The Devil is in the Detail

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The Devil is in the Detail

by Sherlock And Me

Summary

After being fired from the L.A. police department, Detective Dan Espinoza, found his true calling as Agent Dan Espinoza of S.H.I.E.L.D. Everything in life was going well until Loki tore a hole in reality and tried to take over New York City. Even after Loki was stopped, something still wasn't right. Figures from Dan's past are now showing up at his new job causing chaos and mayhem. The repercussions of Loki’s war stretch further than anticipated as Heaven and Hell decide to weigh in.
Dan Espinoza was a dirty cop with morals. He thrived under the hierarchical structure of the Los Angeles police department even when some of its members engaged in questionable practices. He was loyal to a fault, he protected people, he had initiative, he kept his mouth shut, he was willing to jump into a fight, and he didn’t question the how’s or why’s as long as he got the job done.

In short, Dan Espinoza was a perfect recruit for S.H.I.E.L.D.

Even after the Malcolm debacle, Dan continued to cut corners in his police work. He changed names on police reports, disappeared evidence, looked away when his co-workers accepted bribes, trespassed without a warrant, threatened suspects, and even set the Russian mob on a certain Warden.

Everything was done in the name of justice. Despite all of his failings, at his core, Detective Espinoza believed in right vs. wrong.

However, inevitably, accounting and internal affairs caught on that something wasn’t adding up and just like that, he was out.

After the slap on the wrist Dan received for taking a gun out of evidence that was used in a murder by a dirtier cop, his superiors didn’t want the P.R. nightmare of explaining why Dan was allowed to remain a police officer after multiple offenses. He was quietly let go and out on the street with no badge or gun before any of his co-workers noticed.

Dan had stood frozen outside the police precinct holding a cardboard box with his few meager personal items. The bottom of the world had fallen out. He didn’t know how to be anything other than a cop. He pictured the endless stretch of days that lay out in front of him as meaningless and worthless as he was. And, oh god, what would he tell Chloe and Trixie?

Then a man in a suit approached him, and before he knew it, Dan was being shuttled to a secret training facility to learn how to fire assault rifles, stand unassumingly in a corner, and not question or speak about the strange and terrifying things that passed by him.

It felt like being saved. It was humbling and crushing in a way that only someone like him, who secretly believed he had already used up all of his chances, could understand.

The secret agent life suited Dan. For the first time he felt like he was truly able to help people without being trapped by red-tape. Dan believed in the cause. He trusted in his new superiors when they said that everything he did was for the greater good, even when he had no idea what was going on or how to pronounce the weapons and equipment he was protecting.

L.A. taught him the world was strange and only getting stranger. He was glad the good guys were finally getting ahead.

The file S.H.I.E.L.D kept on Daniel Espinoza listed him as an adequate low level security officer. His work was consistent, all of his aptitude tests were well in the acceptable ranges, he followed orders diligently and he got along with even the most eccentric scientist or field agent. He was loyal and had a lack of curiosity that suited the work well.

He was a good agent, but there was nothing special about him.

Daniel Espinoza was your average every-day employee of S.H.I.E.L.D. He didn’t make waves. It
was expected that if he continued to perform at the same level that he would be able to lead his own team in five years or so. Most people would walk right by the corridor he was standing at attention in or look passed him as he guarded an unmarked crate in transit.

The only noteworthy entry on Dan’s file occurred during a mission while he was escorting a foreign dignitary who had a pretty secretary by the name of Natalie Rushman.

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The mission had been routine.

Dan had been with S.H.I.E.L.D. for a little over ten months. On his prior missions, he usually found himself one of a hoard of nameless suit wearing agents entering a building, swarming over a crime scene, or generally being part of a large intimidating show of force. He had only needed to draw his weapon five times.

Dan had the funny suspicion some higher level agent thought it was “cool” to see dozens of identically dressed agents walking around no matter how inappropriate suits were in the climate they found themselves in.

On this mission, he was one of eight security officers assigned to protect a rather over-weight foreign dignitary who had a thick English accent and spent most of his time drinking, eating and ogling Ms. Rushman. To her credit, Ms. Rushman smiled and giggled at any inappropriate comments the dignitary belched out while keeping him on task and following the timetable.

It was apparently vital that this piggish man appear at some peace talks in a country Dan had never heard of for some war that Dan was pretty sure normal citizens in America didn’t know existed. At Dan’s clearance level, questions were not encouraged, and honestly, Dan didn’t want to know. He was there to do a job, and if he had to put up with this gross specimen of a human being then, well, Dan had meet more annoying people back in L.A.

However, he could tell that one of his fellow security officers, the slightly more senior officer, Agent Dartmore, was distracted by Natalie. Dartmore made a point to open doors for her, brush by her shoulder and spent any down time attempting to charm a phone number off of her. He would mention a nice restaurant she really needed to check out once they were back in the United States or a bar or a movie and even suggested putt-putt on one desperate attempt.

Ms. Rushman was coy and flirted back, but never left him any openings. Most of the time, Dartmore floundered around trying to come up with ever worsening pick-up lines.

Off duty, the other agents were polite to Ms. Rushman. They had her go on countless coffee runs and secretly thought she was the hottest secretary they had ever seen with her red hair, tight skirts, and high heels. But they were slightly resentful that they had a useless civilian to baby-sit as Agent Dartmore annoyed everyone to death with his obsessive mooning over her.

Their primary objective was to protect their asset, the foreign dignitary. The agents had a job to do, and, if worse came to worse, she was expendable. On duty, the agents mostly ignored her and sometimes forgot she was there.

Dan never forgot. Agent Dan Espinoza was as polite to Natalie Rushman as the other agents, sometimes had her get coffee for him after a long shift, but never, ever, turned his back to her.

Dan would always keep Natalie in his peripheral vision, as she glided along on terrifyingly high heels while making sure the foreign dignitary signed the right papers and met with the right
people. Dan had this suspicion that even though she gave no indication of it, Natalie was aware that he was aware of her. He never let the fact that she was the smallest (and hottest) person in their group affect him, and this consistent awareness of her ended up saving his life.

It was towards the end of the mission. Everything seemed to be going well. He and three other agents, including Dartmore, were escorting the dignitary and Ms. Rushman from the building where the peace talks had gone on for thirteen hours to the hotel. The four other agents were waiting for them there to take over protection duty.

On the short walk through a cobblestone alley to the hotel, Dartmore was standing too close to Natalie, talking nonsense again. The two other agents rolled their eyes focusing on the dignitary, who was huffing by the small exertion of walking, and all possible attack points. They attempted to ignore the newest embarrassing display by their coworker. On the other hand, Dan was aware of everything, which is why he noticed with Natalie abruptly stopped walking.

Dan unconsciously shifted toward the dignitary, who was momentary bent over wheezing. Agent Dartmore blindly took two steps ahead before realizing he was talking to air. Natalie stood still, head cocked, listening.

Dan followed suit, straining his ears and heard it too. Nothing. It was too quiet. They were the only people on the street; there were no moving cars or street vendors.

“Get down!” shouted Natalie as she crouched.

Dan was already grabbing the dignitary and throwing the heavy mass into a small alcove before he even heard the whistling of the grenade launcher. Dan attempted to shield the protruding mass that didn’t completely fit in the alcove with his own body. He could only watch as his fellow agents reacted too slowly.

After the warning shout, Agent Dartmore stared at Natalie dumbly, slacked jawed. It was only the quick kick of her high heeled foot to his leg before she dove behind a parked car, which caused him to crumble and miss most of oncoming explosion.

The other two agents weren’t so lucky.

One agent simply wasn’t there anymore; Dan thought he saw an arm and foot fly in separate directions. The explosion caused the second agent to lift in the air and spin around before hitting a building. The Agent appeared alive, at least his eyes were open, but the artillery fire that followed the explosion cut him in half.

Agent Dartmore, lying on the ground, was singed and only half protected due to the angle the gunman were firing from. The first burst of artillery fire caught him in the arm and he started screaming and yelping as he tried to roll further to the side, away from the flying bullets.

Against all laws of physics, the fat foreign dignitary was able to pull himself into the smallest ball into the farthest corner of the alcove. He was about as protected as he could be, so Dan returned fire before diving from his exposed position to the same car Natalie was behind.

Dan landed on his belly and looked up to see that Natalie was in a squat position leaning her back against the car. She was talking into a radio that she pulled from who the hell knows where, and holding a large pistol. Her skirt had ridden up just enough that he could see the gun holster and what looked like several knives strapped to her thigh.

When his eyes traveled passed the hidden arsenal to her face, he saw she had one eyebrow cocked
at him. He knew without a shred of doubt that she just saw him look up her skirt. Despite the fact
the unknown assailants had started a second round of artillery fire that was hitting the other side of
the non-bullet proof car; Dan could feel his checks grow scarlet.

When the bullets started to slow, he quickly scrambled to his feet and returned fire before ducking
back down again.

“One minute before back-up arrives,” Natalie told him after she finished talking into the radio.
“Think you can make it?”

Gone, was the hot secretary, and in her place, was the icy exterior of a killer.

Dan quickly accessed the situation. Unknown number of assailants, two agents down, one
wounded, and they were pinned with their asset trapped behind them. Agent Dartmore was
moaning against the side of a building barely protected from the intermittent gunfire.

“Yes,” said Dan, “But we need to bring Dartmore over here, cover me?”

Dan glanced at Natalie and saw her eyebrows rise slightly in surprise. He barely waited to see her
nearly imperceptible nod, before throwing himself in a roll from the protection of the car through
the open space to Dartmore.

Natalie immediately spun, gun drawn, shooting mercilessly, and with what Dan suspected was
greater accuracy then himself, in the direction of the gunfire, emptying her clip.

Dan had time to grab Dartmore by the uninjured shoulder and drag him back behind the car. The
gunfire resumed the moment Natalie stopped to reload her gun and missed him by millimeters.

Now both Dan and Natalie were squatting with their backs to the car as Dartmore passed out from
pain. Dan noticed that Dartmore’s eyebrows were completely gone and blisters were forming on
his skin.

“He needs medical attention,” said Dan.

“It’s on its way,” replied Natalie as she took a moment to spin around, shoot, before ducking back
around again.

“The asset?” she asked.

Not even a finger was sticking out of the small alcove.

“Safe for now,” Dan answered before taking his turn firing.

“Natalie~” he started.

“Call me Natasha,” she interrupted with a rather chilling smile.

“Natasha,” Dan mused forgetting his original question.

This new name didn’t seem as odd as it should have been. Since the explosion, it was like she was
an entirely different person. She held herself and moved with an efficiently and ruthlessness that
was terrifying. Dan was glad he was not on the other end of her gun. An icy pit formed in his
stomach before his brain caught up with his instincts.

“Natasha, as in Natasha Romanova? Black Widow?” exclaimed Dan.
He had to stop himself from stupidly standing up and getting his head blown off as he remembered all the tall tales he heard during training about the infamous Russian assassin S.H.I.E.L.D. had on payroll. In a panic, he started tallying all the coffee she fetched for him throughout the mission.

Focus! He thought in his head, there are people shooting at you. And an assassin who has probably killed more people than you’ve met in your entire life next to you, a quieter part of his mind added unhelpfully.

Natasha’s eyes narrowed at him.

“You already knew that,” she stated. “I couldn’t figure out how you knew. As far as I know we never crossed paths before. It’s been bothering me this whole time.”

“No, no, I-I never thought,” stuttered Dan, his brain misfiring in confusion and a creeping fear.

“Don’t play dumb,” she snapped after firing her gun off again, only this time they could hear a cry of pain and then silence in the distance.

“You made me the moment you saw me. You played it off well, you didn’t jeopardize the mission, but I could tell. You tracked me as a threat the whole time.”

Dan could feel the ice start to spread through his veins. This was bad. He didn’t think it could end well having a paranoid assassin suspecting you of knowing secrets.

“I almost benched you,” she continued.

“I should’ve benched him,” she said looking down with thinly veiled disgust at Dartmore.

Bullets had resumed flying; they were now going straight through the trunk of the car, mere inches from where Dan was squatting. Dan had a wild thought as he wondered if it was safer staying where he was or shifting closer to Natasha.

“That’s not why I kept an eye on you,” Dan said evenly, secretly impressed that he got out a complete thought.

“Oh, really?” Natasha answered; face turned toward him as a jet flew overhead and bombed the area where the assailants were firing from.

The resulting explosion lit up the night sky behind Natasha, framing her hair and momentary bleeding the two reds together, giving her an illusion of a flaming halo around her head.

She smiled at the sound of the blast, all teeth. “Do tell. We have the time,” she asked, but Dan could hear the hidden order.

He was seeing spots from facing the explosion. He knew she was still armed and he had a funny feeling he didn’t have enough bullets left if she didn’t like his answer.

“I was a police officer in L.A. before working for S.H.I.E.L.D,” he started and Natasha nodded knowingly.

Dan felt exposed. He knew she probably, no she definitely had access to his file with S.H.I.E.L.D.

“I was investigating this club called, well it doesn’t matter what the club was called. There was this bartender,” Dan rambled before taking a deep breath and starting again.

“I asked a bartender to see the books of a night-club. The bartender was about your size and I didn’t
register her as a threat. So when she told me the books were in the back and too heavy to carry out on her own, I didn’t think anything of it.” Dan recited before pausing.

Natasha made a go-on motion with her head.

“I walked ahead of her. I gave her my back,” Dan stopped again to Natasha’s growing annoyance.

“And-that’s-the-last-thing-I-remember-before-waking-up-at-my-ex’s-house,” Dan said in one breath.

“Naked,” he finished in a mutter.

Natasha’s outburst of laughter was in Dan’s opinion, excessive. She was grabbing her sides and had a surprised delight on her face that probably didn’t happen very often.

A little put out, Dan continued, “And that’s why I don’t ever assume someone is not a threat, no matter their size or gender or anything.”

Natasha had barely stopped laughing when they started seeing an army of people wearing suits arriving from all directions. The onslaught of identically dressed people was actually pretty comforting. Dan felt safe again. He felt like he was home.

“That wasn’t in your file,” Natasha said off-handedly to Dan as she strode pass him to check on the terrified dignitary.

The indignity of wearing the NSYNC shirt and pink sweats still made him fume.

Kicking at a tire punctured by a bullet, he answered hotly, “Yea, well, when I confronted her that psychopath actually thought I should thank her! She laughed in my face when I told her she was under arrest.”

Glaring at the mangled tire like it offended him, Dan continued, “As a police officer, I worked with her on a couple cases when she decided being a bounty hunter would be fun. That crazy maniac turned out to be the scariest person I’ve ever met.”

Dan looked up and saw that Natasha looked offended.

“She’s the scariest?” Natasha said, sounding a shade jealous.

Dan could feel his cheeks turn flaming red again.

“Humpphh,” was the last thing he heard from Natasha before she man-handled the fat dignitary into a waiting truck and took off.

Medics crowded around Dartmore and Dan, checking vitals while others rolled out the body-bags for the two fallen agents. The clean-up crew had already arrived and was quickly undoing all the damage of the scene. By the time Dan left, it looked like nothing had ever happened.

After that incident, Dan went back to work. He never knew who attacked them or why. It was just another day at the office except he started getting assigned to higher priority missions. He couldn’t help but suspect that a certain red-headed assassin had put a good word in for him.

He eventually found himself assigned to a certain remote base, personally responsible for chauffeuring and guarding a scientist by the name of Dr. Erik Selvig and hearing words like “Tesseract” muttered under his asset’s breath.
Dan had no idea what that meant, but he knew it was powerful, and needed in an ever increasingly weird world.
The magic word is pudding

Dan Espinoza was about to be blown up and he knew it. Sure on the outside he looked calm as he stood at attention. But there was this voice inside his head letting out one continuous scream that was making it really hard for him to concentrate.

The squints in the lab scurried around checking machines and then rechecking machines, getting more and more frantic, as the rest of the base was evacuating. Dan wished he was leaving with them, but he wouldn’t go anywhere without his grey-haired asset, Dr. Erick Selvig.

Dan kept an eye on him as Selvig paced back and forth from one indecipherable reading to the next. Every once and awhile Dan would catch a gleeful smile growing on Selvig’s face as he cracked jokes and one-liners. He was clearly experiencing some sort of science-related-euphoria that Dan just didn’t have the IQ points to understand or Selvig was off his meds.

Within moments of meeting his asset, a meeting that took place several weeks ago but already felt like years, Dan concluded that Selvig was insane. This initial assessment was only cemented over time, however, that wasn’t all Selvig was to Dan.

Dan spent week after week picking him up from the S.H.I.E.L.D dorms, driving him to the extremely large “secret” complex, escorting him to a lab that was way over Dan’s clearance level (in fact, Dan wasn’t entirely sure he was even allowed to think about the existence of his lab), hanging out for 12-15 hours, before, more times than not, Dan had to put his foot down and insist the scientist leave the lab and get some sleep. In all that time, Dan found himself growing fond of the old man as he rambled about stars and trees and doors.

On a rare day off, Selvig would insist on going to a local bar where he would get plastered and try to push drinks towards Dan that he couldn’t have.

“I’m on duty,” Dan would say. To which Selvig would blink and look a little sad, as if he had forgotten Dan was just the latest S.H.I.E.L.D agent assigned to him.

Selvig would reminisce about the hours spent in a van with Jane and Darcy searching for something that no one else believed in.

“The whole world was laughing at me!” Selvig would exclaim. “They called me crazy, but I was right.”

He’d get a little teary eyed, “Best damn time of my life.”

At which point, Dan would always cave and say, “Alight, one drink, but that’s it.”

Selvig would beam and slide over a lager, leaving Dan to mutter about manipulative old men.

Dan was not really worried about Selvig’s rants being overheard. With some subtle encouragement, the locals thought Dan was taking his “father,” who may or may not be in treatment for dementia on outings. They all thought Dan was a dutiful son.

It is not expressibly forbidden for S.H.I.E.L.D agents to care about the people they were assigned to protect. As long as it didn’t interfere with the job, and you kept your mouth shut, there was a certain laissez faire attitude toward friendship and other forms of human contact that kept the agents grounded. It was a lonely life, not being able to talk to even your co-workers about your current missions.
Dan’s friendship with Erik kept him engaged in what other agents would have scoffed at and called baby-sitting duty.

Sometimes, even Dan wondered why Erik needed an armed escort to bring him from the dorms, which were really just outposts on the expansive estate of the facility; to inside what had to be the most secure location on the world. The number of checkpoints and guards they passed on the way to the lab was exhaustive. There was an army outside the lab doors, if someone really got passed all of that, then Dan didn’t know how he would make a difference in protecting Erik.

Dan was also not really sure what he was supposed to do with himself during the hours while he waited for Erik to finish working. However, after finding out that his immediate superior officer was none other than the infamous Clint Barton, Dan quickly decided it would be better to appear busy then find out what kind of tasks Hawkeye would give to a level one recruit who somehow found himself surrounded by level six S.H.I.E.L.D agents.

Dan spent the last several weeks stalking down the corridors, standing ominously in corners, staring down newcomers, checking and then rechecking inventory and any bags larger than a coin purse the squints brought into the lab. It was only in the past few days that he allowed himself to acknowledge the fact that he was bored.

Dan Espinoza was not bored now.

He was pretty sure it was the end of the world. Nick Fury, a man he had only seen once in the distance, was right in front of Dan talking to his asset about radiation and other very worrisome words.

Dan was not entirely sure what a Tesseract was but he had assumed it was some sort of nuclear weapon. He regretted all the times he had glazed over listening to Selvig, but honestly it was like listening to the adults on the Peanuts cartoon.

Yep, Dan was now sure he was going to die. Barton had both feet on the ground, talking to Fury and Selvig as a blue glow grew filled the chamber of the lab.

Afterwards, Dan would piece together the events in his rattled mind. He remembered blue washing over him, some sort of Renaissance Faire reject throwing balls of light that exploded before leaping through the air and stabbing an agent with a spear.

Dan had shoved a blond scientist out of the way of one of those balls of light and under a desk before making his way over to Selvig who actually knew who dungeons and dragons over there was.

Loki, he called himself. He looked mad, what he was saying was insane, and Dan was afraid.

Dan thought he fired some shots off, not that it would have helped, but Loki got so close to Barton with his spear raised, that Dan was afraid he was going hit his superior officer instead of Loki. However, instead of helplessly watching Hawkeye get skewered, something worse happened. Hawkeye put away his gun and stood at attention next to Loki.

Dan was in shock, and he didn’t notice that Loki had turned toward him, until he looked dead straight into mad blue-green eyes and felt the cold tip of a spear touch his chest over his heart.

After that, Dan wasn’t afraid anymore, everything had become so clear. He had to help Loki.

He couldn’t remember why he was so concerned only moments ago. He was floating delightfully, choices didn’t matter, and he didn’t matter. There was only this all encompassing need that
overwrote everything that made Dan who he was.

It all felt very familiar to him and he tried to remember why.

He was aware that like him, Barton and Selvig would do anything to help Loki. The thought of Selvig caused a thrum in his chest, but that wasn’t why this feeling was familiar. What was it?

Pudding. It had something to do with pudding. The pudding was very important. Wasn’t it?

He was pretty sure everyone was dead or following Loki as Selvig carried the Tesseract out. At one point, Loki stumbled and grabbed onto Dan’s arm. Dan looked down and saw the flash of black hair, but it wasn’t Loki’s black hair anymore, it was someone else’s, someone annoying, someone he had to kill, because of the pudding!

Dan almost reached for his weapon; Dan remembered feeling a rage so deep he needed to kill. He wanted to kill L-Loki?

Loki’s hand climbed from Dan’s arm to Dan’s shoulder as he hauled himself back up. Loki looked passed Dan’s face before doing a double-take.

No, Dan thought. I want to help Loki. Staring into Loki’s eyes, Dan felt his face relax and his hand move away from the weapon.

Loki looked at him suspiciously before staggering off. Dan trailed behind still thinking about pudding.

They made it to the garage where Loki practically fell into the bed of a truck. Maria Hill was walking away from the group, only to almost run into Dan who had frozen mid-step staring off into space.

Dan remembered! He was so excited, this was really important, he just knew it. What he absolutely had to remember was a question. Was the pudding worth killing over? Now what was the answer?

This stumped Dan and broke through the happy floating feeling that made him want to do anything for Loki. He stood obliviously in the way of Maria Hill. Who told him to, “move agent,” with no affect.

Maria Hill was not having a good day, and didn’t know why Agent Espinoza was being so dense. Then she looked into his eyes and saw that they were too blue. Tesseract blue.

Her radio crackled to life with Fury shouting through it at the same time Dan finally thought of the answer - No, the pudding wasn’t worth killing over.

Dan fought through the fog the spear had placed over him. He had done this before, and it was harder last time. This time it took longer because he didn’t have brown eyes that were so dark they were almost black forcing Dan to admit the truth. Last time, Dan remembered the rage leaving him like a boulder being lifted off his shoulders. This time, Dan only had his thoughts, but once he remembered how to do it, it was easy. It was like walking through a curtain.

Dan gave up the clearness of the spear and Loki for terror, uncertainty and free will.

Maria watched the too blue color fade from Dan’s eyes as they both registered Fury desperately shouting at Maria about Barton.

As one, Maria and Dan grabbed each other and dove behind a pillar barely dodging the bullets
Barton let loose before he jumped into the driver’s seat next to Selvig and took off.

Dan landed on his side with Maria half on him before she jumped up, practically shoving Dan into the concrete in her haste.

“What is happening?” Maria asked already halfway to a vehicle.

Dan scrambled after her, “Loki came from the Tesseract, he has a spear that can control people’s minds, he took the Tesseract, I was able to break free but Barton, Selvig and the others are still under his control.”

Maria nodded as if this was a normal report, sliding into the car.

Dan hysterically wondered if this was normal for her and what the hell had he signed up for? He hesitated for only a moment. Maria barely glanced at him before Dan snapped out of it and ran for the other side of the car.

Car chases used to be a perk in his old life. He could turn the siren on and see how fast his patrol car could really go. Car chases were not fun when you were being shot at and you were firing back, but were secretly glad the erratic path of the car you were pursuing meant your shots kept going wide because you knew your friend was in the front seat. Oh, and they were trying to outrun an avalanche.

Dan was relieved when the car and the ground finally stopped moving. He helped Maria out of the front seat since the hood of the car was pinned by rocks and started to dig a way out of the tunnel for both of them. Maria was on the radio with Fury and Coulson when Dan breached the last of the fallen rocks and took a breath of fresh air.

“On the ground, agent,” Maria ordered and Dan could hear her gun being cocked.

Dan slowly lifted his arms and turned to face Maria. She wasn’t joking, this was happening. He dropped to his knees with his hands laced behind his head.

Maria quickly walked over and divested Dan of all of his weapons, never taking her gun off of him.

When she was done, she stood in front of him gun still drawn. Her cold professional face cracked for a moment, “You understand, right?” She half asked, half ordered.

He nodded.

Dan understood. He had been compromised, something got in his head, and worse he had failed his mission. Erik was gone.
It was Wednesday, which means there were four Brittanys in various states of undress in the penthouse suite of the building that housed the nightclub Lux. There was also an entire troupe of traveling ballet dancers. Some of its members were drunkenly reenacting their latest performance only with the male and female roles reversed. When a pair of dancers fell down, they didn’t get back up again because they had found something far more interesting to do on the floor.

Steam and the sound of multiple people giggling escaped when the bathroom door opened. Lucifer wearing only a towel, walked over to the couch fully intending to enjoy this new rendition of Swan Lake.

He had about 30 more hours to enjoy his hall pass. He was so pleased that Chloe and he had come up with this arrangement. Lucifer was fairly certain that he could have done the whole monogamous thing with her, but the fact she didn’t expect him too… well that made everything even more hot.

The sex was always good. Lucifer was a creature of desire, he moved through the world uninhibited and brought on the same freedom in all the people around him. To deny that would be, well, not natural. But there was something else bothering him.

Lucifer thought he was doubling up his side dates to make sure he wasn’t missing anything. He didn’t realize that he was always counting down the hours, not because he was afraid it was almost over, but in anticipation.

More times than not he would say some funny quip or observation only to turn and see someone other than Chloe standing there. It was that, more than anything else that caused this strange sinking feeling in stomach. Deep down he knew it was because the jokes wouldn’t be the same if he told them to Chloe later. The magic of the moment would be lost and she wouldn’t laugh as hard if he had to explain the context.

However, a larger part Lucifer thought for sure that his vulnerability from when he was with Chloe caused him to catch some sort of human stomach disease that was strong enough to linger longer than any other mortal traits. He actually contemplating going to a real doctor.

Before he could truly enjoy watching the limber dancers twirl around his penthouse, blond Brittany called out to him.

“Your phone’s been ringing,” blond Brittany said while sitting on brunette Brittany’s lap.

Lucifer moved quickly to phone wondering if there was a murder that Chloe needed help on. Only to be disappointed by the fact that the miss call was from Amenadiel.

There were in fact 18 missed calls from his brother. Which despite how annoying Amenadiel could be, really wasn’t like him.

Frowning, Lucifer stood up and de-tangled himself from blond and brunette Brittany who had migrated to his side. He stepped around red haired Brittany who was at his knees and walked to the balcony to call his brother.

After less than half a ring Amenadiel picked up.

“Do you feel it?” Amenadiel asked with no preamble.
“You’ll have to be more specific brother, I’ve felt a variety of sensations over the past few hours, to which do you refer?” drawled Lucifer.

“This is serious Lucifer. Just look!”

Sighing, Lucifer looked out over the balcony with more than just human eyes, seeing and feeling things no mortal could ever understand. Instantly, he knew what Amenadiel was talking about.

“Hell appears unusually close tonight. The humans must be mucking about again, but that’s hardly unusual brother,” answered Lucifer slowly.

“Why they risk their immortal souls so carelessly is beyond me,” growled Amenadiel.

Sighing again, Lucifer switched hands the phone was in and replied, “It’s not their fault. Father wasn’t exactly clear when he discouraged them from pursuing scientific endeavors. They interpreted his message wrong. They thought Father was saying science was immoral.”

The truth was an altogether different matter. The best analogy for Heaven and Hell would be a balanced scale with Earth as the pivot point in the middle. Except, even though they were balanced, Heaven and Hell weren’t the same.

Hell was larger and closer to Earth. There weren’t more souls in hell, but the scale immense. Distance like time, didn’t exist as concepts. Anyone who was ever depressed and thought that they had reached the extent of their despair only to find there were miles left to fall would understand Hell.

Heaven was remote and smaller. If Hell was an entire world, then Heaven was a city-fortress. An impossibly large city, a lot more souls ended up in Heaven after all, but it was better defended than Hell. It housed all the Angels and God’s seat of power. There were a lot fewer ways to physically get to Heaven and in the metaphysical sense it was further way from Earth.

It was simple physics. Any kid with a teeter totter could do it. But like physics, if you shook the pivot point, the two sides didn’t re-act the same. And in this case, Hell always got closer to Earth and Heaven, well Heaven’s own defenses worked against it. The paths between Heaven and Earth became misaligned and the already difficult task of getting to Heaven became almost impossible.

It had only taken Humans 10,000 years of civilization before they were splitting the atom and otherwise nudging the pivot point. Lucifer thought this was a rather large flaw in the design of Heaven and Hell, but try telling that to your father, the creator-of-everything, he-who-wouldn’t-be-questioned.

“Anyone who is currently dying can’t get to Heaven,” Amenadiel said softly.

“Yes, and they go to Hell because that’s the only other place to go,” Lucifer said exasperated. “But it’s only temporary; I put contingencies into place to keep the new souls well away from the usual activities until our brothers can ferry the good souls to Heaven. You know it only takes an hour or at worst a day to get everything straightened out again.”

“It happens more and more often as the humans try out their new toys,” Lucifer continued.

“But you aren’t there,” stated Amenadiel firmly, “Will the demons really leave the souls alone without you making them? What happens if they get their claws on souls meant for Heaven?”

Lucifer winced, August 6th 1945, was a very bad day in Hell. The explosion coupled by the rise in deaths overwhelmed the few safe-guards Lucifer had in place and new souls, most who weren’t
damned, had wandered around Hell, going through doors and being snatched by demons to be personal chew toys. And it wasn’t just the souls from the explosion, all of the Earth’s dead poured into Hell.

The fact that Nagasaki happened only a few days later compounded the issues Heaven had realigning the paths again and it was a full week before any Angel showed up.

Lucifer had saved most of the souls before anything irreparable happened to them, but there were a few mangled ones that Heaven refused to take. Lucifer did the best he could for those souls. He made a quiet place where they could rest, but it was still Hell.

Afterwards, Lucifer came up with plan after plan to anticipate everything so that would never happen again. And he always kept a special place he and Maze used to frequent for anyone who encouraged or profited off of mass destruction.

“You don’t need to worry about the demons,” Lucifer replied. “They wouldn’t go against my will and besides they wouldn’t risk the wrath of Heaven.”

“Lucifer, I think you underestimate—” began Amenadiel before being choked off.

Even Lucifer could feel his own body shuddering with what felt like an implosion tearing at the seams of reality. He could barely hold himself upright.

“What was that?” gasped Amenadiel through the phone.

“It wasn’t the humans, it couldn’t have been, it didn’t feel like it came from Earth,” answered Lucifer.

“The last time I felt that,” Lucifer trailed off thinking hard, “Was when the Frost Giants invaded. Amenadiel you need to check out Heaven. See if there is a way in or if any of our brothers were outside of Heaven before it was cut off.”

Silence on the other end of the phone.

“I am not exactly welcomed up there, Lucifer,” Amenadiel stated chilly.

“I’ll think they’ll make an exception,” Lucifer responded snidely. “Earth is under attack. You probably won’t be able to get too close anyways, but it’s better to know if there is anyone else around.”

Lucifer could hear Amenadiel breathing on the other end of the line.

“What is the problem brother?” Lucifer asked. “If they kill you, it’ll be extremely easy to get out of Hell again considering how close it is,” he joked.

“I haven’t,” started Amenadiel, “that is to say, with the change… I really need to test.”

Lucifer barked out a laugh, “Are you embarrassed? They don’t look that bad. They suit you.”

“Luci,” Amenadiel gritted out, “I haven’t tested them. I don’t know if they work the same.”

“They’re wings brother, they fly. Now go check Heaven and tell me what you find.” Lucifer said before ending the call.

He stared out over the balcony in the direction of the beach he arrived at when he first came to Earth. More in particular he was looking towards the Hell Gate that was a mile offshore and a
football field wide. It felt alarmingly close to Earth, much closer than earlier.

There were a lot of Gates of Hell just slightly out of touch with Earth.

His phone rang again, but Lucifer didn’t recognize the number.

“Yes?” Lucifer answered.

“It’s bad, Luci,” said Amenadiel. “I couldn’t even find the beginning of a path and none of our brothers are on Earth.”

“I figured,” replied Lucifer before curiosity overtook him. “What happened to your phone?”

“It got wet,” Amenadiel replied tersely. “You need to come pick me up.”

“You can’t fly?” asked Lucifer, eyebrow raised.

“Oh, I can fly,” Amenadiel replied. “Landing however is a different story. I believe someone has called the cops so I would truly appreciate it if you could come pick me up now,” he said sarcastically.

“Yes, yes, tell me where you are,” Lucifer started before Amenadiel cut him off. “You know you need to tell Chloe to leave town right?”

Lucifer huffed annoying while Amenadiel kept talking, “I’m serious Lucifer, she can’t be around if we want to be able to do anything about whatever is attacking the Earth. I’ll text you the address. The owner of the phone is coming back and now it sounds like the fire department is on its way.”

Lucifer was left holding a dead phone. Joy, he though. Chloe is really going to love this.
Fury doesn’t realize that Black Widow just likes Dan because he makes her laugh (at him mostly)

“What are we missing?” asked Nick Fury as he glared at a video screen showing Dan Espinoza sitting morosely on a cot with his hands zip-tied in-front of him.

Dan had just finished getting another MRI, which showed as little as the first two. The S.H.I.E.L.D scientists were drawing yet another vial of blood and had spent the last day putting him through every medical test available and even a few they had invented on the spot.

Fury liked to think he was prepared for any situation: Super powerful aliens with unknown goals—revive the avengers’ initiative; the destruction of a secret base— he had a helicarrier; allies turning into enemies—that was just inevitable.

Everything had at one point in time been anticipated and planned for. That is, everything except Dan. None of the risk assessments had even suggested that Espinoza was anything out of the ordinary and that was a problem.

Espinoza felt too much like luck and Fury didn’t believe in luck. Fury had overlooked something and if he didn’t know what that something was then he didn’t have a plan for it, and that troubled him. His instincts told him that Dan was just the tip of the iceberg and Fury never doubted his instincts.

And then there was Romanov. He didn’t know what her involvement was but that couldn’t be a coincidence. Fury didn’t believe in coincidences either.

Fury turned back towards the table where three people were sitting: Coulson, Hill and Romanov. Showtime.

Coulson was watching Romanov.

Coulson had called her earlier after the S.H.I.E.L.D. facility disintegrated to send her to Calcutta and inform her, briefly, about what happened, all under Fury’s orders.

At the time, they were trying to piece together who was missing and why, and Coulson knew Fury had a few strong opinions about the matter. If Coulson didn’t believe so firmly in the purpose of S.H.I.E.L.D. and in Fury in particular, he might have felt some guilt over allowing the director to listen in on the conversation.

However, time had taught Coulson it was better to just let the director have his way whenever he was in a mood. Besides, most of the time Fury was right.

On the call, Coulson only had to mention Barton once for Natasha to drop her mission and take down a corrupt General and his two lackeys in less than 30 seconds.

“But he’s alive,” Natasha confirmed about Barton while walking barefoot away from the moaning bodies.

“We think so,” stated Coulson. “But there is something else. Espinoza was involved.”

Natasha’s steps momentarily faltered at this.

Coulson waited a beat, but there was only silence at the other end of the line, “He’s in custody.
There was some sort of mind control at play. It appears that Agent Espinoza was the only one able to break free."

“I want first crack at him,” declared Natasha, double timing her steps.

Standard S.H.I.E.L.D procedure whenever someone was potentially compromised always involved interrogation of some sort, and Romanov was one of the best. It wasn’t that usual of a request, Coulson told himself, but he could feel Fury’s eyes on him.

“I can arrange that,” said Coulson shifting away from Fury unwilling to let his trust in Natasha be swayed so easily. “But you have to get the big guy first.”

Coulson was not one for self-deception. In the spy business paranoia could be rather contagious.

He was actually relieved when he was sent to deal with Tony Stark, a man who never had a thought that didn’t come out of his mouth.

At the conference table, Natasha sat with her legs outstretched and her hands lightly resting on her stomach while she counted down the seconds on the clock. If she was particularly bothered by Fury’s and Coulson’s speculative glances, she gave no sign of it.

She had wanted to go to Dan as soon as she got to the Helicarrier and demand answers, but Fury had her on baby-sitting duty for Banner and ordered her to attend this meeting. She was actually glad for the delay. She felt off balance thinking about Dan and needed time to get her head straight.

“Have we heard anything from any of our other people?” Fury asked tersely.

“No,” replied Hill, “either no one else has broken free from the mind control or they have and were prevented from contacting S.H.I.E.L.D.”

“Then until we have proof otherwise, we will assume Espinoza is the only one,” stated Fury, ”and we need to know why,” continued Fury staring dubiously at Dan’s pitiable expression. Kicked puppies looked less sad.

They had Dan’s file up on several tablets. Dan had passed all the normal vetting processes when he first joined S.H.I.E.L.D, and there was nothing usual besides a few unique homicide investigations in his past.


“Anything to add? It was your recommendation that got him the mission to guard Dr. Selvic,” Fury said with narrowed eyes.

If Natasha was someone else, she might have felt a sick feeling of dread at the implied accusation. Luckily, she was Black Widow.

“If you are asking if I knew Espinoza was in possession of a singular ability to defeat an alien device that was capable of controlling the minds of our best people, the answer is “No”,” she drawled out lazily.

Looking over at the video screen, her gazed soften. It appeared that Dan was trying to smooth down his alarming bed-head hair while his hands were still zipped tied. It wasn’t working very well for him.

Romanov mentally shook herself and looked back up to Fury, “he is brave, adaptable, and capable
of seeing past a pretty face and a short skirt. He has all the qualities needed to make a good agent, but nothing that would suggest any usual talents.”

Fury sighed, and turned towards Maria, “Hill?”

“He performs at a consistently adequate level,” answered Maria. “Besides the fact he lasted the longest guarding Dr. Selvig, there was nothing noteworthy.”

Fury’s eye widened as his thoughts whirled back and forth coming up with plot after plot.

“Didn’t you ever question the strangeness of that?” asked Fury staring Maria down.

Maria was not pleased to be on the receiving end of Fury’s suspicious stares. She was just about done with him. She had a whole Helicarrier to keep flying and she didn’t have time for Fury’s dramatics. If he kept this up, he wouldn’t have to worry about imaginary conspiracies, she would take him out herself.

“I think you underestimate how,” Maria paused searching for the right word, “trying Selvig could be. He didn’t like having a guard.”

“We had three separate incidences where Selvig,” Maria was briefly stumped again trying to be circumspect, “encouraged his guards into drunken stupors and left them in compromising positions.”

Coulson’s eyebrows almost melded into his hairline. He was impressed.

“Honestly, I think Agent Espinoza bypassed that just by being kind to Erik,” Maria answered arms crossed over chest.

“Espinoza is the most average agent you could meet. Nothing strange ever-” and then she remembered. “Well there was that coffee incident,” she said off-hand and Fury practically leaped over the table at her.

Startled and suddenly wishing she hadn’t said anything she stared aghast at Fury. But he didn’t let up his one-eyed death glare and she knew she had no way out of this.

“It’s just that when he first started guarding Erik he used to get all of the female lab workers coffee,” began Maria. “I was concerned that he was hitting on them and it was going to cause problems. But it never went further than that. He never even asked any of them out.”

She wondered if discussing her subordinate’s love life or lack of love life was really what they needed to be doing right now when Loki was still out there with the Tesseract.

“It wasn’t until Barton asked if he wasn’t pretty enough and that’s why Espinoza didn’t bring coffee to him that things started getting out of hand,” Maria’s eye began to twitch as she thought back on those days.

“Espinoza started fetching coffee for Barton too, but Barton insisted it had to be hand delivered to the rafters. Then Selvig said he wouldn’t mind some and the other guards got into it,” sighing, some days Hill really wondered how these were the people responsible for defending Earth.

“All of a sudden, I have Espinoza carrying 20 coffees from the cafeteria to a level 6 laboratory multiple times a day.”

Maria remembered seeing Espinoza balance his rifle in the crook of his elbow while trying to hit
the elevator button and hold a dozen foam lattes and caramel macchiatos. In that moment, she knew she had to do something to save this poor man from himself.

“I ended up ordering Espinoza to stop,” her eye twitch had now traveled to her temple. “Of course, the squints weren’t happy, they practically revolted without their multiple cups of coffee and productivity went down.”

“But the problem was fixed once I had the coffee cart go to the lab,” she finished.

Coulson saw the pulsing vein on Maria’s temple and started considering exits.

Romanov, who had been attempting to cover her smile in her hand throughout the story, actually snorted out-loud.

Fury was not amused. He actually remembered that day. Maria had burst into his office paper in hand, one tuff of hair pulled from her bun and the same vein pulsing next on her forehead. She had slammed the paper on his desk, thrust a pen in his hand and ordered Fury to sign it.

Once Fury skimmed the paper and saw it was a request to give the coffee cart support staff of all people clearance to a level six lab, he nearly questioned her sanity.

“They. Need. It.” was all Maria said and after looking into her eyes, Fury wisely decided just to sign the paper.

Now Fury looked at the matter in a whole new light.

“Is it possible that was his inten-” began Fury.

“I don’t think that’s relevant to the Loki incident,” interrupted Natasha smiling, teeth flashing in the light. “You can chalk that one up to Agent Espinoza attempting to balance a Karmic debt.”

When Black Widow was playing a role for a mission, her smile would make artist weep and devote lifetimes trying to capture it. When she wasn’t pretending at all and she was just being herself, her smile became a bit demented. Barton had once told her that it looked like someone had grafted T-Rex teeth on her face.

Coulson, Fury, and Hill were momentarily stunned by the monstrosity made from teeth and lips that stretched over Romanov’s face.

Coulson was the first to recover.

“All we have on Espinoza is that he was nice to Dr. Selvig and emotionally scarred by Romanov,” stated Coulson. “I got to say director; I don’t see the play here. Unless Espinoza is secretly a mastermind and this is the longest most convoluted conspiracy I have ever come across, then I think he is just a good agent.”

Fury made a move to protest, before Coulson put his hand up and said, “I think it’s time for Romanov to have a shot.”

The other three looked back at Romanov who still had the creepy smile on her face as she watched Espionza on the screen. He had somehow got his hair stuck in the zip-tie and was struggling to break free.

“Poor bastard,” said Hill.
No one was talking to Dan, at least not really talking to him anyways.

Sure, there was a parade of scientists and neuropsychologists telling him to sit here or stand over there. They went through check-list after check-list of physical and cognitive questions asking him everything from how many hours of sleep he got? (4 or less); what did this indecipherable inkblot look like? (Wesley Cabot’s fake death scene in Body Bags 4); How many sexual encounters did he have in the past 12 months? (fewer than the number of hours of sleep).

They had taken so much blood from Dan that he was getting dizzy. He occasionally tried to ask where he was or if anyone had heard anything about Erik, but he was met with blank stares. They would then ask him to jog on a treadmill for 20 minutes while reciting the components of his M16 assault rifle in alphabetical order or something equally confounding.

After Dan heard one of the squints bemoan the fact that they would be able to get more precise test results if only they were allowed to take brain slides that Dan wisely shut-up.

Dan was exhausted. The few minutes of sleep he managed to catch on the cot didn’t do anything. He was still wearing the pants and undershirt he had on before all of this started and needed a shower in a bad way. He wondered if this was it. He didn’t think they would ever let him out of this windowless room, and honestly, he didn’t believe he deserved to be freed.

That’s why when Natasha Romanov slammed opened the door and strolled into the room with her full Black Widow gear on, Dan was relieved. This was death he could live with(Ha!). At least it was someone he knew and he could see it coming. He was ready.

His depressing thoughts trailed off when he saw his least favorite scientist, the brain-slide woman, and the head psychologist, an older man who had more white hair on his eyebrows and mustache than his head, follow Natasha into the room pushing what looked like an old fashion poly-graph machine.

They worked efficiently. Natasha cut Dan’s zip-tie on his wrists before sitting down in the chair across the cot. The other two were busy setting up the machine, pulling out wires and straps that they clearly meant to attach to Dan. The scientist told Dan to take off his shirt.

At the order, Espinoza hesitated for half a second with a quick glance at Black Widow. He hadn’t had a lot of time to go to the gym during the weeks he spent nearly every waking moment watching Selvig. Dan unconsciously sucked his gut in before taking off his shirt and allowed the scientist to hook him up to the machine. He attempted to hold his stomach in, and incidentally, cut off half of his breath making his head spin even more.

Natasha looked at Dan's expression curiously, her mouth partly gaped before shaking her head and pulling the coldest expression she could manage.

“I trust you know why we are here,” Natasha began leaning in analyzing every micro-expression on Dan’s face, “Tell me abou-”

“It was the pudding,” Dan burst out, “that’s how I broke free.”

Realizing what he just said, his entire face went red and the machine started beeping alarmingly.
Natasha was now openly gaping at him. She quickly glanced at the camera in the corner of the room as she struggled find a response to that. This had never happened to her before. She always knew what to say in interrogations. Always.

She opened and closed her mouth twice.

“You ate pudding,” she said slowly, “which allowed you to-” blanking, she shrugged and gestured her whole body in Dan’s general direction.

“No, I didn’t have the pudding,” Dan clarified unhelpfully, “that’s the point.”

Feeling vaguely nauseous, Dan wondered if the room was really spinning or if was just him. The three other people were frozen, speechless.

“The pudding isn’t worth killing over,” Dan said on autopilot while the phrase ‘do not throw-up on Natasha’ repeated over and over again in his head.

The psychologist moved in front of Dan, breaking the line of sight between him and Natasha, allowing Dan to finally suck in a large breath.

“Maybe it’s a trigger phrase,” muttered the psychologist shining a small flashlight in Dan’s eyes, instantly giving him a blinding headache.

“He could be a sleeper agent of some sort. Tell me, do you remember your childhood?” he asked, mustache twitching in anticipation.

Dan finally had enough. He was sleep deprived, he had put up with their invasive tests, he was terrified someone was going to start sawing into his brain, and his friend was missing while Dan was trapped in this room. Baring his teeth and making animalistic growl, he swatted the flashlight out the psychologist’s hand, pulling the wires out of the machine in the process. The machine made a high pitch shriek before falling dead.

The psychologist jumped back in alarm and the scientist wrung her hands nervously. They were both used to Espinoza’s meek compliance with all their demands. It occurred to the psychologist that it wasn’t really smart to get into the face of an unrestrained person and accuse him of being a brainwashed traitor.

Natasha glared at the white-haired man and had similar thoughts about his intelligence.

“Alright, Dan, tell us what you mean from the beginning,” Natasha said schooling her face into a neutral expression.

Dan stopped glaring at his two tormentors to look at Natasha. When he did, he felt his heart-rate slow down. He didn’t like thinking about that time in his life but figured Natasha already knew everything in his file.

“There was a time where it felt like my life was imploding. My mistakes had led to my daughter,” Dan’s voice cracked at the word, “being kidnapped by a madman while I sat in a jail cell.”

Dan glared around the windowless room. He was getting really tired at feeling powerless. It wasn’t even his fault! Well, this time at least. He was fairly certain he had no way to anticipate Loki, Palmetto on the other hand…

“After she was saved and I was released with just a demotion, even though I was guilty, things didn’t feel better. People had died and I was responsible,” continued Dan, Natasha nodded along.
Before they joined S.H.I.E.L.D. plenty of agents had higher body counts, intended or otherwise.

“I tried to be grateful, but it was hard. I used to be a top detective and I was doing grunt work I hadn’t done since I was a rookie. I was getting a divorce and I had to watch this smug asshole hit on my wife,” pausing, Dan looked at Natasha before quickly amending, “ex-wife.”

