

## Hell Forged

### Chapter 3 : Of Mice and Men

It was a truly sinful string of firsts for the young drake. Margret basically gave him first base, then Bereft coached him so well he skipped second and went to third. He was balls deep in warm kitten pussy before Bereft showed him the glory of second base with those nice soft tits! They were like two balls of marshmallow-y yarn that could be used to make Margret quiver and grip around him as he played with her sensitive bits. Bereft had shown him the beauty of a woman in rapture and the glory of being desired. He was practically beating the underside of his desk with his boner just from thinking of it, despite how empty his balls were. Bereft coached him through every moment. He let him take control a few times and he didn't fuck it up. He was even given kudos from time to time. His heart was a flutter and his mind a fog, drunken on the waning glow of the intense love making he had given Margret.

That was then, this was now. Kaleth had bid Margret a good evening after they thoroughly cleaned every nook and cranny of each other's bodies. Was she okay? Did he do anything that might have hurt her? Did she really want to do what she did, or was she compelled by the changes in reality? What would all this mean for her soul? What would it mean for the two of them? So many questions roiled in Kaleth's mind. Questions that made Bereft roll his eyes, but he let Kaleth enjoy being pussy whipped.

For now though, she was gone, leaving Kaleth to bask in the reality of what he had just done. Had he really just lost his virginity? Given, he was behind the curve for this kind of thing, but losing your v-card at twenty five isn't such a big deal. Unless there was a demon sharing your skull who liked to shove it in your face.

*You're telling me she was your first kiss? Fuck, kid! You really were a virgin. Not just a virgin, but a virgin-virgin!* Bereft was laughing in Kaleth's skull like a madman. Sure, he had access to Kaleth's memories, but he didn't really look into his sexual experiences. To be fair, there really wasn't anything in Kaleth's memories to remind Bereft to look.

"Hardy, har, har," Kaleth rolled his eyes. "Not all of us are ancient entities from another plane of existence. I'm sure you've had plenty of time to be with plenty of people."

*Keep your thoughts inside your head, kid! You're going to give away that I'm here when you keep talking to yourself like a madman.* Bereft chuckled darkly.

"Maybe if you stopped laughing like a crazed hyena, I wouldn't need to talk to hear myself think!" Kaleth spat back. Bereft just roared with more laughter. Kaleth rubbed his temples in frustration, a mixed sense of selfish joy and aggravation giving him whiplash.

*I had to hold you back so hard I thought you were going to break free a few times. You were so ready to pop your cherry that you were going to christen your pants before you even got inside her! That's too good. Fuck, that's rich!*

Kaleth was reaching his limit, but he took a deep breath and tried to ignore Bereft, retreating into his mind...but it wasn't just his mind anymore. Kaleth remembered something...but it wasn't his memory. It was like watching a murky screen play an old show, but it made more sense than that, and somehow it was moving at a rapid speed and he caught every frame.

Bereft shocked them both out of it with a slam of his fist.

"Don't you dare look into my past, you worm," Bereft growled through their maw. "I have been bound to you, but I can still make you suffer, even if I can only do what you desire."

Kaleth felt fear grip his heart, but he simply shook his head. "Wait...I know something about you now. How did that even..."

"Stop," Bereft snarled.

Kaleth obeyed and pulled his mind away from the screen.

"Wait...you've never been bound before...have you."

"I have communed with hell mages across space and time that would make your pathetic mages weep with envy. I have razed cities to ash and brought scores of mortals to heel through far more talented hands than yours. Don't cross me boy," Bereft warned.

Kaleth normally would be mortified and cower back, but when Bereft spoke, he also sounded like himself. Just more confident. So when he threatened him, it was like he was chiding himself, but that was something he had lived with all his life. The threat felt hollow. Besides, there was a detail in Bereft's words that spoke to him.

"So...you've never been bound to anyone...right?"

Silence! Sweet, sweet silence filled his head for once as Bereft was speechless.

"No..." he begrudgingly admitted. "I have never been bound to a hell mage. None could ever handle nor tame me."

"So..." Kaleth smiled.

