

Hell's Pawn © 2011 Jay Bell

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Chapter 4

A face, pristine in beauty, serene. A sculpture made of light. No, not light. Glass. The hypnotic eyes were two perfectly fashioned orbs, glass grapes set delicately inside their sockets, impossible detail carved into each iris. What master craftsman could create such perfection?

The brow above the glass eyes furrowed, shocking John out of his repose. He tried to open his mouth to speak, to ask any number of questions, but he could not. He was completely paralyzed, unable even to blink, his field of vision filled by the beautiful face looking down at him.

The glass head pulled back, bringing into view a neck and chest just as immaculate. John watched in fascination as the glass man put a thoughtful finger to his lips. The gray walls of Purgatory were visible through his transparent body, telling John that his escape had been a failure. But had he been rescued? He saw no sign of the spiders.

"You should be unconscious," the glass man said, each word perfectly formed, his voice ideal in pitch and volume, "and yet, here you are, seeing things that no soul in Purgatory has ever laid eyes upon."

As pleasant as the voice was, it was laced with disapproval. John hadn't been rescued after all. He had been captured.

"Captured?" the glass man said, pursing his lips. "Yes, I suppose you could say that. You were, after all, behaving like an animal, scurrying after a dog like part of a depraved pack. A more formidable man might have been restrained, a dangerous opponent neutralized, but you? Captured. Downed like a mindless beast. But who is your keeper? Who unleashed you and allowed you to run free?"

John silenced the name before it could reach his mind, focusing instead on the image of a solitary tree in a park.

"Amusing," the glass man said. "Normally in these situations I am unable to read minds since my guests are always unconscious, but I do have other methods at my disposal. There is one in particular that I enjoy. I am quite eager to see how a conscious mind reacts to it. Shall we begin?"

The glass man came near, his graceful crystalline hands poised before him. The beautiful transparent face came close to John's own, as

if proposing a kiss, before the delicate hands pressed against John's abdomen. After minimal resistance, the fingertips passed into his body.

Cold! Like the spider's fangs but a thousand times worse. Cold and hard. The fingers slid further inside John until immersed up to the wrist. Glass hands moved through him, opening him up in impossible ways, exposing his insides to air and causing them to ache. Was this what rape felt like? This violation, helplessness, exposure?

The face in front of him grinned, diamond teeth framed by lips made of stars. So beautiful, but the sensations coursing through John's body were of pure revulsion. Like a careless surgeon, the glass man's hands scampered inside of him, but instead of organs and intestines, memories were being manipulated. Dozens of experiences were brought to the surface, all of them painful. The heartbreak of being left by his first love, the crushing pain that came with losing his grandmother, the humiliations he had suffered in junior high, each feeling as fresh as the moment it had happened, but now all were occurring simultaneously. The glass man had found Jacobi's name long ago, but still he played.

Life's brutality came next: his drunken father beating him, or the night he was jumped by three men and became the victim of random violence. He felt everything, the physical pain dim and distant compared to the anger, frustration, and powerlessness that had accompanied the experiences. John longed to moan, but even that release was denied him.

Then it was over. The glass man's lips curved in satisfaction before he spoke again. "There is only one system, John, one path to walk correctly. We try to teach you that in life, to break your insignificant spirit before you come here. You don't realize how generous that is of us. Purgatory was your last chance to learn your place. You're nothing but a rat ungrateful for his cage, when you should be thankful for the shelter given to you. You should have obeyed our love. Disappointments like you don't even deserve to be broken, only discarded. The rest of eternity awaits you, John Grey."

The glass man snapped his fingers and everything went black.

* * * * *

A rainbow of balloons soared into the overcast sky, theoretically breaking through the clouds to the blue beyond. A crowd cheered, and John noticed that he was being carried, hoisted heroically for all to see. His head lolled to one side. He could see Dante to his right, pale and limp, like a fish starved of water. The two Props beneath Dante carried him above their heads like a giant entrée making its way toward the dining room. With a grunt of effort, John rolled his head to the other side to find Jacobi also being carried, his wide eyes full of panic.

“We’re graduating!” the old man said. “You have to do something!”

On the contrary, John thought. Heaven, Hell, or whatever came next had to be better than here. He never wanted to set foot in Purgatory again, or to think about the icy hands that had played with his insides as if they were a toy.

