears and tongues! Whether knowing you have placed me on the throne beside yourself, or by coincidence overlooked the machinations therein, has no sway on the pride I feel for you, for wisely was your resolution or your error made. Your mate I am, my mate you are."

Hence the crafty devil in that stunning guise of exposed flesh stalked over to Sammael to embrace and kiss him with such a fever and violence of passion as would make even Satan himself weak in the knees. A stunning smile spread his lips as their soft buds of flesh parted scarcely at what time he spoke only unto Sammael. "Your dismissal shall be accepted for but a moment, beloved of all demons, for away I shall, Sammael, but not only unto my wife, but to intercept our son before his eyes feast on all this sin, for comes he this way. With him I shall await you and the birth of these, our second and third children." He kissed him once more then wheeled and departed at that in lengthy strides and in them paused once to cuff Marsol on the back, his eyes penetrating his friend's deeply. "You should have trusted my ability to persevere, Marsol. If ever I need the support of my friends and allies, I ask. I pray you do not suffer too dire a consequence for shunning Sammael's offer of good will. Who knows, perhaps he shall admire your sand in place of contempt or malice. If not, I have faith you shall get through it, as you survived me." He smiled at that, kissed Marsol's cheek, and continued on his way. The disarmingly clever devil breezed hence towards the door, and as he did so a part of him split away once more to remain in the company of Sammael and his wife. That embodiment which hastened to leave sank into the shadows and vanished hence altogether to emerge in the corridor outside where he met Arasgal and led him away from the very adult gathering. His other half meanwhile sauntered along with Sammael and Galaxy, silent but attentive.

It would seem that Gabrian had given everyone the slip. He was there one moment, and then gone the next and no one, but perhaps Sammael, if even him, had seen where he had gone. Acting of his own guile, so as not to incriminate Sammael, Gabrian had chosen a tiny form for himself to take not long after Sammael had withdrawn from him all hot and bothered, and in this form the infernal angel made his way unnoticed to Sarku, determined to separate Lucifer from his wife. In this small form he took and emulated, he had crawled surreptitiously into the deep pocket of Sarku's leather jerkin as a scarab. It was a form Abbadon had forced on him long ago to punish him and which Gabrian held forever in himself. Only if Sammael called him back would Gabe abandon his objective. Gabrian excelled at remaining under the radar, even of Lucifer himself. It helped that he was Sammael's and that Lucifer had no claim on him. Sammael he could not hide from if he wanted to. There in the pocket of Sarku he would remain until he had infiltrated their castle,

and there work on making Galaxy and Sarku either forget the Morning Star, or forsake him altogether. If Sammael commanded him to abandon the plan, Gabriel would do so and return to the party by and by when no one was looking. Those very words could be his logo, 'when no one is looking.'

Cirgoth and Wyrvaust were a very frustrated pair when all their efforts failed in vain of making their way back to Sammael's palace. Their physical flight brought them no closer to the palace than the gates had, indeed, they could not locate it by wing and exhausted themselves in the attempt. When at last the three birds landed, it was at an Oasis within sight of Sammael's palace, and yet somehow they could not see the palace thrusting up and from the desert sand and spreading out in all directions. That of course had to be Sammael's doing, whether for their benefit, or to make less impact on Morashtar by phasing his palace into an alternate plane, making it so it was there, and it wasn't at the same time, much as Valis Urik's shadow palace was at the Lake of Shadows. Indeed, people could walk right through it, or the space it could occupy if risen out of the ether. Wyrvaust was depressed for very different reasons now. His shame assaulted him more fiercely than ever, for a part of him that he was violently aware of, was relieved...relieved that they could not find the palace. When they reached the oasis, he slumped against a palm tree's trunk, dried fronds scattered about his bare feet, and there brooded, incapsulated in his guilt. Normally Arilwen could encourage him to confide what he felt with little effort, but Wyrvaust was slipping away from them all, as happened from time to time when insanity pressed hard on him. After nearly three hours of coaxing, mainly by talking to him, she was able to get him to open up to her just a little bit. His dark eyes had cut on Cirgoth who sat engrossed in his frustration and worry before his gaze locked on his beautiful wife again. "The Raven is a coward surrounded by all kinds of courage, such courage as can only make him feel ashamed in comparison. Glad was a great part of the Raven that this little party of three could not find Sammael's lair. Is the swan not ashamed of her husband?"

Cirgoth laughed at him before she could answer. "Are you ashamed that a part of you is still human and has a human's instinct to survive, Wyrvaust? Of course you were relieved! Who but a friend of Sammael's would wish to go back there? Courage is not in what we feel or think anyway, but in our actions. Had we made it there, you would have had the courage you needed to enter there and do what needed to be done. Why are you so hard on yourself, Wyrvaust? Why do you punish yourself so?"

Wyrvaust scowled at Cirgoth. "Thought and feeling is the beginning and end of us all!" he snapped rather more angrily than he was even aware of. "Does Cirgoth feel relieved? Does he?"

Cirgoth shook his head. "No, I did not and do not, but then, I was never human was I? I never had to struggle between what I born as and what I became as you must. I have never even been mortal, a thing many angels experience at least for a little while. You are no coward though, Wyrvaust. And let us say that you were, because the look on your face tells me you believe it, so what? Not everyone can stand up without fear against the horrors of life and not flee from it. There are lions and there are jackals, and they both have their place. Perhaps you, Wyrvaust, are a jackal."

Wyrvaust sighed heavily and sank against the tan palm trunk. His arm curled around Arilwen as she nuzzled up against him. "Does my beautiful swan want a jackal for a

husband?" he asked quietly.

Cirgoth interrupted them one last time. "You think too damn much, Wyrvaust. Weren't you a priest? Can you not find peace within yourself and be thankful for what you have instead of casting self doubt on yourself at every turn?"

"I don't know..." Was all that Wyrvaust could honestly say. He never had been very good at quieting the chaos in himself. In others? Yes. But himself? He had never been able to conquer himself when the havoc awoke inside of him and he became self-aware of all his inadequacies.

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Gala hadn't been sure how she should be feeling about how gleefully Maelmorda had reacted to Sammael's words. It stung, of course, but in the end she did prefer to see him happy over seeing him downcast. She knew it was probably odd to feel that way, but couldn't bring herself to examine the feelings too closely.

She'd consider Sammael's words once more as he mentioned arranging for their children to undergo the same growth rate. "Well...if you'd like to arrange for your children to follow the twins in their natural growth, I would have no objections. But I'd like for the twins to continue on as they are, unhindered." Of course, she had no idea at the moment that, being conceived in dreams as Keir and Rain were, their growth rate was very much dictated by themselves. It hadn't yet proved to bother them, growing naturally, so the twins hadn't seen any need to change the growth rate. But the moment they made the conscious decision to age, there would be no doubt that they would accelerate their growth. Whether Gala liked it or not.

Gala would stop short when the little man on his wheel rolled to a stop in front of them. She would look a little startled at the offering of a flower, and after a quick glance at Sammael when he spoke, she would reach to accept the flower with her free hand, murmuring her thanks. She realized with chagrin that tears had sprung to her eyes even at this simple gesture. Honestly, what was it with her tonight? She was acting like a damn fountain. They ought to just prop her up in one of the pools, and she could astound them all with her never-ending waterworks. The hint of a smile curved her lips, though, and she'd raise the flower so the silky petals could brush against her cheek. She loved lilies. Hell, she loved most flowers. This was the kind of person who would be just as touched had she received a dandelion as she would had she received a rose. It had been a little while since she had received flowers from anyone, and that simple act was enough to dull her stinging emotions and boost her mood a little bit. She'd glance up at Sammael afterwards. "Well, I like him just fine, too." She would respond, finally gifting him with that itty bitty hint of a smile. Better than the glare she had wanted to level at him earlier.

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As Maelmorda sauntered along with them, still naked as you please, his hands folded behind his back, the back of one hand cupped in the palm of the other, he kept his thoughts to himself and pondered a great many things. He seemed to glower at the unicyclist who gave Galaxy that lily, but the scowl was brief and in his eyes and the expressionless seal of his lips alone. He remembered a time when he brought his wife flowers, always roses, red, black, or both, always of the most fragrant

variety. How long had it been since he gave his beautiful wife flowers? Since she had her cozy little manor? Surely it could not have been that long. Had he only used the flowers to coax her away from her friend's attempts to talk her out of seeing him? Yes, he remembered everything...how her friends had tried to convince her that he was no good for her. Imagine that? The Morning Star not good enough for such a good heart such as she? Of course he had not been good enough for her, regardless of what Lilith and other dark kinds might think. He had known it too, but could not live without her...without the first friend and lover he had known as Maelmorda. Maelmorda recalled when they had been happiest...when he had been very young as Maelmorda, before he had known who he was and they frequented Kar Dur's shadowy but magnificent boundaries. Then...there was the time he had spent with her while he was on Earth as Arcadius. In that perfect dream paradise he had formulated for her and injected himself into...that paradise their twins had been born of. That place and those times were everything he had always wanted for her but had never been able to give. He had brought her flowers then; he remembered now, often, wild flowers and roses from the garden. He had walked with her every day, hand in hand, laughed with her, made love with her beneath the shade of the trees on the softest of grass. They had skinny dipped in the pools, explored the forests and mountains together, and just loved each other. It was a duration many would say was decadently frivolous, accomplished nothing and was a perfect waste of time, but it was a time Maelmorda would always treasure and it mattered to him because it had accomplished something very important to him; it had made Galaxy happy, for three thousand years, he had made his wife happy. Had it been an illusion, this dream utopia? It had been real enough that they had conceived a pair of beautiful twins while making love there. Was Sammael still convinced that the twins were his? Just because he had ravished Galaxy in the flesh while she slept? Of course that made more sense...the timing, the math added up...but he was so wrong if he still believed the twins were his.

The Morning Star glanced over at his wife and his expression looked almost pained as did the smile he expressed. His eyes were glazed with a superfluous sheen of moisture and he looked away from her as casually as he was able to when she looked his way again. Yes, this half of him was going to follow her home, and make such a place for her, never leave her side, see her joyous again, only it would be more tangible this time. He had no intention of interrupting their conversation as pleasant as it was. If Sammael and Galaxy could make peace with one another Maelmorda could only be pleased by that. While many in the room wondered what mischief Sammael was up to, for surely his intentions could never be innocent, Maelmorda never once wondered any such thing. Call it trust, call it a leap of faith, he would leap until the ground fell out beneath him. He felt it imperative that Sammael understood that he was trusted and loved by the Morning Star.

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Sammael did not say anything else to Sarku's growling words, but gave the shapeshifter an 'oh-really?' small thing-of-a-smirk. So the shapeshifter the Morning Star seemed to hold in high regard also wanted to do a tango with him then? It made him almost laugh inwardly at how quick Sarku was to show that side of himself over the Morning Star's wife. Very noble of him, or was it very dangerous? No gestures or words were given for the Golden Goddess and he to be left alone, so they could have a parade following them around the room for all he cared. Though those that in fact had decided to come along with them on their comfortably slow walk he actually would care over. Of course Sarku would never leave her side, he

thought as the shapeshifter was still noticed even at the distance he might have taken. But after that proclamation by the Morning Star and that kiss he had been given that had indeed, caused his insides to knot up with need for his creator all over again, come to take a stroll with them well, Sammael found himself sort of smirking even harder for some reason. He had looked after the other part, that piece of the Morning Star that had left the room to go be with their son after exchanging some words with the dragon lord over yonder. He really enjoyed being everywhere at once Sammael thought with a sort of brotherly sarcasim, albeit he wouldn't mind at all still being in the Morning Star's thoughts. Oh yes, that was the conceited piece in him that very much delighted in being not only the center of attention, but the entirety of the attention and nothing but it. Sometimes. Maelmorda made him actually smile when he had told only he of where the devil was going to be and with whom. Good. It curved his jealousy factor greatly, not that would stop him from whatever it was someone like him plotted. Sammael heard the gruff response Marsol gave his maker, he even saw out of the corner of his black eyes how the dragon lord's jaw clenched after Maelmorda left him with a kiss that had this way of lingering even after he was long gone. There was obvious bad blood between the demonic red dragon and himself. But there was also a thin and shakey temporary truce that sat there now as well. Perhaps it was born out of the fact that Marsol could give a rats arse whose company he was in that he wouldn't hesitate to go toe-to-toe with him again, and possibly risk more than just life and limb in doing so. Maybe it was the truth that Marsol would never fail to let him know just what he thought of him, despite the consequences. Or maybe, just maybe, it was because Sammael knew that Marsol knew that there would be a time and place for them to kill one another and that until then, they mind as well appreciate the time they have now? Who knows really what stayed the fallen angel's hand and contained the dragon lord's temper. It sure as hell was not the fact that the one was severely out numbered and surrounded by those loyal to his enemy. Sammael's eyes went to Galaxy after she had spoken her mind about her children's growth rate and where she stood on it. Back to the present Sam, he thought as he pulled most of his mind back to the beauty at his side, the devil at his back, and the shapeshifter not that far off. The old small thing of a man with the thousand wrinkles, the crow's feet beside each eye, the age spots and the feeble looking hands, he nodded with another gesture of his hand that had a terrible case of tremors for the lady to smell the flower. He looked at her as she looked at him. Was she surprised or something? What, Satan couldn't give people flowers now? Gosh. "Naturally," he said to her, meaning about the kids growing up and all. Though what if the boys got it into their heads that they didn't want to be this small anymore? What would Gala do about that? "He use to make these flowers of chocolate, I wonder if he still does," he said to no one in particular, chuckling again when the man on the wheel scoffed and peddled a circle around Gala and minded not to get too close to Maelmorda. Though the tiny man didn't see the glower he was getting from Lucifer, you could feel it anyways couldn't you? That kind of gaze just unnerved the shyte out of anyone. Sammael wouldn't shoe away the old man, because it seemed to appease Gala in some manner. But if he had seen Maelmorda's expression, even a fraction of it, he might have. "Ahh," he said when she made that itty bitty smile. Pointing the index of his free hand at her mouth before putting it back into the pocket of his coat. "There, you see," was all he said, giving her a more than broad smile of his own in return for her gifting him with that of hers. Whatever reason drove Sam to being nice to Gala, it was probably best left unknown. It could have been that he merely wanted Maelmorda's approval like so many others strove for. Or it could just be the tip of the ice berg to a shyte storm he was cooking up to break Lucifer's heart to pieces. Indeed, he would not

make trusting or loving him easy by no means. Not for the Morning star that is. But Gala perhaps he would be extra nice to. So devious were his methods at times. With a vast amount of luck, this would not be one of those times..

Galaxy had taken note of Sarku following her, of course, and of his earlier anger. She hadn't ever seen him angry before. And while it was a little bit shocking to see this new side of him, she felt comforted that he could be moved to anger on her behalf. And the fact that he was trailing along behind them was a comfort as well...it was nice to know that someone was interested in her safety. And Maelmorda trailing them as well. It would have been interesting to know what he was thinking of...every time she cast her gaze in his direction, he seemed so very thoughtful. She hadn't noticed Maelmorda's reaction to the little man giving her the flower, of course. Her attention had been all wrapped up in thanking the man properly. And as he gestured for her to smell it, she would obligingly give it a little sniff. As she walked with Sammael, she would lightly twirl the lily in her hand by the stem. Now, if the twins got it into their heads that they wanted to be bigger, Gala would just have to accept it, wouldn't she? The twins had already lived their childhood in her dreamworld, of course, hadn't they? She'd already tentatively made the connection between the dreams and the twins...she hadn't really spoken about her suspicions, though. A mother knew her own children, though, and she had known those two the moment they had been born. As she strode along in a liesurely manner with Sammael, she would even look a little amused at the little man's antics as he pedalled circles around her. She was tempted again, of course, to be childish and plaster a scowl back into place when Sammael made note of her smile. But she resisted that urge and just turned her attention elsewhere after she saw his own broad smile. He had a nice smile...she wasn't sure if she'd seen him smiling so very broadly before. She seemed to be a little more at ease now, distracted from her earlier hurt as she was at the moment. She still was uncertain about Sammael's motives, and still intended to be quite cautious around him. But at least she was starting to lighten up a little. She had stopped looking so amazingly fragile for the time being...if she didn't dwell on what bothered her, she did tend to bounce back fairly well.

As much as he liked watching her squirm, so to speak, he liked watching her brighter side too. He'd seen from a distance about this kind soul that the Morning Star had taken as a wife all those ages ago. She did have this glow about her that attracted so many. Hell it was what had attracted Lucifer hadn't it? So she much be some kind of something to have gotten the gaze of Hell's greatly loved Prince and Haman's most rebellious angel. Not an easy feat by no means. Sammael stopped quickly for a moment, his arm tightening lightly with her hand in it as his head turned to the right. Just then two very naked and wet demons chased each other out of one pool and into the next. But was their blantent nudity and obvious sinful ways so bad? Why, they appeared more like creatures of nature frolocking from one water source to the next. All in good fun. Laughing and carrying on almost like children, even though they were adults. "Bit rowdy at times aren't they," he said as the two demons splashed into the pool past them, continuing on with their water polo-ish fun and such. After they had passed, he would start their walk again and his arm slackened with her hand on it like it had been before. The tiny old man on the wheel made scoffing sounds again, waving his small wooden piece with the strings on it at the two demons that had frolocked on by them, as if scolding. Course the old man peddled back around to Gala's side to settle the wooden piece in his lap and brought his feeble hands to strum some awfully comforting melodies from the strings with his nobby fingertips. So not only was Gala offered food, she was



given a flower and now she had her own personal musician playing for her? Seems the little shindig wasn't so bad after all. Nobody had hurt her had they? As Maelmorda pointed out to Marsol in a biting sort of way earlier, Sammael really hadn't hurt anyone except Marsol. And that demon wasn't phased by physical torture in the slightest anyways. Ergo, Sammael hadn't done anything wrong. Or had he...?

She blinked over at Sammael when he stopped so abruptly, and for a moment considered yanking her hand free when his arm tightened around it. There was that flutter of panic for a moment, though she managed to keep it from spreading to her face. She preferred at least having the option to slip her hand free and put some distance between herself and Sammael, so having his grip on her tighten was a little disconcerting. When she saw the reason he had stopped, though, she relaxed inwardly once more. The nudity didn't seem to bother her, especially when they were laughing and playing so freely. They seemed more like nymphs or something than they did demons. It really depended on the situation, it seemed, for nudity to bother her. Or perhaps it was the person she was seeing naked? She glanced up at Sammael once more and nodded. "They definitely are rowdy. They seem to be enjoying themselves, though." She was relieved when his arm slackened, and would begin walking next to him once more. Her gaze would drift back to the little old man. He was kind of cute, wasn't he? She loved music, as well, so that was a certain way to set her at ease. And no one had hurt her, this was true...physically, anyway. She'd had about as much emotional pain as she could handle that evening, and in ways that was harder to deal with than physical pain. But she seemed to have composed herself fairly well, and was watching the little man as he played with what looked like enjoyment. Nothing too overt about it, but her eyes had grown a little more alert. She was very likely committing this little fellow to memory, and he'd no doubt show up in sketches she'd do another day. She would occasionally drop her gaze back to Maelmorda or Sarku. She hadn't forgotten them, but seemed to need the reassurance that they were nearby.

He nodded too when she said that they definitely were enjoying themselves. Of course they were. They were all in a sort of mad house, as it were. Enjoyment came in many forms as some of those gathered there took to the many odd corners of the room to participate in the more darker side of joy. Though it was extremely hard to see from where Gala stood, and Sammael seemed to position himself as he walked beside her in such a way as to hide those spots of decadence. Would Maelmorda see that? How even Satan shielded his wife from the lewd perversions happening there? Did it matter though? Surely Gala had been exposed to such things before right? Mass orgies; couple swapping, and all these sorts of things that only the immortals could handle or even sustain in one another they did. The tiny old man did not sing for her; merely play his square wooden strings for the wife of the Morning Star. To speak would have been to interrupt his lord, and that certainly was not something he wished to do for the world. Only if Sammael or even Galaxy asked, would the man on the wheel sing. Until then he peddled about with his sunken sad eyes that appeared to have something like what humans called cataracts on them. Washed over in a sickly milky white color. Yet he got around quite well in spite of that. Maybe he was a demon. Maybe he was human. Or maybe he wasn't even real at all. "Aside from being rowdy though they do make a party lively," he said as they passed in between two of those pools full of bodies. "I must admit, even if I threw it, they are the ones that make it colorful. Don't you agree?" Oh, careful now. Was that a trick question? Or was he just making idle chit chat? He gave her a lopsided grin as he nodded to a table where a few guests were clamoring over it in a food fight. For all the childish ways some of the demons enacted in, it had the

underlying air of this carefree atmosphere. This light as a feather type of merriment that was so goddamn contagious.

Gala, of course, didn't realize that Sammael was making such efforts to shield her from the naughtier things that were going on at this little gathering. It was nothing she hadn't seen before, of course. Being the wife of Lucifer did come with some rather eye-opening experiences. She had likely been involved in at least one orgy herself, although she'd never willingly discuss such things with anyone but her husband. Although, it would be up for debate exactly how willing her own participation in such things would have been. Still, she was definitely not the innocent little thing she had once been. She had most certainly been exposed to some fairly shocking things. Still, what would she think of Sammael trying to protect her delicate feminine sensibilities, if she had noticed? Perhaps part of her would have thanked him for it, appreciated such a gallant and gentlemanly gesture. But then again, there would have probably been a part of her that would have been a little offended that he thought she needed sheltering from such things. She did have staggering amounts of pride when it came to certain things. It was the sad eyes of the little man that caused an answering little twinge of sadness in her. There was something a little bit sad about such an elderly figure doing the duties of a gesture...he looked to be of an age where she thought he should be doing something less physically demanding. She was distracted again, though, when Sammael spoke, and she considered his question. "I rather think you could manage to make the party colorful on your own. But they certainly add something to what you already had arranged. Is that not the reason you invited them? A good host knows that if they invite a few party animals, they can guarantee a lively event." She commented thoughtfully, her gaze turning towards the demons that were clamoring over the table.

It might have seemed strange to some that the angelic creature at his side made him chuckle with their choice of words. His laughter was rich and full, as if Gala had been telling some monumentally hilarious joke that he had just gotten the punch line to. She was so damn cute he thought with now not one ounce of jealousy over the Morning Star's love. She held herself as composed as she possibly could given the circumstances, and still she managed to find the details in the bigger picture and allow herself to take notice of them, and to feel them. Like the old man for instance. Maybe she hid her emotions of what she thought over the feeble looking peddler. Maybe she didn't hide them well enough. Sam saw through her however, because she let him on some level. And perhaps she wasn't even aware of it. Was the tiny old man a test too? Or a trick like his question? If it was he wasn't chastising her or anything. He wasn't belittling her with harsh language. So all was well for now. "Believe it or not, their not the ones putting the color into the party," he said as he looked at her sideways with his unspeakably handsome face making a faint ghost of a smile. "It was actually you I that I needed to bring life into the party, not color." Good heavens, what was he doing? Trying to woo her or something? Not really. He wasn't pawing or molesting her or some crap like that with what he said. He was just giving her a compliment that he didn't really put any thought behind. Maybe that would tickle Maelmorda's fancy. His son giving his wife a compliment without any strings attached. Around the time that Sammael had said what he had, perhaps Galaxy would become aware of quite a large number of people in the pools hanging on the sides watching her walk with Sammael at her side. How they looked and watched with arms folded or heads canted to the side. Some leaning on the shoulders of others. A few standing with their arms crossed waist deep in the cool clear blue waters. There was some kind of light emitting

from the bottom of those pools that lit them up and revealed everything in them, but it was hard to tell just what or where that light was coming from when the floor to the pools was white stone. Maybe it was the stone that was aglow. Sammael said nothing as to all those with their eyes on the four that walked by them. But he didn't try and shield her from that either. Heh.

At that laugh, she looked like she wasn't sure whether she had somehow become the joke. She didn't think she had said anything horribly funny...had she? And she didn't look as though she liked being the one bringing life to the party. That was probably the last thing she wanted. She studied him for a few moments, as if trying to search for some sort of hidden meaning behind what he was saying to her. Was he making fun of her? It was hard to tell. It was even harder for her to believe that he might actually be complimenting her. "I'm not entirely sure what you mean," she admitted, frowning just a little. Comprehension dawned a little when she turned her head and found that there were people watching her. She had certainly gathered an audience, hadn't she? She looked a bit embarrassed when she turned her attention to him again. Okay, she had a pretty good idea what he meant now, though she still was not at all sure that she appreciated how entertained everyone seemed by her. She felt like some kind of sideshow freak. Gala was not the kind of person that did well with that kind of attention. It made her uncomfortable, and that much was clear from the tension that gathered in her shoulders. But she managed to try and be polite anyway, trying to ignore the weight of all those eyes on her by placing her full attention on him. "Well, thank you. I think." She thought he probably meant that as a compliment, though it was hard for her to take it as one. She probably wouldn't have taken too kindly to him thinking she was cute, either. That wasn't exactly the kind of persona she tried to portray, was it? Although it was how she ended up acting, occasionally. Like that uncertain, slightly frowning expression she had on now...even it had its appeal in the cuteness department.

Of course that frown she made after she said thank you had his smile widening to not off set his dark appeal, but push all that darkness in him to the surface with his insane looks that the Morning Star had crafted on a whim way back when. Of course he could take on a different form, but she wouldn't appreciate that perhaps. Arilwen and Anna certainly hadn't. Those currently shaggy and borderline long dark locks were shaken from his face as he shook his head some, his laughter quieting down. "It's a compliment Gala not a bullet in the chest," he chuckled a bit before his grin was plastered on his face like his hair had been when Maelmorda and Arasgal and he had been romping in the pool. At the mere thought of that he felt a sharp pang in his side. He wouldn't give away what his feelings were inwardly over his new family, but his eyes seemed to wander away from her for a brief moment before he brought them back. She didn't take people telling her good things about herself well did she, he mused as his free hand fanned to his right and then to his left in front of her. A little shoe-go-away kind of gesture that had all those guests frowning or groaning at being chased off from their lollygaging ways to go back to whatever it was they had been doing. Can't take a compliment eh? He would have to work on that, and oh how he would find great satisfaction in pushing that button on Maelmorda's little golden star. He might just sweet talk her into being okay with taking the good things people were going to tell her. Or he might just subtly make it so that she became annoyed with the comments, and then grew to hate them altogether. That would be quite funny wouldn't it? the minute someone told her how pretty she looked today she would bite their head off or something. There were so many things on that prospect that he would have to give it a little attention, but later he would. Not right now...

Well, she was glad someone was amused by this, she thought, as his smile widened. It wasn't so much that she couldn't take a compliment...it was more that she had a hard time trusting compliments when they came from people she had told herself not to trust. Sammael definitely confused her. She was normally a fairly good judge of character, but he just bewildered. She couldn't guess what motivated the compliment, even. Surely all this kindness couldn't have been genuine. She was just waiting for someone to say "Gotcha" and laugh at what an amusing joke this past while had been, with everyone watching their lord play nice with the Morning Star's wife. She seemed to relax a little bit when Sammael had shooed her little audience away. That was better. "Well, of course it isn't a bullet in the chest. I would hope I'd be reacting a little more strongly to that. A bit more moaning and groaning, at the very least." Wait a minute, was that a hint of teasing in her voice? It looked like her sense of humor hadn't flopped over dead for good. She knew she had accepted the compliment kind of ungraciously. She was inwardly surprised at herself. When had she started feeling at ease enough to start joking about things with Sammael, of all people. She was definitely starting to doubt her own state of mind a little. How did a person know when they were starting to go bonkers? Surely this was a sign of growing insanity. Right? Wasn't she supposed to be busy hating his guts right about now?

She actually got Satan's brow quirking after that. Was that even possible? Joking around with him of all people in this kind of situation, surely Gala had lost her mind. Of course... Sam did have a sense of humor. Maybe at times morbid or as dry as a bar on Sunday in Texas, but he did have one. "Touché," he said. Then after awhile he put his free hand over his and leaned forward slightly. A small groan and a mock owe look was made too. Then he straightened up and looked over at her, his stride not breaking at all and his arm never tightening around her hand. "Like that you mean," he said, and yes he was teasing her and not trying to hide it. Cause she had started this, hadn't she? Or had it been him? Surely if he could tease her harmlessly in return he wasn't so bad. It probably didn't help either that when he did smile, truly actually smile genuinely, his entire face took on a whole new facet. Those pit like eyes seemed to have a light in them and it hopefully was not his angelic heritage that had to do with the way his lips curled or how he had such a disarming you-can-trust-me feel that he seemed to just be giving off in ridiculous waves. Would she find that comforting? Or be dismayed by the fact that he wasn't bluntly trying to hurt her and it was confusing? Hell if she thought she was confused now, wait till they walked and talked when Maelmorda, and nobody else for that matter, wasn't around...

She actually looked startled when he started joking back. She hadn't expected that. She thought maybe she might get another smile, maybe a chuckle. But when he actually doubled over as if he had been shot, he shocked another of those little smiles out of her. Wonders never ceased. "Exactly like that," she responded. "Of course, I would have to do it more gracefully, being a woman." She informed him, with mock seriousness. The joking, a little more like gallow's humor than she preferred to admit, seemed to push that lingering hurt even further from her mind. She was momentarily distracted by his smile. He didn't seem so bad when he smiled like that...a little bit like Corwyn, actually. Corwyn had moments where he could be almost frighteningly intense in his seriousness. But when he smiled, it was a lot like the clouds suddenly parting to let the sun through. Maybe not to the same extent...when Corwyn was happy, he had something of his mother's glow about him. But the change in him was still similar. "You ought to smile more often." She

suddenly commented. "It suits you." That was probably as close to a compliment as he was getting that evening, and it would serve as evidence that maybe, just maybe, she was willing to be a little more friendly than she had initially thought she would be. That didn't lessen her confusion any. She felt as if her mind was awirl with questions and doubts. She still didn't trust him any further than she could throw him. But at least she was willing to be a step above civil. Considering she had wanted to stick her tongue out at him near the beginning of their conversation, that much alone was impressive.

There apparently was alot people didn't expect of him. How surprised they would be if only they knew his inner workings. He made a oooh-showing-me-how-it's-done-eh kind of face as she said how she would be more graceful with the whole action then he was. Because that's how ladies were, all full of grace and light as a feather. The air around them just grew lighter and more comfortable the more they joked with one another. From afar one would swear they were friends. "Issatso," he said, obviously mocking her mockery of him at... teasing her? So much mocking and teasing flying around now. Though it all came to a stop momentarily when she mentioned how he should smile more. For some reason that actually caught him off guard. For a split second he thought Maelmorda or someone had put her up to saying that kinda crap. But of course he knew that that wasn't the case. Galaxy wasn't the type to do the bidding of others. Not without a whole hell of alot of persuasion and twisting of the arm. Besides, his lie detector was quite keen. He gave a quiet something of a laugh, sort of like a child having their face cleaned by their mother. Had the Nephelim just ruffled Satan's feathers? "I would say something along the lines of thank you but it might sound disingenuous," he told her as his lips retained that ghost of smile and his dark exquisite features relaxed as they wandered about the room aimlessly at their comfortable slow pace. She was so good at this he thought as his gaze fell on her many times. Holding her with his eyes for long intervals and then looking away at something to point and pull her attention along with his to something silly going on around them...

It was honestly hard for Gala, and probably a goodly number of other people, to know exactly what they should be expecting from Sammael. It was, in all honesty, easier to view Sammael as the "bad guy", the villain, in all of this. He fit the role so well at first glance. She wasn't even sure why she was still talking to him, walking with him. She had fully expected to be given an excuse to leave by now. And while she wanted to go home, just wanted to find somewhere to be alone right now, she couldn't justify leaving when he was being so pleasant to her. Part of her also wanted to show Maelmorda that she was making the effort to be civil. It would seem awfully immature of her to be rude to him when he was being so very polite. "Yes that's so." She responded, raising a hand to tuck one curling tendril of hair behind her ear. She was still speaking in that strange kind of mixture of seriousness and teasing...kind of like she could turn that joking behavior off at any moment, and it would be as if she'd never started teasing him in the first place. It was a guarded kind of joking, suggesting that she wasn't comfortable enough with him to go full-out. She felt strangely pleased when she finally seemed to catch him off guard. It was about time. He had caught her off guard continuously from the moment he had offered her a hand to help her up. It was about time she returned the favor, wasn't it? And no, there were no ill intentions or sneakiness behind her comment. She rarely followed anyone else's orders unless there was some serious concrete reasoning behind them, and besides, she was a terrible liar. She had one hell of a guilty conscience, and couldn't handle lying for long. Anyway, if she was going to lie about something, it would be about something a bit more

important than Sammael and whether he smiled or not. She'd continue along with him as they walked, sometimes unaware of his eyes on her, sometimes meeting his gaze. She'd follow his gaze whenever he wanted to point something out to her, and would remark on it in her own thoughtful way.

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Arilwen tried desperately to enjoy her suspended moments in flight with her husband as they rolled and curled together. The way he latched onto her, causing them to plummet downward, made her panic slightly and cling to him, but of course he did not let her fall. Their lighthearted mood ended some time later however when they grew exhausted and came to the realization that someone was blocking them from returning to the manor they sought. The Swan's feet touched down into the sand behind her husband and the other angel and the exhausted trio made their way to the Oasis lying ahead of them. As soon as the Swan saw Wyrvaust collapse beneath the palm tree she had to steel herself from letting her exhaustion turn to frustration. He was pulling further and further away from her. He was always taking the guilt and mistakes of the world onto his shoulders and she in turn had to shoulder the burdens as well. It was not easy trying to keep the Raven in the right state of mind. At times, no amount of coddling or reassurance would help.

Lowering to the sand beside her husband, Arilwen curled up against him and proceeded to lay her cheek on his chest, tucking her raven-locked head beneath his chin. She was startled when Cirgoth interrupted her husband's usual melancholy questions and her violet eyes flickered over to him as he challenged what Wyrvaust was lamenting about. It was true. Even if they HAD been able to return to the manor, Wyrvaust would have stepped in to accomplish what needed to be done. He just could not see that way through his own eyes. Once the two were done bickering and the Raven fell quiet, Arilwen reached up to gently run her fingers over his chest and shoulders. It didn't seem fair. She was so very new here and in his life compared to Marsol... yet the two could not be together. Not to mention that Wyrvaust now had discovered his deep feelings for their lord. If only there were a way that she could switch places with the Desert Lord. It would be the one gift she could give to her husband that would prove her love for him... and that his bravery had been instilled in her.

Arilwen's eyes opened slowly as realization settled into the pit of her stomach. Perhaps there was a way...

The Swan suddenly sat up and proceeded to swing herself onto Wyrvaust's lap, straddling him as her fingers came to press into his cheeks, forcing him to look her in the eye. "NEVER doubt your bravery..." She said softly, yet firmly, her fingers tightening into his skin. "... for it has instilled itself not only in me, but in our son as well." With that, her eyes closed and she pressed a fierce, desperate kiss to his mouth. At the very same time, her mind reached out to Sammael in a pleading tone. "Lord Sammael, your kindness has been endlessly extended to us... but I must ask one last favor... to set our Lord Marsol free and return him to my husband's side. I request a trade of our Lord and I. Should he be returned to my Raven then I shall be placed in your custody instead..." Her mind would be buzzing and her body tense as she awaited his answer, breaking the kiss with her husband to bury her face into his neck, clinging tightly to him as she was not sure if Sammael would suddenly snatch her away without warning. "I love you and am PROUD of you." She whispered feverishly against his skin, her eyes stinging with tears

behind the lids.

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The "walk" with Maelmorda's beloved wife went on for a little while longer until he was graced by a very familiar voice with a very tempting offer once again. In that room of pools and frolocking demons, of child looking musicians playing in oval depressions within the walls and ceiling, of the sin therein, he paused. Those black eyes of his wandered off as he had just been telling Galaxy of these two demons by a table arm wreslting one another and who they were as he received that pleading request from the Raven's heart and mother of his child. Oh? He thought with so much amusement that he burst out laughing where he stood next to Galaxy. So loud and unexpected that he might have startled the angel at his side and irked the shapeshifter behind them. There really was no need to be laughing. Galaxy hadn't said anything funny. Maelmorda hadn't spoken of a joke or anything like that either. Sarku wouldn't speak to him at all anyways, unless he absolutely had to. So why was Satan laughing? In that link the Nephalim out in the desert had opened up, to which he had caught like a crystal captured light to release it in it's prised aray, Sammael said to Arilwen, "For how long do you wish to remain in my 'custody', Lady Arilwen? A day? A month? Perhaps one or two eternities? You know, he will be furious about your selfless act of love." He turned around to face the general direction Marsol would have been in at the time. Spotting the dragon cheiftain over beside a small round table where it was barely high enough to hide his nakedness. Marsol was giving him a vague evil eye of course, but Sammael didn't mind it. He just gave him a widening grin in return as he patted Galaxy's hand and unwound his arm carefully from around her hand. "And here, Lady Galaxy, is where we part ways. I hope this whole thing wasn't too exhausting. Perhaps in the future you would be kind enough to... plan these things instead. Maybe then they could be less this and a little more that, hmm?," he said as he gave Galaxy that horrid kind of smile again. That disarming kind. The one that was charming and even shattering to his otherwise supposedly "bad guy" exterior. For if he wasn't the villian in all of this, then what the hell else could he have been? A hopelessly misunderstood demon of sin? Or the harbinger of destruction? He glanced at the part of his creator that had been coming with them on their civil and seemingly harmless jesting jaunt, gesturing for Galaxy to go to him and waving Sarku away. As in, his business with Galaxy was done for now so the shapeshifter needn't bare his fangs at him any longer. He would leave the three of them to their own doing's, not giving an explanation as to his sudden change of mood or why that shyte eating grin was on his face. Course when Satan was smiling, something terrible was about to happen...

Arilwen's eyes fell shut, her tight lids fluttering as the amused voice filled her mind in reply. She had not expected a reply to come so quickly. Guilt flooded her gut and chest as Sammael pointed out what she already knew... Wyrvaust WOULD be furious with her. Leaning in, she tucked her face into her husband's shoulder and fought against the quaking feeling that ran through her entire body. Wyrvaust had survived before her... but he NEEDED Marsol. He was more unraveled than she had ever seen him and she was deathly afraid of him reaching a point of no return. Wrapping her arms more tightly around the Raven, Arilwen breathed in his scent, not answering immediately. She knew that this was giving Sammael a HUGE window of opportunity to bargain with, but what choice did she have? Who could fix this? Wyrvaust could not... Marsol could not...and Cirgoth definitely had no say in it. She was the only one who had something to bargain with. Taking in a slow breath, she could feel Wyrvaust shifting below her, becoming aware that she was restless

about something. She could not lie to him. She had to try and do this before he started asking questions. "However long is required to clear the misdeeds of my husband, myself and Lord Marsol." And there it was. That was Sammael's ticket to lay down the requirements that were about to be placed on her.

It was only a matter of time really. If not Arilwen then someone else would have offered themselves to him as a means to leave the desert alone. Or rather just a certain few individuals in it. The poor thing. She really was unlucky enough to have such a big heart to encompass demons in her concern. As Sammael moved through the crowd like a phantom, this time nobody parted the way for him because he did not wish for them to. By the time he had reached the otherside of the room on his quick and yet slow at the same time, he would be fully clothed again. But no one would be able to notice that though with the average eye because he had tugged that huge black coat around himself till it was closed. It dragged the floor as well, so neither his feet on up to his neck would be exposed. Sammael was heading towards Marsol, which wasn't a good thing considering the simple fact that he was still grinning. He moved so that not a whole hell of alot of those there would notice him. They would really have to look hard to find him as he weaved in through the thickening crowd to come to stand on the edge of it just a few feet to Marsol's left. Once there, his arms came to cross over his chest as his voice was thrown not by his lips, but by his mind. "And what if these misdeeds cannot be amended Lady Arilwen? Surely you wouldn't want to stick around me just for friendship like the desert lizard's angel lover had offered. Or am I wrong? If you do this, there is no going back little bird. You will be with me until either I grow sick of you, or you bare me children. And I can assure you, should you choose to give me offspring you will never know them and never be troubled by longing thoughts. I would see to their happiness in my own way. It is... the least I could do for someone who has offered herself to me, twice now," he spoke to Arilwen not in a chiding or mocking tone. Just a light and truthful one. Which was saying alot because he could have lied to her like he did so many others. But why lie about what he was going to do anyways? And much less to someone he had indeed, had his eye on for quite some time now. He would await for her answer before he gave his own version of the ordeal to Marsol, and then gate his soon to be infuriated arse out of his manor before the dragon could explode on him all to hell and back again...

Arilwen felt sick as Sammael proceeded to reply, questioning something that she had not fathomed. What if the misdeeds couldn't be amended? That just couldn't be an option in her mind. He questioned a possible offer of friendship? FRIENDSHIP?! Arilwen was TERRIFIED of the man! What did he want to do... play checkers? Form a book club? Panic began to set in. He wanted children from her. Children. That required them to... DO IT. That thought terrified her too! She could always try to drive him crazy to the point where he DID get sick of her and booted her ass out. Her mind was racing and she felt tears begin to burn behind closed eyelids and her throat tightened. It wasn't forever... she would be returned to her husband eventually. What if he realized that he loved Marsol instead of her and she returned to nothing? No, she could NOT think that way. Forcing a sandpaper-like swallow, Arilwen finally replied in a weak mental voice. "I understand the permanency of my decision. I still choose to move forward with it." She couldn't give him an answer about friendship or babies or any of that. She could not risk ticking him off at this point in time.

His head of dark shaggy locks canted to the side slowly, and as he did he said to Marsol, "It would seem your invitation to this party has expired." As his head



completed that sideways cant something flared up around the dragon lord as dark and wispy as black smoke from a fire. It was a forced gating to be sure, because Marsol never would have let Sammael do it in the first place. But the desert creature would be caught in a very insisting shadow gate and thrust back to wherever it was the Raven and the divine birds were out there in the sands. In the process Marsol had tried to make his own leap, in several means, out of the damned gateway and caused that small table and the area of the floor where he had been standing within five feet of himself to burn to ashes in his anger. Consequently, another gateway opened simultaneously elsewhere. Behind Arilwen a black portal leading to a place not all that far from where she was now opened up, and he bid her to come when she had said her goodbyes and such. Marsol was beside himself with his fury as he fought this goddamned seizing of him but to no avail it seemed. The desert creature came tumbling out of a portal just like the one that opened up behind Arilwen, to roll across the sand and up onto his feet. Still, naked as a jay bird. Still, not giving a damn about that. Marsol's snarl was like that of some enormous beast being released from it's cage. Something was wrong, and he had a faint idea of what it was. The frame of tanned flesh and tattoos begun to make a gate out of the sand to deliever him back to Sammael's oasis manor when his amber eyes took in the sight of Wyrvaust and Arilwen holding one another. And then eventually his senses took in that unmistakable sweet scent of his mate and his gaze whipped around to find Cirgoth. That is, if the angelic man was close by...

Say her goodbyes? Arilwen knew her husband and could usually judge the severity and nature of his harsh reactions to just about everything. In this instance, she had wisely decided that she knew better than her distraught significant other. The second that Marsol was dumped into a nudey pile into the desert, both Wyrvaust and Arilwen shot to their feet... but only one of the pair rushed forward to meet their Lord. Arilwen held back to watch her husband toss himself to Lord Marsol's feet in the sand, immediately spewing apologies and self-loathing as she suspected he would. She couldn't say goodbye to him. She knew exactly what he would do... refuse to let her go... hold onto her... and risk angering Lord Sammael again. And Sammael would only put up with so much. Her violet eyes rose to briefly meet Marsol's and while Wyrvaust's back was turned, she quickly turned and stepped through the gate, holding her breath every moment.

Marsol's brows furrowed as he heard Wyrvaust and then turned away from Cirgoth to watch his fellow clan demon apologize for things that weren't really his fault. Not really, Marsol thought as remorse cut into him as deeply as how he thought he should have been quicker with his plan on why he had stayed behind while everyone else had left. Had it worked? He wouldn't know until later, and this whatever it was he had been doing while inside Sammael's manor he kept to himself for now. It wouldn't do any good to bring Wyrvaust or Cirgoth or most of all Arilwen into this mess anymore than they already were. Though as he started to bend to grab Wyrvaust by his upper arm and haul him to his feet, he stopped when he caught the resolution in the Nephelim's eyes. His amber pools were blazing with his anger but at the same time, they had understanding in them. He understood, is what Arilwen would see in his eyes. Maybe he could never condone what she was about to do, but he did understand it. Painfully even. She was taking the punishment for them all, so that they could remain free to do whatever they could. While they were still able to. In another time and place Marsol might have turned Wyrvaust around to stop his Swan. But, that might have rendured what she was trying to do as meaningless. Even if she would now be at Sammael's mercy. Was it his selfishness that kept Wyrvaust's attention so that she could disappear through that portal into Sammael's hands? Did

he too have some secret greed over his clan and all in it? Not likely. The reason Wyrvaust's old friend held his attention and let his wife slip away into the clutches of Satan were the same as those that had made him stay behind, and very simple actually. Although as simple as it was, it was harsh at the same time. Perhaps this was Arilwen's fight for time being, and not theirs at all? Marsol waited until that portal closed and dispersed to let go of Wyrvaust and say solemnly, "If your going to hate someone, then let it be me." Back at the manor Arilwen would be stepping into. With Sammael waiting there a few feet from the portal with his arms still crossed over his chest where he stood, black fur looking coat covering him like the essence of comfort. "And here I was thinking you come to make the choice," he said, as one of those man servant demons came to offer her a goblet of drink and food on a raised plate with his head down in bowing to her...

Arilwen stepped from the gate and back into the nightmarish hell she had escaped not hours ago. When the gate finally snapped shut behind her the finality set in and she felt dizzy... and a little sick, to be honest. Her face was blanched white and she did not even realize that her fingers were clenching fistfuls of her robe at her sides. It was obvious that she was terrified. Even a blind man could smell the waves of overwhelming sweet scent pulsating through the room. Her violet eyes lifted and met Sammael's and all she could do at the moment was gawk at him, her lips pursed into a thin line. She was about to try and speak when she saw movement from the side of her and she swung around, fully rigid and ready to leap on whoever the hell was coming after her. Poor guy. It was one of the servants who was being very respectful by bowing and offering her a tray. Sucking in a trembling breath, the Nephelim hesitated, then finally conceded a bit and took the goblet, not even sure what was in it. She just wanted something for her fingers to do. There was no way she was going to be able to force food down though, so she took a huge swallow of what was in her cup and managed to then squeak out in a tiny voice, "Did you miss me?" Oh, what a sad, sad attempt at humor... especially since the poor girl looked like she was two minutes from dissolving into tears.

The sight of Arilwen was so classic in the making that when she asked if he had missed her, he couldn't stop the rich and oh so friendly sounding chuckle that left him. "Of course," he said, and it seemed he was making that sad attempt at humor more easy on her? Was that what he was doing? Or was he reveling in the fact that he had a gorgeous thing of a Nephelim at his every whim? It was best not to think of Sammael's inner workings. Best to leave those demons alone. As much as he appreciated the paled look of terror on Arilwen, he wouldn't let her be shocked in that state for very long. Then like the parting of the seas by a particular mortal he had killed in another time and place, Satan opened those black fur coated arms of his with a brow raising harmless smile. Oh good god what had Arilwen gotten herself into this time? The demon servant backed away after the Lady only decided to have a goblet of very sweet tasting but potent manner of liquor, probably the kind of stuff Maelmorda would approve of, slinking back away into the shadows to serve the other guests of his master. Sammael gave a little nod and wiggled his fingers as he stood there with his arms open for her to come to him, that it was alright. As if she were some long lost relative or beloved of his that had just been reunited...

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Arilwen swallowed the large gulp of sweet tasting liquid and decided that Sammael must have had something weak and light served to her so that she wouldn't take a

hard hit of alcohol. Pfft. She was wrong. She just couldn't taste how potent the stuff really was. Arilwen rarely had alcohol and it would hit her like a train shortly. The spreading of warm, fuzzy arms and the charming smile that Sammael lit up made Arilwen hesitate. She didn't want to hug him. She could still smell Wyrvaust on her robes and skin and she did not want to risk rubbing it off or gaining another's scent on top of it. But still, she had chosen to be here and she had to make sure that he didn't reverse his decision within her first ten minutes. Sighing, the lovely birdie lifted her goblet and knocked back the rest of the sweet drink before placing the cup on a small table and hesitantly moving forward. The closer she got the more she felt like a tiny child in the shadow of a gigantic tree... until she finally reached him and slid her arms around his waist in a weak hug.

He watched her down the rest of that potent drink, which she could and probably would be paying for later, before she hesitantly came into his arms to let him hug her. Light, not stifling. Careful, but firm. His arms did not pin her to him. He wasn't a brute about it. He merely coiled her up in his arms where one hand rested on the small of her back and the other on the back of her head. As if petting slowly through her gorgeous locks would sooth her. "See, I don't bite," he murmured as he had to restrain himself like the majority, if not all of the guests therein, against that sweet, sweet scent she was giving off unhindered. Least he was being a gentlemen about it all, like he always was with her. He'd never raised his voice to her. He'd never swore at her either. In all fairness, he'd been nothing but well mannered and very acomodating to her. It were those goddamn demons she lived with that he reserved his terrible tendancies for. How well would Wyrvaust be when he learns where his Swan has gone? Of her own free will, once again. Would he be angry with himself, like he had been before? Or angry with her? Or would he crumble in the wake of knowing Sammael would now do everything just shy of turning the world blue to make her love him? And that quite possibly was the scariest part of it all. Because he wouldn't actually make her do anything. Influence perhaps. But she would grow to love him of her own pace, and that ladies and gentlemen would be the just deserts. Again though what Sammael's real motives were had yet to be seen. Maelmorda however had some pretty good assumptions about it but maybe they were just that. Assumptions. He rested his chin on top of her head for a moment as they both sort of swam in that lush black fur coat of his. Where she could feel the dense or course, maybe just thin and gosimere cloth of the clothing now covering his body. "Relax my dear," he told her as a means of reassurance to her racked nerves. "I've no qurrel or strife with you..."

About thirty seconds into that hug, the liquor started to warm her. Her pale cheeks flushed pink and she closed her eyes, wondering what was making her feel that way. For a moment she felt horrified that Sammael was doing it... and she felt guilt and shame flood her being. But soon she realized that it was the burn of alcohol in her system and she actually became a little thankful that it was forcing her body to relax a little. And that hair brushing DID help... though she did not want to admit it to him. Thick lashes fluttered shut and she let him hold her there while her head started to swim from the booze in her system. He always HAD been kind to her. Well, aside from when their son was born and he had taken him for a bit... but that had been a lesson for both her and Wyrvaust to learn. Sighing softly, she suddenly felt tired... worn out. She was certain that Wyrvaust was howling down the moon in the middle of the desert right now and she feared, most of all, that he would be angry with her beyond forgiveness. It had been over 24 hours since she had slept and it felt like she had been hit by a truck. Perhaps eating would have been a good

move before the liquor... oopsie. How was she ever going to fall into a routine here?

Life as she knew it was about to become much, much simpler. If only she knew. He felt the relaxation in her muscles even if she didn't say anything. His fingers coiled a lock of her hair around them and gave her a feather light tug before he let go of the lock. Again, from a distance one would swear these two were either best friends, or lovers. It was the same case with Galaxy mere moments before. To the unsuspecting eye it seemed like these women and he had known one another in friendlier manners, when that really was not the case. Not yet it wasn't. His left hand on her head moved to pick up another offered goblet brought to them by the same demon servant. "You look a bit famished," he said just above a whisper as she felt his chin lift from the top of her head. All that warmth he had encircled her in was being drawn away like he was some sort of human sized blanket when he started to take a step backwards. Raising the goblet to his lips to take a long swig from it as yet another dish of tid bits and fruit was offered to her. There was so much more to eat naturally on the long tables with the spreads on them but she would have to get on over there to get her hands on any of it. Was it a sort of temptation for her to take a step with him so she could remain in that all too comforting warm embrace? Was he tricking her? Or perhaps he was just taking a step backwards to let her pick at the food offered to her, cause he might hate it too if he was hungry and someone was all up in his grill...

Arilwen's violet eyes fluttered open when she felt Sammael's hand remove itself from her hair and she peeked from his fuzzy jacket to see the servant return and hear the observation that she was famished. His head removed itself from hers and she immediately shot her eyes across the room to see the same nightmarish images as before. The children with the masks playing instruments...the naked people...the commotion...the noise. Choking back a whimper, Arilwen's hand shot out to the offered tray, scooped up a fistful of some type of fruit slices and immediately retreated into Sammael's side again, burying her cheek into the soft material of his coat. She didn't want to see these horrible images anymore. She didn't want to be around a bunch of sex crazed people that humped each other in public. Slipping an apple slice into her mouth, she clamped her lips shut to chew quietly and turn her gaze downwards from the party. They were a bunch of sickos!!

He could have teased her about how she retreating back against him after getting an eyefull of the depraved and lusty demons all over the room and all over each other. It was so goddamn cute really it was. The way she ate her apple slice and how he gulped down the last of his drink and dropped it into the awaiting hand of the servant at their side, to put it back to the back of her head. And rest his chin atop of her head. Though with her looking downwards all she would see were his fine threads and choice of shoes. Or maybe they were boots this time. He was famished himself yes but, his hunger was far different then hers. He wouldn't tell her that of course. She'd flip out on him and probably slap him and demand to go home if she knew. So now that her gaze was downwards she could only see the front of his toned body then? Clothed of course. A normal long sleeved dress shirt with slacks. Perhaps a tux? Maybe no coat other then the one he was wrapping her up in. Just a vest then over that dress shirt? It was hard to tell with how dark it was in that coat, cause there were no candles or torches nearby to see with. But Arilwen wouldn't care would she? Not when he held her so sickeningly comfortable the way he was. Not forcing her to do anything but eat, drink and be merry. In a sense. Heh...

As soon as Arilwen felt the hand return to warm the back of her head she kept her eyes down but relaxed a little more, slipping another apple slice into her mouth to munch noisily on it. She WAS starving and quickly devoured each and every one of those slices, licking her fingertips when she was finished. Suprisingly, Arilwen would not have smacked Sammael if he had revealed that he had a severe want for her blood. Before she had been lost to the desert sands to be found by her husband, she had been scooped up and taken in by Valis. He had taught her a few things during this time... one being how delectable her blood was and how desired it was. He had fed from her nearly every night, dousing himself in the sweet ichor. After she was done eating the Swan fell silent...but soon peeked violet eyes up at Sam to pose a question. "When will this be over?" She meant the party, of course.

Oh perhaps it wasn't just her blood that he wanted, but maybe she already knew that. Maybe she didn't. At her question, he lowered his black eyes on her violet ones and he got a thoughtful kind of hmm look on his face. He tangled his hand into some of her hair as he answered her with, "I'm not quite sure at this point that I want it to end. Would you, if it was yours?" It was the truth, and he was being honest with her. Like he always was. Which was both unnerving, odd and something else all balled into one confusing notion. He didn't have to be honest or anything with her, and yet he was. He had taken a bit of something red and twisted like from the offered plate and chewed on the end of it. Another goblet of that potent liquor was offered to Arilwen again along with more of these apple slices she seemed to like eating. He fiddled with a piece of her robe on her back. Seeming to be inspecting the fiber of her clothing a little as she ate and they spoke in unhushed tones but tones nonetheless that he shrouded from the ears of all. Sort of like how he had with Galaxy in a way, just not as closed off..

His question caught her off guard. Arilwen's brow furrowed as she thought over it, then after peeking to make sure no one was listening in, she leaned in to whisper fiercely to him. "These people should be doing these things in private!" She hissed, looking mortified. Her and Wyrvaust had done plenty of naughty things, there was no arguing that point... but never out in public! OR with an audience! Squirming, she looked down once again. "It all makes me uncomfortable." She admitted, since they were being honest. Arilwen was so distracted that she really didn't notice him poking and prodding at her. If he had, she would wonder why he was doing it. Her face paled as more liquor was offered and she shook her head to decline. If she drank more she would drop to the floor, fast asleep at this very moment. The apple slices, however, definately peaked her interest and she took them from him with a tiny, tired smile before she started munching on them. Mid-munch she swung her gaze up at him and pointed more questions to him. "Do I get a room? May I go to it?" It was obvious that the Nephelim was itching to get the hell out of this sex-pit.

The poking and prodding he did to her was subtle and light, but he did it nonetheless. Down her spine to the small of her back, although never touching her inappropriately. On up to the back of her neck his fingers trailed as she questioned him and he answered her obligingly. He chewed at the bit of candy in his mouth a few moments, looking down at her where they were both so very comfortably snuggled against one another. Then he sighed, "Yes you have a room, yes you may go to it and no I do not want you to. But you don't wish to indulge in the simple pleasures in life so what use would there be to try and plead with you to stay." He had snickered silently when she had said how uncomfortable these people made her with their public display of sexual relations. No wonder Wyrvaust loved her he

thought to himself as he unwound his arms from around her and took all that oh so comforting warmth with him. The more he let go of her, the more the coldness of the room would settle in on her and perhaps make her even more worrbersome? "They will take you to your room, and I do believe there are some very eager ladies waiting for you there with a bath prepared," he said, chewing the last bit of the red twisty candy in his mouth as two of those men demon slave servants appeared on either side of Arilwen to escort her away when she was ready to go. "I don't suppose I'll be invited to your bath party either," he frowned, teasing her of course in a low tone for only her to hear. Cause he wasn't about to let her get away without letting her know she had crushed his nonexistent feelings...

AGGH he was a mind ninja!!! Arilwen frowned deeply as Sammael sighed and informed her that she did have a room and was allowed to retire to it, but also pointed out that she was refusing to partake in life's simple pleasures. And on top of it, he let go of her and stepped back, immediately causing her to be aware of the massively open room and all that was happening. Dumping her apple slices into the pocket of her robe, she wrapped her arms around herself and bumped her chin up in the air a notch, as if trying to make a very important point. "I am not here on a vacation." She pointed out firmly. "I am here to do what is necessary before returning home to my husband." She hit the 'husband' a little hard, then narrowed her eyes suspiciously on the two demon servants that suddenly appeared at her sides. She half expected them to dump her into one of the pools. At the mention of females waiting to bathe her, Arilwen actually hid a smile. Sammael's daughters had, for some reason, always loved toying with and bathing and dressing the angel like a barbie doll. They found her terrifically adorable for some odd reason. His question about joining the bath party made her face turn fiery red and she looked away, refusing to feel guilty. "You shouldn't make arrangements for more parties than you can be at at one time." She quipped, then turned and would go with the two men, keeping her eyes forward as she fished an apple slice from her robe.

Well wasn't she just a peach. He laughed some now as the two servants gestured with their heads bowed, never looking up at Arilwen and keeping their eyes on the Nephilim's feet as they walked with her at her own pace to a set of doors they would open for the lady to walk through and into a hallway of rug covered wooden floors and velvet covered walls with portaits and all kinds of crystal statues on small end tables. "True, Lady Arilwen, very true. I wish I had the ability to be in all places like someone I know, but alas, I cannot," he said as she was escorted away, to leave him standing there and enjoying her scent that had soaked into his coat and tempted him into going after her and ravishing her all over the damn place. As she reached that set of doors, the crowd had swelled again and he was starting to get lost in it because he himself had not moved from his spot where she had let him hold her so sweet like. "Of course out of necessity," he said and his voice had this funny way of carrying over all the music and the moans and thigh aching guttural groans to Arilwen's ears. "If not then why else would you be here..." There could be many underlying messages in his words, or they could just be him repeating the obvious and what she herself had already stated. Knowing Sammael, it was probably the former rather than the later...

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Arilwen remained quiet, walking between her male demon escorts as she listened to Sammael's cryptic words. As kind as he was being right now, she knew at least a small portion of what he was capable of... and she wondered how long the snake

would hide in the grass. She immediately felt a flood of relief when she exited the room and the double doors closed behind them to leave them in an impossibly long corridor. It was beautiful. Her violet eyes scanned over crystal statues and detailed paintings as she polished off the last of her apple slices and licked the juice from her fingertips. Soon she would be escorted to a familiar bath chamber where Sammael's daughters would be waiting. Stripped nude and dunked into the warm pools faster than she could blink, Arilwen frowned and tried desperately to keep her eye on her robe. She didn't want it to be discarded as Wyrvaust had made it for her and it still smelled of him. Her gut ached as she thought of him and she lowered her eyes to the water. What was he thinking this very moment? Did he hate her? Did he miss her? When tears welled in her eyes again she squeezed them shut and tried taking a deep breath. As terribly as she was going to miss him, this was HER decision and she HAD to remember that. She couldn't offer herself and play some pathetic martyr.

When the bathing was finally over the girls brushed out the Swan's long, dark locks and then gave her a nightgown to wear that made her roll her eyes. It was made of a deliciously smooth silk in a stunning wine color, but it only fell to her mid thigh and had thin straps instead of sleeves. How was someone supposed to stay warm in this?! Luckily, they let her have her robe and she clutched it to her chest as they led her to 'her' new room. It was gigantic...and terribly beautiful...and it had the most massive bed she had ever seen. She wasted no time moving to climb into bed, tossing the covers back and taking her robe with her. Soon she would be curled up in a tight ball, hugging the robe to her chest under a mound of blankets, sleep evading her until she closed her eyes and pretended she was home... not alone in a strange expanse of sheets.

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Many thoughts turned inward when expectations were not answered in the minds of Sammael's many elitist guests concerning certain proclamations made by the creature often hailed as Acheron's cleverest accomplice. Eyes bent Galaxy's way, yes, as much to study Sammael's demeanor towards her as to regard him with curious anticipation which barely shone in their well trained eyes. And now the pact recognized Maelmorda as Sammael's equal in power and station, as Sammael did not protest or contest the Morning Star's proclamations of equality and an equal share of the throne. Indeed the Prince of Demons did not so much as express any discontent with Maelmorda's declarations at all, not even those words the devil spoke of being 'ever as they were even before the pact was made'. The pact teetered for a little while on an edge between awareness and uncertainty as to whether the pact had been dissolved altogether on one end by terms being met. Was not granting equal authority, allowing one to declare a state of prior liberty, and choosing one as a mate over a slave the same as an offer of freedom? It was the slight pull of reservation which kept the pact from dissolving those particular links altogether. It waited to meet out its logic one way or the other with final resolve, scales which tipped this way or that from a chain suspended by a word here, a pledge there, and in place of them both, silence. As time lapsed and still no protest arose from Sammael, the tapestry of power which bound Maelmorda to the pact unraveled and dissolved, while Sammael still had his end to maintain. How could this be? They both had to uphold their end of the deal; Sammael to pull his legions out of Morashtar and never again bother or attempt to change Morashtar again, and Maelmorda to give all that he was and that was his, excluding Morashtar, to Sammael, until such a time Sammael chose to free him. The pact could only

translate Sammael's offer of choice and his lack of interest towards Maelmorda's claims thereafter as making the choice to free the Morning Star. How else could the pact interpret such cooperation between the two parties? The pact was hardly alone in interpreting Sammael's inaction that way. Power was shifting rapidly in Maelmorda's favor. It was a silent but powerful force which filled Acheron through the eyes and ears of those present at the party and which swept through the nine circles thereafter as swift and with as much enterprise as the tide. There were those loyal to Sammael who recognized it as well. Mephistopheles was one of them, Gabrian was another. The two were all over it even before they addressed Sammael about it. Lilith had always favored Maelmorda in the past, but did she still?

It was hard for Gabrian to extend his warning. He had to hide himself from a very powerful and ancient shapeshifter that was his equal in arcane forte. It was as Sammael left Maelmorda and Galaxy's side that Gabrian's telepathic voice finally reached him, and by this time; Mephisto was on his feet and stalking Sammael's way, only to lose him in the crowd. If Lilith allowed, he would pull her along with him by her hand. Mephisto would attempt to get Lilith on Sammael's side and promise her a piece of punishing Maelmorda as incentive if Sammael commanded it. If Lilith chose at that time to slip away and go to her husband Mascen, however, Mephisto would not strong arm her. Now while Sammael lost the old dragon with his tricks, disappearing through a gate just as he caught sight of him again, Gabrian's voice intercepted his Lord Prince's mind. "My Lord...Is it your intention to return the throne to Lord Lucifer? If that is your intention, I beg your apologies for intruding, but if it was an oversight on your part, we, Mephisto and I, both request that you take our advice as given as your advisors. We live only to serve you, My Lord." Only Gabrian would have the nerve to point out such a grave error to Sammael, if indeed it was an error. For all anyone knew, it was his intention to return the throne to Lucifer, now that he had claim on him as a mate.

By the time Gabrian's warning reached Sammael however the tide had already shifted. Maelmorda would not let his advantage slip if he could help it. What Gabrian and Mephisto had in mind was to shake the pitbull loose of the leather its teeth were sunk into. One would never know whether or not Lucifer gloated inside by looking at him though, nor would their senses get past that cool exterior. Whatever the pact did or did not recognize, Maelmorda's attention was trained on Sammael and his wife. Now as Maelmorda seemed to beam with contentment as he walked along with Sammael and Galaxy, his arms sometimes linked with theirs with affection, now a squeeze, now a brush, now kneading, at other times not as he sauntered along just behind them, discontent was brewing elsewhere in dark hearts, watchful eyes, and shadowy places. Maelmorda recognized the distraction which stole Sammael's attention away from his wife immediately. He knew that upbraid of laughter was neither for Galaxy, nor a result of anything he had said, inasmuch as he had said practically nothing at all since his Prince requested a turn around the hall with his wife. Why should the devil speak? He had not been addressed since they began their walk. Now when Sammael dismissed them to do as they wished and retreated to tend to his personal business with no further explanation, a faint purse bordering a frown turned Maelmorda's lips and his gaze followed Sammael sharply where so few others could. He also noticed Mephisto trying to catch him up in a hurry. Maelmorda let them both slip from his sight when he felt Galaxy's fingertips against his arm. His gaze bent on her rather thin, his curiosity at the probable cause and offense at their company being so easily abandoned by Sammael raising his hackles. "I suppose you are ready to go home now that we have been dismissed, eh?" he said this with a malcontent edge and a sly smile which



mismatched his tone. Sarku scoffed a breath which spoke for itself. Maelmorda cackled and threw his arm around Galaxy. "You have put up with me this long, darling. Will you wait just a little longer?" he grinned. Wait they did, Maelmorda ordering servants to bring his wife snifters of Brandy and himself cognac, all the while he held her close and spoke to her of how he alone would ever bring her flowers again, promising all others would wilt before reaching her hands, and swearing that she would need flowers from none other so long as she lived. "You shall be sick of flowers!" he promised and laughed brightly, and yet, there was something of evil about him, despite the way he shone with the radiance of the stars which burst through the black curtain of space. It was an evil which overcame him with the mere presence of power in his court. It was a necessary darkness, an edge that without which one could not rule Acheron. His other half would not leave until the throne was his.

At length Maelmorda turned towards Galaxy and smiled. "If you are tired and wish to leave, I will understand, my love. I shall return home after you as soon as possible, I promise you. If you choose to stay, I shall be happy for your company." By 'I' he meant the part of himself that was with her now. He had no intention of betraying Sammael despite his clever larks to seize power again. That was not a betrayal, that was simply who he was.

"This one is sure we should go," Sarku spoke urgently. "While the way is open," he added with stress.

Maelmorda's gaze pierced hers. "Sarku over reacts; You may trust Sammael, Galaxy, as I trust him." This he spoke with confidence.

In concerns to Gabrian; if Sammael admitted to his most trusted progeny that he had not intended to restore Lucifer to the throne, the advice Gabrian would give him was this; "Then you must make an example of Lucifer when you return, claim your silence as a test to see if he would attempt to undermine your power, and then punish him as cruelly as possible for his treachery before witness of all here, then command them to punish him as well. You must call it a treachery, My Lord, whether you feel betrayed or not, else your power shall slip beyond all possible recovery into his hands. Punish him for no less than two weeks without pause, My Lord, for anything less would not phase him. You may trust Mephisto to command the Morning Star's penalties when you are otherwise engaged, My Lord, he has offered himself to this task. You may ravish him even as he is punished when you desire or crave him."

If on the other hand Sammael declared to Gabrian that he wanted Lucifer to have the throne, the infernal angel would laugh, for whatever his Lord chose to do, he supported his choice, his free will. "That grants us more time for play, My Lord, and we all know the souls we find for ourselves and Acheron in play." Seemed Arilwen was one of the souls on Sammael's play list.

Meanwhile, the truest half of Maelmorda was on the verge of and then in the process of giving birth to twin sons, an event Arasgal was excited and eager to assist with. The little devils gave Maelmorda so much trouble and at the same time were so quick to be born that Arasgal had to cut them out of his proud father, and as he did so his mind reached out to his sinful father to inform him that proud father was giving him twin sons and that because it was happening so quickly, he would sadly not be there to witness it unless he came immediately. Was Arasgal

attempting to guilt Sammael? If he felt any guilt it was not Arasgal's fault, Sammael's first son of Lucifer was simply stating the facts to his father. Fact was, Arasgal would actually be proud of Sammael if he did feel guilt. Demons were often like mob bosses; they harbored emotions very selectively. Some could kill thousands without any guilt, and feel terrible remorse if they should cause a mate or child of theirs even the slightest pain. Every demon was a mystery at best. Mephisto would approach Sammael, with or without Lilith, when Arilwen left his company and Maelmorda would come along not long after him. Galaxy and Sarku would be with him if they had chosen to stay. Lucifer would greet Sammael with a smile and a possessively dominant kiss which communicated how much he had missed him while he was gone, and how jealous he was of the nephelim. The burning look his gaze fixed on him thereafter seemed to say 'why do you need that when you have this?' It was not what the devil was feeling either, it was simply the sexual presence of the Morning Star which seemed to have a voice of its own. Even as he communed with Sammael a voice reached him from far away which made him smile a bit and his face darken with a dangerous charm in the same breath. At the moment the message he returned was; "later...I have something I must see through." He would not elaborate until he met that voice in the flesh.

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Gala's eyes had turned suspiciously on Sammael as he burst out laughing at something that she hadn't noticed. Was he laughing at her? Or at something else? She would nod politely in response to Sammael's parting words, and when she was given leave to do so, would make her way to her husband, fingertips lightly coming to rest against his arm. When his arm came around her, she would lean lightly against him, one arm curving itself around his waist, while the hand that was still clutching the flower remained at her side. Her gaze lifted on him, and she gave a little nod. "I'll wait. A little bit longer." She could at least do that, couldn't she? She would accept the brandy she was brought, and would hold it in her hands, though she wouldn't drink. She still didn't feel she could consume anything without feeling ill...after all, she had just spent a fairly good amount of time with her stomach all twisted into knots, hadn't she? She listened to him as he spoke to her about flowers, of all things. She'd offer a few words now and again, but mostly remained silent. There was something that was definitely distracted about her manner, something a little bit withdrawn. For once, she was afraid to believe what he told her. It seemed unlikely to her that they would so easily be able to slip back into that kind of thing...receiving flowers reminded her of her time in the dream world he had created for her, and what had gone on tonight was so far removed from that world that it was difficult for her to get her mind in the right place to even imagine something as sweet as receiving flowers from him. She wanted to think that they could return to that. That everything would be all right. But for now, the voice of an optimist that so often was able to invade her thoughts was silent. Right now, she didn't feel like things would be all right at all.

When finally Maelmorda laid out the offer for her to leave, she would nod after a moment of thought. She was tired; unbelievably so. Absolutely drained, emotionally, and not far behind physically. "I think I will go home, darling." She responded, leaning in to press a little kiss to his lips. "I am tired. And...I want to see the twins. I feel uneasy being away from them." Besides, she had plenty to think about. Her mind was so full she thought it might start bursting apart. The thought of holding the warm little bodies of her sons close suddenly seemed extremely comforting. She wanted to be near her babies, closet herself in their safe little

nursery for a while. "Please hurry home, Maelmorda. And be careful." She murmured, though she wasn't entirely sure why she was cautioning him to look after himself. He was more at home here than she could ever be. She slipped her arms around him in a tight embrace, releasing him only when Sarku had a gate thrown up for them.

She felt a little bit like a coward, when she finally left. But she wasn't sure how much more she could take tonight. When she was safely deposited back home, she would go immediately to the nursery, where she would sink down onto the floor between the two beds where her boys were snugly tucked in. She'd comfort herself for a little while by stroking silky soft ebony hair, first Rain's, then Keir's, and listening to the sound of their even breathing. And, of course, she decided it was just her mind playing tricks on her when she thought the twins were just a little bit bigger than when she had last laid eyes on them. Of course, she couldn't have known that the boys had decided they'd been little long enough. It would become apparent over the next few days when they displayed a truly alarming growth rate...she had no way of charting that growth rate, naturally, but by the third day they would appear to be six or seven years old...and showing no signs of slowing down. It would be shocking, to be sure, but she wouldn't seem too upset about it. After all, she had already raised these two in her dreams.

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Wyrvaust wanted to respond to Arilwen's assurances, to the love she showed him, but his shame was so deep that he could do nothing else but hold her. She told him not to doubt his bravery, he knew he was not brave. She said she was proud of him. He felt only ashamed. Had he known what she intended he would have imprisoned her in his lair. His reaction to his wife's deceptive withdrawal was not perhaps what someone might expect of a very distraught demon, but a response which Marsol would know to be of the worst kind. There he was, kneeling at the feet of his Lord where he had moved himself when the desert dragon had come, head bowed in thanks as much as respect; only when he lifted his head with his dark eyes on Marsol and saw the direction his chieftain's eyes were trained and the look on his face, the Raven's head revolved slowly to behold of Arilwen but for a glimpse as she stepped into that gateway and was gone. No one needed to tell him where she had gone or why. He knew the second she stood on that oasis ground no more. It was like Wyrvaust's soul with his heart drained right out of him and only a shell of the demon remained. His eyes emptied of care and life and his posture sank into the lackluster of the walking dead. When Marsol did at length pull him to his feet, the Raven was balanced not by his own weight but the marionette strings of where Marsol willed his body to be. Wyrvaust's muscles barely supported him and his heart did not sustain him at all. Methods of death played orchestra with the demon's head and the moment Marsol turned his attention on Cirgoth; the Raven plopped back down onto a mound of sand and began scratching in the sand with a claw like someone restless and scribbling nothings in the earth to pass the time, only what Wyrvaust scratched was a very particular emblem, a seal, the seal of Leviathan. Cirgoth pointed his way and asked Marsol what the demon was doing, and if Marsol delayed too long in recognizing what the Raven intended, Wyrvaust would complete his arcanum with himself as the offering to Leviathan's own hell. The request to that mighty beast whom encapsulated a kingdom within his very body and the offering he made was silent, a mental sacrament of oblation for a single favor. If this communication was completed and the seal with it, the ocean abyss which lie within that mighty beast would swallow Wyrvaust and the sand he was seated upon up into darkest and deepest fathoms and vomit him back up again on a deserted isle where not even the

miserable spirits which haunted that hell would keep Wyrvaust company. His thoughts would remain his sole company to torment him as no monster could. Naked rocks thrust up from sand and more sand against a pounding surf, and where sand did not blanket the sea surrounded ground, sharp skeletons of coral covered the small island of sand, dead coral, and stone outcrops, no plant life to be seen. The bond he and Marsol shared could not be broken by this interment of Wyrvaust's immortal being in the Hell of Leviathon. Marsol would know exactly where he was but be unable to reach him or even contact him. Such a titan incarnation was Leviathon in his true form that he could not be envisioned all at once lest gazed upon from a great distance as one does the moon, only he inhabited some remote region of Acheron as a hell within a hell. The ocean of Acheron Leviathan was called by some. He could no more be regarded by the eye than one could hold the entirety of the world they inhabited in their gaze. Leviathan's dragon-like vastness embodied a dark kingdom all its own. What pact the Raven struck with that demon whose Avatar form was all most knew of him the Raven and Leviathan alone would know. This was the fate Wyrvaust imagined for himself and would see come to pass if Marsol did not stalk over, stomp the symbols from the sand, and stop the mental offering the insane demon made of himself out of grief, despair and the overwhelming guilt which drowned him in the unconquerable sense of failure he had not the will to drag himself out of. He could only acknowledge his terrible weakness, his shameful hopelessness, his ignoble lack of strength which he had not the will to rise above, his disgraceful longing for death which he shamed all he loved with. He could not breathe, had no desire to breathe, and if forced to his feet again he would collapse the moment he was released of any physical hold of forced support. Even his muscles rebelled to find any strength to sustain him. If struck his body would respond to the pain but his mind and emotions would register none of it, even if he were torn limb from limb. He would be like a dummy filled with sawdust against any acts of violence. Arilwen had perhaps underestimated how important she was to him, how much of a life line she was to the fragile Raven when he was taken by the madness of his despair. She was not a trade his soul was willing to make. How long would his anguish cage him, and would Marsol even want the bother of protecting the Raven from himself this time?

Cirgoth had never seen a creature so hollowed by misery in his life and he was horribly tempted to slay the demon to release him of the horror which dwelled inside of him. It confused the angel and filled him with conflict. Wyrvaust's kind of anguish was something only the forsaken and the fallen could understand. Cirgoth did think him weak and pathetic and felt guilty for feeling that way, but his feelings were honest. He could not help the opinion his heart and mind formed gazing on the desert raven. It was what still separated him from the hellions. Yes, he would have killed Wyrvaust as an act of mercy if he had acted on his gut feelings, and knowing this caused the angel's logic to wage war with his emotions. A part of him was even angry at Wyrvaust for arousing such feelings in him. "Why is he so weak?" he finally hissed, unable to contain all the fury which stormed inside of him. "Has he so little power over his will?" No, Cirgoth did not understand, could not understand. He was fearless, his will and constitution were incredibly strong, albeit Sammael had warped his nature somewhat. If Marsol moved to hinder Wyrvaust's self-destructive feat, Cirgoth would halt him briefly. "My Lord...How shall he ever find strength in himself if he is not allowed to see where his dejection shall carry him?" The intrusion would not be long enough to prevent Marsol from intervening with his friend, but if Marsol thought about it for too long, Wyrvaust would be lost to Leviathon.

Maelmorda regarded Galaxy with a cant of his head and intent eye beneath those arched brows when she opted to retire home for the evening. He smiled and embraced her, his lips sealing hers with a deeply passionate kiss. His eyes burned on her as the kiss was broken and he grinned like a fox. "The twins deserve all your attention much as I and Sammael have deprived them of your motherly embraces this evening. I shall come along as soon as possible, my love. I love you, Galaxy." His eyes followed she and Sarku until they were well out of sight and a long breath sighed from his lungs when they were gone. Life was unpredictable among the hellions and he hoped he would be able to keep his promise to her. He had plans for her and the children he desired very much to build a reality of. Gabriel went with them undetected, carried past the wards by his proximity to Sarku as a familiar. The infernal angel had his own plans.

Sarku saw Galaxy as far as the twins' nursery and there bid her a quiet good night then left her to her privacy. He needed time alone. The evening had shaken him as well for many different reasons. Maelmorda was always a confusing creature, unpredictable and very cagey in his cunning and Sammael had been impossible to anticipate as usual. Galaxy was not the only one who felt like she had been jumping through flaming hoops all night. He would wait until morning to see her and bring her breakfast.

Belorian was relieved to see Galaxy leave and let loose a long breath when she was safely away. Her being in Hell when Maelmorda ruled had never worried him. Sammael he did not know well enough to trust. He seemed...dangerously unstable to Belorian. That was his first impression of him anyway. Belorian was enjoying the food and the booze and when Arilwen...his daughter returned, he was dismayed and concerned. He was sure it had been her choice to return. He gathered that by her demeanor. When Sammael gave her leave to retire to her room, Belorian followed, keeping just out of sight. He lurked in the corridor outside while she bathed, sipping from a decanter of whiskey he had taken with him. He had drained the bottle and set the empty decanter aside by the time she climbed out of the bath and was dressed by the servants. The moment she was decent, and before she retired to bed; he stepped around the door well and in plain sight. "Lady, Arilwen? Is that correct? I remember thy mathair naming thee Colette." His full lips curled with a faint smile as he said this. He brushed his long curling locks of strawberry blonde back and leaned against the wall by the doorway. "I...I fathered thee, ye know, as a sort of secret favor to thy mother." His accent was thickly Irish Gaelic but his tongue altered between a modern kind of English and a romantic variety of old English, what he would have called Irish pageantry as he spoke now. "She wanted a child...and well, I obliged. I suppose that is naugh the kind of thing I should just drop in thy lap, but so many have thrown hints at us both all night. I am Belorian, although many call me by my earth born name Eoghan. That is the name thy mathair knew me as. I am sorry I never looked for thee, but I am a poor father as any one of my children can tell thee, though some may naugh admit it. Those women I leave behind are the lucky ones I should say." He spoke of his own inadequacies with ease. It was simple fact as he saw it, though he had come by that self awareness hard and with a great onus of guilt. "I can only guess that ye returned here to protect thy husband. Thy courage is admirable but allow me to give thee some advice concerning Acheron and all of its own. Assumption is a dead end with this crowd. Things are never what ye think they are among the hellions. I came here this eve and saw Maelmorda as little more than a pet, and I vow he has nearly reclaimed his throne now, the night barely half gone. I have known Maelmorda all my life, and I still never know what to expect from him. I see

something similar in Sammael. Those two are as hard to read as a flat text book if thou art blind." Her sacrifice was obvious to him. She was worried about her rattled mate and took a stand for him. Eoghan knew what it was like to be rattled and was proud of the daughter he had never met until now for loving her husband that much despite his flaws. "As for me, it was a fool's curiosity which tempted me here. Nothing so grand as protecting anyone," he laughed at that as he gave away to her where his intrigue sometimes led him.

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Sammael knew that his reign as the governing agent and body of the Lower Kingdom, and with some hard work and bloodshed Morashtar too, would be hunted if not met with rigor defiance. Basically, that Maelmorda wouldn't simply let him have what was in all well knowing and good fun, rightfully, wholesomely, and utterly belonged to he and he alone. Even if you didn't count respect in the equation. Whatever the Devil could do to tip the powers that be back into his favor, by any means necessary, he would undertake the task like one took out a rug to shake the dirt clean and beat it with a wooden stick. Even the most well guarded had to be extra well guarded at times like these. But who could really be one-hundred percent safe from the likes of Lucifer? It was only a matter of time before Maelmorda moved against him, and as expected he did not let down his demon son in the least. Sammael may or may not give his trust out so freely as others might, but he did have complete trust in Lucifer. And that was his dark father's insatiable never ending drive to have. Well, it was trust in one part of Maelmorda so that would have to do for now wouldn't it? When he had disappeared after bidding farewell to the very lovely ladies, both of whom were born of the heavens and yet they consorted with demons and mandevils, he had gotten lost in his thickening crowd of depraved and decadent guests to greet a few here and there. Or rather, to whisper things he needed to be carried out or held back. Perhaps he was ensuring no power hungry canigits got froggy enough to jump. It was when Gabriel's voice filled his mind with that oh so deliciously underlying and unanswered certain something that Sammael paused where he was with a goblet raised to his mouth about to take a drink of something and then leave the room to go be with that other otherworldly and strange half of Maelmorda that was giving birth to more of their children. Maybe there were two bodies lying and withering at his feet where he stood, another splayed over a chair and still another getting molested against the wall at his back. So the time had finally come had it? Seemed so short lived though. He hadn't had his seat planted on the throne long at all before he was already having to defend it. Yes defend. There didn't appear to be any clear sign that he was about to just fork over Ancheron to his creator, but sometimes the signs were harder to read than a first glance allowed. Sammael was playing a very dangerous game in how he appeared to be getting himself cornered. The pact. The children. Galaxy. Arilwen. Marsol, not to mention Belorian and whoever else wanted a piece of him. Most of all with all Maelmorda had proclaimed and how as soon as he found out that this meddlesome pact had free'd him of his end, Sammael would be infuriated. But not so much as he knew he was doing this to himself. It was after all... only a test. Of course Maelmorda would leap at the first chance to drop kick him off of the throne and reclaim it as his own. Anybody with a brain stem could figure that out. The part that was some real hairy \*\*\*\* with what Sammael was doing, was that he was seeing how far it would go before it got out of control, and it was quite possible one or both of them would loose their faith in the other and declare themselves enemies forever more. Sammael after all had no quams about killing Galaxy, or anyone else that the Morning Star held dear. In fact, the whole removal

of Galaxy would excite him more than killing her, even if dead people were still useful. Oh no, it would be so much more monstrous in what he would do to the Golden Goddess should he feel himself being crossed, and unfortunately that was exactly what begun to sink into him as Gabriel stressed his dire mistake and how to go about correcting said mistake. Mephisto would find the fallen one whom he served of his own will and choice fairly easily now, course Sammael wasn't trying to avoid people now so that might help the situation a little. Slow at first and then rather quickly however Sammael's expression had gone from lightly amused and perversely entertained, to aloof, and then unreadable. The latter could be considered by some the tell as to whether the demon of sin was either enraged, or about to kill someone. Sort of the same thing in all likelihood though. And during all of this word exchange he did with that infernal angel to tell him that no he had not planned on just handing over what he had been so desiring to have since ages past, and that punishment would be a good start with all of this, receiving Mephisto and with a little luck Lilith in his grasp so he could give the not so poor unspeakably beautiful matriarch perhaps a very uncharacteristic hug, he then heard Arasgal and how he was missing out on the birth of the twins. It seemed that burned him in a way possibly only Gabriel and Mephisto could understand. And a way Maelmorda would appreciate, or enjoy using against him. Either way it went, Sammael's temper had been tempted and now it was just a matter of who it was going to be taken out on and how that would curve it. Or simply make it worse. That goblet was set down slowly on the raised bare end of a female who was pleasuring some other female demon in a brow rasingly interesting position as Mephisto came to him. The liquid had not stained his lips, but perhaps when the Morning Star came to kiss him he would taste the crazily strong liquor on the demon of sin's tongue? Maelmorda however would find to his surprise that the kiss was returned with vigor, but that tantilizing look he received from his maker was not. More of a glower is what Maelmorda got in return as his ill tempered son had not that deviant look of mischief in his eyes as he had the whole evening. Well, minus the whole Belorian and Sarku episode naturally. Temper, temper. It was truly a wonder how alike he and Marsol were when it came to the things they wanted. Although the desert dragon would never admit it, and the demon of sin would whole heartedly laugh about it over tea, they shared perhaps too many similiarities and those conflicted with their interests. "Is that how it's going to be with you," is all Sammael said to his creator, his maker, his father and brother, and now his mate and mother/father of his children. Those eyes. Those black eyes lost the shine or shimmer to them that candle and torch light gave. So very much like the pit they appeared whenever his emotions were beginning to get out of hand. The yawning chasim of darkness carved out of centuries upon centuries of the Devil's whims. His head would start to cant to the left as his expression slipped from a glower into an icy glare. He had actually wanted to be there when the next offspring of Maelmorda and he had been born but it seems he had missed that event of bringing life into the world. No he wouldn't blame Arasgal, cause indeed that wasn't the youth's fault and it would have been petty and below him to do such things. However he did blame someone for it, but he wouldn't say who. "Was it not generosity that I showed to your wife, Morning Star, in inviting her here so that she could part take of her future position in this new life we have made for ourselves? Was I not willing to live and let live by staying my hand for the masterpiece I had so very wished to sculpt this miserable little phucking planet into? Am I not charitable to your desire to keep your family and the world with it," Sammael said to Maelmorda as his body had this funny way of suddenly standing achingly close to the Morning Star that their chest or the fronts of their bodies would be touching, and when he talked his lips might have brushed over his creators chin in the cold tone he took

now. "And you... wish for more. Does your treachery know no bounds? Well then, since you subvertly and most, insidiously, plot against me when I have given you so much you can look forward to the punishment." By the end of his little tirade that quickly turned into a low growl of anger, Sammael had to take a step away from Maelmorda to put a little distance between them. Maybe it was for Maelmorda's safety. Maybe it was it was for keeping the finely honed edge to his fangs away from tearing into his maker, or someone else. By this time if Lilith was still with Mephisto he would rest his hands on her shoulders to give them a hard but oddly relaxing compression to her fine muscles. "My dear, it's been too long. You look as godly beautiful as ever," he told Lilith as he pressed his lips to her right ear, and yet his black eyes scorched Maelmorda like someone that wanted to rip out the Devil's throat and drink of his life fluid. The kiss was slow, teasingly slow. Like a feather brush tickle that promised unimaginable pleasures if only you could handle the insane tickling. "I believe you have a pair of young strapping lads you were playing nice with? If this little party has kept you from them, please don't hesitate to whisk yourself away to them again. I only regret I could go with you to see these acts of deliciousness you commence in," he finished and he leveled his gaze on Maelmorda over Lilith's shoulder or head as his hands slid off of her shoulders. "Hurry now, away with you," he said, or rather commanded Lilith for getting her own revenge against the Morning Star. It was a whole other can of worms that was being opened. And who was to blame? Who indeed. "Don't... bother her again Maelmorda, or it will be your other little rugrats that will be next," he warned the Morning Star before Lilith even answered or moved. So the traps were being set. Oh yes, so very many indeed. So he couldn't hurt those of this world. That was fine. He would just take it out in more literal senses on those not of this world. But the funny thing about his command of Lilith was, it wasn't a command. It was more of a your free to go without having to worry if Dad will come tear off your face and eat you alive sort of thing. Was that getting around the pact? Was it really? Who knows. All Sammael did in that instance was make it quite plain that Lilith wasn't to be harassed anymore by Maelmorda. Not the subject of being harassed about was all up to Lilith to decide, but she was a tough cookie and he would find great entertainment in watching her flex her mojo. "Maelmorda, you will do what I ask of you and you will do it now. Before I was greatly concerned if you would find enjoyment in the flesh of others," he said as he started turning away with a nod to Mephisto, as in it's your gig now. "Now I find myself mildly concerned with how much they are going to hurt you, and yes, it had better be your pain to carry. Or else I will hand it to someone that cannot bare that burden, and I'm sure you know exactly who I am talking about!" And with that he had to walk away. He had given the warning and the orders. The price for Maelmorda's oh so clever scheme was going to be most taxing, and it would start with that whole pick a few folks to have a wild orgy with thing. If there had been love in him for his maker, any at all, it was not there when he so cruelly spoke down to him the way he had before all those gathered there under his roof. Maelmorda had been spoken to, judged, and punished like any slave who had disobeyed their master. And so it would begin. The long torment, and indeed, it would be most hideous. Now where had Sammael disappeared to after walking past a couple pulling a sixty-nine and poofed? Why, to the little tastey tart's bedroom of course. Nestled within shadows, so as not to rase the hairs or feelers of Belorian and his abandoned child, he would wait for a few moments and watch the whole scene. Goddamn, this kind of shyte made him want to gag. Before he had vanished to Arilwen's room, and yes now alot of the reason here was to indeed spite Maelmorda, he had told Arasgal that it is a shame he would be missing the birthing and that he would have to make it up to the little monsters later. Whether or not guilt over came him, Sammael's professional and



crisp exterior made it impossible to know...

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Marsol had just opened his mouth to tell Cirgoth something after he had hauled his fellow clansmen and demon to their feet, when the angel motioned to previously mentioned demon and what the devil were they doing. Anyone else might have asked Cirgoth what he meant first before they turned their head to look where he pointed to. Someone who knew not their ways, like Cirgoth for instance, would have taken too long in coming to the horrific truth of what the Raven was doing and not have stopped him in time from that dark and deepest of places in a hell within hell. However, Marsol was not someone else. He immediately felt what could be translated best by mortal men as having the hair on the back of your neck standing on end at Cirgoth's mere gesture and questioning as to Wyrvausts activities. Without an answer to what his mate had said, the desert dwelling dragon whirled like a dirt devil to storm from where he had been standing a couple feet from the angel, to come trampling over to where the clan demon was conjuring himself into a place that nobody in their right mind would ever want to go. It was never a matter of why when it came to matters concerning Wyrvaust and all the peculiar things he did. He'd spent too long watching his friend face the gut wrenching nightmares that lurked within his own soul to let him pull this practically suicidal mission alone. For all the time that Wyrvaust had done battle with himself and all the things he could not bare to face in him, Marsol had never left his side if he could help it. There was a whole level of pain they say that only the mortal races could feel, and that no one else save the creator(s) could comprehend just how destructive it was to everything you were to allow yourself to crumble and give in to that sweet oblivion that was despair. Wyrvaust could prove that theory single handedly and still have room to spare with how bare naked he made himself to be when his emotions surfaced unchecked. But that was a part of Wyrvaust that his ill tempered lord found to be actually one of his virtues, as strange as that may sound to others. On the outside the Raven could appear to be a ball of raw emotion and thunderous hurt. Someone so out of touch with reality that he was now pretty much useless and it just might be the best thing, and most merciful, to put him out of his misery already and be done with it. But where others might have seen just that basic monotone one sided version of the clan demon's insanely complicated mind, Marsol saw something completely different. To be able to be that distraught and so utterly consumed by hopelessness, it took a lot to be able to have that much compassion, that deep of a drive to feel everything in life in every possible way that when something terrible did happen then it was too... felt to the fullest. Just a piece of what Marsol perceived in Wyrvaust was that and more, but at the moment he paused at the voice of an angel in his ear and that ought-to-be-illegal sweet aroma teasing his senses. Course you couldn't really call it a pause when Marsol only stood still no longer then a handful of seconds before he continued over to his fellow demon to do quite a bit of sand moving, a little bit of hot air and grabbing Wyrvaust by the short hairs, and then filling the Raven's head with the demand of him to cease all of this like water filled the lungs of a drowning victim. "There are times when it isn't yours, but that of another to not idly just sit by and watch," Marsol actually roared as his left hand closed into a fist to smash into the front of Wyrvaust's face and then catch him by the front of his robes to jerk him up off of his feet perhaps too quickly and too painfully. "That lends you that strength needed to endure. Not everyone is born as we," he finished and his tone had gone a bit too cool for all the violent way he handled Wyrvaust to stop this foolish and

very damaging act he was trying to put himself through for all the grief that cracked in his heart. He felt like Cirgoth had directly attacked Wyrvaust's person without even lifting a finger, and the need to defend against such a simple statement. Knowing that Cirgoth was just being himself and as honest as a fire burned hot, Marsol also didn't hold it against him at the same time. Rather he just snapped like some ravenous animal that was being poked with a stick through a cage. It was irrelevant whether Wyrvaust should be left alone to find out the hard way if this decision was a bad one or not. You don't leave the ones you cared about to the wolves. Period. That was pretty much the underlying message in his snapping at Cirgoth, which was also unlike him. Cause he had never done that before, had he? Raised his voice or swore, yelled or anything at his mate had he ever done that sort of thing before? If not then this moment was eventful. Pretty soon they could be arguing like a married couple? "I'll cut your damn eyes out if you don't stop this," he shouted, now his attention was back on Wyrvaust where he had one hand holding the front of the clan demons' robes from them somehow wrestling or something, they were back on the sandy ground again when Marsol crouched over Wyrvaust, and the other hand clamped over his friend's mouth to hold his lower jaw bruising tight to get his damn mind back to the present. The here and the now. He didn't want to, but he would bring up that this would only hurt little Anwar more than anyone if he had succeeded at that incantation of his. Though that was mighty unfair of him again wasn't it? After all it was he who was going to stay behind and carry out whatever plans he had for ensuring the safety of the desert and her peoples. It was Marsol who was going to leave them all behind, including his own children. Very unfair it would be to mention Anwar to Wyrvaust when it would also make him a terrible hypocrite. But call him one and see if it ruffled his scales, cause it wouldn't. He had better things to do then get bent out of shape by what others thought of his motives or how he went about his business. So long as he could protect those in his care, those he cared for, and in general protect then it was all fair game. Oh, was that a twisted logic? A darker side of him that Cirgoth was so very sheltered from constantly? After awhile he would loosen his grip on Wyrvaust once he saw if he was getting through to his friend or not, turning that head with the chin in his hand to the side as if he were inspecting something very pretty and delicate. Amber eyes burning with untold flames in them. He then said, in a far less heated tone then before, "Compassion is not the same as weakness."

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A look of baffled confusion overcame Wyrvaust when Marsol erased the symbols he had drawn in the sand. An unearthly cackle escaped the Raven when Marsol belted him so hard that he was laid out flat on his back. Guilt struck a hard blow to Cirgoth as the severity of Marsol's voice struck home how utterly selfish if not altogether cold he was being towards Wyrvaust. His gaze thinned with a wounded look which cut on Wyrvaust who appeared a hundred miles away and in such emotional agony that it beat him down physically even as his face was smashed by Marsol. He watched with a sort of morbid fascination as Marsol brutalized his friend in an attempt to beat the life back into him, only Wyrvaust took it with all the energy of dummy stuffed with old clothes. His eyes thinned on Wyrvaust when the driest laughter he had ever heard blanched the demon's lips and he responded to Marsol's threats to cut his eye out with, "Burn my eyes out then, cut out this tongue, break every bone in this body, what difference does it make? What is another cripple in the world?" His gaze burned like fiery daggers on Marsol when he used Anwarr II as a ploy against him. "The Raven intends to send his son from Sammael's reach..before he sends that dog Mekkor on him. The Raven of Desert cannot protect his son any more

than he was able to protect his wife," he growled bitterly.

Cirgoth's ultra-green eyes shifted back again on Marsol after he had jarred the demon hard then wrestled Wyrvaust to the ground to stand over him on his knees. Cirgoth likewise dropped to his knees with his head bowed. "Forgive me, Marsol. I judged him too harshly. I never really thought of it that way...of one being so compassionate that it causes them to suffer so hellishly." Cirgoth could be nothing but honest and he truly had never looked at mental anguish in that light. He has always seen it as a weakness in himself and others. He had been conditioned in Haman not to let his emotions get in the way of things...not to be weak "I shall cut out my doubts in him, I swear to you. I realize now that he can no longer help what he feels than I or you can." He sighed and lifted his gaze on Marsol as he felt the dragon Lord's hand clamp down on his arm and he came to his feet easily with the pull given to his limb. "How do we help him?" the question at hand now came readily to him.

"You can't," Wyrvaust said with grim abandon, his eyes lost in the sands to the west, in the direction of Sammael's fortress. It was unknown by all but a few how powerful the demon's power of sight was. Marsol was one of those handful who knew, Maelmorda, Beroth and Muustala the only others counted among the knowing. Perhaps Sammael knew as well and counted on the deepening wounds it would scar the demon with. Visions of his wife with Sammael had quieted him with despair. For sake of Marsol he forsook all hope, for to hope was to invite further agony to his heart. He saw it all so vividly that he might as well have been sitting on the bed with them. Dare he embrace promise that his wife would seize her freedom by refusing to be his? Belorian was the exception to so many rules...Few could be physically claimed so completely and not feel owned by their dominator. Had Arilwen that strength? His chest caved and he felt the crush at the terrible thoughts which followed...Would he ever be able to shake those visions of her with Sammael? Could he love her as he once had knowing what he now knew? That next to Sammael he would always be inadequate? Would she be able to resist comparing how they loved her? A tremulous breath shook his entire body and he pulled at his own hair. Try as he might to reject the visions; he could not. His bond with her was too strong and the power of augery too potent to dismiss. He never could reject the visions which came to him, only ride them out until they were done. Once again he had more the look of a zombie than a creature rife with life and the love of embracing every moment of it. His desire to end himself was more intense than ever but all his posture and expression showed was emptiness.

Cirgoth eyed Wyrvaust for several moments then coiled his arm around Marsol. "He looks very unwell, My Lord," he said quietly. His gaze then leapt on the desert raven as he stood suddenly and brushed the sand off of his tattered habit. Clothing became disposable when shapeshifting was exercised.

"Sammael will never give up his war on Morashtar, we both know that. Maelmorda but purchased a pause. The Prince of Hell shall find a way. We should take this lull in violence as an opportunity and prepare to defeat him. We should raise a mighty army and attack his fortress. His very presence here is an abomination to this world." He spoke with a dead calm which hollowed his eyes and made a statue carved in marble of his posture and expression. No, Wyrvaust was not well. He neither cared if he lived or died. Courage often came from strange places and he was now fearless with his inability to tremble in the face of death.

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It was a blessing that Arilwen remained unaware of how her husband was unraveling in the middle of the desert that she had so recently departed. Had she the chance to witness his heartbreak, she would have been filled with even more guilt than what currently stuffed her stomach and chest. She kept repeating a little mantra in her head about WHY she was doing this... who it was for and that it would not last forever. She hoped. During her chat with Belorian, the Nephelim decided that while she remained here with Sammael to fulfill her promise she would write and keep letters, if allowed, for Wyrvaust to give to him after her return if she was not able to send them to him. But would letters to her strange Raven help or hurt?

It had been nearly two days now since Arilwen had slept and it was catching up with her. The longer she and her father spoke the heavier her head got. By the time they launched into a discussion about places he had visited, her knees were pulled to her chest, her arms wrapped around her shins and her cheek on the top of her knees, thick eyelashes drooping over her violet eyes. She didn't even realize she fell asleep until her two escorts came to explain to Belorian that they had to deliver the angel to her room. Her drowsy eyes flipped open as she felt a hand on her arm, gently pulling her to her feet. A weak smile was given to the man she had just met and she thanked him for taking the time to meet her and expressed that she would be glad to see him again, should the occasion arise. It was not some sappy parting where she threw herself at his feet and begged for that father figure she never had. Truth be told, Arilwen knew she had no problem living without him. She just didn't know how beneficial it would be to live WITH him in her life.

The sleepy angel was finally led away after all was said and done and she was delivered to a massive room where soft candles burned to be kind on her weary eyes. She would not remember one of Sammael's daughters entering and leading her to bed, folding down the covers and coaxing her in. She also wouldn't remember climbing into the gigantic bed, curling up in the middle and promptly passing out. A visitor was already lurking in the shadows unseen and if he just so happened to rouse her in any way, her tired mind would be confused by the scent on her robes and would drowsily think itself to be at home in bed with her husband. At least until she woke up!

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As soon as the Birdie was asleep, the "lurker" would step out of those oh so comfortable folds of shadows. Those sisters that doted on Arilwen hand and foot exclusively, had not left the sleeping chamber yet. They had been awaiting the tall frame of flawless flesh and sinfully handsome features to come so that they could move alongside him as they took his coat for him. Unbuttoned his shirt for him, even loosened his belt for him on his way towards that bed where the Nephelim laid curled up like the innocent that she was. Bit of a bad situation she was in now it appeared; what with her being asleep and a demon approaching her that was being disrobed as he walked by other demons. He was thinking of many things presently, but most of all he was thinking of how long it would take. For what those thoughts were reserved for and by who, well, that was about as clear as pond scum. He came to pause briefly at the foot of that ridiculously enormous bed as he held still while smooth and tender hands slid over his chest to curl thumbs and fingers over the edges of his shirt and slid it off of him. So intimate those female slaves of his were in everything they did, and yet it was controlled when the occasion called

for it. One of them leaned up on their tippy toes to whisper something in his ear as they felt over the front of his neck, while the other two got rid of the rest of his clothing. It was unneeded the way he let these favorites of his undress him while he watched Arilwen sleep. But then again, it was always a gift in some eyes to be able to have physical contact with the one they belonged to, and nothing sexual be involved. Rare, where Sammael was concerned.

It had taken Arilwen only seconds to fall asleep once her dark waves hit the pillow. She looked exhausted, but at least the worried crease in her brow smoothed out once she drifted to sleep. She finally looked relaxed for the first time since initially being brought to the party. It had been a time of nightmares, confusion and fear for the angel, followed by her snap judgment on how to best help her husband and Lord Marsol. Wyrvaust's scent still lingered slightly on her robe, which she had wrapped around her body once again during her discussion with Belorian, and it helped lull her to sleep. It was the most obvious sign that she was a little passed out? The fact that a pack of girls were undressing her new and hopefully temporary owner at the foot of 'her' bed! After a few moments of Sammael watching the Nephelim, Arilwen mumbled something in her sleep, tugged one of the endless number of pillows into her arms to cuddle it and then sighed before falling still and quiet again. Was Sammael aching for good ...yet nude... conversation? Or was she about to be the passed out drunk sorority girl in the frat house bedroom?

Where was the fun in talking to someone if you couldn't be nude at the same time? With the last bit of his clothing having been removed, and two of those exotic beauties trying very desperately not to ogle their lord to the point that it might incur his wrath, the three women would retire from the room and leave their new angelic friend in the company of their lord and master for however long it was till they were summoned again. The ends of the blankets were lifted and under the sinful one went. Slinking like any fine muscled serpent could slither, he was not bothered by the size of the bed Arilwen slept in. Merely, it gave them more room for whatever it was... angels and demons did in their spare time. Quick was his crawl up the bed to start his harassment of her by her dainty feet. First the big toe was nipped, and then the ones after that. Perhaps he kissed the tops of her feet? Maybe. But did Satan kiss anyone's feet? From her feet he just continued up the front of her legs where he dragged his lips over her delicate skin. Stopping once or twice to nip at her thighs or the insides of her knees perhaps where he was on his hands, kneeling over her sleeping figure under those black sheets and fur blankets...

Nooo not the feet! Arilwen's little ducky paddles wiggled slightly, her toes curling up in her sleep as Sammael's lips toyed at them. Ticklish? A little! That did not cause her to rouse from her deep sleep in the dimly lit room, but as lips worked up her smooth legs she started to stir, rubbing her face into the pillow she was hugging on and releasing a wide yawn. When her sleepy, half-open violet eye peeked over the pillow, she saw the form of someone under the blankets and getting happy-go-lucky with her limbs. Of course, in her exhausted mind, she still was dreaming that she was home. A hand lowered and delicately ran over the man's head through the blanket and she closed her eyes again, managing to murmur to him. "How was the hunt?" Many times, Wyrvaust would leave her sleeping to go and hunt at night and many times would awaken her by something as sudden as climbing on top of her and plunging between her thighs. Yawning again, so widely that her jaw could crack, she nuzzled the pillow and let her toes uncurl beneath the blankets.

How was the hunt she asked. His mouth was against the top of her right thigh when she said that, and it made his lips curl into a smile. So sweet she made sugar taste bitter. Further up he moved, and he had to actually exercise some self control not to bite the shyte out of her inner thighs like he really wanted to. "It's... still in progress," he said, although he wouldn't bother to make his voice clear. Rather he let it become muffled by the thick blankets and sheets so that the only real sign of his voice was that it was male. She could feel it however. The heat of his breath being exhaled over her thighs and her sensitive area. Well, perhaps it didn't help any that he had started toying with her sex too but still. Molesting people in their sleep? Oh yes, that did come natural to him after all now didn't it. At first it was just his hand or, his fingers but pretty soon she would feel something else touching her down there. And that something moved and curled much like a snake, soft and wet, with an ever changing length just to drive one bat shyte crazy...

Sammael's lips caused Arilwen's skin to flood with goosebumps and she let out a sleepy sigh, rolling from her side to her back and abandoning her cuddly pillow. Of course she was tired... overly so... but when her husband started spelunking, she couldn't refuse. His breath warmed her skin and this time a more trembling sigh was let forth from her lips, her eyes still closed in the dark room, her thighs spreading to that lovely feeling. She hadn't understood a word he had said under his little sex tent... but he DID have his mouth full, and it was rude to talk with your mouth full. Arilwen's hips shifted upwards then jerked as she let out a sharp gasp. Wow. She had never felt THAT from him before! Was that his tongue? That movement of her body caused her robes and the slinky nighty she wore to bunch up around her hips beneath the covers. Shuddering, her back arched at a rough angle and her fingertips pressed into the sheets as he went to town. Wyrvaust DID tend to come back from hunting all riled up. She certainly was not complaining. It was when a hand dipped below the sheets with the intentions of burying fingers into his hair that Arilwen became quite awake... VERY quickly. It wasn't her husband's hair. She knew EVERY inch of him. Violet eyes flew open and a hand dove down to chuck the blankets back. She couldn't see his face... only the top of his head. Someone had broken into their lair and was molesting her! A horrified shriek erupted from the angel's lips as her feet lashed out at his face and shoulders, much like a toddler having a tantrum. She didn't realize that her screams grew louder as she tossed herself away from him, tumbling out of the bed. She needed a weapon. On her feet, the angel looked crazed. Her mind was shouting to DO something. Wyrvaust was gone. Her son was in the next room. Shooting her hand out, her fingers grabbed the first thing that they fell on...which happened to be a lit candle in a heavy holder. Eyes darkened with rage, the angel turned and whipped it towards the bed as hard as she could. Luckily, the movement blew out the flame before it would hit... if it DID hit its target. "HOW DID YOU GET IN HERE?! LEAVE NOW OR FACE THE CONSEQUENCES!" Oh please. Wasn't it so cute? The angel could never take on someone who managed to get past Wyrvaust's wards. And it didn't yet sink in that they didn't HAVE candles by their bed...

Whether he heard her thoughts or simply read her movements, it didn't matter. The amusement she provided with at first wanting him to molest her and he was so about to believe you me, and then spin round to do a complete 180 on him and kick him out of bed? Well that was just too much fun. His laughter was stifled when he felt her legs move in the manner which signaled he was about to get kicked in the face, and he rolled upwards onto his knees to avoid all of that face breaking and temper tantrum vengeful wrath of the little lady that thought someone had invaded her home

to sex her up. When she all but threw herself out of her own bed, Sammael resigned himself to slowly laying back down on his side to face that side of the bed she had emptied herself out on. Bending his arm to prop his head up in his hand as he waited. Waited through all the threatening words and obvious I-am-going-to-turn-your-face-into-hamburger violent throws, and luckily this item or whatever it was she had thrown ticked into a pillow that suspiciously found it's way into the path of Arilwen's throw. It would be a minute or two after her raging and shouting that he couldn't take all the cute and silliness anymore and blew a breath to give the huge chamber light where it had none before. Oh yes, Arilwen's home did not have candles by the bed. Indeed, Arilwen's home did not have what appeared to be five stone statues of nightmarish creatures, mawls agap with fire sparked to blaze in them surrounding the bed either. The statues tongues served as the dishes full of liquid that burned something spicy and charred in the chamber, perhaps wood of dead leaves, and let flames curl out of the sides of their open snouts much like smoke would through a crack in a door. "If your quite done trying to bludgeon and threaten me to death," came that condemningly smooth as silk voice from the bed, "come back to bed." And there he was laying with a plummeting sheet of doom barely over his hips to hide his naughty parts from her. The rest of his upper half bare. The torch lights of the tall stone statues softening his otherwise dangerously good looks to make him appear less frightening and more... tempting. He could threaten her too of course. Tell her he ought to cut off her legs for trying to kick him or maybe some other bad thing. But he didn't. And for that, would she understand the severity of why she was here..?

Arilwen looked like a crazy woman. Her clothing was all tangled up around damp, bare thighs, her robe was sliding off of one shoulder, revealing her nightgown strained across rock hard nipples. She was panting and looking like she wanted to kill someone. The candle missed and at first, in the dim room, she didn't recognize him. Why wasn't the man moving? She was opening her eyes as widely as she could to try and make out his form when the light suddenly flooded in, causing her to gasp and clamp her eyes shut for a quick moment to adjust her pupils. When she managed to pry them open again the first thing she saw was monsters... monsters breathing fire! Given her horrible fear of dragons, Arilwen jerked back a step and banged into a table. Wait... why was the room so DIFFERENT? THE BASTARD MOVED THEIR FURNITURE! ... Wait. It was then that her panicked eyes fell on the figure in the bed and her heart plummeted into her toes with a horrible sense of foreboding. Oh.... no.... She couldn't breathe. She had just assaulted the ruler of hell. Niiiiiice. All of the color drained from her face and she remained unmoving, gawking at him. He SEEMED calm, but Belorian had JUST told her that members of this group were never what they seemed! ...What if he cut her feet off for doing that? Or locked her up somewhere? She tried to think of something to say...anything... but nothing came. His soothing words forced her bare feet forward, carrying her slowly towards the bed. It was like approaching a dog that might bite. The poor thing looked terrified. Finally she blurted out a weak, squeaky voice. "I...I am so sorry..." If he made any quick movements, she was going to tuck into a ball and hit the floor.

He wouldn't make any sudden movements, although he wanted to. Rather, he wanted to just suddenly leap on her where she stood but he refrained from all that grab arse. There'd be plenty time for whatever there may be time for later. Right now though all he wanted to do was find what made her tick like he had with Wyrvaust. He was, gathering intelligence, so to speak. Studying how she reacted to this or what she didn't like about that. Arilwen was an open book like that, and that wasn't a bad

thing like some people thought. It just meant she was so honest to the point that she wouldn't even bother hiding what she felt from others. "I wonder if I'll have to be on my guard all the time now," he said, and there was that underlying teasing he had had with her from before where she had been held by him in the room of pools and frolicking nude folks. As soon as she was in the bed, sort of, he then lifted the blankets for her to climb back under. With him? Was he out of his phucking mind! After she had just had the day lights scared out of her now he wants her to come back to bed with him? Well yeah. She was his for the moment and he did find her feisty nature tantalizing in his own way. "It has been a long night, Arilwen, some of us actually want to catch a few z's now," he told her with this slight you-know-you-could-have-taken-out-my-eye look about him. Again, he was going out of his way to be kind to her, humorous even, but why? Wasn't it obvious...

Once she reached the bed she stopped, only because her knees hit it. The Nephelim ever soooo slooowly climbed up onto the bed, but kept her wary distance at first. "I...was having a dream that I was home..." She said softly, as if that would explain why she suddenly went psycho-bitch on him. Her thighs felt cold. Looking down, her face suddenly blazed up bright red when she saw her wet thighs and remembered all of the things that he was doing under those sheets. She hastily tugged her tiny nighty over her thighs as best she could, then jerked her head up to look at him in utter shock as he kind of gave her an exasperated huff that SOME of them were tired and wanted to sleep. "WHAT?!" She blurted out, looking stunned. "But you just...just were..." She couldn't bring herself to say anything 'dirty' about what he had been doing, so with her face blazing like an oven, she slid cautiously under the lifted covers and immediately squeezed her eyes shut when they fell on those statues again. "You have a morbid sense of decor..." She grumbled.

Sammael's smile widened like a fat cat over something. With his head still propped up in his hand and his other hand lowering the blankets over the ever soooo sloooooowly climbing into bed Nephelim, he sort of tucked her in. And then of course slid sideways till she could feel the heated skin of his chest against her arm and perhaps other parts of his body against her hip, her leg.. Something something. "A bit odd it would be if I had everything white with little children statues holding flowers and pitcher," he said as he gave her a mock defensive look about his very morbid and outlandish choice of decor. His tastes were as vivid as his hunger was insatiable. "Being what I am and all. You would have to agree with me on this," he said, keeping the chit-chat light and small, unless she wanted to talk about bigger and better things; like the one pressing to her hip for instance? Though before she could voice her own rejection over that terribly oh so good invasion of her personal space; his arm slid around her waist as he moved downwards just enough so that her head was a little above his own. Sammael always did make things sinfully difficult.

The angel seemed to relax little by little as Sammael didn't launch into grabbing her chest or anything of that sort. Resting her head back into the soft pillow, she snorted and gave him a pointed look at his joke about the children statues. "No, you use LIVE children. You just keep them in the party room." Her lips hid a smile and she tried to fight from stiffening up again as she felt him press against her hip, his arm encircling her waist. WW0000AH. THAT thing was supposed to eventually invade her?! Dying was NOT a part of their arrangement! Swallowing dryly, she shifted her violet eyes to him as he scooted lower in the bed, his hair brushing her cheek and jaw line. It was a strange position to find him in, in her mind. Here he was, big mighty ruler, and he was trying to snuggle her? Because she was caught



off guard she let her cheek lower and press to the top of his head. Things were silent for a few moments before she murmured to him. "Did I hurt you?" Hahahaha.

He felt her cheek on the top of his dark disgustingly soft haired head, and it pleased him. Or rather, pleased his motives? She was unknowing at how this game was played, what a looker. He wouldn't have minded her not saying anything, merely not trying to batter him to pieces again and let his arm rest around her hips where his hand was lightly on her side. She broke the silence with a very good natured question that actually caught him off guard. Strange. Was that the first time tonight? Or the second? His head raised from where he had been resting it in his hand to look at her with those pupilless looking black eyes of his. Or maybe it just seemed like they didn't have pupils. "No," he said in a soothingly quiet voice as his fingers poked her in her side very lightly. "Wish you had though." Ah hah! There it was. His masochistic side. Heh.

He reacted strangely to her question. Arilwen paused as he seemed to stop moving, his fingers becoming still on her hip. She was so busy gauging his reactions to everything that she didn't stop to realize that her body was twisted in one gigantic knot from what he had done to her. Her violet eyes met his dark, blank ones and she squeaked as his fingers poked into her hips. She was so tangled in her clothing that she couldn't jerk far, but she DID jerk...and bruised her hip on his member. Ouchie. Her face flushed that familiar shade of red as he mused about wishing she HAD hurt him. And here she had been terrified that he was going to lop her feet off... and he LIKED pain! Her heart banged against her rib cage and she swallowed again, trying to make a nervous joke. "If you really mean that I could go find the candlestick again..."

Oh so she could play this game after all then? That jerk of her body moving to knock her hip into his previously semi awake, just caused him to become fully and if not, painfully awake now. That flushing in her cheeks just made her flustered look even prettier, or to him it did at least. But that was just because he had a vast appreciation for the body and all the little things it could do. Maybe it would be about pain and pleasure for them then? Or maybe he could show her that pain wasn't so bad, once you were use to it. He chuckled some as she offered to get that candlestick once more to finish what she had started. His finger poked lightly at her side again as he said, "Easy now. You start getting all rough and I'll have to find some rope and do something tying up." With that his head lowered to rest on her shoulder as his arm tugged her more to himself so that she couldn't escape the heat his body was giving off. Or the way his mouth was brow raisingly close to her left nipple...

Arilwen relaxed even more as she felt that chuckle reverberate through his body and into hers. However, she caught her lower lip in her teeth as he teased her about having to tie her up. Wyrvaust had never done THAT! She liked being able to claw at him in the throes of passion. Not answering, Arilwen squeezed her eyes shut when she felt his warm breath on her nipple, which instantly perked back up into a hard nub. Guilt was starting to grind at the back of her mind, but luckily she was still pretty numb from her exhaustion and the booze he had been giving her that evening. The angel never COULD handle her booze. "Well... goodnight." She finally squeaked, trying to play on the card that he had point out about SOME of them wanting sleep. He didn't LOOK sleepy!

Well wasn't that calling the kettle black. He liked the way her body responded to

him. Rejection and horrified need at the same time. Though it wasn't him she needed, but Wyrvaust. However that would change. In time, all things changed. It wasn't until a little after she said goodnight that his head raised so that he looked up at her, and he asked, "You didn't think you were going to sleep did you?" Then his face came uncomfortably close to hers so that she could get a real good look at how eerily deep his eyes appeared to run. "It wouldn't be you who got tied up either," he whispered and at that she could feel his lips against her left ear even as he spoke. So bad he was. Mildly invading her space, and then now she could feel all his nakedness against her side as he begun to tug her towards him to snuggle her against himself under the blankets. Still yet, other than the initial molestation he hadn't touched her inappropriately. Though how long that lasted was... up to her entirely.

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Dark were the thoughts and emotions which followed in Sammael's wake; Galaxy's feelings that not all would end well, Wyrvaust's suicidal anguish that he would never see Arilwen again and that it was his fault, Sarku's deep sense of depression after mere exposure to the Prince of Demons, Cirgoth's confusion and misplaced anger, and whatever Marsol was feeling would pale a mighty storm in contrast. Belorian was an odd one in all this. What he felt was neither dark or good. He simply took things as they came and it seemed, so too did his estranged daughter. He was there because he wanted to be. He was studying Acheron's prince. Maelmorda was conscious of all these things. His awareness was like a series of phantom impressions which his complex intellect and perception could make perfect and vivid sense of. He knew that Galaxy had lost confidence in his promises and he was sorry for it, and at the same time he could not blame her for that. He wanted to change that though; assure that his goal with her and their children was achieved. There were forces at work against him, however, forces he was unaware of, for, despite all he comprehended and had achieved, he could not digest all possible conditions and individuals at once without performing a great feat of magic, and even in that the duration he could do so was limited. Still; standing against Maelmorda was no easy matter and Gabriel had to proceed with the greatest care, particularly since Maelmorda was free of the pact. Even as Maelmorda strode leisurely across the ample hall to meet Sammael, voices filled his mind, voices seeking his command and acknowledging him as their sovereign Prince at once. Some of them sought his forgiveness for not opposing Sammael's claims to the throne. Others made demands, among them, Behemoth, but he was not alone in insisting that Maelmorda prove himself the rightful king by right of accepting a challenge chosen by Acheron's high counsel, which Behemoth was part of. Behemoth, Ahriman, Belial, Amaymyon, Abdiel, Argenta, Cahor, Gabriel, Paimon, Pursan, Agiel, Ahriman, Astaroth, Eurynome, Beelzebub, Mammon, Lilith, Baphomet, Abbadon, Ronwe (who perhaps carried the most sway on the counsel owed to his wisdom), Adramelech, Leviathan, Mephistopheles, Botis, Barbatos, Valis Urik, Byron Decasey, and Asmodous made up Acheron's council. Maelmorda consented to accept any challenge they proposed. He had no doubt that he would be pit against others who desired Acheron's throne, and that Sammael would be offered a chance through said challenge to keep the throne. Ronwe would see to that. As Maelmorda's thoughts ran with all these voices, so too did Sammael receive Acheron's collective relay. He was asked why he returned the throne to Lucifer, asked if he had stood only as Lucifer's steward, asked why he had put an end to the occupation of Morashtar, was informed that the council would establish if Lucifer or Sammael or another would rule Acheron. His supporters alone asked IF he had restored Lucifer to the throne.

A rather pained expression crossed Maelmorda's features when Sammael attacked his intentions and loyalty to him while an aggravated if not sore tick twitched at his lips and jaw. As Sammael's gaze burned on him, Maelmorda's feline-jade eyes smoldered on him with equal malice, though as a result of feeling terribly slighted rather than angry, which the remainder of his expression showed. "I have only this to say to you, my most beloved Sammael. Disloyal? If anyone betrayed anyone you betrayed yourself. Perhaps my love is too great a burden for you to embrace. Here I believed you were being generous out of love for me. Am I mistaken or deluded to believe you can love me and desire me as an equal? You offer it and then turn around and disclaim it. I did not lift so much as a pinky finger against you. I see that you believe I mean to take the throne from you, but that is hardly the case. You offered me a share of it and I graciously accepted. I foresaw great things with us both sharing Acheron's rule and now you treat me like a traitor for what you offered? I am afraid I shall not reject your previous offer." His eyes darted towards Mephisto hence he smiled sharply at Sammael. "Have me punished for your change of heart by all means, Sammael. I shall not hold it against you or allow it to diminish my love for you. I realize that you have a reputation to uphold and that you believe others must pay the price to prove it from time to time." He scoffed at that. "I on the other hand always believed you had nothing to prove. It is my hope that one day you shall have the gift of knowing how to answer to your heart instead of the whispers which hiss in your ears. I answer them as I will, and dare not assume how I answer them. Phuck your reputation and listen to your own true will and you shall find true strength in yourself." He cackled as Mephisto took him roughly by the arm and led him across the vast chamber towards a lovely raised table fitted with all sorts of shackles and body shaping devices. He did not put up any kind of struggle as Mephisto shoved him against the table and then down on it to affix him to the various binds in a very exposed position. Maelmorda would take the rape and physical tortures with the courage of a zephyr. Part of him would even enjoy it on a very depraved and involuntarily primal level. For all the evils he had perpetrated and tamed, he had suffered as much in agony. It was said of Maelmorda by those who knew him best that he could not be broken, only banished or temporarily humiliated or destroyed. No one had ever tried though, had they? Did they need to when the very forces which molded him had punished him more than any creature ever could? Was Maelmorda earnest in those things he said, or was he living up to his reputation of being the father of lies? Maelmorda never had lived up to that unless it was to deceive his enemies. Maelmorda's gaze followed Sammael out of the hall even as his wrists were clamped and his ankles to spread his legs wide. "Do enjoy the bird, Sammael! I am certain I shall have a wonderful time here!" His voice was almost cheerful and yet the bite of jealousy so like dry ice freezing the edges of cream could not be missed. By whatever mysterious means he knew where Sammael was going, he knew, and he was jealous.

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Sarku retired to his chamber and divested himself of the clothing he was wearing to toss the raiment onto the floor. Wings folded beneath him as he climbed into his bed where he lay staring up at the ceiling for several hours. He wondered if Lucifer was not possessed to trust Sammael as he did. Lucifer was not foolish, so how else could he place so much faith in a demon whose very nature imbedded shadows in good people's hearts? Did he not threaten to unleash Mekkor on the child of Wyrvaust? The very thought was evil, to speak such a threat was twice as evil, to act on such a threat was the height of evil. Sarku had no doubt that Sammael was

capable of ordering something that unforgivably terrible. Maelmorda drew lines. Mekkor was the kind of line he drew. Sammael drew no such lines, or had something changed in him since Maelmorda offered himself to him? Was Maelmorda the essential something Sammael had been missing, the key to taming the irrepressible evil in Satan? Was Sammael's need to be loved by Maelmorda, to own his heart so obsessive and important to him that without that need fulfilled, he spited the worlds and all creatures in them without impunity? Did Maelmorda trust Sammael because he needed to be trusted, or because he actually trusted him? Sarku's eyes drifted. Was Gabriel not like his master in that way? Did the horseman of pestilence not hate the worlds and anyone in them because he was not loved by the only person he could actually love in return? How many demons were like that? Sarku wondered. Sarku wondered many things before he finally succumbed to sleep.

Waking was violent, instinctive and brought him to an invasive collision. Muscles coiled and snapped, claws raked air and flesh, fangs sank into sweet flesh. There was the sound of meat tearing, tendons popping and the crack of breaking bones then the air was heavy with an ambrosia of beautifully heady aromas. A palm raised against the air and the air sizzled with power. A claw raised and darkness surrounded the bed to snuff the opposing ribbons of desensitizing energies. The soul of the horseman leapt at the animist and the soul, mind and heart of the victim pushed out against it. The struggle was fierce, powers and wills clashed and the soul of Gabriel grew terrible and all resistance against him crumbled. A warning cry was swallowed by that monstrous spirit as was the mental voice, the will, the soul, and the awareness of the one with so many shapes and names. He slept.

Morning had met the afternoon midway when Sarku stirred. He bathed, dressed himself in his usual loin cloth and went to the kitchen where he made Galaxy breakfast himself; grilled cheese on grain rich bread with ripe tomato slices from the garden, fried eggs from his hens, bacon and tropical fruit juice. He placed the plate and cup on a wooden tray and carried it to her chamber where he knocked on the door, announcing himself.

When permitted entry he opened the door, peered inside and then entered. A shy sort of smile hinting of regret tugged at his lips and he walked to the bed to place the tray on a table by its head. "Eat his friend must," he said. "Children has she who rely on her strength." The old animist ambled over to a stool by an easel and settled on its seat. His gaze absorbed the unfinished painting while she ate, and examined other pieces of art. When she had finished her breakfast; his grey-amber-and sienna mottled eyes meandered slowly around the chamber with idle abstraction then trained on Galaxy.

"This one finds it hard to imagine how difficult last night was for his friend. If Sarku had it his way, the golden lady would never meet with the fallen serpent again unless his intentions were proven good towards this one's lady friend and family. Such selfless acts as the Morning Star occasions to enact is unknown to the deeds of the one he offered himself to. Love he proclaims to someone who has never loved anything. Sammael rejected the heart his maker gave him even in Haman and as an angel, 'for' said he long ages ago 'I gave all of my heart to one who does not see me.' Does the Morning Star see something in the Lord of Demons no one else can? Is his maker and mine the one he gave his heart to, or was it Yajmha?" Sarku breathed a long sigh and shook his head. "All this one is sure of is that he shall rise up against Sammael and raise others against him if harm is done to the

Star of the Morning." Having confided what was on his mind his multi-hued eyes shifted and locked on Galaxy. "This one has a great wish for his friend to rest her troubles on him. What has all this awakened in her? Is her happiness and contentment within reach still?" It was the fallen angel of many forms who spoke and none other. It was his heart, his mind, his will for as long as Gabriel let him have it. He was only aware of what his fallen brother allowed him to remember, comprehend, and know. Sarku had gone to sleep, tossed and turned, woken midmorning, and that is how he remembered it.

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Initially, Arilwen was actually naive enough to think that Sammael would let her 'go to sleep', though there was no WAY she could sleep at this point in time. Her face turned away from him and she squeezed her eyes shut until she got that feeling that someone was staring at her. His words made her violet eyes pop wide open and she whipped her head to look at him, nearly banging her nose into his. A nervous swallow was given when he plainly pointed out that sleeping was just against the rules! Her eyes locked on his own and she wanted to tear her gaze away but couldn't. What lay beneath his irises? It was incredible to see his different sides... facets like a gem. He was such a strange being, and yet so unknown. The angel had never been good with anything unknown. She nearly gasped as his eyes lowered and she felt that warm air puff onto her delicate earlobe, immediately flooding her soft, smooth skin with goosebumps. Arilwen KNEW what she was here for and that the sooner she got to it, the sooner her chances of going home. Wyrvaust had explained to her once that angels were very fertile, so that was working for her favor. She did not realize her hands were trembling when she reached up from under the sheets and hastily untangled herself from her beloved robe, tossing it across the massive bed somewhere. It was obvious that she was terrified but trying to be a good, obedient pet.

There were a lot of sides to Sammael so many knew nothing about, and even more that nobody ever would. As she looked at him, he stared back at her before he moved his head or she moved her body to end the whole looking contest. He would watch her however as she declathed herself and seemed to accept the situation with a bit of terror and perhaps regret? Did she regret where she was now? Could she truly regret it and blame him when it had been her choice entirely to come here for whatever entertainment he wished to derive from her? Or better yet, give her. For the unspoken motives or agenda, or whatever the hell it was that Sammael was playing nice with Arilwen, maybe it had more to do with change than anything else presently. As the robe was tossed somewhere that wasn't here, she could feel his arms encircling her slowly and tighter, but not hurtfully. It almost hinted to a scene of a giant boa constrictor entangling itself around its prey. It had to be viewed that way though right? After all, it was Sammael we're talking about here. Nice wasn't in his job description. His left hand rested on the small of her back, while his right arm wrapped around her to place his right hand on her right shoulder. His thumbs rubbing tiny little shapes over her skin. He was gathering her up to himself it seemed. Settling her against him where he laid on his back now with her cuddled to his bare chest and... other regions. "You shake like a leaf in autumn," he said, though his voice was a little hard to understand because now his nose was musing through those gorgeous dark locks on top of her head. Was he... smelling her? Seemed that way. Also seemed a lot of people liked to smell her these days...

Terrified? Yes. Arilwen had every right to be. She was in a devil's playground...getting naked in his bed while big scary flaming statues gawked at them. She had not slept with anyone but her husband in so terribly long. But regret? No. She knew she had to be here and that it was her choice. Hence the reason she somehow managed to get her body to prepare for what was to come. Still, that would not make it any easier. She would not stop missing her husband. Now that her robe was discarded, Arilwen was left in that tiny slip of red silk that Sammael's daughters had wrapped her in. She had managed to nervously slide the straps partway down her arms before Sammael suddenly locked his arms around her, rolling her so that she was settled on top of him, her head tucked under his chin and her silk number pushed down to be wrapped around her stomach. Her first thought? Her tits HURT! She had not realized how hard and tender they were from not being able to feed her son and she silently prayed that she didn't soak the damn devil in breast milk. ...Though she would probably be the first! It was his murmuring words that caused Arilwen to try and take hold of herself, finally realizing that she WAS shaking. "I'm sorry..." She said softly. What else COULD she say? "I miss my husband? I am terrified? Those damn statues are now staring at my naked ass?" None of it seemed very appropriate.

Her apology got a quirk of the brow from him. How classic, he thought to himself as he mused his nose and mouth a little more through her hair as if searching for something, when in fact he really wasn't. It was more like he was nuzzling her rather than smelling her hair and scent. Speaking of scent, the room sort of warmed a little more by the minute till they didn't need blankets to cover themselves with. A pleasant scent? Was it Arilwen's tasty divine aroma that was filling the chamber because of how afraid she was? Or was it something else? His arms moved, sliding his hands up over her back and bunching up the poor red silk delicate thing she wore to expose more of her pert rear and such to nothing but the light of those small fires burning in the eerie looking statues. "It isn't me you should apologize to," he said. His voice was pleasant, even low like a lover murmuring something to their beloved so that only they could hear. Yet for all the comforting of his voice, there was a venom to his words wasn't there? It cut like any good pair of sharpened fangs would. It was Wyrvaust she should save her sorry's for, is what he meant. And she knew it. But was it his intention to make her even more uncomfortable? To hurt her? Or merely to be honest with her...? After several minutes of this though he asked, in an awfully gentle tone, "Would you like me to make it easier for you?"

There was no doubt. Arilwen's sweet scent was pumping into the room in droves. Terror, arousal, uncertainty... it all fueled the smell. The angel shivered as she felt the whisp of silk being dragged up over the perfect curve of her rump and bunched against the small of her back. She hadn't expected his words and they slammed into her like a charging bull to the gut. Hot tears immediately gathered in those lovely eyes and her throat began to burn at his venom. What did she think... that she could do this and not feel the guilt and shame? The reason she was doing it was noble, but could there be a different way? Too late now. The angel squeezed wet lashes together in a sad attempt to choke back the tears, but by the time his second question came her cheeks were soaked. She had lips pressed together ever so tightly, knowing that if they opened right now her body would start to get wracked with sobs. Instead, she gave a tiny, desperate nod. Anything. She would rather be beaten over the head than feel like this... and she could not help but fear that it was going to piss him off.

She became so ripe whenever her emotions surfaced, like her tears in this instance. They made her beauty shine in a way only the ones that dwelled not within the light, but in the embrace of darkness recognize and appreciate it to its fullest extent. He couldn't stop himself this time from removing his arms from around her to cup her face and turn her head upwards just a little. She would now watch as those ungodly soft pillows of flesh came too close to her face, and how that pink oral muscle slipped past the pillows to lick over these damp cheeks of hers. She would cry then, would she? That was quite alright in the end. He could take her tears the way Wyrvaust never did. Perhaps in a way that made Wyrvaust better than him, because the clan demon loved her too much to hurt her that way? But was it really love that kept Wyrvaust from tasting every part of his angel? Or severely restrained lust? It was just a little lick. Nothing big or sloppy. Just a tiny display of affection that otherwise would be labeled as very loving had somebody else done it. But, it was him, so did that negate it? Then the corners of his mouth tugged upwards for a split second before he brought her face to his to crush her lips to his in one of those devouring type of kisses. The kind of kiss that could shatter ones very soul if they became too caught up in it. Though none of that was what he was going to do to her, and for her. Rather as he kissed her he would indeed do as he had said. He would make all of this easier for her. How? By weaving a spell, an incantation, a conjuration or what have you, of such power that Arilwen's mind, her body, even her own soul would have eyes only for him. It was a false love to be sure yes, but it was rooted in her that they had always been together. The tricky part of this was that he did not banish Wyrvaust from her mind or overshadow her love for him either. On the contrary, he did not tamper with those aspects of her heart but rather he buried them whenever they were together so that they never came to be known in her. And when they parted? Well then that was when she was actually "herself" again. In the wee morning hours perhaps? Or when she first awoke? Whatever the case may be. Though... he could have poured his desire into her. He could have wrapped himself around her so tightly that she might have become broken in the way Cirgoth almost had been. In retrospect, he could have done alot of things to her. Yet he didn't. So, now the question posed itself. Why hadn't he...?

Well, Arilwen had been expecting maybe some booze or a sharp knock to the dome... but as he came at her for a kiss she hardly had time to be shocked. Man, this guy sure was full of himself if he thought his kissing would help! Huff! But it was true. The moment that his lips crashed down onto hers, Arilwen felt the entire burden of shame and guilt suddenly dissipate. After a breathless second, her slender arms lifted to slide around his neck and lock her body against his. Warmth flooded her being and her lips and body responded, her thighs parting to cradle at his hips, her knees buried into the bed while her tongue dove in waves against his own. Every few seconds a content, heated sigh escaped against his mouth. She seemed HAPPY with him. Could she see this from an outsider's point of view she would be horrified. But he was doing as she wished. It was easy to be with him now, her heart hammering so roughly against her ribcage that she feared they would break. Tugging her slightly swollen lips free, she sucked in a trembling breath and immediately began crawling her fingers up to bury in his luxurious hair, her mouth dipping and nibbling down his chin, his neck and finally to his chest where she took a firm bite. Nummy!

A pleased murmur was made as he felt her beginning to respond to his advances. To further instill that she was extra comfortable with him, he would even allow her to part take of his flesh and blood if she so chose to go there. How dark would the

angel become after succumbing to Satan? Just how tainted could her soul be after this? Well that too, was easy. As tainted as she allowed herself to be. And that, was the frosting on the cupcake in this entire ordeal. He didn't take her will from her. He didn't even take away her thoughts of her family and loved ones, or enslave her. All he did was bury those things, all those lovey things, and leave himself instead. She actually tasted better in some way when she was willing, he thought absentmindedly. Her tongue would find that his was far from normal and curled in ways no mere mortal could perform around her own. Suckling on her tongue as it were as his hands left her face to travel down the expanse of her back to fill his hands with that lush rear of hers to squeeze on it when he felt her nibbling start and her own hands messing in his dark hair. Good god, Wyrvaust had quite the mouth watering wife and mother of his child. His smile widened as he felt her mouth moving from his neck to his chest where she finally did bite him, and he let out a faint but rumbling groan. His hands squeezed on her rear more as his upper half leaned upwards to nip at the top of her shoulder, and the side of her own neck. And then leaning up a little more he was sitting up straight with her in his lap as he bit her back. Though his bite was a teensy bit harder than hers, he would however suckle over the place he had bit her. Or, places rather. His tongue licking over those bite marks after suckling on them till either she told him to stop, or she yanked his head away somehow...

Dark and twisted? The characteristics had never entered Arilwen's bedroom! Sure, she and her husband were all over each other like horny animals, but how dark COULD things get with Satan? Desire could drive a person to depths they had never imagined before. When his fingers curled tightly into her firm backside, Arilwen's body gave a kitty-like arch to press into him, some type of purr coming from deep in her throat. Fingers tightened in his soft hair as he suddenly sat up in bed and she was straddling his lap, but a sharp cry rang out at the very second his teeth pierced the skin of her neck, a few stray hairs proceeding to stick to the blood that oozed forth. When his mouth pressed over the wound the warm, deliciously sweet liquid would well into his mouth to show exactly WHY everyone loved sucking on an angel! Could anything be more tasty? Arilwen's pale pink nipples immediately locked into rigid nubs that raked and pressed against his chest as she writhed against him, her mouth releasing his skin as her eyes rolled back into her head, her lush dark mane tumbling down the curve of her spine. Her body floating in ecstasy, her bare toes curling into the tangled sheets, and her now completely soaked hotbox grinding against his rock hard member, slathering it thoroughly with what her body was releasing.

Oh how she must not have known how greatly he was exercising his self control not to just tear into her and spill all that delicious life fluid everywhere but mostly, all over them both. His mouth now housed two sets of fangs that nicked barely at her skin once he felt her sweetest of spots taunting and teasing the now painful hard on he had for her. Of course people joaned for angels! It was just... they were so much goddamn trouble though. At the feel of those pink nubs on his chest he would raise his head to capture her mouth with his own again as his hands tugged her by her hips to rub certain tasty parts against other tasty parts and make everything even worse. Then it seemed he couldn't stop himself any longer or, maybe it was because her scent was kind of driving him a little bat shyte crazy now, and he lifted her with his hands on her hips to rub her sweetness all over his painfully hard \*\*\*\*. And we do mean, all. Over. It. Would the length terrify her? Maybe it had before, but now? Then he caught her lower lip, nibbling at her, at the same time he lowered her down on that rock hardness very, very slowly. Although he



would rather just pull her down on himself to bury himself inside her till their hips slapped together. He was slow about filling her with his demon mass. For now....

Good thing the angel was suddenly brutally hungry! ...Before she had been terrified to feel just how massive Sammael's...errr...MEMBER... was against her leg. Now suddenly, thighs soaked and body poised in anticipation, she shuddered deeply to feel the entire length rubbing between her legs and against her warmth. No common sense entered her mind that he could kill her with the thing. No, her body craved connection at the moment and he was so close to rewarding that craving. His fingers gripped tightly to her hips and positioned the lithe angel to hover over him, but only for one or two aching moments. Finally, that thick head split her slowly. Anyone in the nearby corridors would be able to hear the echoing cry of pain mingled with need, but the latter far outweighed the former. Unable to catch her breath at first, the angel's features flushed, her violet eyes growing hazy as she slid her fingertips down to dig the nails into his shoulders, forcing her own weight to work towards their common goal... her body slowly stuffing itself onto him.

Oh how some would think that this inhuman size would kill her, and how it wouldn't. There was no fun if she died after all, and she was so much more responsive now. His lips nibbled over that neck of hers as his hands wouldn't let her speed up the inevitable. Her nails in his shoulders only made his nibbling and kisses to her neck hungrier and more needy. She was after all there for his abuse, and he was so enjoy abusing her in ways that she would relish it all and want more. As her voice rang out to fill the chamber, his lips closed around the side of her neck to suckle a little hard on her skin as he continued to lower her down onto himself. So agonizingly slow like. His mouth though started to move downwards to nip at the tops of her breasts and then lick over one of her nipples...

ASS! The devilish man gets her all riled up and then decides to SLOW DOWN?! Arilwen felt a frustrated cry build up in her chest as she tried to grind her hips faster against him but his hands refused to let her. It was like he ENJOYED the torture! Why would he like that? Err...duh. Had she forgotten WHO she was dealing with? The frustrated cry came out as a whimper and she dug her nails more tightly to pierce his skin. That only caused his mouth to come crashing down onto her neck, diving in and causing her spine to lock up and her body to tremble violently. One hand shot up to grab a fist full of his hair and yank backwards as she tried to force his mouth away and closer all at once. Her body didn't know WHAT the hell it wanted, but it DID know that he could give it to her! "P...Please..." The desperate, trembling whimper came fast in his ear amongst her panting. He could put her in a coma right now and she would be happy.

That whimper made him ease up on her chest, or rather that right nipple of hers he had been going after, and tilt his face upwards as his hips bucked upwards. So quick he was. He buried up to half of his current length inside of her and the sensation, holy fock the feeling brought a low sounding growl out of him as he licked over her lips to taste her again. He brought up his right hand to place it to the side of her face as his hips bucked upwards against her again, pushing the rest of that demonic cock inside of her. And he kissed her as he did to oddly lessen the pain of it all. Turning it into sinful pleasure that he wanted to show her, and reveal what she herself was truly capable of. His hand rested over her cheek, a few fingers under her ear as he sort of devoured her mouth again with his

version of kisses. He purred into that kiss as he was completely inside of her now, and started to stroke in and out of her with his other hand lifting and lowering her on his lap as though she weighted nothing more than a pillow...

Wow he listened! Arilwen's mouth fell open and her eyes rolled shut as his hips complied, taking one swift movement to bury half of his gigantic manhood inside of her. She couldn't breathe...couldn't catch any air in her lungs. It didn't matter. She felt like she was swimming in a thick pool of lust and carnal need. Thank goodness she was aroused and willing...or that would have hurt. BADLY. It was his last thrust that buried him to the hilt and Arilwen vaguely heard screaming fill the room. It was HER screaming. She didn't care even if it wasn't. There could be an entire room full of spectators right now and she wouldn't miss a beat. It was a good thing that Sammael's hands were doing her work for her at the moment by lifting her up and thrusting her down because her body was locking up like crazy during her shrieking fit. She didn't realize that her fingernails were clawing huge gouges into his shoulders, drawing blood which was currently seeping down their chests and being rubbed every which way.