"Don't you fucking say it!" Bereft hissed between their teeth.

"You're kind of like...a virgin at this too...huh?"

"Shut up you fucking virgin!" Bereft spat out.

“Not one anymore, thanks to you!” Kaleth chuckled while Bereft rubbed their temples in frustration. How quickly the tables turn. “I thought big-shot demons like you were all paired up with the government sanctioned hell mages.”

“Not just any hell mage can handle me,” Bereft breathed. “Plenty of kinlings have died at my hand simply because they couldn’t shake it without being smote.”

“Then why did my body work?”

“You’re special,” Bereft looked inward, to the inner workings of his vessel. “Had you been given proper training and guidance, you could have been the head of the Hell Mage Core.”

“R-Really? Head of the HMC?”

“Well...from what I can see of your current hell mages, they ain’t anything special.” Bereft grinned. “Not much competition here in this realm, huh? Just a few two bit demons looking for an easy soul to snatch.”

“Competition?” Kaleth narrowed his eyes. “What do you mean?”

“There’s a lot that goes on beyond your realm that you couldn’t possibly comprehend,” Bereft gestured vaguely in the air. “The easiest way you could describe it, is a competition. Demons compete for the best vessels and powerful kinlings in order to make a name for themselves. Low level demons will take any kinling binding they can get because they want to move up. It’s a guaranteed soul. You offer your soul as collateral and we bind ourselves to you in order to expand and grow.”

“Wait, you get my soul? When? I didn’t offer you my soul!”

Bereft chuckled darkly, a shadowy claw ran down the inside of Kaleth's chest, he could feel Bereft running that razer against something incredibly raw. It felt like a teardrop rolling down his face, then down his chest before it popped into a bloom of fear.

Fear...pain of the soul. Bereft just touched Kaleth's soul with a powerful claw.

"What the fuck did you just do?" Kaleth gasped.

*Sensitive, huh?* Bereft spoke in his head. *Never been touched there? Did I find another cherry to pop?*

Kaleth's breath caught in his throat as that pinprick of fear started to grow and gouge and widen, blooming in his gut like an open wound oozing blood.

"S-Stop..." Kaleth gasped. Instantly the pain subsided.

*Your desire is my command.* Bereft answered with a cocky grin folding the corners of Kaleth's mind. It was an internal grin, one made of the demon's essence. It was...uncomfortable.

"But...I never gave you my soul!" Kaleth spat out.

"No," Bereft chuckled. "Tobias did."

Instantly the knowledge of how the ritual works flooded Kaleth's mind. Tobias would need to have the kinling willingly take part in the ritual. He was telling the truth that the ritual would be used to identify his attunement, but only because it wouldn't work unless he had kinling blood. Once the kinling agrees to the ritual, the deal would be struck. Kaleth gave Tobias his own soul as a bargaining chip, swindled out of his afterlife in service to the father's ambition.

Deep gouges were carved into Kaleth's desk as he raked his hand across it.

“Tobias,” Kaleth snarled. “You...how could you...I wish I still had your soul right now. I wish I could rake my claws across it, tear it to pieces, and nibble on it bit by bit.” Kaleth and Bereft’s voices melded. Bereft was putting to words the torture he could have inflicted on the priest. Kaleth wanted to be comforted, his deepest desire at that moment. Bereft could do that, by helping him imagine what revenge would taste like against Tobias had they not so eagerly broke him to nothing.

“Nothingness was too good for you. Paradise would never have been in your reach, and I could have given you a true taste of hell before I shat you down there myself.” Kaleth had a moment when he realized that he wasn’t speaking on his own. He shook his head. He knew that if their desires aligned, they could speak as one. That was easy enough to comprehend. Though demon binding was common place amongst hell mages. Did all of them know the price they were paying?

*Yes, Bereft answered. Of course they knew. It’s the only way for them to grow as a mage. What were you willing to give up prior to coming to the convent for a chance at that kind of power? That kind of freedom?*

“I get that...but I didn’t choose. I was tricked.”

