

Dakath wiped the sweat off his brow as he surveyed the vast expanse of mountain range before him. His journey to these lands had taken weeks, and he knew his search might take longer still. After the trials he had undergone so far, this tour seemed a far less challenging task!

As part of his final training to join an elite mounted knight squad, he was to prove himself worthy to a dragon companion. Then he needed to perform a rite to bind them as dragon and rider. If successful, he would have a steadfast companion to ride and help patrol the lands against invaders as a full knight. Only the most prestigious knights in his order had the honor of traveling to these mountains. It gave him a sense of pride to have been chosen for this final trial, and it would be his honor to serve the realm as a mounted knight!

Part of the ordeal involved finding his way to the lands where dragons lived and raised their broods. The mountainous region they dwelled in was massive, as befit predators of their size and stature. The biggest obstacle was to find a dragon that was willing to submit itself. Dragons were an intelligent race, capable of speaking in the common tongue. They were well aware of a knight's purpose in their lands, and many detested any of their number taking on elvish companions. Yet attacks from foreign lands threatened both Elves and dragons. Some dragons were willing to work with elves and even serve as mounts to protect their mutual interests. Provided the elf in question was worthy, of course.

And so, Dakath found himself at the end of his training, hunting for a dragon that would find him worthy and willing to perform an ancient rite to bind them together until death. He had studied dragons all his life and found them fascinating. Their power, their valor, their appearance. They did not have culture, not as Elves did, but that did not mean they were simply beasts. He wondered if perhaps his reverence of them was a key attribute that allowed him to succeed at the trials.

The ground was scared with the remnants of blackened stone from dragon's flame and the bones of various consumed creatures. Dakath shuddered from the notion that some of the bones were of his kin. Though it was rare that dragons attacked Elves, given their close affiliation, it did happen. In particular, the victims were trial goers like himself that were deemed unworthy. He planned not to join their number.

A dark shadow flying overhead brought Dakath's attention to the skies. A rather large black dragon blocked out the sun for a moment. Dakath looked up, shielding his eyes. The dragon couldn't have been black. All of the dragons in these lands were metallic colored. Solid-colored dragons had the reputation of being evil and were at constant war with their chromatic-colored cousins. There would be no black dragons here.

Yet as Dakath entered a clearing surrounded by a set of stone pillars, he was shocked to see that the dragon overhead was indeed black. Immediately at the sight of the vile beast, he drew his blade. Yet after a few moments, the black dragon was flanked by several smaller silver dragons. Dakath lowered his weapon in confusion. Why would these mortal enemies be in each other's company?

Seeing the knight stand down, the black dragon leaped from his perch and landed on the ground before him. Dakath could tell that the dragon was an adolescent, likely around a hundred years old. It was at this age that dragons that often became the partners of aspiring riders. Dakath allowed himself to breathe now. He did not want to appear aggressive, but nor did he want to seem weak. He needed to find out what the dragon was after.

The massive black beast opened his maw to speak, as though reading the elf's thoughts. "I am called Chelbot by my kind, the scary one," the black dragon said as a way of greeting. "I see you are wary of my form. That is an understandable reaction. My kind has been at war with yours for many centuries. As have they with these dragons," he said, motioning his neck at his cohorts.

"It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance," Dakath said, doing his utmost to be respectful. Even if these different draconic races were sworn enemies, he did not seem to be in a hostile encounter.

"My story is a short one. My egg had been given up as a peace treaty between warring clans. I was raised with my brothers and sisters all around you. Yet, as you might imagine, I was not always accepted. They are here to see me off, as I have no claim to join their rites of passage or find a mate."

"I have been an outcast of my kind and yours. I wish to join you. I have heard of some of their kind that joins with Elves. I feel that is a worthy use of my life," Chelbot said, waiting for the elf to assess the situation.

"Do you find me worthy?" Dakath asked, more than a little taken aback. He had heard stories of battles waged with monochrome dragons, how vicious they could be in combat. It was an exciting prospect to have one as his mount! He would be revered by his own people and their enemies alike!

“Perhaps the ritual will prove to me you are worthy,” Chelbot said, lowering his muzzle as a way to show his subservience. Dakath raised his arm to touch the scaled nose of his soon-to-be mount.

