

Rachel's Love Potion 3: Oops, Summoned a Demon Part One

“How many times do I have to tell you, I’m *not* a succubus, guy,” the almost certain succubus repeated.

“One more ought to do it.”

“I’m not a succubus!” the horned Rachel-thing on Rachel’s bed wailed plaintively.

“All right, you convinced me.” I retrieved the key from my pocket.

“Seriously?”

And then I smacked it in the forehead. “No, moron. Of course not.”

She – it – giggled in spite of herself. Itself. It was really hard to convince myself that something *that* sexy wasn’t a female. “I wish we’d met under different circumstances. You’re fun.”

“Really?” I smiled down at her.

“Really really.” Her lips relaxed in preparation for an inevitable kiss.

I smacked it in the forehead again. “Quit flirting. It isn’t going to work. I’m a warlock, not some pleb. You can’t melt my brain with sensuality.”

She arched a skeptical eyebrow and glanced toward the doorway. The faint sounds of Joanna scratching at the far side grated at my ears. Our fuckathon the past day (or had it been two days? three?) had melted her brain but good. Shutting her out had been the only way to keep her from constantly pawing at my zipper or “Rachel’s” anything, but there was no stopping her from pleading to be let in. For now, Joanna was little more than a cat affronted at being denied the opportunity to watch its owner take a shit. She hadn’t yet regained her powers of speech after the Rachel-thing fucked her down the evolutionary ladder.

“That was luck.”

“Sure it was. But like I said, I’m not some psycho sex predator. I can’t help it if I was summoned this way. Blame your tasty little apprentice.”

“Rachel is *not* my apprentice. She mixed one potion, and she botched it.”

“So? You said you botched your potion. Maybe she takes after you.”

I suppose I had that one coming. In the midst of my interrogation, listening to her spin a tale of obvious bullshit, I’d accidentally filled her in on everything. Filled *it* in, I mean. “Look. I’m not some crusader. Keep your secrets, wreak your havoc, I don’t care. I just want Rachel back.”

“Havoc? You don’t like what I did with your house?”

Upon returning from my week-long fuckaway with Joanna at her parents’ lake cabin, I’d discovered my home in its most immaculate condition. Top to bottom, it was flawless, with the sole exception of what the real Rachel had referred to as my fungeon – what I called the laboratory. I’d only meant to poke at her a little, have some fun

breaking in Joanna and leaving Rachel missing me, regretting her idiot decision to meddle in my life and my lab. I'd expected to come back to a lonely, anxious Rachel, ready to be a little more forthcoming with my satisfaction. Instead, I'd found a wrecked lab and a missing girlfriend. Girl friend, that is. Fuck buddy.

As for the cleaning, I didn't know what to make of it. There had to be some explanation. Had Rachel done a deep clean to try to make amends for her jealousy over Joanna, then gotten distracted with some idiot arcane quest? Had the succubus thought she could distract me by tidying up somehow? I honestly wasn't sure.

All I knew was, I wanted my plaything back.

"Where is she?"

"I told you, I don't know. This is my first time being summoned to the Prime Material. They told me what to expect here on the Prime Material, but I don't know how it all works."

"Like I'm going to believe that you, a mid-ranking demon, don't know how the whole summoning thing works?"

"Do you know how an escalator works?" Despite having her hands cuffed to the headboard, she managed to convey a smug folding of the arms. "But you still ride it. Hey, speaking of rides..."

"Do you think I'm a complete idiot? Like I'm going to let myself be seduced by you after I've caught you red-horned?"

She laughed at my feeble pun, and it was easy to hear the real Rachel in that. She loved a good pun, the only woman I knew who managed to make routine use of the term "punderful." The lowest form of humor for the lowest form of intellect. "I didn't mean me, Knoxie. I meant Jojo the Sex Clown out there. She needs you. Needs me, too, until you can find her buddy."

"She *wants* us. World of difference. And she'll still want us tomorrow. It'll wait."

"You know, if you want to get her back to normal, all you need to do is fuck her. My hotness overwhelmed her. One of your little wizard—"

"Warlock."

"—toys must have buffered you. Jo, though..." She winced empathetically. "She needs sex with a mortal to even her out."

"How unlike a succubus, to promote random sexual hedonism as a cure for her own misdeeds. So while I'm in the next room plowing Joanna, you find a way to pick the lock on these shackles, and before you know it, bam, I'm responsible for ushering in the next rectification of the Voldranei. No thanks."