*I was tricked too, Bereft crossed their arms. I thought I was going to get a sweet hell mage to bind with, a powerful soul, and a shot at greatness. Instead I got a little drake that hadn’t even gotten his dick wet yet. At least you would have had your soul go to hell. I would have become nothing.*

“I guess you got the better end of the stick.” Kaleth felt an overwhelming sense of dread. “I still have nothing to look forward to when I die.”

“Come on now buddy,” Bereft chuckled, his voice pointed and sarcastic. “You were always going to amount to nothing. Becoming nothing at the hands of me would be quite the honor. All joking aside, it is for your own good.”

“How the *HELL* is this for my own good!” Kaleth shouted.

“Again with the shouting?” Bereft rubbed a pinky in their ear in annoyance. “Like I said before. I’m *literally* right here. And why do I have to explain everything to you? Your greatest desire right now isn’t answers, so figure it out yourself.”

“How should I know why a hell mage would sell their soul...” that’s when it dawned on him.

“Ah...there it is. Now you’re getting it.” Bereft breathed out the words like they were a compliment.

It made more sense with Tobias’ knowledge. Kinlings were susceptible to a lot of things from the hells simply because they had hells’ blood. A demon, imp, or many a damned creature would go after a kingling, sealed or otherwise. They were targets suited and susceptible to hell’s temptations, and a temptation for the creatures of the hells. His soul could have been pegged by any random demon or even another kinling. Consumed and devoured without any kind of recompense. What better way to protect your soul than to sell it to a demon that could protect it...who would have great incentive to keep it safe.

*Someone it was owed to*, Bereft finished Kaleth’s thought.

“But you just hurt my soul,” Kaleth surmised. “I felt it.”

“I can touch what’s mine,” Bereft did that mind folding smirk again. “And you’ll fucking live, you pussy. Your hells’ blood is strong, but your soul is a fucking marshmallow. This world has done quite the number on you. Fear, anxiety, depression, and hells know what else. If I had to describe the condition of your soul, it would be skinned alive.”

“So...my soul is also pathetic.”

“For now,” Bereft put their hands behind their head and kicked their shoes up onto the desk. “Your soul is healing quite nicely. Given, your constant panic and worry make it hard to temper, but you’re well on your way to soul as strong as steel.”

“You’re...fixing my soul?”

“I’m fixing the soul I get when you die, yes. I can’t harm it, but I can at least make it presentable for your last supper.” Bereft licked their lips. “I have a lot riding on you, kid. So long as we’re bound, we’re in it for the long haul. It might not be ideal, but we can make something out of this life you still have.”

Kaleth was still shaken at the loss of his soul. It’s something he admittedly took for granted. That’s the one thing that’s yours, right? Your soul? Given, he didn’t know it was real until he ate one, but still...

“How do you...temper a soul?” Kaleth wanted to know. Bereft grinned.

“You follow your heart’s desire. Happiness, joy, fulfillment. These are all things that temper a soul and ready it for an eternity of bliss.”

“So that’s why you’re bound to do my heart’s desire.”

“Because it is what I most desire.” Bereft smirked. “You catch on quick, kid. You ain’t half as dumb as you look.”

Kaleth decided to simply take the compliment and move on.

“Do you...you must know then what it is that would best temper my soul. What do I really want?”



Bereft had been waiting for this question for quite some time. This entire conversation was used to guide Kaleth to this very point, to ask this exact question. Bereft did the equivalent of cracking his knuckles with his essence before answering.

“You want someone to blame,” Bereft answered truthfully, though, not necessarily the full truth. It was a subtle push, but a push none the less. The same water that softens the potato also hardens the egg, as they say. You got to know how to work the soul in order to temper it right. And Bereft was a savant. Tobias gave him an initial gauge of what he was working with, and now he really knew how to get to work.

If he did this right, Kaleth would do all the work for him.

Those words struck a chord deep inside Kaleth’s soul. His desire for justice...no...vengeance was deep. He didn’t care about right or wrong in this situation, only that he had been swindled out of his soul and used as fuel for another’s ambition.

Just then, the phone rang. Kaleth jumped, but Bereft chuckled.

