

“The Interview”

Ben jumped a bit when his doorbell rang. Ever since he had found out about Lisa's deal with Daryil, he had been spending his free time reviewing his books on 'Cubification and Clan Daryil. A guest was particularly unexpected at this time of night.

He skipped over to the front door of his apartment and looked out the peephole. His jaw dropped and he caught himself before he uttered an oath. Standing outside was a long-haired fox like him. Unlike Ben, his fur was a more natural silver color and his eyes were an unnatural violet color. And his outfit—only a 'Cubi would wear so much shiny, tight latex.

Ben would recognize him anywhere: the incubus who had announced his ascension on Furrae Today, Ikaarion Daryil himself. He seemed to know Ben was there; he looked straight at him and popped his headwings out briefly to wave at him.

If anyone had been watching, it would have seemed that Ben's body flickered slightly as he opened the door. He stood there for a moment, staring at Daryil with his mouth still agape. Ben finally shook himself and moved to the side, motioning inside with his hand. “*M-Milord,*” he stammered, “this is completely unexpected! Please, come in!”

Ben shut the door behind Daryil and rushed past him to the table, scrambling to move his books out of the way. He was more nervous than he had ever been. His eyes darted about the apartment, from his immaculately organized bookshelves to his unkempt dresser and bed. He nearly uttered an oath when he noticed Daryil's eye catch the fish tank on his dresser.

Daryil began to approach the fish tank, smiling almost maliciously as his headwings fanned out. “Are those...” He stopped short as Ben zipped over in front of the tank with speed that astonished even him.

Ben cleared his throat and gestured toward the table. “Milord, I am honored by your presence!” The moment Daryil's head was turned, Ben whipped his shirt off and threw it over the fish tank. “Won't you have a seat? I know they're humble, but the chairs are actually quite comfortable.”

To Ben's surprise, Daryil walked right past the seats at his table and hopped on his bed instead. Daryil smiled sweetly and spoke at last: "I see you've heard about me."

Ben chuckled nervously and pulled a chair out from the table. "As you can see," he said, gesturing toward his bookshelves, "I have a lot of books, including all four parts of your four-thousand-year biography. I even have a copy of the fourth volume of your Tenets," he added with a note of pride.

"Yes, very impressive," Daryil replied, looking over the ten-foot-high bookshelves. "I don't see a copy of my treatise on the seduction of men, though..."

Ben suddenly wished he were wearing a shirt and he blushed a bit. "Sorry Milord, but I'm *definitely* straight."

Daryil shrugged. "Pity. You're not a half-bad bish. Oh well, if this works out maybe change your mind after a thousand years or so." Ben's ears turned pink and Daryil continued, "Anyway, would you mind talking to me *face-to-face* now?"

Ben looked horrified for a moment, but managed to calm himself down. In the corner of the room a second Ben appeared, and the first disappeared. "You really *are* Lord Daryil," the second Ben said, taking the seat where the first had been. "Forgive me, Milord, but I *still* can't believe *the* Lord Daryil would come to see *me* himself!"

Daryil just smiled. "That *was* a pretty neat trick... An inexperienced 'Cubi probably would have thought those brain waves and emotions really *were* coming from the illusion. And speaking of brain waves..." Daryil continued, looking Ben straight in the eye, "Before we go anywhere, I must ask that you lower your mind-shield. If you're going to be part of *my* Clan, I would like to know you are who you say you are."

Ben hesitated for a moment. With a wave of his hand, he dispelled his mind shield and replied, "Fair enough, I suppose. Just... don't tell my mom it was really me who set fire to that wheat field."

Daryil snickered. "I can't *wait* to see that one. And now," Daryil said as he leaned forward and steepled his fingers, "let's get down to business. Why *do* you want to be a 'Cubi?"

Ben started rubbing his hands together as he often did when he was nervous. "We-e-ell, it kinda started as jealousy, I suppose. My mother is an Angel, I've lived around Creatures all my life... I wanted to cast magic like an Angel, to heft boulders like a Demon, to shapeshift like a 'Cubi... Over time it became more about the lifespan. I mean, just *think* of all the things I could see and do in three *thousand* years!" Ben's eyes sparkled a bit during that last statement.

"But what about the drawbacks? The emotional instability? The anti-'Cubi groups? The fact that you will outlive most of your friends and family?"