John managed a groan as they began ascending a hill. Dante had pointed it out to him once. Here was where every good soul went to graduate, an inaccessible green slope covered in grass that led upward to an ancient stone archway glowing with golden light. Beyond lay the greatest of promises. Heaven, sponsored by McDonald’s, they had joked. John noticed with some disappointment that the grass appeared to be artificial.

They passed through the golden arch and the sound of the jubilant crowd ceased. The plastic grass and the hill had disappeared too, replaced by choking fog that suggested they were on the edge of Purgatory again. Why hadn’t they been allowed to escape? Their punishment for trying was to be exiled? This was nonsense, but John didn’t care as long as he got away. The Props set him on the ground, then transformed into their natural spider forms.

Jacobi began yelling, begging John to “do something, do something, please do something!” Dante was roused from his sleep and panicked, reaching out to Jacobi before the spiders bit them both to silence their screams. John was bitten as well and went still after the first bite, not wanting to earn extra venom by revealing his natural resistance. One of the spiders tensed its abdomen and shot a blue line of web somewhere above before gathering John like freshly caught prey and rising upward.

All around him, other souls were rising into the air, not just Jacobi and Dante. Their expressions of terror or confusion, all frozen in place the moment they had been bitten, showed that they had expected something more from graduation. John almost envied their unconsciousness, the tranquil oblivion that followed the brief moment of fear. Perhaps he should struggle, be bitten more until his mind went blank.

The gray sky slowly faded into blue, but instead of hope John felt only puzzlement. This blue wasn't that of the sky, but the electric, stinging blue he had first seen with the dampeners. Their ascension stopped abruptly, and John was hoisted upward.

Above him was a ceiling that stretched as far as the eye could see, a dome glowing with blue energy that pulsed around the frozen, unmoving bodies that were its bricks. Countless souls were pressed together, their twisted limbs forming a barrier against whatever was beyond. Already the spiders were working the new arrivals into this patchwork, binding with blue web that soon dissolved to become part of the abominable structure.

John was stuffed unceremoniously into the mass of bodies. He wanted to scream, but the thrumming blue energy overwhelmed him, made even worse when more souls were layered on top of him. All he could see in front of him were bodies, souls transformed into corpses, translucent like frosted glass.

Despite his growing claustrophobia, John didn't dare move until the activity behind him had ceased. Then he tried moving his arm, causing a shock to run along his body. He tried again and again, every movement sending another burst of pain that subdued him like the spider's venom had. Wincing with each effort, he maneuvered to identify his neighbors. Jacobi was beside him, the old man's hand reaching down to grasp the hand of someone below. If the spiky hair near John's feet was any indication, it was Dante. Neither of them stirred. Except for John, no one in the hideous barrier was awake.

He reached out to shake Jacobi's arm, but before he could reach it, the repeated shocks overwhelmed him and he lost consciousness. When John awoke some time later, he chose to remain still and think rather than suffer further.

So this was graduation. No Heaven or Hell. Just a bizarre traffic jam of souls with nowhere to go. Maybe that was the truth. Maybe Purgatory was all there was in the afterlife. John's mind drifted, thinking of how Jacobi and Dante had reached for each other before being stung, clasping hands like frightened children. He wondered how they felt now in their sleep, and whether or not it was a state he could ever attain. John tried his best to join them. When this failed, he grew restless and moved, clambering through the other bodies before passing out, but he was no longer certain which way was up and which was down, or if either held meaning anymore.

John returned for his companions, and found that he could drag them along when he moved. Jacobi was a lifeline linked to Dante, their grip on each other's hand unbreakable. This gave John hope. If there was somewhere to go, he had an eternity to find it. Maybe he could work his way down and drop through the sky back where they had come from. The thought of the glass man's hands made him abandon this idea. Instead he tried moving upward, hoping to find something beyond the dome's barrier.

Time stretched on as he continued dragging his companions along with him, even though it doubled the amount of movement necessary and increased his suffering. The process was slow and painful, like moving through electrified jelly. John passed out countless times, awaking with his will diminished. For how many centuries had souls been left here to rot? Was it everyone who had ever died? Was the pain he endured for nothing?

Days, maybe even weeks, passed like this. Sometimes John would quit, not moving a muscle and preferring to lose himself in his thoughts rather than suffer any more pain. Then he would grow bored and try again.