*Perfect timing*, Bereft lifted their leg and slammed their foot down on one side of the receiver, causing it to flip into the air. Kaleth was going to flinch away, but Bereft caught it in their open paw.

“Father Ore’s office,” Bereft spoke into the receiver.

“Cut the crap Kaleth, it’s Mathias.”

“So are you finally going to come investigate?”

“On the way out now. Better be worth our time.”

“It was your plan-”

“And you messed it up! You could have summoned an unleashed demon! Do you have any idea how dangerous those things are when they aren’t bound?”

“And it could have just as well followed you here! You’re part of the exorcism core. The EC has plenty of enemies downstairs.”

“Whatever! We need to handle this before it rouses any more suspicion. Be there in ten.”

*Click~*

“Oh, we’ll see who’s to blame by the end of all this,” Bereft set the phone back on the receiver.

Kaleth was ready to start his crusade. He already knew who was to blame, and Bereft was kind enough to remind him. His little dick draining detour was over. It was time for some revenge.

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“Jesus Christ,” Mathias shook his head as he inspected the scorch marks. “Sure looks like hellfire. Not like a blown circuit could scorch like this in the center of the room.”

*Why don’t we just jump him here? Kaleth demanded. This asshole is bending over right now.*

*He’s part of the exorcism core, we need to get him somewhere we can trap him. Away from other people.*

“It’s definitely concerning. Can you tell what kind of demon it is?” Bereft took control of the questioning, emulating Tobias’ soldier demeanor.

“Hmm...not sure. Plenty can use hellfire,” Mathias inspected the scorch marks. The perfect outline of the bulldog was hallowed in a circle of ash. “It looks well controlled, but a freshly summoned

demon wouldn't need to worry about their essence degrading without a vessel. At least not right away. This poor sod must have refused to barter for his soul, so he just scorched him instead."

Mathias stood back up, his tall lanky form inspecting the scene with his dead eye.

"We do have the body down in the cooler. It didn't have much left of it after the fire was extinguished."

"I guess we should inspect that too. I'm sure this is the last thing you'd want to be doing the week before your birthday. What a wonderful gift, huh?" Mathias pulled out his reading glasses and opened his bible. "A wonderful mess for us to clean up."

"I'll take your services over a card any day," Bereft spoke with a dry sarcasm.

*It's not my birthday next week, what the hell is he talking about?* Kaleth seethed. Mathias was really getting under his skin. It was like the very act of breathing could annoy him.

*Calm down kid!* Bereft scolded. *It's not your birthday, it would have been Tobias'. Now quiet! I need to focus. One wrong move and he's going to have us pegged.*

Kaleth did the mental equivalent of huffing and crossing his arms while Bereft continued to work. Kaleth's heart was beating out of his chest; he was so mad, so angry, and so anxious it was giving him a hair trigger. Though, he knew they needed to be careful, the EC is nothing to scoff at. Especially now that he was one of the things they were meant to exorcise.

"Ore?" Mathias raised a brow.

*Fuck! What did he say?* Kaleth had to bite their lips to prevent his panicked thoughts from becoming words.

*Shut up kid! You need to just sit this one out!*

“Sorry,” Bereft feigned concern as he shook his head. “The situation is all...just a little unnerving. What did you say?”

“I told you to take me to the body,” Mathia’s eyes appeared to grow more tired as he put away his reading glasses, the dark rings under them growing deeper with an exhaustion that was palpable.

“Yes, of course! Right away,” Bereft answered and walked them towards the mortuary.

It wasn’t so much a mortuary as it was a place to keep bodies cold until a real mortuary could come and pick them up. Many a wayward soul found their final resting place at this convent. The streets were harsh and cold. With the winter months upon us, there would be another body count.

For now though, the basement walk-in was as good a place as any to preserve evidence. Planted or otherwise.

“You handled the body with care,” Mathias followed close behind. “I don’t want to mistake your claw marks for demon talons.”

“Of course! I’m not an idiot,” Bereft snapped back. This was in line with what Tobias would have done. Pride for his work and bickering with his partner in crime.