Those screams were better than the music any instrument could make, to him at least they were. He wouldn't try to cover her mouth or hinder her from letting out all that was pent up in her. A good set of lungs she had on her actually. And for that it only made his hunger grow. However, Sammael wasn't so wrapped up in what he was doing to the Nephelim that his earlier agitation and anger had subsided. On the contrary, he was kind of taking it out on her at the moment, and Wyrvaust inadvertently, and Marsol in a round about way. Maelmorda had said things that had gotten under his skin after all, it seemed. Be it on purpose or not, Sammael felt like his creator was doing it on purpose. Whatever that meant. Back to those heated moments Arilwen shared with Satan. His hand retained it's light but firm hold over the side of her face and head to keep her in that kiss as his stroking into her begun to pick up in it's pace. Slowly, but more and more with each passing second until she was being bounced in his lap. Those lewd sounds from their coupling filling the chamber where her voice did not. For those nails clawing into him to make him bleed, he wondered if she had ever done such things to Wyrvaust. Perverted? Of course. Who wouldn't wonder what all the Raven and his birdie did in their intimate time? Sammael though as much as he wanted to enjoy this, could not shake those emotions that the Morning Star had caused to well up inside of him, that indeed made demons such as he into true monsters. But as annoyed and pissed off as he was, he masked it very well with his need to have Arilwen and to show her the more... decadent side of life. Well, sex in this case. He ended the kiss by dragging his mouth down from hers to the nape of her neck as he groaned against her skin, pulling her down once especially harder just to sit there for a second or two before bouncing her on top of him again. Those black eyes watching between them at how she made him bleed. He caught one of her hands and brought it down to his mouth so that he could take her index finger into his mouth to lick clean. Even as he stroked into her faster and deeper..

It was funny. Arilwen could actually, amidst her thrashing about, sense the tension that lay under each thrust and fierce kiss that was delivered on her body. Any time that Wyrvaust became overly frustrated or angry, Arilwen would take him behind closed doors and softly explain that he had the freedom to vent that on her body. He never took it too far, but there were times that she passed out cold from the sheer force of it all. Thick lashes fluttered open as her hazy violet eyes tried to

focus on his facial features, his hand cupping her cheek to keep it in place. His face suddenly dropped to the curve of her neck and shoulder and his hands forced the angel to sit buried on his cock for a moment, causing her to kick up that tantrum once again, wiggling and trying to tear her hips free. Of course she wasn't exactly on the same strength level as he was. When he finally hopped her back up into the air, the Nephelim gritted her teeth and held on for the ride, her hips now joining in feverishly to achieve the same goal, those wet sounds filling the room and most likely the hallway outside. The very moment his lips closed around her bloody finger her orgasm hit. Arilwen's body seized up and she threw her head back as far as his arms would let her, those soft lips stretching into the most violent of screams that never seemed to end, her cunt suddenly soaking his lap as her thighs clamped desperately around him, refusing to let go unless forced.

That room was filling with a lot of sounds wasn't it. The lewd and otherwise obscene. The heavy breathing. The panting. Had they been mortal they might have been sweating too. His tongue had just come out to lick over her knuckle when he felt her body seize up and that delicious orgasm over come her. Oh? He nipped at her finger from how tightly her thighs closed in on him. If she made it difficult to abuse her there, then he would just have to abuse her other ways. Something pressed against the angels rear at the start of her orgasm. Something warm and oddly a lot like a... what the... It rubbed down from her cheeks to trace over her crack until it finally nudged at that other, puckered hole her body had. Unless she had been mutated or cut up in some way of course. Heh. What nudged and then abruptly and without warning forced it's heated and slippery way into the Nephelim was a second... demonic...rod?! Surely that wasn't unheard of if she had been with Wyrvaust. Problem was though, as he started to growl his entire body would begin to reverberate. Or more correctly, vibrate. She felt his body do this but, at the same time she felt him shiver too as he could feel her own pleasure and release tugging and pulling at him, trying to force him into the same heavenly euphoric state just because she was that. An angelic being. However no matter how powerful the craving was to have her and fill her with his darkness, he resisted. Stopped himself from doing it, despite how much he really wanted to. It wouldn't do for two insanely fertile ones such as they to be having kids this soon now, dagnabit. "Mmn," his voice could be heard as he let go of her finger to lick up the front of her neck slowly. Although his hips were fast and thrust all the way into her before withdrawing any.

Well, the agreement had been that the angel would be released once she gave him children or he grew bored of her. He never said how many children or WHEN he would start trying to get her pregnant. She had assumed immediately! But this was Sammael. She certainly had not expected the second visitor to come knocking. Of course, she was used to being plugged in that hole. But her screaming grew even more pronounced as it was filled as well. It was when his body started to VIBRATE that her body went on overload. Her screaming was cut off into choking sounds, her eyes immediately rolling back into her head. Wyrvaust certainly couldn't do THAT! Her body thrashed against him, certainly not helping the bloody mess against their chests and even at some point she tried throwing herself back onto the bed to escape the sheer overwhelming pleasure of it all... only to drive herself more deeply on that thing invading the backdoor.

Of course he hadn't specified. When did he ever specify that benefited him, at the right time? Never. And look where that had gotten him with the Morning Star and the situation of the throne now being questioned and the scales tipping. Then again,

there was a reason for everything. He didn't brutalize her, like his better judgment wanted to, by not going to the trouble of making certain parts of his morphing anatomy slick and easily able to be forced into certain parts of her. Like that backdoor invader for instance and how it was already thoroughly coated with some warm substance that lessened the pain of being taken that way, but did not erase the initial shock of entry. Now if only he could just plug that other hole of hers... His mouth sought out hers again to fill it with his tongue as his arms kept her from squirming free of him. Forcing her hips into his fully each and every time he thrust into her. Was it too much for her though to be on top? Was all this pleasure wrapped in pain too great for her? He moved forward, with his hand still on her hip moving her up and down with unnerving ease, to tumble them both into bed where she was now comfortably on her back and he was moving like the sneaky little shyte that he was between her legs. The muscles in his body could be seen more clearer now. How defined he was. How he had been made or, how he seemed to favor this appearance over many others. His body was covering her by now. It flowed unnaturally and it wouldn't be long before it was like a second skin to her. It suited her though, he thought. This color. This liquid. She was the kind of beautiful that just begged to be hurt, to be used and abused, and to never let go. His mouth trailed from hers after he had pressed himself fully inside of her, and then it felt like his girth had gotten a little wider as he thrust into her harder and harder. Both of his cocks actually, had grown just a bit in their size but not too much. He wanted to see how much she could take, how much pain she could handle and then he would give her more of his demonic self. There was a great danger though in this, wasn't there? What did his blood contain? Niculaie would know, for he had been force fed untold amounts of it and for purposes yet to be seen. Had she tasted his corrupted blood yet? Better yet, would she? Some people liked to talk during these perverted acts. Some people just couldn't help themselves and needed to be vocal about how everything felt. Sammael though spoke his mind in the way his body heaved and pressed into Arilwen's. How her every need would be quenched by him. Her every want would be met and challenged by him, and then he would pose to her new heights she might never have known of. Something else changed on him. It was one of those cocks of his he was pleasuring and hurting her with. But it wasn't a cock anymore. Oh no, it was a tongue now. A giant tongue that was just as hard and achingly needy for her. It twisted inside of her sweet, sweet cunt to drizzle more fluids onto that black covered huge bed that they were currently tangled up in. That large tongue appendage curled a little as he drew out of her, rolling over that little nub and then all over between her legs. Sammael's lusts truly knew no bounds...

Poor Arilwen looked like she was having a stroke. Had she been human, she WOULD have. Angels were sturdy... they just reached their point and ended up blacking out to be used as needed. The room was choked with the wet sounds and delicious smells. Lilith would have been proud! Arilwen could feel him shift, sending new shockwaves shuddering through her limbs, her lungs still locked up and refusing to take in air as he pleased her. And the entire not breathing deal was actually causing the orgasm to be even MORE intense. It couldn't GET any more psychotic in her mind! ...Wrong! Suddenly, the dick stuffed in her \*\*\*\* softened slightly and changed shape. Oh LORDGODINHEAVEN! It began WRITHING! It was soaked... dripping all over the sheets which now clung to her bare, wet ass. It was as if it were forcing her to die amidst her pleasure. And at the moment she was perfectly fine with that! It managed to at least dislodge all of that air caught in her lungs. And how was it released? As violent screaming... the epitome of screaming bloody murder. It was so intense that the daughters, who had been creeping about in the halls to catch

little listens, came scurrying up to the door to peek in and make sure that she had not done something stupid to piss their dear father off and make him kill her. That mystery was solved when they saw her being plowed into the wet, tangled sheets, her nails clawing at the mattress for dear life.

It didn't matter if he had sensitive hearing or not. His ears actually twitched at how loud she became from just a little change of \*\*\*\* to tongue. Was that all it took to please her? Maybe he should have done it earlier. He entertained these thoughts a bit childishly, but he entertained them nonetheless as the sound of their hips slapping together tried to compete with her voice. Though that was a one sided contest. Then however the need to taste her started to get the better of him. Those fang looking pairs of teeth sunk carefully and slowly into the side of her neck as his thrusts started slowing down again. Was he seriously going back to that achingly oh so good snail pace again?! Surely he wouldn't dare do that to her. After all she had offered to him, and all that she knew not of. That tongue appendage of his did not slow however, just that demonic \*\*\*\* in her ass. The soft yet hard slickened muscle twirling and rolling inside her \*\*\*\* quickened. It got more greedy for her taste. More greedy to hear her be full of pleasure now. It might be a bit of a tease though how that rock hard phallus in her ass pleased her slowly and softly, but that tongue in her slit was getting all crazy for her. Meanwhile he drank of her blood a few moments and then lowered his head to bite the middle of her breasts. Smearing his blood the entire time within the small bite wounds he inflicted on her in their lust induced states. Also, smearing her blood over himself as well. They really were a mess now. Heh.

Arilwen might actually be spewing words that made sense... if she could get her mind to wrap around it. All she knew was that she was lighting on fire...the hot, white fire that no one should be near. It was climbing up her body and licking at her limbs. She would melt before the night was over and just be a stain on the sheets. That was for certain. Tears sprang into her eyes as she choked on her breaths. No sadness... just overwhelming pleasure that her body was getting on the verge of being unable to handle. And as his teeth leaned in to sink into her neck, finally... FINALLY words came...though few and far between. "Yesss...." The single word was hissed between clenched teeth at first, her hips bucking harder against him as his lower tongue writhed inside of her. And then, over and over, she just kept hissing and growing 'please'. You know, in case he intended to stop. She began to grow lightheaded from it all. She didn't have much longer before she conked out.

Was that a plead or a request? She wanted more did she? His chest pressed to hers like the front of his body did as his hips grinded against hers. Forcing both odd appendages fully inside her inhuman body where she would feel them grow in their sizes yet again. Just to tease her? Or to quicken that sprint towards unconsciousness that she was heading to? His mouth paused in all its biting and drinking to nip at her lips. "Yes what," he breathed while pushing extra hard into her body. That tongue rubbing and licking her all over. Toying with her female parts as well as rolling over her inner thighs. It felt just like the tongue in his mouth, only bigger. Would that make sense? He bit into the side of her neck again before she could answer him, that is if she even wanted to. His mouth opened a little too wide to take in the whole side of her neck to suckle on after he tore into her this time a little too hard. Her arms would feel his fingers dancing over them. Sending little jolts like he was made of electricity or something. Her wrists were taken in his hands and her arms lifted up over her head where he could hold her arms there. His thumbs pressing down on her palms as her breasts were taunting

him to bite them again. The feel of her nipples on his skin and everything that was her. Had she been able to put her hands over his back, she would have felt the muscles tensing in it and all the tantalizing things that made the male body oh so great when fighting pleasure.

Well, that was that. Yes WHAT? "Y...Yess it...it feels..." She couldn't even get the fucking words out! The angel was suddenly thrown into convulsions as his mouth clamped down hard on her skin and his teeth tore into her neck like raw hamburger. She would heal by morning, of course, but choking sounds caught in her chest as she bucked against him, lashing out with her hands. Was she trying to stop him or grasp him closer? No one would know. Her hands were immediately pinned to the filthy sheets and her eyes rolled back to only show the whites left as she convulsed against him, another wave of orgasm hitting her like a freaking truck. Heels kicked at the bed and the back side of his body but soon began to slow, lashing at the sheets before resting on the mattress. Right in the peak of her orgasm Arilwen suddenly shuddered and went limp beneath him. He had found her limit.

His biting did not ease to even help her get those words out. Rather his teeth sank into her tender flesh more as he held her down beneath him where he molested her all sorts of ways. That muscular body stayed meshed against her through all of her thrashing and kicking. During all those heaves and hip bucking she might have done. He did not stop those two very different paces he had set with that achingly slow cock thrusting in and out of her ass, and that giant sized tongue fucking her cunt as if it was trying so very desperately to pleasure her the way an actual member might. Were two pieces of him competing for her ecstasy now? It felt that way. His growling grew louder and with that so did the fierceness of the vibration his body gave off that he push his hips into hers to molest her just by being close to her. By now he was covered more in her blood than his own. Even as he felt her body reach that edge of inhuman pleasure and begin to slow, his mouth went to seek those breasts of hers to molest her still. It was that last lip biting shudder that he felt in her body that almost made him want to give in and just fill her with his lust. The way her body went quiet though sort of forced his insatiable hunger to become curved for the moment. His lips leaving her nipple with a lick as he looked down at her, finally slowing his own hips to a stop. Although, now half-way buried inside her. "My, my," he whispered as he licked Arilwen's lower lip clean of a droplet of his or hers blood. "We are ambitious." The entire gutt clenching experience was not to be forgotten. He'd learned so much about her this night. Sadly though, she didn't know a thing about him did she? Aside from how much of an unpredictable bastard he was. He debated then on leaving her to be cleaned and to sleep, or just continue to satisfy himself with her body and blood. The decision was so... damn... hard...

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Who should visit Arilwen in the wake of her pleasure induced dreams but her estranged father Belorian. He was nude, a pair of huge white wings hung relaxed on the air around him where he was seated on a moss covered boulder with a water fall behind him. His long sun-kissed locks of carrot blonde spilled in waves over his exposed shoulders, chest and back. He was fair of skin, his muscles lean and hard, while his blue eyes shone in the sunlight like spheres of glacial ice. Arilwen saw herself pacing a lethargic margin on sand strewn with colorful pebbles, some of them clear and polished others smooth jasper, cold water lapping at her toes now and again. She was clad in a bondage outfit that was clearly carnal in

craftsmanship, one her subconscious had conjured. Belorian spoke to her, his melodic voice the kind which made men great singers, and epitomized him as an angel. "I was once used as you are now, for pleasure by demons and devils. You will think your fate is sealed but it is not. Look at me; I am free. My destiny is my own. The secret to freedom is easy. Follow your own heart. Follow it always." He smiled and slipped off of the flat topped boulder to approach her. He leaned towards her, placed a chaste kiss on her cheek and held her in the steeping warmth of his arms for an interval; hence he strode away into the limpid green pool and vanished thereafter into the mists of the falls. In his place on the boulder was a single white rose. Its stem was thornless and its fragrance was euphorically potent. If she lifted it in her hand it would manifest thereafter in her reality held in her fingers when she woke. It was a flower she alone would see and feel, but its scent would cover her whenever she held it. It would appear to her whenever she thought of the words he had spoken to her. It was real only to her, as Belorian and that peaceful place had been real to her in her dream. It was a reminder that freedom was in her grasp, no matter what dark place she found herself in. Because Sammael was so powerful, he might sense his archetype as a great presence of virtue surrounding the lady he thought of, or was already satisfying himself with even as she lay unconscious beneath him. Despite all, yea even perhaps because of everything Belorian the Comet had experienced, he was perfection in ways perhaps only Maelmorda understood. He was the ordered and balanced part of chaos, the virtue in nature, progress and change.

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Maelmorda cackled and laughed as he was tortured, lay like a lifeless plaything while being raped, a look of boredom maintained the rest of the time. He emptied his projection of all ability to feel anything physically and made a mockery of Mephisto and the others' attempts to punish him. Oh he could take it in the flesh but why bother when there was a ready alternative. The real Maelmorda in the mean time spent time with Arasgal and his new twin brothers. He fed the babes which matured quickly but not with near the rapidity of Arasgal. All the while he played the role of the good father, his other half made it clear to Mephisto and the others that they would pay for their treachery against him. By three days end the waste of time compelled him to express how he felt about the ordeal. "I am your superior and always shall be," he reminded those working on him out of the blue, his breaking of the silence also cracking the tedium. "I am your maker and your ruler by Sammael's very admission of silence. By letting me name myself as his equal that is exactly what I am, and that makes me your prince every bit as much as he. Cease this fruitless folly or I shall have you all plunged into the cavern of souls until you rot," he had them know coldly. All but Mephisto retreated from punishing him, the others unsure of whether Lucifer spoke true or not, and having no desire to spend an eternity in the cavern of souls, they chose not to involve themselves any further. Mephisto called the others all manners of names, cowards among them, after attempting to convince them in futility to ignore Lucifer's threats.

"Call forth your true self, Morning Star, and prove yourself honestly able to withstand the punishment your equal demanded." Mephisto challenged him, undaunted by Lucifer's threats.

"Very well, old dragon. I shall comply as it is Sammael's wish, but you shall pay the cost for your part in it, mark my words as a vow."

Mephisto shrugged. "So be it." He cared only to obey the demon prince he had pledged his loyalty and life to.

Lucifer smiled at that and phased out of the binds holding him with a cackle, hence he spirited his second self away to what he intended to be home. A problem arose however. Gabriel had inducted the aid of Baal, general of the infernal army to place an 'astral net of binding' around Sammael's fortress which caught projections and bound them to their true form, thus disallowing the unwary Lucifer to embark as he was caught and his true form bound, which meant so long as he was inside of Sammael's fortress, he could not project himself. When the devil found himself within himself he growled. "What trickery is this?" he hissed then pierced Arasgal with his jade green eyes. "Will you look after your brothers for awhile, Arasgal?"

Arasgal nodded. "Of course, proud father. Is anything wrong?"

Maelmorda scoffed. "When in the world isn't something wrong? Is that not what makes life worth living? The challenges which are incessant to arise? I only have the need to speak with your sinful father." Arasgal nodded and Lucifer leapt off the bed, dressed himself in a long black robe which he secured with a red satin belt, hence he stormed out of the room and through one corridor after another, seeking Sammael. Seemed he was blocking his presence so as not to be disturbed. By and by he communicated his request (or demand?) to Sammael telepathically. "You and I need to have a talk, lover. This entire punishment deal is a farce that really must end. It is a useless waste of my time, and Mephisto's, and I wish to know why I am bound to one form, Sammael." Of course Sammael knew nothing at all about that. Gabriel was keeping his business to himself and his Lord uninvolved. "Do tell me where you are so we can enjoy one another's company while we settle things." Of course if Sammael insisted he go through with the added tedium of more torture and rape, Lucifer would comply to keep his end of the pact, but he would punish those involved in it. Mephisto had a surprise for the devil however...as pain did not seem to phase him (he had not phased out of the physical the entire time) he had invited Lilith and Sytri to torment Lucifer with overly-pleasurable exploits. It was clever of Mephisto actually, for it would phase the devil indeed.

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A naive mind could trap individuals like Arilwen in dangerous places. In her mind, this arrangement was simply a temporary business arrangement and nothing more. She would complete the terms agreed upon and would return to her husband. ...It wasn't that easy and she would find that out as her time passed here. Arilwen rarely had very vivid dreams, so when she fell into that deep unconscious state, the one that visited her would certainly leave its mark. While her body lay still in the tangled mess of sheets that Sammael left her in, her mind travelled somewhere beautiful. She felt the sand between her toes first and her violet eyes lifted in awe as she silently studied the landscape, her attention being drawn back as the cold water licked at her toes. Lowering her gaze, Arilwen was stunned to find herself dressed the way she was. Talk about symbolism! Her father's soft voice, though she had only heard it once, filtered into her range of hearing and her gaze lifted to fixate on him, her throat tightening. He was beautiful... the epitome of perfection in her eyes. The words he spoke tore open her chest. Her heart. He told her to follow her heart. How could she do that when she was here only to try and protect that which WAS her heart... her husband and family. Demons and devils. That was exactly what



this place was. Her thick lashes closed as he approached to deliver the soft kiss to her cheek. She had a million questions... she wanted to beg him to explain, to tell her what she had done wrong. Instead, her lids lifted to watch him disappear in front of her eyes.

When Arilwen would awaken, it would be much much later the next day. Eighteen hours later to be exact. It had taken that long for her body to regenerate itself and she awoke with a start, rocketing up in bed, her chest pounding and her head filled with the scent of roses. She looked a fright... eyes crazy, dark hair tangled, dried blood caked on a good majority of her body, her legs lost in dirty sheets. She was alone for the moment, Sammael off dealing with his discussion with Maelmorda. She couldn't shake the dream. Did it mean something? Of course it did, but why had she had it? She had no clue that Belorian had come to her. She simply assumed that her mind was playing it out of guilt. Visions of Wyrvaust filled her head and she felt physically sick and pained. Her hands tightened and that is when she felt the rose in her grip. She stared down at it for a few moments. She was losing it! Heart hammering against her rib cage, Arilwen kicked the sheets away and leapt from bed. Just yesterday she had been bashful about her clothing choice, but not now. She was just getting ready to flee from the room when Sammael's daughters came flooding in, all chipper and excited to finally have her up. They loved angel bathy time! The Swan slammed into the first one to enter and she nearly plowed her over. When the woman's hand came to rest on her arm, the angel jerked it away like it was a hot poker. "I want to see my father." Wooooah... the angel suddenly had balls. Her eyes burned up at them with a nearly crazed look in her demand, as if she were daring them to argue. But three against one was big odds. One of the sisters tried to soothingly calm her by stepping forward and extending her hand, but Arilwen's kneejerk reaction was to slap it away in frustration and anger. "FIND him and bring him to me or I will go and hunt him down MYSELF." Any guards or individuals passing through that corridor would hear her usually soft, uncertain voice growing louder and more commanding. She had to speak with him... beg for his help. Ask him what she did wrong and what other path she could have taken...and how to fix it. It wasn't his responsibility to tell her that, but he seemed to be the only level-headed one around here.

When one of the women told her that she could come and get clean first and then she could speak with Sammael, Arilwen's eyes blazed angrily. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that she was filthy and starving, but that was not exactly her worry. "If you cannot find him, I will go to Sammael myself." Now, the daughters knew punishment from their father was harsh, and he had made them aware that he had serious matters to deal with regarding Maelmorda, so it was quite certain that they would try everything to keep her away for now... but Arilwen was pitching a veritable fit. If they tried to restrain her she would turn into a maniac, nearly frothing at the mouth as she fought against them. She wouldn't win, of course, but she had to try, and she would begin screeching that they could not hold her forever and as soon as they let go she was walking right out the door. Of course Sammael would have wards to keep that from happening, but things in the cozy household were crumbling in all the wings. On top of it all, there was always the chance that Sammael had already impregnated her. It would be his touch that would determine that, as she would have no way of knowing yet. If she WAS, any threats of her leaving would be thwarted even more quickly than usual. She had agreed to stay on certain terms, so aborting them just wasn't an option. And it had not even crossed her mind that when or if she DID return to her husband that he may not be able to see her the same. Would he be able to touch her again? Was her mind poisoned by

being loved from another? She had been with Valis for a short time before her husband, but she had never once thought of that after meeting Wyrvaust. It was quite possible that Arilwen could return home to find a cold welcome and things could never return to normal. What then? What else did she have to hold on to? She was in danger of losing herself over her rash decision... a decision that she would pay for the rest of her life, in one way or another.

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Sammael had left Arilwen in the bed of blood and other bodily fluids that well, you get the disgustingly awesome picture, to disappear to wherever it was an angel gone demon does with plotting. For awhile after he had left the room that smelled of sex; he meandered the hallways with a drink in one hand, and a chain connected to the collar of a slave in the other. After a bit of time alone though, it was back to the party to mingle and toss back more drinks and talk of this and that. Though demons didn't really talk these days it seemed. They were more interested in the feel good times and the to hell with everything else. So literal that was becoming wasn't it? More "guests arrived, little by little and then after a day or so had passed outside of his sin filled humble abode, they mysteriously poured in. Was there a celebration going on that nobody knew about? Had something monumental occurred and the joke was strictly between Mael and Sam? Or was it simply that Satan just wanted to throw one big goddamn shindig where his loyal ones could come relax, kick back, and fully enjoy themselves without the woes of man and his Immortal neighbors? It was whatever anyone wanted it to be. A name was just a name. Call it what you will but everyone seemed to be having a really good time. Everyone except Maelmorda of course and Sammael. Strange, is it not? One would think what with the Demon of Sin being the Host and all that he would be having a grand old time molesting the mother of Wyrvausts child, and then kinda sorta giving her a get out of jail free card by allowing her the comfort of meeting her father and yes he had no blind eye to that event. Belorian was not someone to easily get out of something from unscathed, but neither was Sammael. They were old enough, and wry enough, to know what was what. Nothing had come of the Father speaking to one of his kids that he hadn't paid any mind to until that night. No repercussions. No slap on the wrist. None of that. It was something he had wanted anyways and now that it was over with, Sammael could focus on other things. Though the whole Belorian business and just why in the blue blazes he had invited him here, allowed him to see Arilwen and then come and go as he pleased was an odd one. Sam was an odd one in a lot of things. Like avoiding Maelmorda for instance in the following days. Great lengths were gone to in masking his comings and goings wherever he went inside his palace in that lush oasis. Several times he had actually been in the same room as where Maelmorda was being harassed and abused by all those lovely demons, only to scare the poor things away by none too idle a threat, all save Mephisto. The old dragon brought a smile to Sammael's face where he had been leaning against a corner way in the back away from all the commotion. Bodies came and went. Walking or running by him without so much as a second glance to the hooded figure by the table. Everyone was far too busy screwing each others brains out or getting wasted to be concerned with hooded figures and why they were there probably. It was towards the middle of the third day that Sam tried to contact Gabe in regards to things you wouldn't even tell your best friend. If Gabriel answered that was great and he would be asking Gabe to meet him somewhere that was far from here. If he did not receive an answer from Gabriel that was fine too. He was sure Gabriel was up to something terribly important. Cause Gabriel was not someone to be idle nor be immersed in doing nothing. It wouldn't be until the end of that third

day and slightly into the beginning of the fourth that his head of currently dark brown hair turned in the direction that his maker was coming from. Four corridors south and to the right however, but in that general direction he would look even though he was looking at a painting on a wall. Another thing about the days that passed was that Arilwen wouldn't get to have her heated and rebellious meeting with the demon. Those sisters would try their damndest to console her and let her know that their Lord was indisposed at the moment, that he would come see her as soon as he was physically able to, and that there was nothing to be so flustered about. Course they could have been truthful and said she has no reason to be angry with him at all, that this was in fact her choice and nobody had twisted her arm into making this agreement. Oh and not to mention how her husband was the one that had stomped on Sammael's toes, not her even if Arilwen had previously wanted to take the brunt of the punishment only to regret it now. Those slaves with the dark skin and warm smiles could have said a lot of things to the Nephelim. All of them mean. Cruel. Not hateful, but honest. But they didn't. Whether because Sammael did not wish for them to or because they simply wanted to be nice to the Nephelim wasn't really certain. Arilwen was a very good soul after all, despite how she might be hating herself at the moment. Kind of like a certain desert chieftain somewhere else who was having a hard time keeping his temper in check.

On his way around the room he paused if he happened to catch Malcomb's attention, even if Mernaph was buried to the hip in him, to ask the two love birds if they were enjoying themselves. He did that procedure many times to a lot of the banging or not banging couples there and yes to him it was like a procedure because his emotions never surfaced like any normal persons did. Unless you counted his anger then maybe you would see the nastier side of him. Even so, Satan was making nice even with Belorian if that old one was still around but it was doubtful. Belorian had shit to do just like everyone else. Just because Sammael was restricted so severely and horribly, did not mean he wouldn't be after what he felt was his. The fact that down in the Lower Kingdom motions were made and gone through to question his very place in the natural order was unfortunate, but not unforeseen. They doubted him now, how quaint. That just stacked more crap on the wheel of karma against the Morning Star but that wouldn't put a damper on that old snatch now would it. What's a little more angst here and there to make things more lively? What didn't and never would be shown in any visible way during his mingling and jesting with his flock was how sore he was over missing the birthing of his second and third son from Maelmorda. Yes indeed he felt cheated and guilty in a way, and then at the same time he didn't feel anything at all. It was a complicated thing really. To feel and not to feel simultaneously. Although Sammael heard Maelmorda's request/demanding from the start, he didn't reply to him until much, much later on in the evening and wee morning hours of the fourth day. Not because he was busy physically, but mentally he was all over the place. He carried on so many conversations with so many goddamned people about this and that, who does this and where that goes, he was plotting like a mad man. It took almost all his concentration to focus on so many other things to keep him from thinking of Galaxy and all that unpleasantness that he actually became aggravated with himself over letting that tot of a female get on his nerves. Her mere presence offended him in a way perhaps only two particular individuals could fathom. It wouldn't take a stretch of the imagination to understand why Galaxy's nature pissed Sammael off but let us not bore you with those unkind details. Best to leave that wound alone. For now. Presently Sammael was seated, or floating rather, in an outlandishly deep old looking four footed garden tub of iron. Head hanging over the back, eyes closed, arms dangling over the sides. Steam was coming off of the surface of the water.

Surely not a temperature comfortable for mortal men but who's to say it had to be that hot? He cracked an eyelid as he finally said to Maelmorda, "It may appear a waste of time to you because it is in fact you it is happening to. As far as this being confined to only one form, I don't know what you're talking about. Now, if you'd like there should be a red door popping up behind you like mumps any minute now. I'm taking a bath if you want to say more. We're too seasoned for this mind-speak." Maybe it was Sammael's tone that hinted to his angry mood. Or maybe it was what he said? Clearly he hadn't given any real indication that all this torture and rape was going to stop, but maybe for now Maelmorda could have a pause in it? Indeed a door should be spookily molding out of the wall where there hadn't been one a moment before, and if the Devil decided to open it he would find his black eyed son submerged to the middle of his chest in hot water within the tub that could probably fit eight people easily sideways. It was a room of hardwood floors and maroon walls where there were large hearths centered in each burning brightly. It had no other furniture than the huge white animal rug that still had the dead beasts head attached to it, mouth open, teeth bared at the fire in the hearth as if it wanted to tangled with it. It was one of those rare rooms in Sammael's otherwise lavished and rich decor that wasn't. Humble. Plain. Not things Sammael was but everyone had their thing. Well now he didn't wait on an answer from Maelmorda before a servant was summoned out of freakishly thin air to open the door for the Morning Star and bow deeply to their maker and hold the door wide open for him to enter the warm room. If the Morning Star did come inside the demon servant would back out of the room, closing the door behind them. If not well the servant would just stand there holding the door open, head down, on their knees with an arm folded under their downwards turned forehead to the Morning Star. For Maelmorda was the only one in Satan's house that got that kind of display of respect, admiration, and fear...

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Sammael's response soothed Maelmorda's mind like a warm piece of silk and a high brow quirked over those jade eyes of the Morning Star's. Sammael not responsible? But who else had the power to meddle with him so? At the same time he knew Sammael was not lying. The deception, for being attacked in such a sneaky way could only be counted as one, remained afloat on the air with no culprit to pin it to. "I believe you," he said simply in return. "And you are so right," he agreed that they were above speaking back and forth through mental strings if they had such a marvelous alternative such as seeing one another in the flesh. He looked for the aforementioned door. When the wall melted and transformed into that blood red door, Maelmorda caught the invitation from beginning to end. Lean arms of compact muscle folded over an equally attractive, hairless, and densely muscular chest. Brows raised in a faint arch and a ghost of a smile spread across deliciously edible lips as he strode past the threshold and gave the servant a slight but unbalancing shove as if to say 'you are still in my space'. Wanting for simple exercise he began to walk around the pool as he addressed Sammael. There was a bright glow of love compelled excitement to his eyes which only reached his face as a healthy rise of color and the smile which occasioned to brush his lips when his gaze fell in the way of Sammael.

"It is imperative that you understand my motives, Sammael. I feel you may have misunderstood me." As so many so often do, he thought to himself. He paused, facing Sammael. "You are utterly mistaken if you believe I am intent on betraying you in any manner, including the rumor going round that I am reclaiming Acheron for

myself. I intend that we rule Acheron together, side by side, as partners, advocates of one another, counselors to one another. What could be more glorious for you or me? Are we not one another's perfect right hand? Do I not need you to balance me when my passions escape me? Do you not need me to balance you when compassion escapes you? Am I not wise and you inexperienced? Am I not grown rigid in my ideals and you fresh in yours? Do we not need one another as much as we love one another?" The devil then began to circle Sammael again as he spoke. "What I fear the most with you is this, Sammael; I fear you shall never unlock the heart of me, that you shall seek to destroy what is between us before you grasp into your hand the key which is the sum of me. That is the true challenge I offered you, is it not? But am I such a challenge as shall daunt you? Shall I fly right through you never to be grasped?" He broke stride again when he reached the end of the pool facing the Prince of Demons and crouched down there to pierce his mate with the unnerving intensity of his eyes. "I believe you do not trust in me to see inside of you, when I already do, my dearest evil. You despise what is not faithful to what pledges to be constant, test as many as you can, who wear the mask of loyalty to that end, and punish those whom fail. I do not deceive myself to deceive others, Sammael, as many do, as you do, though perhaps to ends of moral duplicity that you do not even recognize it yourself. The deception Yajmha conditioned you to embrace is not who you are, Sammael. It is a habit, a cigarette, a needle filled with liquid smack, a bottle of strong Rum. The truth of Haman froze your heart and freezes it still. Break the glacier those old wounds and the ties Haman encapsulated you in and you shall know what it is to be free, to truly think for yourself. Oh the glorious pain you shall then feel when you realize how Yajmha has manipulated you, and worse, the ways you let yourself be manipulated by remaining his agent all these ages. I know, Sammael. I have felt that sting. He wants to control Acheron through you, Sammael. It is plain only to me and him, but it is the truth. Haman is opposed to free thinking while I encourage it. I know that you crave to be truthful to those you wrap in your coils, and above all, demand the truth from them. I only ever wanted you to be free, Sammael. Can you not see in my eyes that my love for you is true? That the means to master me is at your fingertips if you but see into the heart of me? If you understood what quantifies my soul, the heart and will of me, you would see that my love for Galaxy has no more to do with you, than my love for you has to do with her. You would see that for the first time in his life, and because of you, the devil can be faithful. You and Galaxy make up one whole. Can you not see where lies the crux of that, the miracle within this beast? I am...so many things, Sammael, more things in more ways, more vast than anyone can ever imagine. I am the second eldest child of the universe, second only to my twin brother and antithesis Yajmha. One can never see all of me with their eyes, or touch all of me with their body. It is my heart alone that can be reached." The devil paused in his dialogue and smiled queerly for a moment then locked his gaze with gravity on Sammael, even as he disrobed and slid into the water to bear the weight of his body down on top of Sammael's.

"It is funny...Everyone that I have created, whom has returned to me, calls me father, as I often refer to them as my children, when they, you, are more like my orchestra and I am more like your conductor. I delivered each of you from the womb of the universe and I guide you, but it is you whose passions and talents make the music. You have always understood, Sammael, that if we forget each other, the entire orchestra falls apart. Marsol...Wyrvaust...Cirgoth...I understand your possessiveness of them all so completely. I understand what they cannot see...what they even despise you for, that you cannot leave them alone. The only way you can

love them and protect them is to show them who they truly are and to strip naked those around them. Cirgoth may understand and that places him in danger, doesn't it? I know why you punish me, Sammael. It is not to break me. It is to test my loyalty to you." Maelmorda gasped as he sank himself down on Sammael in such a way as to bury both of his co\*cks inside of himself until the flesh beginning their genitals ground together with licentious urgency. "Everyone's love has a breaking point as you well know, Sammael. I will trouble you to love me enough never to find mine. You may think you want to unleash the darkest parts of me...But you must trust me when I say that is not something you truly wish to achieve."

Maelmorda lost himself in Sammael thereafter. The only sounds which escaped his voice were his beautiful ululation's of ecstasy and soft cries of savored pain. Such pleasures and sexual wonders he devised of for Sammael to feel as to defy the imagination, cage the breath, and cause the mind and body to spin away together as if caught into a tornado of unquantifiable, ultra-amplified bliss. Flesh surpassed flesh and mingled to fuse together with all those dangerous forces in the body where what was too good became detrimental when abused. But for perhaps the potentially fatal addiction for one another which these inexplicable pleasures beckoned the embrace of, the two immortals could not be harmed by such indefinable pleasures as would burst a healthy mortal's and even many an immortal's hearts and minds with aneurysms. If anyone in the universe now knew what it was like to be plucked by the universe, it was Sammael. When their flesh came together and the Morning Star sank into him to unleash his sexual entity as a pure embodiment of all which sex could embody inside of Sammael, the Desert Wind would know for the first time what it was to feel something that nothing else could ever compare to. He would also know that the Morning Star had only ever shared himself in such a way with one other; Sammael's son, Caine. Was it an accident that the only two immortals who had ever taken Acheron from him had felt the true power of his love and lust? The dominating force, the inexplicable ecstasy, and possessiveness of it? So few could best him that those who could without killing him, won his respect, his admiration, and his love. Caine was too much of a terrestrial to hold Maelmorda to him. But Sammael...he loved Acheron. He wanted to rule Acheron not to spite the devil as Caine had, but because he loved Acheron and its denizens with equal passion. Like many immortals of great age, power, and shadows, most could not fathom or understand the love of such a demon as Sammael. How passions too terrible to tame had been buried, and turned inward to create the illusion of cold, inflexible armour. Sammael's love was greedy, hungry, insatiable but all anyone but those who did love him saw, was cold malice in its place. Maelmorda understood that Sammael wanted to bring Marsol, Wyrvaust and Cirgoth home because he loved them. Marsol and Wyrvaust had no intention of ever giving him his way however. They could not understand his breed of love, had not lived long enough to let themselves comprehend it...but Cirgoth...He understood it too well, dangerously well. Dangerous because he wanted Marsol to see that he was loved not hated by Sammael, when Marsol was not ready to accept it. Maelmorda's love for Sammael was true. He understood Sammael's seeming cold kind of love, craved the true fierceness of it for himself, and desired only to make him greater as his partner. It was no business of creatures of the upper worlds who demons chose to love and how they chose to love one another. Acheron was their world, their kingdom, and anyone bound to Acheron who could not learn to love Acheron and its ways, did not belong there as residents and lords, only as prisoners. That was the harsh reality, the bone beneath the flesh. Acheron ate children of her womb who could not embrace her. The lucky ones, the truly strong ones, got spat out.

When the two finally separated, it might have been hours or days later, the pulling apart was like being torn from true paradise and being hurled back into the crush of a rat race reality. It took more than an hour and less than two for them to stop shaking when restored to the physical concreteness of their bodies. The act had clearly taken a lot out of Maelmorda. The experience was so personal and emotional that it physically drained him. He clung to Sammael; wept, pawed at him, covered him with trembling kisses, and finally dropped off to sleep with his limbs tangled around him as a proper mate should. If Sammael had any doubts before he could have none now. The Morning Star loved him as deeply as he could love anyone. What vexed Sammael remained the same though, didn't it? Maelmorda also loved Galaxy as deeply as he could love anyone. But Sammael understood now, understood that Maelmorda could no sooner reject her than he could him. It was simply the way of it. If Sammael wanted Maelmorda for himself, Galaxy had to be removed, but was that the breaking point Maelmorda had warned Sammael of? Was Sammael willing to take that risk?

When Sammael tried to slip away some hours after the devil had fallen asleep, Maelmorda's legs and arms tightened around him and he meshed against him in such a way as to drive those phalluses still lodged in the devil's body deeper. The slide and the way his gripping walls squeezed him alone was enough to harden Sammael. Add to that the way his body squirmed and pumped against him in a lusty manner of pleading with Sammael to phuck him. Yes, Maelmorda made it hard for Sammael to break away from him and return to that party the devil could care less about. Sammael was the apple of his eye, the creamy chocolate and caramel at the center of his world. The party could hang for all Maelmorda cared. Oh but Maelmorda released him of his want for him when he was sure Sammael had had enough...was over satisfied to gorged on the most incredible perversions ever shared. It was not like Maelmorda did not have places to go and people to see. Since he could not split himself, he intended to go see Galaxy once he had attempted everything in his power to ruin anyone else in Sammael's eyes. He hated anyone touching him, hated it, and wanted to eat Arilwen. The smell of her which lingered on him pissed him off and yet he said nothing of it. Did he need to?

Oh Arilwen did not know what guilt was until after Maelmorda paid her a visit, which was on his to do list before he went to see his wife. He and Sammael had bathed together before parting and were squeaky clean by the time each went their own way, but not before Maelmorda frenched him for a good ten minutes. Maelmorda had told him his plans. He had no intention whatsoever of withholding anything from his mate. He conveyed that he was going to call on Arilwen briefly then visit Galaxy. He was clad in a thigh length poet shirt, virgin wool leggings of a fine weave, and a pair of handsome knee high boots, all black. Sammael had chosen the outfit for him and he had thanked him with a cheeky molestation. The simple but sexy ensemble was very Maelmorda. When he swung by the chamber Sammael had provided Arilwen with; he entered just inside the open doorway and leaned with an arrogance of posture against the frame of the entry. "You phucking whore," he began by saying, his eyes locked dead on her. "I am disappointed in you. You remind me of another angel harlot which betrayed your father over and over again all in the guise of innocence. An honest whore I can respect, but you and Selena...You shall suffer a fate far worse than hers, I promise you, and her fate is hardly done. Do you know that your father's once wife phucked another knowing it would kill him? She took one third of his immortal life away from him. I know what you are not ready to admit to yourself, Arilwen. Your loins could not withstand the temptation of phucking Sammael. The offer was made, your tongue and

guilt seized on an excuse, and you leapt into waters that shall not be easily escaped. I know what shadows lie behind pleasant smiles, self-deceptions, and broken promises. Do you even know what you have done? Killing the heart of your husband is the least of it! They shall blame Sammael when they should be blaming you! Sammael has not betrayed Wyrvaust, you have. You have betrayed them all! You have placed an entire kingdom at risk because you wanted to know what it was like to be phucked by Satan. You have betrayed what Cirgoth was striving for...to achieve peace between his brother and lover; you have betrayed any chance Sammael had at winning Marsol's heart; you have betrayed everything I have sacrificed myself for. I was protecting you all, now you have single handedly ruined all that." He did not mention that she had also ruined his agenda to unite them all while they were under his protection. "You had to have known these things on some level. You are a smart girl, certainly not stupid. Make no excuses to me, Arilwen. I above all know and appreciate how beautiful and desirable Sammael is. You just could not bear the guilt of admitting to yourself that you desire someone other than Wyrvaust, could you? How could you? How could you admit to Marsol that you wanted to phuck Sammael and had the excuse of helping Wyrvaust? How could you possibly be so foolish as to believe that made any sense? Explain to me how agreeing to phuck Sammael could help Wyrvaust or Marsol? My logic cannot lower itself to comprehend such illogic. Sense cannot be made of it, Arilwen. Confess the truth which cowers in your heart or suffer the dire consequences!" Maelmorda was perhaps aiding Sammael with Arilwen by simply being himself. Maelmorda had a special talent for tearing hearts down to get at the truth. His harsh side was ruthless. Maelmorda would know whether she spoke true, or spoke a lie.

If she lied, she would find herself gripped by a power beyond her and jerked into a dizzying descent that would plunge her into Acheron's lake of fire. The infernal heat of the lava would not cremate and vaporize her immediately as one would expect, but strip her bones of her flesh and all else over a period of hours. Sammael, Maelmorda, and a few other Princes controlled the 'burn' duration of each individual they plunged there. Oh, he would not rob Sammael of any time with her. He would have her back, hasten her regeneration to be 'half healed' within another three hours, and from that point let her heal of her own power while he informed her that he gave her but a taste of where lies got her, before he demanded her confession once more. One of Lucifer's main functions was to bear each subject naked to themselves. No one Maelmorda had targeted had ever escaped themselves to date.

Hopefully Arilwen did not piss him off more than he already was, because after getting her confession, first if true, second true or false if the first was a lie, he stormed out of the room briefly after he had gotten a mental lock on his wife, intending to gate home, only to find her in intimately close proximity to Sarku. It could be said that they took up the same space. Acting on that knowledge, he sought clarity into what it meant. What struck him then took all the wind from his sails even as he stalked angrily back inside of Arilwen's chamber. It hit him so suddenly that he actually whimpered and lost his legs in the same choked breath. It was a vision which had dropped him mid-stride. He sat with legs folded sideways staring in abject shock and horror into thin air. His lips were parted in a dumbstruck expression and his entire body shook both with rage and terrible despair. What could horrify the devil himself? Make him shake like a leaf with despair? The vision was not sent by anyone, the devil had invited it. It was a product of things to come which were fated to be revealed at his request. It was Galaxy, loving Sarku, both professing their undying love for each other, Galaxy



whispering her fear that Maelmorda would kill them both for what he had given his blessing for them to do. He could not breathe at all when she spoke of how horribly guilty she felt for having fallen in love with Sarku, and what squeezed a sob from him was her confession to Sarku that she could not bear Maelmorda's infidelities with Sammael. "But...I thought you...I thought you understood..." the Morning Star whispered thick and coarse as rough sandpaper. Tears tumbled from his eyes and his eyes shot on Arilwen to thin into razored slits. He leapt up suddenly and stalked over to her, gripped her throat with one hand, and brought her with him as he plunged himself with her into the pit by Abaddon's ruined fortress. He threw her against the craggy stone wall and even as he held her in a strangling grip by her throat, he healed her within moments. He wanted her healthy before she was torn apart by him. She was merely a convenient target for his pain. What he had seen had not yet come to pass, but was sure to occur. Knowing that it could and would was enough, was all the punishment and grief he needed. "I never betrayed her," he hissed to Arilwen. "I never promised anything I could not give her," he snarled and shook her. "I did not promise to keep myself only unto her as you did Wyrvaust! Even then...Even then I knew I was incapable!" He pounded her against the rock wall as he howled his bitter lament. "And now...now when I can finally be faithful to she and Sammael, with all my heart, and promise it, she will betray me..." He let slip his grip on her a moment, and her body in its stance, but his eyes stabbed her again and he lunged at her, claws, fangs and teeth tearing into her tender, sweet flesh. He would strip her of the parts he liked best, half of her meat at least if Sammael was too busy to care about or notice their absence, as Lucifer ate the daughter of Belorian alive. Whatever time Sammael did choose to track them down to the abyss; he would find Maelmorda in a state he had never seen him in before, truly heart broken, flung in his arms in a desperate cling, seeking comfort, seeking answers, sobbing words Sammael might or might not be able to decipher into his chest. No one had ever seen Maelmorda in such a vulnerable state, Sammael, and Arilwen by default were the first. "Wh-why...She would never be-be-oh phuck, betray me! I know her, she...she would not...c-c-could not!! But the fates do not lie...d-d-do they? Visions...oh but they can deceive! Tell me I am deceived by what I saw...Oh my love...tell me I have been deceived by someone other than her!"

The reason Maelmorda had that vision of Galaxy betraying him, is because while he chose his bed for the night to sleep in, and while others slept, Gabriel worked his dark magic. Galaxy's memories and emotions were restructured as if she were but a construct of artificial intelligence being programmed by a computer scientist. At the moment, Maelmorda would welcome being sent back to Mephisto for the torture end of it. Physical pain was far more tolerable to heart break to most Hellions, and in this Maelmorda was no exception.

What Mephisto had in mind however was something Maelmorda would fight fang and claw, even if it meant Mephisto, Lilith, or Sytri might get hurt. If Sammael gave Mephisto the green light however, Mephisto had a plan to see that Maelmorda could do no harm to his accosters. Because raping males was not his talent, his invite to Sytri and Lilith was very persuasive. He impressed on them that the two of them could invoke Lucifer's pleasures however they pleased and for as long as they pleased, and he promised them that no penalties would come of it, despite Maelmorda's threats. They were simply doing their job, as commanded, and could not be done any serious harm owed to that fact. Of course the fact that Mephisto had given them a choice was a technicality, one he would bend in their favor. Throwing his stalwart arms around Lilith and Sytri's shoulders he grinned ferally, looking

from one to the other. "Surely the two of you have the guts to rape the Morning Star if asked or commanded to, eh? If not you, then who that Sammael could tolerate touching him, hmm?" he put to them as a final word on the subject, hence he awaited their verdict.

Belorian meanwhile was with Arilwen, in mind anyway. Her pleas had reached him and he answered to them through mind speak in soothing tones. She could almost feel his breath, hear his voice as if spoken, a gentle touch now and again, and yet he sat in that monstrous chamber, his boots sunk into a pool, sipping on one drink after another, ignoring the orgy and rejecting flirtations, violently when they bordered on threats of rape. "I have been where thou art now, Arilwen," he told her. "Though perhaps naugh for the same reasons. Acheron...fascinated me...I wanted to understand it, and came to understand it all too well and at great a cost. It is easy to lose hope and give in to despair, to lose thyself. Try naugh to be afraid, naugh of them nor thyself. Ye chose this path, see where it shall take thee, but offer them nothing of thy soul or will, no vows of loyalty. What they take, they can-naugh claim. They can only possess what is freely given to them. This ye must remember at all times. Acheron is full of the best cons imaginable. They can trick the smartest bloke into handing their soul over to them. They stripped me bare, dissected me, turned me inside out, and revealed to me every strength, weakness and shame I owned. I got away with my life and soul because I would naugh offer them my soul. There is good to be gained from it if thou art careful. Ye can-naugh defeat Acheron or its Lords, Arilwen. It is all too powerful. Ye can only reject it. They can-naugh keep thee long if thy will is to refuse giving thyself to Acheron and its Lords. Thy husband was wise naugh to sire thee into demon hood, for that would grant them power over thee. They are only powerless if ye reject their attempts to seduce thee into offering thy soul to them. Remember, thy heart, thy mind, and thy will is thy soul, Arilwen." The moment he said it the floor beneath him yawned wide open and he plummeted into a vertical tunnel which descended into unknown depths. The seizure of his person by means other than a gate triggered the protective ward he had on himself. The sanctuary powers clashed with the shielding around the planar tunnel of smooth, polished stone he was sliding rapidly through on his way to some isolated chamber in a forgotten corner of Acheron. Well, forgotten by most that is. His voice was stolen from his daughter, all sense of her presence stolen from him. Now how had he invited Acheron to have at him again? By acknowledging aloud to someone that the heart, mind and will was the soul. Belorian loved Maelmorda as his father, and as such Maelmorda saw that a part of Eoghan did belong to Acheron, the part that loved him. If Belorian wanted to truly be free of Acheron, he would have to denounce his love for Maelmorda. Maelmorda was not sure Belorian would, or could do that.

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The offer of having Maelmorda to play with as he pleased was most definitely tempting to Sytri. Not that he relished the idea of getting on the man's bad side by doing naughty things that were unwelcome to him. But, he supposed if it was Sammael's command...he couldn't refuse, could he? And with no penalties. That was the main problem he would have had with it, wasn't it? He knew exactly how frightening Maelmorda could be when he had been crossed, and was certainly in no hurry to land his ass in trouble.

It was on the tip of his tongue to inform darling Mephisto that it was never rape when it was with him. He excelled in lovemaking and seduction, not shows of manly strength and force. But he supposed that this would be cutting it rather close,

since Maelmorda would certainly not welcome his attentions. Still, it was Maelmorda, and he'd been itching to get his hands on that particular man for ages. He'd just lacked an excuse to do so. How could he say no when the excuse he needed finally presented itself? He glanced sidelong at Mephisto as that arm went around his shoulders, dark eyes gleaming with satisfaction as his lips curved in a pleased sort of smirk. "If it was under Lord Sammael's orders, I would most definitely not decline such an opportunity." He informed him matter-of-factly, practically purring the answer in that velvety-soft voice of his. He leaned to peer around Mephisto for a better look at Lilith, curious, of course, as to what her own response would be. He knew, as most knew, that Lilith would enjoy getting her paws on Maelmorda. He was just wondering whether she'd insist on Maelmorda being willing or not!

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When Maelmorda had decided to visit Arilwen for a moment, she was sitting in her room, wrapped in a white satin robe, her knees pulled to her chest as she curled up in a chair, staring blankly at the floor. She had spent days trying desperately to do what she knew couldn't happen...She was trying to keep herself in denial. Denial that any of this was happening, that she may have made a mistake, and even that she was away from her husband. Even if she started to think of how long she could be here, she started to panic and forced her mind to shut down. How she sometimes wished that she could handle stressful situations like Wyrvaust. Freak out and just explode and deal with the consequences later. Would that make her feel better right now? She honestly doubted it.

She had been so preoccupied with her thoughts that she did not notice Sammael's man-candy enter. But with those first cold words, that name... Arilwen's violet eyes shot up to meet his from across the room in utter shock. It was obvious that the name immediately struck a raw nerve because her scent began viciously pulsating with each word to fill the room. At first, Arilwen just sat there, looking stunned and pale as he laid into her. Her heart wrenched as he compared her to some woman that her father had apparently been married to that had been so terribly unfaithful. Wait... no! No! A HORRIFIED look rocketed across her features. The angel was on her feet and across the room in a split second. Now, Maelmorda was much taller than her. And no one had explained to her who he was, though he didn't exactly toss off a good vibe to her. "Stop RIGHT there." She hissed the words in a tone that she had never even HEARD herself use before, her thick eyelashes narrowing up at him. "I had to DO something. No one else was! My husband made some mistakes.. TOO many mistakes. It was out of his hands. Then I find out that he has fallen in love with our master, who ALSO was unable to do anything. What was I supposed to DO? I KNEW that Sammael had a soft spot for me. And yes, I exploited it to try and help my husband. Perhaps you should learn all of the details before you DARE laying blame on me. I couldn't bring myself to lie with Sammael and he had to numb my mind in order for me to fulfill that! You are jealous. I saw the look in your eyes before... when I first came. Even now you want to hurt me... the same look is there. What right do you have to cast stones at others, claiming that they are not faithful? I certainly saw how distraught your WIFE was when you told her that she had to share. Now, doesn't that seem as if you were unfaithful to YOUR wife because you desire another. I made a kneejerk decision to try and save MY husband."

By this time, Arilwen realized that she probably had buried herself in a pit of vipers, but she couldn't stop. She was panting heavily, rage causing her entire

body to tremble. The lake of fire would have to wait. The truth was that Arilwen truly didn't desire Sammael. The thought crossed her mind and she had stressed about it, worrying that it was happening, but she could not even bring herself to sleep with the man unless he twisted her mind. "I realize now that I made a foolish decision and I would love to walk out of here, but I have to face the consequence. But my husband had finally spent all of his favor points with Sammael and couldn't help himself any longer. I have that option... I HAVE those favor points. You want to get rid of me? Then you better work on convincing Sammael to dump me back into the desert. NOW GET OUT OF MY ROOM!" It ended in a violent shriek, the angel red and shaking. She would have tried to throttle him, had she thought she had any chance to win. Instead, she spun around and stormed back across the carpet, seething. She felt no heaviness on her heart. Somehow, Maelmorda's visit and accusations were helping. Her mind was clearing. She HAD done this for her husband, but it was a STUPID decision. Now Sammael would find out that she came simply to try and play on his lust for her and that could bring on an even LONGER list of consequences. That was fine. Breathing heavily, Arilwen closed her eyes and forced herself to calm down. Her father was right. People here were deceiving...plotting snakes. Maelmorda could try and rip apart minds and hearts. Arms folded across her front and she sighed, letting her head lower, her dark curls falling in her face. Let's try and make sense of this. She had made a horrible decision. She couldn't change that now. She knew in her heart of hearts that she did not desire Sammael, only her husband. Now, her husband may not have her back, but Sammael might also have her head on the chopping block. Plus--

Arilwen suddenly heard quickly approaching footsteps and she swung around just in time to see a furious devil's hand shoot out to lock fingers around her slender throat. Violet eyes shot open in pain and shock and her hands flew up to lock fingers around his wrist, her bare feet trying to lash out at him, struggling to get free. Fiery heat suddenly flooded them and Arilwen felt her head crash into something sharp and rock hard. Oh, rocks. That made sense. Good thing she had decided to hit a nerve with him about his wife. Sheesh. Arilwen's body flew into panic mode. Her soft wings suddenly and violently tore from her back, through the silk robe that covered her, shredding it to pieces. The words rang through her buzzing skull as the skin cracked open at the back of her head, splattering blood against the rocks. She made choking, wheezing sounds as she clung to his wrist, her eyes begging him to release her as they glazed over. She felt his grip suddenly slip and her feet hit the ground, a ragged breath tearing through her lungs as she choked and gagged. Before she could even catch that valuable breath, she felt the most horrific pain she had ever been submitted to rip through her chest and down her belly. WHAT IN THE HELL WAS THAT?! Arilwen's lovely eyes wrenched open to show complete whites around the irises and something of a banshee-like dying scream exploded from her lips, and just kept going. Strips of flesh were being peeled from her. She couldn't see that very well, but she felt the horrific torturous pain followed by the sight of Maelmorda stuffing bloody flesh into his mouth. HE WAS EATING HER?! Arilwen's brain ripped with threats of unconsciousness and right before she passed out, a desperate mental cry was echoed out to not only her husband, but Sammael and her father as well. Suddenly, her violets would roll back in her head as nearly half of her flesh had been stripped from her body, and she fell limply into a pile on the ground. There was a good chance that she wasn't even able to call OUT to anyone. Her mind disappeared into a foggy, horrific oblivion in which her father's soft voice seeped in, assuring her that he was there... that she had to reject Acheron... to try not to be afraid. His voice was soon snuffed out and the Swan found herself floating in her own thick lake of fiery pain, certain that

she would never feel relief for the rest of eternity.

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It was no secret that Lilith lived for only herself. She was possibly the most selfish person in all of Acheron and understood that well. It would be that evening, however, that she faced her first struggle with not simply taking what she wanted. And why was that? Because she loved him, loved Maelmorda as it were. Those daunting eyes kept a cool look as Mephisto's arm locked around her neck, and her gaze fell on Maelmorda being locked back down to that familiar table. The devil's heart was broken. She felt it immediately, and her jaw ticked as Mephisto taunted her with the option of raping him... the one man who she loved and had always rejected her advances. Sytri would volunteer, of course. Orders? Lilith's arms folded across her chest and she studied the seething devil before her. It was only when Sytri stepped forward that she jerked from under Mephisto's arm and snapped a hand out to grab Sytri's wrist. "No." The word was spoken coldly, her eyes darkening as she looked to Mephisto. "Leave him be." The two would no doubt stare at her like she had lost her mind. It was also no secret that Lilith had a thing for Mael. No one understood how deeply that went. Moving on her own, she slid to perch on the edge of the table the devil was strapped to and a hand lifted. Amazingly, not to heavily pet or grope him, but to... stroke his dark hair. Lilith's eyes gazed down at his torn features and she leaned in to place a gentle kiss on his brow...right in the center. Acheron was full of surprises, but Lilith was usually fairly predictable. Everyone had something up their sleeves! If Sammael gave orders for her to rape him, she would refuse and deal with him on that level when the time came.

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Sytri's brows raised when he felt fingers wrapping around his wrist. And so, he paused in stepping forwards, propping a hand on one hip as he regarded Lilith. What was this, now? He didn't look at her as if she'd lost her mind. The expression with which he watched her was one part amusement, and another part curiosity. After all, Sytri had always firmly believed that love, real love, was beyond people of his sort. And he'd always thought he and Lilith were quite alike. Maybe she was a wholly different sort of person all together. Or maybe he had misjudged the whole love thing? Maybe his sort were fully capable of falling head over heels, and he'd been looking in all the wrong places? Being what he was, he didn't exactly swing by bars to pick up pretty things for relationships. He was more the love 'em and leave 'em type, if they didn't keep his interest. If they did, he'd play with them a little bit longer. But it wasn't love. He knew that. Or, what if it was just him? Maybe it wasn't what he was, but who he was that was the issue. He blinked and shoved those thoughts from his head. This was all getting just a teensy bit too deep for him to be thinking of. He didn't come here to consider deep, soul-searching questions, did he?

Anyway, he wasn't about to move in on Maelmorda without Lilith's okay. Crossing Lilith when it wasn't needed was not recommended, and he knew it. He didn't want to step on her toes in this particular matter. Besides, though it was a bit disappointing not to get to put his hands on Maelmorda, he didn't NEED to. He wouldn't do so unless Sammael insisted. He couldn't go against Sammael in this, if it was what he wanted, since Sammael outranked Lilith when it came to commands that

Sytri actually had to follow. For now, he leaned in a cozy manner against Mephisto...nothing intimate, for once. He could ooze charm all he wanted, but for now it was just a friendly sort of camaraderie...he was making nice. And he just observed, without even commenting on it. She was unexpectedly gentle with Maelmorda, and it intrigued Sytri.

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At the time the infernal angel came back to the desert oasis full of sinful fun and evil delights, Sammael noticed the grin and took it with a loud chuckle as he felt arms go around him and he likewise put his around the infernal angel.

"I would venture to ask what has been entertaining you to merit that grin, but a part of me enjoys ignorance," Sammael laughed as he jostled Gabriel a little before he took a lean against his most trusted, prized and protected Progeny which placed the backs of Gabriel's thighs into a table and thusly, forced him to take a perch on the long table with the red velvet cloths edge.

Sammael laid his hands on the table at Gabriel's sides. His thumbs idly thumbing at a bit of cloth of whatever it was his Progeny decided to wear this afternoon. He stood practically against the table after working his possibly narrow or slender hips in between Gabriel's knees so that they were both positioned in that very guarded yet intimate way he reserved only for Gabriel.

"She was actually thinking earlier about becoming a plump pigeon just so she could fly back to her nest sooner," he said while touching his forehead to Gabriel's as their lips came too close and brushed over each other more than once. "The things they think of," he said in a half laugh and half un-amused tone.

After that he would turn his head so that his black eyes surveyed the scene while his head was just underneath Gabriel's chin. It was only a few moments that he stood there leaning against the other angel, not really saying anything of great importance but rather ensuring that nobody got the bright idea to man handle what was his just because they had been invited to a very disgusting awesome party out in the sands. Some demons forgot their place now and again. He had to remind them of it in subtle ways before resorting to the big guns. Namely the only one he was honestly worried about putting their hands on his Progeny strangely might have been himself. Or was it someone else? Then he gave not so innocent tugs at the top of Gabriel's trousers or bottom half of his clothing as he said, "Ahh, changed my mind. You're free to go back to your previous engagements or other tasks; until next time." He pulled the angel possessively by his waist to him so that when his mouth was just barely a centimeter or two away from Gabriel's, the infernal could feel the hot breath he exhaled when he made that very hungry yet restrained growl type of sound before he let go of him. Was Sammael teasing him again? Did he ever tease Gabe? Or was that just Sam's version of foreplay with him?

Later the man demon found himself in the presence of his Creator. Something most people would never have the pleasure of saying in casual conversation actually. His eyes traveled wherever the Morning Star did even though the back of his head remained unmoving on the ledge of the huge tub or pool thing. Sammael's eyes hardened slightly on his Creator as he felt he was about to hear something very if not the most important since perhaps he had been amongst all his brothers in the place of the divine, most gloriously arrogant, and pompous Kingdom that was Haman.

That gut instinct of his was right on the money. The things that poured out of Maelmorda's mouth raked against his senses and yet soothed the anger in Sammael at the same time. At first he felt like chastising Maelmorda for what he was saying, he even started to sit up to do it. But then it all made sense didn't it. The tension in his muscled frame eased a little as he forced his temper aside so that he could hear the Morning Star without his judgment being clouded by what he thought he would hear. It would have been easier had the Morning Star told lies. Fabricated the truth and then tried to make him believe something else. What was being said though he knew to be coming from that place in Maelmorda that perhaps only Galaxy had ever been able to see. Now, was the Devil willing to share that heart of his with someone else? A demon no less; Sammael in fact. Not your average demon either but a rather complicated and cold one. For a moment he almost wanted to ask Lucifer what this was all about but he didn't. He was too awed to interrupt the long speech that shed new light on things that hadn't been made verbally previously, or perhaps that was exactly what was needed now. It was half way through the Morning Stars revelations of what was and what was not, that Sammael became suddenly aware of the alien sensation of being naked. Well that wasn't the right term seeing as how he was in the buff and he rather fancied his birthday suit as oppose to any other suit. Exposed was more like it. Like the Morning Star was reaching into his chest to remove his insides, most notably his heart, along with cracking open his head to see what all mechanisms made the gears in his head turn. He had sat up straight in the tub by now as he eyed Maelmorda very carefully with an expressionless face. It had been tried before to see what all made him tick. It wasn't like him to say anything of what he did or didn't feel. For his Creator to get inside his head and give voice to the unspoken and quite possible terrifying truth of it all well it was a very strange and unpleasant feeling altogether. He wasn't entirely sure if he liked this conversation anymore as Maelmorda started to unclothed himself to slip into the tub of hot water just as sexy as you please. It was extremely disconcerting when Maelmorda tried to reason with him like this and lay bare everything between them, including most importantly the honesty in them both to see the truth for what it was. But could they accept it? Could Sammael accept the fact that Lucifer knew far more then he realized, and even worse Lucifer wasn't afraid to be frank with him and still have him know how he loved him in spite of it all. That he understood him where no one else did or ever could wasn't something you ran across every day. The man demon shifted in the water as his counter part slid in and came to settle on top of him, causing him readjust himself along the side of the tub as he wrapped his arms around him to pull him closer. He still hadn't said a word since Maelmorda had come into the hard wood floored room with the single tub in it. It wasn't until he felt that body sink down on him to force his quite aching cocks inside his mate that Sammael's voice came back to him in a loud grunt as well as something he said quickly before Maelmorda felt the hips underneath him jerk upwards out of reflex to all this pleasure that was starting. And oh how it started with but the first heaving upwards before they forgot everything else to get tangled up in one another to the point that Sammael wouldn't really have cared if they were actually one person. His need was that profound to have what he wanted, and now that he had Maelmorda the need just became stronger. It was almost like before when the first time they had truly loved one another and discovered more then they realized in the other and what it meant for Acheron and her little sister world. And perhaps for that other shyte ass fluffy place up above. Though this time would not be like the last time when he had ravished Maelmorda beyond the point that he had been beaten and hit in an effort to be stopped. Indeed, this would be something even he could not have conceived of in his wildest and most perverted dream. It went so far beyond sex in any conventional

manner that the first few seconds of this, this whatever the hell it was Maelmorda was doing to him, he couldn't even speak. He couldn't think of anything at all. Was it because it was so painfully good? Or so blissfully painful? Perhaps later he would be able to piece together how it made him feel or after he collected himself from how scattering it must have felt to experience what his Creator either blessed or cursed him to feel in that span of time. Clearly this was something more than a challenge to Sammael. It was something that finally even he probably couldn't best or compete with. Simply to give in to it and hope to god that the rip tide didn't break him down so completely that it killed him. The entirety of it all just blew him away. Sure he tried everything short of using his own powers to enhance or try to get more into Maelmorda than he already was. But it didn't matter anymore as to who was the better and who was better at submitting. Cause at this point he actually thought of nothing. Nothing at all except this, or he tried to at least. It became a tedious battle however with not letting all that unimaginable pleasure and all those ecstasies kill him. It would be in fact days of this, perhaps nearly a week if Maelmorda was up to the task of taking on all of Sammael's hunger at once, that they eventually parted. That motion however was a very unpleasant one, and he actually tried to bite Maelmorda because of it. All during that indescribable joining of them there had been cries or screams, wailings and whimpers, but now where the two held, clasped, clung and bogarted one another; Sammael was left gasping heavily as his body was racked constantly by shuddering. Slowly his mind came back to him but only in bits and pieces. Like when one first awoke from a very heavy sleep that they tried to burrow back into. He felt that he had his right arm around the Devils waist and his left bent around his mate's shoulder so that his hand rested on the back of Maelmorda's head, with a good handful of his hair, as if to ensure that Lucifer didn't leave him, because that would make a mess of things if the Morning Star had left his seemingly cold hearted son. He felt then perhaps what Caine must have missed. Or maybe Caine knew this feeling too and had wanted no part of it? How vulnerable it was that sensation left in the afterglow of what had just happened. Or rather had been happening for the better part of days. It had probably been a week that this had occurred during. That seemed to be the usual time frame with matters concerning Maelmorda and all the deliciousness that lied in him to be discovered. With his Creator held very tightly against his chest, Sammael rested his chin atop that head after just one attempt to untangle himself with the sleeping Devil only to receive a fitful no by a grinding of those narrow little hips and being squeezed in more places than one. It made Sammael grunt loudly before he started panting all over again. Just that bit of movement was enough to tease his appetite into yawning awake once more and make his cocks throb inside Maelmorda with great need. Hard? Like a phucking diamond. His head nudged at the side of the Morning Stars head while sucking in a quick hiss of a breath as his arm tightened around that waist. One knee moving to part the others legs a bit before eventually, and this was...oh we don't know, hours later, that he finally did bring himself reluctantly to untangle himself after that nap he had also taken with holding the Morning Star all to himself. A rare sight; had anyone ever seen Satan in such a peaceful state? Anyone? Anyone at all? He looked content in that short time that he too slept for an hour or so. Hair tussled and damp. Head tilted to the side to lean his left cheek on top of Maelmorda's head while they both drifted in whatever manner of slumbers beings like they did. Were they dreamless ones? Now knowing what they had shared, or rather what Maelmorda had maybe nearly killed him with its sweetness, could the Devil dream? Was the Morning Star now able to perhaps even just this once have even a tiny sliver of a happiness? How unfair that would be though wouldn't it? Lucifer actually being happy without repercussions. Kind of went together like peanut butter and worms-



wart. But before Sammael unwound his legs or arms, or maybe some of those other inhuman appendages of his, from his Creator he merely floated in that hot water with the Devil in his arms and a very serene look about him. Every now and then in that tub he would shift slightly or tighten his arms around Maelmorda. As if maybe it was the Devil trying to escape him?

Later, and we mean much later because he was easily tempted to stay every single time Maelmorda rubbed against him the wrong way and became sorely pressed not to give him a tongue bath, hah, Sammael could be found wandering that party but now he didn't seem the least bit interested in it anymore. Maelmorda had seen to that. The Devil had single handedly snatched up all of Sammael's attentions and whatever else lied unknown within the man demon. He was less talkative which was very unlike him when considering this was suppose to be a marvelous bash of a get together. He didn't visit or mingle either. In fact, all Sammael did when he did slip back into the room of orgy engaged demons and their lovers, was because he felt the sudden urge to walk, to stretch his legs. Get a cup of wine to drink, well two cups and a bottle of wine actually that he would be bringing back to Maelmorda if the Devil was still in that heated tub. But first he made a b-line for the hallway that led to the room he could just smell his sons in. He wanted to see the newborns. He wanted to see Arasgal. He wanted really, to see the parts of him that were perhaps not yet touched by Life and tainted from Time. In the meantime, he picked up a bit of meat and made himself scarce from the party altogether. Maybe he had given Mephisto the go ahead for further abuse of their Maker. Then again after experiencing what he just had perhaps he would have them be nicer to the Devil. Nicer? Since when was Sammael ever nice? Into the room with the very special boys he would sweep. The doors closed behind him so as not to give any passer by the inkling that they were invited. Immediately Arasgal could tell by the creasing in his sinful father's brow that he was not happy about missing the birth of his brothers. It happened as soon as he laid his black eyes on the two, were they twins then, siblings to the white devil. He came to wherever it was in the room that the two tikes were so that he could spend time with them and Arasgal, Just the four of them, for now at least. In the future it would be just the five of them unless by some miracle Maelmorda convinced him otherwise. Throughout the short time he spent with their sons, getting another drink after leaving the boys and thereabouts the separation anxiety started to get the better of him. If only by slight. Even after bathing, and yes he had washed Maelmorda even as he slept in his arms because his perversions knew no bounds like that, the smell of both his Creator and the angel cake saturated his body like some ridiculously expensive cologne that was meant to turn more than just heads. During the short time he had spent with Arasgal and his younger siblings he had asked his eldest son as to his thoughts about having brothers and sisters. He kept the chit chat light in spite of how tangled up he felt inwardly. Everything was never as black and white as most wanted it to be. If it was then they would never have come to be in the predicament they were now finding themselves in.

Before he left Arasgal and his brothers to indeed go track down angel cake, he suddenly became aware of where she was. It was no longer within his desert oasis but down under. In a place she had visited before but had the extreme luck not to be made a permanent residence of. What the hell was she doing down here? He wondered on that as he simultaneously sought Maelmorda and oh would you look at that. He wasn't here either. Down into the pit he would go looking for Maelmorda and he even half expected to see the Devil knee deep in something or other painful but what his eyes beheld once he did catch up to his Maker well, lets just say the

expression of slightly confused if not appalled surprise wrought itself all over his face. A brow quirked further as the demon of sin went quickly to catch or pick up the one who had bore him children, mind you those kids he was very fond of in every way no matter what anyone else thought, and gather him up in his arms to hold him close to his chest where that supposedly frozen muscle still beat with life. No he didn't know what the phuck was the matter with Maelmorda. It was when his eyes leapt on the broken and beaten Arilwen that he could put a few of the pieces together and quite frankly, the majority of him was flattered in that way most people would never understand or approve of. Maelmorda was down here making a mess of her and for what? Because he had taken liberties with the beloved wife of Wyrvaust? He would have dipped her in chocolate and licked her from head to toe if he had known Maelmorda would go this far but there had to be more to him than just this violence. There had to be more than just pure and simple jealousy driving the Devil to do such a thing to the Swan. Had she said something to him? Goaded him into a rage he could not let go of? Whatever had happened he would have to wait for the answers. Sammael settled with an arm around Maelmorda's waist and the other hand cupping the side of the teary eyed being's face.

Whatever was he talking about? Her? Her who, damnit! Had someone heard the Morning Star and he hadn't known of it? Lilith's name naturally jumped into his head just because she was who she was, and it was a well known fact she wanted Maelmorda all to herself. Sammael may have ties to her for the means to justify the ends as far as Acheron was concerned but should she cross him, and it was bound to happen with both of their track records, there would be no place for her to turn to that he would not find her. No arms she could go running into late at night and cry her eyes out in. If she was even had that female bone in her body. All that sudden anger came of course from the certain something that Maelmorda and he now had. The need to punish those who would cause harm to what he felt was his came like second nature to him. He didn't like what had happened to Arilwen however, he did at the same time. It was obvious wasn't it though how he could and couldn't enjoy the terrible thing Maelmorda had done to Arilwen. For the moment she was his and he would do with her as he saw fit. If he wanted to skin her alive and make her screw a donkey, then that was his decision. But it was his because she had given it to him, not the other way around like others were surely thinking. She had given up her life in the desert and made the choice to come to him. All he did was lessen the brutal truth of it a little. He had never lied to her, to any of them. He was only himself, just like Maelmorda could only be himself. Whatever was occurred to her be it painful or not it was to be he that decided that. For this he was a bit miffed but nothing he'd loose sleep over. On the other hand he naturally felt a greedy sense of pride or something to that effect that Maelmorda would enact his anger. It wasn't so much a surprise as it was a sense of ownership. Like a broadcast made loud and clear of who was with who, and who was being the fool to think they could sway the attention of whomever.

"I'm gone for five minutes and already your about to kill someone," he said not chastising but in a small attempt at humor. It was funny actually if you took a step back to look at the big picture. But he wasn't making fun of Maelmorda so he needn't claw his eyes out for it. His eyes did not wander from the Morning Star even if he was studying the horrid condition the female bird had been left in. What had she done to merit such abuse? "She who?" he asked of his mate as his hand ran his thumb just underneath one of Maelmorda's beautifully hued eyes as he held him against the front of himself protectively. Possessively

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Arilwen said all the wrong things, was too defiant in defending herself against the devil's accusations; her counter accusations only enflamed the Morning Star's rage to a roiling inferno. He felt no guilt at all as he ate her alive, and to punish her even more he showed her visions of all which Wyrvaust experienced those hours immediately after she abandoned him, and in doing so, saw for himself the potentially fatal repercussions of what she had done. "Had you just stayed with him peace between the desert champions and Acheron's Prince would have been possible. You have destroyed everything, everything!" he shouted at her before tearing another long, deep strip of muscle from her body, spilling her guts this time. "Now I shall see the brothers I love torn by a woman, a foolish woman of all things! You will repair the damage you have done or I shall have to rein Marsol and Wyrvaust in myself, and have you any idea how cruel I must be to them to do that? I love them damn it, and you shall be removed from Wyrvaust and freedom permanently if I have to do any harm to those I cherish and respect! Do you understand me?" He would say no more, only eat her like a lion gone rabid.

He could not place the relief he felt when Sammael arrived to embrace him, the possessiveness of his hold needed by the Morning Star as he spilled his heart cryptically to him. Sammael's question of who he spouted on about, when repeated that last time, flipped a switch in Maelmorda. Grief turned to rage and ice cold abandon. It was perhaps the first time in his life that Maelmorda had actually surrendered, resigned himself to loss. Why when it concerned what mattered most to him? Guilt, and not just any guilt, but old guilt. Sammael could feel the tension which caught the Morning Star's muscles and stiffened him against the to-die-for-attractive man demon which held him. His arms tightened around Sammael even as his jade eyes raised on him like a pair of sparkling, cold jewels. "I...I unintentionally set myself up for a hard fall...unintentional because I was so plucking sure the steps I took to insure her happiness would go untouched...and now I shall just have to brace myself for it...purge my self-bought wrath. I cannot undo it, by my will, I cannot. I must lose all in this shipwreck." And this is where Gabrian's plan failed him horribly. Who could guess how the devil would take the inescapable loss of his wife? Inescapable because of the chaotically fluid manner in which his mind worked. He gripped Sammael's shirt at the shoulders and shook him while his eyes pierced the Prince of Demon's with a wounded burn that was both as scorching as lava and cold as arctic ice. "How can I be worthy of you, if I am not worthy of her? I laid the cobblestones for her to leave me by, and she walked on them." His brows knitted in an almost confused expression. "I was sure I could bear it if she did not walk away from it...so certain of it." He shook his head and his eyes thinned on Sammael's black fathoms. "Don't you see that I am hopeless and must resign myself to what I am? I am so sure of myself when I pledge myself to any commitment, yet...what commitment have I ever truly seen through to the end? Could it be that I am irresponsibly responsible? That every objective I embrace rides on the ticking time bomb of my whims? I was always committed to Acheron and yet somehow I failed even her...let her slip into your hands. I am a goddamn shadow, I am a child of the abyss, whose heart is as vast, whose soul has no form, and whose love is as cold. Even those dear few I strive only to make content are failed by me. Do you know why I fail, Sammael? Because no matter what my intentions are, I am incapable of resisting my impulses. I am the embodiment of chaos, and to resist my urges and the convictions which come to me is to deny what and who I am. Think of how I came to you, Sammael, think. An idea sprung brightly in my mind and I could not resist following it. Do you know that

the moment the notion came to mind I knew I could not or would not back down from it? I vow that I am sure I would never betray you or Galaxy, a thing I never actually promised her...could not promise her until you and I joined. But what if a day comes that I am unable to resist someone? Shall I be able to deny myself to keep true to you? I tell myself I can, but can I? If I am unworthy of my wife, how can I be worthy of you? Convince me, for this doubt I carry shall take me from you." He shuddered and leaned heavily against Sammael and had not his lover been holding him he would have sunk to his knees.

"So many doubts have usurped me..." the typically sure one whispered in a thin voice as chaos took his mind. After a pause his voice strengthened. "I love all of my children, all of them, yet is what I conceive as love truly love? I love Belorian but brought the worst tortures on him, embraced him with the heart of hell, because he resisted all my charms even as he danced in hell's shadow without giving himself to me. I wanted him to see what it was he was trifling with. I did it because I loved him. I distrust Arilwen and I enjoyed the hell out of eating her alive because she is so like the woman who betrayed her father, so damn guilty and so damn innocent in the same breath, so easily self-deceived by her innocence, and because she was a fool ever to come to you, a fool to think she could do so without consequences to those she strove to help, and because you enjoyed her so much. She dared to accuse me of treachery when I broke no pledges to my wife! She has ruined all my plans for peace! Only out of respect to you did I refrain from obliterating her. I am still not convinced that she did not desire you on some level. A fury arose in my heart and strangles me still. Why do you need her, want her children? Are the children I gave you and have...perhaps had still to give you not enough? I am changed, changed by a string of events I could not foresee and must recalculate who I am, evolve yet again. I am tired suddenly...so tired...Yes, I shall walk away. Do not blame her, dearest Sammael...It is I who am to blame, and I shall take my guilt out on her and her lover to be. I cannot just let her go unpunished, even if I am to blame...but it is I and I alone who can punish her. I needed you both...without her I cannot be trusted by you...or our children. I am no longer whole. I love you too much to ever risk betraying you." He strove then to pull away with every intention of walking away, of walking until the abyss and the dead planes beyond enveloped him in its cold reliable comfort. Of walking until he came to a place where his rage and despair could be unleashed. No, he never spoke Galaxy's name as the one at fault, but had made it clear enough who the harbinger of his grief was. Novelty that it was, he was unaware that it was truly Gabriel who was at fault for what the future potentially held and the changes his deed would incur.

Maelmorda was not surprised that he was not permitted to go anywhere, and he really did not care at the moment. There would be time for him to retaliate; he was certain. No, instead he found himself transferred by a power he did not even attempt to oppose, and pushed down on, but not yet strapped to, that medieval contraption of exploitation which promised full exposure of every delicious part of him. Sammael was standing against the wall behind Lilith and Sytri as they spoke words which confounded him, Arilwen's mutilated figure in his arms, yet no one could see Sammael or smell the angel in his arms at the moment. Whether Sammael allowed her to feel pain or hastened her healing was a thing he alone knew.

Mephisto chuckled at Lilith's refusal and the manner which Sytri jumped on her wagon and patted them both on the back then crossed his arms firmly across his own chest. "Our prince shall decide whether you ravish him or nay, I promise you. You

would be doing yourself no favors by defying your prince and his mate." Mephisto was certain of that. It was clear that Mephisto was Sammael's dragon one hundred percent of the way, another fact that was not surprising to Maelmorda.

What did surprise Maelmorda, was the kindness Lilith showed him, and in her turn, Sytri. When Lilith began to stroke his hair, all the hurt he had refused to shed as anything other than harsh or stunted words of cold pain flooded out of him. A sob broke from him and he embraced her and Sytri with a furiously desperate tangle of his arms and legs, his face buried against Lilith's bosom as he wept. His arms then loosened and he spoke to them as much as to Sammael amidst strangled breaths. "It is him I crave, need, so desperately desire to smother this pain with excessive pleasures. It is your Prince I need to understand me...to love me in spite of myself as I love him." He sounded angry, his voice sharp, his passions and heartache ran so high. "Shall I crave the two of you now as well, to fill this half void only one can fill? Shall I?" he added with a bitterness aimed at himself. Maelmorda then kissed Lilith with all the passion of his pain, ground himself against Sytri licentiously, his embrace around both Sytri and the Matriarch of Demons bruisingly tight. When he broke the kiss he shoved against them both to separate them from him. "Now either phuck me, Sammael, have these lovelies do it, or turn me loose!" he howled. A part of him was perhaps moved too much to the extreme by compassion, for he recognized that Lilith loved him, had to love him to show him such mercy, and for the first time it pained him that he could never return her the devotion she desired. That blend of sympathy and guilt piled on those conflicts and the self-loath he already battled with only fueled his temper.

If he was turned loose he would throw himself off that table and storm away naked in a terrible temper, and in parting ways would leave the palace altogether. He intended to return home to Castle Kilcanoragh and bring his full wrath on Galaxy and Sarku alike, if only to restore balance to himself. Whether Sammael would let him was another story.

His mental voice meanwhile reached out to Octavian, not from himself, but from Acheron itself as a projection of his will. As a result; the voice Octavian received was like ether, having a hollow yet richly harmonic quality as if carried by a wind instrument. ~"Octavian, when you return from your quest, you are to take over my castle and the territory of Esscha Endor, the Lands of Wealth as Prince of that territory under my authority. All residents of that land and those residing in the castle will come under your command and sway, including my family...Galaxy, Corwyn, Yorek, Sarku, and my young sons. Gather a knighthood under yourself as good men are met or considered. I alone shall hold dominion over you."~ The wards would accept Seth as well.

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Sytri wasn't sure what to think of Maelmorda's emotional state, really. He didn't know of the events that had brought it on, and probably even then would have been a little confused by it. Matters of the heart were something that would confound him until he experienced them personally. And Sytri, for once, kept his mouth shut. Oh, he was tempted to toss back that Maelmorda shouldn't feel alone in craving him - everyone did! But he knew better than that. He recognized that Maelmorda was in pain, and that this was no time to be saucy. There was a time and a place. Still, he'd allow himself to be drawn into Maelmorda's embrace...might as well enjoy that while he could, huh? Maelmorda's hands on him, that is. Other than one slender hand

resting against Maelmorda's hip, he kept his grabby little fingers to himself, at least until told otherwise by Sammael, of course. The grinding threatened to call that towering lust of his to the surface, but before that could go too far, he found himself shoved away again. In normal circumstances he would have called him a tease, but one look at him, at the anger and the hurt that raged in him, told him that this was a lot deeper than any of that. He'd prop his hands on his own hips as he waited to see exactly what his Lord Sammael might choose to do. If he wasn't needed, he'd probably make himself scarce. Things were crazy around here these days, and he found himself wanting to resist getting swept up in all the madness. There were some days when he welcomed a little bit of madness to break up the day to day routine. Lately, though, he seemed to prefer more to be a spectator than actually be involved. Not that he would refuse getting wrapped up in all of this, if that was what Sammael chose for him. It just seemed that he was content to let Sammael do the choosing at the moment.

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Sammael had seen many a things. Both great and disturbing. He had witnessed atrocities from one race to another and the rejoicing of one soul to their fellow neighbour out of simplicity. He had stood beside countless man, demon and angel alike and watched them in their darkest hour or in their moment of triumph. Nations burned to the ground, countrysides lain to waste, whole races scattered across the surface of the world. Sammael had known of Heaven and felt Hell coursing in his very veins. But what transpired now seemed to make everything up until now so trivial and insignificant. What he had shared with Maelmorda was in a literal sense Heaven and Hell at the same time, if such a thing was even possible. Rationally speaking of course. They knew one another since they had first become self aware or even had a consciousness, naturally the latter being once Lucifer had deemed it so that Sammael would come into being that is and set about creating perhaps someone that would cause him eternal torment in a way. Maelmorda spoke of knowing Sammael, and for that the man demon had actually allowed that cold unfeeling muscle to have the glimmer of hope that Maelmorda was telling the truth. Not just in a sense that Maelmorda believed in his very temper mental son but that he could curve said temper and actually in some small way, shape, or form... make him happy. With that in mind Maelmorda should have known better then to leave everything to the quite busy Lady Fate and everything would be alright. That it would all work out in the end. But that kinda shiit doesn't happen in reality. Not for the demons, or their angelic brothers, or even the other immortals out there. There are no such things as happy endings and anyone who said otherwise usually got their aas gutted like stuck pigs by Sammael himself. How could one love another and yet have to share them with someone else? To know that you only truly got to have half of that heart which you so longed to give yours to as well, how would one handle something like that? Better yet how the fuuck did Maelmorda think his soon to be loathed man demon son would react to this latest and most unfortunate turn of events? That not only he couldn't be with all of the Morning star but that if he couldn't just deal with a piece of him then he wouldn't have any of his Father at all. Them's the breaks though weren't they. As the greif stricken body he held in the tight grasp of his arms poured said unattainable, and yes by god Maelmorda was officially un-fucking-attainable, the demon prince's eyes would darken. He had thought Maelmorda would go exact vengeance on Galaxy and her new found lover. Rough 'em up some. Worst case senario the Morning star would kill them. Yet to leave them both instead? That was something Sammael had not really given much thought to at all. It was that mind of Maelmorda's to blame for being so goddamn adaptable and his never ending ability to

suprise with the way he invited change daily. If he couldn't have the fluffy sod he wouldn't have either of them? Was that what he was hearing? for a split second he cursed his own ears for being able to function. Not that it would have mattered what with mindspeak and all. In his own growing anger over what this was turning into his black eyes lit on Maelmorda when he started roping Galaxy and Arilwen into the same pot, or in a round about way, to change the subject to why he had maimed the pretty female bird all to shit. Was he trying to clear his conscience? Sammael never questioned or even cared majority of the time who Maelmorda did and didn't brutalize and tear apart. In this case however it was someone he had his eye on kind of and that pissed him off on a level that well, it was the exact same thing with Galaxy. Maelmorda could have a wife and yet Sammael couldn't even have a friend-with-benefits? Maelmorda could have more golden haired flossy brats with that Nephelim and the minute he gets his own Nephelim in some way, he gets the shaft? Because the Morning Star was jealous?! The concern on his face melted like butter in a hot frying pan. Somehow Sammael felt more angst towards Galaxy, anger on the children that Maelmorda and he had's part, next to pulling his own goddamn hair out, and a shit-load of vehement self loathing all in the same breath. It rattled his insides the anger he fumed with because if he gave even an inch of himself into the hurt at what Maelmorda said then he might just flip the hell out. Even if Maelmorda didn't mean anything by it and had no idea, Sammael picked up on the underlying tones and it cut him something fierce. He said he loved him. And yet he would leave him anyways? Because of her he would separate himself from his three sons and his man demon mate. Cause if he couldn't have his Galaxy then screw everyone else pretty much was the kind of vibe Sammael was getting. He didn't blame Maelmorda for his convictions or for what he believed in and acted on. He just hated the fact that Maelmorda was the kind of being who was strong enough to love someone and forsake them at the same time. Even banish him or them from him, or just altogether disappear. He hated that about his Creator and loved it at the same time. It was a finicky kind of emotion naturally. Cause it was Sammael's emotion and those were never clear things to comprehend. So perhaps this was going to get far more uglier before it got any better. The first of which Sammael had heard enough but he did not let go of Maelmorda no matter how hard he shoved and pushed at him. It would take the Morning Star dipping his hand into that infinite well of knowledge contained in his head to blast the man demon with some very wicked powers and/or nearly kill him to be rid of him now. Sammael then went off on him, so to speak. "You speak of Arilwen as if her will was something not to be bent to ones such as us. Enjoyed her I did and it felt oh so good to be with someone who knew next to nothing about me and for once, just ONCE Maelmorda, I thought of us and how we would be together even after you tire of that Goldie locks you delude yourself into thinking is worthy of your time. But I was mistaken wasn't I? You crave her as much as I crave something I now know I will never have. You can say otherwise but the truth is she would never understand your whims or impulses to be what you are. To exist the way you were not created for, but in the way you have molded and shaped, re-shaped into being time after time. She does not grasp, cannot grasp, within her mind or her heart what she truly has. She knows and she wants to believe in the goodness in you, oh how there is goodness in you Maelmorda, but she will never accept the other side of you. I say this not because I would gladly welcome that part of you, but because I welcome all... parts of you. Show her a piece of you reserved for only traitors and swine and she'll bulk. Show her the anger in you when one of your "instruments" is out of tune or has been broken, and she will run from you. Have you the heart to catch and capture her to keep her even against her will? Would her hatred of you that grew in time persuade you otherwise? Or would you let her go and live cherry-bopping gleeful life without you? You say you must

change yourself, dear Creator of mine. To this I ask you, does she have the heart to change for you? Is she even capable of that! Or would she just become another pile of clay? And if I wanted to have a few pups with Arilwen and then eat them afterwards, then squeeze out a few more to eat what difference does it make! I'm not the one who loves her!" And with that Maelmorda was whisked away to some far away place that smelled of leather and wood and other sexual scents. Sammael was so infuriated and silently hurting that he said nothing as he watched in strange disgust at how Lilith doted on Maelmorda as Mephisto voiced what she and Sytri would and wouldn't be doing. Would Lilith even obey him if he did tell her to ravish the Morning Star? Or would she refuse and thusly get the holy fuck beat out of her from sheer aggravation? Lilith always had been a wild thing. Not trustworthy by so many. Sammael never had voiced his own opinion of the Demoness Matriarch. And he never would. Unless she provoked him of course. Where Arilwen's head was tucked under his chin, standing behind the two lovelies while Maelmorda had them all be aware that he had other more important shit to be doing then getting screwed by said lovelies, the muscles in Sammael's arms underneath that thin dark red tunic stiffened terribly. He would have slaughtered Galaxy himself had he been sure Maelmorda wouldn't act nowhere near how he was being now. But then of course he did love her after all. He didn't blame him or her for that but damn. What the hell did they think he was going to do? Sit on his ass and twiddle his thumbs while Maelmorda gallivants around being gay with Goldie locks? His brows furrowed when Maelmorda said he needed him. It felt good to be needed and yet stung too. Though as soon as Maelmorda begun his tirade of how deeply hurt he was over all he foresaw possibly happening with Galaxy, Sammael had scrapped his current string of plans like crumbled up paper into the trash and set to writing new ones. Revising some old ones too. "How about you fuck them," Sammael said coldly as he started to turn to leave them to their perversions. "And then after you three get done creaming yourselves, go back to your damn wife. Whom I might add does in reality love you even if your feelers are telling you otherwise." Did that fit the horrible missing piece into Maelmorda's puzzle then? Did the Devil understand now? He spat obscenities and other foul things as he left the room and Maelmorda where he was splayed out on that device of pain and pleasure. "Can't fucking believe this shit," he snarled to himself even as he carried Arilwen whose body was coming along quite nicely with the healing and whole regeneration process. She should be in tip top shape in no time without a scratch on her. It did occur to Sammael that at any given moment Maelmorda could leap at him from behind or wherever and strangle the damnation out of him, cook him and eat him alive for all of this. The Morning Star could eviscerate him and wear him for a fucking hat. Maybe even a nice coat. It was Lucifer after all. However, one little tidbit remained regardless of all the anger and pain, all the sorrow and anguish being spread around like peanut butter. Sammael could have said nothing, not a goddamn thing and let Maelmorda storm off to tear the two in his castle to pieces. Sammael could have said nothing and just sat back and watched the blood fly. But he hadn't. Kind of. Somewhere way earlier in this short but painful interlude he had commanded in a none too pleased tone for Gabriel to leave the sorry lot in that castle be and leave there at once. Even amidst all his self annoyance, rage and slightly confusing sense of hurt he would not have one of his own, whom he did actually care obsessively over like so few others, he would not have Gabriel mauled all to shit because of what he had wanted to come to be. Had it been someone other then Gabriel or Mephisto, and maybe a couple other select few, Sammael wouldn't have given a rat's ass. He wouldn't have lifted a finger to help the poor bastard once they fell into Maelmorda's gaze and all the terrifying things it beheld.



Ironically enough Sammael wasn't going to spoon with Arilwen either but leave her in her room before he went to blow some shiit up. With any luck it wouldn't be Marsol's face...

--- "Yes little Johnny, Chuck Norris destroyed our periodic table because he only recognizes the element of surprise."

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Maelmorda laughed when Sammael spoke of him supposing Arilwen had the will to choose. "Of course I speak of her will because it was her conviction by her will to make the offer she did. She decided to come to you all on her own, Sammael, and endangered all my hopes for peace between you and Marsol. I do not give a phuck if you enjoyed her. Yes, I am jealous of anyone you touch that is not me, but that does not mean I expect to have you all to myself, much as I would like it. What I would like and realize are two different things, Sammael." A pained look crossed his facial features when Sammael spoke of Galaxy's inability to understand him. "I...I always thought she could accept me...This...her betrayal was so unexpected...But I invited it...suggested it...thinking she would never...not even then. I expect no one to understand me completely...but..." his face grew wounded to the brink of tears and he fell silent as Sammael spoke of showing her the ugly parts of himself. "But I have...She has seen the darkest sides of me...she always forgave me...loved and accepted me in spite of all that," he whispered. He nodded when Sammael said he welcomed all parts of him then sighed deeply. "But can you...? Can you accept the part of me that cannot be faithful to you without her, until the part of me only she could fill is somehow caged or claimed by another...if that is even possible?" he wished to know. "I sense...I sense that you want the whole of me. I would give it to you if I could, but I cannot. I would have given it to her, but I could not." He was clearly having trouble explaining himself. His gaze locked on Sammael. "She is the first I truly loved...Before her I had many wives. I...I slew them all for her." Maelmorda collapsed in his arms. "All these years she and I were together...she did adapt with me...Now it has all come undone. I made an error arranging for her to claim Sarku, and it has all come undone...because I cannot bear it that she would have him. It was a test...another cruel test, and she failed me..." His eyes flashed on him as he spoke again of Arilwen. "Do what you want with her! I would never leave you because of another lover or exploit! I would only remove myself from you to spare you the pain of seeing me phuck others...Of daring to think you are not enough for me when you are! I am not even sure when or why I would screw someone else, but I can promise you that I would for some goddamn reason to quiet the half void Galaxy's betrayal left in me! It would mean nothing though, nothing! You alone can actually satisfy me and make me content!" He was clearly frustrated now. "What can I do but kill her now...Kill them both?" he lamented miserably. "I wish you could understand...Please understand. I have no desire to leave you...But you deserve better...Tell me you could accept the hollow half of me and be content with that, and I will never speak of leaving you again."

After he was transferred to that table by Sammael, and given the choice to please himself with Lilith and Sytri, Maelmorda sat up on the mechanism fitted table and hopped off of it in one fit of anger which was aimed all over the place. Mephisto had to back-step quickly to keep the devil from mowing him over in his haste. It was the 'go back to your wife' and the implications which went with it which spun his mind in that cauldron of boiling emotions and the thoughts which whisked them

into a froth. A finger speared Sammael's back who had turned to walk away. "I...you..." he stammered in perplex then growled as his strides launched him after his male counterpart. He did leap on Sammael's back, but not to maul or sink his fangs in him, but rather to piggy-back bear hug his lean arse. His lips came to rest against his ear and he spoke in low, coarse tones. "You clever demon. So you did as I might have done in your place and sought to remove the competition, did you? How cunning of you." It was impossible to know whether Maelmorda was pissed or amused. He was both is what he was. "Do you know that it never occurred to me because I trusted you not to go there?" he added and laughed with dry abandon. "And here you come clean of it when you could have let it unfold to the final end of she and I. So are you done with me, Sammael? Done with me because I cannot grant you the whole sum of myself? Do you think I enjoy the fact that my love for her hurts you and my love for you hurts her? Could I be faithful to one of you I should choose that one. There is no one creature that exists that I can be faithful to. I can only keep my body unto you and her, which is a miracle you both seem unable to grasp the marvel of out of your selfish desires to have me all to yourselves." Maelmorda slid off of him and strode around to face him. His eyes skimmed Arilwen and then locked on Sammael. "I too am a jealous creature...Yes, I would love to have you all for myself, of course I would, but I am not so foolish as to hope that I alone could ever satisfy all that you are, Sammael. Sexually, yes, but there is so much more to satisfy in us than mere pleasures of the flesh. Could two ever satisfy you, Sammael, as two makes content my soul? Perhaps two is all you need, and you have only to find the other, or perhaps you want something you can never have, which would be a pity, but that is nothing I could solve by being who I am. Do you know that Caine's mate Abraxas went insane, is the angel of despair because he wanted what he could never have? To be all that Caine needed? Let not the angel in you cling to what can never be. You are my soul mate, Sammael, as is Galaxy. I am yours as much I can be anyone's. Am I your soul mate? Is what I offer not enough? If I am not, if it is not, break my heart and send me packing, and I shall go back to being Galaxy's unfaithful husband and grieve the loss of being yours for all eternity. I love you, Sammael, as much as I shall ever love anyone. I shall never touch another but Galaxy. Is that not enough?" With his heart stuck in his throat he awaited Sammael's reply.

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Gabrian was somewhat stunned that Sammael commanded that he retreat from his well laid plans, and when it was going so well. It was without question he removed his will from both Sarku and Galaxy nevertheless, and the mental implants he had restructured their minds with. It was cruel really, but Gabriel did not care whether he wrecked and confused their emotional states. He was neutral to both Galaxy and Sarku. Sammael was the only one he reserved his concerns for. He let them think they had erred in their own thoughts and feelings. Sarku could put two and two together and pick up those pieces, and later Maelmorda when he cared to, which of course he would when he could get around to it. The infernal angel secreted himself out of the castle just as he had infiltrated the stone walls, like a phantom of mischief. In that gate step which carried him to Sammael's palace, to the ground which his master stood on; he phased out of the ether standing some yards away from the Prince of Demons and the Devil. His head canted slightly and then turned away from the personal encounter the two were having and he leaned against a sandstone wall. He wished he had the opportunity of Maelmorda's position. He would be ever faithful to Sammael, no matter how many others he enjoyed. No, he would not like it either, but he would accept it, or so he convinced himself.

Abraxas had thought the same thing. He had believed he could bear not being enough, but in the end he could not. Would Gabriel fall into the same trap? Perhaps Sammael had denied him for so long and sought to find him a mate that would be devoted to him so Gabriel would never have to find that out. Gabriel had no interest in anyone else, however. He was content being alone, serving Sammael. It was Maelmorda Sammael wanted though, wasn't it? Gabriel thought. He smiled to himself. "You know...The two of you complicate things. Do you want each other or not? If you do, just accept that and screw the rest. We are all ancients here. Surely the rest doesn't mean shit, right? All this goddamn drama really is unnecessary. Isn't it giving you a headache? It sure as hell gives me a migraine." His two cents tossed at them, he shoved himself off the wall and headed for his room. He was exhausted and craved a few hours sleep, unless Sammael had other ideas that is.

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Though she wouldn't realize it, Arilwen's temporary check-out from consciousness would be a welcomed rest, for once she awakened, her mind was going to rot. Due to Sammael's assistance, her recovery would be hasty. Her physical recovery, anyhow. The next moments that Arilwen started to become aware of her surroundings, she felt smooth sheets beneath her bare frame and smelled burning candle wicks. All she could hear was her heart hammering in her ears and fear starting to curl in her gut. Her father had warned her not to be afraid... whatever she did, but how could something so powerful be warded? Arilwen was not equipped to handle it. She didn't understand how to shed terror. And now, to have it mingled with such overwhelming sorrow and self-loathing... it was enough of a \*\*\*\*tail to take her breath away.

She was scared to open her eyes. Soon, the sound of her shallow breathing mixed with the thudding of her racing heart and her fingers lifted from the sheets to slide upwards towards her stomach. She had the images, the smells there... she had seen and smelled her own insides. The man had been eating her alive. It was the thing that the most horrific of nightmares was built of. She expected her fingers to touch warm, soft innards but her fingertips skipped across a flat, bare stomach, causing her to release a shuddering breath of relief.

That relief would be very temporary. The next sense that returned to the angel was her common sense. She began trying to think back over what happened, only to be bombarded with the memory of the images she had seen while Maelmorda stripped bloody flesh from her body.

...Her husband. Her soul, her lifeblood, her reason. She had seen the images as vividly as if she had been there. Her husband clawing at the sand, howling, then his desperate hopelessness. Arilwen whimpered out loud as her chest locked up and she rolled slowly to her side, drawing her legs up until she was curled into a tight ball. It had always been so safe with Wyrvaust. She had never crossed any lines... stood by him and trusted him in any decision, and the very first time she had decided that she could take a situation into her own hands to sway the way things were for the better, she had destroyed him. Arilwen's chest was on fire and she felt as if she were being dragged backwards into a pit of tar... it would slowly drag her deeper until she couldn't be removed, locked in the darkness forever. What had she done? The angel had never considered herself significant by any means, in any point of her lifetime, but to see a decision rock the world around her so violently frightened her. She didn't want the power to make decisions. She didn't want her mind to try and formulate plans. She wanted to be

home, curled up in her Raven's arms, letting him shield her and shut her out of this outside world. She decided that she would rather deal with being eaten and tortured here in this nightmarish place forevermore than have to be the hands to break her husband.

This couldn't be undone. The angel felt such a crushing ocean of despair wash around her that she was certain she couldn't stand if she tried. What now? What if she DID get the opportunity to return home? How could she ever look into his eyes again? How could she let him touch her after this? How could he WANT to? The visions of destitute Maelmorda had shown her of her husband would haunt her forever. Would going home help or hurt her husband? Would staying HERE help or hurt him? Arilwen couldn't make these decisions. She felt incapable of doing it. She needed Wyrvaust here to tell her what he wanted, to show her... to bring her home if he wanted so that they could try to work through this, even if she saw no way of doing so. Or to write her off and leave her here so that she could accept the finality and move to more drastic measures to end this.

Arilwen slowly pushed herself to sit up on the massive bed below her, grasping one of the sheets to tangle it around her body, only to slide to the floor and lean against the bed, tugging her knees to her chest and burying her face in them. Whomever would come in next would most likely be unable to get a word or sound out of her.

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Belorian flung his arm over his face as the total darkness which had encompassed him in that tunnel was replaced by what seemed in comparison blinding white light. It was simply the sun in his eyes where the sanctuary gate had pitched him on his back on the very forest ground he had embarked from on the planet Zairen. His breaths calmed and his hand slid to the ground to carry his arm to his side as he sank against the leaf blanketed earth and gazed up at the crisp blue sky. For an hour he tried to reach Arilwen but he could not extend his thoughts beyond Acheron's vast perimeters. A day later, Sammael's wards still permitting, his inner voice reached out to Arilwen to speak to her from across the vast marches of space. It made his mental voice seem thin and whispery.

"Arilwen...Can ye hear me? 'Tis Belorian. I did naugh intend to leave thee...I was seized and escaped to the place I was before I answered to Sammael's invitation. I am returning. It was naugh he took me from that gathering. It was the Morning Star who took me, I am sure of that. I shall naugh abandon thee now. Oh when thou art safe I shall forsake thy company again, I assure thee, but there are things I must discover, and I shall suffer this choice, be it right or wrong, with thee." he paused after the light hearted banter he tried to engage her in. "I sense thou hast been terribly shaken. I understand. Breathe deeply and remember that thy heart and mind are thine still, that thy soul is thine still, and shall always be. Doubt is thy greatest enemy in Acheron. They shall attempt to instill doubt in thee, doubt in thyself, doubt in everything that matters. Just never forget the reason thou art there. Love and faith, Arilwen. Love is all that matters in the end, and faith is all we have when all else is lost. Do naugh despair thy mistakes. I have learned that often, when we follow our heart, it seems like a mistake, when it was never a misstep at all. My brother always said that the hardest roads oft lead to the most wonderous places. I have found that to be true, sometimes." Hence the Anduain who seemed so impetuously dauntless, contacted Sammael. "Pardon, Lord Sammael, but I

seemed to have fallen unexpectedly into a hole which I have fortuitously avoided. Being the fatalist I am, I do naugh believe it is my time to leave thy company, nor my cunning father's company just yet. If thou wilt permit, I shall return." That announcement made, he would gate back to Sammael's palace the moment entry was allowed. It was Ailwen's presence he had locked onto. He would stay with her until she was asleep, and seek out Maelmorda hence to confront him about the attempt to seize him. Belorian did not appreciate underhanded tactics at all, but had come to expect it from Maelmorda. Fact was, Maelmorda was as devious with Belorian as he was with his enemies. He counted Belorian as a sort of enemy and would continue to do so until Belorian gave him what he wanted; his devotion and his soul.

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DAYS OF THE COMET

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Even when Arilwen had first been wandering the desert, lost and certain she would wither away in the sun, she had not felt as alone as she currently did. For hours she remained tucked into a ball on the floor of her room, wrapped in a single sheet, her violet eyes dark and unseeing. Oh, but what she WAS seeing... in her mind's eye. The vivid images of her heartbroken husband reverberating through her skull to the point where she squeezed her eyes shut and dug her fingers into her dark, mussed hair to clamp over her ears...as if it would block out all of the noise. No matter the outcome of all of this, Arilwen would be instilled with a phobia of making decisions in the future, all because she had made a specific decision that had taken everything from her and possibly ruined the man of her heart. Despair led to regret and self-hatred during those quiet hours, and self-hatred even led to anger... rage. She longed to be able to lash back at the man who had taken HIS emotion out on her, stripping her body of skin and muscle. She wanted to set him on fire and watch him burn. No... she truly wanted to set herself aflame and let herself burn, for wasn't she the one who deserved it?

There was no doubt that if Belorian, her newly discovered father, could feel her unrest that Wyrvaust could feel the tremendous amount of pain and sorrow she had suffered at the hands of the man she had recently met...the man whose name she still didn't know. Her father's name suddenly filtered into her head and Arilwen lifted her darkened eyes to stare blankly across the room, uncertain at first if she really heard him. But when he questioned her awareness, she closed her eyes and pressed her brow to her knee, giving him a weak reply that yes, she did. However, there would be no further answer from her, even as she listened to his words. Doubt was her greatest enemy? Arilwen wasn't so sure, for at the moment, she was certain that it was she HERSELF that was her greatest enemy. After all, had HER decisions not brought her here? Ruined her husband? Abandoned her son? But this was Belorian, who seemed to be the wisest of everyone she had encountered...the most at rest with themselves and the world they lived in.

Arilwen felt as if her stomach and chest were being pulled apart. ...And she knew what that felt like now! Feeling sick, she stretched out on the floor, pressing her cheek against the cool tile of her bedroom floor. She wanted to clear her mind, to try to think rationally, but her entire being felt like she had been shoved into cold, dark water and was being held under. Never once during her encounter with

Maelmorda or since had she even worked up one tear. It was an alien feeling, not being able to cry. It was making her choke on her overwhelming emotion. Soon, after so many hours of being stranded on her own little sheet island on the floor, she finally dozed off into a hazy sleep that would no doubt be littered with horrid nightmares.

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Even worse than Sammael's rape of her, Maelmorda's accusations had torn Arilwen down. He had a knack for breaking people emotionally, and he chose those people very elaborately. His reasons for tearing Arilwen down were only half known, the intricacies he always kept to himself. His mind was a virtual network of machinations. Belorian, better than anyone knew how he worked, and suspected Maelmorda had a hand in Arilwen's current state. Sammael seemed more the fear tactic sort from what little Belorian had witnessed, a dominating force, but the Anduain had a talent for reading immortals, evil, good, or in between. Maelmorda got into their heads and hearts, their souls. Oh, he went sadist on them too, as he had with Arilwen and many others, but he knew physical pain only weakened the will for the emotional kill. Selena never had quite grasped how severely Maelmorda had plucked her mind and heart. Belorian realized, perhaps too late, that much of her confusion had never really been her fault. He saw the weaknesses in Arilwen, and meant to either nurture those weaknesses and ruin her, or prove her strength to overcome them. Why take such an interest? Because he loved Wyrvaust, as backwards as that made his interference. Perhaps he loved Arilwen too and wanted her soul for Sammael, or for Acheron. What was Sammael's motive? Was it the same as Maelmorda's? Somehow, Belorian doubted it, but he was well aware that was just a guess.

When Belorian arrived in Arilwen's chamber and found her asleep on the floor, he shook his head and approached her silent as you please. He knelt down and gathered her tenderly in his arms with the sheet to lift her up light as a feather and carry her to her bed. After making her comfortable he sank down on the edge of the bed and gazed at her, the back of his hand gently brushing against her cheek. He spoke, and whatever dreams she was having, the lilt of his beautifully masculine voice penetrated her mind. "I have seen what is happening to thee before, daughter that I abandoned. Has the Morning Star gotten into thy head as I suspect? That handsome devil who can be so terrible in his approach, and so like an angel when his admiration and love is granted? The price he asks to attain his genuine affection is too high. He asks either of our greatest strength or of our fractured souls. We must prove our strength to save our souls when within his grasp. We must be ever good and true to our hearts to conquer Hell. Most suffer him and others like him after they are dead. But we, those unlucky few, must face Acheron whilst we still live. He will make thee doubt thyself, Arilwen. I know; he made me doubt myself many times. He was unforgiving of my mistakes, but I have learned. I muddled through my mishaps to become the man I am today. Had I given in, I would be among them now, a slave or some knight of dark equity. Perhaps even a king, but what I would have been in Acheron does naugh matter. I once pledged to follow my heart and my own will, and have achieved that grace. Despite all my errors and all of the ordeals I have suffered, I have remained free by that grace. Free of Gods and powerful immortals that would control the destiny I placed in my own hands, and clung to will all my strength. Do naugh think I am naugh weak, or unflawed. I carry many regrets in my heart. We all do. I see thee, and I know that I love thee with

all my heart. I see myself in thee. They will only take from thee what ye allow them to take. Thy hope, thy family, thy will, thy soul, thy life. Fight them, love. Fight them by remaining true to thy heart, despite what they do. I promise thee, that if ye do this, thou shalt harbor far fewer regrets." Belorian leaned over and kissed her cheek, then laid down beside her to cradle her in his arms protectively in a chaste embrace. He would not leave her again. They would have to tear him away from his daughter if they wished to separate them. Sammael had let him back in for reasons simple enough. It placed Belorian within their potential grasp, a fact the Anduain was well aware of. Belorian did not fear them or what they could do to him. He was too strong for them to break. He would only ever be theirs if he chose to be theirs.

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Arilwen had been exhausted from the physical and emotional stress of the day that had passed, so she did not even stir as Belorian entered the room and scooped her up to deposit her in bed from her little hiding place on the floor. To say the least, it smelled even more delicious in the room now with them both there! Her hazy mind would be infiltrated with his voice soon after, her eyelids fluttering slightly as her mind slowly awoke and began to grasp at his words. The Morning Star. Yes, that was what the man was called... the man that Sammael fought and swooned over. Her father seemed so certain in his words and beliefs... unshakable by any means. How old was he? How long and to what extent had he been tortured? After his words went quiet, Arilwen's mind slowly worked at awakening until finally she took a soft breath and spoke into the silent room. "Did they ever eat you too?" To anyone else, that question would sound freaking WEIRD. "That man... the Morning Star... has he done it to you too?" Thick, dark lashes finally parted and her violet eyes turned with her head to gaze on the man that lay beside her. How badly had it messed with HIS head, if it had happened to him? How did he overcome it? Arilwen was terrified to leave her room. Hell, even to BE here. The sad part was, Sammael had been much more accommodating in this nightmare of a fire pit than anyone else. At least Belorian's encouraging had brought her to one conclusion in her mind. "I miss my husband. I will be free of this place... and I will go back to him. If he does not take me back, then I will understand, but I have to try. I want to burn this place down and never see or hear from any of these people again. I would rather be tossed from my own home by my husband to rot in the desert than remain here in comfort..." Her eyes were darkened and hollow, and she looked set in her decision... as well as exhausted. "How long? How long did you have to fight to be free of it all?"

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Belorian stirred with his daughter, lids flickering open to reveal intense glacier-blue eyes that locked on the nephalim with a slight turn of his head as she began to speak. She sounded so...on the edge of unravelling completely. Nephalim were giants as the old legends pretended. Each Nephalim was a giant in some way all their own, and she was a giant in her heart. Though she was not really classified as a Nephalim and he was not really classified as a seraph, Belorian thought of himself and his daughter in those terms. He was the archetype of angels after all, so what truly separated him from them other than a pantheon? His arms gathered her more snugly against himself, more protectively as if to protect her from the horrors inside of her. "To the bone," he said tonelessly when she asked if they had ever eaten him too. "Over and over again, because Hell really is all about

repetition," he confided. "Maelmorda is his name up here on the surface of all things, in the Middle Kingdom. He is my creator, my father as he sees it...as I have come to see it. He has done many things to me, in an attempt to show me what Hell really is, and to bring me into its embrace, his embrace. When she spoke of missing her husband and of being free of Sammael's little get-away, his gaze thinned on her. "What were the terms of thy coming here and leaving his company?" he wished to know. He was sure there were terms. There were always terms with this crew. It was how they got their flies into their webs. When she reluctantly explained the terms as she understood them, Belorian let go with a soft groan and shook his head. His hand clasped hers when she haunted him with that mortified look of shame. "Arilwen...do naugh condemn thyself. Ye were only trying to help those ye loved. We all make mistakes for damn good reasons. I understand more than ye know...How ye believed it could mean nothing...Even the child he might make with thee, a physical act ye could get over, but the reality is always different than we conceive in our minds, aye?" He smiled compassionately and jostled her tenderly. "Thy husband will forgive thee, ye must believe that. If he loves thee he shall forgive thee and understand. What ye need to understand is this...Thy terms with him place the duration in his hands. He could keep thee for years before getting a child of thee. And even if he doth naugh...Satan's child is still a child, and ye shall love that child regardless of what ye believe. That child shall always tie thee to Sammael, whether ye want it to or naugh. Ye can- naugh just leave, Arilwen. If ye break thy pledge to him, he can punish thee as no other being can. He can punish thee in ways that shall undermine every reason ye made thy pact with him. But...I have an idea...I have made no pledges to him. None." That said he scooped her out of the bed and stood with her in his arms, her body wrapped in that sheet she had lain on. "I am sorry, lass, but we can take nothing of his with us." That said, he whipped the sheet off of her and activated the Sanctuary Gate he had set to seize them both and transfer to them to his kingdom and keep in Anwynn. His entire kingdom had wards over it to block sensory and divination, and the keep was exceptionally well warded. As the Sanctuary Gate was a benign power which was woven of a weave all its own, disarming that spell was very difficult and required very specific commands. If Sammael was unable to contemplate those commands, Belorian would escape clean with his daughter.

(rolls for Sammael's intelligence vs. Belorian's intelligence.)

(18:05:10) JD: Sammael, Intelligence roll of 17 vs. Belorian, Intelligence of 20

(18:05:29) Host: JD rolls 17d6 and gets 5,1,3,2,4,3,6,5,2,6,4,2,1,4,4,6,?2.

(18:05:39) Host: JD rolls 20d6 and gets 6,6,2,4,4,5,3,6,4,3,2,1,6,5,6,1,?6,3,2,5.

(18:06:38) JD: 3 Aces, vs. 6 Aces, the 6 aces have it and Sammael is unable to figure out how to beat Sanctuary Powers.

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Arilwen's breathing quieted as her father verified that yes, he HAD been treated as she had, yet even worse. And multiple times at that. She felt her heart ache for him. She WAS so close to coming unraveled... how in the WORLD had he dealt with it for so long? And so, she learned the name of the hungry, angry devil who had munched on her goody parts. It was Belorian's questioning about the terms of her stay here that made her wince, but she sighed and forced herself to explain. He would want offspring of her or have to get bored of her. The groan he replied with caused her stomach to drop even further to her feet. He tried to point out that everyone made mistakes for good reasons, but she thought that having a child for



Sammael wouldn't be as hard as she thought. "But he told me that he would erase it from my mind... as if it never happened?" Really, she should know that her body would have told her otherwise. It had taken nearly a week for her milk supply to dry up once she was parted from her son. No, she couldn't let her mind wander to her son right now. That would incapacitate her with sorrow. Her shoulders slumped as she realized how foolish her mindset had been... thinking she could just escape. "I was hoping you might have known a way." She mumbled, her head slouching to head to his chest so that her messy hair could curtain her face. What a pickle... for lack of better terms. If she DID manage to get away, she was going to be caught eventually and dragged back here for worse than she had now. It was his lifting of her that caused her to gasp, her arms locking around her father's waist. "What?" Oh God, he looked like he was...LEAVING WITH HER? The sheet discarded, something that would normally make Arilwen go all weirdy-shy, did not even phase her. She gawked at her father like he was mad, but a tiny bit of hope sparked in her gut. Could they really just leave?

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Now if there was one creature in the world Maelmorda loved to screw with, it was Belorian. As he walked down the long corridor with Sammael, his arm linked with his darker side's soul mate, he and Sammael felt Belorian's power flare at the same time, Sammael as a tear against his wards, Maelmorda as the presence of the Sanctuary Weave. His eyes tipped upwards in brief thought and angled over on Sammael. All Maelmorda required was that burning look Sammael passed his way, and he acted while there was still a chance. He broke down the sanctuary ward on two premises; Firstly, Belorian was under no direct threat; and secondly, the daughter he chose to wrap in those powers with him had offered her presence at the Palace willingly to Sammael and his palace wards. Hence, Maelmorda began to weave a ward of his own over the palace, one which neither opposed Sammael's wards or acted in concert with them. It guarded the palace against Belorian's Sanctuary powers, a Cryptic Shield of Dismantling which targeted all unknown weaves used by anyone but Sammael (or Maelmorda) from within or without. Belorian's power failed him, and he could not attempt to use it again either, so long as the Palace walls surrounded him.

Belorian's face clouded over as the seizure gate faltered and dissolved around him. Gritting his teeth he set his strides in brisk motion which he enhanced with haste, heading for the nearest exit with Arilwen in his arms. His determination was hard to shake, no matter the opposition pit against him. If he could not succor his way out with her, he would try walking out, his daughter entwined, light as a flower in his arms. When Arilwen asked him what was going on, his intense ice-blue eyes brushed her briefly. "Just trust me. I will not fail without saying I did not do my best." Meaning, he might fail, but he would do so with color.

Maelmorda smiled as he felt the dominating stand his arcane forte had taken. "Sammael, shall we pay a visit to Belorian and his daughter?" he grinned, clearly enjoying the game of cat and mouse.

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What was this? The arm which the Devil held tightened, while fingers that had been toying with the front of the Morning Star's clothing pulled against his shirt at that sudden tearing in the aforementioned wards. Indeed Sammael was none too

pleased with the way that Belorian sought to take the Nephelim with him out of the oasis and far from him. Was it not enough that Belorian had been left alone to come and go as he pleased? Nothing had stopped him or tried to dampen his efforts in seeing Arilwen or spending time with her. Unless you counted his plunge into wherever it was he had been sent but that was beside the point. Black pools shifted to look off to the left and then back over his shoulder as if he was expecting something behind Maelmorda and himself. Then his head snapped around to give the Morning Star such a hot glare that he stopped to tug Maelmorda to himself by his arm still being linked with his Creator's. He had hoped for that particular one to do something sort of like this but he was actually surprised somewhat at the sudden spark of excitement it gave him. Of course it would be exciting. The one guy that Hell might want more than anyone was inside this very palace. That glaring would crack into a smirk at seeing Maelmorda's grin and he would chuckle a bit. "It's in the cards isn't it," he said, never minding how his arm had snaked around the Devil's waist as surely as the palace itself begun to warp; distorting itself silently and without hindrance to those who served him inside. Doors became walls and floors disappeared altogether. Some rooms vanished from ever being while new ones rose up in other places in their stead. Most notably the corridor that might have been considered the way to the front door was no longer where it ought to be. Instead there was just a room decorated in ridiculously soft chairs and a table in its middle with an empty silver plate resting on it. Try all one liked but if they were moving by foot well this palace really was a labyrinth to those who had overstepped their boundaries. "You seem to be enjoying this more than I, Morning Star," he offered with a tilt of his head and that blistering look of hunger lurking in his dark eyes. He would lead his Creator, the Conductor of the grandest Orchestra ever made, by his arm around his waist and his free hand stuffed deep into the pocket of his slacks. There was this closeness he seemed to keep Maelmorda in, or maybe it was the other way around, that just oozed hands-off to others. From where they walked down a hallway that had once been long and was now feeling rather short all of a sudden it would bring them to a set of double red-oak doors that were manned by a pair of those hooded slave folks, and they were more than glad to open those doors and hold them as they bowed before the Morning Star and their Lord. It was this set of doors that gave way to the room of chairs with the table in its center, and it was from the other side of the room that the two birds would come flying in, in the attempt to escape from his oasis. Belorian and his daughter, Arilwen, would arrive perhaps a handful of seconds before the doors on the other side of the cool hardwood floored room was pulled open and Maelmorda and son meandered on in just as merry as you pleased. Sammael was curious as to just what Maelmorda would do if ever he got his mitts on Belorian again. His curiosity he did not try to hide at all from the one or two intense stares he gave to the Morning Star as they walked though he said nothing. To tell the truth it seriously pleased him to no end that the Morning Star was currently beside him, and that Belorian was in his path instead...

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Arilwen was terribly concerned. Belorian had meant to gate them and something was wrong. It wasn't working. She had clung to that tiny bit of hope that she would be free of this place in moments, and now it wasn't happening. She would gladly spend the rest of her life underground in Wyrvaust's lair with he and her son if she could just get loose. Tightening her arms around her father's neck, she looked crestfallen when he began to weave through Sammael's domain, hell bent on finding another way out. It was then that she started noticing things were going... awry.

"The hallways do not go this way." She whispered as he hurried on. It reminded her of when she and Wyrvaust had fled the confusing, shifting halls, only to end up at Sam's nude party. Fear began to climb up her throat as she realized it. "They are changing the paths. They are coming for us." It was hard to hide panic in her voice, and the Swan hardly tried to. It was the room they ended up in, Sammael and Lucifer strolling through the massive doors on the other side, that made Arilwen nearly lose it. Her father had told her not to be afraid... but here they were, her only chance at escape gone, and the man who had eaten her sauntering across the room. Belorian would feel her start to shake and she squirmed until she dropped to her feet, free of her father's arms. Why? So she could hide behind him, of course! Lovely violet eyes filled with terror peered around his arm and she suddenly wondered if death would be a more welcoming option.

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Belorian did not need Arilwen's warning that the palace was changing. He just nodded to her. "I know," he stated gravely, then directly to her mind, ~"I have one last card to play,"~ speaking of cards. They would not enter that chamber, not just yet.

The Anduain had more than his eyes, ears, and nose to alert him to troubles, to changes around him, the unknown, and to the unseen. He was a visionary sublime and his intuition was tuned not to only to the physical world but the arcane, elemental, metaphysical, the spectral, and even time itself. He felt the ether which contained all this changing and bending around him. Knock down his stamina, his ability to call on the greater end of these powers, and his intuition remained, perhaps even more keenly, just as a blind man gained other perceptions for being unable to see. Because the palace was restructuring to Sammael's will so that every door in that corridor would lead to that one chamber, for no other distortion would bring Belorian to him, the Anduain, Maelmorda's most powerful of all single creations, was conscious of being trapped. He came out of the hasted state he placed himself in where time slowed for all else but he and the Nephelim he carried. He came to a dead stop in that corridor and gently placed Arilwen on her feet. His hand clasped hers afterwards as a look of deep reflection overcame him. He knelt down and his wings manifested to spread wide behind him and his daughter, forming a protective shield. His clothing dissolved and rematerialized in unison with the spreading of that impressive span of amber, ginger and auburn feathers. He brought Arilwen with him to the floor by the hand he would not let go of, his head bowed as if in prayer, when he was in fact concentrating his inner energies, his very embodiment as it related to the eternal flame, on the weave of chaos itself, however elusive, around him.

It was the Tunnel of Fire which he was awakening inside of him. It was a special ability he had achieved to open rifts in even the most powerful wards, dimensions, and even objects to escape imprisonment. It was a power he attained over three thousand ago as time applied to him and Maelmorda, when he faced near doom in Acheron. That same power held other attributes of surpassing the bounds of space, the material realm and magic. It was a force he took within himself which had become part of him, a force taken from the Eternal Flame powering Acheron and gathered from the fathoms of the universe itself. Only if he was kept weak was he unable to tap this power. Use of this power also damaged him however for the sheer magnitude of energies which flowed through him. It was his last and only hope for escape now. It was also very difficult to sense the presence of that power, as

difficult as sensing the marches of the universe itself, unless someone was probing the embodiment of Belorian himself. Another pitfall to the Tunnel of Fire was that it took time to rip through wards and material space.

Maelmorda cackled when Sammael said it was in the cards. "Belorian is seldom subject to anything but his own will," he deemed. His arm wrapped Sammael's waist as he said he was enjoying the cat and mouse game even more than he was. "I enjoy bitch slapping those who are rude, and he is being very rude to his generous host by trying to scavenge your guest. It isn't as though she is a prisoner to be rescued; it was her choice to be here." Maelmorda's fingers wandered over Sammael provocatively as they strode down the corridor which led to the only room left for Belorian to enter. "What would you do with the Anduain if you decided to attempt claiming him anyway? I can tell you that immortal is a royal pain in the ass...No, make that a nonpareil pain in the ass."

Speaking of probing Belorian; Maelmorda was doing just that, or rather his senses were locked onto the Anduain's metaphysical being. It was as he and Sammael entered that chamber that he felt the presence of those powers in Belorian; whereof his jade green eyes trained on Sammael and a faint smile warmed his sensual lips. That particular ability within Belorian was elusive to most, and though it was even an enigma to Maelmorda, he recognized the power of the eternal flame and chaos where it manifested. To anyone but Maelmorda and his son Mordreig, those inclusive powers would register as a great outpouring of energy they could not get a fix on. The Morning Star had no way of countering that ability directly, no one did, but he did know how to break Belorian's concentration and reduce his ability to focus that ability. Question was; did he really want to? He decided against it. He would leave it to Sammael to discover Belorian's weaknesses, or not, for himself. Maelmorda was not one to spread the vulnerabilities of his children around. Sammael would not want Lucifer exposing his weaknesses to others now, would he? Maelmorda tended to apply one rule to everyone to be fair. Enemies did not count, and Belorian was not an enemy, just a thorn and renegade against Lucifer's wishes. The Morning Star was patient and was well aware that Belorian would not embrace Acheron until he chose to. Belorian had proven that no amount of inducement could sway him against his heart. Of course, Sammael had not had his shot at the Anduain, had he? Still, the devil could not conceive of anyone being able to sway Belorian if he could not. Was that ego, or simple fact? It was a fact as Maelmorda saw it. Maelmorda had not hindered Belorian from leaving to bring him into Acheron's embrace; he had done it because Belorian was overstepping himself by trying to kidnap his daughter, nothing more. He had simply bitch slapped the celestial for being rude to Sammael. He had done his bit; it was Sammael's turn. Maelmorda did not interfere in his children's quarrels unless he had to. Maelmorda remained at Sammael's side, or in his lap if he sat down, helping himself to that delicious cognac he had so graciously provided. "Sammael, my favorite. How did you know?" he grinned and planted a hot kiss on his lips before savoring a sip of his favorite beverage next to acid (as in LSD) laced cognac. Or had Sammael spiked it?

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Sammael made a faint "is that so?" face when Maelmorda said who the Anduain suffered, if anyone at all. His dark haired head tilted again so that he could get a more closer intent look at his Creator's face while he spoke, and when he mentioned how much of a pain in the fucking ass Belorian really was it was Sammael's turn to laugh. He was still laughing as he felt those oh so nimble fingers play

over him as they walked. He took a moment to chase those fingers with his teeth if at all possible. "Yes. Awfully tempting isn't it." On the last Sammael shook his head slowly as they came upon the set of double doors and slaves opening them up so that they did not break stride in their meanderings through the palace oasis. Course it was about that time they would both feel, in their own ways, the new force outpouring from the Comet himself in his last try for freedom with his daughter. His stride slowed till he came to a halt with one arm still wound tightly around the Devil's waist and the other perhaps in his Creator's pocket. Well that was new. His gaze stayed ahead of them for a few more moments before those eyes that were probably darker than black shifted away from the Morning Star to the far wall, which in reality wasn't the direction Belorian and Arilwen were but that wasn't the point. He knew more than pretty damn well that Belorian was chalk full of shit that only Maelmorda could or would ever know of. It was one of the major things that made the pain in the Devil's ass so appealing and sought after by so many. Now in knowing that Belorian was god awful powerful and answered to nothing but his own heart, there Sammael knew was his only weakness perhaps. That fact that he only ever felt pain if it was because of something he himself had done was more than enough for the Comet's downfall. "I'm beginning to think he likes pissing me off," Sammael said, having to not act on his first impulse to tear the entire palace apart in some violent or inappropriate fashion just to find the two. Maybe the only thing that kept him from just exploding into a fit of anger and hunting Belorian and the guest he was trying to take with him was the simple and not-so-small fact that it took away from his Mael time? Or something like that? It wasn't a sure thing just how long this fragile truce over the little sister world would last so long as both the man-devil and the man-demon kept up their ends of the bargain. What was a sure thing however was that Sammael did not take kindly to being interrupted when he was doing something, and he was always doing something if not many things at once, especially when it concerned the Morning Star. Or anyone else that was entangled with him for that matter. Since he could not pinpoint just where all that energy was coming from he called through a mental link to his most prized and protected fallen angel whom had gone to get some shut eye not too long ago. Poor guy was getting woken up to a brain full of that smooth as silk voice that just oozed erotica something fierce, "Gabriaaaaaan. Oh Gaaabriann. There are a couple of birds that need caging. I would not wake you, dear Gabe, if Belorian wasn't one of them and that he's saturating this place with his moe-joe. Be mindful Gabriel that I cannot get a lock on just where he is with his daughter. But I'm sure you have ways around that, hmm." It had to be Gabe that was commanded to find Belorian and Arilwen. If not Gabe then it would have been one of the very few, and we mean you could count on one four fingered hand, that Sammael would have given such orders to. It was just that his trust in Gabriel was only matched by how extremely unavailable he made the infernal angel to everyone else they earn themselves a death wish. He would continue speaking to Gabriel through that mental link as the Devil and he found one of those large cushioned chairs that were so comfortable that they ought to be illegal. The demon of sin dropping into it with a soft thump and the Devil tugged into his lap for a heavy petting session while he sipped that perhaps "special cognac". His chin found a nitch on the Morning Star's shoulder as an arm remained around that narrow waist with one hand resting up inside the Devil's shirt on the small of his back and the other hand lying flat against that belly that had bore him three son's... so far. One leg was folded with it's ankle resting on the opposing knee made everything easier for Maelmorda to park it in his lap. His head of dark locks turned upwards as he was rearranging the palace yet again, except this time it had to do with the wards or something, when he heard his Creator mentioned his approval for the choice of drink. Before he

could reply though he would watch those lips come down to press against his own, leaving the taste of not only Maelmorda but also that cognac that quite possibly had been spiked knowing Sammael. After licking his lower lip he said, "Does it please you." It should have been a question but something in the way he said it turned it into just a regular almost observational statement. Head lifting from Maelmorda's shoulder, he tilted just his head forward to catch either his Creator's left shirt sleeve or bare skin of the wrist, it honestly did not matter to him. With either cloth or skin firmly but not painfully caught between all those whites Sammael's head would start to lean backwards as he tugged at the man-devil sitting in his lap. Black pools fixated on those jade green optics and never once did they stray in those few moments that he played a tiny kind of tug-o-war with Lucifer. Unfortunately their time would be cut short. Someone had done something either very necessary or utterly stupid to yank his mate out of his lap and to the floor where he watched with raised brows at the forced gating, and the bonding to said gating that made it inescapable. It was when Maelmorda had vanished through and went to wherever the hell it was he had been summoned that an severe glare chiseled away his previously content demeanor. Right hand extending outwards to the table where Maelmorda had left his glass of smooth liquor. Fingers that could give unimaginable pleasure or the darkest of nightmares wrapped around the glass to bring it to his mouth whereof he drank the rest of what little was left of the cognac. He rested the rim of the glass against his lips a moment as he finished doing whatever it was he had been with the palace and the way it "changed". With that done, and mind you he kept in contact with Gabe from now until Belorian had been dealt with, he arose to wander into his own gateway of darkness that would take him after wherever it was that Maelmorda had been whisked away to. The empty glass was left to spin on it's side once or twice on the small end table's top before falling to the floor to shatter into thousands of tiny bits and pieces.

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Maelmorda had been enjoying the small talk he and Sammael had been engaged in (such a leisure so rarely afforded either of them) up until his own son Mascen had used the Dark Arcanum to summon him and rip him away from Acheron's other 'the devil'. Now Gabrian meanwhile was stretched out on his ridiculously comfortable bed when Sammael's voice rapped on his senses with instructions to cage a couple of birds, one of whom he placed a name with a moment later. A faint smirk curled Gabrian's lips as he picked himself up. So Belorian was stepping on toes was he, and not just any toes, Sammael's tootsies. "Figures," he scoffed to himself as he swung himself off the bed. A brow rose. Sammael had to be distracted. Gabrian had no trouble at all locking his senses onto the one of a kind Anduain. Gabe could imagine what, or rather who the distraction was. His body phased out of sight en-stride and within that planar phase a sword manifested in his hand, his sword of course. When he came out of the displacing stride he was standing directly behind Belorian, and wasting no time whatsoever, his sword was raised high in a two handed assassin's guard, tip down in momentary suspension directly above and aligned with the nape of his neck and spine, at a slight angle. No sooner was the blade aligned, than he plowed down with force, putting his weight and strength alike into the impaling thrust. Sparks flew as if he was driving the blade through metal when it was the shield of fortitude radiating from Eoghan's wings that he pierced and shattered. Gabrian's strength fully tapped was too much for the diminished Anduain. In his prime state of prowess it would have been extremely lucky indeed for Gabrian to conquer the white avatar of chaos's winged shield. Belorian's concentration was both crushed and at the same time plunged into an almost blinding

clarity by the agony and shock which shattered his senses, the results of which was a potent reflection of all those energies and effects he harnessed which tore open a momentary rift in the wards and seized Arilwen to fling her through a spacial tear to a far off place. It was all an uncanny culmination, the location Arilwen was hurled to random, and yet stable safety measures had been factored in which guarded against such a whiplash delivering anyone seized to the middle of an ocean, the mouth of a volcano, or any other potentially fatal place. Belorian was not seized by that same force however, because he was joined to a non-selected person by the long, cruelly barbed blade and shaft of a sword, which was buried to the crossbar in his body, from the back of his neck to his lower intestines. The pain was incredible, but brief, because paralysis followed as Gabriel worked the blade like a stiff lever inside of him with hard shoves and pulls to sever his spine and mutilate his insides. Arilwen had escaped but that could not be helped. The application of such formidable powers was unpredictable when interrupted or opposed. Belorian then felt sick as waves of potent necromantic energies surged through him from Gabriel's blade. Necromancy had truly proven to be the bane of the Anduain's existence. An arcane splinter of power broke off of Gabriel's sword and imbedded inside of Belorian. It was a power he had created after an Alamascan weapon enchantment. The splinter burned inside of Belorian, leaving a sort of signature etched on his very scapula which Gabe could track at will. It also drained Eoghan of his stamina and strength, and would continue to do so at a sustained level which Gabriel controlled, which at the moment barely supported Eoghan. Gabriel had to prop a bare foot against Belorian's back to extract the blade, which he did with a tremendous yank which tore innards and splintered ribs. Yeah, Belorian was a mess and his regeneration was diminished as well. Would take him quite a while to heal in the state he was in, and once healed, he would remain as weak as a two year mortal but with less stamina.

Gabriel plunged the Anduain and himself into a dark cell beneath the palace, which he raised a necromantic wall of force around, floor, walls and ceiling. He grabbed a fistful of that strawberry blonde hair and dragged him over to a sagging cot, which he very roughly pulled him on top of by his hair. He could have left him on the floor, but he felt Belorian deserved more respect. To see Gabriel, one might have believed he enjoyed all of this, but nothing could be further from the truth. He liked Belorian, had always respected him and admired his pluck. Few had his courage. Gabriel was shedding tears as he sat himself down on a low, wicker seated foot stool really, in the corner of the sandstone cell. It wasn't that he regretted obeying, Sammael, it was that he regretted Belorian getting himself into this mess. He should never have come to Sammael's hidden oasis. "My Lord, Sammael, Belorian is secure. Arilwen escaped however, some kind of fluke tore her away," he reported. He could not really explain it any further than that. He had felt a fantastic surge of energies, and then she had shot away in a rapidly fading blur. If Sammael asked for details that is what he would tell him, and make it known that is all he could describe.

Now where exactly did Arilwen land? She alone knew. Gabriel could not trace her, the force which had seized her also protected her from detection. If Sammael wanted her back, he would have to hunt her down (or have her hunted down) the old fashioned way. Then again, he might not even care that much. In Gabriel's experience, some 'toys' did not hold Sammael's interest enough to go out of his way about them. It was just hard to guess which toys he was willing to discard.

Sammael's own reply to that report he received from Gabrian, so long as the disease allowed it, sounded increasingly tired to the Infernal Angel. "Aah. I don't think your capable of disappointing Gabe," he said from where he was within the Lake of Shadow's Inn. His annoyance was growing the more tired he became. Something serious was going on if none of them could gate anywhere. None of them?! Really. He was mostly concerned from the sudden collapsing of both Maelmorda's and how he had had to physically carry the Devil's most sexy ass to bed to lay him beside himself. Hah. How funny that would look. "You win some, you loose some," he said to Gabrian, his main man for pretty much anything he deemed a case worth the effort. "Eoghan's kid will either make her way back into our circle or she wont. I'd continue to talk but something's happened here at the Inn that I can't quite put my finger on. So fucking tired. Maybe I finally did catch something from Lilith, though I haven't touched her since oh hell I can't even remember when the last time was." Sammael then told Gabrian as to how none of them could gate, and that included the Morning Star, and how he would just chill out here awhile he supposed. As for Belorian, he would be coming home for that roast soon enough.

As for Arilwen, maybe there were things sent after her. Maybe there wasn't. It all depended on if that toy had been out grown now didn't it?

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It all happened so very quickly. One moment Arilwen was clinging to her father's neck as he carried her, the next they were being pitched forward and she felt herself caught up with a momentary feeling of losing gravity. When she emerged on the other side of the rift, Arilwen opened her violet eyes just in time to see ground rushing up at her. She forced her wings to tear from her back but she couldn't spread them in time. She slammed into the stone ground much faster than she had anticipated, her side skidding along for a few feet until she rolled to a stop. Pain laced its way up her hip and waist and she groaned, rolling onto her back. She didn't want to look... it felt bad. But when she finally DID peek down, she saw that her skin from the curve of her hip to the middle of her ribcage was torn raw and bloody from her landing. In fact, it had left a slight trail on the stone walkway below her. ...Wait. Stones? Slowly lifting her eyes, Arilwen froze. Here she was, bloody, naked and her wings lying on either side of her... and there seemed to be an entire town of people gawking at her. Fear seized her throat. Where was her father? Scrambling to her feet, she wrapped her wings around her body to hide herself, not realizing that half of the reason people were staring was because her terror and confusion was causing that sweet scent to pulsate into the crowd like a wave. She heard guards shouting to each other as they pushed through the crowd and she did what anyone would do. ...She took off. Her body hurt... every inch of it... but she didn't slow as she darted behind the closest buildings to her, weaving through the back alleyways, desperate to get away. Her mind reached frantically out to Belorian's, but she received nothing but silence. Where WAS she? She had never been to this place before, and she had not seen a city in so very long. Had he sent her here on purpose? Why?

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Now when Arilwen turned another corner, she would feel the cool grip of a powerful set of fingers close around her arm, and pull her the rest of the way around the building she was cornering into the narrow alleyway just beyond. A muscular but not overly tall figure stepped in front of her as she and those pretty wings of hers were pressed up against a bakery's grey stone wall with the press of a leather encased arm across her chest and shoulders. The smile which lit up Valis Urik's face was a smugly amused one as his violet eyes devoured her nude, bloodied figure with a singular burn which his voice reflected thereafter. "Well I will be damned, if it isn't my sweet run away Colette. What the Hell has happened to you girl?" he ticked his tongue with a shake of his head. Valis was clad in his run of the mill leather trench coat, leather pants, cotton tea-shirt, engineer boots, armed to the teeth with firearms, a dagger, and a sword alike, and sporting his favorite platinum and high grade gemstone jewelry. Yeah, he was pimpin' it bad boy style as usual. "Let me guess...Someone gated you here like that as some kind of sick joke? I mean really, baby, wings and broken flesh? You are making me hungry here and I am the least of your worries in this city. Why don't you come to my place and I will fix you up with some clothes, and you can tell me who you pissed off," he grinned. "Or you can stay naked for me, your choice, sexy angel," he winked and laughed at his own purposefully punk-stupid moxy. Was Valis ever harmless? That all depended now didn't it?