He shifted, feeling a sting and screaming in response. He continued screaming. No longer needing to breathe meant his screams could continue for as long as he pleased. The sound wailed out of him like a ship lost at sea until it eventually broke into a sob.

A dog barked.

Hope, desperate and tiny, blossomed within John. He screamed again, primal and formless. The bark came again, from behind him. If the bark was coming from outside the barrier, as he hoped, then John

had been travelling horizontally through the bodies. He had experienced the same disorienting sensation in the ocean once, when the waves had sent him tumbling below the surface. Only by relaxing and allowing his body to float had he rediscovered which direction up was. The bark came again, setting John into motion. He ignored the pain, only screaming now to trigger another bark that he could hone in on.

Eventually he stopped howling and began calling Bolo's name, for John knew it had to be the same dog. Bolo had been there since the first day. *Maybe the dog is God*, he thought madly as the barks continued to guide him. John still passed out regularly. Each time he awoke he was terrified that the dog might have wandered away, but every time he called out the bark came again.

Thrusting an arm upward for the thousandth time, John was overjoyed when it was greeted not by pain but by a barrage of licks. John laughed joyously and redoubled his efforts. When his head broke through the surface, he felt reborn. Letting go of Jacobi, he squirmed out of the sea of souls and found himself free, moving without pain. Bolo bounded into him, moving through the air like a canine version of Superman. He continued to laugh with joy as the dog licked his face, tears streaming from John's eyes.

* * * * *

Bodies of light, very much like suns, radiated strange vibrations that could be felt across the endless void, swirls of color without names and in impossible shapes. Sounds chased each other across space, noises more haunting than whale song and twice as hypnotic. Sensations travelled in waves, feelings floating along on an invisible astral wind.

John stared, taking it all in, one hand scratching the scruffy fur on Bolo's neck. They were sitting on nothing. They had no gravity, and yet it wasn't like the free-floating astronauts he had seen on television. John could stop and move at will, depending more on his mind than on physical movements. All of this took a lot of getting used to, which is why he hadn't yet freed Jacobi or Dante. He wanted to be sure of his abilities and to regain some of his strength before he even tried. So he sat with his dog and marveled at the wonders surrounding him.

When John felt ready, he turned back to the sobering blue dome of bodies. It stretched impossibly far in all directions, like the atmosphere of a planet and just as beautiful, despite its horrid nature. Bracing himself against the pain, John reached in to where he thought he had left his friends, grabbed a body part, and pulled. What came out of the barrier wasn't Jacobi, but a little old lady. She came to life instantly, gasping as if she had been holding her breath for a very long time. Her face flushed in excitement.

"Can you see it?" she asked with watery eyes.

"Yes," John said, smiling in return.

"It's Heaven! Just like they said it would be. The white clouds, the angels, and Saint Peter's gate. Oh the gate!"

John frowned in puzzlement. He hadn't seen anything of the sort. He was about to turn and look when the woman began to blur as if she was somehow moving. And then she was gone.

John considered what this meant, coming up with a few theories. He liked to think that the old woman had seen Heaven, and that was where her soul belonged. Maybe he had just witnessed a soul gravitating to where it was meant to be. That would be nice if it were true, but maybe the woman's soul had become weak after being frozen in place for so long. Perhaps her soul had extinguished, fading away before his very eyes.

John decided to pull another person free, this time intentionally choosing someone he didn't know. Out came a stocky middle-aged man who glared at him and the realm beyond with disdain.

"What's all this then?" he spat in a thick Scottish accent. "All a bit science fiction, isn't it?"

John didn't know how to respond to this, so he continued to quietly observe.

The man seemed happy to see a dog and was reaching down to pet Bolo when he suddenly stood straight up again.

"Do yeh hear it?" he whispered. "Gabriel's horn! It's a-callin' me. Do yeah hear it?"

Like the woman before him, there was the curious notion of movement along with a blurring before the man disappeared. John felt certain now that the souls were finally going to where they belonged. He realized that he could free them all, dismantle the dome piece by

piece. It would take forever, but maybe if he did this, he too would be called away to an eternal reward.

John was careful with his next selection, making sure this time to choose Jacobi. The old man awoke with a start and took in their surroundings with wide eyes. John was looking so intently for any sign of departure that he flinched when Jacobi starting shouting with glee.

"We're free!" he said, doing a little jig. "Oh, by the heavens, we are FREE!"