“I mean this guy was unbelievable,” Dan said quickly getting on a roll, “He was stupidly good looking, filthy rich, dated super models, and I couldn’t even truly hate him because he risked his life saving my daughter.”

“He even went around saying,” Dan switched to a fake British accent, “he was Luc-”

“Can you Get to the Point,” Fury’s scathing voice sounded over the intercom to Dan’s utter horror. Natasha rolled her eyes at the interruption as Dan sputtered uselessly.

“Umm, well, there was,” Dan choked out as the intercom crackled ominously.

There was no dignified way to say this so he just spat out, “Someone was eating my pudding I left in the precinct’s refrigerator and it must have been one thing too many. Before I knew it, I felt this uncontrollable rage and I wanted to kill someone.”

Dan tried to sort through his fuzzy memories, wasn’t there a pool involved?

“It’s hard to describe, once I realized that killing someone over pudding wasn’t worth it, everything seemed to just get better.”

“So now it’s something I say to myself whenever things seem overwhelming or I have no choice,” Dan finished pathetically.

“That is the most pathetic thing I’ve ever heard,” Natasha echoing Dan’s thoughts, “There is no way you are a traitor or sleeper agent, you would’ve had a better explanation.”

Standing up, she turned towards the other two people in the room, “Well? Can you explain it?”

The scientist and psychologist blinked at each other, before the psychologist postulated, “it could be Agent Espinoza was unwittingly able to tap into a state of mind that could repel the alien device by repeating the right mantra.”

Dan couldn’t help but think that was a load of bullshit.

“Can it be duplicated?” asked Romanov.

The scientist stepped forward and firmly stated, “Yes,” before pausing and really thinking about it.

“If we had the time to come up with the ‘state of mind’ necessary,” she finished sheepishly.

“Good,” replied Natasha, “I don’t care if I have to knock Barton out and drag him to you. You are going to fix him.”

“And Erik,” piped up Dan boldly.

Natasha looked him straight in the eyes and there was nothing to laugh about in his expression. She nodded once.

“You’re back on active duty, Espinoza,” she stated, “someone will come by with your orders.”
She turned and swept out of the room as dramatically as she had entered. The scientist and psychologist followed bickering about how to classify Dan’s “state of mind.”

Back in the conference room Hill had already left to do her real job, leaving only Fury and Coulson staring at the video screen.

“I still don’t trust them,” said Fury.

“Sir, in all fairness, do you trust anyone?” Coulson asked, hiding a small smile.

“I trust you,” Fury answered.

“So trust me, boss,” Coulson said seriously, “I trust Romanov and she, evidently, trusts Espinoza.”

An alarm started to go off on one of the screens. Loki had been spotted. It was time to send the Avengers to work.

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The devil, a fallen angel and a demon stood on a beach. It sounded like the start of a bad joke.

They were staring out over the water in the direction of the Hell Gate. Well, Amenadiel and Lucifer were looking at the Hell Gate, watching it slowly but surely recede from the Earth. Mazikeen was looking at her smart phone.

“See Amenadiel, our brothers are already fixing the problem,” drawled Lucifer, “they’ll bring the good souls to heaven where they belong and everything will go back to normal.”

“Hmmm,” responded Amenadiel not convinced. “That doesn’t explain who came here or why,” he said broodingly, “we don’t know if it was the Frost Giants or someone else.”

“I know who he is,” stated Maze never looking up from her phone, “and I think he wants everyone to kneel.”

Lucifer and Amenadiel looked at her confused.

“How could you possibly know that?” Amenadiel asked, looking at her warily.

“It’s all over the internet,” replied Mazikeen shaking her phone in front of their faces.

Amenadiel snatched it out of her hand saw a picture of the green-clad figure and all the new bulletins under it.

“Asgardian!” Amenadiel exclaimed.

“Yes, one of the princes, I suspect,” said Mazikeen glaring at the phone in Amenadiel’s hand.

“Ah, he is in Germany,” said Lucifer as he peered over Amenadiel’s arm reading the article. “Up for another flight, brother?” Lucifer asked cruelly.

Amenadiel’s last attempt to fly had him crashing through two stories of a hotel and taking off one side of the building before he landed in the hotel pool. Luckily, no one was hurt, and, luckily, Lucifer came along, implied that it was some sort of freak skydiving accident, and bribed everyone in sight to keep silent.

Before Amenadiel could respond, Maze snatched her phone out of his hands.
“Get your own phone! Oh, wait,” Mazikeen said with an evil grin. His phone was at the bottom of the pool.

“He’s gone already,” she continued. “Ironman and some cheerleader arrested him after he cut someone’s eye out on an altar,” she said wistfully, eyes gazing far into the distance, perhaps remembering when she had done something similar.

“Cheerleader?” Lucifer asked; bringing out his own phone, leaving Amenadiel out as both he and Mazikeen scrolled through different articles. “Oh, he is fit, not sure I agree with the color choices but that’s Americans for you.”

The expression on Amenadiel’s face could only be described as a pout as he watched the two of them.

“So that’s it?” he asked trying to draw their attention, “Our brothers fix the path to heaven and the humans deal with the rest?” He didn’t quite leave all the longing out of his voice. If this was nothing then he would have to go back to trying to fill up his days on Earth, somehow.

Lucifer looked up at him, “hmmm, yes. It does seem rather anti-climatic at this point.”

At that, what felt like a thunderbolt shook the metaphysical ties between Earth, Heaven and Hell. If it could be manifested physically than the whole world would be shuddering under rolling earthquakes.

“Dark energy,” gasped Amenadiel, “not many beings could muster up that much of it.”

“Odin could,” Mazikeen said. She and Amenadiel looked at each other before both turning to gaze upward. “But they have the Bifrost, so why would they need to?”

Before Mazikeen became Lucifer’s body guard, she was a solider of Hell. She used to dream about a great war between the worlds. She could’ve been a general. Mazikeen always kept a close watch on the other warring entities in the Universe. The rainbow bridge, was the Asgardian’s greatest advantage, its precision allowed them to travel to any realm without the destructive effects of less sophisticated methods like the Tesseract and dark energy.

“Something must be wrong,” said Amenadiel, “If their bridge has been affected the threat is greater than we thought. An invasion could be imminent.”

“Maybe you should go to Germany and find the prince,” said Mazikeen looking uncertain. She used to want a great war but now she pictured Linda, Trixie and all the other humans she had grown to care about facing some of the terrible things out there. It didn’t seem as fun as it used to.

“I’m afraid the humans are on their own with the Asgardian,” stated Lucifer, he was looking over the ocean, “we have bigger problems.”

Mazikeen and Amenadiel turned and followed Lucifer’s gaze. The ocean was faintly steaming right were the enormous Hell Gate was. Hell was closer than it had ever been before; you could almost see a faint glow coming from underneath the water.

“The gate!” exclaimed Amenadiel.

“Not just this gate brother, all of them,” said Lucifer looking askance at the ocean.

“Then we need to find the one who is doing this and stop him,” cried Amenadiel, “If they use the Tesseract or dark energy again-”
“Then the gates will open faster, but they are opening already,” stated Lucifer, “the balance has been disrupted too many times too close together. The last time this happened the Ice Giants came in and it took decades before the Angels could find Earth again.”

Decades to an Angel didn’t feel like very long, but it was devastating to the humans on Earth. Lucifer’s father had even called out to Odin for assistance in fixing the problem. Of course that’s not what He called it. God had decreed that Odin would clean up the mess from his warmongering ways and then banished him from Earth once the battles were won and all the Ice Giants were gone.

Lucifer had only been the Lord of Hell for a few thousand years and didn’t care much about what was happening topside. But he remembered Earth being wild with beasts and all manner of creatures going in and out of the gates. The humans only remembered them in their myths and legends.

“So how do we stop this and close the gate?” asked Amenadiel, frustrated.

“Close the gate? Why would we do that?” asked Lucifer looking at him shrewdly, “We’re going to make sure it opens.”
And then all Hell breaks loose

Dan had not been aware of the fact he was currently 30,000ft up in the air until he made the mistake of walking too close to the hanger window only to look out and see what he thought was fog were actually clouds and the ground was very far away.

He found himself tripping backwards, scurrying on his heels and butt until his back hit a wall of crates. He stuck his head between his knees gasping for breath and stayed on the floor. The maintenance workers were tittering around him in amusement.

Despite getting the green light for active duty by Black Widow, Dan was in the unique position of being only a level one agent on a vessel he wasn’t supposed to know even existed. A harried S.O. had ordered Agent Espinoza to go patrol the halls or something but not to go into any of the rooms or even look at a computer screen.

Dan had been shuttled from the old S.H.I.E.L.D facility to the hanger of the Helicarrier to the windowless rooms, labs and medical facilities he had been detained in without ever stepping outside. He assumed he was on a ship, not a flying ship!

He felt a hand on his shoulder and looked up to see a man wearing a purple shirt standing awkwardly next to him.

“Do you always have this reaction to heights?” the man asked, his eyes were soft and kind yet sad.

Dan took a deep breath and tried to calm his nerves.

“It’s not the heights. My life in general seems to have taken a strange turn,” replied Dan while moving to stand up. He took the hand offered by the stranger as he pushed himself up.

“Now that is something I understand,” said the man looking straight at Dan. Agent Espinoza felt a sensation like drowning while looking at the stranger’s eyes. He wondered what could have caused anyone to look so heartbreaking.

“I’m Agent Espinoza, but you can call me Dan. And you are?” asked Dan before berating himself wondering if he had just broken one of the rules the S.H.I.E.L.D. S.O. gave him.

The man’s eyes narrowed at Dan.

“You don’t know?” he asked apprehensively.

Kicking himself, Dan couldn’t believe he couldn’t stay out of trouble for less than a day.

“I’m kind of out of the loop,” Dan said sheepishly.

Understanding broke of the man’s face and his mouth rounded into an ‘O.’

“You’re that agent from the base. I’m Dr. Bruce Banner,” Banner replied looking at Dan curiously, his face growing more pleasant. He was glad to finally talk to someone who didn’t know about the other guy.

Hesitating, not sure what he was allowed to say or not say, Dan finally thought screw-it. How much trouble could he get in to talking to one man?

“Doctor? Then what are you doing in the hanger?” Dan inquired. Bruce Banner in his civilian
clothes looked very out of place surrounded by the uniformed S.H.I.E.L.D agents.

This time Banner’s smile didn’t look so nice.

“Oh, just testing out how far my leash goes,” he replied before looking at Dan side-ways, “I got to ask, how did you break free?”

Sighing, Dan should have known the questions weren’t going to end anytime soon.

“I don’t really have the words. I was me and I wasn’t me. There was a time in my life that I could’ve done something terrible and I felt like I had no control over it. But even if I had no control, I would still have to live with myself, you know?” explained Dan, feeling like he was just incoherently rambling.

But Banner looked at him seriously and said, “I understand.”

Feeling a little better at that, Dan continued, “Just remembering the one time I was able to stop myself helped me break free again.”

Banner looked at Dan like he had just taken the sun out of the sky, and then told him Santa Claus wasn’t real. Dan couldn’t figure out what in the world he had done wrong now.

Someone cleared their throat next to them. Both Banner and Dan looked up. It was a S.H.I.E.L.D agent.

In fact, now that Dan looked around they were surrounded by S.H.I.E.L.D. agents, some of them were pretending to do something else but he could see that they were all watching them. The agent next to them had his hand resting very close to his weapon.

“Dr. Banner, sir,” the man said squeaking slightly, “Fury wanted me to inform you that if you needed anything it could be brought to your lab. You don’t need to, ah, leave the lab and find it yourself.”

Banner looked resigned and let out a huff.

“If you want to follow me back there,” the Agent said looking like he was being led to a firing squad, “I mean, as long as you know, aren’t upset about that.”

Dan was extremely confused. He looked back and forth from Banner standing miserably in his rumpled purple shirt and pants and the fully armed agent who Dan feared was about to pass out.

“That’s ok, Agent,” Dan said taking pity on him, “I’ll escort Dr. Banner back to his lab.”

The Agent looked so relieved he only nodded before about-facing and sprinting away. Dan saw that all the other agents around them had also disappeared. Banner looked at him gratefully.

“Huh,” Dan before gesturing to Banner, “Led the way Doc, I’ve got no idea where we are going.”

At the lab, Bruce chatted to Dan about gamma rays and what he was working on. Dan understood none of it, but it reminded him of Selvig, and he let the words wash over him as he tried really hard not to look at any of the computer screens.

It was here that the platoon of guards surrounding Loki walked by. Loki grinned like a maniac when he saw Banner only for the smile to fall off his face when he saw Dan. He actually stopped walking to glare at Espinoza. Loki had to be pushed by a guard to get him moving again, but even
walking away his eyes tracked Dan, never leaving him until his head was turned as far as it could and he passed by the window.

“It’s been a long time since I thought someone had it worse than me,” Bruce said cheerfully after the echoing boots faded away, smiling at Dan.

***

Dan had resumed his patrol of the hallways, trying to pretend he wasn’t hopeless lost, when the explosion occurred.

The entire vessel shook and he could hear screaming in the distance. The floor started to shift to one side alarmingly. Dan, not knowing what else to do, ran towards the sound only to find himself in a fire-fight with people who looked like S.H.I.E.L.D agents.

He didn’t have time to feel afraid as he fired around the corner of a hallway, rolling towards an empty hallway only to run into Coulson holding a big ass gun.

“With me, Agent Espinoza,” Coulson ordered, Dan instantly fell in line.

They headed towards a room that contained an enormous glass cage with a large blond man trapped inside. Loki was standing by some sort of control panel. Espinoza took out the guard as Coulson threatened Loki and told him to step away from the panel.

Something didn’t feel right to Dan. Loki didn’t seem like a person who would raise his hands and do as ordered even when threatened.

“Look out,” cried Dan as he saw a blur of movement behind Coulson. Dan attempted to lunge at Loki only to be swatted away like a bug.

Helpless, he watched Loki stab Coulson straight through before turning towards him.

“You!” Loki snarled, as he hauled Dan up by the jacket, “How did you break free of the mind stone.”

Dan grabbed onto Loki’s wrist trying to break free. It was like scratching at stone. Loki slammed him into the wall and Dan’s head snapped back. He looked into Loki’s eyes and for some reason couldn’t tell if they were blue or green. Then he saw Coulson on the ground.

“It was easy,” Dan spat out, infuriated. Loki’s eyes only narrowed him.

“No matter. I’ll tear the truth from your mind one way or another,” Loki stated before dragging Dan away.

The blond man pounded uselessly on the glass screaming at Loki. Loki looked at him once shrugging, before shifting the scepter and Dan to one hand, and hitting a giant red button with the other causing the cage to drop.

Dan thought he was done for as Loki continued to drag him away until Coulson spoke.

“You’re going to lose,” he said, causing Loki to turn back around.

Coulson kept talking as he looked directly at Dan with a question in his eyes. Dan looked down and saw the gun pointed in the direction of Loki and himself before looking back up and nodding once at Phil.
The weapon discharge was strong enough to lift the pair up, where, thankfully, Loki lost his grip on Dan before crashing through a wall. Dan bounced on the floor several times before coming to a rest, staring dazed at the ceiling.

He recovered as quickly as he could, jumped back up and ran towards Coulson, yelling for a medic through his radio the whole time. He knelt next to Phil, pressed his hands to the wound and watched them grow crimson with blood.

***

Later, Dan stood, still in shock, staring at the blood he couldn’t seem to wash away under his fingernails. He had only met Phil Coulson once before on that fateful day as he stood outside the police station. That’s when Coulson told him he could still help people and Dan’s life had completely changed.

Dan was pretty sure he was just a pit-stop for someone like Coulson. He probably recruited Dan on his coffee break on his way to save the world.

He wondered if Coulson had any family.

He was pulled out of his thoughts when he saw Barton! of all people walk by with Natasha and a man wearing Red, White, and Blue. He followed them all the way to the hanger and heard them talk about the Stark Tower in NYC. He watched them get into a jet and fly away.

Dan knew what he had to do.

“Come on then,” he yelled at all the S.H.I.E.L.D agents milling around, “they’re heading towards New York City to face Loki. We have to follow them.”

They looked at him like he was insane. “That’s suicide,” said a voice in the background. “We don’t have orders,” said another.

“Screw orders,” shouted Dan, “Coulson is down. Are you saying those three are the only ones that cared about him?”

It was like Dan said the magic words. Everyone looked at each other before grabbing ammo and guns, readying every vessel that could still fly and taking off. Dan stood behind a cockpit staring out the window with a look of determination as they headed towards the city.

Fury nodded to himself as he saw the first jet and Stark fly out from the hanger, his plan had worked. He was startled when he saw the fleet of ships that followed. He hadn’t planned for that. What was he missing?

***

Lucifer was standing next to Amenadiel on a yacht owned by the football star Ty Huntley. Ty was at the wheel trying to keep the boat in precisely the location Lucifer told him too.

“Are you sure this is going to work, Lucifer?” asked Amenadiel.

“Yes,” said Lucifer, “theoretically.”

Mazikeen was at the front of the yacht helping Ty’s wife Debra, set up a device that stood on a tripod, which Lucifer claimed could open or close gates. Amenadiel wasn’t so sure, deep down he didn’t trust human made machines.
Lucifer had spent the whole day calling in favors. There were a few engineers that owed him. It was hard translating divine knowledge into human terms but the engineers had done a good job building the device based on Lucifer’s specifications. In fact, Lucifer had an entire warehouse involved and they had cranked out about a hundred of them.

There was a boat floating every ten feet in a circle around the Hell Gate, each had their own device. The water was boiling and the fiery glow underneath the water had only grown brighter.

Lucifer had called in a lot of favors.

There were politicians and judges next to drug dealers and actors. Anyone and everyone who had access to a boat whether it was a skipper or the multi-million dollar yacht Lucifer stood on, was out there.

The humans were nervous. Everyone in the world was on edge after the attack in Germany by a self proclaimed god. However, no one that Lucifer called on refused him. It’s possible they felt compelled to live up to their promises due to some divine power, but more likely, after seeing what Loki did on the news, they were afraid of the fact they made a deal with someone who called himself Lucifer.

News that something was happening in New York City was trickling in and the Humans on the more sophisticated ships that had Wifi were passing the information via radio to the other vessels. The tension grew tenfold.

“Moral is failing,” stated Maze looking out at the humans on all the boats and the notifications on her cell phone as she climbed the stairs to the deck Lucifer and Amenadiel were on, “and we out of time. The new portal has pushed us passed the point of no return; either we do this now or all the gates open.”

“Right,” said Lucifer and he pushed some of his Hellish powers into his voice.

“Listen up, mortals. Turn your device to the middle position and keep your boat steady. The barrier will protect you, if you leave, the barrier will fall and you will die. Do not turn the device on all the way,” his voice easily carried over the water making everyone shudder.

“Remember we’re doing this to save the world,” Lucifer added as an afterthought. All the humans quickly jumped to do what he said.

Once all the devices were on, a pulse burst out and a circle of light formed in front of the ships around the gate.

“Remind me of the plan again, brother,” Amenadiel asked a little hysterically, were they really about to do this?

“The disruptions have caused Hell to practically collide with Earth. There is too much pressure and all the gates are going to burst open at the same time. If we can open one of the larger gates,” Lucifer said gesturing at the water in front of them, “We may be able to relieve the pressure like a spillway for a dam.”

“You are here to prevent anything from getting out,” continued Lucifer, “Don’t hit any of the boats while you are flying around.”

The light turned into a solid cyclical barrier that stretched from the ocean floor to the sky with the boats on one side and the gate on the other. After one more flash of light, all the water on the Hell Gate side simply fell straight down. Safe on the other side of the barrier, the boats bobbed on water
that would occasionally slap against the barrier, a few droplets getting through and raining down. The Humans looked through the barrier to the empty abyss in horror.

The Hell Gate was open. Screams and growls started to rise up from below. The air that escaped was hot and ashy. Shadows rose from the depths and stretched out on the other side of the barrier.

“Amenadiel!” cried Lucifer.

“I see them,” said Amenadiel before taking off in dark blur.

Anytime, Amenadiel or something larger from below hit the barrier it would flicker for less than a millisecond, causing the boats to shift towards the middle as more water fell into hell. The Humans on the boats screamed every time they felt their boats move and used their motors, desperately trying to stay in the right position. For now, they were too afraid to pull back completely with the devices still on.

“Are we sure this is going to work?” screamed Mazikeen over the noise, “It won’t be long until one of the humans makes a run for it.”

“You better convince them otherwise then,” stated Lucifer looking out over the chaos.

Mazikeen growled before turning to leap the divide to the next boat.

This had to work, Lucifer thought. Or else everything was lost. The TV screen below him was showing footage of the carnage happening in New York City. While the people of Los Angeles saw the light from the barrier over the ocean and panicked.
Fury stood in a room in the Helicarrier that only two people had ever had access to. Now that Coulson was gone, Fury was the only one. It was Fury’s personal nerve center of intelligence that S.H.I.E.L.D. command didn’t even know about.

The wall was nearly floor to ceiling video feeds showing different scenes. He was currently looking at all available cameras in the Helicarrier that were still functional. Fury’s eyes and ears were everywhere.

That’s the only reason Espinoza hadn’t found himself in a jail cell after Fury found him kneeling next to a dying Coulson. Fury had watched Coulson’s death over and over again, trying not to blame Espinoza for living when Coulson didn’t. Humans were ants and Loki was the boot.

Now something else was bothering Fury, and Espionza was once again at the heart of it all.

Ironically, Fury had never felt more suspicious of everyone and had never needed to trust someone more than he did now. Coulson’s death felt like something vital inside of Fury had been removed and he struggled to stay grounded.

The door opened behind him and Hill walked in.

“You asked to see m- what is this place?” she asked with disbelief in her voice as she went to stand next to Fury.

“I need you to look at something for me,” Fury said softly.

He pulled up various videos showing Espionza rallying the S.H.I.E.L.D agents in Coulson’s name, how the call to arms spread from the hanger to all ends of the Helicarrier, and the mad scramble to gather weapons and find functioning transport.

Hill didn’t seem too upset about all of her agents going A.W.O.L. at once.

“Sir, we are dead in the air and barely have communications back up. If they can do some good-” she started to say, ready to defy Fury and defend Espinoza if she had to.

“Look again,” Fury interrupted, this time he pointed at the screens not showing Espinoza but the other Agents.

Sighing, she looked while wondering if Coulson’s death was too much for the director. And then she saw it.

“They aren’t all going…” she said trailing off trying to understand what she was looking at.

There were Agents that were encouraging others to fight in the name of Coulson and help load crates onto planes, but when the time came to leave, they were nowhere to be found.

“We can’t fault them for not-following orders,” Hill said sounding unsure.

“Some of the crates they were loading labeled ammo were empty,” Fury deadpanned.

“Then, they’re sending their fellow agents to die. Why would they do that?” she asked horrified.

“I intend to find out,” said Fury, “stay here and start making a list of the agents acting suspiciously.
I need to know who I can trust.”

“I think all the people we can trust just left,” Hill said sounding extremely worried, already fast forwarding through all the videos.

***

Dan knew he was out of his league when he and the rest of the S.H.I.E.L.D fleet arrived in NYC to see an insanely huge metal monster fly out of a portal in the sky. But there was all of New York City down there and he couldn’t abandon those people.

Some of the planes were barely keeping themselves in the air so Dan and other agents were dropped as close to the action as they could be. Other fighter jets engaged the monster, a few survived the attempt, many did not. Fire and debris rain down around them as Aliens leapt from building to building. Things couldn’t have looked more hopeless.

But then star-spangled-banner-man, who turned out to be Captain-freaking-America, popped up passing out orders. Dan was able hook up with the NYPD and he was back in his element.

Dan knew police officers, he knew how to talk to them, and he knew what they could and couldn’t do. They were scared and Dan knew it, but they hadn’t left their posts yet. They were still trying to help people. Dan could relate.

A roar resonated throughout the streets of New York chilling Dan to the bone. He could see a splash of green soar through the air before pounding straight through the large metal monster. The other agents let out a cheer.

“The green one is on our side?” Dan asked incredulously.

“That’s the Hulk!” the agent to Dan’s left replied, a brunette woman with a crooked grin.

Not long after, Dan and several other Agents were pinned down.

A piece of the alien ship had fallen into a building and they were trying to free the screaming people trapped in the collapsing structure. Dan was right next to the building searching for an opening when they were attacked.

All but Dan and the brunette agent were cut down instantly. She had ducked between two cars and lived, only to stand up and find herself surrounded on all sides by the invaders. They converged on her. She looked afraid until she saw Dan.

Steel filled her eyes, and she called out, “For Coulson,” before pulling the pin on her grenade right when the aliens were on top of her. She and most of the aliens were instantly blown to bits.

Dan was angry. He was tired of looking into the eyes of good people while they died. He stood firm with the trapped civilians behind him, gun raised. After seeing their comrades die, the rest of the Aliens kept their distance from the remaining human, raising their own weapons.

A green blur crashed onto them, flattening the aliens like pancakes. Dan got a good look at the foaming green face of pure rage.

“Banner?” Dan asked.

The green beast roared directly at him and Dan could feel wind pushing at his hair and clothes. A uniquely calm sensation rolled over Dan as a few pieces of the past day fell into place.
“Mr. Hulk,” Dan said in the same voice he would use to talk about the weather, “I’m going to need you to move the debris off of this building.”

The Hulk growled with narrowed eyes at Dan, before grabbing the piece of the alien ship, twisting, and throwing it at one of the large metal monsters before leaping after it.

Dan turned to help the civilians out of the building. Help one person at a time, Dan thought to himself. That’s all I can do.

***

“That is a stupid ass plan. We have people down there,” stated Fury.

“Agents who left their posts with no orders, we don’t have time for this sort of cowboyism in this new reality,” the S.H.I.E.L.D councilperson said before hanging up and the screen going blank.

“They did it for Coulson,” said Fury, barely keeping the snarl out of his voice.

Several fighter jets that had been marked as under repair and un-flyable suddenly went green and started leaving the Helicarrier. Even Fury’s grenade launcher couldn’t stop them.

“Hill,” Fury snapped into his headset. From her position in Fury’s secret room she could see everything.

“The pilots are on the list,” was all she said.

Fury was getting very concerned.

***

Off the coast of L.A. Amenadiel swept back and forth pushing all manner of Hell creatures and damned souls back into Hell. Mazikeen leapt from human ship to human ship popping up like a demented ferret with knives, informing the humans that if they tried to run they had better hope they fell through the Hell Gate rather than have her find them.

Lucifer, who would have claimed he was doing a very important job of overseeing everything, was looking at his phone.

Amenadiel flew by so close to the yacht he nearly capsized the boat next to it causing a wave of water to crash up nearly touching Lucifer.

“Watch it!” Lucifer called before resuming his view of the phone. He was looking at video of what was happening in New York and could hear the anchorwoman on the TV below.

Mazikeen, after finishing one round of threats on all the human ships, jumped back up on the yacht right as Lucifer startled hard at something he had seen on his phone.

If it was anyone but Lucifer, Mazikeen would have said it was fear on his face. She looked over his shoulder and saw a clip of Ironman carrying a nuclear weapon.

“The humans are going to make everything worse. This isn’t going to work,” Lucifer gasped out before going to the front rail and letting all of Hell fill his voice.

“Humans!” he called, “turn the lever on the device all the way and reverse as fast as you can.”

The people on the boats were confused to be told to do the thing they were told to definitely not do,
but they were so desperate to leave that they didn’t question the order and immediately complied.

As the boats pulled back, the barrier came with it, except now it was tied to the gate itself and they were physically stretching it.

At first they didn’t have any momentum, the barrier would move slightly and all the water that was now on the other side fell into Hell. However, the barrier like the Hell Gate didn’t technically exist in this dimension and therefore didn’t have weight like a normal object. Once the boats got moving, the gate grew exponentially.

“What are you doing?” cried out Amenadiel as he flew around.

“Trust me!” called Lucifer, gripping onto the rail as Ty was reversing the boat as fast as it was able to go.

Amenadiel was unable to respond as an impossibly large arm with a huge clawed hand at the end stretched out of the Hell Gate and up into the air. It was the size of a small sky scraper. Amenadiel flew fast and hard up and above before twisting back around and diving at the hand.

The boats continued to stretch the Hell Gate behind them, the humans became hysterical when they realized they were literally trailing Hell in their wake.

Lucifer could feel the nuclear blast shake the balance of the world and hell. But it wasn’t as much as he feared, in fact, it was barely anything.

There was an almost audible pop as the Hell Gate grew, the portal in NYC was closed and Amenadiel slammed into the hand forcing it back into Hell all at the same time. A shockwave expanded from where Amenadiel and the hand connected reaching all the way to Los Angeles, shattering windows and causing sweeping blackouts.

It worked. Lucifer could feel the pressure from all the Hell Gates recede.

“Turn the device off, all the way off,” Lucifer yelled over the chaos.

The humans scrambled to the machines and turned the switches, breathing a sigh of relief as the barrier and Hell disappeared. It was short lived as they realized they were floating on a wall of ocean water with nothing in between them.

The water almost seemed to hold in place for a moment before it, as if in slow motion, started to tilt inwards, only to move faster with a great roar.

The humans were screaming again, some of the faster boats could out run the whirlpool, but others were being sucked under the waves.

Amenadiel dove into water grabbing the humans in ones and twos before tossing them in the air at the yacht where Mazikeen would catch them, only to throw them backwards on the deck of the ship until they skidded to a halt.

The fallen Angel and Demon managed to get everyone out of the water in less than a minute. The fleet, now half the size as when it started, almost flew towards the shore where the humans grounded themselves on the beach before staggering onto solid land bruised, bleeding and wet, but alive.

Amenadiel attempted to land in the ocean before skidding like a stone over the water and up onto the beach crashing into a sand dune causing the grains to raise twenty feet into the sky.
Mazikeen had built up a sweat while leaping to the boats and playing catch with humans. She jumped onto the ground, her hair on one side stood straight up in a giant poof.

Lucifer disembarked from the yacht completely dry straightening the cuffs on his pristine suit.

“That went well,” stated Lucifer, “although, I think we broke something.” Hell seemed unusually far away as if Earth had been un-tethered by all the commotion. He couldn’t even guess how Heaven was fairing.

The humans were a cowering mass around him; some of them were wailing and carrying on. Upon seeing his brother looking as dapper as always, Amenadiel stumbled forward covered head-to-toe in sand, murder in his eyes. Mazikeen halfheartedly tried to get between them before deciding she would prefer just to sit on the sand.

“Good job everyone,” Lucifer stated gleefully looking around at the humans, “you have all fulfilled your side of the bargain.”

The humans responded by crying louder.

“Hmmm, yes, I suppose you did more than I normally ask,” Lucifer said thoughtfully, before brightening looking quite proud of himself, “I know! Free drinks at Lux, for all of you, for the rest of your lives.”

Turning towards his sibling and his demon, he was still patting himself on the back. Another good deed done! He really was learning a lot by being on Earth. Chloe would be so pleased he thought happily.

Considering the situation, he turned back towards the humans who all flinched at his sudden movement.

“Now, mums the word, yes? No need to go spilling the beans about what happened here,” stated Lucifer.

“No, scram!” he said shifting momentary into his hell self.

The humans didn’t need to be told twice. They all turned and ran.

“That’s hardly going to keep them from talking,” Amenadiel drawled, “besides everyone on land could see us.”

“You’re the one that doesn’t like telling people what we are,” said Lucifer sounding put-out. “Besides, the humans may be distracted by New York. It looks like they won against the Chitauri.”

“Chitauri?!” exclaimed Amenadiel, he hadn’t been able to look at any of the footage before they had opened the gate. He once again, found himself with someone else’s phone shaking in front of his face.

“You really must get a new phone, brother,” sighed Lucifer.

Luckily, Amenadiel was no longer paying attention to him; he probably would have killed his brother then and there if he had. He was too busy reading the article and seeing the photos and videos on Lucifer’s screen.

“You both know what part of the universe the Chitauri are from, this was only the beginning,” said Mazikeen from the sand as she leaned back to look at the clouds thinking about war. When she was
in Hell she never felt conflicted, now she was filled with both excitement and dread.

“It couldn’t be,” Lucifer said disbelieving, “father banished him so long ago.”

Amenadiel wasn’t so sure. He pointed at the picture on the screen of a man in green armor, “This Asgardian will know.”

“Yes, I suppose you are right. We should go have ourselves a chat. I have a funny feeling no one is leaving Earth for awhile,” said Lucifer.

Amenadiel looked confused before trying to find the connections between Earth, heaven and hell. Yes, hell felt very far away and wasn’t at risk of opening anytime soon, but something was off. It was like everything was off kilter.

“Brother, what did we do?” gasped Amenadiel.

“You know,” Lucifer said, looking chagrined, “I’m not entirely sure.”
Moving pieces

The Avengers gathered in a park, the light barely starting to rise above the trees. Loki was gagged and restrained by something Erik Selvig had been able to throw together while he also built a container that could channel the power of the Tesseract and allow Thor and Loki to travel back to Asgard.

The Tesseract had shown Erik many things, but still, it was a long night after spending days barely sleeping while working for Loki.

Fury was oddly insistent that the Avengers should take a vacation, immediately. He seemed particularly eager to get Loki and the Tesseract off of Earth.

This is of course was when everything started to go wrong.

The container simply didn’t work.

The rest of the Avengers were standing in a circle around Thor and Loki after saying their goodbyes. Thor twisted the container that held the Tesseract, and nothing, they were still standing there.

Selvig sprung to action, rushing over to the two Asgardians. He checked and re-checked the container and the cube only to wonder if the issue wasn’t on this side of the Tesseract. It was like all the calculations that had worked the day before were off. He needed more time.

The Avengers spoke among themselves and agreed that they would have to put off any breaks until this was solved. They had no choice but to bring Loki to a S.H.I.E.L.D. base where he could be held.

After it failed to bring them back to Asgard, Loki’s eyes never left the Tesseract. He almost looked afraid.

***

“You SUCK at this,” cried out Mazikeen as she tumbled face first into a chain-link fence pulling the posts out of the ground.

Amenadiel had carried both Mazikeen and Lucifer from L.A. to the outskirts of NYC. The flying was the easy part. Landing still remained tricky.

Amenadiel stood up dazed. He had crashed straight into an abandoned building causing a crack to form all the way up one side of it.

“It’s the new wings!” said Amenadiel, “I’m not used to them yet,” before bending over in half clutching his head in pain.

Lucifer had fared slightly better. He had been dropped into some bushes, but even he looked a little worse for wear. His shirt was half un-tucked and there was a muddy stain down the front of it. He also had a twig sticking out from his hair.

“Yes, well, at least you got us here,” Lucifer said before looking around, “actually, where are we?”

“You told me the outside of NYC!” Amenadiel said while moaning.
Mazikeen was shrieking off to the side, the chain-linked fence had wrapped around her as securely as a net. She managed to reach the demon blade in her boot before hacking her way out in a mad frenzy.

In the distance they could see a highway sign stating: NYC 50 miles.

“Right,” drawled Lucifer, “Perhaps, we should have clarified how far away from NYC before we left. No matter, we still need to figure out where the humans are holding the Asgardian.”

“And how are we going to do that?” asked Amenadiel standing straight up swaying slightly.

“In the news, those humans that got to the portal first - you know the ones in the ships? are S.H.I.E.L.D., I suspect,” said Lucifer patting all of his pockets before making an ah-ha expression and pulling out his phone.

“About a month ago there was a chap I ran into when one of L.A.’s murder investigations had Chloe and me looking for clues out of state. He was in the dog-house with his employers after nearly screwing up a mission. I helped him get back in their good graces. I even got him a date!” explained Lucifer cheerfully, “he’ll know.”

“You couldn’t have called before we left?” snarled Mazikeen, she had finally freed herself but had a few quickly healing cuts all over her body, “Now the winged menace will have to fly us again.”

“Hmm, you may have a point,” Lucifer said shrugging unconcerned, “I probably could have.”

At this point, the building Amenadiel had crashed into collapsed, throwing up a cloud of dirt, blanketing all three of them.

“Although, once we talk to the prisoner we should probably find alternative means of traveling home,” Lucifer stated.

Amenadiel and Mazikeen, both infuriated, opened their mouths to tell him exactly what they thought of his planning abilities, when Lucifer, with his phone pressed to his ear, held up one finger.

“Ah, Agent Dartmore, it’s Lucifer Morningstar. I’m calling in that favor-”

***

Chloe was corralling her pre-pre-teen daughter up another flight of stairs. Trixie had shot up half a foot over the last twelve months and was mainly communicating with a lot of ‘whatevers’ and sighs. Chloe was dreading the upcoming years when her daughter would be an actual teenager and not just imitating them.

Although, Chloe admitted to herself, with everything that had happened, Trixie was a lot quieter and hadn’t protested until they got to level 20 of the LUX building. The blackouts had caused widespread power outages and Chloe didn’t want to be trapped in the elevator when they could just take the emergency stairs to Lucifer’s penthouse.

Chloe trusted Lucifer, so when he said to take Trixie and go to one of her mother’s houses, she went. However, she did have GPS enabled on Lucifer’s phone and almost obsessively tracked him while she was away.

Then Germany happened and NYC. She had tried calling, but he was clearly screening her calls (which they would definitely have words about when she saw him next). When the GPS said that he was in the middle of the ocean for some reason, she grabbed Trixie and drove back towards
L.A. where she saw the tail-end of... something, happening over the water.

They had barely avoided crashing when the shockwave hit taking out the windows around them, causing the other drivers to swerve in panic. In the chaos that followed, Chloe and Trixie had to find shelter to wait out the looting and riots. By the time Chloe checked the GPS signal again, it told her Lucifer was outside of NYC. That’s when she became even more determined to do something.

L.A.’s streets were abuzz with people as she and Trixie headed towards Lux. The question on everyone’s lips was what the hell happened over the ocean.

There was one politician going around calming the masses and assuring everyone it was over without actually saying how he knew that. Chloe was pretty sure Lucifer had mentioned this particular politician before, something about pictures of the man wearing a pink tutu that Lucifer had helped disappear. She wasn’t able to talk to him as he was literally running around passing out cash from his own wallet and telling people where they could go to get food and clean water.

Chloe didn’t expect to find Lucifer at Lux, but she knew where he kept large stashes of cash. All commercial flights were grounded and she needed the money to convince someone to fly her to New York.

They walked into the penthouse where there was still evidence of one of Lucifer’s parties around. Chloe was the one that came up with the arrangement she and Lucifer lived by. She was a modern women, she didn’t necessary believe the only way to live was one man and one woman in a monogamous relationship.

She wanted to be with Lucifer, but her priority was stability for Trixie. She had suggested that they split up the week. Lucifer could flirt and look at whoever he wanted whenever he wanted, but he could only touch on set days when he wasn’t with her and Trixie.

Lucifer readily agreed, but he wanted all Fridays and weekends with her and Trixie just for the few occasions when Chloe took time off. Chloe countered, saying he could have Tuesday-Thursday to see other people. Lucifer had looked at her horrified.

“And miss Taco Tuesdays?” he exclaimed, “absolutely not.”

Chloe fell a little bit more in love with him right then and there.

That’s how they arrived at the schedule where Lucifer had from noon Wednesday to noon Friday to have his fun. Chloe thought it was working out well, the last thing she wanted was to stop Lucifer from being himself, but she could tell he was struggling a bit. He kept implying that she could stop by on a Wednesday or Thursday and have a bit of fun as well.

It’s not that Chloe didn’t like sex! She 1000% liked sex, it was just that she was, you know, really busy.

Chloe always berated Lucifer for keeping such a large amount of cash in his penthouse when literally anyone could come up here, he didn’t even have any locks on his elevator or doors. Now she was grateful, she was bending down to open a secret compartment on the side of the bar when she saw a dark figure move in the background.

She pushed Trixie behind her, who protested in surprise, while drawing her gun and pointing it towards the movement.

“LAPD, who’s there?” she called out.
“Chloe?” Charlotte Richards emerged from the darkness.

To Chloe’s confusion, Lucifer eventually admitted that the relationship between Charlotte and himself was actually mother and son. Chloe later confirmed with Charlotte that, yes, she and Lucifer’s father were once an item, but Lucifer’s father had chucked her out like he had Lucifer. Even though Chloe had never met him, she was not a fan of Lucifer’s dad.

However, as for the relationship between Lucifer and Charlotte, Chloe had assumed that Charlotte had been, at one time, Lucifer’s step-mom and figured that must have been hard for Lucifer when his dad married someone who was practically the same age as him.

When Chloe said as much to Lucifer, he had looked at her with this fond sort of exasperation and said, “No Chloe, my mother is the Goddess of all Creation. She obviously didn’t have a physical body when she made me.”

That was of course all from before the last couple days. Now she wasn’t so sure, and she looked at Charlotte warily. Chloe really needed to find Lucifer.

“Do you know where Lucifer is?” Charlotte asked. “I can’t find him or Amenadiel. I even tried looking for that demon with no luck.”

Eyes narrowed Chloe asked, “Why do you want to find them?”

Charlotte looked shocked in a way that was too perfect to be entirely believable.

“Why wouldn’t I want to find them? They’re my sons. You saw what happened on the ocean, I trust.”

Chloe paused for a beat, looking at the cash next to her. Even if she had the money, she wasn’t entirely sure she could find someone crazy enough to fly her where she needed to go. Charlotte, on the other hand, had a lot of shady connections with her clients.

“I know where Lucifer is, but you need to find a way to get me there,” stated Chloe.

“Of course,” Charlotte said as a sly smile spread on her face, “Where is he?”

Studying her face to make sure she caught any expression, Chloe told her.

“What?!” Charlotte cried, this time her shock was genuine. “They are involving themselves in things they shouldn’t be. The humans should clean up their own messes. Come on, let’s go, I know someone with a plane.” She was already striding towards the elevator.

“Wait!” Chloe called, “I need to drop Trixie off at a friend’s before we leave.”

Charlotte turned back and considered the small human.

“That thing over the ocean, the gate,” Charlotte began, “there are more of them and they’re everywhere. Wouldn’t your offspring be safer with you?” Chloe could feel Trixie moving closer behind her.

With a tilted head and a slight smile, Charlotte continued, “Besides, doesn’t Lucifer like the child? Wouldn’t he make sure she stayed safe?”

Chloe was torn. She wanted to protect Trixie, but she needed to find Lucifer. She knew she was being manipulated, but she didn’t know if staying in L.A. was safer than anywhere else.
“Alright, fine,” Chloe firmly stated. However, at Charlotte’s wide smile, Chloe wondered if she just made a mistake.

***

Fury was not having a good day. Yesterday, the day Coulson died and NYC was attacked, would be forever the worst day of Fury’s life, but he decided that this was becoming a close second.

The moment he saw the Avengers arrive at the S.H.I.E.L.D. base that was closest to NYC and also where Fury had parked the damaged Helicarrier, he wanted to scream at them to turn around.

He didn’t trust the S.H.I.E.L.D. Council, he didn’t trust the agents around him, and he definitely didn’t want the Tesseract anywhere near S.H.I.E.L.D.

During the battle of NYC a little over half of the agents that had flown out had died. Team Coulson, as Maria called them, the ones that Fury could’ve trusted. Fury had summoned the survivors to the base and kept them on duty in the most vital locations even though they were bruised and battered. He even considered giving Espinoza command of something, but Fury didn’t want to draw unwanted attention to what he was up to.

Fury was still trying to figure out how deep the rot went, but he couldn’t put a name to who or why. He really didn’t need the added distraction of Loki in his detention center and Selvig once again playing around with the Tesseract in the labs.

Espinoza’s joy at discovering Selvig in the labs, managed to brighten up a lot of the agents who were still reeling from all of the losses they had suffered. However, Fury didn’t have time for sentiment. He needed Espinoza and the other Team Coulson agents to be on guard even though Fury couldn’t explain why without being overheard.

Due to how focused he was on internal matters and how chaotic the rest of the world was after what happened in NYC, it took a little while for what happened in L.A. to filter through to Fury. In fairness, all over the world there were people hysterically saying they saw aliens outside their homes. That didn’t stop Fury from cursing himself when the Council sent him the report directly. He knew he had missed something and his instincts reminded him that L.A. was where Agent Espinoza used to call home.

The report also included a “request” from S.H.I.E.L.D. Council that Fury lead the Avengers personally to L.A. based on the premise that Fury was the only one that could control them. It contained phrases like “show of unity” and “acting in good faith.” Fury did not want to leave the base, but his hands were tied. He had to pick his battles and decide how defiant he could be without letting his unknown enemies know he was on to them.

The Avengers and Fury were in a conference room looking at an amateur video clip someone took from the balcony of a building looking over the ocean. It showed a beam of light rising from the water and what looked like an enormous hand behind it before a shockwave shattered the windows around the cameraman and the video went black.

“What the hell was that?” exclaimed Tony still aching terribly from his fall from the portal.

Thor looked at a still of the hand on a tablet but shook his head.

“What I’ve ever heard of in all the realms is that large,” he stated ominously.

“We are going to L.A. to find out, and we may need a Hulk if something like that is walking around,” stated Fury. He considered Espinoza and decided to gamble on Team Coulson.
It would look suspicious if Fury left any of the high powered Avengers here with Loki safely locked up and another portal possibly opened. He looked around the table considering.

“Barton, you stay here,” snapped Fury, “The rest of us will take the most flight ready crafts and head out.”

Protests resounded around the table, but Fury knew it would just look like he was being paranoid about Barton to anyone watching. As Coulson said, Coulson trusted Romanov and since Romanov trusted Espinoza and Barton, Fury would trust Espinoza and Barton.

They were half-way there when Fury severely regretted that decision.

***

The Avengers and Fury listened in horror as a call of distress went up from the base they left not even an hour ago. All the alerts on the base went red. There were hostiles attacking.

“Explosion from out-building five!”

“I see three hostiles approaching from the east, wait, no where did they go? Ahhh-”

“They’ve entered the building. Bullets have no effect; I repeat bullets have no effect.”

“They have the prisoner!”

Then nothing. Fury weighed his options. He, Stark and Thor were on one vessel and Romanov, Captain America and the Hulk were on the other. He had to make a call.

“Alright, we’re heading back. Romanov, you keep going, find out what happened in L.A.,” ordered Fury.

The two ships sped away in opposite directions. Stark and Thor left the aircraft. They could both get to the base faster on their own.

Fury kept hailing the base over the radio, until, to his shock the red alert dropped to orange on its own.

“Are you seeing this Stark?” Fury asked over the headset.

 Yep,” replied Tony, “We’ll have to assume some sort of mind control is involved.”

“Or sabotage,” Fury snarled. Tony’s mind whirled at the implication and he took off faster, leaving Thor behind.

Surprisingly, a voice called out over the radio.

“Hello? I mean, I hear you, base reporting in,” someone unknown to Fury said.

“Well report then! Why did the alert drop to orange?” Fury yelled.

“The, ah, hostiles have stopped attacking and we were ordered to stand down,” the agent said sheepishly.

“Who gave that order?” Fury asked. He could feel his instincts screaming at him, this was the thing he was missing.
“Umm, Agent Espinoza?” answered the agent sounding unsure.

“What!” Fury yelled into the earpiece.

All Fury could hear was a squeak at the other end and a muffled, “Fury is on the line.”

“Director Fury, this is Agent Espinoza, the hostiles have agreed to bring Loki back to a cell,” reported Espinoza into the radio.

“And why?” Director Fury asked voice filled with ice, “Would they do that?”

“Because I, um, asked them too,” Espinoza stated, pausing for a long time before continuing, “I know them,” another pause but shorter than the last, “I worked with them when I was a cop in L.A.,” he admitted.

“Oh, are there a lot of bullet proof people being hired by the LAPD nowadays?” Fury asked sarcastically.

“I don’t know, it seems like I can’t even spit these days without hitting one,” Dan said back nastily before adding a belated, “sir.”


“Ahhhh, that’s probably something I should report to you in person,” Dan added self-consciously.

“Sir, you need to get back here, I have new infor-” he started before shouting, “Mazikeen, I can See you, put down the knife” and the radio went dead.
Phil Coulson was 95% sure the wound he had received from Loki’s scepter had been fatal. Phil was a practical man, in his line of work the best he could hope for was a good death.