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The angel made a tiny, startled sound in her throat as firm fingers nabbed her mid-stride and swung her around a corner to press against a building's outer wall, which was surprisingly warm. That was welcome by her bare back. Violet eyes met the set in front of her and it was obvious, for some strange reason, that she didn't exactly recognize the name 'Colette' or the individual in front of her at first. "Arilwen..." She echoed softly, looking confused. "My name is Arilwen." Run away? Her past life seemed so far behind her now, but then she remembered him. The man that had saved her from a dragon and in turn had kept her with him for a short time. His words seemed too fast for the dazed angel and she shook her head as she tried to get out from under his pinned arm, but he held fast. "My father... he didn't come too. The desert; I have to find the desert... my husband... my son..." Pushing against him for yet another moment, she relaxed at the mention of clothing. "Yes... clothing. Clothing, then you will take me to the desert..." Now, Arilwen wouldn't normally make demands of ANYONE, especially not Valis, but she wasn't in her right mind and she was frantic.

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Valis could tell that not all was well with the Nephelim who had assumed the name Arilwen. Valis would not be surprised if she had gone nuts and given herself that name only...He knew it be a desert name. It meant desert bird if he remembered correctly. He had a Shaamae friend, knew the Shaamaa language fairly well. What he wondered was what a French/Spanish Nephelim was doing with a Neffari or Shaamaa name? She spoke of her father...of him not coming, of a husband and son in the desert.

"It has been awhile since I last saw you, hasn't it, girlie-bird?" His lips quirked into a cocky smile. He laughed when she said he would take her to the desert. "Maybe I will, after you tell me a little bit more and we get you off the

streets."

Valis hooked his arm with hers in a sidestep and in the next stride delivered her with him through the shadow plane and back out again into a bedchamber with stone walls and two deep window wells. One window looked out over a high peaked mountain to the north, the other another mountains to the west. The castle was in fact nestled in a small valley surrounded by tall mountains. Scenic did not begin to describe the beauty of his ancient little kingdom. Valis plopped himself down on the edge of a massively built canopy bed, bouncing before he settled, and motioned towards a large wardrobe.

"Plenty of elven made clothes for a female in there. You are welcome to it." The clothing was old but well kept, the wardrobe of his best knight's dead wife. Few people beyond Aurelius and Maelmorda even knew that Valis had knights, all of them nether or maelvanor elves.

"Now while you get dressed and breathe, do breathe and calm yourself, tell me about this father of yours, why he should have been with you, this son and husband in the desert, and why you are here instead of there. Take your time and give me details, please," he instructed calmly.

If she grew suddenly aware of her nudity and balked, Valis would scoff. "I have seen it all before, sweet heart, so please do not break all bashful on me now. I don't fuck around with married women, if I know they are married." Valis was not the whore people thought he was, or that he gave them the impression of being. He was actually very selective, rarely even slept with anyone at all anymore, had been that way since he met, married, and lost Maria Vistani, the lady he might pine for forever if he could not find her equal or better.

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Arilwen seemed in a daze, and all she could do was nod as Valis pried about what was up with her and took her arm to pull her into a gate. At least she wasn't running around the town square in the nude now. They arrived in a room she had never seen before, but she hardly took note of the layout. She watched as Valis bounced and settled on the bed, then told her to go to the wardrobe and pick out clothing. She hesitated, but as he laughed, she went to open the doors and grab the first thing her fingers met; a deep blue, snugly fitting gown that seemed to be made for her lithe body. Wriggling into it, she felt her throat burn. Wyrvaust loved her in blue. He told her it lit her eyes up like comets. She went to the nearest chair she spotted and sank down into it, looking worn down and confused. "My husband... he was in trouble with Lord Sammael. We were there... as was Lord Marsol... and he let us go, but kept Lord Marsol. I...I saw my husband breaking down. I thought myself helpful and knew that Sammael would probably accept, so I offered that if he released Lord Marsol, I would come for some time in his wake. My Raven... he lived so long before me with his love of his Lord, not I. So I thought it a smart exchange. But apparently I have wounded my husband extensively. Lord Sammael wished to have children with me... said that I wouldn't have to see them or remember a thing. But I realized... I made a mistake. I wished to go home. He wouldn't let me. My father... I met my father there..." She paused to give a proud smile. "My father is a good man. Very smart. Anyway, he was trying to leave with me, but something happened and he couldn't. Then we were running and he pitched

forward and I must have made it through his gate, but he did not. Now I fear what is happening to him and I need to get back to the desert so if you could take me now, I would appreciate it." She tried to take a breath, her heart hammering her ribcage as she looked at him to judge an answer.

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So she had tied herself up with the dangerous desert lot instead of her former dangerous vampire lot, had she? Valis could say the desert lot was far more perilous to tangle with than little ol' him. He listened to her with a sober face. "Making deals with the devil eh?" he shook his head. "When will people ever learn? You cannot just deal with Satan and declare a do over. It does not work that way. If you were smart, you would go back of your own accord and confess all your stupidity, but do not beg his mercy or forgiveness. Just admit you fucked up and let him decide what his idea of mercy is. Beg a demon or devil and they tend to repay your weakness with more pain. If you are going to play lets make a deal with Acheron's lords, you better be real clear on the terms and accept what comes of your errors." He did not think her father sounded too smart to him. "You think pissing on Satan's boots is smart? Darlin', sounds like your pops needs his head examined to me." Valis answered her plea to be delivered to the desert by standing up and walking over to her. His cheek brushed against her cheek lightly as he leaned near her from behind. "I still miss fucking you, angel cakes. I guess I can get over that now that I know you have made another bed. This 'we' shit does not float with me, honey. You ditched me a long time ago, remember? And don't think it didn't hurt, because it did. I am not taking you anywhere." Valis did however deliver her and in a rather startling fashion. She in that blue dress which flattered her so well dropped feet first into a hole which just opened up in the floor beneath her, and whoosh! As if being carried by a wild rapid air-slide, she was dumped right smack in the middle-ish part of the desert. Valis had never been to Sammael's digs, so he had no idea where the palace was. He was familiar with the Sapphire Canyon and the Ring of Fire, so figured Sammael's place was probably somewhere northeast of those locations. He had in fact dumped her ten miles south of Sammy's flat. It was the kindest he could be under the circumstances. He sure as fuck had no designs of getting mixed up with Sammael if he could help it, and letting her choose her path with advice he had given was the best he could do for her under the circumstances.

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Arilwen felt frustrated, but what could she say to Valis? It was true... she HAD taken off when Octavian had bumped him off the map for a bit. She probably should have stayed, but didn't. Nothing could be done now, but grudges could certainly remain. Her violet eyes cast to the floor as he walked behind her, hissing in her ear that she had fucked him over. His suggestion? Go to Sammael, tell him she made a mistake, and withstand whatever punishment was doled out. But her father, whom she had quickly come to admire, had worked so hard to free her, told her to follow her heart and not be afraid. Before the Swan could say a word, the floor suddenly opened up and she couldn't catch her breath in time to scream. She seemed to fall forever, but when the other end of the gate opened, the angel hit the sand and rolled, spraying up grains around her before coming to a crumpled pile. She took a moment to recover her breathing, then slowly climbed to her feet, her heart jumping when she realized she was in the desert. Which part? She had no idea, but it was a

start! She had already made her decision, and trying to ensure that her bare feet didn't rest on the hot sand too long, she started to move, mentally calling out to both her husband and Lord Marsol, "Find me..."

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Now there were many dangers in the sands and none of them were to be trifled with. If the demons or even some rather tedious beasts did not make a snack of you, then the tribes and clans that were scattered throughout the desert surely would. One way or another if you were not accustomed to life in these parts, had never lived here, were not familiar with survival in a desert verses anywhere else, you would die. Oh and let us not forget to mention that the heat alone could and most likely would fry the brain of the unsuspecting or ill-prepared traveler. Point in case, Arilwen was a much unprepared adventurer. Twice now she was in the midst of the desert, alone, perhaps at her wits end and in dire need of proper clothing and shade. Both of which were nowhere to be found. Twice she would be wandering in the sands for whatever reason, and yes twice it would be not man or monster, but a demon to come and find her. Course the first to have found the Swan had been a bird of a different and far darker nature. That was not to say that this bird, who now paused in his actions so many miles away, was no less darker then the first. It wouldn't be all that long at all before Arilwen would have company. The dragon lord was very perceptive, if not sensitive to those who entered his tribe's domain. That and it wasn't so hard to catch that disgustingly sweet scent in the air. Arilwen still hadn't learned to control that. She would have to though in the future. Else she would always give away her position to an enemy out of thoughtlessness. After getting a fairly decent lock on this wandering bird, a gateway of fire and perhaps even black smoke or shadows would crackle to life a few yards or so directly behind her.

It was Marsol's intention to get rid of anything or anyone that might be in the immediate area so that the mother and wife of Wyrvaust's child could be returned to their home safety. And then he'd go hunting previously mentioned tike down as well as the chamber main who had stolen him. Supposedly. The instant he came out of that gate he knew, he just knew she had made the mistake of leaving Sammael for whatever reason. Her gown alone was testament to her having left the Desert Wind and met up with someone else who was far kinder to her to have given her such threads. Marsol wasn't dressed so formal and pristine like she was. He was in his usual dark colored attire. Breeches and boots, vest and sheath with a sword nestled loving in it whose edge was honed sharp enough to severe the limb from the body. The tanned looking skin of his chest and abdomen was exposed from his vest not being tied shut. And why would it? It was kind of hot out here after all. His hair was a little on the messy side, perhaps he had just woken? But he didn't care about that. His hair could be sticking up on end for all he gave a shit. But even in his grogginess or irritated states, he did have some fine looking bed head.

He was into his four step towards her when he made himself known, if she hadn't sensed him already, "Arilwen, by whatever means have brought you here I thank them and curse them all in the same breath. Come, there is much that has happened since you have been away." The gateway he had walked out of behind the both of them was still swirling and crackling open, a way home, to the man who loved every piece of her and yet was no longer in this world anymore, and a child who was missing. Perhaps Arilwen should have stayed with Sammael after all...?

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Arilwen's deep violet eyes swiveled as she saw a gate crack open before her. For a split second her heart stopped, fearing it would be Sammael. Little did she know, Sam was being a little cuddle buggy right now with about half of the residents of Lake of Shadows Inn. When Marsol stepped through, the Swan's gaze lit up and she nearly shrieked with happiness. But the look on the dragon lord's face was not one of joy or relaxation. It was one of somber business and worry. Arilwen followed dutifully, her mind racing. Much had happened since she was gone? "My Lord? She said softly, on his heels. "What has happened?" She was almost too scared to ask. Through the gate they swept, only to come out on the other side into a room with a sand floor and widespread bed. Arilwen seemed distracted and didn't press the issue because of the one thing in that room she saw... her husband. He was sleeping in bed, looking worn and tired, and before she knew what was happening, her bare feet were racing over the grainy floor to his side. She wasn't breathing, wasn't thinking... she just had to be there with him... touch him. And wake him. "My love..." She whispered raspily as she reached for him, her fingertips sliding over his cheek. Now, Wyrvaust was a light sleeper because of his constant sense of alertness, so when he didn't awaken, Arilwen frowned and gently touched his shoulder, shaking him. "My Raven?" Onto the tall bed she climbed, like a little kid joining their parents, dress hiked up around her knees... and it was when her fingertips touched his lips that she realized he wasn't breathing.

The world froze. And then, the angel went... psychotic. The Swan grabbed her husband by the shoulders and began shaking him so violently that his head bounced back against the bed, all the while not realizing that she was screaming. Nothing really intelligible, but something that had to do with 'coming back'. Tears streaked the lovely bird's cheeks and she dropped her face to his neck, giving up her shaking tangent as she sobbed. She had killed him. She had killed her husband by her bad decisions. "You left without me..." She wept into his still neck. "Come back and take me with you..."

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Marsol came in a few moments after Arilwen did into that chamber, strides slowing to a stop as the scene unfolded before him at the dismay the Nephalim had to then feel at the current state of her beloved. A state that was not as known as they first thought. Unless the dragon chieftain knew more then he let on pertaining to just what was happening to the Raven. Maybe he knew. Maybe he didn't. Maybe he thought like Cirgoth and their sons that Wyrvaust was just in a deep sleep. His posture remained stiff from the sadness pulling at him and how unfortunate it was that Arilwen would see Wyrvaust like this. But it was necessary. If Arilwen had tried to run out of the room from grief Marsol would have jerked her up by her dress and dragged her back to the bed and force her to take a good long hard look at what became of having any sort of business with Sammael wrought. Not to punish her though, merely to help her understand. He took a few steps towards the bed of lovers and crossed his arms over his chest as his expression fought to either be pained or sorrow filled. "He has not left you," he said, perhaps too quickly. "Lady Arilwen there is something else you must know and it is about your son. He was not here when I and mine returned two and a half days past, and has been missing ever since. A letter had been written by the servant whom had been protecting and taking care of him, she stated it was she who took him for his own good she insisted and that it was to keep him away from the all the bloodshed that has taken

over our home and the surrounding territories. Do not blame yourself for these things that have happened, Swan, they were bound to come about one way or another.”

There he paused as he could not stand the sight of what had become of Wyrvaust, not because the Raven was not something beautiful to gaze upon or that he was angry with his clan brother, but because he was seething with himself and fairly enraged with Sammael over it. He turned to go back into another gate he had opened up after letting the last fizzle out. He stopped however before he set foot into that gate to turn his head to the side slightly. His expression then could readily be described as one of finality. “I will find him, Lady Arilwen,” he told her with this edge to his voice. “I’ll not have my family torn apart over this. I will not.”

At that he vanished; his tall tanned angry ass into the earth gate and left Arilwen alone in that chamber where servants would be coming along quickly to bring her food and drink, clothing if she desired to change and pretty much see to her every wish. Those who catered to her would do their best to calm the grieving mother who probably felt like a widow and childless mother now. They said that their beloved Lord and King would find the scurvy naïve that took little Anwaar II and he’d return the babe to her as soon as he was able to. That the best men in the land were being commissioned into this task and that she should rest for now. That everything was going to be alright. Honestly though when was anything ever alright?

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Arilwen did not try to flee the room, only for the fact that her legs probably wouldn’t support her flight. The words from Marsol, who suddenly stood at the edge of the bed, made her screams filter off, but not her hysterical sobbing. He wasn't gone? Then where WAS he? Why was he like this? How did one bring him back? A handful of questions that couldn't escape her mouth. They certainly wouldn't try any further once her son was mentioned. Arilwen's head felt thick and the room began to spin...faster and faster... the stone walls blurring together around her. Her son was gone? The servant had taken him? How? She had been so kind, so constant... how could she make that decision? She wasn't his mother, ARILWEN was! What if she didn't have enough food to give him, or a safe place to sleep. What if someone found them?

Marsol was soon gone with the assurance that he would find Anwarr II and their family could be right again. The shell-shocked mother collapsed onto the spinning bed beside her 'not dead' husband and squeezed her eyes shut, her stomach heaving and threatening to climb out of her mouth. Servants that entered were ignored, the poor things, and it looked like the girl was having a fit, the way she was thrashing about on the bed, gripping her stomach through her dress, and mumbling things to her son who wasn't even here.

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The Prisoners  
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Arcades cheek twitched as he shifted in his saddle to lift up the reins and toy with the ring on his middle finger, turning it round and round as he rode his coffee dappled and blonde-maned, stormcloud horse at a walk. "A friendly visit...a friendly visit," he spoke to himself, then his eyes darted towards a bush as

something stirred there, and a small rodent leap up and bounded away. He scoffed a breath and fixed his orange eyes on the horizon from beneath a deep, grey hood. All of his clothes were one shade of grey or another. His white hair spilled out from beneath the hood onto a pair of armored pauldrons, the shoulders beneath as beautifully sculpted by his martial practices as the rest of his body. His flesh was ivory, white even for the Albino he was, and beautifully archaic runes etched his face and the flesh hidden beneath his leather and plate armor, cut through and damaged by scars here and there. His movements, no matter how subtle, had an animalistic quality to them. He was slinky, he was inhumanly twitchy with alertness, he looked at things in a different way, he smelled things and listened to sounds with wolfish attentiveness. As he moved and behaved inhuman, he was also emotionally and mentally unique. The world was his enemy and his mother, and he was a survivor and pack protector first.

He rode alone. Arcades had no fear of death. He did not seek it either. He did not fear attack from the slayers who had killed his youngest son and third wife recently. He had not been close at hand when they had been killed; No, he had been with his damned friend Audaante. Damned, yes, all demons were, weren't they? Even if they didn't deserve it. Arcades didn't know what Audaante deserved. He did not believe in passing judgment on others but in acting according to instinct and how others related to you, and you to them. Arcades had known Dante since he was a child, and as he grew they had become friends. They agreed about some things, disagreed about others.

Arcades owed him a debt. Dante had saved his eldest son Colten, alpha of the Red Fang Pack, from the same fate his late wife and son had met a year ago. The Windstorm bastards had caught him alone and if not for Lord Eleghir and his escort showing up when they did, his son could not have survived. Audaante had lost a lot of clan members and Arcades a lot of pack members to unprovoked attacks in the past five years. Audaante had become Prince because of that loss. He resented becoming Prince in that manner and Arcades sympathized with him. Arcades had earned his position as Alpha of the Sword Dancer Pack. The pack had long been renowned for their martial sword skills thanks to Arcades and the arts he had passed on to his pack members over the centuries, male and female alike. It was their keystone combat skills that their pack had been named after.

When Gabriel had come to the demon and lycanthrope asking for their support, Dante had been willing and eager to offer his clan to the cause, and to beg Arcades to pledge himself to serve Gabriel as well. Arcades had refused to pledge himself to anyone. His pack was all the oath he needed, but he did agree to lend himself to Dante as his ally and to Gabriel by that association. Arcades had made his terms express, he and his pack would fight for them only when they chose to. The animal in Arcades was all about free will. He could offer himself and his pack to someone for a lifetime without a verbal committal.

When Gabriel suggested they seize Eremaes territory Arcades had laughed at him and told him he was crazy. Gabriel assured him that he was quite insane, but that Eredor could be theirs if they gathered enough arms in spite of his madness. No lycanthrope in the Shadowlands had a castle, not one. It was a tempting thought and one Arcades finally let take root in his ambitions. Arcades was not the oldest Lycanthrope, but he was the first of his line and he could see himself as a king. He had what it took to be a king. Now here he was, riding alone to meet with another King, to offer him his terms with the honor he believed the Namas Patriarch

might deserve. Ah well, deception was not something Arcades would pick up for his worst enemy. You did not have to be good to be honest, Arcades was proof of that. He was not evil, he was not good, he just was.

Clicking to his horse, he hastened his pace down the coast. He was on the shore now but soon cliffs would force him to higher ground. The ring he had been twisting was a gate ring, but he enjoyed the ride and so did his horse. Horses did not naturally get along with lycanthrope predator types, but Arcades had spent a lot of time gaining his stallion's trust. He did not train his horse, he gentled him, earned his trust and friendship, then taught him things. Something about the word train bothered Arcades. Maybe that is because the word train was used when you talked about making an animal submit, or because many vampires 'trained' Lycanthrope for daylight guard dogs. Maybe it was because masters trained their pets and slaves.

His mind turned with various thoughts as he rode, his cloak protecting him from the burning rays of the sun. His albinism caused him many headaches, the sun burned him, he practically glowed in the dark unless he used dark body paints and clothing on himself. Typically he rode at night when the moon was shining down. He had control of his shift, seeing the full moons no longer forced him to shift. He was ancient enough for that. He was riding during the day now because he intended on arriving during daylight hours. So called normal people tended to sleep at night and curse guests calling after sun down. He was being polite according to human custom. He had met with Ereme only once and Prince Eleghir had done all the talking. Now Lord Eleghir had a Namas nobleman's knack for being devious, albeit he would never lie to or deceive Arcades. Well, he wouldn't if he knew what was good for him. Dante was all about diplomacy, Arcades was about being blunt as a rock. They actually made a well rounded duo. Arcades was not unintelligent at all, he was just blatant. Deceit pissed him off. Honesty is where all things made sense to him.

Humans...They were so damn devious. All of them lied, they even lied to themselves. Namas had the same skill for justifying everything. In the words of the Windstorm Slayer's Namas leader 'We kill lycanthrope because they are cold blooded killers who turn people against their will. Sure there are exceptions, there always are, just like some forms of the flu will not kill you.' Arcades had not appreciate his kind being compared to the flu. He also knew that the cold blooded cannibals and those who forced others to turn were the true exception. Arcades had killed humans, plenty of them, and though not all of them had been enemies, most had been. The ones that had not been? Food when game was scarce. He had come from a land where game was not easy to come by, and when humans killed off what remained? Well they made themselves the game in Arcades eyes. Then he developed a taste for human blood and flesh, like any man eater did. Arcades could tell you that people tasted good. Like chicken? More like pork but mostly like humans. For all his sagacity Arcades had an evil streak in him; He had built it up in himself, forced himself to be cold even ruthless when he needed to be. When you were hunted like a rabid animal by people who misunderstood you, you had to get some evil in your mettle to survive.

He would reach Ereme's castle when he felt like it. If the king was not there, he would wait for him. At least Ereme was known to be a man who stood by chivalry. Arcades just hoped there was not too much he found to like about the king. That would make things difficult. Would it change his mind? Doubtful, just his tactics.



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Jenk sighed long and hard as he gazed down from his post on castle walls. The sun had set an hour ago, the night had taken hold and the moon was ascending to her perch high above. It was a beautiful night to be sure, but he was stuck on duty because the regular guardsman had been too ill to rise from his bed. Jenk didn't begrudge the man that, it's just that he'd already worked a full shift and he'd planned on a late night meeting with a baker's girl from Eiensborough he'd been seeing of late.

At the sound of something drawing near, he turned from his musings on midnight meadow adventures to see the figure of a man approaching along the wall, very close. Fellow guards assigned to patrol were normal, but this wasn't his normal post and so didn't know the man's name. As the man drew near, Jenk realized that he wasn't dressed in the correct attire for a guardsman. For a commoner to be strolling the walls of Ereme's castle was near impossible. "H-hey, what are you doing? You're not supposed to be up here, sir."

"Oh, just out and about for a stroll," the man replied with a warm silky voice, not slowing his approach, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. The guard had recently received very strict orders, things were being tightened up.

The man was very near now. In the pale moonlight Jenk saw that the man had almond shaped eyes set in a handsome face, framed by a straight cascade of long black hair. Before he knew it, the man placed a hand on his shoulder and smiled, a true brother in arms.

"A fine night, is it not?" He gestured with his free hand to the night below them, inviting Jenk to look, to see. The young guard was already making the move to shrug away from the man to perhaps draw his weapon and detain him, but the friendly hand on his shoulder turned to a vice grip at the nape of his neck. The free hand that had offered the wonders of the night but a second ago now closed around Jenk's face. A blue sheen flashed in those almond eyes as twisting agony enveloped Jenk, worse than he'd ever known. It lasted only for a glimpse before his senses and thoughts were ripped away in a torrent.

The thing stretched in Jenk's body, sensing out its limits, getting comfortable in its new skin. It straightened his hauberk and his hair and left the post to begin a patrol. Things were going to get quite interesting very soon now.

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Leading his tall stallion after him; Arcades approached the heyday of the castle gates even as they were being secured against the encroaching enemy. Was he one of those enemies? And all by his lonesome, he must be insane. Maybe he was, and maybe pain and a heart carved out by it simply made him fearless. Fact was; he trusted Ereme's honor as one who counted himself a beast of honor as well. The albino's clear-tangerine eyes were protected from the sun by his hood, and when he called at the gate and declared himself chieftain Arcades from the north come to see King Ereme, his hood was roughly jerked down and he was seized by two guards, with two more guards behind him, among them Jenks. Arcades was clueless that his ‘

friend' was pulling a subterfuge to spy on him. Now what kind of trust was that? Arcades despised deception so his comrade Dante would do well not to let Arcades discover why he had disguised himself as he did. It was one thing to infiltrate an enemy castle and quite another to deceive a friend. Trust was paramount to the first generation werewolf, one of the few still alive.

"You would do well to get your paws off of me and permit me to walk of my own accord," he snarled at the guards. "My friend, leave him not outside the gate. He must be stabled, our ride was a long one!" His mention of a friend confused the guards for a moment until he mentioned stables. He was assured that his horse would be well taken care of. "That sword was my father's!" he snarled as he was stripped of his weapons, which took some time, he had weapons all over him. "Seen enough?!" he snapped at one of them in the meantime, who was staring at the archaic albeit elaborate runes etched into his face. Some of them were cut with scars from sword wounds. The runes and scars alike were all over his body in places in fact and the Eurokai lore runes protected him against various powers, possession, charms, and domination among them, the enslaving powers of demons and vampires.

His protests only earned him rougher treatment as he was hauled through the gateway and across the courtyard towards the keep. Seemed the adrenaline of Ereme's men was heightened for war, or perhaps it was the very act of the battle preparations being made. By his very name they had marked Arcades as a prisoner of war until their king said otherwise. A smart move, Arcades had to hand it to the guards. With efficient dispatch Arcades found himself shoved into a holding chamber somewhere on the first floor. He whirled and snapped at the nearest guard viciously, the snarl which came from him inhumanly lupine, as wolfish as the canines which only dented the guard's armour and a moment afterwards he was locked in tight. The bite had been instinctive; there were no windows in that smallish chamber and only a bench against the wall; A bare prison. Arcades needed wide open spaces and fresh air. He hated being confined. "I must see the king!" he howled after them, still sounding half animal. He paced the floor with a quick feral grace; lean muscles coiled with energy and yet relaxed and limber. There was always swiftness about him, about his eyes, movements, reflexes and attention. The animal in this lycanthrope was unmistakable.

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It was considerate of Gabrian not to inform Arcades that two of his legions would be attacking Castle Ereme that very afternoon, eh? Well that was what Arcades got for not informing either Gabrian or Lord Eleghir that he had decided to pay Ereme an unannounced visit to retrieve his response to their terms. Then, Arcades always had been unpredictable. Gabrian did not trust him, was sure that only his pack could trust him.

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Audaante Eleghir made a leisurely round of patrolling in the guise of Jenks, stopping here and there to speak with a fellow guardsman or castle servant. The conversations were kept brief and friendly for the most part, a bit of inconsequential chatter that such humans engaged in, though with each peer he did broach the subject of the recent tensions. What did it mean, what had they heard? It was good to be able to see things from both sides of the fence, afterall,

information was power. As he learned more he began thinking about relationships he might be able to foster and turn against good King Ereme. Could Heldras be turned? Likely not. The two throne sitters had strong ties, it was doubtful that either would believe the other had betrayed him, no matter how sly the treachery. But perhaps there were ways. What of young Archaius? The very thought of turning father against son brought a predatory grin to his face. Likely not there as well, especially since he had no idea where the whelp was to be found just at the moment.

The temptation to cause more direct sorts of trouble was very great for the demon prince. Given a short span of time he was sure he could have a small infestation of zombies and other such lesser minions wandering about doing their bloody work, and he did so love putting useless human souls to a more entertaining use. But to what end exactly, other than to spook and bring flashes of the battle to come. There were strong reasons to stay those thoughts and courses of actions, not the least of which the wards that were woven about this place, for as he slowly made his way toward the main castle itself he began to feel an odd sort of detachment. A slight sensation, but there. He dared not manifest them, and his current guise seemed to be holding for the moment. Best not to press his luck where he would be vulnerable if discovered. During his short tenure as a guardsman he had learned the King was away at Hawker's Fort, and it seemed he took with him the most dangerous of his underlings.

He had been about to descend into the courtyard and enter the castle itself when the sound of shod shoes on cobblestone rang out. The shadows drank in his form as he stepped back into them to observe the approaching party, and when Ereme and the rest came into view he may as well have solidified into solid stone for how still he kept. From a distance he observed as they all rode in and dismounted. And what have we here? Young prince Archaius. How very interesting.

And where was Arcades? The werewolf should not have been able to come and go so quickly and without Dante realizing it. He'd left his furry companion riding toward the castle a few days past, and riding with the sun no less. Not that Arcades had known he was being followed. Odd that Arcades rode during the daylight hours, and toward Erador. Audaante wasn't sure exactly what he was up to, but he would find out. If the furry one was betraying him, he would pay dearly for it. The demon had stepped into the spirit realm then, and went to attend to the matter of his own clan and their involvement in this upcoming struggle. If he could not be involved directly in the more vicious aggressions just now, at least he could direct the manner in which they'd be carried out by his own kind.

The next day his concerns about Arcades were answered as he was "on duty" and observing the front gates. There was more to learn here. Audaante took advantage of the situation and used Arcades as a reason to trapse through the castle. The way he struggled in his arms made him smile. Unleashing this one in the right way at the right time, that would do nicely. But first he would have to find out why he was here in the first place.

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Arcades could have fought the guards, easily had the strength to break the hold of four namas. Arcades could have escaped from that cell had he really wanted to, bent the bars back, or with enough force, even broken the door off its hinges. He was stronger than a lot of demons and most vampires. Vampires and demons used

massive chains attached to large steel spikes imbedded deeply in stone on old lycanthrope prisoners or slaves for a reason. Erema knew these things, the young, gung ho guards had not. He behaved because he had not come to fight. He had come to talk. He was a creature of habit and custom, and fought political battles after terms were discussed. The noise Anah heard was the scratching of claws against dirt and stone and a quite voice that was both rich and resonant singing. Arcades had sensed her coming before she had even known he was there, but since he had almost completed his ritual, he did not allow her approach to distract him. He would not have let anyone daunt him even if he had just begun anyway. Someone would have had to physically stop him. If she peered through the bars she would see an albino man crouched, balanced on the balls of his feet, which were shod with a pair of fawn skin boots rubbed to soft leather. They laced up to just below his knees, and he wore a dress of leather armor, dark sienna in color, beautifully decorated with scrollwork which formed intertwined leaves and animal knots. Silvery-bronze colored plates of metal (trianzen) were riveted to the leather to cover his chest, thighs and arm guards, and greaves of the same metal sheathed his boots. The pauldrons his shoulders supported were crafted of bone, leather and plate to protect his throat and to shed swiftly if he needed to shift. Beneath was a grey tunic and leggings a shade darker than his cloak. The colors he wore were very earthy and at the same time complimented his albino traits. His eyes alone being orange rather than pink were extraordinary for an albino. His hair spilled over his back very long and straight but thick, the ends a pale amber-blond. Wiping the dirt and rock dust from his claws against the knee long skirt of his armour, he cut the side of his wrist with his claw and drizzled his blood on the symbol he had scratched in the dirt. Moments later, a large wolf, snow white in color, its eyes rose-red, with a tail like a tiger's, materialized from the shadows. It was his ancestral guardian and would defend him violently if necessary. He had called on his carnivorous familiar for companionship rather than for protection, albeit the fact that the spectral wolf would defend him was an added benefit. Toriku was his friend and would distract him from his confinement. The large lupine loped over to Arcades and nearly tackled him with affection, the man with the tiger-wolf eyes hugging the albino tiger-wolf with animal exuberance before petting its thick coat of soft fur generously. Arcades then shifted his eyes of rare colour towards the door. "I know you are there. I can smell, taste, and hear you. Have you come to take me to the king? I guess not, hmm? An escort of guards is required to see a wolf to their king."

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Anah didn't stop at peering, she flat out stared. She was a woman of manners, one who respected without reservation the customs of those she lived among, and she knew it wasn't polite to stare but let's be fair, this wasn't an everyday sight and to drink in the full effect, anyone would have done as she did. Her eyes were captured by his for a long moment, but eventually trailed down the length of him and over his companion. Being what she was, her mental checklists kicked in as soon as she regained her composure and his rich attire alone could have led to the conclusion that he was no lowly prisoner. The fact that the other cells, as far as she knew (or at least in Arcades' general vicinity) were empty, gave her pause. Was he dangerous or extremely important? She met his eyes again. Both. She reached down to her side and ripped a page from the small notebook there, and lifted the pen from her neck. "Who are you?" She wrote. She could apologize for the intrusion or that she was, indeed, not here to present him to the King, but first thing's first. She extended her arm in a straight line, through the bars she

stood not inches from, offering her note and gesturing with her other hand against her throat that she did not speak. Did Ereme even know this man was here? What a nightmare for his image in other lands if he'd locked a fellow leader up without even seeing him. The list of names she'd read on her first night in the castle played through her mind, she was ready to place him by his answer, not as an enemy or a friend, for politics usually allowed no such black and white designations, but as a pendulum of potential at this moment swinging one way or another. She held steady on his gaze while her arm remained outstretched. She'd already made her private guess as to his identity and her dark eyes danced with a curiosity that begged to be satisfied.

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Arcades had been discontented by the roar of space defying hyperspace gates (an imperceptibly low pitched sound which his bestial hearing made out) which revealed the fact that Gabrian had chosen to attack Eremaes before terms had been settled as agreed upon. Gabrian had assumed (correctly) that King Ereme would never cave to their terms so had resolved to attack without warning or mercy. The albino with the ornately engraved flesh opened his mouth to address the girl when his pale rose lips shut, his head titled slightly to the side, listening, and his eyes rolled upward at the telling sounds of another wave of demons gating in to join the ambush which had been prepared for, in the nick of time, if reinforcements did not come too late. With a faint twitch of his cheek his gaze settled on the female who had written out her question, then the note she had scribbled. So she was mute, was she deaf as well? He wondered, for a lack of hearing often went with a lack of speech.

“Can you hear me?” he asked. “Or are you a vocal interpreter?” He would be rather impressed at her talents if she was deaf.

He reached for the note as he asked, then with startling swiftness; he grappled her arm and pulled her against the bars, causing just enough to pain to arrest her attention, but not enough to last or do her any harm. He himself pressed up against the bars so that the only thing which stood between them was the steel rods which defined his cage. He took a moment to draw in deep whiffs of her scent, his head tipping back with each inhalation, and then leveled his disarming gaze on her eyes.

“Pretty girls should not trust strange men in cages, nor wild animals, and I am both,” his soft-spoken voice resonated, then as quickly as he had snatched her up, he let go of her, pulling the note from her hand to read it. He turned it in his hand and then flung it outside the bars, in case she wanted to reuse the paper, the other side was not written on after all. “I am chieftain Arcades of Arugaurd, Alpha of the Sword Dancer Pack, Guardian and founder of Aiberon. I came to address the terms proposed to your king. It appears new terms have been established.” He tipped his head towards the wall to signify the din of battle outside. “My terms however have still to be addressed.” His lips spread into a furtive smile, his quick eyes penetrating into her gaze. “I suppose the outcome of this battle shall determine whose prisoner I shall be.” He did not intend on being caged for that long however.

The werewolf was guarded but not deceptive. He did not hide his true nature. He was what he was and was not ashamed of it. He was the kind that might confuse Anah’

s instincts. His intentions were honest. If Ereme would not ally with him, Ereme would be his enemy. It was simple really, Arcades had chosen his side, he had believed in that choice, he wanted to tell Ereme why he had chosen the side he had, and was giving Ereme the chance to join the 'right' side, as Arcades saw it. There was no good or evil to it, it was just war. Problem was, this attack bothered Arcades. Gabriel had said he would let Ereme's final decision decide what action he would take. Gabriel had forgotten his word, had deceived Arcades, and Arcades did not appreciate being misled. In fact, it angered him and made him question Gabriel's wisdom. Arcades liked Gabriel, but now he was not sure he trusted his leadership. He needed to speak to Audaante about the matter, but the prison wards blocked telepathic communications. It was a standard prison ward that was damn hard to beat. Arcades did not have the ability to beat it. "I am depending on your king's honor, I came in peace, to talk, but here I am. I only bite if I am cornered." He retreated from the barred door and seated himself on the sawdust filled mattress in the corner on the floor. His legs folded neatly beneath him with his back against the wall. He was facing the door, still in plain sight of Anah. Toriku loped over and sat beside him and he petted the phantom, albino tiger-wolf with easy affection.

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Anah had often been mistaken as deaf, and with good reason. Sometimes she elected to play that game, to hear what people really had to say, but not this time. Oh, the thought had occurred to her but there was nobody else here so the chances of eavesdropping for motives were slim and the man didn't seem the kind to lie when he could just as well not. Thus, she nodded when he asked if she could hear. And then, as quickly as his fingers touched her skin, her face was pressed against the bars of his cell. She didn't seem as alarmed as she should have been. That suppression of natural reaction had taken years to perfect, but once you learned, you never forgot; just a deep breath to steady the surprise evidenced only by the quickened rise and fall of her chest. When his eyes fell on her after a long moment, she met them squarely and then took an immediate step back when finally released.

She watched him while he introduced himself and why he'd come. It occurred to her from the way he'd seemed annoyed with the battle raging outside and how he spoke of terms as if there had been, ultimately, two sets, those he had and those held by whomever commanded the offensive outside the castle walls, that chieftain Arcades had arrived before the attack. She struggled to understand why, then, he would be down here. This, unfortunately, was not the best time to find out. Likely all the men involved were rather busy with more timely matters. In fact, Arcades didn't so much confuse Anah as surprise her with his sincerity, blunt at times as it was. Her gaze fell on the phantom animal at his side. He could conjure up a large wild animal from thin air but could not manage to free himself of the old cage he sat in now? No, he must have elected to stay where he was, and that was most of the reason she hadn't feared for her safety when he had her against the bars. Had he wanted to hurt her in reality, she assumed she'd already be dead.

She bent to pick up the paper that he'd so casually discarded as he retreated to the back of the cell. She didn't care so much about the paper, now that she had the leather notebook fit to a chain around her waist, she could have it restrung with paper whenever it was emptied. However, she would rather not leave evidence that she'd been there, as a good educated guess would say that the area was usually

prohibited. Instead of tucking it away in her belt or crushing it in her hand, however, she again pulled the pen from her dress and held the paper to the stone of the wall adjacent to his cell bars. She may be mute but she was not stupid or soft and in her mind she was really quite loud. "Chieftain Arcades," she wrote, not failing to use a formality to some effect, "I would humbly suggest that a strange, wild man in a cage should not threaten a pretty girl when she may be the only sympathetic ear he has, and an ear close to the King with whom he wishes to speak."

She stepped to the right, and, pen still in her right hand, she held the note up for him to see, crouched down, placed the note on the ground and slid it into his cell in a great show of keeping her fingers clear of the animal this time. Instead of waiting for him to retrieve it, she stood again, ripped a new page from her book and continued writing on the nearby wall, "Moreover, a castle is made of nothing but dark corners. I recommend that even if you find yourself against one, you keep your teeth to yourself." This short addition she slipped between the bars in the same manner as the first, even if by now he stood directly in front of her. Usually she would never have been so casual with a neighboring head of state, but this one had invited her to engage with him in such a way through his own actions and she rarely declined such an intriguing invitation.

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Audaante walked the corridors beneath the castle, retracing the steps he had taken with the other guards when they had brought the werewolf down to his cell. Had he known about the existence of the passage the girl Anah had found, he would have no doubt put it to good use, but the crazed commander of the legions had a... how would one put it? An ambitious timetable. Even now, a battle of epic proportions was taking place above, it was only the first of many. More time to feel out things would have been agreeable, but wishes in one hand and the stink of feces in the other.

An aggressive Gabrian wouldn't get the best of Audaante, even if Arcades had been caught up rather unaware in this game of blitz chess. A creature of preparation, he had formed up his clan early to be ready for any contingency, and at this moment they should be reaping their rewards in Helmsguard. There was no real fear in having them repelled, routed, and killed, it is no easy task for a human to really kill a wrath demon. For them, the trick of abandoning physical form in the face of insurmountable danger and fleeing to the spectral realm was a trick learned early and learned well, or else.

Without bringing harm to his brethren, it was hard to devise a more harsh punishment for the Alpha than to be locked in a cell for any length of time. He wondered why he'd permitted it in the first place. Obviously, Arcades actually wanted to be captured, perhaps in order to speak with Ereme about something. As he walked and thought, he let the form he had been holding slough away. There wasn't much to worry about down here when the battle was raging on the walls and in the courtyards. Just him and the ghosts.

Ahead of him in the corridor drifted a faint grey form in the shape of a man. Audaante smiled and beckoned with an outstretched finger. The image sharpened, gaining definition as it drifted, stepped, closer now. The facial features came into focus, a deformed man, he looked shocked that he could be seen. Dante was an old hand at these things, the spectral realm was his playground. The ghost looked even more surprised when Dante touched him with that outstretched hand. "Don't

worry, I'll take you out of this place." And with that the look of surprise turned to one of terror as Dante's fingers dug into the spirit and he began channeling, his lips moving with incantations. A terrible ethereal wail of anguish echoed raced the halls as Dante bound the poor wandering soul into one of the rings he wore. "Yes, I will find a use for you," he whispered softly. The sound of unkind laughter soon followed, echoing through Ereme's dungeons.

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Anah had just resumed standing, inches from the bars that weakly confined the Chieftain. He could have easily reached through the bars to catch her up again, but she was sure he had just been making a point earlier, perhaps less a lesson for her and more a statement of just who he was and of what he was capable. She wanted to show him the same courtesy, and she wasn't afraid of him. If he looked at her, she stared back, searching in those orange eyes for something she hadn't quite been able to grasp with their quick exchange of words and his body language alone. The ethereal scream pierced the settled silence and even as goosebumps rose on her skin, she turned in the direction from which the echo traveled. And the laughter that followed it. A shudder passed through her and she gripped the bar next to her, fingers in a tight grip, as if the metal was soft. She turned then to Arcades, and with a glance from him to the darkness and back to the Chieftain, she realized that the creature that had issued such a terrible laugh was coming here, that they were most probably partners in this. She took a quick step back, and, forgetting the notes she'd left on the floor of the cell, she picked up her emerald colored skirt and ran for the secret door. It only took a moment, and she didn't look back. Now she understood why there had been no mechanism on this side of the wall by which to open the door. She had enough presence of mind to snatch up the lantern she'd discarded and hide in the shadows, just behind and to the side of the entrance to the passage. The creature with the blood-chilling laugh came from the opposite direction, and unless he kept walking or Arcades gave her away (and why wouldn't he?) she would be able to listen. Anah was no hero built of courage, but she also had a notion of what was important, and to leave without knowing if the two conspired against King Ereme would be tantamount to treason in her mind. Arcades had her on the brink of trusting his motives to peacefully speak to her King just a moment ago, had she been so easy to fool? Her back pressed harder against the cold stone wall that separated her from the long prison corridor as she heard the echo of footsteps approach the place she'd been standing not a minute before. She readied herself to make a dash for the lever that would close the passage door and tried to steady her heartbeat so she could hear the conversation beyond over the rush of blood behind her ears.

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Audaante strolled on up to within half a dozen paces of Arcades' cell and crossed his arms. His handsome face was a mask of distaste and disappointment as he shook his head. The movement, even though slight, caused the sheets of his black hair to waver. He was going to have to be hard, perhaps try to shame the werewolf to coax him into explaining himself and show him that whatever course of action he had had in mind was folly.

The demon's almond eyes sliced between the bars and fixated on those feral orange orbs. He paid the wolf totem no mind, it would be a simple thing to wrap its spirit around his finger. "Really, Arcades. How do you plan to win a castle from



inside a cell? Did you plan on asking Corvaan to simply hand it over and stand aside? That would be rich. Or perhaps you were looking to warn him, or even join him? Gabriel would not be pleased to learn of these things, nor would your pack. The time for diplomacy is over," Dante finished with a sneer.

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Arcades' stood then swung his head around in a duck and rise with eyes thinning on Audaante as he approached the cell he had let himself be imprisoned in. The young guards had taken his weapons, but had not the mind to take his jewelry, a detail the knights or more experienced guards would not have missed. On Morashtar a ring or bracelet could be a formidable weapon or means of defense, depending on the magic it contained. He listened center-cell, his back straight, with austere poise until his pack was mentioned by his demon friend whereof he was standing at those bars in an instant, his face pressed against the cool iron, as a low growl rattled in his throat. "Do not speak to me of my pack. I know their hearts as they know mine. They expect honor of me and that is what I came to deliver. An alliance was offered and the consequences of refusing declared." His nose wrinkled with a very wolfish snarl as Audaante so much as accused him of betrayal. "What trust, what friendship is this?!" he hissed harshly in place of shouting and giving his comrade away. "Do you accuse me, who bleeds to uphold honor, of treachery? Who here was betrayed if not I? I came to make a final appeal and to retrieve Ereme's answer as agreed upon. I was not informed an assault would be waged before terms were settled. I did not expect to be caged, but I will not fight it until I have spoken to King Ereme. I did not come to take anything, to join anyone, but to settle those terms. I do not appreciate having to defend myself to you, and I shall not to Gabriel. He is not my sworn ally and friend, you are. Dare I assume that Gabriel was unaware of my presence here? If you know why he would wish me entrapped, I would like to know what I may expect! How does he intend to use me? And beware Audaante, these walls are warded, a reliable source tells me." That source, his spy was his own. "You may find yourself surrounded by guards at any moment. I am amazed you were able to get this far undetected." Using mind speak he adds. ~"And someone, a mute girl, may be listening to us from behind that wall," ~ his hands gripped the bars of the cells and his eyes pinpointed the wall Anah had vanished behind. Audaante was his comrade, she a stranger to him. He did not protect strangers from his friends. The albino's tangerine eyes pierced Audaante's gaze. "I will not be used by Gabriel as his pawn. I shall speak to Ereme and I shall return to my pack." Audaante could always depend on Arcades honesty. He never lied, he withheld things from his enemies, but he never lied to anyone.

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Audaante stood silent a moment and considered things. No, Arcades would not betray his pack and probably not Audaante either. After all, Audaante and the remnants of his clan had much to do with the fact that he and his pack still breathed. It was the honor and respect he held for Ereme, for enemies, that Dante did not like. But harsh words and threats would not be able to break Arcades of those codes. Now he could see that the reason he did not fight is because he did not yet believe Ereme was an enemy, it had not been put into writing as it were.

"Gabriel is quite insane, we should assume nothing. With the legions at his command, you have to wonder why he approached us at all. I don't like it."

When Arcades came close to the bars, pointing with his eyes and speaking with his mind, Audaante breathed in deeply. [Yesss, I thought I smelled something.] He turned then, with blue flashing almond eyes piercing the darkness to fall upon her spirit if not her body. "Come out, come out wherever you are," his voice lilted out softly to her, even as he moved to cut off a path she might escape with, ready to snatch her should she try to run past. At that moment, every hair on his body stands on end as a foreign energy washes over him. He looks skyward suddenly and gives a snarl not unlike Arcades himself had issued. In the low light, the edges of his form blur for an instant as he attempts to shift to another realm but does not succeed. Surely this was the work of something more than a mute servant girl.

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Arcades was relieved that Audaante was beginning to see things his way. Gabrian was crazy, fanatically loyal to Sammael, but he was also extremely intelligent, which meant he was exceptionally dangerous. "His reason for choosing us may have everything to do with helping his cause, and nothing to do with helping us. He plays with these people...He plays with us! My sources tell me he is one of the horsemen, a pale rider who may have hundreds of legions to call on. Such is his power that he needs no legions at all to destroy a kingdom such as this. Why does he hold back?" He crossed his arms over his chest, his eyes following Dante anon as he called out for Anah. "Ah let them know our minds. I came here to give them my peice of it."

Gabrian was actually more sincere than they knew, but he also lusted for blood. Why did he hold back? Because the blood he truly lusted for was not here. It was in Acheron. It was they who had plotted against Lucifer and Sammael that he wanted to draw out, to drag into his campaign to expose them. He was also determined to seize An Morendor as his kingdom, for Sammael. He wanted subjects to rule, not just corpses to raise and craft as they saw fit. Yes, he could summon all his legions, but then nothing and noone would remain, but a barren land. That was what he and those who wanted Morashtar wished to escape, not to recreate. They also wanted to free Morashtar of Lucifer's chokehold so it could develop more rapidly. They wanted to cast down all of Lucifer's laws which protected the environment and let people become what they would, under Sammael's rule, and the rule of those he elected to rule under him.

Arcades pinned Dante with a keen eye when he reacted to the wards being raised, obviously detecting the sudden presence of that great surge of power. Arcades heard it, the low hum so far beneath human perception which quieted after a time. He believed it to be some modification Ereme's mages were making. He was unaware that the wards had ever been dismantled. He had entered the grounds by custom rather than subterfuge after all.

"It is alright, Dante. You came for your friend out of concern, comrade, how can they fault you that, hm? I was arrested and for what? How could you not be concerned? You have committed no crime here!" he posed with passionate conviction. Hence his voice softened. "Calm yourself," he said serenely then smiled. He had an easy way about him towards friends. He leaned against the bars again, but in a relaxed posture. Much as he hated being caged, Audaante helped to distract him from his claustrophobic dislike of prison cells. "When will you learn to trust me, Dante? I have known you since were a child, from boy, to man, to demon. When have I ever lied to you, betrayed you? Doubt breeds doubt, my

friend. Doubt in me too many times and I shall have no choice but to doubt in you. You can trust me. You are my friend; I will only ever speak the truth to you."

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It was a delicate balance with Arcades. He wore his honor on his sleeve and yet kept his own council when it came to some information. Reliable sources, indeed! Audaante had to admit that the werewolf was quite cunning and saw that he would not be a pawn to be used as he had recently proclaimed, teeth and all. It was in Audaante's nature to seek power and control over others, it was instilled into him as a demon. And he was a demon Lord now. Yes, walk softly now with the furry one. It's not that he doesn't like Arcades, or find him valuable as a friend, it's just hard to see him as an equal now. While the companionship and mutual respect involved in a pack might be second nature to the Alpha, it was somewhat foreign to Audaante and becoming more so. Even if both societies were somewhat hierarchical and based on rank and pecking order, there were key differences. The major one was trust. They had known each other long and long, but the thing that Dante had to be now could not afford to trust. Trusting and having to do it made him feel weak now, and he hates that. It was hard to say if the feeling of weakness itself, or the fact that he has to feel that way was more odious.

When the Anah ran he made as if to lunge and growled to send her on her way, but he did not pursue. He could nearly taste the sweet bouquet of her anxiety, but a part of him marvelled at how resolute she was, for it was anxiety and not outright terror. Other girls might have been rooted to the very spot due to fright, or at least have made good use of their lungs as they fled, but not this one. She was all steadfast determination and strong will. Perhaps he would find her later to sample that resolute soul of hers. He sent dagger thoughts of stalking shadows and reaching hands after her, planting troubling seeds that would take root in her mind. It would make the harvest sweeter if he later chose to go reaping. Yes, he must have been right behind her as she made her way up those stairs in darkness, and the way the hair on the back of her neck tingled and almost moved on its own, she could easily imagine a spectral hand reaching through the book case to caress an ear with a long nail. The cruel laughter she had heard earlier echoed through her mind and then faded.

Below, Audaante turned from stalk mode and approached the bars with a heaved sigh. The lazy manner with which Arcades leaned against the bars would remain a picture in his memory for some time. "I do not doubt you Arcades, you are true. It is my nature now, you see? What I have become, what I must be?"

Idly, he touched his rings, smoothing them with long nailed fingertips. He thought that, in a pinch, he might find a way to be through the ward. But leaving Arcades here alone would not go over well. For now, he would wait. After all, he had come for his friend out of concern, had he not? He had committed no crime here! Forsooth.

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JD

That pair of slit pupil mandarin eyes absorbed little bits of Dante as he spoke,

his mouth, his eyes, his cheeks, his brows and jaw, the meandering path of his gaze subtle. When his friend's oration paused his intelligent gaze settled on his companion's mint green eyes, which seemed so startling framed by flesh of golden brown and hair as black as jet. How much in common did he still share with his Inisai kindred, he wondered? Was he a zealous achiever of martial arts? A lover of the ocean and islands captured in the vast blue? Here his friend spoke of what his nature must be. Arcades understood this of course, because lycanthrope had strong pulls towards the beast sleeping and waking within, and the forces of nature. But...they were also sentient people, intelligent, emotional. By disposition demons and lycanthrope were natural enemies because lycanthrope abhorred domination and it was a demon's instinct to dominate, particularly the things they loved or established a bond to. Yet were there not always exceptions? Pioneers of revolutions which stepped outside the box of norms? Deviants paved the road to necessary change. "I rather wonder what the point of being a leader is if you cannot decide for yourself what you should be. I saw you become a leader through terrible loss, because of the fear of others. Seems to me that the best way to conquer the bastards who target us as monsters, is not to become what they accuse us of, but great leaders. Erema forgets that his ancestors took this land from me and my people. I am not mentioned in their chronicles or lore, I who survived the slaughter by claw and fang alone. Oh he has made this kingdom what it is today, he has ruled with honor and been a great king, but my sons and daughters, my pack brothers and sisters, the strongest pack An Morendor has ever seen had to die first. I want Erema to understand why I am here. I want him to know that we are feared and hated with extreme prejudice because we remind so many of the dark places in themselves. We are reflections of what they most fear in themselves. I want him to know that kingdoms rise and they fall, that what we work hardest for can be taken by others. I want him to remember that what is his can become another's. I do not want it to be Gabrian, I want it to be us, comrade Audaante. We who their people called monsters, when it was them doing all the killing."

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SweetAndante

The thoughts and feelings that chased poor Anah up the stairs were forgotten when she'd reached what she thought of as safety. What could be more comforting than a library filled with history and stories and names of the great past? What could be steadier, more grounding, than a room full of books? But the books didn't settle the tingle of her skin or the race of her heart. Something inside her, something that was quite manipulated though she didn't yet understand it, told her that she was not, in fact, safe. That she would perhaps never be safe again. The feeling was almost desperate but she pushed it down with practiced strength of will. Her eyes shot open and she pushed herself forward and up, swiftly spinning on her heels to examine the spot she'd just rested in. She was so sure that something had just touched her ear, but there was nothing there. A shiver brought goose bumps to her shoulders and arms. Get a hold of yourself, she chided; you must relay this information to somebody.

Steadying herself, she moved boldly back into the corridor outside the library. She had no reason to hide herself now, in fact she rather wished to be caught as soon as possible so she might return to the group of children and other non-combatants she'd left safely stowed. Perhaps they would be a comfort, maybe an idle game with one of the other women would soothe the laughter in her mind.

Should it still echo there? She was probably still feeling the shock of a close call only, she told herself and pressed on. She peered into every open door way, looked around every corner for someone of any rank to notify. By the time she came across the group of magi at their work, she was almost running, but from what? The shadows seemed to advance on her as she walked. She tried her best to stay to the light, but it was a big castle that threw big shadows. She could feel them curl around her bare feet and she felt the constant eye of someone on her back. She paused, gathering all the courage she had left, and fumbled for the paper at her side where before her fingers had been nimble. She plucked the pen from around her neck and wrote a note with a steady hand—for even if she could not control her fear, controlling a pen was second nature—relating that a very dangerous being whom she could not call a man and whom remained unnamed had come for Arcades in the dungeons. She had heard them speak of being allied to each other and to Gabrian, though they questioned Gabrian's motives. She wrote it all out as succinctly as possible, replaced her pen, and leaned against the wall outside the only chamber she could find from which sound leaked. She wouldn't interrupt them, she was far less important and was sure they could... she felt the shadows closing in on her again and fought back the urge to run. Instead she sat where she was, close to the threshold of the chamber behind her, arms wrapped round her knees and head down, clutching the note and praying to no deity in particular that someone would exit the room soon and find her there.

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Kale

Audaante did not bear the mark of Archeron, he was as much a part of this realm as any other inhabitant of this continent, and so he was spared the banishment by Andromedes' next iteration of arcanum. That is not to say it wasn't felt, because such power being channeled and snapped into place had nearly physical manifestation to those who were sensitive to it. And although Dante had great hearing, he didn't realize that spells were actually audible to some creatures without path knowledge, such as Arcades.

The irony of becoming a prisoner of sorts himself while lurking in the dungeons was not lost on Dante. It wasn't all bad though, because although also ironic, the truth of the matter was that this dark and dank corridor was probably one of the safest places within miles.

Lord Eleghir was a student of war and combat as much as any one of his demons, though it was not an art he perfected such as Ereme had. Yes, he did love the islands and the oceans. They were a part of his heritage and where he chose to make his home. It was one of the things that he so coveted about this castle and the cliffs it stood on. He considered Arcades' words and looked up, as if his green eyes could see the war being waged above. "I'm not sure there will be anyone left breathing when Gabrian is done. Even Ereme may perish in this storm. Our words for him would be meaningless then."

And what exactly -was- the point of being a leader? The allure of power and control could not be denied. When Audaante had first stepped up to take the reigns of power over his decimated clan, he hadn't thought he wanted it. It was to be a temporary move to keep the clan together and alive, it was a tactic for survival. But over the short period he'd been Lord, he came to realize that it suited him.

When he spoke of what he must become, it had several meanings. The humans thought the demons monsters, so why not revel in it, give them what they want? It was so easy, fueled by their hatred, the demons provoked into conflict just because of their existence. And they had the tools, tools to rend flesh and bend souls to their will, make them suffer if they liked. And it was a sweet release, that revenge. But if it made them weak in turn, consumed by it...Audaante sighed and leaned his back against the cold stone of a pillar, eyes sliding closed and listening to the calamity above as it was communicated through the stone and corridors. He had surrounded himself with the soul essence of Jenks, drawn from the ring where others resided, amused to see if that would perhaps thwart any further banishment attempts; Unholy water, sanguine addiction...those silver bullets, a last blood benediction.

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JD

Arcades shrugged his lean but broad shoulders as Dante wagered on Ereme losing the battle. "I never bet on outcomes unless I know exactly what the odds are. He attacked without warning, which means he is relying on the element of surprise. Too much time has passed. He should have stormed the fortress by now. He may have lost his edge. If his edge is double bladed he could recover, so ask yourself, did he plan this well, or leap in half cocked and overfilled with zeal and confidence? I know only this with certainty, if I am one of his whetstones, I shall not sharpen his blade. You, my friend, may depend on me, he cannot." A faint smirk tugged at his cheek to give the expression a cheeky smile back its meaning. Yes, Arcades wanted nothing more than to reclaim the land Ereme's forefathers had taken from him, but not by Gabriel's terms. Audaante was his friend, thus his alliance was one he would accept, but he would not be told who he could and could not ally with and what his destiny should be. "While we are delayed here...There is something I have been meaning to say to you, Dante. Your clan is fortunate in their autonomy from Acheron. Gabriel would see you and all of yours bound to Acheron, as he would have me. Rash as I believe he may be at times, he also has a reputation for being a cold, calculating genius who is as dangerous as he is persuasive. Do not let him draw you in, my friend. I would hate to see you lose what freedom you and your people have. I have seen too many believe that Acheron suits them until it pulls them down. It tears them apart and rebuilds them with pain and anguish. I always imagined better things for you..." His tangerine gaze drifted off towards the wall which the girl had come and go by. Hands gripped the bars and he tested the door. He could have ripped it from its iron hinges but the force which hummed throughout and around the walls could not be broken by physical force. It would be senseless to break out of the cell just to be trapped in the corridor outside of it...unless he made the decision that he might want to escape. He was beginning to wonder if he should make such provisions. Could Ereme's honor be depended on in the shadow of war? He would say no about most men, a definite no if it was Helder as he was contemplating trusting. He drew the same conclusion as when he had allowed the king's guards to seize him. He had to trust in Ereme's honor.

"We might as well get some sleep," he proposed and left Dante at the door to retreat to the hay stuffed mattress on the floor. It was burlap. He tossed himself down; arms tucked folded beneath his head, legs crossing over, and closed his eyes. If Dante wanted to speak awhile longer that was fine with him. Sleep would come when there was nothing else to do.

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Marsol did not return. It did not take long for Arilwen to realize that the workers of his household were following orders, and the sweet, dreamless escape of drugged tea became her choice and not theirs. Between her doses and slumber, she felt soul crushing agony. Her husband was gone from her... disappeared beneath her own fingertips. Marsol had not returned and she heard others speaking in the corridor in hushed, worried tones. He was not responding to them either. Anwarr was gone, stolen away from her by her deceitful nursemaid and household servant. What more was left? After a week of no response from Marsol, the household had no choice but to give Arilwen up, and thus she was escorted back to her and Wyrvaust's lair, which now lie in a thick coating of dust. The place was a tomb, the garden overgrown, the rooms silent. She wandered as silent as a ghost, looking quite the same, through the cavern, touching things and leaving her fingerprints in the dust. Anwarr's nursery, which she knew would have to be switched over to a regular room. He had probably grown in leaps and bounds since she had last seen him. Her throat began to burn so she stepped from the room and into the master bedroom where she peeled her clothing off. A quick bath, then her long dark hair was brushed clean of tangles and wound into a tight braid that was secured at the back of her head. A light garment of turquoise blue and white was pulled over her head. Sleeveless, and one that Wyrvaust had helped her fashion around her wings when they were extended to allow less destruction of her clothing.

Within the hour, she had picked some of the vegetables from the overgrown garden and eaten them, drank her fill of water, and lashed a water bladder to her waist before stepping outside. And now, the last hope she had was to find her son, whom she knew was still alive. She had to say one thing for Beth, the girl was fiercely protective over Anwarr, so she was sure he was safe. Plus, she could feel him, and she hoped that it was not just delirium speaking. Pressing her wingspan forth, Arilwen launched into the air and began her journey. She could feel his vague presence, and knew the general direction she should head, and so she did. Wyrvaust's desert training would pay off, as she knew exactly where to find water and food, and what spots to avoid. It was highly dangerous for an angel such as herself to venture forth unattended, but there was not a doubt in her mind that she was going to find her son... or die trying to get ahold of the last piece of her former life.

It was strange...the similarity between her travels now and when she had first stumbled upon the vast expanse of this desert. Initially, she had lost her owner, Valis, and with no one left to go to, had left to wander alone with no real destination. Now, a widow with a stolen child, Arilwen's better-trained feet plodded through the hot sands, her slender fingers resting on the water bladder lashed to her waist and the rope that held it. The only difference now was that she had a general destination... though it seemed after days of traveling, Anwarr's presence was not growing any stronger. He was a long way off and it was beginning to feel hopeless.

Now, the Swan had not remembered in her haze of mourning the ring that dully shone on her finger that had been gifted to her by her husband some time ago. A ring meant to gate you to anyplace if you envisioned it. However, she was about to remember the gift and quite vividly, at that. Settling beneath a scrub tree that threw off only inches of shade on the hot sand, Arilwen uncapped her water

container and took a few long pulls, then sloshed it from side to side to test the levels. She would have to locate water soon. Capping it, she stretched her legs out and sighed, leaning back against the tree to close her eyes as she thought of the past few weeks. So much had happened. Her father had delivered her to safety, though she had been dumped nude in the middle of Hawkers Forte. That had been a nightmare. Everyone staring at her, then Valis stumbling on her after she thought HE was dead, and he had not been very happy with her leaving the first time. But what was she supposed to do in that situation? He had DIED. The only--

Her thoughts were interrupted by a sudden falling sensation and she gasped, her violet eyes snapping open as she was swiftly gated, nearly crashing into a walking family as she arrived at the gates of Hawkers Forte. Catching her balance, she murmured a frazzled apology to the annoyed bunch before looking around. Oh man...AGAIN?! She was irritated...until she realized that she could feel her son much more vividly than before. She was closer! Her eyes hardened with determination and she stepped into the bustling city, deciding that she had to get a water refill and some food with the tiny bit of money she had before continuing on. It would do her no good to be exhausted when she found Beth...

Exhaustion was setting in. Now, Arilwen had fully intended to stay in Hawkers Forte for at least a night to rest, bathe, eat real food... she had not slept well (aside from drug-induced slumber) since she had left Wyrvaust's side. And obviously things had not gotten better. The Swan had gotten to the city, found the market without asking for help, and then had a refilled water bladder and dried food for the road. But she couldn't stop to sleep. She could not unwind or rest knowing that the deceiver had her son... and she was getting closer. And so, as darkness fell, the angel took the foolish step of setting out on the road in the general direction that her gut was leading her. There was a main road that she would attempt to stick to, and a few hours into her journey, she hit a wall of weariness that stopped her in her tracks. Bare feet stopping in the middle of the roadway, Arilwen's slender fingers rose to pinch at the bridge of her nose. It was as if she were drugged again and felt like a walking zombie. And yet again, no precautions taken, the lucky angel stumbled off the side of the road and into the trees. At least she had the sense not to go too far, but enough to be out of sight. Dropping underneath a wide, twisted tree, she leaned back; slumping against the bark and in moments would be asleep, her mind entertaining nightmares of finding her son...only to meet a blank stare of his as he could not remember her.

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The scout smelled something and followed his nose. This was a creature few ever laid eyes on, a race which was seldom seen outside of their very isolated home land. Some called his people Sand Devils, when in fact they were not devils at all, but an ancient race of goblins. Like all of his kind his tough, leathery flesh was bright red, with a yellow belly and yellow and green stripes and spots on his legs, arms, tail, and face. His large eyes were reptilian, yellow-green, and blotched with darker green, yellow, and blue. His ears were large and tapered, crowning his head were bovine horns of green. A wide mouth was full of very sharp, large white teeth. His feet and hands were clawed. He was colorful this one, a beacon during the day, but at night, he was very hard to see. He and his kind were primarily nocturnal, and those large eyes could see perfectly in the dark. He wore no clothing but a frontal loin cloth, and his weapon's harness, which was loaded. His flesh was all the armour he needed. His long reptilian tail was powerful with



a fleshy arrow on the end. It was easy to see why they were called devils, when in fact only red demons bore any resemblance at all to the iconic red devils with the pitch forks. The Ardoreth Goblin could pass very well for the trademark devil. What did set this rarely ever seen Goblin apart from his people, was that he was a horned clan demon, sired out of Sashima of the Battle Claw Clan. He was second generation. He had a name, and it was Kaamus.

He crept up on Arilwen with nary a sound and stood over her to just inhale her scent for awhile, while his eyes absorbed her. His clawed foot then stretched out and gave her a gentle nudge. If she did not wake by that, he would shake her more rigorously until her attention was seized. He did not come by her location accidentally, although he was assigned to scout the area. Gabriel had sent him to her with news. He addressed her in Cenys, and if she did not understand, he would remove a hoop from his ear and toss it to her. It fit over the ear. It was enchanted to translate languages. It aided also in learning other tongues. Kaamus did not speak any earth languages.

"My Lord Gabriel sent me," he announced. His voice was sandy and thick. "You may call me Riel." he had been taught never to give his true name away. Gabriel was already known to the overworlders, had been for a long time. "Wyrvaust should put a leash on you, out here, alone, with enemies all around you?" he laughed coarsely as he wondered which side she would call enemy. Gabriel for sure. He was not here to kill her though. If that were the case he'd have slit her throat as she slept. "Are you a crazy woman or something?" he cackled deciding that she was crazy, whatever she answered, and he leaned against a tree, one arm folding back over his head, his hand resting on the back of his bald head. "Gabriel felt you should be warned. Wyrvaust is on his way back. He shall come for you and you may not like what he has become. He was man and he was demon when you made him your husband. Now Acheron has made him an animal with the demon and very little of him is neffari anymore. He walks upright, but the flesh which was pulled from his muscle is now fur and leather where exposed. His face is that of a black lion and his raven locks a black mane. The eyes which were burned from his sockets are now yellow-green, like the black lion's," he grinned and the feral quality of his nature shone through.

"Oh the beautiful torture he suffered which stripped all away from him which he tried to deny...to run away from. His skin was taken, his eyes, every bone broken, and his spirit was at last set free. The tongues of the lion vampires which lapped up his blood in aftermath, lapped the flesh off of his body after it had almost regenerated, and forced they their blood into him thence, and over and over again they licked him clean of blood and flesh and quenched him with their own blood, until the demon became a beast, a vampire, and a demon. Never a more beautiful monster have I seen. So pure in his nature as a blood thirsting beast, so magnificent of form, so fleet, his body in motion pure art. A born killer reborn, he is beautiful."

Kaamus then lunged forward, and was suddenly right in her face. His breath smelled pleasant though, of sweet herbs he chewed, and his teeth were very clean as was his body. His people were a clean race. Not all goblins were filthy as some believed, and those that were had become that way from being fugitives for one generation after another. He smelled of the outdoors and plant oils from lather producing barks.

"I see the way you look on me. Shall you shun him now, in all his beastly glory? Or love him even as the animal, the beast he has become?" he dared her to answer wrong.

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Willow

Since Arilwen was in the midst of a strange dream when she was nudged, there was no panic in her violet eyes as they blearily fixated on the odd creature in front of her. After all, that was only a creature that could BE in a dream, right? He was a plethora of colors, and as her gaze began to focus, her other senses did as well. She could smell damp earth, feel the breeze on her cheekbones... and she realized she was in fact awake. Which meant this crazy looking creature was real! Sitting straight up, the angel rubbed her face to bring herself about and eyed the lizard thing in confusion as he spoke an odd language, followed by a ring being tossed from his ear to her lap. Picking it up, she slid the ring over her own ear and finally understood what he said. And it was bittersweet information. The mention of Gabriel made her features turn cloudy, and the mention of Wyrvaust made her heart twist and break. Throat tightening, she shook her head as he mentioned her being a crazy woman, and asking if it were true. "You might say that. I am sorry, but you are mistaken. My husband is dead from this world..." Brought on by her own actions, she mentally berated herself for the trillionth time. But this Riel continued, assuring her that her husband was risen, and in quite a different form than before. The Swan was unconsciously rising to settle on her haunches, staring at him as he had a glitter in his eye for the torture he was explaining. Inside, Arilwen's logic and heart were being pulled apart. She dare not believe it, that he was alive, but if it were true, she wanted to lunge on the animal before her for taking pleasure in what he had endured. "He... he is alive?" She was trying desperately not to be excited, but her heart was hammering in her rib cage, causing that sweet smell to flood the trees around them.

Riel suddenly was in her face, eyeing her, demanding to know if the wife would shun her transformed husband, or love him as before. Arilwen immediately leaned away from him against the tree behind her, remembering the first time she had seen Wyrvaust in his demon form. It had terrified her. Why? Because it WAS a terrifying form! But most of all, she had feared that it was no longer her husband INSIDE of that form. Eyes growing stormy, Arilwen jerked her own face into Riel's, her lashes narrowing. "My husband did not always remain in his Neffari form. And the alternative frightened me, until I realized he was still inside. As long as he is still inside, my heart and hand remain his. When will he come? Can you bring him to me? And how do you take such pleasure in the pain caused to my husband? Were you part of it?" Oh, was the sassy angel looking like she wanted to choke Riel if he said yes? Of course she was!

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JD

Kamas laughed rather boisterously, his face still leveled with hers, thus the sharpness, whiteness, and deadly length of his teeth were very close. The botanical scent of his breath washed warm over her face. "I am nothing but a spy and scout and content to be a nothing! I witnessed his torments, aye, he fell into

my quarter. I live among the monsters in the empty places of the sixth circle. Agony is beautiful to me because life is agony, my life and yours, his. I watched him become something else quite different and magnificent through pain. We are all born in pain, we die in pain, and some of us are reborn in pain. He will come for you. Oh he shall come. How can you doubt that? Don't you know him? How fierce his love is, well it is more fierce, not less now. I should like to see what his love for you will make of him. He is still being born you see. His birth shall not be complete for some time." He grinned and swung back to lean against that tree again. "Where are you going anyway? A battlefield lies north. Want an escort, a fighter at your side?" he offered. Last Edit: March 28, 2009, 02:33:12 AM by JD

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Willow

Arilwen studied Reil as he began to explain that Wyrvaust had been assigned to his area during his transformation, and her violet eyes shifted away as she sat back on the grass again, reaching down to meticulously pluck a few of the blades out of the earth. He would come... and how could she doubt his love? "I believe I have done more terrible things to him recently than what has happened to him in your domain. I cannot help but wonder if his love for me has broken because of my actions... and if he comes for me out of love or vengeance." Shivering at the thought, Arilwen closed her eyes and let her head fall back against the bark of the tree. Her mind was swimming and the confusion about her husband on top of her blind search for her son was maddening.

Lashes peeked open as she glanced at Reil, trying to size him up as he asked why she was moving north... and that there was a battlefield there. That made her heart sink. Was her son in danger? If there was war, of course there was. Hesitating, she finally decided to provide him with a modicum of trust and sighed, stretching her bare feet out before her. "My son was taken by our previous employee whose bond was recently broken from us. I have to find him." Was she fearful of stepping into a war stricken area? No, but she was certain her son was terrified of being there. What if the woman left and took Anwarr with her? Gritting her teeth, she lifted two fingertips to rub the bridge of her nose. His offer caught her off guard, and her eyes rose to study him. "Why would you do that?" Of COURSE she was hesitant... he had just showed up out of nowhere and had explained that he came from a place of monsters! "If your intentions are good... I suppose that might be a good idea."

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JD

As Arilwen eyeballed him, Riel stared right back her with those huge green eyes of his. He watched her as she shivered and lie back against the tree roots. He scowled slightly when she spoke of wondering if he would come to her out of love and vengeance but said nothing yet. He waited. He listened to her reason for going North then when she asked why he would offer his guard to her he shrugged and said, "Why not?" He cackled when she asserted that it would be a good idea to accept if his intentions were good.

"As foolish as a mortal this angel is," he berated her in that husky voice of his.

"I am amazed that you know your husband so little, when I, who know him even less know him better than you." He scoffed at that and peered around them alertly before settling his large nocturnal eyes on her again. His people were omnivorous but chiefly carnivores, which his teeth were telling of, and as such, they hunted at night as most predators did. "Your guilt compels you to make up ridiculous stories in your mind. Vengeance, bah! You clearly do think he is a monster, don't you? What but a monster hunts down a mate? That is what you fear, yes? That he shall come for you out of spite and rend you limb from limb? What a foolish, naive, girl! And my intentions have nothing to do with anything. What I say means nothing because you cannot know if I am telling the truth or not. We are strangers to each other. Whether you accept my offer or not is a matter of blind trust and instincts. I travel at night and sleep during day light, so if you want to come with me, I shall lead you north now. You can sleep when dawn comes. It is safer for us both this way." The offer was made. He would wait a moment then make his way to the lombra he had left some yards back westward, closer to the shore, by a large rock jutting from an embankment which sloped down to a beach which ran along the shore for miles before being cut off by cliffs.

If she followed, he would mount up and offer her a hand up to his lombra's haunches. She might notice now, in the moonlight, that his fingerclaws were lemon-yellow, while his toeclaws were green. The animal he rode was fantastic to earthers, a fusion of cow, horse, goat, and lion, but to Morashtarans it was simply another animal. Its horns were bovine like those protruding from the brows of the red goblin, but variants of grey in color while the lombra itself was black with bright blue eyes. Its mane and coat alike were shaggy, the mane longer but hanging on the ridge of the neck and withers like a donkey's, and while its front feet were cloven hooved with a skirt of fetlock hair, its rear feet were clawed paws like a lion's. Its tail was long and tufted, the very shape of a lion's, but its body was shaped like a horse's. With large flop ears and a beard like a goat, its head was both goat and equine in shape. Riel's mount was very friendly to everyone but those Kamas treated as an enemy. Kamas had raised the lombra himself and made a demon of it some years after he himself had been sired. It had simply made the animal ageless, tougher, and granted it regeneration with a few elemental abilities. The lombra really was a beautiful animal. Many goblins abused lombras, but not Kamas, and not his people. They were as much a lombra culture as native americans had become a horse culture.

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Willow

It was useless to get defensive, Arilwen decided as Riel began to berate her and call her foolish. He had not been present for her decisions, or what they had done to her husband. "Every individual, mortal or not, has a breaking point. I served his to him, is that not obvious? It is not self-pity, simply understanding that the chance of him feeling the same for me after the pain I have caused him is minimal. I cannot fancy the life we had before, and I never even considered that possibility." She explained quietly, her violet eyes cast out into the trees, no longer focusing on her new acquaintance. She felt tired and no longer wanted to discuss the matter. She was in a complete twist over her fretting for Wyrvaust, and though she was terrified about what may occur, there was no stopping it now. If he was coming, he was coming. That was that. She had a task at hand and had to concentrate on it. Uncapping her water bladder, she took a few swallows, then

capped it and rose to her feet, nodding when the creature pointed out that they would travel by dark and sleep by day. That was fine with her, as long as they were moving.

When they went to the animal he had apparently ridden here, Arilwen studied it in curiosity. It was a mixture of creatures, but which ones? She would ask Riel about it on the ride, but only once they were settled and on their way. When you are lost and have a map, people are inclined to help. But I find that it's a different story when you have a globe.

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JD

The red Goblin understood breaking points, he did. He had met his long ago when he had been captured, taken far from his home, and sold into slavery. It was a journey that had not ended until he met his maker; the demon that is which sired him. "Things change, that cannot be helped, particularly for immortals, though sometimes things change at the drop of a coin, immortal or not. But do not assume what the Raven, or anyone else for that matter, can and cannot withstand. The soul alone can know such a thing as that."

Later, when they had traveled in the neighborhood of ten leagues or so, and she asked about his mount, he answered her inquiries simply. "He is a mountain lombra. You could say he is a mixture of things, or just say he is a lombra," was his answer to what blend of animals he was.

The ride to Castle Ereme from where they met was six hours at a steady pace, but an hour short of that destination and dawn, Kamas slowed their pace to a walk, the lombra much more quiet than a horse. His eyes found the soil where the tracks of an army manifested suddenly all around them, infantry and calvary alike. Clearly they had arrived through scattered gateways, a feat of Argal and his retinue no doubt. He also recognized the tracks of many Mormulath and Mumaak, Morashtar's great mammoths. These were the legions of Heldras and miles ahead of them they could see the campfires of the King's army to the south, and Gabrian's army to the east, splashing the dark landscape like so many stars. His cheek twitched slightly and he pulled lightly on his mount's reins to bring it to a standstill. His eyes scoped the area then with a soft 'get up' he urged the lombra towards the forest east of them at a gentle pace, leaving the open shore behind them. His lombra carried them to a lovely clearing with a bold creek which cooled the area before running to the sea. When they were well under the cover of the trees, he slipped off the black lombra's back and offered an open palm to Arilwen, his canary yellow claws spreading with his red fingers relaxed.

"We cannot get between two armies. The castle will not be reached by us unless we cheat distance, but the danger is great even should you get inside safely. I can get you there...But if the castle is taken, you will become a prisoner of war. I advise you wait here for Wyrvaust. He will come soon." He was confident for a reason. He had heard Wyrvaust swear in a rage of determination that he would make things right and see to it that death alone would separate him from those he loved again. Riel busied himself collecting firewood. The thickness of the forest would shroud the fire at night, and he would put it out at daybreak so that the smoke would not give their location away. The camp was a good one to wait a battle out,

close enough to the castle to return to shore and keep an eye on things, far enough away that the armies would pay that area little mind.

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Willow

Arilwen's violet eyes turned away from the back of Reil's head when he tried to point out that only the soul could know someone's breaking point. But he had not seen him... he did not know Wyvaust before. The visions Sammael had shown her would haunt her forever. Her husband had been shattered at her own hands. Aside from Marsol, she was supposed to love him the most... and she DID. She was just obviously terrible at making decisions. She made no further effort to convince him or dissuade him from his understanding. Her moments of judgement would lie when and if her husband returned.

Arilwen did make a small attempt at small talk, asking about Reil's animal, what he was, how far they had travelled... but she was not one to fill the silence with anything BUT silence, so the majority of the ride she listened to the movement of the lombra, feeling his ribcage move beneath her legs as he breathed.

Night had fallen around them when Reil stopped, helping Arilwen down as he scanned the landscape. Two armies, and he suggested they stay there. Once Wyrvaust was here, the two could convene and decide. The mention of being a prisoner of war made Arilwen look away. If she was captured, she could not search for her son, and right now her body was broken out in sweat, her stomach cramping because she could feel him just beyond her reach. Dirty bare feet made their way to the creek that ran through the clearing. She needed a drink. She felt dizzy and helpless. A plan was needed, so she sat down on the bank, shoved her feet into the cold water, and took her water bladder off to lay it beside her. As she unplaited the long braid that fell down her back, Arilwen pondered. She could fly there... then she wouldn't technically be between armies... just over them. She could investigate... just see if the castle was taken. If it was, she could come back. If not, she could barge in and go hunting for her son. It sounded easy in her mind, but it carried so many risks. Wait, did the goblin even sleep?

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JD

Kaamus did sleep, during light of day, and he was a light sleeper. Soon it would morning and he would withdraw to his tent to rest. He would offer Arilwen his spare bed roll and a place in his tent. He doubted she would trust him far enough to take the shelter as cozy as their proximity would be. After collecting firewood and starting a fire to cook his morning supper on, he set up his deer-skin tent. It was not much heavier than canvas and blocked out the sunlight better. Once his tent was raised, it took him about eight minutes, he sat down by the fire to cook supper, what most would have said was breakfast inasmuch as the sun was now tinting the skyline with dawn's colors. He unrolled a leather parcel which contained bread, cheese, venison sausage and eggs, and began preparing enough food for the both of them. He was not a bad campfire cook, nor was he great. The food was cooked and tasted as it should. He spiced it with sea salt and herbs he collected while journeying, a peppery spice among them. He paid little attention to Arilwen

as he attended to these tasks, but to glance her way now and again. He was not much of a talker unless he had the company of his own people, demon or goblin. Kaamus was hard to figure. Was he good or bad? He never thought about it himself and considered himself what he was, nothing more or less. Why was he helping Arilwen? Gabriel had asked him to keep an eye on her since he was traveling the same direction as she. He wanted to know if she might be of any value to their cause. Kaamus was Gabriel's property, because two years after being sired by Sashima, the progenitor of the Battle Claw clan, she had lost Kaamus in a bet to Gabriel as a slave. Kaamus had led a strange, unpredictable life since. Gabriel had never bonded him either. He had not needed to. He held Kaamus to himself by physical force and the hard persuasion of his unyielding logic. Kaamus would not call Gabriel evil either. He would call him a creature of pain, zealous loyalty, and cold logic. Kaamus did not break things down into shades of black and white and grey. He believed it was harder to judge people than that.

When Arilwen decided to join him at the fire, his large, yellow-green eyes tracked her to the dead tree he had drug out for them to sit on. He regarded her silently for a moment then offered her a plate of food. "You will do your son no good if you have no strength." Women tended to either neglect their appetites or overindulge them when emotions warred in them in his experience, and since she was lean rather than plump (he liked his women almost but not quite obese) he determined she fasted when upset. When the plate was taken he picked up his own plate (they were a light but strong metal) and began to eat. Silence kept them again with the sonnet of the birds bringing in the morning. When his plate he was clean, he tossed it on the ground and pinned her with his eyes again. He plucked a stick up from the ground and began drawing in the dirt as he spoke. "We shall sleep during light of day so that you will be well rested by tonight. Here is where we are, and here is the forest. Now the sea is here and the shore here." he pointed these things out as he drew in the dirt. "The castle is just above the beach here atop a cragg of rocks. The gate is here on the southward side, but so may Ereme's allied army be with their legions positioned south of the castle on the beach and shore. The other army is to the southeast in this area. The gate may be impassable if the two armies meet against the castle, which is a defensive foray often used when legions are outnumbered. They use a tight phalanx to hold their lines while archers on the walls can take out enemies beyond the lines. If they do this, you shall have to wait out the battle before you can approach the gate. With or without Wyrvaust makes no difference." The Goblin then broke out a jug of strong ale, Escion made, and after taking a long draught he offered the amber ale to Arilwen. It was quite good.

"Do you know that not all people who go to Hell are evil? Many become evil in hell though. Do you know why? Anger, resentment, shame, and despair. That is the recipe for evil. Spirits trapped between worlds with no form to enter into life again grow so angry and bitter that they become wraiths and poltergeists which haunt the living they so envy. Hell is like that...It separates you from everything but anger, pain and all that is heavy and weighs you down. It consumes the soul with the injustices of life and judgment. I did nothing to deserve Hell. I was sold into it. I was never marked and still I cannot escape it. I had a mate, children, a mother and father, brothers and one sister, aunts and uncles, and I was taken far across the sea from my home by slave traders who captured me when I went to sea, just offshore to fish. I was a prince...Prince of Mehr, but to those who attacked our boat, I and my brothers were no more than strong backs. We were sold at a market in Hassim and chained like animals, sent to work in a quarry in

the desert of fire, where they worked my brothers until death, and I until I was skin and bones. Feeding slaves cost more than our purchase, you see. I was sold again, but who wanted a broken down goblin? A lady bought me, a demon, and she sired me a year after, and two years after that? She lost me in a poker game to Gabrian. That was..." he shook his head. "I do not even recall how long ago that was. I have lived in hell since, and I never, not even to this day, offered myself to hell. It does not own me, but I am still its slave. I have seen the heart of it, the true beast in others and in myself. Once in a while I get to see the world above...and remember all that I once was and lost. I envied Wyrvaust his pain, I was gladdened by it, because I knew from whence it came...Not from hell, but from up here, up here! Oh lucky bastard that he is! When this is all over, I shall have to go back below and wander those terrible corridors they call the lost caverns. Do you know what the lost caverns are? They are the places where only spirits and monsters dwell, where those who are lost roam. I am lost see? I can never go home and I am seen as a devil everywhere else. Perhaps one day I shall relent and give my soul to Gabrian or his master. But I keep hoping...he will sell me to someone up above." He imagined himself belonging to someone like Wyrvaust or Arilwen...just for a moment then sighed harshly. He could never be so lucky.

Why had Kaamus opened up to her? Because he had not spoken to anyone for so very long and because he wanted her to understand; he wanted to warn her...He did not want to see Wyrvaust wandering those lonely, terrible corridors with him. "Do not forget him...Do not abandon him to his pain, or those vast corridors shall swallow him. If he loses hope, that shall be the only place for him. It is where the lost go, and what can he be without the ones he loves but lost?"

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Willow

There was something comforting about the simple tasks that Reil was working at, and soon Arilwen put her sneaky ideas on hold, pulled her dripping feet from the water, and completed unwinding her braid, raking her fingers into her long hair to rub at the scalp. It was a glorious feeling... a small luxury in a time like this. She left her water bladder beside the creek and rose to walk silently over to the fire, settling on the dead tree that had been dragged up for them to share. The angel stretched her toes out, pointing and flexing them, and when Reil offered a plate of food to her, she stared at it in confusion for a moment. Food. It wasn't even a passing thought, but the smell of warm food made her stomach cramp and she took it, softly thanking him. She took no time for manners and was cramming cheese into her mouth, trying to chew with her mouth closed while she pulled her knees closer to balance the plate on. It was only when he had finished and began drawing out a diagram in the dirt that she focused on anything but the plate, and she chewed a bit more slowly as she peered down at the layout. This was important. She had to remember it. Concentrating, she nodded at each detail, swallowing the last bit of her food and placing the plate at her feet before she grimaced. The castle was being bombarded by two armies and she would not be allowed to enter until the battle was over? Her son was inside! "What if they breach the walls?" She asked somberly, lancing her very serious gaze at the goblin. Her son was inside. She had to get her son. If the walls were breached, she was going in if she had to run beside the entering armies.

The angel took the offered jug of ale and wiped her lips on her sleeve before



taking a swallow. It felt good washing the food down, and she took a second swig before handing it back. Now, she had not expected her escort to spill on anything about himself or Hell, but spill he did, and she found herself fascinated as she gazed at him, folding her arms on her knees. "You were a prince?" She echoed, a little embarrassed at her surprised look. She had not lived in this world long, and she was a little sheltered, to say the least, so the thought of anything but humanish people being royalty confused her for a moment. She listened respectfully, and once he finished she asked curiously, "Have you ever tried to convince Gabrian to make a deal with someone up here? I am certain that anyone could benefit from having you as a servant." Did that come out wrong? Wrinkling her nose, she switched her train of thought. "I was a servant... by the first man who found me here. But...not that kind of servant. I didn't really do much work." Hopefully that would be hinting to her profession enough without further inquiries. "And then he died and I fled... into the desert. I nearly died." With that, a grin ticked onto her features for the first time since they had met, and Arilwen looked softer... not so tired and drained. "Wyrvaust found me and I remember in my haze... while I was close to the brink... he asked Lord Marsol if he could eat me! It still amazes me that things turned out the way they did." And she cast her gaze downwards, shaking her head. "I haven't given up on him. I am not sure how to process it all, really. I thought him to be dead. My father, he helped me escape Sammael's so that I could return to Wyrvaust, but I was too late. I found my son taken and Wyrvaust dead." It was horrific, and she hated thinking of it. "Do you know what happened to your brothers?"

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JD

His gaze found her steadfast when she asked what should happen if they breached the walls. "If they do, and if they should seize control, then all within the fortress walls and without in that territory shall become Gabrian's subjects and be subject to his rule and demands. Those who resist? Well, they shall have to rely on his mercy, and that is not granted, in my experience, unless he both respects someone and it is logical to spare someone," he told her factually.

A hairless brow rose at her surprise concerning his past station and he shook his head a little. His eyes glanced her when she asked whether he had made any requests to Gabrian in the matter. "It would insult him for a slave to ask him such a thing. Freedom or change of hands must be offered by him or requested by another who seeks my purchase. I am powerless to change that." He quieted and poked at the fire as he listened to her speak about her experiences as an unspecified servant. "Everyone is a servant to someone or something," he said quietly. He scoffed a bit when she said she believed him dead. "You think like a mortal. They have a difficult time grasping what it means to be immortal. Death is merely a stepping stone to a new plane of existence. Death is finite only by very specific conditions to immortals. I remember how death was death to me. Not anymore."

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Willow

Arilwen did not like Gabrian, if only for the mere fact that she had seen him work

and knew his clout. Her heart sank at the thought of her son in that mess, and she reached up to pinch the bridge of her nose. How could she say that though? It would be foolish since her escort was owned by the boney-winged angel. It was his exasperated reply to her mention of death and his observation about how she thought like a mortal. Her jaw muscle twitched and she spoke plainly. "I did not even know what I was for the majority of my life... I only recently found out. It was a miracle that I learned to fly without breaking a multitude of bones. I have had to learn this world in a nutshell so far." Yes, she was annoyed at him a little for being so smug, but she was also annoyed at herself. Yes, she was an angel. No she had no clue how to BE one, her history, what she was... she knew her father now, but what powers lie within her? Many more than she was aware of. Rising, Arilwen went to fetch the borrowed bedroll, but she did not share Reil's tent. Instead she shook it out on the opposite side of the fire and lay down, tucking her arms behind her head as she stared upwards at the trees. She was tired, and knew she had to sleep. But she wasn't sure if that would come so easily...

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JD

Kaamus glanced up at her when she took offense. The goblin expected people to take offense to simple observations, and he knew better than to expect others not to be insulted when he simply spoke his mind. Even when he tried to be polite he seemed to offend, so decided he had a flaw in his nature that was irreparable. His own people had understood him, and Gabrian understood him. That he could appreciate about his master. Actually, there were many things he respected about Gabrian, but that did not mean he liked being his slave, and he hated dwelling in Acheron...waiting for his master to call on him so he could escape the lost caverns for just a little while. He was grateful to have this scouting mission. His eyes gazed up at the sky which was well lit by the sun now, and he listened to the distant din of battle. He had tried to warn Gabrian telepathically hours prior of the allied army advancing from the south, but something (the dead zone) had disallowed him to make contact. His regard fell in the way of Arilwen as she spread the bed roll across from him near the fire, which he began to put out by scattering the sandy soil over it. Morning was getting well underway and he had intended to put the fire out sooner, but smothering it with sand would keep it from smoking. He heard everything she said in the meantime.

"It is not so bad being young, seeing so many things for the first..." He had almost finished the statement when he was grabbed from behind and rapidly jerked to his feet by a large hand which closed around his neck.

"What does Kaamus want with the White Bird?" a deep voice growled inhumanely. The figure which loomed behind him was taller than Kaamus by two feet, and shrouded in a black long cloak and hood. He stunk of blood to the Goblin's sensitive olfactory but the blood stains only darkened the blackness of the shadowy male's cloak, making just how much blood soaked him hard to see. Kaamus tensed as the beast's breath blew warm across his cheek and he threatened to snap his neck if he made a wrong move, or even said the wrong thing. A pair of wings outstretched which enlarged the shadow his figure cast, the cloak sliding between the muscular arms of that massive wing span.

"Hello, Wyrvaust," Riel's tone was light but choked.

Wyrvaust jarred him by his throat, shaking a grunt of pain from the Goblin.  
"Answer me."

"I am escorting to her castle Ereme..." Kaamus could barely speak now the pressure on his throat was so deadly.

"To castle Ereme, or to Gabrian?" Wyrvaust hissed.

"To Castle Ereme. I swear it."

Riel's legs buckled beneath him as Wyrvaust strangled the breath from him, but just short of crushing his neck bone, the other demon released him and the horned red goblin dropped onto his knees gasping.

Wyrvaust went to take a step towards Arilwen, his face still shrouded by his hood albeit his clawed hands were visible, as was the sienna fur which covered all but his palms, the fur covering his body the same color as his desert browned skin. In his advance on Arilwen his strides broke as an authoritative voice boomed over the camp. "By order of the (?Crossroads) Knights of Eremaes, Stand away from the others, Soldier of the Broken Wing, surrender your arms, drop face to the ground and no harm shall come to you!" it was Ereme's 3rd knight, the Shaamea Naazir.

"The Raven is no soldier of the broken wing!" the demon crowed and spun towards the direction of the voice to draw his pair of scimitars rather than throw down. He did not withdraw his defensive stance as a party of forty men which had surrounded the clearing closed in.

"You fought for Gabrian and slew scores of elves and men single handedly, demon, including six of my comrades at arms! Whoever you serve, you are an enemy of my king and stand in his territory. Now drop your arms and face down on the ground! You will not be warned again!"

"Summoned was the Raven! No more shall he yield to the demands of another, else HIS king command him!" Wyrvaust roared and charged Naazir. He sprung to the side to avoid a net of heavy rope that was flung at him and was about to lunge in at Naazir with a deadly swipe of his swords, when he felt a firm and yet gentle touch to his arm which spun him to face Arilwen. One of his sword arms was raised about to strike as his gaze met hers, and she saw his face clearly for the first time since he entered the camp. His was the face of a lion and a man, his black hair a long mane of shaggy, soft locks which spilled over his shoulders and back. His flesh was covered over completely with a pelt of soft fur the same color as his reddish-brown skin, with exception of his palms, the leathery soles of his clawed feet, his chest and the genital area which his shredded robes of black and red covered. He was something other than a bestial abomination, but like it in appearance, trapped in a blood lust body that was part lion, part demon, part vampire, and part man. He shrank from her, his head hanging down low in shame, and as he felt four hands seize him from behind, he sank to his knees in surrender. He did not fight them as his wrists, ankles and throat were clasped in irons with heavy chains binding them one to the other with a lead chain affixed to the iron collar round his throat. Arilwen was the beauty who could tame the beast only Marsol could otherwise bring reason to, her touch a magnet which could freeze his countenance. Wyrvaust could have wrenched free of them, killed at least half of those good,

brave men if not all, but those eyes of violet which owned his heart had him on his knees. He could not bring himself to kill in her witness.

"State your full name, Sir," the Shaamea knight Naazir demanded.

"Wyrvaust the Raven, his once name spoken only in the presence of his King," Wyrvaust submitted.

"Wyrvaust the Raven, you may consider yourself a prisoner of war and subject to our laws and the judgment of our court and king. You shall be reprimanded to our prison until your fate is decided. Do you understand?"

"The Raven understands," Wyrvaust stated tonelessly.

"What king do you serve?"

"Marsol, King of the Desert of Fire."

It was then Naazir bent his gaze on Arilwen. The Shaamea was himself somewhat lion-side in appearance but not nearly as bestial as Wyrvaust. "Who are you whom with a look can bring this mass slayer of men to his knees?" He had expected most of his party to die, himself included, before Wyrvaust could be brought down or seized. He had killed nearly one hundred elves and men in less than three hours before Gabriel had commanded a retreat. Wyrvaust, who had killed six of Ereme's knights during his massacre, had been among those selected with priority to pursue. Naazir had never in his life seen anyone fight like Wyrvaust. Kaamus meanwhile was being seized by two more men, with two others at their backs. Naazir would get around to questioning him as well before he decided what to do about the female and the goblin.

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Willow

Arilwen tucked her arm under her head and watched as Riel went about smothering their fire. She saw him open his mouth to speak, heard the words... then saw the shadow step up behind him. The Swan sat straight up on her bedroll, panic seizing her voice as she parted her lips to warn him. Of course he had said Wyrvaust was coming, but it did not register at first. She just saw the hand clamp around her escort's neck and she scrambled to her feet to look for a weapon...against the huge man in the robe. The very second she heard one of her nicknames rumble from the chest of the individual, her panic stopped and she simply stood beside the smothered fire, staring. Arilwen could not see his face, but her violet eyes fell to his hand. It had fur on it, just as Riel had described. Wait... his name was Kaamus? She did not have time to think about why he had given a fake name, but the realization that he might be escorting her to Gabriel instead of her son made fire bubble in her veins. Was he? How was she to know? Never mind that now. Riel was dropped to the ground while he recovered his breath, and Arilwen's gaze shot upwards to Wyrvaust as he began to approach her. It WAS him. She could sense him... feel the tension vibrating in his body... He did not get far, however, and when the voice rolled over the camp, they all froze and the angel spun to see a massive group of people at the edge of their clearing. Before the Swan knew what was happening, the men were demanding he drop to the ground and Wyrvaust was refusing,

of course, but drew his blades... to face a group of men far too large for him, in her mind. The panic that had frozen her in place now drove her, and her bare feet kicked up dirt as she darted over the dead fire circle to reach for him, her fingertips curling into his arm.

The man that turned to face her was not the same, no not in the least. He was...a lion... and a man. Arilwen had never seen such a thing, but Riel had been correct. They briefly made eye contact before chains were drawn and began clamping down on his limbs, causing the angel's features to grow stormy. She did not look to the demander of her indentivity. Instead, she knelt slowly before her ashamed husband, cautious and curious fingertips lifting to brush slowly over his fur covered cheek. "I am his wife." She said softly, knuckles nudging his chin up so that he might look at her. She was not afraid, as she suspected she might be when Riel had warned her. Instead she felt her heart breaking anew for her husband, and she pushed his long hair away from his face before rising.

Arilwen was not much of a leader. She never had been... but this was a different matter entirely. She turned to the man who had demanded their information. "My name is Arilwen. I, as well, serve Lord Marsol. Kaamus here was my hired escort. A woman has taken my child... my SON... and is within those walls. I need to enter by any means necessary. I pose no threat, but if it means having to be dragged in chains into those walls like my husband, so be it. There is no need for all of this. My husband can remain civil if you will just allow him the chance." Her voice was firm, but in truth Arilwen had no CLUE if Wyrvaust could remain civil. She just needed to get inside.

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JD

The Knights of Eremaes were nothing if not civil, but they were also cautious. When Arilwen said that it was not necessary to place Wyrvaust in chains, Naazir's expression darkened and he shook his head. "Your husband has for the past three hours slain an average of one man a minute, the time between occupied by him in successfully evading a dragon and five of the best swordarms available to us. He has already earned the name Man Bane by the warriors who witnessed him fighting, or survived an encounter with him on the field. I doubt that he is secure enough. He is our prisoner and shall remain so until Lord King Ereme says otherwise." His gaze then bent on Kaamus who half expected Arilwen to give him up as Gabrian's servant. "You are her paid escort, she says. Is this true?"

"Yes, very true," Kaamus verified.

Naazir had very good instincts; and he was sharp. He felt sure Arilwen and Kaamus were bending the truth if not lying, a gut feeling which a map he spied scratched in the dirt by the fire justified. It looked to him like a scout or ranger's map, too accurate and well drawn to mean nothing. His keen observation skills and instincts were part of the reason he had been sent, that and he was one of the ten best swordsmen among mortal men in An Morendor, Ereme among those who could best him. "I don't believe you. The truth shall be discovered, nevertheless. Secure him."

Kaamus was not happy about being targeted for capture. He had not intended to get

much closer to Castle Ereme. He attempted to escape through a dead realms gate but the dead zone reached even the forest clearing to cancel his power. He found himself sprinting this way and that in a futile attempt to find a gap in their line to escape through. He even tried leaping over them but was knocked down by spears which snapped together crossed to block his path mid-air. In the end he was seized by five strapping warriors and wrestled to the ground howling protests until he was pinned. He snapped, lurched and kicked at them as he was placed in the same kinds of irons holding Wyrvaust. He only quieted when there was no hope at all for escape left. As he was pulled to his feet; Wyrvaust spoke of him in that strange manner he had of expressing himself.

"Kaamus is the servant of Gabrian, a menial slave of no importance. A scout at best. The Raven doubts it is Ereme's enemy."

"Bring all three of them," Naazir barked. "Provide the prisoner's wife with a horse. She shall ride with me." The knight's orders given, Wyrvaust and Kaamus were dragged along by the chains, as roughly as necessary to motivate their unwillingness to come along easily. Each of them for their own reasons intended to be as difficult as possible; Wyrvaust because he simply refused to obey anyone of authority other than Marsol, and Kaamus because he did not want to be executed as a spy or whatever they decided he was. Kaamus trusted no one.

Once they had cleared the forest, they had to stop and bind Wyrvaust to a horse. He was slowing their progress with his very unpredictable outbursts of violence. Once they were on their way again, Naazir trained his regard on Arilwen. "Your husband is as tough as mountain stone, do not worry about him for the moment." He recognized her anxiety for her husband. "Tell me about this son of yours. What makes you believe he is within Castle Ereme's walls?" He knew every servant, he knew every chamber, and would know her son if she described him. "How could he have come to reside with us?"

After she had responded to those questions, he pursued another line of inquiry. "There is something I do not understand...If your husband is Marsol's man, how did he come to fight on the side of Gabrian, when his king's men fought on our side. He even wounded a clansman named Gilriael. If your husband is not our enemy, not his alleged king's enemy, why fight against us, and with such brutal determination?"

Wyrvaust knew Arilwen did not have the answers he sought, but he was wrong. Naazir was not looking for the facts now, he was looking for Arilwen's opinion. He sensed great goodness in her. It puzzled him, why she would have someone like Wyrvaust for a husband. He did not know Wyrvaust for the noble creature he could be, only the terrible monster on the battlefield which had nearly taken his heart seeing him fight.

"The Swan does not know why.." Wyrvaust growled from the middle of the procession Naazir led, keeping Arilwen beside him.

"Quiet, Wyrvaust the Raven! You shall be heard when it is your time!" Naazir barked and fixed his slit pupil eyes on Arilwen.

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Willow

Arilwen's eyes nearly bugged out of her head as the knight before her bluntly explained Wyrvaust's current killing streak. "He evaded a... dragon?" It was obviously a shock to her, and her violet eyes swiveled back to her husband very briefly before her attentions returned. His nickname stung her heart and she shook her head, fingertips lifting to rub her temple. This was overwhelming. Irritating. She had to get inside. And then Kaamus decided to try and run. "Kaamus, stop it!" Arilwen spun to shout at him as he scrambled through knights, but was eventually subdued and chained alongside Wyrvaust. He should have known better. The Swan had not expected to get attached to Kaamus at all, but when Wyrvaust spoke of him as only a menial slave, she felt a pang for him. He was much more than a menial slave. He was very smart and resourceful, she thought.

And then it was over. The procession formed, Arilwen climbing atop the back of the horse she was given, though she nearly refused it and requested to walk beside her husband. Right now, she needed to get on the knight's good side, but she found it difficult to talk to him when her husband was thrashing about and causing problems. They were being too rough with him, she worried, but the knight beside her tried to assure her otherwise. The question of her son brought her attention back. "A mother knows, Sir." She said softly. "I am still bound to him, and I have travelled here from the desert, and his presence is so strong I can feel it." She went on to explain every detail she remembered about Beth, the fact that she had been a wonderful servant until she had run with Anwarr. "Perhaps now she works inside? I am not certain Sir, but I do know he is here."

How had her husband come to fight for Gabriel? Arilwen's shoulders slumped just slightly and she sighed in her exhaustion, giving a wince when Wyrvaust growled from behind them. This time, she ignored it. "My husband has a good heart." Well, that was an unbelievable start, but he let her go on. "I was... gone. When I returned, I found him in his original form, dead, and the moment I touched him, he dissolved beneath me and was gone. I did not know what became of him, but as I finally set out to find my son, I was approached by Kaamus. He IS a servant of Gabriel, but he was only sent to warn me that Wyrvaust was being released and would be coming for me, looking and acting quite different than he had before. My husband, in his heartbreak, had given himself to hell, Sir. They made him like this... that is what Kaamus told me. He was there to witness part of it. And then Gabriel released him as he is. He is not a traitor or a villain... he's not. He just... he just had to escape the darkness." How else could she explain it?

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JD

Wyrvaust had called Kaamus a menial servant because it was the truth and as an attempt to protect him and get them to let him go, but the only ones who seemed to think Kaamus was more than Wyrvaust let on was Naazir and Arilwen. Kaamus figured he was just being honest. He was a menial slave to his master and a scout when Gabriel needed one. He was also everything Naazir and Arilwen believed him to be; intelligent, resourceful, and a package of potential. Naazir also believed he was extremely dangerous, and he was right about that too, if Kaamus felt threatened, but he also knew when not to fight. He had not attacked, only tried to escape, because he did not wish to get killed. Naazir listened attentively to the lady angel's terse but enlightening explicative. He twisted around in his saddle to

gaze at Kaamus and then Wyrvaust before his gaze traveled to Arilwen and he relaxed back into his saddle. "You seem to trust the Red Demon..."

"I am not a red demon!" Kaamus snapped. "I am an Ymogoir of Mehr."

Naazir took another look at the goblin and smiled a bit. "A goblin of Anwnn and the far eastern country. Your kind is practically a myth here," he ascertained then fixed his gaze on Arilwen again.

"An educated knight, fah. Practically maybe," Kaamus scoffed and tripped over a rock. It was hard for him to regain his legs being dragged as he was and the knight leading him had to halt until he could stand again. If they had a spare horse they would have had him ride, but Wyrvaust had been given the last spare horse.

"He is as likely to be a spy as a scout. Do you really believe Gabriel, a devil with a reputation for ruthless brutality and deception, just sent this Ymogoir slave to you out of the goodness of his heart? Is Gabriel the Broken Wing a friend to you? Is he your benefactor? You claimed his servant as your paid escort, perhaps that is exactly what he hoped for, to get his slave in a position to gather intelligence. And perhaps Wyrvaust's loyalties changed hands in Acheron..." He could not finish that sentence when Wyrvaust flung himself off the horse so suddenly and violently that the ropes binding him to the animal pulled it over ontop of him, he howling in a rage all the while. Guards and knights left from their horses to sort the mess out.

"He was summoned! He could not refuse him! He was bound by the seal the broken angel summoned him with to do as he commanded!" Wyrvaust roared furiously. "Let the Raven go! Go he must to his chieftain and master and seek his bond so he cannot be summoned again!"

It was hard to understand him. Naazir was not accustomed to his disembodied style of speech. Naazir grimaced as he heard ribs snap beneath the drafthorse and Wyrvaust howl in pain and anger alike. He was out of control. "Get him under control. We shall ride ahead," he ordered his men gravely, then snatched up the reins to Arilwen's horse, and urged it to speed. His men knew what to do. They would beat Wyrvaust unconscious. He left them little choice. The dead zone made attempting a spell that would hold or quiet him impossible.

When they were a good two leagues ahead of the rest of the party, Naazir slowed their pace. "What did he mean by all that? How can he have no choice but to obey just because he was summoned?" Demonology was not Naazir's forte. "Why could he not refuse?" He expected Arilwen to know these things, obviously.

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Willow

One of Arilwen's weak points was always trusting people too much. She hesitated when Naazir scoffed at her, pointing out that Gabriel probably sent Kaamus as a spy, not because he was being kind. No, she wasn't friends or allies with Gabriel, but that was obvious by her reaction. However, the accusation that Wyrvaust may



have changed hands made the angel start, but she did not even get to begin her demands that Naazir stop his accusations when there was a roar behind her. The angel whipped around in her saddle to see her husband tumbling to the ground with the horse in tow. She was horrified, and she shook her head as he screamed, tears prickling her eyes. "Stop! Wyrvaust please!" She cried. He was hurting himself. He was crying out for Lord Marsol, to be bonded again to his one Lord and master. Arilwen's tears streamed harder as the guards began beating him at a command, and she tried to slide from her horse's back, but Naazir was two steps ahead, grasping the reigns to speed her up. This was a nightmare. He should have never come here. Turning to face forward in the saddle, her husband's screams silent now, she shook her head and let it hang, her dark locks falling in her face. "I...I do not know exactly. If he is not bonded to Lord Marsol, he is a wild card. Anyone can do so... Gabriel could recall him and use him for his own requests. I thought that was exactly what you DIDN'T want. You have to bring our Lord here! It can be done under your supervision!" Her red-rimmed eyes lanced him desperately. "Please! Send a request to Lord Marsol... bring him here. He can come alone, remain under watch. You could have just asked him yourself instead of letting those men beat him! He is NOT a monster. Just imagine what he must be feeling... " She was so angry and upset... but mostly she felt helpless. She turned her face away as she cried silently, her shoulders shaking. She wanted to be there with him, but now he was unconscious and it would do no good. "What are you going to do with us? Are you going to help me find my son? Will you bring our Lord Marsol to us?" She implored, looking a bit haggard. Good thing she had eaten or she would have been VERY irritable.

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JD

The knights and guards did not begin the disabling assault on Wyrvaust until Naazir had taken Arilwen well out of sight, actually. The snap of Wyrvaust's ribs was caused by the horse flailing its legs while laying ontop of him, its weight already crushing him. The men did labor with urgency to get the horse on its feet and off of Wyrvaust first and foremost, and only when Wyrvaust was no longer pinned down by the animal, and Naazir with the nephelim had put that distance between them, did they beat Wyrvaust into unconscious submission.

Naazir could sympathize with how the lady must feel, but he did not exactly trust her either. She was after all the mass butcher's wife. His instincts did tell him she was good, but that did not necessary mean she was not an enemy. Time alone would reveal who was friend and foe here. He did believe her story about her son. It was the way she had spoken of it, the anger and anxiety in her tones, eyes, and even the tension of her body. "Lord Marsol did offer us his arms in this fight and is considered an ally. Even without your request he would have been informed of Wyrvaust's hostile position, his pleas to be released to him, and your presence in this kingdom. He shall be sent these tidings as soon as possible. At the moment, communications are limited to normal means. An arcane dead zone has been established for miles round our fortress in this region. A herald shall be sent outside of this anti-thaumaturgic barrier as soon as possible, but you must understand that we have many tasks to achieve in aftermath of a battle that has devastated us. He shall be held in a warded cell where he shall be protected from seizure if that is of any comfort to you. As for your son...We hired a nurse maid two months ago who matches your description. She has a son, an immortal son whose

growth is very rapid. She said she was seduced by a demon of unknown origin who promised her marriage then left her with child. The boy looked six when he arrived here, was very intelligent and could talk amazingly well, and looks around the age of eight now. He has medium brown skin, black hair, is fairly tall for his age, and has plum colored eyes. There is a sadness about him which he will not speak to anyone of. He keeps to himself...Does not play with the other children. He likes horses and dogs very much though. He is a handsome little bloke who looks like he might be half Neffari." Yes, Naazir was very observant. It was a knight's job to be attentive. "I shall arrange quietly for her to be placed in custody and for the child to meet with you. If he is your son and that can be proved, he shall be returned to you."

Two leagues out from the rest of their party, Naazir would halt their advance and waited for the others to catch up. Riel now rode with one of the guards, who risked riding double with the goblin in front of him to improve their pace. Wyrvaust was bound in ropes which likewise secured him to a horse, draping the animal, his long legs dangling over one side of the saddle, his head and chest over the other. He was oblivious to any discomfort such a ride would inflict for his unconscious state. As they closed ground on the castle, they passed the camp and royal tents of Heldras and his allied army. Naazir bowed his head to each king which stood forward to watch them pass, Heldras, Aurelius and Dengoth the kings which received his gestures of respect and thanks. Questions about the prisoners would be saved for courtes. Now as they approached the castle gate, Naazir haled his betters at arms, Brylus and Persaius and drew rein to report to his first and second knights.

"The berserker prisoner has been secured, My Lords. He surrendered to us peacefully but gave us a great deal of trouble in transit. The demon met this lady," he gestured towards Arilwen, "his wife, and a servant of Gabriel," he motioned towards the red goblin Kaamus, "...in a clearing in the woods just south of here. The Red Goblin servant was acting as the lady's escort. He may or may not be a spy. He must not be allowed access to any intelligence. I move that we immure him with the prisoner in the dungeon." A dungeon that was very quickly becoming crowded. "The lady alleges to have come this way to find her son, who was abducted by a woman who may be in our service. I have been led to assume that her husband met up with her unexpectedly enroute to our estate. I believe her, My Lords, but leave it to your discretion whether to place her with her husband for now, or to treat her as a guest of the commons. I have further information concerning the prisoners to report when we are in more private surroundings, My Lords." His report to them given, he awaited his orders.

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Willow

A trembling breath escaped Arilwen as the knight began to assure her that Marsol would be contacted... and when he mentioned what the boy looked like who he believed to be her son, her heart seized into her throat. He had to look so much older. He probably looked like Wyrvaust now. Well, what he USED to look like. It broke her heart that he seemed to be a bit of a hermit, but who could blame him. He sounded healthy and he was safe. Forcing tears back, the angel swallowed against her sore throat and nodded. "Okay..." She croaked quietly, looking relieved. A huge weight seemed to lift off of her at his promises, and she even seemed to relax a

little in her saddle. "Thank you for all of your help. I wasn't sure exactly how I was going to get into the city and make the claim about my son. I had not even HEARD of a war until Kaamus found me. As you notice, that put a bit of a knot in my plans."

When they finally paused to wait for the rest of the party, the Swan had to look away from her husband. Of course he couldn't feel his discomfort because he was knocked out, but she didn't want to know what happened. Soon they were being led through some type of camp and to men she did not recognize, but that was not a surprise. She simply kept her mouth shut as she listened to Naazir report... until he mentioned the decision of where to place her. Then Arilwen got antsy, then she pursed her lips... but before anything could be said, she blurted out, "I would like to remain with my husband, if possible...Sirs..." She immediately looked sheepish, knowing she probably should not have said a word.

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Kale

Audaante took in Arcades' view on things with his eyes closed until Acheron was mentioned. At that, his pale green eyes slowly slid open, as if to see more of the picture that the Alpha was painting with his wisdom. He often found Arcades thought of things in a completely different manner, with an appreciation for things Dante sometimes thought he himself had lost. "Better things, you think? Perhaps." In any case, it had suited Audaante to join Gabrian's cause this time. In the future, he could not say. He would keep the chess board fresh in his mind though, and veer away from the path of a piece and toward the path of a player. It wasn't only for his sake, but for the sake of his clan.

Being cut off from communicating with his his brethren was a bit disconcerting. While Audaante wasn't locked in a cell like his companion, he was very much contained in another, more complete and deeply unnerving manner. Arcades could be free at a time of his choosing, while Dante was at the mercy of the engineers of the wards, unless he could physically escape the boundaries.

"Rest easy Arcades, I think I'll take a stroll and see what I can see," he said softly. He came away from the pillar and brushed the grit from his coat and straightened his attire before moving into the darkness to see just where that passage led to. Perhaps he would find the girl and learn more about her, or something more interesting yet.

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SweetAndante

The silence that came upon Belial was only sudden for those that did not, sadly, share the genius of his mind. Perhaps if Belorian had been more focused at the moment on important things, such as his brother's words and expression, and not on the war raging outside or his other loved ones, he would have recognized that the seeming jokes and play at innocence he'd laughed at earlier hadn't all been a game. Was Belial truly hurt at the way Belorian made light of him? Probably not in any lasting way, but before too long, and especially after this little meeting, he would require more of Belorian's time and they would have a nice long,

uninterrupted chat. And perhaps this time his brother would see truth.

The call from his Master echoed sharply in his mind, he almost flinched at it, and just that quickly, Belorian had brushed by him again and was gone. The chance lost because of this cursed war and goddamned Gabriel had put Belial in a sour mood. He made no pretense with the guards stationed outside the tower room, and they had only to look at him once to realize they did better to stay where they were and steady their gazes straight ahead. Their wisdom paid off, and he paid them no mind, strolling out of the room and down the corridor, down the stairs and out the front as if he belonged there, and indeed everyone he passed believed that he did. It was an easy trick, but so useful. The wards did not hinder him; he'd no malice for Ereme and in fact could be counted as an ally by association with his Liege. Why he waited until he was outside wouldn't cross his mind. Perhaps he needed a deep breath of fresh air, the smells and sounds of vicious battle aside. Once this brief business was taken care of, Belial moved on. One moment he was there, and then he simply was not. Was he simply an old, practiced hand at gates, had he the ability to become invisible, or was it all another illusion? Maybe all of these things, maybe none of them. Some secrets were more interesting remaining so. Faithful as always, Belial answered the call of Lucifer.

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JD

Time was a blur that first hour Wyrvaust, his lovely wife Arilwen, and the Ymogior Kaamus were processed and imprisoned. During that interum, Arcades' comrade Audaante took to the shadows and slipped out with the guards and knights. Lord Eleghir always had been quite resourceful and furtive. Arcades laughed to himself as his friend promised not to let harm to come to him, or to avenge his death if it should, and withdraw with the guards after they had secured a new group of prisoners. The deluvian werewolf's keen, tangerine eyes followed Wyrvaust as he was dragged to the cell across from his own and shoved within to growl lowly at the guard who hustled him roughly into his prison. Arilwen was treated far more gently naturally, as she had cooperated the entire time, unlike her feral husband. His slit pupiled gaze shifted to lock on Arilwen as she glanced his way and a faint smile softened his lips and deepened his fang dimpled jawline. He knew immediately that she was the mate of the demon gone savage. It was the way her hand remained on his arm, despite whatever jostling he invited by his own snarls and threatening postures. She oozed devotion, concern...and strength.

Once the prisoners were locked down and informed of when they would receive their meals, and how they would be informed of their situation as it became apparant, and after the guards and knights had taken their leave, a hush fell over the dungeon. Wyrvaust held Arilwen in his arms, the both of them quiet in their own contemplations, Kaamus away from them leaned against the far corner of the cell, while Arcades just stood near the bars of his prison cell, gazing at the three with his unnervingly odd eyes. In the torch light, the orangeness of his irises seemed set on fire, and the elaborately archaic engravings all over his body were cast in shadows which made the emblems far more distinct than in brighter light.

After a time Wyrvaust met the werewolf's gaze and held it whereof they stared one another down for some duration. It was Arcades who averted his gaze first. A certain dangerous burn had ignited in Wyrvaust's eyes after awhile and Arcades

admitted to himself that it was not wise to challenge it. It was never wise to accept a challenge of insanity, and that is what he saw in the demon's eyes...An insane determination not to have his free will threatened more than it already was.

Wyrvaust would be the first to break the silence, despite the fact that he was more introverted than ever before. There was plenty he wanted to say to Arilwen, but not at that place and time. What he did say was far away from those matters he kept locked up in his heart for now. "Why did you insist on being imprisoned with the Raven turned lion, dearest Swan?" he asked his wife in quiet tones.

"Isn't that obvious?" the albino stranger across the cell block interjected casually. "She wants to be with you. One of his fingers ran up and down one of the bars, his gaze meandering over the bars. "What you might wish to ask yourself, is why we are the only prisoners. The battle seems to be over now. I was placed here as a safeguard, because I made demands they believe are unfair, thus seized me as a political prisoner of sorts. Why were you taken, hmm?"

Wyrvaust just stared at him again until it became clear to Arcades that he was not going to answer him. "Not very social is he?" Werewolves, most of them, were social creatures, and Arcades was no exception.

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Willow

Arilwen answered short and quietly when questioned and stood remotely beside Wyrvaust, always touching him with at least one hand. It was strange. He looked, smelled and felt different, but he had many of the same mannerisms. Just... amplified. Soon, they were lead down for Arilwen's first stay in a dungeon. Violet eyes peeked curiously around as she kept up with Wyrvaust's pace, but each time he began to grow tempered, she laid her hand on his arm and gently squeezed, trying to coax him to calm down.

They were advised of meal times, though there was no clock or timepiece down here, and then they were left alone. Except for the strange man with the glowing eyes and bodily marks across from them. Momentarily, the Swan peered at him, but in seconds was settled on the ground, curled into Wyrvaust's arms. It felt like she was being unfaithful to him, as it didn't yet feel like her husband, but she knew it was still him inside.

The angel was oblivious to Wyrvaust's exchange of stares with the man across the way. It was her husband's question that made her lift her face for the first time and gaze at him with a quiet hint of amusement when the stranger spoke up to point out the obvious. "It is clear, even to strangers..." Her response to him, then she leaned up on her knees to face the newly furred face, palms rising to rest gently on his cheeks. "Should you plant your roots as a tree in the forest, I would build a life in your branches. Besides, I have plenty of inches of new husband to memorize. How can I do that if we are apart?" Lips brushed the bridge of his nose, then she lowered to settle back in his arms. The man across the path spoke again, pointing out that they were the only prisoners and the battle was supposedly over. It caused her to frown, but she shook her head at his question. Was Wyrvaust social? Not quite.

After minutes of nothing, Arilwen leaned forward to press her brow to the bars in front of her, staring at the man with the strange eyes. "Why would we be the only ones down here? What do you mean by that?" When you are lost and have a map, people are inclined to help. But I find that it's a different story when you have a globe.

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JD

Wyrvaust was perhaps antisocial towards the social wolf across the way, but once inside that cell, he was very physically attentive towards Arilwen. Despite the claws curving away from his furry fingertips, he caressed and kneaded her muscles with possessive affection. His nostrils flared as she voiced her love and devotion towards him and for a moment a great upheaval of emotions quaked inside of him as memories of those visions Sammael had sent to his mind assaulted his senses. If those visions should haunt him forever his love for her would remain steadfast. She had been a victim, no matter what the demons which had tormented him claimed...that it was she volunteered herself to Sammael, she who had desired Sammael, she who would have had his children if her father had not torn her away, if she was not already with his child. Wyrvaust had refused to believe their slander, any of it. It had unhinged him yes, but with rage, not distrust.

He was so much taller than she that when she stretched out to kiss his nose, he bowed his frame and head alike into the press of her warm lips and the feel of her palms on his cheeks. Her scent filled him with rapture as much as her touch. His desire for her suddenly caused another riot within him. He let her escape his embrace for but a moment when she moved closer to the bars, then slid himself towards her to press in with his body, encapsulating her with his chest, the firm plane of his muscular abdomen, and his those wings which were covered in a thin film of fur so like mole skin in its velvety softness, only it was not grey, but the tawny-amber color of a lion. That same fur covered the nose she kissed, thickening somewhat on his cheeks and the rest of his face. His hair was still black, but it was shaggy, like a lion's mane, while his eyes were no longer dark brown, but ocrea. Much about him reflected the lion which was now a part of him. He stared again at Arcades as Arilwen spoke now to him. Wyrvaust knew little of Ereme and his kingdom. This country was far from his home in the desert. It did seem strange that they should be the only prisoners.

Arcades responded to her first with a faint smile. "It is said of King Ereme that he does not make a habit of keeping prisoners unless they are either too dangerous to let roam, or promise to be of some value to him. I just happened to arrive at a bad time. I was making proposals in talks he did not care for, you see. He has refused an alliance with his neighbors one too many times. We decided to be more aggressive in the matter, understand?"

Wyrvaust scoffed and drew the werewolf's eyes. "Care to enlighten me to what you mean by that scoff?" Arcades exhorted.

"No," Wyrvaust stated flat.

"Come, come, do not let assumption decide what you mean, for what can I assume but that you think me a fool."

Wyrvaust just laughed, sincerely amused by his own thoughts, shook his head and leaned against the wall which the bar frame was bolted to. He pulled Arilwen with him wrapped up in his arms, but they were still by the bars. He nuzzled his face against her throat and kissed her milky white flesh, ignoring Arcades altogether now, and he would not be at all bothered if Arilwen continued to speak to him, even as the werewolf complained to her of her husband.

"Hell, your mate is being spectacularly unfair to me. I believe he has judged me without a trial." As animalistic as Arcades himself was in the way he moved and behaved physically, he was likewise quite well educated. Oddly enough, and despite his social attitude, he cared little or nothing for etiquette. Honesty meant more to him.

Kaamus, who was still seated in the corner, lifted his voice at that time. "Maybe he is just smart," he told the werewolf. Arcades scowl made Kaamus rise and approach the barred side of the cell. "Maybe he knows exactly what you are about."

"Oh? And what might that be?" Arcades asked, his tones rather surly.

"You said what that might be, an aggressive proposal for an alliance. Sounds like you must have made a hostile ultimatum to me. Join us or else? Wyrvaust does not condone such tyrannical methods, so why should he speak to you?"

Arcades frowned. "So now I am a tyrant. My how your assumptions leap across blind chasms. I have not the power to be a tyrant. My proposals were and shall always be honest. My history with this kingdom is far longer than even its king knows. This kingdom was once mine. I, my pack, and the natives of this land, are what are left of a conquered people, people Erema's ancestors conquered. Well, the conquered have risen, and we shall either be friends of Eremaes, or enemies."

A faint smile curled the Ymogior's wide mouth and he dipped his head to the werewolf before retreating to the corner again. Wyrvaust gazed on Arcades a moment then shook his head. The demon's silent and elusive insinuations were wearing on Arcades' nerves. "What?!" he snapped.

Wyrvaust finally spoke. "The wolf has placed itself in a position to be used and nothing more, to be used by his own broken hopes and rage as a terrorist, or by others who would prey on his desolation as a pawn. To break this cycle, the conquered must reject hatred, envy and resentment if they are to be truly strong, to truly have a voice and rise up in the world. When these feelings run riot, deny them and the wolf shall finally find a place for himself and his people in the world again."

Arcades listened to the demon and was quiet for an interval afterwards. A soft scoff escaped him hence. "You sound like a priest, demon," he mocked in churlish tones. Truth was, he had gotten to him a little, and Arcades did not trust it or him. He never trusted anyone who could shake his conviction.

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Willow

Arilwen would assume that she was not carrying Sammael's child, because it seemed

if she were, she would be feeling differently. And all she felt was tired. The Swan withdrew into her husband's form as he curled around her, and it amazed her how different the two could be, personality wise. But perhaps that was Arilwen's downfall. That sweet, trusting attitude. Naivety. She hated it. Why couldn't she be more guarded? It was something she swore to practice. She listened quietly from Wyrvaust's arms as she peered across the cells to the stranger talking to them. "I don't think we are exactly of value to the king here..." She said softly to Wyrvaust, her head tucked against the crook of his arm. "They must find me dangerous." She was joking, of course, desperately trying to lighten his mood a little.

Arilwen fixated her gaze on the man as he commented about Wyrvaust being unfair, and the angel frowned. "You seem desperate for answers from him. He cannot save you and you cannot save him. There is no reason to communicate. You might be more effective to just talk about the weather." It was true. They didn't know this man, he was of no gain to them, so it seemed stupid to her.

Kaamus sticking up for Wyrvaust made her smile, and her hand gently rubbed over his arm while she listened, and it all ended with him making a comment about sounding like a priest. It made Arilwen bite her lower lip, and she closed her eyes to bury her face in Wyrvaust's arm. She was so tired. She wasn't just tired, she was mentally and physically exhausted. If he didn't move, she would be asleep in minutes, and would only be awakened by the arrival of a meal or news.

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JD

Arcades snorted when Arilwen said he was desperate for answers. Arcades was misread so often he had actually grown used to it. "I look for no answers in a prison cell. You asked why we were here, I explained why I am here. I was simply curious to see if I could spur your mate to conversation, but he is far too serious for casual banter. I never asked to be saved, or to save anyone else. What foolish notions those are." Arcades shook his head and retreated to the shadows of his cell, where his grey battle skirt, knee-high boots and vest of soft leather, even his white skin and exceptionally long, straight, white hair faded away amazingly well. He could still be seen, but he looked more like a phantom lurking in the dark.

Wyrvaust saw in Arcades one who did need to be saved, but whose pride would get in the way of it. He seated himself with Arilwen and carried her into his lap, his arms, body and wings cradling her like the precious treasure she was to him. His thoughts went out to Marsol and his breath hastened. He was not sure if he was ready to face him...and at the same time he could not return home soon enough. Perhaps he could find a way to regain some of his honor before he had to face him. His breaths calmed again and he buried his face against her chest, his hair spilling over to cover her arms, neck and shoulders. "The Raven misses his wife...his son, the long walks in the wilds, and wishes only to return home, to live in peace with his one and onlies. The Raven wearies of the plots and senseless machinations of others. He shall suffer no more enemies." What exactly did that mean? It meant he would kill anyone who posed the slightest threat to their peace. It meant trespassers beware stepping foot on Wyrvaust's remote territory.



Willow

Arilwen was curled against her husband under the canopy of his long hair, her eyes closed and her disposition sleepy at best. A smile ticked onto her lips as he mentioned their family, their walks, their time together. And then, she stiffened. Violet eyes slowly opened. Was Wyrvaust aware that Anwarr was taken? She had not been present when Wyrvaust was taken from Marsol's side, and had no clue how the time line went of his kidnapping. Honestly, after seeing what happened when he was angered, she was afraid to tell him. But he had to know.

Arilwen shifted and sat up in Wyrvaust's lap, her somber eyes meeting his own. "Wyrvaust..." Hesitating, she took a deep breath. "I do not know if you were aware... but Anwarr... he was taken. Our own hired maid... our friend. She took him. I tracked him here, and that is when you found me. They are going to locate him, bring it to the attention of the magistrate. We have to wait for news..." Trailing off, she lowered back to bury her face in his shoulder. She missed Anwarr so terribly that her heart was breaking. She felt helpless from the moment she found out he was gone.

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JD

Naazir had been placed in charge of the prisoners and there were more of them, only they were being held in another cell block of the dungeon. Ereme did not think it wise to keep hellions in sight and earshot of one another. As far as he knew, neither Arcades or Audaante were tied to Acheron, indeed they had claimed to be independants and allies of one another. For now, Ereme took them at their word. Wyrvaust on the other hand had fought for Gabriel which made him an enemy. He had received the reports of Wyrvaust's claims, that he had been summoned and had no choice but to do as Gabriel asked. Ereme knew of such things but had little understanding of them, of how a creature could be tied to an arcanum which took away their freedom to choose. It seemed a terribly convenient way for demons and the sort to seek amnesty for their actions. Ereme was not sure what to do with Wyrvaust until he had a clearer picture of his nature. So far, Wyrvaust had proved himself brutally violent, ill tempered, unpredictable, and rather insane. Several of Gabriel's captured knights along with Gabriel meanwhile had been turned over to someone who could actually deal with such powerful creatures and their friends; Aurelius of Noct'maire, whose men had imprisoned him in Noct'maire's highly secure dungeon. He was cut off from the world of telepathy and sensory powers. If someone wanted to find Gabriel, they would have to seek him out the old fashioned way, by the information vine.

One of the knights, Dwyer, had mysteriously up and vanished, despite the arcane dead zone, which was telling of a power which reached out to the knight from far beyond the dead zone. Unknown to his would be captors, Dwyer was a projection which had been canceled by the one controlling him. As such; the domination factors Andromedes uncovered in Dwyer amounted to nothing. It was all very frustrating and confounding for these honest men who did not delve into such duplicities to be confronted with so much arcane deception and force of will, as demon kind so often resorted to.

The lord Wyrvaust supposedly served of his own free will was known to be dangerous but friendly to the Western Alliance. Cheiftain Marsol, who had even offered his alliance against anyone who would seek to conquer An Morendor's kingdoms, was being contacted by one Valis Urik, but whether he could be reached telepathically remained to be seen.

After being informed of the circumstances surrounding Wyrvaust's capture, what Valis had to relay to Marsol (if he was able to make contact) was this; "Lord Marsol, I doubt you remember me, my name is Valis Urik. We met very long ago. I and others, including King Heldras and Aurelius of Noct'maire have recently engaged in a battle against Gabrian of Acheron, servant of Sammael, who brought forth several of his legions in a hostile attack against the Kingdom of Eremaes. Eremaes is a small independant country north of Hawker's Forte if you are not familiar with it. This concerns you because one of your subjects claims to have been summoned by Gabrian to fight for his cause in this campaign. His name is Wyrvaust. Just prior to his capture, his wife Arilwen, an acquaintance you and I share, consequently met up with her husband enfield, shortly before he was seized. Wryvaust slew a great many men and women fighting for Eremaes single handed. We request your presence in determining the verdict of his crimes against this kingdom. It is not this court's desire to execute anyone unless it proves more dangerous to release them than to keep them. I must stress that he proved himself a very dangerous enemy." That communicated, Valis would wait for his response.

Wyrvaust met Arilwen's gaze with a heavy smolder when she straightened and spoke of Anwarr's abduction by his nursemaid. "I knew he was taken...It seems far away from me now...But I was aware before...Yes, I know." His eyes thinned when she said that Anwarr was here. "She brought him here? He is here?" his voice cracked slightly. That he had not expected. Why could he not sense him, his own son?! He expected too much of himself as always. He had been through things few could even conceive of in their darkest imaginings. His spirit was mutilated but he could only strive to find bits and pieces of himself rather than recognize how devastated his soul was. "Do they know this? These people?" When she confirmed that they did he sighed and sank more deeply against the wall in a rather wilted slump. She could not have told him sooner...Too much happened too fast...Or had she told him and he didn't remember? His memory seemed foggy at best now...Sometimes it was clear, other times his mind drew long blanks. Sometimes he forgot exactly what Sammael had shown him and he was grateful deep down...Wanted the lapses in his mind to lengthen. Whatever the case now, whether she had already told him or not, all that mattered was that he was aware of it now. "What are they doing about it?" he asked, his voice more jaded than he had intended. Once informed that they were going to hold Beth and investigate the situation, he settled deeply against her, pulling her even more snugly into his lap against himself. He fell quiet and just rocked her gently, nuzzled his face against her softly. He was unsure...Unsure of what would happen to him, to Anwarr, to Arilwen. He began to regret letting them take him without fighting it to his last breath. He may have escaped with his wife...He should have taken that chance.

Naazir in the meantime had investigated the kidnapping of Anwarr by placing Beth under house arrest and interrogating her. When he had what he believed was a clear picture of both sides, he returned to the dungeon. It was morning by that time because he had slept on the information.

Wyrvaust was still curled up with Arilwen, who he held protectively in his arms

while she slept. At some point he too had dozed off, but he was a light sleeper, always had been. His eyes opened when he heard the click of a lock at the end of the cell block, and he lifted his head when Naazir's footsteps halted just outside of their cell. Kaamus on the other hand continued to sleep soundly. He felt safer in the dungeon that when he slept outdoors and was a sound sleeper unless he was on edge. Naazir did not unlock the cell door but stood by it as he called out to the both of them.

"Lady Arilwen, Master Wyrvaust, I have news of your child." He fell silent until Arilwen was fully awake, which Wyrvaust would see to if she, like Kaamus, still slumbered. When she was alert, Wyrvaust stood with her and went to take a stance by the cell door near Naazir. "There shall have to be a hearing in concerns to Anwarr's placement. His nursemaid confessed without coercion or force to the abduction of Anwarr, son of Arilwen and Wyrvaust. As she has placed herself under our jurisdiction, she shall stand trial for the crime of kidnapping and forgery, as she did forge documents proving the child to be hers. Her claims and reasons for the abduction shall have to be taken into consideration however, and she is a valid witness to those claims. She alleges that Anwarr was endangered and neglected, that his life was in constant jeopardy while residing in the household of his father and mother. That she was often left in sole charge of the child under threat of enemies, while his mother and father engaged in dangerous activities with even more dangerous enemies. I would like to hear your honest response to these charges. Are they true?"

Wyrvaust gripped Arilwen's arm tightly, painfully so though he had not intended it. He was not accustomed to how physically strong he now was at all times, where before he had only had that kind of strength in demon form. "Lies, all lies! The Raven and his Swan never neglected him...never endangered him! Always he was protected..."

"So well protected that his nurse could walk away with him, hide with him for all these months unknown to you?" Naazir pressed.

"Beth was trusted...Should not have been able to betray her Lord and Lady. We trusted her," Wyrvaust snarled.

"Why should she not have been able to betray you?" Naazir questioned.

"She was...she was trusted..." Wyrvaust stated quietly.

Naazir shook his head. "The truth, Sir."

Wyrvaust scowled. "The Raven will not be judged by those not of his kind! Will not be sneered at for what he is and how his nature drives him!" he shouted angrily.

"I am not here to judge, only to hear the truth, sir. Why should she not have been able to betray you?"

"She was...bonded to me...Incapable of betrayal..." Wyrvaust admitted.

"Enslaved you mean? Dominated?" Naazir stressed.

Wyrvaust heaved a harsh breath. "She was free to live as she wished, just not to

betray or harm. Wyrvaust does not see that as slavery!" he snapped.

"Why so angry all of the time, Master Wyrvaust?" Naazir asked him.

"It has much to be angry about...Much is tangled up inside of him...Those it loved were taken from him. Choice was taken from him, then freedom. So much pain in between...The Raven feels so much injustice in him, all around him. Rage burns in this heart, hunger...a thirst he has never felt before and is terrified to slake. No time in battle was there to take it from his enemies...and also, he feared doing so...Feared he would not be able to stop taking...New is this...New and painful this terrible thirst."

"What is it you thirst for?" the Shaamea asked him.

"Blood," Wyrvaust answered quietly.

"Then you are not a demon, but a vampire?" Naazir searched.

"The Raven no longer knows what he is...An Abyss Demon it was...What it is now, it can only describe as constant hunger."

"Step away from the bars please, Master Wyrvaust," Naazir told him after a moment of silence.

Wyrvaust's eyes shot on him and a low snarl rattled in his throat. Naazir frowned. "I mean only to release the lady, if she so wishes it, to see her son. She shall be returned to you as soon as she chooses to be. She is not a prisoner. She is your guest," the Shaamea knight clarified.

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Willow

Arilwen nodded dejectedly to confirm that indeed, Anwarr was here. "Yes. And the man that came to talk to me in the field... he told me that he was going by a different name... that he didn't speak much and was always introverted." Arilwen tucked herself into his lap, curling against his chest as he began to rock. She was weary. But things were about to get worse.

At some point, Arilwen was nudged awake by the arrival of a knight. Sleepy eyes opened, and she was on her feet in a moment, grasping onto the bars of the cell in dire expectation. News. He had come bearing news. The mother's knuckles whitened on the bars and her eyes gleamed with hope. But what came was not exactly what she wanted to hear. It began to unfold that Beth confessed. To every bit. But also that she had given her own motive. That Wyrvaust and Arilwen were neglecting their child and putting him in danger. That was not an easy thing for any parent to hear. Color drained from Arilwen's features as Wyrvaust began to bark his arguments. No... it wasn't true. Or was it? Anwarr HAD been left with Beth quite a bit, but there were wards... and her bond to Wyrvaust. How could she do this? How could she just suddenly run with him? A tiny whimper escaped from the Swan's lips as her husband's massive fingers clamped down hard on her arm, leaving it to throb in pain. But no words formed. And that physical pain could not compare to what she was feeling. Had they neglected their own son? Was she fit to be a mother? Wyrvaust's growl brought

her back and she touched his arm gently, her violet eyes filled with sadness. "I must go see him..." She said softly. "I will return, I swear it." If he would step back, Arilwen would step out of the cell with Naazir and would follow him from the dungeon to wherever he might lead her. Would her son even want to see her? Would he be angry with her? The unknowns made her crazy.

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Alaina

Marsol had been in the midst of something, it's importance irrelevant, when a voice he had not heard in some time reached him across the greater distances of the desert. Those amber optics hardened momentarily as he dismissed the group of bodies surrounding the table he currently stood at. The things Valis related to him about what had happened to Wyrvaust and then Arilwen were most unsettling. He had not even been aware that Wyrvaust had left his room where he had been lain for... how long now? Arilwen of course, he knew where she had run off to because he himself was not without spies of his own who had kept up with her until she had crossed over into lands that were green and lush, and then the tracking had stopped to see whether or not the swan was strong enough for it. The fact that he had not even known Wyrvaust was no longer the same as he had been well that would only add salt to the wounds. Would he feel guilt and remorse if or when he found out what had become of his old friend? Or would there only be anger? The group of people all looked to the tan fleshed lord they served and then cringed, even jumped, as his eyes thinned on none of them yet they all felt the weight of those scorching eyes just the same. Where in the name of hell had Gabriel gotten his hands on them? The thought was not at the fore front of his mind but it was a close runner up. It would be a moment or two before Valis received a response. It was a simple, albeit disturbingly calm, "My presence... you shall have." The group gathered around him was waved away as he abruptly turned on a dime to stalk off. Not even breathing a word as to why he was just up and leaving. It was none of their godman business so that was just how it was. On his way towards the doorway that led to one of the empty caverns in his volcanic fortress he stopped for just a minute in front of the open door to the personal chambers he had given to Cirgoth. The angel in human's skin was asleep at that particular time so it was easy to enter to cross the room to the bed where he was sprawled in laying on his back.. Marsol's brows narrowed as he watched the man sleep for a second. He looks so peaceful, he thought to himself. Reaching into the pocket of the coat he had grabbed on his way to leave he retrieved something small and wooden from it. A figurine. A miniature statue of someone holding an object in each hand. The piece of carved wood was set on the round obsidian table by Cirgoth's bed just to the right of the demon hunter's pile of clothing he had been wearing when Marsol had gone after him earlier. It was clean. But maybe the fact that Cirgoth was wearing a different outfit, one of fine silk, would rattle him? To think he'd been undressed in his sleep, hah.

Turning to leave he did something so unconscious yet natural to him after having been reunited with their twin sons. He blew a sharp breath and lit the hearth in the corner up to give Cirgoth's room a softer glow to fill it instead of just one candle. With that having been done he shut the door and made haste to leave... except that his daughter Anna got him before he could step through the earth gate he had summoned that would take him to this Kingdom of Eremaes to the far northwest. "Father," she said breathlessly, running to catch his arm and hug him tightly. "I have such good news to tell you!" "I've not the time for it now," he said, unwinding

her arm from around his after kissing the top of her head. "Wh-something's wrong isn't it?" Her brows furrowed now almost in the same menacing manner Marsol's did, just without the menace. "The Raven and his Swan are not in the best of circumstances, to them I must away to." "The s.. oh! Lady Arilwen! Father please allow me to come with you, I have not seen her in many moons and I fear little Anwaar has forgotten me already." Marsol turned his heated gaze down to promptly tell her no but he just could not argue with these new faces she had been making lately. The begging ones only a daughter could do to her father. He'd find out later who was teaching her such tactical skills. On the other hand perhaps a familiar face would serve Arilwen some good in this situation? It couldn't hurt... much. Thus with a rather zealous Anna in tow Marsol set off to Eremaes with every intention of taking back Wyrvaust and Arilwen despite the horrible crimes the Raven had committed against that kingdom. If there was to be punishment, it would be exacted by him on his terms and no one else's. Now whether this King would allow the two captives go with him was another matter entirely. He put a lid on his own inner rage at knowing it was Gabriel who had done this in the name of Sammael. Bringing anger into the other King's court would not solve anything. In time though after this matter was tended to he would be speaking to Aurelius as to just where the fuck Gabriel was. Cause at this point Marsol no longer felt the need to take prisoners...

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JD

Naazir led the nephelim up a gradually corkscrewing well of stairs, which passed four more dungeon levels before two guard rooms and a corridor later, they entered a narrow corridor on the main floor. That narrow corridor led to a wider corridor, then after ascending another flight of stairs off of it, a backstairs leading to the servants' wing, Naazir opened a door and gestured for Arilwen to enter. The room was fairly large, a thickly piled carpet covered the stone floor, and murals painted the walls. The mural made a jungle out of the chamber complete with all sorts of wild animals found overseas in Morashtar. Each wall represented a different continent and a selection of its wildlife in fact. Sitting at table playing with some clay was Anwarr, whose name was presently Haandru, although he had stubbornly refused to forget that his real name was Anwarr. He had never understood why he'd had to go away, why his father's chieftain, the king he was named after, did not want him there anymore... He did not care about the danger, he never had. Beth had told him that his parents had been killed and that Marsol had commanded they leave the desert for their safety. Naazir had already explained to him that his parents were alive, but that his father had done things which had to be forgiven before he could be released.

