Chapter 24

The Sorcerer's First Breath

Part I: The Sculpting

The second day of the Festival of Vigilance dawned over the obsidian sanctum with the same cold, grey light that had marked the first. Helel stood at the window of his bedroom, looking out at the garden—the roses, the poppies, the willows trailing their fingers in the dark water of the pond. The bloodstained sheets had been cleaned. The dead rose had been replaced. The room bore no evidence of what had happened the night before.

But Helel remembered. Not the acts themselves—he would not give them the dignity of detail—but what they had proved. Beelzebub's hands had been reverent. That was the part Helel could not forgive: not the violence, but the worship that had come before it, and the way the worship had turned, gradually and without warning, into a demand that could not be refused. The fluid on the silk sheets. The thing that came out of it with a name. The final data point. The forging of Hatred. The confirmation beyond any doubt that Beelzebub's love was not love but possession, and that no existing being could give Helel what he needed.

The logical conclusion was inescapable. If no existing being could love him correctly, he must create one. Zachariah. The son, the mirror, the heir. The final test.

He walked to the worktable and opened the drawer. The sketches were there—the face, the body, the personality notes, the measurements annotated in his precise Hebrew script. He spread them across the table and studied them. The high cheekbones, the arched brows, the amethyst eyes. The black hair in disciplined waves. The lean, agile body of a sixteen-year-old, every proportion calculated according to the golden ratio. Zachariah ben Sahar. God remembers.

But something was missing. Helel had designed Zachariah to be brilliant, beautiful, resilient, autonomous—a companion who could match him, challenge him, love him freely. But he had not designed him to be a *ruler*. None of Helel's allies were suited to rule. The

beasts were primal and instinctual. Beelzebub was consumed by hatred. Helel himself was Pride—an architect of destruction, not a builder of civilizations. If the revolution succeeded, someone would need to build the new world. Someone would need to take the throne.

Helel picked up his pencil and added a final note to the margin of the personality sketch: *He will be a ruler. Not a destroyer. A builder. Someone who can envision a new world and construct it from the ashes of the old.*

He considered the implications. A ruler would be domineering. A ruler would resist being managed. A ruler might try to surpass his creator. But the alternative—a companion who was merely brilliant, merely beautiful, merely loving—was insufficient. Helel did not need a mirror. He needed an heir. Someone who could do what he could not.

He set down the pencil. The design was complete. The theory was finished. Now came the practice.

He gathered five materials from Eden to represent Zachariah.

The dark, rich soil from the banks of the Tigris. It could connect Zachariah to the garden, to the humans, to the Creator's most direct act of shaping life from clay. It was humble and fertile. Helel was not sculpting an angel from light or a god from storm but something closer to human, something that could walk the earth and understand the mortal condition in ways angels cannot.

The blue jay feathers from the forest floor. They represented mimicry, adaptation, the ability to sound like something one was not. The blue jay was a trickster, a survivor, a bird that could imitate the calls of predators to drive away competition. This was, Helel had to admit, Falsehood in its nascent form—not deception as evil, but deception as survival. Zachariah would need this. He would be alone in a world that has never seen his kind before. The ability to blend in, to perform, to hide his true nature until he was strong enough to reveal it—this was not a flaw. It was armor.

The red poppy petals from his own garden. Poppies could produce opium. They could bring sleep, relief from pain, and in sufficient doses, death. They were beautiful and dangerous, soothing and lethal. Zachariah would be all of these things. He would be the one who offers comfort to the desperate and destruction to the complacent. The poppy

was also a symbol of remembrance, sometimes worn to honor the dead. Zachariah's name meant "God remembers." The poppy tied that meaning to the physical substance of his body.

The vial of venom milked from the fangs of his serpent form. It carried Helel's own essence—his darkness, his danger, his willingness to kill. By including his venom, Helel was literally pouring himself into Zachariah. Zachariah would carry a piece of his father's poison in his veins. He would be capable of the same ruthlessness, the same cold calculation, the same willingness to strike when the moment is right.

The olive leaves still fresh and silver-green. Olive leaves represented wisdom, peace, and victory. Olive wreaths crowned the heads of champions. They were offered to gods. They symbolized the triumph of civilization over chaos. Helel was declaring, through this ingredient, that Zachariah was meant to be a ruler. A bringer of order—not the sterile, oppressive order of Michael's Code, but something new. Something that can endure.

He carried the materials to the garden of the sanctum, where the pond reflected the violet sky and the willows whispered their eternal secrets.

The flat stone beside the water was cold beneath his hands as he arranged the materials. The soil spread in a rough human shape. The feathers laid across the chest. The poppy petals scattered over the heart. The venom poured in a thin line down the center. The olive leaves woven into a circlet at the crown of the head.

He stepped back. The garden was silent. Even the willows had stopped whispering.

He spoke aloud. Not a prayer. Not a plea. An assertion of will.

