**Chapter 3: To not speak**

*[****‘****perspicuus’]:* The spell let the user see the organs of the target. Eyes that witness are blessed with vision beyond the mere surface. Bones are silhouetted, each organ an intricate dance of light and shade. It is as though the body's secrets are shown to the naked eyes like something normal. The overused of this spell may deem the vision permeated enchantment, which is irreversible to witness anything besides a bag of bones and organs

"No, please... no, these words, can they not escape my lips? It's far too late now, a cascade of failures unfurling before me. As the executioner, I faltered, failing to grant Mr. Demon an honorable or perhaps even a justly painful end. Or worse yet, did my emotions mar the execution? How could I let myself become such a failure?

"I must regain my composure, summon the courage to apologize to the head angel and, above all, my father. I have disappointed them both, haven't I?" Gazing around the chamber, an eerie stillness replaces the previous murmurs and whispers. It's as though someone has swept away all the rumors and secrets, leaving only a profound hush.

A looming presence casts a shadow over my senses, and Father's voice breaks the silence, laden with disappointment. Dread and a sense of inadequacy wash over me as I absorb his words. "By the mere fact that you failed to sense my presence, Mikhail, you've already faltered," he intones.

With trepidation, I manage to croak out a greeting, my attempt at a bow hindered by my diminutive form. My voice carries the weight of reciting his name and offering proper respect, yet I dare not meet his eyes, fully aware of my transgressions.

"Your mental state appears intact, which is at least a relief," Father sighs, his hands cradling my fragile frame. My makeshift bed becomes an examination table, the tools of inspection materializing nearby.

His eyes emit an eerie green glow as he meticulously scrutinizes each organ within me. Father's meticulous examination doesn't stop there; he proceeds to carry out what he deems "necessary" tests, his gloved hands probing every inch of me. I've memorized these procedures, every aspect of the ritualistic examinations he subjects me to after each training session. He inspects, scrutinizes, and he culls any perceived imperfections with precise cuts or potent magic. It's a process of refinement, of growing back what is deemed defective, until reaching the elusive pinnacle of perfection Father demands.

"The organs exhibit no anomalies, the skin replicates with precision, and its regenerative capacity remains robust. However..." Father pauses, his judgment falling upon me like a blade. A clean incision through my palm draws forth the crimson flow, but my tissue regenerates at a conspicuously diminished pace. A removal of hands or feet could rectify this, he implies.

"The regeneration rate remains slower than optimal. There appears to be some form of blockage in your mind. Do not withhold any details, Mikhail." Father presses, his words laced with a knowing suspicion that I'm keeping something from him.

The silence stretches an unspoken admission of my incapacity to regenerate efficiently. My conversation with the demon hasn't tainted me with dark magic, and my internal balance remains unaltered. The failed execution, after all, was a testament to my wavering resolve, not the actual strength I possess.

"Secrets you've been harboring, Mikhail? I may have to reconsider certain assignments in light of this incident. Take this time to rest until your presence proves useful again." Father's departure is swift, his disappointment palpable, leaving me alone in the room, consumed by a sense of inadequacy.

The outside world, once inviting and promising, now fills me with dread. Bereft of the comfort of others' care, how am I to navigate this world where failure has become a defining mark?

I bury my face in the pillow, aching with a maelstrom of unexplained emotions: self-loathing, anger, exhaustion, and sorrow. They intertwine and swell within me, creating a tumultuous symphony.

Amidst the crossroads of frustration and desolation, my only solace lies in muttering greetings to myself or any who might hear. It's impossible to convey the pain of having to end the life of a dear friend. The room's emptiness amplifies the cacophony of unanswered questions, resonating within the walls.

"Am I interrupting something, Mikhail?" Gabriel's voice cuts through the chamber's silence, parting the veil to enter. His perceptive gaze must have captured the disarray within, a reflection of the disgrace I've become in the eyes of both him and Father. Yet, the truth remains that my younger brother was bound to witness these fragments of my vulnerability sooner or later. I only hope it won't be too soon before the more unsavory truths unfold before his eyes.

Between fumbling thoughts, I attempt to regain composure. "No, Gabriel, at the moment there's nothing of note," I reply, attempting to straighten my tousled hair with a splash of water. A small offering of treats awaits him, remnants from the ice keeper I had prepared prior to the ill-fated execution.

Vanilla sorbet, crafted from the finest beans, resides in two small glasses, a frosty coldness akin to the mountain's icy heart, crowned with a delicate garnish of citrus for a hint of awakening tartness.

Bites of sorbet punctuate the air as we sit in silence, an unsaid weight hanging between us. How do I bridge the chasm that my failures have engendered in this conversation?

