Rachel’s Love Potion 3: Oops, Summoned a Demon

Part Six

“Let’s try not to be negative necromancers about this, now, OK?”

I steepled my hands before me, allowing the lying strumpet to plead her case. “Go on.”

“There’s a lot of good news here, frankly. For one, you found your Rachel! Huge win, very impressive. Some people, not saying *you* specifically, but some people, would even prefer that they be able to solve it on their own with no outside help. Though I guess I did technically help, suggesting you check your lab, right?”

“I didn’t find anything in the lab. I wasted days looking for clues while you loafed about Rachel’s house. It was Joanna who suggested the laptop, which was the first real progress I made.”

Kammie spread her hands. “OK, fair. But I’m not a warlock. Just because I know an archwarlock, you can’t expect me to think like one. We were talking about good news, though. Rachel is with you! Kind of. She’s practically right here in the room. Where could she be safer than the home of my world’s version of you? Safe, probably crazy happy to be with a friendly face. Heck, you were worried she was face down in a ditch! You must be beside yourself with relief, eh, guy?”

“None of what you’ve said so far justifies any of the lies you’ve told me.”

“Lies? What lies? I’ve been on your side since the beginning. Making you happy–”

“Distracting me into docility.”

“Taking care of your situation with Joanna–”

“Duping me into settling for one sex slave when I bound two.”

“And let’s not forget the most important of all, being your friend. Huh? What about that? You can’t put a price on friendship.”

“Shall I show you my income reports for Rachel’s webcam?”

The khamulan’s nose wrinkled, her horns seeming to scrunch together. She probably thought it was all disarmingly adorable. “OK. So I wasn’t a hundred percent straightforward about a couple things. I was ripped out of my entire universe and dumped in a creepy laboratory! Sorry, laBORatory. You can’t expect someone to get their zen on under those conditions! They were barely even lies, anyway.”

“Barely…!” I sputtered. “Let’s dispense with distinguishing between lies of omission and outright falsehoods, mm? You lied about being summoned here. You lied about being the Silver Mirror Rachel. You lied about having some connection with her. You lied about knowing me. You lied about knowing where Rachel was. Even as I sat there pulling my hair out for days on end, you kept your secrets.”

She crossed her legs, trying to appear calm. The little minx didn’t think I noticed she deliberately lengthened them in the process. “OK, so yeah, I guess that’s fair, kinda, but what good would it have been if I told you?”

“What good?! Are you fucking kidding me? I’d have her back by now if not for you! I’m sure Mirror Knox would be more than happy to have his pet back. The fact that you’re compromised by *his* love potion is the only reason I’m not burying you up to your neck in scarabs!”

“OK, so for one, you definitely do not have that many scarabs. I saw your scarab farm in the guest bathroom, and there’s like forty scarabs tops. For two, I am not under a love potion, so you can take that right back.”

I snorted. “Exactly what Rachel would say.”

“Look, Mirror Knox doesn’t work like that. He has half the neighborhood under some kind of mind control, at least enough to let him have his fun without them meddling. He played bartender at this neighborhood picnic, spiked every last drink. And that? That was warm-up for him. Practice.”

“If my world had infinite resources, perhaps I could have done the same.”

“I’m not trying to humble you, guy. I’m making a point. Those people? He barely cared. Me, he *really* wanted. He invented a whole new process for me. A warlock like that, he wasn’t content to settle for focusing my lust and affection. No, he made a whole new cocktail for my dimpled ass.”

“New brew? What kind? You certainly seem infatuated with him, defending him like this.”

She looked stunned to see me misdiagnose her tone so badly. “What? I’m not defending him! Hand to god, I’d pick you over him eight days of the week. You at least have a sense of humor about yourself. Him, he’s all… *him*, all the time.”

I was not aware of any such sense of humor, but I suppose I could imagine being more severe. “So what did he do? If it’s not love, what is it?”

“It’s… Man, it’s hard to explain if you don’t know how us khamulans think. You know I’m always being super helpful? White lies notwithstanding, I mean. To what some would call a fault, honestly. He swirled up all of that helpy energy, put it through the cosmic wringer and aimed it all at him. I don’t love him, but I’m his even more than your Rachel was yours. Like, breaking into his lab, touching his stuff? Not in a million eternities. I’m almost as much his pet as that stupid bird.”

I had no idea what bird she was talking about, but neither did I care. “Your loyalty is commendable. Now thanks to you, he’s had weeks to do the same to Rachel! So pardon me if I don’t, um, pardon you.” Stupid failed turn of phrase throwing me off my rhythm.

“Wow. You really don’t know yourself at all, do you?” She shook her head, clicked her tongue. “First off, your friend is already his. I hate to be the one to break it to you. I really do. Homely little human girl that she is, she’s probably his new housekeeper rather than sex slave, but still.”

“Um, Rachel is one of the sexiest women I’ve ever laid eyes on.”

“Um, I’m Rachel too, remember? I know what she looks like, and I know his tastes. Like you, taking things is his nature. Whatever’s desirable, he keeps it all to himself. He *takes*. It’s what he does.”

“If he can take her, I can take her back.”

“OK, second off. He’s you, but like you said, he’s got resources. Clout. Friends in low places, and I don’t mean like the song. If you go there looking for a fight, you’re going to get clobbered. Maybe you don’t believe me, but I’d really hate to see that happen. You’re fun. These past weeks are the most fun I’ve had in ages.”

“Spare me the backhanded compliments and get to the point. Which, from the sound of it, is that I should give up, let him keep her? Am I hearing right?”

Kammie shook her head. “I don’t have advice for you, except for this: don’t screw around with him. Remember, he is a *perfect* version of you. He’s smarter, more cunning, better equipped, and greedy as all hell.” She said this fondly. “If you think some of the stuff you’ve done is cold, you don’t know the tenth part of what you’re up against.”

The khamulan ushered herself delicately into my lap, rubbing my neck soothingly. “Eventually he’ll realize he traded down, and he’ll find a way to get me back. Him and me being reflections of you and her, it’s probably no surprise to you that he’s super into me. One day, he’ll wake up, doodle a rune or something, and poof. I’ll be back in his grasp. That’s why I was keeping things from you. Not trying to be cunty or anything. Just treading water, trying to have some fun, help you and your little pets out, until he comes to retrieve me.” She nuzzled my cheek with a horn. How could they feel so soft? So warm? “Don’t get in his way.”

In spite of the flush of pleasure from contact with those damnable things, I scowled. As usual, my scowl was because Kammie was right. If her capabilities were anything to go by as the “perfect” Rachel, the differential between myself and my counterpart was going to be extreme.

“Impressive loyalty indeed. You’re sure he didn’t just make you his familiar?”

“Oh I’m sure. He only recently bound one, this little bird thing. Pretty sure it’s a grackle. At least to look at it. Inside, you know. It’s some evil fucking monster, I’m sure. And before you point out I don’t know anything about familiars, I was there, helping him do it. He specifically said a khamulan can’t bind another khamulan as a familiar, same as a human with a human. I was actually surprised you didn’t have one. So much with you two syncs up.”

“Too many stray cats roaming the neighborhood for the birds to make a home for themselves, I suppose.”

Seeing my wrathful ire fade to a petulant sulk, Kammie rested her head on my shoulder. “Look. Maybe it won’t be so bad. Maybe when he comes for me, you can ask him for Rachel back? I doubt he’d have much use for her with me around.” Her tone was even less convincing than that whole lengthy sales pitch for my impending defeat.

“Why would he? If he’s as resourceful as you claim, as ruthless, I can’t see him giving her up for no advantage. If he has a brain in his head, he’s going to assume I want my Rachel at minimum, and likely you as well. Which makes her a fine insurance policy to hang onto, to prevent me from making a go at a prize like you.”

Her famous, fabulous face permitted a flattered grin. “Yeah? You really think I’m all that, even after everything?”