"My father is being held by...by...King Erema?" Anwarr had asked.

"Yes, for the safety of our people," Naazir had explained.

"My father would not harm them..."

"He came here as an enemy. He is dangerous now to our people," Naazir related evenly. Anwarr fell silent.

"This is all very hard for him," Naazir said to Arilwen. "The nursemaid told him you and your husband were dead. I told him it was a mistake, that you were not in

fact dead. I have not told him he was betrayed by his caretaker. He expecting you. You may tell him what you wish as long as it is the truth. I will be just outside." The Shaamea knight bowed to her at that and retreated to post himself outside the door, which he closed around. It was the only door to the playroom, which was on the second floor. The window was barred for safety.

Because Naazir had been placed in charge of Wyrvaust, Arilwen, Kaamus, and Arcades, he would be the first to receive the news of Marsol's arrival. He would meet with the desert king in the company of Arilwen after her visit with Anwarr. Naazir was curious to see what the red dragonian would have to say about his people and the situation. The room he would choose to meet Marsol and his escort in would be the banquet hall, where he and anyone with him could be provided with a decent meal. That area of the castle was also well guarded it happened. Naazir would seat them at the table of the knights and rangers, who sat together, oftentimes with their king, if he decided to join them.

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Willow

Already, Arilwen was quite impressed with the size of this place. She remained silent and stuck behind her leader and listened intently as he shared the information with her. Beth had told him that his parents were dead. It must have been a striking blow to her son to hear such a thing and then be told otherwise. The moment she stepped into the colorful room and saw him, Arilwen felt her heart crumble into a million pieces. The tears were quick to follow and she brushed past Naazir, making a beeline for her son. She tried to call out for him, but couldn't get a sound out. Her throat slammed shut and her breathing was heavy and fast. As long as he rose to meet her, Arilwen would lock her son in a deathgrip of a hug, sobbing into his dark hair. Now more than ever he looked almost exactly the same as Wyrvaust had... before his change.

When she finally could speak, her words came as whispered croakes. "My son... my son..." She breathed, finally pulling him away to hold him at arms' length. He was healthy physically, but mentally he had to be suffering. "I...I am so sorry." For the first time since Anwarr had come into this world, Arilwen was questioning her abilities as a mother. Had she been a fool to trust the wards...to trust Beth? She didn't know. Fingertips lifted to brush his dark hair back from his face, providing him with a teary smile. "You look well. I have missed you so terribly..." Ten thousand words wanted to spill from her lips and she couldn't get them all out fast enough.

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JD

Anwarr had never seen his parents as neglectful. He had never resented them for their courage to stand up for what they believed was right. He admired them both for it. Anwarr loved his parents, had felt deep inside somewhere that Beth had been deceiving him, but a part of him had not wanted to believe it either. She had been there for him too, loved him, and when Naazir had explained things to him, it had broken his heart that his suspicions had proved true. She had betrayed them all. It was Beth he felt betrayed by, not his parents. He idolized his father and

adored his mother to the ends of the world and beyond. The boy who was almost a teenager now sucked in a choked breath when his mother embraced him and hugged her super tight in return. In fact, he did not want to let go of her. He felt suddely like he was his real age again, and wished he had not outgrown that age in body and even mind. "Mother, mother...I have missed you. Please don't be sorry...You did nothing wrong. I hate her, I hate her for doing this to us!" he hated Beth because he loved her so much, for the pain she had caused all of them. "Father...Is he alright? I cannot imagine him locked up. He needs to be home. Please, can't we take him home, mother?" his heart spilled out in half sobs. He clung to her, unwilling to let go. He had decided while sitting at that table that he would not let her out of his sight. The scupture he had been working on, was a winged rendition of his father, in abyss demon form.

"Lord Marsol...Does he know? He can free father, can't he? Take us all back home?" he looked to her with his mother's violet eyes now, with the wide-eyed expectation of a child who could see things only one way.

Outside Naazir heard the boy's professions and pleas to his mother. Naazir was not without a heart and it pained him. Ereme had left it to him. Was his king testing him for some reason he alone knew, to place the fates of these people, one of them a very dangerous enemy, in his hands? Or did Ereme trust him that much? Naazir had never truly seen his own merit. He was a loyal man, confident in battle, had an even handed but well disciplined sense of authority, but he had no confidence in himself as a judge of other people's lives. He did not trust himself not to trust too easily, despite the fact that his instincts and ability to read people rarely failed him. That perhaps lie in the fact that other people had failed him, many times, before he had come here. He had never been among his own people. He had been taken by a tribe of Neffari in a raid as a very young child, been used as a child slave until he was eighteen, at what time he had been taken to Hawker's Fort where was to have been sold by a slave trader under the radar. Ereme and his party had been on the road at the time and had caught sight of the slave trader and his canvassed cages. The king had stopped the trader on the road to Hawker's Fort, discovered the slaves, and saved young Naazir and other slaves with him from a life of hard labor in Hesstromeph's mines in Mephais. Naazir had been offered the chance to be whatever he wanted to be, and he glowed with the determination to be one of the knights who had given him his freedom back.

Now here he was, 3rd Knight of the Crossroad Fellowship. He loved twenty of his comrades like brothers, and his king as a father. He would give his life for any one of them without regret, and do all in his power to stay alive for them, and to protect them. Naazir did not share his innermost thoughts and feelings with others, but the men knew he was there for them, knew he could be counted on, knew his word was golden. Now here this child and woman caused him disconcert. Whatever wrongs had been done him by his mother and father, if any, he was oblivious to. He clearly worshipped the ground they walked on. He had been gloomy the entire time here, and now? Life had filled his heart again. Was this the heart of a neglected son, of an endangered son? Naazir knew a little bit about abuse. Anwarr had barely spoken since arriving here, been very defensive of his parents when they were accused, and was now spouting out his heart to his mother without restraint.

"What would you do, my king?" he whispered to himself, his voice not even audible, head tilted back, his yellow-orange eyes trained on the stone ceiling.



He knew that this duty had been handed to him...But what of the demon? The brutal butcher of their friends and allies? What was to be done with him? The things Naazir sensed in Wyrvaust scared him, made him doubt his ability to judge him. He sensed...a wildness, an untamed and horribly agonized spirit, but also...goodness underneath all the aggression and hostility. But the way he had killed those good, brave men...It had truly taken another piece of Naazir's heart to witness it, had shaken his courage as nothing had before. Yes, Naazir had forced himself to call up his courage even then...But what he had seen would not soon be forgotten. How did a man let someone who had been so monstrous go? Could he even consider it? He was not sure...not sure he could judge him with any impartiality. Naazir was snapped out of his thoughts by the voice of Arilwen behind that door. She loved that demon, whatever monster he was, she loved him. That meant something. It had to. He felt sure he would fail Erema in this task he had assigned him.

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Willow

Arilwen was unsure of how Anwarr was viewing all of this, or how much he believed about what Beth had told him. She quickly found out, and as her son spilled all of his hurt and anger to her, she slid an arm around his shoulder and led him to a bench against the wall, sitting beside him to take his hands. "Don't hate her..." Arilwen said softly. "Beth was worried for you. She didn't fully understand what was happening, and she loves you like her own son. She was scared, and sometimes people make foolish decisions when they are frightened. I am sure she just panicked and wanted to take you somewhere safe." The Swan's thumb ran over his knuckles and she took a deep breath when the subject of Wyrvaust was opened up for discussion. "It IS hard to see him locked up." She admitted to her son. "But I am staying with him for now to make sure that he is not lonely while things progress. Your father... is different now, Anwarr." She chewed on her lower lip, trying to think of how to explain it. "Many bad things have happened to him and he is now very angry. He doesn't think ahead before he does something. Logic is not in the foremost part of his mindset. And physically, he is completely different. You wouldn't even recognize him if you saw him." She smiled gently and squeezed his hand. "They have advised me that Lord Marsol has been contacted, and they are keeping us updated. Currently I have to stay with your father to make sure he doesn't make any rash decisions. He misses you terribly. It is very hard for him here. But soon there should be a trial or meeting, something of the sort, and we will get everything straightened out. The knights here have been very accomodating to us. I need you to be patient, and brave, alright? We are trying to get this straightened out as soon as possible."

Another half hour would be spent answering any of Anwarr's questions that she could, then rose to say her temporary goodbye. "I have to return to your father. I wish I could split myself in two and be in both places at once." Her eyes were regretful, and she took his cheeks in her hands and kissed his brow. "I will come back as soon as they let me, alright?" Once the goodbyes were said, Arilwen would step out of the nursery to find Naazir. And only once she was out of sight would she press the palms of her hands into reddening eyes to keep herself from falling apart.

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JD

When the lady Arilwen stepped outside of the play room, Naazir steeled himself immediately against any emotional influences. He was quite adept at raising a guard of self-possession against whatever stirred within him up to a point, but being a passionate creature he did have a temper and zeal when justified or roused by conviction. He walked silently with the lady, pretending not to notice her distress, until they met and turned a corner where she bowed her face into her hands in a display of sadness while her son came rushing up behind them. Naazir stood aside and let the boy pass. He would not keep him from his mother, not while he stood witness to handle matters if he should need to.

"I am going with you, mother, to be with father. I won't let you leave without me," he resolved stubbornly.

Naazir shook his head. "A dungeon is no place for a child," he protested.

"The only place I belong is beside my mother and father. I do not care where they are," Anwarr insisted. Naazir looked for Arilwen a moment then set a stern eye on the young man. "I am afraid you cannot stay with your father. We do not allow children to stay in the dungeon...You can..."

Before he finished his sentence, Anwarr complicated matters by acting on his heart and impulses. He lunged towards Naazir, going for his sword. His idea was to get himself thrown in the dungeon. Problem was, Naazir was quick and had many battle hardened years of experience under his belt. The Shaamea looked a lot younger than he was. Like the Namas, Shaamea were an ageless race as well. He caught Anwarr by the wrist in a strong grip which made him wince, and when he began to kick Naazir and punch him with his free hand, Naazir just stared down at the child.

"I know what you are trying to do, Anwarr." The child's eyes shot on him when he called him by his real name for the first time. He had spoken to Naazir before, only the knight had always addressed him by his alias, Handru. "You will only end up locked in your own chamber."

"What about Beth! Are you going to lock her up for stealing me from my parents?!" he shouted.

"She has been arrested and imprisoned in fact, Anwarr. She is in the northeast tower," Naazir informed him.

"Why not the dungeon like my father?" Anwarr practically accused with fire in his breath.

Naazir sighed. "Her crime is not the same...Hers is a crime of love...What she did was wrong, and she shall be punished, but she poses no threat to anyone and is just as secure as your father is, only a little more comfortable."

Ignoring his mother's pleas, Anwarr clenched his jaws and his fists to stand with the defiance of a bull. "I will do harm to someone if you do not place me with my father and mother. I will not be forced apart from them another night. I have a

right to be with my family!"

Naazir had had enough. "Guards!" he bellowed. His voice was so loud and crisp that Anwarr jumped at the sound of it. He struggled against Naazir's grip, but the knight held him fast. His wrist did not even slip. The guards were quick to get there and when they did, Naazir shoved the boy towards him. "Lock him up in his chamber and keep him under constant guard," Naazir commanded, and the guards obeyed without hesitation. They really did not have the men to spare, but Naazir would be damned if he would give the boy his way for his bad behavior.

When the guards dragged the boy off, and he struggled wildly, even despite his mother's pleas, Naazir turned to face the nephelim. "I realize he needs you and your husband, that he is in pain, but he must learn to face the facts, and not resort to that kind of behavior." Naazir began to walk again, and in doing so would carry their conversation down the servant stairs. "Had he appealed to me in a more sincere way, I might have allowed him to visit his father, but...your husband may not be the best example for him right now. Tell me...how came he to be so hostile?" Naazir wanted to understand.

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Willow

It was already hard enough for Arilwen to walk away from her son, but when he came running after her, demanding that he go as well, her heart broke. She didn't want him in the dungeon. What if someone came to deliver bad news and Wyrvaust lost it? She did not want their son to witness that. "Anwarr..." She said softly, but quieted as Naazir spoke. She was backing him one-hundred percent though. "Anwarr, he's right. It is dangerous down there. You are much safer here..."

She saw his body tense and a split second before he did it, she knew he was going to jump at the man for some reason. She lunged when he did to grab for him, but the knights were faster. "Anwarr! Stop that right this instant!" She demanded as he struggled, then pressed a hand over her mouth when he threatened to do harm to someone. "Stop! Don't you dare threaten these men! ANWARR!"

But there was no talking sense into him. He was upset. He was like his father. The guards were called and she watched as her son was dragged off down the hall to be secured in his room. She wanted to scoop him up... to take Wyrvaust and her son and go home. She just wanted to go home. But things were more complicated than that now. Violet eyes turned to Naazir as he asked how he got so angry. "Do you mean my son or my husband?" She asked in a deadpan voice. "Either way, the answer is me."

Of course she fully blamed herself for all of this. Wyrvaust going to hell, becoming the way he did. Her son being taken from them. All of it. A thick migraine began to pound through her skull and she pinched the bridge of her nose, closing her eyes for a moment. She was suddenly very, very tired. What were they going to do with her family?

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Alaina

Out of an earth gate marched seven bodies. Marsol stepped out first, as was expected of any kind of leading figure, with this deathly serious look that burned in his amber eyes to make them seem all the more golden. There was a rather dashing, if we do say so, light haired fellow clad in the choice of gear he choose to wear be it soldier or otherwise that came out of that gate after Marsol. A bard of many a tale and lore if ever there was any. Alongside the irresistible Gilriael there also walked the ruggedly handsome demon progeny, oldest blood son, Draemus. Three guards, men who served Marsol of their own free will's in various fashions within the dragon lord's domain, clad in their usual suits of armor and with the crest or emblem that stated where they came from and what they stood for followed closely behind Draemus and Gilriael. Somewhere between the Son, the Bard, and the soldiers was one who seemed the odd one out. A young woman with a wild tangle of red hair that seemed to shift in it's hue every so often whom wore a simple short sleeved lemon yellow dress and sandals that clashed with the battle hardened and war scarred demons she walked amongst. Anna had tried to make herself as presentable and humble as possible to whatever event it was her Father had to tend to in order to bring the Raven and his Swan back home. No fancy jewelry, not that she ever wore any, or elaborate hair style was necessary here. Just a small piece of shiny tinsel tying her hair back from her shoulders so that it spilled in it's slightly curly waves down the middle of her back. She was extremely self conscious now as she came out of that gateway in the middle of the clustered soldiers, as if she was the one who needed protection. Which wasn't the case here but that was just how it looked to her. She glanced up with her pale blue eyes to faces of the warriors and then studied the fair haired one, Gilriael, for several moments before looking up and over to Draemus a bit. Just watching from where she stood she could see how close the two young men must be to Marsol. She saw how Marsol conducted himself with others and how differently he was around those he held dear. Anna had never gotten the chance to be around whenever something important or political went down. Maybe now she would get that chance? She wondered about that as she stood a little off to the side with a straw basket hooked in the crook of her arm, a small piece of cloth draped over it's contents. One of her secret weapons that she had been wanting to show Arilwen was how well she had taken to cooking in the time that Arilwen and Anwaar had been gone. A pie was in that basket among other things. Food is what she thought would be a decent gift for her friend when she did get to see her. Sadly the last time she had seen Anwaar was when he had been but an infant. So with that respect she had brought little tid bits for him to gum and nom to death. Oh how shocked she would be if she found out just how much Anwaar II had grown. To think he was no longer a child but somewhere in his teens? Or he looked there about?

For whatever reasons Marsol saw fit to bring Gilriael and Draemus on this trip into this kingdom, he had not divulged that information. Not yet anyways. Did it matter though? As they were seen to the banquet hall where anyone within his company was provided sustenance for Marsol himself would decline part taking of the feast available to them. His internal discontent did not let him have an appetite. The three guards however jumped at the chance to chow down though they had not forgotten their manners so they would not make pigs of themselves. For the most part he and his company wore dark colors and black, with the exception of Anna naturally. Marsol knew Anna was pretty excited and hopeful to see Arilwen and little Anwaar again. He allowed her that happiness and kept his own thoughts to himself, just as he bid the others from doing, for the time being.

JD

Of course Naazir realized this was all very difficult for the nephelim and her family. By her scent Naazir knew Arilwen was angelic. He could not tell what kind exactly, but of some pure generation he could tell from the fragrance she carried. "I am willing to wager that you take too much on yourself, as those who love deeply tend to do," he presumed purely on the nature of people. "I am also willing to bet that your husband would disagree with you." Despite all that Wyrvaust had done and was capable of, Naazir was not blind to the fact that the demon's love for his angel wife was heart felt. That fact did not make his task any easier.

"You will not return to Lord Wyrvaust just yet, Lady Arilwen. Accompany me, please," he conveyed and escorted her hence back downstairs to the main floor, and from where the servant's stairway accessed the hallway they came from, to the wider corridor of the main floor. From there they proceeded to the Banquet Hall just minutes before Marsol arrived.

The Banquet Hall was empty with exception of the guards and a few trusted serfs as Naazir had arranged for it to be for the time being. Only the guards, knights and king could enter with those guests Naazir allowed.

"Please have a seat, Lady Arilwen," he urged her, motioning towards a large, high backed chair by the smallest and only oval table in the very spacious hall. It sat only eight people, but every other chair was very throne-like in its craftsmanship. "Is there anything the serfs can bring you? Food, wine?" if she declared a desire for something, the serf nearby would get right to it as soon as the lady expressed her need. The table was already set with a wide variety of food, wine, ale and whiskey, placed by the serfs shortly before they arrived.

About the time Arilwen had declined or accepted some refreshment or provinder, Marsol's arrival was announced by a guard. Two of Naazir's comrades at arms were good enough to escort Marsol to the banquet Hall where Naazir met him at the door. Marsol would recognize the man immediately as one of his desert's most unique people. Shaamea stood out from other people as less human in appearance owed to their lion-like claws, teeth and fangs, and nose. Even their auburn hair, which was redder than their sienna colored skin by only a few shades, was shaggier in its thickness than most peoples'. It was uncommon to see Shaamea outside the desert and alienated from their people as Naazir was. The Shaamea knight bowed deeply to Marsol and when he straightened, he swept a hand out towards the table Arilwen was seated at, if she had not risen with Marsol's arrival.

"I am grateful you could come, Lord Marsol. I am Naazir, 3rd Knight to my good king. I am charged with the guardianship of your man Wyrvaust until my king returns, as it was I and the men I commanded who captured him. Please join me and the lady Arilwen at the King's table. We have prepared a feast for you and your men." Two professional serfs stood by to insure the platters and beverages did not run out, to answer to any needs, and to fetch any special requests if they had it in stock. After Marsol was seated, Naazir seated himself beside the Chieftain so he could address him better and with more privacy as needed. As Marsol's men introduced themselves, Naazir bowed his head to each of them in turn. Gilriael he had heard of indeed, but none so much as Marsol himself, who many of Gilriael's songs spun tales of. The bard was a legend as much for having made his king a

legend as the devastating effects of his songs in the battle field.

"Your man Wyrvaust is in good physical health," he broke the ice by informing the red dragon lord as his men enjoyed the food. "It has not been easy to keep him that way however, as he has forced our hands to violence on more than one occasion," he added informatively. Marsol could count on Naazir to be honest. "It grieves me to report that he is very much an enemy of war, Lord Marsol. The question remaining is whether he did so of his own free will. Many who fought for Gabrian were dominated or possessed, including those allies and men of ours he took control of to turn against us. I wish to understand how a demon who is summoned, cannot refuse to serve the summoner. That aside, he had not been cooperative. His is a violent nature and he has proven himself dangerous to all who cross his path, but perhaps his own wife." He paused and sucked in a deep breath. "I am not even sure of that to tell the truth. I noticed dark bruises and claw marks on her arm when I came for her earlier." It had healed since of course, but he was referring to marks left on her accidentally by Wyrvaust when he had grappled her arm.

"Now there is also the safety of a child to be considered...A child whose own nursemaid abducted him to remove him from the danger associated with his father, and perhaps his mother. We do not condone what she did, but we do feel responsible for your namesake Anwarr now that he has come under our protection. I am ready to hear some tales, My Lord, some tales of why a nursemaid feared for a child's life, of why a gentle lady believes she is cause to her husband and child's rage, of why a demon who once served you came to fight and kill hundreds for the enemy of the world. Yes, we believe Gabrian may be just that. We believe his goal is to unleash hell on this world. We know also that you oppose him and his even more dangerous master." That much King Heldras had informed them of. "Why should they be released, Lord Marsol, why should any of them be released? I want to know the tale of why they should be returned to you, Desert King." Naazir spoke with the conviction of a man who stood by honor, compassion and justice, he spoke as a good man would.

Naasir did not need to hear Marsol demand or request the return of his people. Naazir knew the king would do just that. Marsol was reknowned for being very protective if not possessive of his own, just as he was known for heavy handed honor. Naazir did not know Marsol personally, but he had heard a lot of him and drawn his own conclusions.

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Alaina

Marsol was not just surprised to see the Shaamae knight here in Eremaes but intrigued by it. For the way of the Shaamae people was it must have been something dire if not very unfortunate to take Naazir far from his homeland. It was highly unusual to see one such as Naazir in this region, let alone outside the harsh terrain they had known as their first homes. Or did Naazir not consider the sands to be his home any longer now that he served a King in another land? An arm crossed his chest with the hand near his shoulder as he gave a nod and bow in return out of respect for Naazir greeting him and having his men at arms show Marsol and his group such hospitable accommodations. As they had taken their seats where they could speak in more exclusiveness he gestured with a hand to Anna that Lady Arilwen

was here after all. It took just a look of those blue eyes and off the young woman went to take a seat by the Nephelim and sort of smother her with a hug or two of affection. Now with that having been done he did not have to be concerned whether or not Anna overheard them speaking, or asking questions, or anything else the girl might have needed. The demonic draconian held up a hand to decline any offer of drink when a serf glided on by them. He had not come here to eat, drink and be merry. He'd come for Wyrvaust, Arilwen and Anwaar II. That was all. Nothing more, nothing less. The seriousness in those amber eyes did not waver or wane in the least as Naazir then informed him as to the condition that the Raven was in, the circumstances surrounding this whole mess. Several things Naazir told him unsettled him but most of which, did not shock him one bit. One's will could so easily be bent to that of another's as far as domination and the like were concerned. It was a terrible thing that had happened here to the men Naazir spoke of after having faced someone as powerful as Gabriel. It was not every day one could survive that kind of encounter, least of all if it was the infernal angel himself that they had been contending with. They must have had quite a number of man power to have brought him down, Marsol reasoned after remembering just how easily Marcania and Thane and Cirgoth had been chased down back in the barren lands. On foot too mind you when the three had been in flight. It was to be expected though was it not? Sammael did not house weaklings or foster anything but the best within his fold. As Gabriel was his most prized if not work of art, so to speak, there had to be someone of equal if not more arcane power to bring the infernal down. There was only four beings Marsol would even entertain whom would take up that task of detaining Sammael's Progeny and even then, there was just one man who would actually do it. Well, not a man but a God.

What Naazir wanted to hear was more than just stories to convince him why he should release the three into Marsol's care. It was the tale of their lives is what it was, Marsol thought with a faint tick in the corner of his mouth. He could no more say in so many words how Wyrvaust was what he was then he could define the deserts beauty. It was perhaps one of those tales that had to be seen, experienced, witnessed even to begin any hope of understanding. However seeing as how Naazir was of the mind set to hear a reasonable explanation as to why he should release the parties concerned here Marsol itched his chin a bit as he collected his thoughts, the more productive ones, and put them into the kind of order that would make sense to someone that wasn't inside his head. "Their release ought to be granted for they are no more your enemy than I. Deceived, is what they have been. By someone they had entrusted the well being of their only son to. A woman whom had been a trusted friend as much as a nursemaid to Wyrvaust and his own, only recently to faltered in her loyalty. I cannot say as to just why the woman saw fit to steal a child and whisk it away to a land she had never been in before. If her will or mind has not been tampered with then it would have been out of love that she let her fear overtake her, and hence take Anwaar from his parents. Love can be just as destructive as hate if one allows it. I am not condoning what was done to your men by Wyrvaust, but I am not condemning him of it either. If he was beckoned here to do the bidding of Gabriel it is not by mistake that it has happened that way. It would seem this little stunt was done to put your King against me if Wyrvaust had succeeded in slaying the men you tell me he has which of course would earn him the title of nothing but the enemy. I wonder, Naazir, what would have happened if your King had decided to sentence the Raven to death and not informed me of his capture at all? It is just like Gabriel's master to play such dangerous games between people who count themselves as allies. I dare not think what would transpire if you held your tongue in this matter Naazir." Marsol paused then as he rested the full

weight of his gaze on the Shaamae knight he was conversing with. He did not pause long though as he shifted in his seat by Naazir's side.

"If it's lack of control," Marsol said then, his expression hardening just a degree. "He possesses it on a level many a man and demon do not. Wyrvaust is a husband to Lady Arilwen and a father to Anwaar. A murderer, Naazir, he is not. What he did was orchestrated by Gabrian, on behalf of Sammael to ruin more lives. Innocent lives. You say he is an enemy of war. I say we are all at war and we know damn well who means to see this world burn and enslave all her people. Unfortunately I can tell you till I am blue in the scales why they should be set free but it may be better if I speak to Wyrvaust's nursemaid myself. I desire the truth from her as to why she felt the need to be the cause of such unwanted misery within my family." There it was. Wyrvaust wasn't just Marsol's man, he was a part of the tribe, of the clan, and he was family to the dragon lord just as much as his wife and son were. The last thing on his mind however was punishment. He knew that Wyrvaust must be in worse shape now then perhaps he was when he'd put him to sleep. But what had happened since then? Marsol had no idea of the journey Wyrvaust had taken because of how he had put him to "sleep" back in the sands where he could not get through to him. It unsettled him to think he had perhaps been the cause of something terrible happening to the Raven and after, or if, Naazir let him see the nursemaid who had kidnapped Anwaar II he would want to pay the Raven a much needed visit. Now if and only if Naazir let him see the woman whom shouldn't have been capable of betraying Wyrvaust the way she had Marsol would relay any confessions he might get out of her to Wyrvaust and Arilwen in a very exclusive channel, of course...

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JD

Dire circumstances had indeed led Naazir to the north central kingdom of An Morendor's vast continent, but he never saw being in Eremaes as anything other than a windfall. Certainly he longed to be among his own kind, as unique as Shaamea were he could not help but feel that yearning, but he could not want for a better king to serve. Eremae had a pure heart, despite all the depressing things he had seen and all the pain he had suffered. He was a good man and Naazir, like all the knights, would stand by Eremae until death or old age took them. Few of them expected to live to be old men. Naazir lowered his eyes after he had heard all which Marsol had said. His guts and his heart blazoned what needed to be done here. He knew without a doubt in his heart or head, but he was quite certain that he was wrong to act on such impulses...to give into them. Why then did he stand and fix a pair of amber eyes with a cold burn on the king, and set his face in steel as he gazed on him? Moreover, why did he speak the words he chose without waiting, without further investigation? Because he knew he could do nothing less than what his heart roared for him to do, even if it damned him. That was the kind of man Naazir was.

"You do not need to speak to the nursemaid. You already know her heart and why she did what she did. She has been interrogated until she knelt quivering in a puddle of her own tears, and not once, since she was declared a suspect of abduction, has she lied. You shall not visit your man Wyrvaust, for what needs be done with his fate is also clear as midday from midnight. I shall oblige you to abide by my terms, however, as I have been given the authority by my king to decree in all



matters concerning Wyrvaust and his family with other prisoners in my keeping. I am Naazir Adreamus, third at arms of the Crossroad Knights, devout champions of Eremae and his kingdom of Eremaes. By my authority, I release the prisoner Wyrvaust to your sole keeping, if you shall agree that he shall never against set foot in Eremaes. If he is found within our territory under any circumstances; his fate shall be ours, and you shall forfeit all rights to his welfare. The child Anwarr shall be returned to his mother Arilwen's care. She is free to travel as she sees fit, for she has committed no crime against us or this country. She may stay, she may go; she is free to choose her path. The Ymogior Goblin who calls himself Riel shall be released into your custody, as one who acted as the lady Arilwen's escort. I hold him highly suspect as an enemy agent of Acheron, so be mindful of my instincts. I have no proof whatsoever to base my suspicions on, understand, only my guts. The lady Beth shall remain in our custody, where she shall serve out a sentence of ten years imprisonment in our kitchens, courtyard, and her chamber."

The knight paused in his lengthy albeit decisive verbal contract and gazed a moment at Marsol and then Arilwen as he felt her eyes on him. A ghost of a smile warmed his lips at the sight of Anna's hand resting so kindly on her own. It was clear these two were close friends. His inhuman eyes then locked on Marsol again. "You are welcome to stay as long as you see fit with free run of our provisions. I shall escort you to the dungeon to collect your man when you are ready to disembark."

Just like that he had made up his mind, right or wrong, he acted on his heart, regardless of his self-doubt. If Marsol chose to stay, Naazir would call on the chamber master to show Marsol and his men to the guest wing and their rooms. The castle was presently very crowded, but room would be made for distinguished guests such as Marsol and his men at arms.

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Willow

Arilwen did as she was told and followed Naazir, anxious about meeting with Marsol. Would he be furious with her? Disappointed? None of it mattered when she entered the hall and saw him and Anna standing side by side. Arilwen took off at a dead run and threw herself into Anna's arms, who was the closest of the two, hugging her fiercely and fearing she might start to cry. Marsol was next, and she only let go when she was ushered with the group to sit and discuss what had occurred and what was to be done. The angel was stiff in her seat, her hand reaching beside her to clutch Anna's while Naazir spoke and explained what had happened. The insinuation that Wyrvaust had hurt her intentionally when he had grabbed her made Arilwen sit up straight and open her mouth to argue, but she relented and closed it again. She didn't want to do anything to jeopardize her possibility of release to Marsol's possession. It had been an accident. He didn't know his own new strength.

It seemed unbelievable when Naazir finally declared that Wyrvaust would finally be released to Marsol's custody, and Arilwen couldn't keep herself from letting out a joyous cry and leaping to her feet. It was probably rude, but she couldn't contain it. The angel clasped her hands in front of her. "My son. May I have my son now?" She wanted to fetch him even more quickly than Wyrvaust because she worried he might do something foolish, as he had threatened. She looked ready to explode. Wyrvaust would be thrilled to see Marsol, and she wanted to be there to see his face when it happened.

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Alaina

Marsol's jaw clenched slightly when he watched Naazir stand to give him that burning gaze along with that setting of his expression. Could it be that nothing he said would make any difference as far as Wyrvaust was concerned? Had the knight already made up his mind or had Ereme decided what to do with his prisoners. If that was the case then the outcome would not be a pretty one. Even the lowest in rank that served him he thought of as his own and therefore, he would not allow someone else to exact punishment upon them if he could help it. Relief however softened that clench to his strong jaw and relaxed the tension in his shoulders. He had a small concern that Naazir and his king might not be very understanding in concerns to this matter but he saw then that his initial study of Naazir had proven accurate. The Shaamea not only appeased Marsol but he also perked his curiosity, mildly however, with the news of some Ymogior Goblin who he had never heard of was to be placed into his hands to deal with as he saw fit. The terms that Naazir laid out on the table was acceptable considering the severity of the crimes that had been stacked against the Raven. Well to the kingdom of Eremaes they were. Marsol's face formed a slight contemplative look as if he were considering whether or not the conditions Naazir had set forth were ones he even liked. That wasn't the case though, thankfully. Marsol was merely grateful to have Naazir handling this on behalf of Ereme. It could have gone a lot of other ways had it been somebody else. This was a fact he was more than painfully aware of, due to past experiences.

He shook his head to the offer of staying any longer when Naazir asked it to him and his group. It wasn't anything personal. He just felt that he'd be imposing on Naazir and his King's grounds if they stayed any longer then needed once their business was done. That and he would rather be at home tending to some other serious matters. He told Naazir as much in as politely but bluntly as possible that in a round about way though he told the Shaamea knight that he would come visit when he had dealt with what he needed to. Marsol gave no details as to what bid him to leave Ereme's kingdom so soon but that was neither here nor there. They all had issues to work out, some more than others. The dragon lord tried not to appear in such a hurry, because he wasn't, but it may have come off that way regardless. As he rose to stand and half turn from the table to face Naazir fully he could not help but to ask as to just what they had done about Gabriel. Of course he would ask instead of demand however if Naazir didn't satisfy the demonic draconian's taste for justice. Or maybe it was too dark to be considered that anymore?

Anna was ecstatic to see Arilwen in such good health. The Namas lady had put a hand over her mouth to hide the laughter as she watched Arilwen leap from herself to Marsol to hug him tightly and Marsol in turn had coiled an arm around the Nephelim's shoulders to hold her close a moment with all the concern and warmth any close friend or family would show one another. It was a rare display what Marsol showed then cause his affections were so closely guarded, if not strict in whom he gave them to. She was quick to jump in her seat when Arilwen gave that most joy filled shout when Naazir had spoken of her beloved's release as well as her sons. Her sons? Anna's brows drew together in confusion as she started pushing her chair back to get to her feet. The young lady had no intention of parting company with Lady Arilwen now after not having seen her in many months. Wherever it was Arilwen was going to go to get little Anwaar II she wanted to follow. Oh she wanted very much

to see Arilwen's bouncing baby boy, or so she thought, and give his piggies little pokes and prods galore. Her hands actually shook a little from all the happiness that Arilwen beamed with and she even spied over her shoulder the slow faint smile drawing itself on Marsol's lips too. The soldiers that had come with them through the earth gateway to the kingdom of Erema were also in an up beat mood. Maybe that was owed to seeing the change in their lord's mood from tense to relaxed, and finally that expecting smile as he spoke with Naazir about other things concerning the Western Alliance. She canted her head to the side as she looked from Arilwen to the man named Naazir and then back to Arilwen again. Still wondering, she turned around completely to find where that fair skinned Bard and Marsol's eldest blood son were because she thought she might be able to ask them how in the world Anwaar II had gotten all the way out here. Wasn't he supposed to be in Wyrvaust and Arilwen's home back in the desert? What was a baby doing so far from his home! A bit of angst creased her brow though it was only out of concern for the Raven and Swan's child. Cause she did miss the little tike dearly. Even the hair pulling and drool on her shirt. Thinking then if he had grown an inch or so in the past months her right hand raised to take one of those wild red curls in between her fore finger and thumb, tugging on it slowly to pull it straight before letting it go so that it bounced right back into it's spring looking position. It was an idle gesture.

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JD

When Marsol explained that he would not be staying Naazir nodded his head with understanding. "I shall order the release of the prisoners into your custody then and have the warden draw up the papers under the terms we agreed to for his release. He is yours when they are signed." His gaze then fell on Arilwen when she addressed the subject of her son. "He is free to go home with you. There is no question that his wish is to be with you." That was putting it lightly. The child had practically threatened to wreak havoc if he was not returned to his mother immediately. At that he rose with the king. When asked what had been done with Gabriel Naazir eyed the chieftain, unable to release that information to him in any detail. "He is being held in a secure prison which I have not the authority to disclose the location of. Be sure that his prison is of a class which ensures his captivity. His fate is for his ward to decide, and you may believe justice shall be served." That said, Naazir led the way out of the banquet hall. On his way out of the door, he paused briefly to speak to a young guard which Anwarr favored as a friend and brotherly figure. "Fetch Anwarr, wont you Kallion, and see that all of his things are brought with him to the entrance hall." The guard bowed to the knight and headed off to the staircase which ascended to the staff floor. Naazir meanwhile informed Marsol's escort that they might be needed and to accompany them, hence he continued without further pause to escort Marsol and Arilwen through various main floor corridors, the last of them quite narrow, then a spiraling stairwell which accessed the dungeon's five floors. It was to the bottom of this stairway they proceeded to the lower dungeon's guard chamber. There Naazir picked up a quill and from a table and began to write on a sheet of vellum. The high quality leather parchment was used for the expedition of prisoners because it could be stored in the library of records for hundreds, even thousands of years without decomposing. When two copies of the terms he had discussed with Marsol for releasing Wyrvaust and Kaamus to him were laid out (and he had written them verbatim of his verbal accord) he handed the quill to Marsol and waited for him to

sign both copies. Once signed, Naazir inked the seal on his ring and stamped both of the documents with it. His seal was a cross in a circle with the numeral three etched in an Esurian runic character at the center of the cross, representing the crossroads knights and his rank among them. With the prisoners' release signed, Naazir led the way into the dungeon to Wyrvaust and Kaamus's cell.

Naazir had placed the key in the lock's keyhole, but before he turned it, he looked up and halted all motion. He smelled it before he saw it...The scent of blood. His eyes swerved on Wyrvaust who was curled up seated in the corner of the cell, and then he looked to the corner juxtaposed of him were Kaamus lie...Or what was left of him, which was not very much. "Hell's grave...What has he done?" he gasped, at what time Wyrvaust lifted his head to pierce the Shaamea with his eyes. Two things happened then at the same time which would be very difficult to recognize for what they were. That sharp burn in Wyrvaust's eyes just emptied of all emotion to become perfectly hollow, and Naazir seemed to have a very sudden collapse of mental integrity. It began with the act of Naazir turning the key with a snarl, the rest of them rattling as his hand trembled with his apparent rage, hence he threw the door open with a violent shove. "Take him...take him and that Goblin's remains and be gone from here! Go now!" he demanded the chieftain and his men in a tone as harsh as it was rattled. "If he is ever seen in this kingdom again he shall be hunted down and slain," he reminded Marsol with a fierceness that could in no way be mistaken for an empty threat.

As Marsol's men brushed past him to secure Wyrvaust, Naazir's back smacked the iron plate and grate of the cell door and sent it clattering back with him against the cell's heavy bars themselves. His hand met his brow shaking as he manifested every symptom of an emotional breakdown. His breath was labored, he felt faint and he could not stop trembling. Then he began to calm down. His eyes weighed heavily on Wyrvaust as Marsol's men secured him with chains and irons, as much for Wyrvaust's safety as everyone else's. When he was dragged from the cell, he did not grovel before Marsol as he usually would under such circumstances, but instead, stood staring at Marsol while two of his seven men gathered Kaamus up. "The Raven can never be who he was again," Wyrvaust told his Lord tonelessly. His eyes then fell away as one of Marsol's men said that Kaamus was still alive. No creature should have survived that...And barely alive as he was, his pain was so great that he lived and breathed agony. "He is Gabriel's spy," Wyrvaust said as if that explained everything. He did not let himself look at Arilwen. Was it shame or something more? Perhaps it was the lack of shame.

"He should be put down..." Naazir guttered, then unable to bear being in their company any longer; he shoved Marsol's copy of the release papers into his hand then abandoned the chieftain and his men in quick strides, trusting them to see themselves out from here. Anwarr would be waiting for them in the entrance of the keep. As Naazir passed the guards in the antechamber, he barked at them. "See Lord Marsol and his people out of the keep and courtyard when they are ready. I want them gone within half an hour!" that said with barely a pause before he stormed out. (NPC the guards)

The werewolf Alpha Arcades had watched all of this with interest, just as he had watched the other prisoner getting eaten alive by the other prisoner. He had been sleeping during the initial attack which had come on the Ymogoir silently, and woken to the quiet sounds of horrific pain muted by the very agony Kaamus was experiencing. It had been too late to call for help by then, so Arcades kept his

silence. The albino werewolf with the tangerine coloured eyes stepped forward after Naazir had made his hasty retreat and gazed at Marsol through the bars of the cell across from the cell Wyrvaust had been kept in. "Lord Adreamus has a point, you know..." this said in response to Naazir's parting words to the red dragon. "Then again, who knows what virtues monsters like us harbor in our hearts, hm?" the werewolf retreated at that back into the shadows of his cell, where his grey clothing, white skin and long locks of snow white hair gave him away. Arcades obviously knew something, but he had tired of his prison, of being ignored by his captors, and was not going to talk to anyone sensibly until Ereme or one of his knights released him.

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Marsol noted their surroundings as Naazir led them down into the bowls of the castle where the criminals and miscreants were kept under lock and key. Having never actually set foot on Eremae's soil before he naturally would study this or that in his mind's eye though none of that showed on the dragon lord's facial features. He was as unreadable as ever during that little trip to get back his old friend. But was Wyrvaust still himself? The question loomed suddenly over them the instant Naazir's voice rose in alarm that would be the pre-shock of the horrible sight inside the cell that had been confining the Raven and this Ymogoir one. Surprise never entered the demons eyes as he stood silently while Naazir seemed to be getting a taste of... fear? Or whatever it was that Naazir was experiencing it was a mighty powerful terror that left him so shaken that he could not stand to be in their company a second longer. Perhaps one or two of the guards Marsol had brought on this voyage would look at each other and then look after Eremae's main guard with slight confusion and concern. Marsol's own amber pools seemed as if they had their own molten light to them now. They were so much brighter then they use to be and yet, the fierceness did not crowd out the sense of reason in them. If anything, they were more... complicated. Oh there was so much that had changed as of late, hadn't it? Those amber eyes thinned just a hair when the Raven first spoke those ominous sounding words of the man he use to be. No, he was more then a mere man or demon for that matter. But that was not the point here. Or was it? This was not the first time he had seen Wyrvaust in chains. It was however the first time the Raven had never lowered himself to show that old submissive posture he normally did at times like this. If that didn't say something about what had become of the Raven, nothing else would. He wouldn't have paid any mind to Kaamus had Wyrvaust not labeled him as a spy for Gabrian. That and that alone had an arched brow and a tick at the corner of his mouth all in the same breath that his eyes visibly hardened as though he just might finish the wretched creature off right here and fucking now. It would save them all the trouble later wouldn't it? If that were true then Kaamus was much better off rotting here in the dungeon that Naazir had put him in. The little swine's fate was far worse in trusting him to Marsol, of all people. He'd begun to contemplate just what to do with Kaamus when Naazir uttered those poor choice of words and then proceeded to cram those release papers into his up turned bronze skinned hands before making a hasty retreat from them all. Now he glanced slowly to the side after the guard whom had been so shaken to be in the company of Hell's own. A part of him might have took some shred of pity had Naazir understood their kind. But the man couldn't. His ways were not theirs. Or rather Naazir could not get past the horrors to see the beauty of it all. And what was that? Rolling the papers up into one hand he eyed Wyrvaust with the sort of intensity that made many a brave demon squirm in their scales. Still, Marsol said nothing. Using the quill he

'd been handed by Naazir earlier before coming upon the gruesome scene where Wyrvaust had feasted on Kaamus's flesh, one of the guards turned to offer their backside to use in signing those papers. It was as he was writing his own signature for who he was and where his domain was that yet again, someone had a comment about just what he ought to do with Wyrvaust. As if his own judgment was no longer good enough where the Raven was concerned. But it wasn't a snide comment that Arcades made was it? The lone wolf merely remarked on two sides of the same coin. It was a curious thing that what Arcades said. The demon's eyes shifted to look sideways to the cage that held the white wolf. It was only a moments look, or glower, that was given before the guards started off up the stairs all surrounding Wyrvaust at a distance that was both comfortable for them as much as Wyrvaust himself. Marsol brought up the rear because his own thoughts as well as the need to travel far from here were vying to be heard all at once. Normally it was custom to have one's leader at the front of the group. Marsol was not a pompous prick who had to always be ahead of his men nor was he so slack in the way he commanded that he would always be at the back either. As they all came back up to the floor which would take them out the way they had come; he found his head turning to look back over his shoulder to the doorway that led to the dungeon with a wry eye. Had Arcades been seeking freedom by trying to catch his ear?

On the way to the entrance where they would all meet up with Arilwen, Anwaar, and Annandabah, the guards Naazir had ordered to see Marsol and his company out were none too happy about coming close to the shackled Raven. They had good reason. There was a moment though where one of Naazir's guards either said something or tried to do something to hurry them all along. This of course fell through once the guard realized that their efforts to get this insane demon out of his king's castle was met with an unpleasantly burning stare from the dragon. Marsol's men would not deviate from ushering Wyrvaust back home. They had their orders and they would follow them to the letter. Coming upon the entrance they would catch wind of how absolutely shocked Anna was where she stood beside Arilwen to see that this youth was Anwaar. The Neffari with the wild tangles of red hair and freckles just could not believe the unnatural rate at which Anwaar had grown up. He was in his teens now! Anna wondered if she had missed something and this was some cruel joke on Arilwen's behalf. Her dark blue eyes went up to see Marsol immediately when all the guards exited the entrance on their way to leave, and she turned to ask him if it was true that this young man was Anwaar. From where she stood she wouldn't get a good look at the state Wyrvaust was in though she did catch small glimpses through the guards all around him. The sound of iron clanging made her brows rise as she then noticed the look of irritation on her father's face. Her brows creased in concern as she pursed her lips and decided to keep her questions to herself for now. Somewhere behind Arilwen and Anwaar, but ahead of the group of armed men and the demon they were guarding, Anna slipped her arms around that basket of goods she had brought for her friend's family. Glancing around she then felt extremely foolish to have even brought the basket in the first place. Embarrassment brought a scarlet color to her face as she walked quietly along with everybody else to depart from this strange kingdom and its kind knights and great food.

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Arilwen looked relieved when she was assured that her son was being fetched, and one of Naazir's men left to complete that task. She would grasp Anna's hand and move with the group towards the dungeon. Her son was freed. Her husband would be freed. Marsol was here and he would certainly take care of them all.

She smelled it too, as they descended. Arilwen at the back of the group, violet eyes peering around to see their cell splattered with blood and... Kaamus. Her stomach heaved and she took a slow breath. She noted her husband avoiding her gaze, his quiet tone. Poor Kaamus. He had been so kind, though he had worked for Gabrian. Swallowing, she turned when she was called away to come and get Anwarr. She took Anna with her, because Anna did not need to be present for Naazir's utter loss of composure. She wished to apologize for her husband, but kept quiet and turned to climb the stone steps, Anna's arm linked with her own. Would that be how it was now? Her husband had no control and she would have to follow after him, cleaning up the mess, apologizing, trying to piece things back together? If that was what she was required to do, she would. But even the thought of it exhausted her. He was such a strange being now... someone she would have to learn all over.

As they reached the main floor, Arilwen spotted Anwarr descending the stairs and she let go of Anna to run to him and lock him in a hug, kissing his hair. "We are going home." She said softly. "All of us. Do not be frightened by your father's appearance, or all of the men around him. They have to ensure that he is safely transported back with Marsol." She did not want to tell him horror stories of his father. The sight of him was enough.

When she turned and saw Anna's shocked look, she laughed and motioned her over. "Do you remember Anna? She cared for you when you were a small child. She had been terribly worried." Anna and Anwarr both gawked at each other. Poor Anwarr was shy because, well, he was a teenage boy and Anna was adorable. Anna seemed self conscious about her basket of goodies, so Arilwen leaned forward to whisper to her. "Our garden is dead. We have no food storage left. We are going to need as much help as we can get." Hopefully that would make her feel better. It WAS true, after all.

The commotion coming up the stairs made the trio turn. Marsol looked pissed. Wyrvaust was quiet and indifferent, ready to leave. "That is your father there. See how he is changed? It is strange to him as well, so we have to be sensitive to his feelings." Arilwen breathed softly into Anwarr's ear. How did she personally feel about her husband's new look? She missed his old features... but there was something strange and new about him now. They would follow on Marsol's heels, quiet and unobtrusive. Arilwen was unsure if they were going to Marsol's place first or their own, but she hoped Marsol's. Mostly because they had no food to entertain...

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The raven regarded his wife and son carefully. He felt an oppressive tangling inside of himself which balanced between anxiety and a dull sort of longing when his wife spoke of home, of Anna and the garden. Wyrvaust was the beginning of what came of lasting torture and the uncertainty of having your entire being redefined molecule by molecule. What he had yet to develop had still to be discovered. It was an ongoing process which almost all demons experienced, as Marsol well knew. The man who was barely Neffari any more looked at those he knew and loved best as strangers, his son and wife included, because he was painfully aware that he was a stranger to them now. He was not sure how he would be received, if he would be accepted, how he would be accepted if he was, when he could not be sure he could embrace himself yet. He no longer knew himself, or even what he was anymore. He was still Wyrvaust, for how his experiences would shape him in the end depended on

who he was. He left the castle and kingdom of Ereme behind him with his master and wife in a state that was completely indifferent to what he had done there. The people he had killed...He simply had not had any choice in the matter. How could he explain that his attack on Kaamus had been an act of hunger and nothing else? It had really had nothing to do with Kaamus being a servant of Gabrian. He was aware that the way he felt about things was cold. He was affectionate towards Arilwen because despite everything, he did love her, whether he buried it with the rest of his humanity or not. Because he dared not unleash his emotional beast; he was more possessive of her than ever. Presently it was more like an animal instinct to guard his mate and keep her from anyone else than any ordinary protectiveness. The fact that he remembered that she had offered herself to Sammael, and those visions Sammael had forced on him of that duration, only aggravated his primal position with her. The changes in Wyrvaust, even as they were still happening, could not be missed by Marsol or Arilwen, nor by Anwarr, who did not know what to think of his father, anymore than Wyrvaust knew how to act around Anwarr other than being protective of him. Shortly after they had arrived in the desert, one of Marsol's men engaged Anwarr in a little horseplay to cheer the youth up, only for Wyrvaust to lunge at the other demon like the lion he shared so many aspects with. Only when Wyrvaust understood that the demon had only been playing with his son did he back off and apologize rather awkwardly. He avoided making eye contact with his son. Anwarr avoided asking him any questions, which was very unlike Anwarr. Now when they arrived in the desert, Wyrvaust took a very obstinate stand against going to the ring of fire. He insisted he take his wife and son home to his own lair. This was not unusual. In fact, it was very much in character for Wyrvaust, who had always kept himself to himself and reported to Marsol whenever he had anything to report, or welcomed Marsol when he visited. Wyrvaust had been a hermit for a very long time and had remained a hermit at heart even while with his family. He preferred isolation. That was perhaps even truer now because of his hellish experiences. If Marsol wanted to take Wyrvaust to his lair, he would have to take him by brute force, and Wyrvaust would put up a lethal fight rather than let himself be taken against his will. Wyrvaust would obey no one now, not even Marsol, unless he willfully consented to a command. If Marsol's gate led directly to his volcanic fortress, Wyrvaust would carry himself, Arilwen and Anwarr home through shadows he commanded himself. Wyrvaust had one desire...And it was to be home with his family. This instinct was very strong in him. Whether that happened, all depended on Marsol. He would also extend a warm invitation to Marsol (prior to any contest of wills of course) who was always welcome in his home.

Back at Marsol's lair meanwhile, a certain angel in namas clothing had tried six ways to each exit to escape only to be foiled either by one of Marsol's guards or warriors (including Gilriael), the wards, or the intense heat of the volcanos surrounding the lair. Gilriael whispered to Marsol, after he had escorted the demon hunter back to Marsol's quarters, that his very baffled angel was quite mule-headedly set on escape. One had only to imagine Cirgoth (now Arameth) waking in that strange place surrounded by fire, demons and dragons to understand the position he had taken, particularly as a slayer. Arameth had also decided, with equal stubbornness, to just pretend he had never heard the claims Marsol had made, of sons and love and all those past life matters. It had never happened, Arameth decided. Since he simply did not know how to cope with it, he just made the choice not to cope with it at all. Pity Marsol the pigheaded fools he had on his plate at the moment. Odd that at that moment when Wyrvaust took his stand, a certain voice slithered its way into Marsol's mind sleek as silk with an edge of amusement to say, "You should just have a meal of succulent pork and be done with it, dragon



lord," even Maelmorda's laughter breezed through his head before his thoughts traveled elsewhere. At times it was just Maelmorda's way of reminding those he cherished that he was still paying attention. Would Marsol even get the joke? It really did not matter. What mattered was that he stayed in touch with those who stayed loyal to him. If Marsol understood the message that was just a bonus!

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Arilwen anticipated going home and feared it all at once. In the past day she had seen Wyrvaust more violent than the entire time she had been married to him. It frightened her, though she tried not to show it. It was her husband in there. This WAS her husband now. She had to remind herself that she loved him and he cared very much for her and their son. As soon as the band filed through the gate to the desert, Arilwen nearly collapsed on the sand with happiness. Anwarr seemed relieved too and was soon rough housing with one of Marsol's men. That did not last long, as Wyrvaust snapped and dove at the man, who luckily dodged away and immediately explained, causing him to grumble a stiff apology. Anwarr's eyes remained on his father, but he returned to his mother's side, silent as ever. If Marsol did allow them to return home, Arilwen would feel apprehensive at best. As soon as they were inside, it was Wyrvaust facing Arilwen and Anwarr, the mother's arm around her son's shoulders. She would clear her throat and rub his arm, sliding him the basket from Anna. "Why don't you take this into the kitchen and make yourself something to eat?" She wasn't sure what they were going to do for food. The garden was probably completely dead and they would have to hunt for something to eat. And she was sure, with his new size, that Wyrvaust ate at least three times as much now.

Once left alone, Arilwen's violet eyes would swivel on her large husband and she would slowly step forward, reaching for his hand. "It is strange for him too, just as it is for you." Her voice was quiet. "Give him time to adjust. It still must be difficult for you as well, to be so different than you once were." She couldn't let Anwarr see that she feared him, or he would too. She pressed herself to his warm form, her cheek nuzzled against his chest. "We are home now. We can rebuild our lives." Could they though?

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It was strange the way the three interacted now that they were together again. The dragon chieftain had been studying Wyrvaust ever since he had been released to him back in Eremaes and even now he seemed to act like his usual self. But that was to the untrained eye wasn't it? Had Marsol not known Wyrvaust for the many years that he did, had he not thought so fondly and highly of the Raven, let alone the Raven's small clan now that he had made for himself, he wouldn't have thought anything of the change of mind to go to his own home rather than be in the ring of fire. No, that change of mind was more like a refusal wasn't it? Marsol had asked his most trusted old friend to at least wait for him to order some servants to go with him so that he would have dinner awaiting himself and his beloved wife and son but Wyrvaust would not hear it. In fact, Wyrvaust wasn't listening to anything he said and made it quite clear he would resort to violence if anyone put their hands on him. This... was not like the friend he knew. More importantly the friend he knew would not have made something so trivial like being sent home with food and servants into a huge ordeal as this. That was twice now that Wyrvaust had displayed blatant signs of not just disobedience, but the sort of defiance he would expect from a greenhorn barely into his demon years. It was the way that dark gaze held

his without so much as wavering or even showing a hint of the emotional storm he knew full well was always turning in him. There was nothing. No anger or even guilt over the devouring of that... thing, whatever he was. Kaamus was his name? The mangled remains of the "meal" were set in a cell of Marsol's choosing with one or two servants looking after Kaamus to tend to his injuries and help lessen the pain of what had been done to him. It was like this see, he wouldn't get any answers out of Kaamus if he looked like road kill. The goblin, creature, thing or whatever the hell it was would tell the red dragon all it knew or else he'd let Wyrvaust finish him off. It was unfortunate that Kaamus was one of Gabrian's lap dogs. If it wasn't for that then perhaps Marsol may have been more lenient with his decision on the goblin's fate. As it stood now however Kaamus's fate looked very grim. The red dragon looked to where the Raven and his family were as Wyrvaust made a hasty retreat back to his desert lair to be alone again. Something was... terribly wrong here. In that moment he was also getting an earful from Gilriael about how a certain angel in namas clothing was all es-cap-e. But wait, there's more! As he contemplated what to do with Wyrvaust and Cirgoth he waved away those guards that he had brought with him to bring Wyrvaust back. Whatever was amusing the Devil today, be it good or bad, Marsol could not help but let a smile crack over his face as he shook his head some. Maelmorda had a knack for catching him off guard with the simplest of comments. Extending his feelers, or rather his invisible ones, across the desert to where Arilwen and Anwaar now stood faced with a husband and father that they hardly recognized at all. It was more of a gut feeling than anything else which led him to question his friend's very soul. A questioning he hated to even think of but he would rather see no harm befall Arilwen and Anwaar if Wyrvaust could no longer control himself anymore. Or worse, what if Wyrvaust really was aligned with Gabrian?

These questions and more weren't set in stone but the mere fact that he had even come across them in the beginnings of the doubt over just what shape Wyrvaust was in now... well that was enough for him to act on and thwart the possibility of future second guessing. He sent Maelmorda his fondest regards and a wish that all was well with him and his family, as well that Maelmorda had but to ask to have his company. But the Morning Star already knew that about his demonic creation, didn't he? Turning he'd walk in that fast yet unhurried pace he had with his long stride to see about this freedom-craving angel of his. Along the way he did a quick scanning of the area around Wyrvaust's home to ensure nothing was abnormal with the lair though he doubted anyone would stumble upon that mine. It was probably nothing, he'd tell himself. Or maybe it was everything? As he passed through one doorway he used an earth gate that took him all the way back to that prison fortress that doubled as living quarters for all of those under his care that weren't heat tolerant or immune to the hazardous fumes the Ring of Fire gave off. He wasn't sure what he was expecting to find yet he felt as if there was something Wyrvaust did not want to share with the rest of them. It would be as he breezed into the room or corridor directly in front of those personal quarters Cirgoth felt he had been jailed to, funny that, where he stopped seeing how the door to the chambers was open. "Arameth," he called, a bit tired of this round about of names. "Arameth I've come to tal-," it was then he paused. Depending on how quickly the "charade" was revealed by him scanning Wyrvaust to perhaps see if someone had tampered with him inwardly as well as outwardly, would decide just how fast his amber gold eyes narrowed in a most displeased scowl. Turning his face to the left as if he were able to see something that was not there, the corners of his mouth turned downwards in a stern if not maddened expression. The guards he had taken with him to retrieve Wyrvaust were summoned and given the orders to make haste to the Raven's lair where

they would await his arrival before they were to ensure Lady Arilwen and young Master Anwaar II's safety. Surely that may have baffled them but Marsol gave no more information other than to make themselves undetectable when they had reached the gem mine. There was several moments that passed as he debated on just what exactly he was going to do with Cirgoth even as he was readying himself for a confrontation with Wyrvaust whether his friend wanted one or not. On the one hand he very much desired to tear down this shell to free the glorious bird inside. If that meant frightening Arameth to do it then so be it. On the other hand however, there was the faint inkling in the back of his head that nudged him to let the demon slayer go. For now anyways. Naturally if he did let Arameth go he'd constantly tail him to watch over him but other than that he would have just stood back and studied how it is this Namas lived his life now. Problem was the dragon lord was a possessive one. Especially when it came to those he loved. Or rather the one he loved. Would he let Cirgoth remain any longer as Arameth? Could he? And deny his true self? Was it even fair for him to make that choice for Cirgoth, and would the angel even understand that it was in many ways a painful one to see through? If Arameth did come out of those chambers and so much as looked at Marsol the wrong way the demon might just devour him...

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Who, or what was Wyrvaust exactly now? He was a body driven by instincts, a primitive state tempered by the memories still retained in a mind that never ceased functioning. He simply was no longer a creature of heart and conscience, but of emotionless logic driven by memories of how he should try to behave. Without the spirit, the heart of him, he was stunted and his logic unaffected by emotional responses; therefore he was off kilter of the genuine Wyrvaust. He was a Wyrvaust doll. So where was the actual Wyrvaust? A certain Knight of Eremaes was on his way to the desert, to the long unvisited place of his origins, to answer that question perhaps. Wyrvaust was not himself in spirit either. Unlike his zombie self; he was too emotionally driven, too impetuous, too filled with pain to think at all rationally. It had been Wyrvaust and not his beastly vessel which had eaten Kaamus and barely left him alive. That creature who led his wife and son into his lair, would not harm them unless something very drastic happened. He would have to feel very threatened by them. No, when he leg Arilwen inside mine and connection cavern he had made a home of, he led her by her hand, and Anwarr by his as well. He had not spoken of the food concerns as yet, and did not until they reached the fountain chamber where he released their hands and leaned against the fountain, half seated. "The Raven shall provide food for his family. They may help it gather what they need if they wish, but it is unnecessary, really. It can find all the food its family needs." He smiled but it was an empty smile. "Go and get settled while the Raven gets us meat to last a few days while we seek other less necessary foods." Meat was all he and Anwarr truly required after all. Anwarr liked other foods, but meat was his staple, unlike Arilwen who needed a wider variety of food to keep her energy up and stable. Wyrvaust left by the back corridor which led to the garden storage where a primitive stairs and a cave mouth accessed the garden in the northeast entrance of Sapphire Canyon. It was a small, horseshoe shaped canyon and was shallowest where the garden was. Dunes also surrounded that part of the canyon. Six hours later, Wyrvaust returned to the lair with a large, beautiful dun pelt of short, soft fur. It was tiger striped with umber brown and around the neckline was a black mane, and at the end of the tail a black tuft, as soft and fluffy as a lion's. He had bundled and secured the meat inside the hide, which he would tan as soon as time permitted. He had also brought

along the skull of the animal, for Anwarr, which he had boiled to remove the meat after extracting and saving the brains for tanning. It was adorned with a pair of horns like a bull's, and tipped with a short, blunt nose horn as well. Arilwen might recognize it as a Lombra skull, after having seen Kaamus' lombra. Lombra meat was delicious. Desert Lombra were not easy to hunt and certain peoples scorned the killing of them. Wyrvaust was an exceptional hunter though, his zombie included, and did not discriminate between one excellent meat source and another, although one hoped he had the logic not to resort to hunting people for his family's meal. When he handed Anwarr the skull and unrolled the hide, Anwarr was actually excited and displayed some signs of happiness for the first time since he had laid eyes on his father at Castle Erema. He thanked his father and embraced him, who patted him on the back. Anwarr then sat down on a bench to examine the skull. "It is beautiful..." he said. His gaze then fell towards the skin. "So is the skin. Can I...tan it, father?"

Wyrvaust eyed him for a moment then nodded. "Of course. Does he remember what it taught him about making leather?"

Anwarr nodded and after Wyrvaust hung the meat and got started cooking the best cuts, Anwarr got started on the hide. Marsol's spies meanwhile had observed all this and had only to report that everything looked very normal, but that nothing felt right. They could not explain it anymore than Marsol could. They knew what was wrong, but could not define why. Wyrvaust just was not himself. He put on like himself, but was not. When Arilwen offered to help him with dinner, he accepted, and showed her much affection in that duration. Like his smiles, the intimacies he showed her were bare pretensions. He acted on what he knew, he had no way of behaving as Wyrvaust should feel.

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Arilwen could plainly see that her husband was no longer acting like her husband. Then again, he no longer looked like him either, and she understood that he had been through many traumatizing occurrences. And so, she remained the good, steadfast wife, trying not to be too shaken by it. Or at least, not let him see it. If someone... anyone... came in and suddenly began ranting and raving that this was not her husband, she would chase them out with a knife. Now that they were back home together, she also would become fiercely protective of her husband and son, because nothing was going to separate them again if she could help it.

Things feel back into a sort of routine when they came home. Wyrvaust stated that he was going out to hunt and she wished him good speed with a kiss on the cheek...which he had to bend over for. He was a huge presence in their household now. While he was gone, Anwarr and Arilwen buckled down on getting the place back in order. Dusting, straightening, washing the bedding and making the beds. The little tasks helped to keep her mind off of Wyrvaust's almost complete emotional distance.

When he returned with such a large kill, she relaxed a bit. She had been worried about their depleted food storage, but she knew that Wyrvaust would not let them go hungry. Her chest swelled with happiness as Anwarr finally seemed to open up to his father, jumping in to request that he be able to tan the hide as he had done so long ago. It was agreed, and once he started Arilwen rubbed her son's back and left him to go to Wyrvaust's side, asking if he would like some help with dinner. It had

to be strange for him to prepare food with hands now so large and extending claws. His attentions seemed a little... off... but Arilwen chalked it up to their nerves and what they had both suffered recently. The basket that Anna had prepared for them had a tied bundle of wild onions, so she pulled those out and began to dice and season them, mentally thanking her friend for the help. She stood side by side with Wyrvaust, randomly leaning in to nuzzle her face on his arm before going back to her food. All she could ask for was this...even if things would never be the same.

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THE HOLLOWMAN  
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The hollowman Wyrvaust left behind to proxy him went through all the motions. He hunted, he cooked, he tanned and crafted leather; he worked with his family to restore the garden to its prior condition of paradise; he traded with nomads for horses and food stuffs such as flour and sugar or exotic foods which he could not provide; and for fine cloth including Zanthus silks, Mephais linens, and Szaraebu satins. He played with his son and read to him at bed time, he made love to his wife and remained ardently and habitually affectionate with her. Physical contact was as imperative to him as it was her. He was in every way a good and reliable husband. He only strayed from the lair when he hunted, and he never went further than he needed to. He had not the taste for wanderlust his former self did which encouraged Arilwen and Anwarr's confidence in their sense of security. The only thing missing was his oddness, the heartfelt passion which had also made him so vulnerable. His lust was driven now more by instinct, while he was made temperate by his absence of emotion. He was not completely emotionless, no intelligent being could be, even if they believed themselves vacant of feeling. His feelings were simply no longer driven by his heart, but his mind, and in his mind, he loved and adored Arilwen. He could become angry if he knew a wrong was done, but it was a mild anger that was easily controlled. The Wyrvaust the Raven had given his wife, would take excellent care of his family, laugh with them and smile for them, play with them and work with them. He also protected them and kept them from others who might do them harm. At the same time, Arilwen found she had more time on her hands, because Wyrvaust was almost always there to watch over Anwarr if she wished to visit Anna or Marsol. Marsol's fortresses were about the only places he would allow her to go without his escort, and even then, he was reluctant, as if he didn't even trust Marsol with her, which in a sense was true. Sammael tended to prey on those who kept company with Marsol. Logic dictated that Marsol did endanger them, even if it was not through any fault of his own. Raven Proxy was still fond of Marsol, still loved him, but Arilwen and Anwarr were his key concern now. Logic also mandated that this was as it should be. Still, he would not deny Arilwen her space, as long as he saw her safely to her destination and back again. He would not otherwise permit her to travel solo. The Proxy was almost like a perfect machine, an android who could assimilate emotions very well, without ever going overboard with them.

Why had Wyrvaust abandoned the ship of his flesh? He knew he was unbalanced, knew he was unable to control the chaos in his heart and mind. He could not bear to expose Arilwen and Anwarr to himself after all they had been through. His decision

had come swiftly, an impulse he acted upon no sooner had he thought of it. There were flaws in his methods, of course there were, it had been a rash act committed by a heart crushed by adversity and mind cracked by experiences most unbearable. His deed was criminal to begin with. He had leapt into the body of Naazir to possess him. His need to do was so precise, so forceful, and so brutal that Naazir had been pushed aside almost instantaneously. Wyrvaust liked him, which is why he had chosen him instead of guard of far less account. This too proved that his logic (unlike his proxy's) had gone tremendously wayward. Oddly enough, his nature was not much changed. He had always been predisposed to violence, to madness, but the difference which he had recognized in himself, because despite all, he was still acutely aware of himself, was that he could no longer be trusted to maintain self-control. Wyrvaust had always been extremely independent, as anyone who knew him realized, and he was not one to bring his burdens on others. He had weighed himself and found himself wanting, and until he healed and regained his balance, he would allow his proxy to love his family and serve his master. He had no idea that without the emotional drives, his proxy would accept no orders from anyone unless he chose to. He was Wyrvaust without all the baggage. Wyrvaust did not have Naazir quit his knighthood, but request a leave of absence instead, to journey to his homeland. As Wyrvaust had hoped, his brothers at arms and king alike assumed that the visit by the desert rabble had stirred a longing in him to see his homeland again. It was not unlikely, in fact, their visit had indeed made him yearn to see the desert and touch base with his people again. Shaamea had strong natural ties to their own kind.

Wyrvaust had not put Naazir to sleep completely. He was there with him always in the back of his mind and on the edges of his heart. In a sense, the two became as one, shared all which the heart and soul possessed as impressions that were subtle but not intangible to one another. Wyrvaust even explained to Naazir (often talking aloud back and forth to himself as he did so) why he had possessed him, and ensured him he would not use him to commit any evil. Of course...what Naazir considered evil, and what Wyrvaust saw as wicked, might not always be the same. Wyrvaust did not want Naazir to be blind to the experiences he shared and the journey he took him on. Whatever came of the union, Naazir would learn a great deal about the demon whom had commandeered his body and will. And whether Naazir knew it yet or not, he would help to balance Wyrvaust until the demon could carry his own weight.

Wyrvaust, riding Naazir's best horse, embarked from Eredor two days behind Marsol and Arilwen. As he rode he contacted his Lord, to tell Marsol what he had done, only he left out one detail; just who he had claimed. He begged Marsol not to tell Arilwen, to allow him to do that himself in his own time. "The Raven desires the happiness of his bride and son above all else. His swan and son have suffered enough. He is with them still...a perfect proxy, emptied of madness and made whole by the easiness of his heart. He shall show them contentment, perhaps even joy. Please, My Lord Marsol...Keep this knowledge locked within thy heart. The Raven must find himself again, and with this companion within he shall in time...Much time, My Lord." His voice grew shaky at the last as his frayed heart tried to stress how desperate his need to heal and journey alone was. "...too much time to leave his family alone."

In a fortnight he would be in the Drylands. He had crossed paths with a great army on the move in Esscha Endor and had bypassed it by cutting the rest of the distance with a spacial gate. He followed the river and canyon with the intention of

visiting the city of Zanthus in the southern desert march. Zanthus was the city of Naazir's people. He was taking Naazir home.

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GABRIAN AND ARILWEN  
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Gabrian:

The regent had been busy taking stock, reviewing the disposition of the forces under his direct control, how to best cooperate and liaise with the realm at large. He'd already placed himself at the feet of King Byron and Queen Safiel. 'Hmm, might have avoided a complication with my friend Kassim by coming clean with Byron, Safiel was his daughter after all. Might well be for the best, after all it has gone his way,' thought the horseman, who was still soaking up the satisfaction of doing acts for others, which came as a departure from his original intention to take Seumir for himself. No, this seemed far more honourable and Satisfying! The Horseman had always been the one to simply act, to do as was needed, or to do as commanded or as he saw fit; the very notion of doing anything in the service of a greater good was alien. Now? Not so much. So it stuck with him.

That and his proposal... he had not been sure that Arilwen would marry him, but she had. He'd put up with Wyrvaust as long as he needed to, however strange he got too. If the worst case scenario evolved he could always come up with a ball or a trinket to distract Wyrvaust. It was cheap of him, but there was no one else in his vast acquaintance he was willing to call queen, and his heart, for what it was worth, had not let him refrain from making the proposal and making it good. He also figured, being the Regent, it might well behoove him to apologize to that Ranger family he had deliberately waylaid to keep out out of the way...

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Wyrvaust:

The desert raven folded his long legs beneath himself as he seated himself upon a large block of masonry balanced atop a massively high tower. The abyss demon in neffari skin was quite tall, lean but very strong of muscle, with long but thick straight hair of jet black, and his large, almond eyes were a dark indigo blue. His facial features were not sharp having a softness which made him youthful and even angelic in his guise, and he was small boned for one so tall making him look somewhat effeminate in fact, and extremely attractive. His nose was large but not wide with an appealing bump on the bridge, and he had sensually full lips. Wyrvaust in his chosen body was an exceptional example of a neffari male is what he was.

Wyrvaust remembered the past few months as he sat on one of a ring of huge blocks of stone crowning that immensely high, hexagonal tower overlooking the city, the tower which the knights and mages presided in. From that lofty turret he could see as far as his eyes could reach, the surrounding panorama of Seumir and the lake below the southern crescent of the circular city. It was all so different from his beloved desert and the lair he called home; the verdant rainforest surrounding the

lake's oceanic beaches, the fresh water of that two-hundred plus mile lake. 'Many fish,' thought he, 'many fish eating other fish, and being eaten by other fish in that lake. Is the raven a big fish or a little fish?' He asked himself. He shook his head. 'No, he is not a fish at all, the desert fox he is... less than a fish... less than a raven, less than a fox, and a far dimension more than anyone understands.' Desert fox, desert raven, these were variations on titles Wyrvaust had earned from the desert folk.

Gabrian's marriage to the raven's beloved desert swan had been a private affair; their marriage one of love and mutual respect. Love and mutual respect... this fact, for that is what it WAS, a fact Wyrvaust could not sooner deny that the ground being under his feet, repeated in his mind as a maddening echo of how hollow he felt in his heart. Perhaps Arilwen's love for Gabriel was not what it had been or still was for Wyrvaust, but it was honest and profound all the same, painful for Wyrvaust to bear though. Nothing of what Wyrvaust felt or thought could be sensed or pried from him for all the chaos in his mind, nor seen on his expressions which remained vacant even when his heart exploded in his chest. The broken demon who seemed to think and feel nothing, thought and felt a GREAT deal.

He thought of Gabriel; the fallen eagle whose calling was to deprive one of all which they most needed, had NOT deprived Arilwen of what she most needed... Wyrvaust AND himself. The fallen horseman had won the beautiful Mordim's love by being unselfish, understanding and by loving her enough to be those things. When she had consented to be his wife, Gabriel and Wyrvaust alike had seen the 'but what about Wyrvaust?' question wounding her face and her beautiful pale blue-green eyes. What Gabriel had taken away from her then was that doubt, and had done so by telling her that she would keep Wyrvaust ALSO as her husband and together they would care for him, and that if a time came that he was no longer mad, they would face that together and see him through that transition as well.

Had Gabriel been truly unselfish? Wyrvaust answered his own question; The horsemen of deprivation who had become something else... though he could never really escape what he was, would be deluding himself to think otherwise, had desired Arilwen as his wife and done what he knew he needed to in order to secure her hand. He had SEEMED unselfish, but done what he did to win Arilwen's love and hand.

Wyrvaust had witnessed their wedding in the Shrine of Protection within Serhaubren itself. The Patriarch of chaos presiding had married them, his name Arcenian. His only superior was the Hierophant Bizbi, who owned the bookstore next to the shrine. Wyrvaust liked Arcenian and went often to the shrine to speak with him... but not with words... Arcenian spoke, Wyrvaust listened and took to heart what he could. Being a priest of chaos himself, Wyrvaust understood Arcenian. Arcenian, as a result of being so intuned with chaos, could see past the chaos inside of Wyrvaust to what he was thinking and feeling. In that mind that was locked away from most everyone, Wyrvaust had thought a great many things the day Arilwen had accepted the hand of Gabriel Zephraniah. Gabriel, being a chaosmancer, could also 'brush' on some of Wyrvaust's emotions and thoughts, but not as well as Arcenian and Bizbi of the chaos shrine could, or Marsol who Wyrvaust was tied to by his mark.

With only Wyrvaust, Anwarr (only son of Wyrvaust and Arilwen), Kaamus (Gabriel's red goblin slave), and Morgrymed (Wyrvaust's Black Minion), as witnesses, Arilwen and Gabriel had been wed on the first day of winter in Serhaubren's Shrine, and on



that same day the people had elected Gabriel as KING of Serhaubren, Albiraath and Hartfordshire, King of the Lakeland in otherwords, whose territory would have been as vast as the true king's. Oh what a speech Gabriel gave the people to relegate the title of King of Seumir's Lakeland to regent of Seumir. He made the people see the dangers of seceding from Seumir and splitting it into disparate countries which would be at war overnight, and the logic of continuing to serve UNDER the good and noble Lord Decasey and rise against him only if he proved himself to be TRULY unfit. Indeed Gabriel had done well to convince the people of what few others had been able to... the possibility that Byron had done NO wrong, but been the victim of a vile spirit that HAD possessed him. "It does not matter if you BELIEVE it!" Gabriel had told them. "IT'S the TRUTH!!" Coming from HIM the people had begun to ACCEPT the truth. Wyrvaust remembered how Gabriel had then roared at the crowd once more to say that Byron's rule must never be challenged unless Byron failed them utterly. He remembered the way Gabriel's eyes had shone when he laughed and reminded the people to never forget that everyone made mistakes, and how to forgive was divine, and joked how he had once mistaken a rock for a turtle. In that moment Wyrvaust had seen the power of Gabriel's charisma... how truly dangerous he was.

But what if the eagle WAS rising out of darkness into light? The raven asked himself. He had shuddered when asking himself this. He could rise all he liked... he would still belong to Acheron until he ceased to exist. That was the trap... it was the one place you could never escape once you embraced it or it embraced YOU by your dark deeds, or simply your creed if a lack thereof or it was affiliated to Acheron or any of its many lords. Even if the chains to Acheron were cut... death would bind you again. Giving yourself to Acheron was the greatest decision one could EVER be confronted with, and far too many took it too lightly. Wyrvaust had taken it too lightly. Most did. Those trying to escape Acheron now were wasting their time, Wyrvaust knew. They might step outside of it for awhile, but death, no matter how transient, would cage them all over again.

Seeing Gabriel wed his beloved Arilwen had filled Wyrvaust with guilt and despair of motley kind. She had looked so beautiful, he remembered all the times he had made love to her. Gabriel had been so terribly handsome, and for a brief moment he had desired more than anything to kill him. He had looked to his son Anwarr... eyes barely straying to him then looking away again. He had not smiled, but not looked unhappy... had guarded what he felt, which was only confusion and uncertainty as any child when watching their mother marry someone else. He asked the question why? Why had mother given up on father? Wyrvaust had lowered his eyes when Anwarr looked over to him and wondered... what if this was all a test? A test to prove his mother's love for his father devout or weak?

\*Wyrvaust could only look away from Anwarr for it WAS a test, but not one which Wyrvaust had devised, it was one he WAS aware of and could do NOTHING about. He was locked into his own mind and body, unable to express anything he thought or felt. Clan demons never forgot their own... never let them go but by death... and since Mendorin had made his come back to the Adram clan, he had sought to bring Wyrvaust back... Marsol made that VERY difficult. But where WAS Marsol when Wyrvaust had vanished from his sickbed? Where was Marsol when the raven had wandered off into the desert and swapped forms all over again? Where was he when Wyrvaust had been captured and enslaved? Where was he when Gabriel had usurped his faithful demon gone mad's wife? Where was Marsol now? Still obsessing over Cirgoth AND his affair WITH Gabriel, the horseman who had jilted him in favor of Sammael, and as a lover, Arilwen.

Wyrvaust the wanderer, the raven, the fox, had always been easy to forget about or overlook because he had been such a recluse for so many hundreds of years. Now he was a pet on the end of a leash whose thoughts and hopes could not be expressed but in his body language and eyes which only made him seem insane, and he was. He was quite insane, always had been, only now he was insane AND powerless. His heart would have BEGGED Marsol to come and take him away from this lush land and take him back to the desert and to his lair where he belonged... but for Anwarr. But for his son, Wyrvaust wanted to go home more than he wished ever to breathe again. His love and concern for Anwarr made silent his heart, his hopes and his despairs. What Marsol felt from him was distant and ambiguous. Arcenian felt more because he was closer to chaos and the pentacles of life, the elements, the spirit, the mind, the fates, and the arcane. His superior Bizbi saw Wyrvaust from an even broader scope he could focus as narrowly as a quill point. Marsol would see Wyrvaust better if his mind were not so clouded with heartache and his obsession with the angel who seemed to walk a path just barely outside of his grasp, only out of choice and his unwillingness to approach Cirgoth again. How many times had Marsol gone to the encampment of angels at the crossroads of Morendor and just watched him? How many times had he lost the courage to show himself and go speak to him? Wyrvaust had tried to warn Marsol of how troublesome angels were to no effect. Wyrvaust had been kinder to Marsol than himself, whose own angelic mate had troubled his heart into tatters...because he had simply needed to be her ONLY one that much. Her willingness to let Sammael bed her had been the chisel which had cracked open his heart. The rape of his beautiful new body by slavers had been the hammer which had spread him wide. Her willingness to wed Gabrian had been the lava which had poured in and melted everything which remained.

As Wyrvaust sat gazing from that perilous height out over the city and lake, a land very opposite his beautiful desert of dunes and vast wastelands, he felt less troubled by the wife who should have just let him go. By now (it was summer) he accepted that she loved Gabrian and was his now. HIS HIS HIS, the Pale Rider of Famine... Famine of ALL kinds... now famine of what? Famine of doubt, for he took doubt from the people, famine of instability, for he brought order back to Seumir, famine of despair, for he took away anguish and fear as he gave hope to so many, Arilwen in particular.

Even Anwarr was warming to him... Smiled to him occasionally. Oh, Anwarr had always treated him with respect... except that once when Arilwen had told him they were getting married, when his emotions had flown apart, but since then, he had been perfectly serene towards Lord Zephrahiah... and lately even amiable. Anwarr saw Gabrian not as a father, he never would, but as his leader... his Regent, and showed him the proper respect.

Wyrvaust stood up on that block of grey rock he occupied in the now and gritted his teeth. 'Nothing... nothing to be done... He is gone, gone, into the void at the center of himself... Go he must, back to the beginning of himself, to death and recreation.' Wyrvaust had always referred to himself second person. These were his thoughts as he arched his back and then took a swan dive off the twenty story high tower, the ground rushing up to meet him in a blur. Clothing then tore into rags as wings black as the abyss ruptured from his back and snapped open to catch the air mid-fall and just shy of crashing into the ground he swooped over it, membranes stretched, wingtips brushing the pebble and sand packed street between the tower and Bizbi's Haunted Bookstore. He came up in a magnificent arch and his

feet met the rooftop of that bookstore, and as his wings folded his weight settled on his feet. Wyrvaust had been allowed to wander the streets of the city since spring. He had behaved himself since coming here so they could find no reason to keep him confined to just the palace and its courtyard anymore. Anwarr had been the one to beg Gabriel to give Wyrvaust more freedom to wander, because wanderlust was deeply imbedded in the desert raven's soul. Wyrvaust to date had not gotten into any real trouble in the city either. People had gotten used to seeing him flying around, though such suicidal looking dives as he had just taken were not a normal part of his routine. He had been wanting to try that for some time now. The tower had to be at least three hundred feet high, not including the four foot high crown-like parapet stones, such as the one he had been sitting on and then dove off of.

Wyrvaust walked across the roof and then spying two persons he knew, he leapt down off the top of the stone building, wings catching the air JUST enough to let him land on his feet light as a feather. It was between Arilwen and Arcenian, who was carrying a package for her, that Wyrvaust landed. Arcenian startled and caught his chest with his hand, then heaved a harsh breath when he figured out who and what it was that had dropped out of the sky next to them. "Wyrvaust, great earth! You should not startle a man in such a way!" Arcenian then chuckled and looked to Arilwen, who Wyrvaust peered at for several moments before he simply began to walk with them, hands folded behind his back 'neath his wings.

"I do not intend to be impertinent, but I am wondering, Lady Regent... Why is it you do not dissolve your marriage to Wyrvaust?" the priest had the nerve to ask. One thing Arcenian had to spare was nerve, else he with the rest of his order would not have defended the palace with the mages against the rebels when Serhaubren was nearly toppled as the seat of Seumir. Those priests and mages alone had kept the rebels out of the palace and with the few loyal guards remaining in the city had driven the rebels OUT of the citadel. This had been months before Gabriel had made himself the hero of the people... the schtick which had been Byron's all those ages ago. How soon people forgot and that HAD been a very long time ago, though not so long to Byron and his clan's memories perhaps.

Wyrvaust looked away from Arilwen as Arcenian asked her this and trained his eyes ahead. It really was impossible to know what he was feeling or thinking in that moment unless you could see through him.

"He does not seem to care much about anything so why keep him as your first?" Arcenian went on to articulate, though he knew better... Knew that Wyrvaust cared about a great many things, but what Wyrvaust thought was private to him, and Arcenian would not share it. He would however... counsel AROUND what he knew. And he was also searching, to see what Arilwen sensed in the husband she refused to abandon. She might perceive more than anyone else knew. "At the very least, why not open the city gates to him and simply let him go where he will?" Arcenian's tones curious and at once contemplative.

Wyrvaust HAD tried to leave the city, though to no avail, and one could only really tell it if they watched him flying for hours or happened to catch him at just the right time when he came up against the dome of force high above the city, though all they would see as he tested it here and there, trying to find a weakness he could punch a hole through with his power, was him pressing up against it now and again. The mages who had raised and maintained the wards could feel when the wards

were under attack by their marks and HAD reported to Gabriel in private that Wyrvaust had challenged the wards on several occasions, unsuccessfully. It was the only time Wyrvaust had EVER channeled any of his paths since being there. Gabriel at least knew that Wyrvaust thought of going beyond the city, AND that his mind worked well enough to focus his power, though for what reason he wanted to escape not even Arcenian knew, and had he, he would have kept that to himself. For all anyone knew, Wyrvaust just wanted to fly further... or to visit some place or someone beyond Serhaubren. Gabriel may or may not have shared the information he had with Arilwen. The mages reported to the regent, it was for the regent to share what he would with his wife. Unless Arilwen seized a more active role in leadership, it would Gabriel the people and his officers looked to AS their leader.

Now when they arrived at the palace steps, it did not take long much as the bookstore Wyrvaust had bounded from was across the plaza from the palace and that immense tower; there was Gabriel, looking regal as all get out, talking to one of his officers, also an officer of Byron, Wyrvaust bowed to him just a little and began to wander away, only for Arcenian to grab him by his arm and pull him back. He did not want Wyrvaust to walk away from Arilwen's answer and anything Gabriel might have to say about it.

"Good day, My Lord Regent," Arcenian greeted him. "I was just asking the Lady Regent something rather important in concerns to Wyrvaust." The chaologist then turned his attention on Arilwen, and hiked that package in his arms to get a better grip as he waited her response. Yes, Arcenian was a meddler, but he meddled with good intentions.

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Arilwen:

Whenever Safiel visited Gabriel, Arilwen and Wyrvaust, she was drawn with such interest to their dynamic. Who wasn't? They all saw Gabriel as the gentle caretaker of them both. They saw Arilwen's silent, pleading, loving looks passed to her first husband that were never returned, but her hand remained patient with him, bringing him food, quietly asking if he would like to go with her for her nightly walks, asking if he was thirsty. He never answered her, never met her eyes, never touched her and pulled away from her touch when she tried. Each and every single time it broke Arilwen's heart into pieces. Gabriel would assure her, keep her steadfast, and try to calm her in her weakest of moments when she just couldn't bring herself to get out of bed or to see Wyrvaust and be ignored. She was guilt riddled every single day. She had caused this. She had caused his mental break by a plan gone wrong. She had rubbed rocks into the wounds by trusting and marrying Gabriel and leaving their desert home. She longed for the days they had before. She would leave Gabriel in a moment if Wyrvaust awoke and pleaded with her to return to their lair in the sand. But as more and more time went on, Arilwen was losing hope that he would ever respond or come back to her. It trickled into the other parts of her life. Anwarr, she suspected, hated it here and bore resentment for her. He was no longer the lanky, tanned youth scaling sand dunes and learning from his father. His father was closed down and his mother was consumed in her misery and the healing that Gabriel tried to give to her.

That particular day Arilwen was dressed comfortably for the summer weather. She wore a lilac dress of floating, slight material that was bound in a twist at her back. Her thick hair was pinned back with tiny white flowers and she walked through

the grounds with Arcenian, who was helping her to move her package. They were chatting idly about the rising heat when Wyrvaust suddenly landed between them. Both stopped, Arcenian nearly dropping the box and Arilwen freezing in her tracks, that same look on her face whenever she laid eyes on him in close proximity. 'Speak to me... tell me you have woken and you are coming home to me...' Her look said it all, but it was once again not met and not voiced. As she looked away, Wyrvaust looked to her, studying her profile as she turned forward again and they began to walk. Arcenian seemed hellbent on being a pain at the moment by asking Arilwen why she didn't dissolve her marriage to Wyrvaust. The question made Arilwen's teeth clench in her closed mouth and she took a slow breath as they continue to walk.

"I hardly think that is any of your business, Arcenian." She murmured, eyes forward.

Oh, but he was not dropping it. He hit a raw nerve by pointing out that Wyrvaust hardly seemed to care about anything, so why was she making him stick around? The Swan's delicate neck flexed with a thick swallow and she felt her throat sting inside. It was hard enough to hear these things in her own mind, every day, every night... but for someone else to voice them out loud when Wyrvaust was present was even harder. She did not trust herself to speak at the moment, and as they descended the steps and saw Gabriel, Wyrvaust tried to depart. Arcenian wasn't having it, and as soon as Gabriel looked up, he could read it all over Arilwen's face that she was having a hard time holding her emotions in. He approached to an explanation from Arcenian. He was questioning Arilwen about Wyrvaust, and everyone wanted to know. She watched with watery eyes as the men Gabriel had been speaking to took their leave, taking the hint quickly.

Arilwen moved to the edge of a marble bench and sat, crossing her ankles and wiggling her sandaled feet. She was climbing out of her skin, she was trying to get ahold of herself. They could all see that. Her hands fell to her lap, as did her gaze, and she pleted the soft, light fabric of her dress, over and over, wrinkling it. When she finally spoke, her voice was strained. "I will never dissolve my marriage to Wyrvaust, Arcenian. Never. He is my heart."

Some of this would probably be hard for Gabriel to hear, but she would never be dishonest when it came to Wyrvaust and her first marriage. A tear snaked down her cheek and she took a slow breath. "I have already lost him inside. I have nothing left but his physical presence. If I let him leave, he won't come back to me. You know what those men did to him. He would be at the mercy of the world."

Silence fell and Arilwen looked over her shoulder at the walls and flowers behind her. "I did this to him, Arcenian. Every bit of it. I know not if keeping him safe and close is slowly healing him or slowly killing him, and I would lop off my own arm to know. I would gut myself to have him back for one day... to have him come to me and wrap me in his arms and speak to me in the way he used to..."

The tears were coursing down her cheeks now, but she didn't bother to wipe them away. Her sorrow and despair were no secret, but it was disheartening for anyone to see it out in the open. One night she had been so much in despair that she considered letting him go, waiting a month, and then going to wander the desert to see if he would find her in the way that he had so many years ago. And if not? She would die there, perhaps like she should have the first time. Swallowing against her burning throat, she looked back down at her hands, then promptly rose. "Excuse

me. I am getting a headache. I want to retire to my chambers and draw the curtains." She moved past them. If Gabriel tried to reach for her she would pull away. He knew how this went. When her 'headaches' came she was inconsolable and he had to let it run its course...

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Wyrvaust:

What were Wyrvaust's true thoughts of Arilwen? The voice which so often invaded his mind these days told him that she never loved him... but his heart said she had and still did... but that he was just not good enough for her as he was, this caged thing who could not reach beyond its insides. He remembered the secrets her spirit had shown him when he made love to her once... how though he called her the desert swan, she was not of the desert at all... but of a place he had never been, a place called France... and that for awhile she had belonged to one named Seth, and then after him another called Valis, but neither of them was where she belonged either. Wyrvaust had always believed it was with him she belonged, but others had shattered that belief and his dream for her. Perhaps she did not belong with Gabriel either... and that too would end. He thought. Wyrvaust knew only that he loved her, no matter what the other voice in his head said about her, and wished the best for her no matter how deeply it hurt him. His pain did not matter, only her happiness as the Raven saw it. Wyrvaust knew figures of such strength that they could survive anything intact. Wyrvaust was not one of them. He was strong in many ways certainly, but he was also sensitive to his environment. Marsol had always tried to protect him from the cruel world, but in the end, no one could be protected from the world. The only way to do so was to imprison them and that was not protecting them at all. Sometimes, a person just had to face the world, however painful or dangerous it was.

Arcenian that meddler, that meddler who meant well BY his tinkering, he heard what Wyrvaust thought but couldn't say. This pain the patriarchal priest was bringing out in Arilwen was for Wyrvaust's benefit and for hers in the long run. He was trying to figure out WHY the Raven thought and felt so much but could not express it. He watched Wyrvaust carefully as Arilwen despaired in her refusal to ever let Wyrvaust go. He felt sick inside... wanted to reach out to her, so much so that he lifted his hand and extended it towards her just the slightest bit, but then he backed away from her and averted his gaze to the most distant place his eyes could find... the southern rampart of the city, which could not actually be seen from the palace stairs, but he imagined it there, through all the buildings and across all the streets and parks. He imagined that wall and he imagined going over it, and beyond it to the desert and his canyon lair. But then he thought of leaving Arilwen and Anwarr behind and hung his head, he exhaled a faint sigh that might have been a slightly deeper and longer breath and his gaze meandered back and riveted on the ground beneath his feet.

"Wait, Regent Arilwen," Arcenian called to the lady regent, ignoring the displeased looks Gabriel had pinned on him for upsetting her in the first place. "I ask your forgiveness for bringing this upheaval upon you... but I am seeking to help your first husband." His gaze then locked on Gabriel. "And I beg your pardon, Regent for doing it at your expense as well." Men had been hanged by their leaders for less, but Arcenian had nerve if you recall. "I cannot be specific, for I would be destroying his trust if I did, but you must know that he is no empty shell. He merely has the appearance of it. Lord Bizbi and I may be able to root out the

cause, by finding our way through the labyrinth of chaos in his mind and heart, but it shall take some time, for make no mistake; it IS a complex maze we are navigating." He explained. "Take now for instance... he very much wants to react, wants to speak, to comfort you, Arilwen..." He noticed Wyrvaust fix those intense indigo eyes on him. His own eyes winced as he tried to figure out whether Wyrvaust was trying to silence him, or say yes, that's it. "Do you WANT to comfort her, Wyrvaust?" he asked the demon himself.

Wyrvaust, in an attempt to answer, placed the slightest step forward towards Arcenian and Arilwen, but then backed up two strides. He wanted to nod his head but instead hugged his own chest with his arms as if to alienate himself even more from the others. He wanted to approach Arilwen, to embrace her, but turned and took his leave. Arcenian did not stop him this time. Indeed he smiled and his gaze lit up as he locked his eyes on Arilwen and Gabriel. "I can't say for sure... but I believe he WANTS me to speak for him... but I dare not until I am absolutely certain. I will not risk his trust, understand." His regard settled on Gabriel briefly but as usual, he could get no feeling for the dark angel. Gabriel always felt to him like... a steady cool breeze, pleasant but impossible to gain any insight from, that and whatever he expressed outwardly, whatever he WANTED others to gain from him. Arcenian meanwhile was an open book, too open perhaps, but Byron preferred him honest even if it meant his honesty was occasionally cruel. Arcenian's gaze lept upward as Wyrvaust took wing to make a circuit of the city before settling on the top of the tower again, the highest place in all Seumir. Arcenian smiled a little as his eyes leaned on Arilwen once more. "I will say this much... He often reacts completely opposite to what he feels. He wants to comfort you so he leaves instead. That in itself is a sort of communication."

"Magrymed told me that before you came here... he acted like a kitten towards you, Arilwen... cuddling, rubbing against you with his face... even doing the same to Gabriel, but that on the very day you agreed to wed Gabriel, he shut himself off, and not physically, not at first, that came later, but inside. It was something Magrymed could no doubt feel that no one else could, because he is his creation you see, from the soul of the very body he now inhabits. Point is... no one can just shut themselves off like a light switch. In him it resembled a natural, gradual thing, but unless Magrymed was lying, there was nothing gradual about it. There is something IN him which forces his responses... whether he built it in himself as a defense mechanism, or someone else placed it in him remains to be discovered. If he did this to himself, it was a dreadfully desperate act to guard himself from mental anguish. He is the sort who might conceive of such a thing, yes? Question remains, how can this wall be torn down without doing even greater damage to him? That is what I have been trying to figure out these months."

Wyrvaust swooped towards the tower high above them and landed on the turret, disappearing behind the tower's great height and its massive parapet stones.

Arcenian shrugged and continued inside, with the package, which he would put down wherever Arilwen told him to. He would also slip her a little something for her 'headache', a volkfen leaf which had a tasty sweet, chocolately flavor, was soothing to the nerves and killed pain in only a few minutes. It was slightly addictive but other than that had no side affects. It came from a shrub which resembled a coffee plant.

Gabrian:

The regent was busy taking stock. Reviewing the disposition of the forces under his direct control, how to best cooperate and liaise with the realm at large. He'd already placed himself at the feet of King Byron and Queen Safiel. Hmm, might have avoided a complication with my friend Kassim by coming clean with Byron, Safiel was his daughter after all. Hmm it might well be for the best after all it has gone this way, thought the horseman, who still soaking up the satisfaction of doing acts for others, which was a departure from his original intention to take Seumir for himself. No, this seemed far more honourable and Satisfying! The Horseman had always been the one to simply act, to do as was needed, or to do as commanded or as he saw fit, the very notion of doing anything in the service of a greater good was alien. Now? Not so much. So it stuck with him.

That and his proposal...he would marry that Arilwen if she would have him. He'd put up with Wyrvaust too. If the worst case scenario evolved he could always come up with a ball or a trinket to distract Wyrvaust. It was cheap of him, but he couldn't think of anyone better he might call queen and he had to make the proposal. He also figured, being the Regent, it might well behoove him to apologize to that Ranger family he had deliberately waylaid to keep out of the way...

..."Finally, I'd like you to send this message. It is to Ranger Denveth and his wife. I'd like an audience, in order too...hmm..right perhaps a wrong and explain my actions as I've done with King DeCasey and Queen Safiel. No doubt as officers of the realm they are very busy but I feel it necessary. I'd like to meet all the officers eventually." Gabriel produced a scroll from all that finery. The written word! So rare in this day and age of paperless communication and the art of telepathic communication. It was contained with in a leather messenger cylinder that bore the Regent's seal, likewise the scroll itself was sealed with ribbon and a wax seal.

The letter read:

Dearest Mr. Traerson and Mrs. Elah Denveth His Seumir Majesty's Royal Ranger Company  
<Gabrian figured he couldn't go wrong mentioning a subtle nod to Seumir's King Byron>

Greetings and felicitations, honoured and brave Ranger. I would like the opportunity of an audience in which the chance to personally greet you and perhaps clarify matters between us would be much appreciated. Whilst I know I did not make a valuble first impression upon you and certainly have not endeared myself to your esteemed personages, your reputation as defenders of the Realm, guardians of her people, stalwarts of justice and protectors of the peace precede you and I can assure you, whatever your impressions might be, I've no wish to garner your disrespect or ire. In closing let me reiterate my invitation and a wish for an amiable meeting to clarify matters.

Best Regards,  
Your humble and obedient servant



Lord Regent Gabrian

He dispatched the man..and then at that point, here was Arcenian, with Wyrvaust and Arilwen.

"And What would that be?" The Regent asked of Arcenian, his smile however, was tight. Gabrian wasn't quite sure what to make of Arcenian. It could be he was trying to be helpful. It could be he was attempting to be helpful yet meant to stir the cauldron and by dint of reaction, reap the effect by scooping out what came to the surface. The Regent greeted Wyrvaust, "How art thou today?" He asked, not really expecting much of an answer, but if headway was to be made with the Wyrvaust situation, then he needed to continue to make inroads. While the regent had begun interested in how he might exploit the situation in Seumir and enter the cross purposes so common in those of his ilk, he'd come to enjoy doing the good deed, mostly due to the beneficial effects it brought about and the changes beginning in the hearts and minds of the people. It was satisfying, he'd found. It followed that he'd begun the similar path with Arilwen and the matter was, Gabrian had fallen for her. Fallen, what a choice of words brother, he'd told himself Yet he had, he loved her, if allowing for Wyrvaust was a sacrifice he had to make, then make he would. He worried about him however. The news of Wyrvausts attempts to breach the Capitol's defense, a defense in itself that Gabrian approved of, after all Lord Marsol, not one of Gabrian's favorites, but a capable military leader in his own right had shown the way at Inaaksu, a lesson, Gabrian had noticed on his last visit, that his old friend and confidant Saeed Kassim had taken to heart. Still Gabrian's opinions on the city's defense aside, it was of grave concern that Wyrvaust had attempted on more than one occasion to breach them and he wondered if perhaps this was what Arcenian would be getting at. The regent fixed his gaze upon Arcenian as he waited for the answer.

The situation however, was becoming clear, Gabrian, put his hand on Wyrvausts shoulder..."Fly, and explore the city as you wish friend, let not this one trouble you today." He eyed Arcenian and for the briefest of moments considered killing him on the spot. Oh if things were different, or if this was a place other than Seumir, he might well have done so. Gutted him and dressed him out like a deer while leaving him crucified in a public square. Alas, the same desires that had arisen him to do well and to make this work, prevented it. Likewise he was disturbed at seeing his jewel, Arilwen so disturbed by Arcenian. Gabrian, tried to be patient, and listened, he would not fault Arilwen for turning away, Arcenian had in effect, put a knife in and twisted.

"So you say, but helping here you are not. It would be wise to Cease these efforts, you bring no closure and no peace. What Wyrvaust needs is time to adjust, time to feel himself. You will not win hearts this way. I wish to see him healed and whole more than anyone...save perhaps for Arilwen.." Or did he? Gabrian had indeed won himself two prizes, awakenings of altruism aside, it did not mean that altruism would prevent him from defending what he felt had been won, the same for the feelings he harbored toward Arilwen. There was always the chance Archeron would reassert itself within him, true to the horseman had allegiances he could not shirk to others. Seumir may have been Astraeus property and therefore by extension the Morningstar's, but Gabrian was attached to Sammael, that had yet to assert itself. "I would not have my wife upset by stirring the waters. So stop. Unless Arilwen would hear this then I'll trouble you to refrain from meddling. Even if she should wish to hear this from you, then do not meddle in the presence of

Wyrvaust, he is troubled enough."

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Arcenian:

Arcenian's lips pursed as he listened to Gabriel speak of how unhelpful he was being. "Quite to the contrary, Sire, facing the demons we bury is quite healthy, albeit painful, but often hard roads lead us to peace, chaos dictates it is so..."

Arcenian regarded Gabriel intently when the regent ordered him to refrain from his self-appointed duties where Wyrvaust was concerned and nodded his head. He was no fool to defy the chain of command, but he did inwardly question Gabriel's motives for ordering him to withdraw his aid to Wyrvaust. "If it as you wish, Sovereign." His eyes then locked on Arilwen to see if she also desired him to desist, and if she gave the slightest indication that she supported Gabriel, Arcenian would bow to them both, take the lady regent's package inside, and then return to the shrine. If on the other hand Arilwen desired him to continue his efforts and made it known, he would beg both their pardons for his unsavory techniques and promise to behave himself better in the future, then attempt to convince Gabriel to give him another chance where Wyrvaust's well being was concerned. What that meant was that he would no longer involve the regents until Wyrvaust was communicating more openly.

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Arilwen:

Arilwen slowed and turned when Arcenian called out to stop her and she caught Gabriel's look right before he started to scold the man for upsetting her. She suppressed a sigh. Gabriel was so very sweet... TOO sweet at times, because he wanted to protect her from everything. She gently touched his arm to calm him as Arcenian apologized, but began sharing what he thought...what he felt in Wyrvaust. Her beautiful eyes riveted on the man and she paled. "He's there? He can hear me?" She barely whispered it as she slipped her gaze to Wyrvaust instead, who of course did not meet her eyes. He wanted to comfort her? She was holding her breath when he took a slight step forward, then backed up and suddenly turned to go. She resisted the urge to call out to him, instead listening to Arcenian as he explained that he was doing the opposite for some reason... and that the change had started on the very day she took Gabriel as her second husband.

Dragging in a breath, Arilwen tried to keep her head on straight. Why? Why THAT day? A horrible, accusatory thought worked into her mind. What if Gabriel had caused the change, hoping that she would rid herself of Wyrvaust with time? A chill ran through her body and she tried not to reveal what she was feeling on her face. All she could do at first was nod. "Arcenian, please...anything you can find, I want to know immediately. And also if there is anything I can do to help. I knew it... I knew he was there." Joy began to work into her tone and she almost smiled. She kissed Gabriel on the cheek, accepted the headache aid from Arcenian, then returned to her chamber. She was going to have to talk to Arcenian in private about her suspicion. All she could do was hope that Gabriel would never do that...

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Gabriel:

Gabriel Smiled as Arilwen kissed his cheek. What else could he do? He did not

want to see her hurt and he did not want to see Wyrvaust treated as a second class citizen. The truth was; if he could have done something to give her back her Wyrvaust, Gabrian would gladly do so in a moment, but he could not for the life of him figure out what that might be or what he might do to grant such a wish. He also couldn't be sure Wyrvaust wasn't upset about the tri marriage arrangement. That didn't bother Gabe either really, it wasn't like he himself hadn't explored all the fruits of the trees in the bushes so to speak. Clams and trunks alike. Gabe Sass? Of course. He did love Arilwen, as far as he could feel and tell what love was. He wasn't convinced about Arcenian though. "Arcenian, mind your tongue and your manners one way or the other, I'll not have Master Wyrvaust willfully made to feel second class. NOW, as for the business of the day, We are, I hope, to have company tomorrow night, The King and Queens of Seumir, as well as two, I hope... of their most decorated Rangers... So, some suitable drinkage for the King and the Ladies of Seumir, perhaps something delicious for the Rangers, they are immortal but not, from what I gather, Astraeus so they have shall we say... more mundane eating habits, I would like your attendance M'Lady... Wyrvaust is invited too of course... I would never exclude him... but..." A slight shrug of the hands, what could he do? Wyrvaust would probably avoid the meeting anyway.

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Lena was the first to arrive in Seumir. It had been Arkael, the angel she commanded which had informed her of the invitation to Serhaubren from Lord Gabrian. He had received it from the courier and when he was gone broken the seal and read it out of sheer boredom. Arkael did not often show himself but he was always at her side, most often hidden behind the spectral veil within his spirit form. Arkael was with her but in the flesh so as not to cause any unwanted hassles if he were detected by the wards or city artificers. Arkael had an identical twin in the world, though he had an angel's memory which did not remember Marcania at the time.

Arkael was a beautiful fellow like most Tsetar, auburn hair spilling in curls to his ass, his eyes a deep shade of turquoise, his skin a mediterranean bronze colour whether he kept company with the sun or not. It was simply the colour of his skin.

Lena was early and it was intentional. She wanted to see this regent face to face before politics overshadowed the day. Once Lena was in Gabrian's company, her identity announced by one of those who escorted her in before leaving her alone with Gabrian and his wife, and had taken the seat offered to her then accepted the wine being served; she trained her gaze on the roguishly handsome regent to cant her head slightly as her storm grey eyes traveled over his lovely hair, his face and through his bi-coloured silver and green eyes. "I have heard of you, Lord Zephrahiah. You are a legendary figure of Acheron yet the common appears to respect you just the same. Perhaps they are under the impression that you are human? Namas perhaps?" she explored. They had to surely, otherwise they would distrust him as just another immortal overlord certainly. That or he was controlling their wills which Lena doubted, though would not reject as impossible. He might for all she knew simply exude something in his angelic presence which wrapped others around his fingers.

She smiled as her regard leaned on Arilwen. "You make our new regent a very pretty wife. I hope your mind and heart shall match your beauty that you may have the

strength and wits to make him see his errors when he fails to recognize what is best. That is the most valuable gift we can ever offer our husbands." She concluded with a warmer smile, hoping Arilwen understood how important she could be to Gabriel and to Seumir, then turned her gaze on the horseman as he spoke to offer a reply or express whatever else was on his mind. She doubted she would get as much time alone with the regents as she would like before Byron and the others invited to meet with Gabriel and Arilwen arrived.

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Gabriel of course, politicoe fellow that he was, and with that do gooder habit he'd been picking up on lately, was tickled, if not pink, then tickled just the same, when the guests began accepting his invitations, and of course, promptly, more then ever, actually showing up. Gabriel expected some might show early, to that end he wasn't surprised to see Lena DeCasey gracing hall of Serhaubren. Once drinks and introductions had been made, Gabriel greeting one of the first ladies of Seumir, which was still, by law, Lena, with the ever equisite bow and kiss to the ring perhaps situated upon a royal finger, or with his lips to the back of a hand, he was otherwise well behaved though as he'd been of late and looked forward to the encounter, which to him, felt overdue. (Even if the kissing of rings and to the back of the hands had always felt to Gabriel like copping a feel, wether you actually wanted to or not.

"Welcome" Spoke the regent, setting the other thoughts aside as he answered the question of the respect he seemed to be gleaning from the common plebiscite. "I do not force their view by extreme methods arcane, if that is what you are wondering M'Lady. I do not generally use methods of that sort publically in front of them. If they ask, I would be compelled to tell them the truth I suppose, at any rate, I am simply my charismatic self, which is somewhat strong in my line, betwixt that, and trying to avoid mass displays of the profligate use of power as you and I would understand the terms, yes, they seem to have come around. I'll grant you I did not at first, but I've come to the conclusion that such displays and acts, were in error and I do regret them. I certainly hope your Ranger will. Beyond that, the damage done to reputations by the shapeless one was sufficient that I might have been a cross dressing dwarf vengoath cannibal and they probably wouldn't have objected. In any light however, it helps that they do want to be led, that much is certain. They see safty and security in good leadership. Unfortunately they also don't have the wherewithal to understand all the facts." He shrugged as if to say what can one do?

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Wyrvaust:

It was a pity that Arilwen did not trust Gabriel, for he was in no way at fault for Wyrvaust's exasperated mental state. What or who was at fault if anyone other than the weakness in Wyrvaust remained to be discovered. One fact that was soon to BE uncovered was the presence of several concerned parties who were on their way to 'collect' their lost clan brother. One was the Adram clan Elder, Beroth, the other the clan patron Mendorin, a full blooded Abyss Demon in human guise. The Adram clan's kingdom lie on the edge of the Desert of Fire and over the entire stretch of the mud flats and dusky swamp. It was not a place many WANTED to venture, but it suited these acolyte demons of the abyss. They loved their hot, perilous and humid home. Wyrvaust however preferred his desert canyon and caves to

all other places. It was his home and he cherished it... MISSED it.

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Unexpected Guests:

Beroth and Mendorin were in the city; had turned in their weapons at the gate peaceably as was expected and demanded of all visitors. Invited guests and allies who were well known were often allowed their weapons, but unexpected ones, even those as important as Beroth, had to check their weapons at the gate. Leaving his blade, Mendorin's Edge, his whip Abyss Flame and a set of wicked looking throwing daggers, the tall man with Prince Beroth warned the guards not to accidentally cut themselves on his sword OR his daggers, and to have a care with his whip.

These two were not the ONLY ones with a vested interest in Wyrvaust, no indeed, the dragon lord of the desert had entered the city as well not far behind Mendorin and Beroth, whose very presence in his desert as they had crossed he had heeded in his watchful regard. He had tracked them in fact to the fair city of Serhaubren, named for the peace which had so long made silent its palacial halls. When asked at the gate to give up HIS weapons, Marsol, despite the sobering burn in his eyes, had laughed in his deep voice and called them fools to think his sword was any weapon at all compared to those of himself.

Now Gabriel had always been a horseman of his word as far as Beroth, the eldest of all abyss clan demons could remember. If Gabriel promised pain and devastation, he brought it, if he vowed his allegiance, he honored it. Gabriel had never been deceitful when his promise was made to Beroth's knowledge, but he HAD always been dangerous, especially to cross or betray, and only ever but especially devious as an ENEMY. Thing to know with him was, did he count you among his enemies? Beroth, whose acquaintance with him was casual, had never given him any reason to be. Beroth had heard of Gabriel's reputation in Seumir and though mercy may have been among those things the horseman had learned to appreciate, Beroth doubted it was to the point he would allow himself to be made any kind of fool. He meant to have a care in dealing with Gabriel, but backing down was not something Mendorin would ALLOW him to do... in otherwords, if Beroth decided Gabriel had a point, Mendorin was sure to counter it. Beroth had not LIKED that Mendorin had insisted upon coming, for Wyrvaust loathed their patron demon and with good cause.

It was Mendorin's fault Wyrvaust was so bugged in the head, and the only one who KNEW that other than the Adram clan was turning in so many weapons at the gates that the guards there were slack jawed. One of the guards finally asked if he would be pulling weapons out of his ass next, gaining a rumble from Marsol which the guard was not sure was a growl or laughter. Whichever it was, Marsol was not smiling. He was messing with them though, with all those weapons. Marsol rarely carried any but either the one sword, the one mace, or his warhammer, and the single long dagger he always carried at his hip. It was odd that Marsol was so handsome and at the same time so menacing despite how UN-impressive his stature was in human form. He was only five foot eleven in height, Valis Urik's height in fact. It was more than the sienna colored, war-paint-like tatoo on his face; more than the intensity of the dark brown eyes the faded, red-brown tatoo masked. It was almost like he exuded all the things which lie beneath him in his very demeanor. Marsol had no swagger at all, he simply was, and whether he looked like a human or a demon, what he was was a hellraptor. He was not something to mess around with and anyone with the slightest instincts knew it when they met him. Marsol was not afraid of a fight, nor did he worry about starting one by being himself. Marsol never held the hand of pretense.

As Marsol walked towards the palace, the guards still stowing all the weapons he had pulled out of his hat when he was a quarter of the way across the

city, he buried every feeling he had ever had for Gabrian and stretched his mind out to the Regent of Seumir. "Lord Zephraiah," he greeted him formally. "I come behind two others to seek an audience with you, and I suspect their reasons are much the same. I wish the return of Wyrvaust to me. I am his Lord. He bears my mark. The rightful claim is mine." Unlike Beroth and Mendorin, he gave ample warning of why he was there. Clan before blood, mark before clan, Marsol knew the laws of Acheron well enough, and where a demon belonged was a matter for Acheron.

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Lena:

The corner of Lena's sensuous lips twitched slightly as Gabrian assumed to know her mind too well to be coincidence. As she saw it; the act was a declaration to her that her thoughts belonged to him while in his domain, the domain he had usurped. Lena was not bothered by some knowing her mind... her sire, her children when they could, the Morning Star, whom she had given up trying to block a long time ago, but the regent, this particular 'person' she did not care to have trespassing on her thoughts. Thus she would use the discipline she owned and simply quiet her thoughts in his presence. Such a discipline was not an easy one as anyone who had ever tried not to think could tell you. It was one she had mastered long ago nevertheless, much as anyone could command their imaginings.

"How insightful of you, Lord Zephran," she addressed him now as the common knew him so as to acclimate herself to calling him that. "A little too intuitive I should say," and her laughter carried like the sweetest music on the air. "I appreciate the warning," she thanked him and in doing so tipped her own politic hat to him.

Her storm blown eyes then cut on him to hold his gaze. There was a reason she had wanted to meet with him in private. She wished to counsel him in matters she felt concerned Gabrian and none other. "It is true the people of Seumir are unaware of how very dangerous you are. Me and mine, however, shall never make that mistake. We are perfectly aware of all the dangers which arise by you assuming the regency in Seumir. I wonder if it pleases you to know this? If power appeals to you then it certainly should. In regards to your honor... your heroism as it is, well..." and she laughed again, but this time with an edge of hysteria. "There is but one sacrifice you could make to prove your virtue genuine, while all else is utterly superficial. Byron informed me fully of your confession to him. If that was not just a method to lull him into your trust, then it took great courage. But do you have the courage and heart to do what is truly right, Lord Zephran? When the right thing to do is stand down and declare your throne rightfully Elah Denveth's," she suggested. Did she really expect Gabrian to accept her proposal? Of course she didn't, because she did not fully believe his virtue was sincere. She intended to find out if it was however, and help him to accomplish that goal.

"Surely you realize that by your ties and affiliations alone, you place this kingdom, perhaps even the world in jeopardy by assuming a position of leadership? Where the Morning Star seeks to protect this world and its inhabitants, for that IS his goal here, the Prince you serve has no such agenda. It is the Desert Wind's banner you carry, Lord Zephran, whatever your personal agendas and goals may be. The right thing for you to do, is to step down. THAT is the one act that can truly prove your honor. The people of Seumir will not wander lost in ignorance for much longer either. Secrets never keep."

The queen stood and moved closer to him where she knelt down next to him and gazed up at his eyes. As she spoke again her voice took on a beautifully gentle quality. "I can imagine wanting to forget you are famine... wanting to BE anything else... but we all of us are what we are. I am a Matron vampire, you are famine, and as mortals quake in my shadow, I quake in yours, dear Gabrian."

She truly could feel for him... He was a weapon Acheron or Sammael could unleash at will. The very thought of him wanting to be someone or something else moved her deeply. His was a tragic wish really, though one answer might exist, if he were willing to betray everything he knew to grasp it.

Lena's hand covered his and squeezed with a tenderness usually reserved for Byron and her offspring. "If your wish is to truly be something other than you are... there is only one that I know of who may be able to help you." She did not need to say who it was. The Morning Star alone held the power of creation over Acheron's own, unless one had the strength and will to seize their own fate. The she remembered Belorian, but did she really want to involve him in such a matter? Place Eoghan in the path of so much potential suffering? Her eyes closed as she realized her error... Her thoughts had given the notion of Belorian being another possibility away.

Lena had no idea that Gabrian had dealings with Eoghan already... that when Gabrian had attempted to seize the Kingdom of Ereme with his army, Eoghan had allied against him with Ereme, Aurelius and Heldras (not to be confused with Halen Dreward) of the Westguard. Gabrian had tried to distract Eoghan by seizing Selena and hurling her into Acheron's Oubliette. Eoghan failed to take the bait until after Gabrian was defeated, but Gabrian had then a surprise waiting for Belorian in the Oubliette. Eoghan had only been able to access Acheron to pursue Selena by Gabrian's leave and in the antichamber been met by Gabe's friend Raexes who showed Eoghan to a crystal. In order to even enter the great cavern labyrinth, Eoghan had to touch the crystal, no explanations offered, which Eoghan either bravely or foolishly had, allowing his memories to be captured, his power taken and himself trapped thereafter in the Oubliette just to have the chance to find Selena. Thus Gabrian still possessed the later half of Belorian's memories, all that had happened before touching the crystal and after he had left earth all those many ages ago, trapped by that ancient power inside of the large amethyst crystal of dark colour which his comrades Raexes and the shadow dragon Srevarg guarded in the Oubliette's antichamber.

When Lena opened her eyes again it was to find herself gazing into the fathoms of Gabrian's two toned eyes. "If anyone can guide you to virtue, it is he..." She was referring now to Belorian, much as she knew Gabrian had received her thoughts of him.

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Arilwen:

Arilwen had been especially quiet the last few days. She watched her first husband with a painfully distant look, but tried not to impede on his space. She also tried not to make it too obvious to Gabrian. It was quite the Othello syndrome since their meeting. That guilty suspicion was creeping into her mind and burrowing down, making her quite paranoid that perhaps her second husband DID have something to do

with Wyrvaust's state of mind. She spent a good portion of her day in bed with headaches. That evening, however, they were to have visitors. Arcenian provided her with a mug of headache remedy and she sipped at the warm liquid while she considered her wardrobe. Gabriel had been very clear and concise about how important these guests were. She showed little interest in it, but simply smiled softly and kissed his cheek, assuring him that she would look her best. And so, she was bathed, her long dark hair scented with rose water, then swept up with flowers and pearls. Her gown was a sheer lilac silk that clung beautifully to her figure, and silver earrings coiled up her earlobes. Lena was the first to arrive and Arilwen greeted her, then blushed when the Queen of Seumir complimented her beauty. "My looks are quite dwarfed by your own, Lady Lena. You are quite stunning." She sat quietly beside Gabriel, trying to look seriously involved in their conversation, but her mind was wandering. Where was Wyrvaust? Would he show up? Would the guests know how to react? Lady Safiel was quite used to it. The others, not so much. She had no idea that the situation was about to come to a head, and that Marsol was here, seeking Gabriel's audience to take Wyrvaust home.

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Wyrvaust:

The strange affliction affecting Wyrvaust, whether a curse or a mental aberration, struck him where his emotions, needs and desires ran deepest. All which he was indifferent or mildly concerned with was little if at all affected. Arcenian had discovered this and attempted to give Wyrvaust the ability to act on his true motivations by removing him from emotion, only to find that whatever was at the root could not be fooled in such a way. Because Wyrvaust was only mildly curious about the meeting Gabriel had invited him to, and because Wyrvaust was utterly indifferent to strangers (unless they were trespassing near his desert lair), Wyrvaust was lurking in the wings of that echoingly capacious hall which Gabriel, Arilwen and Lena now alone filled with their larger than life shadows. Wyrvaust had seen that same hall filled with hundreds of people before, and much preferred it the way it was now; intimate.

Wyrvaust always had been and always would be a recluse at heart. The Desert Raven lurked behind one of two massive columns which framed a tall but narrow doorway that opened into a side corridor leading to the wine cellar from a pantry off the kitchen. With all the hall's expanse between him and the three royals across the way, and the hard shadows of the immense columns covering him; Wyrvaust kept out of sight in a perfect assassin's nook between the right-hand column and wall by the door. The reason no assassin ever would use that nook, was because it was a servant's entry which a leader would seldom if ever pass through. Indeed the entry was barely visible much as the pillars utterly overshadowed it. On the same wall opposite of the wine steward's entry two more pillars stood with another door between them which the kitchen servers used. One more reason stood against malcontents taking advantage of those pillars; guards were almost always posted at each end of the Hall of Parlance against the wall with a clear view of the area behind the pillars. Two more guards stood on either side of the stairway which ascended between the two sets of pillars. Wyrvaust had thought to himself how an assassin with advanced skills (such as he had once been for Mendorin) could still use those shadows and obstacles to ambush a leader despite the guards, but the palace was otherwise so well guarded and warded there was little chance of anyone getting that far.



Wyrvaust had shown Gabriel to various danger spots in the palace by 'pretending' to be an assassin at those locations, and accordingly shown him how he might assault him from those sites. By hiding in the shadows of a pillar or tree and aiming a finger right at him to make a 'phfft' sound, he mock killed Gabriel with what could have been a cursed, poisoned or enchanted crossbow in place of the pretend one he was using. By leaping out behind him to mimic a sneak beheading (one of Wyrvaust's specialties as Sammael had discovered the hard way), he introduced Gabriel to the dangers of corner wall blind spots. In doing all this he proved on one level that he did not hate Gabriel, unless of course he was once again acting complete opposite of his feelings. Regardless of what motivated him, he had at least made the Regent aware of these sites so he could keep an eye out for danger (Wyrvaust's Lesson; +4 perception vs. assassination attempts to Gabriel).

Wyrvaust watched Arilwen intently when he was sure she was not looking. It pained him that she was miserable all of the time when all he wished was for her happiness. If he could only escape, then perhaps he could leave and she could find the happiness she deserved with Gabriel. This was his latest conclusion... that he stood in the way of her happiness... that he made her miserable. Gabriel had proven his decency and integrity through his patience with her, but patience had its limit no matter how good, strong, or even indifferent a person was. Wyrvaust had given up on the hope that he could ever reclaim Arilwen... and even if he could, things could never be the same. Too much had happened. It might take him a hundred years or more to piece himself back together... To do that, he had to escape, seek his death so he could be reborn again. Then perhaps he might unlock himself and reclaim his former self, his true being. Death was simply a doorway to most demons... albeit a risky and unpredictable one to enter. Last time he had entered there he had walked straight into the mouth of Leviathan. That experience had changed him in ways no one but perhaps the most fearsome of all divine birds could understand... Tsetar like Gabriel.

Wyrvaust was desperate to find all that he had lost... his body, his mind, his will. Leviathan had ripped him apart, shown him every horror inside of himself, shown him the truths which bore so deep that only shame and despair lurked there. If Arilwen and Gabriel were meant, their union would last the test of time, if not, then it would end and Wyrvaust could pursue her again when she was free... but not unless he was whole enough again to be the husband she needed and deserved. Anwaar concerned him greatly as well... His entire life had been shattered... His was a happy perfect world in harmony one day and a shipwreck the next. Wyrvaust hated that he was failing his dear son as a father. It had all begun with Sammael... HE Wyrvaust counted a most tragic enemy, tragic because Wyrvaust was wise enough to recognize that he would never to be able to defeat Sammael. That was a battle he could not win and he felt utterly defeated because of it. It was also tragic because Gabriel served Sammael. His eyes trailed to the Pale Rider as he spoke to Seumir's Matriarch. There was much he and Arilwen had come to esteem about Gabriel as they came to know him, and much as Wyrvaust was envious, he was also fond of the Horseman. He counted him among his friends, few though he had, and despite some wayward fantasies involving violence, he did not blame Gabriel for marrying Arilwen. Wyrvaust recognized how severely he had failed his wife and son and wished only her content. If only he could speak to her and urge her to find that happiness he wished her to embrace.

Lena's Tsetar companion Arkael glanced his way and he shrank back deeper into the shadows of the great pillar, which with its sisters supported the extensive ceiling

and the three equally as immense floors above. He snorted. Angels were nothing but trouble and nothing had ever occurred to change his mind. Yes, Arilwen was a kind of angel, but she was not Tsetar nor Korumal. She was a darkstar bird, a mordim, daughter of the Anduain and half human. Trouble still followed her though... Sammael's interest in her was proof of that. Sammael... a storm of oppressive anxieties and feelings flooded him for a time... memories which tormented him, worries which vexed him. At length Wyrvaust tried not to think about him anymore... Thoughts of him were poison to his heart and mind.

The raven slipped around to the side of the column which concealed him from anyone's view, well anyone but the nearby guard who the demon's skulking ways made nervous. He listened though... his eyes pensive as he picked up on what the queen was saying to Gabriel. He was interested in what they were saying, wondering how Gabriel would respond to her costly proposal. His eyes cut their way though he could not see them as Lena said that if anyone could guide him to virtue it was he... The Morning Star? Wyrvaust misunderstood, thinking she meant Morbius. He was not in her head so did not know she was pointing to Belorian.

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Gabriel listened politely, granting Lena her private audience by royal courtesy. If his old pal Kassim did it, then so could he. And these thoughts expressed by Lena DeCasey had not gone unconsidered by the horseman. Indeed he wondered if perhaps his deeds here would be noticed and by whom, The Desert Wind, for instance was the wild card in the deck here. He had his stable of entities and his agenda. Gabriel doing this was not likely in that agenda, yet Sammael had not yet summoned or made a visit to Gabriel to punish or approve or command him to desist. That might well mean nothing though, it could be Sammael was just waiting to see how it turned out before he made his decision and intentions known. Gabriel was not unmindful of his proverbial leash, as much as he would, in his present mindset, liked to have shucked it in favor of his present desires. There was that fallout to be considered as well, suppose he did? There would be a shake up for sure. Gabriel chuckled "Somehow I find it hard to believe that you would quake in anyone's shadow M'lady, but you need not, in my presence, my intentions are honourable, no matter how they will be debated in the times to come- as they will surely be. I would hope that your Clan and forces would be up to that task, and what of Byron? Is he coming around? I know he wants desperately to be the fair hand of justice and keeper of the peace, but these times can and will require strong measures." Gabe was sure he wasn't the first to voice that concern, as for fear and respect, it was what it was. It was there or it wasn't...you could enforce it, cajole it, foster it, encourage it or demand it. Going Horseman to achieve his ends seemed counterproductive. Besides, when or if Gabriel wanted people to quake and kow-tow in his presence, they'd know it. He also knew how hollow those forced sentiments could be. Win a peoples heart by leading them to justice and victory. You could also capture their will by killing off anyone who failed to hold their allegiance. Again the latter seemed counterproductive.

He gazed off for a moment. "We're going to have some more guests, old...acquaintances...some friendly, others, decidedly not so much," He informed as he reached out with his senses. He smiled again, it was to be expected after all. He nodded as he caught her thoughts, he might have been polite and ignored it but as she was here in an attempt to secure the security and future of her kingdom and people, a goal he too shared, he felt it best to answer it.

"Belorian...Eoghan. When last I crossed paths up here it was at Inaaksu. That was quite a dinner let me tell you. The Lich knows how to put one on. I am not so sure he would be delighted to remake my company, although..." and he did not elaborate..."there is something I could give back to him I suppose. I've heard tell he's been running King Kassim's new company of Wardens. That would stand or fall on him I suppose, assuming I wanted to go that far. As for who and what I am, I intend to help restore peace and honour to this kingdom. For the moment my methods are diplomacy and leadership, if things require a sterner hand and harsher measures, well, then we'll just have to see what we must do."

He held her gaze. "Step down in favor of your Ranger? I am not entirely certain she would be any more forgiving than her husband and instinct tells me he is not likely to be forgiving, they've both of course been invited. As I said I hope to clear the air with them and apologize for disrupting their lives. I understand they've recently grown as a family unit. I've also been given to understand that Traerson has two older children from a previous relationship. One day perhaps..." A glance to Arilwen, "We'll have one of our own. In truth, I disrupted their lives because I saw them as a hindrance and a possible threat at the time... I did refrain from harming them however, not wishing to alienate the common populace. I understand the Denveth's are or were very popular among the people. I've heard Traerson has lived among them for some years, rather than always staying with the encampment or in a barracks. Whilst we're on the subject, M'Lady, might I inquire about Denveth's background? That is not a Shaamea or Neffari name, it is Esurian, may I infer he is not of Seumir originally?" That meant West Mephais in all likelihood. Gabe had made discrete inquiries. There were holes however in the information thus gleaned. Even missing amounts of time, that could be the nature of the Denveth's profession too however, Rangers tended to come and go as military campaigns and in the case of Seumir, criminal investigations, required.

"I know from the people, that the two are well trusted by the people, at least those who did not wain in their allegiance to the law and the crown. Elah, I understand took his name in marriage, herself having served since time out of mind, at least to the short lived. " That he'd heard as well, Elah was something on the order of a few millenia old. Traerson by all accounts, approaching his fiftieth year or somewhere thereabouts. Yet that was not considered old either, for his race. Gabe contemplated it, he could not say he saw a future or success for his plans if he did not himself maintain the regency. His current plan was to help restore law and order to the country and a faith in it's leaders. He was still trying to put a finger on why he had chosen this path, he could have already seized the country if he'd wished or had continued on his original course. There was the novelty of the idea however, the Denveth's, With Elah as a Regent and Traerson perhaps running the Rangers, or acting as a Marshal or Warden might well be a right move in reestablishing and reuniting the rule of proper law in Seumir. Yet what would it mean to give it up? And what of Your own masters and old alliances? He asked of himself, those that had not weighed in yet...

He gazed down now as she knelt. It was a position many had assumed in the presence of the Horseman, let alone the Desert Wind and others in that Lord's orbit. The True crux, to change. Even if he could and he was, although he didn't voice the notion specifically through words, what were words? They could be changed and twisted and lied upon after all, but with acts, he was still certain that even if he managed it he'd never lose memory of the things he'd witnessed and visited

upon others. Briefly he was aware of Kassim's reticence when Gabe had come walking out of the Desert to visit Inaaksu. What of Arilwen, would she accept the notion? Surely she must have some manner of opinion on the subject...and Wyrvaust, what of the third in the triad? Even if Gabriel could break what ailed him, allow him to return to...himself..as it were...what is it he would do? If you do give it up, and wind up losing everything, would it still even have been worth making the attempt? That would anger him beyond the pale...and then many might find themselves quaking in the shadow of Lord Famine. He cast a brief smile to his wife and sent, 'I do hope he joins this evening.' Not that he thought it likely, Wyrvaust had been behaving in a curious manner as of late, probing the security of the Keep, almost as though he were concerned for Gabe's safety.

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"Greetings...King Marsol, have a seat... Arilwen? Please do come closer, love." Said Gabriel, a creature of Acheron and Morashtar who knew well the ancient laws. "Well, that is an interesting request, King, one I'm not sure I can grant... perhaps I should let Arilwen fill you in, Wyrvaust is... not himself lately." Gabe was not particularly inclined to honor a request that would upset Arilwen, even if he did feel an equal compulsion to honor the ancient law. True he knew Marsol was not high on the Desert Wind's festival card list. "It is best, we palaver, and perhaps clarity will assist us. As for two others, so far you are the only one who has arrived today other than Queen Lena, for a rather auspicious occasion, you see I am expecting the arrival of King Byron of Seumir, Lady Lena, Queen of Seumir is already here, I am expecting Queen Safiel as well. Tell me, who were these other two if you please, and have you settled your differences with King Kassim yet?"

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Lena pursed her lips as Gabriel replied to her proposals thus far by not actually giving an answer. How very politician of him to skirt the issues, she thought freely. When he assured her that she did not have to worry about his intentions the regal lady shook her head slowly in dismal retrospect, wondering if perhaps Gabriel was not taking her counsel too lightly. Surely Gabriel had not forgotten Sammael's prior agenda of conquering any of Morendor's kingdom's he could get his hands on and sending Gabriel to the Westfold to do just that? Byron and Lena kept themselves well informed on current events in Morashtar, particularly those involving conflict. Maelmorda had persuaded Sammael to retract his plans to conquer any part of Morashtar, in Gabriel's witness, but acting on what he knew Sammael desired, Gabriel attacked Ereme anyway, despite his master's renunciation of that agenda, and did Sammael command him to desist? He did not, which was as good as consent. Ereme's defenders, including Belorian, had defeated Gabriel, but if Gabriel had won? It would have been a victory intended for Sammael which Sammael had not forbid. Gabriel knew first hand of the pact Maelmorda had made with Sammael to ensure Morashtar was safe from the Desert Wind, but Lena wondered when the word safe and Sammael had ever gone hand in hand? "Be ever mindful of the calm before the storm, Gabriel. Whatever your master permits you to do, you do FOR him." That was just a simple fact. "You know as well as I that if he disapproved, he would leave you with no doubt." Lena's own thoughts led her to this logical conclusion.

Her storm blown eyes locked on his two-toned gaze as he queried after Byron's

efforts. "He has declared martial law to be carried out within the strictest limits of the law..." She paused a moment then added in pensive tones, "striking antiquated laws which remain buried in the archives that were never meant to implement but in the worst of the worst of times..." Her eyes then pinned Gabrian again with a particular burn. "I made the mistake of acting out of desperation on one such regulation and my king made it clear that I was not to do so again. I am certain he shall address the subject of the measures he has taken to secure his kingdom and borders with you and will expect your cooperation in those matters. So, to answer your question, he very much has come around if ever he even lost sight. Like the Lord he reverses and has learned much from it is oft difficult to understand his motives regardless of how right they may be. For all his faults, there is a man whose honour is true where once the seeds of darkness had spread their roots throughout him. His mercy towards you is owed to believing that you, as his Achonian brother deserve the same chance he was shown to find your true path. Do you, Gabrian, understand the trials you may be pit against in choosing this path for yourself? Acheron will test you... will test you to your ends. I survived just the tail end of those years with Byron, and our love endured despite the terrible ordeals I had to watch him suffer. But it took its toll on us. Life itself will test you. You have married the wife of an enemy's friend. Marsol is the enemy of your master is he not? Therefore are you not also his enemy by default? Have you wondered what might come of that?" she moved.

"I can only imagine how you have suffered, mi hermano... When you were described to me I was told your wings were broken and featherless, bony appendages of what once was. Clearly that has changed but when I inquired after you I was told that Sammael tore them from you when he claimed you all those ages ago... I cannot imagine the torments you suffered just to prove yourself loyal to him and to Acheron. I am aware that devotion often comes at a high price, when in Acheron so many bear the weight of all the hatred and disgust piled on them from countless strangers." Lena had come to understand the suffering of demon-kind well and how it often manifested itself in violent and brutal ways. "But one who seeks to cleanse their soul is laid bear by Acheron. Our kingdom shall not let us fool ourselves. Byron bought his honor with laments, despair, unspeakable torments and agony." The lady who seemed at once so morbid then smiled sweetly and brushed her palm against his cheek to press it warmly against him, despite the coolness of it which indicated she had not been feeding. Astraues were warm to the touch when well nourished. "I am sure you shall have the strength to endure whatever comes, Lord Zephran." Her vote of confidence given. "Remain true and you shall have the support of many friends, myself included," she offered sincerely. Likewise, if he betrayed their trust, he would have many fierce enemies to be sure. She neither thought this, or said it. It was a simple fact they were both certainly aware of.

Speaking of Marsol... the dragon Lord had arrived, Beroth and Mendorin who should have arrived ahead of him had been delayed thus Marsol arrived first. She moved to stand and back away from Gabrian, her eyes locked intently on Marsol, who she had never met, only heard and even read a great deal of. Did she believe everything she had read? She believed some of it was probably true just as other facts had likely been invented or exaggerated. Still, it was enough to paint him as a dangerous enemy to make. Her cheeks clenched slightly against the tightness she began to feel in her guts. She had warned Gabrian that his situation as regent endangered Seumir... Was it too late? Her mind reached out to Byron, wherever he was. "Gabrian is unwell and unfit for company this evening, my love. Nothing to be concerned about though. Return to the chateau. I have some personal matters to

attend to at Lake of Shadows Inn and will meet you in a few days..." She lied bare-faced to her king to protect him. It was told so naturally he would suspect no deceit from her at all. Some part of her needed to believe that Byron could still stay out of this... that he need not be dragged into an insane conflict that had nothing to do with him. Byron would disagree, she knew... By not challenging the people's lawful vote to elect Gabriel as their regent, he had consented to his regency. By that action he embraced Gabriel as his ally and was obliged to defend him. Lena deadened herself inside so nothing could be felt from her... none of the despair which wanted to hollow out her chest, none of the fear which manifested when forced to gaze at the face of horror as it stalked into the mind as Marsol walked into the room. Lena saw the dominos falling into a bleak and savage future which she feared no one could stop. Gabriel had already tilted that domino when he had married Arilwen. Too late... Lena thought... Too late to step down now. "Too late..." she said aloud.

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It might indeed have been too late if not for a certain devil. Lena, like most everyone, and The Morning Star preferred it that way, neglected to remember that Morashtar was under the guardianship of a certain devil. Oh people could have their wars, they often did, but when it came from outworld invaders, or immortals of demigod or higher stature, his own Achonian brethren included, that is when the father of so many kinds took an active interest, that is to say to either meddle or intervene.

Morbius paced his spacious chamber's floor in strides which seemed languid and tranquil while muscle's coiled beneath his robe like a caged panther's. His long, curling black hair hung like so many silk spun springs on his shoulders and back to flatter his graceful movements. He had only an hour ago activated the final and fifth seal which locked Acheron down tight, disallowing exit by any of its inhabitants including himself. Entrance was another matter altogether, strict access was still possible. Furthermore, even when the sixth seal was active, Acheron's pathways in through the spirit veil were always open, they had to be for that kingdom to receive incoming souls. It was through this same spiritual conduit that some of Acheron's more powerful or slippery demons could escape in spirit, only in spirit, and remotely possess beings on worlds beyond. Remote possession was risky much as a demon could lose the part of their soul used to possess another if that form should be killed before achieving the power to survive mortal injuries. It took time for a possessed body to adjust to the energies of a demon's soul and longer for a demon to build that body into anything even resembling a demonic embodiment. Remote possession was like being reborn as a mortal, starting all over but as a lesser being. Given time a riven demon could regain part of their demonic prowess, but until their spirit joined again to be whole, neither the demon or its proxy would be at its full capacity.

So many had escaped Acheron when Maelmorda had been murdered that his new proxy Morbius had begun working on the seals right away. He could not afford for Acheron to remain open. Three of the six seals had cracked wide open when Maelmorda had died, and it had taken this long for Morbius to seal five of the six seals, much as he'd had to devote his efforts to the task of reclaiming the fugitive Achonians and restore order in Acheron as well. Not nearly all had been claimed but enough to satisfy him for the time being. He had closed the second seal (the first had never been broken) on the first day and had then the remaining seals to require his

attention. The sixth seal would prevent entry into Acheron and Morbius did not want that. The Morning Star never engaged the sixth seal unless it became absolutely necessary. It was usually an agent of Haman which triggered the final seal if anyone did. The time required to seal the five which Morbius had was the only reason Acheron had stood open for long as it had.

The Morning Star's reasons for sealing Acheron had nothing to do with the three demons entering Serhaubren's palace, but Morbius found the timing serendipitous all the same. No good could come of Marsol meeting with Gabriel at this juncture. Lena believed Gabriel had tipped the first domino when in fact it had been Solbaid who had done that... or maybe the Morning Star had only himself to blame, for inviting Solbaid by his mere demeanor to help him out. What could the Morning Star be but himself though? If his very existence invited chaos what could he do? The best of intentions oft led to disaster... ah well. It was what it was.

Now, Where one might see Marsol's arrival as just one king seeking audience of another king, Morbius saw far reaching consequences which would rock the world he was the founder and protector of if it went unchecked. Morbius seldom involved himself in personal matters, but this would go well beyond personal. He had no choice but to get involved. He felt the cracks in Marsol's heart, and knew his old friend's mind all too well, knew Marsol had forgotten that he'd had his chance to stop this thing between Arilwen and Gabriel and failed to take it. Marsol would go to claim Wryvaust and demand Arilwen in the bargain, and where Marsol had marked Wyrvaust, Gabriel had marked Arilwen on their wedding night. A bloody and savage war would come of it all... unless Morbius intervened and did so quickly. Morbius intended to remind Marsol that he had already crossed that bridge and had to live with it. Malcomb was called upon. "I need your voice, Malcomb," he called to the pit angel. "Embark to Serhaubren immediately." Malcomb yawned and rolled out of his huge bed to rub his bleary eyes. No time to shower he pulled on a fresh pair of black silk boxers and leather pants, a fish net wife beater and leather vest bangled with spikes, D-rings and connecting chains, all stainless steel, then stepped through a shadow gate to leave Castle Morash behind. The city dome wards of Serhaubren caught him at the gate where he stumbled a few strides as he ambled out of the shadow folds. He had no weapons on him so once he cleared the gate he phased again into shadows and stepped out again as he arrived at another gate below the palace steps, where he was greeted and questioned by the guards. "I am Malcomb Mandevil, here by command of Lord Kilcanoragh," he thrust his hand out to expose the seal ring of the Morning Star. The guards of Seumir knew what it meant. "I must see Lord Zephraniah straight away." The guards bowed to him and let him pass while two of them fell in behind him to escort him to the Hall of Parlance. In the spiraling corridor of the octagonal tower, Malcomb spotted Mendorin and Beroth whom the arch magister was talking to. Malcomb's cheek clenched and he started to pause only the devil his will was attached to spurred him forward past his old enemy Mendorin. That did not stop Malcomb from glaring at the demon with eyes which stabbed him with hatred and a promise of violence. The arch mage caught the look and delayed the other two demons even further with more questions.

"That is two guests who have sworn by their eyes to wish harm on you, Lord Mendorin." Marsol had been the first. "As I told you before, there are delicate talks in progress which Lord Marsol has already complicated with his arrival. I think it best you take a room at one of our fine Inns and come to see Lord Zephraniah when he calls on you. I am sure he won't keep you long." He did not specify how long though.

"We will see him NOW," Mendorin insisted, growing aggravated with the delay.

The arch mage frowned. "Much as I respect and regard the authority of Lord Beroth here, I must answer to my king and his regent. The other guests were invited, YOU are unexpected. You shall have to wait, like it or not." Marsol had not been expected, but they did not have to know that.

Mendorin gritted his teeth and spun on a dime to take leave of the palace in brisk strides while Beroth swung around with his hands tucked relaxed at the small of his back and withdrew in untroubled strides. Marsol had come; It appeared he had not abandoned Wyrvaust after all. The Prince of the Adram clan was relieved to tell the truth. Wyrvaust did not belong in Seumir, of this Beroth stood doubtless, but it was better for him if Marsol should reclaim him, particularly since Mendorin had involved himself. Beroth had intended to protect Wyrvaust from Mendorin, but now it seemed he would not have to. He was no fool, he realized that guarding someone from the likes of Mendorin, when he resided under the same roof a good deal of the time, could fail, and who but Wyrvaust would pay for the moment of inattention or distraction Mendorin might take advantage of? That worry had harried Beroth since he had learned of all which had become of Wyrvaust over the past year, and decided he must own his duty and reclaim Wyrvaust. Marsol had failed Wyrvaust utterly in that time, and if he failed him again in the future, the Adram clan would challenge his rights to Wyrvaust before the King of Acheron itself. For now, Beroth was satisfied that Marsol had come for the demon who now still belonged to him. Mendorin in all his outrage would have to take care of himself. Beroth still intended to meet with Gabriel nevertheless, make him aware of his duty towards Wyrvaust in case Wyrvaust remained with him or came under his authority again. Few even knew Wyrvaust was a clan demon, because it was so damn rare for clan demons to attain a rogue status. Most assumed that Wyrvaust was an independant or rogue demon.

