



CENTAUR OF ATTENTION
A Demon Magic Short Story

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**Best to be read after Malicious Midpoint!
Centaur of Attention—A Demon Magic short story
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*From Marco's POV

“Sometimes life just doesn't go as planned. Sometimes you feel like everything is right, everything is perfect, and then something comes out of nowhere to just ruin your very existence. To make living a *struggle*, to make you question if life itself is working against you,” I explain as I stand in Evan's living room.

Evan nods slowly as he comprehends this. I know it's a lot for him to dive into. “And that's how you feel about your hair laying the wrong way?” he asks, like he could possibly be confused.

“Yes! Evan, come on! Look at me... Look at my hair!” I exclaim as I wave to the hair in question.

He stares at me for an extremely long time. “Looks like your hair is perfect like normal.”

I gasp, unsure how he could have ever come to that conclusion. “But... But it's not!” I look back into the mirror, my eyes immediately drawn to the spot that's sticking up. How could he not see this? I can barely look at anything else.

“While you deal with your crisis, I'm going out to the greenhouse for a bit. If you need me... maybe call next time,” Evan decides. “Really, you didn't need to stop.”

“Is it because it hurts your eyes to look at my hair?” I ask.

Evan does some weird kind of half nod before hurrying toward the back door.

I leave him to it as I try my best to fix what I've been given to deal with. It isn't long before there's a knock on the door interrupting what I'm trying to accomplish. And then another knock. Honestly, it's quite disrupting, so I just shout for them to come in. Hell, maybe they brought some hair balm or something.

The door opens and I look over as Lachlan squeezes in through the front door. He has to bend his body this way and that but eventually he fits before giving me the most beaming of expressions.

“Marco!” he says.

I gasp, thrilled he remembers my name, but of course he does! “L-Lachlan!”

He hurries up to me and grabs my hand before kissing the front and back and then the front again. “*Sooooo* lovely to see you again. Miles said to come here for help determining a certain flower... did he mean you were going to help me?”

I open my mouth to tell him where Evan is, but if I tell him where he is, Lachlan will leave me here suffering all alone. Then he’ll be wowed by Evan’s ability to tell the difference between a dandelion and a cactus. And he’ll be so wowed that he’ll confess his undying love to Evan, and then they’ll get married and have little three-quarter human one-quarter horse babies and I’ll— “Yeah,” I say, pulling out my tough-man voice. “That’s me. The flower expert. I can tell you the difference between the pointy flowers and the flowery flowers.”

“How lovely! Are you ready to go now?” he asks.

“Yeah, of course,” I say as I try to hurry him out the door before Evan can rain on my rainbow parade of love. Stepping outside, I move a little to the right to get the best glow on my feathers as I spread my wings a little and give Lachlan my most seductive look.

He’s still smiling so I can’t quite tell if it’s working or not. “So, I know exactly where to go. Are you ready?” he asks.

Oh no... he’s not noticing the seduction. Is it because of my hair? It has to be my hair. How dare my hair betray me like this? It can’t... no... not like this.

I try a different angle. Maybe my left side is better than my right? Maybe if I hold the hair down but in a way that it looks like I’m posing?

I do a head cock, setting my hand on my head and tipping my chin to the right.

“Do you have a headache?” he asks. “You poor thing!” Lachlan grabs me in a hug, holding my head against his abs, which would definitely make my head stop hurting.

“I... don’t...” I say.

“Oh that’s fantastic! Would you like to ride me?”

“I sure would,” I say, shocked we’re getting right to the point. Are we doing it here? Right now? Just out in the driveway? What if Evan walks out? Does he want Evan to walk out?

He kneels down and I realize that maybe I was completely wrong, and he meant *ride on his back*.

“Is that okay? Would you prefer to walk?” he asks.

“No!” I say as I scurry over, pretending like I don’t have perfectly good wings to fly me wherever I need to be. I climb up onto his back and beam as he starts to walk.

“I’m so happy that I get to work with you today!” Lachlan says.

“Me too,” I breathe.

“Have you been friends with Miles for long?”