I bumped her with my elbow. “You’ve had moments.”

Kammie’s smile gleamed. “You know, I actually thought you were gonna try to bind me as a familiar for yourself for a while there. Hence why I kept counting my hair. Knox needed a feather for the bird, figured you’d need a scrap of me, too. I probably would’ve let you, too, if not for the other guy. So I figured I’d just play it super easy so you didn’t feel like there was anything more to gain by trying something.”

“Would that my Rachel had half your cleverness. She might not have been stupid enough to maneuver us into our respective positions.”

She nuzzled my cheek delicately with a horn. “You know, you could always just run off. Take Joanna with you, enjoy a nice long vacation. Stay out of his way. He’ll come get me, or summon me back, or whatever it is he comes up with to reclaim his property, and you can be nice and far away. Where it’s safe.”

Gently but firmly – but gently – I took hold of the horn on my cheek and pried it away. “Blow me.”

“Wow. That was harsher than I expected.”

“Huh? No, I didn’t mean ‘blow me,’ I meant, you know, ‘blow me.’ Like, open your mouth and put my penis in it. One more for the road before your warlock in shining armor whisks you away from me.”

Kammie smiled. Her eyes slid closed. Instead of complying with what I’d thought had been a fairly explicit request, those famous DSL’s of hers puckered, hovering right out of range. Right where I continued to hold her. No closer, but no further. Still she waited for me to bridge that final inch.

“If I wanted a kiss, I’d download Tinder.” I released her less gently, more firmly, than I’d grabbed her, and strode away.

The journey from here to there would pose no serious challenge, I deduced quickly. I couldn’t teleport across realities with the snap of my fingers, but my research on cosmology in recent weeks hadn’t been entirely for nothing. With my connection to Rachel, to Mirror Knox, and having Mirror Rachel on hand, it would be relatively simple, getting there.

Once I was there, though?

I was doomed.

What does one do when one is definitionally out-classed? There was no arguing against it. My other self possessed an insurmountable advantage. He was, by his very nature, me, except better in all the way I strived to be good. He was smarter, better educated, and far better equipped. Even if that wasn’t the case, he possessed weeks headstart. Whether or not Rachel had landed in his lap when the two swapped places, she’d recognize the neighborhood well enough that it would be the first place she would have gone. He had her, all right, and he’d expect me to come for her. Quite reasonably, since I meant to do precisely that. Anything I might try, he would have seen coming miles away.

So what could I do? The only asset I had that I could be sure he lacked was Kammie. The basic notion of the control mechanism he’d used on her was familiar to me. I hadn’t seen it in khamulans, but while researching how to enslave Rachel, I’d read about an experiment on lantern archons, the guides of the so-called heavens, using their instinctive nature and focusing it on an external agent. Supposedly they’d led invaders right to friendly encampments. Khamulans didn’t seem to be burdened with much of a conscience the way archons were, lucky bastards, so such a machination would likely work on them even better.

In any event, it meant the bitch would betray me for him at the first opportunity. No sense even asking her for help; she literally couldn’t. I couldn’t even strap a suicide vest over those epic tits of hers and try a dead man switch gambit either. Even if I knew how to build one, this was me. I was a lot of things, but a stone cold murderer I was not, and he’d know it.

Joanna was likewise a dead end. Her conditioning had rendered her a first rate sex slave, what had once been my intent for Rachel. It had also turned her brain into pudding. Relying on her to follow instructions without the carrot of my cock or the stick of its withdrawal was a gamble, and there were enough X factors in play already. There was no telling if she’d even be able to distinguish between Knoxes. She’d done a piss poor job recognizing a fake Rachel, and that had been her best friend for years.

In all probability, if I went there and confronted him, he would reclaim Kammie, retain Rachel, and spank me right back home. Could he destroy me without destroying himself? I didn’t know. My ignorance was beside the point, though. *He* would know. If it would, he would imprison me, or enslave me, or wipe my memories and send me back pussyless and confused.

He’d make for one hell of an ally if we didn’t have the same taste in women.

Ultimately, there were only two things I could count on. That he wouldn’t see me as a plausible threat, and the unflagging friendship of my bestie. It would have to be enough.

“A farewell banquet?” Kammie asked as she rounded the corner into my kitchen. As many times as I’d fucked her in Rachel’s, this was the first time she’d been in mine since she’d tidied up the place upon her arrival. Unlike Rachel, I didn’t have a separate dining room, only a couple counters, some cabinets, and a nook for a table. There were only two chairs, though when Joanna realized I meant to permit her trainer to join us, she’d dug up a folding chair in the garage for herself, positioned between myself and the alter ego of her friend.

“Since the odds aren’t exactly great on my needing a two-way trip through the portal, I thought, may as well, you know?”

“First off, portal?” She arched a perfectly sculpted crimson eyebrow. So much for my stoicism in the face of famous faces. Weeks of having Scarlett Johansson’s visage, one so legendary I still couldn’t think of it without the surname, had broken my will to deny her the admiration she’d sought by selecting it in the first place. The baby doll negligee with mere X’s covering her nipples would be missed as well.

I gestured to the living room, through the kitchen’s other doorway. She craned her neck to peer in, and there in the middle of a circle of triphasium metapearls was the beginning of the portal. For now, it looked like no more than a heat shimmer, and that scarcely larger than my fist. It would grow, though. There were faster ways to make the transit, but the delay was the point. Not long after I anticipated our meal winding down, it would fully actuate, one side here, the other opening into the corresponding space in the Silver Mirror dimension my alter ego inhabited.

“Huh. What a neat little gateway you’ve built. Well done.” She smiled placatingly.

“It’s not a gateway. It’s a portal.”

“Second off,” Kammie continued, turning her back to the portal like I’d shown her a new coaster I’d made at Pottery Barn, “you cook? Why have I been busting my bubble butt feeding you this whole time?”

“Because you’re supernaturally predisposed to want to help people, I remind you of your master, and you have weird kinks that are easy to work into domestic labor sex.”

Kammie blinked. For once, I got to bask in the glow of what it felt like to be insightfully correct about her. “Huh. Astute.”

“Anyway, I didn’t cook. I ordered from mine and Rachel’s favorite place. Figured if this thing goes tits up – in the negative sense, that is – I may as well head into it with a solid final meal in my belly.” I took a seat, and gestured a vague invitation for her to join me. My food already awaited me on a plate at my seat. “Help yourself, if you want. Plenty to go around.”

Kammie perused the bowls and platters filling most of the space between us, gave the air a sniff. “We actually have this place back home. Not my favorite, but it’s really good.” She allowed my pat on her scrumptious behind to usher her to the available seat. I nodded for Joanna, sitting patiently in her folding chair, to proceed. Rather than fill her own plate, however, she began to scoop food onto the khamulan’s.

My guest watched her do it, eyes narrowing. “I can serve myself, you know.”

“I know.” Joanna continued, slapping a big dollop of potatoes on Kammie’s plate. Narrow as her waist was, that one spoonful would make for more carbs than she ate in a week. If she needed to eat. Most outsiders didn’t. Not food, at least.

Kammie tolerated it, watching the calories pile up. Rachel had once been the sort to pre-make her lunches for the week on Sunday night, filling them with carrots and cukes and leafy greens. She was ruthless on portion control. Once I promoted her from her boring old office job to internet slut, the extra hours in the day taught her real discipline. She’d put on a few pounds since I’d befriended her, but literally only a few, and she had room for it. Most of it I’d steered to her tits, back when I’d still been keen on that boob enhancement ointment I’d read about. In the end, I’d decided they were perfect as is and dropped the experiment. This plate, heaped with noodles and sauces and gravy and carbs of every sort, would have presented a real test of her love for me. Every hot girl, no matter how sweet, was vain at heart.