In reality, the two did *not* handle the body with care. They thought it was too much of a hassle to carry it the whole way, so they just rolled it down the stairs. They didn’t think to use the service elevator. It was designed to help handicapped students get to and from classes when the school was originally built. Bereft practically kicked it into the walk-in and Kaleth wasn’t too upset about how they treated his betrayer’s body. In truth, he wished he could have done more.

“Father Ore?” Bereft and Kaleth were stopped in the hallway by Margret. She was wearing her night gown and holding a flashlight. She used it instead of turning on all the lights in the hall so as to not disturb their other guests. “Oh goodness, is this your friend from the exorcism core?”

“She knows about us?” Mathias seethed.

“Just where you’re from, nothing more,” Bereft reassured Mathias before turning to Margret.

“Please forget what you saw.”

“Of course...” Margret’s eyes lingered on Mathias before her eyes shot down. “I was...just coming to ask you something...but this is much more important.” Her tail coiled around her waist as she looked at her foot paws. Kaleth suddenly felt a tightness in his pants as he remembered what they did only a little while ago. The smell of her desire was light in the air, but there was no question what she was coming to see him for.

“Oh,” Mathias sighed. “You’re the one who found the body.” Mathias pushed Bereft to the side a little more forcefully than he would have liked. “Just a few questions.”

“Leave the poor girl out of this,” Bereft hissed. “She’s been through enough.”

“N-No...I would like to help any way I can, Father.” Margret answered.

“That’s not necessary Margret.” Bereft was trying to juggle this, but Mathias furrowed his brow.

“It’s just some basic questions. It’ll only take a moment. She’s already involved anyway.”

Mathias turned to Margret. “When you found the body, was there anything that particularly stood out?”

“Well...of course. He was wearing Father Ore’s clothes.”

Mathias’ eyes narrowed. “What do you mean? It was scorched by hellfire.”

“Hell fire!” Margret clamped her hands over her mouth in surprise, and to keep herself from shouting again.

“You found the body before it was burned?” Mathias questioned before tilting his head so his milky eye could get a better look at her.

*Stop him!* Kaleth shouted.

*No shit!* Bereft shot back. Bereft grabbed Mathias by the wrist and turned him around to face him.

“Leave her out of this,” Bereft had a very even tone, but was clear and direct. Something Tobias learned from his drill sergeant. You don’t have to be loud if you can be forceful. “The less she knows the better.”

Mathias looked annoyed, but he knew it was best to keep Margret in the dark.

“Sorry Sister,” Mathias stood back up. “Forget we even asked.”

“Of course Father,” Margret looked between Mathias and Bereft a couple times for guidance. “Those empty eye sockets were very...well...jarring to say the least.”

“Empty sockets?” Mathias caught that bit like a bloodhound. “Before or after the body burned?”

“I said, leave her out of this,” Bereft ordered Mathias. “Margret, whatever you wanted to discuss can wait until later. Come on, we need to get to the basement.”

Mathias pulled his hand free of Bereft’s grip and rubbed his wrist. “I’ll thank you to keep your hands to yourself, *Father*.” Mathias spat out that last part before straightening his sleeves and waiving off the Sister.

“Get out of here,” Mathias ordered Margret. “You’ll just be in the way.”

“Y-Yes, Father,” Margret murmured and scurried back to her quarters. Kaleth had to hold back a snarl and how he treated Margret. Didn’t he know she was his...well...didn’t he know how to treat a lady!

*Do you think he knows? He has to know, right? Kaleth was on the verge of panic. We should take him here and now!*

*Quiet, kid! If we do, the whole convent will have us pegged as a hell mage. We need to isolate him first.* Bereft scowled at Mathias, the treatment he gave Margret would easily justify the response as Tobias’.

“Well?” Mathias said while rolling his tired eyes.

“Well what?” Bereft huffed.

“I’m waiting for you to lead the way.” Mathias pinched the bridge of his nose.

“This way,” Bereft growled, and led Mathias to the basement. This time, they took the service elevator. It was the quickest way. The old building wasn’t the most conventional in the sense of structure. Multiple corridors and halls that didn’t link up the way you thought they should. It was a proverbial maze. It was just easier to take the elevator than guide Mathias through the corridors.