John laughed. "That we are. Do you feel all right? You don't hear any horns or see any pearly gates?"

"Look around, John! This *is* Heaven!"

But Jacobi must have meant this figuratively, because he didn't disappear. John described what had happened to the other souls, Jacobi listening with rapt attention.

"It could be any number of reasons," Jacobi surmised. "Our souls may still be tuned to Purgatory, since we never truly earned our graduation. That means we are still in balance, not quite good or bad enough to be summoned elsewhere. Or maybe it is a lack of desire or faith that leaves us free to choose our own destiny. Yes, I like that."

"We better be sure before we pull Dante out," John said. "Something tells me he's the ideal candidate for a trip south."

"Nonsense," Jacobi said dismissively. "He's one of us! Purgatory's great escapists! Besides, he always kept his points in balance so he wouldn't be expelled. Let's pull him free. Then together we can decide what to do next."

Still John hesitated, but he couldn't just leave Dante trapped forever. He reached down, grabbed the hand sticking out of the barrier, and pulled.

The Irishman groaned when he was free, muttering something about a bender. He glared at each of them before rubbing his eyes. "I take it we ended up in Hell?"

"On the contrary," Jacobi said. "My theories were correct. We are now on the astral plane. Here we will be able to give shape to the formless, to create a world of our choosing!"

"So which one of you made the train station?"

They looked to where Dante had nodded, but neither John nor Jacobi could see anything but swirls and stars.

"You feel that?" Dante asked. "Like being pulled by an undertow. What is that?"

The Irishman's features began to blur, but before he could disappear, John leapt on him, wrapping his arms firmly around Dante's torso. He wouldn't let him fade away! There was a terrible sinking sensation, and John strained against it until it passed and Dante's features went from blurry to solid again.

"That was a close one," John said with relief.

"Think so?"

A train whistle startled John into letting go. He spun around to find himself submersed in a massive station. Trains from all time periods occupied the platforms, passengers pouring out of each one. There was no sign of Bolo, Jacobi, or the psychedelic lights of the astral plane. All of it was gone, replaced by a train station where everyone seemed to be arriving, but no one was departing.

"Doesn't look so bad," Dante said with cautious optimism as he stepped into the crowd.

John hurried to keep up with him, grabbing his jacket so as not to lose him.

"Dante, what was your standing in Purgatory? How many points did you have?"

"About five thousand."

"Oh. Good!"

"In the red."

John gaped at Dante who was grinning. "Do you know what that means? Do you realize where we are?"

"Yup."

"Then why are you acting so nonchalant?"

Dante stopped, the crowd pouring around him as he turned to face John. "Because for the first time since dying, I feel like I've come home again."

"Well, that's a relief," John said through gritted teeth. "What about me?"

Dante shrugged. "You managed to break out of Purgatory easily enough. I'm sure your superpowers can help you leave here if you

want, but I think you should wait. I've been here before. Well, not *here* but the equivalent on Earth, and I think you're going to like it."

They were alone now, the most recent arrivals having dispersed to whatever their destination was. Not knowing what else to do, John followed Dante through a large ornate hall. The exit was blocked by the standard passport control usually found in airports. Even the guard on duty, who appeared human enough, seemed appropriately bored with his post.

"What are we going to do now?" John asked.

"Show them our IDs, of course." Dante pulled a passport from the air. He looked as surprised by its appearance as John did. The passport was blood red and had the word "Hell" emblazoned on it beneath a stylized depiction of a devil's head.

"Where did you get that?"

"I don't know," Dante admitted. "I was going for our papers from Purgatory."

John tried the same trick but came up empty-handed. "Now what?"

"Let's see what they say. If you aren't allowed in, then they'll show you the exit."

Without waiting for approval, Dante strode up to the guard on duty and presented his credentials. He was waved through the barrier, where he waited for John.

"Passport," the disinterested guard droned.

"I don't have one."

"He's with me," Dante offered.

"Get lost," the guard growled. "Next!"

John looked behind him. There was no one else in line so he stayed where he was.

Reluctantly, the guard turned his attention back to him. "I said to get lost, so turn around and go back the way you came. Don't make me sick the three-headed dogs on you."

"Forget him," Dante called. "Who follows the rules in Hell anyway? Come on!"

The guard bared his teeth and stood, readying himself for conflict, but then a look of surprise crossed his face. He placed a finger to one ear and listened, responding finally with a humble, "Yes, sir." Sitting

back on his stool, he thumbed toward the barrier, indicating that John could pass through.