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Marsol passed by Prince Beroth and Mendorin as he walked through the Magister's Tower and for a brief moment his eyes settled on Mendorin with a hard oath to murder him soon. Had he not felt all that power pulsing in the walls all around him, he would have challenged his life then and there. The tower was not the place to challenge Silent Halls wards it was clear. He soon found himself inside the palace, and a series of corridors and courtyards later he stood in the presence of Gabriel, ahead of the other two demons who had arrived before him. Beroth and Mendorin had been delayed first by Gabriel's guards who questioned them outside before the mages in the tower stalled them further, while Marsol had stalked past them and made way to his present location.

Marsol's skin prickled with goosebumps as his gaze settled on Gabriel and he instinctually propelled towards a shift, and indeed some scales popped from his flesh and he seemed to loom taller, only he remained in his sapien skin as his half-dragon eyes lept on Gabriel whose voice did nothing to placate the hellraptor inside of him. The slits and flame coloured veins melted from his amber eyes nevertheless as his arms crossed his chest and he breathed a gruff snort of recognition, that is to say that he understood that Gabriel was trying to be diplomatic. Desert browned skin smoothed again of any brilliant or blood red scales. His eyes slid to the seat offered him then around the fringes of the



expansive chamber. His gaze settled for a moment on the silhouette of Wyrvaust, for that was all he could see of him until he peered around the pillar to meet his eyes for a moment. Marsol's smoldering gaze then swung back on Gabriel to answer his invite by remaining on his feet. Marsol seldom actually sat down.

"I am not here to sit and make nice with the right hand of my enemy, or to speak of my other neighbors. I am here for Wyrvaust and..." Before he could finish his sentence his attention was drawn by the sound of the Hall's heavy double-doors being opened and clapping shut again, followed by the soft footfall of the handsome but very gothic Infernal Seraphim walking their way, whose scent wafted of whatever most pleased each individual's senses.

Marsol's eyes thinned curiously on Malcomb whose acquaintance he had not made but in passing. He knew who he was though, and whose voice he carried, the Morning Star had made that known to all but a very few Achonians who had managed to place themselves temporarily out of his reach. Temporary might mean a day or a thousand years... the duration dependant on the cleverness and luck of those who dared to hide from him. His eyes followed the pit angel as he bowed to everyone, himself included, and he only gazed at him stone faced.

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It was as Marsol had begun to address Gabriel that Malcomb arrived in the Hall of Parlance practically on the tail of Marsol, to meet the acquaintance of Gabriel and his company. He interrupted Marsol by his approach and as he bowed respectfully to the queen, then the pair of regents, and then the desert chieftain, showing the proper order of respect for that place and time. When he straightened from bowing to regard Marsol, he met his gaze for a moment. "I would speak to you in private, Lord Marsol," he informed the dragon. Malcomb wisely preferred not to make Marsol's troubles public, not even to such an intimate little party of Achonian subjects. When Marsol quite reluctantly offered his consent, much as he did not want to step out of that chamber without having gotten what he came for, Malcomb turned to face Gabriel.

"When we return, we will be leaving with Wyrvaust and Anwarr. Neither you or Arilwen will have anything to say in this matter. Are we understood?" He did not give Gabriel the chance to protest or even agree as he clasped Marsol by the arm and pulled him not only out of the hall but out of that plane of existence altogether as he drew Marsol through a fiery gateway into a place he believed he would very much appreciate; Shivardda, the plane of fire. Though the gateway remained open, he waved his hand over it as they stepped out, to block the gateway off from their side, so no one could follow, peer through it, or hear what was being said by them, as though he had pulled a sound proof door closed.

Surrounding them were canyons sculpted into bizzare shapes by lava, and above them dead forests, volcanos, and lava fields stretched into the distant vistas. They stood on a stone bridge connecting to a rock pathway which led around and above a river of lava which bubbled up from magma fissures in the ground to snake red-hot through the canyon. Beyond, in the infernal desert, they could hear the roar of a distant firestorm raging as pockets of heat had reached their peak and exploded to unleash billowing clouds of flame and ash, like a sandstorm of flames. Fire elemental creatures, hell raptors, fire beasts, and demons unique to that plane and resistant to heat and fire were the only living inhabitants there. It was a harsh

plane which damaged anything without resistance to heat or noxious gasses, the damage increasing when one ventured too close to volcanos, lava pools or vents. There were oases to be found there where cooler temperatures and water could be found. There was even one forest (Delcaris) where the central part of the woodland was still alive, all the same the humidly mist veiled jungle was home to dangerous beasts and people.

While Malbius addressed Marsol, Gabriel and Arilwen were granted some time to adapt themselves to the command Morbius had made through the Infernal. The young devil (rather the ancient creature who was young as a devil) leaned his russet ringed amber eyes on Marsol with a slight cant of his head as the dragon lord breathed in the environment around him which fit him like a kid glove. Malcomb smiled slightly. "Your heart and your mind are riven, Lord Marsol. You would spark a war over this matter with Gabriel and bathe the ground of An Morendor in the blood of thousands over a personal grudge. Logic has escaped you altogether, friend of the Morning Star, thus we have come to BE your voice of reason. You have failed in your duties towards Wyrvaust, and you know this. You gave him to the fates and now suddenly you want him back. That is fine of course, he IS yours, and because Wyrvaust needs him to keep grounded and because he belongs to him, you get Anwarr in the bargain, whom Wyrvaust marked with Arilwen before he lost himself. He revoked his mark to Arilwen, out of guilt, that Gabriel could mark her, but Anwarr still bears his father's mark. Marsol... you have forgotten that you walked away from it, and left Wyrvaust and Arilwen in Gabriel's care. You made that choice and must now live with it. You have a quarrel with Sammael, and yes, Gabriel is his man, but YOU left Arilwen AND Wyrvaust IN the horseman's hands, where they have been for almost a year now. YOU did this. There is no going back now. Because Wyrvaust bears your mark, your claim to him IS valid. So you can have him, and with him Anwarr. I will NOT however stand for you starting wars all over the place because of your quarrel with Sammael. You want a piece of him? Acheron will see the two of you locked in a chasm, with lots of food and wine and weapons, until one of you is dead or has bowed down to the other. You will end your grievances in Acheron where your personal vendettas belong. Arilwen is NOT worth a war that would drag the entire country into a bloody and brutal conflict between hellions and all their allies. It's fucking absurd you would even entertain the thought, never mind call out all your dragons and soldiers. Call them off, Marsol, right fucking now, or you will live to see something you have never seen before, my full wrath at work." His threat was not an empty one.

"I am not some hippy tree hugger who is opposed to war, but your reasons for the terrible consequences you would reap are outlandish... Hell, there is not a word that will define the stupendousness of your foolish and wreckless motivations in this case. I always thought better of you than THIS. Jesus fucking-A christ, Marsol. Call them off. Take Wyrvaust and Anwarr and go home, and when you are ready, come to Acheron and meet with Sammael in single combat to the death, or whatever terms you would call him to. Wyrvaust and Anwarr would do well in Gilriael's care while you are away. That is my command, as spoken through this handsome young devil..." Malcomb blushed slightly because he never would have called himself handsome, no matter how attractive he actually was. "Will you honor it, or defy me to suffer the tragic consequences?" Whatever lips he chose to speak from, whatever proxy he assumed the seductive shape of, the Morning Star was ever who he was, be he dark, vicious, cunning, reasonable, authoritative, or good.

When Marsol saw the sense of his command and agreed, however miserably, to obey it, Malbius draped the dragon Lord with his arm and jostled him affectionately. It really sucked when two people you admired hated one another. "There is the dragon I know and love," he approved. "Now let's go get Wyrvaust and Anwarr, take them home, and get bloody shitfaced together, what do you say?" When Marsol looked to him and gave a subtle nod of his head, the ancient devil in mind and young devil in body slapped the old dragon lord's back and led him through the flaming conduit back to the Hall of Parlance, through the same gateway they had exited. He let his thoughts digress from the plots he was so sure were hatching in his friend's mind that he could almost taste them as they stepped into the palace Hall from that threshold of swirling flames. He had left it open for the return trip so he would not have to disrupt wards or make a more round about and lengthy return. When they stepped out onto that beautifully woven shaamaen carpet, Malcomb fixed his eyes on Gabrian. "Have you acceded to the forfeiture of Wyrvaust and Anwarr peaceably, or need I remind you he bears Marsol's mark as Anwarr bears his father's?"

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Arkael: The Tsetar seemed to have just been taking everything in, keeping his opinions to himself for the time being. The conversations were interesting, as they often seemed to be when people like this were involved. He mainly lingered beside Lena, as he always was. Often, as the conversation unfolded, he watched her as she spoke, because there was very little she did where she was not lovely while doing it. She was a pleasure to look at, to listen to. There was not a whole lot in his life right now but Lena. With his memories lost to him, she was the one constant thing day in and day out.

He watched Gabrian, as well. He was another interesting one. As for what was actually being said, he was definitely leaning towards Lena's side of things. The ties a person had could most definitely put a kingdom in danger, if the wrong person was made leader.

These two were not the only ones who Arkael was taking in. He watched Wyrvaust as he watched Arilwen, those turquoise eyes settling on him briefly. The way he retreated deeper into the shadows made his brows raise just slightly, unsure what to make of that reaction. Still, he did not try and watch him longer. He had gotten the brief glimpse that he had been interested in.

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Lena: When Morbius returned with Marsol, Lena's hand reached out for Arkael, her fingers lacing with his to pull him a little closer by the hand as she withdrew a little distance from the regent to give Malbius (as many Achonians had come to call Malcomb owned to the amalgamation of the two names and personalities) the floor. Lena had answered any questions Gabrian had for her while the two lords had stepped out (as later posts will reflect when questions pointed to are posed). She passed a little smile to the criminally handsome angel at her side. If one was observant enough they might gather that Lena and Arkael, though discreet, seemed to share a rather intimate rapport with one another. It might easily be friendship, or something more to the casual observers. Whatever gossip arose in court about it, Lena ignored. She had learned long ago to disregard talk among the plebian population, even some of the talk from her own family or the vampires clans. She

had gotten over caring what others thought of her a long time ago. Still, she kept her life very private. It was HER life after all. If she was attracted to Arkael, the angel was not the only one the queen was impressed with and had grown fond of during her transitions with Byron. She admired King Kassim a great deal, she had just never let on. Besides, she liked her men to be of strong minds and wills and to pursue their own heart's desires. Byron seemed to be under the impression that he had both of his wives in the bag... but he was mistaken far more than he knew. Lena had tried to accept the situation with Saffiel, but Arkael had helped her to the truth and in no cruel way. He was as kind and wise as they came. The kind part people saw, it was his wisdom they missed. Lena had noticed. What once had been between she and Byron, could never be again. He had moved on... She had to do the same. She had tried to respark that fire... but all that remained of it were warm embers. She would always love Byron, always be his loyal subject and progeny, but their marriage had long washed under the bridge of endings.

As Arkael's arm coiled her just a little, she sank against him to cuddle against his warmth as the voices of Gabriel and Malcomb flitted around that giant chamber in echoes which practically mesmerized her for the pleasantness of their tones, despite the painful subjects being broached. As Wyrvaust was discussed her eyes slid to Arilwen. She identified with her... the pain she was feeling of watching the one who meant everything to you slip away. That had to be the worst feeling... worse than torture, worse than death. She knew there were no words that would soothe her... no embrace which could take her pain and lock it away. She had only to suffer until time wore down all those raw and bleeding edges.

At one point, she fidgeted and stepped out of the comfort zone Arkael had created for her of his own viril body and lifted her voice in opinion of the private matter of the shy demon which had been raised. "Is it possible, Lord Mandeville, for Wyrvaust to decide where he should go? The three of you speak of him as though he is not here, yet there he stands," and she pointed at him, causing him to duck behind that immense column. "I understand the policies and politics of marks and all that, of course, amidstades, but why not just let him choose? I heard you speaking of his emotional condition, but Lord Mandeville, being who and what you are, and considering whose mind you are of now, certainly you could see past whatever afflicts him?" She advised, and would say nothing more on the matter. She had her opinion, had expressed it, and that was that.

Morbis shrugged and looked between Gabriel and Marsol. "Fine by me if they are good with it." It was no skin off his teeth. Weird expression, he decided as he thought it.

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Things were growing a little tense between Gabriel and Lena, but they remained civil in their discussion. A headache was creeping into Arilwen's skull when a familiar presence slipped into the room behind her. She immediately felt that connection and turned to look over her shoulder, eyes widening when she saw Marsol. A million feelings rocketed through her. Shame, adoration, regret, uncertainty. She felt her throat tighten and she rose from her seat, an urge to run to him...to throw herself into his arms. She didn't get a chance to do so. He began to speak, but he also was interrupted...by the entrance of someone that she didn't know, asking for the desert lord's company. She couldn't possibly be prepared for what was going to come next. The order was given to her second husband and Arilwen

turned deathly pale. She couldn't speak...she couldn't even follow the man with her gaze before he pulled Marsol out of the room. She couldn't catch her breath. She finally managed to draw in a ragged breath and fell forward, grabbing Gabriel by the forearms. She was shaking like a madwoman. "N...NO..." That urgent whisper gutted her and anyone listening. "Don't...he cannot... he's not ready..." She began breathing so heavily that the room spun and she collapsed into her second husband's arms, a desperate sob tearing from her throat. Her son...her husband. This man was going to take them. If Wyrvaust was given the choice? That was no consolation to her. He could barely look at her.

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"Endure, Lady DeCasey? I have always endured. Continue to do so, I shall. Be not disturbed by the passage of these events... all shall be revealed." Sooner rather than later thought the Horseman. Distantly horns at the gate sounded. He canted his head..."It would appear members of your husbands forces have arrived at the gates... so as it is and so it shall be. Alas tis true, there is no love of Marsol by my Overlord Sammael, Sammael dislikes any who would stand in his way or that would disrupt the machinations and stratagems of his minions. I suspect the trouble with Marsol might also stem from a certain party in Inaaksu we had some time back that didn't help matters. Lord Solbaid, dinh of King Kassim is...quite creative when he feels there's a need for something." He communicated directly to Lena, and to Arilwen as well, whom he now held in his arms...he kissed her gently..for he did love her and now he spoke to her directly..to her mind for wellness or better, ill or worse; "My love, you have ever been unhappy here, although you have tried to endure. I, cannot... bear... to see your heart and your peace of mind broken any longer... it is for you, and for this Kingdom I do this, for no one else; You are free to leave if you wish, I would not keep you from your first love... as much as it will pain me to lose you. You, wether you realize it or not are very much at the core of why I have set upon this path..." To Lena he explained what he'd just done with Arilwen.

He turned his attention to Marsol, "You may settle down Lord King, I've no intention of keeping your minion from you, he is free to go with you if you desire it, you should know however he's been under a sort of... daze... an apoplexy perhaps, a kind of melancholia, he doesn't speak... he wanders off and he seems not himself, he is yours to command, perhaps you can help cure him of what ails him. Ahh, Here comes Morbius, Maelmorda that was, who will probably command me to do what I've just done." The Horseman chuckled, no one else would chuckle, or understand why he was laughing, as it wasn't really funny, yet it was all he could do. Most would be pleased with the outcome except perhaps Sammael, on the other hand, it was probably a good thing the Desert Wind wasn't here lest he lay waste to everything. Chances were, he wouldn't have approved of what Gabe had been trying to do anyway, no love for Seumir or her royal family to be sure. At least Sam wasn't here telling him to buck up and embrace his old nature. A conflict involving all the titans and entities, king and minion alike that followed the Morning Star and the Desert Wind would do nothing but lay waste to Morashtar and likely rock Acheron to it's foundations.

Once sojourning with Domeyl, Gabriel said simply. "It's already been done M'Lord, as for the others, none of them were invited except for the DeCasey's, Arilwen and Wyrvaust of course, not that he would sit in his present condition. The Denveths too..." He shrugged. That was that, Wyrvaust would go, but would he? If what

ailed him went so deep that not even his master Marsol could command his obedience, then what? He didn't voice that concern though, that would simply have to be waited upon. Once returned to the great hall he lowered the wards that held Wyrvaust, the other uninvited guests were greeted, those that could settle peaceably would be allowed to do so, the others, as his last official act as Regent, and as dinh to some of those who had arrived, he commanded to depart when he himself left, one thing remained however...

The sound of more booted feet entering the great hall, and here upon them came two Rangers of Seumir, clad in their Crimson finery (He had eshewed the darker earth toned cloak somewhat patchwork in appearance he favored for campaigning day to day), the lion crests upon their badges gleamed in the light of the hall... The Denveths... Traerson's long hair tied back and hidden by the cowl of the Crimson Red cloak that also served to ensare his face in shadow, yet somehow the blue eyes that had looked beyond this world into the very fields of Elysium and the forests of death as well as into the depths of Acheron, literally into the belly of the beast... twice, still seemed to radiate from beneath the cloak that wrapped around the Ranger, complete with a martial countenance. "Behold..." Gabe said quietly to Lena and anyone sitting nearby who mattered, "Your designated and proper Regent, Lady Denveth." He looked at Lena and said nothing, but his face said, 'Bet you didn't see that one coming.'

As for Traerson and Elah, In a crowd you would mistake him for nothing else but a soldier unless he desired to blend in, which today, he was appearing as exactly what he was, a Seumirian Ranger, A soldier of the Kingdom and a Peace Officer of the Realm. Upon him his weapons, left him by courtesy of his office, and an odd item or two upon his belt that made even Gabrian's eyes rise. On his fingers the rings of his marriage, to the exquisitely lovely woman who approached alongside him, in the finery of her own dress crimson cloak.

Elah Denveth. Herself of course attired and accoutered as her husband. Traerson, tall like most of his race, radiated a presence... yet it was the woman next to him who if it were possible, was even more radiant in the way women were and SHE would play a key role tonight, he was glad they had come. Her badge too caught the light...and locks of hair gleamed as they hung out from the shadow of the cowl, as one with an uncanny precision, their hands rose up grasping the edges of their hoods, hers held the rings of her marriage too (theirs was a love forged after all) and those cowls were lowered. Her blue eyes radiated many things, wisdom, motherhood and a certain coldness when they fell upon Gabrian, as did Traersons. "Welcome, Lord and Lady Denveth..."

"Rangers Denveth and Denveth reporting as requested..." not ordered, Requested, spoke Traerson. The Ranger canted his head and smiled at Lena... "M'Lady..." He bowed his head and saluted... "Morbius... it is good to see you again M'Lord..." Traerson actually bent his knee and bowed that time. "My Wife and fellow Ranger Elah Denveth." By way of introduction, Traerson was pretty sure they'd never actually met, but who could say? Elah was the elder in that relationship. A True Cougar of Three thousand plus years. The Ranger gave nods and slight bows of the head to any other dignitaries present, enough to not be disrespectful, yet just enough so that it was known where he felt his duty and loyalty were lain.

"Again.. .welcome." Said Gabrian... "Lord Traerson and Lady Elah, first let me apologize, the... act upon you and yours was unwarranted and a mistake. I accept

full responsibility. Placing you in that... 'field'... was wrong and I have no excuse that would assuage your doubts except that at the time... things were different. Second, I hereby renounce the Regency of Seumir and abdicate it in favor of you... Lady Elah, the rightfully chosen Regent by his Sovereign, King Byron of Seumir." Traerson's lips were tight, and his jaw locked.

"Oh, that makes it all better." Denveth didn't bother calling him Lord since he'd just stepped down. What happened next would go down in the annals of Morashtaran dinner party history.

Gabrian was about to speak when quick as a flash there seemed to be a radiance in the Rangers eye and the next thing Gabrian felt was a fist like a brick wall connecting with his face... hard enough that the Regent... going ... 'human' as he was felt his head knocked backward and was suddenly on the floor looking up at the ceiling.

Denveth waited for one of the others to step up... for the ensuing brawl... some seemed about to move, but it was the now ex regent who spoke up.

"AVAST! HOLD YOUR PEACE!!" His voice boomed as a hand came to his jaw... snapping it back into place with a crunch... "HOLD STILL... I COMMAND IT!" That more to those present who favored him and who wished to react more strongly... "I... deserved that."

"Yes you did."

"Are you finished then..?"

"In the interest of peacekeeping and the fact that you're doing what you should have done to restore the status as to what it should have been, yes. I am." Denveth extended a hand to Gabrian with the Former Regent took and Traerson helped him from the floor. To Lena he said... "I'll accept whatever punishment you and the Regent here should deem fit..." He then went back to his position of attention and wouldn't utter another word unless spoken too. He was aware on the periphery of his vision of the look on his wife's face. There might have been a smile at the very edges of Denveth's mouth.

"I... I did deserve that." To be humbled so, it was, thought the Horseman, the most expedient means of forestalling and perhaps preventing the shitstorm that he'd created in the first place. "Lady Elah Denveth will be the Regent of Seumir, until such time as deemed fit by the convening authorities in this matter." His voice carried through out the hall. To Lena he said silently... "You still may not believe it but I do want to be a friend to Seumir... that is if I can. There are others I'll have to answer to for all this however..."

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Lena felt truly bad for Arilwen as Gabe tried to soothe her by offering to let her go. By the way Lord Marsol frowned, clenched his fists, amber eyes smoldering, and shook his head it seemed he either did not approve of Gabrian's decision, or was simply unwilling to forgive Arilwen. Lena did not know him well enough to understand his body language. There was a dragon who was barely staying inside his human skin. Whatever thoughts and emotions boiled inside the hellraptor beneath

the surface, Morbius was the only force keeping the dragon from splitting his skin wide open and making a mess of the palace if not Serhaubren. Truth was, after having seen Wyrvaust for himself now, and his attempts behind the curtain to speak to him, Marsol was pretty certain that Wyrvaust would not fare well seeing Arilwen suffer, as Marsol would have her suffer for her betrayal, if not for all the things Morbius had so logically reminded him of. Marsol was not big on logic. Marsol had left Arilwen and Wyrvaust in Gabriel's hands and walked away... not involved himself further until now. He had not permitted Anwarr to go with them, but neither had he been around when Anwarr had run away from the lair, the zombie-like version of his father, and found his way to Gabriel's lair on his own, following both his bond to his father, and leads he had gathered prior by simply listening to his mother and father (Wyrvaust's body self and Arilwen). When Wyrvaust had dispossessed himself, he had left an empty shell filled with his memories behind, and it had been his body proxy that had been watching over Anwarr until he ran away. Gabriel had tried to contact Marsol, but Marsol had been no where to be found, so had contacted Wyrvaust's proxy instead, who wanting Anwarr to be happy permitted him to stay with them. Fact was, Marsol had only just returned from his travels a few days ago to learn of all which had transpired in his absence. As for Anwarr crossing the desert to find Gabriel all alone? Wyrvaust had taught Anwarr desert survival very well.

Marsol had been irrational since Gabe had chosen Sammael over himself, and why? Because he was certain that Sammael had used Gabriel as a tool against him, an all too effective tool which had cracked open his already fractured heart. No matter how many times Maelmorda or Morbius tried to convince him that Sammael was not what he presumed him to be, Marsol just knew that Sammael was rotten to the core, a blight on the world who corrupted all in his path, and a plague who needed to be destroyed. Marsol said nothing beyond those few gestures of body language when Gabe made the choice to stay or go Arilwen's. If she chose to return with Marsol, Wyrvaust and Anwarr, Marsol would cross that bridge when it came, but it would not be pleasant. Whatever Marsol's mistakes, however he had neglected them owed to his own pain, he felt betrayed by Arilwen, and Marsol had never been one to take betrayal lightly. The smolder in his eyes, the clench of his fists, the scowl on his face, was all a warning to her, a warning of things to come should she come with him. She had made her bed, and if she chose now not to sleep in it, she would have to live with the consequences of all her choices. No one else may know what his posture and expression meant to convey but Arilwen surely would. He did not wait long for her to make up her mind but stalked over to Wyrvaust and picked him up like a sack of grain to toss him over his shoulder and carry him out of the hall, while his mind commanded Anwarr to meet him on the palace stairs outside, explaining to him that they were all going home. If Arilwen had chosen to come with them, she would have to follow. Once outside, a tunnel of angry flames would roar to life which he would lead mother (if she came) and son through while conveying the tall demon on his broad shoulder as he stepped through the gateway. It would deliver them into Marsol's kingdom beneath the tallest mountain in the ring of fire.

Lena was taken aback when the Denveth's arrived and Gabriel announced them in such a way and with such a look that Lena dared herself to suspect that he had intended, even before she had made her plea with him, to restore Lady Denveth to throne. Could it be? She asked herself. In her gut she felt that it was. She had not expected Gabriel to give up his seat to tell the truth. Now... she was almost sure it had not been her appeal at all which had swayed him... She had to wonder if she



was a fool to even think it, but somehow she did not think that she was. She was impressed with Gabriel, by his sincerity, by his courage, for it took more courage to own up than it did to do what was right in the first place. To stand up against wrongs you yourself committed and make them right was perhaps one of the most courageous things anyone could do. He reminded her very much of Byron.

Where surviving torture without giving secrets away was an act of will, owed to the fact that even the most virtuous soul could be broken by pain; Admitting to your sins, your crimes and risking yourself to do the right thing was truly an act of goodness and true contrition. Lena dipped her head to the Denveth's as they greeted her, then released Arkael's hand and started towards Gabriel as he made his mind known only to halt in her strides as Traerson, following salutations, approached Gabriel ahead of her. Her arms crossed her chest as the two males settled things as men often did, with a show of violence. She glanced at Malbius who chuckled, amused as always by such barbarisms as people often stooped to.

Before following after Marsol, Morbius walked over to Gabriel in Malcomb's skin, once he was on his feet again, and leaned into him, one arm coiling him lightly as he spoke something to his ear so quietly that Gabriel alone could hear him.

"None shall ever know what I am about to say to you, for it shall fade from the very ether of the universe when I part from you... but the message shall stick to you as an idea, an impression you cannot shake. You can be free, Gabriel, your will can be your own again if you've the strength. The path which you are following can free you... not from Acheron, no, I am afraid that is a thread which cannot be cut... but your will can be your own all the same. Have you ever asked what becomes of the 'good' who are bound to Acheron? Look to Byron, to Ronwe, and Aurelius for your answer. Yes, Byron still serves me, but does so of his own free will, but who does Aurelius and Ronwe serve if not their own hearts. Keep on this path, Gabriel, and you shall have a kingdom of your own on Morashtar." Sammael might hear the same words one day, if he too continued to follow the course he was currently on. The Desert Wind was far more reluctant to evolve towards virtue, howsoever, because he still saw it as an enormous weakness.

Malbius then kissed Gabriel's cheek and withdrew to pursue Marsol to his destination. The moment he was gone Gabriel would feel the deep impression of his words but be unaware that they were actually spoken. He was only certain that he had received an embrace and kiss from the Morning Star through Malcomb, which from Morbius was a definite gesture of approval.

Gabriel had done nothing to betray Sammael, technically, because Sammael had refrained from giving him orders which would break the pact made with the Morning Star. Sammael believed in his cause though, had with conviction almost from the beginning, believed that Acheron's own should not remain imprisoned within Acheron, but be free to live and conquer the realms beyond, be they worlds or planes, as the leaders of Acheron pleased. He saw the Morning Star's wisdom, but his beliefs did not complement his maker's, and never had. Sammael judged that it was against nature for a stronger animal not to claw its way to the top of the food chain. He felt it was long past time for demon and devil kind to claim their rightful niche in the universe, and many in Acheron agreed with him. The Morning Star was certain they would simply create another hell of whatever world they conquered. Sammael believed differently. Even if they were forced to destroy parts of what they desired to have... they would rebuild from the ashes of whatever they had to

destroy. That was a simple repercussions of war. Sammael had been counting on Gabriel being on the same page, and would be disappointed that his horseman had jumped ship to pursue independent ideals which had sprung from, well who the hell knew where. Sammael had not seen this change in Gabriel coming, and blamed Marsol, because it seemed to have all started with Marsol, and because Marsol and Sammael too often blamed things on each other, when in fact, it had started with Cirgoth and Braemen, and Gabe's brush with the lost incarnations of himself. The union of the three entities had not held because all of the conditions had not been met... Peace between the three kings (Saeed, Sammael and Marsol) of the desert had not been made. They were not at war but that was not the same as peace. Marsol was the wildcard much as he refused to make peace with Sammael. Cirgoth had been inside of Gabriel long enough to change him nevertheless. It had felt intensely wonderful to feel what it was like to BE good. It had made Gabriel realize that it was within HIM to be every bit as virtuous as Cirgoth. The day finally came when he decided to finally embrace that part of himself... something he could do now that he was no longer Haman's tool of wrath. He began to see his fall as the most auspicious thing that had ever happened to him. He no longer needed to BE famine. He could simply... be. Sammael loved him... There was no way he would take this from him. Gabriel felt that to be true... had always believed in the good within Sammael when no one else saw it. There had always been some good in Gabriel, however dim it might have been, and he remembered Sammael when he had owned such virtue as the Morning Star alone had outshone. Gabriel had never forgotten what they had all been like before the fall, and he knew that so much of Sammael's pain and rage came from being unable to forget that past.

Now that Marsol was gone and the Morning Star soon after Lena strolled over to Gabriel and took his hand in hers to press it against her cheek. "My friendship is yours, Gabriel Zephrahiah." She kissed his hand then lowered it to squeeze warmly before releasing him by sliding her fingers from his. Her storm blown eyes locked with his and she smiled. "I am somewhat embarrassed to admit that I sent Byron home with a white lie, thinking this might get a lot messier, with Lord Marsol... and I think it might have if Malcomb and who he carried with him had not arrived. Byron's health is still not yet fully recovered and I am protective of my dama. As for punishment..." Her eyes leaned on Traerson. She thought about placing him under Traerson's command since the rangers were now light by Elah. "Gabriel says he wishes to serve Seumir still, what say you, Traerson? Would you see Gabriel's transformation for yourself under your command, as a ranger?" the queen suggested, and a suggestion from the queen, though she might not be queen much longer, was usually taken as a command. It would be Gabriel she let make the decision though. Lena was intrigued by Gabriel and wished to keep him close. She also wished to help him. Perhaps it was because Byron wished to do the same, or perhaps because Gabriel reminded her so much of Byron when she had first met him... a little lost, struggling with his own nature to become the creature he wanted to be. "Arthilus can train him and his Ymogoir companion can continue to serve him as well as his ranger apprentice," she added with a devastatingly appealing smile. "His name is Kaamus, is that right?" She looked to Gabe for confirmation then met Trae's gaze again. "Kaamus he is. Or..." and now she fixed her regard on Gabriel. "You could act instead as my personal guard and advisor with Arkael, while Kaamus may serve in any capacity you think best suits him. You know your own man best. Like Arkael you will be well paid." Thus her alternative was presented. Collecting angels was she? Seemed she was. Though Arkael had been given to her as a summoned bond servant, she did not treat him as a slave but paid him a decent stipend.

While Gabriel gave thought to the matter, Lena linked her arm with Traerson's. "I can tell you are unhappy with the trust I am extending to Gabriel. If the Desert Wind comes to claim him, I know the laws of Acheron and will let him claim what is his, therefore no conflict will come of it, but I am also determined to support Gabriel in his quest by offering him a place in our kingdom if his Lord permits. He has earned it with his courage and his conviction to undo his wrongs. Now let us help him to do right, mi bien Traerson."

Now whether Arilwen had chosen to go with Marsol or to remain by Gabriel's side, Lena had made a silent vow to herself to visit the lady often and do what she could to aid her. Perhaps some would judge her for taking a second husband because the first had lost his mind, but Lena chose not to judge her. She wished only to know her better and help her if she could, Lord Marsol permitting if she had gone with him.

Once these matters were settled, it would be Elah's arm Lena took in her arm. "Serhaubren's throne awaits you, Regente Elah, if you are ready to claim it. Are you ready?" she coaxed with another magnetic smile. If Elah said she was ready Lena would embrace her then lead her to the immense, decorative chair at the Hall of Parlance table, the regent's throne and gesture to her to sit. The Throne Room on the first floor of the regency tower was for less private matters. "I have put together a journal which outlines your basic duties which are open to your own interpretations. I will have it sent over from the chateau."

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Arilwen had no way to know what Gabriel would offer...that he would offer her the chance to just leave him and go. Her violet eyes widened and she looked up only to see the glare that Marsol had on his face. Her stomach plummeted and she felt sick, that seething anger and betrayal pouring from his limbs. He had the ability to make her feel the strongest of emotions with one look, and right now she had the urge to fall to her knees and beg his forgiveness. That wouldn't be sufficient. She knew that she was going to suffer for her choices. Was she prepared for that? She had seen only a fraction of what the dragon lord was capable of, and it filled her with terror to think of even worse happening to her. She was frozen in place... until she saw him sweep Wyrvaust up over his shoulder and turn to go. Panic clawed at her throat and she turned without thinking, cupping Gabriel's face to kiss each cheek. "Thank you..." She whispered with thickened tones. She then released him, not meeting his eyes, and fled after Marsol, praying that he wasn't leaving her. Would he allow her to follow? He didn't stop her from entering the gate with her son at her side, her husband's hair swinging in front of her. She had no idea what she was walking into... had no way to prepare. She only knew that she deserved it.

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Elah had been refusing to go. She loathed Gabriel and could hardly trust him at the drop of a hat. Traerson had convinced her to go though, assuring her that if they needed, they could always leave. She had begrudgingly agreed. Now they strode side by side, first Rangers for Byron, then mates. Elah's pale curls were piled up behind her head and pinned securely. Her gold lion broach was pinned at her throat, holding on that stunning red cloak. Leather boots clicked deftly on the floors beside her husband as they approached. The feel of loathing and caution poured out of her, though her face remained stoic. The last thing she would expect was Gabriel

to apologize and offer her Regent again. She also didn't expect Trey to sucker punch Gabrian in the jaw. She bit her lower lip, but her demeanor seemed to relax with the humor. Lena came to her side, taking her arm, asking if she was ready for her new position. Elah's humor was replaced by quiet humility. "I am." She HAD been. Thanks to Gabrian, that had been delayed. She wouldn't respond to his apologies. Not yet.

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Arkael moved willingly closer to Lena when she drew him by the hand, and he lightly squeezed the hand that held his. Yes, he was as discreet as he could be, but there was an undeniable fondness with which he looked at Lena. He was very fond indeed of her, of that passionate personality, the warmth of her. He didn't terribly care what the gossips said about them, though he was pleased that any rumours that were flying about did not seem to phase the lady. He did, however, respect that Lena preferred to keep her private life that way -- private. He could respect that. Not everybody wanted their dirty laundry aired where everybody could see (not that he thought of what they had together as dirty laundry).

When it came to Lena, he wasn't so much trying to draw her further from Byron. That wasn't it at all. He had simply been kind to her, and he thought, reminded her of how desirable she truly was. He thought every woman needed to be reminded of that once in a while. Every man, too, probably. He knew it did wonders for him, to have Lena desire him in that way. He didn't mind that not many beyond Lena seemed to notice the wise part of him. He would be the first to decide that it was probably better that way. The more people that knew you were wise, the more people came to you for a fix to their problems, and he didn't want that. He was content being the confidant that resulted from people recognizing his kindness. He did not need people wanting him to dole out advice.

He drew Lena in a little closer, arm curling around her waist, and a smile formed on his lips when she cuddled in against him. When she went to pull away, Arkael let her go, gaze following her as she voiced her own opinion on the matter. As for the others, he watched them, too. Because things were picking up, weren't they? With the arrival of these newcomers, all sorts of things were being thrown into the mix. His expression did grown rather grave, though, because empathetic as he was, he did feel terrible for poor Arilwen.

He did glance over with great interest when the subject of another personal guard serving with him came up. He had no complaints, not really. And it was a good gig, if you could get it. He had fully expected to be treated like a slave, truthfully. Most bond servants did not get as lucky as he did. He was treated very well indeed, and was even paid for his services, which he appreciated. It was that added bit of independance that a man needed, having one's own coin to spend on things.

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Lord, well... private citizen now, Gabrian Zephraiah was a touch out of sorts. He could feel the surprise radiating from those around him, the veiled hostility and the restraint that seeped from the Denveths. The more he considered it, he decided it was the emotion of the moment... cross the Rubicon as it were, for indeed even if he had not as yet actually violated any missives or instructions from his master, there was still that invisible door. Like the kid in the store

who buys tobacco for the first time, or who makes that adult decision, it was he thought, something like growing up. In his case growing up again. He also knew the Desert Wind enough that even if he hadn't ordered anything Gabriel had done in Seumir, neither would he approve of the recent turn of events. As that unspooled into his mind, he realized it was only natural, after all, nobody HAD really trusted them. Why should they? They had ages of evidence to let them think otherwise. Why should anyone have expected that he had sought this moment? He had though. Where to go next? Courageous moves, certainly. Did he consider it as such? Mayhaps not so much. For him, he felt it more like instinct, somewhere in the translation of things bravery to do it may have registered, yet he didn't see it that way as the foremost conscientious factor. What he did feel more than anything was an element of peace, not something often found among many of Acheron's denizens both imprisoned and roaming free. He settled on where and what to do next... he did want to help to Seumir... and if he couldn't then perhaps he'd wander.

Well as it happened, that question was half answered indeed by what the Morning Star had told him. "Aye, Mordanta..." He spoke, reverent even... "I..." 'I...what?' he thought to himself as the thought faded from his memory as much as he tried to grasp it, it was like water slipping through his fingers. It was the way to go, not that he could remember the carrot he'd just been offered, he only felt that his current path was somehow justified, a need to continue his current path. STILL, HE felt unburdened though, unburdened was good. Even if it wasn't a complete unburdening and the journey had barely begun.

He bid farewell to the departing Overlord, Marsol having already withdrawn. A quick return kiss to Arilwen before she left... he sent her, silently... "I understand." She would have a place with him if ever she wanted it. He didn't feel sad at the departure though, it still seemed, AGAIN, as though he were setting aside a burden. He did worry about what would become of her. Marsol's emotionalism was legendary. It was he knew, a reason his old friend Kassim had yet to come to grips with the Raptor in anything approaching peace. As that settled, he was aware of Seumir's Queen speaking... "Your Majesty..." answered he, by way of showing she had his attention, he listened to her offer and he looked at Denveth and then to his Queen... as powerful as Gabriel was and could be on his own hook, there was something about Denveth that unsettled him, not in a bad way, yet still in a profound manner. Not a doubt of the man's loyalties, he was a Soldier-Policeman through and through. One of the classic 'Good Guys'. It was that Denveth had strolled right in, all business like, and the impact... there was power behind within that strike. Somehow it dawned on the Horseman that the Ranger had held back. He knew that neither of the Denveths were mortal, Elah was a Sephiroth he knew. Traerson was... something else, but perhaps there was more than met the eye with Traerson. He found himself intrigued by Traerson even more. A man who struck him, yet at once showed restraint and made a peace offering of sorts. In the interest of peace the man had said. Denveth didn't strike him as a man who at the end of the day did good things for simple goodness' sake. He listened to Queen Lena... understood the offer.

"M'Lady... I would like an appointment in his Majesty's Red Company if I could. Yes, it is Kaamus, he too, for he has ever been my faithful servant nor has he shown any sign of wavering... even as... these events unfolded I received no word nor perceived cause to doubt him. He too could be a Ranger... or perhaps one of the Ranger apprentices... the squires and... Scouts do you call them?" He looked to Traerson on the last one... "Too I would like to serve.." He swallowed,

because he was about to eat crow and with a good piece of humble pie to go with it, because turning over a leaf or no, not reacting to anyone who has clocked you good is always an exercise in humility, "under Denveth, if he would have me."

Denveth canted his head and looked at Elah. "I told you coming along was a good idea, Aloneuel." A smile. "Or should I say, M'Lady Regent." The Ranger, with many tasks at hand, including open cases, a quest and a covert mission to execute listened to the Queen. "Slightly less concerned, M'Lady." The Rangers eyes rested upon Gabrian. "If he understands that Seumir considers this oath... <And by Seumir he meant Sovereign and People, Soldier and Civilian, Royalty and Peasant alike, etc> sacred. It will be like bearing the mark of a master, even if this one be of his own free will." Besides, it would serve multiple purposes. It would give Gabrian the chance to truly prove himself. It would also keep him under watch and supervision. If the now former regent spoke the truth, then better he have something to focus on, than wandering aimlessly and possibly backslipping into his old ways. "If his master comes to claim him, then he must obey of course, but while here among us, he and his... aide... Kaamus... will serve us, Kaamus, that is, if he is willing. I would not take the voluntary oath of one and the forced participation of others... You will still have to train with Arthilus and Kaamus too, if he's willing. But I would be willing to take you on the aforementioned conditions. As for your question, Master Zephraniah... Scouts, yes, incidentally. Squires and Scouts. Which M'Lady brings me to another point, desperately short of Knights and Rangers let alone Officers and Sgt.'s at Arm's; I was wondering if I might propose a levy from amongst the squires and scouts, perhaps promoting those who've been proving ability and loyalty to positions and apprenticeships. Something perhaps for your Lordships and My Regent to consider." Traerson was also looking out for his son-in-law, who was one of the rank and file that COULD be trusted and counted upon. He would also put it to Terra once she was done putting herself through hell on account of the Ryan situation. She had been set to join after all, before shapeless one had altered her path. "I would, see this transformation. If there is any place it can be done, it is here." He shifted his gaze from the Queen to Gabrian.

"I will put it to Kaamus Lord Denveth, nor would I have it be any other way. I understand this undertaking... and I have much to prove and to learn."

"Good. Failure is not an option." Take him Denveth would. Trust him and forgive him? Too damned soon for that. He shifted his gaze back to the Queen... "As for the King M'Lady... that was prudent. He should still, however, at some point, meet with Master Zephraniah." Convention and law after all.

"I would like that too M'lady... I had... hoped he could witness what I had intended to do. I think you can understand now why I... played the cards so close."

"My Queen... and Aloneuel... I stand present and ready." He leaned into his wife and partner. "Shall we check out the new digs?"

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JD: When Traerson suggested promotion from within the ranks Lena nodded her head. "That would do very well, Traerson. Byron has mentioned doing that very thing which you may take as his consent coming from me," she approved. Her gaze then meandered back to Gabrian as he made his choice known and another but more

thoughtful nod demonstrated her authorization. "Then on your oath you shall serve as a ranger of Seumir and understand what it means to pledge your heart and soul to a kingdom." A faint smile reshaped her kissably sensual lips and she swivled with the grace of a lioness to face Traerson. "As always you make our kingdom proud, Lord Denveth. May you and your wife know only triumph, hopefulness and contentment as every day unfolds. I will leave you now to your duties and report to our King."

She was about to withdraw when Byron's voice captured her senses to make her turn facing the entry as he stalked into the Hall, Saffiel on his arm. Her lips pursed as the tall warlord approached with his small entourage which included his wife, as already mentioned, Nicodemus in the flesh, and Galaxy. Gabriel and Arilwen had spent quite a lot of time with Byron and Saffiel, and Gabriel had met Galaxy at various intervals with Maelmorda, but Nicodemus, the Greek planar vampire and Gabriel were strangers. All of them, including Galaxy, were exquisitely well dressed. Traerson and Elah had been a part of Byron's company but when delayed by Morgriff he had sent the couple on ahead. Byron pursed his lips when his gaze locked with Lena's to regard the surprise her eyes alone betrayed which softened quickly as she shook her head.

"Oui, ma cher, you should have known." His words echoed her very thoughts. "Unwell? Truly, Lena, you never could lie to me. So what were you trying to protect me from, hm?"

Byron crossed his arms over his broad chest as she explained the situation which had arisen with Marsol and her take on the consequences that would have ultimately followed had Malcomb not arrived. She was right saying that Marsol would have flung the country and Acheron alike into war had Morbius not involved himself, but neither she nor the officers of Seumir had been aware that the dragon Lord had the full force of his army lying in wait within the fiery ether of Shivardda to attack on his command if a single one of his terms had been refused. A bloody and costly war had been immediately at hand without any of them actually knowing it and by the grace of the Morning Star been repressed. Had it just been a war between Marsol and Seumir Morbius would not have interfered, but it would have been a war between the Lords of Acheron that would have spilled over upon Morashtar and devastated it. Marsol in his intemperance would have been giving Sammael exactly what he wanted... or had wanted in the not so distant past.

Byron was quiet for awhile as he contemplated the near catastrophe they had so narrowly escaped and with a shake of his head laid his dark eyes on Gabriel, whose deeds that evening Lena had also described in her report, much as it was all part of the same equation. He found it fitting that he would serve under Traerson but understanding what had barely been avoided, he tried to find a flaw in keeping Gabriel on by any occupation. Sammael was not as unpredictable as Marsol because he had a cooler head, but that made him more dangerous, not less dangerous. Byron then concluded that the danger did not lie so much in Sammael or Gabriel as himself should certain circumstances arise.

Byron drew Saffiel in even closer by her arm and coiled one of his powerful limbs around her. He noticed Lena clasp Arkael's hand as he did so. "I know myself very well," his comment spoke to the attention of them all. "If Gabriel should as an officer of Seumir seek a means to free his will, I would feel obligated to help him find a way. I would do the same for anyone who serves me as you all know. We have

never had an enemy the likes of Sammael and I would prefer never to invite his wrath. I know where the path Gabriel is on leads and he will ultimately if not already feel compelled to command his own will and heart. Therein this paradox lies the danger, for the Prince of Demons like many of Acheron's Lords, guards his own jealously. We must all consider this carefully before any pledges are exchanged to make our decisions final, for as Gabriel shall give oath to serve us, so shall we be obligated to protect and safeguard him as our brother at arms. Is the hero of Seumir worth the unlikely but possible antagonism of Lord Sammael?" He looked to the faces of those he trusted the most, "Is he?" then to Gabriel. "Are you, Lord Zephrahiah?"

Lena looked to Gabriel and nodded her head. He had her vote; She believed he was. The faintest smile etched Byron's lips as he looked her way. They all needed to believe as she did if Gabriel was to become a part of them, for if worst came to worst, the horseman might need the full support of Seumir and they all needed to be aware of that. Just as an attack by Marsol would have pitched Byron into an alliance with Sammael by defending Gabriel, defending Gabriel against Sammael, should such an occasion arise, could place Byron in Sammael's path as a rival. It was always risky business accepting the oath of someone who was marked by a hellion. Where men most often waged wars over land, resources and the like, Hellions were known to spark wars over personal matters of 'possession' as well as territory. Byron was simply making them aware of the risks in case they were not already mindful of the possibilities. As king he would be the last to cast his vote, because Byron was the kind of king who did not place himself above the law and collective will of his people, but rather as a fundamental part of both.

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Gabriel and Traerson: "Thank you Lady DeCasey, I'll make the necessary arrangements and issue the necessary orders and summons to the relevant personnel deemed fitting." Traerson apprised his queen.

There wasn't much time to palaver over anything else though, for The King and Queen Safiel had then arrived. Once Byron reached them in his passage into the hall Denveth bowed to the King with a slight offset grin.

"Good to see you again M'Lord," He offered with a chuckle.

He had in fact seen the King earlier that day before transiting to Serhaubren with Elah, the new Regent. When he stood upright again alongside Elah, the draping folds of their cloaks overlapping... his large hands found his wife's, and his fingers interlocked with hers. He noted the closeness of Lena and her aide-de-camp Arkael but the Ranger would say nothing. Relationships could shift with time and had their own set of difficulties. Traerson had seen it often enough in his work and in the community and if he needed anymore stark reminder all he had to do was think of Luanne or his daughter Terra.

When the King spoke of the plight of Gabriel and the complications therein, Traerson spoke: "I have agreed to take on Gabriel so long as he is willing to accept the oath and duties that come with Serving Seumir, therein then is my answer, M'Lord."

Traerson would say nothing else on the subject until it was accepted or overridden,



likewise he would as always let Elah have her own say. He knew as well, this would also mark what would be her first real official opinion on anything as Regent. No longer would she speak and give an opinion just as a Ranger, let alone as his wife, her words now would carry even more weight. On something like this the Ranger would neither convince or cajole or otherwise attempt to sway his beloved's opinion in any way. He would if, Gabrian was accepted, stand by his pledge to give the man the chance and see that he was trained and indoctrinated into the service properly.

To Byron, Gabrian said, "I believe M'Lord, that I am, nor would I willingly invite the wrath of the Desert Wind; if he should come for me or summon me, I would do what is necessary to spare this Realm and her people from his ire. Thankful too am I, and satisfied it is as you say, that those here would do all in their power to help me find my way and walk the... righteous path." He continued: "As Denveth has stated, I would serve as a Ranger, my man Kaamus too, if he is willing for he's always been loyal and willing and he has accompanied me this far without wavering, I believe he will see it all the way through. So he shall be too, if he is willing, Lord Denveth has already spoken that as for me, so must it also be of free will for Kaamus. So too will I endeavor to right any wrong or clear any mystery about my motive to any here that would, and not without reason, question me." He held the gaze of King Byron. "I also offer these deeds as token of my new journey, I have abdicated in favor of Regent Lady Denveth, so too have I released Arilwen to accompany Wyrvaust, it will go some way I think, to maintaining peace, no matter how fragile. Otherwise, I would hear all of your opinions and await your decision... My..." He paused, but not out of hesitation, more that he was... trying it on... "King."

Silently Traerson contemplated the possible boons, if Gabrian was turning the corner and was going to endeavor to make his deeds match his words and find his heart, then there could be other benefits. Seumir was as they had already spoken of, short of Knights, Rangers, Officers and Soldiers, Squires and Scouts, let alone constables and local authorities who were loyal. While there still were those loyal and honorable, the unrest had taken a toll and was still continuing to bleed the Kingdom, likewise some of those who were loyal and law abiding, well some of them were also in a sea of unrest surrounded by those who were anything but honorable and loyal and many more who could be swayed as the mobs often are. Well that benefit was easy enough, another Ranger, two if Kaamus came along. Another? Gabrian was a being of some means and power and abilities, if he could channel those to walk the path as he was pledging, then that would be beneficial. Gabrian's contacts too, the number of entities he might possibly know or be able to sway or communicate with could also prove useful. However, The Sword also, Traerson knew, held two edges, hence his granting the chance yet not simply giving in to blind trust.

7 G's for the board.

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JD: Byron meditated a moment on the potential forecasts of accepting Gabrian and his man Kaamus as brothers of Seumir withal their promises. His eyes strayed to the Ymogior. If he accepted his oaths and station he would be one of them. Seumir's officers had never had a goblin among them. Perhaps it was time. Even if the Ymogior were from Annwn, the people Kaamus came from had been in Mehr for

thousands of years thus were counted among Morashtar's colonists now like the humans and the Trecouri as well as many other Sidhe out of Annwn. Byron had only to swear them in then, thus he recited the pledge of the Rangers of Seumir, which varied but was yet the same pledge. He called Kaamus over and asked him to stand next to Gabriel then fixed his iron wrought eyes on the two.

"Do you Gabriel Zephrahiah and Kaamus Usthreg of Mehr..." Kaamus thinned his large yellow eyes on Byron, surprised to hear his last name spoken much less with the proper address of Mehr. Not even Gabriel (who had won him in a card game from his sire Saashima) had known his last name. He had not heard his last name spoken since before he was sired a horned demon, so how did Byron know? "...pledge yourselves as sons of Seumir and brothers to your rangers at arms?" He waited for then to say they did, hence he continued. "Do you Gabriel and Kaamus pledge your hearts in loyal service to safeguarding king, royal family, countrymen, brothers at arms and kingdom?" He waited again for the two to say yes. "Will you Gabriel and Kaamus pledge to sacrifice your lives if necessary to protect the king, royal family countrymen and brothers at arms who have vowed to protect you with their lives?" If Gabriel and Kaamus said yes to all Byron would lay a palm flat on the crown of Gabriel and then the Ymogior's heads. "On your knees brothers." He waited for the both of them to lower themselves on bent knees. "By your pledges and with the authority I possess as King of Seumir I embrace you Gabriel and I embrace you Kaamus as rangers of Seumir, in brotherhood and loyalty. I give you both as the rank of Squire to Traerson who shall guide you on your journey to becoming respected officers of Seumir. You may rise as squires to your company."

That official office done, Byron turned his attention on Elah whom he approached to clasp her hand. He lifted it and pressed it a moment against his cheek to feel her warmth radiate into his cool flesh. He needed more blood yet to restore him. He breathed in her scent a moment then released her hand and looked to her eyes. "I know that Serhaubren is in good hands." Serhaubren was more than just the city, it was Seumir's entire north western district which covered 800 x 500 miles of Seumir. "The Regency of Serhaubren, or Countessship if your prefer lays before you." Regent and countess were the same rank in Seumir just under different terminology. Byron reached into the breast of his vest for a document that was not there to retrieve it anyway through a called command. "Seumir's King and Queen demand your lasting loyalty and obedience and it is the King and Queen alone you shall have to answer to. Will you give us your loyalty and obedience?" He now pulled an ink pen from a slit style pocket in his waistcoat. "Will you give it with your vow never to take your King's heart from him, and never to take your queen's heart from her? Will you always love and obey us, Elah Denveth? If so, sign below my own signature and BE a countess and regent of Seumir and ruler over Serhaubren." He handed her the pen and laid the document down on the table which stipulated the same pledge and all her duties as countess and her duties read something like this;

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Your responsibilities include, but are not limited to:  
the maintenance of law and order in your district under Seumir's policies as written in Article 6 of Seumiraen Law;  
any law you make or strike in your territory requires the approval and signed seal of the king or queen;  
by signing this you vow to call all arms into battle as demanded;  
you vow never to attempt a military or political coup else you face execution on

pain of death (no doubt she glaced over at Gabrian when she read that part, but of course he had never signed any such pact);  
it is your duty to insure that justice is served by seeing that all who stand accused are judged as individuals on 'conclusive' evidence and are shown mercy where it is deserved;  
where no physical evidence exists, no suspect will be executed or harmed;  
no one may be found guilty by circumstantial evidence without at least one reliable witness and those who are found guilty by this kind of evidence alone may NOT be executed or harmed;  
known that the King and Queen of Seumir alone may call for an execution WITHOUT benefit of a trial;  
know also that the law does not define defense of one's country and person during warfare and attack as a form of execution but rather as acceptable wartime hostility;  
no one may be found guilty of murder for defensive measures if self-defense can be proven;  
no citizen of Seumir within your district can be refused fresh healthful meal from public stores or public kitchens;  
a public kitchen must be established in every city and village of Serhaubren;  
all farms in your district must sacrifice one quarter of their crops and livestock to the public and military food stores;  
all public and military food stores are collected when crops and livestock come in; produce, grain and meat are to be placed in the cold storage cellars in the capital city and or villages of the district;  
no productive farm will pay taxes;  
any farm in your district which refuses to give up their share of public and military stores will be seized and sold by the regent countess of Serhaubren;  
property in Serhaubren once owned is owned and cannot be taxed or seized for failure to pay taxes;  
failure to pay city and regional taxes results in performing public services and in sever cases imprisonment;

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So the list went on. Byron waited for her to sign two copies and gave one to her then folded the other and slipped it back inside of his gold button down vest. The vest he was was a darkish orange tinted brown and the handsomely tailored waistcoast the colour of deerskin. The ruffle sleeved shirt meanwhile was ivory with a high pleated collar that formed a band around his neck up to just beneath his jaw. His pants were the same color as his coat but three shades lighter therefore more of a fawn colour and his boots the same hue as his vest. He wore also various rings of platinum and gold, all but his wedding and signet rings jeweled. On his head he wore a very celtic looking gold circlet which he had owned since he was a king of Scottland. Every small dent in it told a story. He only ever wore it when he was to be in the company of people who very important to him.

Byron hugged Elah suddenly, who had always been his very dear friend almost since the day he came to Seumir over nine hundred years ago. He had been king now for over eight hundred of those years. He patted her back, kissed her cheek then placed her in the arms of her husband. His eyes beamed as he regarded her for a moment then he nodded his head. "Yes, it is as it should be now." The King then left the two and went to Lena who he pulled aside and led over to the stairs. The guards retreated from their posts for the time being.

"Arkael... what is he to you?" Byron was all too observant but he had felt nothing from her in the way of being in love, or even lust. Fact was, Lena had learned to suppress and mask her emotions so well that not even Byron could detect what she felt unless he actively DUG.

"He has become a dear friend and confidant to me... and he is my guard."

Byron could detect no lies because she wasn't lying. He gazed at her intently for awhile as he considered asking her if she slept with him. His eyes then meandered over to Saffiel who glanced back at him, and he sighed then turned his attention back on Lena. "Are you... Is he...?" He started to ask but heaved a breath and shook his head instead.

"I am leaving Seumir, Byron," Lena then announced as dead pan as she could, drawing a wounded look from Byron.

"Don't act so surprised My Lord. You know as well as I that it is over between us. I can no more share you with another woman that she can, and you are not the polygamist type, mi Hacedor. It is not in our nature to share... I am ready now to get on with my life. I will be going to Hassim. Señor Saeed has always been very gracious and I love the desert as you know. That was one of the ways you and I always differed... I will ever be your child, Byron, and who knows... we are immortal, perhaps in another life a thousand thousand years from now, we shall each be alone and meet again."

Lena leaned in and kissed his cheek but as she started to withdraw he caught her up in his arms in a powerful embrace and captured her lips in a searing kiss which wrecked her senses and shattered her breaths. When she broke free of him tears were spilling down his pale cheeks, and biting down on a trembling lip she wheeled around and left as swiftly as her long legs would carry her without running. Behind her Byron dropped down on his knees and buried his face in hands to sob, albeit not a sound escaped him. He only shuddered. Arkael ran after Lena, and when he raced past Byron he put some distance between himself and the King. Lena gripped his hand so hard it hurt when he caught up to her and through the pantry they went and out into the circa courtyard behind the north tower past more guards. They had barely reached the palace west corner when the shadows gathered ahead of them into a lightless corridor which she pulled her angel through as they met it. When they stepped out the otherside they were standing in the shadow nethers of Nazadun, a planar kingdom which the shadow realm, dead realms and dark realms all three overlapped. Lena would not go to Saeed without a unique gift thus she went to work while with the Tsetar, who their surroundings made somewhat nervous, followed at guard.

Byron wiped his eyes as he felt Saffiel's hand on his shoulder. He knew the feel of her small hand. He stood then and worked his jaw between steadying breaths a moment before he turned to face her. He parted his lips to tell her that it was final between he and Lena, over, but she read it his eyes and she hugged him tight. He didn't need to say the words, he saw it through his eyes, his posture. His grief made it evident that he understood it was truly over between them now. She would move on without him as he would move on with Saffiel. "I love you, Saffiel," he breathed into her ear and kissed her neck, lips and tongue tantalizing her flesh with lusty sensuality. His arms tightened around her and he lifted her in a possessive press against him. "I will never let you go, Saffiel... Never."

It was a promise, a warning and a threat. After kissing her deeply for no less than five minutes he coiled her in his arm and returned to the company at hand.

"If there is no other business at hand, I would speak with you Countess and ranger of the plans Saeed and I have made to secure the borders. Problem is, Seumir does not border Hassim, but the Fire Kingdom of Marsol. Gabrian..." He looked to the pale rider now. "You know Lords Saeed and Marsol both better than I. What chance Marsol will allow Saeed's soldiers free range of his borderlands and the roads to it? This would benefit Marsol as much as Saeed and I. Is there any chance Marsol would put personal matters aside and be reasonable about this?" Doubt nagged at Byron. Marsol was what he was, a Hellraptor underneath it all, and red wyrms simply were not known for their temperance, but their passion, their 'fire', and it was their hearts which so often fueled violent retribution and stubborn conviction. Marsol was feared by his neighbors and loved by his countrymen because he fought with heart and the whole of him as did his dragon tribe. They were wrath and love born on wings. Sometimes that wrath went blind but most of the time it was righteous. "Marsol has his people back... Your opinion. Will he parlay now?"

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"I do so solemnly swear..." intoned the former Regent and Horseman as he and Kaamus too, knelt before the Royal Sovereign of the Kingdom of Seumir. "Furthermore I give this pledge freely and without coercion or reservation." He glanced to Kaamus, the brow raising as he heard his companions last name, silently to him he spoke thus: 'Din't even know you had one brother.' The reply was something along the lines of, 'That's because you ne'er thought to ask, my educated and ill-mannered friend.' Gabrian would have snorted or chortled or chuckled if not for the solemnity of the occasion. Instead he said, 'Well I stand corrected.' He then sent a nudge mentally, the kind to say.. 'Well, you in or out?'

"As do I, hereby swear freely to this obligation and without reservation or coercion."

The pledges made, Kaamus and Gabrian would rise from the floor as bidden to do so.

Traerson for his part, held his peace while the pledges were given and fealties sworn and the basic laws of the land were given unto the new recruits and when that was done he said to them both, "Welcome to the service. You've both undertaken and have been granted a great opportunity, and one of great opportunity." The character building exercises and screaming and yelling of men at arms would begin later. Like as in the West Fold, this was the Rangers, not the cub scouts. Fortunately for the both of them they were somewhat experienced and not complete strangers to the sorts of things one would come across in the service. And as Squires they were being given a bit more responsibility than your run of the mill footman from the back jungle woods of Seumir. Once Elah was sworn in, Denveth spoke "M'Lord, I'll have a list of those other suitable candidates for promotion, there's a few scouts and constables especially whom I think may be up to the task. Citizenry one and all.." the unspoken commentary in there was Denveth letting his Lordship know that the prospects were all native or long term denizens of Seumir and mortals at that, it would not hurt in these times to expand a mortal face, especially when it came to duties of a more community and civic nature. A murderer-rapist couldn't claim heavy handedness from immortals if he was investigated and captured by fellow mortals after all. And for the mortally challenged there was a likely name or two

on there to suit that end as well. It was political of course, but it was also time and necessary. Traerson left it at that, there were obviously other things to discuss of course. He took it as a bad sign that Lena was leaving Seumir, as he watched it happen before those gathered, however, he didn't begrudge her reasons nor would he say a thing either, Elah probably wouldn't, she have her own say anyway, but Traerson understood the need for something to end if a relationship was spent. Been there, done that... and didn't quite get a T-shirt but in the end still wound up with a bag of nifty souvenirs and scars he didn't like to bring up in polite company. Instead, when Lena made to leave, Denveth as the senior military officer in the immediate vicinity outside of the "Boss" called those present and under arms to attention and led the salute to the former first lady of Seumir. When that was complete he led the salute to the reigning King and Queen of Seumir, and at last, offered the first Salute to the new Sitting Regent of Seumir, Elah. Which, to Elah on her being sworn in as Regent the husband in that duo offered a wink...and whispered, maybe even a bit too loud to really be a true whisper, "Congratulations, Mom."

When the commotion had died down, and now it was the Leadership and officers of the Realm, Denveth listened. "Aye M'Lord, I believe the plan was to remain low key enough that it would not arouse the ire of Marsol. That being said, recent events here aside, I believe that concern may be a bigger one for Hassim then Seumir. Nevertheless, Marsol might play if he's given to understand what's at stake, then he may not. He cares little for Hassim, whilst Hassim, more importantly her Sovereign, is not likely to soon forget what his Kingdom suffered at the hands of Marsol. Yet his lands are at potential threat as much as the rest of us. Perhaps if an envoy was sent, or Kassim reached out. It may well be King Saeed has on his own terms, but you know those Blackhorns M'Lord, they're not known for forgetting an insult unless there's a bigger picture. Which there is, what with our alliance, such as it is. I could summon Siddiq Al-Jinn, he was present at your meeting with King Saeed and he is to be our Inaaksuan eyes and ears and contact. Beyond that, as you ask, Gabriel has personal knowledge of them?" He kept his place by Elah's side and nodded to his Squire to speak.

"M'Lordships first let me say thank you, congratulations and condolences." Economy, the hallmark of a clear mind? Perhaps, at any rate he felt all those things for the various purposes he'd said them, due the current circumstances. "As for Saeed, He might be willing to entertain an understanding with Marsol, I know that he attempted to mend fences some time ago during a banquet in Inaaksu, but Marsol is cagey. Even knowing that he wronged Hassim and Saeed out of misinformation, Marsol is a creature guided more by his heart and emotions than he is by logic. If perhaps it could be presented to him on that level, appeal to his heart and the hearts of his trusted clanmates, then yes, it may be possible. Although I am not privvy to the plans of which you speak, if Marsol is not informed or sought out, then things must be extremely low key lest he take umbrage at the presence of dual forces on both his borders. The other option, and not one which I am advocating, mind, I gave up my wife and Wyrvaust back to him to avoid such an event, would be to go to war with him. The thing about Marsol is, even if he went to war, he'll fight, and he cares not if he is among the fallen, to him the urge to act as his heart tells him is strongest. If an audience can be sought and he can be convinced, it would be beneficial. Again, Mind that his Kingdom is oft watched in and of itself by my old friend Kassim as well as he who has set his mark upon me."

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LOST IS WHERE WE ARE FOUND  
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#### LOG ####  
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Orcus:

For the better part of two hours the comfortably furnished cell, a cell nonetheless, was abuzz with the chatter of two friends over warm jam and cool water drawn from an underground spring. Arilwen just might get her ears talked off by Annandabah if it weren't for every few minutes the Namas human woman, or girl compared to other immortals, cramming more toast slathered in strawberry jam into her mouth. And by cramming we really mean shoveling. Nothing ladylike about that feast but they were two peas in a pod! If you couldn't eat your food with your best friend, which is how Arilwen was seen in her eyes, the way you wished every once in awhile then who could you eat it in front of? After the initial tears were out of the way, a few regrets maybe too, the two finished the whole basket of simple breakfast foods off along with the pitcher of water before striking up another in depth conversation. Something about the gowns Arilwen use to wear being the same color as the cacti and dunes? Anna was no painter. She did sculpt though however she couldn't quite make her hands accomplish what lied in her minds eye as far as hues went. But oh how she loved a good description about fanciful gowns worn in the desert. Arilwen had a rapt listener positioned sideways on her bed when she told her about the difference in what they wore where she use to live then what they wore here at home. Home. Yes this harshly hot and dangerous domain was Arilwen true home wasn't it. But how was Arilwen to leave this room with a guard posted outside her door? In the bottom of that basket there were two pieces of toast coated in a yellowish jelly instead of red. Picking up those two pieces Anna was careful not to get any of the yellow jelly substance on her fingers. "Women would overheat if they tried wearing such pretty things here, wouldn't they," Anna exclaimed, jokingly as she got up from the bed to go to the door. She made a hand gesture for Arilwen to keep talking as she bumped the bottom of the door with her foot to have the guard ask in a gruff voice what she wanted. Trying on a sternish princessy tone she heard someone use once, Anna stated, "What I WANT is for you to open this door to share some of our meal with you. Unless you are refusing the generosity of your superior?" Anna didn't like how curt her words sounded or the bitter holier than thou taste it left in her mouth. It did get her point across though by the sound of the guard almost dropping his sword to turn around and open Arilwen's door. "My apologies, Your Highness," the guard said quickly, probably wondering if his Captain would have his head for speaking so boldly to their King's daughter like she was a scullery maid. Anna tried to keep the whole firm eye on the guard but she was starting to fail at it. In an effort to hide her guilt at talking to someone in a manner most unlike her she held the pieces of toast up for him. "Now I want to see you eat both pieces," Anna clucked, all mother hen like at the guard as if he were a four year old not eating his carrots. The guard wasn't sure what to do except eat his damn toast when facing Anna. She was insistent after all. The guard horked down both slices of yellowish jelly looking covered toast for her approval? She approved alright. With a smile and her hands clasped behind her back Anna approved at the instant affect the "toast" had on the man who easily out weighted her by 200lbs. First his eyelids got droppy then he yawned. Why yawn you ask? Cause

the man was being put to sleep in a matter of seconds. "Oh, oh wait," Anna exclaimed, having to catch the guard before he fell into the floor helmet first. "Ack, he weights more than my great uncles boil! Arilwen will you help me stand him up outside against the wall?" With Arilwen's help they positioned the guard outside her cell where he normally stood standing upright with his hands at his side. To keep him appearing as though he were standing upright they leaned him half against the wall and tied his waist to the doorknob of her cell door up underneath his breastplate out of sight. Making sure the door was firmly shut she then tugged a thin but durable beige hooded cloak out from inside her own dress and draped it around Arilwen's shoulders. With the Swan's identity hidden from most Anna then led her out of that area of the tower outside where a pair of handsome brown horses awaited them.

"I have loved to the point of madness; that which is called madness, that which to me, is the only sensible way to love."

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Willow:

When Arilwen made the decision to return to the desert with her estranged husband and her first and only lord and ruler, she steeled herself in knowing that she was going to be miserable. There was something touching that came from Gabrian's gentle care of her tortured shell of a husband. Still, given the decision between staying with her second husband and returning home with her first, there WAS no decision to be made. It was clear.

It had been days since their return and Arilwen had remained in her room for the extent of the time. She was kept clean and fed and safe, of course. Marsol hardly saw fit to torture her, but didn't allow her to see Wyrvaust. There was no doubt in her mind that he was currently taking care of her husband and trying to ease him back into his familiar desert life. She ached for him, but did she ache for the way he used to be? Or did she just want him however she could get him? It was hard to say.

Anna came to visit, giving her a delightful evening of chatter and light food that kept her mind off of things. For now. Anna was stretched out on her bed and Arilwen was sitting cross legged on the wooden chair, licking jam off of her fingers while they spoke. Arilwen snorted when she thought of the dress she had first wandered into the desert in. "Wyvaust taught me quickly about how to dress to keep from fainting in the sun." She hated the aching feeling in her chest and pushed her food aside.

Anna bringing up the idea of leaving to go to a campfire made her feel panicked. She didn't want to anger Marsol. She had been keeping her head down, hoping that she would get time off on good behavior. Anna was having none of these doubts though, and Arilwen arched a dark brow when she smeared toast with something she had not been offered. She would soon find out why.

She wanted to climb under the table when Anna banged the door with her foot and made the guard come scrambling, but she watched instead with interest while she urged the man to eat two pieces of toast. When his eyelids began to droop Arilwen stood slowly from her chair, then nearly shrieked when the big man pitched forward. Anna was on it, but obviously pointed out how big this guy was. Arilwen rushed to



help and hooked her slender arms around the guy, grunting as they hauled him into the hall to prop him up against the wall. She kept her palms flat on his chest to shove him against the door as Anna fetched rope to tie the man to the door. She couldn't believe it! She was staring at the snoring, standing man when Anna thrust a cloak at her and she speechlessly put it on. And once her face was covered? She fell into an uncontrollable fit of giggles, slapping her hand over her mouth as she hurried to the horses.

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Orcus:

To the horses! Checking to make sure the supplies on the horses were secure she climbed her short butt up onto the indifferent four legged animal. Of those the two passed on their way out only one guard gave a second glance. Taking their time guiding their trusty steeds along outside the front gates to ride alongside a merchant wagon is when Anna tugged at the side of Arilwen's coat to give her a reassuring smile. They moised along thru the bazaar, picking up something to snack till they exited out the other side of the marketplace. Did she tell her now? Should she spill the beans that they were on their way to that underground cavern that had been worked on since her return to be a home again? The desert had tried to retake the lair Wryvaust made his own and it almost did. The clean up was not so much that it needed magic to accomplish. If it had well then there might have been a problem. No. It was best to let Arilwen see place for herself. Of course some of the small flowers in the garden were new as well as the clay four foot tall statues of Arilwen and her family by the fountain spring but that wasn't the point. The point was Arilwen was home now.

When they finally reached their destination some time the following night, or was it two days later, she sighed in relief to get out of that saddle and stretch her legs. The guards standing outside, yes the lair had dedicated men from the garrison whom looked after the land, saw the two horses approaching the lead officer contacted his chieftain via mind speak discreetly to inform the dragon lord that his daughter and Lady Arilwen just arrived. Far, far from that corner of the desert Marsol stood in the center of a room whose walls looked like liquid fire. Just having "finished" that room he heard the news of his adopted daughter being a bit rebellious with taking Arilwen out for a three day ride on horseback. His response to the guard had been a simple "I know" and nothing more. He'd known before the idea even popped into Annandabah's head that she would not let Arilwen sit in some cell. He knew the Namas like he knew all of his children. There was not one minute that went by that he didn't know his daughters whereabouts and doings. He ordered the guards to stand down and changed their orders to their first priority being the girls safety. All else was secondary.

Anna pursed her lips in anxiety because she did not think there would be guards here too. Were they busted? Would they try to take Arilwen back to her room? Dismounting and giving Arilwen a nervous look she kept a hand on the reigns to her horse. A guard came over to greet them and welcomed Lady Arilwen back home. Oh? No arresting then? No arresting for them! Hah. Lady Arilwen was told they would be out here if they needed her and bowed his head in respect. Arilwen was so fancy! Oh snap!

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JD:

Returning to the desert had changed something in Wyrvaust. It was subtle but observable as they journeyed through the arid wilderness; He was more attentive; There was more spring in his step; He was reading again, something he had not done since he had emerged from his own Hell a mute mental case. Arilwen had figured out at some point on some level that his thoughts were intact. He simply could not or would not (that was where the greatest mystery lie) express whatever it was he was feeling or thinking beyond occasional glances or furtive body language. His face read like an unmarked tombstone most of the time.

As the drylands gave way to the desert, his gladness shone in his eyes, and as the view of HIS valley spread out before them from atop the Atsulomel (unmoveable or frozen) Dune, the tallest and by far the oldest dune in the desert of fire, a mist of tears glazed his indigo eyes. His eyes journeyed all over the desert as they continued their travels, but soonafter their party divided, so that Anna, Grym and Arilwen went one way, to Sapphire Canyon, and he and half of the entourage the other, to Ptpraang, and only when his wife and her company were well out of sight, he flung himself suddenly from his horse with a loud roar which spooked all the horses, causing some of them to rear up, and attempted an escape into the desert which lasted him all of five days. The fifth day found him in the garden which Anna and her closest servant had brought back to life. Wyrvaust was sitting by the cacti garden he had planted long ago and which had survived many droughts and sand storms. All of the cacti were either edible, medicinal, provided water, both or all of thee above; much like the rest of his garden.

The entire garden was surrounded by the same canyon walls which the entire mine turned lair were all enclosed within. The mine within Sapphire Canyon had at one time also been a Shaamae city, which had become a mine which all had become a ruin in that order. The shaamae had not mined the sapphires because they had once considered them a sacred stone which could control the fortunes of people and bring either good or bad fortune according to the whims of the gods if left in their natural state. For several ages the sapphires had showed them great fortune in the clear springs flowing deep within their city and in the area of the canyon where Wyrvaust's garden now was. The magnificent dragon fountain in his lair with its beautiful, hand cut marble floors were remnants of the shaamae city (the shaamae also revered dragons). Later bad fortune came when their city was sacked by a great Neffari force who sought to mine the sapphires. Even before the mine played out, the Neffari abandoned the digs almost a hundred years later, counting the mine among the richest sapphire mines ever found on Morashtar. Just why the Neffari left and how the mine, the city ruins and the hidden artesian springs returned to the desert until Wyrvaust found and claimed them remained a mystery. Marsol had ruled the desert all this time and for centuries found no cause to interfere in the affairs of the people living under his eyes. He'd had larger concerns than than if the people fought over blue rocks and far more precious water. People to him then had been no different than any other animals. He left them to their own fates... and yet, something buried the lost city and prospects under tons of earth, sand and rubble. But was it Marsol who did it? And if so, why? Even now Marsol rarely interferences in the goings ons of people in his domain unless their activities disturbed him or his. Anna perhaps had been the thing which had made him more... humane, if you could call a dragon humane. Dragane perhaps. Dragons were extremely concerned about each other, especially those within their tribes.

In any case, all past aside, it was in the garden Wyrvaust was found. He was

getting up the nerve to go inside, and trying to speak so he might explain things to Arilwen and Anna, and failing at it, which proved he COULD not speak, though it was only himself he proved it to, when he felt Marsol's hand on his shoulder. He knew immediately whose hand it was because he had never felt anyone's hand feel that way. It was stern, forceful, threatening, steadying and caring all at once. His throat immediately closed nearly shut and he rose swiftly in a swivel and threw himself against Marsol... sobbing. His fists also began to pound on him rather violently because of what he could not say, and he knew as Marsol dragged him away before anyone inside heard him, that Marsol would never let him go unless he could speak again. That at least was what the Desert Fox believed. He wondered as Marsol shifted into dragon form once outside the garden and gripped him in his talons then beat the desert air with those huge, scarred, red wings of his, if Marsol understood just HOW much he resented him right now for not leaving him the HELL alone? If Marsol understood that the LAST thing he could STAND right now was someone ELSE controlling him? What Wyrvaust could not say his actions very well DID say by the savage fight he put up within those great talons, which had ripped so many people, immortals and monsters limb from limb. All of Wyrvaust's wild flailings against those talons were doing quite a lot of injury to him, but as Marsol well knew pain next to spiritual injury to the Desert Raven was nothing. It seemed as if Wyrvaust would tear himself in two using the talons holding him as his wrack if not put down... and so Marsol dropped his altitude and let go. He watched Wyrvaust fall quite a drop, land with a hard thud, roll across the desert's very uneven floor... then the dragon fairly pounced on him from the air, pinning him down with a single talon, which caged him against the hard packed sand and pebbles. Wyrvaust continued to fight Marsol as he just... stood there in all his dragon magnificence and enormity, and with patience the dragon simply just let the demon wear himself down.

Whatever bizzare changes Wyrvaust had taken on, the nephelim he had possessed (he never had liked angels much), his body left behind as a zombie replacement to keep Arilwen and Anwaar safe and happy, Gabriel had straightened it all out. He had depossessed the angel of Wyrvaust and returned Wyrvaust's soul intact to the body it belonged to. Wyrvaust was Wyrvaust again. He had done it to make Arilwen happy and in hopes that it would aid in Wyrvaust's healing. But fact was, there was no healing for Wyrvaust seeing his wife and son with another demon.

The last time Wyrvaust had been in a state as desperate as his current one, he had needed what he was violently trying to grasp as he fought Marsol... Seclusion on his own terms. To wander the desert and find himself again, but Marsol understood something that Wyrvaust could not quite connect with in his present mental state; The desert was no longer the safe haven it once was. Enemies kept finding their way to Wyrvaust and that likelihood was only getting worse, not better. Marsol had received some very secretive and disturbing warnings from an assassin slash espionage agent who served Beroth of the Adram clan very closely... Mekkor had been asking around about Wyrvaust. And why? Mendorin was Mekkor's progeny. What the agent with the alias name of Hawk in any language failed to inform Marsol of was that Mendorin was the proxy of Mekkor. Mendorin, who as an Abyss Demon Lich was excessively powerful, a being who had become a true individual, was split FROM Mekkor ages out of most people's memories. This was knowledge VERY few people possessed and which Beroth of the Adram clan could be executed for if he should ever divulge such information to anyone. So... his man twisted the truth in his intelligence to Marsol. Progeny was close enough to the truth. Mekkor and Mendorin were related, even in some of their habits. Mendorin was not AS bad, but

he was bad enough. Either way, Marsol would never risk either of them getting their hands on Wyrvaust.

Wyrvaust began sobbing again when he saw Ptpraang and might have slipped right off Marsol's back if the dragon chief had not arcanelly bound him to himself until they landed.

How many days had passed since? It could have been three or ten and Wyrvaust wouldn't have known the difference. The stone walls weighed on him so heavily that it was all he could do to take a walk through the many corridors. When he was granted access to the oasis gardens, he paced from one boundary to the other until his heart ached and his mind screamed with chaos. Sleep offered him his only solace and he was hard pushed to wake from it. Marsol spoke and he wanted his King's words to matter but his heart defied his every hope. Several times he tried to communicate his greatest wish to Marsol in his most desperate hours by piercing his eyes with his own and thumping his chest in a most urgent manner. But Marsol either did not understand or refused to hear it. In those moments if not every moment he was begging Marsol to end him, hell eat him. Thing is, it was not a true end he wanted. He simply wanted to be renewed through Acheron. He was simply asking for what he needed most. As a priest of chaos he understood what needed to follow. He had declined to the point where he NEEDED an end so that he could be returned to his beginnings. It was the natural cycle. Things were born, they progressed, they peaked, they declined, they ended, they were renewed. Birth and renewal hung on the same axis for the immortals.

Wyrvaust finally grew too exhausted to fight Marsol any more at what time Marsol finally broke his own silence to speak to his oldest and most faithful friend at length. Wyrvaust showed no signs of taking his friend and master's words to heart but he was listening and processing everything Marsol said, no matter how hard or kind his words. Then when Marsol lifted the cage that was his talon Wyrvaust just laid there for awhile, but it was growing late and Marsol's patience had worn thin. He ordered Wyrvaust to stand up. The demon stared beyond Marsol a moment and then stood. Usually he would brush the sand off himself but he didn't bother. Marsol altered his posture to dip his shoulders low, as if bowing, but it was a command for Wyrvaust to mount him. He could tell that when Wyrvaust obeyed him it took all his will just to climb up on his back. Step by step Marsol was getting a clearer look into just how broken his friend and advisor was. Even Marsol had to wonder if he could be healed this time or if he would have to leave his fate to his true master... Maelmorda. Some might have wondered why Maelmorda had not intervened by now. The thought never entered Marsol's mind because when it came to Wyrvaust, there was an understanding between the Morning Star and the Lord of Red Dragons. Wyrvaust belonged to Marsol and the desert. Maelmorda had agreed to let it be that way since the day Marsol had taken him from his sire Mendorin (Mekkor in truth), who had not once in his attempts to reclaim Wyrvaust from Marsol succeeded. One of Marsol's regrets was not killing Mendorin the one time he'd had the chance to do so. Mendorin was anything if not slippery and had eluded him every time since the first time they locked horns, but Marsol had not known then what he later learned from Wyrvaust... Had he, he never would have let Mendorin escape him in the first place. What had broken his friend so badly all those years ago broke him now. Or at least it was the straw which broke the savaged camel's back. He had been enslaved and raped... repeatedly. As Marsol flew back to Ptpraang with Wyrvaust balanced on his shoulders, he recalled all the information Gabriel had passed on to him concerning the slavers who had captured and 'conditioned' Wyrvaust

and his creature Morgrymed, aka Grym. The leader's name was Atoluss and he traveled with a rather large compliment of male and female traders and slavers who were all skilled fighters, all neffari, and all well protected from magic by their own resistance and items they wore. Marsol would undoubtedly take care of Atoluss and his gang much as Gabrian had simply purchased Wyrvaust and Grym and let Atoluss and his mob of malcontents continue on their way. Getting Wyrvaust back for Arilwen had been his concern. Judging the sins of slave traders had not. Not until they died or his superiors sicked him on them at least.

It was when Marsol moved Wyrvaust out of Ptpraang and to Tirkasghul, his fortress in the Ring of Fire, that the mad demon's mental state began to improve. Ptpraang had always preyed on Wyrvaust's mind and in his present state it positively depressed him. It was the ancient cruel aura of the place. Many terrible things had happened in that place. Marsol was not always the gentle creature his friends, Anwaar and his sons Amaru and Ardwyrr adored and loved. The space and ancient and ever changing stone inside and out and the magnificent power of Morashtar itself present in the volcanos of the Ring of Fire did much to lift Wyrvaust's spirits, but what most healed his spirit was seeing Anwaar playing, exploring and practicing at being men with Marsol's sons when he came to visit. The sound of his voice when he read with him (Wyrvaust silently, Anwaar aloud), his laughter and his smile, his very presence there breathed life into him as well. Seeing his son's hope was his own. Anwaar had been overjoyed that his mother had chosen his father, despite all his terrible troubles, and left Gabrian. It was one of the happiest days of his life. Anwaar reported every detail of his visits to his mother.

"He laughed at me, today, mother and I saw happiness in his face. Ardwyrr disarmed me and I dropped my waister (a wooden practice sword) in one of the steam pools. He laughed when I jumped in the steam pool after it and the twins leapt in after me. I got the sword first and we started sword fighting in the pool. He actually looked happy, mother," was one of the most recent tales he had to tell her. When asked if he had spoken yet, he shook his head. "Sorry, mother. But he will soon, I am certain," he promised her.

Anwaar had not long left him and Wyrvaust was on a high turret which overlooked the lake of fire. It was an amazing and sizzling sight. Being an abyss demon, the ring of fire was actually oppressive to Wyrvaust. The heat weakened him tremendously but it also had what felt to the Desert Raven like a cleansing effect. It wasn't that fire was a particular enemy, but rather he had no resistance to it. It affected him the same as anyone without resistance. On the high turret he was as far away from the lava fields as he could get within the mountain range, but heat also rises, but as it did it also cooled, so... he was bathed in thick drafts of sauna like heat up there. It was better than a sweat lodge. Wyrvaust could not tell anyone how long he had been in the desert now. He could not tell anyone what day of the week or even what month it was. But when Marsol walked up behind him and his shadow fell on the wall beside him, a faint smile curled his shapely lips. "The Raven wishes to go home... Will his chieftain and friend let him?" His voice was shaky but fairly strong. It took everything he had in him to form and give sound to his words. But that most desperate of all desires expressed was the gate to a dam being opened. Now that he had spoken, he could speak. The eyes which raised and locked on Marsol as he turned around to face him swam with the promised injury a refusal would result in. In all honesty Wyrvaust was not sure he could take a refusal. He just couldn't tell.

Even as Wyrvaust waited for Marsol's answer, Malcomb spoke in Marsol's other ear, present but unseen and unheard by the Raven. "He seems to have had enough time. Shall I remove him from the chromomorphic axis? Or would you rather keep him suspended longer?" All of Wyrvaust's experiences since his arrival at Tirkasghul had occurred in a bubble of time courtesy of Maelmorda via Malcomb, who Mael could channel his powers through remotely. What to Wyrvaust had been virtual months, had only been a course of hours adding up to less than two days. It had only taken that long because they'd had to synchronize Marsol's talks and Anwaar's visits. Two long visits had been broken up to seem like multiple visitations. As Maelmorda had explained it to Marsol, it was the quick fix that wasn't quick at all. It made time irrelevant and anything that was likely to work as effective as it really was, because it really happened. It also took someone of immense power to pull off without risking time anomalies which could really screw things up.

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Willow:

Arilwen settled onto the back of her horse and followed Anna's lead into the arid weather of the desert. The dry heat that felt like the inside of an oven to some was surprisingly comforting to Arilwen. Did that mean it was home? She wasn't sure yet. She had missed it here, of course, but such a huge part of that was her old life which was a broken up puzzle with scattered pieces right now. She had no idea where they were going. She had assumed it was to a campfire or to show her something nearby. But it was hardly close, and Arilwen began wondering how far they were going. Anna looked as if she might burst, but she never cracked and told her.

Along the way Arilwen was excited when she noticed plants and immediately remember them and their properties. Wyrvaust had patiently worked with her when she had recovered from her initial introduction to the desert, and over the few short years that they had together, he taught her about plants and how to recognize them, as well as how many to take and how many to leave for others.

The next day Arilwen began to realize where they might be headed but she kept her head down and mouth quiet about that. How would she feel if they were going to her old home? She tried not to consider it.

It took only a few more hours to prove her theory, and when Anna pulled her horse to a slow stop near the entrance, Arilwen sat stock still on her horse, staring at the entrance. She had expected it to be overgrown and inaccessible. Did she think about this place? Often. She would lie in bed and dream about the cool, dark areas inside and their soft bed that was never made. Anna was already feet in the sand, but when they saw guards approaching, Arilwen immediately assumed the worse. They were going to take her back. So was she surprised when they bowed and greeted her? Absolutely.

Arilwen slid slowly from her horse, lingering next to it as she shoved her hood back. Her dark hair was in a long braid that was twisted around her head like a braided crown. It was practical for trips and to keep the hair off of her neck. It also stayed cleaner.

"Anna..." She said softly, shifting her gaze between the guards and her small friend. Still clutching the leather reins of her horse, she swallowed. Would Anna let her stay there? Hells no! She came over and, only when she touched Arilwen's

hand did the desert swan notice that they were locked around the leather straps, so she let them go, allowing Anna to lead her inside.

It smelled the same, except for missing Wyrvaust's scent. The first breath that the swan took inside of the entrance made her head reel and she pressed a hand to her forehead, trying to breathe. "Anna..." Why did she keep just saying her name? Because she felt like she was floating in a dream right now. How many times has she had this dream? Walking back into this place, these scents, these sights? And here she was.

Anna followed behind her, allowing her some space while she wandered through the cavern, touching things. Things? Touching EVERYTHING. The backs of chairs, the flat top of the wooden table, the dishes on the shelf. The hot spring room was still steamy and, when she reached their bedroom, she stood frozen and stared around. What was missing? The tiny set of deer antlers that had been her first gift from Wyrvaust that used to sit beside her side of the bed. "I took them with me.." She said softly, going to sit on her side of the bed so that she could touch the wooden table beside it. "He can send them back, I think. Gabrian. If I ask." She was quiet, contemplative, as she glanced towards their closet, which was honestly a mess most of the time. It was clean, with their clothes folded on shelves. It was something else that caught her eye that made Arilwen suddenly let out the most joyful of laughs, hurrying from the bed to kneel in the closet. It was a wooden chest that Wyrvaust had made for her when she was pregnant with Anwarr. Every inch of the chest was carved. It wasn't "pretty" by "normal" standards, but Arilwen adored it all of the same. The carvings showed plants and notes, small maps, names. Things that Wyrvaust had worked with her to remember. Paper? Who needs paper when you can make it more permanent? Arilwen's fingertips ran over the bumpy surface and she started doing that weird giggly crying that happy people did. "Oh Anna..." She just couldn't catch her breath and she reached up to drag her friend down into her arms, clutching her close. "I thought I would never see this place again. Did you do this? Did you do ALL of this?" She laughed, wiping her eyes on her thin sleeve. "I can't wake up and you better not wake me up! Has Anwarr seen this?" Of course not. Anna was not even aware how big Anwarr was now with his lanky body running around and gaining lean muscle like his father. His dark hair a ruffled mess on his head. He would soon be taller than Arilwen.

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JD: #### LOG ####  
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(00:18:16) Orcus: Could he go home? Could he go back to the way things use to be? That answer was most certainly no. However, he could start anew and make something more of the broken heart. Things were different now. They were different now. What was once open to wander and explore now held nothing but danger and certain death. The only reason they made it to Sapphire Canyon was because of the much larger platoon shadowing them, literally from their own shadows and sand under their horses hooves, that guarded them with their lives. In watching their sons play together he was painfully reminded of the part of himself that was no longer there. A part of Marisol had been missing for some time now. But those thoughts he kept to himself and did not breath a word of that mess to anyone. To Wyrvaust, he answered with, "Nothing would give me greater pleasure, my friend." To Malcomb, he responded, "He has been held long enough. He must remember to fly with his own wings. Or he never will. I am indebted to you." Naturally his gratitude was to

Maelmorda and Malcomb because his lord chose Malcomb as a conduit for his will. Pretty soon he was going to need to make a trip to give Maelmorda and Malcomb gifts of thanks for their invaluable help in trying to heal the walking breathing rubix cube that was Wryvaust. Raising his then amber golden eyes he gave a surveying look around his volcanic fortress. To him the lava pools and fissures of air so hot it would steam flesh from both was comfortable. Since the change in him, not completely certain what that change was yet, his internal heat had risen, among other things. But what about those who had wronged his oldest friend? What of the few who could not be dispatched so easily? Marsol felt the regret for not destroying certain assholes long ago begin to burn. Evil assholes, mind you, whom this world would not miss in the slightest. He gave Wryvaust room to gather his thoughts and anything else he may want to take with him before they departed. Of course he also waited for Malcomb to disperse the time bubble first. Cannot go around living in bubbles now can we?[fin]

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(00:40:54) JD: When Marsol agreed to let him return to his family the Raven drew in a deep breath, shivering breath then embraced his friend and master tightly, and held him an interim before withdrawing from him. He smiled weakly at the dragon lord then bowed as deeply as his tall frame would allow him to. He did not miss that Nephelim he had claimed and Gabriel had stripped him of to return him home to the Neffari form he was born to. Wyrvaust never had liked or trusted angels. He was sorry Marsol ever met Cirgoth except for the sons the auburn bird had given him. Amaru and Ardwyrr were fine young men, just as Anwaar was, the son Wyrvaust had named after Marsol. "The Raven is ever grateful to you, my lord. He only wishes he could help mend his master's heart," he looked to Marsol as he said this. "What can he do to aid his Lord?"

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JD: Wyrvaust was despite all his problems very wise when he could see clearly. The haze had not lifted completely just yet, but his mind was clear enough now to recognize when the being who mattered most to him next to Arilwen was in pain, or not quite himself. No matter what Wyrvaust had gone through, he had ever remained the priest of chaos he had always been, even before he was forcibly sired by Mendorin and Mekkor alike. Both their blood, the one blood divided was in him. Wyrvaust did not mind at all that he was an Abyss Demon, but how he had become one had been a nightmare and a horror beyond the comprehension of most. That was behind him though, to him it was. It was doubtful Mekkor would ever just let matters lie, as Marsol had heard. "Will Marsol come home with his Raven?" he smiled a little. #

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(00:52:21) JD: Malcomb shrugged when Marsol thanked him and patted him on the back. "It was our pleasure, friend," he assured. Malcomb had come to like and respect Marsol a great deal. That and he was easy on the eyes. Hey ouch! Cut that out Mernaph, just looking... no touchies. "We... I hope to see you again soon." And that said, Malcomb left the great lord of dragons to his concerns.

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(01:05:58) LiftTheDarkness: If he had been asked how long he had been searching,



Cevari would have been hard-pressed to come up with the exact number of years. He could name a ballpark figure regarding the number of centuries he had been looking for his older brother, but even then, he might have had to pause and think. Now, most people might have given up, after even a couple of years. One might think that thirty years might have certainly told him that Wyrvaust was dead and gone. But then, it had only taken about three years for Cevari to decide that waiting about was for fools, and he might as well be more active in his search. The method he chose was perhaps a little bit unusual. But then, Cevari was a resourceful young man. He had exhausted all the usual routes, but to no avail. Why waste more time? He went right to the being he thought most likely to have the answers. Certainly, there was plenty of folklore even among his own people to caution against making a deal with the devil. But desperate times called for desperate measures, and that had been a very desperate time indeed.

Granted, he had rather expected the devil's end of the bargain to be upheld a little sooner. Centuries had passed. And certainly, Abyss Walker that he had been turned into, he had survived them all. He had just expected to be reunited with his brother a little sooner. Still, the centuries had turned him into quite the profitable merchant. Rare was the merchant who would actually wade in after warriors to collect loot himself! Sure, he was no hand at actually fighting, but he could escape like nobody else...with his pockets filled with every manner of highly desired artifact or item! And the nomadic lifestyle of a merchant was nothing if not perfect for gathering information on missing brothers.

It was not idle rumors that had led him there today, of course. The devil had finally come through. He'd given him someplace concrete to look, which was how Cevari found himself riding up to a certain north gate. He thought he cut a fine figure. He had dressed in his best, after all. Reunions were important occasions. He rather thought, on the back of his glossy mount, that he might be the thing that sweetened the dreams of the more romantic young things. He had always looked rather similar to his handsome older brother, if slimmer and much shorter. He had the same twilight blue eyes, the same warm skin. There were subtle differences, of course. Cevari had a distinct dimple in his left cheek when he smiled. His hair, though quite long and black, had the slightest wave to it. His stomach, though he'd never admit it, was in knots as he approached the gate. They had been apart for centuries. What if Wyrvaust had forgotten the younger brother that had been left behind? What if that tricky devil was sending him not to a living, breathing brother, but to a vault that held his bones? No. No. Don't worry about it now. He would know soon enough.#

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(01:21:56) Orcus: That tight embrace was met with the small want to smile but instead a circular rub of his left hand over the back his friends head, some of the Raven's hair slipping thru his fingers. The key word being small. No smile actually came to his facial features. No twinkling in his golden reptilian looking eyes. Who hugs dragons? Not many. As far as looks went he was one of those folks who never would look at themselves in "that" light. His physical body was just that. A body, one at that which he changed out for other more massive ones or none at all as he would come to find out soon. After the embrace ended and respectful bows done it was time to go. Except that last question was asked right as he was about to shift into his dragon form to give Wryvaust a ride among the clouds. Marsol paused in his step near a patch of bright red hot rock near his left bare foot. He should go

visit the handsome mines turned lair with him and see his family once again safely home. He knew Anna would be thrilled to see him too. It had been months since he'd seen his adoptive daughter, no a year actually. He also knew he must bring the Namas into his tribe wholly so as to better prepare her and enable her to protect herself. But that was a matter not for today. "No, old friend," he said to the Raven. Turning half away but keeping his amber gold gaze on the Raven. "This is a time for you to be with your family. They have waited long enough." Where was Marsol going then after he brought Wyrvaust to Sapphire Canyon? The same place he was building something in... a place of solitude and fire.[fin]

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(01:34:47) JD: The bones of Wyrvaust indeed. Compared to the brother Cevari had once known the Desert Fox, or Raven as people had come to call him was the bones of what had once been. He had evolved a dozen times in 660 plus years. Wyrvaust nodded when Marsol dismissed his offer of support and insisted it was time for him to return to his family. Was he ready? As ready as he was ever going to be until he went.

When Marsol shifted back into that titanic dragon that was more the true him than any other embodiment he had ever claimed as Wyrvaust saw it, the chaosian climbed onto his Lord's scaled back and gripped a spike. Once Marsol took off and as he flew, Wyrvaust spoke to him, as much with his mental voice as his actual one, otherwise the wind would have stolen his voice away. "There is something your demon has needed to speak to his master of for... a long time now," Wyrvaust then let on. "He has... communed with what many in Acheron consider the enemy... with Leviathan. The Raven had this thought... and when he had it, the all being swallowed him." He called Leviathan the all being and Maelmorda the all maker. "A deal tried the all being to make with the fox... when the Fox thought only in his mind of a truce that might between the all maker and being be made. Such was the power and allure of his majesty and presence that difficult it was to refuse his... offer... but... refuse we did, and angered... no, disappointed he was. Since then the world has made no sense... all has been upheaval and madness... What if... no end to it comes? What if he has been cursed by the all being? Does the all being lay curses?" Wyrvaust may have known and understood a LOT about Acheron, but he knew little of what made Leviathan tick. If he had known that a proxy of Levi's was in the world and parading around as a certain someone's daughter, he might have been even more worried. He did not trust anything out of Haman much.

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(01:42:18) JD: Now when someone came knock knock knocking at Marsol's door, Gilriael was on duty that night at the gate tower. He was actually surprised to hear someone approaching the immense gate on horseback, much as horse was about a dragon's favorite food, and well, few who were not expected EVER approached Tirkasghul. It was a fortress of dragons after all, though Gilriael did not look much like a dragon at the moment, but a pale white elf with freaky red eyes. He stood up from the bench he was sitting on and peered over that ridiculously high wall to the neffari below. One lone neffari on a fine fat horse, huh. He almost licked his lips. Instead the dragon in a handsome elf suit smirked and laughed, then called down.

"Are you stupid or just crazy? After you tell me which, tell me what you want."

Dragons did not usually believe in manners, though among them Gilriael could have those in spades if he wanted. He was the tribe's bard.

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(01:54:37) LiftTheDarkness: "A bit of both," Cevari responded blithely. "Each in their time. Seldom both together, but on occasion." He seemed entirely unruffled by that question. He had been called worse things, in his day. He did tend to play the fool on occasion, but only because it tended to lower the guard of the people he interacted with. "I'm here to call on Wyrvaust, should he be in residence." He flashed him that grin, strikingly white against that warm complexion. He idly swept those masses of black waves over one shoulder, raising those dark brows at this handsome thing playing gatekeeper. "Now, you mustn't keep me out here for long, just because my company is so charming. I'd not complain, normally, but I'm afraid this matter is rather pressing." That silver tongue of his tended to get him into a bit of trouble, but he saw no harm in being a little bit flirtatious. It was a habit that certainly tended to increase the sales of his wares, when aimed at the right people. A man learned all sorts of tricks, to get what he wanted.#

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(02:04:36) JD: Gilriael's eyes thinned and he leaned over the wall a little deeper when the creature declared he was there to call on Wyrvaust. Wyrvaust HAD no friends other than Marsol, the dragons of the tribe and his wife. All the banter went out one ear and his reason for being there stuck in the other. "My Lord has just taken his leave, but he would want to know of your interest in the Raven. Wait there." At that Gilriael disappeared behind the wall. Some time passed. Then... all of the sudden, a magnificent red dragon flew up and over the wall. He was not so large as Marsol, but plenty huge, and before Cevari's horse could wheel and attempt flight, Gilriael swooped down and plucked the Neffari off its back and winged away with him, setting his flight path after Marsol. Gilriael held Cevari lightly enough in his talon that he did no harm to the fellow, but tight enough he would not fall to his supposed death.

"You don't smell much like a Neffari. What are you? And while we are at it, what do you want with Wyrvaust?" Yes, he was interrogating the man as he flew, and his voice as a dragon was not at all human or elven. It carried well even despite the air rushing over and past them.

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(02:12:17) LiftTheDarkness: Cevari, naturally, thought nothing was wrong with his request. People visited people all the time. He nodded calmly when the gatekeeper announced that he would just inform his lord. At least, that was what Cevari had assumed he had meant. So, when a dragon suddenly burst over the wall, who could blame him for letting loose an ungainly yelp and nearly unseating himself from his horse? Not that he had time, before he found himself ensnared in the dragon's talons. "Well, you don't look much like an elf!" He responded, indignantly to the comment regarding his scent, once he got his breath back. That was false advertisement! Not that the dragon wasn't lovely. Just...a little more than his modest bedroll could accommodate! "That's eau de Abyss Walker you're enjoying. Unique, yes?" He was tense. This was very high up. Very, very high up. "I'd rather like to see him. He's my brother, and we've been parted a long time. But this was

not the entrance I had in mind!" He griped. #

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(02:13:52) Orcus: The ridge of scales and smaller spikes that could be called his "brow" arched at the mention of Leviathan coming out of HIS mouth. Of all the things to talk about why that? Being in his dragon form that left him with just one real way of talking to the Raven in the traditional sense and that was by mind speak. He answered Wyrvaust in his low rumbling telepathy projecting his thoughts into coherent, sometimes broken up, words into his mind. "Tell me of this deal you refused," he asked, wondering what Human could possibly want with his Raven? What game was being played here? Or was it a trick by one of his enemies to coerce betrayal from the loyal? What could the holy hope to gain by meddling in the affairs of dragons and their family? Other than the occasional bastard Alamascan trying to kill him he did not think of Haman. Maybe that was a good thing? Not long into their flight he would start to sense Gilriael approaching from behind. What for? Tilting his massive body he swung to the left to spiral down slowly to land atop a dune disturbing all manner of sand everywhere with a few flaps of his wings. Out stretching his neck, maw opening a bit to taste the air with his tongue, he waited. It was not just Gilriael was it? No. That was why he had not let the Raven down from his back yet with a prod of his tail to Wyrvaust's hip to tell him to stay put.[fin]

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JD: "It was a simple and yet cruel temptation the orderly one put before him, My Lord. If the Raven were to convince his Lord of a thing... to guard a certain person... the Raven's soul would be cleansed of all burdens... of all things dark and cruel and... well, painful." He sighed a shaky breath. "But the Raven is no fool and understands that one cannot serve Leviathan and serve Acheron. It is unheard of... then when the Raven suggested something to the all being, well... that is when it all went so bad... and has remained bad ever since..." He still was not sure if it was not all related or just... plain bad luck.

Now when their course changed Wyrvaust was curious, a little anxious, but trusted Marsol to get him home. It was strange that they landed, and odder still that he would not let him get down. Then came Gilriael into view. He was not far off.

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JD: "What do you mean his brother? He has never mentioned a brother to us." Gilriael disbelieved. Truth be told, Wyrvaust didn't speak to them about his mortal life at all. It had been long in his past before Marsol ever found and claimed him. "Well, save your answer for Lord Marsol. It is he you shall have to answer to and there he is, just ahead of us." Marsol was twice the size of Gilriael and that was saying a LOT. The walls and gates of Tirkasghul was so enormous for a reason, and Marsol could never fit through the gate as a dragon.

Less than a minute later Gilriael lit down on the dune next to the even bigger dune Marsol occupied, and set the Neffari Abyss Walker claiming to be Wyrvaust's brother down in front of Marsol. Yep, could get a crick in the neck trying to gaze up at Marsol. "My Lord, this Neffari says he is an Abyss Walker, and the brother of Wyrvaust." Gilriael filled his lord in.

Gilriael had no idea what an Abyss Walker WAS, but he imagined in was something like a planeswalker, or maybe a fancy abyssmancer. He smelled kind of like... a ghost... Yes, ghosts had a smell, to dragons at least. They smelled kind of like snow and electricity. "He smells like a specter and specter's are tricky sorts," he said with a snort.

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(02:54:26) LiftTheDarkness: Cevari stumbled a little as he was set down, and threw Gilriael a dirty look as he straightened his rumpled clothing and windblown hair. How rude. His eyes flared wide at seeing Marsol, though. Well. That wasn't intimidating in the least. Not at all. He frowned at being called a spectre. And tricky! That was stereotyping. Hmph. "I'm certainly those first two things, though the last statement might be questionable." He responded, finally. He could be tricky. He acted the peacock as a front, after all, either to coax information or invite sales. He had a hell of a time getting a good look at Marsol, what with the way he towered over him. Where was a ladder when he needed one? As such, he had not yet spotted the figure on Marsol's back.

This was not what he had imagined. He had thought he would show up on his fine horse in his fine clothes. Probably in slow motion, with hair blowing in the breeze. Majestically. There would probably be feasting and wine, and he and his brother would clap one another on the shoulder in a manly fashion. And maybe they would cry manly tears of joy. He certainly had not expected to be plucked up by a dragon, rumpled thoroughly, and deposited on a sand dune.

Still, he'd make the best of it. He flashed that charming merchant grin and dip a low bow to Marsol, who was clearly the one in charge here. "I am, as he says, Cevari Aalamea, younger brother of the aforementioned Wyrvaust. I only seek to see him once more." He assured him. #

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(03:12:08) Orcus: The ill tempered desert lizard, as one particularly black eyed demon calls him, took in sight and smell of the peacock Gilriael set down on the smaller dune. Looks aside he did not act anything like the Desert Fox. How could these two be related was a good question. Better still was how come it took this Cevari so long to find his brother when he has been here for so long that he outlived most cactai? Wry of new faces and the peculiar scent this one gave off he was not going to take any chances. Not with either of his clan mates safeties. Without warning Marsol spewed flames from both nostrils to form a twenty foot wide circle around Cevari and cast a somewhat trapping spell through the sand Cevari stood on to keep him from gating his handsome butt away so long as he was inside that circle of flames. The spell only applied to the sand inside the circle. Lowering his head slowly so no ladder was needed Marsol came to thin his unnerving crocodile like eyes on Cevari as is he was a healthy horse. "Why do you seek him? Lie to me and I will devour you, Ghost." The threat of being barbecued and snacked on was all too real. Either Cevari was not aware of how dangerous his domain was now or he was a lunatic that wanted to be a hotdog. Strolling up to his front gates asking for one of his tribe so familiarly apparently came across as a challenge to their chieftain? [Fin]

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(03:22:41) JD:

It was true, Marsol's giganormous figure concealed Wyrvaust from his younger brother completely, and Wyrvaust could not see him any better because he stood too close to Marsol. He could hear the conversation though, and his heart began to hammer in his chest. No... it wasn't possible... His brother had lived a normal, comparatively uneventful life, had lots of children and died fat and happy... That at least was how Wyrvaust had always imagined his brother's life. His chest and throat began to constrict as he realized he recognized his voice... not at first... but then it all came flooding back... the very last time he had seen his brother. Wyrvaust had just gone on a short pilgrimage to the shrine of flowers on the border between Aersei and Hassim. It was only a day's walk, and Wyrvaust had set out on foot, but he never made it there. He had been grabbed at the watering hole not far from their caravan, which consisted of a dozen merchants and their families. Wyrvaust had been their presiding priest. Beyond that memory he did not wish to think of what happened, and the truth of what actually HAD occurred over the months and years had been blurry. Not all had been cruel or abusive to him... Beroth and the demon who had claimed to be his sire had been kind and tried to help him. They had turned a blind eye when he escaped. Clan demons were very possessive of their own, had very strong customs concerning leaving all of which Wyrvaust broke.

"My Lord... let me down to see him... please," he begged, getting rather squirmy where he sat high up on those shoulders. He might as well have been seated atop a winged mountain.

Wyrvaust understood how protective Marsol was, and loved him all the more for it, but he also knew he was dangerously protective and possessive.

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(03:34:24) LiftTheDarkness: Cevari wished he could look affronted at the flames that spewed forth at him. Really, he was mostly concentrating on not dirtying his trousers. Those blue eyes flared wide, and he paled at least two and a half shades. Maybe three. He swallowed. Once. Twice. Ah, there his voice was. It had retreated to hide somewhere in the region of his stomach. "Why else might I seek him? I've not seen him in centuries, though I've searched. He is my brother, and he was taken from me. I swore never to rest until I found him once more." Dramatic, yes. But infinitely truthful. He didn't comment on being called "ghost", which he thought to be rather derogatory. He didn't call him "lizard", after all. "I seek only to regain a connection with one I never ought to have been separated from." In many ways, Cevari's life had simply frozen when his brother had disappeared. How could he move on, have a life, have children (nevermind that his preferences made that a little unlikely), when he had no idea whether his brother was able to do the same?

He froze, when he thought he had heard a voice above him. He craned his neck to try and see, ears straining. It had been very faint, but he had been sure he had heard his brother. #

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(03:53:28) Orcus: He felt Wyrvaust getting ants in his pants to be let down to see Cevari. On the one hand how much did even he know about that part of Wyrvausts

life? Perhaps nothing. His life did not start until he found him, in a manner of speaking. His new life in the desert basically. It did not look like Cevaris answer appeased the red scaled Beastie in front of him because those eyes thinned just a bit more. Was that the truth? Marsol weighted it not against his own thought but on Wyrvausts reaction alone to hearing Cevari. Very carefully he lowered his left shoulder and made one long curved slide out of his wing to his shoulder for Wyrvaust to slide down inside to be under his neck. Still well within his grasp but about ten feet in front of the wall of flames that continued to burn. Just because he swore to be someone did not mean it was true. But then if Wyrvaust could vouch for him then all would be well. Of course, Marsol did not smell lies on Cevari and for his honesty he earned some respect. "What sent you to my gates in your searching of this brother that was taken from you?" He needed to know the why's of Cevari appearing now in the desert during times of war and strife. He needed the truth. But Cevari was truthful wasn't he? Marsol just had to be sure.[fin]

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(04:05:07) JD: Wyrvaust was unaware of the fact that word of Mekkora and his counterpart Mendorin making overtures to reclaim him had reached Marsol. Had he, he might have understood just how suspicious of this stranger who'd come to his doorstep Marsol was. Marsol was nothing if not thorough in unraveling potential threats to his tribe, which Wyrvaust was a part of. One might call him and his family honorary dragons. Wyrvaust's instincts, his power, his judgment really were all far duller than usual because of his fragile mental state and Marsol knew this, whereas it really had not occurred to Wyrvaust yet JUST how vulnerable he was because he was still so fresh out of full blown psychosis... and yet...? The Raven had long been a cautious and wary sort himself. When Marsol offered him a closer look, Wyrvaust slid with ease into the cradle offered him and peered over Marsol's mighty wing to take a gander at his brother. It looked like him... a few years older, but definitely him.

"It looks and sounds like the Raven's little shadow... but who is it really?" He was whispering to Marsol. Anyone with the right path could resemble and even mimic him. "He even has his demeanor... The one he remembers was cocky but beneath it all his heart was gold... but it has been long... and much might have changed... How will I know?" Wyrvaust sounded a little afraid for a number of reasons. The violence he would unleash if he discovered someone was parading falsely as his brother... Facing his brother if it was really him. Wyrvaust was not the man he knew. He was as he was now. But he would... should, like so much to see his brother again. He had loved him so dearly. He had gotten into trouble often and Wyrvaust had bailed him out a few too many times, but he had always meant well. "May he speak with his caller?" He would do nothing Marsol did not approve of.

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(04:16:44) LiftTheDarkness: Cevari considered the question briefly, and then decided that honesty was clearly the best policy with this dragon. Besides, he hadn't been told to keep his information source a secret. "Maelmorda pointed me in this direction." The name, he reasoned, had to be notorious enough that he didn't really need to expand on who he was.

Movement caught his eye. Was that the top of a head, peeping at him? He looked puzzled. The Wyrvaust he remembered was not so timid, but...then again, so much

time had passed. They were neither of them the men that they had been. He tilted his head slightly. "Mumaaq?" He called, gently. A nickname that he had been using since they were children together. Perhaps it was a bit odd, to call someone something that meant 'elephant', but Wyrvaust had always been so very much taller than he. That, and the patient older brother he remembered, had resulted in that fond nickname. It was a name that almost embodied the deep respect he had had for his older brother, who had gotten him out of so many scrapes. He kept his gaze on the wing that he believed his brother was resting on, though he made no move to get any closer.#

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(04:20:49) JD: Gilrael had taken that dirty look in stride and shown the fellow a dragon's smirk, which likewise exposed quite a few of those dagger sized teeth. He settled on the dune comfortably to watch the show, observing the little fellow as well as his chieftain and his advisor, who was the one seeking advice presently. He saw the fox whispering to their chief and suspected Wyrvaust was at least half as suspicious as Marsol was. The wereraptor shifted his head so that it swung around close to Cevari. "What proof can you offer that you are his brother?" he was curious to see what he might come up with. Girlriael in the mean time probed the fellow for shadows... and not the kind which followed Wyrvaust around when he was a young man or child.

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(04:34:16) Orcus: When Cevari said it was Maelmorda who sent him their way a part of him debated on whether to feel insulted, enraged, or both. He chose to feel neither and instead ask his lord of this. If Maelmorda denied it or said he had no idea what the kid was talking about then Marisol would have no choice but to suspect treachery. But if Maelmorda did not answer his simple question as to if he gave guidance to one named Cevari to go into the Desert of Fire to seek his long lost brother, that was fine too. He would not pester his lord with matters he could deal with himself. To Wyrvaust, he said, "Do not enter that circle my friend. Its cage is not for you. Speak to this handsome ghost. I will lower the flames so that you may see more of him. If he deceives, I will kill him." And so the tall flames of the twenty foot wide circle around Cevari slowly lowered little by little till they were waist high. It made it clearer for Cevari to see Wyrvaust peeping at him.[fin]

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(04:48:35) JD: Wyrvaust had never been a warrior, but he could hold his own with a sword, whereas his paths and innate abilities were where his real strengths and power lie. As a demon he was very powerful, as a chaosmancer he was even more capable. But chaos when the mind was in chaos was a dangerous path to command, and he was always aware of that fact. He was a troubled creature now... Marsol was withholding things from him, and that bothered him deeply. If he was no use to Marsol he was no use to himself. Even Arilwen was aware that her husband always put Marsol above all else, even himself. It vexed and depressed Wyrvaust that he had gotten in so much trouble that he had become a detriment to his lord. Much as he wanted to go home, he also desired with an even greater desperation to help Marsol. He was hoping he could persuade Marsol to stay with him awhile, and talk, confide. This was his hope.



Now here was what might be his brother. If it was him, how would he fit in? Marsol would want to KNOW he could be trusted. Trust was hard to prove until proven. When the handsome fellow called him by Mumaaq a breath caught in the Raven's lungs and he had to remind himself that demons could steal the memories of those they possessed, and there were other ways one could find secrets, just as Gilriael was quietly seeking them now. He ran into some walls however... well not walls exactly, more like pits... trying to read Cevari was like trying to see into the abyss. 'Abyss Walker indeed,' Wyrvaust heard the dragon across from them gutter and as a bardic dragon his voice was quite guttural. Sucking in a deep breath and better able to see his brother now, Wyrvaust addressed him on the assumption it was his brother he was talking to.

"Cevari... why seek the Raven for so long? A mammoth of the desert he is no more, but a raven and fox become. A demon of the same march his alleged brother claims to walk. Never would have Marsol's devoted chaotic imagined his little brother should live so long as he... But if it is so... he can only hope with the deepest aches in his heart his little shadow has not suffered in all these years... Has..." He paused and swallowed. "Has he?" his words as he asked this choked.

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(04:54:15) JD: Maelmorda was in the middle of a conversation with his son when Marsol called, and was happy to hear from his old friend. Two conversations at once was like sipping a mint julep for the even older dragon. "I did indeed send him. Hope he's been no inconvenience. The lad tends to think with his heart and act on his passions. Gets him into trouble now and again. Like the time he struck a deal with me," he paused to laugh. "He sold his soul on the promise I would help him find his brother. I agreed and because he did not specify how soon, my lesson to him was waiting until now to tell him where Wyrvaust could be found. Oh he was SO pissed off for SO long, but eh, what's he gonna do? His under-sight." The Morning Star cackled.

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Orcus:

Anna walked along behind Arilwen following her further inside her home to see if her friend liked or disliked the current state. Of course some stuff had been moved to be folded and hung up neatly to make room for more. Like that closet for instance contained three more outfits for herself and Wyrvaust and "little" Anwaar from a tailor Anna hounded for a month to finish early in time for their return. She did not know of Anwaar sprouting like a bean stalk though. If she did then she would have made those baby clothes into that of a young mans! She wanted Arilwen and her family to have their home to come back to. Not just any home but THEIRS. Anna shook her head when Arilwen asked and cried those deliriously happy tears. It made her chest swell to see Arilwen happy again. "There was only a bit of sand near the entry I swept out," she told Arilwen, now turning bright red in the face because she was still to this day painfully shy about certain things. Being thanked was one of those things. Putting her arms around the Swan she squeezed her. She couldn't wait to hold Anwaar and ommomnom his piggies and have her hair pulled. But mostly mock eat his too ties.

Willow: ##### LOG #####

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JD: Time had been a rather elusive mistress to Wyrvaust lately (which was no wonder considering Malmorda had been screwing with his sense of it) therefore when he and Marsol arrived at the lair by the garden entrance with his brother entow, and Wyrvaust was convinced it WAS his younger brother, whom he had never even spoken to Marsol OR his wife of, Wyrvaust could not have told you if it was half an hour or ten hours ago Gilriael had come to them with Cevari. One of the odd things Gilriael had informed Marsol of on his end was that the fellow had ridden him quite well from the desert to the lair, much as Gilriael had carried the Neffari Abyss Walker to the lair on his back this time, not gripped in his talons as before. Gilriael had come with Marsol simply because he felt as if an extra pair of dragon eyes could not hurt, that and he simply enjoyed his chieftain's company. This creature on his back, no matter how unfamiliar he felt to Gilriael, felt plenty familiar to Wyrvaust, not only because of the high likelihood that he was his brother, but because like himself, Cevari was a creature of the abyss. He could sense all the things abyss in his brother. He found it strangely comforting that his brother had ended up in the same place as he had. The two dragons, one huge and the other colossal landed on the sand packed earth outside the garden where the canyon opened up wide and leveled off somewhat with the ground above it. From there they walked, Gilriael and Marsol both shifting into forms more managable to the narrowing of the canyon walls, which soon met the rock wall which closed off the canyon end and garden. They were all dusty with the desert and Wyrvaust was no exception. His desert coloured robes betrayed the sand and dust mostly where the embroidery and stitching was caked by it. His long hair too was dulled by it. His eyes however were bright as they entered the garden, much brighter than they had been in a long, long time. His chest however felt constricted with the kind of joy at his homecoming that could only charge his nerves. Indeed he came up short of the door to plopp down at the table center the garden, a stone table with wood chairs around it. His eyes then lifted on Marsol.

"Will his chieftain be staying awhile? The raven hopes his dear chief will stay awhile..." A request every bit as much as a question.

Gilriael mean time threw a rather heavy arm round Cevari's shoulder. "Question is what to do with this fellow. We can't be sure he isn't an agent of the Adram clan, brother or not. He is an abyss specter after all." Maelmorda had confirmed Cevari was Wyrvaust's brother but little else.

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LiftTheDarkness: Cevari looked puzzled by Wyrvaust's question. How could he not search for him for so long? "I believed I would know it, had you died. As long as you were living, how could I not try to find you?" He responded, giving his head a shake that sent those ebony waves dancing against his back. That next comment gave him pause. He couldn't tell him that he had never suffered, of course. He'd traded his soul to the devil, and had been left in the abyss for what had been three years but felt an eternity. Learning to be what he now was had been a lengthy process. Acheron had left its mark, and he couldn't deny that. "Everyone suffers a little, brother mine. But look how I've come out of it. No worse for wear, and with a brother to show for it. That's all I ever wanted." He gave him that grin of his.

He followed along, of course, when it came time to change location. Wherever his brother went, he was not about to be budged from his side, if he could help it. Not yet. He was rather pleased that he was not toted along in the dragon's claws this time, like a particularly tasty sheep, or something. He was moving up in the world! As they walked, now, he was trying to shake sand out of his fine clothes. His entrance had gone all to hell. At least he could try to avoid being caked with sand.

Cevari staggered a bit in surprise when that arm was thrown heavily around his shoulders. "What do you have against abyss spectres, anyway?" He grouched. "That's stereotyping. I have no such connection to that clan." This 'distrust the abyss spectre' thing was getting old pretty quickly. #

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Willow: Oh, if only the Swan knew that there was quite the procession showing up in their garden. The garden that she had not even SEEN yet since she had arrived today. She and Anna were too busy giggling over Arilwen's stories of how she had met Wyrvaust and how ..taxing.. it had been to try to understand him at first. Anna was seated at their table while Arilwen poured tea into clay mugs, grinning her gorgeous little self away. "I couldn't understand but every...fifth or sixth word out of his mouth? And they were so jumbled. He would desperately try to talk to me and I would get so frustrated that I would plunk down on the couch and fold my arms. Then he would want to smell my hair and trace the angry wrinkles on my face." Arilwen put down the plain tea pot and sat down across from Anna, dumping a little extract into her tea that was taken from one of the cactii in her garden. It was insanely sweet, so she only put a dribble. "I do wish to tell you, though...that the clothing you had made for Anwaar MIIIGHT be a little on the...ahem...small side?" #

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Orcus: Marsol looked over those walls and that garden after they landed to head inside with an appreciative eye. Even in one of the most harshest terrains in the world there was beauty. He did not sit at that stone table initially because in truth he had not planned on staying. His mood was not in the best of sorts he did feel a lightness in his heart to be amongst family. And so after considering leaving he decided to stay, if only for a while, taking a seat across from Wyrvaust as he nudged one of the guardsmen to go bring Arilwen, Anwaar, and Anna here. Granted Anwaar had to be pried away from having fun with his sons, whom he also invited to come, but Anwaar II surely would be as glad to see his parent under their own roof as they were. "For dinner," Marsol says, a rumbling in his stomach. "Will you have us for it, my friend," he asks, not commands, Wyrvaust. It was respectful when in another mans house after all. Elsewhere Anna shook her head and giggled at the sweetness of her tea. "Too small," she exclaimed. The look on her face was rejection as she thought on those baby clothes. Maybe she miscalculated his tooties? "I can resow them. Truly I can. It would only take me a day, two most." Sipping her tea she wrinkled her nose unconsciously. "Smell your hair?" Her expression was uncertainty. Maybe Arilwen washed her hair in flower soaps? Soon a guard came to inform them that their presence was requested by the chieftain.[fin]

JD:

Wyrvaust had looked at Cevari when he had asked him how he could not have looked for him when he was so sure he was alive. Wyrvaust had always hoped for a normal life for his brother but had never really LET himself wonder if was alive or dead either way... He had never looked for him either, because he wanted to spare him, feared Mendorin would get his hands on him, if nothing else than to use his brother against him. In a way, he had chosen to believe Cevari was dead rather than risk the temptation of looking for him and over the years, he just continued to let himself believe he was a mortal who over the course of time died as a mortal. Wyrvaust could only accept that he had suffered as all did suffer, but without too many scars. He did seem... like the brother he had known, so far. Cocky, full of life, charismatic as the sun and stars.

Now where it had been only a day for Arilwen, it had been weeks for Wyrvaust, weeks filled with visits from his son, Anwaar, whom he had watched practicing at the sword with Marsol's slightly older sons, Amaru and Ardwyr... The three As as Amaru amusedly liked to call them. He jokingly called he, his brother and Anwaar the A Mob, soon to be terrors of the desert. Anwaar was indeed a young man now, and only a child in his youthful charisma and perhaps because his mother and even his father wished to keep him that way as long as possible. Anwaar had genuinely spent two actual days with his father which Malcomb via Maelmorda's remote abilities had spread into weeks in his little time subterfuge.

Wyrvaust could tell Cevari's patience was wearing thin, another trait he remembered his brother having clearly. Seemed it was a part of his character he would not be outgrowing, if he had not in six and half hundred plus years. "Understand the Raven's dragon friends you must, Cevari. It has only... hours been since you arrived." He was pretty sure it had only been hours. "And powerful are all our enemies. All too easily they might have... recreated the Raven's lost shadow, or dominated him, or mirrored him to make a spy or lure any one of us into a trap. Many are the ways to duplicate what is in believable facsimilies. And war rages in the continents around us and spills onto my king's backyard. Be patient with us," he advised and then looked to Marsol with a smile as he decided to sit down.

"Your Raven's heart fills with gladness that his king will stay," he promised Marsol and stood. "Our home is his, and his men's, and Cevari's. Excuse the Raven while he prepares dinner." How long had it been since Wyrvaust had made supper for his family and chieftain? Too long, when he had once done so often. Wyrvaust had only acquired one servant after he married Arilwen to help her with Anwaar and she had ended up kidnapping their child. They had gotten him back but the lesson remained, trust your family to very few. Wyrvaust had always invited Marsol for dinner and cooked for him, and cooked for Arilwen and Anwaar often as well. Now, just like that, Marsol got up and marched into the house he had not seen in so long. He went straight to the kitchen and lit a fire, as if he had never left the place. He returned to Marsol and poured him a huge mug of fine wine, then, he returned to the kitchen and gathered the ingrediants he needed and what he didn't have he snuck, from fresh markets all over... The wine for instance he had taken from a camp. It was Redlion and Blacklion Wine, he had snatched a bottle of each. A ham here, some palm fruit there, some nut grass from another... He just reached right through the ether and grabbed what he needed. If he'd had gold he would have left payment in place of what he took, but he had none. So today, he was a thief without the slightest remorse. He saw it simply as taking. Some merchants had wards against the kind of 'shopping' Wyrvaust was doing, he did not take from them. His

larder was rather empty at the moment so he did what he needed to. Before long he was setting a fine meal on the table for his family and much loved and respected visitors.

When the table was all set, he went back to the garden and called Marsol, Cevari and Gilriael in with a cheerful, "Supper is on, friends and brother." He held the door open for them, and then when they were inside, he went to call Arilwen, Anwaar and Anna, as if he had not just arrived and spoken for the first time to any of them in a year. "Beloved Swan... supper is ready. Will our beautiful bird call Anwaar and Anna to supper with her?" he called to her.

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LiftTheDarkness: It was true that Cevari had not changed much, at least in certain ways, from the day they were separated. He was still cocky, yes, though that was more of a tactic to take attention away from the fact that he very much had no idea what he was doing. He did tend to be short-tempered regarding certain things as well. Despite his years of searching, he was not exactly known for his patience. He was still wrapping his head around how very much his brother seemed changed. He was definitely a little more...peculiar than he remembered. Not necessarily in a negative way. The speech patterns were different, at the very least.

He looked perhaps a little frustrated, but gave a reluctant nod. Fine. He would play nice and put up with their suspicions for a little longer. "Patience has never been my strong point." He admitted. The lack of ability to wait patiently for his brother's return was what had sent him searching in the first place.

When his brother went marching inside, Cevari lingered in the garden, unsure where he ought to place himself. He didn't want to crowd him. He waited until he was invited inside and raised his eyebrows at the spread in front of him. Wyrvaust had been busy! #

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JD: #Now the inside of Wyrvaust's lair was a blend of stone and marble, mine meets what little was left of palace. The floors that were marbled were gorgeous, deep blues, greens and reds, while some of the floors were just bare but smooth stone. The walls were much the same. There were not many rooms. Most of the mine and city had been buried by the desert long ago, albeit there were secret chambers Wyrvaust had secret accesses to. There was the kitchen off the garden, the fountain chamber and dining room off the tunnel from the kitchen, a largish bath house, and three bedrooms off the corridor where the floor became marble again. It was not the palace it had once been. There were some very pretty little sapphires in some of the bare walls however, which Wyrvaust had uncovered when digging what he did of the tunnels out. He liked the jewels just where they were. The ceilings in all the rooms but the fountain chamber were low. The part of the palace he had uncovered had been where the servants lived, and lacked the high vaulted ceilings of some of the hidden chambers far deeper down he had uncovered. One of those chambers he used for his arcane practices and enchanting, while another was a prison. Marsol was the only one who even knew of these other rooms. Wyrvaust had his secrets. He had never really meant to keep secrets from Arilwen or Anwaar. He had just never gotten around to revealing those rooms to them. Just as he had not intentionally concealed his past life from them.

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Willow: Resew it? Arilwen just nodded and sipped her tea to hide a grin. Anna couldn't yet comprehend just how quickly Anwarr was growing. The look on her face when she saw him would be great. The two finished two cups of tea a piece and were starting on a third when Arilwen smelled...food. What? Had Anna put something in as a cherry on top of her surprise sundae? The confused look on her petite friend's face told her the answer to that and Arilwen put down her mug and stood, moving cautiously through the house. A break in...dinner? Who even knew of this place? What she DIDN'T expect to see when she rounded the corner was Wyrvaust. Yes, her husband was cooking up a storm in their kitchen. Arilwen stood in absolute flabbergasted silence and gawked at him as he moved. He was...chipper. He seemed to be enjoying himself? She couldn't even get a word out. She could swear, by the time he was hauling food to the dining hall, that he had seen her, but he said nothing. He didn't avoid her gaze like she had been dealing with for so long, but he didn't say a word to her. Arilwen knew that she had to be careful here. She wasn't supposed to be out of her room, for cripes sakes. Now here was her possibly-still-unstable husband cooking food. He left the kitchen and her in a whirlwind and the next thing she knew...he was calling for her. CALLING for her. Saying her NAME. Before Arilwen could even try to choke out a sound, Anna was there, taking her gently by the arm to lead her to the dining hall. Wyrvaust was adjusting trays on the table. Marsol...people she didn't know. Anwarr, looking anxiously at the food. He knew it was rude to snatch it, but he was a growing boy, and his long fingers may be sneaking across the table to try to nab something or other. She could feel Marson staring at her and she met his gaze. She wasn't sure what to say. Was she dreaming? The Swan rubbed her face, blinked four times, then peered at the table. No, they all were there. She was white as a ghost when Anna led her to the table and she sat. Sweet, sweet Anna probably expected some romantic reunion because her heart was sweet like that. Arilwen had just been hoping that he could meet her eye when they finally came together again. She DIDN'T expect to be made dinner at a table of mixed company. Still, she sat, her hands limp on her lap as she gawked at the people there.#

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Orcus: Marsol kept an eye on Cevari from the second he showed up at his gates. Granted he no longer suspected him not to be who he claimed to be, owed solely to Maelmorda devulging that vital information, but that did not mean he was categorized as "safe" just yet. Too many times he saw friends and loved ones played like marionettes by his enemies. Since Cevari was Wryvausts brother it meant more careful handling if he discovered the abyss specter to be treacherous. For the snatchy fingers he cast an stern look on Anwaar II then reached for a piece of something meaty himself to eat. The dry smile he gave the youth was his way of saying be quick if you're going to take it. Like a mischevious uncle. Anna did not know her father would be there. So when she entered the room with Arilwen in arm she felt her chest tighten and an intense burning in her eyes. How long has it been? Too long. She gave Cevari, Gilriael and Anwaar II friendly smiles as she took her seat at the table and tried not to stare. They were all dashing handsome men! It was not her fault her father kept gorgeous company dagnabit! Since the last time she saw the Raven and Swans son was when he was still an infant she did not recognize him then. She squeezed Arilwens hand under the table to try to encourage her to conversate, smile, something. "May I pour your drinks," she asked, trying to

shoe away this slight awkwardness in the air. She would if those at the table said yes. Now when it came to Marsol she could and could not meet his fiery amber golden gaze at the same time. On the one hand she was becoming emotional that he was there. On the other, she felt ashamed in tricking the guard back at the tower to bring Arilwen home. Something like that just was not on her usual list of things to do. Maybe she was over reacting about it? Or maybe her actions were worse than she thought and he was angered by her?[fin]

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JD: Wyrvaust had only chuckled quietly when Cevari said patience had never been his strong suit. Wyrvaust was quite the opposite. He had always been uncommonly patient with only a few exceptions. He had no patience for being separated from Marsol, Arilwen, or Anwaar. Of course he understood Marsol could not always be around. It was the forceful separation from him he would not endure. Such as when an enemy got their hands on him. Otherwise, Wyrvaust bided his time well, for long periods of time at least, before he had to check in on his king.

Now here the Desert Fox was, at that large thick surfaced table in one of the rooms which did have marble floors and walls. He could barely remember when he last sat down at it. And here was his king, his brother, his wife, her best friend, his son, and entering shyly because Wyrvaust forgot to call him was Grym, that strangely lovely cat-like man creature Wyrvaust had created while inhabiting another body. The Abyss Demon felt as if he were in a dream and would wake any minute now in the nightmare he had been living in not so long ago. Perhaps he would wake up in a cage next to Grym. Or perhaps in the corner of a palacial bedroom watching his wife sleeping with a devil, or was he an angel now? Seeing Cevari there made it all seem even more surreal.

The smells rising from the table were delicious. There was the ham, yes, but also all manner of other foods he had roasted and steamed over the fire and it had not taken him long. He was one hell of an open flame chef. Cevari would remember how well Wyrvaust could cook and he'd had over six hundred years to improve on those skills. The demon knew just the right kind of combinations of spices to bring the best flavors out in foods. He knew just how long to cook things, with which kind of utensils, and on what kind of flames. He knew how to take a large cut of meat and cut it up so it could be cooked quickly. Cooking had in fact been just the thing he needed to break the ice off of his home coming. Gilriael was sure Marsol had planned for him to take his belly growling hint all along. He even smiled at his lord and ribbed him gently with his elbow as they went inside. The weredragon sucked in a deep breath of the savory smells and settled in a chair next to his chieftain. Chieftain might have been a second class king in the neffari world, but not so in the dragon world. Chieftain was no different than king. Among dragons there was no high king persay; each tribe had a chieftain all its own. If there was a high king among them it would've been Maelmorda.

Wyrvaust in a rush found himself at Arilwen's chair, pulling it out for her, then pushing it back in, like he had seen so many servants do during their stay at the palace. He just wanted her to feel... special. That is why royal people did such things after all, right? He then leaned over her and smiled at her, his face up close with hers, then he vanished from her view momentarily as he straightened, and then moved around to sit next to her, placing her between Anwaar and Wyrvaust.

He smiled to Anna when she offered to pour the drinks. "Please," his expression thanked her. He laughed a little when Marsol gave Anwaar a lesson in dragon manners. Wyrvaust's table had never been one of grace but of grabbing. Seemed society had tamed Anwaar with courtely manners.

His eyes held Cevari a moment then settled on Arilwen. "The Rrrr... I... I have missed my most cherished Swan," he said shakily as he reached for some rolls, sweet and rich with fresh grains. It was unusual for him to refer to himself as I or my. He usually distanced himself from himself in conversation. He was trying to impress her. "He is... we are... I am most pleased she chose to... to come home to us." Leave Gabrian is what he meant. "His heart is... it swells so greatly in his chest... that he swears it shall as a tidal wave spill over..." Yet old habits died hard and he was unable to keep up the new way of speaking. He had not always spoken that way. His experiences with Mendorin had caused him to cut himself off from himself in any way he could, and his speech had been where it had stuck. Wyrvaust was not speaking when Marsol had first found him. Wyrvaust was someplace else altogether for a long time. He had not spoken in years, and it was years before he finally talked to Marsol. He had come around far more quickly this time. Arilwen and Anwaar were part of that equation. Marsol knowing how to manage him was also a part of it. Wyrvaust wanting so deeply to come home though was what had gotten him over the first and hardest hurdle. "Will she... stay... or... What is in her heart?" this he asked her quietly. He was actually a fan of not talking of serious matters over dinner, but afterward, but he could not wait that long to speak to her, and he could not speak to her of idle things.

"But first... The Raven would like for his Swan to meet his brother... from ages long past when he was a mortal. Caught up with him his younger has." He introduced, sweeping his hand towards Cevari. "Cevari... we give you our... wife..." Was she still his wife? She had married Gabrian. What exactly did that mean? He puzzled over these questions in silence.

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Willow: Anwarr watched Marsol with fascination, as he usually did, then grinned widely at his namesake. You had to be fast to steal food. He would practice that. Anwarr was growing faster than anyone could keep up with him. His dark hair was nearly to his shoulders now and pulled back with a leather string. Eyes the same color as his father's, and while his father was eccentric, Anwarr tended to be a little goofier. At least he was so far. He was so excited to be back in his home that he couldn't sit still, and he tucked one leg under him, then put it down in remembrance of table manners. He hadn't seen the redhead that was serving drinks quite yet because he was so focused on the thought of meat, but oh, when she stopped at his side, Anwarr reached up and grabbed her slender wrist while he stared quite brazenly at her, tilting his head just a little. "I know you." He murmured those words, then his dark brows shot up. "ANNA?!" Out of his seat he came and Anwarr suddenly bull rushed her, hauling her up in a bear hug while he spun her in a circle. Poor girl. He put her down and she was shaking. She was shy?! Uh oh. Anwarr was NOT shy. He snickered and patted her arm. "Sorry. Don't you remember me? We spent so much time together!" My, she had gotten pretty. Anwarr had never really taken notice of girls yet.

Arilwen was startled when Wyrvaust rushed up behind her to help her with her chair. His face was so close that the tip of her nose brushed his cheek and her breath



hitched in her chest. He was gone as quickly as he came, but he wasn't gone for long. He plunked down in the chair beside her and Arilwen just stared at him. Was she trembling? Maybe a little(lot). When he met her eyes and began to speak to her, Arilwen nearly came unwound like a tugged sweater string. Why was he trying to speak in first person? It was ODD to hear him do that. But he quickly slipped back into that way of speaking that made the Swan's brow relax and her heart explode. The words that had once confused her so now made her feel at home. Her hands reached for his and she slipped the roll from his hands, dumping it on his plate before she clutched his fingers in hers. "I have not felt more pain, agony, and confusion than I have recently. I thought you were lost to me... to our world." She was speaking softly so that not everyone was staring at them. "So..so much to say, so much to speak of. That will be later. Know this: If I have the choice, I will remain in our home with my family until my skin falls from my bones, whenever that may be. If...I am allowed." She glanced towards Marsol, then dropped it for now. They had dinner and guests. Wyrvaust absolutely stunned her when he introduced his brother. "Cevari... It is a pleasure to meet you." She wanted to point out that she had never HEARD of him, but that would be rude? She bit her lip, then glanced over to see her son swinging poor Anna around. She hooted with laughter. "Might take you more than two days to resew those things, huh Anna?" Poor, blushing Anna. Especially when Anwarr poked gently at her shoulder, demanding to know what his mother was talking about.#

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Orcus: Marsol remained silent as the noise level rose around the table. He held a mixed look of amusement, watchfulness, and something else that was harder to describe. Anna on the other hand was quiet because she was so utterly embarrassed by some young man taking hold of her wrist and then bear hugging the wits out of her. Why did he speak so familiar to her? Why was Arilwen laughing? What was so funny? Confused, embarrassed,she tried firmly but politely to wiggle worm out of this guys arms. But he was as tall as she was! No wait taller by an inch or two. Granted her being Namas she was older than some people but by others she, too, was just a child. "I have never seen you before," she squeaked, part of her wondering if this dear lad was insane. "How could I spend time with someone I have never seen before?" After being set down on shaky legs and feet she tried to smooth her dress out and kept her light blue eyes on the ground. Where was her chair? Right where she last sat in it. Wait. Resow. Did she mean.. But how? Anna was bewildered by Arilwens words. That made no sense to her. At first. "I.. I er... I would need more fabric to make HIS clothes?!" Realization gave way to excitement gradually. For now her cheeks stayed red but instead of trying to get away from little Anwaar she circled him to get a good look at him. So many questions! She poked the end of his nose then gathered her skirts in her left hand, reaching for his feet with her right hand, mockingly saying something about going to get his feetsies. Marsol clapped Gilriael on the shoulder with a knowing smile.[fin]

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JD:  
(00:23:34) JD: Wyrvaust was perfectly content once Arilwen assured him she was not planning on going anywhere. He observed the look she paid to Marsol out of respect, knowing what it meant, just as he knew Marsol was not about to take Arilwen away from her family. He would not have bothered bringing the Desert Fox home if that were the case. ""One may occassionally get lost only to find their way back again,"

he said softly on the subject of being lost. "The Raven was... unsure he would find his way home, but found his way nonetheless. All that matters now is that the Raven, his Swan and their son have found their way back to one another. The Raven shall do what he must to protect his own. We shall not be torn apart again."

Wyrvaust was going to erect all manner of wards and traps and raise all kinds of loyal and devoted creatures to guard their home and family. He was taking no chances. Not that he had before, but he HAD been unwilling to have guards or servants. But with raised or created minions, trust was not a question he had to concern himself with. The next child they had would not be guarded by someone who was merely dominated, but someone who was bound utterly to Wyrvaust's will.

"He... tried to make his troubles less painful to his cherished wife by leaving a part of himself behind while he traveled. He never imagined he would stumble into even greater misfortunes. Had he... had clarity of mind, or truly considered the dangers, he never would have strayed into the desert. He is ever so sorry to have brought despair to his beloved mate's heart. He is sorry he almost lost her..." He winced slightly then forced a smile that was pained but sincere. "But we are together and have the future to greet us. Let us forget the past and drink deeply of the joy in our hearts," he raised a glass of wine at that and held it up to her and when their glasses touched he emptied his glass and hugged her tightly. He trembled slightly as he did, for it had been so long since he had so much as held her.

His eyes the leaned on Cevari as he refilled Arilwen's glass and his own. "The Raven wishes to welcome his brother into his home as well, if willing he is to stay." He took a leap of faith with his instincts as his guide. He had no idea that Cevari's time on Morashtar was limited by what he was and his bonds with the Abyss. Every few weeks he had to melt into his spectral form and return to the kingdom that was his little piece of the Abyss. An ancient ruin deep in the throat of the abyss which had been restored over the ages, and the enormous shelf it sat on, which spanned a thousand leagues of rock, was his. It was a home plane he had to return to now and again. When he was young, he could only stay aware for a few hours at a time. Over the centuries as he had grown more powerful, he could stay away from his 'home plane' longer and longer durations. He had called his palace Bleak Palace as a joke, because of a Dickens book he had read loaned to him by the Morning Star. Bleak House. Maelmorda LOVED Dickens. It had really irked him when Haman had snatched his soul away from him.

"Will our Shadow now tell us who it is he serves, and what it is he does when not chasing the Raven across time?" he fished. As Cevari had called him mumaaq, Wyrvaust had called him 'Aldul' which meant brave shadow, because his little brother had often followed him everywhere. Seemed that had not changed either. And though Cevari avoided fights, he had great courage, something which few beyond Wyrvaust had ever really understood. Most mistook Cevari for a coward.