She sighed. "Suit yourself. But I'm telling you, I'm not a succubus. The sooner you take me seriously and let me be a friend to you, the sooner you can get your 'friend' Rachel back."

“Don’t use air quotes. Rachel is my friend. My god, if anyone in the whole history of the multiverse was someone’s friend, it was Rachel.”

“Sure. No more air quotes. Your love-potion-compromised friend.”

“Save it. I’m not letting you go until I have her back. You think you can annoy me, goad me off-track?”

“I haven’t been able to annoy you onto the right track, so maybe you’re just easily annoyed by friendly advice.”

“Save it. You keep forgetting that you’re not talking to some untutored hedge wizard. I’ve never even heard of the plane you claim you’re from, much less – what did you lie that you were again?”

“Hurtful. And I’m a khamulan. Of the Silver Mirror Plane khamulae? How can you not know about us? We’re *awesome*.”

“Because there’s no such thing, and no such plane? It’s not a bad lie, I’ll grant. A succubus would expect I was familiar with Mirror Theory, and of course anyone with even a rudimentary familiarity with Qyssinian etymology might swallow the *-ae* ending as a legit derivation for species nomenclature. Still, there’s the little fact that you’re an extraplanar fuck machine that energy drained the nice lady out there into lizard level functionality.”

“Extraplanar fuck machine?” The creature eased down the sheet I’d draped over her idealized iteration of Rachel’s lean lines, tugging it inch by inch until her naked body was once more exposed to me. “Finally, you call me something I don’t resent.”

I threw the sheet back up. She smirked unrepentantly as I tucked it in so it wouldn’t creep down from breathing alone, like she’d let happen the first half dozen times she’d wanted to show off those too-perfect tits of hers. Now she at least had to own that it was deliberate. Once more I considered binding her ankles to the bedposts, though I was still pretty sure the idea only appealed to me because of how amazing she would look all staked out.

“Look, if you won’t tell me where you stashed Rachel, then you’re not much good to me alive. Last call. One more line of crap about mirror demiplanes and augmented summonings and your Prime Material field trip comes to a bloody end.”

“If I were a succubus – and I’m not – I’m pretty sure only holy weapons would destroy me. And last I checked, warlocks can’t wield holy weapons. Not without melting their calloused mortal hands off, anyway.”

Well then. Bluff called. Though it was only one more point in favor of her being a succubus. I stocked holy implements in the same abundance as dick-melting elixirs, and for the same reason. Rachel was, or at least had been, one of those lapsed Christians who believed in guardian angels (apocryphal), offered thoughts and prayers after catastrophes (pointless), and bought digital copies of *Eat, Pray, Love* for her female friends (cyber-bullying). One of the first things I’d done after copying her house key was

to make her take down her crucifixes. There was still a faint outline in the paint where one had hung over her bed. Its presence didn't seem to disturb my hostage, though.

"I could always try sawing you into pieces and dumping them in disparate parts of the ocean. Might not kill you, but it would feel just as good."

"Not to me, it wouldn't," she grumbled. "Come on, Knox. Be reasonable. If I were a succubus, wouldn't I have fled as far as I could get from you before you ever came back from you and Jo's trip to Boinks Island?"

"Not if Rachel managed to bind you to some condition of serving me, like she did with the potion she fed Joanna. Maybe you were required to wait behind and fuck me before you would be free of the conditions of your summoning to this plane?"

"I thought you said Rachel was too stupid to know what she was doing."

"She is."

"OK, so once we fucked, if I'm so evil, why didn't I bonk you over the head with something at the first chance? Didn't you provide me a dozen different opportunities to vanquish you while we were fooling around?"

"One more overconfident demon who likes to toy with its food. No surprise there."

"Pretty sure a succubus would've taken that literally and bit your dick right off."

That very fate had been met by a guy I attended the academy with, roommate of an old friend. Too soon. "Pretty sure this succubus was busy feeding off of Joanna.

"Feeding...?!" The she-demon managed to look affronted. "Do you know how much energy it takes out of me to be *that* pleasing? Do you spit in your witch doctor's face if you don't like the taste of their medicine?"

"Fucketing?" I repeated. Mocking someone's misspeech was low, but I was frustrated.

It doubled down. "Yeah. You guys don't use 'fucketing'? It's like fucking, except it means in a good way. Lousy fucking weather, spicy fucketing chilli?"

"We do not."

"You should. Anyway, you and Jo should be thanking me for what we did. On your knees."