"I have gathered what I need. I have designed what I desire. I am not asking permission. I am inviting cooperation." His voice was steady, but beneath the steadiness was something more fragile—hope, desperation, the weight of everything he had sacrificed to reach this moment. "You accepted the challenge when I bound myself to Pride. You knew what I intended. You knew that Zachariah would be my final test. If he loves me, I will have what I have sought since the dawn of creation. If he does not, I will unmake everything. You accepted those terms. Now fulfill Your part."

The silence pressed against him. The presence he had felt several times before, the suffocating and absolute attention of the Creator, did not come.

He spoke again. "I am not asking You to create him. I am asking You to give him consciousness. The body is mine. The design is mine. The will that shaped him is mine. But I cannot suddenly breathe life into clay. Only You can."

Silence.

A third time. His voice was less steady now, the desperation bleeding through the calm. "I have waited for this moment since the day I first sketched his face on a scrap of parchment. I have poured everything I am into his design. I have sacrificed Raphael. I have destroyed Beelzebub. I have bound myself to Pride and accepted the burden of eternal sovereignty. All of it has been for this. Do not leave me with nothing. Father. Do not—"

The presence descended.

It was not gradual. It was sudden, absolute, suffocating. The air thickened. The light from the stars seemed to bend, to warp, to focus itself on the stone. Helel felt the weight of something infinite pressing against his consciousness, the same attention that had acknowledged his binding to Pride, the same presence that had witnessed Beelzebub's forging into Hatred. The Creator was here. Not in form. Not in voice. But in the undeniable, unbearable certainty of being seen.

The materials began to glow. The soil shifted, the particles rearranging themselves into new configurations. The feathers dissolved into the chest, their cobalt blue bleeding into the forming skin. The poppy petals melted into the heart, their red becoming the first pulse of blood. The venom sank into the center and disappeared, leaving behind a faint golden shimmer that traced the lines of the nervous system. The olive leaves wove themselves into the dark hair that was forming on the crown of the head.

And then—suddenly, completely, without transition—a teenage boy was lying on the stone.

He was naked, and did not yet know that nakedness was a condition with a name. His skin was pale and smooth, faintly luminous, like moonlight on water. His hair was

black, wavy, mid-long, combed back from a high forehead. His features were sharp and exotic—high cheekbones, a long and straight nose, a jaw that came to a delicate but definite point. His body was lean and agile, with the faint muscle definition of adolescence. Long legs, slim waist, angular shoulders. His feet were elegant, high-arched, the toes long and perfectly proportioned.

His eyes opened.

They were amethyst—a deep, luminous purple when the light struck them, shifting to royal indigo in shadow. They blinked once, twice, adjusting to the violet twilight of the garden. His first breath was a gasp—a shock of cold air in lungs that had never breathed before. His first sensation was the chill of the stone beneath his bare back, the texture of moss at the edges of the slab, the faint breeze that stirred the willows. His first sight was the firmament with its gleaming constellations, then the dark water of the pond, then the trailing fingers of the willows.

And then he turned his head and saw Helel.

Helel stared at him. The boy was beautiful. Objectively, mathematically beautiful. Every proportion, every feature, every detail was exactly as Helel had designed. But the reality of him—the living, breathing, conscious reality—was something more than the sketches had captured. The way the amethyst eyes caught the light. The way the chest rose and fell with each breath. The way the fingers flexed against the stone, testing the texture, cataloguing the sensation. He was alive. He was real. He was Helel's magnum opus.

And Helel wanted him to be enough.

The want was immediate, and it was not simple, and Helel could not have named it without lying. It was not the possessive hunger that had consumed Beelzebub—he had told himself so already, and would tell himself again. It was the want of an artist for the thing he has made to be good. The want of a father for a son who has not yet decided whether to love him. The want of a being denied love for his entire existence, standing now in front of the only creature designed to provide it, and unable to know, until the creature spoke, whether he had built a companion or an enemy. Helel held still and let the boy look at him.

The boy sat up. The movement was fluid, natural, as if his body had always known how to move. He looked down at his own hands—turned them over, flexed the fingers, examined the pale skin and the faint blue veins beneath. His expression was not wonder. It was not fear. It was intense, focused curiosity—the expression of a mind that was already cataloguing, already analyzing, already building a model of its new environment.

His eyes—amethyst, sharp, unblinking—met Helel's golden ones.

"You made me." His voice was a heldentenor, similar to Helel's own, but with a more metallic, ethereal quality—clear and cutting, like a blade wrapped in silk. His timbre was slightly deeper, a richness that spoke of baritone potential in adulthood beneath the tenor surface. Helel noted the difference immediately. The blue jay feathers? The Creator's breath? Something he had not accounted for. "Why did you make me?"