Now had Anna yommed his son's belly and slobbered on his toes, Wyrvaust would have thought her looney and likely asked Marsol to please not let his daughter molest his son. As it happened, he laughed at how happy Anwaar was to see Anna, surprised that he remembered her, and snickered as Anna figured out who Anwaar was. He was a handsome devil, what with a Mordim mother and a neffari father who just happened to be born attractive. For a moment he thought what a lovely couple they would make until he reminded himself of how young Anwaar was. It was easy to forget the way he

had grown. Indeed, Wyrvaust had missed much of that growth. Anwaar had been perhaps 16 in apparent age when Wyrvaust had been captured. Now he was what? In his apparent 20s? Wyrvaust had lost track. For all he knew Anwaar had stopped aging by now. It had felt like years that Arilwen had been with Gabriel when it had not been quite a year. It had felt like years he was with the slavers when it had only been a few months. Malmorda had not needed to worry about screwing Wyrvaust up time wise, because he was already utterly time disoriented.

Gilriael chuckled when Marsol smacked his back. He wished Marsol could stay with Wyrvaust for an extended period. It would do him good, but he had committed himself and his dragons to the war. Gilriael was not a fan of wars which did not involve their tribe, but it seemed this war was spilling over everywhere. So he would uplift his tribe with dragon and elf song alike and fight beside them when the time came. He had already taken part in one assault against Seumir's enemies. Gilriael had asked Marsol if he wanted him to sire dragons to fight with them, and Marsol said he would think about it. They could only sire those whose trust was already well established. Could not go around making dragons of anyone. And once made, Gilriael would have to train them in how to BE a dragon. Flight and dragon fire did not come quickly without expert instruction. There were good reasons Marsol had to sleep on it. He had to weigh the advantages against the pitfalls.

"I wish we could just avoid this damned war altogether so you could remain here with your friends and family, old dragon. Besides, Jedah can lead armies as well as anyone. This really isn't our war yet. Why not wait until it is before you involve yourself?" he wished to know. Had the Morning Star asked him to get involved? He had no idea to tell the truth, but if he hadn't, wasn't that message enough? Gilriael really had no clue what made the Morning Star tick but seemed to him, that if Maelmorda wanted Marsol involved, he would tell him.

Wyrvaust smiled brightly at his wife as she looked his way. The first thing he was going to do when he got her alone was beg her to make more children with him. Was he ready for that? Fatherhood and being a husband he could handle. He might be overzealous in their protection, but he would be that anyway after all that had happened.

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(00:48:04) LiftTheDarkness: Cevari was impressed at the life here that Wyrvaust had built for himself. A beautiful wife, to boot! He supposed he had imagined such a thing enough times, when he stopped to ponder where his brother might be, and what he might be doing. He glanced back to his brother when he was addressed, that smile quick to spring to his lips at being called Shadow once more. It did things to his heart, to be called that after so very long. Sweet, squeezey, achey things.

When he was invited to stay, he nodded. "I'd be happy to." Until he had to take a vacation back home, but by his count, he had a couple of weeks. He would bring it up to him before then, to prepare him for his absence, but hesitated to dump everything on him all at once. "As long as I'm not imposing?" He turned his attention on the lovely Arilwen, with a questioning glance. He didn't want to step on any toes, of course.

"Well, I serve the Morning Star, first and foremost. And myself, profit-wise. I split it with my men." He grinned. "I've had success as a merchant, mainly to the

varied residents of Acheron. They've all got their fancy, of course, and I do my best to collect whatever artifacts or trinkets their hearts desire. There's one who has an almost excessive fancy for glass flowers, if you can believe it. He pays me a pretty penny. I'll not name names, though. Confidentiality, you see." He had settled into what was clearly a silver-tongued salesman rhythm of speaking. "So, mostly, I fill my time with collecting and selling once more. It's been rewarding." And he liked it, that much was plain to see. #

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(00:53:59) Willow: Arilwen put down her glass, wine untouched, and gave Wyrvaust the most painful look, her fingers coming to cup his cheek. "You were so far away." She breathed, searching his face. "While you were lost, I became lost, and we were both wandering in the darkness, uncertain of where to go. We found our path, merged back onto our path with the guidance from those we love." They both knew that she was referring to Marsol. Marsol had swept in and plucked Wyrvaust back to his home...and had allowed Arilwen to return behind him.

The lip of her glass touched Wyrvaust's and she smiled softly, her eyes warm and hopeful. Was this it? Was it all calming down now? Could she go to bed beside her husband tonight and lock her arms around him and refuse to let go? She needed to relax. They had kind company, good food, wine. Was it hot in here? Tiny beads of sweat were forming at Arilwen's neck and she cleared her throat before picking up her wine to take a swallow. She immediately coughed into the back of her hand. It was WAY too strong. What was this? It caused her stomach to churn just a little, then it settled as she pushes the glass away and reached for the clay pitcher of cold water. One she chugged a cup of that, she started to feel better. It had been an emotional day. It still WAS. She needed to relax.

It helped a little that she was laughing at Anna and Anwarr. She didn't go quite so far as nomming his parts like she had threatened BEFORE she saw how big he was. A poke to the nose and she started teasing him right back. Anwarr wasn't taking this laying down, and he planted his rough palm on her forehead. "I remember you being... taller. Did you shrink? You are quite tiny now." His dark brows narrowed in concentration and then out came the grin. After a few moments he finally let the smell of food win over and he returned to his seat, where he heaped a plate and began eating like a ravenous wolf. Arilwen wrinkled her nose. "Shall I go fill a trough for you?" He grinned around a mouth full of ham and then closed his mouth, swallowed, and apologized. Arilwen cut her meat carefully. Something on her plate smelled odd. How could that be? Was something bad? A bite of potatoes. That tasted lovely. Some greens. Lovely as well. Ham? As soon as she got the first bite down, Arilwen made a horrible face and took an immediate swallow of her water. She didn't want Wyrvaust to feel bad, so she kept eating the rest of the food. And, since everyone else at the table seemed to enjoy the meat, maybe she just had a bad piece?

It was then that Cevari asked if he was imposing by accepting Wyrvaust's offer to stay. Arilwen quickly dried her mouth on her napkin and shook her head, giving him a warm smile. "Of course not. I know very little about Wyrvaust's past. It would be an honor to have his family stay with us." She settled back in her chair after refilling her water glass and kept her gaze on Cevari while he told tales of his business. The thought of glass flowers sounded lovely. "Who crafts the glass flowers? And do they craft other things?" Wouldn't it be lovely to find a raven

made from dark glass to give to Wyrvaust as a gift? Perhaps a set... a swan as well. Arilwen felt that twinge in her belly again and she shifted in her seat. The beads of sweat were back and she patted her neck with her cloth napkin, trying to drink more water. Was she allergic to the desert now? Wouldn't THAT be awful?!#

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(01:15:11) JD: "Found we shall stay," he promised Arilwen firmly, dedicated to that reality. His eyes then warmed on Marsol. "Indeed, a debt of many thanks we owe our chieftain and dearest friend," he agreed that Marsol had saved them, once again. "If he would but let us return the favor? Stay with us as long as the dragon needs and as often..." He would not force the issue but wanted him to understand how much he was loved and wanted there.

Wyrvaust helped Arilwen with the water when her cheeks flushed and she traded wine for a more refreshing beverage. "Is his... our... Is my Swan alright? She looks a little pale..." he noticed, but then she seemed alright after drinking some cool spring water. The water from the fountain and well outside were from the same source and was very cold and clear. Wyrvaust rubbed the back of her neck and worked his way to her back with concern and affection. Just touching her in the most innocent ways breathed life back into him. "The Swan is certain she is well? She is trembling..."

His eyes then leapt on his brother. "Imposing? No, no," he practically stumbled over Arilwen's own similar words to say and looked to her as Cevari did. He laughed that they welcomed him together.

"The Morning Star," Wyrvaust nodded. That was a great relief to him because Marsol served Maelmorda as well. There was no conflict of interest there. No enemies by association. "Your brother is glad to hear of it." He did not mind saying. "And Shadow is still a merchant? As I am still a priest and mage. We are amazed." He laughed a little when Cevari spoke of the kinds of items he delivered. "Why glass roses sound pleasing. The Raven made a vase of crystal roses for his Swan," he smiled at the memory. "We used the sand of the desert to spin the glass and shaped it round the roses from the garden." Of course he had spun the crystal differently than glass was blown. It was more like he captured the roses inside of clear diamonds. "The Raven can make many things. Perhaps his brother could purchase some of them." Wyrvaust was not opposed to money, he just did not go out of his way to find it. He made do with what he could conjure (steal really), grow (sometimes using elemental aids), find, and gather from his garden and the desert.

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(01:20:28) LiftTheDarkness: Cevari beamed when Arilwen followed up with that question. "Oh, any number of artist who's taken a fancy. A great many creators have died, so they are a little difficult to track down, but I know of at least one still actively producing them. They're quite a thing, really. Awfully lifelike, not a petal the same between them. I imagine they could create other things, though I've never had cause to bother them about it. I'm mainly just a go-between for this particular collector." He popped another bite of something in his mouth, and added afterward, "I'll put you in touch with him sometime, if you like." He was happy to do that, for someone his brother clearly cared for.

He smiled at his brother. "Old habits die hard, I suppose, for both of us." He perked up at the thought that he might buy some of his brother's creations to sell. "I'd be happy to," He assured him. He didn't mind helping his brother to profit a little, and if what he remembered of his brother's skill to be true, he would have no trouble finding a market for his creations.

He did turn a concerned eye on Arilwen, when his brother expressed his own worry. She wasn't looking very well at all. #

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(01:27:47) Willow: Arilwen waved her hand dismissively as Wyrvaust showed concern and began rubbing her back through her thin tunic dress. "Of course I am. It has just been an exciting day." She smiled at his worried disposition and leaned over to place the softest of kisses on his temple. The last thing she wanted was to worry him. Cevari was all too happy to tell her about the suppliers he worked with, then she beamed at Wyrvaust when he reminded her of what he had blown for her. "They really ARE lovely. I have only seen a little of what he can do, and I have those gifts carefully wrapped and buried in my trunk. I should put them on a shelf so that I can stare at them always, instead of taking them out each time that I want to admire them." She squeezed Wyrvaust's hand, then she looked thoughtful. "I would love some glass birds. A raven, a swan..." The Swan gave her husband a soft smile, but those relaxed features soon gathered into a worried look. "Will you please excuse me for a moment?" She whispered softly to Wyrvaust. There was plenty of chatter at the table, so she hoped to slip out unnoticed. She placed her napkin on the table and slipped from her chair, gripping the back before she pushed herself off and disappeared into the hall. By now she had sweat between her breasts, her shirt sticking to her, and she pressed a hand to her forehead. She wanted to lie down. #

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(01:41:42) JD:  
Wyrvaust frowned at his brother when he said he would put Arilwen in touch with this unnamed and unknown artist. "Through Cevari and none other the Swan shall purchase. Too many enemies have we to strangers meet for trinkets," he protested. Paranoid much? You betcha! "And mentioned a caravan our Shadow. Who compliments it and where is it now?" He was not done gathering information about his brother just yet. "Who commands it?" He would be shocked to discover that Cevari was the leader of his own merchant caravan. Cevari had never struck him as the leader type, but then, he had not known his brother for a VERY long time.

When Arilwen mentioned what she wanted to buy, his cheeks puffed out. "A perfect set that would be... The Raven shall build her a shelf to place her things on," he promised and kissed her cheek. She felt cool against his lips, yet she was beading with sweat.

That was that! When Arilwen showed real signs of being sick, the priest and Shaman in Wyrvaust kicked in and he scootched his chair back in a pivot to face her side. "Our Swan is ill... The reason we shall suss out and eliminate without delay," he insisted. Oh if he ONLY knew. But before he could do any such thing, she excused herself and left the table. For a moment he just stared after her, then sucking in

a deep breath, he stood and followed her.

Marsol and Gilriael stayed where they were, neither of them wishing to crowd the happy couple, confident Wyrvaust could manage it. If not, they would know about it. Gilriael swallowed a chewed piece of Ham and wiped his mouth on his sleeve, ignoring the napkins. Hellraptors tended to be barbarians in their human guises, when they had them. Not many in the tribe did. "I wonder what that's about?" His gaze then leaned on Wyrvaust's handsome younger brother. "You sell dragon skins by any chance?" he smiled as he asked.

Wyrvaust took her in his arms and turned her to face him. "What ails his divine bird? Has his food made her sick?" he began to draw her essence into himself and let it flow back to her, in much the same way he would drain someone, only he fed what he drew back to her, so as to gather the source of her illness.

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(01:49:22) Willow: Of course Arilwen appreciated how attentive her husband was. It made her a little angry that she wasn't feeling well on the very first night that they had together in so long, and that it was happening in the middle of a dinner party that she desperately wanted to be a part of. Still, she would rather have Wyrvaust stay and catch up with his brother and enjoy himself. She was certain that if she could just lie down with a cold cloth on her forehead that she would feel better after awhile. She was halfway down the corridor when she felt arms encircle her. The Swan turned into Wyrvaust and squeezed her eyes shut for a moment before opening them and meeting his concerned look. "The ham. I took a bite of the ham and it upset my stomach, that is all. Just a bad piece." But would Wyrvaust allow a piece of ham to be served if it was bad? Now that she was thinking... "And the wine. It was much too strong. The water was delicious." She fell quiet, studying his intense features. He was probably trying to sense what was upsetting her stomach. She probably wouldn't have ham again for a long time. #

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(01:58:27) LiftTheDarkness: Who commanded the caravan? That smile widened. "Why, that would be me." Truthfully, no one was as surprised as he. But then, he had a hell of a nose for the best sources to acquire wares, and his men had recognized that. He was the brains to their brawn, and that charisma was no joke. He could talk a lady out of her last coin, just by batting those eyes at her in the right way.

He watched after his brother as he followed his lady, and made no move to follow. He was not about to crowd the two of them, either. He glanced at Gilrael, and those dark brows shot up at the question. "Looking for an excuse to eat me up?" He wondered. He doubted dragons took dragon skin trade very well. "I can honestly tell you, I've not ever handled dragon skin." He'd never been asked to, truthfully. #

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(02:15:17) JD:  
Wyrvaust had simply stared at his brother with a faint smile when he announced it was HIS caravan. "The Raven hopes his Shadow travels the Desert of Fire with his goods. If he has all this time it is truly an act of chaos that we never crossed

paths." That said before he chased after his wife.

When the answer to what plagued his wife came back to him, as a secondary stream of essence from a secondary life, he gasped and let go of her suddenly as he staggered rearwards several strides and hit the wall with his back, not really aware of how he was gripping the stone with his fingers splayed wide.

"Famine..." he guttered. It was the first name he had ever known Gabriel by. He was breathing heavily and with rapid breaths with the shock of what he had learned. When Arilwen went on about the Ham his eyes cut into her like razors and he shook his head. "No!" he had not meant to snap but he had come undone. It was not her he was angry with, but Gabriel. "The boar is not the culprit... Famine has... has..." his voice cracked and he clamped his hand over his mouth. He walked away from her a short distance, down the hall towards the bedroom. Then back to her again. "A pale rider's seed grows within his Swan..." he choked the words out. He then rubbed his face, clearly disturbed. "He comes between us still... We wish... He wishes to..." THROTTLE THE HORSEMAN, is what he was thinking... and eat his spawn... That fell thought began as a whisper in his mind and grew louder. He had many ways to rationize why he should eat the child. Why eat? Because he could make sure its soul was destroyed that way. He could devour that as well, but only for certain by eating IT. He would assign it no gender or even call it what it was, a child.

When he saw how he had upset Arilwen he shoved himself off the wall and pulled her into his arms again. "Forgive us... we are stunned... Not angry with our beloved wife... We love her... love her so dear..." It was all he could do not to break down sobbing at this point. He was too fresh out of insanity's cage to come to grips with himself.

Gilriael leaned back in his chair with arms stretching out and hands settling behind his neck. "The digger holds himself up well, heh heh heh." He was amused. "Never? Well, I am sure the temptation shall overcome you one of these days. It IS in high demand after all. Smiths get rich with it, Warriors stay alive wearing it... It's only a matter of time. Surely someone has approached you with the request, not that I doubt you. I am just saying... I haven't met a merchant that won't sell it. By the way... You rode me like a dragon rider. Where'd you learn?" He did not dislike Cevari. He didn't like him either. He had not made his mind up yet. He DID find him attractive. He was even better looking than his elder brother.

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(02:28:02) Willow: What did Arilwen expect? Well, possibly to have Wyrvaust take her to bed? Tell her to rest? Get her some water? Arilwen looked stunned when he suddenly let go of her and stumbled back to hit the stone wall. "Wyrvaust?" She looked worried for him. Her mind briefly entertained that she had some sort of illness that was spread by touch. Hah, funny right? When the first word he choked out was "FAMINE", Arilwen turned white. "W..What? I--" He snapped and Arilwen jumped, not expecting that. He was coming unraveled and Arilwen knew from experience that she had to try to pick out meaning in his words, even though they may seem mostly random. "F..famine? I..." It unnerved her to see him this way and she was shaking harder than she could ever remember in her entire life when he began to move away from her. She managed one step forward before he swung around and stormed back, raving about a pale rider's seed. A planted seed? Who was the pale rider? Some of the puzzle pieces clicked into place and Arilwen froze. No. No,



it couldn't be. Seed. He meant he had sensed that she was with child. And whose could it be? Only Gabrian's, unless something had happened to her that she was completely unaware of. The swan was sweaty, shaking, and standing in the middle of the corridor while her husband had a bit of a breakdown in his own way. What was her own way? She would surely be having one soon if this was true. He staggered forward to beg for forgiveness and Arilwen's fingers gripped onto his robes while she tried to keep her balance. Everything started to spin, slowly at first, then more quickly, and she squeezed her eyes shut. She was shaking her head back and forth and no words would come out. It was as if her mouth were filled with glue. Hot tears snaked down her flushed cheeks and she tried to speak, though words came out as broken as his. "Sure? My raven is certain? Could it be ANYTHING else? ANYTHING?" She was gripping his robes harder now, wet eyelashes flying open as she demanded it of him. She didn't want to be in that situation. She didn't want HIM to be in that situation. She didn't want IT to be there. What if it was? What if he was right? She could vaguely recall that her first few days of pregnancy with Anwarr were a nightmare. She had been violently ill. Then, three days later, she woke up rested and chipper and hungry. If Wyrvaust confirmed it, Arilwen would dissolve into tears. She seemed to be begging him as she shook her head, looking terrified. "I didn't know...I DIDN'T KNOW. I-- Don't let him send me back. I cannot bear to be away from my heart another moment." She was terrified that Wyrvaust wouldn't be able to cope with this...And that Marsol would see red and ship her back to Gabrian.#

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(02:58:30) JD:

Strangely enough, seeing his wife unravel glued some of Wyrvaust's crumbling bits and pieces back together. When she began to plead with him, his arms tightened around her and by the time she was begging him not to let 'him' send her back, he had gathered her up in the cradle of his arms and was carrying her to their bedroom. He knew for a fact that Marsol and Gilriael could hear every single thing going on in that hallway, and that Cevari might as well. Anna he was not too sure of, but she was worried.

She had wanted to go after Arilwen but Marsol had stopped her with a look. He needed to know what Wyrvaust could and could not cope with, and how he did when he did. He would act when he felt the need to. Cevari could do as he liked for the time being. It was the best way to get a better picture of him. Marsol might have even already known about the child Arilwen carried. He would unless Gabrian had protected it from sight, in which case the only reason Wyrvaust had detected it was because he had used a vcry unusual method of seeing within his wife. He had pulled what she was inside of himself and taken a sort of abyssal peek at her when he had felt that other life form flowing through him. It was not a probe or scan, and not the kind of combination of powers Gabrian could have known to guard against.

"We are certain, beloved... A part of him lies within you. But do not despair," he spoke gently to her now as he carried her down the corridor. "Figure out what to do we shall together... and together we shall stay until all the stars burn out. Never fear being taken... Our chieftain knows who the Raven's heart is and that his heart is forever. This will not compel him to take what the Raven most needs in the world. Nothing and no one shall ever take the Swan from the Raven again. Glass figures of ourselves we shall not purchase, but of clear gemstone of most unbreakable kind," he proposed with all his heart as he laid her down in their bed

and covered her with the soft furs. Oh in the chasm of his mind he was imagining all sorts of things he would not repeat to Arilwen. He would do what had to be done and no injury to her mind, heart or body would come of it, that he would see to.

Gilriael was puzzled when Cevari told him that Mael had instructed him in that most privileged of arts. "A merchant who can ride dragons... that has got to be a first. If Maelmorda taught you, there has to be a reason. Damned though if I can figure what it is...

Ere came the merchant astride dawn scales,  
And billows flames about him flared,  
Whence gold upon the field it rained,  
Swooped he on borrowed wing to claim,  
And golden bounty to lair return,  
A gift for the king of wyrms."

Gilrial shrugged after his bardic improvisation. "Makes no sense... really." Yet there was a reason for it perhaps no one would understand until it came to pass. (02:58:38) JD: #

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(03:06:00) Willow: Arilwen was an absolute wreck by the time that Wyrvaust gathered her up in his arms. She hugged his neck and wept softly. Somewhere between sobs she was whispering apologies. Her husband was back in the land of the living. He was speaking to her, touching her, loving her. And now this. She didn't let go of him until he laid her down and began covering her in furs, and she looked miserable and heartbroken. However, Wyrvaust showed an impressive amount of growth by momentarily pulling himself together to assure his hysterical bird that Marsol would not part them over this. It WAS good that Wyrvaust didn't mention what ideas he had for the spawn inside of her, because that would make her terrified to sleep or relax around him. That was exactly the opposite of what should be happening between them now. Then again, so was another man's child. "Gemstones..." She echoed softly. She seemed to be calming as he touched her and the familiar feel of their bed beneath her helped that along. She suddenly felt so tired... her eyelids like iron vices. Her hand snaked up to take his as she closed her eyes. She wouldn't be awake for long. "Tell them I am sorry..." She nearly told Wyrvaust to advise the guests that she would feel better in the morning, but that might not be true.#

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(03:31:37) LiftTheDarkness: Unaware, of course, of the turmoil that was going on in another room, Cevari was still nibbling away at things. It was rare that he was treated to a spread such as this, so of course he was going to make sure he got his fill. He shrugged his shoulders at Gilriael's response. "Aren't you lucky that you've such protection built right in?" He responded, helping himself to another swallow of wine. "One learns plenty, if they stick around the Morning Star long enough. Surely there must be stranger things than a merchant astride a dragon." He was amused.

His manner had cooled a bit towards Gilriael after that initial flight. Less flirty, that was for sure. Even if he was a pretty thing, Cevari was rightly deciding to be a bit cautious around him. He didn't want to become a snack. That second ride had actually been nice, though. He loved the freedom of that kind of ride, the open air, the warmth of the sun. He could get used to that kind of thing,

now and again. He thought this Gilriael could be fun to get to know, if he could sheath his claws and put away him acid tongue for a little while.

He was a little surprised when Gilriael started playing bard. "My, if my tongue is silver, yours must surely be gold. You've a way with words." He was preening a bit, clearly pleased. He thought that particular verse ought to become lore in these parts. He would very much like to become a thing of legends. #

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Willow: ##### LOG #####  
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Willow: Dinner was going well, aside from his mother looking ill. But Anwarr knew that she had gotten frequent headaches when she lived with Gabriel and would often go lie down... usually when she got upset about Wyrvaust and didn't know what to do. He would sneak glances at her but it seemed that his father was giving her rapt attention, so he didn't dwell on it. What did he dwell on? Possibly waiting until his mouth was full and no one was looking so that he could stick his tongue out at Anna. Sure, he had a twenty-year-old body of lean muscle, light brown from refusing to stay inside for too long, but he wasn't quite grown yet, so that definitely showed in his attitude. You could tell the level of naivety because he didn't register that this was Marsol's daughter, and thinking she was pretty and swinging her around probably didn't look good. Marsol might have a 'hands off' policy. Still, they were all aware that Anwarr adored, respected, and slightly feared his high lord, so he wouldn't push anything that he thought might look bad. Halfway into dinner, his mother excused herself and Anwarr frowned, putting down his fork. She was sweating and dismissed herself down the hall, his father hot on her heels. Anwarr glanced across the table at Anna and could tell by the look on her face that she was probably struggling with the thought of whether or not she should tail after them. Anwarr gave her a tiny smile, then took a drink of his water. He heard nothing of the commotion that followed, but began poking at his food, mounding his potatoes into a sloppy looking castle. #

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Orcus: thought might look bad. Halfway into dinner, his mother excused herself and Anwarr frowned, putting down his fork. She was sweating and dismissed herself down the hall, his father hot on her heels. Anwarr glanced across the table at Anna and could tell by the look on her face that she was probably struggling with the thought of whether or not she should tail after them. Anwarr gave her a tiny smile, then took a drink of his water. He heard nothing of the commotion that followed, but began poking at his food, mounding his potatoes into a sloppy looking castle. #  
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Willow: Anwarr knew that Anna cared a lot about his mother and father. He had heard stories about when he was a baby and they had hired a servant to watch over him. The servant had kidnapped him. That was when Marsol brought Anna forth and she turned out to be a gem and life-long family friend. Pushing his plate away, Anwarr looked up and followed Anna as she moved around the room until she arrived at his side. He answered her question with a shrug. "She would get headaches a lot when my father wasn't well. But I have never seen her like this." The only other time she had been this way was when she was pregnant with Anwarr, but of course he wouldn't

know that! Fidgeting in his seat, he looked up at her and smiled. "Want to go light a fire outside? I'm tired of sitting here." Anwarr didn't do well sitting still just yet. He was happiest when he was outside in the heat.##

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Orcus: Of course pregnancy was the last thing Anna would ever think. She knew next to nothing about Arilwen and Wryvausts stay with some dude named Gabrian other than it was one huge mistake that helped Wryvaust get better. At one point Anna had told Arilwen she would slap this Gabrian cur if she ever laid eyes on him for the trouble he's caused their family. Naturally this wasn't possible but one can always dream right? She nodded to going outside and excused herself, kissing Marsol on his left cheek on her way out. "It is quite disconcerting to see how much of a man you are becoming Anwaar," she said once they were outside. "What will I do with all the clothes I sowed for you? They cannot fit over your feet!" She did an exaggerated sigh then giggled as they gathered timber for the fire. [Fin]

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Willow: Anwarr looked pleased as punch that she agreed, then he hopped up and followed her outside. Just at the end of the garden was where they headed, where Wryvaust had built a stone fire pit from rock he had mined when he built his home. Anwarr wrinkled his nose and gave Anna a look as he went to squat down, piling dried out wood into the pit. "Father says I grow faster than some other beings because of who my parents are. Sometimes it hurts my bones, but I seem to be slowing down now." Flint rocks in hand, he struck them together four times before the spark caught kindling. "You are just irritated that I am taller than you now." Oh, that grin could be seen a mile away, couldn't it? "What have you been doing with life? Did you find any more slowly-growing babies to coddle?##

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Orcus: "Anwaar!" She huffed then laughed because it was funny and true at the same time. Her shortness made it difficult for most guards or people for that matter to take her seriously. Yes she was petite. So what! She was fun size! Flicking a fingernail sized piece of wood at him, she said, "One of the women in the kitchen had a boy about two weeks ago. They named him after his father and he has these little brown nubs for horns on his forehead." It became obvious Anna loved talking about babies. She wore the look of someone who wanted children but would not push for them. "What have you been doing with all your free time Master Anwaar," she asked, mock serious face, "Training to be a gladiator? "[Fin]

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Willow: Anwaar swatted away the piece of wood and snorted, standing up once he got the fire going so that he could go plop himself on a bench where he drew his legs up and sat cross-legged. Anna lit up when she talked about babies. "HORNS? That sounds AWESOME!" Horns looked tough, didn't they? Anwaar rolled his eyes when she referred to him as "Master" and made fund of his training. It made him laugh, nonetheless. "I've been learning sword work. They tried to cram school down my throat when I lived with Gabrian, but I ran away all the time." He shrugged. "Father was teaching me important things I need to know first, like cooking and hunting and survival skills." Wasn't that the basis of life...surviving? "You

should have some babies. You like them, huh?" ...Yep. Smooth.#

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Orcus: There was that name again. Gabrian. It made her head hurt with being mad at some dude she's never even met before. "Father tried to teach me how to fight with a sword once but I..". Her words trailed off as she poked at the fire with a stick. "I do want children. Niculaie and I are trying to have a baby. Will you wish us luck?" Despite Anwaar having good intentions and being innocent in his questions she felt the color rise in her face about babies.[fin]

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Willow: Anwaar tilted his head and watched Anna turn red again. "Why do you always turn that color? And who is Niculaie? Your face looks like the sun was on it for too long." Children were blunt and he was somewhere between a child and an adult. "Why do you have to try? Is it hard for you to figure out how to mate?" His parents had been very open about how that whole thing worked. Attraction, mating. They were very simple in speaking about it and treated it like a natural occurrence. By the time he was done asking questions, Anna's face was going to catch fire.#

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Orcus: She glanced up, dropping her stick, and her face must've turned even darker. Immediately she put both hands up to cover her cheeks and turned her face downwards to the ground to hide behind her red mane. "Anwaar its personal," she almost whined, crossing her feet where she was sitting. "Yes we know how to mate. Its just sometimes it is not easy for people to conceive. Niculaie is my fiancée and YOU need more timber for this fire." Keeping her hands over her face the entire time she spoke just made her look as silly as she felt. In truth Anna wanted children very much. She missed those squealing fists of Anwaars when he use to pull her hair as an infant.[fin]

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Willow: Anwaar leaned back on his seat and just grinned. He looked proud of himself for making her face flame. "Personal? Pfft." He rolled his eyes. She was so easily embarrassed. "What? Fiancee? Like...you are going to be his sworn mate?" Anwaar made a face. "What is he like?" It was an honestly curious question while he stood and went to put more wood on the fire, poking at it with a thick stick. "Does your heart belong to him? Do you love him like my father loves my mother?"#

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Orcus: "Yees personal, don't you sass me just cause you're taller!" She was loosing this battle. Uncrossing then recrossing her feet Anna shook her head to get some of her hair off her shoulders. "I am. We will be married soon. We have not settled on where tho. He is adventurous, like you. He was found by my father who took him in. He is a skilled fighter and I think he likes sparring with my father just for the fun of it. Its so dangerous." Her heart? She smiled at that and lowered her hands from her face. "I do love him," she tells Anwaar, folding her hands in her lap. "I love him as the fish love the sea. You should meet him, I

think you would like him." Bringing her knees up to her chest she fiddled with the toes of her sandals.[fin]

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Willow: Anwaar remained standing, one fist on his hip while he studied her skeptically. Anna announced that she was getting married...and that she loved this fishy man. Then she began to immediately play with her sandals and averted her eyes, so he decided to try and torture her a little. "Do you REALLY though? And fish don't love the sea. They happen to be there, then they get eaten by bigger fish. That sounds awful, if you ask me." He poked at the fire, looking quite proud of his difficult self. "I shall meet him. Can he skin an animal? Cook? Build you a home? How capable is he... REALLY?" Oooh, inquisitive, serious look. "Your father took him in? Doesn't that make him like...your brother?" Was he trying to give her a hard time? Oh yes.#

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Orcus: His interrogation shouldn't have ruffled her skirts yet somehow it did. What did he mean? Was he trying to embarrass AND make her mad?! "The same could be said of us in mother desert. We love her and she loves us, but she can 'eat' us if she choose to. Does that mean we love her any less? Does that mean the fish's heart isn't with the sea?" It would appear nobody has ever questioned her love for Niculaie before. It was an awkward subject. One she did not completely know how to handle without going red faced ka-boom on someone. "I am sure he can do all those things, he has cooked before. Anwaar! He is not my bro-arrgh!" It was official. Anwaar had finally gotten Anna's goat. She shot up to pace to the left then to the right. She grumbled something about using the bathroom and stomped off. Although her stomps were more like piddler padderding. All the way to the bathroom she grumbled about building houses and fish.[fin]

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Willow: Anwaar raised one dark eyebrow and tried to hide the amusement glimmering in his eyes while she struggled to argue with him, growing defensive in the process. Once she stormed off Anwaar hooted with laughter. Would he let it go? That was a stupid question. He took off after her and, when he caught up, he hooked his arms around her waist and swung her around in his arms. "Come oooooon, Anna. Don't be cross with me!" He tried to give her a sweet smile. "I am sure he is very nice. He can poke things with a sword and you know he can cook. That's a start, right? You know TWO things he can do and you are going to swear yourself to him. TOTALLY normal." Oh he was pushing it SO badly. Was she going to hit him? Possibly. If she did, he would not dodge it. He put his hands on her hips and smiled. "I'm sorry. I just like to see you get red. I hope he does make you very very happy. You deserve to be happy every moment of your life."#

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Orcus: She was in such a tisy about having to defend her love, which she felt she failed horribly at, to a CHILD that she didn't hear him coming up the hall behind her at all. His arms around her waist surprised her and she squeaked like some chew toy on Earth. Sulking for all of five seconds she shook her head with her hands on his forearms till he set her down. "I am not cross with you dearest little

Anwaar," Anna smiles. Then of course he goes and ruins it by not picking about her knowledge about the guy she is to wed soon. Her big blue eyes went wide and she screeched his name with a swat at his shoulders using both hands. Not hard. He wouldn't leave it alone would he, she thought. Why wouldn't he? "I know more than that I just, well you startled me and I didn't have time to answer properly." Oh somebody was back peddling. "No Anwaar I turn red because I'm embarrassed. You're doing it again!" Just like that her face turned scarlet and she looked down and off to the side hiding her freckled face. She did not notice his hands on her hips or that they stood perhaps entirely too close. This was Anwaar II after all. There was nothing to be ashamed of here. She blew a breath to get some hair out of her eyes. "Thank you for that. He does make me happy. I think you would find it fun to go hunting with him too. Maybe bring something rare back for your parents?"[fin]

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Willow: Anwaar snickered when she swatted at his shoulders. "There seems to be a bug problem out here. Better look into that." He mumbled loudly, just to annoy her. Finally he let her go and held his hands up in innocent surrender. "Hunting sounds just fine, Little Anna. I would treat him with respect to ensure that you were happy. I couldn't have Ol' Bug-fist Anna come at me if she was angry that I treated her mate like a fool." That was it. He backed away and looked quite pleased with himself. "Does he do nice things for you? Does he tell you that you smell nice? Because you smell nice, so he should tell you that. And you should give him thirty red headed, terribly adorable children, I think."#

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Willow: ##### LOG #####

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Orcus: He was tenacious wasn't he? Scowling at him for a moment she shifted from her left foot to her right and crossed her arms over her chest. "Yes my fists are bigger than yours, see," she said as she shook her right fist up at him. Her scowl turned into a smile as she laid her arm back over to cross again. "He does tell me nice things. It means a lot that you respect him. Truly it does. I thank you Little Anwaar." Oh, was she teasing now? Oh snap! [Fin]

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Willow: Anwaar looked down at her fist, then gave her that "oh..really?" look before she lowered it again. How did he feel about this person of hers telling her nice things? Well, he wouldn't want this man telling her BAD things, so he supposed it was okay. "LITTLE?" Anwaar's voice boomed out as he suddenly dipped his shoulder down to tuck it into her midsection, and in one swoop, stood up straight so that she was tossed over his shoulder like a bag of potatos. "Ooooh Little Anwaar!" He squealed in a falsetto voice, carrying her inside and down the hall. She wasn't going to get away with this, because Anwaar was hauling her ass into the hot springs room. He approached the bubbling, warm water while gripping her legs to keep her wiggling ass in place. Annnnd DUMP! You bet your biscuits he dumped her ass right into the hot water!#

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Orcus: She opened her mouth to respond but what came out was a grunt on account of

him bending to pick her up and neatly haul her ass away like the wiggling sack of potatoes she was. "Hey now that isn't fair, Anwaar! You put me down this instant! I do have bigger fists than you!" Did she just try to show him her fist? Yes. Did he care? Not in the slightest. Much as she tried to worm her way off his shoulder his grip on her legs made her efforts go poof. When she felt the rise in temperature she tried to turn her head to see where they were going and gathered handfuls of his shirt propping herself up on his back in this attempt. What she saw put a new wiggle in her as well as nearly screaming for him to put her down before she used her big bug fists on his head. Or his stomach. She could only reach his head right now cause she was on his shoulder after all. At the point of no return she felt herself slide off his shoulder and take a dip in the hot waters of the spring. Anna fully submerged before coming up to the surface sputtering. All that red hair darkened and stuck to her neck. "...!" For the moment she looked like she couldn't speak. Blinking where she stood she lowered her hands into the water and shook a little. Was she about to cry?! Now if he came little closer to the hot spring she would splash the holy crap out of him and give a battlecry of revenge. Ana would not take being tossed into hot springs lightly![fin]

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Willow: It was so delicious when she went under. It was even MORE delicious when she came UP, with that hair all plastered to her neck and cheeks. She was sputtering, spitting water, eyes huge as she looked at him in disbelief. "Speechless. There's a first!" He smiled sweetly at her and batted his dark, thick eyelashes. However when it looked like she may cry, Anwaar's look softened into one of concern and he approached the edge of the hot spring. "Oh Anna, don't be upset. I -- GAH!" Anwaar spluttered as a wave of water hit his face and went down his throat. Once he coughed it up, he glowered at her, backed up slowly, then screamed "CANNONBALLLL!" Long legs pumped three times, and sure as the day is long, he cannonballed right into the water, past Anna, and sent a wave of water washing over her.#

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Orcus: Revenge was not always a dish best served cold. Just as her look of triumph reached its peak she realized that his backing away from her signaled his own retaliation. Wait no he can't, is what her expression said. She blamed his legs! She covered her face with her hands right before the wall of water smacked into her and put her off balance. "NOW SEE HERE YOU!" That stern look broke into laughter as she tried to move in then heavy wet dress to push him down again by his shoulders. If she could even get to him that is. If she couldn't then she would take her arm and continue splashing him till the cows came home.[fin]

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Willow: "OOOF!" Anwaar made a strangulated noise as she jumped to push on his shoulders. Holding his breath and going under, he gurgled a little, then shot up, looked directly at her...and spit water in her face. Now THAT had him dying with laughter as she sputtered all indigantly. "It seems that the little Firefly's light has been doused. Whatever is the matter?" He touched a hand to his cheek and made a shocked face. "My bug has been snuffed out!"#

CeasedIsTheHeart:



Niculaie sneezed, turning his head away from Gosha who he held in his arms, and he then looked back to his son and smiled.. "Looks like papa is being talked about, eh?" He said with a grin, though he would be surprised if he had know what it was Anna was saying, he did not think she was the type to play tricks on her friends, but then again one should not underestimate a redhead who had been raised by a dragon, should they? He had been keeping to himself for the day but where had Anna been lately, Gosha was hardly pleased with her absence the past few days, but she had said something about going out for a few days with Arilwen. Gosha had made his point though, he wanted to see her and soon, and Nic had given in. The child was dressed so as to be protected from the sun, but the sun had relinquished its hold over the land and the sky had darkened a fair bit by the time Nic had arrived at the abode of Wyrvaust, Abyssal Reaver, and adopted son of Marsol would Whistle as he made his way down into the complex.. "Hello?" Nic called out there were people about a table he came to see soon enough.

Nic would let himself come closer, his dark brown hair was a bit of a mess he was hardly the type to preen himself like some peacock, though he did wash himself before he came out. He dressed himself in dark clothes and a hooded cloak and all, the oppressive heat was much different then the cold embrace of mother russia, but Nic seemed to do fine in extreme climates. He would come up closer to the gathering of people, "Hello, my lord. Gosha was getting a bit antsy, I hope I am not interrupting anything." Nic pulled his hood back and met the others gazes, he then looked from one to the other and then back to Gosha.. "Hey, want to see gramps?" He asked, and then he looked to Marsol, that mischevious grin Nic always seemed to have was the same as ever.. Why did Marsol ever let him court Anna he would never know.

If Marsol was not opposed he would hand his son over to the dragon lord gently, and then took a seat that was empty and looked to Marsol.. "We haven't sparred in some time, you haven't gotten rusty have you.. Old man?" Nic was certainly informal, though he knew when to be serious, he respected Marsol, but he could not help but wonder if Marsol would give him a few rounds sometime.. Nic had missed it. He glanced about, taking in the scents about him.. She was about somewhere. "So where is the light of my life at anyways? Gosha had been so eager to see his Mama, after all.." Nic asked as he let his eyes search about the place, then returned his gaze to the eyes of his adoptive father, Marsol.. who had been much more of a father then he had ever known.:

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JD:

As Nic attempted to access the lair, he found himself unable to proceed any further than the area where the canyon walls narrowed and got high coming from either direction, much as he would have run smack into a kick ass abyssal wall of force which Wyrvaust had raised on his lair ages ago and maintained ever since. It had only not been maintained for a couple of months, so they were completely intact, and the only people he gave passage to were Marsol and his sons, Anwaar, Anna, and Arilwen. Cirgoth did not even have passage. The old demon never had trusted angels anyway. Anyone not those people trying to enter beyond certain points in the canyon or its lair, as Nic had, met a wall of force which caused a rapid drain on their health and or energies which made them feel immediately sick, and gave them enough warning and time to retreat from the wall's abysmal range which was around dozen yards. Anyone killed by the ward was turned into a minion as chosen

by Wyrvaust so yeah, retreat was a good idea. Not too long ago he had even turned those wards to hold Arilwen IN, before the whole Gabrian incident. That was how paranoid and protective of his family Wyrvaust was. He would however allow Nic momentary bypass, meaning for the duration of his visit, if Marsol tipped his hand to ask Wyr if Nic could join them.

(As far as the Nic and Anna's kid thing goes, that is between Alaina and Mike :).

Presently Wyrvaust was seated by Arilwen on their bed as she tried to sleep. He had given her some of that sleepy nerve and tummy settling tea he made for her now and again. It even helped sore throats!

CeasedIsTheHeart:

Niculaie had not expected a ward to be there, or atleast not one that would bar him entrance, he thought himself alot less of a threat then Wryvaust thought he was it seemed, then again it was hard to tell what hermits thought, wasn't it? Niculaie's natural immunity to magic staved off the drain and almost like an immune system the wards were undone by the Abyssal reaver on a subconscious level, he had never been trained really... There was a book, but the last he knew Felix still held the manual. Niculaie was more a creature of impulse learning what he could from accident and need, not to say he was completely inept, but he defineately had room to grow.

Niculaie then proceeded on like he intended, the wards shattered and dissolving, in his wake as he moved on. He hoped there was some meat left.. He was famished after all.

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Orcus:

It wasn't every day you got water spat in your face much less thrown fully clothed into hot water. She was flabbergasted at his nerve to try to annoy the freckles off her face! Something about choking on second hand water was the last straw for her. Scrunching her face up she pulled her skirts in one hand so that she could trudge through the water to jump on his back like a monkey and try to cover his eyes so he couldn't see her left foot trying to extend to the wall to push sideways to tip his jolly green giant butt into the heated spring waters. "If you think this bugs light has gone out you are sorely mistaken, little Annnwaar!" Oh now she emphasized his name, or rather whom he was named after, as if he were an infant again. Such baby talk just made them look as ridiculous as ever splashing around in the hot spring.

Marsol received word of Niculaies arrival and when he did the two pronged fork in his left hand got bent in half by too much pressure from his thumb. Surely it was a sign of something? Setting down the fork he just bent he took a long pull off his drink before turning to Wryvaust. And by turning we mean communing with his old friend using discreet telepathy and not barging in on him and his swan in their private quarters. "More guests for you table, will the Raven allow two more at his table? Or would you have them sent home?" Rank did not enter in here. This was Wryvaust's and his family's home. Therefore he would ask the man of the house, or lair rather, for permission for Niculaie and Gosha to join them. He was beginning to think he gave Niculaie far too much liberty with his daughter...

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##### LOG #####  
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JD:

Wyrvaust felt not only his wards wavering when their marks and signatures dissipated as if steam from the air, but the sudden absence of those his wards allowed him to sense without effort on his part (those persons being Anna and Cevari, much as he was bound to Marsol, Arilwen and his son Anwaar). One thing he DID sense was the presence of clan blood... blood he had been misled to believe was Muustala's when in fact it was Mekkor's. A dark scowl overcame him and even as Marsol's voice reached him the Raven unfolded his six foot eleven inch form to stand. Arilwen slept for the time being and he had no wish to disturb her or add to her worries. ~"The Raven would see who demolished his wards and suspect him as an enemy,"~ His anger was evident to Marsol even in his mental voice. Marsol would barely have time to ask what he meant when Wyrvaust stormed into the dining chamber and made his aggressive approach of Nic. "Him? The halfscale turned demon would destroy our ancient defenses? What friend does such a thing?! The Raven shall welcome no one who who tears down his wards! Now leave or face our wrath!" He roared, his eyes burning as he pointed violently towards the door. Not a very nice welcome was it?

Oddly enough, he was curious to discover WHY Nic smelled and 'felt' like clan to him, but he was too pissed off to care at the moment. He had not seen Nic since he had been sired by Mekkor so had no idea they shared blood except by what he felt and smelled, something only other abyss demons or abyss reavers could even do. All Wyrvaust knew was that Nic had made his family more vulnerable and Wyrvaust simply had zero tolerance for that. He had even woven protective abysmal shields around Himself, Arilwen, Anwaar, Marsol, Anna, Gilriael and Cevari as his bracing strides had carried him from his bedroom to the dinning area. He was THAT paranoid about enemies using his family against him. Indeed, because his wards WERE down, someone DID attempt to seize Wyrvaust, Arilwen, Anwaar and Anna, but failed, much as the unknown enemy's forking abyss gate was swallowed by the void shields Wyrvaust had woven. Given time, Wyrvaust might even be able to find out WHO had tried to take them. He was even AWARE that someone had made that attempt, which made him even MORE suspicious of Nic.

"Someone just attempted to seize the Raven and his clan. Tell me WHO, blackened halfscale! Clearly he destroyed our wards so we could be taken!" Halfscale was his word for demonkin and by blackened he meant sired, and yes, he was accusing Nic based on circumstantial evidence. It could have all been coincidence though... someone may simply have taken advantage of Nic's 'accidental attack' on the wards.

For someone to have even tried to capture Wyrvaust, his son, wife and Anna, they would have to be familiar with all targets, have been INSIDE the lair at some point, or share some kind of connection. Wyrvaust was well aware of this. Who the targets were was also telling. Cevari, Marsol, Gilriael and Nic had been ignored. They either held no interest to the perpetrator, were involved in the task, or were too powerful to risk taking. Wyrvaust decided that Nic had all the makings of being involved. Gilriael meanwhile wondered if Cevari was not in on what had happened and eyeballed the fellow for awhile. The bard held on to the belief that the quickest path to trust was treating every stranger you met like an enemy until

you could trust them. Otherwise he was the friendliest fellow anyone could meet. Wyrvaust on the other hand did not suspect his brother at all. It simply had not occurred to him. His instincts had not led him in that direction. Nic had entered... the wards had fallen around him, someone had tried to seize the Desert Fox and his family. 1+2=3.

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LiftTheDarkness: Cevari would not be best pleased to know that Gilriael was still being so damned suspicious of him. This guy clearly did not believe in the benefit of the doubt, did he? He caught that look he was giving him, and his eyebrows arched inquisitively at him. Yes? Cevari, naturally, knew nothing about the reason the wards were down. He had no motivation to take them down, of course. He wanted nothing but his brother's wellbeing, having just met him once more.

He did turn surprised eyes on his brother, when he so aggressively approached this Nic. This was a side of his brother he had rarely been treated to, even in their youth. Wyrvaust was, as he recalled, a particularly patient and goodnatured man. Or was he just painting his memory of him in a rose-tinted, nostalgic light? That was a possibility, as well.

He watched the exchange intently, holding that tongue of his for once. Wyrvaust seemed to have it well in hand, and he wouldn't step on any toes.

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(21:08:17) CeasedIsTheHeart: Niculaie was approaching Marsol and the others at the table, though he was still a distance off when Wryvaust appeared before him, seething with anger and absolutely aggressive with him. Niculaie of course had no idea what he meant with his accusations, and the strange way he spoke was a little hard to follow. Halfscale, was that an insult? No matter. The Abyssal Reaver just glared back at the demon a moment, Niculaie was a friendly sort when it came to those Marsol treated as family, and he had know Wryvaust was loved by the desert.. Gosha began to cry then, the mood making the child upset.

"Shh.. Gosha, its going to be alright. It is just a misunderstanding, my son." He said trying to sooth the child, kissing his forehead gently. "Wryvaust.. We were never close, but think why would I want to hurt you? I took down no wards, there weren't any! I came to bring Gosha to see his mother and to speak with Marsol, no other reason." Nic said as he softened the scowl on his face to a more calm look to do his best to try and to see if he couldn't calm Wryvaust down a little, he was obviously a little paranoid. "You can threaten me all you wish, but not my son. Where is Anna?" He demanded more forcefully, the situation somehow seemed dire. "I dont know who is trying to take you.. All I know is my fiance and the mother of Gosha is here." Hr glanced to Marsol.. "Help me out here my lord, tell him I am friend not foe." Nic was prepared to retreat if the demon did not calm, he felt vulnerable with his defenseless son exposed this way, he had not expected things to go this way.:

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JD: Cevari's memories were not painted in false colors but vivid ones. As a human

there had not been a mean or cruel bone in Wyrvaust's body. He had changed quite a lot but never at the heart of him. Beneath all else he was quite good natured, or Leviathan would not have bothered with him at all. He was however a complete monster when his clan or friends were threatened, and he treated most trespassers like food, but he was a kitten with those he loved and trusted. He did not know Nic well at all, only really met him a few times when Nic had been a lot younger and if he ever had met him after he had been sired, it had only been brief encounters which involved him little, and Wyrvaust had no memory of it. But at the moment he felt threatened so he was anything BUT kind or safe.

Wyrvaust's eyes darted on the child he had not even noticed until now... His nostrils flared as he tasted the air with his olfactory. The child smelled of Nic and Anna, of Adram and that unique scent Anna gave off. His eyes thinned a moment on the child Nic named Gosha then he sucked in a deep breath and calmed himself at the center. He had upset the child, and that was not something he would have wished. His dark blue eyes then cut on Niculaie. "Marsol will not calm what can only be appeased by the truth and Niculaie does NOT speak it. The wards he DID bring down. The Raven FELT it. Felt one of his own blood enter his domain and as he did, the safeguards he-I built here dissolved around his clansman like honey in boiling water. And THAT is another thing... His blood is the same as mine. IS he Marsol's agent still? Since when did Muustala sire the demon son of earth? When did Niculaie meet Muustala?" he asked Nic, who he must have confused even more by his question.

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JD: Now while Wyrvaust was having his discussion with Niculaie, Gilriael leaned his cool amber eyes on Cevari. "Here Nic is getting blamed when I think it could be you. What do we know about you, after all? Other than Wyrvaust seems to think you MAY be his brother and you are in the right place at the right time to arrange a clan napping. You might be an agent of the demon who will not be named by me, or the Raven's old clansmen, or the gods knows. I suppose you shall just have to prove your loyalty by sticking around. So... you have any other family? A wife, child, clan, servants?" He jumped from accusing to curious.

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(21:47:58) LiftTheDarkness: Cevari gave Gilriael a disgruntled look. "You're an awfully suspicious one, aren't you? I've done not one thing to make you doubt me." He pointed out, mildly. He wasn't offended, not really. Somewhere between irritated and amused, perhaps.

"I am his brother." He insisted. "Why doubt that, when the evidence is right in front of you?" He knew very well how much he resembled his brother. "Wouldn't my brother know, if I weren't?" That was a romanticized view of things, given how easily he might be impersonated, but then, that was Cevari. He had grand and romantic notions sometimes, and among them, was that brothers must always know their brothers.

He blinked at the sudden change of topic. "No wife. I'm afraid I've never had a taste for them. And therefore, no children. I've my men, who travel with my caravan. They're all the family I've known, since my brother and I were separated."  
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(22:03:06) CeasedIsTheHeart: Niculaie was indeed lost beyond comparison, he watched Wryvaust who noted the child and visably calmed but he was sure it was only for the sake of the young one, and not Nic's. He was grateful though, and even more confused.. There were wards that he had apparently taken down, and he was being asked about a Muustala? He blinked and looked at him curiously. "I am ever friend and allie to lord Marsol who was like a father to me, more then my own ever had been." He spoke of his own father back on earth of course, "I do not know who Muustala is unfortunately. I was sired by Mekkor."

Niculaie did not hide his heritage, Marsol knew of it, he had never hid such a thing from his friends in the desert, though Mekkor had never asked him to endanger that friendship or do anything to cause a rift between him and Marsol's family. "If I broke your wards, then I am not sure how. I am unable to weave magic, so bringing down a ward would be quite the task for me, wouldn't it?" Niculaie was at a loss really, "Unless you have an explanation to how I unwove these wards of yours with no magic you will have to look elsewhere for the culprit. Please believe me, why would I bring my son if I was doing something so dangerous as that? My boy wants to see his mother, and I want to hold my fiance once more. I miss her." Nic was wondering where Anna was though, he was not familiar with Wryvaust's.. for lack of a better word, complex, at all. He was not worried though, Marsol was here after all, but he did miss her dreadfully. He was just glad she did not see this exchange, hopefully she did not stumble onto it either.:

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(22:35:49) Orcus: Marsol did not devle into abyssmal magic, or what he sometimes called "negative force", and because the wards were not of his creation he had no idea of their failing or the attempted kidnapping of some of his family. Wryvausts clan was part of his family after all. He rose from his seat to stand as Gosha started fussing then crying. Though just because he did not perform abyssmal magics did not mean he wouldn't take the attack on Wryvausts lair any less serious than if it had been with fire or ice.

"She is here Nic, and will rejoin us soon. Now, how is it that you do not know how you are capable of undoing what is done by magic?"

His tall broad shouldered form gave off waves of heat since his temper had been provoked by currently unknown assailants. His hands held up to Nic did not suggest but told the young Russian abyss reaver to give him the toddler. If fists were about to fly then that was one thing. If fists flew and Gosha got smacked because of it? Misunderstanding or not he would have both Wryvaust and Niculaie's hides for it.

"If he has not been taught then how is he to know? Though he does speak the truth when he says his sire is Mekkor... Your senses are not wrong, Lord Wryvaust but that we must save for another time. First we must find out just whom is seeking you four and why."

If Cevari thought he was out of the woods he would be mistaken. The timing of Cevari's appearance along with Nic dismantling Wryvaust's wards could not be

overlooked. It was too much of a coincidence. Or excellent planning. Marsol bet every scale on his body it was the latter. Gosha made angry fists as he cried but the old dragon lord cradled him as he had done with all of his children to his chest and rubbed large warming circles over Gosha's back. Something about children listening to his heartbeats and his higher than mortal men's body temperature proved to put them right to sleep. Gosha was no different. He fought his nap but after a few minutes closed his eyes and was out with his head tucked under Marsol's chin. Now who looked like a grandfather? "Who knew you were coming here Niculaie?"[fin]

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JD: Wyrvaust stared hard at Niculaie as he spoke. Wyrvaust could almost always tell when someone was lying, and Nic gave no appearance of doing so. And yet... he HAD eliminated his wards. "The Raven cannot say HOW exactly the youngblood of Mekkora dissolved his wards, but he did it all the same. Tell me he felt nothing as those energies were swallowed up by him, because THAT is what the Raven felt happening. It was as if his younger clansman drank his wards into his skin as a salamander drinks moisture from the air. He felt as those forces poured into Niculaie and then simply were no more. How he can be capable of such a feat we do not know, but that IS what occurred. The Raven did not imagine it. He felt and saw in his mind what happened for joined was he to his defenses." By his marks and signatures.

Mekkora had never revealed all of Nic's secrets to him, because he believed that power was best achieved by self discovery and through trial and error. That things never imagined could be learned that way. He had told Nic and Felix what they were capable of, but had only taught them the basics thus far. Mekkora taught them what he believed they needed to learn from him. It was how HE had learned. Adram had taught Mekkora nothing other than how to master his blood. And that he had only allowed him to learn when he had gained Adram's full trust.

"He-- You are Mekkora's...?" he asked hoarsely. "But our blood... it is the same..." He practically hissed, but then Marsol told him that topic was for another time.

Yes, Mekkora and Muustala were both Adram blood demons, but Nic felt closer to him than Muustala ever had, and he barely knew Nic. Wyrvaust held Marsol's gaze a moment then nodded. He trusted his chieftain, and nothing would change that. That was just the kind of trust they shared.

When Marsol said they had to find who was responsible, Wyrvaust took his comment quite literally and walked to the area between the corridor and table where he plopped down Indian style on a hand woven carpet. Wyrvaust had made all the carpets in his house. Weaving had been part of his Chaosian practices. It had taught him patience, connectivity and balance. His arms came to rest palms up across his folded legs and he closed his eyes as he peered through the shadows and enhanced those shadows with the abyss as he peered backwards through the gateways which led back to his home, seeking those responsible for trying to take him and his. But as he got close, he was struck by a light so blinding that it stabbled at his mind like a thousand lances and he cried out and threw his arms over his eyes. It was reflex, the light he saw came from within the visions he had sought. Breathing heavily he felt someone's hand on his arm lifting him and he stood with

that tug on shaky feet.

"My sight was blocked... blinded..." he half gasped. It had really startled him. "Neither Mekkora, Mendorin or Sammael would use light to blind us," he hissed. That at least eliminated who had NOT done it. "Light of pure and agonizing quality blinded me from seeing who..." Wyrvaust was no seer, he simply had powers which let him see through shadows and abyss as though seeing through to the other side of a gate, only he could trace those pathways backwards and occasionally forward through time. It was the oracle of shadows power.

Wyrvaust's friends might notice that Wyrvaust's speech was clearing up. His mind had received a jolt which had untangled a part of it.

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JD: Gilriael arched a brow when Cevari spoke of his men and how long they had served them. "They could perhaps camp in the canyon until Wyrvaust knows them and you better. They could act as... lookouts perhaps. Then? Who knows." He smiled. Wyrvaust could use some defenders and if Cevari was willing to lend his, all the better... IF he turned out to be trustworthy. Mael sending him was a good sign much as Marsol was a good friend of his.

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(00:09:16) Orcus: Marsol did not feel it wise to put Gosha down just yet so he held the sleeping toddler in the crook of his left arm as he stepped to stand beside his old oddball friend. He did not want to have that talk now but this might be as good a time as any. His brow arched at the not so subtle change in Wyrvaust. Blinded? Even though that ruled out Sammael he suspected him above all other regardless. It was just how deeply rooted his hatred was for the fallen angel gone demon. He would have to take him aside to ask him how he felt and be insistent about it. [Fin]

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JD: Wyrvaust followed his lord obediently when he led him to the fountain chamber just off the dining hall. "I-- feel fine..." he assured his chieftain. "Other than these flutters in my gut..." He was talking about the anxiety he felt. He then reached out with his hand and gently touched the child's cheek. "The Raven is sorry if he scared you, little one..." he spoke soothingly, once again speaking in third person because it felt strange not to. His eyes then locked on Marsol. "I never meant to make the child cry." He apologized.

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(00:37:35) Orcus: There it was again the change in speech. What was going on? Gosha looked nothing like his mother and a spitting image of his father. The toddler cooed in his sleep and smiled to the touch Wyrvaust gave his cheek. "You are a great-father," Marsol says, proud of that truth about the Raven. "Can you feel anything different in here?" He held a hand out to place his index finger to Wyrvaust's forehead.[fin]



JD: Wyrvaust smiled when Marsol complimented him as a father. "We try, My Lord, and you are a most excellent father to your sons. The proof is in them," he assured. When asked if he felt different mind wise, Wyrvaust nodded. "Something did happen... that light... it was as if it burned away a great fog which has long hung over my mind. The Raven has feared his past and the shadows it casts for so long... he forgot how to relate with himself and others without... well, separating himself from himself and even others. Even his most beloved of all, his master. It is a habit he... I find it difficult to let go of... but now... I think I cling to it only because... it feels comfortable. That shock I received... it seems to have opened my eyes to my own faults. Is that... a bad thing, My Lord?" He as always spoke openly to Marsol.

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(01:20:19) Willow: Anna and Anwaar had tortured each other long enough. The younger of the two slopped first down the corridor to the smaller bedrooms, one of which had been his first baby sitter's. "She left her things here. Father only said that she left abruptly... in so many words." He pointed out the small closet, which was filled with typical clothing for a desert dweller; lightweight and simple. He took his own leave down the hall to his room where he would shed his wet clothes, pull on a loose grey robe that used to be his father's, then snagged a towel off of a metal hook on his door to scrub his dark hair dry. Once it was, he tied it back away from his face...then frowned. A strange tingle was crawling up his spine. His father had laid a specified ward around him, but he didn't yet understand that concept. He just felt...alert. Stepping into the hall he tilted his head and listened. Shouting. He was back down the hall, busting in on Anna, HOPEFULLY in a state of dress. "Something's happening."#

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(01:38:03) Orcus: "No," he said, suspicious as hell of this blinding light. It seemed to him that there was a greater interest in Wryvaust a d his family than merely kidnapping to do who knows what with. "And here," he asks, placing his index over the Ravens heart. The word Raven made Gosha giggle in his sleep.

Elsewhere, Anna was finding a beige colored dress to put on and tie a sash around her waist since it was two sizes too big. But there were no sashes to be found in that closet. So she tried on another loose fitted dress which was also beige when Anwaar barged in. Startled Anna squeaked, tripped backwards overall rug and landed behind the bed. "ANWAAR JR YOU SHUT THAT DOOR THIS INSTANT!" Anna wanted to crawl under a mountain and die of embarrassment. Granted she was mostly covered but he wouldn't seen her upper thighs right? Once dresses she stepped out of the room wearing her wet sandals and his ex-nannys shaw dress. "What is it," she asks, braiding her towel dried hair quickly into a long fat braid down her right shoulder.[fin]

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(01:44:04) Willow: Poor Anwaar. His young brain didn't get the concept of embarrassment quite that easily. Nudity was a normal thing for animals and had never been hidden away from him while he was growing up. Well, at least in the desert. Gabrian's place was a different story. He blinked with owlshly large eyes and wasn't sure if he should go behind the bed and help her or if he should run. He

squirmed for a minute, then backed out and quietly closed the door. Girls were weird, this he was deciding. When she FINALLY came out, he had his arms crossed and didn't look amused. "I hear people yelling. If I tell you to stay here while I go look, are you going to listen?" She gave him a LOOK, and he rolled his eyes. "Fine. Let's go." He turned to head down towards the dining hall with her on his heels. Though, it took her more steps because she was a little bug. "Why did you scream at me?" He narrowed his eyes down at her as she caught up. "It's not my fault you are clumsy."#

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JD: One of the things Wyrvaust had only ever felt the mildest guilt for, but somehow now felt horribly ashamed of, was his one sided attraction to Marsol. He had felt that desire for so many ages that the feeling had become a simple part of himself which he seldom dwelled on... until now. As Marsol brushed up against him as he touched his chest there it was again... that warm longing which always left his flesh cold with goosebumps, only this time his mind punished him with thoughts of being married and having children and being unfaithful in his heart, when in fact he had always been honest about how he felt to Arilwen and she had never expressed any concern over it. It had never been anything more than an occasional perhaps flattering nuisance to Marsol. Only once had Wyrvaust gotten carried away with those feelings, and he could barely remember it. Wyrvaust had a very compartmentalized mind which shelved things that might be destructive or counter productive for him. Yes, he could get overloaded, as had recently happened, but in general he coped well enough with stress and hardship to get by.

And here Marsol was asking after his heart. "I... we..." He felt suddenly as if his breath had run out of him. "I feel... guilt I never have before... Not really... Not like this. For... feeling what I always have for you... I never felt this way before... Like I am betraying my beloved Swan. IS what the Raven feels... wrong?" His voice tightening on the last word while his eyes smoldered on Marsol. He felt a deep need for the truth. His hand then covered his mouth suddenly and he gasped. "Ahhh... I wanted to eat her..." It was as if the memories of his dark side were rising up against him one by one. Would the one then become two, two become four, until a landslide of guilt assailed him. "I... I should check on my most beloved other..." All he wanted to do now it seemed was escape what he was beginning to feel and focus on his wife instead. But watching her sleep would not take his mind off of what was awakening in him for long.

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(02:09:48) Willow: When they arrived at the dining hall, Anwaar noticed two things. Firstly, there was another man here and Marsol was holding a baby. Secondly, his father was having one of his moments where he was climbing the walls with anxiety. He shifted his gaze around the room, then moved through them to his father's side, where he hooked an arm behind his back to pull him to his side.

"Hi father." He said smoothly and carefully. "Shall we go check on mother? I am worried about her." It was true. He WAS worried. But it may help Wyrvaust if he could talk to his son somewhere more quiet for a few moments. If he would allow it, he would head down the hall to his parents' room. He wanted to ask about the man, the baby, and the change in atmosphere, but knew that the topic of his mother could help calm him. Arilwen was curled up in bed, her dark hair now loose from her braid

from Wyrvaust trailing it through his fingers. She had her color back and seemed to be resting easily. "Is she alright?"#

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JD: Wyrvaust had heard Anna yelling, and was actually glad for the distraction the voices of his son and Marsol's daughter offered. 'Fresh air... fresh air... THAT was just the thing,' he thought to himself as Marsol held him where he was with a halting advisement and some words of wisdom before excusing him. Marsol was simply allowing Wyrvaust some time to sort himself out... to see if he could... or find out how bad it would get in the time he was willing to allot his old friend. He would approach him again after granting him some space for a little while.

Meanwhile Wyrvaust was thinking that the garden would wash away the terrible clarity that had overcome him, he was sure. His eyes leaned on Marsol and he managed a weak smile. "It was more than just light which struck me, wasn't it? It was some kind of... power. The kind angels wield," he hissed rather hatefully then felt terribly guilty about feeling that way. "Arrah!! The Raven MUST be himself! No more of this tampering and digging!" he roared angrily then squeezed his head between his hands as if he might squash whatever was working on him and then slinging his arms down in frustration he tried to find his center again.

He startled slightly when Anwaar came up and put his arm around him but calmed immediately as his eyes settled on his son. A warm smile spread over his lips and he hugged Anwaar, tight, then kissed his cheek and straightened. He towered over Anwaar in his height still. "I... yes of course..." His son had put him back on track. He glanced over at Marsol, who he thought looked positively charming holding that child then walked with Anwaar to the bedroom he shared with his mother. "Is Anna alright...?" he checked. When Anwaar gave him the report he smiled. "We believe our son has his eye on Marsol's daughter. Is your father on the right track?" He actually avoided speaking in a way unnatural to HIM for fear of confusing his son.

Wyrvaust sat down on the bedside next to Arilwen and combed her beautiful dark hair with his fingers. She was so like a neffari but for her ice blue eyes. She had her father's eyes. "She is... fine... She has..." He was about to lie and say she had worms... when that hideous guilt their unknown assailant had infected him with assaulted him again. "She is..." He couldn't do it. He could not lie to his son no matter HOW much he wanted to. Wyrvaust had never had trouble lying for a good cause before! "She is... ill is all. Upset stomach..." Well, it wasn't a lie. He could manage leaving out details. "And you, Anwaar? How are you?" He wondered if Anwaar had sensed the attempted seizure of his person.

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(02:30:40) Willow: When Wyrvaust asked if Anna was alright, Anwaar wrinkled his nose and gave a report about her tripping over the bed to pull her skirts down. His father then decided to ask if he had an eye for Anna. "Eye?" Anwaar sat down beside his father on the edge of the bed, crossed his legs beneath him, and frowned. "She is a good friend to have. Mother adores her very much. She makes me laugh because she acts bigger than her size." Did that make sense? Probably to Wyrvaust. "She has a mate. Niculaie. I asked if he knows how to hunt, to build her a house, to keep her safe. She says that he knows how to hunt. Why do women choose mates of those

who they do not know so well?" Women were confusing to Anwaar already.

His eye cast to his mother and he offered the Raven a small smile. "Lucky is the Swan for having a husband who can handle her illness with grace and love and care." Was he speaking like he KNEW something? No. He was being honest. She had a bad stomach and he was a shaman! #

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JD: "Eye, yes as in... you find her attractive..." He laughed when he went on about Niculaie. "Yes... but the Raven hardly knew your mother when he claimed her. That worked out well. But I can see you are jealous..." It was now a struggle for him to speak the other way... the way that earlier that eve had come more naturally to him. He felt inside out. "Best not to set your hopes on someone else's mate, son. And Anna is not just anyone. She is Marsol's daughter. If your interest in her fails to wane... Well, speak to Marsol of your feelings, and be open."

Yes... Wyrvaust was a shaman... and he HAD been planning to gently extract Gabriel's child then eat him and his soul then tell Arilwen he had been mistaken and that she had worms. Problem taken care of. Now guilt was welling up inside of him like mad because his son was telling him how loving and caring he was. He suddenly had this HORRIBLE need to confess! That hand of his covered his mouth for the third time that night. He felt like he was going to hurl. Anwaar noticed he had grown pale by the look of him and Wyrvaust lowered his hand and smiled slightly. "Maybe what mother has is catchy..." he joked, hoping his son took him seriously. Okay, so he could not outright force a lie out but he could tell a joke and try to pass it off as the truth... right? "The Raven is the lucky one here..." He changed tactics and tried to distract. "I-- we have the most beautiful son and wife ever a demon could hope for. We have a wonderful master and exquisite home..." Yes, the ruins he lived in were perfect in his eyes. Truth was, he wanted to get rid of Gabriel's child so he and Arilwen could have their own child asap. Well that and other reasons... HIS wife carrying a pale rider's child? He just could not cope with the possibilities.

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(03:01:51) Willow: Attractive. Anwaar considered this. "She has fire for hair and spots on her face, as if the ends of her fiery hair touched her cheeks and nose and left tiny singe marks. I think she laughs at me even when she is not. Her eyes shine." He shifted uncomfortably on the bed and brushed away the thought of Anna for the moment when his father seemed to grow uneasy or ill. Anwaar frowned severely and took his father's hand. "If father is unwell, he should rest beside his Swan. Shall I have Lord Marsol kick everyone out? Send them to bedrooms? Shall I haul them up by the scruffs of their necks and toss them into the garden?" He was terrified that his father's mind would crack again and he would be so far away from them, in the darkness, as he was before. #

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JD: Wyrvaust laughed quietly so as not to disturb Arilwen when his son described Anna and his deep voice resonated with the lightheartedness Anwaar gave to him as a

gift. "The greatest treasure this desert has even shown the Raven is his son," he praised. He laughed again when Anwaar asked if he should clear out the lair. Wyrvaust embraced his son and pulled him down on the bed beside he and his mother. "No... It is an impolite deed to throw people back into the desert when they are your guests. Nothing is so dire that they must go. But... We would ask our son if he would grant his mother and father an interim of privacy. I wish to offer her further healing. We shall not be long," he promised his son. "Perhaps my son will go to the garden and await his father, but wander no further we beg. There was an attack on our family this eve. The garden is safe enough, but if a threat challenges... call on me without delay." Wyrvaust wanted to see if he could do it... See if he could work up the nerve...

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(03:17:10) Willow: Anwaar's dark eyebrows arched when his father laughed, but his surprise melded into a look of warmth when he complimented him as a treasure. He went with his father to nestle into the bed, tucking an arm under his cheek as he looked directly at his father. Throwing them out into the desert. Mother Desert could be cruel to some who were unprepared or unknowledgable. He had heard about when his mother was found, half dead, baking in the sun. He lifted his head sharply when his father mentioned an attack and he grimaced, but nodded in agreement. "Of course. I shall wait for you in the garden, Father. If concerns are raised, I shall call on you." He kissed his father's temple, then clambered from the bed and headed towards the garden, warily looking at everyone he passed. Except Marsol and Anna of course. He had no details about this attack and didn't trust a single one of them.#

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Wyrvaust kissed Anwaar and when he had withdrawn, Wyrvaust locked the door after him, then returned to the bedside where he carefully drew back the covers and placed his hand over his wife's abdomen. She was barely beginning to show. How, he asked himself, had he not noticed she was pregnant before? Oh... that's right, he had been totally off his brainpan. The demon inhaled a deep breath then let it out slowly as he focused himself. Oh the punishing things his mind was lashing out at him with as he strove to weave a womb gate to bypass flesh and organs.

The children are innocent, not at fault for who their father is.  
But they are the sons of Gabrian, of famine...  
And...? You know the TRUE reason behind your hunger. You are jealous... You are afraid these children will tear your marriage apart. You are afraid of losing her again.  
I am... He could admit that to himself.  
The true test of your marriage is to let them live... to LOVE them as your own.  
I cannot...  
Then THAT is what shall destroy her trust in you.

Wyrvaust's chest shuddered and he buried his face in his hands. He choked back a quiet sob then straightened to gaze at his wife. It would be so easy... He saw them now... all.. SIX? Holy mother of the devil... all six of them. He felt sick at his stomach again. Focus Wyrvaust, he told himself. You are the Desert Fox and her womb is your hen house... It is for the best... Devour them! But... if we must hide it from her... Lie to her... IS it best? Wyrvaust slumped in defeat and the womb gate vanished... the shadowy rest he had laid on his wife lifted. He could

not do it. Not without her consent. He would have to ask her if she wanted the children of Gabrian.

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(03:38:57) Willow: Arilwen was fast asleep while all of this was taking place, of course. She was unaware that she was pregnant. She was unaware of how many of them were inside of her. She was unaware of what Wyrvaust had considered. She was basically clueless. Suddenly the fog of her sleep began to dissolve and she groggily opened her blue eyes, rubbing her face against the pillow to clear her mind. "My heart?" She said softly as she saw Wyrvaust sitting beside her with his face in his hands. She sat up slowly so that her head could adjust and she immediately took his hands into hers, kissing the palms before tucking them against her chest. "What is it?" Was that a stupid question? It was to her. She knew why he was upset... or so she thought. Her face fell. "I..I am unsure of what to say. I honestly am unsure of what to THINK." She raked her fingers through her dark hair and blew out a slow breath. "I have brought you more pain than you can probably bear. I am a horrendous person. I took you away from your home..." She had thought that Gabrian was the answer that they needed...to get him healthy. And now she was pregnant with a child that wasn't his. "I could never even ask you for forgiveness." She whispered in a pained voice. The amount of self-loathing that she felt was monumental. "Tell me...tell me how to take your pain away."#

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Wyrvaust sat there for some time, staring off into a distant hiatus. When his wife's voice reached him it was as if he was coming away from a dream the way his twilight coloured gaze journeyed upon her. His cheeks tightened slightly as she spoke then the ghost of a smile softened the tense seal of his lips. "You have brought me no pain... only joy and contentment... adventure and hope. You give the Raven a reason to live, to strive, to care. The world brings us pain... Brings it to us all, for without pain goodness has no meaning. The universe wants us to know what joy and bliss is, but how can we if there is nothing to hold it apart from? You are everything to me, Arilwen." How long had it been since he had spoken her actual name? The name he had given her when she had come to him without a designation. "Now we are challenged by the world again, by the life within you. But the Raven's wife has every choice in the world. What shall make her content. Would she choose to be the mother of Gabrian's children, or would she choose instead to say farewell to them and put that life behind her altogether? Will she raise that life under her husband's shadow? Trust in him that he may come to love what he now envies and resents? His feelings are what they are. He cannot change them so easily. The only choice I will forbid is the one where she breaks her husband's heart and returns to Gabrian with what they made together. That he will never offer as a choice." He smiled warmly as he said this, for he did not speak in anger, only the facts. "Before you decide I think there is something you should be made aware of. Our swan carries not one child, but half a dozen. It is common among devils to produce litters. Six sons of a horseman. I for one will do all in my power NOT to dwell on what that means. The Raven shall simply offer his wife her choices and respect the one she adopts." Wyrvaust held her tight as she began to tremble. He expected at any moment that she might scream, when it struck her that he was serious about her carrying six baby devils of horseman and mordim blood.

Eoghan meanwhile, where he lie under the pale light of a moon peering through a

small opening and heavy bars, was having another restless night, and it was not because he was Halen Deward's prisoner, and not because he was biding his time in the presence of great risks, but that ever since Arilwen had conceived he sensed what lived within her. It was akin to a presence he had not felt in a very long time... akin to the darkest son he had ever fathered... Maladin. But these offspring... Maladin's wickedness paled in comparison to what he felt from Arilwen and Gabriel's spawn. He could not pursue it though... It was too risky to attempt getting word to Saeed, or Marsol. His captors kept him powerless and they had to believe he was incapacitated. But if he managed to escape WHEN he was ready, it would all have been worth it. He had collected a great deal of intelligence. He had finally made it to Halen's camp. They had tried to hide its location from him, but he had figured it out well enough to get close. It seemed as though someone else had found the camp too though... The girl he had spotted in the trees. She could not see him in his little mobile prison cell, a steel box on a wagon's bed. But he had seen her shadow flit past a few times, passing over the little window in the top of his box. It was the only window and only by peering down through that barred opening could Eoghan even be seen. How Eoghan had ended up with Halen was a tale to be told when he escaped and found his way back to Saeed. The king he was trying to convince others he had deserted. No one was buying it. But they were buying the truths he told them. That he would fight for Morashtar's innocents... for those who would fall victim to injustice whatever side of the war they were on, if any. Eoghan was still counted as an enemy, but he was an enemy they kept as a secret weapon should the need arise to use him. Eoghan had no intention of being kept THAT long. Yes, he was weakened, but he was NOT as weak as he pretended to be. Out of self preservation he had learned the art of feigning near death well. He could even play dead quite convincingly. A trick he had learned from Maelmorda.

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Why did he have to respond to her with such grace and patience? Why couldn't he grip her by the shoulders and shout all of the things that had hurt him while he was unable to communicate with anyone? Then again, it was selfish of her to wish for an ease of her own guilt, wasn't it?

Hearing her assigned name made Arilwen let loose a very slow, calculated breath. He had given her that name when she came to him lost, dying... not knowing much about herself, even. Her mother had died, she had never met her father. She had no idea if she even had family. And then, she was gifted a family that meant the moons and stars to her. And here they were, having been lost together, finding their way back home, and the rug was being tugged out from under their feet again.

Wyvaust proceeded to carefully explain that his Swan had choices. Would she choose to be the mother of Gabriel's children? Children? A look of confusion flickered across Arilwen's face. Did he think that she would go back after this one was born to get impregnated again? She began to think that was his line of thinking, especially when he so carefully pointed out that he wouldn't tolerate her going back to Gabriel. And then he laid it on her.

"S...Sss..." Was she going to be able to get the word out? No. It turned to thick glue in her throat as her blue eyes locked on her husband. She was trying to watch

his lips and see if he had mistaken the word "six" for something else that he was trying to say. Uh, no. He seemed to mean it. Six sons. Six sons by Gabrian. Six devilish... Arilwen's hand shot out and grabbed the wooden bucket beside the bed that Wyrvaust had left for her, and she promptly leaned over and began wrenching violently into it. Any stomach soothing effect that the tea had given her belly was gone now. Six devil fetuses would do that to a person.

It took minutes for Arilwen to quit vomiting, and when she did, she reached for her cup of water and chugged it down, washing the vile taste from her mouth. She nearly asked him if he was sure again, but she knew that he was. All Arilwen could do was shift on the bed, stretching out so that she could lay her head in Wyrvaust's lap, her eyes unable to rest shut. She just stared at the wall. It was at least ten minutes before she spoke.

"What would happen to them?" Her voice seemed distant. "If..if we didn't...keep them. Would they be hurt? Would they...feel things? Feel pain, sadness?" Woah woah, was she considering it? The Swan was trying to understand what the offered options actually WERE. "If we keep them, do they pose a threat to us? Gabrian, he..."

She shifted onto her back so that she could look straight up at Wyrvaust, her voice wavering. "He was good to us, Wyrvaust. He tried everything to help you, to find what was wrong. He was kind to us. He let me go without putting up a fight so that I could come with you. But...if he found out that I had six of his children living here, would that pose a threat to us? To Anwaar? Marsol, Anna? I need to know what we are dealing with here..."

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When Arilwen became sick despite his efforts to sooth her, Wyrvaust held back her long waves of raven hair and rubbed her back, then held her lovingly when she finally shifted to rest her head in his lap. When asked what 'eliminating' the children would mean, he thought carefully on this before answering. His original and rather emotionally impulsive plan had been to gently extract them and transfer them into his 'mouth' and hence eat them, devouring their souls as he did so. Would that be painful? Yes, he imagined it would be agonizing if they could feel pain which he imagined they could. He had not really considered that much as in his panic and deep disconcert all thought of the embryos being able to feel pain or even fear had never entered his mind. Was there a painless way to do the deed which he could perform? Yes there was. He felt rather ashamed that he had not thought of 'their' feelings before Arilwen had reminded him of compassion. "Yes, it can be done in a way so painless to them that they shall not even know it is happening," he assured her. Understanding that she was weighing her options, because what else could someone with a good heart do, his eyes pierced hers and he stroked her hair gently as he continued to answer. "The Raven doubts the horseman of famine would endanger us if knew he of his children, as long as we were candid with him. If our Swan decides to keep her children, she must write the horseman a letter informing him of his children and her plans for them, herself, and the Raven. And if Arilwen chooses to raise her children with the Desert Fox, he shall forget they are not his offspring and raise them as his own... But most beloved and beauteous Swan... The raven wants more sons and daughters of his own... What if... Six became ten? Demons can make such things happen if they know the way, and Wyrvaust possesses such methods. So she understands fully what he means... Arilwen could carry her Raven's two sons and two daughters with the horseman's six devils safely. We could raise



our two broods together." the abyss demon proposed.

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Willow: The symbolism in this situation did not escape Arilwen. Here she was, on the brink of an immensely important situation, trying to understand what it all meant. The most poignant part of this, for her, was time. This wasn't a decision that she could take too much time weighing. She could imagine that these six children could grow as swiftly as Anwaar had, leaving them little time. And had she known that Wyvaust had nearly consumed the children in a violent matter, she would have been highly upset. Surprised? Not particularly. It was an emotional situation and sometimes, bad decisions are made.

"Oh Wyrvaust..." Her voice was tender as he spoke of possibilities of more children... Because he wanted more. Arilwen sat up and gently pressed her forehead to his. "Of course we will have more children. Dozens, if you wish it. Though with constant babies, we would need Anna to move in." A ghost of a smile at that thought, but it quickly faded. Anna was to be married and start her life as a wife. She wasn't a babysitter that could be called at the Swan's whim.

Would Wyrvaust be able to love Gabriel's children as his own? Truly? And he did not believe that Gabriel would be a threat, but what if he suddenly wanted his children? How could that even be an option?

Arilwen sighed. So many what-ifs. So much uncertainty. Could she feel the six yet? She paused and tried to sense them. No, not quite yet. And ten children? How would she feed them?! She pressed a hand to her forehead. As of now, just she and Wyrvaust knew. Marsol? Probably.

"We need to put them to rest." She said quietly, then met the Raven's gaze. "No pain, no memory. I cannot risk danger coming to our clan... To our home and friends. Hearts change when it comes to one's children, and the uncertainty of it all is too great to risk. Should..." The Swan hesitated. "Should we consult with Lord Marsol first?"

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When Arilwen came to her decision Wyrvaust felt himself strangely torn. On one hand he was relieved, while on the other he was saddened that Arilwen felt it necessary to destroy the life within her and was willing. For Wyrvaust to be willing to do such a thing was fine, but he was saddened that Arilwen felt she had to.

"Yes... inform our Lord we should. Though it is a matter personal to the Raven and Swan, the trouble destroying them could bring is our chieftain's concern. Sense his brood the horseman may..." He was unwilling to speak Gabriel's name, wary of drawing his attention. The high fallen were often if not always aware when their names were spoken. It was just a matter of whether they chose to disregard the fact or not. Either way, it was risky to speak their true names.

"We have Grym now. He will be happy to watch over our children and his nature is such they shall adore him, and he they," he assured her with a faint smile. "Other loyal servants your Fox can create, of the likes will never betray us," he

proposed. "Indeed we plan to do just that, as guards and caretakers." Grym had been as much a friend to him as a defender. Through creating him Wyrvaust had found that true friends could be found even in the created and summoned. Grym was not even enslaved. Wyrvaust had simply developed in him a will and spirit that were incapable of betraying his maker. Magrymed simply did not have it in his nature to betray Wyrvaust or his family and trusted friends.

"Marsol aside... we shall keep this knowledge to ourselves. No one must ever know these offspring ever were if we must say farewell to them." He put as kindly as he knew how. He clearly was willing to abort them for her. "Do the deed we shall as soon as our chieftain has been informed." He went on to relate, rubbing her back comfortingly as he spoke and thereafter.

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It was a bit unexpected, wasn't it? One who knew Arilwen would assume that she would want to keep the children... to find a way to embrace the new role of being mother of a brood. But the fact of the matter was, Arilwen was tired. She had just gotten Wyrvaust back. She was home now, as was Anwaar, among family and friends. Bringing a litter of a horseman's devils into the home could only pose problems. What were the chances of that going smoothly? Then again, would a brood of any children really go "smoothly"? Arilwen rubbed her face in her hands. She looked exhausted. "Of course. We speak with Marsol. If he agrees that the children would be a potential risk to the clan, and agrees that we should put them to rest, then we will. And it will remain between us." She could never burden Anna's sweet heart with that news, as much as it would pain her to hold a secret from her dearest friend. Anna adored babies of all kinds, and had an incredible way with them.

Trailing her fingertips along Wyrvaust's knuckles, the Swan managed to smile to herself. "Two boys and two girls is what you want? Have you been wanting this for awhile?" Her blue eyes met his and she tried to push the worry from her mind. "Tell me...what would you want to name them? Have you even thought of names?" Not that it was urgent. She just wanted to talk about something to get her mind off of the boy devils. At least, until Marsol joined them.

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Wyrvaust nodded in agreement with Arilwen's overall assessment of the situation. "Between us," he repeated to settle it. When she asked if two boys and two girls is what he wanted in addition to Anwaar and if he had been wanting that for awhile, he smiled a little, met her gaze and nodded. "Yes, and yes," he replied softly. He shook his head with lips pursed when she asked what he would wish to name them. "We believe names should come from their spirits. One must be born first to have a name. Personalities shine even in the young, and it is after what radiates in their spirits they should be named, does not his lovely Swan agree?"

"How many children does his wife desire? The Raven has no wish to overwhelm her." He chuckled a little and hugged her tight then leaned his lips against her ear. "Of course the making of them is what is most delightful," he teased her but in deeply sensual tones. "I... miss the feel of you, Arilwen. Gods how I miss you..." his voice trembled as he said this and tears welled up in his eyes, but he wiped them away before they spilled over and he laughed breathlessly. "Your Raven

is so happy we are together again."

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Arilwen was doing everything she could to get her family back on track. Wyrvaust was here and back in the land of the living. That of course, had nothing to do with her as far as she knew. But she was trying to be very aware of his feelings... of Anwaar's feelings... of their guests and their home. It was the first night back and so much had happened. She couldn't let anything derail this. She couldn't put her family in danger. In her mind, she called for Lord Marsol, requesting that he come to their chambers alone so that they may speak with him about a highly private matter.

Wyrvaust's words did coax a soft smile from the Swan as he explained what he felt about baby names. "It's true. As I remember, we waited to name Anwaar after he was already here." It was a beautiful way to put it. His question about how many children SHE desired surprised her. Why did it surprise her? She had just never thought about it. "I...I am not sure." She blinked, then wrinkled her nose and looked at him. "One child was hard. It was a learning experience. The thought of having ten...four...six babies at once? I would seriously doubt my skills as a mother. If I could do it, and do it WELL, I see no reason why we couldn't have more." Was this all set in stone? Not yet. But the only way she would decide to agree on keeping these six babies, and possibly adding more, would be if Marsol could assure that their family would be at no risk of harm from them or as a result of having Gabrian's children.

"Oh my heart..." She whispered softly when she saw him tear up. Her gentle hands cupped his face and she coaxed him to look her in the eye. His comment about making them made her blush, but she nodded. "It has been torture. But we have a pressing matter at hand. Decisions must be made. I don't want our first time together to be rushed in any way. We will speak with Lord Marsol. We will come to a decision. Then, we shall go from there. Okay? Tell me you can be patient for just a little while longer." Arilwen tucked a lock of hair behind his ear and kissed his forehead.

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JD: Wyrvaust could see how hard his wife was trying, and wished he could be everything she needed him to be. But he was still unstable and though he was aware of that deep down... he was doing his best to be what 'normal' was for him, while actually having a devil of a time keeping himself steady. For instance... when his wife had gone back to considering keeping the horseman's beasties (he had trouble thinking of them as 'children' persay); Chaos swept into his mind as he struggled with himself. He had been easily willing to accept her decision to abort them, could have 'possibly' accepted her wanting to keep them more easily had she said so in the first place, but he was confused by her teetering heart. He knew how he 'should' be handling this; he should be patient, should understand she needed time to sort such a drastic situation out, should lend her his wisdom, and normally he would be, but his mind was what it was. Easily hurled into a storm of chaos which made him feel anxious, on edge and somewhat unhinged.

So Wyrvaust did the first thing he was compelled to do and focused on the subject of their own children. "The Lord and Lady of Sapphire can have their children one

or two or six at a time... But even if they had a dozen all at once, the Raven vows to go nowhere but where his wife and children are. Never will he leave them again unless he is dragged away in chains. He and those he plans to create shall help, as Grym shall help, will carry the work end... the schooling, washing, cleaning, while the Raven and his Swan will have only to love and teach their offspring how to be wise and good." He fell quiet after that as he realized two things... One; that the little beasts she carried inside of her now had not occurred to him in the equation he had just posed, and Two; he was adding to her burden with all his future casting. She had been through a great deal, so much that she had leaned on Gabriel as a sort of savior. She had needed him because her heart had been shredded.

Somehow amidst all the senseless noise in his mind he looked at his wife and gained some clarity. It dawned on him like a lightning bolt... She was right. She was right about everything. A smile crept over his lips despite the fact that he was afraid of himself and what he might say or do. When she asked if he could be patient a little longer, he chuckled, partly because he was unhinged but also because he was so proud of his wife. He embraced her suddenly and tight, rocking her in his arms. "Waiting to bed his beloved wife he will not do," he warned and promised in one breath. "Rush into this we two shall, but wait for the rest also, and with joy do so. So right is his wife, so wise in her callowness, so wonderful in her spirit. One thing he must say to his wife though, before they return to their chieftain; More chambers shall Wyrvaust prepare, for invite Anna, her husband and their children to stay in our lair his lovely bird shall. Invite them. Your Raven plans to dig out more of the ruins no matter what, for guests, for children, for the guardians and friends they shall make. Long before the years end the Swan and her Raven shall have a citadel of their own. Any gems he finds in doing so shall be his wife's to keep, to craft, to bestow, to enchant, to sell, to do with as she wills." That said he fell silent just to hold her awhile, petting her hair, rubbing her back, soothing her by spreading a calming and healing warmth through her, before he shifted and lifted her gently, then stood. She seemed steadier now... not as pale. "Is our delicious wife ready to seek her chieftain's counsel now?" he wanted to make certain. He was lending her the aid of his arm and tall frame, and when she nodded, he escorted her back to the dining Hall with one arm coiling her for both physical and emotional support.

When they arrived he dipped his head to Marsol, then the others, and seated Arilwen. Wyrvaust didn't have the greatest etiquette so he made no apologies. Marsol understood Arilwen was sick and Wyrvaust saw no reason to be sorry for caring for her. He was one of the savages of the realm, what could he say? He was more like a dragon than a neffari in many ways though he knew all the neffari customs and obliged those which made sense to him now days. "Everyone's thirst has been quenched the Raven prays," was the first thing he asked and did so while going over to the board and pouring Arilwen a cup of tea, which he brought to her afterwards. If anyone else requested a drink he motioned to Grym who happy as a pampered puppy would spring up and fetch anything anyone wanted. Considering what he had been through with Wyrvaust he was a very contented winged leopard man. When Grym had done serving others he bounced over to Wyrvaust and crouched down at his side, gazing up at him wide eyed. "Wine please, dear Grym," he asked with a smile and off Grym went to pour the dry red wine he knew his master liked and bring it back cheerful in his movements and demeanor. One would almost think him incapable of speech, because he rarely did, but he could and his voice was a pleasant balm to the spirit and senses, not deep, but pretty in a masculine way and sweetly soft

spoken. It was a treat just to hear him talk. Sometimes, once he got started, he just could not stop himself. His curiosity about everything would just come pouring out of him. He was very childlike in so many ways, and yet, as a warrior he was magnificent.

"Wyrvaust must speak of things most personal to him and his wife." That said, and with no further explanation, he raised a selective abyssal aura of silence around himself, Arilwen, and Marsol. Now if he, Marsol, or Arilwen spoke to anyone outside these barriers, they would be heard, but anything intended for privacy between the three would go unheard by others. He looked to Nic and Cevari, then Anna and smiled a little.

"It has been awhile, Niculaie. He's a cute son. Gosha is his name you said? Does that not mean truthful in the tongue of Dragons?" It did in fact. "A parent can only hope their child shall grow to be earnest. The Raven is joyous than his son says what he means. Proud of him we are."

His gaze then leaned on Cevari. "Has our brother a wife or children?" He looked puzzled when Gilrael started snickering. The dragon elf had made Cevari as a fan of males, being cut of the same cloth himself. In fact... Gilrael found the brother of Wyrvaust quite attractive. Maybe that was why he was giving him such a hard time.

Once enough time had passed he looked to Marsol and confided in him. "Arilwen was sick because she carries the Pale Rider's brood. Six there are, and sense we do something dark in them to the extreme. Yet... there is great darkness in the Raven and in his dear master. There is darkness in many who are good in deed. The Raven will not assume that they shall be born as his enemies, for he will assume nothing he does not know. A great sin it is to do so by the Morning Star's teachings, no? But... considering all our options we are... Keeping them, bidding them an eternal farewell. Your Desert Fox believes that if we keep them, the Horseman should be informed... If we should see them gone, no one should know. Our wife fears that to keep them should invite trouble from the bringer of famine. The Raven has from the beginning been prone towards their extinction... but he is willing to care for them as his own if that is what his Swan desires," he informed Marsol of their situation.

The one thing Wyrvaust had not considered where Gabrian's offspring were concerned was whether or not they COULD be eliminated. There were cases of immortal children having defenses against harm, and such a possibility was even more likely when spawned by high profile beings tied to fate as Gabrian was.

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Justice

Anna, after having followed Anwaar II back out to the dinner table where every one was, exchanging glances, a few choice words said, would've taken a previously fussy Gosha off Marsol's hands if it weren't for the toddler being fast asleep against his chest already. She smiled as she leaned up to kiss Nic hello and if Wyrvaust permitted it, would pour Nic a drink along with making him a plate of the delicious dinner. "Did he fall asleep fast or did he fight it like he does all his naps," she asked, taking an empty seat beside Nic and Marsol. She would refill anyone's

drink when their cup ran dry. Looking to Nic as she asked this, spooning out portions of food onto a plate for him.[fin]

Nic was pleased when he did not have to wait for Marsol to give him permission to go to Anna, as they were holding a prior conversation, instead she came to him and leaned in to kiss him, likely on the cheek but he turned into it, and kissed her back. Nothing that would be considered inappropriate of course. "He tried to fight it, but Gramps is a natural." He said with a grin as he put an arm around Anna, and looke dinto her eyes, "I missed you, I think I came here as much for myself as for Gosha.." He said softly, and then he looked up to Marsol. wondering what he thought about everything, "Marsol, me and Anna want you to have lunch with us tomorrow." they had been talking about bringing up the marriage to him soon, and he decided tomorrow was the perfect time. "Can you swing that?" He was still concerned about his appearent ward destroying nature.. Should he not live in the warded tower, would he harm the safety of it? He was concerned. If it was permitted and he was made some food, he would happily accept it and take a seat after thanking Anna for making him a plate. "You are so good to me, love." Russia had been nice, but it was good to be home, he had actually missed the desert.:

Justice

Nic's earth slang was something she would never completely understand but his words amused her anyways. Sometimes she wondered if Marsol would ever throw Nic across a room for referring to him in such familiar fashions as "gramps" and "pops" but it hadn't happened so far. Maybe he tolerated these things because Nic said them in fondness? Or maybe he didn't care enough to get his scales bent over some earth slang? One thing that did bend his metaphorical scales was the fact that Anna had given Nic a son before marrying him. She knew it. She could tell by the reserved, or restraint, he showed in picking up his cup not to break it. "Nic," she said, gently taking his free hand to hold in hers. "I do not think Father has time for lunch, there are matters he must tend to. We are at war, you know." Though she did miss him she would not try to monopolize his time. "When time permits it we will have lunch. Tell me, has he been good for you?" She buttered some bread to chew on and listened.[fin]

Niculaie supposed that was true, war was upon them.. but still he had a certain idea of how he wanted to do things, he might have to just do things a bit more sloppier than he imagined it, after all life just didn't work out how you planned it. But Niculaie just sighed, "Fine, fine.. But when you have time Marsol, me and Anna would appreciate it." He said as he thought on how his son had been the past few days, "He must take after you, cause if I remember the stories of my own child hood, I was a terror. Gosha, has been a good boy though, but he has missed his mother I think. He is restless at night." Nic was eating quietly for a moment as he was not exactly sure what to say, somehow the way Marsol was quiet and how he didn't say much made Nic even more on edge than if he had back handed him, "..."  
Nic just put his fork down and stared at his plate, he had been through it with Anna a few times, how hard it was to talk to Marsol sometimes.. Hell this was the first time he had seen the man since they got back. Nic wondered if the knowledge of who his sire was made Marsol regret letting him get involved with Anna, not that he precieved Nic as a danger, or else he would not have permitted their relationship to go on as it had, but did the man regret it? Instead he just reached out under the table and took Anna's hand as he closed his eyes.. "I have caused your friends some bit of trouble tonight Anna.." He knew these people but only Anna and Marsol were people he felt he truly knew.. the others were strangers to him,

Niculaie was after all an outsider in this world.:

Justice

Anna felt a tension in the air that she had not felt been there earlier. Was it that bad, she wondered. Holding his hand with her left one she reached for another piece of bread but then changed her mind and picked up some fruit. Anna actually didn't eat the meaty dishes anymore. It was a gradual process but she had become a vegetarian. The only reason she ever ate meat was because she saw Marsol do it and everyone else did and as a child she wanted to grow up being big and fierce like her father. How ironic that she'd grown to become the exact opposite and yet no less fierce in her own way. "I planned to come back after getting Arilwen settled in and her new pots delivered. Shhh, its a surprise. They're clay pots with her family on the sides as animals. This is delicious you should try some. Here, here." She offered Nic some of what she was eating on a fork. "I am restless at night. I would rather ride my horse under the moon than sleep." Laughter bubbled up out of her.[fin]

He would eat any food she offered him and he tried to push that tension out of himself as she said she had only planned to be gone a short while, and he nodded as he swallowed, though he was a demon and enjoyed meat, he could not deny the flavor of fresh fruit, it was good. "I would not have come, but Gosha was beginning to fuss quite a bit, and I do not believe a child should be away from its mother so soon, Gosha needs his mother." He said as he pressed his head against her own, "So do I." Niculaie just smiled as she laughed, "I like the sound of that, you can sleep when you're dead, after all." A friend of his used to say that, he enjoyed taking in her scent.. "When all this fighting is over, we should move somewhere quite, I have.. always wanted to build a house." He said with a grin, Niculaie had done some carpentry as a hobby in his younger days, nothing like building a home, but he wanted to.

Niculaie was thoughtful for a moment.. "Do you think we should wait?" He asked softly.. He was speaking so only she could hear him, "I could talk to Marsol now, man to man, and you have your beloved friends here.." Of course he was talking about asking Marsol for his blessing, and he always figured their wedding would be small. "I get the feeling if I wait to long, he might eat me whole.":

Justice

"He won't eat you," she exclaimed, naturally defensive on both sides of that equation. She swatted his knee for saying such. Little did she know that Nick's words of being eaten by the dragon lord were all too close to the truth. Shifting in her seat as the others at the table were talking amongst their selves she offered him more of her fruit and finished her bread. "I think we should wait," she said, lowering her voice to an even quieter tone than it already is. "Something is wrong here, I don't know what it is but someone has tried to invade Lord Wryvausts home. I am certain my father will want to deal with this tresspass on this home and its family now. We should try to help them Nic. But what could we do?" It bothered her that tension in the air but she kept her thoughts on that to herself. She squeezed his head and leaned her forehead to his for a moment. "When we get home I will tuck Gosha under my chin so I can use his hair for a pillow." She was teasing Nic of course. A kiss laid to the corner of his mouth then she ate another piece of fruit.[fin]

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##### 9-11 LOG #####  
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Sporkitious: Marsol moved his amber golden eyes to the Raven and Swan as they rejoined them at their dinner table. Now he could tell that something had changed between them not because of any outward visible gestures on their parts but because he knew them. He knew them as he knew all of his family, more or less. Did he know about the ticking time bomb in Arilwens womb? Did he know about the six devil spawn between she and Gabrian before he even brought them back? Was there a chance he couldn't have sensed it? Now he kept silent while everyone else around the table talked amongst themselves, especially when Anna wanted to fuss over Arilwen but she didn't because he'd already given her "the look". Marsol considered all Wryvaust told him in a moments worth of time, no longer than an exhale, and shifted to give Gosha back to Anna as she offered to hold him. Something deep down grated against his scales about the six spawn growing in Arilwens womb.

"Is it not just him," Marsol said to his old friend and young fair bird. "You need to worry about... Or have you both forgotten your time of imprisonment in Acheron?" For this he was disappointed in Wryvaust, and it showed in the small flattening of his left brow.

He did not say who. He shouldn't have to. But anything that would do them harm or cause anguish he would not be surprised if it was just another order passed down from 'that' asshole. "I will not make this any easier for either of you in that, I will not allow children such as these to live in my domain. Choices have already been made. You both choose. Now, you will live with it. If it is your guilt that needs to be eased I will offer to destroy that which grows inside you."

The way he spoke of it gave the distinct impression that this was not the first time he was forced to do this exact thing. But why? For whom? Did it matter? What he did not say was that he knew in time there was a great chance Arilwen may come to resent this choice, and resent Wryvaust. She was a mother. Children just weren't something you took the life of and slept soundly that night. If they thought they were out of the woods with their marriage they had another thing coming. Has Arilwen ever lost a child before? Marsol would not budge on where he stood. The devil kiddies must be destroyed. And then naturally what came later would be his concern. "There is... No keeping them M'Lady. These are not meant for you. Do you both understand."

By then Gosha was beginning to get loud with his crankiness. Anna excused herself from the dinner table to take him on a walk. She kissed Nic and told him that he better not eat all her fruit before she left the room. Marsol then asked Nic to tell Gilriael what this Russia was like just for humor sake and possibly to see the look on Gilriael's face when Nic talked about the "lovely" weather. Anna rubbed Gosha's back and told him about what his name meant here as she wandered about the parts of Wryvausts home that weren't off limits and not private to her. She didn't go to the garden room because she'd spent so much time there already. She knew everything plant in the place by now. On her wandering about telling Gosha about the pretty gems here that Master Wryvaust gave to Lady Arilwen as gifts she passed by the lair entrance but did not venture outside of it. She did get to singing as she held Gosha and tried doing her best impersonation of one of Nick's favored



songs while rocking sideways slowly to pull some giggles out of her son, who of course thought it was the best thing since sliced bread. Since she had that abyssmal shield around her and her son they couldn't be seized by gates right? Well that was a good thing. Or was it?[fin]

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JD: Sadly Wyrvaust was RELIEVED that Marsol shared his proclivity to terminate the pale rider's offspring. What Wyrvaust sensed from their spirits was exceptionally dark, and as he had pointed out, that did not prove they would evil and bring tragedy to them, but it was something to be enormously concerned about. There had been a logically cold side to Wyrvaust for a very long time now, since about the second year he had been sired. The Raven's first instinct had been to EAT them and devour their souls after all. He had even planned on it. Womb gate them to his mouth, chomp them up, swallow, and drink their souls. Tell Arilwen he had made a mistake and that she had worms which he had taken care of. That was how callous he could be if it was to protect his clan. He hadn't changed his mind about that either. He simply decided after much warring with himself that Arilwen had the right to make the choice. Now after hearing Marsol out Wyrvaust was sure she would agree with their chieftain. There was no way she would decide to keep them now would she? WOULD she resent Wyrvaust? He wouldn't let her. He would remove all memory of them from her if he had to... He would do anything he had to to protect her heart and mind.

"The Raven understands his chieftain and most trusted of all friends," he promised. "Perhaps... he... the Raven should feel more remorse... but he does not. What he is feels is that what his chieftain believes is for the best. Your old servant feels the same way, but also concluded that his beautiful wife should have final say, even if she disagrees with her mate and chieftain. The Fox whose heart belongs to two trusts her to do what is right for her clan." Marsol was counted as clan by him just as Wyrvaust was counted as tribe by Marsol. "The Raven fathoms all the dangers here ALL too well," he assured Marsol, his eyes burning on his chieftain. Oh, he had thought of Sammael. Whenever thinking of Gabriel he thought of Sammael. Those two were one entity as far as Wyrvaust was concerned. When did Gabriel ever do ANYTHING without Sammael's knowledge, or input, and knowledge not acted upon was as good as consent where some dynamics were concerned.

His eyes then followed Anna and Gosha for a moment before his gaze locked on Marsol. "His own children the Raven desires under his roof guarded by brothers of his own creation. Leave his wife and young again your Raven shall not. Only one can call him away and that be Lord Chieftain Marsol." If Arilwen decided to keep them? Wyrvaust would be unequipped for that possibility. It would mean they would have to leave Marsol's kingdom and that was one thing Wyrvaust just wouldn't do of his own free will. He had just finally made it home. He had no intentions of ever leaving the Kingdom of Fire again so long as Marsol lived.

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Tyrant Thorn: There were many states that could mimic death, with every appearance of death, with every transmission of its signature before the silence, without actually having suffered the inconvenience of it. Hers had been such a thing, a game, a red herring, to throw the scent off. For it to be convincing enough she'd

had to make it 'real'. Real enough that even Sammael and those closest to her, that felt her through particular bonds, had also been made to feel it. She'd waited until an appropriate time had passed to emerge and initiate the second phase. Almira was shed the same as a snake shed its skin. Although Almira's humanoid shape very closely resembled the truest form of her default shape, what emerged was an infinitely prettier picture, which was to say that what emerged could have been regarded as the image of female perfection... if one had a thing for blondies. Big things had small beginnings. Molecule by molecule until streams of black, rather lively, sludge oozed from the sands of the shore where Almira had taken the big dirt nap in the sky until a pool of the same bubbling substance had formed. Quickly the bone structure formatted, organs and other connective tissue, muscle, skin, hair, eyes, and then the sludge was gone.

What lay, naked and outstretched, and after an initial gasp of breath laughing, was such a blonde. She was a vain creature if there ever was, but then not even she could delude herself into thinking she was entirely unique in that aspect... there was after all another. Her laughter was some enchanting and terrifying sirens song. It was the sort of thing that would be found terrifying by the few things that wouldn't be drawn to it like moths to flame and dominated by it. It dulled the senses of most things as well, lulled them into complacency, like a shot of opiates into the bloodstream. Abruptly the laughter ended and blonde jumped to her feet, shook off the sand, and stood to observe the burnt out forest and cluster of mountain in the distance that had not long ago been a battlefield where two fierce things had done their absolute best to murder each other. She smirked a pretty little smirk that quickly became a wretched sort of sneer.

"Oh me, oh my, my ill-tempered 'pet'... hmm..."

Her eye's then golden of iris burned like fire as the sun set, but reverted a hint as she calmed. Said Lizard had walked, or flown, away utterly satisfied that he'd put his lover-enemy to death had he. She'd given him that much and he hadn't even said goodbye. However it had all been a part of the plan. It was not all that she'd 'given' him. Not that she knew in the moment but he had also given her something unexpected. She was suddenly gone from that serene river fed valley.

By gate and by shadow would the golden haired terrible one emerge in another place entirely, largely with such precision owed in thanks to her 'gift' to him, and remained undetected. Stalking. Slithering. Plotting. An opportunity presented itself. Not the opportunity she'd sought to exploit, but all the same something terrible and delicious. In fact what presented itself, considering the totality of what she sought to bring, was in ways a better eventuality. How about that. There was a boy, and a girl, and while the boy was otherwise inconsequential to her and the plans that she had made in as far as she could immediately identify, the girl was something workable. Oh yes. She watched, and she waited, and when the moment had become especially 'tender' so had the wicked beast decided that the moment was as ripe as it was going to get. She struck. Phasing into the physical plane right in front of the boy, a child, and the girl, a young woman, that she sought. No words were spoken. No words needed to be spoken. The beautiful, wicked, naked thing seized the girl and tore the child from her arms. The child was cast lightly down upon the padded chaise, and its caretaker hurled through a gate of opal fire which the wicked thing did so follow. Just like that it had happened. The ginger of the ill-tempered ones care and doting had been taken, and a screaming fucking brat was left without its source of milk. (D)

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LiftTheDarkness: Cevari had been waiting for that question, regarding whether he had had a wife and children. It was a logical question, of course, given the amount of time that had passed. He had been sure Wyrvaust had guessed, or at least had had an inkling that his tastes veered away from the fairer sex, before they had been separated, but perhaps not. He had been young enough then, himself, that his own leanings had sat ill at ease in his own mind. Not so today, however. Cevari was comfortable with himself and his lot in life, and even his men had come to accept that that was just the way he was. They might tease about it occasionally, but Cevari only seemed to take it in stride. Would Wyrvaust accept it as easily? He was unsure.

He gave Gilrael a chastising sort of glance at the snicker, but he seemed amused by it. Was a dragon meant to have such a cute snicker? Gil was apparently more perceptive than his own brother. Cevari wondered if that meant the handsome thing had been admiring him. He hoped so. "Neither," He responded to his brother, finally. "I'm afraid the fairer sex does not hold a great deal of appeal to me. I've not bound myself to a mate of either gender, though." He watched him closely for a reaction. He hated to disappoint him, if he had hoped for such a thing, but then, he wouldn't lie to him. He wanted to be as honest as possible.

He did spare what was a distinctly flirtatious glance to Gilrael. Did he have a thing for him? Perhaps he had been so difficult because he was like a little boy on the playground, pulling the plaits of the girls he fancied. If that was the case, Cevari would certainly not complain. Despite that thorny attitude he had first displayed, Cevari thought he was an awfully pretty thing. And when had he ever flirted with a dragon? How exotic! #

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JD: Fortunately so far for Anna, the abyss shield guarded her for the most part. First of all, it absorbed the gateway her attacker intended to drag her through, collapsing it, secondly, it rapidly drained her attacker's health, stamina, and strength every second she was contacting her, or close to her, and thirdly Wyrvaust sensed the abyssal aura being activated because of his mark and signature. The seal made it permanent, until he removed it that is. This shield would also absorb any hostile or foreign energies being aimed at Anna. It was the same shield he had raised around his family while the wards were down. The instant he sensed the surge in that shield, he stood fast, his eyes leaping on Marsol. "Someone is attacking Anna..." he said and raced for corridor Anna had disappeared into. He would navigate the corridors of his lair, and there was not a lot to it at the moment, three bedrooms, the dining room, kitchen, bath, fountain room, his hidden chamber, and the corridors between them. He had not built on to it yet, it was in his plans to do so before the year was out.

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Sporkitious: Anna being attacked? The nerve someone would have to have, no the balls really, on anyone who would dare come into this lair with so many capable immortals in it had to be huge. Of course Marsol's first thought was that Sammael just arrived and was trying to murder Anna a second time, though this being more

direct in approach than the first. Who else would it be? Well there was Mekkora too but why would he even bother with that again? He would've gotten further taking Arilwen again wouldn't he? If not them then who! He bolted from his seat because he believed Wryvaust. He would have done the same if it had been any member of the tribe. Out of that room down the hallway and almost knocking over something hanging on a wall he went to find the trespassing party, or parties, with every intention of flattening them like a pancake. When he did make it to the cave entrance where he saw Gosha sobbing on a chaise rubbing his eyes and a hysterical Anna slapping or attempting to slap away the hand of one blonde, his stride did not slow but quickened into a dead sprint the likes of which no mortal man could accomplish.

One look at this familiar blonde bombshell and he knew. He should've stayed by that mother fucking lake. He should've stayed there to make sure beyond a shadow of a doubt that she was dead and gone forever. Maybe he would've grown moss on his head and sprouted roots from his feet but he should've fucking sat there waiting. How had she made it back to the land of the living though? How? Obviously, she was not our average bird. He chided himself for not killing her, since he didn't know he actually had, as he raised a wall of sand behind Ariela while storming towards her like the murderously enraged dragon critter that he was. Anna seemed of less importance to this wretched creature as she shoved Anna aside into a wall hard enough to break her right arm in four places and give her a bloody nose. There was that same cheeky evil smile of false innocence the dark winged she-devil gave the charging dragon lord just before they collided with talons, claws, wings and fangs bared in ground shakingly loud snarls between them. The force of their collision disturbed sand outside the opening to the lair. He got one good handful of her throat just as she buried all her slender digits and talons into his backside to spill his blood all over the ground then they disappeared into the sandy Gateway which took them far north from Sapphire Canyon. The quietness that followed was only broken when Gosha scooted off the chaise he'd been plunked down on to wobble over to Anna's legs where he hugged her left leg, hiding under her dress...[fin

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Tyrant Thorn: How about that. Leaping before looking had its consequences, she was old enough to know better, but fuck it ... she had a thing for gingers right? She had dared, and she had failed. Failed miserably, and suffered for it. She was staggered like a broken bird clutching her stomach as if her guts had turned to hot coal against a wall when Wryvaust, and company, followed by her 'lover' stormed in to fuck up her party. From bad news bears to covered in shit, how her situation had become, but she'd not give satisfaction of a scream to the one responsible for the taste of the Abyss she'd felt. So that was what that felt like. She was resistant to it, and really the only reason why she was even standing however fucked up. It had gotten her attention, in a way, and distracted her enough that gating away to lick her wounds elsewhere had become an impossibility. Even through the pain racking her she managed to offer the chieftain a sickening sweet smile and the poke of tongue sticking through blood stained teeth before coughing. He was charging. He was charging and she really ought to have been moving, right? She wouldn't run. She'd shoved Anna away from herself and had at Marsol. In her weekend state it would be a tricky situation. She'd proved about an equal for him at full strength when it had come to their combat. Oh what fun! (D)

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JD: Now, before he went dashing after Anna, tracking her by his signature, which was not an exact art when you were in a hurry, but it got you close enough for a visual search, he had paused in that very sobering conversation he was having with Marsol and looked to his brother when he replied to the inquery about family. Wyrvaust cocked his head to the side slightly and chortled. "The Raven understands," he assured him in mild tones. Wyrvaust had only ever been attracted to ONE male before, the handsome dragon sitting across from him before the room exploded into a collective frenzy of alarm. Marsol was the one male Wyrvaust would have given himself to. Marsol had already had his heart, mind and soul. His body was all the hellraptor had not accepted, and it was not because Wyrvaust was unwilling. The Raven LOVED his wife, adored, cherished and worshipped her, but he had loved Marsol first. Nothing had or probably ever would change that. He coped well with that unrequited desire, as did Arilwen, perhaps because it WAS one sided, but whatever the reason for her forgiveness of it, Wyrvaust loved her all the more for it.

"Has his brother a mate then?" he searched. Males could have mates and children in his experience. Either they were those creepily Haman birds, devils or adopted! Gilriael was watching Cevari now, curious about the mate question. Maybe he was available. Maybe Cevari would have a chance to answer before someone tried to take Anna.

When that moment DID roll around however, and Wyrvaust's very long strides had been interrupted by one extremely pissed off dragon lord who had shoved him off to the side in passing, the Raven shook off the pain and shock of being slammed into a stone wall and raced after his chieftain. He stood back from the violence which erupted thereafter, watching closely in case he needed to jump in, but before he could even hurl agony and injury at the blonde beast which had invaded his home, Marsol dragged her off through a corridor of sand which sank into the floor until only a light layer of pale grit remained. "Marsol!" he shouted after him as he made a mad dash to the gateway, trying to follow, only he skidded to a halt as it, Marsol and the accursed bitch vanished. Wyrvaust snarled deep and guttural and swiveled as Nic came sliding into the room to find his shaken wife and child safe, if there was such a thing. Wyrvaust was furious. TWICE in one night his family had been attacked, for if Anna was not family than who else was? Once again where his master was concerned, Wyrvaust could only hope and prey to the lords of chaos that Marsol would be safe. Tonight he would be offering his finest wine and food to Acheron in hopes of their favor.

The angered demon found his wife in the hallway and leading her by his arm, returned to the dining hall where he plunked back down in his chair and buried his face in his hands, elbows against the table. He was collecting his thoughts, finding his center, searching his mind's bank of knowledge. He had to start on the lair wards tonight. He could not risk another assault.

When Nic brought Anna in, Wyrvaust closed his eyes and held up an open palm towards her and began to chant rhythmically in deep, harmonic tones, whereas heavy doses of healing spirit energies snaked from his hand and covered her over. Some of it curled around him as well, healing him of a busted rib. Marsol hit hard sometimes when he didn't even mean to. Wyrvaust had been in his way when he was in a hurry. Oh well. It was not often Wyrvaust reverted to his oldest of all paths, Shamanism, and when he did it was usually to heal or commune with spirits.

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LiftTheDarkness: Cevari had been relieved, of course. There had been a number of possible outcomes of that little revelation, but Wyrvaust had taken it with great ease and maturity. For that, he was thankful.

"No mate. Not yet, anyway." There was that charming grin of his. "Not opposed, of course. Just never met that special one in particular." He hoped for that, someday. Settling down. There had been no shortage of willing lovers, of course. Cevari was not the type to wait around without sampling some of the pleasures to be had.

He felt Gilriael's eyes on him, and glanced over with a cheekily cocked eyebrow. That interested, was he? He had just dropped him a flirty little wink when they were interrupted.

Cevari glanced up sharply. An attack? He could not claim that he knew this Anna very well yet, but an attack was cause for concern no matter who the target was, in his book. He stood as well. He wasn't sure whether he would be able to help much. He wasn't a fighter. His specialty was merrily sidestepping danger. But he was willing to lend support where necessary. #

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##### LOG END #####  
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Willow: Arilwen settled into the chair that Wyrvaust offered her, knowing that this was going to be one of the harder conversations that she had participated in with their Lord. It was in front of so many others, but they wouldn't have the ..er.. pleasure?... of hearing what was going on. It wasn't easy for Arilwen not to run to Anna and beg her friend for advice. Giving her friend the understanding of what was happening would place that heavy of a burden on sweet Anna's shoulders. If things went the way they were looking, Anna would be devastated, and Arilwen couldn't bear the thought of hurting her.

Wyrvaust started slowly, by speaking with his brother and commenting about Gosha. Wait, Anna had a child?! Arilwen's blue eyes grew huge and she tried to lean over to peek at the slumbering toddler in Marsol's arms, but his face was firmly planted in his chest. She gave Anna a look that said, "HOWDIDYOUNOTLETMEATHIMYET?!"

Her features quieted, however, when they moved onto the matter at hand. Had Marsol known about the babies when he allowed her to come back to the desert? Had he decided that this would be a test to see if she could commit herself fully to them? Yes, them. Not just Wyrvaust, but to the clan. It seemed, at least initially, that it might be working. Her immediate thought had not been of cherub-faced babies, but of any possible threats to the clan. Still, it didn't make it any easier when Marsol so plainly laid out that the choice was theirs, but this ran so much deeper than Gabriel's consent... and that those babies could not live in his domain. Arilwen immediately felt the restrained reaction inside of Wyrvaust. Arilwen tried to keep her gaze steady on Marsol's, her fingers tangled in her lap as she pursed her lips and tried to just breathe. She could do this, she told herself. Just think of your womb as a mass of darkness. Wyrvaust can remove the darkness. A darkness that endangers your family and clan. She thought she had ahold of herself, until he gentled his voice just a tick, telling her that the babies were not meant for her.

Fire crawled up her throat and Arilwen felt hot tears escaping down her cheekbones. She had no warning...they just spilled over her dark lashes and she lifted a palm to rub them away, almost angrily. She had never lost a child before. This was going to be a hell of a roller coaster ride. Her mind was telling her that if she removed the "darkness", then things would proceed on in a calm, collected manner. "I understand." She managed in the most dampened of voices, looking at her lap as she tried to get her emotions under control. Without looking up, she reached for Wyrvaust's hand and gripped it like a vice, drawing it into her lap so that she had something to squeeze and concentrate on. After a moment or two she managed to stop the tears, and she wiped her face on her sleeve, thankful that Anna had taken the baby for a walk. Her friend would worry if she saw her in such a state. Three things could happen: Arilwen could consent to get rid of the babies and they did, dealing with the aftermath as necessary. OR Arilwen demanded to keep them and she had to try to drag Wyrvaust from the desert, kicking and screaming. OR She demanded to keep them and Wyrvaust went willingly with her elsewhere. Ah, the resentment that would overflow in THAT situation, eh?

After a few moments, the Swan tucked a lock of dark hair behind her ear and nodded, looking directly at Marsol. "They go." She said softly. "But we do it ourselves." Did she feel as if she deserved to shoulder all of the guilt? She had to.

No sooner did she get the words out did Wyrvaust rip his hand from hers, jumping to his feet. Arilwen looked startled, as did many at the table. Wait..WHAT?! The moment Arilwen heard Anna's name, all concern about their previous conversation flew out the window. Marsol and Wyrvaust being faster, of course, but Arilwen grabbed up the length of her robe and raced down the hall, ignoring her thrashing stomach. She tried to scream Anna's name down the hall, but couldn't force the words to release.

It happened so very, very quickly. Marsol was gone. Wyrvaust was so angry that she felt the heat radiating from his skin. He hooked his arm around Arilwen to lead her back to the dining hall while she was looking over her shoulder. "Anna...Anna's hurt..." Even Arilwen was shaking. Someone tried to take her? Someone had been in their HOME? And where was their Lord?

Wyrvaust fell into a chair and Arilwen knew not to touch him or demand answers. She had to let him draw himself together. She turned to go to Anna, looking pale and shaking her head. "Oh Anna...Anna..." She was whispering. Nic, whom she had not gotten the pleasure to meet yet, was with her of course. And unfortunately, Gosha was quite awake and clinging to his mother's leg. Wyrvaust could take care of physical healing, and there was not much that Arilwen could try, but she would. Very slowly, and about two feet away, Arilwen knelt and very calmly tried to smile at Gosha. "I believe this is the first time we have met, Mister Gosha.." She said softly, being very careful not to move too quickly. He may feel his mother start to relax as Wyrvaust's healing power wrapped her to douse the horrific flames of pain she had to be feeling. Nic as well. "My name is Arilwen, and I admit that I am quite jealous of that beautiful hair. This must be your father." She smiled up at Nic and offered her hand. "It's a pleasure." Obviously some might look at her like she was mad for acting like this in a moment of chaos, but Gosha's mind was seeing the chaos and horror ten times worse than the adults, so she wanted to try to create a calm bubble for him.

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Wyrvaust held Arilwen tight and rubbed her back when he observed the tears spilling from her eyes, and once again he'd felt relief. He had been glad that she shed tears for the spawn of famine. It was healthy for her spirit and mind to grieve for them.

After the assault on Anna his cherished wife allowed him the quiet he needed while he healed Anna. Once she was mended and Wyrvaust had calmed, his gaze lifted slowly to settle on his wife. He just gazed on her awhile, watching her with Gosha, then broke his silence in quiet tones. "The Raven wants nothing more than to crawl in bed with his wife and just... hold her... love her... forget the world," he then breathed a deep sigh. "But instead... he must repair those forces which protect all he cherishes." Thanks to Niculaie he thought rather churlishly. He had SOME tact, when he wanted to. He did not wish to upset Anna anymore than she already was by chiding her mate. "Maybe his Swan can help while Grym guards dear Anwaar," he suggested and smiled weakly. It would do her some good to focus on something other than the end she agreed must come to the malevolent lives inside of her.

He had expected her to ask how she could help and he smiled when she did. "The Swan is daughter of Belorian. She is most capable and with focus can draw from herself and from around her, her intellect, her mystic center and endurance until she feels it overflow inside of her, then with synergy direct the force she has gathered to her Raven." Wyrvaust was teaching her how to share her power, stamina and psyche, a skill that was actually advanced but which he made simple for a being who very much had it in her to follow his instructions. She might not get it on the first attempt, but Wyrvaust knew it would not take long for her grasp and succeed in what he asked of her. And once she achieved success, things like healing, invigorating, and enhancing others would come easily to her. It was in her blood and spirit as Mordim. "But save some of these forces for herself the Swan should soas to maintain her own substace in the effort." He then explained how she would herself lose nothing from the process. In this way she could continue to restore and enhance him as needed. Wyrvaust then stood, his hand resting on Arilwen's shoulder. He already knew how he would handle the situation with the famine spawn. He would do it while she slept and when she woke... if she wanted all memory of them removed, Wyrvaust would see it done. Either way, she would feel nothing. It would be as if it had never happened.

Now as he contemplated this and Arilwen was trying to focus herself so she could assist her husband, something unexpected happened to her. A powerful vision slammed her which redirected her perception entirely to the probable future which all her senses were transported to. She saw Wyrvaust, seated on their bed, his hand flush against her stomach while she slept peacefully. His expression suddenly gnarled in shock and agony seconds before he keeled over off the bed to lay flat on his back, where he lie gasping for air with muscles locking up just before he seemed to dissolve into black vapors. Arilwen meanwhile continued to sleep on, serenely, while the vision carried her inside of her abdomen to the six small lives swimming the darkness of her womb... barely larger than tadpoles, yet she got the distinct impression they were warning her not to let anyone attempt harming them. There were no words or red lights flashing, it was just a strong impression. The big question was, had what happened to Arilwen come from her... or her brood of half devils? Her mind then cleared and the present came back to her like coming



around after a heavy swoon. The feeling was much the same... some disorientation and fogginess followed by a gradual return of awareness.

Wyrvaust was shaking her by her shoulders lightly, trying to get a response from her. "Arilwen... Arilwen... What just happened?" Wyrvaust had been in and seen enough trances to recognize the condition when he saw it. She had either had a vision, contact with spirits, or a seizure, and he doubted it was a convulsion. Still... with six rapidly growing immortals growing within her he would not completely rule it out.

Wyrvaust was getting overwhelmed here, and he was sure Arilwen was too. The wards needed immediate attention, they'd come under attack twice already, Marsol had gone off the devil knew where, and above all else his mate was very unwell. He contemplated how he might solve the problems at hand while Arilwen gathered her senses, then it occurred to him what he must do. He would summon Beroth's aid to restore his wards for him, with full command of them granted to Wyrvaust. He and Arilwen would take over and finish the wards once they had time to breathe easy. That decided, he reached out to Prince Beroth with his mind. The clan Prince knew that Wyrvaust would never contact him unless it was important. Wyrvaust avoided his clan demon association like they were a plague. Indeed he'd rather contend with a plague than Mendorin or Mekkor. But Beroth and Muustala were decent enough sorts that he could tolerate and even welcome them.

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Poor, obedient Anwaar was still in the garden where his father had sent him. He had wandered to the far side and knelt next to a patch of herbs so that he could dig out the scraggly weeds that grew there, threatening to choke the life out of some of the more delicate plants. He wasn't even aware of what was going on inside, and it was probably for the best. How would he have reacted to Anna being hurt? Probably not well.

The situation seemed to be calming momentarily and Arilwen looked up from Gosha's uncertain face when she heard Wyrvaust speak. How could she help? She implored him, because her idle hands were killing her in this moment. "Belorian." Arilwen's nose wrinkled just a little. "I keep hearing this name and everyone seems to have met him but me." Yes, Arilwen's mother had died when she was young and Belorian, this father of hers, probably had no idea that she even existed... but he seemed like a popular fellow. She stood and went to the Raven, taking his hands into hers so that she could kiss his palms. "Show me how I can help, my heart." Wyrvaust could sound confusing at times. He could be eccentric and high strung and all over the place... but when he was teaching Arilwen, it was an entirely different experience. He was calm and thoughtful and fully patient with her. He had never once lost his patience with her, had he? The first step was gathering her energy and the energy around her. The next step was to funnel that energy to her husband while he was trying to rebuild their wards. She just had to ensure not to completely drain herself. The Swan nodded that she understood and would settle herself into a dining chair, her hands resting on the arms. Focus. Focus. Foc--Gosha's voice was cute. Was Anna okay? How was her arm? FOCUS! Arilwen shook her head and frowned before trying again. It took four failed attempts before she could feel the background noise and thoughts start to dissolve away. Her dark lashes closed slowly and her shoulders relaxed... but only for a few moments. It was as if someone suddenly bull rushed her, slamming into her and melding with her body so that they could possess her.

The Swan's back went ramrod straight and her fingers clutched the arms of the chair like talons... as if she were about to rip them off. Inside of her mind, the most horrendous visions were washing over her, as if someone were taking buckets of black tar and splashing them in her face. Visions of Wyrvaust, trying to slip the children away while she dreamed, and suddenly collapsing to the floor and dissolving like ember smoke. On the inside of her mind Arilwen was screaming, howling... but in the vision she was so relaxed and lost in slumber. And the children...she saw the children... the "darkness" that she had been trying to envision them as. Little forms of life, curled together, and one clear, precise feeling. She couldn't let Wyrvaust do it.

She was shaking. What was shaking? Someone was shaking HER. Arilwen's hands were clutched around the arms of the chair. No one could pry them off at that very moment without breaking her bones. Her blue eyes flew open. Her pupils were so dilated that her blue eyes looked black, then suddenly contracted and turned into tiny pinholes before easing into their original and correct size. She wasn't breathing. Her mouth was formed into a silent scream, but she looked as if she was trying to climb out of her skin. Arilwen. He was talking to her. A half shriek/half breath escaped and she managed to wrench her hands from the chair so that she could grab Wyrvaust's arms. Unfortunately for him, she was clinging to them as tightly as he had the chair. Once that breath passed her lungs, she began panting, looking utterly terrified. Forming words right now? Just forget it. Her lips parted, closed, parted, then finally gave up as she just focused on breathing. She couldn't even explain it right now. It seemed like Wyrvaust was trying to shift his communication to someone else and she let his arms go, burying her face in her hands as she just breathed heavily. She was sweating profusely. Marsol. She needed to talk to Marsol. But their lord was not here. When would he be back? No one knew.

So... sleep for the night was out, huh? It didn't look like any of them would be going to bed any time soon.

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Wyrvaust did not speak to Beroth long, however, for just as he touched base, Cevari piped up to offer his help with the wards. Wyrvaust felt profoundly thankful and it shone in his eyes as his regard fell his brother's way. "That would be... wonderful, Cevari, we thank our brother." His gratitude was breathed in every word.

Wyrvaust meanwhile spoke to Beroth long enough not to be rude for interrupting him for nothing after all, but did not implore him for assistance with the wards, but did ask if he was well and if his clan was safe from the war. Beroth expressed how happy he was to hear from him and appreciated his concern, and assured him the war for their part had not even cast a shadow on them, which Wyrvaust was genuinely

glad to hear, and yet... there had been something in the way Beroth had worded his comment and in his tones... something the Prince was not saying but wanted to communicate silently to his estranged clan mate. Beroth was in some kind of trouble and it had to do with the war, but could not risk it to the casual mental path Wyrvaust had established. It was a talk for another time, Wyrvaust could tell. It was the 'war for their part' remark and the soberness of Beroth's voice which had alerted the Raven. Yes, the perceptive abyss demon got all this from subtleties. Marsol had often dispatched Wyrvaust as a scout in his lands because he was perceptive, and a natural wanderer who blended right in with the desert as a native and hermit, who few paid much attention to.

When his brief mental conversation with Beroth was done; those twilight eyes of his which matched the highlights in his pitch-black hair trained on his wife with an attentive stare. He could almost see her mind racing, spinning out of control, so much so that she had not gathered the moxie to speak. He was tempted to 'peek' at her thoughts, as he was often tempted to do a great many impish things, but instead he embraced her and just held her a moment before holding her away.

"Whatever his Swan is thinking... she may confide in her Raven. It is us now, against the world, bird of our heart. He can see that she is... reluctant to trust him with whatever she has just experienced, but if she cannot trust her Raven, who can she trust?" he urged her to open up to him. Even as fragile as his mind still was, Wyrvaust was a capable and powerful creature. What he was now was unpredictable and perhaps even more dangerous than usual, but Arilwen had little to worry about on that end.

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Anwaar meanwhile was not alone. Grym was watching over him, although he had hung back from his master's son while doing so. But seeing a sort of restless look overcoming Anwaar, Grym came away from the canyon wall he had been leaning against, and which his darly spotted rust, grey, amber and cream colored fur acted like camouflage against. He moved like a cat in his quick grace and reaching Anwaar he left up on the boulder he was pulling some weeds out beneath and crouched down to gaze at him. "Lord Anwaar seems troubled. Is there anything Grym can do for him?" He spoke a little bit like Wyrvaust but his speech was not as convoluted and detached from himself. Grym was fine with himself and the world. And why not? He had a wonderful master and lady, lived in a fantastic home, and was surrounded by people he adored and would do anything for. Grym was as friendly to those he was devoted to as he was fierce to enemies. The creature then reached out and brushed Anwaar's cheek with the back of his hand, claws turned under. His fur was wondrously soft.

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When Wyrvaust accepted his brother's help gratefully, Gilriael was about to say it was unwise to trust his wards to Cevari so soon, but held his tongue. Once in a while you had to take a leap of faith. Maybe it was unwise, especially considering all the circumstances, but in his gut Gilriael felt trusting him was the thing to do. It wasn't because he was attracted to him either, which he was, but because his instincts had told him all along he was okay. He had to give him a hard time, that was just the process. Indeed he'd had it easy so far compared to most. Most got chewed on, or stepped on, or clawed for awhile at least. Cevari had been

spared that for one reason... He was Wyrvaust's brother, or most likely was, that, and Marsol was preoccupied and Gilriael wasn't one of the dragons who tended to terrorize people to prove they could be trusted. They were Hellraptors after all. What did people expect? Among them Gilriael was civilized... in comparison. By mortal standards he was a complete barbarian. Many bards were in fact. If Gilriael could have helped with the defenses he'd had offered but was inept in that area. He was a bard and a weredragon little else. He smiled at Cevari after Wyrvaust had accepted his help. "If you need to draw strength from me, I am here," he offered what he could. One thing the nether elf dragon had was strength, stamina and a powerful elemental and cerebral nexis.

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Willow:

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JD: True, Wyrvaust was chaotic. He was a chaosian priest for a reason. His expressively wide lips pursed and a jet brow arched as Arilwen finally came round from her nightmarish vision to grip him so tightly that even he felt pain. But pain was something Wyrvaust could tolerate even when severe because of his upbringing around demons hard, cruel and demented, and red dragons which simply played rough. He knelt by her as his mind made contact with the Adram clan prince and picked a napkin up off the table to wipe the sweat from her brow and cheeks tenderly.

Wyrvaust did not speak to Beroth long, however, for just as he touched base, Cevari piped up to offer his help with the wards. Wyrvaust felt profoundly thankful and it shone in his eyes as his regard fell his brother's way. "That would be... wonderful, Cevari, we thank our brother." His gratitude was breathed in every word.

Wyrvaust meanwhile spoke to Beroth long enough not to be rude for interrupting him for nothing after all, but did not implore him for assistance with the wards, but did ask if he was well and if his clan was safe from the war. Beroth expressed how happy he was to hear from him and appreciated his concern, and assured him the war for their part had not even cast a shadow on them, which Wyrvaust was genuinely glad to hear, and yet... there had been something in the way Beroth had worded his comment and in his tones... something the Prince was not saying but wanted to communicate silently to his estranged clan mate. Beroth was in some kind of trouble and it had to do with the war, but could not risk it to the casual mental path Wyrvaust had established. It was a talk for another time, Wyrvaust could tell. It was the 'war for their part' remark and the soberness of Beroth's voice which had alerted the Raven. Yes, the perceptive abyss demon got all this from subtleties. Marsol had often dispatched Wyrvaust as a scout in his lands because he was perceptive, and a natural wanderer who blended right in with the desert as a native and hermit, who few paid much attention to.

When his brief mental conversation with Beroth was done; those twilight eyes of his which matched the highlights in his pitch-black hair trained on his wife with an attentive stare. He could almost see her mind racing, spinning out of control, so much so that she had not gathered the moxie to speak. He was tempted to 'peek' at her thoughts, as he was often tempted to do a great many impish things, but instead he embraced her and just held her a moment before holding her away.

"Whatever his Swan is thinking... she may confide in her Raven. It is us now, against the world, bird of our heart. He can see that she is... reluctant to trust him with whatever she has just experienced, but if she cannot trust her Raven, who can she trust?" he urged her to open up to him. Even as fragile as his mind still was, Wyrvaust was a capable and powerful creature. What he was now was unpredictable and perhaps even more dangerous than usual, but Arilwen had little to worry about on that end.

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JD: Anwaar meanwhile was not alone. Grym was watching over him, although he had hung back from his master's son while doing so. But seeing a sort of restless look overcoming Anwaar, Grym came away from the canyon wall he had been leaning against, and which his darly spotted rust, grey, amber and cream colored fur acted like camouflage against. He moved like a cat in his quick grace and reaching Anwaar he lept up on the boulder he was pulling some weeds out beneath and crouched down to gaze at him. "Lord Anwaar seems troubled. Is there anything Grym can do for him?" He spoke a little bit like Wyrvaust but his speech was not as convoluted and detached from himself. Grym was fine with himself and the world. And why not? He had a wonderful master and lady, lived in a fantastic home, and was surrounded by people he adored and would do anything for. Grym was as friendly to those he was devoted to as he was fierce to enemies. The creature then reached out and brushed Anwaar's cheek with the back of his hand, claws turned under. His fur was wondrously soft.

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JD: When Wyrvaust accepted his brother's help gratefully, Gilriael was about to say it was unwise to trust his wards to Cevari so soon, but held his tongue. Once in a while you had to take a leap of faith. Maybe it was unwise, especially considering all the circumstances, but in his gut Gilriael felt trusting him was the thing to do. It wasn't because he was attracted to him either, which he was, but because his instincts had told him all along he was okay. He had to give him a hard time, that was just the process. Indeed he'd had it easy so far compared to most. Most got chewed on, or stepped on, or clawed for awhile at least. Cevari had been spared that for one reason... He was Wyrvaust's brother, or most likely was, that, and Marsol was preoccupied and Gilriael wasn't one of the dragons who tended to terrorize people to prove they could be trusted. They were Hellraptors after all. What did people expect? Among them Gilriael was civilized... in comparison. By mortal standards he was a complete barbarian. Many bards were in fact. If Gilriael could have helped with the defenses he'd had offered but was inept in that area. He was a bard and a weredragon little else. He smiled at Cevari after Wyrvaust had accepted his help. "If you need to draw strength from me, I am here," he offered what he could. One thing the nether elf dragon had was strength, stamina and a powerful elemental and cerebral nexis.

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Willow: The Swan felt as if she were closed tightly into a glass jar full of water and everyone in the room had their faces pressed against it, staring at her while she was drowning. She wasn't drowning. She was sweating. She realized it as Wyvaust's fingers pressed a cloth napkin to her cheeks. Her saucer-like eyes closed and, after a few dabs of the napkin, her breathing began to regulate. She was terrified and still trembling, but didn't seem to be seizing, and Wyrvaust was slowly bringing her back around. Her Raven. "My Raven..." She whispered softly, finally letting her eyes ease open while she focused on his face, her fingertips soon following her gaze so that she could touch him everywhere on his face that she could possibly focus on. "It was...as if I were looking into our future. I was...I was sleeping. You were there. You touched my stomach. The babies... I saw the babies..." This was the first time that she had called the Pale Rider's spawn "babies". "You...you tried to do what we have planned... what must happen. There was pain. So..so much pain. Tortured pain. I--" The bird's voice cracked and she began to weep, falling forward into his arms, out of her chair while she clutched onto him. "And you were gone. Dissolved into the dark. How...how can unborn...hardly formed children make something so clear?" She whispered, leaning back to stare at him. She didn't even realize that, unless HE had thrown up a shield of privacy, that Nic and Anna and the guests were going to be privy to this information. "Can it be? If..if someone tries to harm them. They...they CANNOT." Arilwen looked like someone was kicking her in the chest. She could barely breathe. "You...you can't do it, my heart. You cannot. Something terrible could happen. I...I cannot be losing my mind, can I? CAN I?" She nearly shouted in his face, then immediately buried her own in his neck. This was a pretty predicament. The babies couldn't live here. And...what if they couldn't be exterminated in the womb? That didn't leave many options.

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Willow: Anwaar looked up as he heard Grym speak and he settled back on his haunches, his bare toes dug into the dirt. He had to smile. Grym was kind. He was easy to talk to and never made Anwaar feel awkward. "Hi Grym." He dusted his hands off on his pants and sat back in the dirty, hooking his arms loosely around his bent knees. "I don't know..." He shrugged. Oh, didn't he? "I know that I should feel the joy of a thousand lifetimes because my mother and father are here, together. But... my mother is ill and my father is worried about everything." He picked at the knee of his pants. "And Anna..." Yes, what about Anna. He squinted one eye up at Grym. "Grym, have you ever been in love with someone? What does it feel like to have...your...uh...eye on someone? Eye out for someone? Wait, that can't be right. That sounds messy." He frowned severely while he tried to remember what his father had asked him. He wanted to give his eye to Anna? No, gross. If she freaked out about showing thighs to him, she wouldn't want his damn eyeball. "I don't know." He sounded frustrated. "Is mother feeling better? Father said he would come to meet me in the garden when she was asleep." He had no clue about the chaos that had upturned the insides of his home.

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JD: Wyrvaust held Arilwen firmly by one shoulder and stroked her hair with his fingertips as she tremulously and with mortified distress revealed what she had seen and sensed in her vision. He felt a desperation in himself to console her for

he had so seldom seen her so distraught. Having been where she was he knew what to do. He had to remain her rock of support and her voice of reason. "Beloved Swan, shhh, calm yourself for a moment. Take deep breaths, starting in your gut, and exhale them slowly, until your breath comes easy and your mind has cleared. Concentrate on your breathing and nothing else." These instructions given, he gave her the time needed to steady herself, reminding her gently of the technique she needed to draw from if she started unraveling again. Then, when she seemed collected, he spoke to her in even tones.

"Where devils are concerned, many unexpected and disturbing things may happen. The young in his adored wife may be new, and they may be tiny, but their spirits may be powerful or ancient or even both. Devils can often project their powers remotely. These young in her must understand that their lives are in peril, and like any life, no matter how small, strive to protect themselves, to survive any threats they perceive. What the Swan perceived may be a warning, or it may be a defense. They may not have the power to do what she envisioned, rather the vision alone may be their only defense. Sensing danger, and being perceptive enough to gather from the Raven exactly what that danger is, and being helpless against it, they appeal to the one who is most sympathetic to their plight. Now... If they spoke to her with words.. The Raven would ascertain that they might own the knowledge to carry out their warning, for power, even of the instinctual variety is come by through knowledge. Now, if on the other hand this vision came, not from them, but from the daughter of Eoghan, then it was an omen revealing a possible future. But... Now having been warned, whether by them or the Swan's connection to the fates, the Raven can take precautions to avoid what his magnificent bird has seen. That is to say... If this experience has not altered her resolve. But, before she sets her will in stone either way, allow the Desert Fox to grant her some wisdom of demon kind. What his eternal mate experienced was no act of kindness, but either a brutal attempt to terrorize her into submission, or just the fate's unveiling a horror in the making. Either way, it from evil and darkness seeps. Ancient and wise enough is the Raven to combat the unborn, even if he is outnumbered," he smiled, betraying the twisted sense of humor which occasioned to sneak out of him.