The elevator was one of the newer things in the building. Must have been added shortly before it closed. The manila colored doors swung open to reveal metal walls and what looked like old movie theater carpeting. The floor was worn and weathered. The designs in the carpet were indistinguishable from a mixture of traffic and dirt.

"I really must have Margret clean in here," Bereft said absently as he got in the elevator. He turned and gestured Mathias to come along.

*Going down?* Bereft smiled inwardly.

Mathias didn't even hesitate. He walked in and Bereft pressed the basement button. The elevator lurched to life, the fluorescent lighting flickering as power was redirected to the motor and the metal box started its decent.

It was slow and Mathias was looking at his nails, inspecting them quietly as the elevator moved slowly downward. That's when Mathias plucked a piece of paper off the wall. It was an old faded pink flyer that held on by a weathered and yellowed strip of tape.

"Decennial festival?" Mathias chuckled and let the paper fall to the ground. "That shit was, what, two years ago now? You're on year thirteen of this shithole?"

"Thirteen and counting," Bereft sighed. "We put that flyer up here because we had a handicapped resident. We wanted to make them feel welcome."

"Really? Waste of paper if you ask me," Mathias pulled out his reading glasses and flicked them open before putting them on.

"I made this convent prior to you, you know. It serves this community more than it serves us."

"Yeah, and a whole lot of good came of that. Let's just get this shit over with," Mathias scoffed as the doors dinged and he stepped out and pulled his bible. "Where did you say the body was? Which way?"

*Now!* Kaleth shouted.



*No, not yet.* Bereft reigned in Kaleth's hand that was going to lunge for Mathias.

Mathias noticed this out of the corner of his eye and raised a brow.

"Uh...there we are." Bereft flipped a switch beside the rat, the fluorescent bulbs flickering to life. "Just down the hall." Mathias rolled his one good eye and continued onward. There was a kitchen in the basement of the building. It was mainly used to clean and prepare bodies now, but for tonight, it would be used to hide them. Can't have Margret finding this body too.

Mathias pushed his way through the swinging doors into the make shift mortuary and headed for the large metal door. Bereft followed soon after. This was it, this was the moment they would have Mathias. This is where they would get their revenge. Kaleth and Bereft were practically drooling. The two had to take a gulp as they felt the anticipation of lunging in their legs.

*Now!* Both Bereft and Kaleth lunged forward.

Only to be held tight.

Mathias had his free hand up, one wagging finger enveloped in white holy flame as he clicked his tongue.

"Tisk, tisk, little demon," Mathias turned. He had a sly grin on his face, his buck teeth showing through his crooked smile. "Not quite on time, but better late than never." That's when Bereft's essence ran cold while Kaleth's fear became confusion. Mathias' dead eye was blood red, black ichor oozing out from under the socket.

"We've been waiting a long time for this," Mathias groaned, stepping forward and gripping Kaleth by the throat, the veins on Mathias's hand twitched as they ran black with ichor. His one glowing finger shone with holy magic, but oranges of hell flame tainted that holy fire.

“What the hell are you?!” Bereft was caught off guard. This holy magic was powerful. It wasn’t a binding, simply a holding spell. Normally Bereft would counter it, but with their powers sealed he couldn’t muster the mana. Not to mention this wasn’t a typical holding. To the naked eye, there was nothing, but the invisible hands that bound him were bathed in holy light and tipped with hell magic. A powerful duality.

“That’s for me to know, and for you to never find out.” Mathias chuckled darkly. “You made it so easy to peg you. It was laughable. That little flyer in the elevator though was the kicker. Over ten years of running this place? What would you have been? Fifteen when you founded it? Just because we haven’t properly forgotten the poor soul you sucked, doesn’t mean it’s a fool proof cover. What was the fuckers name anyway?”

“Like I’d tell you,” Bereft spat back. Mathias frowned. With the curling of his finger, the arms holding Bereft pulled his arms taught and forced his legs together. He then lifted him off the floor, forcing his body into the shape of a cross.