With that, Dakath pulled out the scrolls and set up the markers around them. Chelbot, for his part, was more curious about the rite than anything, posing many inquiries about the ancient magics. Dakath was more than happy to discuss the details as he understood them. It was an ancient rite, a pact forged by elder dragons and elves. For many centuries, the ritual had kept both races at peace. It channeled a combination of dragon and elvish magic to forge a powerful bond between two trusting individuals.

The silver dragons had left by this point, uninterested in the ritual or the fate of their nest brother. Chelbot hadn't expected otherwise. If anything, he seemed unconcerned, more excited about the prospect of a new life.

The preparations finished, Chelbot was directed to stand in the center of the circle while Dakath commenced his chant. The words flowed from his tongue as the entire surface of the runes began to glow. The massive black dragon winced as the light from the spell engulfed all in the circle. He braced himself, trying to erase his thoughts of doubt. He hoped he would have a more satisfying life with this elf. It would have to be better than what he had endured so far.

As Dakath finished the ritual, he felt a strange surge of energy envelop him. Though he had never performed this rite with a dragon present, it felt far different than his practice had been. Had he perhaps made a mistake at such an important juncture? There was no use worrying about it now. He couldn't stop the spell once it had started without risk of grave consequences to them both.

After a few moments, the light started to fade, and the two regarded each other, still feeling the magic tingling over their forms. Chelbot blinked a few times, wondering what had happened. He didn't feel any different. Was the bonding successful?

Chelbot sniffed the air, drinking in a scent that it seemed only he could detect. It smelled really...pleasant. It was thick and musky and sent a need through his loins that he was unfamiliar with. He had detected whiffs of female dragon scent before, yet this certainly wasn't the case now. It did cause a similar stirring in his groin, making his red-tipped cock slide out of his slit somewhat.

He had never mated before, given his heritage in the presence of his brood. But he had certainly experienced the feelings of sexual awakening before. The urge to find a mate, to breed

her over and over till he was certain her eggs were fertile. His cock would sometimes slide out of his sheath at such thoughts, and he had more than once played his tongue over his member to alleviate the need.

But this was different. Chelbot still felt a familiar swelling in his loins that signaled arousal. Yet, the scents seemed to be wafting off the much smaller elf. They smelled nothing like the female scents he was used to. Yet he could not recall ever being more powerfully aroused than he was at this moment. He needed to breed, and the object of his sexual desire was this tiny elf!

Dakath was meanwhile shocked and disgusted at the sight of the enormous dragon's penis coming to life before him. He had seen the penis of male animals, of course, but never one of a sentient being such as himself. Such things were considered repugnant by his kind! Elves were dignified, noble creatures, and only had intercourse in the privacy of their own homes, mostly in the pursuit of reproduction. Anything else was considered vile and unnatural!

Chelbot meanwhile was struggling with the conflicting thoughts in his mind. He wanted to mate with the smaller creature below him, every aspect of his instincts were screaming that. But it was impossible to breed with such a diminutive creature, even if it was female. And though his cock was erect, he did not feel the same need to rut as he did in the presence of a female in season. Instead, there awoke an insistent need in his hindquarters that was nothing like what the adolescent dragon had ever experienced. It was as though he needed to be rutted into.

Where were these desires coming from? He wasn't a female. Males of his kind did not rut with each other. Such acts were forbidden! He had never heard of a male taking another male in the...breeding another male like they would a female. Yet, why were the thoughts plaguing him so?

Chelbot struggled with the internal conflict even as his plump balls slid out of his slit and his ass clenched open and closed with the need to be bred. The feelings of lust were overpowering and threatened to override any semblance of sanity he had remaining. He not only needed to cum, but he needed the one who he thought of as master to help him!

His pleas left his muzzle before he was able to formulate the thoughts. "Something's wrong with me...I can't help myself...I need you master...please fuck me...make me yours...take me, please!"

Chelbot turned around, his massive tail raised to reveal a backside that Dakath had no desire to see. He was left speechless as Chelbot lowered his hips to be mounted and bred. Yet how could he protest to a being that could rip him apart if the black dragon so chose?

In all elven history, nothing like this had ever occurred. Had Dakath completed the spell incorrectly? It was the first time he'd heard of the ritual being performed on a dragon without completing some sort of trial. Something to prove his worth to the dragon in question. He thought himself blessed that a dragon had come to him so willingly. Was perhaps the black dragon not really so enthusiastic? If so, was the spell affecting his mind and requiring the dragon to be his mount...in another manner?