Now had Arilwen spoken aloud of her thoughts on Belorian, Wyrvaust may or might not have reminded her that she had met him when a prisoner of Sammael. Indeed Eoghan had even tried to help them escape with some success.

Concerning the disruption shields Wyrvaust had raised around them to distort anything spoken by them that he'd rather go unheard outside of himself, Arilwen and Marsol, well that had been torn apart when Anna had been attacked and Marsol had taken his leave in a tempest of violence. But, before he had begun counseling her in concerns to those offspring, he had raised an abyssal aura of silence around himself and Arilwen, and not just so their company would not hear them, but the devil brood in her womb.

Wyrvaust then confessed the hardest thing he'd ever had to, to his wife. "Arilwen... The Raven cannot leave the desert... Never again, longer than to visit elsewhere. He sees no other choice... These offspring... They are not only the Pale Rider's, but by association, the Desert Wind's, our chieftain's most bitter enemy." It was safe to refer by Sammael as the Desert Wind, or any other such title given him. Only by their true names could the regard of omnipotents and their proxies be drawn. Wyrvaust hoped Arilwen understood him completely much as it would break his heart to explain it any way more unkind.



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JD: Grym cocked his head and toodled his fingers at Anwaar when he said hi. He settled down on his perch thereafter with his arms loosely curled around his bent legs as he listened to the other youngster. Grym was odd in so many ways; in that he was only a few months old, had a nephelim soul that was only months old, and which had not even been quickened until Wyrvaust had plunged him into yet another existence, not even knowing what he had been before. He was basically a baby nephelim in a catman's skin.

"Grym is certain that all the troubling matters here will flit away given a little time. Enemies will be dealt with, Master Aalamea shall mend his mate, and peace will return hand in hand with contentment. Grym promises you this," he smiled, having no doubt at all in what he promised. He did not make promises based on things he was doubtful of.

The question to him of love made him cackle and flip Anwaar's hair with a swipe of his hand. "I am only..." he counted in his head "...six months old." as Grym he was. But he had no memory of being anything but Magrymed. He looked positively riddled when Anwaar went on about eyes. "I don't know about all this eyeball business but I don't see what it could have to do with love... What was the question? Oh, eye on someone... Hmm..." he thought for a moment then hopped down to stand close to Anwaar who he then leaned the side of his face against with his eye pressed up against his chest. "Okay... Um... Kinda warm... A little pressure, not unpleasant... Can't see outta that eye... Altogether, I would say it seems unrelated to anything I've seen between the Horseman, Wyrvaust and Arilwen relating to love. They're the only ones I can really draw from." That said he straightened and then lowered himself to cuddle against his legs. "Did you want Grym to show you what they did to show love?" he then asked in every bit of his innocence, sincere desire to help Anwaar with his conundrum, and with no understanding that what he offered was unacceptable by most people's standards. Grym saw nothing at all to be wrong with how he was offering to help the young man who was actually quite a lot older than he was.

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CeasedIsTheHeart: Niculaie had been enjoying the company of Anna and the fruit she selected was delicious, even if he primarily enjoyed meat, he had not always been a demon, in fact his demonic nature was a relatively recent change, given he had lived a good many years as something else entirely, not exactly human... But close enough.

When Anna got up to leave he asked her if she wanted him to come, but she was only going for a stroll with Gosha and he sat back and picked at the food a little more as he relaxed, it was nice to relax. He regarded Wyrvaust to whom he had closer ties to than he first realized, then again he had been included in very little as far as clan matters went anyways. The only clan member he was remotely close to was Felix.

"Thank you," he said to Wyrvaust when he complimented Gosha. "I've never considered myself a fatherly type, but the night Gosha came into the world, I felt a warmth unlike any I had ever known. I have faith that Gosha will grow up strong

and true, it is his name sake after all, and he is surrounded by men of virtue and strength, that I have come to rely on. Even you, as mysterious as you are, I have a feeling I can trust you." It was true he hardly knew this demon, but he had been true to Marsol longer than Niculaie had been alive, so he knew there must be something to him.

"I had seen Anwaar when he was young, I was surprised to see him so... grown up, did you ever think to slow his aging?" Nic had been curious to know, how the fast aging of youth was handled, "If you'd rather not answer I understand, it's quite personal, I was just curious."

Things seemed to get real, and quickly, Niculaie was not long behind the others when they shot from their chairs and raced through the small complex that was the home of Wryvaust. Niculaie slid next to Anna, whom Gosha clung to and he examined her.. He wished he had the power to help her.. He felt weak right then, but he said nothing of that. He just took her hand, the one of her uninjured arm and held it tightly. "Anna, are you well..?" He asked, and he looked to Gosha, who seemed well enough, he touched his sons head and smiled.

"It is a pleasure to finally meet you, Lady Arilwen, I believe you are what people of earth would regard as Anna's.. BFF? I am pleased to finally meet you, though the circumstances are less than ideal." He said as he cradled Anna held in his lap as Wryvaust worked his magic into mending her wounds.

Niculaie would have to go to Mekkora, it was the only way he would get more powerful.. Strong enough to protect his family.

"Wryvaust.. Is there anything I can do to help? It was my ignorance that brought this down upon us, I need to do something." He said as he was gently combing Anna's hair with his fingers, before his demon brother's wife seem to have a break down of some kind. Marsol meanwhile had taken off with this enemy. Niculaie wanted badly to punish them, but he would take care of his betrothed, and his son, he trusted Marsol to do what was needed.

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LiftTheDarkness: Cevari was glad to help where he could, when it came to providing assistance to his brother. He had waited centuries for this, after all! It was good to see how grateful Wryvaust was for it, too. It was nice to feel appreciated. "It's the least I can do," He responded, easily.

He was even more pleased when the protest he expected from Giriael didn't come. Was he winning him over? He hoped so. Not just because he was extremely attractive. And he was, He had a unique beauty that Cevari found extremely alluring. Those eyes of his. But beyond that, he also sensed a fierce loyalty in him, and he liked that a great deal. It was the same thing he sought in the men of his caravan. He flashed him that grin, when he offered his strength, causing that dimple to deepen in his left cheek. "I'll keep you around while I work at the wards, then. Just in case." He doubted he would have to tap into his strength, but he appreciated the offer. "Thank you for your assistance."

He would then focus on those wards, and getting them back into working order, and greatly improved, he hoped. He enjoyed this kind of work, had quite an aptitude for

it.

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JD: Arilwen was difficult to console, but if anyone could do it, her beloved husband could. It took his calm, collected demeanor and breath coaching to get her panting to even out to normal breaths. Her face was wet with tears and she looked stricken, but she eventually was nodding and concentrating on her breathing. From the gut! She tried not to breathe too hard or she might start vomiting again. When the Raven assured her that the vision from the unborn inside of her was most likely just a reaction to her line of thinking, and that he could most certainly take them on, though outnumbered, Arilwen actually let out a weak laugh. Only her husband. "Of course..." She whispered, wiping her face on her sleeves. "Who am I to doubt your wisdom? Who am I to doubt your power?" It was true. She was panicking over everything now. She was like a nervous cat, nearly clinging to the ceiling at every sound.

The admission that Wyrvaust managed to pry from his lips next made Arilwen nearly burst into tears again. She cupped his face, looking almost...angry? But not at him. Oh, no. "My heart..." She whispered, over and over while she stroked her thumbs along his temples. "If I have to cut them out of my own stomach and bury them in the ground, I will." She whispered very calmly, almost eerily. Her eyes were dark as she met his. "I will never force you to leave this place again. This is our home. and we will do what needs to be done." And that was that. Right?

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Willow: Anwaar had the biggest grin on his face when Grym climbed down to smooch his eyeball up against Anwaar's chest. He was just delightful. And his offer, though inappropriate, was kind. "I remember seeing them together, when I was small. We went to this place that had beautiful water and sand and trees. My father knew where it was. I would play in the water and they would show their love to one another on the sand." It wasn't odd to Anwaar. Arilwen and the Raven had never tried to shield their natural love from one another. "Perhaps we can go there soon. I want to show you. It's beautiful and calm." It may be a nice break for them all...once things calmed down. "I want to show Anna."

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JD: Once Arilwen had calmed; Wyrvaust shifted to hold her in a tender manner with both of his arms coiled loosely around her with his tall form and head leaning against her so that his long hair fell across her shoulders and chest mingling with her own dark locks. His indigo eyes met with that dark smolder in her ice-blue gaze and there was no mistaking her resolve. For the first time he realized that she was as desperate if not determined to rid herself of the dark entities within her. For that to be true Wyrvaust knew that she had to be terrified of them. The abyss demon lifted her hands to press a kisses against her knuckles with tongue softly feeling along the contours then he stood to pull her up by her hands.

"Come," he said, "...and let us be done with this." Then before he led her out of the dining hall he turned to face his company, first laying his regard on Cevari. "The Desert Fox is ever grateful to have his Shadow back with him again. He has not forgotten how close they once were, and chaos willing will be again. Love he

still feels for his brother and love he shall always feel. Cevari is welcome here to stay and bring his men, whom very soon there will be room for in these walls. Much more to this place is there to be uncovered. Again The Raven's Shadow has his deepest thanks for granting him the time needed to take care of his family by helping him to protect his loved ones." He bowed to Cevari at that hence he leaned his attention on Nic.

"We give thanks for the offer of Halfscale's offer to assist." He did not mean to offend Niculaie by calling him half scale, it was just the name he'd adopted for him as he chose them for everyone. He had even called Marsol Sunscale a long time ago, he just seldom used it anymore. "He may coordinate with the Raven's Shadow if he wishes," he indicated and up-nodded towards Cevari.

"While they are speaking.. Raven invites the mate and child of his chieftain's daughter and she to reside in his home as long as they will. Share her room they may until more areas are here opened, then a house of their own they shall have here, as his brother and his men with him shall have a house here. Homes for all whom the lord and lady of twilight trust and cherish shall be opened here, above all Lord Marsol and his man Gilriael the Golden Heart." He invited all of his present guests to live in his home as they needed. The more the merrier. More friends meant more eyes and ears and arms to protect his family. As for the rest of the dragon tribe, they'd have to camp out in the canyon. They'd hardly fit inside Sapphire Citadel.

Wyrvaust then curled Arilwen's waist with his arm and excused he and she from present company by escorting her out of the repast hall and through the corridor to their bedroom, where he closed and locked the door then disrobed her and himself, and in doing so made a sensual art of it by caressing and kissing her all over as he slid this and that bit of garment off of her. Once they were both nude he compelled her to lie down and slid into bed after her to tangle her up in his arms and legs. While hands and fingers brushed trailing lines and curves over her flesh or softly kneaded her breasts and muscles, his lips and tongue tasted her throat, shoulders and mouth between quiet whispers. "Make her forget dark and sorrowful things so she can rest her mate shall," he promised and with passion and fever excessive he filled and flooded every emotional and sexual reservoir her body and spirit contained, and by the love they expressed was himself bliss blown by her sustained angelic release.

In the beginning he drank in her heightening need with a shuddering gasp as his demonically proportioned mass pressed up against her just enough to spread her entry around his crown. Pushing ever so lightly, ever so gradually inside of her two fingertips kneaded her pleasure center until plump and sending intense jolts straight to the heart of her abdomen and outward to the rest of her body. He moaned and trembled as her divine body sent this back to him in waves of magnificent physical rapture. He then sank himself halfway inside of her fantastically moist body then as her legs opened wide to beg him deeper he buried his thick length within her snug cushions to sob in elation just to feel her body gripping him again. The ways that he loved her thereafter were rife with passion and obsession, livid with gratifying her so far beyond sense that she might imagine never coming back from those heights again, and depraved enough to reach into every sexual and emotional sum of her being. And though he didn't allow himself to be consciously aware of it, he had picked up some techniques during his enslavement that even Mendorian had failed to introduce him to. For one... Certain ways of

touching someone while being petted and penetrated. Certain ways and spots the fingers teased to bring sexual energy surging to the surface of them, causing the navel to crunch, the pulse to race, the mind to spin, muscles to shudder, breath to catch. This he explored her with off and on between groping and gripping her flesh in such opposition of those blissfully tormenting touches that he melted her. Meanwhile a second wormy member had snaked up inside of her rectum to layer prayer on top of pleas. This licentious member felt so incredible that her libido shot out of control and quickly spilled over to give Wyrvaust the first taste of her over worldly orgasm as rushes of physical and cerebral euphoria tore through him like a tsunami. His enraptures cries echoed in the chamber but he remained meticulous in sustaining his wife's orgasmic seizures.

Just when their love making, if a tempest of raging passions could be called that, came to an end, they were wrapped in so much fog neither of them could have placed when it happened, but when their fervor was finally tamed and they held one another, Wyrvaust waited, petting her hair and skin with soft and soothing caresses, until she was sound asleep, and through his touch deepened her sleep until she was completely sedated. Indeed he could have carved her up like a turkey and eaten her and she'd have never been aware of it. The demon then closed his eyes and rested a hand on her tummy as he first warded himself against spectral energies. Usually this was not something he needed to do when contemplating devouring souls for possession was not a concern when converting souls out of body into raw energy while consuming them, but devils were tricky beings and just in case these offspring were ancients being reborn, Wyrvaust was taking no chances. He also raised a field of resistance within himself against the elements and arcane. This of course would fall if he was forced to use his power. One could not resist powers they themselves could wield unless they absorbed that power. What Wyrvaust could absorb was out of body spirits, which the souls of Gabrian's spawn would be the moment Wyrvaust destroyed their bodies.

Now the demon opened the womb gate, a power he had learned about as a shaman and later adopted as an umbramancer, and from that dark gateway delivered those embryos into the joined cup of his hands which he held above Arilwen and before himself. The sextuplets were larger already than they had been and had the appearance of little aliens now than of tadpoles, each roughly the size of a medium sized prawn. They tickled the palms of his hands as they wriggled in them like catfish frye out of water. His mind was suddenly jolted by horrible visions and snarling he retaliated by cramming the things into his mouth and chewing on them viciously. They were... Very chewy, like overcooked squid. They kind of twisted like raw squid too. Not bad but...

Now there were one four things that could happen here...

- 1) the little bugs were actually new, and weak, and Wyrvaust would just chew them up and swallow their souls without further incident.
- 2) they were actually ancient and clever and had not used words because they were trying to protect themselves by seeming innocent, and gang Wyrvaust's soul to possess him.
- 3) the same thing as above only they would lodge themselves inside of Wyrvaust while shielding themselves from him harm and there grow inside him like parasites and eventually eat their way out of him.
- 4) they were actually new but ALSO powerful and would never have arrived in Wyrvaust's mouth at all but shielded themselves from all harm, and what Wyrvaust was eating was all a hallucination followed by the little beasties shielding

themselves from detection until well... There was no hiding their entities anymore because Arilwen began to show in an obvious way.

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JD: Grym meanwhile listened to Anwaar speak of his parents and that lovely oasis with fascination and interest. Had Grym known the story of how Arilwen had been nabbed from that place by Mendorin, he might have been surprised that Anwaar chose to remember what was good about the location instead of bad. Or maybe he wouldn't be so surprised because that was what good people did. Hold onto the bright side of things.

"Sounds wonderful. Grym would love to go there. Yes, the kind of love they share is not shown the same way as the kind of things the bad people made Grym and Master Wyrvaust feel. That feels all wrong. It was all... Incredible but horrible at the same time... It was very confusing. What your father and mother feel is completely right. I would like to know one day what it feels like for such mingling to feel right." If he had revealed things Wyrvaust would rather he had not to his son, Grym hadn't intended it, he was just confiding in his best friend. Anwaar was his only friend in fact.

Grym pet Anwaar's leg and thigh for an interim then looked up at him. "Is it your wish to love Anna the right way? If so... Won't that Halfscale fellow make that kind of... dangerous? He does not seem like the kind who'll share... What will you do? Do you need Grym's help?" Grym had three loyalties. Wyrvaust, Arilwen and Anwaar.

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##### LOG ##### Nic and Anna  
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Orcus:

Anna did not know the strikingly beautiful woman that appeared out of nowhere near the entrance to the Raven's cave mine turned home. She did not have time to think of a proper greeting which consisted of a hello followed by are you suppose to be here. One moment the woman was there then the next she felt herself being grabbed, released because of something hurting the blonde woman and Gosha was plunked down on the chaise. What came next was like trying to wake from a nightmare. The force behind the woman shoving her sent her into the wall where pain flared up from her arm and face. Why? What was going on? These were not the first thoughts in her head as they may have been for someone else. Her first thought was Gosha as she turned, feeling liquid drip over her lips and chin, to reach for her son. She barely saw Marsol go stomping by to tackle the blonde woman into a sandy gate to vanish from sight. Though she heard her father's enraged roar over the blood rushing in her ears. Finding the top of her sons full head of hair she tried to sooth the crying toddler where he was hiding under her skirts clinging to her leg. Then they weren't alone anymore. Everyone was there. Everyone trying to help. Everyone except her father. She tried to sooth her son over the pain biting into her arm and face. Luckily for her Gosha was more than distracted by a fair dark haired Swan whom he poked his head out from around his mothers leg to peer up at. He was every bit a mirror image of his Russian father.

As the group moved back to the dining room, Gosha crawled over his fathers legs to get a better look at Arilwen and having picked up the funny art of mimicking those

around him, namely his parents, he extended his sandy hand to Arilwen. He wanted to shake like he'd seen his father do to his friends. Something about a whole arm or something. Anna visibly shook as her complexion paled from the breaks in her bones but with Wryvaust being gifted as he was his Shamanism kept her body from going into shock. It wasn't every day she went around breaking her arms and smashing her face into walls. That would've been just silly.

"Is Gosha alright," she asked Nic, sitting sideways in her chair beside him. She had to know their son was okay. She had to know because her eyes felt like they were going to pop out of her face from the pressure in her nose. Shifting in her seat she dug her nails into Nic's arm and bit the inside of her cheek to stop herself from just screaming. She owed Arilwen an explanation later. Over fruit and aloe juice. [Fin]

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Ceasedistheheart:

Niculaie looked at his betrothed and smiled, he did not mind that she dug nails into his flesh or that she seemed so worried she might pop, she was a mother, it was to be expected after all, that strong maternal instinct in her to keep her child safe over all things. "Yes, my love. But I think it would be prudent to have Wryvaust look at him as well, just to be sure." Niculaie was breathing her in, rubbing a hand over his sons head as he reached for a hand shake, and he kissed her lips gently. "I should have come with you, Anna, I should have been there to keep you safe." He whispered softly as he looked into those beautiful eyes of hers, and then he pressed his forehead against her own, he had made it a point to always protect her the best he could, even on earth, especially on earth. He knew what humans were like. "Luckily we have such talented and powerful friends and family, though. I wish I could take all your pain from you, my love, I would bear it for you." He said softly as he looked to Gosha. Nic was a handsome devil, or so Anna would have him believe with his grey eyes and olive skin. "I think we will have to be more careful seems like there is something out to get you." Niculaie doubted he was going to sleep much at all anymore, not with someone going after Anna like this, he only needed just the briefest amount of sleep. "Why is Arilwen so surprised about Gosha?" Nic asked almost confused, he figured everyone knew already.

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Orcus:

After the initial spikes of pain calmed to throbbing jolts she stopped digging her nails into his arm and reached for a cloth on the table to dab at her upper lip. She wouldn't touch her nose because it still felt so sore and she didn't really want it to bleed again. The top of Anwaar's ex-nanny's dress had spots of brown around the collar from her gushing nose. "Oh thank goodness he is safe." Turning her head to glance down at Gosha she smiled as the little man grasped Arilwens right index finger to shake since that was all he could reach. It was important he shake her finger cause that was how people said hello right? Anna shook her head as she tried to smile again but it hurt too much to do it just yet.

"I was there and I should not have wandered so far from everyone. I should not be saying hello to strange women in red suits either but how else does one make friends if not greeting a stranger? It is not your fault dearest. Unless you knew that woman?" Anna's right brow arched at Nic suspiciously then she laid her

forehead to his. "I should learn the ways of combat to defend against strange violent people. Perhaps when I am able to lift a buckler." She winced as she tried to move in her seat and in doing so moved her arm too. His comment about Arilwen's surprise drew her blue eyes and she suddenly looked embarrassed and ashamed of herself. "I meant to surprise her after getting her settled in, when she and her family felt comfortable I would have brought Gosha over to play with Anwaar but..." Her blue gaze lowered off to the side in thought. Seeing Anwaar grow up so fast reminded her of being mortal amongst Immortals. Would Niculae regret loving her when the grains of sand in her hourglass finally ran out? "I did not mean to keep it as some shady secret from them. I wanted to surprise her, truly I did and we would have laughed about it." The tears that filled her eyes then were a mixture of emotions.[fin]

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Ceasedistheheart:

Niculaie's jaw tightened when she asked if he knew that woman, and he looked into her eyes, his gaze was burning and passionate as it always had been when he felt passionate about something, Nic just held her gaze completely as he wondered if she truly thought he had known this woman, Niculaie did not. He only had eyes for Anna. "I do not know her, and truth be told, if I ever see her again it will take every ounce of strength not to kill her where she stands, my love."

He knew she did not like violence, though he was surprised she thought he might have known her, he had gone so far that he had himself caged up every valentines day, even on earth he had found himself sealed away during his time of madness... Not something he could help, that inept Jules had ruined him. He would overcome this disadvantage though, and he would be better for it. "Is that it? Well I am sure it would have been funny, Am I rubbing off on you?" He teased as he sat beside her pulling her head to his shoulder, with their son in his lap, he breathed deeply of her scent. Niculaie could not see himself with another, not even when she looked like a grand ma. He wondered though, not siring her or somehow imbueing her with immortality, or even quazi-immortality, was this a mistake? It was harder to protect her this way, Nic was worried though. "I am here for you, my love.. Let it out." He whispered softly as he looked upward, could they see the sky? If not he would just let his eyes rove over the stone above. "Lets build a house, sometimes I feel like.. The tower is too big, am I being silly?" He asked as he glanced down to her, trying his best to put some cheer back into her heart.

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Orcus:

If he said he didn't know her then that was good enough for her. That may make her gullible in some eyes but she believed those she felt close to when they told her something. Unless he said the sky wasn't wide then she would question his sanity. The sobs were kept quiet and few as she was well aware they were among friends and family. Drying her tears on her sleeve, ignoring the mess of her blood and snot filled nose, she breathed through her mouth slowly taking a deep breath. Leaning her temple on his shoulder her thoughts drifted to her father and if he was well wherever he'd gone. Anna knew not one shred of the danger that she was left out of only because Marsol choke slammed the violent blonde woman into an earth gate. If she had then she would have felt a mountain of guilt and prayed for him. "The tower is not so bad," she said, sounding nasally. "A house or an underground home



for better cooling? A house we shall build." Gosha peeked over the table where he sat in his fathers lap, kicking his legs slowly, curious about this nice smelling Arilwen and Wryvaust, and then the other two men at the table.[fin]

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Ceasedistheheart:

He sometimes forgot that they were in the desert, and he just smiled as he noted the curious nature of his son, he had always been curious, just like Nic. though it had gotten Nic in more than one bind, his wiley ass some how seemed to make it through alright though. He hoped his son was less Wreckless. "A house is good, I will find us a good climate stone so we don't have to worry about it getting to hot, or too cold at night." Nic was surprised how cold it got at night, but it was no mother russia, Anna had got to experience winter in Nic's homeland, it was down right frigid. "We can still stay in the tower from time to time, no need to stay in one place all the time, sometimes its good to be away from the city. Living in that tower, we're almost like celebrities.. well you are, I think some people still dont like having an outlander so close to you." He said to her, but he was probably just being paranoid. "Does your arm feel better?":

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Orcus:

"I do not know where this paranoia comes from," she says, trying a small smile. Her eyelids felt heavy from the relief she felt due to Wryvaust's healing energies working their magic. With the edge taken off her arm and face she tried to sit up straighter in her chair. "Mhm. Why is that? I have not taken any medicine. Did I pass out?" Unsure why she looked down at her arm then back up at him. [Fin]

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Ceasedistheheart:

Niculaie nodded as she said it felt better, but he just grinned at how she did not even realize she was being healed. "I think Arilwen's mate might have something to do with it." Nic had the potential to heal wounds, but it was not quite the same as Wryvaust' and it was beyond his current skill as well. "And who knows, it just goes to show how deeply they adore you, after all you are basicly a princess.." He teased and then whispered to her softly, "Nic will give you the royal treatment tonight." His tone had something in it she would recognize, something that was playful and wicked, she had heard it before. He kissed her earlobe gently then, and pulled back, "Until things are safe.. I think I am going to keep you close, Anna," It was Nic's turn to be paranoid, he felt like if he looked away she might get captured and it scared him to death.

Niculaie though would quiet down when he heard Wryvaust speak toward them, he had gotten up and was speaking to them all. Niculaie tried to remember as much as he could about each person here who was unfamiliar, Nic had a strange habit of keeping dossier's on people, it was a quirk not something he was all that aware of all the time, he just kind of took into and in his mind had a seperate folder for each person and tucked the info in their respective folders.

When he thanked Nic he would nod, "I will do so," He said and the invitation to stay was unexpected but, he was glad. Anna would be safe here, and Nic would learn

to command his ward eating power, he needed to keep that in check. "Thank you, Wyrvaust I will not abuse your hospitality." Which meant he would indeed have to make himself useful, he turned his attention back to Anna, "You hear that?" It seemed their desire for a smaller, quieter home might be answered. As for if Nic was keen on sharing, the answer was definitely a no, though if one asked Nic, he would not suspect that Anna liked the idea of being shared. Though Nic had never felt the desire to ask that, after all he had no interest in sharing his most beloved.

"Should we Sojourn to your room for the night, its well past little Gosha's sleep time." He said to Anna and then Inspected her arm a bit as if to wonder if it was really healed, magic was so.. interesting. If Anna said she was ready for bed he would pick up Gosha and press the boy to his chest then stand up and offer his hand to Anna, to help her up to her feed, he would let her lead the way.:

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##### END LOG #####  
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Presently the abyss demon was chewing on tough little baby devils... chomping them up as quickly as he could. They were chewy because of their fortitude. Tasty though, in Wyrvaust's opinion. He WAS a demon after all and most demons were carnivores. He was no exception. Hopefully the Pale Rider and recent addition to the Redlion Rangers would never get wind that he had knocked Arilwen up with offspring the Raven had eaten. As each of those critters expired Wyrvaust engulfed their souls to convert them into raw energy which he could channel as needed where and when he chose. He could even strengthen an aspect of himself permanently for each soul he consumed. Considering they had been embryos they had been amazingly powerful.

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Wyrvaust was actually amazed that nothing bad happened when he consumed the little devils. He had been expecting the worst, even prepared for it. But nothing strange or dangerous occurred. He ate them flesh and soul. He inhaled a deep breath then breathed it out slow and curled up next to his wife. He gently lifted the sleep he had laid over her so she could rest normally, on her own. He closed his eyes and just listened to her breathe, her heart beat, her cute little snore. How he had missed her... loved her so intensely it hurt. He could not say when he fell asleep but he did, and when she stirred, he woke with her and gathered her possessively in his arms. "Your Raven will never leave his wife's side again... She may come to tire of him being ever by her." He kissed her throat hungrily and his tongue followed a hot trail to her lips. He brought her more fully against his body as he kissed her and unable to stop himself, he made love to her again. When he had fulfilled her in all ways she desired to be filled, he held her for awhile before he climbed out of the bed and held his hand out to her so he could help her rise. "A new day awaits the swan and her most willing slave," he grinned. He intended it to be a GOOD day or anyone who made it otherwise be damned and torn to shreds.

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Needless to say, their first night home together in so very long was.... eventful?

Anna had made so much of it possible by working so hard to restore their home to its former glory. That had been enough to tilt Arilwen's world, but she hadn't even gotten to adjust to being home before she discovered that Wyrvaust was there as well. And now, here she was, in his arms, where he was kissing and touching away the apprehension of the day. Well, not away for GOOD, but for now. She met him with full fervor and by the close of the night, she was tangled in his arms, sleeping like she had not slept since before he had mentally and physically gone away from her.

It was good that Wyrvaust had not explained to her how he would dispose of the six demon children growing inside of her. The mere thought of what he had to do would curdle her stomach. And perhaps more, could she handle that he would so easily do that without batting an eye? It was better that she was only aware that the spawn had not felt a thing. Still it would be a poignant point in her life. She would decide later on to brainstorm an idea for some sort of memento for them.

When Arilwen finally began to awaken in the morning, she did so slowly. Everything that she was encased in at the moment smelled and felt familiar and comforting. No thoughts of yesterday's chaos. Only love and safety. Her thick lashes remained closed, but a tiny smile ticked onto her lips as she felt his mouth on her neck. "Then at this rate, neither of us shall leave our bed. Whomever comes to find us shall certainly need to shield their eyes to protect their innocence." Her fingertips ran up his ribs and slid back around behind his shoulders, pressing her fingertips into his shoulderblades as he took her.

After another round of bone-melting lovemaking, Arilwen squinted up at Wyrvaust when he energetically climbed out of bed, offering his hand. She grimaced at the thought of getting up, but she knew they had guests and she wanted, more than anything, to get clean and meet them with a healthy disposition. "I won't get out of this bed until you assure me that our first stop is bathing." Then food. Gosh, she was starving. She wanted to see Anna and Gosha. She knew that they had to be fine, but she wanted to hug her friend and tickle Gosha and eat breakfast with them and refuse to let today be ruined, just as Wyrvaust wanted.

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##### LOG #####  
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When Arilwen rather insistantly suggested they take a bath before greeting the day, Wyrvaust chuckled deeply. "A bath would be most enjoyable if taken with his wife," he smiled. Of course then they might never make it out of the tub! Wyrvaust helped Arilwen into a loose robe of light material and walked with her hand in hand out into the corridor and to the bath chamber which was just across the tunnel. It was a large room with a single bath the size of a small pool sunk into the floor with steps leading down into the cycled spring water, which was heated by the desert sun on the hard packed sand and clay roof of the mine then piped down. The water was constantly running, draining, and refilling, keeping it clean, and the soaps used in it were made of skin softening plant oils with wonderful aromas. When the two arrived at the door... it was... blocked! By Gilriael and Anna and her son. They were... standing there. It puzzled Wyrvaust who pushed his way past them to door, Arilwen pulled along with him naturally, much as he was holding her hand. He the turned to look at them. "Why are the Raven's friends... standing at this door?" waiting in line or his turn was a new concept

for him... Well perhaps long long ago when he was human he had experienced it, but that was long forgotten... IF it had ever happened. His family had been nomads and the desert had been their restroom. When Gilriael answered to say he was waiting his turn to take a bath, Wyrvaust raised his brows, then shook his head, and pushed him out of the way to enter the bath chamber with his wife. Waiting his turn... that was just silly, he thought as he dropped his morning robes and plowed into the water, only to stumble right over his brother and land face first in the water with a splash.--

The tall demon rolled over in the bath pool, kicking up water all over before he straightened up enough to sit, and not because he was bouyent, he actually had no body fat on him and sunk like a rock in water, but because his legs were so long and he had gotten tangled up a bit with Cevari. His long black hair for which he was called Raven, clung to his face like a wet curtain and he had to peel it back with his hands to gaze at his brother with his dark blue eyes, which only in direct light looked anything other than dark. "Cevari... your brother did not.." he sputtered at a stream of water... "...expect to find his younger here..."

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LiftTheDarkness

Cevari, for his part, was only shocked for a moment when his brother belly-flopped in next to him. In the next moment, he was howling laughing, while simultaneously making sure his brother didn't drown. Cevari had not one bashful bone in his body, and why should he? He knew how he looked. About as fit as his brother, truthfully.

Cevari just grinned at him, that dimple flashing in his cheek. "Oh, I've been hogging it. Is this my hint that bathtime's over, then?" He teased. "I told your Gilriael he needn't wait, but he's as shy as any maiden." Okay, so maybe it hadn't gone down that way, but he could see Gil at the door right now, and he couldn't resist prodding at him a little, with a flirtatious glance. #

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seektheocean

Arilwen slipped her slender arms into the offered robe, then tightened her fingers between her mate's while he led her across the corridor. Hot water, quiet room...she couldn't wait. Except, waiting was what they were going to have to do. Arilwen smiled warmly when she saw Anna and Gosha waiting outside of the door and she swooped in to give her friend a huge hug and a kiss on the cheek. Of course she knelt to give Gosha a good morning handshake, since he was now so talented with that, and bid him good morning... right before Wyrvaust grabbed her hand and plowed through the door. "Wyrvaust..." Arilwen started gently, trying to think of how to explain to him that he had perhaps come off as a bit rude to their new guests. She didn't get time. He plowed naked into the tub and fell right over his brother. Arilwen clapped her hands over her mouth to stifle the HORRIBLE case of giggles threatening her while she watched her husband's long form thrash around. She kept it in, until Cevari started laughing. Then she lost it. Nudity was nothing that they found shameful. It was natural, like animals in the wild, and Arilwen untied her robe while she tried to get ahold of herself. "Good morning Cevari." She grinned, then stepped slowly into the hot water, wading to Wyrvaust's side. "Is my Raven quite alright? His brother has sent him flying." Ugh, horrible joke, Arilwen. No room for puns here.#

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JD: Wyrvaust chuckled a little as his wife and brother struggled with themselves to calm their amusement. "We are glad we can amuse," he let them both know. He scoffed at his brother's quip about Gilriael. "Shy THAT dragon is not. Respect for territory is what he shows," he explained as he dipped back to wet his long black hair and carry it behind him. He smiled up at Arilwen. Wyrvaust was anything but shy and Arilwen? Neither was she for that matter. They might strut around the lair naked all day if was not against the custom of so many others who might drop by... like many ever did. He laughed a bit harder when Arilwen asked if he was alright and poked fun at him at the same time. "Your Raven is just fine..." His eyes then leapt on Cevari. "Stay awhile shadow, if its his wish." He would like Arilwen to get to know his brother better. Did he care if he was as naked as the day he was born? Not in the least. He had figured out already that Cevari and Gilriael shared the same tilt. He had no reason to feel threatened. He felt threatened in that manner by few... Two he could count actually... Sammael and his man Gabrian.

"How are the wards coming along...? What can they do and need still to do?" he inquired and slipped around behind Arilwen, grabbing some of the soap along the way. It was as wonderful for the skin as it was for hair. He lathered up his hand and began to work the suds into her long, dark curls. He loved the way they turned chocolate red and brown in places while the base color was jet black. Lovely hair. He loved it and loved to play with it. #

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seektheocean

Arilwen loved seeing him laugh. Her chest felt tight and as he spoke to his brother, she had to take a moment to get herself together. How many mere days ago had it been that she would try to speak to him, try to approach him, and he would jerk away from her and wander off? She had never felt anything more painful in her entire life than that feeling. Swallowing the emotional lump in her throat, Arilwen settled down into the water between Wyrvaust's legs and dipped her head back to get her thick hair wet. It could be a bear to take care of sometimes, but he loved digging his long fingers into it. And she loved letting him. Closing her eyes, she could care less what the men were talking about at the moment. She was in sheer bliss from the head massage. She knew that inviting Anna was probably not a good idea, because Anna was shy about her body. Perhaps she should be a little more shy? She had been, at Gabrien's. Those people wore clothes every second of the day. Most of them even to bed. But she was home now, so good luck getting them on her!#

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LiftTheDarkness

Cevari arched those dark brows expressively. "Territory? Me, or the bath?" He joked. He showed not an ounce of interest in Arilwen's naked form, though not because it was anything less than beautiful. She just lacked the anatomy that Cevari found himself drawn towards. Nothing personal, at all. He hesitated when he was invited to stay longer. Should he? The hot water was nice, and he was relaxed, but he hated to think he might be infringing upon a private moment between his brother and his lovely wife. "Surely you can't want me to play the third wheel,

brother mine. Haven't you just reunited with your love? Now, I know better than to get between that." He informed him, easily.

He did remain a bit longer, to answer his questions about the ward. He moved himself onto the edge of the bath, angled modestly to save any bashful eyes a look at the goods. He carefully finger-combed his long black hair, damp still, and then began to braid it. "They're up, and stable. They're spherical in nature. Devours power on contact, and there's the added option of having trespassers dumped somewhere through the void for safekeeping. Where would you like them? Have you a dungeon, or holding cell? I can add additional features if you want. I've thought of adding a spirit field around the wards. Just for oomph." #

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JD: Wyrvaust eyed his brother when he spoke of third wheels. "If there were no third wheel to stabilize us I fear we should descend into a fog of pleasure no one could pull us from," he promised and smiled at Arilwen as he said this after kissing her nose. He kneaded her scalp deeply in the meantime. He loved bathing her... every inch of her. How would he ever stop himself from keeping her here for days if his will alone decided anything? He canted his head over after Cevari had filled him in on the wards. "Your brother shall put them to the test and see just how far his dear lost and found again shadow has gotten in the arcane." He stated with an arch of his brows, a faint upnod and smile.

Arilwen's hair now sudsed thoroughly and her scalp tingling wonderfully, Wyrvaust growled a little and caught her up to roll her in the water like a hungry crocodile, only all in fun and to rinse her hair, while very completely rubbing himself up against her in all kinds of ways in the process. When they surfaced he was laughing wickedly then nibbling at her throat before he caught the soap he had let go of. It slipped from his hand a couple of times but he caught it when he trapped it against the calf of Cevari's leg where he sat on the edge of the chest deep bath. "Thanks, brother," he practically cackled then started washing his most adored one's back. "As for dungeons..." he got around to. "No... not really... Not exactly... Not yet... We usually eat or kill enemies... The Raven supposes it could come in handy... The only prisoners he held were placed in secret, uncovered chambers... warded ones one way or another, but long it has been since any kind of prisoner we held... An underground is what our home is... not a penitentiary." Arilwen was the last truth be told, but he did not think to mention that. He hoped that for her it was not a bad memory, for he thought of those days as the most precious... The ones that had brought him... her.

His eyes then cut on Arilwen as he began lathering and at the same time deep massaging her shoulders upper back. "What does his cherished Swan think of his brother...? How might he be of help to his brother's love?" he wondered aloud and looked over at Cevari as he did, to see how he might respond to his question. Wyrvaust was simply trying to fit everything together and figure it all out. Soon enough he would be making room for all the people that mattered to Arilwen and himself. #

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LiftTheDarkness

Cevari chuckled. "Ah, is that the way of it? Well, by all means, let me chaperone,

then." He teased, gently. He laughed when Wyrvaust informed him that he would be tested. "Test away," He responded, easily. He had no problem with that idea. He was confident in his ability. He had had the time, after all, to perfect his craft.

He finished with his hair and let the braid drape over his shoulder, amused at his brother's shenanigans. He snorted when the soap was caught against his lean leg. "Glad to be of service." He responded, cheekily.

He nodded his understanding regarding the lack of dungeon. Not every place had one, of course. He didn't seem to mind the question. He was willing to be of help in any way that he could. It was the least he could do. #

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seektheocean

Arilwen felt relaxed and invigorated as Wyrvaust finished up her hair. It was a pile of sudsy goodness and she just planned on leaning back against him and snoozing away until their conversation was over. Not hardly. The growl made her eyes shoot open and she shrieked as she was suddenly rolled into the water. They surfaced again in a sputtering puddle of suds and Arilwen's thick hair was all over face. She was laughing and trying desperately to rake it out of her face as Wyrvaust tried to snag the soap. When he finally got ahold of it, Arilwen immediately snagged it from him. Yep, she had allowed him to do the hard work. Now she had it. "My turn." What a wicked little thing, hmm? Instead she ducked around behind him and started with his shoulders, peeking over one at eye level so that she could see Cevari. "How could the Raven's brother help me? By keeping her clan safe. Or helping with that, anyhow." Her soapy fingers kneaded into his spine and worked slowly downwards, stretching her neck up to give Cevari a wicked grin, she gave Wyrvaust's backside a hard pinch. "I shouldn't have this much access to you naked in a tub." She mused as she continued her scrubbing. "This could turn into a lewd bathhouse."#

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JD: Wyrvaust would soon enough lose himself in the tasks he had set for himself, and was a little worried that Arilwen would feel somewhat lost during that time. How could she help him? Is what he asked himself as he wrapped his arms around her soapy back and just hugged her for awhile as that almost too hot (for normal people) water stirred against them in the small waves their motions made. Because he was teasing his brother on the sly Wyrvaust failed to mention that he tested his own wards too when finished so he could tweak, perfect and repair any oversights. He never had been one to take chances where security was concerned. They had the dead zones to think of too. He would adjust the void in the wards to include a counter void, which negated powers before they could establish, effectively preventing dead zones, magic, and antimagic zones from ever happening. "The Desert Fox is uncertain if his Shadow has heard... Dead zones in the present day war are being raised wherever the Army of Man has engaged their chosen enemy, which would be we... much as immortal kind of Acheron and its supporters are their elect. The Raven avoids such matters as war with all he is... but such a war is this that it may come to us. It is the Raven's wish for he and his to be invisible to them unless we choose to strike... like the sand cobra." Sand cobras blended into the sand, salt and soil of the desert so well they were seldom seen until stepped on or they struck. They were just chameleon enough to alter their color according to

these terrains they lived in or traveled across.

Speaking of striking like a cobra... That soap was snatched from his hand in a flash. Blink. His twilight eyes leaned on that beautiful face as she cried out that it was HER turn with a little too much victory attached. He chuckled deeply, most of it reverberating in his chest. His back arched like a cat when she kneaded along his spine and a soft groan escaped him, only that same breath caught and was gulped in as she pinched him. His head snapped around to bring his gaze sideways on her, and his hair whipped around as he did to spray water lightly across her face. Lips curled into a terribly appealing smirk. "That goes many times again for the Raven." He assured her. He wriggled against her, throwing ripples off all around them.

His gaze locked on Cevari again. "We would wish to meet his Shadow's caravan tomorrow eve. Invite them in for food eve after tonight. We should know one another's faces and minds, as time passes with the later. The Raven wishes to know of his brother how long he will stay..." Wyrvaust would wish it to be always. Family meant everything to him. Clan? It might have, had he not been so terribly treated. He had made his own clan, and was building it still clearly. Arilwen did something which made him fall back against her and exhale a deep breath of elation. Yes, he could all too easily lose himself to her... for days, months, years... forever... end up as Mernaph had with Malcomb. "Arilwen..." he whispered because for a moment he couldn't speak. "The Raven has much to take care of in the safe keeping of us all... We could use the Swan's help... Will the Bird of Paradise help her demon priest?" His eyes looked to his brother almost pleadingly...

"Llewd..." The raven then repeated that part he had heard a little while ago but which had continued to echo in his mind. "There is no llewd between hearts bound so tightly it wounds with longing... every moment... ever distracting... ever tempting to lose self and all other cares in..." Yes, he could all too easily forget himself when Arilwen was so near, carressing him in such ways. #

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LiftTheDarkness

Cevari nodded thoughtfully. "I'd heard whispers, of course." He murmured, in regards to the Army of Man. As much as he tried to avoid violence, being excellent at escaping rather than fighting, he hoped to avoid much involvement in anything of that sort.

At the mention of his caravan, he beamed. "That can be arranged. They're a rowdy bunch, but I'll see that they behave." It was quite a sight, usually, Cevari silencing a group of burly men with a glance. They respected him, though, and he treated them very well in return. He needed muscle along with him, given that he was not inclined to enter combat, himself. "As long as you'll have me," Cevari responded, smiling a little. "With the exception of trips here and there, to obtain new artifacts." And whenever the abyss decided to pull him back, but that was never permanent. "Now that I've found you again, I'm afraid I'm reluctant to stray terribly far."

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JD: Wyrvaust smiled at his brother. A part of him regretted that he had not



looked for him... but each time he thought of Mekkora or Mendorin getting involved with Cevari he knew he had done what he had to. He would rather never see him again than risk him suffering their evil acquaintance. Wyrvaust was happy to hear his brother say that he would rather not stray too far from him again. His smile warmed and he splashed Cevari a little in the face. "We would not have our shadow wander from his reach never again. Ever watchful the Raven shall be of his younger, Tire of his protective yoke his brother may," he smirked a little as he said this. Wyrvaust turned his attentions then on Arilwen. "As his Swan may tire of his attentions," he added and laughed quietly. The demon finished bathing himself and his wife after and when he had bid Cevari a good night, he retired to bed with his mate. He loved her until she was spent in the best way and rest was able to blanket her with ease despite her troubles.

In the days ahead he worked tirelessly on expanding their small kingdom deeper into the earth and building the wards until not a crack could be found for their enemies to worm their way through. Sapphire canyon was the sanctuary it was meant to be again, and as long as they remained inside its walls, garden and the canyon itself they were safe from harm or capture. In a month Wyrvaust had uncovered the sapphire palace in its entirety, using earth elements to aid him in his endeavor.

Sapphire Lair: The wide corridor off the bedrooms, kitchen, dining room, and fountain hall which led to the garden had once led to a balcony which the garden now replaced. Wyrvaust had excavated six additional bedrooms in the Sapphire Lair (ie the original level of his lair) a large non-specific living space, and a huge library where many books had been found, a few of them still intact. His personal arcane lab was still hidden by rock walls.

Above Ground: Above the lair was another level he called Above Ground because it was the only story which was above ground, which Wyrvaust had opened with three additional rooms connected to an actual balcony that was quite large which thrust out slightly over part of the garden's south side. It shaded the doorway below. The balcony had looked like a rock ledge before. Also on the upper level was a large bath chamber and a huge great room connected to the balcony once used for gatherings, a small kitchen, and a stairway leading to the palace roof, which Wyrvaust had left as nature had reclaimed it. Covering the stairwell to the roof was an illusion which from without made it blend in with the sand, dirt, cacti and other desert loving plants above. Wyrvaust assigned this entire level to his brother Cevari.

Defenders Quarters: Below the lair level was another story with a dozen large bed chambers, a bath house, a huge game room, several storage rooms, and a sauna. This was the level Wyrvaust assigned to Cevari's men, and he called it the Defenders Quarter.

Ready Quarters: Beneath that level were two spacious bed chambers, two combat training rooms, one for weapons and hand to hand the other for magic, an armory, an arcane lab, a large sauna, a small kitchen and another large room.

Meeting Quarters: Below that was the ground floor which had a large kitchen, a large dining area, a smaller dining area, a series of six, large interconnecting rooms, a huge greatroom, three bathrooms, one large bedroom with a connecting bath, two barracks, an armory, a ready room and an entry hall which was now a closed hall. There was also a guard room outside of a stairwell which led down to the

Dungeon Quarters.

Dungeon Quarters: This area was actually two levels high and contained a large but simple kitchen, two guard rooms and the rest was divided into single cells with one large containing cell on the upper level.

The City: Beyond the Sapphire Palace the Raven had uncovered several streets and the buildings around them. One of the stone keeps he assigned to Nic, Anna and their child. The other ten building, all of them stone, three more of them keeps, were unoccupied at the moment. The largest keep he reserved for Marsol, as well as the best bedchamber in the lair. Wyrvaust would be working on uncovering the remainder of the city in his spare time as he desired in the months and years to come.

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Speaking of Anna... Something untoward had happened before Wyrvaust had managed to get his wards fully operational. An incident which had in fact spurred him to ward the entire canyon instead of just the lair inside and the garden. Anna had been by herself gathering herbs in the canyon when she received a letter delivered by a raven. Because of recent events she was under guard of four of Wyrvaust's guardians, two of them Morgrue, two of them death knights. (He had also created a small army of various kinds of minions for himself and Arilwen to command.) When Anna read the letter she seemed pleased, so there was nothing to alarm her guards. At length she told them she had to pee and slipped away. That was the last time they saw her. All they knew was that she had received a letter, read the letter, been happy about what she read, and excused herself to pee, and insisted she did not want her guards to watch! They followed her footprints in the sand and dirt which just ended abruptly before she even left the canyon. There was no sign of her or the letter. What had happened to her was simply a mystery. Had she volunteered to leave? Chosen to leave? Had she been taken? There was no sign of a struggle at all. Had she been tricked into quitting the area? Wyrvaust scanned and probed the area for any signs of magic, and all he could find was that that residual elemental energy was present, air elements in fact.

One person could have told him what had happened. His name was Demascus Mordante and the magic he had used to take Anna was his. His will had possessed her as she read the letter. She believed that she was where she was because she wanted to be. Wyrvaust was able to trace the element trail to the gateway's destination. It had delivered them just outside the gates of Hawker's Fort, but by the time Nic and those he took with him got there, Demascus (Who was going by Dantes) and Anna were long gone. Those who had seen Dantes could not describe what he looked like either but could say he was male. He had been wearing a Cloak of Masking, which was like a cloak of id only it also scrambled physical appearance. A ghost might as well have taken her. What all witnesses did attest to was that she and the fellow who met her were on friendly terms. "They seemed to know and like each other very well," one of the witnesses attested and all other accounts were much the same.

Where HAD Dantes slash Demascus taken her? To his home, which was also the lair of his master which only a few even knew the location of. There Anna was made quite comfortable and treated like exactly what she was. Family. She was family to Arilwen and Wyrvaust, so she was family to Dantes. He showed her some of the most beautiful places on and in the mountain he lived within. He swam with her in those

sublimely pristine mountain pools. He showed her the ancient water shrine hidden beneath the falls. He ran with her in the open meadows where the Orchid Moths flew. He smoked the Ahnri with her the moths made from the nectar of the orchids they were named after. High as the moon on Ahnri he cooked her delicious meals over an open flame beneath the stars. He treated her like his own sister. He persuaded her to spill her heart to him. In turn he told her all he could about himself, how he was a bastard vampire son of rape abused by demons who a demon claimed as his own and protected. He told her his master took him as a slave but had never treated him as a slave... He confided how happy he had been living in the mountain with the master he called father, for he had been the only father he had ever had. His name? Azale.

Anna met his father and he was kind to her. He was often busy with various studies or ventures but joined them often for dinner, and though rarely, for breakfast or lunch. He offered Anna objects of protection, in case the Vengoath, giant cave snakes, unfriendly gothelves, or other hostile beings encountered she and Dantes on the mountain paths or in the caverns. Dantes had similar tokens to keep him safe, and his would not be removed any sooner than hers would be. She found once she put them on she could not take them off. The objects had other powers too... Azale could gate them home safe on his whim. If badly injured the items they wore would transport them home as well. Azale could also locate them with ease and gate to them. They would be kept safe though.

So how was Anna so easily won over? A part of Dantes was in her, had been since she read the letter. Not everything he said agreed with her though... only those things which made sense, and Dantes had a way with logic that could make most anything make sense. How then had he convinced her that she was better off without Nic, or without her child? By playing on all her doubts and fears which was not difficult after he had taken her to his master's Lunar Oracle which showed her the future. If she stayed with Nic; There was a devil after her that would kill her daughter to get to her, if for no other reason than to make her suffer, and her grief would be so great that Nic would be forced to find solace elsewhere. Years of misery would ensue before it finally ended. If she left Nic however... He would raise their daughter alone it was true, but she would live and be happy and after a time Nic would find happiness too. His daughter alone would bring him great happiness. Anna would find contentment as well, in the bosom of her new found friends who had embraced her as family because her connection to Wyrvaust made her family. She would also find happiness living with Arilwen and Wyrvaust whom she would be returned to when the time was right. How was she family? Dantes explained that as well, but it was something he had told her privately as something between them. Azale was Wyrvaust's father but he had been greatly misjudged, by his clan and by Wyrvaust for things his maker and not he had done. Azale's sire was a great evil he had tried to protect Wyrvaust from, but had failed in this because he had lie dormant, imprisoned by a death like sleep while his sire pretended to be him. Azale had always avoided his sire, as Wyrvaust avoided him, but he was avoiding the wrong creature, Dantes attested. It was Mekkor Wyrvaust needed to avoid, not Azale, Dantes swore. Anna had seen for herself how inoffensive Azale was. True he was quiet and often occupied by his interests, but when he was there he was kind and soft spoken. His laughter was genuine when he laughed, his smile warm when he smiled. She had never seen him so much as raise his voice to anyone. Even when he admonished he did so calmly. Dantes certainly had nothing bad to say about his master. He sang only praises to Azale. Anna questioned him about the time Mendorin kidnapped Arilwen and tortured her. Dantes

explained that it had NOT BEEN Mendorin, but Mekkor who had taken her. "Mekkor wants everyone to fear and hate Mendorin as he is feared and hated. Know why? Because Mekkor made Azale... as his proxy. When he realized that he couldn't control him, it pissed him off, so he has done everything in his power to make others believe Mendorin is as horrid as he is. I promise you there is no truth to it. Hell, Mekkor even lied to Azale about who made him, telling him Adrameleth and Ireleth, the first born Abyss Demons sired him. Hell, Mekkor proxied Azale as an abyssal Balrog. He is abyss and flames, one of a kind and I think that pisses Mekkor off too, that he created a first born that got away from him."

So went Anna's indoctrination into Azale Mendorin's clan.

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JD: How many months had slipped by after the completion of his little city beneath the sand and the disappearance of Anna? The Desert Raven could not say, but autumn and winter had come and gone and the early days of springs were on their way. Wyrvaust had come to know his brother far better, even to learn more about what he was and what it meant for him to be a planar being. He also came to know Cevari's men as loyal to his brother and via that devotion loyal to himself. Wyrvaust's concerns over the absence of Anna and Marsol grew on him by the hour but he kept those worries to himself for the most part. He concentrated greatly on his family and on expanding it with many nights of passion his wife, but there would be no further children else Arilwen willed it. Whether she knew it or not she was in control of her own fertility. The one son the Swan and Raven had so far begotten was in a dark mood lately, brooding often over Anna's absence as well as Marsol's. Marsol's sons Amaru and Ardwyrr did what they could to cheer their friend and honorary brother despite their own worries but his was a heart smitten and broken. He needed time for his heart to mend. Wyrvaust and Arilwen alike hated seeing their son in such a way but they both knew the inevitability of heart break and that it like all things would pass given enough time. Meanwhile Wyrvaust fortified their desert citadel against all manner of attacks and infiltrations to the point it was highly unlikely any further attempts to harm or capture his tribe while inside the confines of Sapphire City would come even close to succeeding. If someone wanted to get to anyone under Wyrvaust's protection they would have to catch them outside the Sapphire Canyon and underhold's walls. Even the spring rains which had brought some severe flash and silt floods to the desert and canyon had failed to weaken the Sapphire Citadel's defenses. Wyrvaust had thought of just about everything. Their keep was a private haven shared only by their children, servants and Cevari who stayed on the upper floor. Cevari's men lived on the floor below them and had an elemental gateway of their own to come and go by. Yet for all Wyrvaust had done and was doing still, a great part of his composure was false. He felt responsible for the loss of Anna and Marsol and as such there was a crack in the foundation of his mind, a crack which widened with each month his wife failed to conceive a child. The gods he recognized were punishing surely for his failures. Indeed, he had just come into the garden after surveying the damage outside the ward perimeters when he met up with his most beloved wife in the lovely garden outside their keep. His mood on this particular day was... strange, as he returned from the desert.

Wyrvaust came up behind his wife so quietly that he could have been accused of sneaking, but he was simply that quiet when he walked, and when she startled as he wrapped her with his arms he chuckled deeply and pulled her close within his warm

embrace. "Is our most beloved of all desert birds happy to see to her mate? Such happiness he feels in her company that he is sure he cannot deserve it, for whom can earn such joy from the fates? The Raven must surely be dreaming to have such a wife as spills his heart over with contentment and rapture. That or the gods must love him. Either way, he is unworthy of such happiness but grateful for the gift of his great fortune in a mate all the same. Blissfilled as he is... he wonders of late... will his wife soon give him a child? She does long for more children as deeply as the Raven, yes?" he fished. A part of him wondered since the loss of Gabriel's brood if she no longer wanted his children, or... if the killing of them had somehow cursed her, or him... them. Wyrvaust kissed the arc of her neck then rested his chin over her shoulder, cutting his indigo eyes on her. "The trying her mate loves... wonderful that part," he assured her with a smile. "The suns and moons in all their phases have passed us by many times without a child though... The Raven is doing something wrong perhaps?" he searched. "Or... he is too happy... and the fates must take something for all his debts, perhaps..." he speculated then fell silent to give his wife room to speak.

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JD: Cevari meanwhile was being led to the kitchen adjacent to the very garden Arilwen and Wyrvaust occupied by the hand of Gilriael whom had come to be extremely close with the Abyss Walker over the months. One might even say the silver haired and fair skinned elven dragon bard was in love with the sienna skinned Nefarri though he was not ready to admit it just yet. Gilriael kept his heart tightly bound and guarded but if he had to confess the truth he had fallen for Cevari almost from the moment he had set eyes on him. "I am famished," the elf dragon exclaimed as they entered the kitchen, where he released Cevari's hand and began to rummage for food, making himself perfectly at home. "Oh... antelope sausages... yum yum... eggs and cheese... oh this bread looks wonderful. Ever had breakfast allah dragon's breath?" he cackled as he laid the things out on the board. "Let's see..." he found a pot and iron skillet. "Not sure why everyone is so worried about Marsol..." Wyrvaust had just been questioning him that morning about his chieftain, asking where he might have gone, why he would stay away for so long... if he had tried to contact him, why he had been unable to reach him, and so on. "He can damn well take care of himself..."

Sure, Gilriael pretended not to be concerned but he was, quite troubled by his long absence. It reminded him of the time Marsol had last disappeared... He hated thinking of it, he had been gone for such a very long time. The tribe had gone native again... reverted to the old ways of protecting the domain by raiding and burning, which was why Saeed's kingdom had been attacked as it had without any warning. The tribe had been led to believe Saeed had been responsible for Marsol's absence and attacked without warning or negotiation. Gilriael was not going to let the tribe get out of hand this time. He would lie and say Marsol left him in charge if he had to. He was sure Marsol would understand and know he would never try to replace him as head of the Hell Raptor tribe.

"I hear your guys are going to scout around today... Why don't we ride with them?" he suggested as he heated the pans. Gilriael was restless. He was not one to stay cooped up for long. He had been indoors during the rainstorms for almost a week now which for him was an eternity. It was rare for storms in the heart of the desert to last so long. The sun had come out that morning finally and Gilriael was ready to bask in it.

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LiftTheDarkness: Cevari allowed himself to be towed along by the hand, that dimple flashing in his left cheek as he grinned. Oh, he had grown terribly fond of the dragon-in-elf's-clothing over the months he had stayed there. Contrary to Gilriael's reluctance to share his feelings, Cevari had no such qualms. He was forever proclaiming his adoration with flowery words and pet names in his people's tongue. He was certainly not shy when it came to affection. He savored the small things from Gil, though. The way he so naturally reached for his hand now, and the fact that he was no longer so prickly towards him, although he still found that thorny nature rather endearing. More so, really, now that he was no longer being pricked so often.

Before he allowed him to have his hand back, he raised it to his lips to leave a kiss across the pale flesh of his knuckles, so fair against his own cinnamon skin. Was he in love with Gil? He thought so. He had played around enough in his long life to know the difference between fancying his admittedly lovely appearance and something deeper. It showed, in the way he treated Gil. Sure, he was still irreverently flirtatious and silly, but there were tender moments, when his prickly dragon would allow them. Like this. Was he actually...?

"You're cooking for me?" He pointed out the obvious. And Cevari looked absolutely thrilled. What a fine gesture. He leaned against the countertop, watching him as he made his way around the kitchen. "You're the only dragon who's ever made me breakfast, as you well know." He teased, gently. "So, no. I've never had breakfast ala dragon's breath."

He looked over at him as he commented on Marsol. Even over the months, he saw right through that unconcerned front of his. He could tell that he was concerned. "Of course he can," He assured him, reaching to gently brush some of that silken silver hair behind an ear, to keep it out of Gil's face while he was handling the food. "He's very capable."

He rolled back the sleeves of his fine tunic, and moved in to help where he could, and where Gil would let him. Being cooked for was nice, but doing it together was better, was it not? "They are," He agreed, those blue eyes coming to meet his rubied gaze. "Will you ride, then, or will you give your wings a stretch?" He imagined remaining in this form had to be stifling. He loved seeing Gil in all his glory. He truly was magnificent, as he had told him on many an occasion. Cevari had a deep appreciation for Gilriael in both of his forms. He particularly liked it when he was permitted to fly with him, though. It brought their connection, he thought, to entirely new heights. What? He thought it was punny. He was looking forward to getting out with his men again, too, though he always welcomed whoever wanted to venture along.

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JD: "Well," Gilriael began as Cevari said he couldn't claim to have eaten dragon roasted food, "In this form it is not 'exactly' dragon's breath... more like... fire of the dragon," he explained with a deep chortle. His was a voice that could reach deep or peal high and dulcet. When he sang he could captivate as easily as soothe or even fright. "Watch," he said as his hand gripped the handle of the pan

he was preparing to cook the delectable Wyrvaust made sausages in. If Wyrvaust was anything it was self sufficient. If someone made him a king he would be a king who mended his own clothes, hunted his own game, and looked after his family's needs. Gilriael deeply respected Marsol's right hand for that. When the goth-dragon's hand gripped the cast iron handle the pan began to heat up rapidly and the sausage to sizzle as he placed them in the skillet. Wild boar fat had been added to the lean antelope meat when the Raven had processed the venison with desert spices and peppers into sausage. When the skillet was nice and hot he let go of it, and to maintain the heat at an even level he occasioned to touch the handle. While cooking he sang and in place of a wind instrument he whistled. The song was a humorous one about a boar which no one had ever been able to kill (he sang of the various ways he had escaped and hunters had tried to kill him) in many hunts until the wild pig achieved an ancient age, only finally to be lured with crispy fried bacon to a trap which ended in his demise. When the sausage began to brown the pan he added a little wine to deglaze it and with some wooden tongs rubbed the sausage around in the resulting broth. By the time the sausages were done they were a delicious and flavorful dark brown and little moisture remained in the skillet. After cutting up the links in the pan he added mushrooms, peppers, onions, and sauted them until the pan was glazed a second time, at what time he deglazed it a second time before adding the dozen eggs he had beaten until fluffy in the meantime, a heap of lombra cheese, then some desert sage, dry sea-salt and pepper. Covering the skillet and turning the heat very low, he leaned against the bread board and smiled at Cevari. "Naked egg pie," he said. It was what on earth most called a frittata. The naked part referred to it being crustless. Quiche was called Dressed Egg Pie by the natives of Morendor. "Naked is after all how I like you best," he grinned. He handed the planes walker a loaf of fresh baked bread made with soft grains. "Have some fun with it and I will toast it up," he encouraged. There was a jar of fresh butter, wild honey, and many kinds of spices on the rack to make an herb butter. If Cevari had nibbled at Wyrvaust's sausage he would find it a highly marketable flavor.

When Cevari asked if they were going to be flying that afternoon, Gilriael shook his head. "Nope. Not to say I won't be compelled to let the dragon loose if he is needed." He liked to spring his dragon side on enemies, catching them unawares.

While watching Cevari prepare the bread he pestered him with a clean wooden spoon, using it to flip his dark hair, poke at him, spank him, what have you. His casual demeanor appealed more to his youthful looks than his age. He was unquestionably of a mischievous nature but less obviously very good. When the bread was almost done he laid out plates enough for everyone (Anwaar, Wyrvaust, Arilwen, himself and Cevari) and rang the iron triangle which served as a dinner, or this case, brunch bell. "I get the feeling we are going to run into trouble out there today. That's why I want to go," he smiled and his eyes shone on Cevari. Clearly he looked forward to a good adventure. Few bards moonlighted as warriors but Gilriael was exceptional in various ways. A gay elf by itself was highly unusual. "So be ready," he added. "Bring which ever men you choose to stand at your defense." He had come to find out through certain encounters they'd had in the desert with raiders that Cevari was NOT a fighter. Gilriael wasn't bothered by that at all. In fact he rather enjoyed the role of playing his protector. "More than just marauders are in the dunes lately," he noted. While he had received some reports of enemy movement, he was also relying on his instincts.

That said, Gil plopped into a chair at the kitchen table and helped himself to

breakfast. He smiled at Cevari after taking a bite of the bread. "It's very good."

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Willow: How could time pass without Anna and Marsol? For Arilwen and so many in the Sapphire City, it seemed that each moment was longer than the next. The waiting, the worry, the hopefulness when the search parties left and the heartbreak that resulted in their empty hands and solemn faces upon return. It felt like they were wading through wet sand up to their knees, unable to make leeway. Surprisingly, Anwaar seemed to take it the hardest of all. His mood darkened by the day, his efforts being thrown into helping his father dig out the city. And, as it seemed, he took particular interest in the house that was being crafted for Anna, Nic, and Gosha, specifically spending weeks to make certain that it had all of the features that they could ever want. His heart was stormy and his mind confused. He felt so strongly about someone who was married with a family, and happy at that. This was the first touch of love for another that had landed on his heart and he didn't know how to process it... or how to speak to anyone about it. Only his father had pointed it out when they had first moved home, then gently warned him that it was not a good idea to yearn after a woman who was spoken for. Wyrvaust had told him that if he DID continue those feelings to speak to Marsol. But Marsol was not here either, and if Marsol couldn't reach them, how could Anna ever get back too? Marsol was a second father to him, someone that he respected more than anyone, and he wondered-- HOPED that this was a test. But the seasons slipped away and the spring rains had come. Anwaar began to go to the canyon walls to sit in the rain, feeling like the swirling water below him made sense. He would come home soaked to the bone, dripping wet, and would leave damp footprints in the halls on the way to his room. At times he wouldn't even come back to his room. He would go to Anna and Nic's house and polish the sapphires in the walls and ceilings, because he wanted Anna to light up when she came home to see it. He even considered giving credit to Nic for it.

It wasn't easy for Wyrvaust and Arilwen to process their son's heartache. He had the body of a man but the weightlessness of a child before all of this. Now that seemed gone and he was suffering. It left Arilwen in tears for many nights, intensifying how much she missed her friend. Nearly everyone felt at fault. What if someone had gone with her, what if someone had said something differently, what if what if what if. Arilwen had not left the Sapphire City since Anna had surprised her with the return there. She threw herself into helping feed and support their new friends, family and allies that would occupy the city with them. She had small moments where she would seem fine, then go to turn to Anna to share something funny with her, realize she wasn't there, then excuse herself for awhile when she went to her room and wept quietly.

This particular evening she had put the racks of boar over the fire to slow roast, then stepped out into the garden to distract herself with herbs. She didn't hear Wyrvaust approach her, especially since she was concentrating on tying herbs into small bundles with thin twine. Her fingers delicately worked the twine around the green leaves, and she jumped nearly as high as Wyrvaust stood when his arms slipped around her, laughing breathlessly as her heart raced, leaning back against him so that she could smell him and soak in his warmth. She could tell he had just come in from their Mother desert, because his skin radiated heat. "Happy to see my Raven? There is not a word in any language made by any man that could describe how happy I



am." She murmured, smiling as she closed her eyes and turned her face just a bit to nuzzle his neck. His voice continued and she could immediately sense unrest in his tone, so she remained quiet and still, listening fully to his words. His words made her gut tighten and she winced. This is what he had been worrying about. Arilwen turned in his arms to face him, searching his dark eyes. "Oh, my heart." She breathed softly, dropping her herb bundle so that she could gently run her fingers into his hair. "Of COURSE I want more children with you. It...it HAS been some time." She admitted out loud. She wouldn't sensor her words for him. She would think out loud and speak honestly. How could time seem to be dragging on and flying by all at once? She frowned, feeling waves of guilt. "May I confess something to the bird of my heart? Each and every time we lay together, I am more and more enamored by you. You must know that. I would try all days and nights and bar any other activities, except for the fear that my thighs might catch fire." That made her grin and she took his hand, leading him to a bench on the side of the garden so that they could sit together and she could touch her knee to his. "I do have to admit that since Anna and Marsol have gone away, my soul and my heart are at war. Part of me feels as if I deserve no happiness until they return to us safely. When we lie together, it is a warm and wonderful way to lose myself in you and think of nothing else. Including, I fear, the thought that we may have more children soon." She hurried to continue. "I want a family. A LARGE family. But our son is heartbroken and my best friend and our Lord are gone, and no one has answers. Perhaps, when we lie together, my mind is not focusing on breeding, but only the feeling and comfort and happiness that it provides." She frowned then, running her thumbs over his knuckles. She had no idea that she had a say in her fertility but it had been her own absent mind that was causing the lack of child. "Do you think..." She paused, looking around before dropping her voice. "Do you think that ridding my body of the previous fetuses cause...damage?" That was a thought that had never occurred to her. Arilwen immediately felt her eyes start to burn and she swallowed. "What if I am unable to bear you more children?" She whispered, searching his face. She suddenly looked horrified. If they were to shed their clothing now, lie together, and Arilwen could center herself for the first time in months, she could make it happen. She just had no idea it WORKED that way. She felt tears threatening. He wanted a family so very badly and she may have made a choice about the children of the Horseman that had ruined her body.

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A rakish smile curled Wyrvaust's lips when Arilwen flourished her libido to prove just how much she desired him. He pulled her even closer and groped her, his touch hungry and sensual accompanied by a low growl. "Your mate could too easily be tempted to keep his wife a prisoner of his hunger until eternity sleeps. Beware the depths of his desire for the desert swan, the star of the east, his bird of paradise and keeper of his heart. Beware because he might just lock himself away with her if the temptation to do so grows too unbearable for him to deny." Who knew if he was kidding or not.

"As for our son's sorrows..." His hold on her loosened slightly. "Pain is inescapable, as is growing up. Your Raven looks on his brother now and sees still the child, the younger brother he remembers. Always Anwaar shall be our child, but save him from pain we cannot. The Lord and Lady of Sapphires can only love him through his pains and experiences. Guide him as best we can and hope he heeds our wisdom. He will follow his own heart more often than not though. That is the way of fledglings flying from their nests. He is becoming a man too fast. Anna will

not be the last to break Anwaar the undragon's heart." He sometimes called Anwaar an undragon because he was an Anwaar who was not a dragon. "We are all islands, Arilwen. We cannot bend the fates of others as well as ourselves, much as we may wish it. Each of us withers the storms in our way and are shaped by the elements which meet us. The Raven cannot make his chieftain reappear no matter his efforts. This failure has shown him. For all we know Lord Marsol chooses to remain aloof. Whatever the cause, it is meant to be, just as his return shall be meant. He could not turn the Swan back from all her struggles, try as he might, just as his wife could not stand in the way of his troubles, but none of it matters because here we are, together. Anxious he is to have more offspring it is true, but he will love his wife no less if it never happens. Oh, that reminds us..." He changed the subject.

"While wandering in the dunes your Raven found something... something left behind by the rain storms... a child there was stuck in the cement left by the floods... The Raven plucked her out and washed her off at the clearwater oasis where he made her a camp. Neffari through and through that one, and no more than eight years gone by. Found her parents the Raven three miles upstream and feeding the vultures. Drowned. He returned to her with food and said he would come back in two days. A four day walk out to the child where the Desert Raven left her. Should we... bring her home...?" he wondered. Most people would have never left her there alone to begin with but Wyrvaust saw the desert as an extension of chaos and mother of those who lived in it. If the child was meant to live she would survive until he returned. He had bathed, rehydrated and fed her, made her a shelter and left her with food. She had survived being neck deep in the moisture sucking concrete left by the flash floods for two days. Wyrvaust had actually had to chip her out with a pick. Leave it to Wyrvaust to stumble across an urchin beyond the middle of nowhere. That should have been enough to prove fate wanted her alive surely but Wyrvaust did not think that way. If she survived that only to die while he asked his wife if she was up to rearing a waif, then it was not meant. His fatalism was part of his religious zeal. He might not go around preaching chaos, but he did live by it and guide others by it.

How did time pass without the Kingdom's chieftain and his adopted daughter? As time always did while people watched it slip by hopeless to stem its tide. Wyrvaust though was aware of ways to not only delay time but to turn it back. He did not practice chronomantic paths himself but he could 'borrow' such powers through shamanistic summoning rituals where demons or deities gave him access to abilities he did not himself possess. He had... explored bringing Marsol and Anna back that way, but he had spoken to an oracle who had assured him that any alternative path through time which would return them would result in something far worse than what had befallen them already. In each probable time line their presence during that interim would have caused terrible catastrophes. Ronwe had warned Wyrvaust against knowing the details, but assured him that both of them were alive and that Anna was even in good health. Having just recently gathered this information, Wyrvaust thought it a good time to tell Arilwen the good news. He hated seeing her upset and had not meant to alarm or distress her.

"No desert flower... In perfect health her mate left her. He promises his beautiful and most wonderful of all birds this. Perhaps we are just unlucky, or chaos wishes to make us wait so we might appreciate our offspring more. Who can say what the fates or all maker intends, hmm?" He would not worry her by expressing his own darkest fears of Gabriel or someone loyal to him possibly leaving a curse

behind in her. He did delve within her for such hidden sorcery but had found nothing. But he knew magic could lurk within someone well concealed. "It is more likely that the star of the desert is just not quite ready to have a child. Too worried by the absence of her dearest friend and chieftain. Your Raven carries the same concerns. Her husband is just too eager. Forgive him. An ageless demon should not be so impatient," he apologized and kissed her along her shoulder blade. When he straightened he smiled and scooped her up to carry her into a graceful whirl which landed her back on her feet light as a feather, he smiling at her with adoration and profound warmth.

"The Raven can at least promise his Swan that they are alive and well. They are unharmed." Well, Marsol was alive at least but Wyrvaust had no clue what shape he was in. The fact that Ronwe did not cite the dragon king as being in good health was a clue that Marsol was likely in far rougher shape, but Wyrvaust would be grateful for alive. Marsol was a tough old dragon. Alive was a windfall the Raven would not disdain. Wyrvaust pulled a strand of pork from the roasting boar and leaned against the palm near the firepit where he ate the meat. After licking his fingers he smiled at Arilwen. "Delicious." He was thinking they should take some of it to the little orphan if Arilwen decided to add her to the clan.

And IF she decided they should go collect her and do so right away?...

Wyrvaust would leave her long enough to gather he and his wife's day packs and meet her back in the garden where he would wrap up a slab of the pork in paper and antelope hide then stuff it in the compartment with the other traveling food he had packed. Magrymed would be called to look after the roast and receive the information of where they were going while he and Arilwen headed out. With any luck they would be back in time to eat some of the breakfast Gilriael and Cevari had prepared the next morning. If not, Grym would inform them of where Wyrvaust and Arilwen had gone off to. Would Arilwen be nervous leaving the safety of their canyon after all these months? Wyrvaust had no intention of letting any harm come to her, and the wedding ring of hers he had enchanted those months ago protected her from powers, gateways and elements not of her husband's making. If someone wanted to get their hands on Arilwen they'd have to get to her the old fashioned way. Wyrvaust had rather wanted to spend some time with Arilwen in the desert again. Though he loved to be home with her... out there, when he was sure he could protect her, was where he most loved to be with her. He wouldn't mind though if Anwaar decided to join them. He had told him on his way in where he and his mother were going and invited him to join them if he'd a mind to. He had left it to his son. Anwaar would show up, or not.

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LiftTheDarkness: Cevari did indeed watch as Gil demonstrated his particular talent at heating pans. He had known that his hands were delightfully warm (at least, they were whenever they touched him), but this was an entirely new level of heat. "I'm ever grateful for your control," He announced, playfully. "Else you might have branded me by now, on accident." Handprints scorched onto him by his lover would certainly be new. He smiled as Gilriael sang. He did love that voice, dearly. Cevari had a decent voice, himself, but next to a voice like that, it was nothing. He liked to boast that he would handle the dancing, himself, if Gil took care of the music. He was rightfully proud of his dancing skills.

He chuckled at that flirtatious little quip. "Pity I spend so much on clothes, then, isn't it? But I daresay I prefer you that way, as well." He flirted right back. He accepted the bread and went to work creating a savory butter spread for it, with just the hint of sweetness from the honey he drizzled into it. It was an interesting combination. He chuckled as that wooden spoon tousled those gleaming dark waves, and proceeded to prod and swat at him. He finally turned to ensnare him in his arms, to still that spoon by distracting him with a kiss. It was, he had found, the most effective way to tame his dragon lover.

He heaved a sigh at the T word. "Trouble. You know I hate trouble." Dramatic as always. But he flashed him that white grin. "But since it seems to find me, and since you seem positively gleeful at the prospect, I shall persevere." He waved off the suggestion to bring whichever men could defend him. "That's all of them. That's precisely why I've taken them into my service." He had no problem admitting it. He was much better at escaping than fighting, and was clever enough to know that that meant his men needed to make up for that. Every man in his caravan was hulking and burly, but it was a sight to see, the way they looked to him for leadership. Though much shorter and slighter than them, he could silence them with a look, and never were there men more loyal to their leader. "I'll tell them to let you play white knight a little, though. You do make my heart flutter, when you prevent my spleen from being ripped out." He teased, pretending to fan himself...with a slice of bread, no less. He liked protective Gil, as much as Gil liked protecting him. And he did see him generously rewarded afterward, when they retired to his bedchambers. He made a point of kissing it all better, should he get banged up in defense of him.

He joined him at the table eventually, taking a bite of the naked egg pie. "It ought to be illegal," He announced. "To be so talented at everything. I was half hoping you might be a dreadful cook. Is there anything you cannot do?" He teased him, with that charming smile.

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JD: Gilriael laughed as Cevari spoke of the heat his hands could radiate and his fortune not to have been at the bad end of that internal inferno. "I tend to remember to turn the stove off when not in use," he mused with a clownish wave of his hands. "Just take care not to touch me if I am in a temper," he warned. "My control can slip at such times." He added on a more sober note. Gilly was a passionate being and as such his self-possession could get away from him if he was enraged or extremely upset by something.

If anyone else joined them Gilriael would smile and nod to them and greet with a friendly 'good morning' and invite them to have some food with a 'please help yourself to some breakfast.' His attention would then turn back to Cevar momentarily.

"Yes, you do adorn yourself in fancy cloth," Gilriael observed with an air of amusement. Gilly dressed like an elven nomad, which is what he was at heart. He and Cevari had wanderlust in common though as Marsol had tamed his somewhat, he imagined Wyrvaust had done the same to Cevar... given him a reason to live in one place, albeit Cevar's home plane would call the Neffari abyss walker back to his home in Acheron now and again.

When Cevari halted his horseplay with a kiss Gilly froze and melted in his arms to kiss him back with a steamy hunger that left the weyrdragon breathless when their lips parted. "In the desert I found a man who could do what none other can and melt me like lava from sand, light a hellraptor on fire, who but him could this heart inspire..." he sang with enamour. When it came to whose voice was best between the two lovers? Gilriael loved Cevari's voice and had been even more smitten when he discovered he had found a man who could sing along with the best of them including himself. His voice was not as pretty perhaps but most excellent, Gilriael would say better because Cevar hadn't the advantage of being an elf. Among Neffari Gil imagined that Cevari's voice was superior to most.

"I only really like the kind of trouble which involves ridding my king's homeland of trespassers and enemies. I otherwise abhor drama," the goth dragon went on to say. Fact was, if Gilriael could use his vocal talents to aid others in the actual killing, he would never draw his blade or dragon skin during battle. If an enemy charged him or anyone in his company on the otherhand and was invulnerable to his voice, Gilriael would not hesitate to meet them with his blade and shield. "By the way... when will we get to go on a little holiday in your place in Acheron?" he was unaware that Acheron was on lock down with exception of a certain gatekey who could come and go from his father's domain as he pleased. Cevari had left Acheron prior to its sealed being activated, and had remained as long as he had on Morashtar from the consumption of souls and other spirit energies which sustained him beyond the abyss. He had explained all this to Gil minus the Acheron being sealed part. Cevari was aware of it because Maelmorda had informed him and others he trusted and or respected. The rest could find out the hard way.

He smiled when Cevari flattered him. "I am not all that good of a cook. There are only a handful of things I know how to make. Naked Egg Pie isn't exactly hard to prepare. I have just had a lot of practice with those dishes I do know how to make. More than 250 years experience." As immortals went Gilriael was fairly young at 262. He knew Namas older than he was, but as food went that was plenty of time to perfect any meal. "I do camp fire and dragon cooking. Show me a real stove and I am confounded." he chortled and finished up his breakfast. When Cevari too had done eating Cevari scootched the chair away from the table and stood in one motion. "Shall we go catch up with your fellows? I am sure they got an earlier start than us bums," he snickered. If there was anyone else at the table he bid them a good morning and be off with Wyrvaust's brother. He felt confident that he could protect him and if not him, then his men and the other far more ancient dragons.

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Willow: Arilwen felt a hot flush go through her when Wyrvaust growled against her, threatening imprisonment for all eternity. How did he make it sound desirable and a little fearful all at once? She bit her lip and curled her fingers into his chest, "As long as you take me out for walks in the sun, I see no qualms about this plan."

Anwaar was indeed becoming a man too fast. It seemed as if one day he started sprouting facial hair, then muscles, then a deeper voice. They had only blinked and their only son had become a man. But Wyrvaust was right. At no point would Arilwen ever look at him and see anything other than her sweet son. "It is true." She said softly, gazing up at her husband. "I had never been in worse physical pain in my entire life than when I wandered into the desert and was found by you. I was nearly

dead, only to be roused by someone asking if he could eat me." She gave him a pointed look, then grinned. She remembered his voice that day. She was somewhere much cooler and her eyelids had still been blistered when she heard his voice, almost in a hiss, requesting to someone in the room if he could eat her. And here they were, years later. "A very painful and cloudy path led me to you, and I would walk that path again ten times over to remain in your arms. Our son is strong."

Usually when the Raven found something during his desert travels, it was a skull or beautiful feathers. One time he even found glass beads on a broken rope that he had brought home for Arilwen. She had wound them into a beautiful wind chime and hung it in the garden. This time? "A CHILD?" Arilwen's eyebrows shot upwards as her husband easily told her about the child that had been buried up to the neck in hardened silt and mud. Neffari. Her parents dead and given back to the earth. Being married to her husband had taught her to have two views on everything. The first half of her wanted to demand an answer as to WHY he hadn't brought her home right away. The second half that tried to keep up with how he thought, understood that he had given her shelter and food until a decision could be made. She took in a slow breath. "Of course we need to go and get her. She is at the oasis, so she is safe with water and shelter." That would mean her having to leave the Sapphire city to venture with him. Did that make her nervous? Decidedly so, but she missed walking the dunes with him.

Arilwen's hand subconsciously fell to her stomach as Wyrvaust assured her that she was in perfect health. Nothing was wrong with her physically. She was just worried and distracted. Her features softened when he apologized for his impatience and she lifted his hand to kiss his palm and draw it to her cheek. "When things have calmed, we shall litter the city with dozens of children." She assured him. Dozens? One at a time, at least at first. Arilwen laughed when he swept her up and she squeezed her arms around his neck, stealing a kiss before he slid her to the ground. "Come." She said, taking his hand. "Let's go meet this child of the sands that is waiting for our return. What is she like? She must be beautiful. Neffari are so stunning..."

Food would be wrapped and packed as well as two light travel packs for Arilwen and Wyrvaust. She changed, donning a lightweight, white linen head wrap to keep off enough of the sun. She had been living away from the desert for so long that she was re-acclimating her skin in stages, and being caught in direct desert sun with no head covering could be lethal for her. Wyrvaust would never let it come to that, of course. But she had learned. Anwaar wouldn't arrive to go with them. Most likely moping in his room, or playing with Gosha and attempting to avoid his direct gaze because he looked so much like Anna.

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"No qualms...?" Wyrvaust echoed with an incised glance which hung on his wife, hence he huffed in an interested manner to indicate he would keep her response close to his heart as something to seriously consider.

"The Fox was very hungry and the roasted bird smelled very good," Wyrvaust remembered fondly, a smile curling the corner of his mouth while his indigo eyes glittered on her. The Desert Fox then nodded. "Yes, our son is strong. Stronger by far than he knows."

When his wife spoke of how many children they would have once circumstances settled Wyrvaust chuckled lightly. "The Lord and Lady of Twilight shall have as many offspring as pleases her," he assured her contentedly with a light poke at her chest. Hence his hands bloomed open. "If we have too many we might trip over them in the hallways..." he cackled then shook his head. "Can't have that, can we?" he scoffed. The oddness of him was simply who he was.

Arilwen had reacted very much as he expected to the news of the child. His hand clasped hers warmly when it was received and he pressed a kiss against her knuckles. "The child is plain and quiet but her eyes are bright with intelligence." He said as he straightened and met her gaze. "Her hair though is beautiful, very long. The Raven found it a task washing all the dried mud from her locks and brushing out all the mats left behind. He braided all those satin strands to keep it kempt." Hair was one thing Wyrvaust knew how to take care of having so much of it himself. "More than all that she is very brave, he would say."

Since Anwaar was a no show Wyrvaust instructed Grym to keep a close eye on him. He did not need to tell the reconstructed angel that Anwaar had better not come to any harm under his watch. Magrymed was very much aware of how important Anwaar was to both Wyrvaust and Arilwen... not to mention the sons of Marsol, who, ever since their father and sister had gone amiss, had been staying at the Sapphire Oasis. Fact was, in a way they were hiding from their responsibilities. With Marsol gone, people had been looking to them to lead, but neither of them was ready to step into Marsol's shoes, not even on a temporary basis. They were only a few years old and though they might look like juveniles they were far too young to lead. Fact was, they had told those who had requested audiences with them that Wyrvaust was leader of the Desert's western kingdom until Marsol returned. They had just failed to inform Wyrvaust of that little detail. So... when Wyrvaust and Arilwen left the canyon and entered the area where the canyon and dunes met, a place called 'the corridor', they were greeted by a rather large crowd of people, some common, others nobles or nomadic royalty in the form of shieks or their sons. It was a prince which approached Wyrvaust at the head of the throng.

He began by bowing to Wyrvaust. "Lord proxy in chief, I am Imael Jaashik Mendaama, son of .... "

Wyrvaust halted in his long legged tracks as the handsome Nefarri stepped in their path. He hiked the pack on his shoulder a little higher then looked first to Arilwen and afterward canted his head to the side with eyes suspiciously thinned as the other spoke. His eyes then rounded. "Wait... wait, what?" Wyrvaust interrupted him. "Lord proxy in what? The Raven is neither Lord or proxy of anything other than his oasis. Even there he is little more than an advisor, that and husband of his most cherished, and father to his son." He said with an adamant shake of his head and dismissive cut of his arms.

"Chief he is, YOU are, for so you were named by the Princes of Yfrin. The throne of high chieftain, of king of Yfrin has been delegated to you, Lord Aalamea, until such a time our Lord Marsol, the desert bless and keep him, returns safe to his people, or his sons come of age as decided by you, My Lord Proxy in Chief." The handsome prince informed.

Wyrvaust pursed his lips and thinned his eyes on the upstart. He was tempted to

say they WERE of age and to take whatever it was up with them, but he knew they were no where near ready to accept their father's mantle. They might look like young men, but they were babes in the desert. "The Raven shall return to the corridor when his present task is done. He shall receive you and your words then. Now stand aside!" he barked in a foul temper. He was not about to be elected chief deputy by Amaru and Ardwyrr and would deal with THEM and the new situation when they got back. Now because there was a great deal of mystery, many myths, and a lot of conjecture surrounding Wyrvaust, he was feared as much as he was respected, and he was respected because he had always been loyal to Marsol, and because Marsol had always trusted him and held him in high esteem. Many had often wondered why, but trusted in Marsol's good judgment of character. Thus, when Wyrvaust barked his command at him, they all obeyed, moving aside to give he and his wife plenty of room to pass.

Once well clear of the rabble Wyrvaust clasped Arilwen's hand and drew her in close. "Worry not... Sort out this mess the Swan's mate shall when the child is fetched safe and sound. Fit to lead he is not. He shall make the fools who would see him as a commander grasp sense." That said he opened a secure gateway through the abyssal plane. It was colder than the shadow realm and when one was not accustomed to it it felt extremely heavy, almost like something you might sink into and never escape. Indeed for those who were not selected to pass through it, the void would bring anyone who was not a creature of the abyss immediately to their knees as they felt their strength fail them utterly and their life being sucked out of them. Anyone who happened to try and follow Wyrvaust and Arilwen there would, once drained of life, be transformed into a black minion whose will would fall to Wyrvaust to command.

One step in, one step within, and one step out, and the onerousness of the gateway passed and they stepped out on the dunes just beyond the oasis where the girl waited with terror in her heart for her savior to return. Terror because she was mortified that he would not come back for her. Imagine the joy on her face when the Lord and Lady of Sapphire canyon approached. They had still a little walk before the palms and deep pool of Clearwater Oasis met them though. Wyrvaust had already set hard runes on the trunks of palms and boulders to protect the area.

"The Raven did not ask after the child's name," he mentioned while they walked hand in hand across the soft sand. It was getting dark and while the air cooled the sand was still warm beneath their feet. "He cannot say the reason... he just... felt it best until his wife declared an interest in the lost dove." Wyrvaust clearly had a bird fetish of some kind. "The Raven was almost certain she would want the foundling, but was also a little unsure... No longer is he that," he smiled. "If she had declined he would have found a home for the dove." He assured her. He did not want her to think he might eat the girl or abandon her to the cruel elements of the desert which had almost done her in in the first place.

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JD: Wyrvaust loved Arilwen more than he could ever explain to anyone, much as he cherished the little things about her, such as the way she blew that little breath when they had cleared the abyss gate, or the way her eyes shone when she breathed in the desert around her. Of all her qualities there was perhaps only one which vexed him; and it was an ineffable characteristic which he couldn't even define which had resulted in whatever it was had landed her in the arms of three demons;



two of whom were closely associated at that. There were times when he wondered if Sammael. Mendorin and Gabrian had not been working together to finish what was left of his sanity or to simply break him. All Wyrvaust was certain of where protecting Arilwen from any further violations against her and their marriage was concerned, was that if anyone tried to seduce her again, he would go to any lengths, ANY to keep her only for himself. He would risk anything, kill anyone (with the single exception of Marsol) DO whatever he had to, to keep her safe from harm or vile tasting forms of temptation. Wyrvaust did not see her as unfaithful but as a victim of foul play and devious manipulation.

Wyrvaust was nervous taking her into the desert but he was also elated to see how she blossomed under the wide open sky. Love and adoration softened his handsome face and made his smile pure as he knelt with her to peer beneath the shelter where the child's body warmth and little else warded off the chill. As she found the Raven's familiar face filling the opening of the stone shelter, in the company of another face much fairer than his own both in feminine beauty and a far lighter pigment, she was met also by warmly sympathetic smiles and a warm hand woven blanket handed from Arilwen to Wyrvaust then to the youngster. Wyrvaust moved back at that point, though he still gazed on the girl over Arilwen's shoulder.

"The desert Raven has returned as promised." That was how he had introduced himself to the child. "She is lady Swan as the girl is little lost dove. So does she see? We are all birds and so shall be part of the same family. Her mother and father have flown to the other side..." he made a flying gesture with his fingers away to the twilight sky and the stars that shone there which so mirrored his eyes. "So little dove can be with us now, hmm?" He ducked out of her sight then and let his wife take over while he went to collect some more wood and build up the fire. When Arilwen joined him at the fire with the girl the flames were burning bright and warm. The neffari abyss demon added a few more palm logs from a trunk that he had pulled out of a thick cluster of prickly pinapple plants. There was little wood to be found at the oasis, as the girl had found out, but Wyrvaust knew how to look where few others did... in hidden or hard to access places. He had also brought a nice little stack of wood from home through a shadow gate.

Wyrvaust pointed to the fish the girl had trapped. "A small fish farm. Very clever of the girl. Now she can roast them." He handed her a long stick. "Best to skewer them through the mouth and out the tail," he advised. While she was doing that he looked to the rock overhang. "Not the best place to take shelter. Too close to the spring... breathes in cool air and moisture," he pointed out matter of factly. He smiled at Arilwen, curling an arm around her and stirring the fire with a staff in his other hand.

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Willow: Arilwen took the biggest of breaths when she laid eyes on the Oasis that was fast approaching. The last time they had been there it had not ended so well.... But they had had so many wonderful days there. Her nerves suddenly melted into calm and she grinned up at Wyrvaust, her eyes bright. He seemed just as happy and it warmed her heart.

It wasn't hard for Wyrvaust to locate the little scared bird under the rock, and she let him kneel first. The girl's dark eyes lifted and she looked relieved, then concerned when she saw another face come into view. This woman didn't look like her

and Ravenman, but he easily explained who she was. The blanket was quickly taken and the little Dove wrapped up in it. Lady Swan smiled softly and knelt before her. "It's alright, Little Dove. Should we make a camp?"

The Dove seemed to think in silence then nodded, crawling out with Arilwen. Soon Ravenman had a fire going and was inspecting her fish farm . The Dove smiled proudly and shyly, her small hand reaching out to take the stick that Ravenman offered . She went to work on practicing while the Swan and Raven settled by the fire.

Arilwen looked fascinated by the girl, watching her intently as she stopped spearing at fish to look up at the stars . She seemed to be processing what Ravenman had told her about her parents. She eventually turned her attention back to the fish and Arilwen sighed, leaning into her husband. Soon, a loud screech exploded from the Dove and she turned to flourish her stick... Which had perfectly speared a large fish through the mouth and out the tail. Arilwen laughed and rose. " She caught dinner. Our hero!"

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JD: Wyrvaust laughed more lightly than he had in longer than he or his wife could remember as the child flourished her skewered fish in triumph and Arilwen stood to cheer and applaud the child. Her happiness truly uplifted his spirit and spread it across the desert sands. He felt freer than he had in a very long time, all because of a girl's simple victory and his wife's share in her joy. This was one of the reasons he wanted more children, that and to make his life have meaning. The waif was now theirs, he could see it. Wyrvaust clapped as well, and when a lull came to let in the quiet, his eyes were drawn to a very subtle sound, one which Arilwen too might have heard though less likely the girl. A breeze had kicked up and with it Wyrvaust had heard the soft shifting of sand as it did when someone walked across it quietly, though few could move as stealthfully as the Raven and some of the raiders the desert bred. His eyes locked on the location the whisper of sliding granuals of fine sand had come from and he planted the butt of his ivory-wood staff in the sand. "Step into the light," he commanded evenly. "Or as an enemy be recognized." His voice was neither aggressive or friendly, simply flat.

Silence fell then for but a few tightly held moments when the figure of a young man emerged from darkness new mantle and there stood three yards out facing the avian named trio. "What does it want?" Wyrvaust asked the handsome young man far more aggressively now that he could see him. He recognized him, as might Arilwen, he could not be sure or whether she knew his name. Last time she and Wyrvaust had visited the beautiful oasis at the furthest corner of his territory, they had nearly been seized by shadow and net, necromancy and sheer will amidst flames and fury by Mekkor only for her to fall into the hands of that fiend later, delivered to him by the maw of a shadow dragon, regardless of Marsol and Wyrvaust's combined efforts to protect her. Now here was the servant of Mekkor's progeny and another enemy... Wyrvaust's own sire (he believed), Mendorin. Arilwen might have seen Demascus in the home of Mekkor, as an acolyte of Mendorin's. If he had been there it was to implicate Mendorin in his deeds and was unlikely to have been by choice. Mendorin was another free bird Mekkor wished to cage with any progeny. The young man's name was Demascus but he also answered to Dantes, the name Anna knew him by.

"I come only to talk to you, my lord." Dantes assured, his mien friendly. He

looked no older than seventeen with thick, curling brunette hair and being tall he could be even younger when in fact he was quite old, though not so old as the ancients. He was in the ballpark of four hundred.

"The slave of Deception has nothing to say the Raven wishes to hear. Be gone before this beast canabilizes the brethren toad!" Wyrvaust demanded as if he meant it because he did.

"I bring knowledge you SHALL want to hear, I promise you, my lord and lady." He looked Arilwen's way with eyes the color of moss as he included her.

"Do not dare presume speak to his wife, dogboy!" Wyrvaust's voice rose to a roar.

Dantes sighed. "Very well, but I am no slave. I am your brother and bear no ill will. You may have disowned your clan, but it shall never disown you. The news I bri..."

Wyrvaust moved towards him so threateningly and swift that the young man bit his tongue and staggered backwards, almost stumbling in his haste. "The Raven warned the mouth of Mendorin... Now he shall die," he hissed and struck his staff to the sand which swallowed Dantes up to his chest almost immediately and he was still sinking, only it was not just sand he was being swallowed by but a necromantic pit which would suck the life out of him and transform him into a black minion much as Grym was, which was a serious violation of Acheron's standards much as Demascus was marked by Mendorin. Only because Wyrvaust was Dantes' superior clan brother was he even able to seize and alter his soul and body.

"Please, Lord Wyrvaust... I came only in good faith to speak... as a friend..." he was up to his neck in sand now.

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Willow: Ah, how the Dove puffed her chest out beneath that blanket a little when her new bird family cheered for her. Arilwen approached her and knelt to give a low whistle at her work. "Now THAT is how to spear a fish. You may be better than I am." She grinned at the dark-eyed girl, but her grin faded slowly as she sensed Wyrvaust tensing... then heard sand shifting. Just as Wyrvaust stood with his staff, Arilwen reached forward and snatched up the little Dove, standing quickly. The girl dropped her fish and let out a small sound, but then quieted when she saw Ravenman looking intense and angry, wrapping her skinny arms and legs around Arilwen. "It's alright, Dove." Arilwen whispered against her cheek, which was still flushed from excitement. Wyrvaust's demand rang forth and both girls held their breath while someone stepped from the shadows. Arilwen blinked, then tried to study the stranger while he approached. He looked awfully familiar.

When he finally stopped in front of Wyrvaust to greet him, offering only a request to speak, Arilwen relaxed a little. That only lasted a moment, because Wyrvaust threatened to canabilize him. Yikes. The Swan did not expect the man to turn dark green eyes on her and she stared back, looking blankly at him until Wyrvaust's volume grew much louder. So much so that the little Dove whimpered and buried her face into Arilwen's neck, hiding in her long hair. Arilwen wasn't sure how to react at first. Mendorin. That was a name that did not bode well with either of them, and Arilwen wouldn't try to tell her husband that he was wrong for what he was doing.

But she watched him sinking into the pit of sand that had softened below him, and she cupped the back of the Dove's head to keep her from lifting it and seeing. As soon as the level hit the man's neck, the Swan felt a sudden panic crawling in her throat for him. She immediately approached Wyrvaust, staying away from the man in the sand because Wyrvaust might snap by seeing her approach this strange. "Wyrvaust." Her voice sounded soft but focused. "The man is up to his neck and about to die and still he pleads only to speak with you, NOT for his life. Perhaps you can pause the process where it is, while he is rendered helpless, to at least hear what he has to say?" The process could always be restarted. She needed Wyrvaust to understand that HE had the control in this situation. It would help ground his mind a little. "It may be crucial..."

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JD: Wyrvaust would not have snapped at the Swan when she approached, oh no, but he might have pushed her back from Dantes. Protective of his family? That went without saying. His eyes did deviate slightly from the scion of his enemy to settle on Arilwen without ever actually taking his eyes off of the young man. The staff he was holding lifted slightly and the lightning sand sucked him no deeper, but he was in it up to his chin. Dantes would have thanked Arilwen but he was afraid it would only piss Wyrvaust off. In fact, he dared not speak at all just yet, just listened as the other demon addressed his wife. "There is nothing he can say we can trust," he had decided. "Mendorin is a fiend and he is the willing progeny of a fiend..." His eyes then locked on Demascus. "But because the Desert Fox is a curious sort... and his prey is immobilized for the time being... He will hear what lies the worm has to spew," he resolved, laying a pair of burning eyes on the younger demon. "But first... why is its hair curling and its eyes green?" he wanted to know. "Does it think such a poor disguise can trick the Raven?" he asked suspiciously.

"The Raven is far too clever and keen eyed to be fooled by mere style choices..." Dantes assured him. "It was not my intention to deceive you. I am wearing contacts and a different hair style out of choice... and because... well... it pleases my sire... It's personal..." Dantes tried not to talk about it but Wyrvaust frowned.

"Tell us," he insisted.

Dantes sighed. "He says I look too much like my father..."

"Azriel," Wyrvaust clarified.

"Yes... and well... he got sick of his face in Acheron when... well... he was disembodied for awhile until he could self-revivate... as Liches do... So he bought me some contacts and had his slaves curl my hair..." Demascus actually looked like Wyrvaust somewhat in the face... very Neffari, or in his case, Sioux. Azriel had assumed a Sioux persona he had passed on to his son."

"Contacts...?" Wyrvaust was confused.

"Small membranes you place in your eyes to change their color..." Dantes explained.

"Oh... Why...? Why not use magic?"

Dantes chuckled despite himself. "I guess I could have... It just didn't occur to me to learn such a spell..." he admitted then rolled his head a little, trying to keep sand out of his mouth. "Anything else?"

"Many questions has the Fox for the weasle..." His eyes then leaned on the girl a moment before he went over to her and crouched down to level his eyes with hers. "Be not afraid, little dove... Father Raven is protecting the girl and his beloved Swan. The man in the sand is a bad, bad, man." He explained to her and smiled. "But Raven spirit won't let it or anyone else harm the little dove or his most exquisite Swan," he promised. He ruffled her hair then stood and went back to standing over Dantes. "What lies does it carry?" he asked, his eyes thinning into slits on the young demon.

"Not lies... the truth... I might begin by saying that nothing may be as it seems... Many things have happened to you that were done not by Mendorin but the master he has struggled only to escape, his own father, Mekkor. Mekkor has only ever wanted ALL his scions under his wing... Mendorin, you, Niculaie. I am Mendorin's progeny, it is true... I was once his slave but he finally sired me. Death... it changed him. I won't say it turned him completely around, but he has changed a great deal. He is not as... cruel as he once was... not as possessive for that matter. The fact that he sired me is proof of that. And did I have a choice in ANY of it? I did and I didn't. His is a will I grew tired of fighting, Wyrvaust. I hadn't YOUR strength... Few DO. I gave up fighting him... I just gave up... long before his soul mellowed. And now... well... He is better... tolerable even. Hell, I might even say content. My father told him many things he didn't wish to hear... and other things he needed to know. Just as you need to know them. Though Mekkor is plenty capable of rape... or was... Its not something he would have ever done to a clan member. You KNOW how carefully he choses acolytes... hell, how FEW he chooses. You were his prize... he was thrilled to have you. It was never him that did all those horrible things to you after you were sired. It was Mekkor... in guise of Mendorin. I beg... don't kill me for telling you the truth, brother... Muustala wasn't the one who sired you, Wyrvaust... It was Mendorin... only shortly after he did... he was semi-killed. So... to keep you from Mekkor, whose hands you would have fallen into upon Mendorin's demise until his return, some great magics were done to hide your true line and Muustala claimed you, and Prince Beroth bore false witness to your siring by his progeny Muustala. It was all to protect you from Mekkor... but Mekkor found out hundreds of years later... six years ago we think... That is when he tried to reclaim you and your family, and probably still plots to do so... but now Mendorin is returned and wants to make things right with you. He has only been back a few years. I know its all confusing, and disheartening, and... well, frightening really... Mekkor is... well... we all wish him dead to be honest. I often wonder what the purpose of him is... What use he can possibly be... Perhaps the only ones who can answer that are the king and prince of Hell. And I want you to know, Wyrvaust... we have someone of your acquaintance living with us... It took us months to find who her people were, and she has become a part of the family. Hell... I have quite fallen for her... She is so strong, and beautiful, and wonder..."

"WHO?" Wyrvaust questioned deeply.

"Her name is Anna... Annandabah. I invited her to Hawker's Fort to meet with me.

I had foreseen of some things in my sire's oracle I wished to inform her of. It was a private matter for her alone to witness. She had to stay far away from her husband Niculaie, or terrible things would have happened... She will be returned to you as soon as the danger has passed... but she can never be with Niculaie... never..."

"A trick... a lie," Wyrvaust hissed.

"No... an omen... an unalterable one if she remains with her husband. The price of being with him is too high. She chose the right path... It is sad that a couple must part ways... but not as tragic as the alternative."

"And what is that?" Wyrvaust seethed with distrust.

"I tell you this in confidence... The only who may know is Marsol. She has given her consent for you three, myself, and Mendorin to know. Your child is hearing nothing I say to you now..."

Wyrvaust scoffed, impressed he had been able to sneak that bit of magic past him despite his present circumstance, and at the same time it made him ever more wary of him and his motives.

"Her child will die if she remains with Niculaie. A jealous entity will see to it. So long as Niculaie remains unattached from Anna, the child will be safe. Also... no woman he attaches himself to is safe."

"So... it kidnapped Anna, convinced her of a thing to snair her... and...? Is what... using her as seeds to bait the rest of us birds?" Wyrvaust surmised.

"No..." Demascus denied.

"YES," Wyrvaust was sure and continued to let Demascus sink into the sand.

"Wait... stop... I am telling the truth!" Dantes cried in desperation, his head tilted back as far as it would go to gasp at air as long as he could.

"It LIES," Wyrvaust snarled.

"IT is simply relaying information!" Dantes yelled. "IT has not fought back or been at ALL aggressive! And... it CAN if it MUST!!" the vamp-angel-devil-demon-boy snarled back at last. He was about to break bad, though Wyrvaust's bad was worse... He was a lot older. Still... Dantes was an unknown element and there was no telling what he had up his sleeve. "You want Anna back or not??!!" That for one. If Wyrvaust made a real enemy of Mendorin where was the logic in returning Anna to them?

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Arilwen stifled a small breath of relief when her husband pointed out his curiosity, eyeing the man in the sand while he let the questions roll. She moved her attention to the man and actually felt a little bad for him when he admitted that he had to change his eye and hair color because he looked like his father. The tiny Dove's dark eyes could only be torn away from the vision in the sand when

Wyrvaust knelt to address her. The man in the sand was bad. That was simple enough, right? She stared into his eyes, finally giving him a small nod before slipping her hand into Arilwen's. She couldn't hear what the man was saying, but she was watching every move.

The man turned into a flurry of explanation... about who actually assaulted Wyrvaust. Mekkor. The word felt like a punch in the gut and Arilwen felt a little breathless. It was hard to keep up, especially when she didn't know all of the names being spoken. But the comments turned to an acquaintance living with them. Someone they knew. No. Arilwen wouldn't even let her mind consider the fact that Anna could be in that cluster of insane men. But Wyrvaust demanded a name, and when the name was spoken, Arilwen let out a strangled sound from deep in her throat.

They had Anna. And according to the word they were getting currently, she had chosen to go because of a dark omen about Niculaie and Gosha's future. How would she know it was truth? Wyrvaust began doubting just as immediately, though more violently as he hissed at Demascus, lowering his staff again. The man in the sand began screaming and swearing upon his word, begging for it to stop. Arilwen was frozen. Words would not come, just as movement escaped her. It was their tiny Dove that broke her handhold with the Swan, stepped forward, and gripped Wyrvaust's staff, trying to lift it from the sand again. She was quiet, but her face was wet with hot tears. The man's agony was reminding her of her parents as the muddy water was sucking them under and her hand broke free of theirs.

This prompted Arilwen to move forward to grip Wyrvaust's arm. She looked pale and shaken. "Wyrvaust, Anna's trail died at Hawker's Fort. We could follow it no further. Even if he is lying about the omen... she is with them. We CANNOT allow that. We HAVE to find her and bring her home." It certainly was awful to try to punish a man with these two around. Arilwen's eyes flashed. "I don't care if we have to tie him like a boar for butcher and douse his powers. We have to find her and bring her home."

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Though appearances didn't tell, Dantes' flesh was not the only thing being sucked into the sand... His very life was being gulped into the abyss which lie unseen beneath and within that pit of ground up rocks, salt and earth. Wyrvaust was willing to let his sorcery run its course until a pair of small hands gripped his staff and tried to lift it... The force driving the toe of the staff into the sand was more than just a physical one resulting from the pressure Wyrvaust held the staff against the ground with, it was an arcane one of the most ancient origins. Had the Raven not relaxed the energy flowing through the ivory-wood weapon nature had carved and the supernatural had empowered, and indeed effectively altered the objective of those energies in the course of the two females' protests, the girl would not have been able to budge the staff even a little. A mature dragon's strength would have been necessary. And rise the staff did not, but rather the energies rippling through it shifted according to the Raven's will, the sand began to recede, but no further than Dantes' chest, and the dark eyes the demon had rested on the small person softened as they glanced between child and matron. When the redirection of those mighty forces had been fully attained to drain Dantes' of all arcane related energies, additionally weakening him physically to a mortal-like state, likewise holding him in stasis of the sand and abyssal chains which morphed from the sand and wound around him, only then did Wyrvaust turn to face the girl

and his wife. His head canted over and lips pursed slightly and while one eye thinned a brow arched over the other as he held them in regard.

"This soft beast we three have encountered may speak with warm tones and smile with bright lips and wear a charmed face, but poison spills from its mouth, and a mask he wears to cover the machinations and soul of a fiend." Being a fiend on many levels himself he felt he should know. "Trust it we cannot... The Raven agrees to keep it as a prisoner and its life spare for NOW. But believe ONE thing ALONE, that the only truth it shall speak will be tangled up in lies. Let not its charms tempt too much kindness or sympathy for its plights are as a false as all else it claims." He warned gravely.

"What is the point then, Wyrvaust?" Dantes wishes to know. "If nothing I say or do can be trusted, why not just let me go?" He knew it was futile, but he didn't appreciate being called a liar.

Wyrvaust cut a pair of mean eyes on Demascus with a turn of his head. "Let it go while his hated sire has custody of his wife's friend? His clan brother shall not see light of day until the daughter of the Raven's king is returned to him."

"A trade then...?" Dantes supposed.

"IF he is so lucky," Wyrvaust stated darkly.

"Why are you hating on me so intensely?" Dantes truly wished to know. "I never did harm to you. I only ever admired and respected you."

"It HELPED him for one," Wyrvaust snarled.

"WHAT??!! I NEVER!!" Dantes denied angrily.

"AND it disturbed his time with his wife and the girl. Scared the girl... and worse made the Raven scare the girl." His tones still very dark.

"I have an idea then..." Dantes went on to say. "Stay here with wife and child as long as you wish... Send me to your home... Let me PROVE to you that I can be trusted. Nothing ventured nothing gained, Wyrvaust. I vow to say nothing to anyone, other than announcing myself as your prisoner and saying I am not allowed to speak other than to tell them that. Tell me where to stay and I will stay. Tell me what to do and I shall do... Tell me what to say and I will obey. I will stay with you, as your prisoner, until Anna is returned to you. Just... please... let me show you that you CAN trust me." He proposed and begged him consider.

Wyrvaust heaved a deep sigh. He did NOT trust him, and even IF Dantes kept all his promises, he could not trust his motives for doing so. "It would be fruitless," Wyrvaust told him honestly. "The Raven would still doubt his motives for behaving in trustworthy ways. The distrust is too deep."

"Brick by brick, brother. Let this be a start of something. I am trusting you with my life. Trust me enough to be your willing prisoner, on YOUR terms."

Wyrvaust thought about it for a moment then leaned his eyes on Arilwen. "He has come to trust his mate's wisdom..." In most ways. He did not trust her to make ANY



decisions where his life was on the line. He would rather die than have her do the things she did to save him. "What are the Swan's thoughts on what the demon thing proposes."

Dantes almost laughed when Wyrvaust called him a demon thing. He was that, wasn't he? What he had become didn't even have a name... He was a vampiric khorumal sired as an abyss demon. Most would say he was an abomination... but as the only known son of Azriel, THE angel of death, most wouldn't dare.

The fact that Mendorin had been ABLE to sire him attested to how powerful a demon HE was. The sire of Wyrvaust and Dantes was quite powerful, possibly as powerful as HIS own creator, Mekkor. Mendorin was in fact a part of Mekkor... his proxy. Mendorin had only just recently come to learn of this himself, courtesy of Azriel. It was not unusual for a proxy not to know of its origins. Azale Mendorin had always believed that Adram had sired him. Mendorin was not the liar Wyrvaust believed him to be, but he most certainly had lived in a web of lies for most of his life, a web Mekkor had woven. The irony therein was that Mekkor wasn't really a liar by nature, but Mendorin had been the exception. Mendorin was his own personal soul vault and the tapestry of lies a shield. As Shaithis had been Valaeros means of survival, so Mendorin was Mekkor's. Mendorin had no memories of being a child because he'd had no childhood. He was a monster, a Balrog of the Abyss of Mekkor's creation, a creature harboring half of his soul which had gone off the reservation. Mendorin had become independant and discovered ways to pull it off. Mekkor could not mark himself... and his bond had been unable to hold Mendorin where their spirits were identical while their wills split along a gap which widened with time's march, like a river which carved out a canyon.

Wyrvaust glanced at Dantes then looked back to Arilwen. "Where does her heart trend?" His eyes locked on her again. "Her mate feels only anger... rage... and... and uncertainty in the presence of a clan brother... Too close he feels... TOO close..." That said with his eyes burning on Dantes. By that he meant he could feel their blood ties too sharply, which made him wonder if what he said about Mendorin being his actual sire was true. His eyes leaned on Arilwen again, almost pleading. "The Raven shall heed his beloved Swan's advice... Do what she recommends," he decided, not trusting his own judgment at the moment.

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The sweet, damp-lashed Dove looked stricken, her skinny fingers clutching Wyrvaust's staff. When the Ravenman looked down at her she met his gaze and looked haunted. Arilwen was soon to follow and in moments, the sand began to recede... at least a little. Both of the females listened somberly as Wyrvaust warned them that, even though he would spare him for NOW, most of what he would speak would be lies. Arilwen took a deep breath and touched his cheek. "I trust only your word, my heart. If you tell me now that there is no way that he is telling the truth about Anna, I will stand back and allow you to continue. But it seems as if he may at least know about her location. The omen... her son, her husband... all of it could be lies. They could be taking her to use as a pawn against our family or something worse." Arilwen stopped herself. She was trying to show Wyrvaust that she TOO was paranoid about this man in the sand, but she had a strong drive to get her dear friend back. She knelt to the Dove, gently pulling her fingers from Wyrvaust's staff, then gathered her in her arms. The girl wrapped her arms around Arilwen's neck, her legs around her waist, and held on for dear life, sniffing softly into

her shoulder while Wyrvaust began to argue with Dantes.

It was then that Dantes proposed an interesting idea so that the birds of the Sapphire Kingdom could spend more time with their newly found Dove. The thought of him in their home made Arilwen bristle, but she stayed quiet and tried to mull over it. Wyrvaust sensed this and turned his attentions to her. She could tell that his nerves were raw from being around Dantes and he was having trouble stepping outside of his hatred. But he did step out enough to offer her the choice. She looked stunned for a moment, then thinned her lips while she thought, her hand never stopping as she gently rubbed the Dove's back through her thick blanket. "I believe that if you can strip him of all power and strength indefinitely, and he is sent with strict instructions of who will guard him and watch him until we return... then perhaps it is a GOOD idea to keep him locked up in our home until we get Anna back." She turned her gaze to Dantes, her features darkening. "If anything has happened to Anna, I shall skin you alive and pack you in a grave of salt for the rest of eternity. I would ask you about how she is, but I don't trust a word you say until I have her in my arms and I can verify it with her...WITHOUT enchantments being cast over her eyes."

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"I shall keep that in mind," Cevari laughed, with a warm smile. Oh, he could imagine that Gilly in a temper was likely a sight in itself. If he could be prickly on a regular day, imagine his thorns when he was truly angry!

"I do rather favor fine cloth," He admitted. "But why not? I see such pretty things in my travels." He was a big fan of beauty in all things, and the rich colours of his wardrobe were always stunning, the fine embroidery at the cuffs and necklines. And anyway, jewel tones looked so fine against his skin. He had tried to talk Gil into borrowing his clothes already, because he thought his rich silks would look especially fine against the elf's fair skin. But Gil wore what Gil wore.

As for Cevari's wanderlust? Tamed, for now. He had spent so much of his life moving that it was rather nice to stand still for a little while. At least until the abyss called him back.

Cevari breathed a laugh at those honeyed words sung when their lips parted. "Amazing the things that turn up in the sand." He teased, at the idea of being 'found' by him. As for his voice, Cevari had a decent one. Certainly, he had never had complaints from his men for singing on the road, to amuse them.

"A holiday, is it?" He asked, amused. "Hmm. I know not. When Wyrvaust can spare me, perhaps, but don't rush me. I've been enjoying the sun." The abyss was certainly not the desert, where he could feel the warmth to his very core. He loved it here. The abyss was a necessity for his kind. Acheron was not unpleasant, but he was partial to this. "Hungry for a change of scenery?" He inquired.

When he had finished eating, he stood as well. "Yes, let us find the rogues. Leaving without their leader again. Cheeky." He was amused. They knew, of course, that Cevari would catch up. He always did.

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A sly smile curled Wyrvaust's lips when Arilwen made her decision on Dantes' behalf and for a moment his eyes beamed on her. "Ah, weakened and stripped he has been. Cage him we shall," he said in tones as impish as his former sneer. "Under Grym and the Ymogoir's watch be he kept in the northeast tower of our keep most recently uncovered." That said; the demon trained his twilight gaze on their prisoner. "Stay in the chamber the Raven delivers it the Demascus snake shall and all the Raven's demands and wishes obey, and his or Grym's alone, and his silence keep except in their presence." He made clear. Why did he not include Arilwen as someone he should obey? Because if Anna was used to bait her, Wyrvaust did not trust Arilwen not to sacrifice herself for her friend. This way, if Dantes tried anything, he'd not have the 'excuse' of doing as the Swan asked... and Wyrvaust could, with a clear conscience kill him for any attempts to manipulate his wife.

The tower he spoke of sending Dantes to was six stories high and still deep in dirt and sand that he hadn't completely cleared out. The rooms off of the tower hadn't even been exhumed as yet. The tower's fourth floor connected to the back of Cevari's outer courtyard on the roof of the Sapphire keep.

"As you wish, my lord," Dantes wasn't about to argue with him. "Let me just say before you send me off that I haven't lied to you. I will give you this... The lady Arilwen is not wrong to believe that I charmed Anna to place her where I needed her. I utilized possession to bring her into our fold, for I saw no other way to remove her from either her husband's gaze or your own. You never would have believed me until Anna's child Gosha was dead and Annan's spirit with her. Try to understand that the oracle showed this Omen of Anna to me. I didn't even know who she was until I looked deeper into what I had seen to seek more knowledge. The fates wanted me see... to find an alternate future. I had a choice... I could have done nothing and let Anna's child be murdered by that she-devil... I even know that someone once called her Ari... that name, given me through the forecast." It was short for Ariela but he did not know that. "The voice was telling her to kill the daughter of Anna. She asked why, and he said... a male spoke to her, that the dead child would bring her to them. He said no more... but the vision showed me more... it showed the child being resurrected and placed in her arms, then she receiving the mark of a serpent. It was either the mark of Sammael, Mekkor, or Zaxien, who believe it or not are the only ones whose mark is a serpent, unless you include the winged snake entwining a pentagram which is the mark of our father Lucifer. Regardless, now you see... she trades her soul for her child. So I made the choice, based on that future knowledge, to turn it around the only way the fates would submit to... all other paths led to either the same or far worse outcomes. I did it because it all leads back to you, Wyrvaust, and to Marsol. She is a focal point because of you and your king. I am not your enemy. I am not a liar. I am trying to help."

Wyrvaust stared at him a twitchy interval after he had spoken, then without reply he gated him through abyssal veil to the tower mentioned, where he would be met by Grym and the red goblin Gabriel had placed in their service. When he was gone a fairly deep pit remained in the sand which began to fill with the sand around it. Wyrvaust meanwhile took Arilwen's hand in his and sat down. "What if it... it speaks the truth? He might as well have been sired by Mekkor himself to be the acolyte of his only slightly lesser evil proxy Mendorin... How then shall the Raven and those he love ever escape the serpents? Hah! Mark of the serpents indeed... if such a future exists it is likely by the plots and intrigues of Mekkor if not

the Desert Wind as well." He wouldn't doubt. His eyes fell on the girl as he wondered if it might have better to let her take her chances with the desert. He leaned his gaze on Arilwen then. "The Swan's husband hopes the toad is croaking a pack of lies."

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Gilriael laughed when Cevari said that he would look good in his fancy clothes. He imagined that might be true, then perhaps some time he would get dressed up for him, but not today, not when they were going out to face possible dangers. Speaking of going out, Wyrvaust had not gotten back yet from his journey out last night with his wife. Gilriael was wondering just where they had gotten off to and if they were safe. He was hoping they might run into them while scouting around in the desert. In any case Gilriael fixed an amused eye on his lover Cevari and patted him on his shoulder. "I will be happy to play dress up with you when the occasion is more befitting of looking pretty." He chuckled a little bit and having finished his breakfast he grappled Cevari by his shoulder pads and pulled him along as he headed for the door. Soon enough they were mounted up on the fine horses Wyrvaust had provided and with his friend's good men rode out north into the desert guided by Gilriael who followed signs left by Wyrvaust and his wife Arilwen. The signs led them to a large group of people camped out in the corridor, an area where the canyon mouth leveled out and widened. There, Gilriael dismounted and spoke to the acting leader prince Mendaama who was waiting patiently for the return of lord Wyrvaust and likewise keeping the people in his company calm. It was from the tribal prince that Gilriael discovered where approximately the desert Raven had gone. Satisfied that Wyrvaust was safe for now Gilriael mounted up again and continued on the journey north.

It was a hot day in the desert though perhaps not as hot as some. The recent storms had reshaped the desert in many places, creating dry riverbeds some filled with damp mud, others with smooth packed sand also dampened from the recent rains. Their party avoided these damp areas much as in some places the mud might still be treacherous. They were in fact riding in the direction of the Clearwater Oasis though they would not arrive there for two days. The moisture in the air from the recent rains hung thick in the atmosphere making it very humid. It was worse even than the dry heat common for the desert. Still, to a Hellraptor whether in elven guise or not the heat was welcoming though not perhaps for some of the other party members. Most of them however being desert born were well suited for the heat even if the humidity might be somewhat uncomfortable.

For the first 3 hours of riding the party did not encounter anything other than a few animals and a couple of nomads. Plainly speaking it had been an uneventful afternoon. This did not displease Gilriael though he would not have minded a bit of adventure, even a little conflict, but he was easily contented just to spend time with Cevari and his fine men. Now... As the day wore on the peacefulness of the day was shattered as they came over a dune only to come all too close to one of the desert's most dangerous monsters, a cobra dragon, which was not only titan in its size, but equipped with a pair of wings utilized for gliding short distances which could launch it from the top of a dune to another location up to a mile away even further with a good tail wind. The rare creature could also tunnel beneath the sand where deep enough. The handsomely patterned monster spotted the party before they had a chance to avoid detection, and so it seemed a battle would be unavoidable, only for the grace of Gilriael who spoke the serpent's language and

merely asked it to allow their party to pass. Yes, it came in handy having a dragon bard on board. What for most people would have been a dangerous conflict between monster and man had been a close encounter with a perilous beast and nothing more.

Nightfall approached and camp was struck where the dunes ceased their march and the desert spread flat beneath the open skies as the stars filled its vast scope. A large pile of driftwood had been gathered and a bonfire burned on which they cooked their evening's meal. They were not afraid of attracting enemies for it was enemies they were on the lookout for. If a large host approached them, too many for them to manage, they would retreat by a gateway if need be.

Gilriael was leaning back against a large rounded boulder and just finishing a leg of desert grouse. After licking his fingers and wiping his hands against his pants he smiled over at Cevari. "It has been a beautiful albeit quiet day in the desert. The great cobra we encountered is a rare creature to behold and thankfully today it was our friend... err... Perhaps friend is the wrong word. It was not our enemy might be a better way to put it." He laughed. He reached over to Cevari and tugged on his fancy clothes, causing dust to fly up all around him. "This is why I wear plain clothes traveling in the desert, although your clothing has held up very well. Perhaps one can dress well and still weather the desert with pride. I also observed that you know how to choose an outfit being that it is the right weight and well layered for desert environments. I shall let you dress me in the morning." The dragon-elf bubbled with laughter but he meant it.

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Wyrvaust stood silent as Arilwen explained to the child why he had been so protective of them. When the girl had calmed and it seemed that she understood, his indigo eyes leaned on his wife as she turned her regard his way. He inhaled a breath which trembled slightly in his chest as she commiserated with the pains he had experienced in the past. The embrace she so passionately endeared him with was returned almost numbly inasmuch as he innately detached himself from that period of time he was now subject to in discussion. From Dantes it surfaced as rage, while coming from Arilwen he deadened his emotional center in the moment. His gaze fell on the child, whom he let absorb his focus as Arilwen loosened her hold on him. Hence he locked his gaze on his beautiful wife whose face he could easily lose his attention in. He added some more logs to the flames of the small fire the desert Dove have built and when the flames leapt up he leaned back against the boulder again.

Wyrvaust kept his thoughts to himself as he gazed for an interval between his mate and the child who would be his daughter. Did the girl wish to be his daughter or was she so frightened that she would take shelter beneath any shadow? Did she fear him? Wyrvaust wondered. Or did she understand that he would do no harm to her? He hoped it was the latter. The girl was plain in her appearance but had a beauty all her own in her long black hair, the coffee color of her skin, the brightness of her dark eyes, her quick intelligence, and in her youth, always there was beauty in youth. She would make a fine addition to their family and Wyrvaust was sure Anwaar would come to love her as a sister. Perhaps she would be a good distraction for him. Anna... should they tell him about Anna? He got a bad feeling just thinking about it and fidgeted where he sat.

The stars crowded into the inky void which encompassed the sky over their heads. At least 10 constellations could be seen from their point of view. Wyrvaust pointed out the morning star constellation to Arilwen and the girl. The stars formed a robed figure with a goat head holding a staff. Another constellation he showed the girls was of a dragon and represented the first known dragon, Acheron. So the first two constellations the Raven pointed out to his wife and their little dove belonged to the king of hell. Time to show them the great triangle which represented the largest volcano out of the ring of fire, the constellation of Anwaar, otherwise known as Marsol. Wyrvaust had shown this group of stars to Arilwen and his son and as he showed them to the girl he pointed out, "The Raven's only son is named after these stars which carry the name of their king, the girl's king, king of the western desert, the ring of fire." He informed her. "He is the Ravens friend and lord master. If the girl ever sees her king she must show respect." He smiled at her and patted her head then Then looked over to Arilwen whose gaze he held with a smoldering burn that alluded to the carnal hunger he held for her perpetually, a look accompanied with a rather devilish grin which exposed his long canines. Waif or no waif he still wanted to have children with her and enjoy the exercise of creating them. Wyrvaust did not tire of loving his wife or of the very thought of loving her.

Was he avoiding the subject of his past experiences with Mendorin or whoever may or may not have been masquerading as him? You betcha! But more than that he was bonding with the girl and his beloved Swan. He did not want to talk about that part of his life or think about it for that matter. He was however blissfully content to spend time with Arilwen and their little desert blossom. His smile when he looked to them again said what he did not, but only felt, happiness in their company. And so he continued to point out the constellations and match them with names. "And there is the hunter who is a wolf, and the archer who is an elf... Those five near the horizon, are the Raven's sign... the pentacle, the chaos constellation... The elves call it the All Maker group... another after the Morning Star. Chaos is visible all year as it's highest point is the northern star." That was three visible in one sky. The sky was his in the spring. "Irony finds the Stars of Balance opposite chaos in the south." His arm arched over from north to south to point out a ring of stars. Also called?" he asked the girl to see if she knew who Levi or Yajmha was, as the nine stars were the Haman's Gate constellation. An ancient myth told of the gateway to Haman being at the center of those stars.

Wyrvaust's thoughts trended back to Anwaar and he locked his gaze on Arilwen again. It was to her mind he spoke this time, not wanting to worry the girl anymore than he already had. ~"Love... should the birds sing the song of Anna to their son? Will he not go off on the wings of impetuosity and seek her, and in doing so risk getting caught in a net of trouble? Will not the terrible one be on the lookout for such an opportunity to steal and torment our only boy?"~ He did not wish to speak Mekkor's name as a precaution against drawing his regard as could happen with high demons or devils.

Dantes meanwhile was making himself as comfortable as possible in his cool, damp, dirty accommodations. He lived in a cave so...

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Arilwen's throat was on fire when the child went to hug the Raven, showing care for

what he had suffered, even when she had no idea what he had gone through. No questions were posed, however. It seemed like she could tell he wouldn't explain, and she wasn't a particularly nosy child, so that was the end of that.

The fire was fed and the little flock of birds settled down against the boulder, the Dove tucked between them as Wyrvaust began showing them the mapped out stars in the sky. The Dove would set her lips in a thin line of concentration and they could tell the immediate moment where she caught on, her dark eyes lighting up and her small finger flying up to trace it out in the air. He tried to give her room to guess a few, but it became quickly apparent that her family hadn't really spent much time speaking of devils and gods.

Eventually Wyrvaust's questions were met with silence and when the elder birds looked down, they saw that she had fallen asleep, slumped against Wyrvaust's arm. Arilwen looked up to see Wyrvaust grinning at her and she felt her face flush before she went about standing and shifting the child to the side to sleep. She put her day pack between the child and the fire in case she moved in her sleep, then went to settle onto her husband's lap. "Keep going." She said softly, smiling at him as she gently kissed his neck.

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Wyrvaust watched as Arilwen moved the child onto the sand and placed her pack as a shield from the fire. His gaze then settled on his wife again as she slipped into his lap and bade him continue... He assumed she meant about the stars, much as her words did not seem any kind of reply to the concerns he had communicated to her telepathically. Perhaps she had incidentally blocked her mind (or the page was not refreshed to reveal update to post? hehe). Instead of repeating those worries he had he snuggled against her, cheek to cheek, and lifted her hand in his to point to another constellation. "Those fifteen stars spread out across the sky to the east..." and he pointed to each one of them with their hands, playing dot to dot with the stars...

"Are the Swan, and is named after the Moon Goddess who takes the form of a Swan and flies back and forth between the mother moon and Morashtar. I prefer to think of those stars as my wife flying free across the Heavens..." He wrapped his arms around her and kissed her throat as he said this. "The Raven hates to speak of sad things at such a tender moment... but what of Anwaar?" he now said aloud, though he kept his voice low. "Shall he tear after the daughter of the dragon when he discovers she is with the shadow of the serpent, and land himself in a scorpion infested sand pit... perhaps with the worst of all vipers?" He asked, hoping she knew he meant Mekkora. If not, he would not speak his name but refer to him instead as the horror master... or if he had to, the rape master.

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Perhaps... Someone missed the original message? Ahem. Arilwen laid her delicate fingers on Wyrvaust's, smiling as he helped her trace the stars. How many ages had it been since they had been together like this, in the quiet? The kids to her neck made her shiver, then a frown lit her features when Wyrvaust asked about Anwaar. "I am at a loss. He had it hard enough when his heart yearned for her. He misses her and now we find out that Niculae may need to go. But this man from tonight... He has also yearned for Anna? Our son will not handle any of this news well. He will

want to gather an army and go knock down doors that should not be disturbed." Arilwen closed her eyes. " We cannot tell him yet until we know more. All of this could be a lie." Why get him worked up? "What if Anna has fallen for the man in the sand? She will have to choose between our home and theirs?" That made the Swan ill to her stomach.

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Wyrvaust nodded his head in agreement that they should wait to tell Anwaar anything. He would seize any excuse not to tell him and the ones Arilwen made were perfect. "Wait they shall then. The Raven is too happy to tell his son none of this..." He glanced behind his shoulder as if expecting someone to appear from the darkness... It would be just like Anwaar... His eyes leaned on his wife as she mentioned Dantes infatuation with Anna, which he didn't seem shy about sharing. Was he smitten or leading her on? Or was it a lie? Either way, Anwaar wouldn't have any of it. "I cannot see her shifting her heart from husband to another. If she returns its feelings she is STILL possessed... which would mean... he is in love with himself?" he could not help but cackle. "If she IS soul seduced there is nothing funny about that and Dantes shall soon know what it is not to have limbs... and as time goes, a head." He would make sure of that. "Worry not that Anna could fall in love with the dog of the shadow snake. Nor would she ever choose to leave the kingdom of her father." He was certain of these things. Anna was nothing of not loyal. The tall Demon in Neffari skin coiled Arilwen more tightly with his arms and pointed to another group of stars. "That is the Trickster, some call it Loki, or the Cradle of Antares... That red star there, the eye of Loki, is Antares sun... and that very dim star there in his mouth is actually the Antares planet. People there are looking back at us." He smiled at the thought of someone in a desert there gazing at Morashtar's suns and perhaps some of the visible planets as well.

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It was a silent agreement that they would hold off telling Anwaar. Right now he was sad, but it was better than being angry. "I agree. Anna has to be heartbroken. I wish I was there to comfort her." It made her want to cry and she swallowed the lump in her throat. Wyrvaust eased her mind when he assured her that Anna wouldn't fall in love with a snake... And that she would never leave her father's kingdom.

Arilwen curled into her husband as he told stories of the stars. "I want to pick a constellation for you." She mused. "A whole galaxy of stars to sparkle like my Raven." Greedy? Tough! She lifted his hand and kissed his fingertips one by one. "Someone would have to make sprays of stars to make me feel like they did justice."

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Wyrvaust smiled slightly when Arilwen confirmed that Anwaar was best left in the dark for the time being. "If it were the Raven's choice his son could do without knowing a great many things," he admitted. "Especially in concern to all the ways he might ensnare himself in the many horrors and sorrows of the world. But as he admitted before, he and his exquisite Swan can only advise him... HOPE to guide him, and pray to chaos for the most life might offer him. The Raven would trade his life if it meant Anwaar would never suffer as his father and mother have. But... impracticable is that, a thing that can never..." Wyrvaust about jumped out



of his skin as a voice from behind them finished his statement only as an open-ended question.

"...happen? Is that what you were about to say?" A devilishly handsome middle-aged fellow interjected whose horns, dragonsque wings, claws, tri-hoofed toes, and albino pigment made it obvious that he was not human. Judging by his looks Wyrvaust suspected he was a devil. And he was right. With a pleasant smile he dipped over with one hand tucked against his stomach and the other laid palm up against his back in a gentleman's bow. "Memnoch at your service, son of Chaos, of Acheron, most recently reborn out of Rhiannon and Tiberius, and restored to Acheron." He was still smiling when he straightened, unfazed by Wyrvaust's disgruntled expression. "If you desire to be bereft of company try making camp somewhere other than an oasis. Watering holes are few and far between in this desert. Now on to the business at hand..." Memnoch pulled up a seat across from the happy couple. In other words he sat down in the sand opposite the two. "Your wish is not impractical, it's simply unlikely to be fulfilled... or at least it was. Wishes are what I do... desire is my sin, my raison'detra if you will. I am the devil of desire. That said, did you really mean what you said? Would the two of you give up your lives to Guarantee your children lived full lives free of pain and strife? I mean... it's a tall order but I can do it." He certified, his white wings flexing to expose the membranes' pink underside.

Wyrvaust had glared at the intruder at first, then just stared, now he was gawking at the devil like he was insane. At length he locked eyes with Arilwen. He wondered what she was thinking. After holding her gaze for awhile, he leaned a suspect gaze on the fellow, and as he did wove a powerful detection Ward over the area which would reveal lies by making anyone telling them glow with an aura of yellow-green. "Is the Snowbird affiliated in any way with the first son of Adram?"

Memnoch shook his head. "Glad to say no. He is not the sort I like to call friend or associate myself with. I know him though... Fallen God of fertility and birth. He fell very far from the God I knew before he was crushed." He spoke to the couple with the openness and honesty of an age old friend.

"The Snowbird knew it before its fall...?" Wyrvaust had trouble digesting because of how very ancient that would make the devil.

"That's what I said," Memnoch confirmed.

"Can the white devil really do the things he declared?" Wyrvaust asked.

"I'd not have said I could if I couldn't," Memnoch vouched. "And you have a strange way of talking, friend. Disassociative," the albino observed.

"Yes... And can he do other kinds of things?"

Memnoch smiled just a little. "All kinds of things," he promised. "But it costs. I am no djinn. The price is all in the terms which vary from wish to wish." He stood up, canteen in hand. "You two talk it over, I'll be right back."

"Is what he offers a trick?" Wyrvaust asked as he walked away.

"No tricks!" The devil promised with a wave and went to the spring pool to fill his

canteen.

Wyrvaust looked to Arilwen. "He speaks true," he said. "A ward the Fox raised insures it. Memnoch is rarely ever seen. A God among devils he. Should the Raven and Swan wish for something?" The temptation to take the devil up on his offer was tremendous... then... that was the point, wasn't it? But there was also something else on his mind. Wyrvaust gathered Arilwen's hands in his own. "What his desert flower said earlier... about her Raven and the stars. He does not deserve such praise, but that she would say such a thing of him is the best wish he could hope for come true. His wife is more amazing than his thoughts can describe. More beautiful than his eyes can portray. More dear to him than his heart can hold." He just wanted to profess his heart to her before the stranger returned from the pool, where he was now washing up, and interrupted them again.

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Yes, the horrors and sorrows of this world. Anwaar had already been introduced to a little in his short life, but even just seeing his heart broken over the last few months was killing his mother. Wouldn't any mother and father want to shield their children from harm and sadness? FUNNY THEY SHOULD ASK. Arilwen jumped when a voice finished her husband's statement and she stared unabashedly at the man and creature standing before them. ...They really needed to find a different vacation spot. Wyrvaust was thinking the same thing and she could tell it by the way he glowered at the devil before him. Arilwen shifted her eyes back to the man that had just joined them, inspecting him as he bowed at the waist to introduce himself. He was shaped quite differently than them, but had a bit of grace about him. And by the time Memnoch got towards the end of explaining that he could offer a pain free existence for their children, The Swan and the Raven were staring at him like he was a lunatic.

At least Wyrvaust managed to pull it together after they exchanged bewildered looks. He knew some questions to ask, and Memnoch answered easily. And yet, Arilwen stared at him. Was the heat getting to her? When she had passed out in the desert upon first entering it, her mind had conjured some insane things in the waves of heat that hung around her.

It was only when the devil went to fill his canteen that she turned fully to face Wyrvaust. She looked completely lost for words. In fact, she opened her mouth twice to speak, scrunched her nose, then closed her mouth. Wyrvaust assured her that the new visitor spoke the truth. Thankfully Wyrvaust took her hands into his to thank her for what she had said earlier, and her bewildered look turned to a softer one and she smiled. "Even three of your words make my heart want to explode with joy." She laughed softly, then leaned in to cup his face and kiss him. "This is one of the strangest moments I have lived. I must try to keep my head straight." She cleared her throat, then turned into the cynic. "There is a price to be paid to have children that live pain free. What is it? The children are happy, but are taken from us? The children are happy, but we cannot have any more? Or perhaps he would transform them into fat little furry animals that are content just digging in the mud." Well, when Arilwen's mind went places, it WENT. She met his gaze again. "I don't want them to feel what we have. But...but what if the wrong people get them and they are still happy? How will they ever want to come back to us? I just..." She frowned, uncertain of what to say.

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Wyrvaust appeared puzzled when Arilwen said that just three of his words made her joyous. He was trying to think what three words she meant, not getting that she alluded to the words 'I love you'. Where he usually caught on to subtleties quite easily, there were times when the obvious went right over his head, particularly if they involved sentiments. Not wanting to hurt her feelings by not knowing what the three words were, much as he felt he ought to know, his confound melted into a smile and a nod. The smile was genuine because he knew she meant well. It was like he had been confused at first but then had caught on.

When his wife ran the gauntlet on a string of tandems, the demon pursed his lips and a brow arched just slightly. "The father of chaos teaches us not to assume but to speculate or ask the right questions if at all possible. We might speculate that if we set the terms for the wish... certainly we can decide not to go through with it if the devil's price is one we would not choose to pay... We shall ask him what conditions we might expect," he advised. "Is our children's happiness the wish the Swan would desire to make? Does complete happiness midigate joy itself by eradicating anything to compare contentment to? The wise ask what is love without hate, joy without sorrow, pleasure without pain? When the Raven spoke as he did he did so impetuously... not as something he believed possible. Yes... he meant it... but no regard towards the potential consequences was taken into consideration. If a single decision can change multiple lives and fates... one must consider the possibilities carefully... What would the Raven wish if he could wish for anything? Perhaps that his entire family could remain safe until their end of days... That is one notion in a sea of possibilities..." He conveyed with an open heart and mind. "What would his cherished Swan desire above all else?" he wished to know and leaned forward to press against her as he stirred the fire and dragged another log from the wood pile to throw it on the curling flames before he leaned back and wrapped her with his arms again, his eyes absorbing her face as she mulled an extremely important question over.

Though he might not have shown it on his face, Wyrvaust was staggered that this unbelievable opportunity had fallen into their lap, and he wondered if it was just pure chance the white devil met up with them, the machinations of Memnoch or another, perhaps Lucifer himself, or if it was fate. Whatever it was it was a tremendously rare opportunity they had to be careful benefitting from, or they might not benefit at all, but rather regret ever having met the devil. All devils were tricky. Not every devil was evil necessarily, but always tricky. As a world class mage Wyrvaust had the advantage here of being an expert at loopholes, so it would not be easy for Memnoch to catch him in a pit fall... but not impossible either. Memnoch's cunning was legendary. Wyrvaust would not bet against him gaining the upper hand in any deal he made.

Wyrvaust glanced over his shoulder to find Memnoch stripping out of his clothes, which he laid aside while he swept a sarong around his waist and tied it off. Hence he began washing the dust and sand from his clothes, which included a light grey tunic cut to fit around his wings, another sarong of dark grey material with flowing white and light grey geometric patterns, and a pair of well made boots. He was an attractive creature who moved like a martial artist and had the build of one. He had no weapons that they could see but that didn't mean he didn't use or couldn't beckon them from the ether. Or... he simply might have no need of them. He said he had been recently reborn... Did that mean he had died or had he simply

decided to 'move on?' With immortals it was hard to tell. So little about Memnoch was known. He was often mistaken for the king of Acheron. He was one of the Tsetar who had fallen with Lucifer during the first rebellion... one of the nine dark fallen.

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At times Arilwen forgot just how specific she had to be with Wyrvaust. He didn't always pick up on subtleties, so when she saw his confusion she just smiled and squeezed his hand. It was when her paranoia overran her mind that Wyrvaust had to squeeze back, reminding her that they were never to assume. Assumptions were dangerous and foolish. The Swan frowned and studied her husband when he suggested that they should ask Memnoch about the conditions and terms of the granted request, if they were to move forward with it. The bird was humbled so often in the presence of her husband. To some on the outside, he seemed erratic and even irrational at times. Yet here he was, meticulously pointing out that without pain or troubles, how would their children truly know pleasure and joy?

Arilwen looked off into the fire and rubbed the back of her neck, feeling torn. He was completely right. And at the same time, parents were meant to guide their children and protect them. If given the chance to erase their sorrows and suffering, and the parent was to deny that offer, did that make them terrible parents? What if the condition was for Arilwen to take their pain and suffering onto her own shoulders? How much would she sacrifice to keep her children content and safe... and would she really be protecting them by removing pain and worry? They would be happy in the company of anyone...even names that would not be mentioned around this fire.

"What if they ended up with unsavory people and they were happy and not afraid of danger?" She asked softly, looking suddenly drained and tired. She turned her gaze to Memnoch and watched him silently. She had never seen anyone like him and he was admittedly intriguing to watch. She eventually turned back around and scooted closer to her husband, laying her head on his shoulder so that she could watch the Dove sleeping soundly. "We shall need to find the terms first. Only then can we make a decision. No assumptions." She nodded firmly, then closed her eyes and turned her face into her husband's neck so that she could breathe him in.

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"Wyrvaust regarded Arilwen as she spoke of one of the possible drawbacks to asking for their children to live happily always. "One of many pitfalls, most of which we may never even consider until long after the fact," he surmised. "The Raven is skilled in the art of circumventing logic, so is aware of the ways possibilities may be manipulated, and shall make as fool proof a pact as possible, and he doubts Memnoch seeks to harm his brethren, but he may hope to teach us something, or if not, then learn something from us. The Snowbird would not bother if there was not something in it for him, Acheron or the Griffen of the Abyss." One of his references to Maelmorda. "Unless... however unlikely, he simply favors us..." he added.