“What did I tell ya?” Dante smirked. “No problem. Prepare yourself for some fun, Johnny-boy, because I was right. See for yourself!”

Outside the station was a long stretch of concrete slashed across by rail tracks. Beyond this, an old European city was squeezed in between rows of canals. The buildings, tall and narrow, were covered in ornate detail that had been worn down over the centuries. From behind the station, barely detectable over the typical city sounds and smells, was the scent of a harbor and the occasional call of a seagull.

“Welcome to Amsterdam,” Dante said, throwing an arm around John’s shoulders and leading him forward.

“I thought we were in Hell.”

“Call it what you like, but either way it’s paradise to me.”

As they made their way around the stationed trams, John read their destinations: Las Vegas, Sodom/Gomorrah, Shanghai, Bangkok. Despite his apprehension, John couldn’t help but laugh. So Hell was one big bachelor party?

Dante’s earthly visit to Amsterdam must have been fresh on his mind, because he made a bee-line for the old part of the city. Here the cobbled streets narrowed so much that the sky above was almost lost behind the tall, leaning buildings. All around were smoky coffee shops, windows full of blow-up dolls and pornography, and stores offering a plethora of mushrooms and herbs. The streets were stuffed full of people, not all of them entirely human, but John couldn’t focus on them lest he lose Dante in the crowd.

Dante led them to a coffee shop on the corner. The smoke was thick inside the dark interior, and most of the stools were filled with patrons not the least bit interested in coffee. David Bowie was blaring over the speakers, singing something about sound and vision, as Dante pointed happily to the ceiling and grinned. John realized he hadn’t heard any music in Purgatory. He couldn’t imagine going without it for as many years as Dante must have.

They wound through the tables until they found a free spot in the back. Dante left to order from the counter, leaving John to examine the other patrons. For the most part those here were human, none of them

appearing particularly seedy despite being in Hell. The rest were demons. He didn't know what else to call them. They had red skin, horns, and tails, the basic criteria for such creatures, but the humans they intermingled with didn't appear intimidated.

Dante returned with a tray loaded with a half-dozen joints already rolled, a plateful of brownies, and a couple of beers. If Dante's grin was any wider it would have severed his head in two.

"I found money in my pocket!" he exclaimed, tossing his change onto the tray after he was seated.

John picked up a coin and examined it. One side was engraved with a sour, fat-faced devil. On the other a pile of bodies engaged in an impressively detailed orgy. "Why am I not surprised that Hell has an economy?"

Dante sparked up one of the joints and took an impressive pull that burned away half its length, something no mortal could have achieved. He then held it out to John with a questioning look.

"No, thanks. I think one of us should keep a clear head."

Dante shrugged indifferently and finished it off in another drag. "You could have a brownie. They're fine."

John rolled his eyes. "I'm sure they are." He left the hashish-laced brownies where they were, but allowed himself a few cautious sips of beer. The draft was cold and tasted even better than the German beer his father used to import.

John realized that he was both literally and figuratively holding his breath. He kept waiting for a little monotone voice to announce demerits. So far their limited experience of Hell had been a marked improvement over Purgatory, which didn't seem right at all.

"If only I had known," Dante said wistfully. "Eight years wasted in Purgatory when I could have been here. Here's to eternity!" He raised his glass and gasped in satisfaction after a hearty swig. Then the music changed, and his ridiculously bloodshot eyes widened. "Hey, who's singing this?"

"Nirvana. They're after your time."

"Man, they're really good! Music is way better in the future."

John thought of the endless boy bands and sophomoric teenage pop stars that had dominated the music scene since the likes of Kurt

Cobain had died, but kept his mouth shut. It was kinder to let Dante believe the lie.

"You boys must be new in town," oozed a voice made of silk.

John looked up to see five and a half feet of naked, red flesh. *Demoness* was the first word that came to mind, with *vixen* hot on its heels. Her clothing consisted of a single chain wrapped around her pert breasts, covering nothing more than her nipples. A similar chain circled her waist with a sparse curtain of chainmail hanging from it that left nothing to the imagination. Long black hair complimented the shiny black lips that smiled around slightly pointed teeth. The delicate looping horns that protruded from her forehead silenced any doubt about what she was.