Dakath did not know his next course of action. Even if the act had not been so vile, so repugnant to his sensibilities, there was no way he could possibly aid Chelbot. The black dragon was far too massive. Anything he did would surely have no effect! Yet the black dragon insistently squatted over, bringing his rump closer and closer to the confused elf.

Dakath could scent the dragon's musk wafting into his nostrils from his proximity to the beast. The smell held his interest more than he would have thought conceivable. He shook his head for a moment. No, it was impossible for him to feel that way, wasn't it? Yet he would have thought it unnatural for a massive black dragon to want him as a mate in such a manner. And there was no denying the sight before him!

His own tiny elf member came to life inside his armor. Dakath couldn't believe his body was betraying him in such a repugnant fashion. The spell was obviously beginning to affect him as well, making him find the dragon before him especially attractive. Despite the intense conflict in his mind, he had no reprieve other than to satisfy his lusts inside the massive dragon's hindquarters.

As though in a trance, Dakath felt his fingers undo the straps of his armor, letting it fall to the ground in a clang of metal. Soon, even his britches were off, and he stood naked, shivering from the cool mountain air. But before him lay a massive warm body that was more than eager to take Dakath inside of him!

"Yes...please..." Chelbot moaned as the scent wafting off the elf's naked form washed over him. He could detect his mate's need as much as his own. He didn't care that it would be impossible for his mate to penetrate him like this! Nothing else mattered to his sex-addled cognizance!

“I need...I can’t...” Dakath moaned as he rubbed the leaking elven member with his hand before massaging the supple flesh of the massive black dragon. He was surprised to see how smooth the skin was in contrast to the rough black scales that covered the rest of Chelbot's body.

Dakath tried his best to find a place inside his mate, a way to fuck him. But he was simply too small, too short to manage such a thing! His mount, however, was more than happy to oblige him, as best as such a large creature could. The massive draconic hips leaned down as far as they could go, almost crushing the small elf. But there was just enough space for Dakath to guide his tiny elven member into the cavernous folds of the bulky dragon.

Chelbot felt almost nothing against his massive gaping pucker, yet he knew his elfish rider was trying his best to meet his requirements. He tried to rotate his hips but knew he needed to be careful of his elven mate’s much smaller fragile frame. He had a passing thought of what it might be like to feel the massive cock of a dragon inside him. He knew he needed to be fucked by THIS man, but if only Dakath was a dragon, like him!

Dakath felt warm, flushed all of a sudden even as his tiny elf prick struggled to find something to press against the inside of his much larger partner. He started panting, trying to alleviate the heat flowing all over his form. His tongue began to ache as it slid out his mouth, the tip growing forked and pointed even as he watched. He was disgusted by the sight of the alien growth but could do nothing to pull away as his tongue started lapping at the dragon's tight tail hole.

An ache in his backside forced him to hunch over. He could feel something pushing out of his spine, getting longer, and wriggling back and forth. He moaned, reaching back one hand to grip it while keeping his other on his cock. The smooth skin of his back felt off, less like his elven skin and more like the hide of his would-be mate!

Dakath grunted and growled as his spine pushed out of his ass and grew thicker from the base. New bones and muscles took shape within his new tail, increasing its range of motion. He couldn’t believe something so bestial was sticking out of his own ass, even as his hips quickly grew bulky to support his massive tail. He grunted slightly as his own ass started to pucker and move under his new posterior protrusion. He couldn’t help but think that it was now in the same place as his mate’s. His ass and hips were impossibly gargantuan compared to his still elven body!

All the while, Chelbot kept struggling to force his suiter deep inside him. He felt a desperate urgency to be fucked, to submit to this smaller creature who he called master now. Yet still, the cock inside him was far too diminutive. He needed more!

As though responding to his wishes, he could smell the draconic stench wafting off his lover, growing more potent to his flared nostrils. His cock pounded further erect from the alluring aroma. And the sensation of his mate in his backside felt different. He growled in frustration as what feeling he had was taken away, as though his lover was pulling back. No! He needed the tiny elf inside of him!