Which is why he was confused about how he could even be thinking about death, being dead and all. In fact he could feel his heart still beating as he slowly became aware of his surroundings. Part of him admitted that the screams were a bit alarming and the air felt very hot on his skin.

Phil’s eyes snapped open. He found himself standing on a hard surface surrounded by pandemonium. An untold amount of people were on all sides of him; screaming, crying and most importantly trying to run away from the creatures chasing them with weapons.

The creatures were hideous. Some had fangs, some had ten eyes, some had no eyes, some were clothed and had human features and others had forms that had never existed on Earth. The ones with wings were swooping down on the mass of people jabbing at them with spears. They were all screeching at the humans.

But when Phil looked down and touched his chest, there was no blood or wound, his suit was pressed and looked exactly like it had before Loki escaped.

Phil was known for being calm and this was no time to ruin his reputation, even if he had this sinking feeling he knew exactly where he was. Steeling his nerves, Coulson took the time to really observe his surroundings.

He was standing on a grey stone-like material, ash floated in the air and was already settling on Coulson’s white shirt, it looked like he was on an impossibly huge plain filled with humans, and in one direction, it stretched as far as Coulson could see before fading into a hazy smog.

However, on second glance, he realized it wasn’t a just plain but a plateau. Behind him, the land appeared to drop off an edge where a wall of the creatures stood between the humans and empty air. Some of them were facing outwards weapons raised, while others faced inwards swinging at any human who got too close.

Interestingly, the creatures weren’t actually hurting anyone. They swung their weapons a hair’s-breadth away from the running humans, but never connected to flesh. In fact you were more in danger from being trampled by the panicking crowd, Coulson quickly realized as he was jostled around.

A humanoid bird-like creature with wings and a large beak landed directly in front of Coulson, gesturing with his spear and screeching directly into Coulson’s face.

Coulson rocked back on his heels, but otherwise didn’t move. He thought he heard something he recognized. No, it couldn’t be-

“I’m sorry, but my Mandarin is a bit rusty, could you repeat that?” Coulson asked politely.

The creature stopped talking and cocked his head to one side before responding in perfect English, “You don’t speak Mandarin?”

“I’m afraid not,” said Coulson.

Now the creature was looking around at all the running humans, before asking, sounding confused,
“Aren’t 1 and 5 of you Chinese?”

“On a global view, yes, I believe that’s right,” replied Coulson.

“And you don’t all speak Mandarin?” clarified the beaked creature.

Coulson just shook his head.

The creature snarled showing a full row of teeth in his beak. “You humans are so stupid,” it growled before leaping into the air and flying away towards a whole group of winged spear-wielding monsters.

Coulson watched as the beaked creature spoke to the others. Despite the difference of forms, some having faces and some not, Coulson saw them all turn to look at the humans in disgust before flying in opposite directions to other groups of creatures.

Now when they screeched, every once in a while, Coulson would catch what they were saying as they cycled through different languages.

They were all repeating the same thing, “Line up! Form a line! Line up now!” and so on.

After a while terror can be exhausting. None of the humans were getting hurt and there was nowhere to go that wasn’t the same as where they just were. There was nothing else to do besides listen to the creatures and lines started spontaneously forming everywhere before converging.

Seemingly having learned something, the creatures would stop and actually listen to what language the most upset humans were crying and praying in before yelling at them.

Coulson slowly walked closer and closer to the edge of the plateau. Several of the creatures were distracted, arguing which of them had the right number of fingers or talons to properly sign to a human that was deaf. Phil took his chance and peered over the edge.

He was very high up, the land dropped straight down and there were no hand holds on the smooth cliff-side, however, Coulson wasn’t sure he would have made the attempt even if it was possible.

Below, he could hear humans screaming in pain. There appeared to be a field of flayed flesh and a river of blood. In the far distance there were doors and cages that were eerily quiet.

The ground at the edge wasn’t stable, and crumbled under Coulson before he could even think. His hands reached out and grabbed air, he was going down, only to be stopped by a scaly claw that grabbed his arm.

He turned to see what could only be described as an alligator with boils.

“Thank you,” Coulson said as the beast pulled him back to safety.

The creature looked at him oddly.

“You need to join the line,” it huffed at Coulson.

“May I ask why?” inquired Phil.

It blinked at Coulson, before smiling, showing rotting black teeth, “To be sorted,” the creature looked over the edge and back at Coulson still smiling, “you’ll find out whether you belong down there soon enough.”
At that, Coulson joined a line and started moving forward. It ran next to other lines until one-by-one they each turned back on themselves and somehow formed one long line. The wide flat ground he had been on turned into a twisting labyrinth of pathways, and Coulson couldn’t remember when that had happened.

Sometimes Coulson found himself squeezing through a narrow crevice with the walls towering overhead. Other times, the walls were only waist high like corrals for animals and he could see all the other people also in line, as they all went back and forth and around and up and down. He couldn’t remember how long he had been here. Sometimes it felt like five minutes and other times it felt like years.

The creatures were always around, whether flying overhead or leaping above them from wall to wall. In his mind, Coulson started to hesitatingly call them demons.

It was when the walls were low that he heard his name, “Coulson!”

Turning, Agent Coulson saw that Agent Jasper Sitwell was directly parallel to him but several lines over. Agent Sitwell, after looking around, started to scramble over the walls, pushing people out the way to get to Phil.

“Coulson, where are we? What are those things?” he gasped out catching his breath.

Coulson looked at him shrewdly, “What is the last thing you remember before being here?”

Sitwell looked vaguely nauseous thinking about it, “The Helicarrier was under attack, I think, I think I ducked under the wrong console, there was an explosion, if I had only moved right rather than left… Coulson, are we dead?”

Before Coulson could answer, one of the smaller creatures flew over before balancing on the wall. If they had been standing on the same level, she would have only come up to Coulson’s knees, her eyes were large on her bulbous head and, for lack of other defining features, Coulson called her a she because she had on a dress. She also had a very small but wickedly sharp looking spear she stuck in Sitwell’s face.

“No jumping the line,” she squeaked out, “stay in line or I’ll stick ya.”

“Get away, monster,” Sitwell said alarmed, swatting at her, and nearly knocking her off the wall.

She growled and stabbed him in his palm with her spear. Sitwell howled and jumped back closing his hand into a fist and clutching it to his chest, there were several drops of blood dripping down.

“Spera, no!” a stocky short gargoyle type creature with an underbite flew down, “you can’t hurt them yet.”

“Humph, please,” Spera said sticking her face up, “I’m calling this one, Gaudium, he’s got that look.”

Gaudium stuck his face as close as possible to a shaking Sitwell.

“You can’t know that by looking at them,” said Gaudium still studying Sitwell.

“Can too!” countered Spera.

Before the argument could devolve further, Phil cleared his throat, and asked the question that had been bother him since he got here, “So sorry to bother you, but is this Hell?”
They both looked at Coulson like he was a pet that did an interesting trick.

“Sort of,” said Spera at the same time Gaudium said, “No, I mean yes. You’re in Hell, but you really aren’t getting the Hell experience yet.”

“We call this place Limbo,” Spera piped up.

“How long do we stay in limbo?” inquired Coulson testing the waters to see how much he could get away with asking.

Spera and Gaudium both looked at each other before shrugging.

“We’re not really sure,” Spera said, “There has never been this many of you here before and you humans have never stayed this long, ever. They had to call in extra guards and everything.”

“This isn’t normal?” asked Coulson (as if anything here could be normal here).

“Of course not! Most of the time the good humans go straight to heaven and the damned ones go to hell. It’s only when you humans disrupt things that cause everyone to come here, duh,” Gaudium replied snidely, pulling what looked like a cigar out from somewhere.

The line was still moving, Sitwell stayed silent in the background trying not to call attention to himself.

“Lord Lucifer built this place for you to be sorted so the good ones can wait until the Angels come pick them up,” explained Spera.

“Lord Lucifer?” asked Coulson, “As in the devil?”

“Ah, yea,” Spera said looking at him in disbelief, “You’re not that bright are you?”

Coulson raised one eyebrow at that, but it appeared they were finally getting to the front of the line. He could see a crowd of the demons around a stone table. It looked like all they had to do was pick up a feather? However, before Coulson could see more, everything came to a halt.

At the front of the line, there was a woman holding a baby with half a dozen demons around her. They were peering at the bundle in her arms in confusion.

“Is it a tumor?” one asked.

“No, I think it’s just a deformed one,” said another.

“Oh, Lucifer,” Spera said under her breath before flying over to the group. “It’s a baby! It’s their offspring,” she said shouting.

All the demons recoiled from the bundle.

“It’s hideous,” a rather gooey demon said while spittle bubbles blew out from several orifices.

Spera was taking control, moving the women toward the table that had the feather.

“We don’t get those down here,” explained Gaudium in a gravelly voice to Coulson, “And the guards don’t know anything about humans, they usually just stay in the outer reaches of hell.”

The mother picked up the feather and Spera gestured she should give it to the baby. The baby immediately grabbed a hold of it waving it around before throwing it in the air causing all the
demons to jump back. The demons scrambled around avoiding the path of the floating feather before it came to a rest in a crevice. They all looked at it in horror.

“That’s Michael’s feather, he gave it to Lord Lucifer when he needed a way to know which humans needed protecting and which ones belonged to us,” said Gaudium. Coulson noted that he seemed to have no problem sharing information with him.

Spera pointed at an extremely long and narrow demon, “You’re the ugliest. You pick it up.”

The demon bent back his stick like arm pointing it at his own chest mouthing, me? The other demons around him were backing up. Sighing, the demon reached his hand into the tight crevice and quickly pulled up the feather, rushing it over to the table, saying “ouch, ouch, ouch, ouch.”

“They’re dumb as anything,” stated Gaudium, “but lucky for you they’re here or you would have all been snatched up by now.”

Spera who had made her way back to them, nodded fervently, “Yes, we are all Lucifer loyalists. There are a lot of demons out there that don’t agree with what we’re doing here.”

Before Coulson could question them more, it was his turn. He walked up to the stone table and could feel all the demons looking at him in anticipation. He curled his fingers around a feather, it didn’t feel like anything unusual, and picked it up.

The demons around him looked disappointed, they shouted at him, “Put it down! Keep moving.”

Coulson strolled towards an opening in front of him slowly, half turning and watching Sitwell.

Agent Sitwell hesitated for a long time. The demons getting impatient crowded him forward and finally gave him a shove. Stumbling, Agent Sitwell got to the table, and stared at the feather for a moment before swiping his hand down to try to snatch it up. But when he tried to lift it, it didn’t move.

A cackling howl started to rise up from demons around him.

“Wait! No!” Sitwell exclaimed in panic before a winged demon with hawk like talons swooped down, piercing his shoulders and flying away with him. Sitwell’s screams could be heard for a long time.

Coulson was only prevented from rushing forward by Gaudium’s clawed hand on his chest. He was surprising strong for his size as he flew, pushing Coulson backwards through the opening. They were back where he had started on the open ground, or were they on the other side? Coulson couldn’t tell.

“Nothing you can do, nothing you can do,” Gaudium repeated, “He was damned before he got here.”

“Damned!” exclaimed Coulson, “He didn’t do anything! He was S.H.I.E.L.D.,” Gaudium only looked at Coulson in confusion.

Coulson was trying to figure out how he could chase after him, but Gaudium’s solid hand didn’t let up.

“I called it,” cried Spera running up, “We should have bet on it!” she said sounding upset and ecstatic all at once.
“How did you know?” asked Gaudium still looking at Coulson worriedly.

“How?” she huffed out, “I was a part of that expansion of one of the lower circles were they stick ones like him. It’s one of the fastest growing sections in Hell; those HYDRA people.”

Coulson startled so hard at that he actually shook Gaudium off of him, “What?!”

Gaudium looked at Spera, “Sister, this human said the other one was something called S.H.I.E.L.D.”


“First, I thought the humans were actually stupid enough to brand their skin twice. Then I met this ‘social media specialist’ who had just finished gluing together a broken glass statue over by the bone fields,” Spera started chatty away, “She told me all about the internet, and twitter, and how rebranding was when you change your name and convinced all the humans you are something else.”

Spera smiled at Coulson, proud she had remembered all these human facts. Coulson was stunned.

“Hang-on,” Gaudium yelled in bewilderment, “she finished gluing the statue back together?”

“Well, yea,” started Spera, “but then I broke it again and told her to start over.”

Both Gaudium and Spear cackled in glee over that. Coulson couldn’t keep an appalled expression off of his face.

“Don’t be like that human,” Gaudium said, laughter sliding off of his face, “she is being punished for something she did.”

“Ya, she’s a baddy,” said Spera, “she did these “smear campaigns” and ruined a lot of people’s lives. There were three suicides that only happened because of her.”

“I see, I’m sorry, the news about Sitwell and HYDRA comes as a shock,” Coulson said working at keeping his voice level, “is there a way to reach Earth? There are people that need to know this information.”

Now they both looked at him with pity.

“Buddy, you’re dead, you’re done, just be grateful you get to go to the Silver City,” said Gaudium, crushing his cigar into his hand before eating it.

“It’s not so bad up there you know,” said Spera patting Coulson’s hand.

Coulson looked at her small grey hand. “You’ve been to Heaven?” he inquired.

“Of course! Me and my idiot brother here are fallen cherubs,” She exclaimed, “Lucifer was so different than all the rest. He was so dreamy and interesting,” she said while twirling around causing Gaudium to snort in disgust.

Sticking her tongue out at her brother she continued, “We followed Lucifer until he was cast out and we were banished to Hell with him. A bunch of us in the lower order did, we were tired of the way things were. Always the same. God,” she spat, “with all his favorite angels.”

Gaudium grunted in agreement, “Heaven. Boring place.”
“Regardless, I’m sorry that happened to you. That must have been hard losing your home,” Coulson said kindly.

Gaudium peered at Coulson before snorting, “You are really something, human. Hell’s not too bad. It’s not better, but it’s different.”

“Phil,” Coulson said, “call me Phil. But I have to know, is there any exception? Perhaps, if I could plead my case directly to Lord Lucifer?”

“You can’t,” said Gaudium. Phil attempted to protest, before Gaudium held up a hand, “I mean you literally can’t. He’s not here. He left hell.”

“Ya, why do you think we have all the guards?” said Spera, “No way the big man would allow so much unrest if he was here.”

“Where did he go? Is he coming back?” asked Coulson desperate for a way out.

“Earth and not a chance,” Gaudium said at the same time Spera replied, “Of course he is!”

The siblings looked at each other annoyed.

“He’s coming back!” shouted Spera.

“Why in all of Hell would he come back? No one would stay in Hell if they didn’t have to,” stated Gaudium rolling his eyes.

“Then why are you here if you don’t think he’s coming back?” Spera asked shrilly, “All the demons are only here because they’re afraid of what Lucifer will do to them if they go against him.”

Sputtering, Gaudium looked at Coulson once before back to Spera, “I’m, I’m a fallen cherub. Not a monster. We are only supposed to torture the evil humans. Besides, why are you here then?”

If Spera was capable of blushing, Coulson was pretty sure she would be.

“Excuse me,” Coulson interrupted attempting to crush down the apprehension inside of him, “but how long has Lucifer been on Earth?”

“Ages,” replied Gaudium in grunt. Spera looked more thoughtful when she said, “It’s hard to tell sometimes since the time in Hell is so different than Earth. A couple years less than a decade, I’d say.”

A horn rose over the flat ground, causing Spera and Gaudium to spin around. The edge had even more demons around it, except now they were several bodies thick and they were all looking outward. When Coulson looked up the sky was filled with winged creatures flying back in forth.

“Duty calls,” Spera said before flying away.

Gaudium started after her before turning and shouting to Coulson, “I hope the angels get here soon, for your sake,” before darting away.

After they left, it was hard to keep track of time. Coulson felt neither hungry nor tired. He wandered aimlessly around the field that kept filling up with more and more people. All the other humans seemed more shell-shocked than Coulson and stared at him blankly when he tried to communicate with them. If this wasn’t even the true experience of hell, he shuddered to think of
the horrible things that go on below them.

“Coulson!” cried out over the crowd like dawn breaking. He snapped himself out of the slump and saw an Agent he recognized from sight waving at him before running towards him. She had had brunette hair and a crooked smile.

“We’ve been looking for you,” she said, her crooked grin showing crooked teeth. Coulson looked around and saw there were other Agents gathering around all smiling at him.

As glad as he was to talk to anyone, Coulson’s heart sank at the number of S.H.I.E.L.D people.

“How did you all-” Coulson asked gesturing around them.

“Die?” the agent asked, “NYC mostly, the aliens opened a portal and a whole army came out. We think we won though. We haven’t seen any new S.H.I.E.L.D agents in a while and the civilian population arriving appears to have leveled out.”

“The number of people arriving was insane for a bit,” another agent mentioned, “the demons looked like they were going to start throwing us over the edge.”

“Have you seen anyone else?” the first agent asked as she looked around Coulson.

“Yes, Agent Sitwell,” Coulson said coldly, “but he didn’t make it by the test.” The Agents around Coulson appeared shocked.

“Has anyone seen anything that could lead us out of here?” asked Coulson.

“No, nothing,” the brunette was no longer smiling, “why didn’t Sitwell make it? He was a tool yes, but he was one of u-”

“He wasn’t one of us, he was HYDRA,” said Coulson, “and where there’s one-”

“There’s always more,” the brunette finished wide-eyed before looking around, “we could rush some of the demons when their backs are turned, grab their weapons.”

Coulson shook his head, “That’s not going to work. Apparently, they are the only thing standing between us and a hoard of less friendly demons.”

“Well, fuck,” she said, “how are we going to get out of this one Coulson.

Coulson didn’t know but knew he needed too. Fury and Hill and the Avengers were up there potentially surrounded by enemies.
The building Amenadiel crashed into while carrying Mazikeen and Lucifer must have contained incendiary devices because it quickly became engulfed in flames, before exploding.

The devil, the fallen angel, and the demon were mostly unscathed standing outside of it watching the flames. Their clothes were a little singed and they were covered in soot which went with the dust, mud, twigs and sand from earlier.

“Well there goes the element of surprise,” Mazikeen said in disgust, glaring at Amenadiel who looked both appalled and ashamed as the building disintegrated into ash.

“Oh, come on Maze,” said Lucifer while looking down at his shoulder frowning and futilely brushing the soot off of his suit jacket. “Doesn’t it remind you of Hell? And besides it will be twice as fun now that they are expecting us,” he said looking up at Maze with a knowing smirk.

Mazikeen looked at Lucifer sharply before gazing off into the distance, eyes glazing over. She got a soft smile on her face that would have looked lovely if she really had been human and thinking of human things, but she wasn’t human, and the picturesque vision was ruined by the fact her fingers were slowly stroking her demon blade she had moved to her hip.

Noticing that Mazikeen’s thoughts had taken a rather darker turn than Lucifer intended, he clarified, “Remember, I gave my word. We aren’t killing any of the S.H.I.E.L.D Agents so there is no need for that.”

Agent Dartmore had to be coaxed into divulging the base location. But with Lucifer being Lucifer, it had taken less than three minutes. Even over the phone Lucifer could be… persuasive.

Eventually, Dartmore had explained in a high pitched placating voice that he of course wanted to help Lucifer, but he couldn’t in good conscious tell him anything unless Lucifer promised not to kill any of his coworkers, and yes, he was still seeing the red-headed librarian, thank you for asking.

Still facing the burning building, Mazikeen only rolled her eyes before pulling her hand away from the knife, muttering about how Lucifer wouldn’t let her bring any of her toys and now she couldn’t even kill anyone.

“There are humans with weapons approaching.” Amenadiel interjected. Both Maze and Lucifer turned to look, before glancing at each other with glee, prior annoyances instantly forgotten.

The three walked through the bullets like they were rain. The holes in their clothes were the only evidence of the human’s attack. They easily bypassed the S.H.I.E.L.D agents, incapacitating any who got too close, and slipped inside where Lucifer cornered one of the humans.

Lucifer had the Agent pressed up against the wall. He had knocked the gun away from him before holding the agent in place with one hand on his chest. Lucifer crowded into his space, staring intently.

“Tell me, what do you desire?” asked Lucifer with a Cheshire grin.

“I, I,” the dazed human stuttered hypnotized by Lucifer, “I really want to sleep for a week.”

“And the easiest way to get that is to tell us where the Asgardian prisoner is, and then we’ll be on
our way,” Lucifer replied reasonably. The human told him.

They quickly found the prisoner, still gagged and restrained by the cuffs on his wrists, looking bored with the proceedings. Only his eyes betrayed his unease once he realized how easily they man-handled him out of the cell.

Loki gave an experimental tug on Amenadiel’s grip on his arm and nothing happened. Despite all of his godly strength, he couldn’t move his kidnapper.

“Should we fly out?” Amenadiel asked.

“I don’t know,” Mazikeen said considering their prisoner, “this Asgardian looks like he was hit by a truck and run over. If you crash somewhere worse than the previous times, I’m not sure he could survive it.”

Loki’s eyes widened in alarm, all pretense gone, and he attempted to wrench his arm away again to no avail.

“Well this should be interesting,” drawled Lucifer, “shall we walk out?”

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Dan was struggling. After the portal finally closed in NYC, and he actually had a moment in between pulling civilians out of destroyed buildings, he wondered if he could have done something differently.

Despite everything, Dan always tried to do the right thing. He started to suspect that there was some sort of flaw inside of himself because things always went so wrong. And worse, he never seemed to pay for his failures but everyone around him did.

Fury had ordered all the S.H.I.E.L.D. agents back to base and he wanted them there yesterday. Dan and the other agents managed to scrounge up enough helicopters to take them the short flight from the heart of NYC to the S.H.I.E.L.D base outside of it. They didn’t need as many aircrafts to leave as they did to arrive.

Dan spent the trip counting and recounting their number, hoping he was off but knowing he wasn’t. Did he lead all the missing agents to their deaths? And worse upon worse, all the living agents were tiredly smiling at Dan and looked to him for direction.

Dan was prepared to take full responsibility for leaving the Helicarrier without orders. He was going to make sure no one else suffered for his crimes.

Except the axe never fell, Dan was simply given new orders. They all were. Dan wondered if this was his punishment. No rest for the wicked.

Although the other agents who came back from NYC were also tired, Dan had it a little worse than everyone else. He had gone from Selvig’s lab, to being a lab-rat for S.H.I.E.L.D, to wandering lost on the Helicarrier, before leading the charge to NYC with barely a moment of sleep in between.

Therefore when the red alert occurred and he could hear gunfire throughout the base and cries for help over the radio, Dan had pretty much had it.

Dan rounded the corner through a doorway to a large warehouse where S.H.I.E.L.D. vehicles could bring in supplies. The Agents had formed a blockade between the hostiles and the doors that led outside.
They had brought out the heavy artillery and the multitude of agents had their weapons raised as they prepared to shoot at the three intruders and the prisoner who were either steadily walking or being dragged towards the exit.

Loki was desperately trying to escape his captors and the line of fire; even gods could be hurt by missile launchers. The other three appeared to barely notice the line of agents in front of them. One poor soul was stuck in the middle of the kill zone, but as soon as he came in arms reach of the intruders he was thrown 20 feet across the room.

It took Dan half a second to process what or rather who he was seeing. He first thought he was delirious. However, facts and past events started to click into place and part of him was coming to a realization he wasn’t ready for. So his brain simply shut down that part of his mind and Agent—formerly known as –Detective Espinoza reacted on gut instinct.

And Dan’s gut told him that he was royally pissed off.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” Dan yelled charging between the S.H.I.E.L.D. agents and the intruders. He was done with this shit.

His fellow agents tried to grab Dan and stop him from walking in the path of all the guns, but he easily side-stepped them waving them off.

He half turned almost exposing his back to the intruders, “Stand down. If anyone is shooting them it’s me,” Dan ordered to the confusion of all of the agents.

They didn’t stand down, not until they noticed that the three hostiles and the prisoner had actually stopped their onslaught, the four looked almost as perplexed as the S.H.I.E.L.D. agents.

After a beat when no one moved, the agents reluctantly lowered their weapons. Dan’s rifle hung loosely in his hand; he had never even raised it.

After his initial reaction, Dan was floored. He hadn’t really thought this through.

Mazikeen looked like she wanted to kill someone, Loki looked at Dan suspiciously through his gag, Amenadiel seemed like he was annoyed at the interruption but it came off as constipated, and Lucifer was practically vibrating with excitement.

“Detective Douchebag!?” exclaimed Lucifer one part delight, one part appalled. “Or is it Agent Douchebag now? Is this where you’ve been? Switched out one corrupt organization for another, I see.”

Sputtering, Dan could feel his hold on the situation slipping as he tried to think without actually thinking about a certain word spelled d. e. v. i. l.

“This is a secure S.H.I.-” started Dan, “How did you even-” he couldn’t string a full sentence together. Lucifer continued talking, completely oblivious to Dan’s mental breakdown.

“You missed a birthday,” Lucifer said eyes narrowed, “real father-of-the-year material right there, and I should know.”

Dan twitched, hand tightening on his weapon.

“I went of course,” Lucifer, still oblivious, kept talking although now he was giving Dan a shit-eating grin.
“I was forbidden from buying a present,” Lucifer said momentarily looking insulted at the thought. “But I was allowed to bring the cake, so I got the best four foot tall chocolate tiered cake in all of L.A. Chloe was still annoyed, and she really didn’t like when I had one of the girls from the club jump out of it. Some people just don’t know how to enjoy life, am I right?”

Lucifer stared expectantly at Dan, clearly thinking he would agree. The rifle in Dan’s hand seemed to leap up a foot higher on its own and almost swerved to point at Lucifer.

Lucifer only grinned more after finally noticing Dan was experiencing some sort of unknowable human emotion and might be easily incited to violence.

“You did not bring a stripper to a little girl’s birthday party,” said Dan horrified, latching onto the only thing he could make sense of in this whole situation.

Rolling his eyes, Lucifer whined, “She was dressed as Elsa. It was tasteful! The kids loved it.”

Dan was fully prepared to charge at Lucifer, never mind that voice in his head reminding him of the agent he just saw fly across the room. He stopped when a rope appeared next to him.

Barton, holding his bow in one hand and had a rope wrapped around one leg and his other arm, slid down from the rafters to land next to Dan.

“Do you know what you’re doing, Agent Espinoza?” he said quietly in a fierce whisper to Dan.

Dan paused, took a deep breath, and tried to think of calm thoughts.

Mazikeen looked positively jealous. “HE can have a bow and arrows, but I can’t bring my crossbow?” she asked, turning to Lucifer looking betrayed.

“Maybe next time, Maze,” Lucifer replied absently.

“Alright, you idiots are under arrest. You can’t just break into a S.H.I.E.L.D facility!” Dan said in his best cop voice. The intruders all started talking at once.

“What do you mean we can’t break in? We just did,” snorted Mazikeen.


“Humph,” grunted Loki behind his gag.

“And how exactly do you intend to stop us?” Amenadiel said disdainfully, nose stuck high in the air.

Dan’s hand gripped his rifle hard, a raging headache formed behind his forehead, and the whole world tinted red.

“You do not want to fucking mess with me right now, Amenadiel,” Dan snarled, all calm thoughts disappearing. “I have video of you at a certain sex club. Do you want to find out what I can do with that?”

“What?!” Amenadiel said shocked nearly letting go of his grip on Loki as he stepped towards Dan threateningly, “How did you get that?”

“HE sent it to me,” roared Dan, nodding at Lucifer, “at 4am and then sent the poop emoji on the hour for the next 16 hours in a row!”
Lucifer snorted and continued to giggle behind Amenadiel.

“Oh!” Mazikeen said, mouth forming a perfect circle, pulling out her phone, “I have the best picture of Amenadiel to show you. What is your new number? You’ll love it, you were there.”

Amenadiel rounded on Mazikeen, Loki being unwittingly hauled around with him, “You said you deleted that! That’s my mother-”

“Alright!” Lucifer interrupted, “no need to go into Daniel’s sex life again,” looking sick to his stomach as he said so.

“What?” hissed out Dan, unintentionally echoing Amenadiel, before shaking himself and tried to remember his training. “Enough! You are being detained,” he said with a glare at Lucifer, “for attempting to free the prisoner Loki. I didn’t think you would stoop that low,” Dan said shaking his head.

The three looked at Dan like he was speaking gibberish.

Amenadiel was the first to react.

“Free him? We are not trying to free him. He is a heathen that goes around calling himself a god,” said Amenadiel revolted at the thought.

Dan exasperated, looked around the room for assistance, only to see the Agents behind the blockade all wide-eyed looking back and forth between Dan and the intruders like it was a tennis match. Barton was harder to read, he was coolly assessing everything.

Dan hummed in annoyance, he pointed at the left half of the Agents, “you lot. Go make sure the base is secure.” They were frozen in place for a moment before looking at each other and scrambling away.

Three long breaths later, Dan turned back to Lucifer, Amenadiel and Mazikeen, before slowly asking, “What are you doing here with him then?”

“We need answers,” Amenadiel stated unhelpfully.

“Pick up a newspaper then!” Dan snapped, before closing his eyes for a moment and taking another deep breath, “S.H.I.E.L.D. has handled the situation, the portal is closed, Loki has been stopped, it’s over,” he recited.

“One portal,” Mazikeen mocked.

This time Dan’s fury was like ice, “yea, one portal that caused a lot of good people to die. I was there, you-”

“You fought the Chitauri?” Mazikeen interrupted, looking impressed before continuing, “Nothing’s over. You humans and Asgardians have really screwed up this time. All your dead are probably still sitting in hell.”

“Yes, you are messing with things you cannot possibly comprehend. Heaven might be permanently out of reach,” said Amenadiel pretentiously.

“Agent Espinoza, what are they talking about?” asked Barton looking extremely concerned. “Who or what are these people?”
Dan’s head shook back and forth, his face started to pale drastically. This was getting dangerously close to that thing he wasn’t supposed to think about. Could this be? Were they really…? He grasped for another topic of conversation.

“and you thought you would help by attacking S.H.I.E.L.D., the people actually trying to fix the problem? How did you even find this base?” Dan asked desperately.

“Someone owed me a favor,” said Lucifer cutting in, “and it’s not like we killed anyone, part of the deal actually. Besides you should be thanking us. If we didn’t temporarily open a gateway to hell and relieve the pressure, we’d all be neck high in monsters and the damned. You know how that is, right Dan? Remember Malcolm? If that nuke had actually hit New York…”

“It was you in L.A! The portal with the huge monster,” exclaimed Barton.

Espinoza needed to take this one step at a time before things spiraled more out of control. That part inside of him that usually spent moments like this silently screaming, quietly pointed out that clearly S.H.I.E.L.D. knew about something terrible that happened close to his home and didn’t tell him. Dan pushed that thought away, he couldn’t lose faith in S.H.I.E.L.D now, or he would have nothing.

“You!” Dan pointed at an agent nearby that just happened to be the one Lucifer had cornered in the hallway, “get on the radio. Find out if there were any casualties from the intruders.”

“Lucif-” Dan couldn’t bring himself to finish the name, and jabbed his finger in his direction, “you! What would have happened if the nuke hit NY? What does Malcolm have to do with anything?”

Lucifer just sighed, and began to speak to Dan like he was a child, “Nuclear weapons, the Tesseract, and Dark Energy are all things that disrupt the natural order of things. Heaven gets pushed away, Hell gets closer. Hell was so close this time it nearly broke through. Malcolm was one of the damned. He spent less than 30 seconds in hell and killed all those people because of it. Now, imagine all the damned escaping never mind the demons and monsters. You’re welcome.” Lucifer finished with a little bow.

Dan’s mind was short circuiting. Humans are, by nature, selfish creatures. The Heaven and Hell talk didn’t really penetrate Dan’s skull, but when Lucifer started to talk about Dan’s mistake that nearly cost him everything. His sin. He couldn’t shut it out; it was shattering all of his beliefs about himself and his crimes.

“Malcolm was in hell and then he got out?” Dan repeated dumbly.

“Yes, yes,” said Lucifer shaking his head in fond amusement of ridiculous humans, “you actually murdered him when you shot him. If Amenadiel hadn’t come along and released him, none of those people would’ve died. It was all his fault, well, besides all the parts that were your fault.”

“whh-at?” Dan asked befuddled before Barton asked, “how long have all the dead been going to hell?”

“Since someone opened the first portal with the Tesseract. The good souls have to wait until the angels come fetch them from heaven. Of course that was all ruined when Odin used all that dark energy to get that other Asgardian here,” answered Lucifer.

Dan had seen large balls of light turn into doorways that let in killers that looked like they belonged in a renaissance fair, portals with aliens coming out, a mild-manner scientist who was
secretly a giant green rage monster, and now the actual Devil, the person dating his ex-wife, was telling him that Hell and Heaven were involved. Either Dan had gone insane or the world was crazier than he thought. He needed to gain control again.

“Lucifer,” Dan said, Barton startled violently at the name, “If nuclear weapons and the Tesseract can cause Hell to open and release monsters, then we need to know that.”

“Humans,” Amenadiel jeered, “Are not prepared for that kind of knowledge. You’d probably only bring about your end sooner.”

“Don’t give me that shit,” snapped Dan, “I have a god trying to conquer Earth with the Tesseract and enslaving people with his mind stone. We need to know what we are facing or the end is coming anyways!”

There was a pause, before Amenadiel looking shocked asked, “The mind stone is here?” before turning towards his brother and crying plaintively, “Lucifer?!”

“I heard him,” Lucifer replied for once looking serious, “this doesn’t bode well.”

Dan looked at them sideways, “It took over a bunch of our best people,” quickly looking at Barton before looking away. “It quickly faded on me but others had to cognitively re-calibrated.”

“You broke free on your own?” Amenadiel asked and looked at Dan like he was the strange one.

“Hmm… Dan has shown evidence of an unusual amount of free will in the past,” said Lucifer contemplatively, “He was able to overcome Azrael’s blade, perhaps that led to some sort of immunity.”

“What?” asked Dan, startled.

“Oh yes, you forgot didn’t you? Human minds are funny like that, unable to comprehend the divine,” Lucifer said thoughtfully, “full yoga massacre ring any bells?”

“That was you!” Dan yelled, his temporary control over himself fading into the distance.

Lucifer let out a sigh. “No, that was my other brother’s fault for bringing the blade to Earth, don’t worry I killed him. But then mother had to go tell some humans where I hid the blade and the metaphorical shit hit the fan. The blade compels humans to kill one another over the smallest of grievances and has the added benefit of ending even divine beings, including yours truly. It erases us from existence. Frankly, we’re lucky it wasn’t worse before I hid the blade again.”

Dan opened his mouth once, twice, three times and then he remembered everything.

“You ate my pudding!” Dan yelled.

Looking abashed Lucifer said, “Yes, well I told you I didn’t see your name on it and I was sorry. I thought we were over this?”

Dan’s mouth was still gaping like a fish when Amenadiel started talking.

“You were holding Azrael’s blade and managed not to kill Lucifer? I can barely stop myself from killing him on a good day,” Amenadiel was looking at Dan in a new light. Lucifer looked at Amenadiel annoyed.

“I’m very happy that Daniel didn’t smite me over a tub of sweetened goo, but the fact that he was
able to overcome an infinity stone as well is nothing short of extraordinary,” said Lucifer, “This changes things brother.”

“Umm, sir,” the agent that had been talking into the radio began as Amenadiel and Lucifer started to argue quietly amongst themselves, “I’ve heard from the rest of the base, some broken bones and a concussion or two but no deaths.”

“Good,” said Dan.

The agent was back on the radio seemingly giving someone a report when Amenadiel and Lucifer seemed to come to some sort of agreement.

“You are right,” Amenadiel said before looking pained at the admission, “This affects humans too. And if someone like Dan can overcome the mind stone then we should share knowledge.”

“Good,” Dan repeated trying not to be offended, “then what did you want with Loki?”

“Oh, it’s not Loki we really wanted,” Lucifer drawled, “He’s a pawn after all. We just needed to confirm his boss’s name. If it’s who we think it is,” he paused for a moment, “well, we could all be in trouble.”

Just as Dan thought things couldn’t get worse he realized that this already horrible situation could be a whole lot more complicated.

“Alright, fine, but Loki goes back to a cell,” said Dan holding up a hand to stave off any protest, “I’ll arrange to let you talk to him,” he said remembering all the times Lucifer inexplicitly got a criminal to talk.

“But everything you know, we need to know, got it?” Dan ordered and waited for Lucifer and Amenadiel to agree.

Lucifer nodded but Amenadiel still looked at Dan like he was an uppity insect. They started whispering back and forth amongst each other again saying things like: “our father,” “mother might put up a fuss,” and “He could bloody well do it Himself if He wanted.”

The agent talking into the radio let out a squeak before running to Dan, passing it to him, “Fury is on the line.”

Dan took a millisecond to gather his thoughts. There was no going back now, this was all actually happening.

“Director Fury, this is Agent Espinoza, the hostiles have agreed to bring Loki back to a cell,” reported Dan.

Despite sounding small and far away, Director Fury’s tone could peel skin, “And why? Would they do that?”

Dan was definitely fired he thought hysterically.

“Because I, um, asked them too,” Dan replied while Amenadiel and Lucifer’s argument got more heated. Dan gestured at them to stop it.

“Knock it off,” Dan hissed taking his hand off the button of the radio. He looked up to the heavens praying for guidance before realizing that someone might actually be listening.
Pressing the button again, Dan said, “I know them,” to Fury before taking his hand off again and telling Lucifer and Amenadiel, “I will shoot you if you don’t stop.”

“You’ve been thinking about shooting me since we met,” replied Lucifer, “You haven’t done it yet.”

Putting his hand back on the button of the radio, Dan admitted to Fury, “I worked with them when I was a cop in L.A.,” while wondering what the sentence was for not mentioning that you knew the devil to your boss who was the head of an intelligence agency.

“Oh, are there a lot of bullet proof people being hired by the LAPD nowadays?” Fury asked sarcastically.

“I don’t know, it seems like I can’t even spit these days without hitting one,” Dan said before he could stop himself, he really was going insane wasn’t he? He tacked on a “sir,” at the end wincing.

“Who. Are. They?” Fury asked, clearly having run out of patience with Dan. Even though Dan was slowly accepting the fact that Lucifer was actually L U C I F E R, he found it hard to admit out loud.

“Ahhhh, that’s probably something I should report to you in person, sir,” Dan said before once again trying to find a different topic to talk about, “you need to get back here, I have new infor-”

Mazikeen who had been standing there using a demon blade to pick underneath her fingernails while Amenadiel and Lucifer discussed tedious things like Heaven, Hell and Earth relations, decided she was bored. The prisoner was still being held in place by Amenadiel’s death grip and Mazikeen had nothing to do now that the humans had stopped firing at them.

She had come all this way and she wanted to fight someone. Demons don’t follow the same logic as humans. In her mind it made sense when she decided that Dan was an acceptable target since he had ignored her for the last five minutes.

Head down, blade by her side, she stalked towards him like he was prey.

Dan immediately saw her before shouting, “Mazikeen, I can See you, put down the knife,” and dropped the radio.

He attempted to back up, but she moved too quickly. She was on him with a cruel grin.

She swiped at him with the blade. Luckily, Dan’s detective and S.H.I.E.L.D. training helped him avoid being sliced in half by ducking to one side and jabbing out at Maze.

She grabbed his arm, did a complicated twist and Dan was suddenly on the ground looking up at the ceiling.

In panic, he kicked out his leg at Maze, surprising her. She fell to the floor next to him.

Mazikeen let out a growl, moved faster than Dan could see and was on top of him, blade at his throat.

“Back off,” said Barton with an arrow drawn back, pointed directly at her eye. She considered him thoughtfully, and was about to pounce.

“That’s enough Maze,” Lucifer called out, “We don’t want the other agents to accidentally shoot Daniel.”
Looking over, Dan saw that all the remaining agents in the room had their weapons drawn again and aimed at Maze.

Rolling her eyes again, she jumped up. “I never get to do anything fun,” she said while grabbing Dan by the jacket and yanking him up.

Dan may or may not have let out a high-pitched “epp!” when she did that.

“What the fuck was that?” snarled Barton.

“Don’t get your panties in a twist. I was just fooling around,” Maze said before playfully punching Dan in the stomach making him let out an “oof.”

“He doesn’t mind,” she continued. “We’re friends,” she said throwing her arm over his shoulder.

Dan gawked at her causing Maze to squeeze his shoulders harder than a human was capable of. “We’re friends, right?” she growled at him.

“Right,” Dan wheezed out. Maze let up the pressure and smiled at him.

Iron-man chose this moment to crash through one of the windows by the ceiling. He landed with all weapons and missiles drawn.
Tony Stark prided himself as being the smartest person in any room. In fact, until he met Bruce Banner on the Helicarrier, it had been ages since he talked to an actual person and not a machine (he had created very smart A.I.s) that could challenge him intellectually.

And since he had turned himself into a walking, talking, fighting superhero, there was really no situation where he couldn’t come up with a plan of action, even if that plan might be considered poorly thought out.

However, the scene at the S.H.I.E.L.D warehouse was really stretching his intellectual capacity.

Flying in, Tony had seen the burning building and the evidence of a one-sided firefight. Yet the S.H.I.E.L.D. agents weren’t on alert anymore as they brought their wounded in. Repairs on the damage were already underway. They all looked a little jumpy but otherwise fine and definitely not working as mind controlled slaves trying to take over the Earth.

J.A.R.V.I.S.’s radar system picked up on agents converging on a point with all their weapons raised. J.A.R.V.I.S. even tagged one of the people as Loki, yet he wasn’t the one the agents were pointing their weapons at.

Stark, never failing to make an entrance, crashed through the window, glass falling all around him before he hit the ground, one arm raised straight out with his missiles and repulsor beam ready to go off.

He was just not sure what he had crashed in on.

Everyone’s weapons were in their hands, even Barton’s bow was out, but they weren’t quite pointed at anyone. Loki was still restrained and held in place by a large man who was covered in soot and sand. There was another man in a torn up suit and a dirty white shirt with the best sex hair Tony had ever seen.

A very attractive woman holding a wicked looking knife was half embracing a S.H.I.E.L.D agent who looked like he had a few screws loose. Looking back, Tony noticed that the man with the sex hair had a grin that made Stark’s suit feel tight and uncomfortable.

“Sir, I sense that your heart-rate has increased and your skin has grown flushed. Are you alright?” asked J.A.R.V.I.S. in Tony’s headset.

Ignoring the A.I. Tony pointed his arm with the weapons at Loki, then switched it over to the woman with the knife, and then sort of hovered between them. Stark’s helmeted head swiveled from person to person. Everyone in the room had frozen and was staring dubiously at Stark. Everyone except sexy-hair-man, he was smiling, man that mouth, what Tony would do…

Dropping his arm completely, all missiles retracting, Tony turned to face Lucifer, his helmet folding back into the suit.

“Hi,” Tony said giving his own grin once his face was exposed, “I’m Iron Man.”

“Hmm,” the man hummed looking Tony up and down, “I can see that.”

Stark sauntered over to him as best he could in the suit. “And you are?” he asked tilting his head in a way he knew was adorable.
“Fuck,” Agent Espinoza said detangling himself from Maze. He had seen this before. He had seen this many times before.

“Is he controlling him?” Barton asked sharply slowing raising his bow and arrow towards Lucifer. Dan shook his head; he wasn’t sure how to explain it when he didn’t understand himself.

“Lucifer Morningstar,” Lucifer answered Stark, looking like the cat who ate the canary. “The Devil, retired now of course.”

Tony nodded, looking Lucifer up and down appreciatively, before shaking his head looking confused, “wait, what?”

Tony’s moment of self-awareness was short-lived and he quickly went back to staring at Lucifer dopily, his thoughts were taking him to dark and carnal places.

“Cut it out Lucifer, we don’t have time for this,” ordered Dan.

“Dan-ieel,” Lucifer whined stretching out syllables longer than necessary, “You know I can’t control my affect on people. Mr. Stark here is a man of desire and I am all about desire.”

“I have a mansion in Malibu, you’d probably like it. It’s on a cliff-side overlooking the ocean,” Tony intoned. “You should come by sometime.”

“Oh, would I ever! How does Wednesday sound?” asked Lucifer.

Gritting his teeth, Dan turned to Stark.

“Mr. Stark, Iron Man!” he snapped out, finally getting a grunt from Tony in acknowledgment.

“Yes, dear?” Tony asked barely paying attention.

“I’m going to need you to focus, Mr. Stark. You can’t have sex with the intruder,” Dan said trying to keep his voice reasonable.

“Well, not right now he can’t,” Lucifer threw in, “in a day or two, sure.”

To Tony, Lucifer saucily added, “I have a penthouse in L.A. above my nightclub LUX, if Malibu doesn’t work out, you should stop by and see me sometime on any Wednesday or Thursday.”

“You’re the owner of LUX?” asked Stark, “I’ve heard good things. I always meant to check that out, well before-” Stark shook his head getting confused again, there was a very good reason why he shouldn’t be doing this, wasn’t there?

“MR. Stark,” Dan said almost yelling now. At that, Tony practically jumped a foot in the air.

“Pepper!” Stark exclaimed, “I have a-, Pepper.”

“Oh?” Lucifer asked intrigued, “what do you do with the pepper? I haven’t heard of that one. I’m a zucchini fan myself.”

Tony had to force his head to look away from Lucifer. He found it much easier to resist his charms while staring at the ceiling.

“Pepper is a who, she’s my girlfriend, I can’t be-” Tony said to the ceiling refusing to look down.

“Ah, yes, commitment. I find myself in a similar situation,” said Lucifer with an understanding
look, “no matter. Invite her along! The more the merrier.” Lucifer smiled at Stark after having found the perfect solution.

This suggestion was too much for Tony, his head snapped down and he got that dopey look on his face again like someone had hit him with a twenty pound weight.

“I’ll, I’ll ask her.” Stark said rather dreamily.

“Alright, great, fine,” Dan sarcastically said to Lucifer, “Why don’t you go have another mea-ning-less one night stand.” Dan could also stretch out syllables if he needed to.

For a moment, it almost looked like Dan had hurt Lucifer’s feelings.

“No need to be so jealous, Agent Douchebag. Just because your sex life is abysmal doesn’t mean we should all suffer,” Lucifer said pouting.

“Yea? What about Chloe?” asked Dan. Barton looked at Dan curiously; Lucifer had mentioned this woman earlier.

Instantly brightening at the mention of Chloe, Lucifer got a knowing look on his face.

“I see. This is some sort of protective douche bag ex thing. Let me reassure you, Chloe is fine, she’s great actually. She’s the one who came up at the arrangement. I thought you were over her by now?” responded Lucifer.

Dan felt a great longing to punch the perfect teeth out of Lucifer’s mouth.

“No, I mean yes. Chloe lets you-?” spluttered out Dan, his anger felt like it was cutting off all the oxygen to his mind.

He didn’t even know why he was angry. He was over Chloe, definitely. Wasn’t he? When he thought about things like that lately he always pictured red-hair, a leather cat-suit-

Dan shut down that thought immediately. Nope, that thought didn’t exist. With his luck the next person he ran into would be able to read his mind and broadcast his deepest darkest secrets over the internet or something. Then Dan would probably die of embarrassment if a certain red-head didn’t kill him first.

Remember how nice it was yesterday when you were just saving people from Aliens? That annoying part of his mind asked him. Dan closed his eyes in frustration for two beats of his heart. Time to focus! He was a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent for god’s sake.

Opps, sorry God, Dan thought hysterically.

“Lucifer,” Dan began slowly, “I am upset that you attacked the base, hurt S.H.I.E.L.D agents and now you are wasting time setting up a date with Iron Man. We need to concentrate on Loki, the Tesseract, and-”

“HOLY JESUS FUCKING CHRIST ON A DICK,” Dan yelled as one wall blew inward causing cement bricks and debris to crash around all the Agents as they frantically dove for cover. Thor was here.

“Do either of you know what a door is?!?” Dan hollered at Iron Man and Thor who had landed next to him.
“He’s Asgardian,” Amenadiel replied disdainfully, “They aren’t exactly known for being bright.”

Turning towards him, Thor considered the man while attempting to avoid looking at his brother. He failed, his brother looked terrible. He still hadn’t fully recovered from his bout with the Hulk. Something twisted inside of Thor that he refused to acknowledge.

