

The Captive

A Story of Fear & Forgiveness

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Prologue

Abaddon sat at the far end of the table in an attempt to keep as much distance from Patho as possible. Patho had become hideous to look at, barely resembling his former self. To Abaddon's perturbation his own appearance had also begun to change. He added it to the ever-growing list of effects and results from choosing to follow Patho. The extended time in the Pit, which had recently been forced upon him, was taking its toll. Abaddon couldn't understand how Serpent could come and go as he pleased. This angered Patho immensely, but from Abaddon's vantage point, Patho was unable to control him. The friction between the two was more than Abaddon could, or wanted to, tolerate.

“What are you suggesting?” Secretary asked in his annoying high-pitched screeching tone.

Abaddon cringed every time he spoke. He much preferred Patho's first assistant, at least Abaddon could read him. But since his untimely and unexplainable disappearance, Abaddon was now forced to deal with Secretary. In his experience, the only difference between Secretary and Serpent was that Patho still had a little control over him. From where Abaddon stood, Secretary was as bad, evil and annoying as Serpent. In the past, these were traits

that typically drew such characters to Abaddon. But he was becoming increasingly tiresome of these three using him as their whipping boy.

Serpent hissed in long-drawn-out phrases, “He wantss you to make the Fallen Souls sso fearful, they stop making requestsss for redemption. You’re not as bright ass the lassst one, are you?”

Secretary glared at Serpent. He may not be as bright, but he was certainly more daring.

“I not only want them to stop, I want them to revoke their original request!” Patho sneered with teeth grinding. His eyes were squinted, and his jaw locked as he said slowly and defined, “I DON’T CARE WHAT IT TAKES! The hair on Abaddon’s neck stood up. “If I am told of one more Fallen Soul seeking forgiveness,” Patho clenched his fist so tightly the bones cracked. He stretched his head as far to one side as it would go, “...there will be consequences.” Patho’s entire being began to twitch.

“We don’t know how they make requests,” Abaddon said.

“THEN FIND OUT!” Patho sneered.

“I suggest that we recruit assistance,” offered Secretary.

“You mean from the Fallen Souls? The Fallen Souls will never assist us,” Abaddon said.

“Oooh, there are some that will,” Serpent said with a hint of excitement, which was all the excitement he could muster. He tilted

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to one side from his crouched position on the ground. He put his hands together and began tapping his fingers in controlled rhythm.

“Who?” Abaddon asked sharply.

“Ahhh...those who have returned to the darkness,” Secretary offered as he looked at Serpent. “Don’t you agree?”

This time he had Serpent’s approval. “Yesssss,” Serpent replied with evil mischief in his voice, “Those who have returned to the darkness.” He began to roll his hands as if in preparation for a meal.

Abaddon huffed and shook his head, “The ones I’ve seen are lifeless, almost comatose,” he said.

“Not all of them!” Serpent said with great pleasure. “There are some whose anger and hatred erupts continuously at the mention,” he paused and slowly and intentionally turned toward Patho, “THE KING.”

As expected, Patho shook at his name. Serpent was entertained by Patho’s reactions and had perfected his timing when he spoke. “They are angry and bitter – just the right combination for this little task.”

“Angry and bitter,” said Secretary, “music to my ears.”

“This is no little task,” Abaddon argued.

The room fell silent. Secretary looked down and began making notes. Serpent remained crouched in the layer of filth that covered the Pit, only his eyes moved. He looked from side to side suspiciously and with anticipation.

Unable to endure any length of silence, Patho abruptly shouted, "What are you waiting for? Did I not make myself clear? I WANT THE REQUESTS FOR FORGIVENESS TO END NOW!!!"

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The King turned the page with great care and continued reading. Balbas sat nervously watching. There wasn't an inch of him that didn't want to jump up from the table, bolt through the doors and head back to the lower chambers.

Whatever made me think I could do this? he thought. *Write what you know, they always say. Write what you know.*

Konnory watched from across the table. He could sense Balbas' angst. He could also feel the nervous vibration of his uncontrollable bouncing knee. The King had this effect on those who came into his presence. It wasn't of his doing, it was the result of the guests' own insecurity. Those who entered his presence humbly, immediately felt his love. Those who entered fearfully had to face their own demons before accepting his grace.

The King turned the page.

Balbas began quietly tapping his hand on the table. *Why did I let him talk me into this?* He looked up at Konnory who responded with a smile. *I should have never told anyone,*

especially Konnory. Whatever made me think I could pull it off? Balbas glanced at the door. There is no one in my way. If I were to make a run for it, I would have to keep going. If I leave now, I could never return to the lower chambers.

Konnory observed his every move. *He has it bad, he thought. Maybe this was not the best idea. I thought he was ready. He may have needed more time.*

The King sighed, making both turn their attention his way.