Kammie, however, was no girl, at least not in the technical sense, and neither did love handles appear among the enumeration of her anxieties.

Not to say she was without anxiety, however.

“Look, Knox. No offense, but how do I know this stuff isn’t laced with something?”

“Laced? What, with drugs or something, you mean? I don’t give those away for free.”

She blew a wisp of crimson hair out of her face. It fell right back down. It looked better that way. “Don’t gaslight a gaslighter.”

I loaded my fork, but didn’t raise it to my lips. “I honestly haven’t a clue what you mean.”

Her own utensils went untouched. “Yes you do. Come on, off through a gateway across the multiverse to do battle with your better self? You have to have something up your sleeve to have even a chance. You know he’ll want me back, so…”

“Portal.”

“Excuse me?”

“*Portal.*” Joanna repeated it with me in unison, though the rest was me alone. “It’s a portal. And how would poisoning you, or drugging, or whatever you think I dosed our dinner with, benefit me? And why would I take it myself?”

“Your food was already on your plate when I came in,” she pointed out.

“Fucking hell, Kammie. If you’re so paranoid, switch with me. Be my guest.” I shoved my plate toward her. Joanna was scowling at her openly for this display of rudeness to her master.

She reached out, but barely, and then stopped short of touching my offering. “But what if that’s the gambit? It’s obvious enough you expect me to object, so you lace your stuff and there goes the switcheroo.”

“Do you want me to take a bite of it first? Would that make you feel better?”

She eyed my fork warily, though she at least had the temerity to look abashed. “I mean, sort of. Though you know as well as I do that we don’t have the same physiology. I could drink acid and barely need to burp, but throw in a pinch of–” She stopped herself from revealing whatever weakness had rushed toward her tongue. “Of any number of things, and I’m a total kitten.”

“Do you even need to eat? Nobody’s making you. I was only trying to be polite.” I shook my head, and very deliberately shoveled my fork into my maw. I chewed with my mouth open and swallowed so no one could accuse me of trickery. “There. Happy?”

“I’m not trying to be a bitch, guy. I’m only saying, under the circumstances, it’s a lil’ suspish that–”

Joanna rose to her feet, palms on the table, looming. Or maybe just displaying her huge natural tits as a display of superiority, slut to slut. “You’re really going to sit there and tell him you’re not trying to be a bitch? You? The liar, the backstabber, the selfish shit who sat around with her thumb up her snatch for *weeks* when you knew he could use your help making me his devoted, docile fucktoy? Now he’s off to probably die – leaving me here to die miserable and desperate without him I might add – and you have the gall to accuse *him* of trying to take advantage of you? You should be on your knees, *begging* him to throw you whatever crumbs he doesn’t finish.”

“I was only–”

“But instead you take the good chair, and then accuse *him* of trying to take advantage of *you*? You know what? No. No. Brainwash me all you want, but I won’t sit here and watch you cast aspersions.”

It was the most either of us had seen Joanna stand up to her. She hadn’t really needed to before now. I gave her a grateful nod, and didn’t miss her impressive chest swelling with pride. As Kammie sputtered indignantly, I used my words. “Thank you, Joanna. I was going to have you suck me off while I ate, but you know what? Take her place, and her plate. Eat with me.”

Joanna licked her lips. She indubitably would have preferred the former, but could still recognize the offer as a courtesy. The woman would gladly live off my cum if she could. “Thank you,” she murmured deferentially. Kammie still looked shocked at being both confronted and displaced as Joanna shoved her out of her chair and then settled into her place. She picked up knife and fork and dug in with gusto.

The cardio she’d need to shed the calories could wait until we found out if I wound up living through all this.

Kammie stood by watching us eat, vexed. She’d come in with her horns retracted, but moment by moment they protruded forth, as if emerging from the center of her skull. They didn’t have a right to look so adorable. That confounding little missing chip. “Can I help you? Or is there something else you want to accuse me of before my portal matures and I leave?”

“I didn’t mean…” She chewed on her lip anxiously, then forced a timid but flirty grin. “You know, if you want, *I* could…”

Her accompanying gesture was perfectly clear, but I didn’t give her the satisfaction of avoiding saying it. “Could what?”

“You know. Like you asked earlier. For old times sake. So we can part as friends, ya know?”

I took my time chewing, even more swallowing. “Which thing I asked for? I seem to recall asking for honesty, for the whereabouts of my Rachel, for–”

“The blowjob, Knox. Geez. I feel guilty, OK? You don’t have to keep on banging that drum. I really wish I could have helped you better, believe me!”

“I’m sure Joanna’s mouth will be perfectly adequate once we’re finished dining. I don’t need a charity beej, least of all from you.”

“Don’t be like that.” Kammie slowly dropped to her knees and crawled beneath the table. Her horns scraped against its underside like rolling thunder, stopping when she came in range to work on the myriad interposing fastenings.

“Fine. Help yourself. Just don’t take too long, all right? I’m a quick eater, and the portal will be ready soon.”

“Yes sir, Mr. Sir, sir,” she grumbled. Still, she got my pants down with only a little assistance on my part, and got right to work.

She was a hell of a cocksucker, even without her otherworldly hotness. For once, Kammie didn’t even resist when, after finishing up my in fact un-tampered-with meal, I grasped those gently ridged horns and fucked her flawless face. Those things practically sizzled in my hands. Joanna sulked a bit, but she took her own equally benign meal in relative equanimity, especially considering how badly she wished she could trade places.

As for Kammie, when I grunted her own dinner right down her gluttonous maw and into parts beyond, well…

“You know, I honestly can’t believe you can have your nose in my pubes and not see the glyphs of entrapment.”

“Mm mmfs mf mm-mmpmt?!” she squeaked, face still held impaled as I drained a few final dribbles of my magically altered jizz down her gullet. Before she could even consider a means of egress, I snapped my fingers, and she disappeared into a swirl of energy that, according to *A Warlock’s Primer for Home Security*, would briefly have glowed a faint blue. It was too well-lit in my kitchen to see.

“Holy shit, Knox! I know you said you had a surprise in store, but what the hell! What did you do to her?!” Joanna exclaimed. She didn’t sound concerned so much as shocked. She hadn’t seen much genuine magic as yet.

I rose, brushing the onyx dust from my still glistening nether parts casually. “I trapped her in one of the less mean but more inescapable hells, sealed by a glyph of my choosing. Until it is drawn, by me or with my blessing, she will remain there. Forever, if it takes that long.” Another brush, and a few more crumbs fell free.

I hoped that was true. Imprisoning someone in a hell dimension was no mean trick, but it was a lot easier on someone already displaced from their plane of origin. As for the glyph that would free her, it ought to be sealed to my will, but Mirror Knox was, to a degree, still Knox. If he discovered the elements I’d used to imprison her, that might well be enough. Ordinarily I wouldn’t even consider that a foe might be clever enough to inspect my cock for clues, but he was me, after all. From what I’d learned of him, and what I knew of myself, we both did a great deal of my thinking with my cock.

“She just… disappeared! I didn’t think it would be so… magical. That was nuts!”

“It was mostly shaft, actually. You know I don’t especially enjoy attention to the nuts. You played your part beautifully, by the way. She never even saw you coming. As if I’d conceal my planar imprisonment hex in mashed potatoes? Please.” I sighed. I’d worried the whole performance had been too brisk. Served her right for not letting my more direct appeal succeed earlier. “Anyway, I hope dinner was satisfactory?”

“I’m going to get fat and unfuckable if you keep force feeding me like that,” she grumped. “A few hundred crunches, though, and hopefully it’ll mostly stick to my titties. Would you like to fuck them before you go, by the way?”

“Would *you* like me to fuck them before I go, my pet?”

She nodded, and I beckoned her with a finger. She was no Rachel, true, but if this didn’t work, I would miss her nevertheless.