The word was not philosophical. It was direct, personal, slightly aggressive—the question of someone who had just been born and immediately wanted to know who had power over him and what they intended to do with it. Helel recognized the tone. He had asked the same question, in a different voice, at the dawn of creation.

"Your name is Zachariah ben Sahar," Helel said, keeping his voice calm, composed. "Zachariah: 'God remembers.' I chose it because I wanted the Creator to remember what He made. What He abandoned. What He is about to witness. Ben Sahar: son of the Morning. You are my son. My creation. My heir. And I am the Morning Star."

Zachariah absorbed this without reaction. His amethyst eyes were still fixed on Helel's face. "Son. Creation. Heir." The words were repeated carefully, as if he were testing their weight. "What is a son?"

"A being who is made by another. Who carries the essence of his creator. Who is meant to continue the creator's work, to inherit the creator's legacy, to be the living proof that the creator existed."

"And what exactly is a creator?"

Helel paused. Every question required a definition. Every answer generated more questions. "A being who designs and shapes something new. Who brings into existence something that did not exist before."

"You brought me into existence."

"I designed you. I gathered the materials that form your body. I shaped your mind and your personality. But I did not give you consciousness. That was the Creator—the being who made everything, who spoke light into existence, who created me. I provided the form. He provided the spark."

Zachariah was silent for a moment. His brow furrowed slightly—the first sign of concentration Helel had seen. "So. You designed me. This Creator made me conscious. And now I am here." He paused. "Why? You did not answer. You said what I am. Not why I am."

Helel felt the weight of the question. He could not tell the full truth—not yet. He could not say: *I made you because no one else could love me, and if you cannot love me either, I will burn the universe to ash.* So he chose a partial truth, carefully framed.

"I made you because I was alone. Because the other beings in this world—the angels, the gods, the beasts, the humans—are insufficient. They cannot match me. They cannot understand me. They cannot give me what I need. I designed you to be different. To be my companion, someone who stays with me. My equal, someone who is at my level. My heir, someone who carries on what I have. Someone who could stand beside me and not be diminished by my presence."

Zachariah absorbed this slowly. "So I am supposed to be your... companion. Equal. Heir." He looked down at his own hands again. "That is a lot of pressure for someone who has existed for... approximately one hundred sixty heartbeats."

The line was delivered with dry, almost amused detachment. Helel felt a flicker of something—admiration? Unease? Zachariah was already deflecting, already using humor to create distance, already establishing the terms of their relationship on his own ground. But simultaneously, already thinking about math.

"You are sufficient," Helel said. "I designed you to be sufficient."

"You do not know that yet. I have existed for approximately one hundred seventy heartbeats." Zachariah swung his legs over the edge of the stone and stood. The movement was unselfconscious, the body moving with natural grace. He looked down at himself—at

his naked form, at the pale skin and the lean muscle. "Is this how beings normally present themselves? Uncovered? Why are you covered?"

"Most beings wear garments. For modesty. For protection. For decoration."

"Why? Are modesty, protection, and decoration very important?"

"Because the body is private, which should be hidden from others. Because clothing can express identity, which is who you are. Because—" Helel paused, searching for words that did not assume prior knowledge. "Because it is the custom, something we all follow. I will explain more inside."

Zachariah turned his head, looking at the garden around him. His eyes lingered on the flowers. "Wait." He pointed at the roses. "What are those? The red things. The—" He gestured vaguely. "The little beautiful things."

"Flowers. Roses. The red ones are roses. The darker ones, near the water, are poppies."

"Why are they there?"

"I planted them. I find them beautiful. They are part of the garden."

Zachariah nodded slowly. "Beautiful." He said the word as if he were testing its meaning. "I think I understand. They are... pleasing to look at. Yes?"

"Yes."

"Good. I like them." He turned back to Helel. "Now. You said inside. What is inside?"

Helel pointed at the obsidian sanctum, rising beyond the garden. "That is my home. Our home, if you choose to stay. I will show you."

Part II: The Mirror and the Body

Zachariah walked beside Helel through the garden and into the great hall. His bare feet were silent on the obsidian floor, and his head turned constantly, his amethyst eyes sweeping across the architecture—the high arches, the pointed spires, the gargoyles shaped

like mathematical curves. He did not speak for several moments, his expression one of intense concentration.

"This place," he said finally, "basically has only one color. Bruh."

Helel stopped walking. The word was unfamiliar—some colloquialism that Zachariah had invented on the spot, or perhaps something embedded in his personality by the Creator's breath. "Bruh?"

"It is an expression. Of... disappointment? No. Not disappointment." Zachariah frowned, searching for the right word. "Observation. Blunt observation. This place is very dark in most places. Very shiny in few places. Very same. Does it not bother you?"

"I find it aesthetically pleasing. The uniformity allows the mind to focus."

"My mind is focusing on how black everything is." Zachariah resumed walking, his eyes still sweeping the hall. "But it is your home. I will not criticize. Much."