"Brother, has something been troubling you? You've been reticent since your first mission. I regret not being by your side," Gabriel's voice carries a hint of fatigue, his gaze fixed on the chamber's entrance. Does my perceived distress concern him this deeply? I'm compelled to reassure him, to alleviate the weight he bears.

Offering a brave smile, I endeavor to deflect his concerns. "It's nothing much, perhaps just the fatigue of long nights spent immersed in reading," I respond, casting a veneer of normalcy over the situation. He doesn't need to shoulder my burdens, not at this moment.

"Father hasn't disclosed everything, it seems. The head angel of the garden has passed away," Gabriel shares, his announcement shattering the tranquility like a fragile crystal. My grip falters, and a spoon clatters to the table, a cascade of sorbet scattering like my own emotions seeking release.

"What could have led to his demise..." I begin, my thoughts trailing into the realm of speculation.

Gabriel interjects, his voice gentle but firm. "He passed away upon returning to paradise, a few days prior. The prisoned demon’s subordinates traced the magical residue left behind, he was but a victim of their revenge."

The narrative seems meticulously woven, its threads intertwined with Mr. Demon's confessions during our clandestine discourse. He knew he had been forsaken, urging his underlings to stay far from the partition dividing the realms. However, I dare not divulge these revelations to Gabriel. Secrets and concerns intertwine in a precarious dance, each of us harboring knowledge the other is unaware of, a delicate balance rooted in mutual silence.

As the final spoonful of sorbet disappears, our conversation fades like frosty remnants. Duty calls Gabriel back to his training, and I, too, retreat to rest. In this stillness, a contemplative question lingers—would the course of events have diverged if I had unveiled the truth from the outset?

*[Gabriel’s POV]*

He lies there, still and silent. Mikhail, who has held a brave facade for far too long. But that façade is no longer necessary; he need not bear his burdens alone. I am stronger now, more capable of defending myself and sharing the weight of his pain. Why then, does he persist?

"Have you confided in Mikhail about your actions, Gabriel?" Father's voice emerges from the shadows, a silent observer of his grand designs.

"Not all the details, Father. I've shared fragments, distorted by my haze of confusion," I respond, my words laced with a respect that feeds his insatiable ego.

A maniacal laughter escapes him, a chilling sound that sends shivers down my spine. I've heard this laughter before, during the upheaval that wiped out an entire race of elves.

"Your request is a rarity, Gabriel. It's the first time you've entreated me, offering your accomplishments as a form of tribute," Father remarks, his demand wrapped in veiled sarcasm.

The achievement he refers to is my request in eliminating the head angel of the garden, a role that was meant to suppress Mikhail's burgeoning sense of liberty. Once that purpose was fulfilled, his vulnerability made it easy for Father to orchestrate his demise, ensuring it would be as agonizing as his own malevolence.

"That insignificant being dared to harm Mikhail. Creatures of its kind should have been eradicated long ago. I've been anticipating this moment," I declare, my tone laced with righteous fury.

Days before, I had borne witness to Mikhail's suffering at the hands of this malevolent being during his supposed training. The torment Mikhail endured, using magic to conceal his wounds while shielding me from the sounds of his own agony, is etched painfully in my memory.

"This experiment distinguishes itself due to the empathy shared between two vessels," Father's chuckles resonate, though this time they are less chilling, more calculated. He exudes a sense of wisdom as if he wishes to impart some twisted form of insight.

"I was meant to be unique, bearing little resemblance to other lords or ladies in purgatory. Yet, my designation as 'Gabriel' was an oversight," I reply, echoing Mikhail's words, though doubt tinges my assertion.

"Incorrect. You are still an inheritor of Gabriel's legacy, acting much like him, with the same noble heart residing within your being," Father retorts, delving into the tale of the once-lord Gabriel's virtuous endeavors. However, the Gabriel he told differed vastly from the stories of virtuous figures, more like a lonesome figure.

"And the reasoning behind this, Father?" I inquire, my anticipation growing.

Father's demeanor stiffens as he prepares to impart his revelation. "Gabriel exerted minimal effort to distance himself from my plans, rarely engaging with other sepharim aside from Michael. Much like you and your twin." Father's tone grows stern, preparing to divulge the heart of the matter. "Similar to Michael, Mikhail requires the same shield—a safeguard against the sins and brutality of the world."

It's a revelation that both elucidates and confounds. The enigma of my existence deepens, tied to Gabriel's legacy and my role as a shield against the harsh realities of existence. The complexity of Father's designs becomes apparent, intertwining our fates in a tapestry of fate and manipulation, all under the guise of protecting us from the world's unforgiving grasp.

**The end**

Within the dire enclosure, silence I embrace,

My wings enfeebled, my voice effaced.

Yearning for the morrow's unseen grace,

All is well, within this confined space.