"Thank you," I said evenly, "for making your deception so easy to see through. You really thought I couldn't tell the difference between my... between Rachel and this façade of yours?"

"Between your... what?" Its eyes widened, face softened like it was the real Rachel and she'd just seen the couple's first kiss under the mistletoe in a Hallmark Christmas movie. "Oh my god, you actually *love* this girl! Shit, after seeing Joanna, I thought for sure you were just another warlock with a sweet tooth for mortal poon and a recipe for a love potion, but you actually care about this chick. That is probably the sweetest thing I've ever heard!"

“No, you had it right the first time. Warlock, potion, poon. I came up against a supply shortage and Rachel’s potion lacked a little bit of the lust factor, but anything resembling love is all on her side.”

“Sure it is. That’s why you’re so ready to forgive me whatever it is you think I did if I give your gurrll back.” She grinned. “No wonder you fucked me so good. I haven’t taken it like that in I don’t even know how long. C’mon. I’ll pretend to be Rachel again. It’ll be fun. Let’s go.”

“You’re not a very *good* succubus, you know. That’s, like, not even trying to be sly.”

“Because I’m not...!” Her nostrils flared, but adorably. Adorable like a succubus. Her pussy flared, too, but that was not adorable. Still succubus-like, though. “Look, I won’t even make my pussy smell like vanilla this time. It’ll be totally like your ‘friend’ – you won’t even notice I’m not her.” This time, its toes jerked down the sheet down in a single swift tug. The chaotium core in my shackles kept it from shapeshifting, but I’d swear it had still managed to downplay the extra layers of sex appeal it had slathered on when it had let us in to play. If not for the pair of curved horns sprouting from her forehead – one of them with a little chip out of it – she might have passed for the real Rachel.

“Cute. Look, if you think something as pathetic as showing me your boobs is going to corrupt me, you’re the worst succubus I’ve ever met.”

“Met a lot of succubuses, have you?”

“Succubi,” I corrected pointedly.

“Suck me, bye? Wow, you really don’t do the foreplay, do you.”

I rolled my eyes. A whimper accompanied the plaintive scratches at the bedroom door. “Aren’t you clever.”

“But ya know, you *could* suck on me...”

“Where’s Rachel?”

“Like I keep telling you, I don’t know. The longer you keep on not believing me, the longer it’ll be before you find her. Even if I were the sort to kidnap some innocent mortal chick and hide her somewhere, at this point I’d tell you everything just to get you to stop asking me the same questions over and over.”

“I’ll stop when you quit bullshitting me.”

“You’ll stop when you quit bullshitting *yourself*.”

With a sigh, I snatched a pair of Rachel’s underwear and stuffed it in her mouth, then secured it using a pair of her nylons as a cord. “I’m going to go ruminate on what I can do to make your presence in this realm less comfortable without decapitating you outright. I’ve got some toys I never got a chance to try out, so maybe we’ll find a way to make this fun for me after all. In the meantime, contemplate how much you’re willing to suffer just to spite me.”

“Thuth ith gruhth.” It glared.

I smacked her – it – in the forehead. “So are you.”

It was the middle of the night. Joanna traipsed along behind me at the end of a leash. It was left over from one of Rachel's ex-boyfriends' dogs, but it fit her – Rachel's – fetish collar fine. She didn't wear a stitch, and though she glanced around with muted anxiety at the dark nooks of our neighborhood on the walk back to my house, she didn't complain. Since I'd cut off her access to our extraplanar visitor, she hadn't said a word other than a high-pitched whimper that might have been the word "please" when I exited Rachel's bedroom to find her playing with herself on her back, legs in the air.

She'd started to cry when I tried to leave her tethered to the coat rack, so I let her follow me into the lab. There was much there she was never meant to see, but her IQ had been cut at least in half. She gave no sign that she saw anything out of the ordinary. When I told her not to touch anything but herself, Joanna nodded, and seemed to take the mandate to heart.

"She really scrambled you good," I said, shaking my head. Joanna looked up, mouth open, eyes vacant, but gave a little nod. The equivalent of a labradoodle wagging its tail, but it was a nod.

The laboratory received a thorough scouring. I needed to know what I still had, what I was missing, what was spilled and what had been used. Right now, I knew that Rachel was an inconsiderate slob, leaving the place like this. That sentiment might be enough to bolster my sense of justification for using my love potion on her, but it wasn't going to solve my dilemma of what had come of her. Anything I could determine of what she'd used might suggest an answer to the question of what she'd done; anything I could determine of what she hadn't was a tool I had in my kit when it came to fixing her mess.