I had always been a stickler for protocols. Most of them had a reason behind them. Take the incantation customarily uttered before opening the Vacuous Grimoire. Absolutely unrelated to reading the thing, but the little fucker could panic and inhale you in a gulp if you surprised it by opening it without some forewarning.

I could only hope it was an attitude my mirror self shared. By the time the portal was fully open, he would have had three full hours’ warning as it materialized on his end. If I’d done it right, it should open right there in his living room. Enough time for a cursory divination to ascertain its origins, as well as establishing a warding to keep anything that came through from having free reign of his place. The magical equivalent of texting before you showed up and pounded on the door. It was a courtesy, and it signified that I came in peace. Or at the very least, I had the decency to attempt something clever rather than shredding the veil between worlds asunder in an instant and then lobbing a few hand grenades through to the other side.

(I appreciate that hand grenades aren’t very warlocky, but c’mon. They’re hand grenades. No need to improve upon perfection.)

I honked Joanna’s cum-speckled tits goodbye. She was on the verge of tears. At least it wasn’t that she doubted my odds of success, but rather that she was loath to go any duration without my cock in arm’s reach. I gathered my things – not that there was much; a ballpoint pen and a scrap of paper – and stepped through, trying not to look too much like I was braced to be disintegrated on arrival.

There was a surge of energy, a swirl of something blue-ish and vanilla, a hurricane-force gust of what I perceived as air even though it was actually the stretching of my life force across infinite parallel eternities. Then in a blink, the sensation ended, and there I stood in my own living room – or a reasonable facsimile thereof, at least.

It was about what I expected. The architecture was the same. This was a Mirror Plane, after all. The affects, however, were all, broadly speaking, superior. Instead of mere drawings and books on the walls and shelves, there were minor artifacts and enchanted furniture. The magic here was *real*. Present. I didn’t dwell on it. I hadn’t come to burgle, nor to make war. No sense lingering on the presence of the Shiny Cock of Saint Krod casually serving as a book-end. Fucking hell. Could I possibly…

No. No, I couldn’t.

Surveying the room was plenty to settle the matter, in fact. The protocols had been observed. There was a ward in place, one large enough to give me what looked to be exactly half of the room, like two brothers drawing a line across their bedroom to demarcate turf. From the yellow-gold glow emanating from it, they weren’t even lethal. It might burn all the hair off my body and maybe clothes and skin as well, but even I could do far nastier. This was a welcome mat, albeit one in front of a chain-locked door. The gateway – err, portal – remained reassuringly open at the back of the room, awaiting my return trip. I hoped very much there would be one.

Of my host there was no sign, nor of Rachel. The room was tidy, if not so immaculate as Kammie had rendered my house on the other side. Perhaps it was suffering from the absence of its usual housekeeper. There could be no doubt though that an alarm had been set to alert him of my presence, so rather than call out, I took a seat on the armchair, placed conspicuously near the center of my side of the room. Or rather, it was standing conspicuously; the thing had legs, and unless I was hallucinating from the influx of magicrons, I’d seen it lick its lips right when I came in. I sat. A soft rumble passed through its arms, its operating enchantment matching itself to its new occupant. Nothing changed, however. At least in terms of how we fit in an armchair, the new and prior occupants diverged not at all.

The urge to marvel at my surroundings was real, but I suppressed it. Not only was there the background awareness that I had literally transcended my reality and entered a whole new world, but also the house itself. *My* house, or the skeleton of it anyway. Everything had the impression of how I *wished* my house looked. The objects of magic, yes, of course, but even the things that were the same… My portrait, a bit darker, more dignified, the lines less crisp and photorealistic, more a classic rendition of a being of historical import. The chair I was sitting in, a masterpiece of carpentry and magecraft. Even the paint on the walls, a bit less blue and more teal. It was soothing, the sort of soothing I’d sought at Sherwin Williams but had been denied by my own lack of vision.

Then I – he – *we* – were there.

It was cathartic to see him appraise me in the same way I surely was appraising him. Simple curiosity, really, to be able to study oneself without the aid of either screen or mirror. The distinction wasn’t so stark as it had been when I’d first encountered Kammie in her glamorized rendition of Rachel. Her true form, that is. Mirror Knox was scarcely more handsome or fit than me, yet his eyebrows dominated his face where mine simply kept my forehead from looking too big. His nose was a regal beak. His hands were quite nearly gnarled, the sign of a master warlock who had tirelessly worked his mortar and pestle. He hadn’t opted for full regalia, the robes and staff and all that. Not unlike my own casual ensemble, he came as a man comfortable in his own home. A man not at all threatened by the appearance of a portal in his living room, nor of the warlock who had emerged from it to reclaim his lost love.

Or, well, stolen property. No need to wax quixotic.

“Knox.”

“Knox.”

We shared a smile, and though we couldn’t shake hands on account of his ward, we each nodded cordially before he took his seat across the room from me.

“I have to say, I expected you much sooner,” he said, folding his hands neatly in his lap. It looked smug. It made me shift my own hands away from my lap and back to the armrests.

“A little surprised you didn’t force the issue yourself. I have to say, the mountain of lies your little pet dropped on me kept me pinned underneath.”

“Hardly surprising,” my counterpart observed dryly.

“What, that Kammie – that’s what we decided to call her, Kammie – lied to me? I’m surprised you would tolerate that in her.”

“No, unsurprising that you spent these past weeks pinned underneath her.” The cad laughed at his own joke. “And ‘Kammie?’ Really? That wasn’t too… on the nose…?” He scrunched his face in distaste.

“It was a placeholder only. I hadn’t expected her to stick around long enough to bother with something more prolific.”

“You couldn’t simply keep calling her Rachel…?”

“I didn’t know she *was* a Rachel for most of this whole aggravating interval.”

His sigh was just shy of contemptuous. “Of course you didn’t.”

Well this was certainly going about how I had feared it might. Time to get to it. That portal wouldn’t remain open forever. “Speaking of, I don’t suppose you’ve seen any extra Rachels hereabouts of late? About yea high, perfect golden brown hair, bit on the chatty side despite an abundance of useful things to say?”

My other self chuckled. It was a robust chuckle, bordering on malevolent. I was as envious of it as I was of the house. “Well said, Knox. Yes, I think I might have encountered someone matching that description. Amusing creature. Lovely, for a human. I understand you slipped her a magic mickey, eh? Or attempted to. Seems it didn’t quite take?”

“It took fine. The process was complicated by an unforeseeable supply chain issue, but she’s still mine to her bones.”

His goatee lengthened subtly with each bemused stroke. “Hmm. Is she, though? You see, I… No. No, you’re distraught, understandably. I confess to missing my own Rachel a bit as well – a subject you no doubt meant to broach soon. Very well, I’ll reveal my hand first.” He turned his head, but rather than call to her, he issued a piercing whistle. Only that, a single shrill trill, and then he sat there waiting. I knew that twinkle in his eye, though. This was going to be a surprise I wasn’t going to like.

I heard her before I saw her. A rhythmless thudding, like footsteps but heavier, accompanied by an odd jingling that reminded me of something I couldn’t quite name. Moments later, Rachel – *my* Rachel – rounded the corner.

Suddenly, the name was the only way to describe it.

She was crawling. That was the thuds, her knees and palms on his floor. (Hardwood! The bastard.) The jingling, I quickly deduced, was a little bell attached to a thin pink cord around Rachel’s slender throat. A collar. There were tags on it, too, one with a red heart big enough I could see it from across the room. If I didn’t miss my guess, that was my name – his name – emblazoned in the middle of it.