He doesn't like it, I knew it. Konnory, why did you make me do this? I said no! Didn't I say no? Why didn't I stand up to you? "No, I don't want the King to read this." That's all it would have taken; two little letters that would have stopped this catastrophe from happening. No! No no no no no no no no. He looked up at Konnory with all the resentment he could muster. His eyes tightened.

"It's OK," Konnory mouthed.

The King turned another page.

This is torture. I can't write! This was a great idea in the beginning. Record the events of Turayn as told by those watching and protecting its inhabitants. Keep a record that can be passed on until the last Fallen Soul returns. They need to remember – or maybe they don't. Maybe once in the Kingdom, we are to forget it all. What made me think that he hadn't already thought of this? Surely, he has assigned someone to document the history of Turayn. Surely, it is being documented somewhere. Balbas glanced once

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again at Konnory, who nodded his head ever so gently, and the King turned another page.

He's almost to the end. It's almost over. What will I say when he tells me I should not have attempted such a feat? I'm going to lose my position. He won't let me back in the lower chambers. I wouldn't let me back, why would he?

Balbas was too focused on creating an escape route to notice the misty glance from the King. Konnory saw it. He knew where the King must be in his reading. The King's eyes fell back on the pages of the large book he held in his hands.

He's reading of Jael and those final hours, Konnory thought as he took a deep breath.

The King turned the page and wiped the tear that softly rolled down his cheek.

Konnory looked back at Balbas, whose attention seemed to be elsewhere. He wanted to stand up and shout, "You're missing it!! Get out of your head and take notice of what is happening right here!"

It's as I expected, Father loves it, Konnory thought. How could He not? It's a record of the Fallen Souls. None of us could have ever written it in such a way. I can't imagine the time Balbas has invested in this. The conversations with the Watchers, the stories he has heard. Balbas, you are missing it.

The King turned the page.

Konnory understood the gentle smile that began to illuminate Father. He kicked Balbas under the table. Balbas stiffened. Konnory motioned for him to look at the King.

Balbas clenched his jaw. He stiffened further. *This was not for the King's eyes*, he shouted in his head. *This was for my children. No, I don't have children, but I may someday. I didn't want them to forget. I never want them to forget. Even after the last Fallen Soul is in the Kingdom, I don't want them to forget. What made me think I could write the creation of Turayn? Of homecomings such as Waldemar, Taytan and Odella? Odella, what will she think of this? She should have been the one to write it. She would have done it beautifully. She could have spoken first hand of ruling in Turayn, or Konnory, for that matter. He could have written it. Perhaps he has, and this is just a ploy to get rid of me.* Balbas glared at Konnory. *Konnory, why didn't you write this? It's not that brilliant of an idea - after all, I thought of it. Carasi, he should have done it. He was there all along. Planning and watching every move. I am so unworthy. Crazy! Crazy, crazy, crazy....*

Balbas was so preoccupied with the conversation in his head that he failed to hear the King close the book. Konnory kicked him again. Balbas stiffened. His lips were clenched tightly. He glared across the table.

The King took a breath and Balbas froze. "It's beautiful," the King whispered.

"I knew you would like it," Konnory said.

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“What are you calling it?” the King asked.

*Calling it? Wait! What! What did I miss? Is he addressing me?
He couldn't be...*

“Balbas,” the King said softly. “When you are finished with your private conversation, I would like to talk to you about this book.” Balbas turned his head slowly. “It’s beautifully written. What gave you the idea?”

“Sire, I’m at a loss for words,” Balbas finally replied.

“I don’t believe that,” the King said as he patted the book.

There was silence, a long silence. “Perhaps he is at a loss,” Komory said.

Balbas sat back slightly in his chair. He took a deep breath, and then another. “I only wanted to create a record, something that would never allow us to forget.”

“And what made you think of using the stories from the Watchers rather than the documentation that is being kept?” asked the King.

“Because they were there,” Balbas replied shrugging his shoulders, “they are there,”

“Yes, they are,” the King responded nodding his head.

“They were there not as Fallen Souls, but they were here, watching the day of the fall. They were with you when you spoke Turayn into being. On the day you and the Princes journeyed for the first time to Turayn. They watched as you walked Waldemar back to the Kingdom. They assisted Latzof in building the boat and watched in amazement as you called all the creatures of Turayn to come. When Odella took the throne as King Haddad, they were there.”

The King and Konnory watched Balbas as the words rolled off his tongue. These were no longer just stories to him. He spoke as if he, too, had been there.

Balbas instantly transformed from a mounting bundle of nervous energy to a confident, well-spoken representative. His leg no longer shaking under the table, his hands folded softly in front of him. He continued, “When they spoke of Jael’s entry into Turayn, it was always with great care. Telling of how they watched the Son of the King become human, causes most of them to break.