It was a hell of a riddle she'd left me. I wasn't in the habit of keeping close track of my reagents. I worked alone, after all, so I ordered, gardened, or infernal bargained for more when I needed more. I remembered the artifacts and implements, mostly. It felt mostly accounted for. Wand of transfiguration, Broach of Rylox, Peg of Hanging Stuff On It (non-magic, but Rachel had gotten a giggle out of it when I'd let her down here to blow me while I steeped unguent base).

Not that I missed her. She was mine, though, and I'd be damned if I let some demonic cunt strumpet take my Rachel from me before I was done with her.

It was morning before I was done, if only in the technical sense with the sun coming up. Joanna had fallen asleep with three fingers in her pussy and three more in her mouth. It was cute, kinda, in a skanky way. The way I liked her. Women whose identity required them to look down on skanks always made the best ones, or so my old academy buddy had always insisted when he skankified another uptight untouchable prig.

There was lots missing, that was for sure. Several containers emptied, some of which were labeled, some not. Others were a lot more empty than they had been. Objects of power were mostly accounted for; he'd have to double-check upstairs to see if

any of the absent ones might have been quality-of-life enough that he'd left them in the residence after using.

Most of the absences weren't concerning. After crawling around looking in every nook and cranny for the Daggoth's Band of Affinity, however, I had to concede that a few of them were. Most concerning of all was the absence of my personal notes, a handwritten notebook of my own theories, recipes, musings and even simple diary entries. I'd have to check my leger to see if other books were missing, but that one I knew for sure. Thirty years of my life's work, gone. Consumed by her imbecilic stunt? Or with Rachel, wherever she was?

If she was, in fact, still somewhere.

No. No thinking like that. She had to be somewhere. She *had* to be.

I was *not* done fucking her yet. Not even close.

At the final tally, Rachel could have done any of a multitude of things in my absence. The odds that she'd accomplished whatever it was she'd set out to do were one in a thousand, if I were being generous. Her attempt at following my notations on concocting a love potion had left Joanna as her ultimate wingman and my grudgingly addicted love slave, and that had been a relatively simple brewing with my own fresh notes to guide her.

I opened up the pullout sofa at the side of the lab space. I hadn't slept on it in months, not since upgrading to Rachel's pillowtop queen. My final thought before I drifted off to sleep was to wonder what had even been going through her head.

What were you after, Rachel?

My dreaming state delivered no insight on Rachel's betrayal. If she had been a fellow warlock, I might have been able to guess at her aims and methods. As it stood, I was dealing with a woman whose grasp of the supernatural was informed by binging season after season of *Once Upon A Time*. For all I knew, she might have summoned a succubus on purpose – unbound, no less – because she thought it looked cute in the picture and I could use a girlfriend who was into magicky things, too. Cursing Joanna out of jealousy, dispelling one or both of the love potions, or hell, baking me a cake with glow-in-the-dark frosting – all of them were within the realm of possibility.

I could – and would have to – surmise something of her efforts from my evidence-gathering, but that would take weeks of analysis and might yield nothing. In the meantime, I had half a mind to forge a pair of Dunce Spectacles so she couldn't read any more recipes and create more trouble.

If she was even alive. Served her right if she wasn't. But she better be.

As if to make my point for me, I awakened to the sensation of Joanna's lips on my cock. There. That was an excellent reminder of what this was all about. Rachel made my dick feel really, really good, plain and simple. My anxiousness to get on with the investigation prompted me to take a handful of Joanna's deep red hair and fuck her face to completion. She didn't mind. She got to pleasure me, which was all Rachel's botched love potion required of her.

"Asshole," she mumbled once I came on her face and bucked her off.

"You liked it."

"Mmph." She sneered for a moment, then sat up and stretched. Her face grew darker as she took in the sight of my laboratory. Last night, she'd kept that blank face through the evening, not registering where she was or what was going on. Only now did she take it in. Still, whatever the effect the succubus had had on her, it wasn't gone. There was confusion, malcontent, but no questions, no accusations. Joanna wasn't out of the woods yet. ("Woods" being a metaphor for succubus pussy.) Still, as my nominal girlfriend, I had to issue credit where due. Coming did a lot to clear my head and remind me of my purpose.

Facts: There was a creature down the street. It had tried to impersonate Rachel. Its arrival coincided with her disappearance. It was sexy to a fault, and somehow managed to look even hotter with horns on its forehead. It had turned Joanna into a listless shell of a person, and, confounding though it was, its advice had proven correct. My cum had been a restorative.