Beyond that, she looked… incredible. Better than she ever had. Almost as good as Kammie. Her hair had been brushed until it practically gleamed, a river of honey flowing down her back in an elaborate braid that even featured a hair-wrought bow on the back of her neck. Her skin was more perfect than usual, so clean and smooth it almost looked wet. She wasn’t naked, as her canine accoutrement might have suggested, yet the frilly blue lace lingerie she had been dressed in was somehow suggestive of something less than human, clinging well below her hips, failing to conceal much of her breasts. It wasn’t meant for modesty, any more than a dog’s sweater was meant for theirs. It was decoration to amuse the owner, a reflection of his vision for his pet’s fashion sense.

Rachel’s mouth was open. Her tongue lolled out. I was surprised the son of a bitch hadn’t implanted whiskers. And, I could admit to myself, almost disappointed. She looked hot as fuck.

She entered the room with a view of the other Knox, and after she arrived, her eyes never left him. Rachel crawled around in front of him, then sat down with her palms on the floor between her knees. In the brief moment her ass had been raised in my direction, I could see she was wet as hell, the pale blue lace soaked almost navy. Not that surprising, I supposed; I’d long since made sure she could lube up at need. Her good-natured tolerance for my affections being what it was, sometimes the girl needed a little help. Or I suppose I could have learned to settle with a little foreplay, but who has time for that?

“Here she is, Knox. Your Rachel. Do you like what I’ve done with her?” He patted her head.

Rachel’s panting intensified in response.

“Not too subtle. What’d you do, demand she debase herself for you if she ever wanted to see me again? Because honestly, I’d have thought extortion was beneath us.”

“Bold accusation from the man who entered my home to negotiate an exchange of hostages. But no, nothing so base as that. Leverage is a trifle. Try to dominate them with leverage, and they can squirm out of it. Seek a better deal. Lie to you, then betray their word. Come on, man. We’re warlocks.”

“Meaning what, exactly?” I could think of a curse that would turn someone into a raccoon, but that was a fur-and-all kind of deal. This wasn’t that.

“Meaning… I did what you meant to do. Isn’t that right, Trixie?” Knox prompted her with a nod.

Rachel barked. A single high-pitched yip. Her sumptuously rounded bottom wagged behind her, buttocks jiggling.

This couldn’t be happening. To be clear: I don’t mean that as some cliché reflexive denial – this really could *not* be happening. Not after what I’d done to her! It was difficult to ruminate on reagents and formulae when I was this focused in suppressing an erection, though. I couldn’t give him the satisfaction of seeing me admire his handiwork.

“I never meant to do *this*. I wanted to fuck her, not turn her into a beagle. I don’t know where you get off, buddy, but–”

“Right here,” he interjected smoothly, reaching out and swishing a finger in Rachel’s open mouth. “Isn’t that right, Trixie girl? Much more appropriate than ‘Kammie,’ don’t you think? A girl with so many tricks up her sleeves could only be a Trixie. And, of course, we had to get rid of those pesky sleeves, too, didn’t we? Couldn’t have you fucking up my plans like you kept doing to his. Now we’ve made you into a proper bitch in heat. My happy, horny little mammal. Isn’t that right, girl?”

“*Yip! Yip yip!*” She wagged harder. I watched, mesmerized, as they swallowed her panties in real time.

“Very impressive. While I’ve been twenty-four seven balls deep in your little shapeshifting slut, you’ve been here housebreaking mine. Bravo.”

“Oh, you should see the new tricks I’ve taught our little Trixie. Here, let me balance a treat on her nose.”

I scoffed. “You seriously went out and got dog treats just to try to prove to me you could make her–”

Rachel’s head had obstructed my view of his lap, but I didn’t miss when Knox’s cock flopped out of his pants and thudded with a weighty *plop* onto Rachel’s button nose. Of course the fucker was bigger than me. If Kammie could improve upon ScarJo’s tits, it stood to reason he could one-up mere porn stars. The shallow bastard, as if a big dick was necessary to satisfy a besotted love slave. Rachel responded to it by re-doubling the intensity of that wagging, audibly clapping now, all the while not letting it slide off the tip of her nose. My mind’s eye could picture her going cross-eyed in delight as she took it in. In the absence of permission, rather than gobble down her treat, Rachel merely sniffed at it excitedly. Within moments a series of pitiful whimpers came from her throat.

She’d never whimpered for my cock. Never.

“You want it? You want it, Trixie? Yeah?” He slapped her about the face with it playfully as she bounced and lunged after it, tongue extended. Whenever she managed to get a taste, her whole body quivered. “All right, then, have your treat.”

I expected her to lick at it, continuing with the whole puppy slut aesthetic. Instead she dove on it face first, plunging so deep in the first gulp that I could hardly believe that monster didn’t lobotomize her. And she sucked. Holy god, she sucked. Her hands were no paws in this. She stroked whatever her mouth couldn’t hold, caressing Knox’s balls with delicate deliberateness. As her head craned from side to side, I saw her eyes were squeezed shut in unearthly bliss.

“That’s… pretty fucking gross, man,” I jibed. Ugh, what a pathetic lie. “You really prefer this to having a genuine love slave? I suppose I could see how it could amuse for an afternoon, but it’d have to get old quick.”

Knox folded his hands behind his head, leaning back in his seat. The seat back accommodated him. Then he looked up and gave a laugh. “You misunderstand me, Knox. She’s–” He stopped, and then he stopped Rachel, shoving her face off his shaft with a palm to the forehead. She whimpered plaintively. “You can speak, Rachel.”

His command didn’t stop her from squirming, still trying to get back at that cock. “What would you like me to say, my love?” she said breathily.

“Oh, I don’t know. Why don’t you tell your, ah, ‘friend’ there what you’ve been up to since you last saw him? I’m sure he’s curious how you’ve been spending your days.”

Rachel didn’t waste any words assuring him of her compliance; that she would obey seemed so obvious that the whole “yes master” rigamarole was utterly unnecessary. Her head turned ahead of her eyes, but finally she managed to drag them to me, as if they were tethered – no, leashed – to his cock. Soft and brown, they were, like the utter shit this encounter was turning into.

“Oh, hi Knox!” I tried to say something, but she was obeying, and obeying meant speaking, not conversing. “So, yeah, I guess when you left with Jo, I was feeling sort of jelly. Sounds crazy, I know. Anyway, I figured I would try to make myself perfect for you so you wouldn’t need her. I know, I know, I’m the village idiot of Idiotville, but I figured since my potion for Jo sorta kinda half-worked, a smidge, maybe I could do better this time. So I did all this research, and all these weird rituals… Oh! the fish!” She flashed a pout. “But I guess I messed it up because… well, here I am, right?” She konked herself on the side of her head playfully, and then the hand sunk down between her legs and into her panties. She’d always been a self-conscious masturbator. No more.

“You guys are always telling me how dumb and helpless I am – I guess you were right! I was scared at first, and I missed you so much. *So* much.” Another pouty face. “It’s OK to tell him that, isn’t it, my love? It doesn’t mean I love you any less.”

“Quite all right, my pet. Speak freely, and if you displease me, I’ll punish you for it later.”

Her eyes lingered on his spire of a cock, which the cad hadn’t bothered to tuck away, but she managed to eventually pry them away and return to me. “Knox – this Knox, the improved, perfect Knox – he promised he would help me. I didn’t know what else to do, so I trusted him. I thought maybe deep down, he would be like you. He tricked me, though, because he’s *so* smart and I’m *so* not. He fed me a potion that he said would transport me back home, but instead it made me dizzy and I passed right out!”

“An unanticipated complication, that,” Knox admitted, having the grace to look at least a bit less smug for a moment. “Probably some reaction as my unflawed brew clashed with whatever it was that you gave her. Truly, impressive stuff. Her commitment to you was unlike anything I’ve seen before. It helped me refine my own recipe, so thank you for that. In the end, however… I’m sorry, why don’t I let you tell it, Trixie.”

“Right! So when I woke up, he asked me how I felt, and I said I wasn’t sure, how was I supposed to feel, and he asked me if I felt any different about him, and suddenly I was like aw, snap, I *love* him! He’s the love of my life. It’s like what you and I had, only a million zillion times better. You know how I let you do things with me? Like, sexual things?”