“And who are you?” asked Thor, it wasn’t everyday someone could hold his brother in place even when he was so grievously injured.

“Amenadiel, first of the angels,” he declared, some remnants of a forgotten pride had him puffing his chest out.

“Fallen now,” Lucifer clarified with a cheeky grin.

Amenadiel only rolled his eyes. Somehow Lucifer’s Luciferness wasn’t as annoying when this god-pretender was standing in front of him. His brother had at least never encouraged humans to worship him like the Asgardians had.

“Never heard of you or your people,” replied Thor. He wasn’t quite focusing on Amenadiel, his brother’s condition kept drawing his attention.

Amenadiel’s eyes narrowed. He took Loki and shoved him at least ten feet across the room to Maze who caught the prince before kicking Loki’s legs, causing him to buckle, knees hitting the ground. She pressed her demon blade under his chin forcing him to stretch his neck upwards and his head away to stop from cutting himself on it.

Thor took several steps towards Loki before Amenadiel’s bulk blocked him.

“Well your father knows who I am,” Amenadiel said while pressing closer to Thor. If Amenadiel kept moving Thor was either going to have to step back or shove Amenadiel out of the way and Thor wasn’t going to step back.

Amenadiel stopped an inch away from the blond god. Thor would never be as good at magic as Loki, but he had been around him long enough to have caught a glimpse of the mysteries that his brother was obsessed with. Thor felt something from Amenadiel, like there was something hidden just out of view, and it was more intense than anything he had ever felt from being around Loki. Thor gripped Mjölnir and stepped back.

“Ahh, more intelligent than most then,” Amenadiel said unkindly.

“Father has never mentioned you,” said Thor warily.

Amenadiel’s laugh was grating like nails on a chalkboard.

“Good old Odin is probably embarrassed after my Father kicked him off Earth after the Frost Giant invasion,” said Amenadiel amusement still in his voice. Like a switch the laughter turned pensive as Amenadiel continued, “My Father doesn’t like to share.”

“My father left Earth because the humans were not advanced enough to join the other realms, and they needed to be protected,” stated Thor.

“Your father is a liar,” scoffed Amenadiel, “He was a warmongering dictator, who conquered every world he found in his youth until he overreached and his enemies spliced into Earth causing death and devastation. His actions threatened the silver city, the seat of my Father’s power. Father
made Odin clean up his mess and ordered him never to return.”

“Silver City?” Thor asked unimpressed, “I’ve never heard of that either. And my father doesn’t take orders from anyone, perhaps your father is the liar.”

“Heaven is what it was later called. Does that ring any bells?” asked Amenadiel snidely, “And my Father is much worse than a mere liar.”


“Is a pale reflection of the Silver City. In fact, all the afterlives on all the worlds only exist as echoes of my Father’s human experiment here. When you threaten it here, you threaten them all. The Silver City was around before the Earth, Sun, Asgard, or the first soul that needed somewhere to go after its body died,” uttered Amenadiel in a soft angry voice.

A muffled gasped occurred behind Amenadiel. Thor quickly looked around him to see a thin line of blood drip down from his brother’s throat. The small wound did not heal like it should have.

“Opps,” Mazikeen said with the most unapologetic expression on her face. “But seriously are you both auditioning for the role of Draco Malfoy? You have seen the Harry Potter movies, right?” she asked.

She also puffed out her chest, pulled her lips down in a mock glower, and deepened her voice in a cheap imitation of the two of them, “My father said this. Well, my father said that.”

Tossing her hair back, making Loki flinch in alarm as her arm nearly rose upward, she continued talking, “Why don’t you go run back to your daddies little boys and tell him how mean the other one was. That’s a grudge match I’d pay to see.”

“Good one Maze!” Lucifer said laughing. Tony still staring at Lucifer absentmindedly started laughing too.

Thor took several steps back and looked around the room. This angel had him falling back into his bad habits of his youth, when he was so hot headed he would get everyone around him in trouble.

Tony Stark was off to one side, unusually quiet with his face exposed. Thor recognized the S.H.I.E.L.D. agent that had tried to prevent Phil Coulson’s death; he looked a little worse for wear as he glared at Amenadiel, the hand that held his gun kept twitching. The other agents were trying not to draw any attention to themselves as they inched closer towards the exit. Barton was the only one that looked cool and collected.

“Barton,” Thor said, “Who are these people? Why do they have my brother?”

Barton let out a long suffering sigh, “The laughing one is Lucifer; tall, dark, and brooding is apparently a fallen angel; and that makes psycho knife lady…?” he trailed off looking at Mazikeen.

“A demon,” she answered.

“Right, that makes sense,” said Barton sarcastically, “Other than that I’ve understood maybe a quarter of what they’ve been talking about. Espinoza, want to shed some light on this?”

Whipping his head around, and seeing that yes, he was the only Espinoza in the room, Dan also sighed. He closed his eyes for a moment. Everyone in the room could see him mentally counting to five.
Dan’s mind was finally catching up with the reality of the situation. When he said the words out loud that Lucifer doesn’t lie, it echoed in his head over and over again as he realized exactly what that meant. Somehow his face grew even paler and he swayed in place for a moment.

Then he rallied.

Gods, aliens, rage monsters, and now angels and demons. Sure why not? If he wasn’t fired and/or executed by a firing squad, he was demanding a raise.

“Lucifer can help us get the information we need from Loki,” he continued talking sounding more sure of himself, “It’s his… superpower.”

“Oh, yeah!” Barton spoke up, “Almost forgot. Stark’s under a spell or something and wants to sleep with Lucifer.”

“Does he need to be cognitively recalibrated,” Thor said horrified while immediately walking over to Tony, Mjölnir raised.

This, out of everything, finally penetrated Stark’s skull as his eyes widened in alarm at the approaching Norse god. He shot out his repulsors on instinct, sending himself flying high into the rafters.

“I’m good! I’m good!” yelled Stark, “Mood is ruined, totally ruined. Keep that thing away from me.”

The agent, who had first talked to Fury, had picked the radio up at some point during all of this. He approached Espinoza and Barton.

“Fury will be landing in a few minutes,” he reported.

“Ok,” Dan said as dread slid up his spine like ice, “Go meet him and bring him straight to us. I’m going to have Loki moved to a secure interview room. The sooner we get answers, the sooner this ends,” he finished sounding very unsure of the probability of this ever being over.

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Fury did not know what he was flying into. There were agents on the air strip but he didn’t trust any of them. He left his aircraft. One hand was hidden in a deep pocket holding a pistol.

“Umm, sir?” asked a voice next to the ramp. It was the idiot from the radio, except Fury recognized him as one of the agents that went to NYC.

Fury relaxed and took his hand out of his pocket. Team Coulson, he reminded himself. He had to trust someone.

“If you would follow me,” he led the director to a waiting vehicle, “Espinoza is bringing the prisoner to an interview room.”

“What the Hell is going on here?” barked out Fury.

The agent paled at the word ‘Hell.’ He started concentrating really hard on driving the vehicle to
the front entrance.

A low growl started to form underneath Fury’s breath.

“I’m not really sure, honestly,” the agent squeaked out.

“Then tell me what is going on with Agent Espinoza,” said Fury.

“Maybe you should wait to talk to him-” said the agent trailing off to silence.

“That’s funny, I didn’t realize my orders were optional,” Fury snarled

“Ummm, right,” the agent tried to think of where to begin, before just going with it. “Ok, so the Devil, right? ate Espinoza’s pudding. And he had this knife, see? That could kill the devil, but then he didn’t kill the devil, so now Espinoza has magic powers. And because of that, the devil, a fallen angel, and a demon have agreed to help us figure out who is really behind the attacks on NYC because apparently it’s not Loki. Oh, and Dan’s a shit father because he didn’t go to his daughter’s birthday, but the Devil did. And he might own a night club and possibly has a date with Mr. Stark. The devil that is, not Espinoza.”

They had pulled up to the front entrance but neither of them moved to get out. Fury was gob smacked. The agent appeared to be mouthing words to himself as he slowly repeated what he just said out loud back to himself in his head before looking at Fury dismayed.

“I’m sorry, sir. I haven’t slept in 60 hours. Espinoza can explain and it will all make sense,” the agent said before looking away and whispering to himself quietly, “or maybe it won’t.”

Fury was inclined to agree with him.
Agent Espinoza was standing in a viewing room watching through a one-way mirror as Lucifer, Amenadiel and Mazikeen installed Loki in a chair behind a table. His restraints and gag were still on. Dan left the intercom between the two rooms on mute because he desperately needed a moment of silence.

Luckily, everyone else in the viewing room wasn’t demanding anything like answers or explanations from him.

Barton had disappeared to some higher vantage point. Dan suspected the air ducts but didn’t really want to think too much about it.

Thor stood quietly next to Dan. He didn’t want to say anything because he was afraid his hopes and fears were clouding his judgment.

The need to embrace his brother and make sure he wasn’t still falling through the void had overwhelmed Thor since he got to Earth. As soon as Thor heard that there could be someone else behind the attacks on NYC his heart leapt to his throat and he wanted to run to Loki. Yet, he knew Loki would only use his sentiment against him. Part of him didn’t care; he just wanted his brother back.

Stark was leaning in the corner of the room. He had taken his suit off and seemed to be preoccupied texting someone.

The other agents had mostly dispersed to find something to do elsewhere. There were a couple guards posted at the doors and hallways, but when you were facing entities that could throw a full-grown human across the room like it was nothing, you quickly found a back log of paperwork that absolutely had to be done now.

Through the window, Mazikeen appeared to be lining up an unimaginable number of knives next to the water jug on the table in front of Loki. The knives were ordered by size, and, Dan looked closely, shininess? He couldn’t even tell you all the places she was pulling the knives from let alone why she owned one with a rainbow sheen to it.

He was still staring transfixed at the purples, blues, and yellows of the rainbow knife when Fury slammed open the door to the viewing room causing it to hit the wall with a bang. Dan jumped half a foot and twisted towards him in horror. However, part of him sullenly wondered if there was anyone on this base that actually knew how to politely open a door.

Fury glared at the occupants in the room who were all staring at him wide-eyed. Fury paid special attention to an unusually abashed Stark who had ceased his relentless typing on his phone. This lasted only moments until Stark’s narcissism took over and he was smirking knowingly back at Fury.

“Humph,” Fury muttered before disregarding Stark, apparently satisfied with his state of mind. He turned his attention towards Agent Espinoza causing him to visibly flinch.

They stared at each other, neither saying anything. Dan held his breath. But all Fury did was walk to his other side and look at the three divine beings in the interrogation room.

Lucifer and Mazikeen appeared to be arguing. Mazikeen was gesturing towards her knives and then towards the prisoner Loki, Lucifer answered while shaking his head and Loki’s eyes shifted
from one to the other as the argument intensified. Amenadiel must have said something because both the devil and demon turned to yell at him. Amenadiel threw his hands up in disgust and went to lean against a wall. Mazikeen and Lucifer turned back to each other and continued their heated debate.

“The devil works in your old police department and dates your ex-wife and you didn’t think to mention it before now,” Fury said to Dan having turned his one eye towards him while Dan had been distracted by the argument.

Startled, Dan dumbly looked around the room and noticed all eyes were now on him. Fuucckkk Dan thought.

“Well, I didn’t know- I mean, I didn’t Believe him when he said he was-,” Dan stumbled over his words.

“Wait,” interrupted Stark, “are you telling me he does the whole ‘Hello, I’m Lucifer, the devil,’ thing to everyone?”

Tony’s face kept switching from jealous to impressed before turning into a perfect copy of Obama’s Not Bad meme.

“It works for him,” Tony concluded his lips still pulled down as he nodded to himself.

Snorting Fury responded by saying, “Of course Mr., ‘I am Iron Man,’ would think that” his sarcasm could cut steel.

“Look!” Dan said too loudly before consciously keeping his voice level, “I was a police officer in L.A. some asshole club owner calling himself Lucifer and claiming to be the devil didn’t even fall in the top 10 of the weirdest shit I heard on the day I met him.”

“Him deciding that working with the police and punishing bad guys is his new hobby because he is really good at keeping the theme going was just annoying,” continued Dan, “Excuse me, if I didn’t immediately jump to the conclusion that he was anything but crazy.”

“And after you joined S.H.I.E.L.D.? It never occurred to you then?” Fury’s full attention was on Dan. This was it, Fury knew as his hand slowly got closer to his weapon. Things would tip one way or another depending on what Agent Espinoza said.

Dan stared at Fury incredulously.

“What? I didn’t- ” Dan was really tired of being so tongue tied all the time and ended up just spitting out, “Until Loki showed up, I didn’t know about magic or aliens or monsters. How was I supposed to know?”

“What did you think we were doing here?” Fury asked suspiciously.

“What did I think we were doing here?” Dan repeated rather shrilly and he could feel all the terror, stress and tiredness of the last few days bubble up all at once.

“I thought we were fighting terrorists!” yelled Dan and his voice continued to get louder. “I was told I could help save the world. No one once mentioned monsters or magic. I’m a level one agent! I don’t fucking know what’s going on.”

After a very, very long pause Dad added a meek, “sir.”
“Humph,” Fury said before turning back to the interrogation room. Mazikeen was now waving one of her knives around as she animatedly yelled at Lucifer who rolled his eyes before looking at her sternly. Loki looked a little paler than normal as the knife got closer and closer to his face.

Fury had a scowl on his face that caused a pit to grow in Dan’s stomach. He felt like his feet were weighted to the floor and he unconsciously curled into himself trying to make his frame seem smaller.

“Am I fired, sir?” Dan asked softly. Or dead? The unhelpful voice added in his mind.

Dan needn’t have worried. Fury’s scowled belied the fact that this was the best Fury had felt since Loki had showed up. Fury was the ultimate spy and prided himself on knowing all the secrets. Fury’s instinct had told him there was something more going on with Agent Espinoza and he was vindicated knowing he was right. As for punishing Dan for not realizing he knew the Devil? Well-a lack of curiosity was listed as a strength in Espinoza’s file. Fury couldn’t blame him for that.

“Fired?” scoffed Fury, “I can’t fire you. You are the only expert we have on –Them,” he said throwing an arm out in the direction of the interrogation room. “I’m promoting you.”

Another very long pause occurred before Dan piped up, “I want a raise then.”

All eyes swiveled to Dan including Fury’s one eye. That shrinking feeling increased as Dan wished the floor would just swallow him up.

Eye narrowed to a slit, Fury measured Dan maliciously while being secretly glad he had a backbone, “Name your-”

A loud thump could be heard from the interrogation room despite the fact the walls should have been sound-proof causing everyone to twist their necks so fast they’re lucky they didn’t get whiplash.

Mazikeen had thrown her knife so hard that it had embedded to the hilt in a cement wall. She was angrily gathering the rest of her knives back up before storming out of the room. Amenadiel was close behind her.

“I wouldn’t have taken them seriously either,” Fury admitted while sighing.

It didn’t take long for Mazikeen and Amenadiel to leave the interrogation room, walk through the hallway, and enter the viewing room.

“-gardians are so durable. Do you know how long it would take before one actually died?” cried Mazikeen.

“I could have had so much fun,” she continued pouting.

“Lucifer said if he couldn’t get the prince to talk then you could have a shot, Maze,” Amenadiel said consolingly.

They looked around the room at all the occupants.

“Who’s the pirate?” Mazikeen asked snidely.

Coughing, Dan spoke up, “This is Director of S.H.I.E.L.D., Agent Fury.” He paused for a moment, “My boss.”
She snorted and walked to the mirror to watch Lucifer and Loki. Amenadiel followed her looking bored.

Everyone else moved to find their own spot to watch through the mirror. Loki was in a chair and across the table Lucifer had one hand resting on the back of another chair.

“How is he supposed to get Loki to talk when he still has a gag on?” Stark asked. “Selvig used technology even I can’t figure out to lock that thing.”

“I wouldn’t worry about it,” muttered Dan and they all watched Lucifer walk around the table reach over behind Loki, move his hand around and the gag snapped open.

“Right, devil,” said Stark absently.

Lucifer smirked down at Loki before walking back around the table and taking a seat. Loki worked his jaw and wiped his mouth with his bound hands before sneering back. Lucifer simply took the water jug and an empty cup next it and poured a glass before sliding it front of Loki.

Loki looked at the water suspiciously before using both hands and bringing it to his mouth to drink. It was empty in moments. The gag was only intended to secure Loki for his short trip back to Asgard before everything was derailed.

“Amenadiel, is his trick going to work on Loki?” Dan inquired, the thought only just occurring to him.

“Why wouldn’t it?” Amenadiel asked. “They may live slightly longer than humans, but they are no more immune to the divine than you are.”

“We live thousands of years!” Thor thundered.

Amenadiel assessed him coolly. “As I said, slightly longer,” he replied.

“Right,” said Dan before turning the sound on. Showtime.

“Now,” Lucifer said letting out a hum, “I assume we have a very eager audience behind that mirror,” they both looked and only saw their reflections, “that wants to know all your dirty little secrets.”

Lucifer’s voice could be heard in the viewing room clear and seductive.

“I’m a prince of Asgard,” Loki rasped before his voice became stronger. “Show some respect.”

“Are you really? Still?” asked Lucifer curiously. “Your father risked things you can’t imagine to send your brother after you.”

“Not my fath-” began Loki before trailing off with an audible exhale of annoyance. Lucifer only tilted his head like a bird.

“Let’s get this over with then. Look at me,” Lucifer didn’t need to ask twice, Loki’s green eyes were glaring into the brown/black of Lucifer’s, “and tell me what do you desire?”

Loki’s head twitched and a flash of confusion crossed his face for a second. He almost moved to look away before stubbornly remained staring at Lucifer. His nostrils flared and one bead of sweat dripped down his temple.

“Oooh, complicated one,” Lucifer commented gleefully never moving his eyes away from Loki’s.
Loki started to breathe heavily and bared his teeth at Lucifer before spitting out, “I want to rule Ea—”

“No, wrong,” interrupted Lucifer. “Ruling is tedious and dull. It’s all protocol and order. I can tell by looking at you that you desire things to be more, ah- chaotic. Try again.”

Loki gritted his teeth and clenched his bound hands into fists.

Loki hissed out, “I want Odin and my brother to suffer like—”

“Hmmm, partially in a way, I suppose, but still not on the mark,” Lucifer said thoughtfully.

Loki, seemingly lost in Lucifer’s eyes, felt something shift inside of himself that reminded him of being a boy and sitting on Frigga’s lap after Thor left him behind to play with his friends.

“I want to go home,” said Loki almost choking on the last word. Thor shifted in the viewing room closer to the mirror. Lucifer opened his mouth to speak, but Loki beat him to it, “but home doesn’t exist, it never did. I see now, well played, you are a devil. If I couldn’t have home then Earth seemed like a good consolation prize.”

“THE Devil,” Lucifer corrected, tilting his head the other way. “You picked the wrong world though. Odin might have let you have one of the other realms to play ruler in, but here is off limits to you lot. Of course that’s assuming you picked this world.”

Eyes narrowed, Loki countered slightly too quickly, “I went where the Tesseract was.”

“Yes, you were sent where the Tesseract was while holding another infinity stone. How convenient for you that you found two of the stones within such a short-time frame,” Lucifer drawled.

In the viewing room, Dan turned towards Amenadiel and asked, “You mentioned those things before. What are they?”

“There are six of them and they are the only things besides Mother and Father that still remain from before the universe began. They are impossibly powerful,” Amenadiel said looking grim.

Lucifer put his feet up on the table while leaning back in his chair, his hands behind his head looking like a pantomime of relaxation.

“So tell me, would-be-king, how is Thanos now a days?”

Loki’s reaction was immediate and severe. His face drained of blood, his hands splayed out on the table before his fingertips dug into the surface, and his breathing became irregular and harsh. If he wasn’t sitting down he would’ve fallen down.

“No need to look so shocked,” Lucifer replied nastily, “There has never been anyone quite so obsessed with the stones as him.”

Loki still did not speak. Lucifer looked at him more closely before understanding washed over him. He had seen that face a lot in his own work.

“I see,” Lucifer began while bringing his feet to the floor and leaning as close as he could over the table to look at Loki, “You’ve been suffering through Thanos’s hospitably. He always was a brute.”

There was a thump again but this time originating from the viewing room. Thor was pressed up
against the glass after having struck it with his fist. There was a hairline fracture growing from the impact.

Loki looked over at the mirror, resolve smoothing over his face. “Ah, sweet pain, my old friend. What does it matter? It was my plan and those humans still died.”

Lucifer looked at him mockingly, “How noble of you to fall on the sword for him. Of course you are as susceptible to the mind stone as humans are. Even if he didn’t use its full affect on you, the stone has the ability to warp perception. It preys on your hatred and fears until you bring about your own end as you try to prevent it.”

“Did he tell you that when he gave you the scepter?” Lucifer asked disdainfully, “You look rather worse for wear. Tell me, did other options suddenly seem more reasonable after your head got knocked around a bit? Did your anger and fear fade somewhat?”

Loki stared at Lucifer opened mouth, his silver tongue failing him. “I-, I had failed. Of course I would take other options,” he stammered.

“You did fail,” Lucifer said cruelly. “He’s not going to forget that.”

“Of course not! So if I can’t be the ruler of Earth, I’d much rather be a prisoner of Asgard and have all of Asgard’s forces between me and him instead of being stuck here on this backwards planet,” Loki said snarling.

Laughing, Lucifer said, “Blame your father for that one. Of course I don’t really care about Odin or Thanos.”

Loki stared at Lucifer uncomprehendingly. Nothing Lucifer said had startled him as much as this.

“I need to know,” Lucifer said serious for once staring directly at Loki. “Was there a woman with him? She sometimes takes other forms, but tends to favor a beautiful female body.”

“He had his daughters-” Loki said slowly.

“No, not them,” Lucifer hurriedly said, “although, it’s almost sweet. He picks his daughters because they remind him of her. The woman I am talking about he would treat as his equal or even above him.”

Loki stared at Lucifer before admitting, “There was no one like that.”

“Well, it doesn’t rule out the possibility, but that’s the best we can hope for,” Lucifer said before standing up to leave.

“I’m sure your father will forgive you in a century or two, prince,” Lucifer said as a parting shot.

In the viewing room, Dan turned to Amenadiel questioningly, “Who is this woman Lucifer is talking about? What are you afraid of?”

“Millennia or more ago, our sister, Azrael, and Thanos were in love until Father forbade them from seeing each other and banished Thanos to the outer reaches of the Universe where barely a planet had formed,” Amenadiel replied.

“Azrael? Like Azrael’s blade, Azrael?” Dan asked.

“Yes,” Amenadiel said grimly, “Our sister, the Angel of Death. Thanos used to destroy whole
galaxies as gifts to her. I had assumed she had grown indifferent to him, but the attack on Earth was too bold.”

“Either he is trying to win her back or she is helping him. And if she is helping him…” Amenadiel trailed off.

The Avengers and Fury looked at Amenadiel in horror. Even Maze had lost the bored expression on her face; she clutched the knives she was still holding closer to her chest.

“I still think I should have a chance,” she stated. “I can make sure there is nothing else the prince is hiding.” She looked at Fury hopefully.

“You were right, you know,” Loki’s voice rang out over the intercom. Everyone looked back at the room where Lucifer had only made it half way to the door. He now looked at Loki curiously.

“Odin would have let me rule my own realm,” Loki admitted, “as long as it was cold, dark, and full of monsters.”

Intrigued, Lucifer went back to his seat.

“And he’s not going to forgive me, I’m just a useless tool to him now. I made sure of that,” Loki stated without a shred of doubt in his voice. “Besides, why would I forgive him? This is all his fault.”

“I do love a good horrible father story,” Lucifer said before motioning with his hand for Loki to continue.

“He lied to me about my origins and purpose. He always raised me with the intention to rule, but Asgard was always going to Thor. Odin had different plans for me,” Loki hissed out.

“I never belonged on Asgard. I was always compared to my shining perfect brother and found wanting,” Loki said forlornly.

“Oh, I understand!” Lucifer exclaimed. “You only had one brother. Imagine thousands, all perfectly obedient and praising the wisdom of Father unquestionably. The Silver City was unbearable.”

“No,” Mazikeen snarled in the viewing room.

“What is happening?” Amenadiel asked bewildered. Dan began to grow concerned at the demon and fallen angel’s alarm.

“Yes!” Loki called out, “I was always different and they never listened to me as I pointed out the idiotic things they did.”

“My Father would never listen to a hint of criticism of His creation and demanded we bend to His “perfect” will,” Lucifer explained. “And then He became obsessed with humans, some of the most flawed and dissident creatures in the whole Universe. When I simply asked for the same freedom, I get banished to Hell to prevent Him from killing me!”

Dan looked through the mirror and then back to Amenadiel and Mazikeen.

“What is he doing?” Dan asked, his voice higher pitched than intended.

“He’s making another friend!” Mazikeen shouted before throwing her knives on the floor.
“Earth has ruined him. He used to be the Lord of Hell and now he’s-he’s friendly,” she finished shuddering.

Everyone in the viewing room could only watch as if they were witnessing a car crash in slow motion.

“Thor attacks the ruler of a world and breaks a thousand year truce and all he gets is a time out on Earth where he was instantly adored,” Loki said annoyed.

“Clearly, Odin doesn’t think as highly of the beast on Jötunheimr as he does the humans of Earth. I prevent a war and try to end the threat once and for all as was my right as the ruler of Asgard,” Loki said a mad gleam growing in his eyes.

“Thor merely has to risk his life for a human before being restored to full power and status. He thwarts my plan by destroying the Bifröst, yet I’m the one father shows disappointment in. As if he ever cared about those monsters,” Loki said building himself into a frenzy.

Amenadiel whirled to Thor. “You destroyed the Bifröst?” he asked dismayed. “The one thing your people ever did that even my Father was impressed by. You spent tens of thousands of years calling yourselves gods because of one invention and it’s gone due to some sort of brotherly spat?!”

“I couldn’t let him murder an entire race of people,” Thor said quietly.

“So your father now risks Earth and the afterlives of all people using dark energy to send you after his wayward son. Brilliant,” Amenadiel said sarcastically. “You really are idiots.”

“I should really introduce you to my therapist, Dr. Linda. She’s wonderful,” proclaimed Lucifer to Loki.

Loki looked appalled, “absolutely not.”

“Why not?” Lucifer question, “clearly you are going to be here awhile with the Bifröst gone. You’ll have to wait until Earth re-aligns for the Tesseract to work for traveling as far as Asgard. Of course that would only re-damage the pathways again and I doubt my brothers would let you do that.”

Lucifer stood up and walked towards Loki still talking, “It’s in your best interest to help the people of Earth. Thanos is still out there. He might have to take the long way around, but he is coming and you can’t do anything locked up.”

Lucifer bent down and unlocked the shackles on his wrists. Loki looked as shocked as the people in the viewing room. However, Lucifer just grabbed his wrist and pulled him upwards so they were face to face.

“Of course, as you said, all those humans did die because of you. I’m going to have to come up with some sort of punishment,” Lucifer said cheerfully as his eyes shifted red. Loki could feel himself being drawn into an unimaginable abyss of fire and torment.

“The difference between me and Thanos, is that Thanos loves death and so his playthings tend not to last long,” Lucifer said calmly, “where I’ve only ever dealt with those already dead. I can show you an eternity that Thanos couldn’t even dream of.”

The fire Loki could feel licking at his skin, whether illusion or a true glimpse into a world far worse than Jötunheimr or the void, caused an internal defense that Loki hated within himself to activate. His skin started to turn blue where Lucifer had grabbed onto him and his eyes turned
blood red.

Red eyes looked into red eyes.

“Ah,” Lucifer gasped pleased, “I see we are both hiding the monster within.”

Lucifer let go of Loki’s wrist before throwing an arm around his shoulder, both forms merged back into their more pleasant exteriors. They could see their reflection side-by-side in the mirror a moment before the hair-line fracture caused all the glass to shatter revealing the horrified, annoyed and dumbstruck faces in the viewing room.

“This is going to be so much fun!” Lucifer declared.
Romanov was torn. She pushed the jet to its limit to try to get to L.A. as fast as she could, but she felt like she abandoning the base and her other team members as she got farther away from them.

Rogers and Banner weren’t doing much better. Of course, she was worried about one of them a lot more than the other.

“Banner? You good?” She asked turning her head around to look at Bruce as he sat in a lotus pose with his eyes closed.

“Leave him alone,” Rogers said as he paced behind the cockpit for the thousandth time. She considered shooting him in the leg to get him to stop moving. He healed fast right?

“Have we heard anything from base?” asked Rogers. He stopped moving, but now he was leaning on the back of her chair, reaching over her shoulder and touching toggles on her counsel that he had no way of knowing what they did, him being from the forties and all.

“No,” she said slapping his hand away.

“Have we heard anything from L.A.?” Rogers asked stepping back and rubbing his hand looking like a kicked puppy. There was no way that hurt him, Natasha thought to herself angrily, refusing to feel sorry for the overgrown baby.

“No,” she replied curtly.

“Are we there yet?” he asked this time simply leaning on the back of her chair, pulling it slightly backwards making Natasha’s hackles raise. She was going to-, then she saw outside the window.

“Actually, yes,” she said sounding surprised, “we are.”

Banner pulled himself out of his meditation and joined Rogers and Romanov to look out the window.

L.A. didn’t look terrible, it definitely didn’t look good, but it didn’t look like a monster taller than a sky-scaper had flattened it.

There were a lot lights still out from the black-outs and most of the tallest buildings’ windows were missing their glass. However, they could see people walking around outside and they weren’t running around in terror or anything.

Natasha circled the city twice before bringing the jet to the beach right off the coast where the portal and the monster had been spotted.

It was deserted besides a graveyard of beached ships of all sorts and sizes.

Actually, Romanov realized, there were people there. Two police officers were standing guard by the entrance. A long line of police tape stretched between every tree, rail and building from the parking lot to the beach. It was a very flimsy barricade.

She landed the jet in front of them and the three Avengers disembarked. One officer was blinking at the jet his coffee was half way to his mouth, and the other had pulled out his weapon but was shaking so badly Natasha wouldn’t have worried about being hit with a bullet even if she was
standing two feet in front of him.

“Captain America!” the relief on the blinking officer was palatable, “Black Widow and-” he looked confused at Banner before disregarding him.

“You know us?” Rogers asked.

The officer hissed at the other to lower his weapon before replying, “News has been pretty spotty. A lot of electronics are out of whack, but we saw what happened in New York. Is that going to happen here?”

“That’s what we are here to find out,” responded Romanov. “What do you know?”

The officer blinked a few more times before switching his coffee to his other hand and saying, “I was in the station when the power-” only to interrupted by the other one who Natasha realized wasn’t nervous but simply extremely excitable.

In one breathe, he said, “I was with my cousin Luis. We had tickets for this ballet performance. It’s not usually my scene. I’m more of an impressionist modern dance fan, but we had heard that their rendition of Midsummer’s Night’s Dream involved far fewer clothes than you would normally expect. Word on the street was that they all had this mind blowing encounter with a night club owner that had them re-interpreting all the acts. But we never got there to see if the rumors were true because people were running around screaming about monsters. I heard from Luis, who knew this boat tour captain, Rafael, who had asked Luis earlier to clear his computer browser history if he never heard from Rafael again. Luis said, that Rafael said, he was pretty sure he sold his soul to the devil in exchange for this real sweet 40ft long Sunliner he took his clients on because the devil had called him up to cash in on the favor and needed his help to save the world.”

While listening to his co-worker, blinky closed his eyes fully, sighed heavily, and covered his face with his free hand.

“This is from your cousin who had some scheme to steal a smoothie machine? He’s a criminal! Besides, it was aliens, not demons,” he said sounding like a man who had repeated that line a thousand times already.

Flailing his arms around the excitable one said, “And that’s better? Besides Luis said, that Rafael said, he was on the water when the “alien” came out and was close enough to see into the fiery “alien world” and hear all the human “aliens” being tortured below. Afterwards, he fled L.A. saying he was moving to the desert. That’s his boat over there.” He finished pointing, everyone turned to look to see a Sunliner tilted over on the beach, the tide coming up halfway up the stern.

“Right-” Rogers said pausing for a moment processing what he just heard before saying, “So why are there only two of you here?”

“Orders from above,” the first police officer said having decided to pretend his fellow officer wasn’t there. He put his coffee on the hood of the cruiser and pulled out a warrant to pass to Captain America. “Everyone is on peacekeeping duty or helping with the clean up. Funny enough, not a lot of people are eager to go to the beach lately.”

“It’s kind of weird actually,” the other one said while bouncing up and down on the balls of his feet, “How fast everything got handled. It’s like the politicians are actually doing their jobs. It makes me think the world really is ending.”

Figuring he wasn’t going to get anything more usefully out of them –a night club owner and lewd
dance performers, really? Rogers ordered the police officers to remain at their post and the three avengers tramped over the sand to the boats.

“This is incredible! Wait, no. What?” Banner said while picking through the boats lifting up devices attached to tri-pods that were on every single one of them. He continued to mutter under his breath as he popped one open and looked amazed before switching to befuddled and then to annoyed.

“Either someone slapped together a quantum computer using duct tape and paper clips or we are being pranked,” Banner declared.

“All these boats are from different marinas,” Romanov interjected while studying the S.H.E.I.L.D. tablet she had been scanning serial numbers into, “they are owned by different people who have absolutely no reason to know each other.”

“What does this all mean? Did something get out? Was something already here?” Rogers asked. Romanov looked at him before snatching the warrant out of his hand.

“I don’t know, but the judge on this warrant owns one of the boats,” she said gravely, “I think we need to find the owners.”

Bruce insisted on staying with the ships. He raised one eyebrow at the suggestion that it wasn’t safe and that ended that conversation.

Assuming he was the most level headed of the two, they left the officer who had finished his coffee at this point at the entrance of the beach. Rogers stressed that if anything showed up, especially if something green showed up, then he should get into his cruiser and drive away very fast. The officer wasn’t stupid and started to look at Bruce in a new light.

Since the excitable one knew someone who knew someone involved with the incident, Steve and Natasha had him drive them to a bar where they might find his cousin Luis. In the meantime, Natasha was looking up the contact information for all the other owners of the boats.

The bar was in a poor part of town, but it was crowded with anxious people from all walks of life. They were talking in low conversations or staring blankly at nothing. Everyone seemed to be loitering around a television that was playing static.

While the police officer looked for his cousin, Steve and Natasha sat on the stools calling the other owners of the boats on their phones, but they weren’t having much luck reaching them.

Despite signing the warrant, the judge was nowhere to be found. A harried assistant told them that the Judge had quit her post a couple hours ago after slashing the sentences of everyone who had committed a non-violent crime in the past three years that she had presided over.

As for the other owners, there were a lot of odd voicemail messages explaining why they couldn’t be reached ranging from a sudden need to spend more time with family to a quest to find the owner of a car that they had hit in a parking lot and didn’t leave their insurance information for.

Eventually the officer returned and explained that Luis had left an hour ago to go back home to San Francisco. For half a second, Rogers contemplated finding out how many drinks he could have before he felt the slightest buzz. He was brought out of his funk, when the voice of a reporter rang out from the television.

A hush fell over the crowd as the TV that had been showing static burst into color. The previously docile patrons were now completely alert staring at the screen where there were three people on a
podium talking to an unseen crowd.

“-nk Ty Huntley and his wife, Debra, for their generous donation to the city of Los Angeles,” an applause could be heard in the background.

“During tragedies, most people will give something back, but what inspired you to give away 95% of your wealth?” a news-reporter standing off screen asked.

“Um,” Ty began eloquently, “there are more important things in life than money.” He looked at Debra who was fiercely nodding next to him.

“And you congressman,” the reporter said while addressing the third person, “you have personally passed out $50K of you own money to anyone you came across on the street and I hear you have an announcement to make?”

“Yes, thank you,” said the congressman. He was normally a slick looking man but was currently uncharacteristically disheveled around the edges.

“I have decided to pledge 40-” a look of panic crossed the politician’s face when he happened to glance at Ty and his wife, “-60%! of my annual income to help kick-start a fund to give back to the sanitation workers of Los Angeles to reward their hard work cleaning up the city.”

Like a little kid who got a gold star, the politician looked satisfied as he took in a new round of applause.

“That is very generous, congressman. Are you hoping that your actions help motivate other people to donate in these hard times?”

The congressman’s expression grew serious and he spoke slowly, “I think it is very important that everyone concentrate on being good people.” He inched closer to the camera until his face almost filled the screen, “In fact, it is imperative that everyone be good. If you aren’t a good person - money, aliens, and portals are the least of your concern. Trust me; I know what I’m talking about. Just be good.”

The politician’s bloodshot eyes filled the screen, a confused murmur could be heard from the audience and Ty and Debra were now both nodding fervently in the background.

“Right-,” the reporter said grasping at anything to say in response to that, “Well, with what you’ve done at least we know now there really are angels in Los Angeles looking out for us.”

The politician, Ty and Debra looked positively green at this announcement. Then a popping noise could be heard from the television and the whole screen went black.

“What was that about?” Rogers asked sounding like he wasn’t sure if he should be impressed or suspicious.

“Their boats were on the beach,” Romanov said monotonously while scanning the tablet to see if there was anyone else they could contact.

“Oh, I know him!” the excitable police officer said smiling widely and pointing at Natasha’s screen, “He controls the drug trade in this area. I arrested him a few times, but never could get the charges to stick. He’s a nasty piece of work, but he hangs out not too far from here. Want me to take you?”

The officer was beaming at them and barely waiting for Natasha and Steve to agree before
bounding out of the bar to the police cruiser.

He brought them to a dilapidated community center that had a surprising number of tattooed people working on repairs and cleaning up outside of it.

“Huh,” the officer said while watching everyone. “I’ve arrested most of these people before, and that one,” nodding at a skinny man whose face looked like a weasel and was currently raking out a patch of weeds that might have been a garden once, “has never done an honest day’s work in his life.”

They walked unimpeded inside the building where the bustle of people only continued. Walls were being repaired and painted, light fixtures switched out and bulbs replaced brightening up the hallways and rooms.

They eventually made it to a large community room where a muscular man with greasy black hair and a scarred face was directing all the workers.

“-make sure it’s cleaned up, we want the playground to be safe for the kids,” he told three surly looking teenage girls who rolled their eyes but picked up trash bags and gloves before leaving the room.

“That’s him,” the police officer said while pointing at the man.

On the other side of the room, it looked like two different gangs were getting into an argument while holding Windex and paper towels. The man moved to walk over to them, but stopped when he saw the police officer and the Avengers.

He looked at them warily before asking in a gruff voice, “Can I help you?”

Still worried about the S.H.E.I.L.D. base, Romanov decided not to waste any more time and asked, “Why is your boat on the beach where a portal was spotted?”

The drug dealer quivered and grew pale. He couldn’t have looked guiltier if he had tried. He looked down at his hands and held them against his body, trying to stop them from shaking.

“I’m not supposed to talk about that,” he said very softly.

A boy, if you could call him a boy since he was almost 7ft tall and weighed about 300lbs walked into the room. His head was shaved like a skin-head and his stomach jiggled as he moved.

His face still had some youthful chubbiness around the edges but when he saw the police officer his eyes widened in surprise and he reached behind his back to pull out a gun shouting, “I’m not going to jail!”

The officer drew his weapon and yelled at him to put the gun down. The two gangs pulled their guns out but didn’t seem to know if they should point it at the police officer or each other. Romanov shifted into a defensive pose as Rogers swung his shield in front of them.

“What’s going on here?!?” Romanov yelled at the police officer.

“There is an outstanding warrant for his arrest. He knocked his grandma down a flight of stairs when she wouldn’t give him $20 bucks and put her in the hospital. He just turned 18, no more juvie for him,” said the officer as fast as ever but now there was no lightness to his voice. He eyes bore down on the kid unrelentingly. The tension caused more of the gang members to swing their guns towards the trio.
The drug dealer standing in the middle looked at both sides in panic before promptly bursting into
tears.

Within moments, he was wailing uncontrollably. The horrified gang members started to sheepishly
put their guns away. Even the large kid looked at him aghast and pointed his gun upwards.

The police officer confused, also lowered his weapon, but didn’t put it away.

The kid, having finally noticed Natasha and Steve, looked star-struck, “Are you the Avengers? Can
I have your auto-graphs?”

Natasha decided that L.A. was insane and wished she was back in NYC fighting the Chitauri.

“Oh, what the hell?” she snarled, this caused the drug dealer to stop crying but had the unintended
side effect of causing him to faint.

A flurry of motion occurred as the two gangs rushed over to pull him into a chair, put his feet up,
and find a cool rag to put on his neck. The drug dealer stared dazedly into the distance. One girl
with a facial tattoo was fanning him with a newspaper. The skin-head stood awkwardly to the side
looking ashamed.

When the drug dealer came back to himself he looked at Natasha pleadingly, “I can’t die, not yet.
I’ve done terrible things and I need to make up for it!”

“Why? What happens if you die now?” she asked.

Somehow his face grew whiter and he said, “I go-” unable to bring himself to say it, he pointed
down.

“So the devil made you bring your boat out to the ocean?” Rogers asked not sure if this was a joke
or not.

“I didn’t know he was the actual devil!” he cried out. “Lucifer Morningstar owns the nightclub
Lux, I owed him a favor.”

Natasha abruptly turned away her mind reeling. She knew that name.

Rogers, not noticing Natasha’s distress, continued questioning the drug dealer. “What sort of favor
did Lucifer do for you,” asked Rogers bracing for the worse.

The drug dealer blinked at Rogers once, noticing his concern. “Ah, no man, it wasn’t like that.
Lucifer is a good guy. He got my daughter a free ride to Stanford.”

He looked over to the kid. “You’ve gotta make it up to your grandma before it’s too late,” he said
imploringly. The kid looked down at his feet as the police officer walked over and took the gun out
of his hand.

Steve looked at the scene perplexed before glancing over at Natasha. He saw she was distracted
and looked at her questioningly.

The problem was Agent Espinoza’s S.H.I.E.L.D. file. Natasha had read it before the mission with
the odious foreign dignitary and had studied it only a few days ago when Dan was being held in
S.H.I.E.L.D. custody. Lucifer Morningstar was mentioned several times and Natasha hadn’t
thought twice about it.
It felt like walking down the stairs and missing the last step. What else had she overlooked? She was aware that Rogers knew something was up so she didn’t bother explaining. She jerked her head indicating he should follow her as she called out to the police officer, “We are taking your cruiser, you good here?”

“Yep,” he replied after talking into his radio, “backup is on the way. I don’t think they’re going to try anything else. I knew it was the devil!”

They were in the car speeding back to the beach before Rogers could even get a word out.

“What-” he began, but Natasha interrupted him while clenching her hands tighter around the steering wheel, “get Banner on the phone. We need to contact base.”

He sighed, pulled out his phone, punched Banner’s number in and put it on speaker.

“They’re legit, I think,” Banner said with no greeting. “Except there seems to be several layers of reality they work on that are currently unknown to mankind.”

“Great, fine. Put them on the jet. We’ll test them out at a S.H.I.E.L.D. lab,” Natasha said briskly.

“Oh, they’re not working right now. I don’t think the conditions are right. They are very precise instruments which is amazing considering how slapped together they are,” Banner rambled on.

Natasha paused, momentarily distracted from thinking about Dan and asked, “How do you know they aren’t working?”

Silence for two beats. “I may have tried turning them all on?” Banner said timidly.

Natasha’s only response was to clench the steering wheel of the police cruiser tighter, her knuckles turning red. She took several deep breaths before focusing on why she called him in the first place.

“Can you patch in Fury on a secure line?” she asked, “We need to update him and find out what happened at the base.”

“Give me a sec,” Banner replied quashing down his curiosity.

Banner jogged back to the jet and after a few moments they could hear him messing around with the controls before Fury’s voice rang out.

“Was it the devil?” he sasked grumpily.

Both Natasha and Steve had identical looks of astonishment. Steve recovered first.

“Yes, someone claiming to be the devil was involved with the portal. There were a lot of people, including prominent members of society, who owed him favors and got mixed up with it as well. We don’t know who he is working for or if he is an alien or a human with powers,” Steve summarized.

“He’s the devil,” Fury replied dryly, “Lucifer, former Lord of Hell, nightclub owner and fan of threesomes and orgies.”

Natasha wasn’t entirely sure how to respond to that, but brought up the issue weighing on her mind, “Agent Espinoza-”

Fury’s heavy sigh interrupted her and he began to talk, “our security clearance levels may have worked against us. Agent Espinoza has successfully made the argument he cannot inform us of
strange other-worldly people, if he doesn’t know such people exist in the first place.”

“How did you find out then?” she asked, “What happened to the base.”

All they could hear was a low growl coming from the phone.

“Get back to base and you’ll be debriefed,” Fury ordered before the line went dead.

“What the fuck?” Banner asked.
Fury was not looking forward to explaining to Black Widow, Captain America and the freaking Hulk that Loki had been freed and was currently sitting at a S.H.I.E.L.D. conference table next to Lucifer.

Although, Fury thought with some satisfaction, he didn’t look very comfortable. Loki still had bruises from the Hulk and the cut on his neck from Mazikeen had only just stopped bleeding. His entire body was ridged and he stared straight ahead, but that was most likely due to the devil sitting next to him.

Lucifer was attempting to show Loki how to play Angry Birds on his phone and Loki was not amused.

“IT’s delightful! You must try it,” Lucifer said while shoving his phone under Loki’s nose.

If looks could kill, everyone on base would be dead. Loki’s eyes shined with madness and his fingertips started to glow green until he looked directly at Lucifer’s shit-eating grin. He instantly re-thought any plan of attack and his entire body deflated in surrender.

“I will not,” answered Loki, still sounding haughty no matter the situation.

“Have you ever tried?” Lucifer asked while Loki stared at him in disbelief. “I mean, why try conquering a people without sampling their best goods?”

“If that’s the best they can offer maybe I was wasting my time!” Loki cried out in frustration.

“Well, obviously,” Lucifer said rolling his eyes, “I understand trying to piss off daddy-,” Loki hissed in annoyance, “-right, your kidnapper then, but take it from me, ruling anywhere is not worth it.”

“Oh?” said Loki disdainfully, “I’d rather rule these slops than try to fit in here like Thor does and fails miserably at.”

Lucifer started laughing. “Better to rule Hell than serve in Heaven, huh? Except, of course, you are playing straight into Odin’s hands either way you know.”

Loki looked at him sharply.

Once Lucifer knew he had his full attention, he explained, “Odin may not be as dreadful as my Father, but he operates in a very similar way. You are either the dutiful son, doing whatever he wishes or you’re the monster he sets the standard against. It took me millennia to figure out that I helped my father consolidate more power being his Devil than I ever did as his favorite angel.”

Loki stared off into the distance before grabbing at his own hair and letting out loud huff. At wit’s end he snarled, “What do you suggest then?”

Catching Loki’s eyes, Lucifer’s grin was all teeth, “don’t play the game at all, of course. What would your family- yes, yes, I apologize, your abductors- do if you didn’t do what they wanted or anything truly horrendous? What if you came here, took in the sights, had a bit of fun, maybe take up a musical instrument,” Lucifer winked at Loki while thinking of his piano, “and told them where to stick it? Wouldn’t it just drive them mad?”
Loki looked intrigued. His mind blazing with the type of mischief he hadn’t thought about since that fateful trip to Jötunheimr.

“Of course, I still have to come up with your punishment,” Lucifer said thoughtfully. “That whole scenario sounds rather too much like what I told my mother to do to keep her out of hell. I can’t let it be said that the devil is not creative.”

Loki’s jaw dropped and he had a sinking feeling he wouldn’t like whatever Lucifer came up with.

After watching that interaction, Fury was feeling a whole lot more sympathetic towards the exhausted agent that had driven him to the base. Nothing made sense and he doubt it ever would again.

Right before the Avengers, Loki, Espinoza and the divine beings had meandered over to the conference room- herding cats would have been easier- Fury had found out the agent’s first name was Leroy.

In a rather memorable interaction, the agent had said, “Just call me Leroy, Nick,” as he staggered off tiredly trying to do his duties and being completely obvious to Nick Fury’s death glare at his back.