"I've already given those some thought. I actually know about SAIA from an incubus friend of mine; I'd be more than happy to take classes to learn how to control my powers. The 'Cubi-haters..." Ben chuckled and continued, "Well, let's just say I have a lot of experience with angry people. And the longer lifespan..." Ben trailed off and his smile faded a bit. "That really *does* eat me. But... I learned long ago that depression and denial don't make things better. That's why I try to make the most of every day."

"A bit naive," Daryil thought, "*but his heart is in the right place.*" Then he continued, "And as for 'Cubification itself... Do you realize what the ritual entails?"

Ben nodded. "Yeah, I have to have a kid with a succubus. Which is actually kind of another dream of mine... 'Cubi have always been my favorite Creatures."

"Not to mention succubi are freaking *hot*, right?" Daryil said with a teasing face.

Ben's ears glowed red and he stammered, "Uh, I, well... What do you expect? I'm only male!"

Daryil giggled. "You're so *cute* when you're bashful!"

Ben's felt his face become unbearably warm.

"All right, I'll stop. Let's move on... According to your file in the Cornelia Registry, you're a part-time adventurer. That seems like an odd profession for someone who's so enthralled by Creatures."

Ben began to rub the back of his neck again. "Heh, yeah, I thought so too at first. But... As much as I adore and understand Creatures, there are still plenty of them out there—Demons, usually—and even *Beings* who would prey upon the weak and the innocent. And I figured: I was born with this above-average magical power and talent... *Why shouldn't* I use it to help people? I mean, sure, it wasn't always easy. I always tried not to kill anyone if at all possible. Not so much because I didn't feel they deserved it; more like because I just didn't have the stomach to take another life. And I'll admit," Ben said and looked at the floor, "there were times when it really was hard *not* to kill my target..."

Daryil nodded somberly. "There's nothing inherently wrong with that. We 'Cubi know what it means to feel angry. The important thing is that you controlled your emotions, not let them control you."

Ben nodded in return.

Daryil continued, "Next question: what's your phone number?"

"It's three-one-*heeeeyyyy* wait a second..."

Daryil snickered. "Well, it was worth a shot! (*Besides, that was one of the first things I looked for in your mind...*)"

"Sorry, what was that?"

"Oh, nothing! I'll ask you a real question now: out of *all* the clans who could accept you, why would you want to be *my* Clan?"

Ben grinned from ear to ear. "Ever since you made your appearance on Furrae Today, I've been following your Clan. I read everything I could find about you, from your history with Ti'Nera to The Chronicles of Jakob Pettersohn to your Tenets. Your Clan has come a long way and I believe it has a very bright future. Not to mention you have ideals I can wholly get behind. Besides, Taun is a little too serious for my taste."

"Hahaha! You have *no* idea. Now, if you do join my Clan, do you know what that will make me to you?"

Ben looked puzzled for a moment. "Well, you'd be... kind of like my patriarch, right?"

"More than that. *Much* more. We will be *connected*. I will *know* you, Ben. Possibly even better than you know yourself. Not in *that* sense," Daryil added swiftly. "Well, unless you want to, of course..."

Ben's eyes began to sparkle again. "You mean like a Vulcan mind-meld?"

Daryil placed his fingers to his brow and shook his head, smiling out of pity. "Sure, let's go with that. All right then, I think I have just three more questions for you." Daryil held up one finger. "What is your name?"

"Uhh... Benjamin Buran? I thought you already knew..."

"What is your quest?" Daryil said and held up a second finger.

Ben blinked. "To... become a 'Cubi?"

Daryil held up a third finger. "What is the capital of Syria?"

“What? I don’t know that!”

Something suddenly flew up from under Ben and straight into Daryil’s hands. Ben whimpered and curled his tail up between his legs. It was his pants.

Daryil snickered a bit and stood up. Ben’s embarrassment was so palpable even a non-‘Cubi would feel it. “All right,” Daryil said, “I think I’ve heard enough. It was a pleasure meeting you, Ben. I’ll call you as soon as I’ve made the necessary preparations.”

Ben’s eyes went wide and his ears perked up. “You mean...?”

Daryil grinned hugely and said, “Yup! I even have a partner for you already in mind.”

A high-pitched squeal shattered the still of the night...

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