“Rings a bell,” I grumbled.

“And it was fun, most of the time! It was. You were a good friend. But with Knox, it’s not just the sex. Although the sex is amazing. Like so good I can almost blackout come just from looking at him, from remembering the times he’s fucked me, or let me suck him off, and so on. One time, he fucked my you-know-what so good I literally burped up cum after. Crazy, right?!”

Knox grimaced self-consciously. “A parlor trick, I know. I was bored.”

Rachel watched carefully to make sure he was done speaking before she went on. “When we’re done here, I know I’ll be touching myself thinking about being a silly yippy puppy for him, because it turned him on, and nothing could ever turn me on more. Like right now, you should *feel* how wet my hooha is. Seriously. I mean, don’t, because I’m his, and I’m no wizard but I’m pretty sure that sparky wall in the air there would melt your face off. But it’s nuts. God, I could come just thinking about the other day when–”

“I get it.”

“Right. Sorry, you know how I get carried away when I’m into something. Do they have *The Bachelorette* here? They have to, right? This place is perfect. It must be on every channel all the time. But anyway yeah, it’s not just sex! It’s–”

“I said I get it,” I intruded, louder this time. “It’s ‘love.’ Emotionally fulfilling, the greatest man you’ve ever met. I’ve read a thing or two about love potions, you know.”

“Oh yeah! Duh.” She peered over her shoulder at the preening Mirror Knox. “Do I have to say more or can I suck on you some more? Pleeeeease?”

“I’m a khamulan, Trixie girl. My penis will still be here when your bones have withered to dust. Have your conversation. Don’t be rude; he’s a guest.”

She sighed wistfully, but forced a polite smile for me, head tilted to make sure he could see she was complying. “So yeah, we’ve been just fucking and fucking and fucking, all day every day. I guess the version of me that I swapperoonied with was kind of a freak, so he was enjoying having a pathetic human slut who was pure fuck slave. His words.”

“The other you was… unconventional, at times, yes.”

“I guess I should thank you? He says I only felt like you were my best friend because you gave me a watered down love potion. Which, why didn’t you tell me, you doof! Feels obvious in hindsight, but if there’s one thing I’ve learned from having you Knoxes enslave me back and forth, it’s that nothing makes a girl feel righter than when she’s got love potion inside her.” She waited for us to show some reaction to her rhyme. We did not. “Anyway, if you hadn’t done that then I never would have wound up here as his love slave. I’ll be grateful to you for that forever. Or at least until I age out of usefulness to him and he throws me away like a piece of stinky garbage. Again, his words. But even though he’s the most perfect wonderful sexy powerful god-lover I could ever dream of…”

Rachel’s eyes fixed on mine. Those brown orbs hardened, for a glimmer. “You’ll always be my bestie. *Always*.”

With that, Mirror Knox patted her head, which was all the invitation she needed to resume sucking him off. “She’s laying it on thicker than usual,” he said as she noisily gulped his shaft down her throat, “but I think you get the idea. So. I suppose we’re coming to the point where you invite me to make an exchange. Trixie for Rachel. Or Kammie, or whatever you were calling her.”

“I… was.”

He nodded. I wanted to blast that smirk right off his stupid better version of my face. “As I’m sure you can appreciate it, it wouldn’t be much of an exchange. I could send her with you, yes, but unlike your little… experiment, my potion is quite binding. She’d be inconsolable. Probably kill herself before long, and not be very good company in the interim.”

“There’s no means of reversing it?”

Knox snorted. Then twitched a little, in a way that made me very self-conscious about the faces I made during sex. “You should know, a proper love potion can’t be reversed. The best you can do is trump it. Pour two into a vessel, and the stronger will burn out the weaker. It cannot be undone, however. And I did mine by the book. Not the pamphlet.”

“So you’re saying you destroyed your only collateral? You must not want Kammie back very badly, then.”

This time a full-on belly laugh. “Of course I do. Your human girl is amusing, and not ugly, but my Rachel is a higher order creature altogether. Since the moment I laid eyes on her, I needed her. A need all the way down into the most primal parts of me. Perhaps you felt something like it, and simply failed to address the urge with appropriate vigor.”

“Let’s not lower ourselves to petty taunts, all right? If you can’t return my Rachel to me, then I guess I’ll have to content myself with yours.” I actually had to raise my voice to be understood clearly over the slobbery slurpy blowjob she was lavishly bestowing upon him.

“Nonsense. Surely by now you’ve realized she belongs to me, if not in the same way as this one. It’s occurred to me that I ought to diminish her autonomy somewhat, seeing what profound stupidity her Prime self is capable of. In any case, if you don’t return her, then you know I’ll simply make arrangements to take her back. Arrangements that I assure you, you will not enjoy.”

I drummed my fingers at the tedium of his response, though really, trying to condescend to someone receiving the blowjob of a lifetime from the star of your wettest dreams was pretty much a non-starter. “I don’t doubt it. I considered doing the same.”

“Considered, but realized you are entirely outmatched.”

“However,” I went on, “that’s why I didn’t leave her lying around where any idiot could find her. I’ve stashed her away somewhere, and until I’m satisfied, she remains stashed away. And before you can spew more bravado at me, know this. Where I’ve trapped her? Her freedom can only be restored by my free will. Even if you tortured me, even if you fed me another of your by-the-book love potions, there’s no retrieval possible without my unadulerated consent.”

What followed was an awkward half-giggle from both of us, simultaneously appreciating the irony of a lecture on consent while our love slave knelt between us, feverishly pursuing his cum at the behest of the sludge we’d replaced her sense of self-determination with. We moved past it simultaneously as well, but I held my tongue.

“Well, look who’s become a student of cosmology all the sudden,” he said, grabbing the bow in Rachel’s braid as handles and thrusting into her face. Irritably, I thought. “So, let’s see. Carceri, is it? Nasty little place. Good thing I’m immortal. It would shave years off a man’s life, bargaining like that with the Prison Plane.”

“So you’re familiar with it, then. Good. I won’t have to prepare a lecture on how futile any attempt to liberate her without my assistance would be. Give me what I want, and I’ll draw the glyph of liberation for you. Refuse, and your prize rots away in hell for eternity. Up to you.”

His frown intensified into a scowl. Then it became something else altogether, and from the way Rachel’s cheeks puffed out, it was easy to surmise what. When he finished, he bucked her off. She sprawled backwards, coughing up gobs of cum all over herself. It took a moment, but she managed to smile at him for his donation to her happiness.

“You really still want her?” He thrust out a hand at where she was scooping his seed back into her mouth hungrily, eyes locked on him in worship.

“I do.”

“Trixie, tell this man what you think of him.”

She never looked back. “I know he used to mean a lot to me, but now that I have you, I don’t really need friends. I don’t need anyone or anything but you, my love. He’s my best friend, always, but I’d give him up for a single kiss from you.”

“Sweet, but I don’t kiss cum-breathed little mortal girls.” He looked back to me. “She means what she says. Take her from me, and she’ll burn out in despair and resentment inside the week. Perhaps you could chain her up, gag her, keep her alive for a time. Have some fun with her body for a while before her charms atrophy.”

“What I do with her is my business.”

Those eyebrows did quite a job of bearing down on me with displeasure, and remained so for some time. Almost, I thought he might refuse me. At last, he heaved a sigh and waved a hand at me dismissively. “You know, I must say, I was so looking forward to this confrontation. To meet the man who reflected me into existence, to spar with him over our respective lives’ most precious works? Truly, I had been anticipating this moment with some relish. Even after you failed to intercede in time to save her. I’d hoped you might come up with some desperate scheme, some mad plot to best me, so unorthodox and suicidal I couldn’t anticipate it. A portal opening in my bedroom in the middle of the night, lob a cluster of hand grenades through. Something bold. Instead, I get… this. Straightforward. Uninventive. Pyrrhic. Cutting off your nose to spite our face.”