“They recall the day Jael saw them clearly for the first time, the relief that they could now communicate with him. They laugh as they tell of Magnor’s tree incidents,” he paused.

“They love to tell of the humans reaction to Jael’s Works of the Kingdom; the day he healed that brave woman and brought the child back to life. Their stories are never about Jael, but about the reactions of the crowd, or the one being healed. It always makes them laugh.” Balbas began to laugh.

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“Listening to Watchers talk of the Humans is one thing, hearing them actually laugh - is quite another.”

“I’m not sure I knew they could laugh,” Konnory said.

“Oh, yes. It’s like nothing you’ve ever heard,” Balbas continued.

“Yes, and you are right, it is a rapturous sound,” the King replied.

“They weren’t laughing when they talked of Jael and Quaine’s reunion. No, there wasn’t a dry eye then. It must have been an amazing sight. I wish I could have witnessed it,” Balbas said.

“You wrote as if you did,” the King offered.

“Thank you, Sire,” Balbas said bowing his head. Balbas was having a difficult time breathing. There seemed so much breath in him, he may pass out. “Your acknowledgment means the world to me.” The room was quiet once again.

“You’ve recorded recent events, very recent in fact,” the King said.

“Yes, Sire. There isn’t a day that goes by when I don’t add to it,” Balbas said. “But I believe its complete now. Jael is home.”

“What of the last chapter? When will you tell of Jael’s homecoming?” asked the King.

Beads of perspiration beginning to form on his brow, Konnory could once again feel the rhythm of his knee. “No, Sire, I couldn’t write of Jael’s homecoming. I could never do it justice.”

“You are mistaken,” replied the King. Balbas’ mouth opened in preparation for a rebuttal before he remembered to whom he was addressing. “You owe me one last chapter.” Konnory caught a glimpse of an all too familiar smirk from the King. “I will expect it in three days.”

“Those would be Turayn days,” Konnory quickly added. Balbas looked up at the King for confirmation. He did not receive one.

“Three days,” said the King.

“Three days, then this is over,” Balbas said ever so quietly.

“Over?” Konnory burst out. “It’s just beginning my friend! You and I have much to do.” Instantly, Balbas moved from concern to very concerned.

“We?” he asked.

“Yes, my friend - WE!”

“You’ve not filled him in?” asked the King.

“Not yet. I was waiting for the right time. I guess it’s now,” Konnory replied. “You have been selected to assist me. We

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know that there is going to be those who are committed to eliminating Jael's teachings in Turayn. If they have it their way, this will include anyone who follows his teachings."

"Am I to accompany you?" Balbas asked with reluctant excitement.

"No," replied Konnory, "At least not at this time. You will remain here, doing everything you do already. The only difference is that you will be focused on a select group of humans." Balbas never took his eyes off Konnory. "You will be collecting information, organizing the Watchers, and keeping an accurate accounting of each operation."

"This we now know you can do quite well," the King offered.

Balbas smiled, grateful for the compliment. "Who will be the focus of our efforts?"

"You, my friend, are going to be focused on those who have such hatred for the King and Jael, that they dedicate their lives to eradicating it."

"That will indeed be a challenge," Balbas said. "When will this begin? Do you have someone in mind already?"

"Konnory will be accompanying Jael to Turayn for his final visit," the King replied.

"Jael is returning?" Balbas interrupted.

“He is,” said the King. “He is eager to return. Your new assignment begins now. The Watchers are already on the lookout for those who need our special attention.”

“They will be reporting back to you,” Konnory continued, “and we will be coming up with our game plan.”

“Is there anyone they are currently watching?” Balbas asked.

“Yes, in fact, there is,” Konnory replied. “He is evil. If I didn’t know better, I would think he was Patho. The Watchers will fill you in, they have kept a close eye on him for a while now.” Konnory paused, looking directly at Balbas, “Are you sure you are up for this assignment?”

Balbas response was not immediate. He looked at Konnory and then to the King. He dropped his head for a moment, considering the obligation he would be making. “Without a doubt,” he replied.

“Glad to hear it!” said the King.

“Then it is time to begin,” Konnory said. “You have some work to do and I have a brother who is eager to begin a trip.”

The three left the Throne Room and walked silently down the hall; there was far too many thoughts bombarding Balbas’ mind to carry on any conversation. As they approached the Dining Room, Konnory and the King stopped. The stood watch while Balbas continued on.

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“He’s going to make a great comrade for you,” the King said.

Konnory nodded. “I’ll have my very own Waldemar,” he replied.

“The record that he wrote, I’m curious, what does he call it?” asked the King.

Konnory reached to open the Dining Room door, “The Plan,” he replied.