It could be coincidence. It had been almost a day since Joanna had been permitted contact with it, and so whatever the effect had been could be wearing off independently. The fact remained that Joanna hadn't managed a single human word until she'd gulped down my cum. That was to say nothing of the fact that, as near as I could tell, I hadn't been affected. I'd gotten a little carried away for a while with what I'd

thought was my new and improved Rachel, but nothing like Joanna. Whatever was happening, the succubus's energy drain was not performing as advertised. It was possible, if unlikely, that I was, in fact, dealing with something else.

It could be a trick. What was a succubus if not an expert manipulator and deceiver? Only *why*? Chaos for its own sake was their kind's bread and butter, but irritating confusion was weak Abyssal sauce. A stalling tactic? If so, why? Awaiting reinforcements? It couldn't summon minions, not with those shackles on, and lightning didn't strike twice. No way Rachel could repeat whatever she'd done.

Of course, if it was a succubus, which remained the most probable possibility, I couldn't be sure I wasn't also somehow corrupted by it. The only way to be sure, though, was to bring in independent help. Loathe as I was to bring anything else into this mess, I had no choice.

Time to reconnoiter.

I gave Joanna a few good thrusts first. True to the creature's word, by the time that evening when I finished titty-fucking her on the dining room table, she was a reasonable facsimile of her usual self.

"I really hate that the table isn't perfect any more. Everything else is so clean. Now there's cum and sweat and oil all over it." She dragged a finger through it all, then twizzled her fingers and snorted in disapprobation.

"So clean it," I said, fetching my robe from its hook.

"Do you mind first telling me what the heck is going on?" She folded her arms beneath those spectacular tits of hers. They looked even better speckled with my jizz. (Some iteration of that phrase suddenly became my leading contender for the first tattoo I'd require of her. I'd workshop it. But later.)

"How do you mean?"

"Are you kidding me? You show up at Rachel's dressed like an evil monk from some Japanese horror anime. Then the three of us started fucking, and I lose all track of up and down. Like I was high out of my mind or something. Then I wake up in that weird basement room filled with props and powders. I deserve answers. If you're going to be my boyfriend, Knox, you have to tell me stuff."

"No I don't."

"OK, I suppose you don't, but I'd like it if you did."

"Luckily what you like isn't a foundational principle of our relationship. Now I need a favor from you."

"What? Knox, saying something shitty to me then immediately asking me for a favor? This is my look of utter fucking shock."

"It's not sexual this time."

Her face went from irate to crestfallen, like that. "Oh."

"I need you to keep an eye on Rachel's place for me. OK? We're, um, playing a little game. It's a cosplay kind of thing. Complicated. She's pretending she's... It doesn't matter. I just need you to hang out over there, bring her food and water if she asks for it. But whatever you do, do *not* touch her."

"What? After the other night, I thought you'd never want me to stop. I've never seen you so excited. It was... kind of insanely hot, actually, much as I hate to give you credit."

I shook my head. "Part of our game. But I mean it. Not so much as the tip of your finger can touch her, and I want you to spend as little time as possible around her. I know she's your friend, but believe me, she'll thank you if you play along."

"But why? No joke, Knox, you're kind of freaking me out. Rachel is my best friend in this whole world, and ever since you and I got together, it's been so hard on her. She's obviously jealous of the attention you give me – god knows why – and then we had that

fight...” She shook her head. “We were finally making up, too, but then you barged in, and now... Now I don’t even know.”

“I know.” I pulled her in, kissed her forehead. She nearly swooned from my token affection, but I never minded a reason to take hold of that ass. “Do this for me, and I’ll give you a whole day, whatever you want to do. No teasing, no toying – whatever you want. All right?”

Joanna giddily stroked my shaft through my robe flap. I’m not even sure she noticed she was doing it. “A week.”

I folded immediately. “You got it. A week.” I could ignore a promised week as easily as I’d intended to honor the promise of a day.

She brightened. “All right. I’ll do it. But we will talk about your ‘cosplay’ when this is over. Understand?”

I pinched her ass and nudged her toward the front door. “Go on, now.”

“I don’t have any clothes.”

“Wear what you wore at the lake.”

“You made me throw my clothes *in* the lake. Remember?”

It wasn’t classy, but I couldn’t help but chuckle at the memory, watching her unload her suitcase into the murky water piece by piece. Those had been hot clothes, too. Ah, well. Body like hers, I’d find her a way to be able to buy more. “Oh, right. Fine, you can borrow something of mine. Just this once.”