“Sorry to disappoint. So you assent?”

He shook his head in apparent disbelief. “Fine. If push is coming to shove, as it seems to be, there’s no question which of them holds more value. Have what’s left of your toy, for as long as you can.”

“Just like that, eh?”

“Would you like to see what comes if we roll up our sleeves, I dismiss this ward and we duel it out?”

Rachel clapped her hands excitedly, cute little tits nearly bouncing out of her skimpy bra. “I’ll cheer for you so hard, Knoxie!”

Knoxie.

I held up my hands. “No need to get snippy about it.”

“Says you. Now, I presume you have some process in mind for the exchange?”

“Nothing elaborate, though since I also don’t want any grenades lobbed my way, I think we’re both better off leaving the ward where it is, and ourselves on opposite sides. Alter it to permit Rachel through safely. Obviously she’ll do whatever you tell her to, so tell her to retrieve the glyph, then accompany me home. In perpetuity.”

Mirror Knox arched a commandingly bushy eyebrow. “Really? You don’t even want me to leave the room while she delivers the glyph through to this side? How do you know I won’t countermand the order once I have the glyph?”

“Will you?”

His eyes narrowed suspiciously at my apparent abundance of trust. “I suppose not,” he relented at last. Then he gave another of those whistles, only this time it summoned a crow instead of a dog. That must be Talnas, whom Kammie had spoken of. The intelligence shining in those beady black eyes confirmed it.

“Nice familiar. Been thinking about getting one myself. Tricky ritual, though. And it's hard to find good help these days.”

Rachel nodded seriously. “Especially with Jo still being all messed up in the head. Is she doing all right?”

My counterpart responded to me as if she hadn’t spoken. “Something to set yourself to once you get back, perhaps. I recommend them. Talnas has served me well, even in our short acquaintance.” Mirror Knox extended the arm on which the creature perched, approaching the portal slowly. As it neared the translucent barrier, it gave one solitary peck at the wall. A flash of white energy shimmered through the room, then coalesced into a point that receded into the creature’s beak. “Always better to tie a ward to your familiar than yourself,” he explained. “I doubt if our connection would have been strong enough to let you alter the barrier in my stead, but with Talnas in command of it, no chance.”

“Smart.” I said nothing more, merely looked at Rachel and waited.

He hauled her to her feet. She leaned in for a kiss, but he shoved her back roughly. She apologized immediately. “Rachel, I want you to walk over to your friend there. He’s going to hand you something. Bring it back to me, then I want you to follow him through the portal to your home.”

She looked at me warily. “Do I have to?”

“You do.”

“When do I get to come back?”

We answered in unison. “You don’t.”

“But… but…”

“No blubbering, Trixie. You’ll go with him, because that is how you will best please me. Am I understood?”

Her chin quivered. “Yes, my love. Ugh, this sucks!”

“Good. Now go. And crawl, will you? Give the poor fellow a thrill.” I’d have to work on my smirking if I was ever going to parallel this guy.

After a weary sigh, Rachel dropped to her knees and crawled through the barrier, eyes downcast, face as glum as I’d ever seen it. The merry jingling of her tags was dissonant. I rose, and once she was at my feet, I helped her to hers.

“I missed you, Rachel.”

A faint smile threatened at the edges of her lips, but then her chin fell, abashed. “I’m Trixie.”

I tilted it back up. “You’re amazing.”

The familiar cawed right as Mirror Knox cleared his throat pointedly. “The glyph, Knox.”

“Right. Of course.”

It was easy enough to draw, a simple twist on Erkhimar’s Noctis. Using the pen and paper I’d brought with, I sketched it out for him. Precision was important, but I’d always had a steady hand with such things. My parents had wanted me to be a surgeon. I handed the paper to her, and with a good deal more urgency, she crawled back through the gate with it held gently between her lips. She sat at his feet and allowed him to take it.

“The Noctis Pattern, eh? Not bad. A bit simplistic, though, don’t you think? Fudge it with ink from an infernal squidmare and you could trick the gate open with half of the glyph missing.”

“So go to hell and find a squidmare.” Whatever that was. Fucking know-it-all. “Now come on, Rachel. We’re leaving. Have a nice life.”

Rachel looked at her master longingly, then turned to go. She had been ordered, after all. She’d barely moved one knee, however, when he caught her by the braid.

Big fucking shock, that.

“You’d better not be reneging,” I growled.

“I’m only making sure it works first. Relax, Knox.” His tone was so earnest it could only be a lie. He could at least have pretended he meant it. No, this son of a bitch meant to steal them both, and we both knew it. With that barrier still in place, though, there was fuckall either of us could do to the other. A fact he was well aware of, as he dispatched the crow familiar to retrieve his inks from the laboratory. I watched, helpless, as he knelt down, brush in hand, and painted my glyph on the oaken floor. His hand was every bit as steady as mine.

There was a groan, a cacophony of groans, the groans of men longin for a death denied them. It came from nowhere but filled the house to overflowing. Rachel’s head whipped about, panicked. Then it faded, and the glyph became a hole into nothingness. Out of that hole popped a certain redheaded two-horned hottie. She still wore that negligee from her trip under my kitchen table, but now it was singed in places, torn in others. If I wasn’t mistaken, the chip in her defective horn had widened.

“Who the…” He cocked his head. “Rachel? Why the hell are you made up like Scarlett Johansson?”

But she was rounding on me. “You fucking asshole!”

I grimaced. “Yeah, my bad. In fairness, you did have it coming, kinda. Mess with the bull, and all that.”

“I already have horns! You *imprisoned me* in mother fucking *hell!*”

“And I said, my bad. Come on, we’re even now. It has to feel nice, having that weight off your chest.”

“Speaking of weights on your chest… back to your true self, my pet. You know I don’t like it when you try to rise above your station.”

Her glower lingered even as she shimmered and became the hyper-perfect Rachel I’d met that first day back from my trip with Joanna, when I’d thought Rachel had merely glamored herself rather than the chaos she’d actually wrought. Kammie even mirrored Rachel’s trampy lingerie. The real Rachel – *my* Rachel – staring at her in awe from the ground. Honestly? I couldn’t have said which I preferred.

I snapped my fingers for attention. “Well, have a happy reunion, you two. Rachel, let’s get going. And feel free to walk this time. I don’t want your knees bruised up.”

“Actually,” Knox said with predictable reticence, “Rachel, stay right where you are.”

I tensed. “Don’t do this. You gave me your word.”

“And you were a fool to accept it.” He shook his head with a rueful laugh. “Really, how many sex slaves need a man take before he can be relied upon to keep taking more sex slaves? I warned you about the inadequacy of leverage. This really is the most disappointing contest I’ve ever won.”

I stared hard. “You really don’t want me trying to earn your approval. Knox.”

But he was admiring his prizes. After a moment, he glanced at me. “You’re still here? Come on, then. Portal’s open. I can’t abide the sight of a grown man crying, least of all with that starter kit edition of my eyes. Shuffle on home, Knoxie boy.”

My very first dialogue with Rachel, at the neighborhood picnic where I’d slipped my love potion in her drink, her then-boyfriend Jim had called me that. I’d never intended to let him keep her, but that slight had cemented my intention to use her to take him down. Rachel had gleefully confided in me every soft spot on Jim’s underbelly. Ultimately, I’d eschewed standard revenge tactics – going after his reputation, his employment, keying his car and so on – and stuck to the warlock arts.

Rachel had met with him over coffee ostensibly to reconnect; while he was in line buying her a scone, she’d dumped my dick-shrinking cocktail into his latte. Good luck fixing that with your so-called medicine, Jim’s doctor. Even if he could get another woman to let him put it inside her, she’d never feel the shriveled little baby carrot. It would wear off in a decade or two on its own, I suppose.