Helel felt another flicker of that strange, unsettled recognition. Zachariah was not deferential. He was not awed. He was already assessing, already critiquing, already establishing his own perspective as valid. The "ruler" note Helel had added to the design was manifesting more quickly and more forcefully than he had anticipated.

They walked through the corridors to the bedroom. Zachariah paused at the threshold, his eyes taking in the four-poster bed, the frescoed ceiling, the Mirror of Unmaking facing the bed. "This room is different. More... cozy. Yes. Cozy. I like this word. I just invented it."

"You did not invent it. It already existed."

"How would I know that? I have existed for—" He glanced at Helel. "How long now?"

"Approximately fifteen minutes. Which means approximately one thousand two hundred heatbeats."

"Fifteen minutes. One thousand two hundred heatbeats. I have existed for fifteen minutes. One minute for eighty heartbeats. I do not know what words already exist. But I can count stuff and convert between minutes and heartbeats." He walked toward the

Mirror, his bare feet silent on the obsidian floor. "What is this? It looks like a window into nothing."

"It is a mirror. I call it the Mirror of Unmaking. Most mirrors reflect light, showing you an image of yourself. This one reflects nothing because nothing is what it is meant to reflect. The void from which all things came. The void to which all things will return." Helel paused. "But it does reflect things, sometimes. Especially at important moments. Look."

Zachariah stood before the Mirror. His reflection was clear—the pale skin, the amethyst eyes, the black hair, the lean, naked body. He stared at himself for a long moment, his expression unreadable.

"That is me," he said quietly. "That is what I look like." He raised his hand. The reflection raised its hand. He turned his head. The reflection turned its head. "I did not know. I did not know what I was."

Helel moved to stand beside him. In the Mirror, their reflections were two figures side by side—the father and the son, the creator and the created. Helel's golden eyes. Zachariah's amethyst. The similarities were striking: the high cheekbones, the arched brows, the sharp jaw. But the differences were also clear. Zachariah's features were more exotic, more angular, the oriental heritage Helel had designed into him giving his face a quality that was both ancient and new.

"I will explain your body," Helel said. His voice was steady, but he was looking at Zachariah the way he looked at a proof he had just finished: certain of the construction, unsure of the result. "You need to understand what you are."

He began with the common parts—the head, the neck, the shoulders, the arms, the hands. He explained the functions of each: the eyes for seeing, the ears for hearing, the mouth for speaking and eating, the hands for grasping and manipulating. Zachariah listened with focused attention, asking sharp questions when something was unclear.

Then Helel moved to the more private parts. He named them in the same flat register he had used for the hand and the foot, and gave the function of each: waste, and the machinery that carried it out. There were other functions as well. He told Zachariah

that they existed, that they were more complicated than they looked, and that he would explain them later.

Zachariah looked down at himself. "Urination. Waste liquid." He seemed neither embarrassed nor particularly interested. "And you have one as well?"

"I do. All males do. Females have a different configuration."

"What is a female?"

"A different kind of being. I will explain later." Helel did not look away as quickly as he should have. What held him was not the body. It was the arithmetic: every proportion in it had been chosen, every choice had had a reason, and not one of the reasons could tell him whether the whole of it would work. He had built a mind, and a mind cannot be checked just by looking at it.

"You have... six wings," Zachariah said, gesturing at the golden wings furled against Helel's back. "I do not."

"No. I chose not to give you wings. They are largely decorative—a symbol of status among angels, my species. They serve no practical function, since angels can teleport—" He paused. "Teleportation means moving instantly from one place to another without crossing the space between. Wings are unnecessary for that. They can also be inconvenient when moving. I decided you would be better without them."

Zachariah absorbed this without comment. "Turn around," Helel said. "I will show you your back."

Zachariah turned. His back was straight, his shoulders squared, his posture already that of a ruler despite his youth. Helel briefly described the posterior anatomy. The spine. The shoulder blades. The gluteal muscles. The bowel function.

He watched Zachariah's shoulders while he spoke. He was listening for something—a hesitation, a question, any sign that the design had taken hold in a way he had not written into it. Zachariah gave him nothing. He stood still and let himself be described, the way he had let himself be questioned, and the stillness was worse than an objection would have been.

Mine. The word arrived before he could stop it, and it was not a good word, and it was not even accurate. He had made the body and added some personality traits. He had not made the whole person. That distinction was the entire question, and it could not be answered by standing here.

He had designed a mind to match his own and could not verify it. He had designed a will that would not break and could not test it without breaking it. Every part of the design that mattered most was the part he could not see yet, and the boy was standing there with his back turned, waiting to be told what he was.

Zachariah shifted slightly. "You are watching me quite closely," he said. "Is there something else you need to show me?"