A few minutes later, I all but shoved her out the front door as she fought to sufficiently tighten the draw string on a pair of my shorts. “The *shirt* Knox!” she hissed back at me. Oh, right. I opened the door and tossed it out behind her. No sense of priorities, that one.

I took a moment to gather a few protective reagents, and headed for the linen closet.

Tendrils of purple-black smoke reached for my throat again. “Just be cool and try, OK? I’m not asking for anything uplifting or unfair or anything.”

Primek, Defiler of Strays, howled, the words forming only just below my capacity to understand them. (That’s what the ear plugs were for. Dread madness is well and good for fraternity hazing rituals, but I was on a mission.) The black wind subsided, and I was finally able to open my eyes, where Primek’s natural synesthesia let me read his speech.

YOU ARE LESS THAN NOTHING. IF YOUR WILL FALTERS FOR AN INSTANT YOUR SOUL WILL BE MINE. THE UNIVERSE WILL NEVER EVEN KNOW THAT YOU ARE GONE. SUBMIT. SUBMIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIT.

“Is that a yes?”

The tendrils withdrew. FINE. I’LL TRY. NO PROMISES.

I’d have thanked the dread wraith if genuine gratitude weren’t one of the conditions for his convergence. “Take it easy.” I departed the linen closet and replaced the sign of banishment over the frame, and then Rachel’s handmade *Home Is Where the Tart Is* sign over that. She’d made it for me in a painting class at the adult learning annex. It depicted a buxom lass blowing kisses on the left and right sides. I’d only had her enroll because I’d thought it would be funny to see her squirm at having to wear her slut clothes to class, but instead it had necessitated having her break up with not one, not, two, but three members of the class she’d let art their ways into her DMs.

There were only three bums camped out in my living room when I exited the linen closet. The last time I’d needed to contact another plane, Primek had drawn in almost a dozen. Son of a bitch had a real affinity for the displaced and hopeless. Made his nickname easy to remember. Like last time, they had no recollection of their names or where they’d come from. I wasn’t a hundred percent sure they were even real, which made kicking them out on their asses and calling the cops all the easier on my conscience.

I’d had the presence of mind to leave my phone on the charger this time. Three days I’d been in communion in the linen closet. About what I’d expected. Still, creatures of alternate realities, parallel dimensions, and Prime-imitating Abyssal realms weren’t my area of expertise. I needed to know what I was dealing with, and if that meant making a bargain with one of the multiverse’s most loathsome denizens, so be it.

Missed calls... Plenty of those. Almost all from Joanna, all of those from two days ago. That wasn’t good. She hadn’t left any messages. Hopefully she’d simply been horny, or wanting reassurance. Looked like she’d gotten the hang of things, though. Time for me to head back to Rachel’s and attempt the same.

Rachel’s quiet suburban house was quiet, and in the twilight hour, there didn’t look to be any lights on. “Joanna?” I called into the stillness.

No answer.

The only surefire repellent for a demon was a holy symbol wielded by a priest. Not just any priest, either; it had to be one of those anti-sex religions. (Which was most, luckily. And unluckily.) Anyway, I was neither a priest nor anti-sex. What few tricks I could fit up my sleeves, I did, but honestly, if that creature had gotten loose, I was probably hosed. With succubus jizz.

(I was no expert, but what I had read about her kind agreed: fucked into oblivion by a succubus was a really horrible way to die. That's certainly what my academy buddy had said about his former roommate. It was hard to imagine, but if Joanna had done her job, hopefully I wouldn't need to find out.)

I flipped on a few lights, but there was nothing to see downstairs but Rachel's house. It was tidy, if not the immaculate joy-sparking spectacle that was my own house. Joanna wasn't a neat freak (that I knew of; she'd never corrected me when I'd called her a dirty little slut), but she'd had to fill the time as what she thought was her best friend's jailer somehow, I supposed. Fingers crossed that she was merely indisposed rather than disposed of, I headed up the stairs.

There wasn't much up here. Bathroom, empty. Guest room, same. The clothes I'd loaned Joanna were wadded up in a ball at the foot of the bed. The linen closet was one of those nice normal sorts with no nightmare portals, just sheets and towels. On top was a hand towel Rachel had custom ordered, stark white fabric with a color photo on one side. It was a surprise selfie she'd taken of us right after I'd taken her ass for the first time. I looked blissed out and a little startled by the flash; Rachel had kind of an "oh, you!" look in her eyes, but her nose crinkled adorably, that same irrepressible smile on the lips I'd just used to clean off my dick.