He craned his neck to see the elf was growing slightly larger. Dakath's hips and ass were swelling to gigantic proportions unfit for his elvish frame. And Dakath's face looked unusual, his eyes yellowed with slits while his forked tongue tasted the air. Was he becoming the true object of Chelbot's desire, a massive male dragon to fill him up?

Dakath meanwhile felt the change center on his hips as his glutes swelled beyond the confines that his small legs could support. He worried they might rip through the skin! Yet the flesh on his leg expanded, breaking out into black scales. His balance felt a bit off as his swelling hips started sinking into his stomach. His spine snapped audibly and made his four legged-position more comfortable.

His feet too started to crack as his heels stretched up along his expanding legs, leaving his hunched-over posture more natural. He groaned in a much deeper baritone as his feet began to swell, and his skin itched with the spread of more dark scales. A warm fluid trickled down his toenails as they erupted from the tips into the beginnings of draconic claws. His massive feet dug into the earth from the weight of his still-bulging body.

Yet all of the other changes were insignificant to the sensations rising from his groin. His cock, already erect and eager, became impossibly hard, the tip reaching towards the draconic pucker that had enraptured his attention. He looked down, shocked to see that the head was growing pointed. His cockhead and cleft were melding into a pointed rod as the whole thing started inching toward the object of his desire. The entire length darkened to red and formed dozens of tiny spines along the expanse. His cock looked very much like his would-be mate's!

All of a sudden, his balls started tensing up in preparation to shoot his load. He had no control over the processes. The changes seemed to arouse him beyond the point of reason!

“AAAHHHHHH!” He yelled as his cock blew several thick blasts of seed all over his lover's backside. The force was powerful enough to coat the larger dragon's ass with thick spunk. Dakath panted a moment, feeling his balls rotate up towards his ass even as a slit developed underneath them. It felt strange, a protective reptilian pouch to store them when not in use.

The change wasn't nearly done with him yet, however. His still-growing cock came to life once more as his hips widened impossibly far from his still elven-sized torso. But soon, his belly began to distend as it absorbed the girth of his hips and ass. He could feel the tingling running down his stomach as his harder scutes grew in over his vulnerable belly. His entire torso was widening to mammoth proportions!

It began to dawn on him that this dragon had indeed been a mount for him. A mount for him to rut inside and spill his seed! At the realization, his cock started to surge once more and he moved towards his mate as though in a trance. The still elven part of his mind screamed out in disgust of the act he was able to perform. But his body needed it more than anything he could have even fathomed.

Before he could ever consider stopping himself, his now-massive cock was already pressing against the wide-open pucker of his needy mate. Chelbot was too enamored by the lusty scents wafting out of his mate's changing form and the clenching need in his own ass. He had no control over his hips as they leaned back to take as much of his lover as he could inside him. Chelbot growled as the thought of being filled alone was enough to stimulate his prostate and have him shoot all over the ground and his belly. The air was once again filled with the rank stench of draconic spunk. But his balls weren't nearly empty enough yet. He still needed to be fucked!

He could feel the glorious, pointed tip of his master touch his pucker and seek entrance into his waiting inner folds. "Yes...Please...Fuck me...Fill me with your seed...I need it...I must have it!" Chelbot cried as the flesh of his anus was stimulated and lubed by his lover. Yet there was little way in the sensation from the elf's still-modest cock, scarcely enough to stimulate his prostate. Chelbot shoved his hips as far as they could go, taking as much of that glorious cock inside him as possible. But it wasn't nearly enough!

"Yes...take me...take me all the way inside!" Dakath cried in a deeper, more raspy voice as he felt his cock getting more substantial inside his lover. Yet there was still hardly enough of his cock for proper stimulation. He growled in frustration, a bestial noise as he struggled to get further in his mate's bowels. He prayed to all his deities to be allowed a proper position to satisfy the needs in his draconic loins.

His prayers wouldn't go unanswered for long. As he commenced his thrusts, he could feel his cock somehow becoming larger inside the prone dragon. Every thrust caused another inch to bury in deeper as his hindquarters grew ever larger still. If he kept expanding like this, then he would surely be large enough to fuck his mount properly!