Fury had almost ordered Leroy to go take a nap, but he was still too concerned about infiltrators from an unknown enemy to bench, even temporarily, an agent he could trust. Leroy also made himself useful by pulling out a coffee cart to bring to the conference room.

Unlike Selvig’s old lab, the NYC base’s coffee cart attendants didn’t have a high enough clearance level to be around Fury and the Avengers while they tried to get useful information out of the two fallen angels and the demon.

However, Fury considered increasing the coffee attendants’ clearance level across the board as an institutional policy as he watched Leroy pour a splash of orange juice into a mug of coffee before handing it to Fury with a sleepy smile.

Fury was staring into the mug wondering if he might as well drink it when Loki finally caved and took the phone from Lucifer.

“You have 147 missed phone calls,” Loki said dryly to Lucifer.

“Oh,” Lucifer said snatching his phone back and standing up while scrolling through various text messages, “that’s not good.”

Loki’s smug grin faded as soon as Thor swept down into the seat Lucifer had just left. He tried to talk to his brother but Loki stared resolutely away completely ignoring him.

Lucifer walked by Stark who was engaged in a fierce text messaging battle. Stark had been taking covert pictures of Lucifer when he wasn’t looking since he had left the interrogation room. Lucifer passed by Mazikeen who was watching Netflix on her phone and forlorn Amenadiel who was staring at Mazikeen’s phone in envy.

Maybe smart phones were a weapon they could use against the big, bad and scary, Fury thought hysterically.

Lucifer hadn’t quite made it to the door when Maria Hill walked in. She looked Lucifer up and down, paused, and then looked him up and down again more slowly. After an internal battle of wills, she stared at the wall directly behind Lucifer’s head before addressing him.
“You damaged a S.H.I.E.L.D. base,” she said firmly.

Smiling slyly Lucifer replied, “So sorry, my dear. Here this should help out.” He pulled out a stack of slightly singed $100 bills from his jacket and handed it to her. “Bill me for the rest.”

The cool and collected Maria Hill showed only the slightest twitch of a reaction while looking at the wad of cash. She shook her head, still not staring at Lucifer and made her way over to Fury.

“We have to discuss that list you wanted me to compile,” she stated to Fury.

Grateful for any reprieve Fury barked out, “Espinoza, you’re in charge, get dossiers going on this Thanos character and everyone else these- these people mention.”

Fury walked not ran out of the room, thank you very much. He was pretty sure he didn’t want to be anywhere around when Natasha Romanov showed up and cognitively recalibrated everyone.

Dan stared after Fury as the door swung shut behind him. He really didn’t think they could pay him enough for this.

He walked over to Lucifer who looked like he was trying to compose a complicated text message. There was something that had been bothering Dan.

“Lucifer,” Dan started. Lucifer looked up to him, deleting the draft of the message as he did so. “Does Chloe know that you’re, you know.”

Sighing, Lucifer’s gaze got a sort of dopey half fondness, half exasperated expression that used to drive Dan up the wall when they worked at the same police precinct.

“Well, as you know, I’ve told her multiple times,” Lucifer began, “and she knows I don’t lie. She doesn’t not believe me.”

Shrugging Lucifer continued, “It’s rather difficult because I am physically incapable of proving it to her anymore. And when I finally convinced Amenadiel to show her his well, you know, he wasn’t capable of getting it up as it were. Turns out, Chloe has that affect on all of us, or possibly just the fallen.”

“What?” Dan asked instantly regretting bringing anything up. His constant desire to shoot Lucifer, which was usually just a fantasy he kept in the back of his mind, almost overwhelmed him.

Oblivious, Lucifer kept talking, “Maze refused to help. She is still annoyed about the whole Linda fiasco even though that turned out well! Even for a demon she can hold a grudge.”

Dan looked up and almost prayed until he remembered who was up there.

“Your therapist knows you are the actual Devil?!” Dan cried out.

Lucifer looked at Dan confused, “Of course, it’s not like it’s a secret.”

Dan’s mouth opened and closed multiple times, before Barton came from nowhere. Dan didn’t even care that Barton had super scary ninja skills, he was just glad for any interruption.

“Fury wants him to explain something in Selvig’s lab,” Barton said eyes bearing into Dan’s. Lucifer looked at Barton curiously.

At a private airfield near NYC, a jet had just landed. Chloe shook Trixie by the shoulder to wake her from her slumber. Chloe was always so amazed by how gangly her daughter was. It was like she was being stretched into a woman as she slowly out-grew her little kid cuteness. Chloe wasn’t ready for that; it was too soon.

Charlotte had been eerily quiet the entire plane ride. She had barely moved at all as she sat in one of the passenger seats. She hadn’t even looked out the window once.

In spite of her oddness, Chloe had to admit that Charlotte traveled in style.

With two phone calls and some barely veiled threats, Charlotte had been able to wrangle up a limo ride from Lux to the airport where a pilot had been on standby next to a very nice private jet despite the travel ban that was in place.

The plane had been well stocked with alcohol neither of them had drank and possibly a stripper pole that could rise out of the ground. Charlotte had only explained by saying that she knew someone whose boss was out of town and wouldn’t miss the airplane.

They were greeted outside on the airstrip by a waiting Escalade that was all fueled up and ready to go. Charlotte waved away the driver before taking the front seat.

“Where now?” she asked Chloe who was checking her phone.

Lucifer still hadn’t replied to any of her messages. They were maybe an hour away without any traffic from where the GPS told her Lucifer was, but let’s be serious who knew how crazy it was this close to where the aliens had been.

“I’ll direct you,” Chloe said while ushering Trixie into the back seat. She was still playing at being the sullen pre-teen that didn’t speak and quickly leaned up against a window to stare out morosely.

Chloe could feel the abyss of upcoming years ahead of her and was afraid she wouldn’t be able to connect with her daughter anymore. That worried her more than aliens and Lucifer not answering his phone. If he was fine – she was kicking his ass, if he wasn’t fine, well, she would wait until he was better before kicking his ass.

Chloe had barely buckled the seat-belt of the front passenger seat when Charlotte had peeled away from the airfield, tires screeching.

***

Alexander Pierce was having a good day. He was reviewing the number of S.H.I.E.L.D. agents lost in the fight for New York City and was internally cheering as he kept a solemn face in front of his fellow council members.

He couldn’t wait to get these knuckle-heads off the line so he could talk strategy with the true power behind S.H.I.E.L.D., HYDRA.

It wasn’t necessarily the number of S.H.I.E.L.D. agents that had him practically tap dancing under the table. It was the names. The quick thinking of the HYDRA agents that had infiltrated the Helicarrier had led to a large number of non-HYDRA agents to their deaths.

If Pierce’s calculations were correct, it was enough to finally tip the balance into HYDRA’s favor, but only if they acted quickly. This spout of good-luck easily pushed up the time table.
He impatiently tapped his hand on the table as he listened to the S.H.I.E.L.D. council members drone on about nuclear weapons, whether Fury’s disobedience was good or bad and whether the clip of the monster in LA was a poorly timed hoax because a congressman was assuring them that L.A. was better than ever.

Soon, Pierce thought, S.H.I.E.L.D. would be destroyed.

***

Amenadiel and Thor were at each other’s throats again. Dan was sitting at the table while slowly banging his head against it over and over again. If he heard the word “father” one more time…

Loki was watching the show the Angel and demi-god were putting on with glee while making light commentary with Stark. They appeared to be placing bets as Stark bemoaned the fact they didn’t have anything stronger to drink than coffee.

Mazikeen was ignoring everyone. She got a text message on her phone that had her frowning before standing up and walking out of the room. Dan didn’t even care because Thor had brought out his hammer and Amenadiel had made a vulgar joke that had Dan suicidally jumping between them.

While staring down the hammer at the blond god, Dan decided he really needed to start making better life choices.

It took awhile for everyone to calm down, but Dan used small words and a calm voice. He finally got Amenadiel to start listing off possible weaknesses of Thanos. Occasionally, Loki would throw in a tidbit or two.

However, the peace was quickly lost when Amenadiel gasped out loud.

“A portal was just opened,” he snarled staring at Dan accusingly.

Sirens followed this announcement as the lights all turned red. Fury’s voice rang out over the intercom. “Selvig is getting the same readings the Tesseract gave off when Loki opened the first portal, what the fuck did he do?”

Everyone turned in the room to look at Loki who remained in his chair hands held up. “I’ve been here the whole time,” he drawled, the picture of composure as he eyed Thor’s hammer.

Amenadiel looked around the room. “Where are Lucifer and Mazikeen?” he inquired.

“Espinoza! Did you lose the devil and the demon?” Fury’s roared over the intercom.

“Hey! Barton took Lucifer to Selvig’s lab on your orders,” said Dan while skipping over the fact that he did see Mazikeen leave and didn’t do anything about it.

It took several moments for Fury to respond, “I did not order Barton to take Lucifer to the lab that currently holds the Tesseract.”

They all looked at each other before Amenadiel motioned to Stark, “Give me your phone.”

“Why?” Stark asked looking suspicious.

“Because mine got wet,” Amenadiel replied while gritting his teeth.

Stark reluctantly passed his phone over. Amenadiel recoiled by whatever was on the screen and
looked up at Stark in disgust. Tony didn’t look apologetic at all. Amenadiel sent off a quick message.

By this time Fury, breathing heavily had burst into the room, Hill at his heels.

“Why would Lucifer open a portal?” Fury snapped out.

“Why did your man take him to the Tesseract?” Amenadiel responded equally as furious before the phone in his hand went off. He looked down, “Mazikeen is in hanger five, my brother has not responded.”

“What is she doing there?!” Fury yelled while turning to Espinoza.

Dan wondered if he should just retire and find a nice quiet beach to sit on. He heard Tahiti was nice.

***

Everyone from Loki to Maria Hill rushed over to hanger five.

Inside, they found Mazikeen crouched down holding out her demon blade next to a portal barely big enough to squeeze a person through.

Before anyone could say anything she held out her phone.

“That’s all I know,” she stated never taking her eyes off the portal.

Dan snatched the phone out of her hand and read out loud, “Popping down to hell for a moment. In hanger five. Won’t be long. Make sure nothing nasty gets out. ‘devil emoji’”

Dan decided to screw it, looked up through the hanger windows and prayed to God while telling him exactly what he thought of his son.

Amenadiel looked at the portal wearily before taking a post next to Mazikeen. She handed him one of her blades.

“I’m going to get a suit on,” Stark said before dashing out of the door.

“What do we do?” Maria asked.

“We wait,” Mazikeen said. “He took the Tesseract with him.”

Thor stood next to Amenadiel, hammer in hand, prior argument forgotten. Fury drew his weapon wishing for a bigger gun.
Hell: Part 1

How many angels can dance on the head of a pin? What a strange question. Why would they even want to? Besides, even though strictly speaking it is not forbidden, the only two angels that have danced in the last millennia are both banished from heaven. That is, if you can call the white man’s overbite dancing.

However, it does take all of the angels left in Heaven to realign Heaven and Earth.

Angels are, by their very nature, divine. It would take a mathematician on Earth a thousand years to come up with an equation to explain exactly how they moved the pathways between the two realms. But for practical purposes, the best analogy would be to imagine a car stuck in the mud and they all had to get out and push.

The momentous effort of thousands upon thousands of angels all focusing their strength on the task was only enough to find a sliver of a pathway for the barest fraction of a second.

In this time, that was shorter than the rest between a hummingbird’s heartbeat, two angels under the orders of Michael himself were able to slip through.

And not a moment too soon, as a tidal wave of cosmic forces rippled up through Hell, Earth, and Heaven. The disruption was smaller than the previous ones that had ravaged Heaven over the past week but it was still enough to careen Heaven further away.

The two angels felt the distance to Heaven grow. One gasped in despair and the other was silent.

Without speaking or hesitating they both turned and flew faster than could be explained by human physics towards Earth and Hell.

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Barton could feel the devil grinning behind him as they walked towards Selvig’s lab.

The same preternatural sense that allowed Clint to fire an arrow and hit a target through an air vent caused the hair to rise on the back of his neck as they moved forward. Eventually he couldn’t take it anymore and he spun to face Lucifer.

The devilish grin was wider and toothier than he had imaged. It was all Barton could do to stop himself from shuddering. He knew this was going to end in disaster, but he couldn’t stop picturing a mad god, a scepter and a man in a suit.

He hadn’t witnessed the actual event, but he saw the body afterwards, and his imagination did the rest as he pictured a thousand different scenarios of how it played out.

He didn’t care that Natasha told him not to keep track of the body count. This one was on him, and he, like her, had red in his ledger that he needed to wipe clean.

Lucifer said nothing as he stared at Barton expectantly with one eyebrow raised.

That made it worse somehow. There was no coercion and no temptation offered. Barton was doing this on his own.

“I want to make a deal,” Barton said, his mind made up.
“Of course you do,” Lucifer replied. Noticing Barton’s unease he explained, “You are positively brimming with desire.”

This surprisingly did nothing to calm Barton down.

Barton faced forward and resumed walking with Lucifer now walking next to him. Out of his peripheral vision, Barton could see Lucifer had neither stopped smiling or looking at him.

“I need to go to hell,” he said curtly.

“You don’t need me for that,” Lucifer said dryly, “Do something horrible and then die.”

Clint winced. Lucifer looked at him curiously before remembering Daniel’s explanation of the infinity stone.

“You know it doesn’t count, right?” Lucifer explained carelessly. Unsure of why he felt the need to reassure a human he didn’t even know, he came off sounding like a twat. “Anything you did under the Mindstone, wasn’t you. And even if you were to blame, you got the whole redemption thing down by risking your life in New York City.”

Barton just let out a huff. Undeterred from his goal, he pressed forward, “I want to make a deal to get a particular human soul out of hell and back on Earth.”

“No,” Lucifer stated firmly having stopped moving. Barton whirled at him in panic; this couldn’t be the end of his last chance already-

“Freeing one of the damned doesn’t tend to work out very well for anyone,” Lucifer drawled.

Relief flooded through Barton, there was still a glimmer of hope then, he didn’t know how badly he wanted this until the possibility was almost taken away.

“He’s not damned. He’s waiting, like you said,” Barton said in a rush. Lucifer’s eyes narrowed as Clint continued to talk, “The other one, your brother, got a soul out of hell before. So it can be done. This person doesn’t even belong there.”

Still looking at Barton warily, Lucifer replied slowly, “My brother has wings. I do not. Besides, Hell is -awful. I’m not sure you have anything that could be worth even a short trip.”

“I’ll take his place,” Barton countered immediately.

Looking at him incredulously, Lucifer replied, “How would that help at all? Of all the useless things-”

“You can have my soul,” said Clint.

Lucifer rolled his eyes. “I apologize, it just got worse. What in Father’s name would I do with your soul?” he asked mockingly.

“Then what do you want?” Clint asked beyond frustrated.

There was that grin again.

“Oh, I deal in favors,” said the devil.

Clint saw something black and red in Lucifer’s eyes that hadn’t been there before. It immediately touched on some sort of primitive fear at the core of Clint’s being, but it was gone faster than he
could consciously process, and Clint was left looking at normal human brown eyes again.

Turing away from Barton looking thoughtful, Lucifer started walking again. Now Clint trailed slightly behind him.

This could be the worst idea he had ever had in his life, Clint thought alarmed. Half remembered childhood stories flashed through his mind. Somehow the hero never got what he wanted with a wish or the cost always ended up being worse. Barton didn’t want to get Coulson back and then lose him all over again, that- he might not be able to survive.


Lucifer scoffed at him, “Betray S.H.I.E.L.D? Like you are doing now you mean? Besides I don’t really do conditional favors. That’s not really my M.O.”

“And I won’t kill anyone for you,” Clint continued as if the devil hadn’t said anything.

Lucifer now looked appalled. “You remember Maze, right? Why would I need you? I don’t think she would ever forgive me if I had someone else kill for me.”

“That’s the deal,” Clint said confidently.

It hadn't escaped his notice that they were still somehow walking towards the lab despite the fact Lucifer was now leading.

“Hmmm,” Lucifer hummed, lips pressed together considering, while walking on. “Agreed, but I have conditions myself.”

Now Clint was the one looking at him with narrowed eyes. Lucifer was smiling, but there was nothing kind in his expression.

“If the soul you want turns out to be damned, we leave him there,” Lucifer said, Clint immediately nodded completely unconcerned.

Lucifer studied him looking slightly impressed and continued, “If my brothers make it to Hell before us and bring his soul to Heaven, then that’s it. Even I can’t get a soul from there. However, either way you still owe me.”

Barton grabbed Lucifer and slammed his back into a dark corner. Their faces were a breath away from each other. Lucifer looked down at the hand on his shoulder and the forearm on his chest amused. Barton remained perfectly silent as he glanced backwards.

A muttering Selvig had left the lab and was shuffling down the hall. Barton knew Selvig’s habits backwards and forwards. Now was about the time Erik always sneak away to grab a swig of a flask he kept in the locker room. Fury hadn’t assigned anyone to fill Agent Espinoza’s old babysitting duties yet.

After he was sure Selvig was out of earshot. Barton lowered his arms and took a step away from Lucifer.

“How much time do we have until your brothers get to hell?” asked Barton.

“You know I am really not sure,” Lucifer mused. “We may have been slightly over-zealous while trying to counteract the Tesseract by opening the gate to Hell.”

At Barton’s widening eyes, Lucifer waved a hand carelessly before explaining, “Don’t worry, Earth is fine. It’s Heaven that’s idiotically placed in such a precarious position. My brothers really
should have been to Hell and back a thousand times by now, but I can tell they haven’t yet. And every day it gets worse as more and more people die.”

“I really should check it out and see what’s going on down there,” Lucifer said absently.

“So we have time?” Barton asked impatiently.

“Yes,” Lucifer said while looking through the glass of the lab door at the Tesseract that was suspended over a work bench with several clamps. “Since we will be using a short-cut, it is entirely possible that we can get to Limbo where the souls are before my brothers.”

Practically hypnotized by the Tesseract, Lucifer continued, “You know it has been a very long time since I’ve seen that.”

Barton didn’t know if it was his overactive imagination but it seemed like the blue of the Tesseract reached all the way through the lab window to Lucifer’s look of wonder.

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Two HYDRA agents in their S.H.I.E.L.D. uniforms had abandoned their posts to head to the secondary armory.

They had been ordered by Fury to guard one of the outbuildings and were annoyed by how long of a walk it was back to the main part of base. Also, the primary armory had exploded earlier and they really weren’t sure why.

The rumor mill had suggested that Fury was being vindictive about all the agents who had gone AWOL to fight in the battle of NYC and was working them to exhaustion as punishment. Even Barton had been grounded.

“They’re all jumping at shadows,” a mousey agent with stringy dirty blond hair muttered to his compatriot, a tall muscular man whose face was so conventionally attractive that it was boring. A red alert had sounded earlier, only to be turned off by some level one agent.

“They probably blew it up themselves by accident,” the blond continued after they passed yet another group of agents suffering from some sort of mass Tourette syndrome outbreak as they all alternated between praying and cursing.

“Better for us if they are exhausted,” the attractive one replied while waggling his eyebrows in a move that normally got him laid at a bar and he started to hum the Imperial March.

The blonde rolled his eyes; the hot ones were always nerds.

They got to the armory and started sorting out the weapons they would need.

“We should just blow this one up too,” the blond complained. “The reinforcements are bringing their own weapons, and we just need to make sure S.H.I.E.L.D. has nothing.”

The attractive one stopped humming to smile at him, “Ah, don’t be like that. We need the more specialized toys if we are going to execute order 66,” he said with a wink. “That was the best part of the whole series,” he continued wistfully.

The blond moaned at the reference, but stopped when he saw what the other had pulled out.

“Who’s that for!??” the blond asked amazed.
“Oh, you’ll see,” said the hot one while caressing the very long case. “Come on let’s put it on the back of a truck. I can’t wait to try it out.”

The blonde shook his head; hot, nerdy and psychopathic like all of his exes. Today was just not his day.

***

Barton was clenching his bow and fingerling the string as he glared at Lucifer.

The devil had nonchalantly wandered around base with the Tesseract in his bare hands in full view of everyone for the past ten minutes. Never mind other agents in the hallways or which doors Lucifer had insisted Barton open whether he had the clearance to or not.

Lucifer had only nonsensically explained, “Hell and Earth aren’t really overlapping. There isn’t a map of Hell that corresponds with particular locations of Earth per se. Hell doesn’t really have directions after all. You could walk for eternity towards something in Hell and never get any closer only to one day turn around and discover it was a couple steps behind you all along.”

Barton’s jaw was clenched as they circled one room for the second time, passing by a squint who barely glanced at them before becoming reabsorbed by the tablet she was holding. Barton stared at her in shock as she turned around the corner. He was starting to understand Espinoza’s explanation. Can you really get away with everything by simply being too unbelievable?

Lucifer continued on obliviously, “However, there are places that are easier to cross-over to one section of Hell or another. The Tesseract can theoretically go anywhere, but I’ve never actually used it before. It’s better that we find a soft spot, as it were, than have to tear a larger hole in the Universe than needed or end up in the nasty parts of Hell.”

“There are some places in Hell we need to avoid,” Lucifer stated seriously for once.

“Or you’re just stalling,” Barton snarled feeling like the grains of an hourglass were trickling down.

Lucifer looked completely miffed at the suggestion. “Through those doors is a good spot,” Lucifer said with a disdainful inhale through his nose.

Barton looked up to see the words Hanger 5 above a door wide enough for the Hulk to easily pass through. The Hanger was also full of S.H.I.E.L.D. agents.

Barton grabbed the bridge of his nose and sighed.

“Ok, but there is one more part of the deal, without it everything is off,” Barton said.

Now Lucifer sighed while rolling his eyes, “Yes?”

“After we do this, after we get back, the Tesseract stays with the us- the humans,” Barton said while staring down Lucifer.

“Well, I don’t want it,” Lucifer replied staring dubiously at the cube.

At Barton’s expectant expression, Lucifer sighed again before replying, “Fine. You have my word. The humans keep the Tesseract until you lot decide what to do with it.”

Nodding and throwing his bow over his shoulder, Barton said, “Stay here. I’ll get rid of everyone
“Go to Hell,” Lucifer finished with a grin.

Barton only grimaced and turned away already working on spinning a tale in his mind to tell these agents to get them to go somewhere else.

By the time he got back, Lucifer was just finishing sending a text message.

“What did you just do?” Barton cried out, his hand itching for his bow again.

“Told Maze what we were doing,” Lucifer replied simply, “Relax. She’s just the back-up plan. This is Hell we are talking about here.”

“We’ve already wasted too much time,” Barton growled. “Let’s get this going.”

“So eager,” Lucifer said walking to the middle of the hanger holding the Tesseract. “You may not feel that way once we get there.”

Lucifer did something Barton couldn’t see - which was odd considering that this was Hawkeye- and the Tesseract was suspended in mid-air spinning faster and faster as Lucifer stood next to it awash in its blue glow.

There was a flash of light and a shockwave traveled out, however, it was much smaller and more controlled than when Loki broke through. The portal appeared stable and self-containing.

Lucifer grabbed the Tesseract as it slowly stopped spinning. He offered it to Barton who held open his quiver (which was capable of holding a variety of unstable substances, considering all the different arrow tips he had). Lucifer dropped the Tesseract to the bottom and the blue glow faded to nothing.

The portal was very small. They would have to squeeze through it one at a time. Barton could already feel the heat radiating outward. A sheen of sweat formed around his face. Even Lucifer looked a little pale.

For once the devil didn’t say anything. He glanced at Barton briefly before sliding in. Barton took several deep breaths and followed.

It felt like Clint was being stretched unimaginably long and then compressed to nothing. The separation between Clint and the rest of the universe fell away and he got a glimpse of time and space so vast and wide that he felt as insignificant as a grain of dust. He realized he knew nothing of reality, not really. He could feel his mind shattering as he saw the void between worlds and just when he thought for sure he would go mad, it was over.

He was standing on solid grey rock. Ash floated around him. Barton stared at his own shoes as he sucked down hot sulfuric air in sharp quick gasps. A thought popped into his head when he realized that was what Loki felt and Stark had seen. What a strange brotherhood, he thought wildly, and wondered if he really had lost his mind.

When Barton finally looked up he could see the back of Lucifer’s suit. The devil looked over his shoulder at Clint with a grin, Ash already coating his hair.

“Just where I wanted to end up,” he exclaimed with glee before pointedly looking behind Barton. “Mind the edge.”
Barton twisted and looked down and then looked more down. The world spun as vertigo hit him like a truck. His vision lost focus as his mind scrambled to process what he was seeing. All he could do was stagger backwards least he fall over. It would have been a very long fall.

They weren’t on as solid of ground as Barton thought. They were miles above hell and there was nothing in between them and it. As he looked up and around he saw the land he stood on was part of an archipelago of floating jagged rocks.

Beyond the ash, the clouds had a sickly green hue to them. There was some sort of precipitate falling in the distance and Barton had a feeling it wasn’t water. What looked like lightening didn’t actually come out of the clouds but split the sky into sections that immediately and impossibly grew as if the world itself was expanding.

He couldn’t find a light source even though he clearly could see. The shadows disorientated him because they appeared to move out of the corner of his eye but stayed put when he stared directly at them. At one point he cast four separate shadows on the jagged stalagmites, then none, then two but in other directions.

He stumbled over to stand next to Lucifer who was now looking out into the distance.

“Ah, look. Our rides are here,” Lucifer said laughing.

Clint looked out at what he thought was a swarm of insects, but he was wrong. The swarm grew impossibly large as the beings got closer faster than Clint could imagine. They were monsters—demons Clint realized—flying under their own power or riding winged beasts. They came in all shapes and sizes. The only similarity was how ugly they all were. Oh, and the fact they were all carrying weapons they brandished angrily.

Reacting on instinct, Barton grabbed Lucifer and attempted to drag him back to the open portal. Maybe there would still be time to close it before they got here, Barton thought.

Lucifer wasn’t cooperating and they barely got behind one of the stalagmites when the first of the swarm landed.

“What are you so worried about?” Lucifer asked. One might say he was giggling, if the devil giggled which he certainly did not do. “You brought the devil with you. There is no better firepower in Hell than me.”

The demons were speaking in a low guttural tone. Every once in a while Barton could catch an English word. They were hissing, “Intruders.”

Lucifer shook off Barton’s arm before strolling out to the crowd of demons that had landed on the rock. Lucifer fiddled with the cuffs of his suit as all the demons pointed spears, clubs, arrows, and swords at him.

“How is that really any way to greet your Lord?” Lucifer asked not even bothering to look up from his sleeve.


An arrow flew out from a nervous demon with a pig snout and dragonfly wings which Lucifer caught in one hand.

“That wasn’t very smart,” Lucifer growled back. The arrow burst into flames and it almost looked
like the fire had consumed Lucifer himself.

Where Lucifer had stood, a red being of bloody muscles quickly became covered in a flame that oozed like molten lava. The liquid fire started extending outwards from the red being towards the demons that were now panicking.

Besides the one arrow, Lucifer wasn’t being attacked, Clint realized startled. He was controlling the fire. He was the red being.

Trails of lava snaked around the stalagmites making it impossibly hotter as the island itself shuddered and pieces started falling off towards Hell. Lucifer walked towards the fleeing demons as they climbed over each other trying to escape. Lucifer managed to grab the harnesses of two of the beasts causing at least one demon without wings to leap off the edge and grab the waist of another. They began to spiral downwards as the winged demon tried to kick away the one desperately holding on.

As Lucifer turned to look at Barton, the red muscles turned into bone and then shadowy flames before resuming his human form. He was still grinning.

Barton looked at him and then looked back at the portal considering. His eyes caught something on the rocks besides Lucifer’s feet.

A quiver of arrows had been dropped by a demon. Clint made his way over to Lucifer and picked them up. The points spiraled out and looked wickedly sharp. He didn’t know what metal they were made of but put them in his own quiver above the Tesseract.

He could work with this.

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Somehow Lucifer was the one riding the enormous horse/dragon looking creature with a majestic flowing mane, two hoofs in front and long scaly fins in the back. Barton got the fat smelly salamander with tiny wings that the lazy beast forgot to flap occasionally causing them lurch downward until Barton yelled and hit it in panic.

Barton was pretty sure the dumb beast had fallen asleep at one point while flying causing Barton to dig his heels in to its sides jolting it awake.

Lucifer was chatting away over the constant roar of the ever shifting hell landscape as rocks randomly rained downward and toxic storms passed through. Lucifer was kind enough to avoid the worst of it for Barton’s sake.

“We arrived pretty much in the middle of nowhere of Hell. No great beasts and no traps, just a few platoons of guards patrolling the soft places and you already saw them,” he shouted over the noise.

Human screams started to rise up from underneath them as they passed over fields of flesh that Barton attempted not to look at. He could see demons loping between the fields holding whips and spikes.

“The worst of Hell is over there, in its center,” Lucifer said nodding to a dark and eerily silent spot in the distance. “Even I’m no longer immune to those doors.”

“What do they do?” Clint asked curious despite himself.

“Guilt,” Lucifer called back, “the majority of humans don’t need demons to suffer. Their minds
come up with tortures that demons couldn’t dream of. Even I’ve been amazed at the depths of despair you put yourselves through.”

He couldn’t help himself, Clint called back, “What is the devil guilty of?”

Lucifer snorted and looked at the center of hell with an expression Clint couldn’t recognize, “I killed my brother, Uriel. Had to, he was going to kill other people I care about, but that’s never stopped anyone from feeling guilty.”

He seemed to shake himself before turning back towards Clint and he continued talking as if nothing unusual had happened.

“The ones in the fields and the other chew toys of the demons are the humans that need a little help understanding the error of their ways,” Lucifer said cruelly. “Your psychopaths, fanatics, and dictators of all sorts. The ones that never cared about the suffering they caused.”

Barton looked down at the people running and screaming naked below. He tried to understand a Universe where this was justice and it was hard to swallow.

“How much longer until we get there?” Barton finally asked ever practical.

“Hard to say,” Lucifer said, “Time is irrelevant here. What feels like ages is only hours on Earth. But have you thought about how to find your man?”

“What?” Clinton asked sharply. “You’re bringing me to him.”

“I’m bringing you towards Limbo,” Lucifer said confused, “Where all the good souls are being kept. I don’t have a way to pick out one good soul. He doesn’t belong here; he’s not one of Hell’s so I have no way of tracking him.”

“You could’ve mentioned that before we left!” yelled Barton. “How many souls are currently in Limbo?”

Lucifer scoffed. “It’s been almost a week since all of this started. At least three quarters of a million humans have died, most likely more due all the destruction.”

“But only the good ones-” Barton began.

“How many people do you thing actually end up in Hell?” Lucifer asked in disbelief. “Walking down the street how many people do you pass do you think truly deserve to suffer for all of eternity?”

Barton didn’t speak.

“5% is a bad day,” Lucifer exclaimed, “Most of the time it’s less than 1%. 1 out of 100 people, maybe, end up in hell.”

“Best case, that’s 675K souls to go through, but the number could be as high as a million,” Lucifer replied angrily. He was on a roll now; he had spent millennia being treated like the bad guy when all he was doing was cleaning up his Father’s mess. There was no reason his Father couldn’t just smite the very low number of humans that caused nearly all the suffering on Earth.

“Of course, your perception of the world is probably skewed,” Lucifer said nastily, “You are surrounded by some of the highest percentages of people who end up here.”
“Look,” Barton countered back, “S.H.I.E.L.D. does a lot of-"

“I’m not talking about S.H.I.E.L.D.” Lucifer said rolling his eyes, “or all those people whose only crime was being a little different or inventing something new or whatever it is you lot hunt down and try to contain.”

“Then what are you talking-” Barton started.

“There’s Limbo,” Lucifer interrupted.

Barton was glad Lucifer had mentioned the number of souls before this moment. Even forewarned Barton was staggered by the sheer number of people collected on a plateau that rose high about the ground. He blinked and the flat land turned into a labyrinth of twisting pathways filled with people. He blinked again and was a simple plain again where everyone stood shoulder to shoulder.

“Hrrpph,” Lucifer grunted unhappily. “The unrest is higher than I like. It’s good that we are here. We are lucky they were able to hold the line for this long.”

Barton pulled his eyes away from the people to the perimeter where he saw a mass of demons surrounding – no guarding- the souls on the plain. Others were flying above the crowds. And beyond the demons protecting the souls there was an equally large mass of other demons pressing forward, occasionally darting in quick bursts before being beaten back.

He didn’t understand why he hadn’t seen this immediately. Hell was messing with his head.

“Oh, dear,” Lucifer said dismayed. Barton looked at him quickly, but Lucifer wasn’t looking at the plateau anymore but at two comets zooming towards the souls.

Barton could feel his stomach drop out from under him as the comets got closer. Was he really going to watch all the souls get destroyed? What happens if you die in Hell? Can you die? Phil was down there!

But the comets stopped before they reached the souls. Almost on the exact opposite side from where Lucifer and Barton were two figures now hovered with white wings above the plateau.

“My brothers are here,” Lucifer said grumpily. “We better hope to find your man soon, be- What are they doing?!”
Phil Coulson blinked and shook himself. There were more people around him than he remembered: older people, young people, and some children. Everyone was packed in so tightly their shoulders were brushing.

With a start, Phil realized he could no longer see any of the other S.H.I.E.L.D. agents. When did that happen? He thought for sure that he was just talking to them about how they could get a message to Earth. Or was that years ago?

The brunette agent with the crooked smile had insisted that he call her Bob. Short for Roberta Roberts, she had said. My parents were monsters. But of the human variety, she added after looking around.

Coulson blinked again and realized he was now looking up through the ash at greenish clouds. The people around him were different. The horizon in the distance looked different. How did he get over here? Did he move or did everything else?

Phil slipped in and out of awareness like water flowing out of cupped hands.

Then he was looking at his hands. He had been here for a thousand years, hadn’t he? Shouldn’t they be more wrinkled? His suit was the same but the ash kept falling. Around him there were people staring blankly, covered in several inches of ash. Would they be buried like Pompeii but in slow motion?

Even though he wasn’t moving it felt like his mind was tipping backwards into nothingness. Phil fought to hold onto any thought but he was losing. From the bottom up, his vision started to fade. The only thought that remained was the awareness that he used to be able to think.

He had a last moment of panic when he wondered if he would ever come back to himself before that thought faded as well. Just when the darkness had almost reached the top of his vision, the crowd rippled around them. Previously frozen people were all pushing forwards in one direction as they cried and prayed for the first time in who knows how long.

Phil was jolted into awareness as if his consciousness had never left. His sense of time was still screwy, but he could see everyone and everything. He could plan and hope again.

Unlike everyone else, he moved against the crowd and pushed towards whatever was making people run away. He was curious. And he didn’t want to fall back into apathy again.

He discovered that by chance or luck he was near the edge of the crowd of people closest to where the demons stood facing outwards. They appeared to be struggling against something climbing up the side of the sheer cliff Phil had seen earlier.

He could see them jabbing downwards with their spears, growling and yelling at each other. A group of winged demons flew towards the edge before twisting in formation and dive bombing whatever was on the other side. Phil could hear a chilling scream, the winged demons reappeared, and then what seemed like a very long time afterwards, a distant thud.

Phil found himself standing alone in a gap, with the fleeing humans on one side and the demons on the other. He could look up and down the line to see the hoards of demons grouped together talking in different languages as they looked distrustfully over the edge.
After the initial panic of the humans faded, he could see the gap closing as the people dully drifted back. Coulson’s own vision started fading and the world started tipp-

Fear! Phil thought, snapping himself out of it. Fear keeps the apathy away or maybe adrenaline. Reacting on instinct he walked closer to the wall of demons. In one section, there was a break between two different groups, and he could peer over the edge.

That! crystallized reality very quickly. There were armies of demons scaling the wall and something snakelike that stretched from the cliff to as far as Phil could see was slithering below.

Phil was shoved backwards by a demon whose face opened into four mouths that were all twisted in disgust as three disturbingly human eyes glared at him. The demon turned and spat four gobs of spit to the side before losing interest in Phil and turning back to the edge.

Phil felt better than he had- how long had he been here? Three minutes? since he got here. He had a goal.

Every time an attack occurred from below, the gap opened up and Coulson was free to run to a different section of Limbo, usually towards the greatest number of skirmishes.

Whenever there was a lull and things started to fade again, he risked creeping up to stand behind demons. If his eventual discovery and the increasing annoyance of the demons didn’t snap him out of his ennui then the conversations the demons had certainly did.

“-hellfire tribe said they would join our ranks if we gave them 10,000 human souls.”

“Only 10,000! That’s a steal. The kingdom of bone and flesh want 1 out of every 5 to pull their army away from-”

“-leave now. Grab a few for ourselves and be done-”

“-ucifer said not even one.”

“And where is he now? If he cared about these humans-”

“I can’t believe I’m saying this. Where are those fucking angels?”

Phil was considering the merits between looking over the edge again or trying to pickpocket a demon who was covered in gold coins when a familiar gargoyle flew towards him.

“Phil! What are you doing? It’s not safe,” Gaudium exclaimed as he hovered two inches away from Coulson’s face. His under-bite twitched nervously.

“We already talked about this!” Spera flew in next to Gaudium peering at Phil with her large eyes. She had sticky blue goo on the tip of her spear and splattered on her dress. “He’s stupid.”

“You gotta get closer to the center,” Gaudium belched out looking genuinely concerned, “the farther from the edge the better.”

“I appreciate your concern,” Coulson replied evenly, “but I can’t. I start to forget who I am.”

Gaudium worriedly looked at his older sister. She only rolled her eyes before twisting her spear around and jabbing it into Coulson’s shoulders.

“Ow!” Coulson cried out. They had gathered some onlookers as demons turned to see what the commotion was about. Their expressions looked a little too predatory for Phil’s liking.
“Remember who you are now or should I make up a name-tag?” Spera asked sarcastically.

Phil grabbed his throbbing shoulder and realized, yes, everything was as clear as when he had his first look over the edge 20 minutes ago. Or was it 20 years ago?

“That is better, thank you,” Phil said to Spera. After hearing this, the demons eavesdropping around them openly stared at Phil as if he was the strangest being in all of hell.

“Good! Get to the center and I’ll have Spera come stick ya ever once and a while,” Gaudium snarled.

“No need,” Spera said looking upwards, “Our cousins are here.”

“Took their sweet ass time,” Gaudium spat out not entirely hiding the relief in his voice while swooping upwards to get a better look at what appeared to be two comets shooting towards them.

Looking back at Coulson, Gaudium said, “You’ll be ok, Phil. They’ll get everyone out of here soon enough.”

Their cousins turned out to be two angels, both with curly blonde hair and white wings. They could have been bookends, but the more Coulson looked at them the more different they appeared from each other, but he couldn’t pinpoint why.

Did one of them have longer hair? Or sharper cheekbones? Was the cut of one of their very stereotypical robes different than the other? Coulson was memorized. They were the cleanest things in all of Hell. Their white wings and white robes radiated over the ashy dim landscape.

The demons grew silent as they looked up at them warily. The attacks from below had finally stopped. The dazed humans were snapping out of their lethargy and began talking to each other in excited whispers.

However, the angels didn’t look happy as they gazed over all of the humans. One appeared to be angrily talking to the other who remained silent. The angry one became more animated and started gesturing at the humans with an outstretched arm. He finally stopped moving and stared at the other as if waiting for an answer.

The silent one closed his eyes and even though they were hundreds of feet in the air, Coulson could see one perfect tear slide down his face. It was beautiful and heartbreaking, and it might as well have filled up a movie screen by how clearly Coulson could see it. He wasn’t the only human affected. All around him other humans began to silently cry.

The first angel looked satisfied by his brother’s response and turned back towards the humans with both of his arms outstretched.

“That,” Gaudium started, sounding unsure, “can’t be good.”

A spark of static jumped from one of the Angel’s hands to the other. It quickly turned into forks of electricity that grew outward. The purplish glow of the static discharged under-lit the Angel’s face turning it gaunt and unforgiving.

Lightning shot out from the angel’s hands hitting the edge of Limbo to the combined shock of demons and humans alike. However, it wasn’t the lightning they should have been worried about but the roar of sound that followed.

The thunder after the lightning disintegrated several of the demon guards before striking the cliff.
side and causing a large chunk to fall to the ground below. The vibrations of the sound shook the plateau with rolling quakes. When the sound wave hit Coulson, it felt like his very atoms were trying to shake apart. His ears popped and everything started sounding thick and low. He reached up to touch something wet under his ear. It was blood.

Coulson could see but not hear Spera screaming at all the demons while circling her arms like an aircraft marshal. She, Gaudium and the rest of the winged demons flew straight at the Angels.

However, the section of the cliff that had fallen might as well have created a ramp for the demons below to reach the plateau. They poured over the demons on the edge as they tried to get to the humans.

The attack on two fronts broke the Lucifer Loyalists. Some of the winged demons turned to fly back down to the plateau to fight, some were still flying towards the Angels, but most fled.

Having seen this, the non-winged demons by the edge not already stuck in the middle of a bloody battle turned to run away from the onslaught. The only direction they could go was the same one the terrified humans were trying to escape to. Humans and demons alike were side-by-side shoving and pushing each other in their mad dash to get away.

Coulson was also running but he was one of the humans closest to edge. The fleeing demons that were once their guards simply jumped over him. Now there was nothing between Coulson and the tidal wave of encroaching demons besides the ever decreasing number of the demons too loyal to Lucifer or too slow to not to get caught up in the fight.

The Angel’s next attack was broader but more dispersed. Several tongues of lightening shot out randomly at the remaining flying demons with the roars of thunder quickly following the flash of lights.

The pandemonium around Coulson was in sharp contrast to his dulled hearing. It was as if someone had left the TV on mute. The carnage of the demons being ripped apart looked ridiculous like the worst kid’s cartoon ever. It was all bright blood of a multitude of colors and white bone. Coulson could feel the thump thump thump of his own heartbeat in his skull.

The first clear sound that broke through Coulson’s eardrums was Spera’s high pitched scream.

“Guadium!” she yelled desperately from above.

Coulson twisted around to catch sight of Spera flying after Gaudium’s body that was falling like dead weight. He must have been hit by the Angel’s attack. He landed right in front of the demons charging at the humans.

Coulson was running back towards them before he could even process the insanity of what he was doing. Good day to die, he thought, again. He decided to leave philosophical questions of mortality in Hell for another day. This is what he was trained to do.

Spera was crouched over Gaudium’s unmoving body holding her blood soaked weapon while snarling at demons who started to surround them.

Coulson ducked under the first wave that had passed by the two fallen Cherubs uninterested in them.

One demon’s large talon swiped out to grab Phil. But he was too fast. Once Phil was behind the demon he turned and climbed up the demon’s ridged back like it was stairs, circled his arms around its neck and yanked downwards letting gravity do all the work.
There was a sharp snap from its neck and the demon’s body was left twitching on the ashy rocks. Coulson grabbed the club that was made out of bone and had spikes on the end that the demon had dropped. He turned and batted a demon that had gotten too close to Gaudium and Spera causing its head to indent inward.

Spera’s bulbous eyes looked at Coulson in wonderment.

“Phil for King!” Gaudium said dazedly as he started to come around. “Leave me here,” he continued while slurring his words, “save yourselves.”

The ground shook again, a larger part of the edge had fallen off. But then a strange sliding scraping noise could be heard over the chaos. Even some of the charging demons turned to look.

A snake-thing wider than a subway tunnel shot over the edge, its scales were the size of sidewalk squares, and more of its body kept sliding and sliding over the edge as it coiled together.

It was hard to tell which demons were which as they all tried to jump out of the way. The snake-thing snatched one of them up and swallowed it whole, who knows if it was one of the Lucifer Loyalist or one of the attackers.

“I take it back! I take it back!” Guadium cried out. “Save me! Get me the fuck out of here.”

Coulson scooped up Gaudium in one arm as he rested the club over his shoulder. He grunted at the effort, the fallen Cherub was a lot heavier than he looked.

Gaudium rested like a very ugly baby in the crook of Coulson’s arm. The three used the distraction created by the snake-thing to flee.

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The problem with a plateau that shot up like the largest devil’s thumb in existence was that there was really no place to run to.

The attack on the one side of the plateau caused a chain reaction as demons started to abandon their posts all around the edge. The demons who stayed weren’t enough to stop the attackers below from crawling up over the edge of the cliff.

Over a million humans and demons were running towards the center of the plateau. In their panic, they hadn’t thought of what they would do when there was nowhere else to run. It didn’t matter though; they were never going to make it.

The silent angel floated down from the sky to the exact center of the plain. The humans and demons closest to him tried to stop moving but they were being pushed forward by the masses behind them. The angel was still crying and it was still the most beautiful heartbreaking thing anyone had ever seen.

He held his hands outward, tracks of tears on his face. His power was a lot more silent than his brother’s.

The ground below him started to blacken and expand outward. The screams from one side of the plateau didn’t seem to be able to pass through the ever expanding circle. It was eerie and even the demons didn’t want to find out what would happen to someone on the wrong side of the circle.

The humans and demons in the center started to turn and push back at the masses running towards them. They were at a standstill; the attacking demons on one side and the angel on the other.
One unlucky human was too close to the circle and his skin started to blacken as the dark slowly crept up his leg. He began to scream a high pitched yelp of terror and beat at his leg with his hands only spreading the blackness faster.

Then his screams stopped even though his mouth was still moving. He convulsed and fell to the ground making no noise. His body shook and he stared into the distance seeing things that weren’t there. The effort to get away from the center doubled.

But the angel lowered his arms looking upwards before the circle could reach the crowd. The black started to recede. It oozed out of the human and he sat up gasping. Noise from the other side could be heard again. When the blackness reached the angel it disappeared altogether. The angel shot into the air and flew away and the crowd looked to see what had saved them.

The greenish clouds ignited into fire, blanketing the sky in orange and red licks of flame. A figure on a winged beast that was part horse, part dragon, and part sea monster was rocketing towards the first angel. The long mane on the beast trailing behind as the wings beat powerfully. The silent angel scrambled to catch up to it but he was too far away.

“He’s here!” Spera shouted gleefully.

“Well, I’ll be damned twice!” Gaudium said weakly from Coulson’s arm. He started looking a little green around the edges as Phil twisted and jumped while whacking all the approaching demons with his club. His suit was covered in bits of brain matter and ash now.

“Whose here?” Coulson shouted as he struggled to pull his club back. A spike had gotten stuck in an eye socket of a demon that had looked like a moldy lion. The smell coming from the body was unbelievable.

“Our Lord Lucifer,” Spera said while doing somersaults in the air. The battle around them slowed as more and more demons started noticing the devil.

The devil’s body was a shifting mass of fire, exposed bloody muscles, and red skin. He collided with the angel in a giant ball of fire and lightning. A sonic boom shook the surrounding area. The horse beast let out a whinny of distress but the devil and angel only looked more infuriated.

The angel brought his hands around. More lightning was forming, but before it was let lose, the devil punched the blond angel causing him to fly backwards, back rounding in an arch. The angel’s hands flew to his face where blood was dripping down his nose.

Lucifer was yelling at the angel now but Coulson couldn’t make out the words. Whatever the angel said in response must have pissed the devil off because fireballs started to rain out of the sky.

Coulson could feel a rumbling under his feet and the landscape of Hell itself started shifting in the distance. Entire mountain ranges got closer or further away.

Lucifer spared a glance at the fray below and waved his hand in a short abortive gesture before turning back towards the angel.

At first, Coulson didn’t think that anything had happened but then trails of lava started to emerge from below. They rose up like living creatures before whipping forward, lassoing around the attacking demons. The demons screamed before catching fire and disintegrating into cinders.
And just like that, the battle reversed course. The attacking demons turned to run away. Even the snake-like monster slunk back down the cliff-side. The Lucifer Loyalists gleefully starting bringing down any stragglers as they went after the other demons. Even the humans took part in the chase. Of course, the humans leading the charge were all wearing S.H.I.E.L.D. uniforms, Coulson noticed. They found discarded weapons and fought alongside the demons.

Coulson saw one S.H.I.E.L.D. agent run straight through a yellow gooey demon. He splattered the sickly substance everywhere while letting out a giant Whoop.

Everyone was bolstered by the devil above. The ground started to shift under their feet and the labyrinth reappeared. The attacking demons found themselves trapped in dead ends being constantly tripped by lose rocks while the Lucifer Loyalists and humans were protected by moving barriers and shown safe passage ways through Limbo.