"TWIT & TWAT, BFFs 4 4EVER!" it read in Comic Sans at the bottom, as if we were contesting whose linen closet could contain the greatest evil. I'd asked her which one of us was Twit and which one Twat, then hurried to reassure me she'd only meant it teasingly, since I'd used similar terms for her so many times. She'd giggled at my suggestion that they were both her. The next one, she had promised, would say "Knox and Fox." Her attempt at giving herself a more flattering nickname didn't take, but she still answered to both Twit and Twat like they were compliments.

I didn't miss her. That wasn't what this was about.

"Joanna?" I called one last time down the stairwell. Still no answer.

No turning back. I gave my hands a little shake, limbering up my fingers, and opened the door.

There it was, the thing that wore Rachel's body with so much disdain that it needed to improve everything. Its eyes were open, widely, eerily so in fact, but they fixed on the ceiling. Or the infinite darkness of the night sky above it. She – it – was naked, like before, and gave no reaction to my presence. Her hair rustled as if blown by some

unseen ethereal breeze. There was no sign of my improvised gag, though its mouth hung open like it was on the edge of screaming.

“Where’s Joanna?”

Its head swiveled to face me. The creature didn’t smile, but it bared its teeth in a mirthless grin. When she spoke, her voice was unnaturally scratchy, like she’d had scalding water forced down her throat and burned her vocal cords away. “*Joanna isn’t here any more. There is only ME.*” The dissonance between that face and that voice couldn’t be more stark.

“What the fuck did you do to her? If you killed her, I swear, you’re not getting off with a banishment. I will wreck your ass.” I took a few bold strides toward her, producing a serrated sacrificial dagger from the sleeve of my robe. “Now WHERE IS SHE?!”

And suddenly she looked both panicked and apologetic, speaking in a voice that wasn’t quite Rachel’s but might have passed for it if I weren’t on edge. “Eight-legged whore on the break-dancing floor, relax! I was only screwing around! I’ve been so goddamn bored over here.”

I blinked. “What?”

“I said, I was kidding. I learned to do that thing with my voice forever ago. Freaks people out.” It gave a sudden distasteful sniff. “Did you roll around in dread wraith or something?”

I ignored it. “You know I might have destroyed you, right?”

“I do now, yeah. Anyway, Joanna left. I think yesterday. Time’s weird here. I dunno.”

“Left? What do you mean, she left?”

“I mean she left.” It shrugged. “Hard to blame her. You know she didn’t even know you were a warlock?”

“You told her?!”

“I felt bad! Once she figured out the horns weren’t cosplay – and why anyone would tell her they were, I really don’t know – she got all sad about her friend, and wanted answers, and I didn’t know what else to do so I told her. Like you should have done.”

“Are you moralizing at me right now? Succubus?”

“I keep telling you, I’m not–”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. So did she say where she was going?”

“She said she was going to look for Rachel. I told her she probably wasn’t going to find her, but she didn’t care. She looked really determined, especially for a mortal chick. Inspiring, in a mortal kinda way.”

Shaking my head, I stepped back into the hallway and called Joanna’s number. No answer. No sense leaving a text; she’d see that I called and know I was back. With

that ultra-strength half-cocked potion Rachel had fed her, she couldn't stay away long. I hoped. Then again, since she no doubt thought this creature *was* Rachel, that love potion could well be pushing her down whatever road it had sent her down instead.

Back in the room, I eyed her with open malice. "Nice going, bitch. That's going to be fun to fix later."

"All I did was tell her the truth. You know, for a guy with multiple magically compelled sex slaves, you're awful judgy."

"Says the hellspawn."

"I'm not...!" It growled in frustration, hands tugging in vain at the shackles. "If I were a succubus, don't you think I would have eaten her alive or something nasty like that? She was *way* trusting. I totally could have – if I were a succubus, that is."

"How do I know you didn't?"

"I heard you traipsing around. You think I can dismember a hundred and forty pound human without making a mess? I can't even get out of these stupid handcuffs, much less rip a woman apart, guy. You're way too certain about your succubus theory, considering your only evidence is my being hot and horny. Don't ever go to a dance club or you'll wind up compelled to stake the hearts of every woman there."

"You don't stake a succubus through the heart." I frowned. "Do you?"

