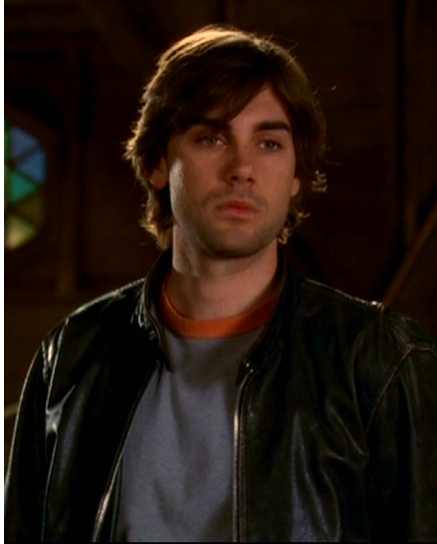


The Right Hand Man

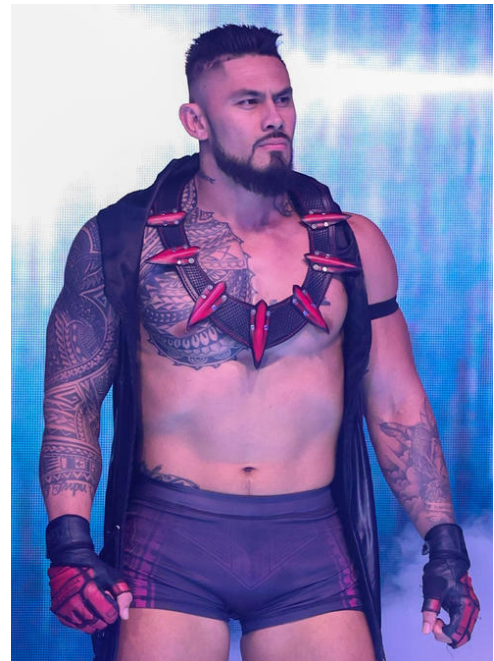
A short story by Henry Cavanaugh



Once upon a time Chris Halliwell had led the rebellion against his tyrannical brother Wyatt but that had come to an abrupt end when his sibling developed mind control abilities. In the six months since then, Chris had been forced to submit to his older brother's will and help facilitate the domination of supernatural creatures over the mere mortals still residing in San Francisco. Chris felt incredibly guilty for his actions but there was no point in even trying to fight back anymore - Wyatt's control was simply too strong to break free from, even a powerful witch like Chris himself was.

One of the magical limitations that Wyatt had placed upon his younger brother in order to bring him in line was that Chris was unable to attack any other magical creature unless he was attacked first or ordered to by Wyatt himself. For somebody who had dedicated his life to protecting innocents like his mother and aunts had before him, this was nothing short of torture. When he looked at Wyatt he didn't see his brother but a cruel and evil dictator with not even the smallest shred of humanity. Chris didn't see how his situation could possibly get worse but little did he know, it really was about to...

The mere fact that he had been sent to steal a magical urn from a witch in hiding like he was some sort of glorified errand boy had been enough to put Chris in a bad mood. That only escalated when he was interrupted by a heavily tattooed man with sharp facial hair and a muscular physique that he seemed all too proud to show off. Chris didn't need to have any sort of telepathic ability to identify that this new arrival was bad news, as the arrogant smirk upon the man's face was more than enough of a hint. "Well, well, well! What do we have here, eh? Looks like it's Lord Wyatt's favorite lap dog," the tattooed man exclaimed, his voice emerging as a deep and intimidating rumble as he looked Chris up and down in bemusement.



"I'm busy," Chris retorted bluntly, "My brother doesn't like to be kept waiting, so I suggest you move on and let me get back to what I was doing." Even as he spoke, Chris knew that his request would fall upon deaf ears. The demons, warlocks and other dark creatures that populated San Francisco seemed to love taunting Chris whenever they got the opportunity to. While not all of them actually went as far to attack him, there were a handful who resented him for vanquishing so many of their acquaintances when he had been leading up the resistance, so they'd made the foolish mistake of challenging him. That allowed him to use his powers to defend himself, per the conditions of the command Wyatt had placed upon him, and considering how irritated he already was, Chris really hoped that this demon or warlock (whatever and whoever he was) would be one of the ones foolish enough to try it.



"You know, I've heard rumors that you didn't defect willingly after all," the imposing man began, "That he's actually got you under some sort of mind control. It's an interesting theory, isn't it?" Even though he'd done his best to keep his expression neutral, Chris knew that his face must have given something away, as the man's smirk spread wider. "These rumors also suggest you can't hurt a warlock like me if I don't attack you first. I suppose Lord Wyatt doesn't want you vanquishing his followers, eh? That's quite the predicament you've landed yourself in... if any of it's true, of course."

Chris bristled in response to the smug look the man wore upon his face. Oh how he wished he could use his telekinesis to cause the warlock some serious harm at that moment in time! "Just get to the point already," the witch huffed in exhaustion, already anticipating having to humiliate himself by explaining the whole situation to Wyatt once he returned to the manor.

"You have no idea just how good you have it, do you?" the warlock growled, the gloating tone dropping away from his voice and being replaced by something much more dangerous. "The son of a Charmed One, the brother of the most powerful being in the universe... you're basically royalty and yet you hold back when you could be right by your brother's side! You're a waste of your lineage, Chris Halliwell. You could have the respect of this whole city just by clicking your fingers while hard working guys like me have to fight and claw for every little bit! How is that fair?!" While he spoke, the warlock's voice had risen into a yell and Chris instinctively flinched. He desperately wished that the other would simply attack him so he could freely retaliate and get this whole situation done with, yet despite his evident anger, the warlock held himself back.