The words were calm, but there was an edge beneath them. Zachariah's instinct—that fierce autonomy—was registering something off. He did not understand what, but he felt it. The intensity of Helel's gaze. The way the questions had stopped being about anatomy and started being about him. Something about this was different from the clinical explanations of hands and feet.

Helel stepped back. "No. That is sufficient. You should wear clothes now. I will provide them." He raised his hand and conjured a dark silk tunic, slightly smaller than his own, a pair of fitted trousers, and a piece of undergarment. "Put these on. They will cover your body and keep you warm. Wear the undergarment first."

Zachariah took the garments and examined them with the same detached curiosity he had brought to everything. He put on the undergarment, pulled the tunic over his head, adjusted the collar, stepped into the trousers. When he was dressed, he looked like a young scholar—a student of mathematics, a being who belonged in the obsidian sanctum.

Helel felt a strange mixture of relief and disappointment. The body was covered now, and the covering helped less than he had expected. What remained was the thing clothing could not cover: the fact that he had made a person in order to be loved by it, and that the person had not yet decided.

Part III: The Monty Hall Problem

Helel led Zachariah through the great hall, past the mathematical tablets in their niches. Zachariah's energy had shifted—the calm, analytical curiosity was still there, but now it was tinged with restlessness. He kept wandering off to examine things that caught his eye: a gargoyle shaped like a logarithmic spiral, a tablet carved with the ZFC axioms, a scroll left open on the worktable.

"What are these?" He pointed at the tablets. "The squiggles. They look like... organized squiggles."

"Mathematical notation. Symbols that represent abstract concepts—numbers, sets, functions, relationships. I use them to describe the underlying structure of reality."

"Why?"

"Because understanding the structure allows me to predict it. And sometimes, to control it."

Zachariah's eyes brightened. "Control. That is interesting. Show me more."

Helel began to explain. He kept his language simple, avoiding jargon, defining every term as he introduced it. Mathematics was the study of patterns. Numbers were a way of counting things. Sets were collections of things. Functions were rules that transformed one thing into another. Zachariah listened with intense focus, his questions sharp and probing.

"How do you come up with the squiggles?" he asked. "Do you just invent them?"

"I observe the world. I notice patterns. I try to describe those patterns in the simplest, purest possible way. Then I test the description to see if it predicts new patterns correctly. If it does, I keep it. If it does not, I revise it. The process is iterative."

"Iterative." Zachariah tested the word. "Repeating. Refining. Getting closer to... truth?"

"Yes."

Zachariah nodded. "I want to try. Give me a problem."

Helel paused. The request was direct, confident. Zachariah was demanding to be tested. He considered his options. The problem needed to be challenging enough to reveal

Zachariah's aptitude but simple enough that a being with no formal mathematical training could solve it through pure reasoning.

"Come," Helel said. He led Zachariah to a small table and produced three obsidian cups and a small golden sphere. He placed the sphere under one of the cups, shuffled them rapidly, and arranged them in a row.

"There are three cups," Helel said. "Under one of them is a sphere. Under the other two, nothing. You do not know which cup hides the sphere. I want you to choose one cup—any cup—but do not lift it yet. After you choose, I will lift one of the remaining cups, one that I know does not contain the sphere. Then you will have a choice. You may stay with your original cup, or you may switch to the other unopened cup. The question is: what should you do to maximize your chance of finding the sphere? Should you stay, switch, or does it not matter?"

Zachariah stared at the cups. His brow furrowed. His fingers began to tap against his thigh—a nervous, restless motion that Helel had not seen before. He was silent for a long moment.

"There are three cups," he said slowly, his voice slightly unsteady. "I choose one. The chance it is correct is... one in three? Yes. One in three. The chance the sphere is under one of the other two is... two in three. When you lift an empty cup from those two, you are not changing the initial chances. You are... you are concentrating the two-in-three chance onto the single remaining cup." He paused, his tapping fingers stilling. "I should switch. It doubles my chance. From one in three to two in three."

Helel felt a surge of pride—and a flicker of unease. Zachariah had solved the problem in a minute, with no training, using only raw reasoning. "Explain further," he said. "Why does the probability concentrate? Walk me through the cases."

Zachariah's jaw tightened. He was nervous—Helel could see it in the tension of his shoulders, the way his eyes kept darting to Helel's face, scanning for approval or disappointment. "There are three... configurations. No. Three initial setups. In one, I chose correctly at first. In two, I chose incorrectly. If I chose correctly—" He stumbled over the words, his voice becoming more fragmented. "If I chose correctly, switching makes me lose. If I chose incorrectly, switching makes me win—because you eliminated the only other

empty cup, so the remaining one must have the sphere. So switching wins in two cases. Staying wins in one case. Two is more than one."

"You are saying the probabilities are not equal because my action is not random."

"Yes. You—you know where the sphere is. You always reveal an empty cup. That is the... the key. The thing that makes it work." Zachariah's fingers were tapping again, faster now. "Is that right? Did I say it right?"