I think about my relationship with Miles and how that disgusting demon has destroyed all of it. “He thinks that parasite is prettier,” I announce.

“Parasite?” Lachlan asks.

“Nothing. I mean. Yeah. A while.”

“Miles has had parasites a while?” Lachlan asks, looking highly concerned.

“No! I mean we’ve known each other a while.”

“Aw, that’s wonderful. Long relationships are very special! What kind of things do you enjoy, Marco? I’d love to hear about you!”

“Like... what do I like to do?” I ask, confused by this question.

“Yes! In your free time, what do you enjoy?”

“Um... um...” I feel confused. No one ever asks me this. They always just tell me to stop looking in a mirror. “I... like to collect mirrors.”

“Ooh! That’s exciting! Mirrors can be very beautiful! You’ll have to show me your collection sometime. What else do you enjoy?”

“Science...” I whisper.

“What’s that?”

“Science... I like watching science videos! I know it makes me seem like a loser and everyone would make fun of me if they knew.”

“That’s so exciting! I love science too! Can I show you my lab sometime?”

“You have a lab? You must be really smart. I’m not any good at it... I’m not very smart.”

Lachlan turns to look at me. “How dare you degrade yourself like that? You are very wonderful. You don’t have to be a genius to enjoy science! I’ll show you my lab! Maybe... you’d let me teach you a thing or two.”

My heart... I think my heart just got squeezed by something. My whole body feels warm and tingly and... "I think I'm dying."

"What? Are you ill?" Lachlan asks.

"No, I just got this weird feeling in my chest... and my face heats up every time I look at you. And every time you talk... I've only ever felt this way when I looked at myself," I realize.

"I'm very happy you enjoy my company! That makes me feel blessed," Lachlan says as he gives me a big smile that does things to my body I've never felt before.

I can't stop staring at him. Have I ever stared at someone other than myself this closely before? He *is* quite beautiful. His gray coloring shines brightly in the sun. His smile makes my stomach flutter. But it's not just that... Miles is beautiful... but this is different. Why is it so different?

I must be ill.

That is the only reason for this, that must be the issue. Yes. Very much. Very much that. Uh-huh...

Right?

"I'm quite happy to have met all of you," Lachlan says. "For much of my life, I was treated poorly. People thought I was more monster than man, so I was ruthlessly chastised and even driven away from my home at one point. It made me start to resent people, but I am very much a lover not a fighter and it ate at me quite a bit. It was hard to pretend I didn't have to deal with it. It was difficult to smile at them every day, but I pushed it all back and did my best to treat everyone with kindness anyway. That's when I met Jacob and was invited to work at the university. I was so happy to be surrounded by so many lovely people, but most were students and you can only connect with students so much.

"So when I met Miles, and Miles introduced me to the rest of you, I felt so happy. Thank you for showing me so much kindness," he finishes with a huge smile.

My heart is aflutter. My heart is going crazy! What is this foreign feeling? I always wanted Miles, but this is so much different. "Of course! We'll treat you wonderfully. I promise. I super promise! I have been previously told that I am also a monster. But I think that's... because I might have accidentally tried saving the prettiest people first. I just thought if anyone was going to make it out alive, it should be those who are easier on my eyes and have a better chance of having beautiful children."

Lachlan seems to contemplate that for a moment. “It was kind of you to save people even if your priorities were a bit... mixed.”

I smile, pleased by the compliment. “Thank you!”

“You’re welcome!”

When Lachlan comes to a stop, I’m too busy staring at his broad back to really care or notice.

“We have arrived!” he announces with a stomp of his hoof. “I shall help you down!” He reaches back and takes my hand as I slide off and smile at him. “I very much appreciate you helping!”

“With what?” I ask, not quite sure what I missed.

“The flowers!” he says.

“Oh! Right!”

I look around at the meadow filled with flowers. So many flowers everywhere. I glance between him and the flowers before plucking a dark blue one. “This one! It matches beautifully with your hair!”

Lachlan’s eyebrows knit. “Are you sure?”

“Of course! Like this!” I say as I tuck the flower behind my ear. “See, the blue would go perfectly with the hue of your hair.”