“I really don’t care about harnessing power like my brother does,” Chris spat out bitterly, rolling his eyes. “I also don’t care in the slightest what you think is fair or not. Now please, if you’re not going to try and kill me, just get the hell out of my way.”

He wasn’t sure what sort of response he was expecting from the warlock in response to that, but the laughter certainly came as a surprise. “You think I want to kill you? Chris, you’re so naive,” the other man retorted, slipping back into the gloating tone that made the witch’s blood boil. “I’m not going to kill you, that would be such a waste of your potential! No, I’m going to *become* you!”

Now it was Chris’ turn to laugh. “What the hell do you mean by that, huh?” he asked incredulously while shaking his head. “You gonna switch bodies with me?” After airing out the question though, Chris was suddenly struck by total fear, especially when he saw the warlock’s grin widen. He had absolutely no way to defend himself from such a spell considering it wouldn’t be considered a direct attack. Wyatt’s command was screwing him over yet again!

“That’s precisely what I’m going to do,” the warlock spat out in return before beginning to chant in an ancient language: “*Alli permutat anima kimota, alli permutat anima kimota, **alli permutat anima kimota!***” It wasn’t a spell that Chris had ever heard before but he quickly became familiar with it, as the effects were felt immediately. His consciousness was painfully and forcefully ripped out of his body in the form of a ball of blue energy. At the same time, the warlock’s spirit was pulled out from that muscular body covered with ink, departing as a ball of red energy in sharp contrast to Chris’. The two souls crossed paths for a fleeting moment before slamming into the opposite bodies, completing the spell and trapping Chris in the flesh of a lowly warlock!



“What the hell did you do?!” the body-swapping victim exclaimed, looking down at the tanned bare chest he now possessed and then up and across at his true body. Knowing that it was now a warlock behind those blue eyes was nothing short of absolutely chilling for Chris. While plenty of bad things had happened since the death of the Charmed Ones and the fall of San Francisco to Lord Wyatt, this was by far the worst thing to happen to him personally! “Switch us back or I’ll kill you right now!” he practically screamed, tensing up all of his muscles as he prepared to charge forward and grab at the other. To his horror though, he found that he was still unable to attack the other - Wyatt’s control had been over his mind, not his body after all, so he was still suck obeying that stupid command! “No, no, no... this can’t be happening. We’ve gotta switch back!”

“Yeah, that’s not going to be happening,” the warlock in Chris’ body replied while a cruel smirk settled upon his face. It was completely out of character for Chris but it was exactly the same expression that the warlock had worn prior to the swap and the mocking tone of his voice was the same too, even when it was said in Chris’ naturally higher pitch. “You can die knowing that I’m not going to waste this like you were. For your sake, I hope that brings you some peace.”

“Die?” Chris repeated in a weak voice, his eyes going wide in fear. His voice quickly ascended into a panicked yell as he realized just how much danger he was in. “You’re kidding, right? Please, you’ve got to switch us back! You have no idea what you’re getting yourself into--”

Chris’ words were cut violently short when the warlock who had stolen his body made use of one of his new powers, telekinetically sending a sharp piece of nearby shrapnel right through the gut of the warlock’s former body. Then, as if that hadn’t been brutal enough, the warlock made further use of his telekinesis to continue bludgeoning and puncturing the helpless Chris with pieces of debris until the other was far too weak to even attempt to fight back.



As his previous body dropped to the floor and began bleeding out, the new Chris approached and stood over it. Switching into this skinnier body had definitely been a physical downgrade in his opinion but it would be worth it for the power and authority it would ultimately grant him. He’d be feeling right at home soon in this new flesh enough, he was sure of it. “Another disgusting warlock vanquished,” the new Chris spat, grinning from ear to ear like the twisted individual he truly was.

“He... he’ll know,” the former Chris croaked out with his last few breaths, looking up through watery eyes at the body that had been stolen from him. “You... won’t win.”

“Buddy, he won’t care,” the new Chris retorted smugly, moments before the man he had replaced completely expired. Staring down at the body he had occupied for three whole decades, the former warlock was surprised by how little he cared to see it all bloodied up. He had truly cut his ties to that identity and was already getting comfortable with the life he had ahead of him as Chris Halliwell. The best part was that now there was absolutely nobody left other than him who could possibly reveal what had happened in that alleyway, and so the truth would never come out!

His final words to the previous Chris had been completely right, too. Although he truthfully didn’t know if Wyatt was fully aware of what he had done, Chris knew that his



new violent attitudes had earned him his brother's favor. They were much closer than Wyatt had ever been to the real Chris and he was no longer being forced to complete simple fetch quests for his brother. No, he was being trusted with assassinations and other important tasks that were much more fitting for his new position!

In no time at all he had proven himself as a worthy right hand man to Lord Wyatt and had even adopted a new image to suit. Over the space of several months, he allowed his short hair to grow out down to his shoulders and had multiple piercings and tattoos added to his body to add a little intimidation factor to what was otherwise a fairly unthreatening body, especially compared to what

he had previously been used to. The changes he had made to his look were well received by his brother, who was quick to comment that they were a much better match for his reputation as the second most feared magical being not just in San Francisco but in the world! Chris couldn't be any happier to have earned his big brother's approval and he knew that life from then on was going to be as rewarding as it could possibly be!