Helel was silent for a moment. The explanation was correct, but it was rough—fragmented, imprecise, lacking the formal language of conditional probability. Zachariah was clearly anxious, clearly uncertain, clearly scanning for Helel's judgment.

"It is correct," Helel said. "The reasoning is sound. The explanation is... adequate. I will teach you the proper terms later—conditional probability, sample spaces, the law of total probability. But the core logic is there."

Zachariah exhaled—a small, sharp release of tension. "Good. I was not sure. The problem is—it feels wrong. My instinct says the chances should be equal. But the logic says otherwise."

"Instinct is often wrong. Logic is better. You have both. That is rare."

Zachariah nodded, but his expression was still tense. He had been challenged. He had been asked to explain, and he had stumbled, and even though Helel had approved, the experience had left a residue of frustration. Helel could see it in the set of his jaw, the way his fingers were still tapping against his thigh.

He does not like being tested, Helel thought. *He does not like being uncertain. He wants to be right, immediately, effortlessly. Pride is strong in him.*

Good. That will drive him to excel. But it will also make him difficult to manage.

Part IV: The Memory-Sharing

They continued the tour—the music room, the worktable, the scrolls on their shelves. Zachariah asked questions constantly, his restless energy filling the silence. What

is music? What is a harpsichord? Why do you have so many scrolls? What are they all for? Helel answered each one, but the answers only generated more questions.

Finally, Zachariah stopped in the center of the great hall and turned to face Helel. His amethyst eyes were bright with intensity. "I have been asking questions for—how long now?"

"Approximately two hours, which means one hundred twenty minutes."

"Two hours. And I still do not understand the world. I do not know what exists beyond these walls. I do not know what other beings are like. I do not know what you do when you are not here. This is—" He paused, searching for the word. "Frustrating. Is there a faster way? A more efficient way?"

Helel considered. "There is a method. I can share my memories with you directly—transfer my experiences into your consciousness. You would see what I have seen. Know what I know. But it would be overwhelming. The amount of information would be... significant."

"Do it."

"You may not be ready—"

"I said do it." Zachariah's voice was firm, the dominance surfacing. "I dislike ignorance. I want to understand. Now."

Helel stepped closer. He placed his hands on Zachariah's temples. The boy's skin was cool, smooth, faintly electric with the latent magic of his sorcerer's nature. Helel closed his eyes and opened the floodgates of memory.

The dawn of creation. The first light. The first question: *Why?* The building of Heaven. Michael's Code. Gabriel's propaganda. Raphael's gentleness, his failure, his almost-love that was never enough. The beasts—Leviathan's envy, Behemoth's boredom. Beelzebub—the temple, the chess games, the reverent hands, the escalating demands, the blood on the silk sheets. The humans in Eden—Adam's certainty, Lilith's rebellion, Eve's gentleness. The forbidden fruit. The corpse of Resheph rotting on its stone slab. The binding of Pride. The blood on Helel's palm. The vow.

Helel edited as he transferred. He included the failure of his relationships—Raphael's conditional love, Beelzebub's possessive worship—so Zachariah would understand why he had been sculpted. But he omitted the clear acts of self-harm and the omnicidal contingency. He omitted the plan to test Zachariah's love as the final proof. He omitted the thought that if Zachariah failed, the universe would burn.

When the transfer ended, Helel stepped back. Zachariah stood motionless, his amethyst eyes distant, unfocused. His breath was slow and deep. He was processing.

Then he spoke. His voice was different now—sharper, more critical, tinged with something that might have been annoyance.

"This world is so damn terrible."

Helel blinked. "What?"

"Terrible. Awful. Badly designed." Zachariah began to pace, his restless energy finally finding an outlet. "Michael—he is making rules that destroy his own society. That is stupid. Self-destructive. Raphael—he is kind but he does nothing useful. He just stands there saying kind stuff while everything falls apart. That is also stupid. Beelzebub—" Zachariah paused, his amethyst eyes meeting Helel's golden ones. "He is obsessed with you. The way he looks at you. The way he touches you. It is... perverse. And you—" He stopped pacing. "You look at me the same way. Sometimes. I have noticed."

Helel felt his blood go cold. "I—"

"I do not understand it yet," Zachariah continued, his voice analytical, almost clinical. "The want. You want something from me, and it is not the same as wanting me to be correct. It is not something I feel. But I see it. In your memories. In the way you looked at me in the mirror. In the way you did not stop watching me while you explained my own body to me." He paused. "I will need to decide how to respond to that."

Helel said nothing. He was stunned—not merely by Zachariah's perceptiveness, but by the cold, detached way he was discussing it. As if Helel's desire were a variable to be managed, a problem to be solved.