“Don’t make me bless this corpse you’re defiling and make it into a cross. It would be a very painful prison for you.”

“Tobias,” Bereft spat the name out like he couldn’t do it out quick enough.

*What the hell are you doing! Do something!* Kaleth screamed in his head.

*Sometimes doing nothing is something, kid! He can’t hold us forever, not with something this strong. I need to keep him talking.*

“Tobias...ah,” Mathias smiled. “The old war dog turned priest. I remember him, but I can’t remember his face. All I see is you. Funny how soul eating works. You consume everything that the

person was, and because their soul is still part of our memories, it gets warped into you. It's exorcism 101, you hell filth. You think I wouldn't pick up on it?"

"I thought you'd have picked up on it sooner, being from the EC and all."

"I suspected it as soon as you told me hell fire was involved." Mathias boasted.

"Come now Mathias, I can smell the lie on you," Bereft called Mathias' bluff. "You didn't know until you were in the elevator. Admit it."

"Don't you dare patronize me!" Mathias spat on Bereft's face. "You're nothing, or you soon will be."

"Wait don't you want me to tell you more about what's going on down below? What the plans are for this world?"

"I'll know soon enough," Mathias opened his mouth, and sucked.

"Fuck!" Kaleth couldn't keep quiet any longer.

*Quiet kid!*

Mathias looked surprised, then frustrated. He sucked again...and again...but Kaleth didn't feel any fear or anguish. At least none that felt unnatural.

Mathias shifted his finger and felt the pulse in Kaleth's neck.

"You're not alone in this body." Mathias' lip curled into a snarl. "You fucking bastard! You're the kinling Tobias and I were trying to use!"

“You got that right,” Bereft chuckled. “Do you really think you’re capable of breaking an accord that *I made*? You’re just some low level grunt that found a way to hold onto both holy and hell magics. I’m the real deal.”

“Who are you?”

“You’re telling me the big exorcist hasn’t figured it out yet? Use that stolen eye and look at me closer, you hell filth!” Bereft threw Mathias’ insult back at him.

“You think you can intimidate me-” Mathias started, but his dead eye grew wide.

“He’s not lying,” Mathias’ words sounded scared and surprised. “Run...”

“What? No!” Mathias wrestled back control of his mouth. “I’m not going to hold back just because he’s an old friend of yours.”

“You don’t understand,” Mathias’ words came through distorted with a shaky voice. “We don’t have the authority to break this kind of accord. He’s...kill him. Just kill him and be done with it.”

“I’m not going to give up, he’s my bounty, and you serve me!” Mathias sucked harder and both Bereft and Kaleth felt a pull, but still no fear.

“We can’t! Don’t you get it! He’s too big a meal for us to handle. We need him in smaller chunks.”

*Oh fuck*, Bereft shuddered.

*I don’t like the sound of that*. Kaleth was starting to lose it.

*We need to distract him just a little longer*.

*With what?*

*Something! Anything!*

“Please don’t!” Kaleth shouted, his voice pleading. “I don’t want to die. Please! Don’t hurt me! I’m begging you.”

“I didn’t give a shit about your soul before,” Mathias chuckled and gripped Kaleth’s throat harder. “What makes you think I do now?”

“Please! We’re brothers!” Kaleth lied.

It was a piss poor lie that anyone could peg as false, but the soul eating and this whole “not forgetting properly” thing was just enough to confuse Mathias. He furrowed his brow for a moment and chuckled.

“I’ve only ever had one brother.” Mathias leaned in to look at Kaleth with his demon eye. “And I killed him for his eye. What do you think I’d do to someone who’s not even my family? I don’t think you’ll need to wait to find out.”

*Gotcha!*

Bereft wrestled his hand free and gouged that eye with Kaleth’s claws. The shattered remains of Mathias’ reading glasses ripping into his retina before clattering on to the floor.

Mathias jerked back and howled in pain, the bindings falling as he dropped his bible. Bereft cracked his joints.

“Good to be free,” Bereft smiled and licked the ichor from his fingers. “Hell mage and holy father together. What a delicious combo.”