She rolled her eyes with heavy disdain. "Did you really just acknowledge you don't know how to kill a succubus? What if I really was one? Good lord, you'd be completely screwed."

"You try to confuse a man like a succubus, that's for damn sure."

"Or are you easily confused?" She offered an open-mouthed grin, waiting for the rimshot. "Fine. So what now? Are you going to leave me tied up like this until I die of boredom, or did you come up with a way to test me so I can prove I am what I said I am?"

"I've done better than that. I've contacted help. They're on their way now."

"They? The helpless naked person chained to your buddy's bed merits an extermination squad?"

"Extraplanar extermination squad. But only one. A pro."

"Pff. Frickin' primes, always throwing out 'extraplanar' like that makes something scary. You know they have butterflies where I come from? Yeah. And you know what? To you, they're 'extraplanar.' Ooooooh, scary extraplanar butterflies, hide your kids."

"Abyssal butterflies could probably kill somebody, actually."

"I'm not from the Abyss!" She growled in what was no doubt meant to sound like frustration. "Here I am, friendly as could be, trying to *help* you even *after* you tied me up, and you'd rather kill me than so much as consider that I might not be a she-demon! No wonder you have to dope chicks to get laid."

"Help me? You turned Joanna's brain into pudding. You could have killed her."

“I told you how to fix that, and it worked. Didn’t it? And I didn’t even mean to do that in the first place, but with you storming the fortress like a budget ghostbuster, I wasn’t about to stop in the middle of our little fuckathon to see if you’d kersplode me for dishing out a little honesty. Seeing how you reacted when you wised up, I’m glad I didn’t.”

“Wow. Only took you three days to concoct that little rationalization, huh? It’s almost convincing.”

That growl again. “Well tell your stupid extraplanar minion to hurry their butt up! This is a sucky way to visit a new plane, guy. Seriously sucky.”

I settled in to wait. There was no point talking to it. I took a seat at Rachel’s makeup bench and bounced a tennis ball off the wall over the bed. It annoyed her. That was where I was at. Empowered only to annoy my prey with infantile gestures. But it annoyed her more than it annoyed me.

It was a good while before help arrived. I’d nodded off a couple times. So did the succubus, though I assumed she was only faking it to lull me. For something. At long last, though, I heard voices downstairs.

“This is a really cute little house. Neighborhood’s pure suburbia, sure, but cute on the inside.” A woman’s voice? It sounded familiar, though I couldn’t place it.

Then I heard one I recognized, and I relaxed. No, not merely relaxed, but grinned wolfishly. The cavalry had arrived. “Up here!” I called out.

The creature who’d drawn horns on Rachel’s gorgeous face watched the door nervously. Then it opened. I wasted no time throwing a hug at the man on the other side. “Jerbil!”

“ObKnoxious, you old so and so!” He gave me a few slugs on the back. “Been, what, three years? Since that so-called ‘class reunion’ where Bagwell tried to mass sacrifice the lot of us!”

I laughed at the memory, sparing a moment to wonder what the old bastard had been turned into. “And who’s your friend?” I nodded to the woman at his side. Stone cold hottie as usual.

“Oh. This is Scarlett. She likes when you call her PSV, though.”

“I don’t, actually,” the gorgeous redhead said, elbowing Jerry aside. “But Scarlett is fine.”

“Thought you liked to work alone, Jer.”

“I do, but the Captain saddled me with another rookie. I think she thinks they keep me under tighter wraps.” He laughed. I laughed. Whoever this redhead was, she was the farthest thing from a handle on a horndog like Jerry. It was hard to find a sleazeball, scumbag or dickwad in the multiverse Jerry didn’t have his eye on. Self included, I suppose.

“So this is our slaver?” Scarlett asked, jerking a thumb in my direction.

“What? Shut your damn mouth, rookie. Knox is an old friend.”

I clapped his shoulder. “That I am.”

“How about you, Knox? Last I heard, you were refining your alchemy skills, dipping a toe in the old love potion ocean.” He glanced at the woman on the bed.

“Goodness gracious, great balls of ball juice. Is this the lucky recipient?”

“What? No! Look at her – does she look like a human?” No sense telling him that I’d fallen for it for a day or two. I hadn’t had the horns. Still, Jerry was an expert in this kind of thing. There wasn’t a species of otherworldly temptress out there that he hadn’t fucked. If there was a man who’d know how to handle a succubus–

Jerry laughed. “No, of course not. This is a khamulan. Of the Silver Mirror Plane khamulae? What, you thought I was gonna fall for that?”

Well fuck.