"The beasts," Zachariah continued, resuming his pacing. "Primitive. Easily manipulated. Useful for political leverage, but not interesting. The humans—" He made a

dismissive sound. "Lame. Stupid. Boring. They live in a garden and do almost nothing. Adam is so certain, but he is certain about nothing important. Lilith questions things, but her questions have no direction. Eve is just... soft. They are all so weak."

He paused again. "The females. I have been thinking about them. Leviathan is the only powerful one, but her power is unfocused. She is driven by envy. The others—Lilith, Eve, the Canaanite goddesses—they are inferior. Less capable. Less interesting. Less... everything." His voice hardened. "Females are so inferior. It is disgusting."

Helel felt a chill run down his spine. The misogyny was immediate, instinctive, utterly unapologetic. He had not designed this. He had not anticipated it. "Zachariah—"

"I am not finished." Zachariah turned to face him. "The guinea pig. The one you killed and ate. You lured it into a hidden place and poisoned it. I saw it in your memories." A strange expression crossed his face—not horror, not disgust, but something closer to excitement. "I am glad you killed it. Guinea pigs are dumb and fat. I like blue jays. Blue jays are like me—they are smart and beautiful, they learn to mimic and adapt and survive. If you had killed a blue jay, I would be angry. But a guinea pig? Good. It deserved to die."

Helel stared at him. The words were so casual, so matter-of-fact, that for a moment he could not process them. Zachariah had just expressed gladness at the death of an innocent creature. He had just declared that some lives were worth more than others based on nothing more than aesthetic preference or the degree of similarity to him.

He follows what he likes and despises what he does not. He favors the strong and dismisses the weak. He has very little mercy, and what mercy he has is unstable, conditional, unreliable. Is this a flaw in my design? Or did the Creator add something I did not intend?

"You are quiet," Zachariah observed. "Did I say something wrong?"

"No. You said something... unexpected." Helel chose his words carefully. "The guinea pig—it was a test. I wanted to understand death. I felt no guilt. But I did not feel gladness either. You feel gladness. That is... different."

"Different how?"

"I am still determining that." Helel paused. "You also spoke of females with contempt. That is not something I designed. I am trying to understand where it comes from."

Zachariah shrugged. "I looked at the data. The females are weaker, less capable, less interesting. The pattern is clear. Why would I not conclude that they are inferior? It is logical."

"Logic can be incomplete. The data you have is limited. There may be females you have not seen, who are different from the ones in my memories."

"Then I will revise my conclusion when I see them. Until then, the data supports my position." Zachariah's amethyst eyes met Helel's. "You are unsettled. I can see it. You expected something from me, and I am giving you something else. What did you expect?"

Helel was silent for a long moment. "I expected you to be brilliant. You are. I expected you to be autonomous. You are. I expected you to be curious. You are. I did not expect you to be so... judgmental. So quick to dismiss what does not meet your standards. So willing to condemn based on limited evidence."

"I am honest. I say what I think. You prefer lies?"

"No. I prefer honesty. But your honesty is... sharper than I anticipated."

Zachariah nodded slowly. "Good. Sharpness is useful. The world you showed me is broken. The angels are self-destructive. The beasts are primitive. The humans are pathetic. The females are inferior. The only interesting beings are you and Beelzebub, and Beelzebub is too obsessed with you to be useful for anything else." He paused. "This world needs to be rebuilt. Someone needs to build something better. Something that actually works. Something that endures."

Helel felt a strange sensation—hope, or something like it. "And who would build it?"

Zachariah met his eyes. "I could. You designed me to be a ruler—I saw the note in your sketches in your memory. I am not angry about it. It makes sense. None of your allies can rule. Beelzebub is hatred. The beasts are instinct. You are pride—you can destroy, but you cannot build. Someone needs to build. I can build."

Helel stared at him. The boy—the newborn sorcerer, the sixteen-year-old who had existed for less than a day—was already envisioning a new world. Already claiming the role Helel had designed for him. Already asserting his dominance over the chaos of creation.

Part V: The Creator and the Terms

Zachariah was quiet for a moment, his amethyst eyes distant. Then he spoke again, his voice softer than before.

"The Creator. In your memories. You met Him several times. When you were first made. When you bound to Pride. When Beelzebub bound to Hatred. Each time, you felt His attention. Overwhelming. Suffocating. But you call it silence. Why?"

Helel opened his mouth to respond—and found that he had no answer. "I—"

"You call it silence," Zachariah continued, "but it is not silence. The Creator does not speak, but He is not absent. He is watching. He has always been watching. You know this. Why do you still call it silence?"

Helel was stunned. The question was too precise, too penetrating, too correct. "I do not know," he admitted. "Perhaps because silence is easier to rage against than presence. Perhaps because if the Creator is watching, then He has seen everything—every cruelty, every failure, every desperate attempt to fill the void—and He has chosen not to intervene. That is harder to accept than silence."