Meanwhile, the changes continued to crawl over his visage. His face started to crack as his lips pursed and revealed more dagger-like teeth erupting from his gums. His nostrils flared to drink in his mate's scent as his massive black-scaled muzzle filled his vision. He growled as sharp horns burst forth from the bare skin of his scalp. All his body hair had fallen out and burned away in the wind by this point. The two massive horns were soon joined by several more to adorn his sloping skull. His ears swelled to the top of his head, forming two more flaps of flesh that quickly filled out with thin webs of skin. He was shocked to hear the amplified sounds coming from all around, yet that was the least of his worries. His elvish visage was gone now, replaced with the ferocious face of a deadly black dragon!

Yet the changes no longer caused him concern. His massive bulk allowed him to climb further into his mate's needy pucker. He could feel his own scales against the scales of his lover as he tried to clutch on his mount's back. Yet his grip began to wane as his shoulders hunched, and his chest started to barrel out. Soon his arms slid into the flesh of his expanding torso, and he was hardly able to rotate the appendages any longer.

His hands started losing their functionality as his thumbs slid up his wrists. The tips of his nails began to extend as they thickened into the beginnings of massive draconic claws. Dakath growled at the implications of what was happening. He was losing his hands, his elven ability to interact with the world! He couldn't even move his digits anymore, couldn't grip his lover's back. Despite his panic, his claws managed to sink into the backside of his mate, keeping Chelbot in place as he began his thrusts in earnest.

Dakath was growing so massive now, towering over the ground with his ever-increasing frame. Yet there were still changes to go before his body matched his mount's. He growled as his back arched, and protrusions of flesh ripped from his shoulders. The alien limbs extended over the length of his back and swelled with bone and muscle. He could feel new connections opening up from the new pair of hands taking shape above him. Long bony fingers extended and filled out with web-like flesh to form his wings. His new appendages beat in excitement as he continued to fuck his mate. A passing thought made him ponder the possibility of flight, but his mind was too focused on the mating act to give it more contemplation.

His massive bulk continued filling up all over, reaching the size of his lover now as his draconic visage took its final form. He reveled in the power of his new body and the raw masculinity of making the now-smaller dragon his bitch. He could feel his cock getting impossibly large inside the smaller dragon, pushing in inch after inch as it sought further depths.

Chelbot growled as the waves of pleasure washed over his prostate. Chelbot thrust his hips back inside his master, loving the feeling of a proper-size dragon on his back. But soon, the sensation of pleasure started to fade as he sensed how massive his lover was to be inside him. He grunted from the pain, almost making him regret his need! Yet still, he was determined to see this through by bearing the discomfort and letting the fleeting pleasures of prostate stimulation bring his balls to orgasm once more.

Dakath meanwhile finally felt the changes starting to slow as he properly grew into his new black dragon body. His bulky penis slid in and out of his lover's asshole, the tension building in his loins with each thrust. The sensations threatened to wash over him and engulf all he was with the prospect of draconic pleasure.

“Fuck...so close...need to rut...take my seed! Take it!” Dakath yelled as the tension in his balls grew to unimaginable heights.

“Yes...I’m your bitch! Fill me...I need you so bad...make me yours! Your mount and servant!” Chelbot yelled as the pressure in his prostate and the pleasure he felt from being used could not be contained. With a mighty roar, his taut cock blew all over his body and the ground once more. The quantity he produced was far greater than anything he could have imagined. It was even superior to even the last orgasm he felt.

Dakath roared as the impossibly moist tunnel gripped his cock like a vice and forced the last vestiges of self-control from his mind. He released a primal scream as his own balls exploded into his mate’s backside and filled it with an overwhelming volume of draconic seed. His phallus shot over and over, floating away from the sheer quantity of spunk that his girthy balls unloaded.

The massive black dragon that had once been Dakath fell out of the tight hole, tired from the rutting and the mighty release. The scents of heat and lust and seed were strong in his nose and made his cock stir even though he had just cum. He grinned as the lovely abused pucker of his dragon mate spilled gallons of his seed onto the ground. He truly was a virile male!

As the lust in his mind started to die down, they were replaced by thoughts of his future. He was a dragon, a beast, and one that loved rutting into the backside of another male creature! He could not return to his life, his goal of protecting the kingdom like this! And if his male mate continued to draw his lusts and attention as they had now, they would be shunned from both their cultures, never to return to either elves or dragons.

The more the idea played over Dakath's mind, the more he loathed the notion of living in the mountains with no outlet than rutting a male beast like himself. He couldn't even produce any heirs! To be forced into sexual servitude, against his wishes, and a slave to his body's whims. What kind of life would that be?

