

their souls over to you?”

“It’s not about my ego, Samuel. It’s about your life.”

“My life? What does this have to do with me?”

“Remember when I was a kid and I wanted to be a dancer? Mom talked Dad into letting me take lessons. I stayed with it for four years. I went every day. Then one day I realized that I would never be a dancer, no matter how hard I tried. I could work at it hard enough to be good but I’d never be great and only the great ones make a living at it. So, I quit, just like that. Mom was so disappointed in me. She thought I was just being flaky. You and Dad didn’t really care. I think Dad was just happy to find out I wasn’t gay. I’ve never been good at anything, Sammy.”

“You just needed to find yourself.”

“No. I’m just not a talented person. I’m not particularly smart. You were always the straight A student. I was just average, except for the way I looked. When Mom and Dad talked about you, they imagined that you would grow up to be a famous politician or maybe a lawyer or a Nobel Prize-winning scientist or author or maybe a black leader of some kind. They thought you could have been absolutely anything. They were so proud when you decided to become a priest. But when they talked about me all they ever said was how handsome I was. How I could grow up to be a famous actor. Then I tried acting and failed at that too. They talked about me becoming a model. So I did. I’m one of the highest paid male models in the world because that’s all I could ever be.

“You know why they never talked about me becoming a politician or a lawyer, Samuel? Because I’m useless. They knew it then. I’m a beautiful piece of nothing. I used to see how envious you’d get when everyone would talk about how handsome I was and when all the girls would chase after me. I don’t think you ever knew how envious I was of you, though. To me, you were always the perfect one. You were the smart one, the one who never got into trouble. When I was fighting in the street you were turning the other cheek. When I was fucking everything that moved you were taking your vow of chastity. I should have hated you for being so perfect, but I never did. I love you, big bro.”

“I love you too, Samson. But what does any of this have to do with this...this contract?”

“Because it isn’t fair!”

Hurried footsteps rushed toward the confessional in response to Samson’s outburst. There was a tentative knock on the door.

“Father Samuel? Is everything okay?”

Adam, who rules under threat of damnation and eternal hellfire by the power of the Supreme God, Elohim, over all Spirits, superior and inferior, I invoke and command thee by the true name of God, Yaweh, in whose image I am created, who sacrificed His only begotten son for my sins. O the most great and powerful name of God, JEHOVAH, TETRAGRAMMATON, who cast thee out of Heaven with the rest of the faithless angels into a boiling lake of fire; by all the other potent and great names of God, Creator of Heaven, Earth and Hell, of all contained therein; by their powers and virtues; which Adam heard and spake when he was cast from the garden; by the name which Jacob learned from the Angel on the night of his wrestling and was delivered from the hands of his brother Esau; by the name which Lot heard and was saved with his family; by the name ZEBAOTH, which Moses named, and all the rivers and waters in the land of Egypt brought forth frogs, which ascended into the houses of the Egyptians, destroying all; by the name SCHEMES AMATHIA, which Joshua invoked and the sun stayed upon his course; by the name ANEHEXETON, which Solomon spake and was made wise; by the name EMMANUEL, which the three children, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, chanted in the midst of the fiery furnace, and they were delivered; by the name ALPHA and OMEGA, which Daniel uttered, and destroyed Bel and the Dragon. Hear me and make all your scourge brethren obedient to me,” Samson screamed into the night.

The night retorted with silence. Samson knew the spirits had to be commanded, his tone certain, yet not disrespectful. A fine line to walk. In truth, he imagined this was how life was for his brother, time wasted talking to someone who wasn’t there.

“I have brought the names, those souls I have to barter.”

For an hour, he implored the empty air. Sweat glistened on his body. He sliced his arms in blood tribute. Drops of blood sizzled in the candle flames.

“Why won’t you answer me?”

“Not enough,” a voice finally murmured and extinguished the candles.

Samson collapsed into an exhausted heap of spent flesh. “I’ve failed.”

“Twenty for one.”

“Twenty souls?” Samson asked.

Samson felt his hopes sink. There was no way he could find twenty women willing to sell their souls for sex. It was impossible. Well, nearly impossible.

“Twenty for one. Their blood must be spilled for the covenant to be made.”

Samson shivered as the meaning of the words sank in.

They hugged and Amon planted a light kiss on Samson's lips then winked at Jacque, who jealously studied them. He turned his head but remained rooted to his spot.

"You're a bad man, Amon." Samson laughed.

"I do try."

Amon walked past Jacque and onto the set with his chin pointing skyward, glancing at the photographer who once again averted his gaze. Samson took the opportunity to make a dash for the stairs before Jacque could speak to him again. Unfortunately, Jacque still caught up with him.

"Leaving? We'll go down together, okay?" Jacque smiled from ear to ear, batting his fake eyelashes. Everything about him had the veneer of artifice—from the eyeliner tattooed above his cobalt blue contact lenses, to his collagen injected lips, to his anorexic liposuctioned body, to his perfumes and makeups that were so expensive that one bottle of face cream could have paid a month's rent in most San Francisco apartments.

"Fine." Samson mumbled back, making no attempt to hide his disgust for the man.

"Good. I've been meaning to talk to you. We're going to be working together a lot and I know we haven't gotten along well in the past. But with us both selling drawers for the same company at a couple million dollars a shoot, I just thought we should get a bit closer. I mean, this contract could make or break both of our careers. We need to get along or we're both going to wind up on the street. So why don't we just kiss and make up? How about I take you out to dinner tonight? Anywhere you want to go. It certainly would not hurt my reputation to be seen waltzing around town with one of the world's most beautiful men, and it just might help us get a little closer."

"How close exactly did you want to get?"

Jacque looped his arm through Samson's and led him out of the elevator into the parking garage, whispering in his ear, "As close as possible, handsome. As close as possible."

"Fine."

convulse in such pain he almost puked.

“When you want me to stop all you have to do is say ‘Kill me.’ Then your suffering ends.”

“I signed your fucking contract! I just wanted to fuck. What do you want from me?”

“Oh, you know what I want.”

“You’re going to kill me aren’t you?”

“How else am I supposed to get your soul? Wait for you to finally OD? No, by then it will be too late. I need it now.”

“But why? I never did shit to you! I haven’t done anything to you! Why are you doing this to me?”

Samson stood naked in a widening puddle of Jacque’s blood. He dropped the bullwhip and Jacque breathed an exhausted sigh of relief until he caught the glint of steel in Samson’s hand. His breath seized in his chest.

“No. No. Oh, God. No. Why? Why?”

“Because I don’t like you, Jacque. You are a pompous, egotistical, manipulative parasite. And I love my brother. You are going to die so that he can live. But first I am going to enjoy myself. You wanted to fuck? Let’s fuck. But I’m kind of big and you look kind of tight back there. I think I’m going to have to widen you up a bit before I can fit.”

The knife bored its way inside Jacque and slowly rotated. He screamed and kicked and fought against his restraints. He had briefly passed out by the time Samson replaced the knife with his own turgid flesh. Samson’s hard thrusting deep inside of him awakened him. Like a caressing finger, he ran the knife along Jacque’s belly. Almost as an afterthought, Samson sliced from the photographer’s abdomen to his throat.

“You still won’t get my soul.” Blood bubbled up from the photographer’s mouth as he spoke, spraying from his lips and dripping off his chin onto his blood-drenched chest.

“Oh, no? And why is that? You signed a contract. In blood. Your soul is mine!”

“But I never owned it. It wasn’t mine to sell.”

Samson paused. Intestines flopped out of the massive gash in the photographer’s torso as blood poured out in sheets. It was amazing that the man could still talk. In fact, it was impossible.