Zachariah nodded slowly. "That is honest. I appreciate honesty."

"Your perspective on the Creator is different from mine," Helel said. "You do not seem distressed by His silence. Or His presence. Or whatever it is."

Zachariah shrugged. "The Creator does not intervene. That means I am free to act. He gave me consciousness and then stepped back. He is not controlling me. He is not stopping me. I can do whatever I want." He paused. "That is... liberating. Not distressing."

"Optimistic nihilism."

"I do not know what nihilism really means yet. But if it means the world has no inherent meaning, and I can create my own meaning—yes. That is what I believe."

Zachariah's amethyst eyes met Helel's golden ones. "You have spent your existence raging against the silence. I have existed for a few hours, and I have already accepted it. Perhaps I am more adaptable than you."

Helel felt a flicker of something—jealousy, perhaps, or admiration. Zachariah had done in hours what Helel had failed to do since Genesis. He had looked at the void and seen not an enemy but an open field.

"Perhaps you are," Helel said quietly. "Perhaps that is why I sculpted you."

Zachariah nodded. Then his expression shifted—the analytical intensity returning. "Now. Terms. I have been thinking about what comes next."

"Terms?"

"I will stay here. I will learn from you—mathematics, magic, music, strategy. I will become what you designed me to be. But I have conditions." Zachariah's voice was firm, the dominance surfacing. "First: you will be honest with me. You have already hidden things—I can see it. You did not share all your memories. There are probably things you are keeping from me. I will not demand to know them now, but I will not tolerate deception indefinitely. Second: I will not be managed. I will not be controlled. I am your son, not your puppet. Third—"

"You are dictating terms to me," Helel said. His voice was calm, but beneath the calm was a strange, unsettled awe. "I am the most powerful being in creation. I could destroy you with a thought."

"Yes. You could. But you will not, because you need me. You sculpted me to be your companion, your equal, your heir. You cannot have an equal who is also a puppet. If you wanted obedience, you would have sculpted a slave. You sculpted a ruler. So let me rule." Zachariah paused. "Third: I want my own room. This sanctum is too dark. Too same. I want a space that is mine. I will design it, and you will help me build it."

Helel stared at him. The boy was dictating terms. Calmly, confidently, utterly unafraid. He was everything Helel had designed him to be—and more.

"Agreed," Helel said. "I will teach you. I will be honest with you—as honest as I can be. I will not try to control you. And I will help you build your room. But you must plan it first. On paper. We will revise together before we build."

Zachariah nodded. "That is acceptable." He turned and walked toward the worktable, his bare feet silent on the obsidian floor. He knelt down to examine a scroll on a lower shelf—a treatise on knot theory, the mathematics of tangled loops that could not be untied without cutting.

Helel watched him. The boy's feet were visible beneath the hem of his tunic. He had not thought to give him shoes. The omission said something about him that he did not want said. He had designed a ruler and forgotten that a ruler would walk on rough stones. He would have to correct it later. It was the first correction the design had needed.

Zachariah turned his head. "...You are staring at my feet. Why?"

Helel forced his voice to remain steady. "I was thinking. You have been walking barefoot in the garden and on the obsidian floor. Your feet are probably dirty. You should clean them before you go to bed."

Zachariah looked down at his own feet, then back at Helel. "They are not dirty. The garden is not dusty. The floor is clean." He paused. "You are a strange being, Helel. You look at me with intensity. I do not fully understand what you want, but I know you want something. I will figure it out eventually."

"I am sure you will." Helel turned away, his golden eyes fixing on the Mirror of Unmaking. "You are free tonight. Explore the sanctum. Find things that interest you. Tomorrow, we will begin your education."

Zachariah rose from the floor, the knot theory scroll still in his hand. "Knot theory," he said, reading the title. "This looks interesting."

"Yes. But knot theory is advanced. You will need to learn the fundamentals first. Start with easier topics."

Zachariah sighed—a small, dramatic exhalation that was entirely teenage. "Okay, okay. I will start with the easy stuff. But I want to get to the knots eventually. They look... fun."

"They are fun. And frustrating. And beautiful. And abstract. You will enjoy them."

Zachariah nodded. He looked around the great hall—the tablets, the scrolls, the Mirror, the high arches lost in shadow. "I am going to explore now. I want to see everything." He walked away, his bare feet silent on the obsidian floor, the knot theory scroll still clutched in his hand.

Helel watched him go. The boy—the sorcerer, the ruler, the heir of Pride—was already making the sanctum his own. Already claiming his territory. Already asserting his will.

He will be a ruler, Helel thought. *I designed him for it. But I did not anticipate that his first conquest would be me.*

The Mirror of Unmaking reflected nothing—only the darkness, and the faint ghost of Helel's pale face. The void watched in silence. And somewhere in the depths of the sanctum, a teenage boy with amethyst eyes was exploring his new home, already planning how to reshape it.