A chant rose about the crowd, yelled by both demons and humans alike, “Lucifer! Lucifer! Lucifer!”

Coulson was mesmerized by the sight when a comet flew across his field of vision. The silent angel was flying towards Lucifer’s back, but he was brought up short by a large beast, this one more reptilian with smaller wings. The beast got between the angel and the devil and it was being ridden by- Barton?

Barton?! Was the thing he was riding breathing fire?

Coulson didn’t know what was more unbelievable; Barton riding a giant flying fire-breathing salamander in Hell or the humans cheering on Lucifer as if this was some sort of cosmic wrestling match. However, Coulson’s eyes were drawn to the divine beings.

Lucifer and the first angel were back at it. After glaring at the blood on his hand, the angel let out a yell and flew straight at Lucifer. Lucifer jabbed the angel in the side repeatedly, but the angel merely held on as electric discharged erupted over both of them. The horse-beast whinny turned into an echoing howl after feeling the electricity.

Lucifer yelled in frustration and pain before doing a complicated twist that involved kicking the angel in the head before grabbing onto his golden locks. Lucifer urged the beast to fly away as he dragged the angel through the air by his hair.

The Angel scratched at Lucifer’s hands, kicking and screaming but to no avail. He couldn’t get a hold of him. They were getting further away as Lucifer unrelentingly pulled the angel towards a floating island that hadn’t been there before.

Coulson couldn’t tell if the island was zooming towards them or if Lucifer was moving the entire Hell landscape towards it.

***

Barton’s first thought when the angels attacked was Coulson. He dropped closer to limbo scanning the crowd. Between the humans and demons there were at least a million bodies moving around. Barton barely noticed Lucifer shift into a monster as he flew like a bat out of hell- bat through hell? - towards the angel.

Something was wrong. Every time Barton got a good look at the scene, everything shifted. First it was a plain, then it was a labyrinth, and then there was no one.

He yelled in frustration, but saw when the second angel started flying towards Lucifer.
Barton kicked at the flying salamander. To the beast’s credit, once it saw Lucifer’s true form and the angel it lost all of its sluggishness. It flew at the angel faster than Barton that it was capable of, snapping at him as soon as it got close enough.

The angel stopped and considered the beast. If the angel had been human, he would have been the most beautiful man Barton had ever seen.

The angel appeared ready to attack, but looked shocked when he saw Barton riding on the beast’s back. He seemed unwilling to do anything to the beast with Barton there and tried to dart around it.

However, the beast was too fast. Every move the angel made the beast would counter and try bite down at whatever body part of the Angel was closest; arm, foot or wing. A glow started to appear underneath where Barton was sitting and smoke trickled from the salamander’s mouth before jets of flame shot out causing a few of the angel’s feathers to be singed by the fire.

As the angel and the beast danced in the sky, Barton was still trying to look through the crowds. Looking around the angel’s head Clint kept his eyes peeled for one particular person. Except the harder he looked the more out of focus things became.

Eventually the angel managed to feint the beast and got around it before flying towards Lucifer who was still dragging the first angel towards a very familiar floating rock. How had that gotten there? Barton could see a hint of the blue portal that was still open.

Clint could feel the sands of the hourglass again as he turned to look at the people. He was confronted with a ghastly vision as it looked like everyone’s faces had disappeared. Then their faces were back but shadows started to obscure Barton’s vision. Why couldn’t he see anything?!

A near inaudible whisper of laughter came from the air around Barton as a shadow in the shape of Barton and the Beast materialized in the air next to him.

Glowing red eyes and a mouth appeared on shadow Barton’s face. The real Barton watched it grin at him before it and the shadow beast turned and flew towards the angels and the devil. Somehow Barton just knew this was the same shadow he had seen when he first got to Hell. Lucifer had said there were no traps or great beast, but Barton wondered how long he had been on Earth away from his kingdom.

Barton looked back at the crowd once before remembering the portal and the Tesseract that now weighed a thousand pounds at the bottom of his quiver. If he didn’t move fast the shadow demon might make it to Earth and who knows what it would do there.

Clint felt the last grain of sand tumble out of the hourglass. That was it, he was out of time. With a shudder, he closed his eyes momentarily before turning his beast and urging it towards the portal, leaving limbo behind.

He glared at the backs of the angels. As far as he was concerned, the angels had screwed up everything. Barton didn’t know why they attacked the souls, but didn’t care. If he couldn’t save Phil, he would avenge him.

***

Still holding onto Gaudium with Spera now perched on his shoulder, Coulson watched the devil, angels and Barton fading into the distance. He had thought, for a second, that Barton had seen him standing by the edge of limbo.

But the second had passed and Barton had looked through him and away.
Bob came bounding up to Coulson smiling with her crooked teeth. It looked like she had dipped her fingers into bright red blood before pulling them over her face in imitation of war paint.

“Was that Barton with Lucifer?” she exclaimed still high on adrenaline. “Does S.H.I.E.L.D. have the devil on payroll?”

She seemed delighted by the idea and started giggling. Or maybe that was just nerves. She had a wickedly curved blade that was longer than her forearm stuck in her belt.

Coulson looked around where even everyday humans were taking up arms and taking down demons. And entire mob of them had surrounded one of their attackers and was kicking it into a bloody pulp. Coulson couldn’t even tell what it had looked like anymore.

There were groups of Lucifer Loyalists staring wide-eyed at the brutality of humans. Coulson had a funny feeling they had never seen humans fighting back on this large of a scale before.

Bob had stopped giggling but was still looking at Coulson expectedly as if he had all the answers. Coulson sighed. He felt very old and very tired.

“Not when we died, they didn’t,” he answered. “But who knows what has happened in the years after.”

Coulson tried to reassure himself by the fact that Barton was still- alive? Was he alive? How did he get here? What was happening on Earth? Coulson’s downward spiral was interpreted by Spera.

“Years?” Spera exclaimed looking at Coulson exasperated. “It hasn’t even been a week on Earth since all this started.”

“A week,” Coulson said calmly, not feeling calm at all.

“Ya, welcome to eternity. Your rides just tried to feed you to demons,” Gaudium said trying to pull himself out of Coulson’s arms before crumbling back down in pain.

“We need to get Gaudium help,” Coulson said focusing on one task at a time. “Are there-” he paused having realized how ridiculous that would have sounded.

Spera finished his thought. “Healers? Doctors or hospitals? This is Hell Phil. Either Gaudium gets better or-” she trailed off looking around them.

Both Coulson and Bob looked around warily. Bob pulled the blade out of her belt and clenched it her fist. Despite the fact they had just faced a common enemy together, Coulson realized they were still surrounded on all sides by monsters. This was still hell and their exit strategy had just been dragged away by his hair.

The euphoria of winning the battle was still hanging over the demons and humans but what happens when they realized Lucifer had left and there were hundreds of thousands of human souls and more were still appearing every second. The plateau was already getting crowded before one side of it had started crumbling. Where would they go?
A Tease

Outside of the south entrance of the S.H.I.E.L.D. base, a black Escalade was parked on a dirt side road hidden by the foliage. It had taken a very long time to get through NYC to the base and that was with Charlotte flooring it on every clear stretch of road.

Five minutes into the drive, Chloe had wondered if Charlotte had ever even passed her driver’s test. She seemed to think driving on the right side of the road (vs. the left side or sidewalks and in one memorable occasion down concrete stairs) was optional.

Chloe had to scream at Charlotte to stop the first time they came across a crowd of jittery New Yorkers trying to clean up the city.

“What?” Charlotte had asked. “The humans need to move.”

“Pedestrians,” Chloe had hissed, “have the right away.”

“Really?” asked Charlotte sounding genuinely confused. “I had always thought that was a typo in the law books. It doesn’t make any sense.”

That was a couple hours ago. The urban landscape had eventually faded and they started driving the Escalade on back-roads through a forest as they traveled upstate.

The GPS on Lucifer’s phone appeared to be leading them to the middle of a nature preserve. Of course, Chloe thought to herself, nature preserves don’t usually have guards carrying automatic weapons by concrete gates with barbed wire fences stretching as far as you could see.

At Chloe’s insistence, Charlotte had parked the car instead of simply driving right up to the guards at the gate. Oh who was she kidding? Chloe thought. Charlotte would have driven straight through the gate given half the chance.

When Chloe pointed out their weapons, Charlotte had merely rolled her eyes at Chloe’s caution, tucked the car behind some shrubs, flipped down the mirror and started checking her make-up. What was with this family and not understanding the fact that bullets could hurt?

Chloe huffed out an angry breath of air; clearly she was the only adult here. Her annoyance quickly morphed into worry. What was she bringing her daughter into? NYC looked like a war zone and now they were outside of some sort of military outpost that didn’t exist on any maps. If she had any idea they were going somewhere where the people carried automatic rifles, she would have left Trixie with Ella in L.A.

Trixie sat behind her staring listlessly out of the window. Everyone once in awhile Chloe could feel Trixie mindlessly kicking the back of her seat. She didn’t tell her to stop. Part of her was reassured by the physical proof of her obstinate daughter.

Chloe checked her phone, hit refresh, and then hit refresh again only to finally look up at Charlotte in panic.

“The signal’s gone,” stated Chloe. Charlotte didn’t seem surprised by this news. She was staring off into the distance, lipstick held forgotten in mid-air.

“How can we find-?” Chloe tried to ask with a desperate edge to her voice.
“I know exactly where he is and we need to find him before he continues this foolishness,” Charlotte declared. The tapping of her left leg was the only thing that gave her nervousness away.

“Then where is he?” Chloe asked but Charlotte didn’t answer her in any coherent way. She just started muttering something about gates, foolish children playing with objects of unparalleled power, and how she wasn’t going back down there again for ungrateful sons who never listened to her.

Chloe decided that the woman next to her was as useless as the GPS signal. Eventually, she threw the phone on top of the center console in frustration while wishing she could toss Charlotte out of the car as easily. Chloe didn’t see the small hand reach out, wrap around the phone and pull it slowly to the backseat.

Noticing that Chloe’s expression was getting more wrathful by the second, Charlotte looked at her out of the corner of her eyes, and considered her next words very carefully.

“You can believe what you want. How you’ve had relations with my son this long and still think he’s,” there was a pause and a sigh, “it doesn’t matter. Call it a mother’s intuition. If we don’t find Lucifer, he might find himself stuck in, well, hell,” Charlotte replied obtusely.

Chloe made a face that strongly resembled a doll Trixie had mutilated once upon a time.

“Right, whatever,” Chloe replied, refusing to be pulled into another devil/hell/angel metaphor. “So I’m guessing you have a plan to get us by the guards then?”

“Well, you have a weapon don’t you,” Charlotte stated while looking pointedly at Chloe’s side- arm.

“Absolutely not! Trixie is with-” Chloe was drowned out by a large rumble. An enormous caravan of vehicles drove straight passed their hiding spot to the gate where they stopped with a loud screech.

One of the two guards stood in front of the first truck blocking the gate. He appeared to be checking a tablet and shaking his head.

Chloe couldn’t hear what he was saying but she could see the moment of shock cross his face as the gate started to open behind him.

The guard whipped his head around to look at his counter-part standing by the controls. The second guard merely shrugged and smiled. He walked over to the first guard and eased him out of the way so the vehicles could pass through.

Chloe couldn’t see what happened to him next since they were blocked by the caravan that was now moving. However, no one was standing by the gate once the last truck had passed by. She figured the guards had hopped onto one of vehicles because there was nowhere else they could’ve gone.

“Alright, once the trucks are out of sight we are getting out of here,” stated Chloe reaching out her hand blindly for the phone. “We’ll get a hotel room and try calling Luci-”

The phone was gone.

Chloe twisted around to look for it only to stare dumbly at the back seat’s door which was wide open and the back seat which was empty.
“Charlotte!” cried Chloe. “Where is Trixie?”

“…” Charlotte didn’t reply. She was studying the vehicles as they started turning around a bend in the distance. One side of her mouth was tilted slightly upwards.

“Charlotte!” shouted Chloe desperately looking around the forest.

She lightly touched Chloe’s shoulder to get her attention and nodded at the last truck. To Chloe’s horror she could see a small sneakered foot sticking out from the back of the canvas before it slid up and away.

“What an enterprising little girl,” mused Charlotte. “I think I like her, she reminds me of me.”

Chloe’s nose was practically touching the windshield as she watched the trucks disappear around the corner.

“Go after them!” she hissed at Charlotte.

Not needing to be told twice, Charlotte shifted the car into drive and drove straight through the still open gate. If they had taken a moment to look around they might have seen the body of the first guard lying in a heap in some weeds by the fence.

Since she was so focused on getting to Trixie, it took Chloe a few minutes before she realized that it was odd that they didn’t come across anyone on the road and they shouldn’t have been able to drive through the gate unchallenged, but there was no turning back now.

Charlotte kept the Escalade far enough from the caravan that they could never quite see it through the trees, but close enough where they could still hear it.

As the trees started to grow sparser, Charlotte dropped the car back further to Chloe’s irritation. Why did she have to show some sense now of all times? Chloe was more than willing to drive up to the last truck and force it to stop. She didn’t care if she had to use her gun to do it.

They started passing buildings. This was clearly a military base of some sort and it should have been crawling with people, but it was eerily deserted where they were.

Without saying anything Charlotte parked the car behind a building and got out, taking the keys with her. Chloe scrambled after her and unholstered her gun at the same time. Just in case Trixie was in danger, Chloe told herself as she held the weapon by her side, definitely not because Lucifer’s mom was driving her insane.

“Why did you-” Chloe started before being shushed by Charlotte. Chloe was getting really tired of never finishing a sentence or getting a straight answer.

“Look,” Charlotte said and they peered around the corner where the caravan of vehicles had stopped. A couple dozen uniformed people were hastily unloading ammo and weapons from the trucks.

“Do they look like they found a stowaway?” Charlotte asked sounding completely unconcerned that a girl who wasn’t quite old enough to be called a pre-teen was alone surrounded by an unknown military force. “She’s smart. She would’ve jumped from the truck before those humans could’ve found her.”

Chloe studied the scene and had to agree with Charlotte, not that she would say that out loud. But even though she was glad her daughter wasn’t being detained, Chloe still had no idea where she
“She has your phone, right? So once that map thingy starts working again she’ll find Lucifer,” uncharacteristically, Charlotte tried to sound sympathetic, but it came off smug. “All we need to do is find Lucifer and we’ll find your daughter.”

“That’s great, Charlotte,” Chloe responded sarcastically. “And how are we supposed to find him? As you said, Trixie has the phone with the “map thingy”.”

It was late evening, but not quite dusk and the sun hadn’t set yet. However, the flash of lightening intensified everything for a second like a light bulb before it burns out. The crack of an almighty thunder rolled over the base shaking the buildings.

In a state of shock, Chloe had the presence of mind to realize that lightening usually came from the sky and not from buildings.

The uniformed people also looked up towards the building where the lightening had come from which was a hanger about a mile from where they all stood before turning back and continuing to unload the trucks. They were moving twice as fast now and Chloe could hear the words “Thor” and “we got something special for him” from two of the people closest to where she and Charlotte were hiding.

Charlotte looked like a cat that ate a canary. “My best guess is he is over there. Lucifer was never one to stay out of the action.”

Chloe rolled her eyes before she and Charlotte started rushing towards the hanger. They ducked between buildings staying out of the sight.

However, before they got very far Charlotte started to slow down. Chloe turned back to give her hell but stopped short when she saw the confused look on Charlotte’s face.

“You know that thunder-” Charlotte started before pausing for a long time. “It has been a millennia, but it sounded- Could it really be-?”

Charlotte trailed off before seeming to notice Chloe standing in front of her. Charlotte blinked and a look of realization came over her face.

“You know maybe you should stay here,” Charlotte said. “I’ll go alone.”

Chloe was completely taken aback for a moment before irritation took its place. She was a cop! Charlotte was a lawyer, what the fuck did she think she could do better than Chloe? Not bothering replying, Chloe turned towards the hanger, intent on getting there sometime this century.

She was stopped short when a slender hand encircled the top of her left arm. Chloe couldn’t move forward. Charlotte was stronger than she looked. Chloe turned back, completely willing to give away their position to scream at Charlotte in frustration.

However, once again she stopped herself due to the fact Charlotte looked completely floored as she looked unseeing into the distance.

“They fixed it,” Charlotte muttered. “How did they mange that?”

Chloe took a deep breath and tried to remain calm.

“Charlotte!” snapped Chloe sharper than intended. Chloe took another breath and breathed it out
“Charlotte,” Chloe said through gritted teeth. “What is going on now? And you really need to let me go.”

Charlotte eyes swiveled to stare deeply into Chloe. For a moment, Chloe had a feeling that she was faced with something completely alien to anything she had ever seen before. Chloe couldn’t recognize anything human in Charlotte’s blue eyes. But the moment passed and now Charlotte just looked worried.

“I know you don’t want to hear these things Chloe,” Charlotte said not unkindly. “But forces beyond your comprehension are at work. Things were rather broken before, places were out of reach, and that was bad for everyone. But now everything is back to normal, and that- well that, is almost more concerning because I don’t know how, but I know my boys are involved.”

“Alright,” Chloe said and she didn’t question how Charlotte could be getting this information. The part of Chloe that always knew the truth started to grow. “If you let me go, we can find out together.”

Chloe’s mind felt like something was emerging from underneath the surface of an ocean. It hadn’t broken the surface yet, but it was bubbling up from below. A voice whispered in Chloe’s head reminding her that she was talking to Lucifer’s mother, who was Lucifer’s Mother.

“I’m afraid that’s not possible,” Charlotte said coolly. “No, you need to stay here away from the boys until I know it’s safe.”

Any thought of caution flew out the window, Chloe was done.

“Fuck you, Charlotte,” hissed Chloe. “My daughter is out there all alone and in danger. Why did you even bring us here? I know it wasn’t for us, and I doubt it was for Lucifer. You’re up to something!”

“Of course it was for Lucifer!” cried Charlotte. “I only want what is best for him. But timing, Chloe, is everything.”

Charlotte gasped again and looked over the hanger in pure shock. Chloe spun around to try to see what she was looking at. Maybe there was an odd light? Wait, didn’t that hanger used to have a roof?

“My Ex,” Charlotte sputtered out.

“Who?! ” Chloe yelled still trying to see what was over the hanger. She had this feeling there was something there but her brain refused to process it.

“Lucifer’s and Amenadiel’s Father,” Charlotte said. Chloe turned back to Charlotte shocked.

“What is He doing here?” Charlotte whispered under her breath.

“Lucifer’s father?” Chloe asked and her shock morphed into a curious calm fury, “the reason why Lucifer has those scars on his back?”

“Well, of course, most things are His fault,” Charlotte said absently not really paying attention to Chloe.

“Let me go,” Chloe said quietly and she could hear that she sounded very calm. Part of her pointed
out how impressive it was that she could sound so very calm in this moment. A larger part of her was just a wash of red noise.

“No,” Charlotte said in that infuriating prissy way she always sounded and she forced the car keys into Chloe's left hand. “You need to go wait in the car.”

Chloe didn’t remember deciding to holster her weapon before clenching her right hand into a fist and round-house punching Charlotte in the side of her head. But she watched her own arm swing through the air as if in slow motion, nothing had felt so satisfying since this had all started.

She watched her fist slam into Charlotte’s cheek, rippling her skin unattractively. Remember this moment, Chloe thought lazily, before time sped back up.

Chloe heard the snap of a few finger bones before the burst of pain hit her. It had been like punching a brick wall. Charlotte moved barely a fraction of an inch, but in shock more than pain she had let go of Chloe’s arm.

Holding her broken hand to her chest, Chloe spun and sprinted towards the hanger. Charlotte called out behind her, but no matter who she really was, Chloe’s practical shoes could out-pace the stilettos Charlotte was still wearing.

Once away from Charlotte, Chloe’s mind was a whirl with possibilities. Her rational self was fighting with her intuition. You know it could make sense, Chloe thought, if Lucifer’s dad was in charge of some sort of super secret military operation. Who knows what they do here? Maybe Lucifer is a superhero like the ones that were in NYC. That made more sense than the alternative, she thought with a twinge of hysteria.

After 30 seconds of a flat-out sprint, Chloe could see one long stretch of grass between her and the hanger. She was still a few minutes out no matter how fast she ran, but she could see Trixie in the distance. She had almost made it to the door when a pop, pop, pop and a whistling sound could be heard. The dirt by Trixie’s feet sprayed out.

Chloe’s cop brain took over as she recognized gun fire; she located the source of the sound and saw the guard from the gate was standing back towards where Chloe had come from holding a gun and pointing it at her daughter.

Chloe fumbled her gun out knowing there was no way she could hit him from this distance with a busted hand before he let out another volley.

She could see him line up his sight on the rifle towards Trixie, but then Charlotte was behind him and he wasn’t standing anymore. Charlotte barely touched him and his broken body flew through the air. He landed thirty feet away with his neck going in the opposite direction.

Chloe turned back towards Trixie and watched her make it safely inside the hanger. Before heading after her, Chloe looked back and acknowledged Charlotte with a nod. A look of perfect understanding passed between them, mother to mother.

OK, Chloe thought while loping towards the hanger. Lucifer’s father is not in charge of a secret military operation and Lucifer…

Lucifer was kind of a superhero, Chloe thought, but that wasn’t all he was.
The Devil Made Me Do It

“This isn’t even the same type of portal reindeer games made,” Tony stated. His helmeted head was bent over, inches away from the blue glow.

Once Stark had returned in his red and gold armor, he had slowly migrated closer to the portal. If he had a stick he would be poking it. Everyone could see that he was barely refraining from sticking one of his own limbs through it as he muttered about never having a good drone when you needed one.

Nicholas Fury was twitching in annoyance at Stark’s cavalier attitude. He was still clenching his weapon with both hands. His one eye only wavered from watching the portal whenever he felt the need to give someone the stink eye, an event that occurred about every 30 seconds.

He couldn’t help it, the rest of the occupants of the room were barely acting better than Stark. After nothing immediately popped up from the portal, they started wandering around and talking/arguing with each other.

It was like he was running a daycare full of toddlers, Fury thought. If they weren’t constantly distracted by something new and shiny they threw tantrums.

However, if threatened with the destruction of Earth, Fury would have been forced to admit that Mazikeen was acting up to his professional standards. Her gaze never wandered once from the portal as she stood as still as a statue with a knife in each hand. Her single-mindedness was more terrifying every minute they all waited. If there was a hint of longing in her eyes lit up by the blue glow of the portal, no one would ever be suicidal enough to point it out.

As for everyone else, Fury was serious contemplating finding out would happen if he accidently pushed a few of them through the portal and what the going rates were for hiring demons.

Even Hill had hit her limit of weird-crap-in-one-day and had acted out. After Fury declined her offer to order back-up, she had retaliated in her usual passive aggressive way by sighing every thirty seconds and attempting to run the base with her tablet and radio in ever increasingly loud conversations with various agents. Fury finally had to order her out of the hanger. It was that or find out if hell really hath no fury like a woman scorned.

Thor was swinging his hammer and tossing it a foot or so in the air. He was apparently completely entertained by watching it spin around before landing back in his hand. His carefree attitude had an inverse reaction on most of the hanger’s occupants. The more at ease he seemed, the more pissed off other people got. It didn’t help that it looked like Thor was intentionally flexing his biceps like a body builder going through different poses.

Loki was rolling his eyes at Thor’s preening while sulking in the background. He wasn’t quite sure where he stood now that his new-found friend had abandoned him amongst his enemies. He didn’t like the way that angel kept looking at him. He could still feel the strength of the grip that had held his arm. Loki was pretty sure he had another bruise to add to his collection.

He wondered if he should just leave. He wondered if anyone would notice or care. Of course, Loki thought as his mind spun to a darker place, if they didn’t notice him, he would make them notice.

Espinoza had a glazed-over look and was swaying slightly. Amenadiel was complaining to him but he wasn’t hearing a word. He was too busy wondering if he could go take a nap behind some
equipment in the corner. Now that Hill wasn’t here (as his superior officer, she was oddly against him getting near any sort of caffeinated beverage) maybe he should offer to go on a coffee run? Maybe Leroy was around with the coffee cart? He had probably been too hasty when he turned down the orange-juice coffee. Dan was pretty sure the hipsters in L.A. drank stuff like that all the time.

In between glaring at the portal and glaring at the Asgardians (the blond one wasn’t paying any attention to him so he focused most of his wrath on the smaller one who looked rather shifty in his opinion), Amenadiel was bemoaning how un-fair life was to Dan. He talked about how this was so typical of Lucifer to go off and do something so reckless and here he was once again, having to be the responsible brother and clean up his mess.

Amenadiel would’ve gone through the portal after his wayward brother, but hell was enormous and he wasn’t entirely in control of his new wings. If Lucifer really was going to be back in 5 minutes, he didn’t want to be stuck flying around and risk crashing into some of the nastier beings that lived there.

He would never ever admit this to his mother, brother or Mazikeen, but it had taken Amenadiel an embarrassingly long time to realize he was still immortal and had some of his powers. In fairness, Chloe Decker was a magnet for trouble. Most death-defying situations occurred when she was around and Amenadiel was not exactly sure when proximity to Chloe had started affecting his abilities like she did Lucifer’s.

“Hey, angel dude,” Stark said loudly. “I’m talking to you.”

As he broke off his tirade to Dan (a one-sided conversation that wouldn’t have sounded out of place at an elementary school), the long suffering fallen angel let out a sigh at being forced to interact with these lesser beings. They didn’t seem to quite grasp the concept that he was billions of years old and one of the first creations of the divine.

“Of course it’s not the same type of portal the Asgardian made,” Amenadiel said exasperated. “My brother actually knows how it works, well so much as anyone in the Universe knows how. The Asgardian got lucky, like an ant walking over a nuclear launch button.”

“Got lucky? I opened it, didn’t I? It seemed to work quite well over New York City!” Loki cried unthinkingly only to shrink back slightly as five people spun on him with murder in their eyes. His various bruises and cuts seemed to throb more when it looked like the Avengers were going to advance on him once again.

Maybe life wasn’t so bad when he was invisible? His injuries were making him think he should really take some time off from creating chaos for awhile. He could always do something terrible in a week or two.

Only Mazikeen didn’t bother moving towards the trickster. She refused to give up her vigil. She let out a breathy hiss that snapped the Avengers out of their thoughts of revenge and back to the situation at hand. There was an entrance to hell opened up right there in the hanger after all.

Thor was ashamed at how easy it was for anything involving his brother to distract him. He reluctantly turned away and stood next to Mazikeen. He refused to be drawn into another needless fight that didn’t solve anything and always seemed to make things worse. All of Thor’s previous mirth was gone as he followed the demon’s example and stared down the portal like a statue.

The rest of the occupants followed suit and focused on the portal. Dan did a weapons check, counting his bullets and Stark went to pester Amenadiel some more.
Loki’s sense of self-preservation disappeared as soon as all the attention left him. How dare they ignore him!? Even now everyone underestimated him. He would show ALL-

Loki paused.

Sometimes the shifts within his own emotions scared even him. In one moment, everything seemed perfectly clear and he was ten steps ahead of any adversary. It was laughably easy to overcome and conquer anything.

Then there were other times when it felt like he was waking up in another world. One that didn’t follow any logic and attacks came at him from every direction and every one. This felt like the real world. Like he finally stepped behind the curtain and saw the enormous conspiracy centered on him. He was the joke, everything until now was the lie, and everyone was laughing and waiting to watch him fall.

Perhaps Lucifer’s suggestion of a mind healer wasn’t unfounded, Loki thought. If The devil was going, perhaps there was something to it. Also, the one-eyed S.H.I.E.L.D. director was still staring daggers at him. He had at least made an impression on him. The others were idiots anyways.

Deep down in a damaged stunted part of Loki, a feeling of warmth and glee spread outwards from his center to his finger-tips at the Director’s clear look of mistrust. Loki was like a child caught with his hand in the cookie jar who also knew that he could stuff the whole cookie into his mouth before anyone could stop him. The trickster lived for moments where he felt like this.

“Right, so as far as I can tell, Lucifer created a portal with no outside energy source, no device to contain it and the Tesseract isn’t even here,” stated Tony. “How the fuck did he manage that?”

“Clearly it was due to the < > and < >,” huffed out Amenadiel except it wasn’t quite a sound that came out or it was more than just a sound.

It felt like a whisper directly into everyone’s minds which woke Dan up and startled Loki, which was lucky for Loki because he had been contemplating smirking at Fury just to see what would happen.

“Were those even words?!” asked Stark annoyed. He wasn’t a fan of mystic crap.

“It’s not my fault you humans haven’t even invented the terms needed to explain the Tesseract yet,” spat Amenadiel, he wasn’t even sure why he was bothering.

“I heard words, but they sounded identical,” said Loki thoughtfully. “It was like he said the word ‘magic’ and ‘science’ overlaid on top of each other as if they were one thing. The second word might have been an echo of the first. However, the way he said it made it seem like ‘magic’ and ‘science’ were contradictory concepts existing in the same space.”

Loki’s mind was reeling. Allspeak should have translated any language, but he had a sense that it had only barely touched on deciphering those words. A joy similar to what he felt moments ago spread through Loki, but this sensation was stronger and purer. A cool rush made the hairs on the back of his neck rise as he considered all the ancient tombs he had read in his youth. This was a puzzle! He tried to remember if he had ever seen any mention of ‘angels’ and the apparent knowledge they had.

“Angel, tell me,” Loki ordered, “which principles of nature control-”

“Be silent,” Thor snapped, interrupting Loki.
It felt like Thor had just stomped on an open wound. Loki was back in the other world where his enemies wore the faces of his family. He remembered all the times when he was ridiculed for preferring a book over a sword. He saw a different one-eyed man holding a golden spear whispering, “No Loki,” over and over again as Loki fell endlessly.

He twisted towards his fake brother intent on tearing him apart. Consequences and pain be damned. He didn’t care as long as he could make Thor feel like he-

Loki was brought up short once he saw his brother. In particular, he saw what Thor was doing with his left hand.

No matter how much Loki wanted to forget, in between all the bad that had ever happened to him, there were all the other moments. Like the centuries of trailing behind his brother as they got in and out of trouble with all of their—no, not his, never his—Thor’s friends.

In the midst of battle, it almost felt like they could read each other’s minds. They could anticipate the other’s movements and communicate with a look or gesture. If he was honest, facing an enemy together was the one time Loki felt like Thor’s equal, but Loki was never honest.

The hand movement Thor was currently doing meant something along the lines of, ‘A potential enemy approaches! Get your head out of the clouds so I don’t have to save your ass again and boast about it for the next decade. We fight first and ask questions later. That is if there is anyone still around to ask once we are done with them!’

Loki followed Thor’s gaze to the portal, but it didn’t appear any different than a moment before. Everyone grew silent as they watched the blue glow. No one knew what was happening, but the tension heightened as they readied for the unknown. Collectively, they all seemed to be holding their breath.

Then they heard it.

It was high-pitched and growing steadily in volume like something was getting closer. It became piercing and the portal pulsed like it too was waiting for something to happen.

Was it the screech of a creature? The wail of a child? A missile getting closer?

There was a stillness in the hanger as everyone leaned forward only to spring back for cover when something white, pale, blond, and shooting lightning burst upwards from the portal.

It was an angel in white robes, screaming his head off and flailing all six of his limbs. His wings smacked Iron Man who was still the closest to the portal, forcing him to fly backwards.

The Angel continued to thrash awkwardly in the air before twisting his back like a cat and landing in a crouched position on the balls of his sandaled feet with his wings fully outstretched. He finally stopped screaming as he gasped for breath. His robes were covered in an ashy substance, his eyes were bloodshot and his face was red. His hair on one side was standing on its end; some of it seemed to be missing.

Fury stared aghast at this Sunday school parody. Fuck Espinoza, he was giving himself a god (double fuck)-damn raise.

“Remiel?!” Amenadiel asked shocked.

Remiel’s only response was to glare at his older brother. His conventionally attractive face curled up unpleasantly like he smelled something rotten. The only reason he didn’t say something nasty
back was because something else was arriving from Hell.

The blue portal seemed to waver, there was a gurgling sound before the portal popped and something hideous was belched out.

The thing, whatever it was, was red and black, and twisting back and forth. Bone and muscle jutted out unexpectedly like a ripper crime scene. Hell itself seemed to follow it, stretching the boundaries of the portal and spilling out into the hanger in a sweltering ashy smog. The ground became scorched and then molten as obsidian stalagmites rose from nothing like pikes.

The thing was saying something in a low guttural voice. It was the same three words being repeated over and over again.

“How dare you? How DARE you?”

In his two handed grip, Fury let out a stream of bullets towards the monster. They smacked into it like pebbles hitting a boulder. The creature yelled in annoyance before turning towards Nicholas.

The monster flickered back into Lucifer’s human form as Fury’s jaw snapped open and the bottom dropped out of his stomach. This was not good. Sometimes it just wasn’t worth getting out of bed in the morning.

“Really, Director?” Lucifer asked caustically. He seemed annoyed.

Remiel used Lucifer’s momentary distraction to throw his arms out in front of himself. He pressed his palms together and curled his fingers like a clamshell, a ball of lightening formed in his hands before bursting forth, hitting Lucifer in the shoulder.

Lucifer snarled and transformed back into his hell-self, seemingly just irritated by the blast. It was shockwave of thunder that actually caused him to stumble backwards in a roar of pain. He flickered through different forms. Only his human face showed the extent of the damage. Blood was pouring out of his ears and some of his skin was quickly growing back from where it had been abraded.

“Angall,” Mazikeen gargled. Once the hell landscape had stretched to where she was standing, half of her face melted away exposing rotting dead flesh. She stood, knives in hand, ready to pounce.

Thor recoiled in alarm from Maze, stumbling to the side, confused about what sort of beast she was and whether she was a friend or foe.

Having mostly recovered from the sound wave, Lucifer lunged forward causing Remiel’s eyes to widen in fear as he tried to summon another ball of lightening. Lucifer was stopped short by Amenadiel.

Amenadiel stood tall between his two brothers with his wing unfurled. They were much larger than Remiel’s. They stood at least 20 feet wide from tip to pointed tip. The brown flesh of the wings was almost translucent. They glistened in an oily sheen and there were thick veins running between the bones. Each of the bat-like wings was tipped with a vicious looking claw.

When Amenadiel had lost all of his feathers, he thought he would never fly again. He didn’t realize at the time that his wings were just changing. In this new incarnation, they were stronger and faster than they ever were before. He had barely scratched the surface of what they could do and was already amazed and frightened by their destructive power.

Remiel forgot all about Lucifer as he stared at the wings. The expression of disgust grew ten-fold.
One side of his lip curled so far up everyone could see a hint of perfectly white teeth. His normally ideally shaped nose was rolled up priggishly. It was almost obscene seeing someone so saintly look so ugly.

“What is going on?!” roared Amenadiel, refusing to feel self conscious about his wings in front of another one of his stupid baby brothers.

There was a battle cry and Mazikeen was soaring through the air, demon blades outstretched towards Remiel who managed to trip over his own wings as he tried to scurry backwards.

Amenadiel plucked her out of the air and pulled her close so they were chest to chest in a mockery of a lovers’ embrace. Her knives were trapped uselessly between them as Amenadiel’s arms held her like a vice. She thrashed and growled into his chest.

Choosing his human form because it was smaller (and more personal), Lucifer darted under Amenadiel’s wing in a determined charge towards Remiel forcing Amenadiel to hold Mazikeen with only his right arm as he spun and snagged the back of Lucifer’s suit.

“Someone needs to explain to me, what is going on?” barked out Amenadiel.

“What’s going on? Don’t be so dense Amenadiel,” Remiel said nasally. “It’s Lucifer screwing up everything. Again. Just like he always does.”

Lucifer made an unintelligible noise of rage and almost broke free.

Undeterred by the fuming devil and common sense, Remiel continued with a prissy flick of his long blonde hair.

“How can you stand to be near him?” Remiel said haughtily eyeing the large wings up and down while refusing to look Amenadiel in the eyes. “Even in your lowered state, I would have thought you had better sense than be fooled by him. Lucifer is the cause of everything terrible going on right now. He is the reason for all the pain and suffering."

The air temperature instantly rose 20 degrees and licks of fire burst from the hell landscape that was still expanding. Lucifer was a flurry of wild movements, shaking even Amenadiel’s solid grip.

Knowing he couldn’t hold both his brother and the demon, Amenadiel decided to worry more about Mazikeen with her knifes that everyone knew could prick. He flung a furious Lucifer backwards. Lucifer shifted through his hellish forms more rapidly than before as he fell towards an extremely startled Dan Espinoza.

Before he could process what was happening, Dan had caught Lucifer with two arms wrapped around the devil’s waist. And it was the devil’s face and not the annoyingly attractive one Dan was used to that was inches away from him.

Lucifer grew very still in Dan’s arms. His face was still switching from muscle, to bone to worse. Each time the image would touch on a greater and more primitive fear that Dan never even knew he had. Agent Espinoza could feel a scream rising from his chest but not quite leaving his lips yet.

“Daniel, you are going to want to let go of me. Right. Now.,” Lucifer said softly.

Suddenly violently aware that he was practically bear hugging a being that could turn him into a smear on the wall with a flick of his wrist, Dan let go of Lucifer and stepped back. He could make the smart life prolonging choice after all.
Lucifer momentarily looked human again and had a crease above his nose and left eyebrow as he looked at Dan with concerned confusion. The glimpse of humanity was short-lived as Lucifer decided to ignore this illogical guilty feeling to beat the shit out of one or both of his brothers.

However, it made Dan feel better. Yes, this was a higher level of weird than he was used to, but Lucifer was always weird.

Amenadiel was still struggling with Mazikeen who had gotten one of her arms free and was slashing at him with her blade. He could barely keep his face and wings out of harm’s way.

Remiel seemed to be having performance issues as he couldn’t get a ball of lightening to form for more than half a second as he started to realize his life might be in serious danger.

Lucifer was almost on him when a silent form crashed into his back causing him to sprawl across the floor.

As Lucifer skittered across the ground, the hell landscape seemed to follow him, forming a path to the side of the room where he finally stopped.

The second white-winged angel was almost floating in the rafters above everyone, his wings barely flapping as he stared sadly down at the scene below him.

Mazikeen finally managed to shove Amenadiel away.

“Pik a shide, Menadiesl,” She snarled too fired-up to try to morph back into a form where words came out more easily.

Amenadiel looked at her incomprehensibly causing her to hiss out in annoyance. She ignored him as she looked upwards and tried to figure out how to get to the second angel. Maze had gone millennia with really only Lucifer being able to understand her. She didn’t need to pretend to be human or care about anyone else when there were angels to fight.

She threw a blade at the angel, forcing him to swoop downwards toward Remiel to avoid it. The blade arched through the air before hitting the ground near Lucifer’s hand with a thud. Lucifer grabbed it and rolled towards the two blond angels. Mazikeen always did have good aim.

The portal flickered wildly again as Barton leapt from it while shooting one of his newfound arrows from his bow at the second angel. An enormous head that sort of resembled a salamander followed him.

The arrow missed.

Barton shook his head and clenched his eyes shut for two long seconds before opening them and letting off three volleys in rapid succession. The first missed again, the second grazed the bottom of the angel’s wings taking a few feathers with it, and the third missed the intended angel but skewered Remiel’s wing straight through.

Remiel’s scream was almost as loud as Fury’s cry of, “What the fuck, Barton?!!?”

Barton turned towards the sound of his boss and stared unseeing at Fury. Barton huffed in frustration, clenching his eyes shut again before opening them and started studying all the spaces around everyone. Luckily, he answered Fury while doing his frantic search or else Fury would have shoved him back through the portal.

“Those angels,” Clint spat, “attacked the human souls, sir. They were trying to force them into
Hell. Coulson is down there!”

“Is that true Duma?” Amenadiel cried. Remiel stuck his nose in the air, sniffing slightly in barely contained pain, but Duma only looked at the floor ashamed.

A repulsor beam shot out from Iron Man’s fist causing Remiel and Duma to fling away from each other.

“Right, choir boys bad. Beings from my worst nightmares, good. Memo received,” Stark declared before unleashing an unrelenting force of missiles and repulsor beams.

Fury and Dan also opened fire at the duo, even if bullets didn’t do much, it felt damn good. Thor started swinging Mjölnir in a rapid circle. Maze got close enough to slash across Remiel’s face causing a line of red to glare out from his pale skin before he knocked the knife out of her hand and fought back.

Maze held her own, never letting him get far enough way to unleash his lightening until he swung his uninjured wing like a whip causing her to duck and roll.

His lightening tickled over her but she ran before the thunder could hit.

Barton found himself unable to move forward as the salamander had latched its teeth on his quiver, holding him back. The creature was too fat to fit through the portal and cried plaintively at Clint through clenched teeth.

Barton turned and started shoving the larger head backwards through the portal.

“Go back you stupid beast,” Barton muttered under his breath. The salamander’s reptilian-like eyes became mournful.

“You can’t come here. You don’t fit,” Barton said sighing. The beast let out a puff of smoke but let go of the quiver and pulled itself back to hell.

Barton intended on joining the fight but the exertion caused him to sway and images that couldn’t possibly be true danced across his sight. Something had happened to him in Hell and it wasn’t going away. He stumbled and grabbed onto the nearest arm for support.

He looked upwards and blinked. Then he blinked again willing the vision to fade, but it didn’t. Loki stood less than half a foot away from Barton staring at Barton’s hand on his arm in confusion. Barton was pretty sure he preferred hell.

Loki’s eyes rose to meet Barton’s. He had one eyebrow raised questioningly; a slight smirk graced his lips. Barton could only blink stupidly at the god who had emptied him out and stuffed something else in his head.

Loki’s smirk started to twist in annoyance as Hawkeye still hadn’t let go of his arm, but Barton wasn’t paying attention to him anymore. He was looking out of the corner of his eye at something shadowy moving across the floor.

Loki had just about lifted his other hand to wrench the offensive appendage off of his person (and possibly throw the idiot attached to the appendage across the room). When Barton grabbed Loki’s arm tighter and pulled him forward. Surprised, Loki stumbled off balanced.

“There are too many Shadows in this room,” Barton hissed.
Loki knew Clint Barton’s mind, probably better than Barton knew himself. If he said there were too many shadows then there were too many shadows. Loki glanced around counting only to catch a glimpse of something moving across the room and merging with Thor’s shadow.

The shadows momentarily spun around Thor making him lift the hammer higher as he tried to find his attacker. They finally settled into two forms. Thor, apparently disregarding anything he couldn’t hit with Mjölnir, swung the hammer at the nearest angel.

Except he didn’t quite make contact. His arm dropped lower like Mjölnir had grown heavier. Or he had grown weaker. Thor looked down in confusion and attempted to swing it again but with even more difficulty.

Loki and Barton exchanged a worried look. See Barton knew Loki’s mind too. Especially the things Loki tried so hard not to think about.

Thor managed to hit Remiel with Mjölnir more by luck and the angel’s general incompetence than any skill or strength on Thor’s part. Remiel had practically run into the hammer trying to avoid a duel attack from Iron Man and Maze. It clearly still hurt.

Remiel unleashed a deafening cry that reverberated around the room. He rose into the air and struggled to remain flying with his injured wing. He dipped slightly every few seconds.

“You are going to pay for that ‘god of thunder’” Remiel said disdainfully. Thor was still looking at his hammer barely noticing the angry angel above him.

“Feel the Thunder of God!” Remiel yelled triumphantly while letting out a dispersed force of lightening that was followed by a crash that shook the foundation of the hanger.

Although Barton was aiming for the Angel’s head, he was still pleased when his last of his arrows from hell pierced Remiel’s other wing.

Remiel dropped like a stone after letting out a high pitched shriek.

He stuck his arms out straight at Barton gathering a large ball of lightening. Barton hesitated for half a second making sure what he was seeing was real, but by then he knew it was too late to get out of the way. He could feel the hair on his arms start to rise as the Angel built up more static charge, and watched the purplish blue glow of lightening point at him. If this was his death maybe he could find Coulson.

It was only Duma’s intervention that saved Clint. Duma knocked Remiel’s arms away making the lightening shoot up and out a window in the hanger’s rafters. Duma looked shocked that his brother would try to mortally injure a living human being, one of their Father’s favorite creatures.

“Enough! You will all stop brawling like children and explain what in Dad’s name is going on. Why would you attack the human souls?” Amenadiel called out.

“We had no choice,” Remiel said arrogantly, almost keeping the pain out of his voice, he shifted his wings trying to find some relief. He didn’t bother acknowledging Duma who was still hovering near him with a disquiet expression on his face. “If Lucifer hadn’t -”

“You’re blaming me?!” cried Lucifer angrily, “For what you just did? Oh this better be good.”

The bad smell look was back on Remiel’s face as he continued, “As I was saying, Lucifer is the reason Heaven is separated from Earth. Duma and I were charged with finding a way to realign Heaven. We were succeeding before Lucifer got in the way.”
Mazikeen was stymied enough to turn back into her human form. She needed to be understood so at least someone made sense.

“Loki and the humans were the ones messing with the Tesseract, not Lucifer,” Maze stated.

Remiel looked her up and down slowly before turning towards Thor and Loki; internally, he was surprised she knew how to form sentences. Amenadiel got a sudden urge to punch Remiel in the face and he wasn’t sure why. This is why she liked resolving things with knifes, Maze thought to herself.

“Don’t think the Silver City won’t be making sure the Asgardian’s pay for their crimes as well. We’ve been watching. We see how Odin has completely disregarded our Father’s Words in these last few years, letting his sons come to a world expressly forbidden to him.”

“Do you mean war?” Thor asked sharply.

Remiel laughed cruelly. “War would imply we are equals. It will be more like an extermination, the unworthy will be smited.”

Duma’s eyes widened and he took a step back away from his brother shaking his head.

“But what about the souls?” Amenadiel asked.

“I didn’t want to attack them,” Remiel said through gritted teeth. “I had to, because of Lucifer, to save the rest of humanity and heaven. I would never have done that if it wasn’t for him.”

“I have never made anyone do anything, ever,” Lucifer said coldly. “And I certainly didn’t make you do that.”

“No one can get to the Silver City right now,” Remiel said heatedly. “Not us, not any of your precious human souls. The longer we stand here arguing the worse it gets. You've doomed more souls by not letting me do what needs to be done.”

“Why? We have never needed to attack the souls before, not even when the Frost Giant’s attacked. With time and effort we have always found the path again,” Amenadiel asked confused and worried.

“We have tried!” Remiel said grabbing his hair in frustration. “It’s impossible, and it’s all because of Lucifer!”

Multiple voices rang out with more questions. Remiel yelled over them, “Lucifer created limbo! It’s not in Father’s plan.”

“I made Limbo because Father left glaring holes in his perfect creation,” Lucifer said while sneering. “Even when I was Lord of Hell I couldn’t protect all of the human souls trapped in hell after Hiroshima. These last few days have caused more peril for the human souls than a thousand nuclear blasts.”

“Yes, you’re just trying to protect the humans, right,” Remiel said mockingly. “And I’m sure the effects on the Silver City were purely unintentional.”

“I really wouldn’t know,” Lucifer said with a cold fury, “as I didn’t think about the Silver City once when I created Limbo.”

It was one thing to be tossed from his home because of a slight rebellious period. It was another to
be accused of damaging it when he honestly had no idea what Remiel was talking about.

“Well let me enlighten you brother,” Remiel hissed. “You created a place that tipped the balance too far into Hell’s direction. It and all the humans on it are weighing the scale down. The more humans that die, the worse it gets. You further exasperated the problem when you opened the Hell Gate too wide and knocked everything off its axis.”

“All of the angels have worked non-stop to find the pathways again. Duma and I barely managed to get out of Heaven. There is no force left in Heaven able to fix things on that side,” Remiel continued.

“Father could,” Amenadiel threw in.

Remiel spun to face him and looked him in the eyes for the first time.

“Ah Amenadiel, Father trusts us to get the job done. Of course, you wouldn’t know that with how disappointing you’ve become. Although-” Remiel shot a quick glance at Lucifer, “You’re another example of the consequences of Lucifer’s recklessness.”