“I told you to run...” Mathias muttered.

“Shut up!” Mathias screamed at himself as he covered his eye, black ichor oozing from between his fingers. He went for his bible, but Bereft had other plans.

“Tisk, tisk,” Bereft mocked Mathias as his bible burst into flames. Hell fire ripping the binding and wards apart. “Can’t have you using that.”

Mathias finally took his passenger’s advice and turned to run. Bereft lunged forward, gripping Mathias by the back of his vestments.

“Where are you going? You’re just in time for midnight communion! Say your prayers, Father Mathias!” Bereft sucked, the force like a gale. Mathias gripped this throat and clenched his jaw, but a few white strands with bits of icy blue mixed in came furling out of his eyes.

Bereft and Kaleth gulped it down. Sinfully decedent.

“You’re too weak to protect your soul, and you tried to take mine first. You know what I am owed by the code.”

“Like hell I do!” Mathias turned and brandished his golden crest. The golden cross on it flared with blinding light that seared deep into their soul. It was like looking into the face of an active volcano. It burned and seared and threatened to burn them to death.

In that moment, Kaleth could see into the darkest parts of his mind. The light bleached everything and exposed all. In the corners of his mind, in the darkest alleyways and avenues, he saw Bereft. Not just a shadow, but a solid image. Metallic scales and rippling muscles.

Then it was gone.

“Run you fool!” Mathias begged himself.

“Shut up demon!” Mathias shot back.

Kaleth and Bereft had let go of Mathias to cover their eyes. They couldn’t see, everything was white, yet they knew the light was gone. Its searing pain wasn’t there and the relief of darkness enveloped them.

*Don’t let them escape,* Bereft demanded.

*I can’t see, where did they go?*

*Hold on, I’m healing our eyes.*

Tears streamed down their face. Their eyes had never been drier in their life. Holy light can do some serious damage to a demon if they aren’t prepared for it.

*He’s getting away!* Kaleth snapped.

*I’m working as fast as I can!*

Already the sound of the elevator dinging down the hall alerted them to Mathias’ escape. That’s when Kaleth had an idea. Tobias knew this place like the back of his hand. Kaleth drew upon Tobias’ memories and let his muscles memory take over. He stumbled forward, but caught himself on the metal pipe that was in the kitchen. He could do this. He could catch Mathias.

Kaleth dashed forward in a world of white. He burst through the kitchen doors. The world started to gain some color, hazy images. Mathias was in the elevator pressing the close button rapidly.

“Get back here!” Kaleth shouted, and Bereft sucked. The range was quite impressive, though it may have just been desperation. Mathias gripped his throat and clenched his mouth and eyes shut. A few more wisps of his soul trickling out of him.

They tasted like ecstasy. They rolled down their gullet like pearls of pure joy. The flavor of a man who has known true happiness and extraordinary loss. The duality was intoxicating. Kaleth had to have more!

*Kid! Stop!*

“Be gone!” Mathias bellowed. Kaleth felt his body halt. Their vision cleared just enough to see that Mathias had pulled out a pocket bible from his coat and was now keeping the two of them held in place as the elevator closed. The last thing the two of them saw of Mathias was his crooked grin as those old manila doors closed.

“Damn it!” Bereft and Kaleth snarled. The holding spell broke and they slumped to the floor. There was no way they could catch Mathias. The damn layout of the school was so fucked up there was no way they could catch him.

Their revenge had been taken from them. Their vengeance would go unfulfilled. A dark pit of anger writhed inside of them, begging for satisfaction, for a soul to tear apart. They had only wetted their hunger with bits of that soul. Drops, no more a meal than dew on grass.

But those bits held something important. Bereft chuckled darkly, his tongue lulling out of their mouth as he got more info about Mathias.

“I know where you live...” Bereft chuckled. “Not just where you work...no...I know where your family is...I know where your wife sleeps and where your daughter lays her head down at night. You think you’ve gotten away, but you’re far from out of reach.”

Kaleth felt dread bloom in his chest. Not that he was worried about what Bereft would do...

...but that he might let him.