This is it, John thought. This is where the good times end and the conflicts begin. Hell has lured us in and is about to make with the torture and turmoil.

The demoness wrinkled her nose cutely at John as if she could smell his distrust before turning to Dante. The effect on him was instant. He straightened up, like a puppet yanked on strings, his full attention dedicated to the demoness. Even the red from his eyes cleared as if he was shocked sober by his sudden need for sex.

"Do you want a brownie?" he asked stupidly.

The demoness laughed as if he had said something clever. "Aren't you sweet?"

"And aren't you lovely?" Dante responded, taking her hand.

"Mmm, an Irishman! I haven't had one in ages." She held out a black-nailed hand to him, palm side down. "Delilah. It's a pleasure to meet you."

"Dante, at your service." He took her hand and kissed it.

Another demoness joined them, this one blonde with a lighter tint to her red skin. Her face was more angular and her body more petite. Unlike her companion, she was dressed respectably in a summer dress the color of orange sherbet. She didn't waste any time in dedicating her full attention to John.

"Looks like someone could use a tour guide," she said shyly. "I know the first few days here can be confusing."

"Actually, we were doing just fine," John answered coldly.

Dante spared him one glance, accompanied by an expression that said John was crazy, before turning back to the vixen. "I wouldn't mind a little exploration."

"The sun has just gone down over Hades," Delilah said seductively. "Let's have us a night on the town."

"I don't think that's a good idea," John said.

"Oh! Daddy is cranky!" Delilah taunted as she began to drag Dante away. "I'll have him back in one piece, old man. Don't worry."

"And I can keep you company until then," the shy demoness offered.

"It's not going to work on him," Delilah called over her shoulder. "I'll send Rimmon over instead."

"Now she tells me," the blonde demoness rolled her eyes, all signs of timidity gone in an instant. John tried to stand, but the demoness shoved him effortlessly back into his seat. "Let your friend go," she said. "He'll be fine."

John glared at her. "So this is the real Hell. You let new arrivals think they've found paradise before a demoness drags them away to a fiery pit."

"Hardly," the demoness snorted. "A couple of wet fish like you could never afford a succubus. Not that you'd be interested."

"Then tell me what's going on here!"

"I'll take it from here," a masculine voice purred.

If the afterlife had Calvin Klein ads, the demon standing before him would be their star model. The immaculate physique was blatant below the tasteful black dress shirt and charcoal gray slacks. A face perfect in symmetry was gifted with lips as full as the cheeks were hollow. The half-lidded, golden cat-eyes radiated cool confidence. Unlike the looping demoness horns, his were short and blunt, like those of a baby goat, and could barely be seen under the tangle of messy black hair. John had never heard of a male succubus before, but the demon oozed so much sex appeal that he couldn't be anything else.

"That's not fair," John whimpered.

"He's all yours," the demoness sighed before gliding away.

"My name is Rimmon," the demon said with a subtle smile, "and I'm hoping we can spend some time together."

Sweat broke out on John's forehead as he summoned the willpower to look away from this avatar of male perfection. He succeeded in the end, speaking through gritted teeth. "If you want anything from me, you'll have to turn off your demonic mojo."

Rimmon chuckled, and after a moment the sexual tension dissipated. John looked back at him. Without using the full extent of his charm, Rimmon was merely extraordinary.

"Better?" he asked.

"Barely," John admitted. "Now tell me what you are really doing here."

"You're something different," Rimmon said, his tail curling into a question mark shape behind him. "Very well, since the usual methods won't work on you, I've been sent to show you a good time. Nothing more, nothing less."

"But why?" John asked, trying to suppress the feeling that Christmas had come early.

"Because tomorrow you have a meeting with a very important person, and he wants to make sure you are of an agreeable disposition." Rimmon held up a hand when John tried to interrupt. "I can't tell you more than that because I'm not privy to the information. What I can promise you is that there are no tricks, no deceptions, or anything else that would cause you or your friend harm. You are, in effect, being bribed."

"Bribed? Why? What do we have to offer?"

Rimmon spread his hands in a gesture of helplessness, melting John's heart. "If you really want, I can leave you alone, but it would be a shame. My clients are rarely as attractive as you."

John wanted to roll his eyes, but his face betrayed him by smiling. "Oh, to hell with it. What did you have in mind?"

That's it for the free sample, but from here on out, things only get hotter for John and his friends!

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