“If Lucifer had just stayed in Hell where he belonged, then you never would have come to Earth and you never would have fallen,” Remiel said sympathetically as if he was giving Amenadiel a gift.

Amenadiel was silent for a few moments before speaking very very clearly so there could be no mistake.

“I fell because I put my own selfish desire to return home and please Father ahead of what was right and good. I thought the end justified the means and I was wrong. Humans died due to my arrogance,” Amenadiel’s voice turned pleading by the end, hoping he could get Remiel to see sense.

But Remiel only saw it as pathetic, just one more example of how far his older brother had fallen.

“You used to be the strongest of us,” Remiel said wistfully. “Maybe if you were in the Silver City right now we could have fixed this without any of this unpleasant business.”

“Well maybe my brothers should stop acting like a bunch of babies,” snarled Amenadiel done with playing nice. “Maybe you should all toughen up and stop blaming other people when it’s you who isn’t good enough. Lucifer was trying to help. None of you were doing anything.”

“You know what they say about good intentions,” Remiel said snidely. “It doesn’t matter what you hoped to accomplish. The facts don’t change. If you want any human alive now or born in the future to go to Heaven than Limbo must be destroyed and pray that is enough to right the balance.”

“And the souls on Limbo right now?” asked Barton.

Remiel looked at him like he was a fly in his chardonnay before trying to school his face into something that resembled kindness. And he managed it. Anyone who came across him in the street would have wept at the Mercy of God shining through his chiseled jaw and symmetrical features.

“A necessary sacrifice, they will not be allowed into Heaven. If Lucifer was still Lord of Hell he might have been able to protect a few and stop the degradation prolonged, hmm- interaction with the demon population causes. I only hope they can take solace in knowing that their sacrifice helped save the souls of the rest of humanity,” Remiel spoke with a conviction only the most faithful could achieve.
Lucifer, who had been quietly steaming though that delightful tirade, exploded towards his brother. The Hell landscape had reached the far walls of the hanger, turning them into stone with slivers of molten lava running through them. Anyone not already suffering from heat stroke became drenched in sweat as the air grew hotter.

Lucifer shoved Remiel down on the floor. Rocks started to crawl over his ankles and wrists, holding him in place. Lucifer raised the demon blade high over his head aiming for a killing blow.

Duma stepped between them, hands raised in supplication. He didn’t even try fighting Lucifer but used his body as a shield and plead Lucifer silently with his eyes. Lucifer hesitated.

“Don’t look at me like that Duma. I blame you as much as him,” spat Lucifer.

Duma, not moving an inch, stared into Lucifer’s eyes.

“It’s a little late to do anything, don’t you think? You could’ve stopped this at any point. Instead you silently stood by halfheartedly participating just like you always do,” Lucifer said, his voice hitching at the end.

Duma let out a breath that almost made a noise.

“Yes! I’m talking about my fall. Where were you then? You can’t tell me you didn’t agree with me, even a little bit.”

Duma’s sadness radiated out in waves.

Sighing heavily, Lucifer lowered the blade. “I’m over it, Duma. Don’t get yourself all worked up about it.”

Remiel pulled his arms free from the stone in frustration and sat up to work on his ankles.

“What does it even matter?” he barked out while struggling with the left leg. “It’s just a handful of human souls. There are more being born every day.”

Remiel might not have spoken so carelessly if he bothered to look at the expressions on his brothers’ faces.

Lucifer shoved Duma out of his way, and Duma let him.

“So the humans currently in Limbo are not allowed in Heaven?” Lucifer asked calmly.

Remiel’s eyes lit-up in triumph when his left ankle broke free. He turned to focus on his right.

“That’s correct, Lucifer,” Remiel said in a sing-song voice, he still hadn’t looked up from the stone.

“The problem is, brother, I am not going to allow them to stay in Hell either. It’s a conundrum,” Lucifer stated.

Remiel looked up in confusion and was shocked to find Lucifer bent over him only a foot away from his face.

Lucifer was fingering the demon blade. Duma was off to the side, a single tear was falling down his face.

“There seems to me that there is only one solution,” Lucifer said in mock thoughtfulness as he
tapped his index finger from his free hand on his chin, “one place for them to go.”

Remiel who had finally popped his right foot free was still holding his ankle awkwardly in the air.

“Where?” Remiel asked cautiously.

Lucifer stuck his face an inch away from Remiel’s, “Well, Earth of course.”

Lucifer’s free hand shot out as Remiel tried to crab-walk backwards, but Lucifer was too close. He grabbed a hold of Remiel’s right wing, bringing the demon blade down and severing it at the root. Instead of blood, static erupted from the stub arching up and water-falling downwards.

Remiel howled in pain but Lucifer had already stood up and turned away bringing the severed limb with him. He tossed the wing back through the portal. All the Hell aspects that had appeared in the hanger seemed to follow after it revealing the walls and ground beneath. Everything looked untouched as if nothing had ever happened. A great wind picked up as all the hot air was sucked back into Hell.

Angels aren’t like humans. A title for them held power. They had dominion over their names and their names had dominion over them. Duma was silence. Remiel was God’s Thunder, when he wasn’t also being God’s Mercy. Lucifer as Lord of Hell was Hell. He could control anything located within its boundaries if he really wanted to.

As the wing fell, Lucifer pushed his will after it. The wing broke apart and each feather started to glow and rocket towards Limbo. Lucifer wasn’t stupid he knew Mazikeen saved Amenadiel with one of his feathers.

If a single feather of a fallen angel could heal the first of the angels from a mortal wound, then each feather of a true sycophant could save a hundred human souls or maybe more.

The demons wisely fled Limbo once they saw what looked like the light of God himself raining towards them. The ones with wings flew away and the ones without took their chances sliding down the edge. However, one fallen cherub was too injured to move and his sister refused to leave his side.

The humans looked up and saw only beauty and felt only love. As the feathers started to touch down, each human felt like the particular feather that grazed them had been made specifically for them. Most let out peals of laughter before turning into pillars of light and flying back towards the portal.

One suit wearing human bent over both of the fallen cherubs shielding them with his body before all three turned into light and shot upwards.

Back on Earth Remiel was sobbing and rocking back and forth. Unlike Duma, his tears were ugly and made his nose snot up unattractively as his face grew paler in anguish. Only, the tip of his nose and the bloody gash over his perfect cheek bones held any color. The sparks coming from his back died down and only occasionally shot forth.

The souls zoomed out of the portal like the blowback of a bomb.

“Lucifer, what did you just do?” Amenadiel asked and then he felt it. Hell, Earth, and Heaven were realigned.

Within seconds, the roof of the hanger was torn off and everyone looked up to see thousands of armored angels carrying spears glaring down at Lucifer who was glaring back ready to fight them.
all with a single demon blade.

Mazikeen took a spot next to Lucifer holding another blade. The grin on her face stretched from ear to ear.

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Miracles don’t have to make sense.

It doesn’t matter what happened to the bodies, whether they were buried or cremated or still lying alone in the morgue. That all has to do with being dead and souls only ever remember the parts where they were alive and they remember dying.

So when the humans woke up back on Earth wearing the clothes they wore on the last day of their lives- yet somehow still covered in ash- most of them were close to the place of their death.

Any humans that died crushed under buildings found themselves on top of the rubble or in a side street. The masses that emerged in NYC startled a lot of the clean-up crews. People instantly ran to their aid and whispers about divine intervention started off softly but grew in veracity and volume.

Anyone who wouldn’t be safe arriving back at the place they died- soldiers, drownings, abuse victims, etc.- woke up in temples, churches, mosques, and one very surprised drum circle.

Anywhere that might be considered the house of God was fair game. And it didn’t matter what religion the soul was. Atheists were as likely to wake up in a Hindu Temple as a Baptist Church. A Catholic school teacher found herself sitting hip to shoulder next to her Muslim neighbor as she was doing her morning prayer.

It also didn’t matter what they died of, if it was violent or after a prolonged sickness, everyone was healthy again. The old felt decades younger. Some people who had never taken care of their own bodies felt better than they ever had in their entire lives.

Phil Coulson found himself standing next to where the glass cage used to be, still holding the demon club with Gaudium in his arms and Spera on his shoulder, in the Helicarrier that landed (crashed) in a field next to the NYC S.H.I.E.L.D. base. He was coated head-to-toe in ash, demon blood and gore.

Two slack-jawed maintenance workers stood off to the side.

“Where is Director Fury?” Coulson asked quickly. He didn’t get a response. They had yet to shut their mouths from where they hung gaping open.

“Come on! This is a matter of life and death. Where is Director Fury?” Coulson almost shouted, he sounded like a disappointed parent which was enough to snap one of the workers out of his shock.

“Umm, Agent Hill was bitc- I mean complaining about Hanger 5. I think he’s there,” the worker replied while scratching his head. He didn’t know what was more disturbing the pieces of brain matter stuck to Coulson’s hair, the spiked club covered in guts, or the two creatures he had with him.

Coulson took off sprinting with Gaudium in his arms and Spera flying behind him. The workers looked through the doorway for a long time after the three had disappeared from view.
Sympathy for the Devil

Thousands of cold stony expressions stared down at the wingless fallen angel and the small demon by his side. They each held the conviction of righteousness from millenniums of never having a doubt or question about their places in the Universe.

The tips of their spears were cruelly sharp and their wings fluttered softly keeping them well above the ground. Most of the angels’ wings were varying shades of brown or gray with a few bright colors inter-spaced in-between. Completely white wings like Duma’s and Remiel’s were the exception. Although, none of the wings were as white and brilliant as Lucifer’s once had been.

A buzz of excitement rolled through them. This was it! They would finally end the serpent and his reign of wickedness.

One angel broke away from the group and descended gracefully down to the hanger floor to stand in front of Lucifer. Unlike the rest, he didn’t look happy at the thought of a potential smiting. There was a hint of unease on his otherwise impassive expression.

The rest of the angels watched him attentively for direction. At the slightest signal, they would attack. He was their leader after all and God’s favorite.

If Lucifer was contrast and sharp features with his pale skin and dark hair and eyes, then this angel was his muted twin. He had light brown hair, warm chocolate eyes, and a glowing tan. His wings were the largest pair, save Amenadiel’s, and were soft white freckled with brown feathers. His face was rounder than Lucifer’s but unmistakably similar like they had been created from the same mold.

He looked with disapproval at his brother whose eyes were shifting into hellish red and black shapes resembling two open mouths, the demon who had resumed her half rotten form and Amenadiel who moved to stand behind them. Amenadiel’s bat-like wings flapped once with a sharp crack before being held in a half folded position, towering over the devil and demon in front of him.

The angel looked around the room at the other occupants a bit mystified by the strange collection. Different expressions flickered across his face too rapidly to figure out. He deliberately tilted his body and head so the angels above him would only see his back. It wouldn’t do well for morale if they saw that their leader wasn’t entirely sure what was going on - seriously, what in Dad’s name was going on?

Their Father had been exceptionally quiet as of late, so the burden of keeping his brothers in line had been more difficult than usual.

It was to be expected that Lucifer was a wild card and his pet demon was renowned for her viciousness. As for the others, the biggest physical threat, besides Amenadiel of course, was the ‘god of thunder’ who was holding Mjölnir, ready to strike.

However, the Prince of Asgard had beads of sweat trailing down his face despite the fact the hanger had dropped to a cooler temperature and the hand that held the hammer trembled slightly. But the Angel still hesitated. He knew it was always messy when deaths of royalty were involved.

Despite Remiel’s earlier pronouncement, a war with Asgard would be rather inconvenient at this current moment in time.
The Silver City had been suffering a crisis of identity ever since Lucifer had defected to Earth. Many angels in the lower orders could be seen whispering their fears amongst themselves. The latest blow to the pathways, whether it was intentional or not, had even some of the higher order speaking out right about their displeasure of the state of affairs.

The other Asgardian, Loki, the start of all the trouble, stood closest to the portal. He was now gripping the upper arm of Barton, using his greater strength to hold him upright as he listed to one side.

The angel noted that the human Loki appeared to be helping looked even worse than Thor. He had a greenish tinge to his skin and could barely lift his eyes from the floor as he breathed heavily. Unused to mortals, the angel wasn’t sure if it was typical behavior for them to just sicken and die randomly.

Prince Loki was attempting to study the angels above but his attention kept being pulled to area around Thor. The angel decided to disregard him for now and consider the biggest hurdle to a righteous beat-down, the humans.

Father had always been very particular about his favorite species. Angels were not supposed to hurt or directly kill the delicate short-lived people. A few like Uriel could get around that rule, but they all saw how little their Father did about Uriel’s death.

The angel turned to watch the armored one fly above the rest. Internally, he was impressed with how far the humans had come as he eyed the lights on the palms of the armor that faced threateningly in his direction.

The other two male humans stood behind the trio of the fallen angels and demon. Their useless weapons were raised upwards. They seemed completely willing to join a battle they had no way to win and on Lucifer’s side at that, which was troubling…

The angel opened his mouth to speak but was beaten to the punch by Lucifer.

“Michael, I have a bone to pick with you,” Lucifer said ferociously, his face momentarily shifting red. He didn’t resemble Michael at all in that form.

Michael bristled at Lucifer’s nerve. He had to remind himself to remain calm, but for some reason Lucifer was an expert at getting under his skin with the slightest provocation.

It hadn’t always been that way.

When the Universe had just begun and was little more than clouds of dust, Lucifer and Michael had been inseparable. They used to play together as they helped their Father form the Universe into its current shape. They would compete to see who could spin the best galaxies and impress their Father the most. It was all done with brotherly affection and their Father would delight in his two favorite sons.

That was before Lucifer had grown dark and sullen, before their Father stopped talking to them as much, and before everything had soured and gone so wrong.

“I too have grievances, brother,” Michael responded while staring at Remiel who was struggling to stand, any nostalgic thoughts fading away.

Duma offered a hand to help Remiel, but it was smacked away. Now that he only had one wing, Remiel wavered slightly off balance; sparks were still jumping out of his stump randomly.
“You’ve gone too far this time, Lucifer. You’ve mutilated our brother,” Michael said resolutely.

“I’ve gone too far?” hissed out Lucifer the blue portal seemed to howl in protest with him. “Do you even know what he was doing? I have never seen such evil done in the name of good before, and as the Lord of Hell, I met every terrible human that ever died.”

Lucifer’s eyes narrowed in consideration.

“Or are you the one that gave him the idea? Do you agree with Remiel? Do you believe those ‘handful’ of souls do not even matter?” Lucifer questioned in a harsh whisper.

Michael’s eyes widened in shock at the accusation before hardening in anger as he replied, “I didn’t say that. But your reaction was extreme just like always. And dare I say, overly dramatic.”

“Those souls were INNOCENT!” Lucifer roared. The very air seemed primed in hellish intent like it was just waiting to turn back into molten lava and ash as Lucifer continued, “They didn’t belong in hell. None of them had done anything worth being tortured for eternity!”

“And how convenient was it that you had the perfect solution at the eleventh hour!” Michael yelled back.

“Of course, you already burnt your own two wings. Good thing your brother was here so you could make him your own unwilling sacrifice. I guess when you do it; it’s not so bad, right?” Michael said sarcastically. “Limbo, your creation, was damaging the Silver City. It was an abomination-”

“That’s not what you said when I made it and you gave me one of your feathers,” Lucifer said quietly, internally fuming.

Michael paused, closed his eyes and sighed sadly. It was true. He had helped Lucifer realize his vision of a place within Hell where souls could be protected and kept separate until Michael could send angels to fetch them.

Michael, as the de facto leader of the angels, was the one that had to make the hard decision to turn away those damaged souls from their rightful place in Heaven all those decades ago. They had been corrupted and he couldn’t risk it spreading to the rest of the Silver City. It had been a very sad day and all of Heaven wept at the evil perpetuated by those demons and Hell itself. Michael had almost questioned how his Father could have let that happen…

So when Lucifer had started building Limbo, Michael had latched onto the idea and offered up one of his feathers to help. He should have known not to trust anything Lucifer came up with. It was foolish of him to depend on his brother.

“Clearly it didn’t work,” Michael snapped. “If you hadn’t abandoned your responsibilities you might have been able to do something before things got so critical. You more than any of us, should have known the humans would have kept creating more powerful weapons and seeking powers they couldn’t possibly control. They risk their immortal souls in the name of progress. And here you are, forsaking all of us and them to fool around on Earth.”

“Now ‘science’ and ‘technology’ are my fault too?” scoffed Lucifer. “Father is the one that gave the Humans free will and deemed it more important than everything else without bothering to explain anything to anyone. All I did was decided not to play His game anymore, when He holds all the cards and He is the only one that knows the rules!”

“You should be pleased; I haven’t done anything remotely terrible while on Earth. You should try it. You look like you could use a holiday,” Lucifer ended nastily.
“Amenadiel, Uriel, and now Remiel have all paid heavily for your vacation,” Michael spat. “You treat Hell like a revolving door and don’t bother worrying about the consequences of your actions. You never think things through, brother!”

“You want me to go back to being the Lord of Hell?” snarled Lucifer. Unlike before, Lucifer remained in his human shape and it was somehow a thousand times worse for Michael to see his once beloved brother’s familiar face twist so angrily.

“Well let me tell you, brother, the only way I’ll ever take up that title again is when I raise an army to attack the Silver City! Would you like that, Michael? Want to test out your strength on the full might of all the demons?” Lucifer continued mockingly, spitting out each word like venom.

Mazikeen practically vibrated with anticipation. Her grin was all teeth and stretched rotten flesh. Amenadiel crossed his arms over his chest, his wings weighed unusually heavy on his back, but he struck an imposing figure. The angels above hummed angrily and pressed in closer, spears all pointed downward.

Michael looked around at the determined humans and Asgardians, up to the mob of angels, seemingly prepared to tear Lucifer apart no matter the collateral damage, and at Lucifer himself, once again the center of chaos and potential misery.

To Michael, Lucifer looked small in his human form without his wings. Michael had a cowardly thought – one he would never acknowledge- he wished Lucifer had his wings back and was already leading the army of demons. It would make things so simple. Then Michael wouldn’t have to look at this damaged version of his brother. Lucifer was mutilated so much worse than Remiel and in so many ways.

“Thank you, Lucifer,” Michael said calmly. “I can always rely on you to make a point.”

Lucifer’s eyes narrowed.

“You condemn me and our brother for not thinking of the human souls and in the next breath you threaten the destruction of Heaven itself. Tell me brother,” Michael’s calmness dissipated completely and only a cold fury remained. “What if you succeed? What if you tear down the Silver City, proving once and for all that no one can make the great and mighty Lucifer do anything he doesn’t want to- not even Father? What happens to your precious human souls then?”

It was as if Lucifer had been struck by a great blow. The look of dismay on his face would have been comical in any other situation. Michael had never seen his brother look so conflicted before, so human.

With an audible exhale, all the wrath and anger drained out of Lucifer, and to Michael’s surprise, he looked away first as he tilted his head to the demon at his side.

After a whispered, “Mazikeen,” the demon pouted for a moment, her face grotesquely pulled downwards, before sheathing her knives and reverting back to her human form.

Lucifer only had to look back and up at Amenadiel, before he too shifted into a less threatening form by making his wings disappear from sight. No one noticed Amenadiel wincing slightly.

It had been harder than it should have been putting his wings away, Amenadiel thought idly. He unconsciously rolled his shoulders in discomfort. Ever since he had come to Earth, this odd sensation kept cropping up randomly. He wasn’t sure if it had something to do with his new wings or not and hadn’t seen the pattern yet.
Humans would have called it back pain and it only flared up when a certain detective was around.

Michael was so shocked at the turn of events that it was all he could do to stop himself from gaping openly at Lucifer.

He mentally shook himself before lifting a hand up and waving the host of angels back. Maybe this de-escalation could work. Maybe they could get through this without any more of his family being hur-

“You CANT let him get away with this,” Remiel said practically foaming at the mouth. He stood tall; his one remaining wing loomed above him. The static discharge from the stump intensified forming what almost looked like a second wing out of lightning.

“He ne- eds to be taught a lesson,” Remiel said, his voice cracking. He had gone mad in rage and pain.

He brought his arms up and started forming an immense ball of lightning as the air around him flickered and crashed.

Duma tried to grab his arm but was hit with a glancing blow by the wild discharge of energy. He was shot across the room, tumbling and sliding until he smacked into the wall of the hanger with enough force to shake the building. Remiel didn’t notice.

Iron Man and the humans brought their weapons around, but they were never going to make it in time, and it’s not like they could have done anything useful.

The Angels above Michael hesitated for perhaps the first time in their existence, as they were unsure what to make of their brother’s spectacle.

The purple-blue light snapped outwards towards the demonic fallen trio. There was no one close enough to stop him and no time to get out of its way.

Lucifer stared at the energy ball that was rapidly approaching with one eyebrow raised. He prepared himself for the annoyance of having to suffer through divine lightning and thunder before he could beat his stupid brother to a bloody smear. Only Amenadiel felt a moment of unease when he realized he couldn’t pull out his wings again, it was almost as if Chl-

The lightning never reached them. An impossible tear appeared in the fabric of space between Remiel and the trio, sucking the lightning away like it had never existed. For a second, everyone in the room stared at the now empty space baffled.

Stark, since he thought faster than maybe any human that had ever lived, had one thought drift through his head, ‘Huh, that’s so Deus Ex Machina,’ before he wasn’t capable of thinking of anything.

All the angels hit the ground, the humans and Asgardians quickly followed. It was like a giant hand had reached down from the Heavens and was flattening them. But it was more than that. It was like all the spaces between their atoms were filled, making the humans realize for the first time how truly empty they actually were.

Incomprehensible images and sounds rushed into their minds. The mortals, including the Asgardians, could feel it tearing at them and knew they couldn’t take much more before they either went mad or shattered into a thousand pieces. The Voice of God was not meant for their ears.

Amenadiel was on the ground yelling in frustration and helplessness. He was able to push himself
to a push-up position, once, twice, before hissing and giving in. He listened to the words of his Father.

Only Lucifer and Mazikeen were still upright, although it cost them.

Mazikeen faltered and fell first as she screamed in pain. The divine presence felt like a thousand knifes, and not the fun kind, stabbing her from the inside out. Lucifer glared up at the sky, teeth bared, until he too fell to his knees.

As fast as the presence had arrived, it was gone. Everyone was now mixed together on the floor of the hanger as they dazedly sat up. Nicholas Fury glowered upwards, plotting.

As they processed the divine revelations, several angels made audible protests, which they followed with a gasp in the same breath. Many of the vocal angels covered their own mouths with their hands, completely shocked that they would make even the smallest rebellion against the Word of the Lord.

All the angels looked towards Remiel and Duma.

Remiel was breathing heavily, the bloody cut across his face still hadn’t healed, his hair stuck up at odd angles or was missing entirely, but it was his eyes that were the most disturbing.

Like a little boy who had looked under his bed only to find that there really was a monster there, he was half shocked and half afraid. His eyes widen impossibly as he looked to his brothers for help only to see placid faces staring back at him. His chin quivered.

“No,” he said quietly, but his volume steadily rose. “No. NO! It’s not fair. Michael, please!”

Michael slowly rose to feet. Remiel also scrambled upwards, his hands held out to Michael pleadingly.

“Father’s words were clear. He,” Michael paused and had to force himself to finish the sentence, “agrees with Lucifer.”

Remiel recoiled and wailed. Ugly fat tears dripped down his face. He looked much, much younger than his billions of years.

“The human souls must be protected at all costs,” Michael intoned, speaking over Remiel.

“He has decreed that Hell must once again fall under heavenly control and since Lucifer-,” Michael paused again, his Adam’s apple was moving but no sound came out. He clenched his teeth once before building up the resolve to continue talking. “-has responsibilities on Earth, Father has tasked Remiel and Duma with bringing order and He has given them the duel titles of Lords of Hell.”

“NO!” shouted Remiel. “No, Michael! You can’t- I only came here on your orders. I was trying to help because you told me to! I wanted to save heav- Why is Father punishing me? I have never gone against Him- I’ve done everything for – I never rebelled!”

“I didn’t tell you to attack the souls! You decided that course of action on your own,” Michael spat out quickly before he could stop himself.

“But you didn’t,” hiccup, “tell me any other way,” Remiel interjected pathetically.

Michael closed his eyes, schooled his face into a serene calm, and reminded himself there was always a purpose. There had to be.
“Anyhow, He is not punishing you. He has only given you new orders,” Michael’s eyes were still closed. Maybe he wouldn’t open them until everyone had left.

“Well, I’m not going,” Remiel said with a sniff.

Michael’s eyes snapped open and spoke carefully leaving the statement open ended, “Then you choose to fall- ?”

“What?!” Remiel cried out and shot a horrified glance at Amenadiel and Lucifer who had helped each other to their feet. “I either go to Hell or become like them? That’s not a choice!”

Amenadiel crossed his arms over his chest and scowled at the insult his baby brother had just dished out.

Michael looked at Remiel sadly, “You are an Angel of the Heavenly Host. You don’t have a choice.”

“No, no, I’m not going. You can’t make me,” Remiel said while shaking his head rapidly.

“Then you have fallen,” Michael said before turning his back on Remiel and looked towards Duma. “And you, Duma? Do accept the Divine Word?”

Remiel was shocked to see the lightning shaped scar that was slowly fading from Duma’s side. He hadn’t meant to hurt-

Duma looked at Remiel with forgiveness and sadness before turning towards Michael and nodding his head once.

“I take it back,” Remiel said immediately. “I didn’t mean it.”

Michael spun back to him, his heart swelling in hope and breaking at the same time.

“You accept your orders then? You will go to Hell and rule in our Father’s name?” Michael asked slowly, trying to keep his voice level.

Remiel was shaking his head in disbelief and clenching his fists over and over again, but was able to reply, “I can’t let Duma go by himself. I will go with him.”

Remiel started wringing his hands together as his face crinkled up in despair. “It’s my fault anyways. I’ve disappointed Father. In time, perhaps if he will forgive-” Remiel started to say only to be interrupted by Amenadiel’s booming voice.

“Or, have you considered you didn’t disappoint him because you acted just how Father knew you would and this is, and always has been, the intended outcome Father planned,” Amenadiel said simply yet firmly.

A ripple rolled through the crowd of angels who were now mostly standing as they murmured amongst themselves. Remiel froze and looked like he could be knocked over with a feather. Then his gaze fell on Lucifer and instantly and inexplicably shifted to rage.

“I REFUSE to accept that,” he snarled to Amenadiel. “You’re twisting things- Father wouldn’t-Lucifer is not BETTER than me. He’s not.”

A steely resolve fell over Remiel as he glared daggers at Lucifer.

“I will go to Hell and rule it better than he ever did!” Remiel declared. “I will turn it into a place of
divine purification and save those evil souls from their own wickedness. It will be far superior to what it was before. I will prove to Father that I am the better son!”

Spittle flew out of Remiel’s mouth, his eyes were bulging out of his skull, and a pulsing artery was trailing down the side of his face. His dirty robes were wrapped around him and didn’t look unlike a straitjacket.

Off to the side a certain trickster god was wincing internally at that pronouncement before turning back to Hawkeye who was still lying on the floor.

Loki pulled Barton up by the front of his jacket with one hand and used his other to pry open one of his eyelids showing a milky dead eye underneath. Barton tried to weakly swat him away.

Fury looked over at Barton in shock, before scuttling to his side and pulling him into a seated position and away from Loki. He wasn’t half-hugging Barton but protecting him from insane gods, Fury thought to himself as he watched Loki warily.

Loki wasn’t paying him any attention as he had rocked back on his heels. He had eyes only for his brother.

Thor was sitting up with his legs splayed in front of him, but his head was bent over low and his chest rose and fell rapidly as he tried to catch his breath. With great effort, he held Mjölnir an inch over the floor.

Iron Man used his repulsors to fly to Thor’s side and lay one armored hand on his shoulder once he noticed that something was wrong.

“Are you counting the shadows?” Clint asked softly, blinking dead eyes that stared unseeing into the distance. Fury looked at him confused.

“I am counting,” Loki replied.

Fury would’ve thought this was a trick and really wanted to blame Loki, but he remembered Barton coming out of the portal and missing a shot.

Barton never missed.

Also, he could see Barton’s quiver lying forgotten on the floor in front of Loki, the blue glow of the Tesseract was clearly evident from within the casing. Loki didn’t look at it once.

Fury snatched the quiver off the floor without ever letting go of Barton and passed it back to Espinoza for safe keeping.

Espinoza was standing, holding the quiver out in front of him, preparing to swing it on his back when Lucifer called out, “Daniel.”

Dan froze in mid-motion, quiver still hanging from his hand as a thousand angels all packed within the hanger turned to look at him.

“I do believe my brother has surpassed you in douchiness,” Lucifer said mockingly, barely glancing at Dan, his expression betraying his annoyance at Remiel. “It may be time to retire your title of Agent douche-bag and pass it along. Remiel does seem to love collecting titles. Or should I say Lord Douche of Hell?”

Remiel moved to charge at Lucifer. He seemed to forget all about lightning and thunder in favor of
a more human type of brawl. This time Duma’s soft hand stopped him in his tracks.

Remiel’s anger faded as he turned back to the only brother who hadn’t forsaken him and placed his hand on top of Duma’s. He couldn’t stop the thought that this wasn’t fair from cycling through his head over and over again.

“They are not the only ones with new orders,” Michael said irritated at the childishness. “You, Lucifer, have also been given a task.”

Suddenly, it didn’t seem that unbelievable that Remiel and Lucifer were related because Lucifer’s expression mirrored exactly the look of disgust Remiel so favored.

Michael pretended he couldn’t see the disrespectful look on Lucifer’s face by gazing slightly over his head, really, if any other angel was half as rude...

“Father has decreed that you, Lucifer, will be the one to handle the problem of Thanos should he arrive on Earth, as Heaven’s envoy. What do you say?” Michael couldn’t help himself he looked at his brother. “Will you obey?”

Lucifer wouldn’t have looked more insulted if Michael had crushed his corvette into a ball with his bare hands and then presented it to him with a bow on top. The delay in Lucifer’s response lasted an awkwardly long time. But at Michael’s unrelenting gaze, Lucifer finally moved his head slightly in a way that one might interpret as a nod.

Satisfied, perhaps more than he should have been, Michael turned towards the rest of his brothers with a pep in his step.

“As for us,” called out Michael, it must have been centuries since he felt this light and carefree. “We will be the ones to protect the human souls and save them from the terrible fate that almost befell on them in Limbo today. We will create our own space outside of the Silver City that will be guarded and kept separate from the terrors of hell. A place where the souls can rest peacefully until they are able to make their way to Heaven.”

Michael’s expression grew patiently resigned as he continued talking, “The humans will not stop their pursuit of knowledge and will continue to disrupt the pathways. They are indeed the cause of their own suffering, but we must take pity on them, they know not what they do.”

Michael eyed Duma and Remiel up and down, pausing at Remiel’s ruined wings before speaking again, “Duma, will henceforth be responsible for flying the misplaced souls out of Hell.”

Michael whirled to face Lucifer and Amenadiel, his tone hardening. “Besides Duma, no one who doesn’t plan on staying dead is allowed into Hell. That means no more resurrections unless you want to risk facing the wrath of Heaven.”

The other angels were nodding, emboldened by this new direction. Everything was part of the plan; one just had to have faith.

Michael smiled softly to himself; it was almost like all his brothers were on the same side again. He could feel himself slip into a daydream, maybe this time would be different, maybe he could make them see sense.

He mused out loud carelessly, “You know Lucifer and Amenadiel did the best they could. We probably should have taken this roll on decades ago. We expected too much of our lesser kin. How much good can the fallen really do?”
He smiled indulgently at his two brothers.

A titter rose up from the other angels, before turning into an all out roar of side grabbing, back slapping laughter.

The smile slipped off Michael’s face as his daydream shattered. He hadn’t meant for it to sound like he was making fun of them. He felt equal parts appalled at the army of his brothers and ashamed of his own words. He honestly thought he was helping by taking on some of the blame and complimenting Lucifer and Amenadiel in the process.

“Dick,” the demon muttered before coughing into her arm, covering up the word.

Michael’s eyes snapped towards her. The impertinence! He would not allow- but his thoughts dissipated once he saw the twin infuriated expressions on Amenadiel’s and Lucifer’s faces.

Amenadiel moved towards Michael who took a step back in fear of his older brother before he could stop himself. Lucifer twisted, laying one hand on Amenadiel’s shoulder while using his body to block his forward assault.

“It’s not even worth it, Amenadiel. Beating them up isn’t going to change anything,” Lucifer said sensibly. “Besides, it wasn’t so long ago when you would have agreed with him.”

Amenadiel studied Lucifer’s face carefully, the prior insult forgotten. Over the past few years, he really started having some compassion for his younger brother. Sure Lucifer was an irritating little shit, but he tried. He really tried. And sometimes, Lucifer could pull off amazing feats. Usually something that Amenadiel thought was impossible. None of his other brothers did that.

Amenadiel’s expression grew thoughtful. “You know,” he said with a sly grin. “I really was an asshole, wasn’t I?”

There was a beat of silence as Lucifer just stared at Amenadiel. Finally he scoffed, “I do hope you aren’t expecting me to disagree with you. You know I don’t lie. Luckily, you were able to overcome your shortcomings, well, most of them anyways.”

Amenadiel and Lucifer shared a grin.

“Beating them up might not change anything, but it would make me feel better,” Amenadiel said while taking measure of the army around him. However, for some reason he kept thinking about the odd sensation on his back. He felt a hit of unease and he wasn’t sure why. It wasn’t possible…

“As would it I,” Lucifer said in a serious tone before it cracked showing the mirth underneath. “Although, if we stop talking for long enough, maybe they’ll leave, and this whole unfortunate family reunion could be over. It’s for the greater good you understand? We’ll have to take the high road.”

This pronouncement had them both chuckling together to the annoyance of all their other brothers who had stopped their own amusement and were now looking at them with loathing. They didn’t like it when the tables turned and people laughed at them. Who did these ingrates think they were; besides vastly outnumbered?

Next Lucifer spoke louder towards all the other angels. He never did know when to shut-up.

“Oi, when are you lot going to piss-off? You got here and did your big scary posturing thing - accomplished nothing - but you must be used to that by now. It’s not that I didn’t miss you, actually I didn’t miss you. Next time call first. I’ll make sure I’m out of town,” Lucifer said mockingly.
Some angry shouts rang out as the angels bristled. Michael was not amused. He was about to have a riot on his hands and part of him wanted to take his frustrations out on Lucifer.

Because it wasn’t just Heaven having the identity crisis, Michael had never felt as adrift as he had in the last couple of years. For millenniums, Michael had been known as the good son. He had thought Hell had been the dark shadow of the Silver City and Lucifer was defined by all the traits he lacked that Michael had.

But watching Lucifer and Amenadiel together, it became clear that Lucifer didn’t need him or the Silver City and maybe he never had. Perhaps Michael had it the wrong way around and Heaven, the angels and God himself all depended on their antithesis for meaning. Because if Lucifer wasn’t the embodiment of all that was evil and more like the slightly bad/irresponsible son, what did that make Michael? The slightly ok angel that lorded that fact over his less fortunate brother?

Michael resented Lucifer for his own doubts. And he knew that was petty of him, but he couldn’t seem to control his own emotions. Especially when Lucifer seemed perfectly fine and Michael was still in pain from Lucifer’s initial betrayal. Michael never wanted the rebellion and he hated Lucifer for making him choose between him and their Father. Even though Lucifer had been forcefully kicked out of Heaven, it still felt like he had abandoned Michael who had to step up and led their brothers alone. It wasn’t fair.

As Michael simmered, he became aware of the human that Lucifer had called Daniel. Earlier, the one eyed human on the floor had pointed a finger at the quiver holding the Tesseract before jerking his hand towards the exit.

Dan had spent the last minute trying to nonchalantly walk through the crowd of angels to the hanger door. They had all ignored him as he tip-toed and all but started humming as he tried to appear like he was just aimlessly moving around the room. To them he wasn’t even worth considering. There were so many angels, sometimes Dan had to turn side-ways and hold his breath to squeeze through them. It was very slow going.

“One more thing,” Michael said softly. “We are taking the Tesseract with us. Daniel, please stop trying to leave.”

Dan froze as once again a thousand angels turned to look at him, today was just not his day. He turned to look at Fury who was scowling at Michael and then at all the angels crowding around him.

“Father didn’t mention anything about the Tesseract,” Amenadiel protested.

“Regardless, we are taking it with us. You want us to leave? Once we have it, we are gone,” Michael replied, the less than virtuous part of himself was thrilled that he could get one over his older brother and Lucifer. He looked back towards the human.

“Daniel, if you would hand it over,” Michael said to him not unkindly.

Dan looked around and realized there was no hope for him; he was never going to make the smart choice. Ah well, might as well embrace the insanity.

“I’m afraid that’s not going to happen,” Dan replied while gripping onto the strap of the quiver with both hands. Michael sighed in exasperation.

“Take it off him,” Michael ordered. His brothers were quick to obey and started pressing in closer to the obstinate human.
“But don’t hurt him,” Michael clarified, he wasn’t going to make the same mistake he made with Remiel by assuming his brothers knew to stop before they took things too far.

This made the angels hesitate confused. They were warriors, and yes, they saw billions of human souls every day, but none of them had really ever dealt with them when they still had their mortal bodies.

Dan took advantage of this by ducking under the nearest pair of wings and rushing towards the door. What followed was so embarrassing that Michael wished he could burn the memory from his mind. The Silver City was never going to live this down.

Maybe angels are more graceful in the air, but whatever the reason, they failed miserably at trying to catch this one human.

Dan ducked and weaved around the multitude of angels, all of his games of touch football from his youth suddenly coming in handy, as he deftly avoided the out-reached arms.

They chased after him only for him to twist unexpectedly and run in a new direction before the angels could process what had just happened. More than once, two or more angels collided as the human ducked or rolled or stopped short.

Dan was panicked and didn’t realize he was whispering, “Oh, shit. Oh, shit. Oh, shit,” under his breath. He couldn’t keep this up forever and he wasn’t getting any closer to the door.

He did another quick spin and Mazikeen’s face was suddenly inches from his.

“Duck,” she said and he instantly complied so she could punch the angel whose fingers had just brushed the back of the quiver.

The angel, with his peacock colored wings, went flying backwards and collided with a bunch of his brothers. There really were too many angels crowded within this one hanger.

Dan scrambled around Maze, completely willing to hide behind her small mass. She had her demon blades out as she taunted the angels daring them to approach. They eyed the wicked curve of the blades warily.

“Enough,” called out Lucifer. “You aren’t taking it, so leave before Mazikeen starts putting holes in you.”

“Be reasonable Lucifer,” Michael replied, equal parts annoyed at his brothers’ incompetence and at Lucifer for his Luciferness. “There is nowhere safer than the Silver City for it.”

“Oh, but brother,” Lucifer began, a cruel smile rose across his face. “You already accused me of being rash and not worrying about consequences. You see, I made a deal. I agreed that the humans would keep the Tesseract and decide what to do with it. You don’t expect me to back out on a deal, do you?”

Michael gauged his force compared to the few beings in this room. No matter the way he counted, he always came out ahead, but with Lucifer one could never be sure of success. He was too devious. But he couldn’t retreat now, Michael felt committed.

“You can’t hope to beat us all,” Michael countered.

“That may be true. But how many more brothers are you willing to sacrifice for a mere babble?” Lucifer replied easy. “Also, your theory of the Silver City being safe is flawed.”
Now Michael was truly insulted, he sputtered indignant, “Thanos will never reach there.”

Lucifer only rolled his eyes. “No one actually cares about Thanos. I’m talking about Azrael. Are you going to keep her out too? What if she decides she wants it?”

Michael forgot to hide his uncertainty from his brothers and they all started to whisper amongst themselves. Lucifer’s and Father’s fall-out had been legendary, but part of that was due to the fact that Lucifer was a drama queen and made sure everyone noticed when he threw a tantrum. Azrael’s and Father’s relationship was in some ways colder except she had never been thrown out of Heaven. If Michael didn’t know better he would have thought his Father was afraid of her.

As the other angels became louder, Michael wiped the unease off his face and tried to keep an impassive expression. That was a lot easier to do if he didn’t look at Lucifer so he turned to the humans.

“You can keep the Tesseract for now; Father did leave it on Earth for this long. However, I beg you to consider removing it from this planet as soon as possible. The more infinity stones you collect here the bigger the target you become,” Michael said evenly. “If you decide that you want us to safeguard it, we will allow Amenadiel to bring it to the gate for you.”

Michael addressed Amenadiel directly, “Just to the gate, brother. You won’t be allowed in.”

“Sycophantic winged dick,” Maze called out, no longer hiding her insults. The human Daniel still cowered behind her, but he was also nodding at her assessment of Michael.

Michael gritted his teeth, before waving his brothers back to the Silver City. Duma wrapped his arms around Remiel and after once last sniff from Remiel, they too left. The rest of the occupants seemed to breathe a collective sigh of relief as the angels departed. Michael turned to leave too, but hesitated.

Lucifer glared unhappily at Michael as he dithered most unlike himself. Everyone else watched the angel suspiciously.

Michael finally seemed to decide on a course of action before turning towards Lucifer.

“You’ve changed, brother. Earth has been good for you,” Michael said before staring contemplatively into the distance. “That could have gone worse. It also could have gone better, but I was expecting it to be a lot worse.”

“No thanks to you lot,” Lucifer bit out angrily. “Really with the things our brothers get up to, you have to wonder who the bad guys really are.”

Michael huffed out in annoyance, reminding himself to be patient as he spoke, “Can we stop fighting, just for a moment? I’m trying to talk to you.”

“Really? Why?” Lucifer said in a deliberate obtuse tone. “What could we possibly say to each other?”

“You always did love to play the victim,” Michael snapped out, why did he even bother? “What will it take to satisfy you, brother? Once again you’ve gotten everything you wanted.”

Michael talked over Lucifer’s fevered protest, “You never have to go back to Hell, you’ve turned one of our brothers to your side, you’ve kept mother here with that farce of a punishment and you get to stay on Earth with your ridiculous hobby and the human you love.”
“As if that’s not exactly what Father wanted,” snarled Lucifer. “You should be pleased! I finally fell in and followed the party line when I decided to be with the detective. Father’s manipulation worked. Hats off to him.”

Michael looked at him incredulously before replying, “You really do think the whole universe revolves around you, don’t you? Chloe was not created for you.”

Lucifer’s expression of shock might have delighted Michael once, but now he was just tired.

“Do you remember the day you met her, brother?” Michael asked but didn’t wait for Lucifer to respond, “because I do. It was the same day Amenadiel left the Silver City and never came home. Do you really think that’s a coincidence? Father never wanted you anywhere near her.”

“What?” Amenadiel cried out.

Michael looked his older brother sadly before responding, “As you are well aware, our Father gives us orders but doesn’t actually tell us how he expects us to carry them out. If you had only dragged Lucifer to Hell the very first night, he never would have met the human and you wouldn’t have fallen.”

“He would only have escaped again,” Amenadiel responded softly.

“Yes,” Michael agreed. “But he no longer had his wings and you could have thrown him in again and again until he ran out of ways to return. I think he would’ve given up eventually if he had never met the human. That’s what I would have done anyways. It never would have occurred to me to try to reason with him.”

Michael turned back to Lucifer and spoke as honestly as he could, “Although Amenadiel paid for the lengths he went trying to get you back to Hell, I am glad it wasn’t me sent after you. I think- I think you’ve impressed even Father with how far you’ve come. Perhaps Remiel was right, in time, there could be forgiveness.”

“My forgiveness? Or His?” snapped out Lucifer, but at Michael’s look of disappointment, he became slightly chagrin and then worried as he really thought about what Michael said. “What does Father want with the detective?”

“Nothing,” Michael said to Lucifer kindly. “She already fulfilled her purpose years before she met you.”

“You know,” Michael said thoughtfully. “You’ve made even our Father pause. Over the centuries, our brothers and I have come up with plan after plan to counter any attack you might have made on the Silver City or Earth. Not once did we ever think you would have just given it all up. We- no, I was so sure that your trip to Earth was just a trick. I am glad to know that I was wrong.”

Michael turned to leave, but Lucifer called out after him.

“You could stay, if you wanted,” Lucifer said, no one could quite tell what the expression was on his face, it was doubtful Lucifer even knew what he was feeling. “The humans could use your help. With Thanos and the infinity stones in play, their troubles are only beginning.”

Michael sighed, “You have chosen to live here brother, you protect them. I still have my responsibilities for the Silver City.”

Then he was gone.
The silence after his departure was broken by a pained whispered voice.

“You held up your end of the deal, thank you,” Barton said. “However, I don’t think I’m going to be much use to you.”

The corruption that had started in his eyes had spread down the sides of his face as skin started to flake off. Lucifer looked at him genuinely confused.

A metallic twang rang out through the hanger as Thor finally lost his struggle with his weakening muscles and Mjölnir hit the ground.

A breathy laughter twisted through the air, as a large Thor shaped shadow started to rise up behind the Asgardian Prince who could barely hold his head up. Red eyes and mouth appeared as a shadowy Mjölnir was lifted up in the air ready to strike.

The shadow became illuminated with a bright green glow before twisting in agony. The green light appeared to be forcing the shade into a physical form.

Mazikeen let out a war cry and soared through the air. She wrapped both thighs around the now solid shadow Thor’s neck as she brought down her demon blades one at a time over and over again. She rode the flailing creature to the ground, never giving up her violent assault.

The shadow creature let out one last shriek of pain before dissipating in a puff of black smoke. The real Thor leapt to his feet, completely renewed. Barton blinked in shock as the corruption faded from his face and his eyes became clear again.

Once the smoke had cleared, Loki was revealed to be standing behind Thor, panting heavily with mad eyes. The green glow was still coming from the finger tips of his outstretched hands. He looked around the room wildly.

“It is entirely possible that I may have slightly over-reacted after I found out I was adopted,” stated Loki. “There are worse families to be a part of.”

Thor looked at him like the sun began and ended with Loki.

Fury was less than amused.

“What the fuck was that?!” Fury cried out.

Lucifer had knelt down to touch the floor where the shadow had dissipated before offering a hand to help Mazikeen to her feet. She was grinning as she basked in the afterglow of the violence. She had really been worried that she wouldn't get the chance to kill anything on this trip. Especially now that Hell was completely ruined, she had to resign herself to her new home on Earth with all of its pesky rules.

“A Shadow Demon, from Hell,” Lucifer responded, “nasty creatures, parasitic. They feed on your greatest strengths before jumping to a new host. They are very rare.”

Lucifer looked contemplatively at Barton.

“There is no reason one should have been anywhere near where we were,” Lucifer stated before sighing and shaking his head. “But that’s Hell for you. Anything that can go wrong will go wrong. It has a way of always finding an agent to make your worst nightmares a reality. Tell me Barton, what is your personal version of Hell?”
Barton thought for a moment, before looking up and responding sadly, “The souls were right there and I just couldn’t see Coulson. I had to leave him behind.”

Fury sent a sharp look at Barton, his expression unreadable.

“Sounds about right,” Lucifer replied nodding. “No matter the precautions you take, no one can go to Hell and come out unscathed.”

“Did anything else get out?” inquired Fury frantically. “What about those lights from earlier? Are those going to cause trouble?”

“Oh, definitely. You can count on that,” Lucifer drawled. “I am not sure what you expect me to do about it though.”

At Fury’s furious expression, Lucifer rolled his eyes and continued, “I’m sorry, have you not been paying attention at all? You should be thrilled at what I accomplished, I wasn’t even sure it was possible.”

Apocalyptic is the only word that could describe Fury’s state of mind. He let out a growl that even Mazikeen was impressed by before turning to Dan.

“Agent Espinoza, explain everything that just happened,” he ordered.

“Um, Umm, Ummm,” Dan sputtered, his mind going blue screen of death.

Amenadiel also rolled his eyes before walking over to Dan and taking the quiver off of him.

“Regardless of what the humans understand or don’t understand, we should close the portal before anything worse comes out,” Amenadiel intoned before reaching his hand towards the Tesseract.

When he touched the Tesseract, the portal immediately disappeared, but he also wrenched his hand out of the quiver with a hiss of pain. A burn stretched up from his fingers to his forearm and didn’t heal.

He looked at his hand in shock and asked, “Lucifer, where is Chloe?”