I really, really hated being called Knoxie.

Kammie was still glowering at me, unencumbered by the distraction of affection for him. As for Rachel, she was watching me out of the corner of her eye, anxious, as she nuzzled her cheek into Mirror Knox’s palm. Love potions were no trifling matter. Kammie’s control mechanism might be less openly servile, but every bit as binding. By her own admission, only the most powerful bonding magic could override it.

This, clearly, should be where an ordinary man would cut his losses, give up and go home. But, like I said, I really hated being called Knoxie. And I was no ordinary man.

My name is Knox, and I’m a warlock.

“Can I at least say goodbye?”

He didn’t miss the desperation in my voice, even if he misunderstood its cause. “Good lord, you really are dragging this out. Fine. Rachel, kiss your friend goodbye. On the cheek.” As Rachel popped spryly to her feet, he turned to Kammie. “And you, go slap him on the other one. You’ve earned the right.”

The girls shuffled and stalked respectively, right through the barrier to my half of the living room, side by side. They could be twins, aside from Kammie’s horns and the quiet smile stealing onto Rachel’s face. I offered a cheek, and she gave it exactly the little peck he’d ordered. Kammie raised her hand open-palmed, though she hesitated to make sure I could tell she’d rather it had been ordered into a fist.

Before it could fly, I splashed her with the vial I’d kept in my inner coat pocket.

There was supposed to be more ceremony to it, but if there was anything I had learned from Rachel and her confounded love potion, it was that sometimes one simply had to wing it. As a stickler for protocol, it pained me to do it so haphazardly, but it was that or let her slap me. I’d imprisoned her in hell with a mouthful of freshly siphoned cum, after all; it would have been the mother of all slaps.

She stumbled back, blinking, sniffling, trembling. Knox, fists clenched, cried out in rage, “What did you do to her? If you hurt her, just because you couldn’t keep her for yourself…”

“Spare me the indignation, chum. It’s a little cocktail I’ve been saving for the right moment. Had it for a while now, and it seemed like it was a now or never kind of thing.”

“W-what… What *was* that?” Kammie asks, eyes refocusing. She still looked a bit unsteady. Rachel put an arm around her to help her keep her balance.

“It’s a familiar ointment,” I said calmly.

“What? I’m not familiar with any ointments, I promise you, guy.”

Knox’s nostrils were flaring, though. “You… You didn’t. You couldn’t!”

Kammie was beginning to comprehend, though. She must be feeling what I was feeling, a connection blooming inside her. There was a nook in the back of my brain that was now Kammie. It told me where she was, that she was confused, frightened, angry. Beneath those motions was a sizable dollop of curiosity along with surprise entwined with gratitude. Arousal was blossoming beneath that, warm and radiant.

I was handling the disorientation a bit better. After all, I’d had weeks to prepare for these feelings. She was only now processing.

“Wait, like *familiar* familiar? You bonded me?”

I nodded. “I surely did.”

“How?! I was with him when he bonded Talnas. You need some kind of physical piece of someone. A feather, a hair, something! And I counted my hairs every night!”

“That’s my girl,” muttered Knox proudly. Likely a precaution he’d taught her, to protect his property.

“You can *count* your *hairs*? How many do you have? Do I have the same number?” exclaimed an awed Rachel.

“Lucky for me, I harvested your pubic hair, which you evidently haven’t forgot to include in your tally. The guide said it would alter the familiar bond into something a bit more… amorous than the conventional familiar.”

“You stole my pubes? When the hell did you–”

“You took all those sleeping pills that one night, remember? So I could take advantage of you unconscious? Or whatever the creepy intent behind it was.”

“Didn’t put you off your appetite, though, did it guy.”

“Anyway, it’s not my fault you took the roleplay so far. I’d been looking for an opportunity, and you handed it to me. Once you told me he’d just recruited one himself, I knew I was on the right track. Our lives, our fates, are intertwined. If he’d taken one, it had to mean I was meant to do the same.”

Knox looked apoplectic. He knew as well as I did – better, no doubt – that the familiar bond was squelching his control the same way his love potion had supplanted mine.

Or at least, the same way he believed it had.

“I think I’ve looked into the mirror long enough, girls. Shall we?” I gestured to the portal.

“Rachel!” thundered Knox.

Both Rachels turned, but Kammie replied. “Sorry, neighbor. I’m his now. I’ll see if I can’t teach him that whistling thing you do for your little birdie. It’s kinda hot.” She blew him a quick kiss, shrugged, and strode to stand before the portal.

“Trixie…” He snarled. One corner of his upper lip was twitching in rage.

“It’s Rachel, actually,” I corrected him. “Right, buddy? You can drop the act. It’s all right.”

“You’re sure?” she asked in a tiny voice.

“You’re safe now. From now on, forever. I’m taking you home.”

Rachel, my best friend, the best friend I had ever had, threw her arms around me and hugged me with strength I could hardly believe those skinny arms possessed. I hugged back, though made sure to practice my own smirk over her shoulder.

“Act?! How? What did you do to her?”

“Nothing,” I said simply. “Or rather, *you* did nothing to her. Your by-the-book love potion? Used the full hundred grams of lunar caustis, didn’t you.”

“Of course I did. That’s the prescribed–”

I spoke softly, forcing him to fall silent and endure my lecture. “Lunar caustis is a necessary ingredient to invoke the lust component of the potion. However, it also dilutes the binding process in the Glauber’s salt and white vitriol. See, my supplier shorted me, so I had to scrounge what I could and adjust the rest. In the end, Rachel’s loyalty was greatly heightened, at the cost of some of that libidinousness she play-acted for you while waiting for me to rescue her. And I am sorry it took me so long, hon.”

She didn’t let go. Didn’t even loosen her grip. “Never apologize, friend of friends. I knew you’d come for me. I knew it.”

Knox fumed. His little bird squawked angrily as well. “This isn’t possible. For *weeks*, I’ve been training her. Grooming her. Using her in every way conceivable! No one could fake it *that* well!”

At last, Rachel turned to look at him. Her eyes swelled with pity. “What choice did I have? I’d read up on love potions, see. Once I figgered out what you tried to do, I knew I had to roll with it while I waited for the real Knox, the bestest most magicky warlock in the whole wide multiverse.” She flashed a gleaming white smile at me. “For him, I could endure anything. I’d let a thousand men fuck me, night and day, every position and every hole, no matter how disgusting or degrading or perverted or whorish, if that was what it took to get back to him.”

“See? Loyalty.” I really was nailing that smirk. “You should have been more careful though, Rach. If you’d dropped any more hints, even that ego-blinded moron might have caught onto your little charade.”

“Hints? What hints?! I turned her into a dog, and she sucked me off in front of you!”

“I’ll grant, she had me going for a moment, there, but… she’s my bestie, Knox. The pout when she said how much she missed me? God, when she told me I’d always be her best friend – you’d have to be deaf not to hear how much she meant it. That delay after you came in her mouth, where she forgot for a moment to pretend to love it? Joanna’s received half the training you’ve been giving her, and she would never hesitate to slurp that down.”

“But…!”

I tsked my tongue at him. “And come on, ‘Knoxie?’ She called you Knoxie. No way a brainwashed fuck slave with weeks of hands on training would be so obtuse. After that, it was just obvious.”

She beamed at me adoringly. I could not wait to fuck this woman again. “I’ve told you a thousand times. You’re always, always, always going to be my best friend. Count on that.”

“I did count on it. That, and that this clod would underestimate me.” Smirk smirkity smirk smirk. “What do you say, Knoxie boy? Still disappointed? Don’t despair. I’ll see if I can’t find one of those pamphlets for you.”

I didn’t wait for a response. With one Rachel under each arm, I strode through the portal.