The demon just held Arilwen thereafter with her leaning against him, while his lithe fingers trailed softly over her hair and the hand which held her gently massaged her shoulders and side. Memnoch meanwhile draped his clothing over the

branches of some spider palms (small bamboo-like palm trees that grey in clumps, were highly flexible and produced bitter nuts that were delicious when roasted, tasting delicately of coffee and chocolate) to dry. He had also collected some of the walnut sized nuts that had fallen on the sand. When he approached the fire he produced a roasting basket which he set aside as he sat down.

"I imagine you wish to know how my terms work." He had not overheard them, it was just a logical precautionary step he knew someone like Wyrvaust would take. He knew far more about the abyss demon than he knew about him. As he spoke, he pulled the leathery hulls off of the nuts and tossed them in the fire and placed each nut in the open roasting basket. It was square in shape with two sides that closed on whatever its user wanted to cook over an open fire. The hulls released that chocolately java scent as they burned.

"The hulls are also useful..." Wyrvaust pointed out to him.

Memnoch quirked his brow and cocked his head over. "Really... but they taste so foul and are so tough..." He had nibbled on one once. He was also terrifically pleased to be told something new. Most people were too afraid of him to 'point things out' to him. He was smiling and Wyrvaust smiled back at him.

"The hulls can be candied and sucked or chewed on, or boiled and sweetened as a hot or cold beverage which other ingrediants may be added to. The nuts also contain a mild stimulent called deloksin which is much stronger in the hulls." He educated the devil.

Memnoch chuckled. "Well that is wonderful. I knew they were a slight pick-me-up." He yawned. "Which I could use about now." He mentioned. "Now about those terms... You tell me your wish and what you are willing to offer, and we haggle on the terms from there. It is not like I do this everyday or for anyone. I quite like you and your wife, Wyrvaust, and thought you could use a little break."

Wyrvaust was once again taken aback by the legendary devil and his amazed expression left nothing to imagine. "I... the Snowbird does not know the Raven and his wife... but they are honored to carry his favor regardless..."

"Oh, I know you as well as I know anyone, Lord Aalamea. When you understand all the desires of a being you come to know them quite well. What are we if not what we desire? Is not desire at the root of everything we do?"

Wyrvaust thought about what he said and saw the truth in it. "The Raven cannot argue that nor has he any desire to." He smiled a little then once again turned his gaze on Arilwen while Memnoch continued to shuck the nuts and place them in the rack. "What does Raven Spirit's Swan desire?" She never had really answered that. "The Raven would see his entire family forever safe from harm," he mentioned and noticed that Memnoch pursed his lips in a dubious manner. "What?" Wyrvaust asked.

"Such a tall desire would carry a high price to fullfil. You see... it is true that nothing in life is free, and the bigger the prize the greater the cost. By your entire family, do you include yourself?"

"Yes... for my harm would be theirs..."

Memnoch smiled. "Very true, very true. You are wise for one whose soul is so damaged. So... what are you willing to pay for the grant of such a wish?"

"He... He can think of nothing which would be enough or be possible," Wyrvaust admitted.

"What do you believe would be impossible?"

"Giving his soul and life to the white devil for one..."

"And why is that impossible?"

"His soul is Acheron's and his life Marsol's already."

"Ah, but see, that is where the sacrifice comes in, Wyrvaust. It IS possible. ALL things are possible where a wish is made through me. It is the nature of what I am. Your wish made through me overrides all else. You can place your soul and life in MY hands. I would accept those terms in fact... The safety of your family forever, for full command over your life and soul."

Wyrvaust shook his head. "My fealty to Marsol is forever. Not for any wish would the Raven break with his friend and his king." Yes, he was THAT loyal to Marsol.

Memnoch stared at Wyrvaust like he had grown another head. Of course... that wouldn't have actually surprised him. He had seen quite a few demons sprout extra heads. The demon saying no to what he offered DID amaze him. No one had ever turned down such a sweet pact before. "I am sure Marsol would understand and even insist you take the deal I am offering..." He knew Marsol's desire as well and he was not at all wrong.

"It does not matter... If he demanded his demon agree to make such a wish we should refuse. When the Raven vowed to serve him always, he meant it."

"Marsol isn't even here... He is amiss," Memnoch pointed out.

"He is alive... That is all that matters."

Memnoch looked to Arilwen. Though her life was not as valuable to him, her soul was. And he could make her more useful to himself. "And would you be willing to make the same deal he in his stubborn sense of duty has declined? Would you, to insure your entire family's safety for all time, be willing to give your life and soul to me?" he asked.

Wyrvaust locked his eyes on Arilwen. Her soul was free... Giving herself to Acheron through Memnoch was a great sacrifice, and not one he would have her do, but he had no business telling her what to do with her soul. As for her life... If Memnoch tried to lay a hand on her sexually, Wyrvaust didn't care how powerful he was, he would cut both of his hands and his cock off as many times as it took to make him back off. Rape would count as harm, yes, but would seduction? Somehow Wyrvaust doubted it. Was the demon insecure where Arilwen was concerned? Though he locked that lack of confidence in his ability to protect her from such influences deep inside of himself, why yes he was, to the extreme after Sammael and then Gabriel. Mekkora had been different; he had forced himself on her. It was her

affairs with Sammael and Gabrian which had shattered his sense of well being.

What Memnoch intended for her life or soul he would not say. That was the risk involved. The risk one was willing to take was part of the price for having one's greatest desire fulfilled. "Or perhaps Arilwen has a different wish?" the devil then fished.

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Arilwen relaxed as her husband stroked her hair and for awhile they just sat on silence, brewing in their own thoughts. Soon the Snowbird rejoined them, wasting no time in reigniting the conversation. Arilwen looked pleased with the Raven when he was able to teach something to Memnoch, and the white devil looked pleased as well.

Arilwen had not answered the question because she was torn. Was she truly saving her family by wishing them a safe existence? Wyrvaust was right in concluding that his safety was as important as the children. But the price to be paid? Fealty to this new visitor? Wyrvaust was swift to refuse, and it was a little hilarious to catch Memnoch so off guard.

Next came the Swan. Her soul was free and had never been cemented to anyone. She looked stunned when the offer was made to her. She didn't look at her husband, which probably made him a nervous wreck. "I am humbled that you would even make such an offer to me, Lord Memnoch." She fell quiet and looked at their sleeping daughter. After a while, she smiled softly. "But I must politely decline. Lord Marsol is my family and I pledge my loyalty to him. However...."

She paused, then met his inquiring eye. "What price would be set to return a dear friend to the kingdom of her father and to check the validity of a recently revealed omen?"

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Memnoch had ignored Wyrvaust when he'd mentioned how honored he felt by his regard, but when Arilwen also paid him esteem, the devil looked almost humbled. She after all was neither brethren or fallen, but a Mordim, the second highest order of all darkstar after the Anduain and Mogduain even if she failed to recognize that about herself. Her compliments meant more to him.

"I am happy as a courtesy to assess the information you have in mind. The omen is quiet valid and accurate. There is some deception at play in the situation but only initially and though not selfless, the overall intentions in the matter are honorable, if one shares my views. As for returning the girl... the price would be high indeed because of those involved." (and because Anna cannot be put back into play until Spork has time and is willing to play her). After a moment's consideration he said, "I would advise you to trust in fate in that matter for the time being. I shall remain available to you as you like for awhile. In fact... I was wondering if you had a space I might lease?"

Wyrvaust was uncertain if they should rent a keep to Memnoch. Though he seemed pleasant enough, Wyrvaust knew him to be almost if not equally as dangerous as Maelmorda. "We might..." he was hesitant to promise anything. "If his mate believes we should."

Memnoch laughed softly. "You fear the sort of guest I might prove. Well I can promise you will hardly know this white devil is there unless his kind landlords call on him." He smiled.

Wyrvaust looked to Arilwen. The last thing the desert fox expected in a day full of surprises was a request from Memnoch the Phoenix to reside in their sunken citadel. "What does the Swan think? There is the southwest wing..." which was actually on the main level adjacent to them, only it was divided from the Sapphire by a tunnel and two doors. Wyrvaust had uncovered it before the tower Demascus was being held in, and had no plans for it yet. Its restoration is complete."

"Sounds perfect," Memnoch chimed in too cheerfully for a devil.

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Arilwen was completely disconnected with what she was. The woman was made of some powerful stuff, the majority of which had not been tapped into yet. She knew little about her past and had only met her father for a short time. She didn't even know if she had siblings. But as her path progressed, things would be revealed and her husband would be there to help her harness that knowledge and power. Perhaps even Memnoch might feed her a bit of the information as time went on. It certainly surprised the Swan when the devil before them offered free information regarding Anna. Unfortunately, the omen was solid. That made Arilwen's heart sink. It would be up to them to speak to Anna's husband about it and remove him from their home. It was a shame, because Arilwen liked Nic for the most part. He seemed like a pretty solid father and husband. Of course she had just met him, so her opinion didn't mean much. Arilwen reached over to take Wyrvaust's hand, squeezing it between her own. "He was telling the truth." She whispered to him, her eyes rimmed with dampness. She missed Anna, but she knew that she was safe for now. She wasn't about to suggest to Wyrvaust that they might upgrade Dantes quarters a little since he HAD been fully transparent. That conversation could come later.

The Swan shifted her attention back to Memnoch and nodded solemnly to him when he suggested that she wait it out. "It's hard to do that, but more manageable when I know that she is safe." She said softly, then took in a slow, deep breath to center herself. Calm. Solid. Collected. ....That is, until Memnoch asked if he could crash their pad. It wasn't intentional, but a laugh exploded from Arilwen's lips. She clamped her hand over her mouth and looked between the two. It was obvious that the laugh had even shocked her. "Ahem. Apologies." She cleared her throat, trying so hard not to snort. But the giggles were climbing up her throat and she fake coughed to try to cover them. "Forgive me." She said carefully, forcing a grin away. "This..is just the oddest vacation we have ever taken." That giggle escaped and she grinned at her husband. "The Southwest Wing would be perfect. Plenty of privacy." She agreed, looking more than amused when Memnoch piped in to accept at the same time that she agreed.

The smell of the roasting nuts was making Arilwen's stomach growl, and she rose and went to her day pack to quietly dig out the packages of meat that Wyrvaust had wrapped to take with them. A little would be set aside in case the sleeping Dove woke up, but the rest she brought back to sit next to the fire, spreading open the package so that they could share. She pinched a hunk off, then licked her thumb. "May I ask another favor?" She eyed Memnoch, then glanced at the girl by the fire.



"Do you sense anything about her? She is quiet. She seems very clever, but does not say much."

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When Arilwen croaked that the omen was true, Wyrvaust's lips formed a skewed purse and a single brow arched ambiguously. His mood had darkened substantially but he did not allow it to reach the surface beyond that slightly irritated expression. "We assured the Swan of that already..." he reminded her tonelessly. It was a blow to his confidence that she believed Memnoch over him. Wyrvaust was already on his guard because of how much attention Memnoch was showing his wife. It did not matter that Memnoch had no designs whatsoever on Arilwen. Wyrvaust saw plotters and satyrs everywhere he looked. But could he fool Arilwen who knew him so well? Chances were she could probably see right past the wool he tried to pull over her eyes to hide his true feelings. Unless Memnoch distracted her enough that she did not notice his flat tones and subtle aggravation. The moment Wyrvaust wished that Arilwen would trust him more and strangers less, Memnoch locked his eyes on the demon. If Arilwen didn't see it Memnoch surely did.

"I am not an enemy to you, Wyrvaust, nor shall I ever be. That is not MY wish. You and your wife are safe with me. I was not lying when I said I admired you. Come, friend. I understand why you don't trust anyone... but you may trust me as long as I may trust you." He vowed.

Wyrvaust sighed a huge breath. "Forgive the Fox... He is struggling with himself lately..."

Memnoch smiled almost sweetly at the demon. "I know, Wyrvaust and its alright. I understand." Probably more than anyone could possibly guess.

The mood between the three lightened up again even before Arilwen started giggling and laughing, at what time Wyrvaust rolled his eyes a bit while Memnoch laughed with her. The Raven was having a hard time. It wasn't Memnoch's fault, but his own demons eating at him. Wyrvaust did nod to the comment about the west wing being private, and, thought Wyrvaust, they could easily keep an eye on him.

When Arilwen asked if she could request another favor of him, Memnoch's eyes thinned on her slightly. "You may, but make no attempt to take advantage of my generosity," he warned in even tones. But when she inquired after the sleeping girl his expression softened. "Ah, such a question as one friend would ask another. That I can do." Asking Memnoch for favors cut along sharper edges than it did the average immortal, but he was open about it, to them anyway.

"The obvious trauma and fear aside, she desires what all children do... A stable home, parents who love her, siblings to play with. She was poor with working parents so pulled her weight. Her intelligence was more a bother to them than anything else but they were kind enough not to tell her that. Despite how hard they worked her, she was not mistreated. Everything interests her right now. She is a sponge who shall only choose her path in life when she has experienced enough to make up her mind. She will always remember her parents but embrace you as her new mother, Arilwen. Because of her intellect Wyrvaust shall remain an enigma to her but one she respects and loves. Father figure... well yes... but more than that a teacher figure, a mentor she looks up to. Because she is human and Neffari

she will also come to fear the demon in him though. Not the kind of fear that hates or distrusts, but which withdraws. She may get over it, or she may not. I am not a seer, not in the usual sense... I can see people through their desires. If the desire does not yet exist, I can see no further. You for example..." He turned to face her better. He wanted to give her a taste of what he could offer off hand.

"Your greatest desire has already been fulfilled by the fates, or if you prefer, the immortals who placed Wyrvaust in your path. Wyrvaust is your greatest desire... Someone who loves and accepts you and is genuinely devoted to you but also needs and relies upon you as much as you do them. Remove either of you from the equation and the one who remains feels like nothing... might as well be dead. Were you not dead when you were with Gabrian? Desire... I know what I know through the archives of desire." He explained before she could ask how he knew about that. "Our desires can lead us away from our true paths if we are not careful. Happens to the best of us." He swung around to get closer to her and leaned in to whisper into her ear. "Desire brought me to this desert." He looked past her to Wyrvaust who was watching them intently and with an edge of apprehension coiling his muscles and narrowing his dark eyes. Now that Arilwen was up close to Memnoch she could see that he had very pale green eyes like key lime pie minus the food colouring, not pink or even ice blue like most albinos. His bleached mint eyes locked on Arilwen again. "Every life plays out for me like a story book centered on desire. Some stories are so grim I cannot bear to involve myself... others so dull I could care less, still others so sweet I... well, I want to barf." He cackled then sucked in a breath to stifle it. "But yours and his... it inspired and captivated me as few tales of desire do." He looked between Arilwen and her mate. "I want it to end well for you both. That is my desire. You and he shall make a wish within a fortnight and I SHALL fulfill it, just as you or he or you both will meet its terms. Not all can trust me with their desires... I use them often to trick, torment, teach, or even trap, dependant on who is making the wish. But that's not the case with the pair of you. You can trust me with your desires... unless... you try to take advantage of me. That would be very unwise." He wanted to make it clear that he would have none of that. "Otherwise, I shall even advise you against unwise choices." He did THAT for almost no one.

"Why else is the white devil here?" Wyrvaust wished to know and finally got up the nerve to ask. He did not find Memnoch as easy to talk to as Arilwen did. Perhaps he knew too much about him while also knowing far too little. "Was the Snowbird sent?"

Memnoch met Wyrvaust's intense gaze and out-pierced him with his own pale lime eyes. "The white phoenix only ever sends himself. Only the Morning Star himself can command me and he almost never does. YOU and SHE are what brought me here. Why? Because of what you desire and the choices you shall have soon to make. I have come to be your guide. I only pray you and your wife have the wisdom to listen."

Wyrvaust grew very quiet and still, but after awhile he looked to Arilwen and held her in his gaze. "Very well..." he said, then trained his gaze on Memnoch again, who was helping himself to some of the smoked meat he had been offered. "The Raven shall accept the Snowbird's counsel and offer of a wish, which the Lord and Lady of twilight shall decide upon by fortnight's end. We thank the Phoenix." the demon finally went against his suspicious nature to agree. He was taking a leap of faith

here with Memnoch... trusting his own instincts really. Memnoch seemed genuine to him. Dangerous, yes, but also honest. If Memnoch betrayed his trust, Wyrvaust would have his hide for a rug and his skull for a candleholder was all.

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Arilwen had not meant to offend her husband. She felt sick about Anna on a daily basis , and hearing it not only from her husband but from another being made it harder to swallow. She felt Wyrvaust tense and she immediately locked eyes with him, a regretful expression on her face. How did she apologize for offending him? The tears came without warning and she buried her face into her husband's chest, weeping quietly. He assured her that if Anna needed help, they would give it to her. "I know." She said softly, sitting up to touch his face, her thumbs tracing to the corners of his frown. All the Swan could do was meet his eyes before Memnoch interjected to pin Wyrvaust with assurances about his intentions. Arilwen could feel his struggle and knew why. Her marriage to Gabriel and his inability to converse with her during that time had just added to his paranoia. She was surprised when Wyrvaust apologized. Sincerely. The Swan reached to him mentally. ~Do not apologize. I must be more vigilant around strangers. I should know....~

She went silent when Memnoch spoke and she just curled herself into Wyrvaust's arms, closing her eyes . Eventually her pulse would slow, and she opened her eyes to focus on Memnoch when he warned her to be careful about asking for favors. "I understand." She replied, but listened intently when he told her about their newest addition. She had been poor and an only child. She wanted siblings. That made Arilwen smile up at her husband. He had promised her that she was physically healthy and able to give him children. The Dove would get her wish. The Swan focused on Memnoch again and thanked him warmly for the information... Then looked suspicious when he turned his observations on her. That made her nervous... Until he began to explain that she had found her desire with her husband. It made her chest flood with warmth and she sat forward, hugging her knees to listen. Her time with Gabriel. She HAD felt dead and lost. She held her breath when Memnoch leaned in close. His eyes were a color she had never seen. Their story was like a book.... And it seemed to fascinate him. She never blinked while she looked into his eyes but then he looked at Wyrvaust, so she leaned back against her husband, her back to his chest, and she lifted his hand to kiss the inside of his wrist. Neither of the birds expected offer of one wish and Arilwen could only stare, finally taking an offered nut with a soft word of thanks.

The trio would share food and steer away from deep conversation. Arilwen was emotionally exhausted and eventually she drifted off to sleep against her husband, her bare toes curled into the sand.

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Wyrvaust felt regret too; regret that he could not control his confounding feelings; regret that he had made his wife feel worse than she already did, what with her dearest friend's situation. A part of Wyrvaust could not help but feel he and Arilwen were being played by higher powers like a pair of castanets, and though he chalked it up to his usual paranoia, because let's face it, he was pretty damn paranoid, he was not completely missing the target, as Memnoch was about to reveal.

Arilwen had fallen asleep against the Raven some time ago when the rare albino

devil began to speak quietly to Wyrvaust. "There is something you should know, my friend." He considered Wyrvaust and Arilwen his friends though they barely knew him. He had other friends among the abyss demon's crew who hadn't even had the pleasure of his acquaintance yet; such as Anwaar, and Morgrym. Cevari as well though he and Cevari had met. In fact they were neighbors in the abyss. "Leviathan wants you and your wife to play on his team."

Wyrvaust frowned. "The Raven was aware Yajmha placed interest in him... but his wife? Why?"

"She is the daughter of the one who has eluded both Haman and Acheron..."

"Belorian..."

"Belorian," Memnoch confirmed. "Levi has an agent here in Morashtar of no acquaintance to you, who shall very soon make her presence known to you. She is soon to awaken in power and knowledge, and when she does she will be drawn to your lair to find you and Arilwen. Something sleeps inside you, Wyrvaust which Levi wants very much."

"What...? What could he possibly want with the Raven when he has made it clear he has NO interest in offering fealty or even trust to him?" Wyrvaust wished to know. "And can the Snowbird even know the desires of the Soul Sorter?"

Memnoch had never heard anyone call Levi that before. It fit him. "Yes I can. I know ALL desires. And you are an arch priest of chaos, and understand the beliefs which drive not only those who worship the Morning Star, but the all maker himself. His agent shall not seek to convert you as Yajmha has tried to do, but to retain you as an ambassador of Acheron."

Wyrvaust snorted, shaking his head. "That is ridiculous. The Raven is not suited to such a lofty task. He belongs here, in the vast isolation of the desert, in remote hidden sanctuary, not flitting betwixt dark and light otherworlds apart." He gestured with flapping hands to demonstrate the to and fro.

"Some ambassadors Don't have to flutter about, but by the value of their council bring others to them."

Again the demon shook his head, and this time he waved his hands in a strongly dismissive gesture. "No, no, no, no! We have enough of unwanted strangers knocking on our door looking for guidance and leadership!" He protested violently, though he did so as quietly as he could, though Arilwen was getting gently shaken by all her husband's gesticulations.

"Sometimes leadership is just something that happens to you, Wyrvaust. Like love." Memnoch smiled.

"We loath people," Wyrvaust hissed.

"Which should make it easier for you. You can just tell them to skid on off when it pleases you," the handsome albeit bestial albino grinned. Wyrvaust only huffed and sighed in a single breath. Memnoch laughed a little. "She will come to you and your lady as a queen, Raven, and you and your wife will like her and she you."

You have a chance to see and experience the inner workings of Haman for yourselves. You may wish to consider taking it."

Wyrvaust looked positively miserable now and nuzzled against his wife. "We need our dragon lord... cannot decide such things without him..." he felt.

"Maybe it would make him proud if you could decide these things for yourselves, my friend. Perhaps it is time to stand on your own. You have a good wife and good men to counsel you."

Wyrvaust gazed off at the fire awhile then gathered Arilwen in his arms and laid down on the sand with her next to the child. "We are going to sleep now," with such finality that Memnoch knew better than to push his luck.

"Good night, lord Aalamea. Sleep well." Memnoch bade as he stood.

"Doubt it," Wyrvaust muttered under his breath and swept the long robe-like cloak he wore around his wife and child to transform it into a blanket which captured the heat Arilwen radiated to keep them all comfortably warm. Memnoch meanwhile laid down on the other side of the fire and raised a Ward that not only kept out enemies but sand fleas and other biting insects or vermin. Next morning when they woke they would find a fine breakfast laid out for them. Memnoch even fed and watered the horses.

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Arilwen was soundly asleep during the conversation that Memnoch reserved for Wyrvaust alone. She only stirred when the conversation got heated and her husband began moving around. The Swan shifted and murmured something, kissing his cheek before she cuddled back into his chest and dozed off again. Could this visit be any more overwhelming?

Dawn broke and the little Dove was the first to awaken. She shifted under her coverings and turned to see the Sapphire Birds sleeping soundly beside her. She sat up to watch them for a moment. They were still here and that was good. The smell of warm food infiltrated her area and she looked up to see..... Memnoch.

The Dove's dark eyes fixed on his from feet away, and she didn't seem scared. She DID seem curious. The skinny waif slipped from her sleeping spot and slowly approached the pale, interesting looking fellow that was watching her. She saw that one of the food items was roasted fish and she knelt two feet from him. "Did you catch those from my fish farm?"

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Memnoch smiled at the child which moved closer to him. He had a wide mouth and though his lips were thin they were expressive, giving him an almost jester-like quality. Those pale eyes so like the flesh of limes in colour meanwhile though intense and often piercing also betrayed a warmth behind them that was as disarming as bewitching. "Why yes, I did harvest your fish. I hope you don't mind if I cooked them for you and the kind people who have adopted you. I am Memnoch," he said and offered her his hand to shake. "...but those I cannot yet call friend call me Worfel, which means shadow tooth in my mother tongue. Perhaps one day you can tell me why that is," and he gave her tummy a light poke as he smiled again to

her. He put one of the fish on a wooden plate with some eggs and roasted pagdawa root (starchy like potatoes but with much better flavor) and offered her the plate. "Want it?" he asked. If she declined he would eat it himself, if she accepted it he would fix himself another plate. "I will be living under your parents' roof. Hope you don't mind." He ate some of the fish then looked up at the intensely blue sky. The sun was gaining on the morning and it was beginning to get hot. He moved over a little to place himself in ever shifting shade. He and the sun were not on the best of terms. His gaze fell from the sky and in the way of the youngster. "Your fish is very delicious," he wagged his fork at her as he complimented her catch. He seemed comfortable with children and to have a natural way with them. Fact was, he was at ease around 'most' anyone. "Tell me... Nuni," he knew her name. "If you found a geni in a bottle and could wish for anything, what would it be?" He loved to hear what children wished for. It was one thing to know what someone desired and quite another for them to actually tell him what they wanted. As often as not, what escaped the lips was not at all the same as what the soul guarded. There were also those who had no idea what they wanted.

Wyrvaust, who lie curled on his side spooning Arilwen, was watching the devil interact with the girl in the meantime. Overwhelmed... he was that, but trying to take it all in stride as well as he could. One of the many ways in which Wyrvaust was odd was that he could often handle bat shit crazy situations with greater ease than the little or far less complicated things. Meeting a wish granting devil in the middle of nowhere who wanted to live with them while claiming a homeless orphan to adopt? Nnnnnooooo problem. Talking to people he hardly knew or didn't know at all about what they needed to clear them from his doorstep? He would rather have his teeth pulled with a pair of crude pliers. Wyrvaust was not looking forward to the unwanted assembly awaiting them. No... watching this white devil talk to the girl was far more interesting to him.

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The Dove looked pleased when the pale man told her that he was using her fish and she leaned forward to shake his large hand with her tiny one. "I am glad that you used them. It took me almost three HOURS to build it." Three hours was a lot to an eight year old! Worfel. The poke to the belly made her smile and she stretched her scrawny legs out, reaching for the offered plate with an eager 'thank you'... then proceeded to eat. Nuni ate efficiently. She had been working since she was young to help her family, and with as much work as they did, they ate swiftly and only to replenish energy, as one would see now. She held the plate with one hand and used her fingers to pick at and scoop up food into her mouth, her form bent over her plate and her dark braid falling over her shoulder. The child sucked fish meat off of the bones, her small tongue picking through them with expert ease, then she nodded and licked her thumb when he told her that he was going to stay with them. "That is good. You will be new too. Maybe our sleeping mats will be near each other." Memnoch was fully aware that she had grown up poor and slept on the dirt floor, as did her parents. She had never owned a bed or had her own room. Wasn't she in for a surprise?

When the Pale Bird said her name, she slurped down the last of her eggs and frowned. Had she told him her name? She didn't have long to think about that before he gave her a fanciful question to answer. A genie in a bottle? Certainly a child's wish would be something simple... like a pretty dress or necklace. Not Nuni. She put her plate down between her legs and curled her toes, over and over, while she

thought about it. "I would be the greatest hunter and gatherer. So that way, my new family wouldn't go hungry like my old family." She said it so plainly and so simply that Arilwen, who had just come to, nearly melted into tears. She looked at Memnoch, then closed her eyes to gather her composure, all while reaching for Wyrvaust's hand under the cloak. The child had no idea that her new family was well off, to say the least.

Nuni picked up her plate again and polished off her food. It was delicious and she smiled as she began to carefully pick apart fish bones, laying them out in rows by size to dry in the sun. "You are a very good cook." She seemed to size him up, then tilted her head. "If you found the genie before me, what would you wish for?"

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Memnoch tipped his head over as the child remarked that they could be the new kids on the block together. "Indeed," he said with a smile tugging at the corner of his lips. "Though I doubt we shall be sleeping on mats." The mischievous side of him left it at that. "A fine wish," he commended her, and though his mental voice said, "I can do that," he never told children that he would make their wish come true. It would just happen. In Nuni's case, the white devil doubted she would need his help achieving her dream much as Wyrvaust was sure to teach her all she needed to know to hunt and gather in the desert. Still... he would help her along, and with children, if he did grant their wish, he enforced no toll. Their lesson was in being wise in what you wish for. It was hard for Memnoch to believe that the child would ever come to fear Wyrvaust, but events would come that would make it so. She would see sides of him that would darken how she felt about him. Even Arilwen would find herself afraid of him from time to time, but not enough to shake her love and loyalty for him.

Wyrvaust tugged his wife tighter against himself when she gripped his hand, winding his long fingers with hers. "The girl is rather amazing," he whispered to her.

Memnoch stared at Nuni when she asked what his wish would be. Only one person had ever asked him that before in all his long ages of everness. "I would have to think about that very carefully. It has been a very long time since I have wondered that. My desires since then have changed. I once desired freedom but have long since come to embrace my fate, regardless of the troubles it invites." Memnoch ended up with a lot of enemies in his line of business. Some people ended up very dissatisfied with the outcome of their wishes and took it out on him for giving them what they asked for. "It could be to have desirable friends that would never abandon me," he thought then shrugged, unwilling to commit.

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Not sleeping on mats? Poor bird family. Maybe Nuni would make them mats from scratch. She could sew and maybe she could sew bird silhouettes on them. She tucked that thought in her mind and kept arranging her fish bones. It would be nice to make them a gift. Arilwen could only nod when her husband pointed out how amazing the little Dove already was. She wanted to gather her in her arms so that she could squeeze her and cry.

Why was the white bird so stunned by her question about wishes? Nuni left her fish bones alone and crossed her ankles, glancing around. "You are not free? Are you a

slave?" A few parents sold their children as slaves because their family was starving. The desert was not easy on anyone. "Friends is a good wish. If you stay for a long time with the Sapphire Birds, I could be your friend. I can teach you how to build a fish farm and start fires." She looked pleased at her offer.

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Memnoch shifted slightly causing his wings to sway like half furred sails. His great wings exaggerated each agile motion of his martial form. "I am free and I am not. No one is really free. They are bound by laws, rules, or even their pursuits. No, I am not a slave as you mean it, though I've been a slave before." Death had been his means of escaping it.

Wyrvaust kissed his wife's hand sweetly while watching their new acquaintance with the girl. "Each moment the girl occupies his interest we learn more about him." He was still whispering though he wouldn't doubt that the immortal could hear them. "He seems an almost gentle being at heart for one with such a feral reputation. But what is reputation usually built on but the rumors and assumptions planted by others? True notoriety can be grounded in fact, but how often?" If Wyrvaust's reputation was true then he would be robbing babies from cradles and eating them. Sure, he ate the occasional enemy or trespasser but he only ate baby people if they were possessed by tremendously evil beings or spirits. "Many things are said of Memnoch but I must wonder how much of it if any is true. What do the Swan's instincts say about him?" Wyrvaust generally trusted her instincts.

Memnoch's left wing spread open to flick the child's cheek gently with the soft outer surface of its clawed tip when she offered him a nomination of friendship. The large bowed talon was curved under so she was never in danger of being scratched. As soft as his touch was with his dragon-like wings, they packed enough force to knock or blow a heavy adult off their feet and to stun someone senseless with a blow to the head. "I think we shall be fast friends before we know it. We have already made a good start." He replied with a tenderness and warmth unbecoming of a devil, much less one with his black infamy.

Wyrvaust ground against Arilwen lustfully and breathed a heated growl. "Either the lord and lady of sapphires steal away for awhile or must join the girl and her friend devil for breakfast and conversation," he suggested. Being so close to her was making him need her quite fiercely. Wyrvaust then laughed at what Memnoch said next, unable to help himself.

"I already know how to build fires, but know nothing of trapping fish. I would appreciate if you would teach me. Could I use my tail for bait?" A very long cat like tail slithered around from behind him and beneath his sarong. He dipped the tip of it into the aquamarine pool and wriggled it around. Like the outside of his wings the tail was covered with fine, silky fur.

"Is this truly Memnoch?" Wyrvaust mused at what moment the devil looked his way and flashing a fancy smile, nodded. Wyrvaust sighed a laughing breath and locked his gaze on Arilwen. "He thinks Marsol would like this Snowdevil." Unknown to Wyrvaust Marsol and Memnoch were already acquainted. Memnoch had once fulfilled one of Marsol's desires. Had it gone well for Marsol? Only he could tell because Memnoch didn't grant wishes and tell unless there was a very good reason for it.



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No one was truly free. Nuni was quiet as he explained this to her and she was thoughtful for a moment before interjecting. "I am bound by my age and the things I do not yet know. I have little strength so I was bound by nature. I cannot yet survive alone." That was all that her young mind could grasp.

Arilwen had gone from wanting to cry to being delighted. This child seemed to be connecting to Memnoch from the start. Wyrvaust wanted to know her opinion? "I think he wants a family... just like she does." She was soft in tone and smiled. It was pretty enchanting to see Nuni's eyes light up at the extension of Memnoch's wings. One very gently brushed her cheek and she touched it with her fingertips.

Apparently the snow bird could already handle fires, but fishing? Nuni gasped when that tail shot out. Wings AND a tail? He was so lucky! He put it in the water and she wrinkled her nose, shooting to her feet. "Here." The skinny urchin went to touch his tail, gently at first in case he was too ticklish, then inspected it. A glance to one side, then the other. A pile of fish guts. Perfect! Nuni proceeded to dunk his tail right into the pile, swishing it about.

Arilwen sat straight up with a gasp. Nuni got the tail nice and goopy before placing it slowly into the water, then turned to explain. "No one wants a mouth full of fur." She pointed out. "But fish eat other fish sometimes."

Arilwen covered her mouth. Oh she wanted to die laughing. Wyrvaust pressed against her and dragged her back into their pile. Oh my, how he baited her. Arilwen looked flushed and glanced at the fire. She was trying to catch Memnoch's eye. Would it be terrible to ask him to babysit?

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Memnoch nodded at Nuni's interpretation of what commanded her efforts. "You have the gist of it, I see." He smiled then sobered a bit. "But there is a great difference between the things we choose to be controlled by and being forced into genuine slavery. It is slavery when we have no choice in what we do." Slavery was still commonplace in the desert, though not as well accepted as it used to be. Even Saeed had changed his tune where slave trading was concerned. Memnoch would always be a slave to his destiny as one of the fated, but unlike Maelmorda had come to accept and even enjoy his path.

The albino met Arilwen's gaze as she looked his way and smirked. "You two look as if you could use a walk. Nuni and I will be f..." ugh, what was that smell and gross slime she was sticking his tail in? He looked over his shoulder to see what she was doing. "Wait... uh... that is just nasty... I was thinking of just luring them into the trap. Won't they bite my tail with that disgusting gunk all over it? That would hurt, Nuni, especially if they got sharp teeth."

Wyrvaust meanwhile had thrown back his robes and rolled to his feet, bringing Arilwen with him by her hand. He hadn't let go of it yet. As he led her away towards the center of the oasis he glanced back at Memnoch while commenting on how gross the fish guts were and how a fish bite could hurt. He looked at Arilwen with dumbfound. "Can the white pheonix be such a mouse? Surely he is play acting... that or cursed." Oh but he was wrong. That was just Memnoch, and though he might

seem like a wuss he was not someone you wanted to make an enemy of. Just because he didn't like pain didn't mean he couldn't take it. Besides, he was speaking to a child as he spoke to children. It wasn't long before the happy couple had found a soft shaded area and were disrobing one another to fling their clothing off around them. Wyrvaust didn't even think about being quiet about it. It just wasn't his style. Memnoch meanwhile extended his camp Ward to include their new location.

Memnoch looked to the child in the meantime as Wyrvaust and Arilwen lost themselves in passion. The devil's smallish flared horns had grown and his tail had thickened. It happened when he was in the presence of love being so amorously expressed. If the pair held to their usual sexual practices with each other, the devil the sidhe called Worfel would end up with a massive pair of horns on his head and a heavy tail he could knock six men down with. Nevermind what hung concealed between his thighs underneath his calf length sarong of black, white and grey hues. He tied the cloth to leave a slit in the back for a reason, it let his tail escape. Normally it was the shape and size of a cheetah's tail. When it got large, scales began to replace fur. At his height of desire borne sensitivity his innate and elemental powers also grew.

He waited to see if the youngster would wash his tail off. If not, he would see where she was going with this fishing thing. "Ever trapped a hare?" He preferred conies to fish. Obviously he was fine with babysitting, they two would have been the first to know otherwise.

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Nuni blinked at Memnoch, his goopy tail in her hand, when he sounded disgusted and pointed out that he just wanted the wriggling movements to attract the fish. Bites hurt, right? Somehow, she hadn't thought to consider that it might hurt him. She had gotten her toes bitten by fish thousands of times. Her dark eyes switched to her new parents who were watching them and standing. Memnoch seemed to think that they needed a walk. They had just woken up. What if they were hungry? Still, they seemed eager to do so, so she waved at them, then looked at Memnoch. Yep, he was still grossed out. "I guess I could have just dumped the fish guts into the fish trap and let them in." She thought out loud, then bent to the water's edge so that she could start scrubbing that tail.

Arilwen gripped the Raven's hand as they hurried away. Part of her felt guilty for leaving the Dove, but she seemed perfectly content torturing someone who was much older and wiser than her. As soon as her bare feet hit the shade, Arilwen was grabbing at her husband's cloak to tear it away from his body. Clothing was an annoyance at this point and they swiftly peeled it off, tossing it every which direction away from them. The Swan gripped the Raven's face, staring hard into his beautiful eyes. "Sit." With a firm press of her hips, she backed him up to the rough tree that cast their shade, then slid down with him to straddle his lap, her hands never leaving his cheeks. "You are the most incredible person I have ever met. That girl has the favor of gods and devils to have you as a new father." A hand dipped between her legs and with a shift of the hips, two bodies became one. Arilwen groaned and pressed her forehead to his. Nothing that followed would be even remotely quiet or contained, the Swan howling in the heat of all imaginable pleasures, even harshly demanding more children against the Raven's ear while she buried her nails into his shoulders.

Nuni was done scrubbing the demon's tail, and blinked when she realized that it was getting heavier. She dropped it, realizing that there was no fur left. That made her go white. "I...I think that I scrubbed too hard." She whispered, then looked up at the devil hovering next to her, the sight of his massive horns making her jump back. Had he waited until the bird family left to change? And what did it mean? Her dark eyes levelled seriously on him... until he asked about catching hares. Nuni LOVED rabbit meat and she immediately lit up again. "No! Will you show me?" She bounced from one foot to the other, then stopped and blinked when she heard distant howling. "What is that?"

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"Good idea," Memnoch said to Nuni's idea about the fish guts. The devil cackled when she dropped his tail with a splash. "My tail is just fine, little one. I am like the ocean and change with the tides. I swell with the storms and shrink beneath the blistering sun." He scooted deeper into the shade as he concluded the statement. Why had he chosen the desert if the sun was so cruel to him? Because Wyrvaust and Arilwen were there.

Wyrvaust had the look of a man who had truly found Paradise when his wife buried his shaft in her warm body. His breaths were drawn with elation and his voice barely escaped them as his hand cupped the back of her head when their brows met in that press. "But for his obsession he would be but a savage still. As the red falcon tamed his master, the Swan awakened the heart of the Raven. The Dragon and the Raven were but wild things of mutual minds and deeds until found by thee." He sang out deliriously as she drove him deeper into himself and slid his hand between them to tantalize her pleasure center with eager savvy. His indigo eyes absorbed her to the slightest detail as his head reared back to spill his long jet black hair to the crack of his exposed ass. The last time they had loved each other in the open at that very same oasis, they had nearly been captured, but having Memnoch there made him feel safe in the bosom of the desert and the arms of his wife. Wyrvaust's hand slipped down the length of her auburn brushed black hair and across her shoulders to her breasts which he cupped and kneaded deeply and sensually before lips and moist mouth replaced palm and fingers. Free again his hand gripped and guided just forcefully enough to excite along waist, hips, ass, and thighs. His hips rocked against hers meanwhile to lift and drive deep then sliding back to pump her shallowly before thrusting in deep again, all the while he whispered, hissed, or growled to her how like bliss she felt, how he would never let her go, how he worshipped every moment he held her in his gaze, in his arms, in sexual thrall. He kissed her incredibly deep when she begged for more children then breathed elatedly against her lips as he spoke. "Her Raven will give her as many offspring as she desires... one at a time... two at a time... three... six, however she desires them." His voice carried on the air then in its rich deep tones to echo across the desert.

Memnoch tipped his head to the side, his pointed ear almost touching his shoulder while he considered the best snare to build. "A sling snare is the easiest but startles the prey so as to make it scream and scare its kin away. A basket trap is better but requires more time, unless you already have a basket. For either you need string, which doesn't take too long to make if you don't already have some. Have a basket or some string?" If no string he'd start with that and gather some palm fronds for their fibers and show her how to make string and or rope very efficiently with no other tools other than his teeth, hands and toes, making a sort

of spinning wheel of his body. It was a basic survival skill really. When Nuni asked about the howls Memnoch laughed. "Oh don't mind that. Its just wild Coyotees," he assured her. "They won't trouble us," he promised with a chuckle.

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Their first vacation to the Oasis had been disastrous. But now, though today had been odd, it was having an intoxicating effect on the Raven and Swan. The Raven's words made Arilwen nearly weep and she slid her fingers into his glorious hair, clutching it when his fingers went for her most delicate parts. There were no qualms about the Swan requesting more children. Far from it. But when the Raven began speaking of multiples , part of the Swan's gut went ice cold. It was hard to think of more than one after what they had to do with the secret six. Her eyes locked on Wyrvaust's and she slowed to a stop, whispering, "Only one." Pregnancy would be hard for her, so they needed to ease into it. She swallowed, then gave him a soft smile and kissed him tenderly. She wasn't going to allow her emotions to take hold of this. She leaned in to kiss his neck and bury her face in his shoulder.

Nuni wanted to touch his horns. But after dipping his tail in fish guts, she should probably lay off. Now came learning the art of rabbit hunting. Did she have string or a basket? Nuni screwed her nose up. "I was buried in mud." Oh, did she have a little sassy streak. Palm fronds were gathered and she sat down beside Memnoch to concentrate on making string. And she seemed utterly delighted by it.

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Wyrvaust caressed his wife's cheek when she stopped all motion to whisper her command of one. The demon smiled and kissed her deeply then whispered back to her against the soft pillows of her lips. "As his queen desires. He is after all her obedient and willing slave." That said he pulled her head back by her hair and trailed hot kisses down her throat to her breasts and at length back his mouth and tongue traveled to her lips which he suckled before their tongues entwined and he nursed on hers between lustful tangles. Meanwhile he pet and penetrated her with the passion and frantic need of a tidal wave breaking on a reef. He would be thrilled to have her with child again, and the next child he would let catch up in age with Nuni then slow his or her growth to match a mortal rate. Arilwen had lived her childhood as mortals did and Wyrvaust wanted her to have that with their next child, but he also wanted it for himself. He too had been mortal once. He looked forward to his children having Cevari around as their uncle as well.

Memnoch showed her how to pull the thin fibers away from the leaf in thin strings until the entire frond was stripped into a pile of fine threads, then how to roll the fibers between her hands to release the oils which would strengthen the threads and help bind them. Once they had their pile of quick seasoned fibers he showed her how to twine them bit by bit by rolling them between their palms again until tight then adding more further down, little by little until bit by bit the string got longer and thicker, until after awhile they could hold the original end in their teeth and keep twining, then when too long to do that, to tie the end around their big toe and keep twining. Before long they had two nice lengths of thin, strong rope which he showed her how to join together using the same techniques. He explained as they made the string that thicker rope was made in the same way by continuing to twine in fresh fibers until tight and the desired gauge. He told her that the type of fibers used, how few fibers were twined at a time, and the

tightness of the twist determined how strong it was. "Palm leaves are good but not nearly the most superior. Bark and stems are almost always better though and I find the whispering branch tree has the best fibers, though in the desert... I really don't know." Wyrvaust could have told her that the palm fronds and bark of young Giant Palms were the best. That lesson done he looked around for something to build a basket with. "That bamboo will do perfectly. Fronds work in a pinch too. I just kinda stink at making baskets... I know how though." It would hold together, it just wouldn't look very good. "We need to make strips again only wider and using the intact bark instead of the fibers... and we'll need to soak them in some warm water. We can heat some in the sun..." and so began their second project. "Hey wait... those vines up there would work even better..." he referred to the sand grape vines winding between the palms and trees. "You can reach them if you climb up on my shoulders. You can grab onto my horns for balance or even stand on them if you need to." his horns were quite strong, the same as flared goat horns, and though usually fairly small, they were much longer, thicker and heavier than goat horns presently. At the moment they were quite impressive.

Before long the devil and the child were busy weaving their desert steamed wicker, having made some very fine strips of thin wood to craft. The girl had nimble little fingers and Memnoch had complimented her for it.

Memnoch looked sideways at Nuni after they had worked on the baskets awhile, each weaving their own, though the white devil was actually planning to make a detachable lid for Nuni's basket. "So when you were stuck in the mud... what was it like?" He thought it might be good for her to talk about it. "How did it happen? Did any wild beasts approach you while stranded there?"

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Arilwen's eyes were fixed intensely on her husband's when he soothed her nerves with assurances. He gripped her hair and bent her head back to assault her neck with his lips, which was positively the best type of assault, wasn't it? No more words, Only pleasure and howling and screaming. By the time they were both spent, Arilwen was so weak that she could not lift her sweaty cheek from Wyrvaust's shoulder. She was going to have to lay here forever and get pecked at by birds.

Nuni's small fingers worked diligently as they wound string. That task was soothing to her, and she worked deftly to ensure that her string was tight and even.

Baskets came next. Nuni's dark eyes lifted to the vines, then she rose and brushed the sand from her hands. "Stand on you?" She eyes his horns uncertainly. Still, those vines looked tough, so she finally agreed and waited for him to stand. He lifted her without warning and she was startled at that, gripping onto his horns like vices, her skinny legs trembling at first. Slowly she rose to a stand, one hand leaving his horn so that she could snatch down vines. Some came easily, and some she had to hang on with all of her weight.

Once they were settled and the basket making lesson began, Nuni eyes the demon. He wanted to know about being stuck in the mud. "My family was moving. We were trying to find a new place to live. The storm came... The water was faster than us. The ground we stood on turned to mud in moments...Animals did come. Some seemed bored with me. Some headbutted me and tried to smell me. If they did that, I would shriek at them and make horrible noises. Some sniffed and moved on. I thought Father Raven

was a death bringer. I begged for him to kill me. But he dug me up and brought me here. Now I'm glad he was not a death bringer. Not my death bringer, anyway."

She fell quiet as she turned her basket again. It was awhile before she spoke again. "I will never forget my mother's face when my hand slipped from hers. She made a horrible noise...like an animal." Her fingers grew still and she stared at the sand before taking a deep breath, glancing at Memnoch. "Are your parents alive?"

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It was a fine day in the desert...

though hot like any other day. Thanks to an obscure feat of magic by the desert's elusive guardian; Arilwen and Wyrvaust managed to stay cool despite their activities and the sun mounting the clear blue sky above the oasis. Memnoch did not control his environment as the child balanced precariously atop his horns to gather vines which he helped pull down as necessary when she handed them down to him, though she gathered most of them well enough alone thanks to her stubborn tenacity. He and the youngster felt the heat all the while they worked late into the afternoon. Memnoch smiled as the loving couple quieted but his attention was drawn hence by the grave tones of the Neffari girl. He gazed long and hard at Nuni during which time she spoke of remembering her mother's face for always, and he knew it was not terror or regret she had seen in her mother's eyes and expression, not something she would rather forget, but all her mother's love pouring out of her for the last time. He nodded to her. Memnoch knew that memories were as ephemeral and bendable as dreams often were, no matter how hard a wish to hold onto them. Echoes of the past were meant to fade over time to make room for new memories, but Memnoch felt sure that Nuni's recollections of her mother would not unless she was ready to let go of them. The child was just that stubborn.

The day was getting on when they finished their basket and while the sapphire birds slept off their exhaustion, the white devil and the waif set their simple snare. Their trap was comprised simply of the basket Nuni had made (hers was far better than Memnoch's lid for it, indeed he had proclaimed that she had done this before) propped by a stick which their string was attached to the bottom of. For bait they left the pale yellow root of a wild carrot under the basket near the back of it. Memnoch had complimented Nuni's cleverness when she had camouflaged the basket with various leaves and fronds she had gathered. Now all they had to do was wait belly down on the other end of that string until the trap was sprung. Memnoch had told Nuni that she had to be very still and quiet for a long time, and was amazed that she followed his instructions. Forty minutes later Nuni gave a Yank to the string and her basket stood the test of a panicked hare's attempts to bound and kick free of its wicker confines. As Memnoch assured, it was unable to shake loose. Inside the basket the devil's clawed hand popped and out again to hold the rabbit up by its long ears. His fangs gleaned white in the sun as a hungry grin spread his wide mouth. "This lovely shall make us a fine supper," and it was a very pretty kind of animal. He held the cute little fellow in such a way that it was easy to tell he was about to snap its neck with his bare hands. "We'll catch a sack of them before supper." He indicated, but before he could crack its spine, he heard a fairly large number of people coming their way. At the moment they were about a mile off. Memnoch stuffed the hare back under the basket and hopped to his feet. "Stay put, Nuni," he said in deep tones then off he went in a dash of pale limbs and backspread white wings to the western edge of the oasis where he spied a peculiar

sight, one which he shared with Arilwen and Wyrvaust through a sending which let them see what he saw as he saw it. There were about three hundred men and women, fifty or so of them on horseback. What was odd was the shadow which surrounded and extended outward of them. It moved with them. Both Memnoch and Wyrvaust being creatures of the pit could sense the power radiating from that veil of darkness not as a product of shadows but a force of the abyss. There was nothing to indicate who the company was otherwise.

"What do you think, lord and lady of Sapphires?" The white devil asked the two telepathically. "Should we make scarce?"

Wyrvaust unraveled himself from his wife like a snake uncoiling itself his motions were just so liquid, and sat up and began to dress himself. "The Raven for one would like to see why these people trespass in his chief's lands." He said both to Memnoch and Arilwen.

Memnoch heaved a breath. He could tell he would have his work cut out for him keeping the demon and his family safe.

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The Sapphire birds had worn themselves to sleep beneath the shade where they had fallen, the Swan still straddling her husband while she breathed quietly and evenly against his neck. By some miracle, the "coyotes" had gone away and now, basket done and in hand, the new dynamic duo went to find a place to trap rabbits. Nuni hugged her basket to her chest and was nearly climbing out of her skin in anticipation while they chose a spot and Memnoch knelt to show her how to rig it. She was like an excited puppy until they scooted down onto their bellies and her new friend told her that she had to be still and quiet. She immediately went silent, her string loose but stable in her fingers, and her dark eyes watching the area. And she stayed that way for over half of an hour, only digging her toes into the ground when she started to feel antsy.

Finally, FINALLY, the trap fell and Nuni nearly shrieked. Instead she leaped to her feet and stared at the basket, holding her breath while she watched the rabbit beat around inside. She was certain that the side of the basket was going to bust out, but it didn't. "It held. IT HELD!" Finally she whooped and watched Memnoch yank the rabbit out on proud display. A sack of hares? Oh, she was CERTAIN. Her eyes were gleaming as the snow devil went to snap the hare's neck, but he suddenly bent and shoved it back under the basket for holding. Nuni's face fell and she gave him a "whattheheck" look. Was he teasing her? Nope. That look on his face said otherwise. "Stay put." His tone and look gave her no reason to argue and she ducked into the underbrush, shoving a bare foot out to mess up the grass where they had been, erasing most of their indents. She drew her foot back in and watched Memnoch disappear through the trees.

Arilwen and Wyrvaust were awake now, lazily getting dressed. Even that was taking forever because Arilwen had stretched, then proceeded to knot her long hair back behind her head. That left her naked body open to hands, and hands did approach, smoothing over her flat belly. She smiled softly and finished her hair before she let her arms fall around Wyrvaust's neck, almost making a comment about how they had been gone too long. But they both heard the noise at the same time and Arilwen stooped to grab her light dress, tugging it on to tie it behind her neck while she

felt panic clawing at her insides. Not again, not again. It was all her brain could repeat. Arilwen immediately agreed with Wyrvaust. They needed to figure out who this was. The Swan shielded her eyes and watched the group in the distance while she spoke to both of the men. "Perhaps it is the group from our doorstep?" It wasn't any of their crew, right? Wyrvaust would sense them immediately. Memnoch was going to have his hands full....

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Memnoch had made a good point when he'd pointed out that an oasis wasn't the best place to be alone. They were scarce in the desert of fire and in high demand by travelers, and though not as well known by foreigners, while reputed to be guarded by a dangerous demon who happened to be Wyrvaust, most any traveler might find directions to the desert's most beautiful island of water and botanicals if they asked the locals. No, the horde advancing on the oasis at a steady pace was not the band of locals encountered earlier. Those people were still camped out in the corridor at the Sapphire canyon's doorstep. This band included fifty rangers and two-hundred-fifty odd warriors and mages. Most of them were Namas, Eschion, Anua, Neffari, Ssetis, and Tumae, but also among them were Mythaen, Tsulari, Ariad elves, Sephorai, Shaamae, and Tsetar.

Wyrvaust had waited patiently for his beloved wife to dress and put her hair up. He meanwhile looked like a wild thing birthed by the sands with his long hair spilling untamed around his handsomely fierce face and all but the barest stitch of his layered robes swept from the sand to wrap around his waist over the leather loin cloth that was the only garb he had bothered to pull on. The loin cloth looked very Native American in style and could be worn alone, while the brown and white sarong over it looked more Egyptian. These were also the two peoples Neffari resembled the most. Once Arilwen was ready and came to claim the hand he offered, he led her to the edge of the oasis where they were met by Memnoch who stood to greet them with a nod. When they asked after Nuni, the devil in grey assured them she was safe. In fact... none of them would or could come to any harm anymore, even if they didn't realize or believe it yet. Wyrvaust squeezed his cherished wife's hand and fixed his gaze on the advancing mob. The dark veil which came well ahead of them had eclipsed the sand all around the oasis but dispersed as it had met the treeline of the oasis itself. This was caused by the combined feats of Wyrvaust and Memnoch. Muscular arms crossed and eyes thinned as with a tilt of his head the Raven watched the leaders at the front approach.

He was still holding Arilwen's hand when the only ranger dressed in grey called the entire company to a halt then dismounted and walked over to meet Wyrvaust and Arilwen. He paid the odd looking albino devil no mind whatsoever, which Wyrvaust found somewhat strange. The abyss demon's head tipped back as his eyes locked with the light grey eyes of the ranger. "We are the watchers over these lands," Wyrvaust proclaimed in dour tones while cutting his arm across the air from his shoulder outward, then he pointed at the ranger rather aggressively. "And who is this brings so many armed warriors into the kingdom of fire?" He demanded to be told.

The ranger eyed Wyrvaust almost curiously but there was a certain sharpness to his eyes which were telling of his scrutiny of the demon. "I am Greyfoot, chief Ranger of the Greywood company." The ranger introduced himself by the moniker he was commonly called by. It was one of five names he went by.



"An odd name that for an elf, and where is this Greywood it speaks of?" Wyrvaust asked with his eyes thinning doubtfully on the fellow.

The elf cocked a brow and pulled down his brown hair to retie his ponytail, his hazel eyes fixed on Wyrvaust all the while, he also spoke as he fixed his wind blown hair. "Not a strange name at all for a Morendor Elf. I wear grey... My boots are even grey, I am known for walking great distances, so I am called Greyfoot. I was born in the Greyhaven Mountains and my company is named after the Greywood Rainforest west of the mountains which we watch over and protect." Done with his hair he knocked some of the dust off of himself. "Thy gaze must not reach beyond the desert much if ye do not to know of the Greywood and its guardians." He observed.

Wyrvaust stared at the elf whose skin was almost the same color as his but a little lighter. "And why is it and all its people here with it?" Wyrvaust asked, not even trying to be friendly. It didn't help that the ranger was right about him. Wyrvaust knew little of the lands beyond the Desert of Fire, but he knew everything could be known about his homeland.

"To get water. Why else?"

Greyfoot's evasive answer did nothing to improve on Wyrvaust's disposition. "In the desert. WHY is it and its mob in the Desert of Fire?" the demon asked sternly. He did not appreciate word games of the kind the elf was playing.

The elf smiled. "We are a mob, are we? Why not a caravan? Or a troop? Or perhaps..." He could see the Neffari was not amused. "To see what is here. To see if we might be welcomed here."

"Who does it serve?" The Raven wanted to know.

"We serve our King, the great King in the Mountain."

"Its name?"

"He is NO it. He is our king, our champion, our hero. He is Goldstaff. He is the King in the Mountain. He is the Lightbringer... He is..."

"He HAS a name. What is it?" Wyrvaust growled, about to rip into the elf with his bare claws if for no other reason than to shut him up.

"Darmeos," Greyfoot said unhappily and he was frowning to boot.

Wyrvaust pointed west, in the direction they had come from. "Leave this desert." He commanded.

"What have thee against our illustrious king?" the elf wished to know.

"His people say too little and talk too much," Wyrvaust told him tonelessly. "Now leave," he demanded a second time.

"But we need water..."

"Conjure it," Wyrvaust knew they had mages among them. "Now LEAVE. He will not say it thrice," the demon demanded one last time and warned.

The elf looked to Arilwen, hoping she would talk some sense into her husband. "If we had been able to create water from thin air, we'd have done it. We have mages, yes, but no conjurers or hydromancers, not with us at least. Our hydromancer was seriously wounded and is being treated elsewhere. But if ye wish to send us back out into the desert to starve and die of thirst..." he shook his head. Standing behind him in the meantime was a mass of tense bodies, a small army really, prepared for anything and any command from their leader.

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Cevari thought Gil would look lovely in anything he put on him, truthfully. His unique colouring lent itself to all sorts of things. "Really? You'll play dress up with me?" He rubbed his long-fingered hands together with a broad grin, gleefully, just imagining what he might put him in. He was more than happy to allow Gilriael to drag him off for their adventure, although he snagged another slice of bread for the road. He could not get enough of the food here. It was all so good!

Cevari was in his element, leading his men through the desert. It was a sight to see, the way they followed him with such loyalty, the way he could get them all roaring laughing with a word, and silence them with a glance, if they got too rowdy. He had proven himself to them, and instilled such loyalty in his men that they would gladly fight to protect him. Cevari was a man who knew his strengths, but fighting was not one of them. He saw no shame in that. He couldn't be talented at everything, as well as sinfully handsome, could he? It simply wouldn't be fair.

He rode well, and occasionally did little showy tricks to show off for Gilly, kneeling in the saddle and balancing, or the like. He preferred riding without a saddle, but it was such a fine one, elegantly tooled and ornamented. He did have a weakness for glamour.

He thanked the stars for Gil, when they encountered the dragon. He imagined he and his men might have had their hands full, without his presence. When night fell, and they found their campsite, the number of men with them became helpful, as camp was set up in record time, and with such practice that it was clear they were accustomed to sleeping outdoors this way.

Cevari had settled beside Gilriael, nibbling away on a dried fig. He always travelled with something sugary in a saddlebag. Dates. Figs. Coconut. Whatever struck his fancy. He smiled back at Gil when he found a smile turned on him. "Lucky to have you with us. I'm afraid we'd have been at a loss, without that language up our sleeve." He responded. He laughed when his clothes were plucked at. "A little dust never hurt anyone." He responded, easily. He did choose the right garments for the desert. This was not his first trip into the sands, after all. He beamed. "Will you. Had I known, I'd have brought more of a selection for you. Fear not, though. I'll have you dressed in the height of fashion." He teased.

He shifted over until their shoulders touched, and then leaned his head against Gil's shoulder. "You'll sing for us, won't you?" He pleaded, with a charming grin. It seemed a waste to have a bard with them, and no music around the bonfire. Plus,

he never got tired of hearing Gilly sing.

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"Play dress up?" Gilly cocked a dubious brow and punched Cevari playfully. "Don't he such a girl!" he laughed then jostled him. Giriael was as gay as a pink dandelion true, but he was all male, even of the rough and tumble variety. "I will wear something you choose for me though," he said smiling and ribbing his handsome lover.

Later at the fire the weyrdragon could be found snatching dates from Cevari and popping them in his mouth. He ate all kinds of things and he loved dates, all kinds of sweets actually, but he limited them. "Still talking about clothes," he teased with a chortle. "What I get for falling for a merchant I guess," he bumped him with his broad shoulder and messed up his own platinum blonde locks to shake the dust out. "That dragon we ran into... they are a rare, ancient breed. Dune dragons. Their language is very ancient too, almost animal but too advanced to be animal. They also go by sand dragon. Not all dragons are sentient, but Dune Dragons are. They just have a savage intelligence. Only thing rarer and less reasonable is a salt dragon, which live in Mephais Andorath but they are created by Terramancers. Dune dragons were created by nature, or the devil if you believe that sort of thing. I for one like to think they evolved from the desert like us Hellraptors. Hell, they could even be our ancestors for all we know." Gilriael didn't believe the Morning Star created everything his followers said he did. Maybe he created some things, but not the world and elves and dragons and what not. He simply didn't believe that. He lit up when Cevari asked if he would sing for them again. "Sure. I would love to." He appreciated being appreciated.

There had been word of enemy divisions in the desert between Wyrvaust's lair and the Clearwater Oasis, yet not a single enemy had Gilriael, Cevari and his men encountered or spotted. Who had the reports come from to begin with? Two of Marsol's dragons who had sighted them from the air, but the group, whoever they were, had managed to hide themselves before the dragons could get a good look at them. That to Gilriael meant they were either well trained scouts or soldiers. It was doubtful they had been raiders because their formation had been clustered rather than strung out. Raiders never had more than three traveling side by side while somewhat staggered. Desert tribes tended to travel single file so they could easily scatter if attacked by marauders. The group spotted by Blood Hammer and Deadly Breath was large, at least three centuries, their formation fairly tight, and easily able to disappear in a moment's notice, either by natural or supernatural means. The dragons had not sensed magic but the legion had been far enough away initially that they might not have felt the presence of arcane or elemental energies from them. So... had they left? Were they still in the area? In the desert? Concealed? Whatever the case Gilriael was determined not to return home until he knew the answers. Fortunately for him the fellow he loved in the fancy clothes and the men who served him were used to traveling and even enjoyed it.

Gilriael's golden voice pealed with laughter as those men of Cevari's ended an amusing drinking song by toasting to it with a stiff drink. Gilriael drained his cup of the liquor they distilled and whistled at its strength and pungent flavor, then held the cup out for more. Tumet, aka Tombs refreshed his drink and he nodded his thanks. The Caravan guards made it from juice squeezed from a common cactus called Candy Cactus, so called because of all the plump little buttons that were

its flower buds which covered its thick paddle shaped leaves. The red buttons looked like pieces of candy and were even used to make a delicious candy. Some called it button cactus. They only actually bloomed after drenching rains, so they were in bloom all over the place presently. The red buttons meanwhile had a very sweet flavor and mildly intoxicating effect, which when distilled was highly concentrated. Not only were the buttons used to make chewy or hard candies but a tasty medicine for treating anxiety or tension. The cacti spread profusely by dropping leaf segments which easily rooted, but because the flesh and flower buttons alike were good to eat, the segments provided water, and the whole plant made great liquor, the consumption rate kept up with their rate of growth. A saying went, 'Chop down a thicket of Button Cacti and it'll spread like a wild fire over dry grass.' Cevari's men impressed Gilriael, not only because they made awesome liquor! But because they were so efficient, skilled and loyal to Cevari. He couldn't help but wonder how Cevari had cemented their devotion to such extremes. He would ask him when he figured out a way to ask that would not offend him. Hey Cevari, why on earth are your men so loyal to you? Yeah, there was a right and wrong way to ask such a thing. Gilriael was certainly crazy about him, but that was different. Cevari was something different to them and the weyrdragon wanted to find out what.

After drinking his fifth drink Gilriael had an idea and decided to share it with his comrades to see what they thought. "You fellows travel as a caravan... Why don't we do that? Maybe we can draw the enemy to US for supplies? And in the meantime... maybe you can make some money," he proposed. "I mean... even if we have already been spotted, its not like we are dressed like any kind of officials or soldiers. Maybe we are just scouting out the roads to make sure its safe to travel after all the recent rains. It's something you may have done anyway, right?" His solicit got some nods from the guards. "Beauty is... if they can detect lies, we won't be lying... You really are a caravan. I am just along for the ride with my beau," he grinned, flashing those pointy canines of his. Aside from having cattish ears, eyes and noses; Elves had cat fangs and sharp teeth like a cat.

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Now Memnoch, who was being ignored by the elven rangers and their 'troop' because they quite simply failed to see him, returned to the child. He had to sniff her out because she had hidden herself well, which pleased him and it showed as he grinned at her when he ducked into the brush with her. "You did very well," he complimented her, whispering. He made himself comfortable in the shady sand beneath the shrubs and dense cluster of palms, happy to be there where it was cooler with her. "You asked me a question before that I never answered. You asked if I had a mother and father. I have. A father who is a mother actually. He is both father and mother. To answer your next question, yes, I love him. Even though most people call him evil, I love him. He isn't evil, though, not really. No more than a lion is evil, or lightning or fire or a storm is evil. We all are what we are, aren't we? Are the rains which killed your parents and trapped you evil? They replenish the desert. Maybe the lives they take are necessary somehow... the cost of keeping such a delicate balance. Who are we to question the wisdom of mother nature and the all maker, after all?" He smiled as he said this. "Things may get dangerous here with those people who came here. Wyrvaust does not trust them and wants them to leave, and they want water..." She was of the desert, he was sure she understood how important water was to people and how the tribes fought

over the smallest springs or oases. "Don't be afraid though. You'll never be in danger." he promised and pet her hair. He then handed her a cherry flavored whip and left her again. Only he popped his face under the brush a moment. "I'll be back." Then he went back to Arilwen and Wyrvaust. Wyrvaust glanced at him when he returned and he smiled at the demon, who looked back to the elf as he waited for him to leave or attack. What else was there? He noticed once again that neither 'Greyfoot' or any of the people with them paid any mind whatsoever to Memnoch. He had to wonder if they even saw him. They couldn't. Only Arilwen, Wyrvaust and Nuni could see him at the moment. Anwaar would be able to see him when they met too. The only ones who COULD see him were those involved in the desires he fulfilled or those he chose to show himself to. He rarely ever did.

He dipped his head in greeting to Arilwen. "Nuni is doing fine." He told Arilwen and smiled warmly. He seemed such a kind and gentle sort of fellow. But what kind was he really? He was what he was is what he was.

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A part of the Swan wanted to go and snatch up her new daughter and demand that Wyrvaust send them home. Memnoch assured her, however, that Nuni was safe and the Swan seemed to trust him. She decided instead to slip her hand into her husband's, squeezing it lightly while they waited for the small army to approach. She hardly knew as much as her husband when it came to the races and traits of others. All she knew was that there were so many different types of people to look at in the oncoming group, and she tried not to look eager. She was still worried, but curious as well.

A ranger approached, introducing himself when Wyrvaust demanded a name. Greyfoot. Fairly literal, huh? That was all that was literal about him. Arilwen could sense the Raven's immediate annoyance when the elf began trying to speak lightly with him. It went downhill very quickly until Wyrvaust demanded that they leave. Arilwen caught the panicked look that flashed across a few faces behind Greyfoot and she remained still beside Wyrvaust, studying Greyfoot. Her mind did reach to her husband's, however. ~My heart, may I question him? There must be a reason he would bring an army into the desert. Perhaps we can allow his people to rest momentarily on the opposite side of the bank while we speak with him. I am certain that you could banish his group with a single word, if needed?~

Arilwen would wait for his answer. If he refused and insisted the group leave, she would say nothing more. BUT if he allowed her to question the man, she would tilt her head a little and study Greyfoot. "Tell your men that they may regroup on the opposite side of the lake, for a short time. I suggest that you strongly encourage them to remain in one group and away from us." She folded her hands in front of her. "Tell me why you are here, really. An army in the desert is not just looking for a place to belong. Were you banished from your mountain? If you are not honest, we will know. And I do not appreciate liars and sweet talkers in the land of my children." Her voice was cool, but not entirely rude. Not yet, anyhow.

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Wyrvaust almost laughed when his wife asked him if she could speak to the cheeky elf. It just felt so strange to be asked such a thing when he did not feel like he controlled the speech of anyone. ~"The Swan never requires her husband's consent

to speak at will,"~ he assured her in that mental channel they shared. The demon then turned his eyes on the elf as Arilwen spoke to him and he agreed to her terms. His people seemed satisfied for the moment and went to the opposite bank of the spring filled lake of rocks, sand, pebbles and the crystal clear water the oasis was named after. Wyrvaust guarded it carefully for a reason. No soap unless made from plant oils was to touch the water. No mud but only sand and grit was to be washed off in the lake. Where the springs spilled into a shallow stream which vanished beneath an outcrop of rocks mud could be washed from one's clothes. No piss or shit was to touch the water unless it came from fish. Even the wild animals sensed the purity of the spring water and emptied their bladders and guts elsewhere. There was no cleaner or sweeter water in the desert if not all Morendor. Indeed the water had a powerful healing quality to it.

"No one may wash in the lake. Only drink. They may wash in the stream, but not evacuate." He instructed, making the rules for them even more rigid than they actually were. "I will eat anyone who defies these laws." He added. The elf stared long at him before he nodded. Oh he understood, and realized just then what no amount of trying to read the neffari had exposed. He was a demon. With a wave of his hand and upnod he ordered his company to dispatch to the north bank as the lord and lady of the oasis had ordered.

When Arilwen asked him in more detail why they were there, he leaned against a palm and laced his arms across his chest. "We are here recruiting for our cause." He finally admitted. His eyes then locked on Wyrvaust. "A cause which you no doubt would oppose. We seek to beat back the Achonian forces which invade our lands, enslave, subjugate, possess, dominate, and slaughter our people, and to unite ALL people who would be free against them. I doubt you being a demon would understand. You who eat the flesh of the native born and mortal kind. You did just threaten to eat us if we disobeyed your mandates... I do not take it idly. I know you mean it. My cause is a righteous one. It IS just. The walls between Morendor and Acheron have slipped and if we do nothing we shall all be slaves and food for your people. I imagine I am your enemy and you are mine. Shall you still let us pass peaceably through your lands? We shall harm no one who doesn't try to harm us first. We simply offer a choice to all free people. All we bring to your land are words and the means to defend ourselves if attacked." He was ready for a fight if it came but he was not lying when he said he would not light the fire. Oh he was aware that recruiting could fan plenty of flames, but he was trying to be discreet about it and until now had been quite successful. He could have lied to them, or tried, but his instincts had told him it would be a bad idea here, that and the way their dead zone had failed over the oasis and JUST the oasis. "Allow us to refill our water supply, gather some food, and we shall leave." He vowed and he was an elf of his word when he gave it.

"Words are as powerful as any weapon..." Wyrvaust hissed.

"But if you fear them then you must question all that you are." Greyfoot disputed. "If you fear words your power is only an illusion."

"He never said he feared them." Wyrvaust had him know. "But people are birds who when they hear one side of a thing flock to it." The demon went on to say.

Greyfoot laughed, amused by his analogy. "And what is your people's side, demon?"

"My people? What people are these IT speaks of? This is my person, my wife. My children are my people. My king is my people. Do we eat and enslave people? Sometimes. We eat and enslave our enemies and criminals. What does the eagle do with its enemies and prisoners? The Raven cannot speak for Acheron, for that is not his country. THIS is his country." and he pointed at the sand and gestured to the desert all around them. "Speak NOT to our people, not because he fears the invaders words, but their lies, for speaking against a thing when the truth of that thing is barely known is as good as any lie."

"I see what ye are saying," the ranger was not unreasonable. "What if ye sent an ambassador of thy own with us? So the people can hear both sides of things and make an educated decision?" he suggested.

"What ambassador?" Wyrvaust's tones darkened. He felt like he was being wrapped around the elf's finger.

"Why any of your choosing." The ranger went on to say.

Wyrvaust looked at Arilwen. "Is this a good or bad idea?" he looked to her to decide, because the chaos in his mind wouldn't allow him to see a clear path through this whole affair. He would rather just make them leave the desert altogether. "Marsol would never allow this... They should leave..." Or would he? Did Marsol fear their words? He doubted it. What would Marsol do...? He was asking himself. Eat the whole lot of them probably, he laughed inside as he thought this. Times like these Wyrvaust wished HE could turn into a dragon and solve things Marsol's way.

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Nuni hugged her knees and peered out through the leaves at her basket. The hare had calmed for now and she yawned, feeling bored. Not afraid, only restless. She was starting to hate this oasis. She wanted to go to her new home with her bird family. Too many people showed up here. She was thankful for Memnoch showing up though. Speak of the devil! His head popped into her hiding spot and she smiled broadly at his compliment. He settled down beside her and would see that she had been working on more strings. Thicker this time. The ones that were finished here being tied around her wrists and ankles like bracelets. Her dark eyes met his when he brought up his parents. A person that sounded mysterious, but Memnoch seemed to love. Her nerves felt raw when he mentioned her parents... But he was right. The desert gave and the desert took away. He warned her that things might get dangerous, but that she would be safe.

What was this thing he handed her? Nuni had never had candy before. She looked at it, then sniffed. It smelled tangy. She poked her tongue against it, then looked surprised. It was sweet and tart. Deciding that she liked it, she began sucking a small length of it.

Arilwen smiled when her husband told her that she hardly needed to ask. ~I would hardly want to tell him to stay if you wish for him to go.~ She saw wary relief in the faces of the men behind Greyfoot when they were dismissed to drink. The heat of the desert could drive people mad. The elf split no hairs while explaining why he was there. Arilwen winced. Great. The man wasn't leaving her much opportunity to ease Wyrvaust from his alert state.

A hand circled her husband and rested on his lower back when his rage threatened to boil over. "What is to say that our ambassador would be treated well? Kept safe? " They would be outnumbered. ~I feel as if we have two choices, my Raven. Eat them all and risk angering many others, dragging them into the desert for revenge.... Or send someone we trust to try to sway them and not allow them to alter the minds of others.~

She was getting a headache. Memnoch appeared and she smiled at him when he assured her that Nuni was fine. "I thank you, sincerely." That took some weight from her shoulders.

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Wyrvaust was getting a stress headache himself, and it actually showed as he rubbed his palm against his brow rather vigorously. The elf meanwhile kept a cool head, despite the extreme danger he felt he and his people may have found themselves in. There was obvious power here, and he wondered if all of it came from the demon he already decided was quite mad, though his mate seemed sound of mind, and she smelled like a few among his own, like the Tsetar, but she was not Tsetar. Or at least he didn't think she was. He had never met a female Tsetar. What few understood (and he was no exception) was that Tsetar weren't really male or female, they were both and neither, but most did look male, though some so pretty in the faces they looked more feminine than others. Nephelim and Sephiroth meanwhile could be male, female or bigendered.

Wyrvaust was staring rather hard at the elf when he answered Arilwen's question. "It is our pledge as members of the Greyhaven Court that we never speak a lie else it is to save a life. You will know your ambassador shall be safe because I guarantee it in the name of my king Darmeos and the Mythaen people. I would never dishonor my king's good name." he vowed.

Wyrvaust didn't doubt the elf's promise. What he doubted was allowing these people to roam freely in his homeland spreading their 'words'. He was unsure what Marsol would think of it, or his king the Morning Star for that matter. The Morning Star hadn't really made his mind known in these matters of war that Wyrvaust knew of. He respected the elves... but he was also the king of Acheron, and these people claimed to be enemies of Acheron. "Why is the elf and its people enemies of Acheron? Who EXACTLY does it proclaim to be an enemy OF?" Wyrvaust wished to know, his eyes still narrowed on the elf.

"Acheron." The elf answered.

"Why Acheron? Acheron is a realm of many independant nations ruled by various overlords which one king resides over, but the all maker is not always in complete control of all the kingdom's factions. How does the elf know that Acheron's king is not subject to an action which he is not united in? Is the elf's king Darmeos in control of ALL the elves? If one said they were at war with the elven nation would it not ask with which nation?"

The elf stared back at Wyrvaust. He had not expected to hear such an argument from a demon, nor had he ever considered Acheron a realm of divided nations, but as one nation under one ruling godhead. Fact was, the elf was more right than Wyrvaust



was, but the elf could not help but wonder if Wyrvaust knew more than he did about it, being a demon. Wyrvaust did in fact know exactly how Acheron worked politically. The Morning Star was sovereign ruler, more a prince than king actually, because the only king in Acheron was Acheron itself, and though the kingdom was divided among its princes, they ALL answered to the one and only high prince and true proxy of Acheron, the Morning Star. Wyrvaust told the truth... the kingdom was divided among its princes, only he failed to mention that the Morning Star ruled them all, but Wyrvaust did believe it was true that Maelmorda could not always be in control of the other princes. No one knew that Maelmorda chose when and when not to BE in control, to force his will on others. Whose side was Maelmorda on in the war of man vs. Acheron? Maybe he was on no one's side. Maybe he was on neither side. Maybe he just wanted to see what would happen. Or maybe he was helping the side he had chosen without revealing himself. Whatever the case, Wyrvaust felt that not ALL of Acheron was waging war against the mortals. That if any part was it was a small fraction, otherwise the Army of Man would have surely been crushed by now.

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"Acheron's lord knows what his subjects do, and is therefore condoning all actions taken by them by not stopping it," Greyfoot insisted.

"And it KNOWS everything about Acheron does it? KNOWS the mind of its prince and all its overlords? Pfft. Only a fool would ever think such a thing, and the Raven for one shall not suffer fools in HIS chieftain's desert! Let the ranger's people drink and rest he will, for the length of ONE HOUR, but LEAVE the Desert of Fire the elf and his company SHALL without further sojourn or delay. Westward travel, ever west until the desert borders cross, or food for dragons and carrion it and its entire lot shall become..." He decided at last and with final resolution. He would not suffer them in his king's desert, period.

His eyes locked on Arilwen. "Will his mate support the Raven's pronouncement?"

The elf shook his head but after inhaling a deep breath, he agreed to obey the demon. He could have ordered his people to take the oasis and kill or capture the demon and his wife, but something powerful within the elf told him not to start a

conflict here. He had a terrible feeling in fact that nothing here was as it seemed. That should all 325 of their arms attack just the two, it would somehow end badly for HIS people instead of the demon and his wife. Elves, especially old ones like Erebor, which was his birth name, had preternatural instincts and perception. "We shall leave within the hour." And it wouldn't be a moment too soon in his opinion. In fact, he was going to urge his people fill their canteens, casks and water bladders, and gather as much food as they could find as quickly as possible so they could return to the desert where their dead zone and other defenses functioned. Here only those worn or tattooed on their flesh did still work, and that bothered the ranger a great deal. Though he could not name it, there was something uncanny at the oasis.

Wyrvaust was glad to hear that the elf was willing to pull out. He waited for the elf to leave them and join his people then wrapped a tight arm around Arilwen. "When they are gone, the Raven shall call on one of the dragons to guard this site and he and his Swan shall take the girl and the white devil and go home..." He would ask Gilriael to handle the people in the corridor for the time being. If they wanted the Raven's counsel they would just have to camp out a few days to get it.

That white devil in the meantime went back to the child as promised and guided her out of the bushes to a well protected clearing where the spring tumbled over rocks in pretty little falls which poured into the creek that fed the small but perfectly pristine lake where the people now filled their containers. Memnoch sat down on the sand with her and took the basket from her. "I think this hare is not meant to die today. Why don't we let it go? Your new parents the Raven and the Swan will feed us well when we get home, I am sure." He handed the basket back to her. "Your decision. You caught it. By the way... Did you like the strawberry whip?" If she looked confused he would explain better. "The sweet I gave you. It's candy. I have a habit for it." You'd never know he was a candy junky by his strong white teeth.

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Arilwen stood quietly while Wyrvaust began to question the elf and WHY he was so against Acheron. She couldn't help the feeling of pride spread through her chest as he made clear and thoughtful points... then proceeded to reinstruct the elf and his people to leave after they had refueled. Greyfoot looked to Arilwen to ask if she backed her husband's decision and she gave him a firm nod. "Of course I do. Take as much water as you need and safe journey." She wouldn't wish them ill, but she did want them gone. She wanted to take her family and their new pale friend and go home into the safe confines of their walls. Once the elf returned to his group she turned to Wyrvaust and took his hands into hers, squeezing them between their bodies. "I think that my Raven is clear of heart and mind today. He speaks truthfully and plainly, for all to understand, and his words of returning home are a welcome sound." She placed a kiss on each of his knuckles.

Nuni was contemplating a nap when she saw Memnoch shove his head back into the underbrush, his hand extending to grip her small one. She rose and stepped out, going to immediately fetch and lid her basket with the hare in it so that she could take it along. The child looked pleasantly surprised by the tiny waterfall and settled into the sand, hugging her basket to her chest. Memnoch's comment about suggesting that the hare was not meant to die made her shoot him a dark look. In

the desert, meat was as scarce as water, depending on the area. She had worked hard to catch this animal, and he was mentioning letting it go. "No." She squeezed her basket tighter, until he assured her that the Swan and Raven would probably have enough to feed them upon their return. Did Memnoch know them? Where did they live? She struggled quietly for a few minutes, then lifted the lid. The hare was hunched down and shaking violently with fear. Nuni gave an annoyed grunt and slowly tipped the basket to the sand before watching the hare dart off in a flash. Her one desire was to become a great hunter and gatherer and to support her family, but she was letting food go. It felt unnatural.

It wasn't hard to distract an eight year old, however, and the mention of the strawberry whip made her squint, as if she was trying to figure out what he meant. Oh, that sweet skinny food! She lit up. "It was delicious. I thought it was a flimsy rope. I sucked on it until it came apart, then I ate it. Wherever did you get it?"

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Wyrvaust smiled when his wife assured the stranger that she supported her mate's decision. His eyes warmed when she complimented his actions. With a slight tilt of his head he pulled her against himself by both arms and kissed the top of her head. For a while he just cradled his chin over her crown and held her in his arms, this while he contacted one of the younger dragons in the tribe, Flame Eye, and asked if she would watch over Clear Water for a few days. The dragon spoke back to the voice in her mind that she would guard over the area and not long after the hot air off her wings could be felt in strong drafts above the oasis before she flew a little way off and landed on a dune in easy sight of the spring filled lake and the palm gardens surrounding it. She was a sight to behold spread out on the sands with her red scales reflecting against the sunlight and her massive wings of red hues with black creases flattened out across the sand in restful pose. She snorted a breath of air at the scent of humans which violated her senses before she shook out her long neck and relaxed against the dune behind her. The people at the oasis made a point to rush their efforts even more now that a dragon had come, but did not halt as Greyfoot hastened their tasks by stirring his hands against the air, himself and half of his fifty rangers keeping their eye on the dragon which had arrived. They had seen enough dragons to know when they were being hostile or just landing. Flame Eye had flown in like she owned the oasis and made no fuss about landing and laying herself in the deep sand by a large outcrop of bedrock which broke from the sand at the northern edge of the lake, whereas the people were on the west bank while Wyrvaust and his three had made camp on the south side of the clear turquoise waters. The clearing Memnoch and Nuni were in was on the east side of the pool however, where the springs sprung and went leaping down those lovely little falls and stream to fill the small lake basin.

Memnoch watched the child release her catch reluctantly. "I will make sure they know what a fine hunter you are and that you caught a fat hare," he promised, as if reading her mind. But maybe it was just the look on her face. "You will catch more." He smiled a little. His wide lips broke into that iconic jester-like smile of his when she asked where he got the candy. "From a sweetshop in Castleguard. Wonderful place. They have ALL kinds of candy there. They even have candy for grownups." Candy with liquor in them or other safe intoxicants. Safe as in not poisonous or toxic. There were no illegal substances in Morendor, only the illegal use of them as in using a poison to murder someone, or a drug to disable and rob

someone. Some of Memnoch's favorite candies had Anrhi or rock-rose oil in them. "I will take you there next time I go if its alright with your folks." He proposed.

Wyrvaust retreated from the western edge of the oasis and with his wife returned to their camp which they found empty at first. Wyrvaust took advantage of the moment and swept his wife into his arms for a steamy kiss, until Memnoch and Nuni rejoined them that is from the beautiful clearing they had waited for them in. Nuni could now see the people on the other side of the lake and they her. A couple of women waved and smiled to her. The people across the lake did not seem unfriendly but watchful and very busy. They still couldn't see the albino devil holding her hand, nor would they ever unless he decided to favor one of them at some time in their life.

"We are leaving," Wyrvaust announced to them, and letting go of Arilwen he went to gather what few things they had left scattered around... namely his clothes. He was half naked if you remember, wearing no more than a loin cloth and sarong tied around his waist. His upper body, legs and feet alike were bare.

Memnoch looked to Nuni and smiled. "We are going to see our new home soon. I can't wait." The excitement in his tones was genuine. Devils could be like children at times, and in that Memnoch was the rule rather than the exception.

Wyrvaust glanced at Memnoch. He still had his doubts about him, namely because he had a suspicious mind, but he could see that the devil was truly looking forward to seeing his new home. "We have not talked cost as yet," he mentioned to their legendary acquaintance.

"Name it," Memnoch dared.

It then occurred to Wyrvaust that Memnoch might prove very valuable to him. He could meet with all these annoying people for him. "The Snowbird can be the Raven's voice," he suggested.

Memnoch's cheerful expression faded. "But we... I mean I have to be deceitful to go that road," he said regretfully. "And I would rather not... How about money...?"

"Said the Snowdevil name it. This is what the Raven most needs from the white devil. Why must he deceive to act as his spokesperson anyway?" the demon wanted to know.

"Because he... hrum, I cannot allow myself to be seen by anyone but my patrons so would have to assume a false form and identity to do so. My appearance would be a lie, my name, my purpose. I would be a lie. I don't like being untruthful. It's a bad habit to get into." One he tended to enjoy far too much.

"The Snowbird's purpose as the Raven's representative would not be a lie, so a new persona would be created for a new purpose. How is that a lie? Is it not more like trying on a new face?" Wyrvaust justified. He really wanted Memnoch to be his voice. Gilriael never stuck around long so his aid in the matter would only be temporary at best.

Memnoch screwed up his strangely handsome face and locked his pale green eyes on Arilwen. "Really, is he always this slippery with his rationalizations? How is

making up a whole new person for a job not being deceitful?" he wanted to hear it from her how to live a lie was not a lie. It was a weird subject actually that must have sounded even more curious to the child in their midst. She was no dummy.

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Nuni looked gobsmacked when Memnoch proceeded to tell her about an entire shop with sweets. "Like...a whole ROOM?" She heard what sounded like heavy wings and felt a shift in the air, but it passed by the time she looked up. She asked questions about this Castleguard place while she used one of her thick strings to tie to her basket trap. She wanted to be able to sling it across her body like a travel bag so that she could have free hands.

The new friends made way back towards their camp where her new parents were having personal moments to themselves. She was eager about going home and it seemed Memnoch was as well. The child was surprised when she saw so many people across the lake. When some waved at her she lifted her hand absent mindedly in reply.

Arilwen had to purse her lips when Memnoch was dealt the payment for his new home. So no one else could see him but them? Memnoch immediately asked Arilwen if Wyrvaust was always this way, causing Arilwen to grind at him. Her opinion? She paused so that she could think of how to respond.

Nuni was listening and decided to interject. She lanced Memnoch with a hard gaze. "If only we can see you and you want to take me to the sweet shop, I will look like I am wandering around alone. That might cause problems. So would taking on another form be lying to people? You would be keeping me safe."

Arilwen almost hooted with laughter. She coughed to cover it up. Nuni eyes Memnoch...until movement on a far dunes caught her eye. If her eyes got any bigger, her brows would touch the back of her neck. "Is that a DRAGON? " She hissed. Oh, she looked like she was going to bounce out of her skin. She was half terrified and half thrilled. It was beautiful. "Is it going to eat someone?"

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\*\*\*\*\*JD

Nuni's amazement made Memnoch laugh, and his laughter almost always sounded like a mad cackle. "Like a whole house with a huge kitchen where they make the candy. You will see."

Back at camp the child answered in place of her new mother. The logic she used on him made him arch a high brow. "You people have a talent for proving anything true. Fine, I shall choose a form for myself.. and call myself... hmmm... Golly. Yeah. How is this?" All of the sudden he was standing there as a Neffari, only he had preserved his albino pigment and pale lime coloured eyes, so his long curling hair was snow white. In the Shaama tongue his name translated to Ahlahid. "Ahlahid at your service," he reintroduced himself with a proper bow then straightened with a crooked smile. "But you may call me Golly." His sudden 'now you see me' appearance startled some of the people across the lake who were already nervous enough with the dragon's presence. Some of them gathered what they already had and hurried off to join those already gathering for their exodus. Memnoch frowned. "See, this is always how people react to me. What's wrong with this

form?" He swayed around to get a better look at himself but looked up suddenly as Wyrvaust plopped a hand down on his shoulder.

"Nothing. People are fools. Come, let us go," he beckoned, and holding Arilwen's hand he led his little band into a sand gate which raised up before them like a runed doorway made of sandstone leading into their very own garden, only it was a doorway no one else but them could enter and which would collapse once they cleared it.

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\*\*\*\*Willow

Golly? Nuni looked pleased when his form changed. He still looked like Memnoch in color...especially the eyes. "Nothing is wrong with you. Your hair is pretty." Nuni smiled up at him, then took his hand. Arilwen slid her own hand into Wyrvaust's and squeezed it hard. They were eager to get home with their extended family.

Nuni had never travelled by gate. She jumped and grabbed Memnochs hand when she saw it open. Oh it only got worse when they stepped through. She grabbed onto Memnochs waist and gripped it for dear life. She wanted to close her eyes, but she was too terrified. By the time they stepped out, Nuni was clinging to Memnoch like a wet, pissed off cat.

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\*\*\*\*\*JD

Memnoch had tried parading in his true form but he'd had too many and too precarious results arise. He was pegged immediately by most for what he was for one thing, and that was seldom good when the people who were doing the recognizing were mortals. He beamed at the girl when she said his hair was pretty. "That is very good of you to say," he thanked her. Wasn't he the polite devil? Indeed he crouched when he clasped Nuni's hand to kiss her knuckles and with a smile straightened and led the girl through the gate. Nuni was the reason Wyrvaust had used a gentler gate than an abyss portal. Terramancers were rare enough that the demon felt confident using an earth corridor. The look on Memnoch's face when they arrived in the garden outside the kitchen entrance was priceless. Having the child gripping him like a scared cat struck him odd all over and with dumbfound rounded eyes, skewed lips and arched brows, he pried her off of himself, and those fingers digging into him just didn't want to let go! He was holding her away from him by her shoulders when he finally detached her, and stared her in the face with her feet dangling midair off the ground. "I forget that some people have little experience with mages, and yet... it didn't surprise you when I imagined myself into a brand new shape. I guess that little droppy feeling can be unsettling, but such gateways are quite safe unless you get lost between here and there... or someone intercepts it, or they collapse with you still in them... or they merge you with a solid object..." he listed all the things that could go wrong, ignoring the 'look' Arilwen shot him. "...but those things hardly ever happen." He rambled then put her down and afterwards the albino took a turn around the garden, stopping to smell the flowers. He made various comments as he went... "Nice..." "Oh lookie, how pretty." "Oops, ouch, hey those spines are sharp." He sucked on his middle finger after that one. He stopped and tried out one of the stone benches. "My this is comfy for a rock." He cackled then laid down on it, his head hanging over the end to spill his long hair onto the sand. He laid there a little while gazing

at Nuni upside-down while Wyrvaust went to get his lovely wife some water from the little basin of rock the garden spring poured into. It was from the same spring which recycled through the dragon font in the fountain chamber. "Dag it's hot out here..." he griped and did a legs over head tumble off the bench to land on his feet. He was as limber as he was well balanced and athletic. He had basically built himself a human version of himself.

Wyrvaust took the dipper from Arilwen when she'd had her fill of the refreshingly pure, cold water, then after putting it back in the grey marble basin, he wrapped his beloved with an arm and waved to Memnoch and Nuni. "This way," he said, heading to the kitchen door. "We shall show the girl and Snowdevil to their home."

Thence began their tour of the keep. Later they would be shown the rest of the subterranean city which lay beyond the Sapphire Keep. The entire citadel had yet to be named, but Wyrvaust had been calling it Gemstone Hold, which was fitting seeing how Wyrvaust had a large depository filled with piles of precious and semiprecious minerals and metals he had removed when he'd excavated the city, which was only halfway finished. Few knew that it had been one of Saaed's ancestors that had sacked the city and killed off thousands of Shaamae to claim the wealth of Sapphires and other minerals buried there. Several wars had been waged over the mines the city was turned into. Sapphire canyon came to be known as the cursed canyon when Marsol took control of the desert and buried the mines beneath rubble and sand many ages before he and Wyrvaust met.

The first room they reached from the east garden was the kitchen. There, Nuni and Memnoch were fed and fed well, and did that devil like to eat, especially anything sweet. In fact, he poured honey all over his Ham. Next they were shown the lord and lady's part of the keep, and the large chamber across from theirs that was now Nuni's. Wyrvaust assured the girl that they would make it nice for her. The only thing in it now was a full sized bed (on the floor Neffari style with sheer drapes all around it), and a huge trunk three Nunis could easily fit in. There was also a deep built in closet.

Next, they showed Memnoch to his wing. It needed work too but the devil found it perfect. He flopped onto the bed when his bedchamber was shown and proclaimed his satisfaction. "I love it! Sold! Where do I sign? My voice for these wonderful accommodations!"

"How long does the Snowbird think he will be staying?" Wyrvaust asked.

"As long as he and you lets me stay," he replied. Wyrvaust assumed that by 'he', he meant Maelmorda, when in fact he meant someone else altogether. Anwnn was Memnoch's highest authority although he also answered to Acheron through Killian and Maelmorda as friends. He loved his father-s and obeyed him but Anwnn was HIS king.

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\*\*\*Willow

It would take some force for Memnoch to peel Nuni from his waist when they arrived from the garden, and her bare, sand covered toes dangled in the air as he held her up and eyed her. Oh, the physical change of the demon had been warned ahead of

time. That AIR HOLE? Nope. She looked at him with huge eyes when he began explaining the only things that could go wrong...and the list made her want to throw up. Arilwen shot Memnoch a look while she mentally warned him that she might pinch of his tongue if he didn't stop right this instant. Ah, he did, then put the girl back on the ground so that he could go check out flowers. She was a little rattled, so Arilwen touched her hair and smiled down at her. "If you hold someone's hand when you go through, it's nearly impossible to be separated from them." She assured her. That made Nuni feel better and she went on a flower hunt with the devil that had just spooked the crap out of her.

Nuni's mood changed when Memnoch swung upside down on a stone bench and it made her giggle. She turned her head as far upside down as she could to look at him. "Don't fall --" Ass over teakettle he went, landing on his feet. Nuni decided that she didn't need to warn him to be careful of falling. It was the kitchen they entered next, which was bigger than her parents' old hut. Smells. Oh the smells. Someone had made food. They all sat and Nuni nearly wiggled out of her skin when the plate of food was being dished up. She snatched a piece of ham after thanking her new parents, then stuffed it in her mouth. Arilwen watched her eat like a starving animal, then looked at Memnoch, whose ham was nearly floating in honey. She snorted and let them finish.

Nuni was almost .... nervous about how large this place was. She had been at the Oasis, feeling sorry for her new parents who didn't have sleeping mats. It seemed that they were fine without those sleeping mats. The Swan and Raven had a large bed chamber, and it made Nuni feel comforted to know that her room was going to be right across the corridor. Oh, but when they opened the door, her eyes went massive, like dark plates. A huge bed in her OWN room. She went over to squat beside it, running her fingers through the curtains. "This is mine?" She whispered, looking back at them. She didn't have much time to process it because Memnoch was insisting that it was HIS turn to look at his room. Nuni rose and followed them.

Memnoch would get his own wing. Why would one person need a WHOLE wing? It was hard for a child to process. But she dissolved into giggles as he bounced on his bed. Hopefully he would stay for a long time.

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\*\*\*\*\*JD

Memnoch had chosen the guest bedroom for himself because it was closer to his friends. He already had a long corridor to walk through to reach the entry hall. After that was a large sitting room which the bedroom he opted for was off of. West of the sitting room was a large area with a walk in fireplace that had once been a library, then north from that room was a huge dining hall and kitchen, then west off the banquet room was a master bedroom with a bathhouse and walk in closet. Memnoch hoped he could stay a very long time too. Memnoch knew what to do with a whole wing! He would fill the library with books again for one. He'd use the giant banquet hall for practicing his martial and arcane disciplines for another, unless he was entertaining guests there. But if Memnoch had it his way, the family of birds would be his only visitors. In fact... despite loving his new home, when Wyrvaust and his wife and their little orphan Nuni withdrew, Memnoch followed right along after them. He didn't get in their way or anything, he just kind of shadowed them, though he'd play with Nuni if she engaged him, or if they needed to attend to grownup matters... such as... paying a visit to their other



'guest' Dantes.

With his hand gently riding on the small of Arilwen's back, Wyrvaust guided Arilwen to the roughly excavated tower Dantes now resided in, which lie dead east of their chamber's bathhouse, although the only corridor to the tower was accessed from a new room Wyrvaust had opened up south of their bedroom. The fourth of the tower's six floors meanwhile opened to the roof of Cevari's 'Above Ground' floor overhead. The tunnel which led to the tower from the newly opened room went dead east then curved north where it entered the tower's southwest wall. There the lord and lady of sapphires met up with the demon Wyrvaust had decided to call toad. In fact, he addressed him by that moniker first thing. "Yazi, I see it fulfilled its promise and relented to its prison. Now it must obey its master. Who is its master?" Yazi was Shaamah for toad.

Dantes had stood from the rubble he sat on and dusted himself off. He bowed to Wyrvaust. "You are my warden, Wyrvaust Aalamea. I obey only you until I walk free."

"Imen naagul szaronu dometh imvu sidra Grym naa imaa ronu Beduiin." He told Dantes in his native tongue that he (he called him son of the snake here) would obey his servant Grym as he would the Raven. He wanted to see if he understood.

Dantes nodded. "As the Raven commands." He understood.

"Carry itself to the kitchen and feed itself, then return to its tower," Wyrvaust commanded, but just as Demascus started away, he added, "But ask first if it can do anything for the Swan."

Dantes swiveled to face Arilwen, who he also bowed to. "Is there anyway I might serve you, my lady?" He smiled a little but if there was any warmth in his eyes it was either imagined or well feigned. It also annoyed him to be called it all the time but he largely ignored it. Fact was, Dantes rarely felt emotion like most people did. Oh he had passion, he felt emotion, but it was not human emotion. He could be stone cold or on fire, depending. Where Anna was concerned he felt plenty. He was trying very hard NOT to obsess over her, but he WAS smitten. He just hadn't mentioned it to her or Mendorin. Wyrvaust and Arilwen were the first ones he had admitted it to and he wasn't even sure why he had, when what it was, was that it mattered a great deal to him that he felt that way, and Wyrvaust was important to him as well. Why when he barely even KNEW Wyrvaust? Because he was his clan brother, a clan superior who had a reputation for being fair and good to his people, and that meant everything to Demascus.

Memnoch meanwhile was back in that big empty room, the one before the tower where Wyrvaust had told them to wait. There was nothing in the room but a few shelves holding a few very old books. The white devil had picked up a piece of purple schist and was drawing on a large, empty, light grey, marble wall. So far he had drawn the beginnings of an oasis, including waterfalls tumbling over rocks as he recaptured the clearing at Clear Water Oasis. He was telling Nuni how she could help him paint it. He was a fair though not incredible artist. Still, he could paint some beautiful murals.

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\*\*\*Willow

Nuni looked tickled when Memnoch saw his wing and floated from one room to the next. He loved it. Nuni was trying to wrap her little head around how big the Sapphire bird nest must be. If they were giving away an entire WING to someone...how many wings were there? She turned to follow her new parents out of Memnoch's new home and in turn, Memnoch followed her. They were left in a large room while the two birds headed upwards, and Nuni watched them before looking over at her new friend. He was going to make this room exciting. That was the name of the game. The little dove decided to settle down next to him, watching him draw. That made her smile. "You draw well. Who taught you?" He was going to want her to help paint. She frowned. "I've never painted." She didn't want to ruin his pretty picture. She loved watching it appear in front of her.

Arilwen took Wyrvaust's hand and headed upstairs. Dantes was there, just as instructed. The conversation that proceeded from there made Arilwen want to squirm out of her skin. She felt torn on trusting Wyrvaust's instincts and feeling bad for this person for the treatment he was getting. Dantes was forced to turn and ask Arilwen if she needed anything and she met his eye before shaking her head. Once he exited, she turned to the Raven and frowned. "I feel as if we need to tread lightly, my heart. Dantes has been honest with us. He hasn't put up any resistance. If we treat him badly, how will we get Anna back? I am worried for her." She stepped forward and wrapped her arms around Wyrvaust's waist, her cheek on his chest.

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When asked who had taught him to do art, Memnoch drew a wide arch with the bit of rock then a slope, a dune in the background of his oasis. "I taught myself..." Hence he scratched some lines on the walls that quickly began to take shape as a dragon, Flame Eye to be exact. Memnoch tipped his head over sideways to eye Nuni when she said she had never painted. "I will guide you. When we start painting, we shall start with the sky and work our way towards our foreground, that which is in front of the mural." By the way the sketch was panning out one could already see that the scene would have a lot of depth, given the play of light was right, and Memnoch was as good as he was because he was a master of capturing light and shadows and giving his work dimension. Realism is where he failed, but even in lacking that, he captured the sum of things, the quality and character extremely well. "You just have to imagine what the sky and sand looks like to you as you paint it," he said. He began to fill in some highlights with a white piece of clay he had just plucked from the floor. Where the rubble had been removed, plenty of pebbles still littered the floor. I will show you where the light should be most evident. Always imagine your light coming from natural sources and one direction. If the sun is there... the light should be on this side of things. See? But if there is a secondary light source, say... a fire, or a mage's light sphere, then you adjust for that light and the brightness or colour of it and the shadows it casts on the opposite side of things, but the sun is always the main source of light unless it's at night. Our scene here is in broad daylight. I want to capture the sun on the water, on the dragon, against the dunes, and so on."

Now while Memnoch was giving lessons Wyrvaust was unintentionally giving lessons of another kind to his wife, lessons in leadership. Though Wyrvaust would never admit it and even deny it until blue in the face, he was a fair leader when he applied himself. What kept him from being a good leader was his insanity and the demon

blood which made a cannibal of him. That and he just HATED the role. The only lives he wanted control over were those of his family. His eyes cut on Arilwen with concern when she showed Dantes so much compassion. She was a compassionate creature, and he loved that about her, but it was also part of what let her get sucked into dangerous and undesirable situations. "It is our prisoner, not a guest, and must prove its honor and intentions. We shall not mistreat him but nor shall we treat him with kindness which he may well take advantage of. We do not know if Yazi can be trusted and with Mendorin as his master we should NOT the gift of doubt or forgiveness grant him. Whether it was Mekkor or Mendorin who violated the Raven's trust and bond all those ages ago, Mendorin IS a great evil and greater peril. If what the son of the snake says is true, then Mendorin IS Mekkor... perhaps an independant side of him, but Mekkor still. That is the nature of proxies incarnate. They are a double of their maker. Never forget that, and Dantes is the LOYAL acolyte of Mekkor's proxy. Never doubt his loyalty to Mendorin. Never not for a moment." Wyrvaust cupped Arilwen's face in his palms and pierced her gaze with his dark blue eyes. "They are not here for us. They are here for themselves... here to take me back. They are clan demons, that is what clan demons do, but Marsol, my Swan and the children are the Raven's clan now and forever." He hugged her tight then kissed her. "Never trust him, I beg." He would keep Dantes as leverage to get Anna back then release him to his sire, but he would kill Dantes if Anna was not returned to them.

After kissing her deeply again, he showed Arilwen the rest of the tower, one arm ever coiling her. Their was a floor below the one level with their's, a sort of basement that could have accessed the level below which Cevari's men occupied IF Wyrvaust had unblocked the door and corridor leading to the Defender's Hold. The tower basement was very cool, a good place to store food. It was also very clean, finished, though without light. Wyrvaust was using a light spell to show her the tower, though several torches burned in sconces on the first floor where Dantes had waited. The room Dantes had been sitting in was one large circular room with a rather tall pile of rubble in the middle, and a staircase which hugged the wall and wound its way up and down to the other levels, of which there six altogether. The next level up was also incomplete with a pile of rocks against the east wall though the stairwell had been cleared. That floor was divided into three rooms by a T-shaped wall at the center, which some of the rock pile was still blocking. The next floor up (the 4th story) was cleared completely and on the same level as 'Above Ground' the story Cevari occupied. The door to Above Ground was sealed for the time being by a powerful spell. Cevari had a shadow door which opened to the Sapphire Keep's dining room from his floor so did not require the tower access to their floor. Besides, there was a staircase of stone from his balcony to their garden below which gave his brother quick access to their lair. The fifth and sixth levels were also cleared. The fifth was split into two large rooms, and the sixth was one large room with a door that opened to the oasis plateau which formed the natural roof over the entire underground complex. Arilwen had never until now ever even seen their oasis roof. It made Clear Water Oasis look like a sand pit in comparison. Where the tower opened was a low lying area surrounded by a crescent shaped natural wall of rock which waterfalls poured off of into a pool the size of an olympic swimming pool. It could be called a small lake, only the basin was solid rock with a layer of sand carried by the wind, and smooth pebbles formed by crumbling rocks and rushing water, a nature made tumbler. There were huge palms scattered inside and outside of three giant trees found only in the tropical areas called Canopy Trees.

Named by the Tsularian in the Hamantran language Nunqemish (noon-kay-mish), Wyrvaust had been tending the three trees since coming to the canyon, honoring the fact that Nunqemish were protected. They were related to the rare Ivory Tree of Mhas Andoreth. The branches of Canopy Trees when mature like his trio were wide spreading and stout, forming broad umbrella-shaped domes with their leaves and boughs, while the trunks were heavy in girth and not tall. Beautiful trees with succulent magenta and maroon coloured leaves which turn brilliant shades of red in the autumns, these evergreens were only bare if they were dying of disease, or if all the leaves were eaten by animals, none of which Wyrvaust would ever let happen if he could help it. The cupolas of healthy trees like his were so densely crowded with its fleshy, ovate leaves, that little light and almost no precipitation got through their canopies. One could remain dry during rain storms if they took up shelter beneath the gorgeous trees, and the temperature beneath their shade was ten degrees lower, also offering protection to those like Memnoch would could be injured by the harmful rays of the sun.

The bark of the trees was smooth, very tough, and almost white, while the hard, rot resistant wood was pale yellow-orange when green and a deep amber-orange when seasoned, with a texture like ivory. The wood was called amberwood, and sometimes fool's amber. These trees could be found growing alone or in small open copses in the tropics and subtropics, or where they had been planted in temperate areas. They typically grew in savanahs and on soil rich islands such as the Sapphire Oasis. The trees grew very slowly once they matured, which they did fairly quickly in about twenty years, at up to thirty feet high with trunks about five feet wide, and domes even wider than the tree was tall. On average the trunks were 15% the trees height in width. Cupola trees could attain great sizes if they could survive for hundreds or thousands of years. Nunqemish, which also means sanctuary tree, could survive forever theoretically if not ravaged by disease, cut down or defoliated and severely damaged by large herd animals which treasure their succulent leaves. Wyrvaust's three trees were between ninety-five and one-hundred-twenty feet in height with thirty to forty foot wide trunks, which stood fifty yards apart and yet their canopys formed one single huge dome, the ground beneath them covered with thick moss, shade loving flower beds and sandy paths which the pool of clear water was dead center of. There was also a nursery of younger Canopy Trees and a number of fruit trees which filled in and formed a wooded ring around the lake and outter edges of the plateau's cliff walls. Between the half moon rock wall and the cliff, the lake and little woodland was on a huge shelf off the plateau. The Shaamae cared for a ninety foot tall tree in South Haven Morendor, a tree worshipped and guarded by Savannah Shaamae whose village, LhasHashanin, was not far from the tree and the spring it grew near.

Wyrvaust led Arilwen over to the pool where a root from one of the great trees formed a perfect and very comfortable bench. He urged her to sit with him by pulling her into his lap and wrapping her with both of his arms. He leaned back against the massive trunk of the tree. "Finally he has found the chance to show his Swan the heart of their home... Here in the Sapphire Oasis he could live with her and their children forever... but great care must be taken with this place. Never comes the Raven here when danger presses for this is a sacred place that must always be protected. This place has endured since before Marsol knew the world. It is believed to be more ancient than the desert itself. Few even know this place exists." He explained. "On the other side of the rock wall from whence the waters tumble is a cliff almost a thousand feet tall. If someone climbs that cliff they shall meet the wall Beduiin (beh-due-wine) built. The same wall which protects

all the canyon and his family. Anyone who tries to pass that wall shall become the Raven's minion, or his meal." He smiled at that. He missed human flesh. He would take himself on a hunt soon. He hunted alone for a reason. "Come and feel the moss... It is as soft as it looks," he promised and stood when she had left his lap to lead her by her hand to the moss carpet which he knelt down on and brushed her hand over when she stooped with him. He looked at her then with a smolder in his eyes. "If any place can bless us with children... It's this place," he hinted with a charmed grin. If she latched on to his invite he would have her disrobed in no time and fully captured by his insatiable desires amidst the grandeur of that gorgeous atmosphere.

Memnoch meanwhile had broken out the paints, brushes, pallets, water jars, and paint sticks. All of which he plucked out of thin air of course. He didn't travel light, he just traveled with everything he owned at his fingertips within the folds of space. His lair and everything in it was always with him.

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At eight, Nuni had a mind like a giant sponge. But already she felt a little discouraged because she had just met Memnoch and he knew so much, as did the bird parents that had plucked her from the desert. She was SO eager to learn everything that she was seeing, but one could only learn so much at once. Drawing and painting, much like basket weaving, took practice. Still, Nuni listened carefully, smiling when she saw the dragon taking form. It looked like the dragon from the Oasis. "Have you ever met a dragon?" She asked, inspecting the progression of the sketch. "My father said that they are very wise and dangerous. We would see them from time to time, scouting the sands. We would avoid them to ensure that we didn't interrupt what they were doing. I think they are beautiful. I wish I could fly like they do."

Arilwen took in a slow breath. Her husband was explaining to her WHY they couldn't trust Dantes. They wouldn't mistreat him, but they wouldn't treat him well either. Not until he proved himself. Perhaps it was hard for Arilwen because she had not been there or heard of what had been done to her husband by his people. He refused to tell her and she didn't question it. The Swan took his hands and squeezed them, meeting his gaze. "I will not trust him. I swear. I am just...new at ordering someone around." Everyone who came into their home was treated with courtesy and kindness....but this was a different situation.

Once Wyrvaust felt that she had understood what he said, he decided to show her the rest of the tower. Sliding an arm around his waist, she walked with him through each floor. The size of the place STILL amazed her. It had to be overwhelming for Nuni. What she didn't expect to see when she walked through the final door was an oasis all their own. Right on top of them and she had never even known it. Her eyes grew huge when they stepped outside, and she pressed a hand to her cheek. "Is this real?" She whispered. Wyrvaust found that funny and led her over to sit beneath the tree on a thick root. The Sapphire Oasis. The name was beautiful, and all of the names of the trees and the people who had formed this place before were beautiful as well. The moss? Arilwen rose and went to squat down beside her husband, running her fingers delicately over it. She closed her eyes and shivered. She wanted to strip her dress off and roll around in it.

It was as if her husband read her mind, because he mentioned that if ANY place

could bless them with a child, it would be this very spot. The Swan opened her thick lashes and grinned at him. "Would it be wise to defile such a beautiful spot?" What kind of question was that? She threw her head back and laughed when he grabbed onto her and began shedding her clothes. This WAS the perfect place to conceive a child. Once her naked back hit the soft moss, she let out a sigh of pleasure. It felt better than she had expected.

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Memnoch paused and turned to face Nuni with a large brush full of blue paint in hand. "Seen dragons?" He chuckled deeply. "Why yes. I am what some call a dragon rider, and others more accurately a son of the dragon. I ride a winter dragon, name of Aegoth, but he was wounded when I last slept." Died, albeit an evanescent death. "A winter dragon is one who is not a summer dragon, such as Flame Eye," he motioned with both hands towards the hellraptor he had sketched on the wall. "Shadow Dragons, Dusky Dragons, Ice Dragons, and my dragon, who is an unusual case, are winter dragons. All the rest are summer dragons. Aegoth was once Pentari, but I and he with me were cast into the void, a dark, cold, heavy place which changed us. He into a Winter Dragon, and me into a winter devil. Immortals, if very strong and thrown into deep space, deep water, any kind of abyss really, for a very long time, are partially reshaped into something else if they survive the experience. Aegoth will come to me when I call, but I am waiting for him to get better. I do have something very important he asked of me. Perhaps you could help me with it. I think it requires a girl's touch." He reached around as if to grab something off a shelf, only there was none to be seen, and produced a leather bag with two reinforced handles stuffed with soft, clean wool, only there was something in the wool. He held it out to her by both handles. "Be careful with them... they are hard as gems but gems can crack you know. Now... while summer dragons use hot embers to hatch their eggs, winter dragons use ice. Pentari are winter dragons, so Aegoth was one before his... rebirth." Sounded less dark than fall. "Until hatched, they remain dormant, even for thousands of years! Isn't that amazing? And look at them. They look like common rocks. Agate maybe? At least Whitewing's eggs look like agate. Pretty, but not anything anyone would suspect was an egg. Whitewing, That was Aegoth's mate..." when asked if something happened to her, Memnoch sighed a trembling breath, his grief evident. Were those tears pooling in his strange lime juice coloured eyes? Nope, not a single one. He just had shiny eyes. "She was killed by our enemies and we could not save her..." he regretted deeply. "But we were able to save these." He said, as he stuck a hand in the nest bag to give each egg a soft pat. His gaze locked on her. "You interested in helping me hatch these and raise what comes out? There are five eggs. I can create a safe place to keep them. One of them might even choose you to be their daughter... rider remember. You never know. Those who don't choose us we'll have to watch fly away one day." He left Nuni holding the bag and went back to painting.

Wyrvaust had been wanting to share the oasis with Arilwen for a long time, but the right time had never shown itself until now. He wasn't worried about Memnoch. He felt no malice or fell intentions in that devil at all, despite being sure he was a stone cold killer, but so was Wyrvaust. Maybe their reasons for killing were different but their devotion to friends and family was the same. Wyrvaust could tell that Nuni was safe with him because he felt no doubts nagging at him. As for Dante's? Grym and another black minion Archer were shadowing him. Wyrvaust chuckled at the comment his wife made about spoiling a sacred place. "To the

contrary. Love is a hallowed act that shall honor this place." He was no Christian, that's for sure. When Wyrvaust had Arilwen on her back against the velvet green beneath them and her body spread apart and filled with too much of him, his lips came to rest against her ears as breathless, he spoke. "Each time the Raven feels her quivering against himself, it feels like the first... Never shall this demon tire of his fair Swan. To feel himself so deep inside of her... this is Paradise... THIS is Arcadia. YOU are his perfect state of bliss..." Wyrvaust lost himself in her as he always did, so engrossed in drowning her in ecstasy and himself in the bliss she returned that the universe around them melted away, then he slept with her naked under the canopy of leaves which so many species of glow bugs lit up like stars while the actual stars could only be seen between the leaf dome and lofty ground. The mesa they were on was over a thousand feet in the air, and the plateau over the sheer cliff the waterfalls cascaded from was well over that.

When they woke it was morning again and the cool shade which blocked out the sun found Wyrvaust trailing his fingers over his wife, following the contours of her muscles as she slept. When she did awaken, he smiled, his indigo blue eyes gazing at her with an intensity which felt like he was looking straight down inside of her soul. "The Desert Fox had an idea which his dreams led him to. He saw Anwaar in the fine keep he uncovered beneath the garden. He realizes they just moved their son to a new and bigger room to make him happier... but soon he will be grown and need a home of his own. This will keep him close... while allowing him to be independent. Perhaps one day he shall even rule over Sapphire City... when it has been filled with brothers and sisters, friends and guardians." He plucked a stray blade of nutgrass and brushed his wife's cheeks with the soft hairs growing from the swollen seed heads. It was ripe. There was a meadow of it closer to the cliff edge south of them. He laughed when she squirmed, tickled by the grass. He offered it to her. "Eat it," he suggested. It was sweet and nutty, delicious and nutritious. It also had healing and rejuvenating qualities.

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A dragon RIDER? Nuni's jaw dropped open as she gawked up at Memnoch. Had she HEARD him right? The tiny child glanced at the dragon that he had etched on the wall, then looked back at him as he tried to explain the differences between the types of dragons. Winter dragons and summer dragons. She HAD to learn about this. "Are there books that I could find to read about dragons?" Nuni could read at a basic level. That would improve as she lived here, because both Wyrvaust and Arilwen believed very strongly in the power of knowledge. Wyrvaust had charts and etches of different herbs and plants that she could start with as well, many of which grew in their garden that Arilwen tended. "Could we send Aegoth some salve for his wounds? Who helps dragons to heal when they are ill or injured?"

The little dove didn't know what task Memnoch could have that required the assistance of a small girl? She frowned and followed him to the shelf, gasping when he tugged a heavy duty leather bag out of nowhere, extending it to her. Tiny fingers gripped the handles and she couldn't be prepared for how heavy it was. It dropped like...well...a bag of stones, but she locked her back and gritted her teeth to even out her balance. What was in here, bricks? She peeked inside to see round stones nestled in soft cotton. Was this some kind of trick to teach her a lesson? Nuni glanced up at the winter devil as he launched into a speech about how incredible eggs were. What did any of this have to do with eggs? She opened her

mouth to ask, but quickly snapped it shut when he proceeded to explain that they had saved Aegoth's mate's eggs when she died. Nuni's dark eyes lowered slowly into the bag as she lowered it to the ground, kneeling in front of it. "These are her eggs?" She asked quietly. She counted them, feeling a thick, burning ache in her chest while Memnoch spoke mournfully of the fall of Whitewing. She didn't even know that dragon... or ANY dragon for that matter, but this touched a personal nerve. That small hand gently stroked each egg. "You lost your mother too..." She bent over the bag to whisper, choking back tears as she rubbed the tough exterior of the unhatched eggs. After a moment she looked up at Memnoch and nodded. She felt an immediate sense of responsibility for these tiny beings. "Can they stay in my room?"

Arilwen clung to her Raven as he pushed into her, wrapping her legs around him like a vice, her fingers clutching at his back as if she refused to part. His words made her shudder and she loved him until they could not lift head or hips or eyelids, and they slipped into sleep. The Raven awoke first, his fingers tickling at her bare skin until she followed suit, parting thick eyelashes to peek at him. He was watching her expectantly and she grinned, turning her head to kiss whatever skin was closest. "Tell me the ideas that came to you in slumber, my heart." She murmured sleepily. She loved waking this way...slowly and thoroughly with him in her arms. His idea was a wise one and she nodded thoughtfully. "It makes sense. He is nearly grown and he has thrown every ounce of his effort into helping you dig out the city. He would appreciate his own private home." A blade of what she thought was regular grass was sneaking across her cheek, making her wiggle a little in her husband's arms. He seemed to enjoy the game, then urged her to eat it. Arilwen inspected it at first, then met his gaze while nibbling it down, her eyebrows raising in surprise. "That is delicious. It would be good to mix into salad."

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Memnoch shrugged when Nuni asked if there were books in the keep about dragons. "I cannot really say what kind of books the Raven of Morendor has." Except those Wyrvaust had desired which was most of them, but he didn't make a habit of revealing the knowledge imparted to him by his *raison d'etre*. "I imagine the arm of the dragon chief has books about dragons." He decided. "I have the one I wrote and illustrated if it interests you. It has the dragon council's seal of approval. They are dragons which represent the dragon tribes of Acheron which Whitewing was a member of." He explained, hiding nothing about his heritage and where he was from, from Nuni. It was one of the many ways he was protecting the bird family. If they didn't wear masks she wouldn't have as many reasons to fear them. He picked up one of the glassy smooth eggs. They truly looked like hunks of agate that had been tumbled to a high polish and crocodilian egg shape. He kissed the egg then placed it back in the nest bag. "Sure, I see no reason why you shouldn't keep them in your room. When you are ready to incubate them talk to Wyrvaust or yours truly about maintaining a bed of ice for them. You will need to turn each egg every four hours when that time comes until they hatch. It could take a couple of weeks to hatch them. If you need a break or your parents want to take you somewhere, tell me and I will stand in for you. Don't begin incubation until you are truly ready, and I suggest you ask your Mom and Dah if it's alright." He instructed.

Since Nuni wanted to read his book, the albino produced it like he did most things, like a magician pulling things out of thin air, and handed it to the child. It was rather large, the binding hand crafted with pages and cover alike bound in shed



dragon skin and sewn together with dragon whiskers. One thing Memnoch could draw and paint was dragons. The illustrations were both beautiful and informative, some of them showing their anatomy. The book was also about the riders as much as the dragons, and one of the first distinctions the book made was the difference between dragon riders and dragon masters. Masters forced dragons to be their mounts instead of the wyrms accepting them as they did riders. While she read, he painted, but when it was getting late, he cleaned the brushes and made things a little neater, then suggested they go get supper. After supper he sat with her in her room while she made a place for her eggs and read some more, then when it was bed time, he picked out some pajamas for her then tucked her into that bed that had to seem huge to her, and told her true stories of some of his adventures with Aegoth (the fun and not too terrible ones).

"The demon thinks his son will," Wyrvaust agreed that Anwaar would be content to have his own home. He smiled as he watched Arilwen eat the seed head and suggest a way the nutgrass might be used. "Salad, huh?" He looked amused and appalled at the same time. Wyrvaust ate a lot of things but he didn't 'do' salad. He was primarily a carnivore, but like most carnivores, he supplemented his diet with other things as well. "It can be milled into excellent flour or used whole to make breads or add to breads. It can be toasted and even popped over a fire. Many are the ways it can be used. It rarely grows in the desert, but grows here just south of us." He told, then sighed a little. "Much as he would love to stay here with his wife all day... he imagines they should get back to their children. Time Anwaar and Nuni met." He smiled and pulled on his clothing then rolled lazily to his feet and offered Arilwen a hand up. "Then," he said in grumpier tones, "The Raven supposes we should meet with the vultures roosting on his doorstep." He didn't mean for Sapphire city to be a refuge for the Desert of Fire's citizens. He meant it to be a sanctuary for family, clan, and close friends.

By the time they reached the kitchen, Memnoch, Nuni and Anwaar were already there, but they had all just arrived only moments before Arilwen and Wyrvaust. Memnoch had plopped into a chair like he owned it and was now gazing between Anwaar and Nuni. Anwaar looked... suspicious and unsure. Memnoch smiled. "You are the Raven's son. I am Ahlahid, or Golly if you prefer. Your father's tenant, and I suppose employee. This lovely creature is Nuni." And though some might call Nuni plain, Memnoch genuinely believed she was perfect. "So who cooks around here?" he was famished. He was usually hungry actually. "I would love some pancakes with loads of syrup, and bacon on the side?" with more syrup. His eyes searched the kitchen for some kind of cook but in walked Wyrvaust and Arilwen, who actually did most of the cooking, only they did have an actual cook, the Sand Devil Kaamus. He just tended to sleep a little late, so breakfast by him was not served until mid morn, and it was still early.

Wyrvaust passed a sage sort of smile to Memnoch and put an iron griddle on the cookstove, stoking its fire. "The Raven shall make morning meal," he offered and made himself busy making pancakes and bacon from the boar he had killed recently. They had pig meat coming out of their ears. It was a warbash he had killed and they were big enough for a grown man to ride. Indeed, Goblins and others did make mounts of them. They were just difficult to tame and very strong willed. Half an hour later everyone was seated and had a plate heaped with as many pancakes as they could eat. Memnoch had ten pancakes drowned in syrup. His metabolism was tremendous. He would provide enough fare for the household to make up for it though.

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The arm of the dragon chief. That was who her new father was, and it sounded like an exciting title. There was something to be said about not having any clue who your adoptive parents were, then finding out tidbits. Nuni gently rubbed her thumb over one of the eggs while Memnoch explained how the hatching process worked. It was a labor-intensive process and would require a lot of love, time and patience. Sounded a lot like parenting, didn't it? Nuni knew that she was nowhere near ready to hatch those eggs, but she quietly agreed with Memnoch that she would need to speak with her new parents first. She had been calling them Mother Swan and Father Raven. Those were a bit somber for a child, weren't they? Mom and Dah. Nuni liked the sound of those and wondered when she might be comfortable enough to call them that. Her attention was brought back to current company when Memnoch once again reached into the nothingness of the air and pulled out the book. "You really wrote this? AND drew the pictures?" Nuni grunted under the weight of it, wrapping her skinny arms completely around the book to hug it to her chest. She wasn't paying attention to how long she had been here talking to the winter demon, but her small mouth split into a huge yawn, and she found herself being steered by her shoulders through the hallways to her room, her with the books and Memnoch with the eggs. She put the book on her bed, then tried to decide what to do with the egg nest, deciding on the huge wooden chest that took quite a shouldering to get open. Once she did, she saw that someone had put clothing in it for her. Most was passed down from Anwaar...leggings and shirts and robes. She found a sleeping gown and pulled that out before she gently lifted the egg bag into her pile of clothes. No way they were rolling out here!

Memnoch helped to dress the drowsy child and tuck her in. She immediately settled onto the side of the bed, looking over to see what felt like a massive expanse of sheets beside her. Frowning, she threw her blankets back and hopped out of bed to fetch her egg bag from the trunk, bringing it back to the bed. She proceeded to put it on one side of the bed, smooshing blankets around it to keep it stable. Only when she was satisfied did she climb back into her spot, allowing a very amused demon to tuck her back in. He began with a bedtime story about Aegoth, and she tried desperately to stay awake for the entire thing... but that wasn't sticking for long.

Arilwen had to laugh at the face her husband made when she said the S word. She loved meat, but also liked lighter fare at times. He had fed her light greens and things of that sort when he had first found her in the desert and she was recovered enough to try solids. The two pulled themselves up and dressed slowly, the Swan forcing herself to hide a grin when he grumped about the people on their doorstep. "My Raven, please remember how lost we feel without our Dragon lord." She took the Raven's hands, making his grumpy gaze meet her kinder one. "They must feel just as lost. I would like to think that Marsol would feel proud of you for hearing their concerns and taking up some of his responsibility while he was away." She left it at that as they headed back down to the kitchen where...

Anwaar was standing at the table, his arms folded across his bare chest while he eyed the pale-haired fellow and the messy-haired girl in a sleep dress at the table. Golly? Ugh, who picked that nickname. Anwaar was still feeling sour, but he tried to reign in the attitude. The child was described as lovely, but when he inspected her, he saw nothing outstanding. She was the type that would blend into a

crowd and not stand out unless she screamed or swung from the rafters. "Are you the one that my father plucked from the mud?" Nuni inspected the tall man with her dark eyes, then nodded. Arilwen snorted. "Nuni, this is Anwaar... Your new brother. You will have to forgive him for his lack of manners." She shot a look at her son and he grumbled, but unfolded his arms and sat down across from Nuni. "Do you like your new room?" He at least tried to spark up a conversation, even though he didn't feel like speaking. Nuni lit up and nodded eagerly, words tumbling over themselves while she tried to explain to him about her bed and chest and clothes. Arilwen snuck in one last warning look that he had better ACT interested, so he sighed, then smiled at Nuni and nodded.

Wyrvaust agreed to make breakfast and Arilwen followed him to the counter to dig out a bowl and flour. Nuni decided to request that Golly finish his story from the night before. "Wait... Anwaar needs to hear the beginning." She piped up, giving him pleading eyes. Yes, she wanted him to start ALLLL over, but at least it seemed that Anwaar seemed interested.

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Memnoch smirked when the child asked if he was really the author and artist of the book, the homemade binding tough and lasting but very handcrafted looking. "I said I was therefore I am," he promised. "Golly never lies." He crossed his heart. The girl didn't last very long when he began telling her of his greatest of all adventures with Aegoth. She was so tired, poor thing, that she barely got further than when he was still a Tsularian and Aegoth an Arddenian. Well that would be made up for at breakfast. Speaking of which...

Wyrvaust gave his beloved son a couple of glances when his interactions with Nuni went less than well at the breakfast table. The Raven had considered that Anwaar was used to being the star in their paradise and would not allow him to think he would be alone now. But he wouldn't let him get away with being unkind either... though Arilwen had that handled presently. He smiled proudly at Anwaar when he caved to his mother's cues and treated Nuni with more consideration and nodded to show his appreciation. No one could ever doubt that Wyrvaust loved his son. He only wished he and his mother had never been taken from him for longer than it took to carry out a simple task or duty. Just for fun the Raven made pancakes in the shapes of desert animals like he did when Anwaar was young. He did it for everyone, even Memnoch, so Anwaar wouldn't be embarrassed when he got a plate of them too. There were elephants, hares, lombra and scorpions. They looked kind of like earth's animal crackers but puffier. Memnoch laughed and sang praises that Wyrvaust was as fine an artist as he was, which wasn't true but he was just showing his appreciation for the amusing food.

Memnoch had chosen the name Golly aka Ahlahid because it was silly... and a Gaelic thing... until translated in Shammah. It did not sound like the name of a demon of desire. When everyone was seated and Nuni asked him if he would finish the story he had started to tell her and to start it all over again now, he looked around at the faces gazing back at him. He smiled a little, scoffed down the rest of his sixth pancake, wiped his mouth on his napkin (something Arilwen had introduced to Wyrvaust's household) and sank back in his chair. "I was telling her the story of how my dearest friend Aegoth and I came to be together and of our greatest of all adventures together. Once upon a time I was a Tsularian, one of the bird folk, and Aegoth was an Arddenian Demon."

Memnoch was a rare creature who remembered all of his lives. Few Tsetar or Khorumal recalled existence before becoming divine.

"We had always been friends since we were children... which was a taboo because the Tsulari and the Ardden were mortal enemies at that time because of their beliefs and a war being waged over them. Well, Aegoth and I shared the same beliefs, that the beliefs of both our peoples were absurd," he laughed. "While the Ardden believed the Tsulari would bring about their genocide, the Tsulari believed the Ardden would forever eclipse the world in darkness. Despite this, Aegoth and I have always been the fastest of friends. Well we grew up together, got into a lot of trouble together, flew far and wide together, had many adventures together, had families together and grew powerful together... and... we died together... but that was not the end. For the Tsulari and Ardden death was only the beginning..."

Then Anwaar asked what Nuni had not... How they had died. He sighed a little. "The wars between our peoples tried to tear Aegoth and I apart but never could. Our goddess Tsul had made it impossible for the Ardden to declare war over the Tsulari, so an evil minded Arddenian king named Aqaiel Tyraim allied with a goblin army whose king made war on us because he feared our technology. The Tsulari had great science back then. King Tyraim was dedicated to the cause of wiping out the Tsulari people, truly believing we would become their greatest enemies. Aegoth and I chose to stay out of the wars. We both believed the same thing... the wars were senseless and tragic. Both of our fathers and many of our brothers died in those wars. We lived in the same village in Mhas Andorath... isolated, beautiful, serene. It was primarily elven but there were some Tsulari, a few Ymogior, but the only Ardden were Aegoth, his wife, and their children. Ardden tended to live among their own almost exclusively. For a long time it was peaceful there... until the great war came to us. The Goblin Ardden army was hunting my people and so the Tsulari presence there brought their army upon the village. The elves could have given us up but they didn't, and fought beside us, but for all our individual power we were overwhelmed... It was an entire army of Ardden and vast numbers of Goblins against a small, peace minded village. Some of us survived the attack to be captured, among them Aegoth and I. Aegoth was named a traitor for taking up arms against his own people to protect his family and dearest friend..."

Anwaar asked him what happened to his family and his eyes locked on him. He had also skipped that part in the telling with Nuni. "Well... I never really found out. Aegoth and I were put to death... but that's when..." When the Raven's son asked how they were put to death, Memnoch looked a little annoyed. "Just allow me to tell the story, Anwaar, if you don't mind." He took a deep breath and continued. "It doesn't really matter how we were put to death, but it was by Aqaiel Tyraim's own hands we died, the slayer of Tsul, our god. Years beyond imagining after this Aqaiel united with humans and came after the Tsulari again, but that is a tale for another time. When death came to Aegoth and I, that's when our great change happened... We were transformed... At first we were but ghosts of our former selves and felt ourselves rising, being lifted up, and soon found ourselves standing outside the gate of a kingdom filled with gardens, forests, fields of grass and sandy shores all bathed in the purest water, light and air... the elements most associate with Haman. We looked to one another and as we did I saw a snow white dragon and Aegoth a snow white Tsetar. The gates opened to us and we were greeted by what I believed was another Tsetar, but when he introduced himself as Auros, the Morning Star, I knew... my people's beliefs had not been

completely wrong. Ironically Aegoth knew the same thing... Gods did exist... and the father of us all was Eos, the all maker, father of the summer god Leviathan and the winter god Acheron. While I evolved into Tsetarhood, Aegoth deevolved into dragonhood. Ardden can evolve into Enochian Tsetar but they can also revert into dragons when they die. His was the heart of a dragon."

"For more ages than I can remember I rode Aegoth as an acolyte of principalities, defending the higher orders, including the Morning Star and Yajmha from harm... I did so by the talents I achieved by my final death as a Tsulari, as the sword of desire. I did not fight in the conventional sense unless I had no other choice... Life in Haman was good... but times changed and the Morning Star disobeyed the commandments of his brother, believing himself an equal and not a servant. I took sides with the Morning Star and as such Aegoth and I were bound in chains and cast into the terrible vast black of the abyss. Deeper than all the rest we were thrown, I suppose because we were accused of betraying not only Yajmha but the order of Principalities. In defending him we betrayed all others we were supposed to protect."

"There in the crushing black we struggled for time out of sight for ten thousand and more years, towards what end we did not know, first to break our chains... so we could fly. Then to move towards something in a place where there was nothing to see but blackness. At last we met a vast ceiling of scaly stone. It was too dark to see it but we could feel it. We did not know what it meant but with nothing else to do, we followed it, carving the days as we knew them in the stone with our claws as we went. In this way we would know if we moved in circles. In all these ages we changed... the light in us burned out and was filled with the cold, the barren darkness of the void, the stuff which sucked the life out of everything and left it dormant, the winter. Five thousand years later we came to an opening, circular in dimension and about half a mile across. Aegoth climbed up inside of the shaft with me on his back. The walls of the opening formed a high upright shaft like a lava tube which challenged our weakened forms. At times he lifted me by his head to reach narrow clefts which I would climb on and brace myself against before pulling him up by his neck until his talons could grip onto the narrow crevice. I then climbed onto his back again until another crack in the smooth wall was out of his reach. Sometimes he could not hike me up high enough so he had to swing me up, and so we continued until the top of the shaft was reached. There the walls continued... upward beyond sight and ever widening, shelf upon shelf of hard material like rock which to us had more the look of a carapace, only we could see the glimmer of firelight far, far above us, and so we continued our climb, only now we had those deep shelves to rest on, which became greater and greater in size the higher up the vortex of stone we went. It took us years to reach the shelves where the light beckoned to us. Vast that pit was, but at long last we climbed onto the first shelf where the fires burned. In some places flames leapt from cracks or holes in the walls. In others there were natural troughs in the stone filled with oils that seeped from the walls which the flames caught fire to like braziers. These flames took away the cold that had seeped into every part of us, and for the first time in countless millennia, we slept like babes curled on a rock shelf together. For ages out of time Aegoth and I had only had each other. We had not set eyes on another living being. Not even an animal. The only thing we had seen were spirits... and there had been scarce few of those. The first thing we came to see in the pit were also spirits, but of dead humans, arddens, dragons, elves and other humanoids from other worlds I did not recognize. Hundreds maybe thousands of them wandered the pit of the abyss. Aegoth and I were hungry..."

starving beyond imagination. To survive in the abyss all those ages we did things... for one... we ate every soul we crossed paths with and we didn't cross paths with many over the ages. Most spirits don't last long in the abyss, and those that do are best left alone. I commanded powers that allowed me to capture spirits, and I created powers in the abyss which let us convert those souls into energy to feed us. Over time we were able to devour spirit energy without my powers... to simply drink them in like a breath full of steam. But spirits were scarce. Aegoth and I starved for tens of thousands of years. The abyss was not the only thing which changed us. When someone asks me how we did not eat each other I can only say... we didn't exactly fail to do so..."

"Anyway... so there we were, in the great cavern which loomed over the abyss. And who should meet us there on the very night we found the shelf of fire? But the Morning Star. He embraced me, and he embraced Aegoth, asked where we had been all this time, and was sad to hear we had fallen with him but only now found the kingdom he and the others had scratched their way to out of the abyss... 'You are in Acheron.' He tells me. 'So it was Acheron's belly we followed?' I asked, and he nodded. 'And the abyss is what...? His latrine?' I asked, and though I was not joking, he laughed. There was a gleam in his green eyes though that told me it was true. 'So I crawled out of Acheron's shitter and up through his ass?' I went on to illustrate, and he laughed some more, even louder, and the gleam in his eyes grew even brighter.'

The white devil paused for a moment as the children giggled and Wyrvaust chuckled, then he went on with his story. "Aegoth looked ruffled. The thought of flying around in some gods toilet and crawling around in his..." he glanced at Arilwen. "...bunghole did not please him. Then I asked... 'So where are we now...? In his belly?' And he just smiled. 'Nevermind all that. Acheron is what it is and you are in the Pit. Come with me... you and Aegoth must be famished.'" And he took us to his palace in the City of Dawn, the capital of Acheron. We were among the dark fallen and so our rank was among the highest. Where before we protected our brethren in Haman now Aegoth and I protected our order and our king in Acheron. Don't forget that it is through desire I achieve all of my goals... be it to bring down an enemy, or to uplift an ally or friend."

"A day came when Haman declared war on Acheron, lot long after the fall of Sammael during the second rebellion. I was ancient as a dark fall Khorumal by this time. Sammael was not yet Prince of Demons, and with a legion he gathered on his own, he marched on Haman, just crossed the barrier between the two kingdoms with his army and walked into Haman. This ignited a great war between demon and angel kind. When I was called on to fight, I explained to the Morning Star that I would never kill one of my brethren be they fallen or divine. He asked why and I told him that if I could not combat an enemy through their desires, then I would use no other weapon. I expected him to punish me. This was the devil... the devil who flayed the sins from souls. He was evil personified, was he not? He was bitter with grief, rife with envy, gorged with resentment, his pride broken into shatters by his own brother, and yet he only stared at me, for a long while, then draped his arm around my shoulder and walked with me, and with Aegoth walking along behind us, he spoke. 'If you refuse to fight my greatest enemy than you shall just have to accept your fate as the devil of desire. I will miss you, Memnoch,' he said, and before I could ask what he meant, Aegoth and I found ourselves being pulled as though by a tornado through the fabric of space and unceremoniously dumped in a forest as dark as it was beautiful and speckled with ethereal light. At first I

thought we were back in Eden, but far from it and somewhere far better... We were in the land of shadows, otherwise known as Anwnn. It has been my home from that day to this, though I consider Morashtar my second home. The Morning Star and I have been good friends ever since. He let me free, you see? Happy ending. The end." He grinned and picked up his fork to stab at his cold pancakes and scoff each bite down. He didn't mind that they weren't warm.

Wyrvaust, who was holding Arilwen's hand in his own, was staring at Memnoch once again as if he was unreal. It was the story he had told which left the demon flabbergasted. He had never heard anyone tell such an honest and open account of Acheron, as if it was a campfire or bedtime story everyone told. After a time he sighed and while his fingers brushed against his wife's digits he addressed the devil with some of his concerns. "Friends with the Dawnstar, the Snowbird says... Would the all maker appreciate so much about Acheron being told?" he was curious to know.

Memnoch cackled and flashed one of those jester-esque grins. "It's about time people knew the truth behind Acheron and its proxies, don't you think?" It was his way of helping the Morning Star out... of helping HIM to achieve one of HIS dreams. Wyrvaust looked doubtful. Memnoch sighed a bit then leaned forward in his seat. "Lookit... There is the Morning Star... Lord of the evil dead... Lord of Acheron. Father of so many races, and yet the definition of him is evil. Just because he punishes the wicked and is their prison warden does not mean HE is evil, does it? And yet... that is the reputation he has been forced to emulate over the countless, vast, impossible to measure ages. He is the poster child for being misunderstood. Humans are the worst about it. They blame him for every foul and terrible thing that ever happened to them or came out of them. People joke about the term 'the devil made me do it', but how many times have people REALLY believed that? Compared to how many times it's actually been true? I am not saying Maelmorda is a boy scout... err... ranger, but he is not evil incarnate. He is chaos incarnate. Those are two very different things. And how is it different for me to tell tales of Acheron than for you as a priest to teach the disciplines of chaos? We have the same goal really... to enlighten people to the virtues of chaos." he smiled, and Wyrvaust smiled back at him. He clearly approved of Memnoch's answer.

Wyrvaust pushed his plate aside and stood. "Meet us in the garden when ready Snowbird is to meet with the people assembled outside," he directed and Memnoch nodded. As soon as he finished his pancakes. Kemish was entering the kitchen as Wyrvaust put his plate down and picked it up, signifying he had assigned himself clean up duty. He would also make breakfast for any late comers. When Grym came in Wyrvaust pulled him aside. "Has our right arm seen his brother?" he asked.

Magrymed nodded. "Cevari and his men left with Gold Tongue..." A name given to Gilriael by his dragon tribe. "Said they would be back in a few days." Wyrvaust nodded his head and contacted Cevari and Gilriael simultaneously as he walked out into the garden with Arilwen. He gave them the short version of what happened with the trespassers.

Even as the Desert Raven spoke to them they were arriving at the oasis, having followed the trail left by Erebor's company there. The Army of Man troop had cleared out not long after Wyrvaust's group had, and Flame Eye was at the oasis guarding the site as asked. She greeted Gilriael and gave them more details about

Erebor's company who Gilriael decided were nothing better than trespassers crawling over Marsol's lands. Gilriael didn't like the sound of the lot and wanted to make sure they had left. They would camp out at the oasis that night, where the weyrdragon would scout around the area for any signs left by the garrison.

Once in the garden Wyrvaust went over to the spring and filled a watering can, then walked around the garden watering the plants. He spoke to Arilwen as he did. "The Raven is liking the white devil too well. He is having troubling keeping him suspect of anything. Perhaps his charms make him dangerous..." he refused to trust him so early, indeed distrusting Memnoch because his gut instinct was to believe in him already. "The way he speaks of Acheron... Never has the Raven heard of anyone speak so openly of those matters so few even know of. We are uncertain if the Dawnstar would approve."

"Oh he approves..." Memnoch said as he made his advent into the garden. "You worry too much, friend. But I understand why. Thing is... you don't have to worry anymore, and neither does your family."

"If that is so at what cost?" Wyrvaust insisted on knowing for sure.

"I told you... You and your wife being mine is the cost."

"Wait..." Wyrvaust growled. "Said the white devil the cost was the Raven's life and soul alone."

"And you turned me down, said it was impossible, so I will accept the Swan's life and soul and your life and soul outside of Marsol's hold on them as the cost instead." He said as he pulled the watering can out of Wyrvaust's hand to go and refill it for him.

"Outside of Marsol's hold?" the abyss demon sought clarity.

"Why yes... meaning I will claim no part of you that is not his."

"The Raven is Marsol's in every way," Wyrvaust insisted.

"And Marsol would like to see you and yours safe. I will do nothing to step on the Lord of Hellraptors' toes. And Arilwen's life and soul are hers to choose what to do with... so... that is my price. I hope you will accept my terms. I truly want to see the two of you and all your family safe for the duration of your lives. You and all your line could just consider yourselves luck children." He smiled.

Wyrvaust could see that his wife didn't understand what a luck child was by the question in her eyes. "A luck child is one who nothing truly bad happens to... He can barely imagine what it would be like... The Raven never met one but he has heard true tales of them."

"So when are we meeting these people of yours?" Memnoch changed the subject. He was quite aware that neither Wyrvaust or Arilwen was ready to decide anything yet.

Wyrvaust heaved a huge breath. "This way..." he relented and led the way through the garden's gate and north through the eastside canyon.



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