Chelbot, too, found the notion of such an existence deplorable, perhaps even more so than living with his chromatic cousins. Thoughts of living a better life protecting the realm were steadily becoming a distant memory to the certainty of a life of debauchery and shame.

Dakath found himself wishing that he could change back, that he would be spared the shame of what he had done with another male. Yet as the thoughts played over and over in his head, a strange warmth began coursing through him. To his shock and somewhat relief, Dakath felt his body shrinking as though he was changing back. He craned his much more flexible neck to see that his black scales were indeed starting to recede into flesh that was much more smooth. He growled as his pointed fangs fell out, to be replaced by his smooth elven ones. His horns and claws and spines and wings all retracted into his shrinking body. Snaps and cracks resonated as his limbs regained their former flexibility while his neck and body became stiff once more.

Soon a naked elf stood there in the aftermath of his former lust. He looked up at the dragon, sharing the shame on those reptilian-slit eyes. Without a word, he donned his armor, not bothering to clean himself up. He had no way to do so, anyway, not in the middle of the draconic territory.

Dakath gathered his equipment while Chelbol lowered himself down to allow himself to be equipped with a saddle and harness. Once done, the black dragon flew into the sky, to return to the elf's fortress where they could both complete their training. Though it was far different than they expected, it seemed that the two had bonded, after all.

After a few days' travel, the newly bonded pair found themselves back in the city of Ifferion. Thankfully neither had experienced the twinges of unnatural lust during the journey, though Dakath wasn't sure the spell had gone. He may have wished it away, but it seemed too convenient, especially after how readily it had occurred. Surely there was evidence of a similar event hidden away in the archives of his people. He was certain that due to the shameful nature of its effects, it was well under lock and key.

As he entered the walls of his city, he was greeted by his teachers and fellow knights, though they seemed more than a little shocked to see Dakath back so soon. Chelbot was taken to

a stable of sorts, a place for dragons to rest and relax while not on patrol. He didn't like the idea of being away from Dakath, and in fact, felt a little physically ill from the separation. But in his stubbornness, he refused to admit that the bonding was any more than a spell gone awry and thus kept his muzzle shut for the time being.

Later that day, Dakath was greeted by King Virion to be congratulated before the induction ceremony. He was praised for being the fastest candidate to return with a dragon mount in the history of their order. Cheers erupted from all in attendance, though the attention made Dakath feel a deep sense of shame.

A feast was held that evening in his honor, though Dakath was reluctant to attend. Yet he had little choice in the matter. He had achieved a feat as of yet known by his kin. The entire court viewed it as a cause of celebration, with Dakath as the guest of honor.

As a symbol of his achievement, he was rewarded with a medal from King Virion directly. Yet as he shook hands with the King, he observed a tingle spread from his body, eliciting a similar tremor to that he felt with Chelbot. The King gave him a puzzled look, as though he'd felt the same electrical surge. Dakath paid it little mind, however, more concerned about the changes returning, especially in front of such a crowd!

As the night carried on, Dakath found himself feeling a little ill. It reminded him of the magics that afflicted him on the day of the bonding, that same warmth building under his skin. He couldn't shake the notion that he was still infected by that spell, even though his mind played it off as a trick. Eventually, he was able to excuse himself, not wanting to change in front of the court!

Meanwhile, after the ceremony, the King retired to his chambers to contemplate the situation. The feast was thrown to keep up appearances for the rest of the court, but the King had his doubts. How was it possible for someone to complete the trial so quickly? And to return with a black dragon, one that was a sworn enemy of both dragons and his people! He would find out in greater detail at the induction ceremony. Provided Dakath told the truth, after all.

For now, the King laid down on his bed, trying to alleviate both fatigue and a sudden sensation of illness. Yet, no matter how he tried, he was unable to rest. He felt he needed to rise, that there was something left undone before he could sleep. There was a strong compulsion to visit his dragon before retiring. Yes, that was it. Some fresh air and a visit to Dayrdyr, his mount of many years. That would help him to rest.

As King Virion left his chamber, he rubbed idly at his arm, not noticing the golden scales that had formed on his wrist. The only thing on his mind was how lovely his dragon looked, and how massive his ass would appear as he commanded his mount to present to him.