“I mean... you’re the expert, of course, so maybe I’m completely wrong, but isn’t that the one that gives you a rash if you touch it?”

I pull it out from behind my ear and drop it before looking down at my hand that’s already turning red. “What have I done?” I whisper before whipping out a mirror and looking at the side of my face where the flower had touched.

I gasp, dropping the mirror. “No!”

Lachlan smiles at me as he picks the mirror up and holds it out before me. I flip it open and let out a shriek as the red chases its way up my face.

“My face! My beautiful face! I’m going to be ugly. Then I’ll have nothing left and no one will like me, and I’ll have to become a hermit and live in a hole in the ground. I’ll only be able to emerge at Halloween where children will come to get a look at me and scream.”

Lachlan cups the less hideous side of my face, his smile never faltering. “It’s a good thing that beauty is on the inside and not the outside then, right?”

“What? NO! It’s here,” I say as I wave to my face.

“I assure you it’s not. You’re much more beautiful on the inside than you even realize, Marco.”

“You’re clearly mixing me up with someone else because—”

“Marco, I’ve heard about all the times you’ve risked your life for your friends. Just recently you got hurt trying to save Miles, did you not?” he asks.

“I... guess.”

“That’s pretty selfless of you,” he says with a smile. “I like you just the way you are.”

“E-Even ugly?” I ask.

“No matter what happened to you, you’d never be ugly, Marco. And the rash will go away within a few hours.”

“Oh thank god,” I say, but what he’d been saying is slowly sinking into my head. Does he really think I’m that good of a person?

“Now I’m going to go out on a limb and guess that you are not the one who knows a lot about plants,” he says.

I’m silent for a moment. “No... that’s Evan. I just... I saw you, and you’re so nice, and I wanted to... help... but then I gave myself a disease instead!”

He cups my face again. “All this to spend more time with me? You could have asked, and I’d have loved to spend all the time in the world with you! You could have even come with me and the plant guy!”

“It’s Evan. Evan’s the plant guy.”

Lachlan smiles. “Thank you! That’s good to know! I guess since we’re here, we could go cool our feet in the river?”

“Yes!” I say, happy for an excuse to spend more time with him.

“Oh!” he exclaims before trotting over to what looks like a weed. He picks it up, crushes it in his hand and whispers some kind of spell to it that I don’t understand. Then he comes back to me and rubs it against my cheek which instantly soothes it. “Better?”

“Much,” I say, wondering why my skin feels a million times hotter everywhere he touches.

And with that, he leaves me gazing after him as he heads off for the water. I have to jog to catch up. When I get there, he starts unbuttoning his shirt as I watch in awe.

“Can you set my phone on that rock?” he asks as he hands it to me since the rock is beside me. I do and as I go to set it down, I see that there’s a text from Miles from a while ago.

Miles: You're going to talk to Evan when you get there, he's the plant dude.

"Wait... so... you knew it was supposed to be Evan?" I ask.

Lachlan glances over at me.

"Maybe."

"Oh... then why'd you let me pretend it was me?" I ask curiously.

"Maybe because I also wanted an excuse to spend more time with you," he says with a grin. "Now come on!"

He takes off into the water, splashing it up around him as I take my shirt and pants off, leaving just my briefs on as I use my wings to pull myself up into the air before dipping just a toe in.

"It's rather cold."

"It's lovely once you're in!" he promises me as he holds his arms out.

I drop down just for him, surely getting dirty and smelly, but I'm positive I'd have waded into neck-deep mud if he asked me.

He grabs my hand and pulls me down farther before I see a huge smile on his face. "Perfect!"

"If you say so," I respond, but there is something perfect about it. And even more so when he goes, "Can I kiss you?"

I don't know how to find words, so I just nod as my heart beats out of my chest. He leans in and gives me the softest and sweetest kiss that makes everything around me explode. My face is hot, and I don't even think it has to do with the mess my face has become. My pulse is racing, and I don't know what to do with my fingers.

But what I do know is that despite spending so much time looking at my own beauty, I'd never realized how beautiful someone else could be.