

Chapter 173: A Test of Trust

Lottie POV

Standing in the familiar surroundings of Astaroth's cathedral or church, whatever this place was, I turned to Knox and Kane, my mind racing with questions. This didn't feel right.

"We don't have a choice!" Sage reminded me that the Moon Goddess had really messed with Sage's head. I could feel how conflicted she was over the choice that had been unnecessarily laid at her feet.

"How exactly do you plan to trick Connie into thinking she's your mate?" I questioned, crossing my arms, feeling vulnerable and more than a little sceptical of this plan.

"She's going to want to.." Swallowing the lump that formed in my throat, I nodded, knowing everyone understood.

"Have coitus? Fornicate? Bone? Go all the way? Have intercourse? Have relations? Do the deed?" Astaroth started to list off, his fingers twirling around the large beast's ear.

"Not helpful, asswipe." Knox moaned as I rolled my eyes.

"Oh, not clear enough? Ok, Sexual relations? Do the deed? Fuck? Make love? Mate? Screw?"

"Astaroth," Kane warned, his voice low and angry, which seemed to get the attention of Fluffy.

"Ah ok, oooh how about a good old game of hiding the sausage?" He grinned mischievously at me. And despite myself, I felt a smile slip across my lips.

"It's ok," I smiled, feeling somewhat lighter. Kane sighed, glancing at Knox before meeting my gaze.

"Charlotte, we've told you—we're not interested in that. Our bond with you is unbreakable." Knox nodded in agreement.

"Exactly. We're committed to you, Lottie. This is just a ruse to keep the old witch distracted and buy us some time." Knox winked as he stepped into me, his large arms cocooning me, his lips finding my neck to suck on my mate mark. "There is only one girl I want to play hide the sausage with." He added as he lifted to look into my wide eyes, a dirty smile licking the edges of his lips, that sent butterflies to

my stomach instantly.

"I believe you both. I trust you, that isn't my question." I smiled, trying to brush off the feeling washing through me. The knot in my stomach wouldn't ease completely until I knew every detail.

Astaroth's hellhound flickered into view as if summoned by my concern, it padded over its large head, forcing between a startled Knox and me to rub against me, its large body curling around me as its surprisingly soft fur tickled at my arms.

"Get your dog away from her." I heard Kane order, his voice laced with nervousness that was sweet but utterly unneeded.

"Shh, it's just saying hello." Astaroth grunted, a smile licking at my lips as I lowered my hand down to fuss behind its ears tenderly. I can't explain why, but its presence didn't scare me like it did Kane. I liked the beast. It reminded me of another large black creature I had recently tamed.

"That's because they come from the same litter." Astaroth announced, his words pulling a groan from my lips as I lifted my eyes to meet his red hues.

"What have I told you about delving into my

thoughts?" I asked, arching a brow as the hellhound lay at my feet, his body so large that even when lying down his head rested comfortably on my stomach, those big dark eyes looking up at me.

"What is it doing?" I asked, running my fingers through its fluffy fur. "I see why you got your name, Fluffy." I offered with a soft chuckle.

"It recognises the pup you carry." Astaroth announced, without emotion.

"What?" I laughed, looking over at Astaroth, who had jumped down from the altar to come stand beside Knox, his arm resting on his shoulder.

"I told you they are from the same litter," he repeated, nodding to Knox and then to the hound who was sitting beautifully at my feet.

"You gave me a damn hellhound!" Knox growled, spinning to look at Astaroth, who held his hands up in surrender. The Hound at my feet surprised me by growling.

"Careful," I cautioned Knox, but his eyes were already glaring angrily at Astaroth who was smirking devilishly.

"I did not give you the hound. No, but someone did yes. Havoc has served you well, has he not?" Astaroth asked with a grin. I watched the hellhound at my feet rise and walk to where Knox was stepping into Astaroth.

"He destroyed a damn ballroom. He almost killed people", Knox barked, his irritation growing rapidly.

"Like I said... same litter," Astaroth muttered, nodding to the hound approaching as if he might protect him from Knox's fury.

"And you were able to manipulate Havoc to react that way because.." Kane started to say, but he was cut off by a grinning Astaroth, it was, however, too late, Kane's words had already registered.

"He is of my realm, yes." Astaroth laughed, his white pearly teeth glimmering.

"Knox, calm down, please." I warned as Fluffy approached from behind Knox. The growl coming from its lips was utterly terrifying. Turning, I glanced at Kane, hoping he was ready to pounce and help Knox at any moment, but in the place of the panic I felt, Kane was smiling at the scene behind

me.

"Why are you smiling," I growled as Kane strapped into my back, his thumb landing on my chin. With a wink that had my jaw tensing, he twisted my head to look at Knox, who had Astaroth by the scruff of his top.

"Wait." I whispered, seeing Fluffy had pushed through Knox's legs, his teeth bared... at Astaroth.

"Traitor!" Astaroth grunted to Fluffy who snapped his teeth back.

"Something to remember about hell hounds, guys... they are fiercely protective over their kin... even if they haven't seen them since they were pups." Astaroth muttered, holding his hands up in surrender for the second time this afternoon.

"I am sorry I upset you, Knox, I honestly thought you would have put two and two together. I mean Fluffy is the spitting image of Havoc. Wouldn't you say?" Astaroth rushed out his eyes, meeting mine and Kanes. 1

"I would." Kane laughed as Knox lowered Astaroth back down, but not before giving him a shove. Fluffy took the opportunity to spin and jump up

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Knox, who was barely able to wrap his arms around his thick black neck.

"Hey there boy. Are you gonna watch over my girls for me, huh?" He asked, ruffling his fur.

"Can he go with Lottie to the Royal's pack?" Knox asked, my mind suddenly spinning with the realisation that this was actually happening, for all the jokes and banter, I was truly leaving my mates. While they paraded another girl.. If you could call Connie that, but watching them show her off like she was the best thing since sliced bread.

"Do I have a choice?" Astaroth asked, more of Fluffy than Knox. A low menacing growl from Fluffy was all the answer I needed. She was now my protector, companion and confidant.

"At least he will be able to comfort me when I am heartbroken, alone and contemplating murdering a brunette she-wolf."

"Maybe don't mention the murder part to Fluffy, that happens to be his favourite game." Astaroth laughed, but I knew from his tone that he was at least half joking.

"Can I sweeten the deal?" Astaroth asked, stepping

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closer, his eyes meeting mine sympathetically as he crouched before me.

"I wouldn't say this is a sweet deal, but go ahead." I muttered, crossing my hands over my chest as I found a nearby pew and fell into it, my body suddenly depleted of all energy.



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