Mazikeen was stunned for a moment before turning and punching Lucifer in the arm.

“Ow,” Lucifer called out while rubbing the quickly forming bruise. “What was that for?”

Lucifer looked down at his jarred arm. That hurt more than it should have. Even taking in account Mazikeen’s greater strength, it should have healed instantly, but it was still throbbing.

“You don’t have your powers,” Mazikeen called out dismayed.

“Huh,” stated Lucifer before a wicked grin rose over his face. “You know what that means right? We just bluffed our way into making an army of angels retreat. Good thing we kept our cool.”

A high pitched cry of “Lucifer” came from the hanger door and a small blur ran at him.

Lucifer recoiled, turning his body and holding out his hands in defense while calling out an undignified, “Gah!”

Trixie was here.
Pre-Pre-Pre-Teen Trixie

Trixie Espinoza had always known her parents’ job was dangerous. She knew that her grandfather was shot and killed on the same job and that had always made her mom sad. Trixie didn’t want to grow up feeling sad like that. But she also knew that what her parents did was important.

Sometimes when she thought about all the people her parents helped and all the good they did, her heart would fill up and feel so heavy it felt like it was going to burst from her chest.

When she was very little, she thought that because mommy and daddy were working together there was no way either of them would ever get hurt. They were her superheroes and together they were unbeatable.

That is until they started arguing all the time.

Sure they did it behind closed doors in hushed angry whispers, but Trixie heard every word. After the fights, daddy would leave for longer and longer time periods. Mommy, with her red rimmed eyes, would assure Trixie that everything was fine and they both really loved her and always would.

Trixie knew they still loved her; they had simply stopped loving each other. Or maybe they loved each other is some weird adult way that meant they didn’t like each other anymore. Trixie didn’t know and swore she would never find out. She would avoid the whole messy business of love so she would never have to know what falling out of love felt like.

They were still her heroes, but she started to grow concerned. What if they started arguing at work and got so distracted they got shot by a bad guy? It was almost a relief for Trixie when they announced their separation and she and mommy moved into one of grandma’s houses.

But a new fear started to grow. Who was looking out for her parents now? Trixie watched her mom go to work every day alone and it felt like Trixie had to hold her breath until mommy walked back through the door at night. And sure, she worried about daddy too, but she didn’t see him every day so it was easier to keep the fear in a small corner of her mind.

Trixie loved her parents more than anything, but she also loved the fact they were the good guys. She pictured her parents as the heroine and hero in every book she read, and maybe, one day, she could be as good and brave as them. Trixie had a feeling if her parents really knew how afraid she was, they would do anything to make her feel better, they might even stop working, but then who would help everyone else? What if someone got hurt because her parents weren’t doing their very important jobs? She wasn’t a baby. She could handle it.

So Trixie kept her fears hidden so far down no one could see. She smiled sometimes when she was actually sad. And maybe she stopped talking to her parents as much. A small price, she thought, but worth it. They didn’t need to know everything anyways.

Of course, Trixie had also known that she couldn’t hold all this fear inside forever. The longer the separation between her parents went on the worse it got. Sometimes her emotions would spill out unexpectedly and explosively. Like the time she kicked a bully in the no no touch touch square. But that was also the day she met Lucifer and everything had changed.

Lucifer was funny and made her forget all of her fears. And the worst happened, mommy did get shot! But Lucifer saved her and everything was fine. It was better than fine because mommy
wasn’t alone anymore and Trixie knew Lucifer would keep her mom safe.

And sometimes he hung out with daddy too! They were always joking together and it made Trixie laugh and laugh. Lucifer called daddy his friend and Trixie knew Lucifer didn’t have that many friends, so maybe they were best friends!

Life was perfect: mommy, Lucifer and daddy.

But then daddy left again, and this time he was gone a lot longer than before. He had a new job he didn’t really talk about and Trixie would only see him once every few months. They talked on the phone every week, but it wasn’t the same. Trixie could feel the fear rising up in her again and she grew quieter, but now there was also a bitterness under her tongue and sometimes her jaw hurt because she was clenching it so hard.

All her teachers told her if she didn’t have anything nice to say then not to say anything at all. Maze would tell her to wait until her enemies showed a weakness before pouncing. She didn’t think her parents were her enemies so she followed her teachers’ advice even though it was so hard. Besides Trixie knew she couldn’t always follow Maze’s example. In some ways, Maze was like a kid just like Trixie. But that was kind of nice; it felt like Trixie and Maze were figuring out the world together. That’s why Maze was Trixie’s best friend.

But that was all before the monsters came and Lucifer left. Now it was mommy who was the one pretending she wasn’t afraid. Trixie was an expert at hiding fear and could see straight through her. However, instead feeling more afraid, Trixie felt something else spreading under her skin. It was kind of like being mad but not in a bad way. It felt similar to how she felt kicking the bully.

Trixie knew it was up to her to do something. She would prove she could be as brave and heroic as her parents. In a few years, she would be a teenager and that was almost like being a grownup. So Trixie came up with a plan.

Find Lucifer.

He would make everything better again. He always did.

***

There are very few things in the Universe that Lucifer felt ill-equipped to deal with. One of them was overly-affectionate human children. In particular, there was one small cuddly child-size human who insisted on “hugs” while staring at him like he was responsible for all the good in the world. Oh, who was he kidding? He was delightful. Plenty of humans stared at him like he was god’s *cough* gift to mankind (what an unfortunate phrase).

Granted most of them were sexual partners, but that’s only because of the smear campaign going on against his name.

Of course, in Trixie’s case, she was so very good. She was good in a way that all the angels combined couldn’t even come close to competing with. No scratch that, what a horrible analogy, the angels suck. Trixie- Trixie was Chloe’s daughter. It was a miracle that she was who she was when half of her DNA came from Daniel... a true miracle.

She was also delightfully wicked. She knew how to scheme as well as any of them (maybe better), but she never lost her goodness. She tug on heartstrings that Lucifer was pretty sure had never once existed within himself until he met her. It made him almost want to hug her back (almost) and make sure she was real and safe and happy.
Lucifer always told the truth and he would admit that he was not completely against hanging out with her. She was decent, for a human.

The timing, however, could be better.

The small dark-haired blur rocketed towards Lucifer from the door that led outside. Lucifer braced for impact. He knew from experience there was nothing he could do to avoid the terrible onslaught of cuteness.

Halfway to him, Trixie started slowing down as she looked around the room. When her gaze fell on Daniel her expression crumbled completely. Everything she buried deep within her felt like it was bursting forth at once. Her face that still held some baby chubbiness crinkled and turned bright red. It was tragic, not unlike watching a car crash.

She let out a sob of, “daddy,” and switched directions to sprint to him.

Dan’s mouth was still gaped open when the full force of his daughter slammed into him, making him take a half step backwards. Her small arms wrapped around him, squeezing tight. He could hear her muffled sobs as she pressed into his stomach.

Maybe it was OK to be a kid for a little while longer, Trixie thought to herself at the same time Dan realized that his daughter almost came up to his sternum. When had she gotten so tall?

He was quick to wrap his arms around his little girl. Detective or S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent, it didn’t matter, Dan was a dad.

“Hey, hey, hey, monkey,” he said soothingly. “It’s all right. I’m here.”

Trixie melted in his arms going completely limp, something she hadn’t even realized was missing seemed to slot back in place. She knew finding Lucifer would solve everything. It was better than she ever could’ve hoped. Lucifer found daddy!

Lucifer meandered over to Dan and Trixie, careful to stay an arms-length away in case *this* was contagious. With his hand flat, Lucifer reached over and patted Trixie on her head twice.

“There there small human, Daniel makes everyone feel that way sometimes,” Lucifer said reassuringly. “Even I’ve almost shed a tear while thinking about all the air he wastes every day.”

Trixie looked over her shoulder to smile at Lucifer, her eyes still brimming with tears and nose positively leaking snot. He was always so funny. But the tickle of humor she felt was short-lived. She quickly turned back to sob even harder into Daniel’s jacket, wiping her nose in the process. Dan glared over his daughter at Lucifer while shaking his head.

Alarmed at the increased volume, Lucifer looked at Dan in panic, completely oblivious to the waves of indignation being directed towards him.

“I think your offspring is broken. Is there an on/off switch we can try?” Lucifer asked while studying the child up and down.

Before Dan could respond to the idiot in front of him, Amenadiel butted in.

“Trixie, where is your mother?” he asked in a frantic tone. Trixie turned to him, tears subsiding slightly.

“I’m right here, Amenadiel,” Chloe said breathlessly from the doorway. Her face was blotchy and
strands of her hair had freed themselves from her ponytail to hang limply. She was holding one hand awkwardly to her chest while the other held her gun. She had a scowl on her face that could curdle milk.

Lucifer looked at her like she was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

She stalked into the room glaring at Amenadiel and Lucifer in turn before stopping short when she saw Dan holding Trixie. Her warpath temporary stymied by the twin looks of confusion she and her ex shared.

Lucifer sauntered over to Chloe, grabbed a belt loop and pulled her closer to him, jolting her out of her shock. He bent down a hair’s breadth away from her lips, waiting for his hello kiss.

She shoved him hard away from herself; he staggered backwards but never lost the dopey smile on his face.

“What do you think you’re doing?!?” cried out Chloe beyond pissed.

“Darling, it has just occurred to me that forbidden love is by far the sweetest. Don’t you think?” Lucifer mused while moving in close again, hovering expectantly by Chloe. It was like she was a magnet and he was a steel rod.

“You didn’t answer a single one of my texts or phone calls,” she hissed out, turning towards this impossible creature she chose to share her life with. “I’m mad at you!”

If anything this made Lucifer look even more delighted.

“Mad at me? Like angry make-up sex mad at me?” asked Lucifer, he was all but clapping his hands in glee.

“Lucifer!” Dan shouted while gesturing with his head towards Trixie.

Trixie looked up at her dad before looking over to her mom and Lucifer. “I know what sex is, dad,” she declared, her sobs had turned into adorable little hiccups. Now it was Dan’s face that was crumbling.

“Oh, you’re hurt,” Lucifer said while gingerly holding Chloe’s injured hand. “Who did this?”

“An idiot who walked into my fist,” Chloe snarled. “Want me to demonstrate?”

“Are you all insane?” Amenadiel called out annoyed. “They both need to leave now. It’s not safe.”

“You don’t get to tell me what to do, Amenadiel, and I don’t need you to protect me,” she shot back equally furious as she turned all the stress of the last few days, especially the last five minutes (she hadn’t been so scared since Malcolm) towards him. Everything felt surreal; this couldn’t really be her life, could it? Was that Iron Man over there?

“You?” Amenadiel sputtered, “I’m trying to protect us!”

He turned towards his brother to plead his case. “Lucifer if she got here mere moments ago there would have been nothing to stop our brothers from doing and taking whatever they wanted.”

“Amenadiel is right,” stated Dan, first looking down at Trixie and then to the quiver in Amenadiel’s hand that still had a blue glow coming from it. “Bigger and worse things keep coming for the Tesseract. I want you and Trixie as far away from that thing as possible.”
Nick Fury put his face in his hand, sighing angrily at the breach in protocol. At this point they might as well just put out a news bulletin about the Tesseract explaining what it was and where to find it.

“What about you?” Chloe asked suspiciously eyeing the blue glow.

She was having a hard time keeping the blitz of realizations from overwhelming her as they cycled through her head: gods, monsters, and portals exist, NYC was destroyed, LA was attacked, someone shot at Trixie, Lucifer’s mom is strong enough to throw a grown man and practically pulverize him, Iron Man and Thor are standing in the same room as her and… and Dan was with them, oh hell – did I just bring my daughter to the center of all this madness? and then there was Lucifer… who was Lucifer!

“What are you even doing here? You told me you were working private security, not fighting aliens!” Chloe asked her ex-husband who looked way too at home with his uniform and assault rifle on his back for her liking. Sometimes all you could was fall back into old habits and arguing with Dan felt good right now.

Trixie eyes grew wide as she looked at her dad in wonder.

“You fought aliens, daddy?” she squeaked out.

He looked down at his daughter and smiled softly. “Only a little, monkey. I mostly helped the people in the crossfire and guard—”

“Agent Espinoza,” Fury said scathingly, interrupting Dan, “works here. The infamous Miss Decker, I presume? You and your daughter are currently standing in the secret base of a secret organization where your ex-husband is, for lack of a better term, a secret agent. The real question is what are you doing here? And how the fuck did you find this place?”

Trixie stared at her dad like he had personally placed all the stars in the night sky. He was so cool!

Dan let out a cough that sounded sort of like ‘language.’ Fury’s one eye twitched.

“I followed the GPS on his phone,” Chloe exclaimed while throwing out a hand in Lucifer’s direction, almost smacking him in his face and making her threat a reality. He kept inching closer to her.

Fury was horrified that a being as awe inspiring as the actual devil didn’t know how to turn off a simple tracker, but he was also re-visiting his weaponized smart phone plan.

Maybe they would give all the super-powerful beings and aliens their own smart phone loaded with Angry Birds and Candy Crush. Then show them how to take pictures and post them to their super-powerful friends, and watch their conquering ways descend into useless, obsessive, mediocrity.

“Detective! Are you stalking me? How naughty,” Lucifer exclaimed in that stupid accent of his that Chloe was not charmed by at all, she wasn’t.

Lucifer placed both hands on her waist. Since they had officially started dating he had practically turned into an octopus, he was so touchy-feely. Chloe had to place some very firm ground rules – which he was currently breaking– about public displays of affection.

“You went through all that trouble. Aren’t you at least a little glad to see me?” Lucifer asked. He sounded like he was still joking, but underneath Chloe thought she heard something else. She
turned and really looked at him since she first ran into the hanger.

It was just Lucifer. He was looking at her the way he always does, like she was the only thing in the Universe and if he blinked she might disappear. Some sort of wall she always had in the forefront of her mind, built after her father was killed and reinforced by her divorce from Dan and her uncertainty about Lucifer fell away. He was still her Lucifer. And in that moment, she knew without a doubt that in the quiet times in their bedroom (after absolutely fantastic sex) when he told her he would love her until the end of time, he meant it.

She bent forward and gave him a heartfelt but quick peck on the lips, making sure he could see in her eyes that she felt the same way.

“Yes, I’m happy to see you. But we going to have a long discussion about answering phone calls, especially when the world is ending!” she stated.

Lucifer smiled and was about to suggest something a lot more interesting he could do with his mouth to make it up to her when Amenadiel, like a cold shower, butted in.

“Lucifer, is this really the time?” Amenadiel asked odiously. “I would think you would agree with Dan and want to get those two as far away from here as possible, especially after what we just learned from our brother. You were listening, weren’t you?”

He pointedly looked at Trixie and everyone followed suit. Unsure of why all the eyes in the room were suddenly looking at her she buried her face deeper into Dan’s stomach. She had a bad feeling.

Lucifer stepped back from Chloe to address his brother. His expression was pure ice.

“Obviously,” Lucifer snapped. “It makes sense in cruel twisted way, but that’s Father for you.”

“Nope, nope,” stated Dan looking alarmed from his daughter to Lucifer. “Nothing makes sense. What was the winged asshole saying and what does it have to do with my daughter? Sorry Trixie, don’t say that word.”

“Winged-?” asked Chloe trailing off, managing not to swear in front of her young daughter.

“Michael, their brother, the angel,” Dan answered uselessly. “He mentioned you by name.”

“Right, angel, Lucifer’s brother, with wings,” Chloe repeated senselessly. It had been a long few days.

Looking back and forth between Dan and Chloe, Lucifer finally sighed and attempted to explain, “Chloe is a miracle, a literal miracle. She needed divine intervention, courtesy of my brother, Amenadiel, to be born.”

“Amenadiel is her father!” exclaimed Dan wide-eyed staring at Chloe and the two fallen angels in horror.

Amenadiel and Lucifer shared the same annoyed exasperated expression, this is why they didn’t bother explaining the intricacies of divinity to humans.

“No! I blessed her mother, the thing your priests do all the time,” rambled Amenadiel, “but you know, effectively.”

“We thought-” Amenadiel continued still stumbling over his words, partially because he wasn’t entirely sure what he had done all those years ago. Not really. And he liked Trixie. He started to
feel bad for mentioning anything as he watched the little girl burrow into her father. “It doesn’t matter what we thought. If Chloe isn’t- look, there are two miracles now.”

“Yes,” drawled Lucifer his eyes tilted upwards angrily, “and when she has kids and grandkids they will all be miracles too. Hell, we could wait a few centuries and there will be a literal army of miracle humans. We hardly know the scale of Father’s plan.”

“And it doesn’t matter,” said Lucifer while looking at Mazikeen. She recognized that look from her centuries of being Lucifer’s most trusted ally in Hell and grinned viciously. They used to have such glorious battles, which was a kinder word than bloodbaths.

“Between the three of us,” stated Lucifer pining Amenadiel with his eyes until the fallen angel found himself nodding along to whatever his younger brother had in mind, “and Chloe,” Lucifer face brightened infinitesimally at her before turning towards the child, “and… Daniel, Trixie is hardly going to do anything she doesn’t want to do, ever.”

Now that matter was settled, Lucifer smiled down at Trixie completely confident that anyone who did anything to this particular small human, even if it was his Father himself, would regret it a thousand times over. Trixie smiled shyly back.

“I’m sure it’s passed time for a meal in the child’s feeding schedule,” Lucifer stated. “Maze, take Trixie and find some food. Maybe there’s chocolate cake hidden somewhere on the base!”

Trixie lit up. Mazikeen rolled her eyes but reached out her hand which Trixie was quick to take after one last hug for her dad.

“Come on human,” said Maze.

Dan let out a long suffering sigh, it would be petty of him to be annoyed at Lucifer for thinking of Trixie and being so fatherly, wouldn’t it? He couldn’t help but add his two cents.

“Maze remember: no knives or explosions or alcohol,” he listed out tonelessly while Maze let out the longest drawn out sigh imaginable.

“Those are all on the list,” Maze said while digging out her phone and holding up a screen showing a note titled: ‘The care and feeding of small humans and other rules you really should know by now Maze.’

“OK, wait,” Tony Stark interrupted, “not to sound racist or speciesist, whatever, you are totally awesome,” he said to Maze before turning to Dan, “but are you really OK with letting your daughter go off with a demon, alone?”

Tony, shocked that he was the one sounding responsible, looked around wondering where the adults were. Clearly, this poor kid’s parents were delusional. OK – there were the Asgardian Princes, that’s a big fat no, Barton appeared to be playing eye doctor with himself as he kept holding one hand over each eye in turn and looking around the room, and Fury – no one would trust their kid with Fury. Oh my god, am I the most adultest adult here? Tony thought horrified.

Dan had a stupid expression on his face as he thought over his life and the past few days.

“Yes?” he said as his mind reeled at the implications. “Maze is Trixie’s back-up babysitter?”

“I’m not a baby, dad!” Trixie said rolling her eyes and sighing the same way Maze did.

Dan looked at his daughter and Maze who had one eyebrow raised at him, her mouth was pressed
into one thin line. Dan sighed again, he could count on one hand the people he trusted with his daughter in this moment and Mazikeen was at the top of the list.

“Yes, Trixie can go with Maze,” Dan said firmly. There was a hint of relief on Maze’s face before she morphed it into an annoyed scowl.

Delusional, utterly delusional, thought Stark. He turned towards the little girl with the unfortunate hooker sounding name.

“Trixie, are you OK going with Maze? She’s an actual demon, from Hell,” he clarified.

Trixie’s face twisted in a way that screamed you are a stupid un-cool adult. Currently, the expression combined with her youthful features was adorable, but when she turned into a real teenager, it would drive any adult who saw it up a wall. Tony Stark who thought of himself as a very cool adult, if not the coolest adult, was a little taken aback.

“I know she’s a demon,” stated Trixie matter-a-factly.

“You do?” Dan asked.

“Duh,” Trixie said regaining her I’m-almost-a-teenager-and-I-know-it attitude. Everyone in the room was staring at her.

“Her face goes all ahgggg,” Trixie clarified while using her hand to pull back the skin on half of her own head.

“When did her face go like that?” Dan asked worried. Maybe he should visit home more often?

“Every Halloween, we get so much candy!” Trixie stated getting excited just thinking about it. “Sometimes people even turn out their lights and leave money on the porch when they see us coming!”

“You let my daughter extort money from our neighbors? Is that why you always agree to take her?” Chloe asked always all holier-than-thou.

“Is that really what we should be concerned about here?” Tony exclaimed, he didn’t like being the adult, he really didn’t like it, where was Pepper?

“No, I don’t let her take the money, that’s on the list too,” Maze explained showing the part of the list that stated: ‘Trixie is not allowed to be given large sums of money’. Chloe looked relieved.

“I put it in her college fund,” Maze continued. “You are always going on and on about it. Last year we got almost got $2K.”

Chloe looked so torn at the moral dilemma.

“Do you know what they are too?” Fury said gesturing towards Lucifer and Amenadiel. Who was this child?

Trixie looked around her confused and spoke really slowly, wondering if this was a practical joke, “Yes, it’s not a secret. Lucifer tells everyone he’s the devil and Amenadiel is his brother so that means he’s an angel.”

Everyone looked at Trixie gob-smacked. Even Loki was looking calculatingly from the child to the only human to break free of the mind stone to the mother who was also Lucifer’s lover. Humans
might be a little more complex than he had planned on.

“I would slaughter everyone who sold these shoes if only they didn’t make my posterior look so good,” stated Charlotte striding through a door that opened to a hallway with only one heel on. She looked up through the missing ceiling to the sky eagerly. Her wistful expression almost made her look gentle and kind.

There were traces of dirt on the heel, under her barefoot and the side of one knee, yet her hair and make-up looked perfect. Her skirt was damp like she tried to dab out a stain.

Did she really- Chloe thought. No, she couldn’t have. But she had. Unlike Chloe who still looked like she did after chasing bad guys through the L.A. heat with her hair messed up and her skin sweaty and flushed, Charlotte looked refreshed and nearly as prim and perfect as she normally did sans one shoe.

She must have stopped somewhere to fix her make-up, how utterly annoying of her. There was something about Charlotte that always so infuriating. At least she cleaned the blood off her hands, Chloe realized belatedly.

Mazikeen let out a growl that sent chills down the spines of all the mortals, including the Asgardians.

“Mother,” Lucifer said coldly. "I should have known you had a hand in this.

“Not possible,” Dan said looking at Lucifer and Charlotte as all the blood drained from his face. Dan could almost feel two insane ideas that couldn’t possibly go together connect irrevocably. They were the last two pieces of the puzzle his mind had subconsciously pushed apart in fear that the truth would turn Dan into a gibbering mess.

Dan looked up at the same sky Charlotte was looking at. He was so fucked.
“Where are they?” Charlotte asked while looking up at the sky like there could be something hiding behind the clouds. Dan Espinoza was letting out a low steady stream of ‘no, no, no,’ in the background.

“Who? Our brothers? They’re gone,” Lucifer replied cruelly. Due to Chloe’s presence he wasn’t turning into his full Hell self. There was only a hint of red in his eyes, but he managed to get the same affect across as he glared at his mother.

She barely took notice of him as she turned to Amenadiel. The other occupants in the hanger, including Maze and Trixie who hadn’t managed to leave yet, looked from Charlotte to Lucifer to Amenadiel and back again.

“Where did they go?” she asked her eldest who only stared at her incredulously.

At his lack of response, her gaze hardened and the volume of her voice rose in a very recognizably ‘mom’ tone, “Son?!”

Amenadiel jolted and blinked before responding, “They went home, mom. They were here twenty minutes, probably less.”

“Twenty minutes!” Lucifer shouted. “That’s impossible. It felt like three weeks at least. I thought for sure I’d die of sheer boredom before they finally left.”

“They all went back to heaven? My children didn’t stay to see me?” asked Charlotte, the hopeful expression sliding from her face. “Not one of them?”

“Mother, they would no doubt try to kill you and send you back to Hell if they saw you,” Amenadiel said at the same time Lucifer gleefully exclaimed, “They didn’t all go back to Heaven. Remiel and Duma are currently in Hell.”

She was mid-way through scoffing at Amenadiel when she turned sharply to her younger son, “Lucifer Morningstar, if you did anything to harm your brothers, so help me-”

“Me?!” cried out Lucifer. “I didn’t send them to Hell. Father did. And I only hurt Remiel, but he had it coming.”

“Your Father sent my babies to Hell!?! How could he?” Charlotte screeched. “We have to go get them. Amenadiel fly down-”

“Oh, I see. When you send one of your children to languish in Hell it’s a good idea, but when dad does, it’s a travesty,” Lucifer said softly, his voice deceptively calm. “Tell me, mother, did you gain this sympathy after your stint in Hell or is the difference just because it was me?”

She recoiled at the accusation before a sad considering look crossed her face. She reached out a hand to cup Lucifer’s cheek. He deftly avoided it. Charlotte curled her hand closed before drawing it back slowly.

“Lucifer, you are stronger than them. Remiel –Remiel is delicate, it might break him. And Duma! What has Duma ever done to- ” she started.

Lucifer snorted, “That ship has sailed on Remiel,” he twirled a finger while pointing at the side of
his head, indicating his opinion of his sibling, “and Duma never does anything, that’s the problem.”

“Maybe I should go visit them,” Charlotte said worriedly. She spun away from her sons and looked around the room like she expected a Hell Gate to magically appear in front of her.

“Yes, please do,” Lucifer drawled. “Take an extended vacation. Send a postca-”

Shaking his head, Amenadiel interrupted his brother, “Mother, Michael doesn’t want any more resurrections. He said only Duma can go in and out of Hell.”

Charlotte whirled on Amenadiel, and spat out viciously, “Well, then Michael can come down here and tell me that himself. I am his mother! Who does he think he is?” She paused. “Wait, why can’t Remiel leave?” She asked looking suspiciously at Lucifer.

Amenadiel threw his hands up in frustration. He was tired of being yelled at for pointing out the obvious. He was just the messenger!

Lucifer found something very interesting on a wall to stare at; his way too innocent expression was ruined by a hint of a sly smile.

“Nope, this isn’t happening,” stated Dan interrupting the dysfunctional divine family reunion. He was pacing back and forth making tight circles. His flight or fight instincts were going haywire and he didn’t know if he wanted to run out of the room screaming or – did he have any bullets left?

“Want to know why this isn’t happening?” He walked up to Lucifer who looked entirely too amused for Dan’s liking. Dan raised a finger to stop Lucifer from opening his mouth.

“Because it isn’t possible,” Dan answered his own question, punctuating each word with a jab to Lucifer’s chest before spinning around to continue pacing.

Lucifer’s amusement held a hint of disgust as he looked down and brushed imaginary dirt from where Dan had touched him. He raised a hand to Amenadiel who looked like he was about to speak. “No brother, let him figure it out himself. This is far too hilarious to miss.”

Dan’s pacing brought him face-to-face with Charlotte. Her worried expression transformed into interest as she looked him up and down taking in his new uniform. Dan shuddered and turned around to face the other people in the room.

“She’s your-” started Dan looking at Lucifer and Amenadiel. “Chloe said-”

He turned and looked to Chloe for help, but she just shook her head and looked away.

“Yes, Daniel?” Lucifer asked, his grin showed his stupidly perfect white teeth.

Dan’s face started doing its ghostly white impression again before he meekly answered, “-step-mom?”

“Oh Father help us,” Amenadiel said looking upwards while Lucifer let out a roar of laughter.

Lucifer tried to talk in-between gasping laughs, “Dan-” snort, “think about that,” husky chuckle.

“How would that work exactly? My Father is-” he pointedly looked upwards before finally curtailing his laughter.

Dan could feel his entire body seizing and thought about his weapon. He didn’t think he used all of
his bullets on the other angels. He might actually have two or three left and didn’t Amenadiel say something about him and Lucifer being in danger? All he had to do was move his arm just so. Could he claim accidental discharge of his weapon as a defense with this many witnesses? Charlotte would know.

“Charlotte Richards has a past! People at the precinct knew who she was for years. She has a husband and kids for fuck-sake. You two came from nowhere! With your stupid names-”

“My name is not stupid,” said Amenadiel offended.

“Language daddy,” stated Trixie.

“-Really Amenadiel, really?” Dan was practically foaming at the mouth as he started pacing again in even smaller circles. “Have you met anyone else with your name, ever?”

He startled when his gaze fell over his daughter and offered a muttered, “Sorry, munchkin.”

Amenadiel scratched his chin and looked bewildered as he really tried to think of one other soul. He had lived a very long time. Was it really possible that no one wanted to call their offspring Amenadiel? What was wrong with his name?

“At least it’s not as dumb as Lucifer’s,” stated Amenadiel petulantly. “He wanted a more ‘interesting’ name after he lost his first.”

Lucifer rolled his eyes at his brother’s childishness. Really, where did his brother pick his immaturity up?

Trixie had a particularly impish grin as she watched all the “adults” behave badly.

Right, shows over, Lucifer thought, mustn’t expose the child to too much rotten behavior or he might really be in the doghouse with Chloe. They had just reached their PG-13 swear limit and Trixie wasn’t actually a teenager yet.

Time to put Daniel out of his misery.

“The real Charlotte Richards,” Lucifer explained, “died when her co-worker stabbed her in the neck with an ice pick. My mother simply inhabits the empty body.”

He had a satisfied look of a job well done; now let’s move on to other-

Dan stopped pacing to stare horrified at Lucifer. He opened his mouth, closed it and opened it again.

“You mean this whole time-” started Dan, “-she-,” he swayed as the room started spinning, “-was your actual mother?”

“Yes, Daniel,” Lucifer replied. Daniel was being impossibly slow today. Thankfully Trixie didn’t show any of these unfortunate mental handicaps. “Aren’t you glad you only slept with her once?”

“Oh, snap!” shouted Tony. “This is like the best episode of Jerry Springer ever.” He looked around the room; no one else seemed to be relishing this new reveal as much as him. Fury had looked positively constipated at the drama before turning an unbelieving eye to Tony.

“You know if I watched that show, which I don’t, because it’s beneath me,” Tony finished, trailing off sheepishly.
He was actually becoming seriously concerned about Agent Espinoza’s mental well-being. He had never seen such a tortured expression on a S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent before and Tony loved to torture S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents. It was one of his favorite hobbies. But Espinoza looked absolutely shattered and it kind of felt a little mean even for Tony.

Dan, frozen in place as he thought about the past few years, felt the hairs on the back of his neck rise. He was forgetting something, something more immediate than the fact that he must have been truly horrible in a past life for all of this shit to be happening to him. His stomach dropped out before he could push through his shock and figure out exactly what he was doing wrong now.

*SMACK*

Oh, that’s right. He had turned his back on Charlotte and she had taken advantage of his exposed backside to deliver a mighty wallop with her manicured hand to his ass. Another petite (horizontally petite, Charlotte was practically a giraffe as she balanced on her one remaining heel) seemly harmless looking woman had gotten one over him. He was going to develop a complex at this rate.

Dan’s face grew beet red as he watched Lucifer’s eyes narrow. Amenadiel covered his mouth with his hand and began gagging. That’s a little excessive for a reaction, Dan thought. Unable to look at the brothers any longer Dan spun to face Charlotte.

“Don’t,” he said firmly, “do that again,” at the same time Lucifer inquired, “You only slept with her once, right Daniel?”

Charlotte stepped into Dan’s space and caressed the lapels of his jacket, tugging at the edges slightly, like he was a well-wrapped gift she couldn’t wait to open.

“Stop,” Dan said and he tried to take a step backwards, but was prevented by the un-natural strength of Charlotte's hold on his jacket. She took a step closer to him and smiled seductively.

“Once? Oh, no. Dan and I have slept together many many times,” Charlotte said as she bent down, eyes on Dan’s lips. Dan leaned backwards so fast that if Charlotte wasn’t holding his jacket he would have fallen over. He could hear Amenadiel dry heaving behind him.

“OK! Mazikeen maybe you should take Trixie for that chocolate cake-” Chloe shouted. There was a terrible voyeuristic atmosphere building in the hanger.

“In fact, I've had more sex with Dan than any other being, well besides your Father of course. Why the last time- when was it? Oh, yes, it was the same day as the human-child’s birthday party everyone was going on and on about,” Charlotte mused, her laser focus on Dan’s pale pink mouth never wavered as she went in for her prize. She pressed her lips softly against his before smiling slyly and licking his upper lip nastily. “He is my favorite human, and besides, no one invited me to the party.”

“-because I have to kill Charlotte and Dan,” finished Chloe as she unconsciously checked the magazine of her gun and released the safety. She winced as her broken hand wrapped around the gun in her normal two-handed grip.

“Oh! Well, congratulations Daniel on reclaiming your title! Agent Douchebag is back,” Lucifer snapped out, having never felt so indignant on another’s behalf before. If he was a human-child whose father didn’t go to HIS birthday party, a little bit of rebelling would have been the least of his parent’s worries.
“Ah, but I want to watch,” Mazikeen whined as she gleefully imagined Chloe going postal on Lucifer’s mom. There was a reason this woman was part of her tribe.

“Hruggh,” Amenadiel bent over in half continued to dry heave.

There was a pounding noise as Tony’s metal arm slapped against Thor’s shoulder repeatedly. He wheezed uncontrollably; he couldn’t even get his laughter out. Tears were streaming down his face as he struggled to contain his mirth.

“When you die-” Tony started before falling over in another fit of laughter, he was now gripping Thor’s arm for support, “Espinoza, when you die- oh, man, it’s going to be so awkward.”

Tony stood up straight and appeared to be doing yoga breaths as he struggled to find a neutral expression.

“If I were you, I might take my chances with Tweedledee and Tweedledumbass below,” he said in a faux-calm tone before his face cracked in merriment.

“NO!” Dan cried out. A flurry of motion took place as he detangled himself from Charlotte’s embrace. He might have even elbowed her in the face in his desperation to get away from her. She stepped away more in confusion than anything else as the human went insane in front of her. Dan turned to the only thing in the room that truly mattered to him, his daughter.

“Trixie, baby,” he said as he knelt in front of her, his two hands on her shoulders, “that’s not how it happened. I really wanted to go. I- I – well there were a few issues at work, a minor explosion or two. We got the bad guys though! But I didn’t get out of work on time, and then my flight was delayed. I wanted to visit but- but it was too late, and my flight back was so early the next morning, there wasn’t time to see you.”

“It’s true,” Maze piped up helpfully. “He showed up, but I tossed him out on his ass.”

Chloe’s homicidal feelings died down as she looked at her crazy roommate/baby-sitter. She had no one to blame except herself, why did she leave her daughter with a demon again? Oh, right, she didn’t actually know about the whole demon thing before today… or did she? Chloe’s head hurt and she must be in shock because the only thought she had when Iron Man (Iron Man!) revealed Maze as a demon was, ‘oh, that makes sense.’ Maybe she should give her the benefit of the doubt? She was still Maze after all.

“Maze, why would you kick Dan out?” Chloe asked in her calmest mom voice.

Maze looked at her like she was stupid before scrolling through her phone and showing the screen to Chloe.

“It’s on the list,” she said haughtily and it was.

‘Bedtime is bedtime there are no exceptions (blood moons and eclipses are NOT holidays were you run around naked hunting small animals in the forest)’

“If Dan travels all that way, especially after fighting aliens or whatever the hell he does, he can see Trixie, especially if it’s her birthday,” Chloe said while sighing heavily.

“Argh, make-up your minds humans,” Maze said frustrated as she started jabbing angrily at her phone to amend the rule.

Trixie hugged Dan around his neck. “It’s OK daddy. I was really tired. Lucifer had a friend from
work come to the party and she showed us all of these dance moves! It was great! And mommy had a sleepover too, with Lucifer.”

She smiled toothily at her dad. He was less than enthused thinking about what a dancer from LUX would teach his daughter and his ex’s “sleep-over.”

“Trixie, it’s not OK. I’m really sorry. I should have been there,” Dan said apologetically.

Amenadiel didn’t feel very forgiving at all, no matter how much like a sad-puppy Daniel looked. He stood up straight, still green around the edges, as he glared at Dan. “So my mother is your-your- booty-call?!?”

“What’s a ‘booty-call’?” Trixie asked Amenadiel who looked at the child and instantly felt nauseous again.

“Umm, ask your father,” he said embarrassed. Trixie turned to Dan expectantly.

“Time for that chocolate cake, monkey!” Dan called out a touch hysterically.

Trixie knew she was being played, but it worked every time. She hurried over to Maze so they could leave the hangar. Dan stood up and tried to find a spot that was farthest away from Lucifer, Chloe, and most importantly, Charlotte.

Trixie really wasn’t upset that her dad missed her party. She wasn’t. He worked with superheroes! Other people needed him more than her. And maybe, since he fought aliens, that meant he was a superhero too. Speaking of which- she looked at the tall brooding man wearing green next to her. She didn’t like the way he was looking at her daddy.

“Aren’t you the bad guy that was all over the TV?” Trixie asked Loki.

He looked down at her like she was an insect, but surprised everyone when he dropped to one knee so he was eye-level with the human.

“I am,” Loki said. His smile wasn’t nice. It was a touch manic. He couldn’t help his gaze from flickering from the ‘miracle’ child to the human who beat the Mind Stone. There was something more to these humans.

Trixie’s eyes narrowed.

“If you hurt my daddy-” she began.

Loki raised one eyebrow and prompted her with an inquisitive, “Yes?”

Trixie pursed her lips considering the worst threat she could come up with. “-I’ll send Maze after you.”

Maze crossed her arms over her chest and stood behind Trixie like the little girl was a gangster and she was her enforcer.

This threat had more effect on Loki than he anticipated. He looked at Maze warily. The demon really had far too many knives.

“I underestimated your father once, child, I won’t be making that mistake again,” Loki drawled.

“Humph,” replied Trixie. “Shouldn’t you be in jail?”
Another crazed smile bloomed over Loki’s face, “Ah, I was, but I’m good friends with dear Lucifer over there. We have so much in common.”

Loki reached towards the part of himself that he typically refused to acknowledge and instantly felt cold. Red bled into his eyes and his fingers turned blue. He was a firm believer in making sure children knew exactly who the monsters were. It was practically a public service.

“You’re friends with Lucifer?” Trixie’s chipper tone startled Loki.

“Is your daddy mean to you too?” she asked looking him up and down sadly, emotions switching faster than even his.

She reached out and put a comforting hand on his shoulder.

He lost hold of the transformation and remained in his false Asgardian guise as he looked at the small hand in disbelief. He just lost concentration, right? This human child didn’t actually do anything to him, did she?

“Is this sorcery?” Loki asked unsure, unable to tear his gaze from the hand touching him.

“Lucifer used to act all mad about it, even though he was really sad. But then he became friends with mommy and me and daddy and Linda and Ella and we help him feel better,” Trixie said sensibly.

“It’s good you’re friends with Lucifer. I can be your friend too!” she said while beaming at the trickster god.

There was something inside of Loki. It felt – it felt odd. The only description close to matching the sensation was ‘warm and fuzzy’.

He sprung to his feet and danced several paces back from the child. There was something wrong with her. There had to be. Sorcery, he was sure of it.

Mazikeen snorted, well aware there was no stopping Trixie, she was too fierce, and began guiding her towards the door.

Dan, whose brain had probably short-circuited by this point, tried to make up for not exactly being the father-of-the-year, called after them, “Mazikeen, Trixie is not allowed to drive anything, or god-forbid, fly anything, and no weapons of any kind. If you use a plastic spork to hurt someone, it counts as a weapon.”

Mazikeen and Trixie walked out the door to the hallway with Mazikeen holding her phone up with the list still on it.

The last thing anyone heard was Mazikeen saying to Trixie, “You know it’s like he doesn’t even want you to learn how to disembowel your enemies,” and Trixie’s girlish giggles.
Impending Violence

“Thirty minutes out,” Natasha called out curtly.

Steve was once again leaning on the back of her chair as he looked through the front window of the jet to the forest below them. Natasha gritted her teeth since she could feel her seat tip ever so slightly backwards from Captain America’s weight. She pictured several ways she could incapacitate Steve Rogers or at least break an arm and sighed contently. Possible impending violence always had a calming effect on her.

Bruce was muttering to himself in the rear of the aircraft, blind and deaf to everything but the impossibility in front of him.

Bruce hadn’t managed to wait for a S.H.I.E.L.D. lab before tearing apart several of the devices found on the boats in L.A. He was sitting cross-legged on the floor of the jet with pieces scattered in a circle around him. He looked equal part furious and dazzled.

Some of what Bruce was saying traveled to the front of the jet. They could hear phrase like, ‘suck it Einstein,’ ‘spooky action? This shit is fucking freaky,’ and ‘kitty, kitty, kitty, are you alive?’ but neither Natasha nor Steve wanted to think too hard on that last one.

A red light flashed on the dashboard as a steady piercing alarm rang out. One of the consoles started listing a series of numbers. Natasha was quick to switch off the alarm, but it had caused enough of a ruckus to even draw Bruce’s attention.

Steve looked at Natasha questioningly, but her face was blank. Her eyes flickered rapidly back and forth as she scanned the numbers.

Steve didn’t know if he was just imagining things that weren’t there or if maybe, just maybe, he had gotten to know Natasha enough over the past few days to get a good read on her. (Probably more than she realized, he was well aware he was pushing her buttons by leaning on her chair. What? Everyone thought he was so perfect. He had to have his fun somehow.) He had a funny feeling that she was suspicious or even – part of him rebelled at the possibility – worried at whatever was on that screen.

“We have new orders,” Natasha said calmly as if she was merely pointing out an interesting feature on the landscape. “Another portal has been opened, north of here.”

Within moments, Steve was practically sitting in the pilots chair as he leaned over to try to decipher the message on the screen, never mind the fact Natasha was already in the chair trying to fly the jet.

She was really going to have to talk to him about personal space. Sometimes he was like an over-eager Labrador puppy that didn’t realize how big he was.

“Pull it up on a map and call Fury,” Steve replied, his expression grave.

“Already on it,” Natasha said her hands deftly moving over the controls even if she had to maneuver around Steve’s bulk. Banner got up to stand behind them.

A map came up on a console showing the fastest route to the coordinates the machine was spitting out. The three Avengers’ gazes followed a line drawn from their current position to the new portal. Their eyes hit the top of the screen and Natasha was forced to scroll up, and she then had to scroll
again before they saw exactly where the location was.

A beep went off signaling that their call had connected.

“Is Santa Claus attacking now?” Steve said incredulously into the radio before looking down at a different console and seeing someone who was definitely not Fury looking back.

“Where’s Director F-” Steve began.

“This is Alexander Pierce of the World Security Council,” Pierce did not look amused at Captain Roger’s outburst. “You need to immediately fly to the new portal. We have confirmed cases of extraterrestrials already invading Earth. Director Fury is mobilizing forces to join you.”

“How does this have to do with the attack on the base?” Banner asked.

“The ‘attack’,” Pierce scoffed, “was resolved within ten minutes by a level one agent. It was hardly worth having Director Fury, Thor and Iron Man disobey orders to investigate it.”

“So it was Agent Espin-” Rogers began only to cut off after seeing Natasha shake her head almost imperceptibly. “What about the Devil?” he quickly inquired to cover himself. Natasha had been acting oddly since they had connected Agent Espinoza, however indirectly, to what happened in L.A.

Only because Steve was studying the screen so closely that he noticed Pierce’s eyes narrow in confusion for a brief moment at the question. Wait - did he not know? Out of the corner of his eye, Steve could see Natasha tilt her head slightly.

“The prisoner is in his cell,” Pierce answered after deciding that Rogers must be talking about Loki. “I have received no reports that suggest there is any danger of him escaping.”

Pierce barely contained scowl morphed into a half motivating, half demanding expression that only a consummate politician could pull off.

“There is danger of the civilian population getting caught in the cross-fire if you don’t move now,” he said sensibly. “We were lucky - this time - that the portal opened in such a remote area. But it is only a few hours away from the nearest town.”

Alexander Pierce’s expression changed once again as he continued his rousing speech. He looked dignified and poised like a bust of a Greek statue.

“Now is when we need to work together. We lose ground when assets start going off on their own,” Pierce continued earnestly before looking directly at Bruce. “We need the Hulk to slow the invaders until we can bring the full force of S.H.I.E.L.D. against them.”

“Understood,” Romanova replied neutrally. “How’s the saying go? Hell’s empty because all the devils are here.”

Catching on to Natasha’s game, Bruce was quick to add, “Better the devil you know, right Mr. Pierce?”

Pierce looked blankly between Black Widow, Banner and Captain America before his eyes narrowed once again. He nodded once in apparent agreement and switched off his console.

The three Avengers stared at the black screen in silence for several beats.
“Is it just me or does he have no idea the actual Devil is on Earth?” Steve said and began reviewing the report detailing the number and speed the new aliens were arriving on Earth. It was just another day in the office for Captain America. The devil didn’t even make it in the top of weird things he had discovered since being unfrozen.

“Maybe we should try calling Fury again and hear this from him,” Bruce said hesitantly, but Natasha was already shaking her head.

“That was Fury’s direct line and the computer confirmed the identity of Pierce. If we call back, well just get the councilman again,” she replied while attempting to erase the uncertainty from her voice.

“We’re not that far from the base—” Bruce trailed off.

“It’s S.H.I.E.L.D. we’re the good guys remember? Everyone doesn’t know everything,” Natasha replied confidently. She couldn’t quite crush the feeling that something wasn’t right.

“Do we even know what’s going on? Fury never actually explained anything,” Bruce asked frustrated.

“We are still twenty-five minutes out and then we would have to find Fury. We would lose a lot of time. If a civilian dies—” Rogers reasoned.

Natasha swore under her breath before swinging the jet around to fly north, away from the base.

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“What the fuck is happening right now?” snarled Fury.

“I don’t know how I can be any clearer,” Charlotte responded pretentiously. “Dan and I have an active and varied sex life.”

“I Do Not want to know about Agent Espinoza’s and your—” the veins on Fury’s face were bulging out and he could barely spit out a coherent thought. “He doesn’t appear to be very interested in your advances.”

It was true. After, Maze and Trixie left the hanger; Charlotte had continued to stalk Dan around the room. Dan was now huddled behind a disturbed looking Amenadiel.

“That’s just a game we play,” Charlotte responded. “He might say ‘no’, but his body says—”

“I Don’t—” Fury began only to be interrupted by Lucifer, “Hold on. Mother, what are you talking about?”

To Dan’s relief, Charlotte turned away from him to face Lucifer.

“Dan is always saying things like ‘I’m not interested,’ ‘never again,’ and ‘I don’t want to have sex in the police precinct,’ and then I always convince him otherwise,” Charlotte replied smugly. “He doesn’t complain after the fact.”

“You had sex at- wait- not important,” Chloe said while looking at her petrified Ex. At the same time Amenadiel shouted, “Mother!”

Amenadiel’s arms were crossed over his chest and he moved to fully blocking Dan from view of Charlotte. The effect of his stance was slightly ruined by the gagging sound he couldn’t seem to
“Stop himself from making.”

“Mommomm,” Lucifer whined. “That’s not how sex and consent work. Humans are very clear on that sort of interaction.”

“I can’t believe I’m saying this,” Lucifer continued while looking at Daniel and shaking his head, “but I feel bad for the douche.”

Charlotte looked between her two sons who were standing in the way of her and her favorite toy on Earth and to Dan himself. He did look a little worse for wear, dark circles were under his eye, and his right hand kept twitching. She could take his mind of things, but apparently that was off the table for the time being. She was a Goddess! He should be begging to worship her.

“Fine,” Charlotte said an upturned nose. “It’s not like he doesn’t have my number. I’m his ‘booty-call’ after all. He’ll be back.”

“No, not happening. Charlotte, I’m saying no. Not if you were the last person-god-whatever-you-are on Earth,” Dan called out stepping away from the protection of Amenadiel.

Charlotte let out an offended huff.

“Congratulations, you are all going to a mandatory S.H.I.E.L.D. sexual harassment workshop, and I don’t care what manner of beings you are or if you even work here or are just invading the planet,” roared Fury, he finally flat out lost it. “But right now, I need to know about three things: the attack on New York City, Thanos, and Hell. Got it?”

“Oh!” Charlotte cried out delighted. “I’ll trade information for sexual favors from Dan. Ask me anything.”

Her eyes flashed as she looked at Dan sensually. Dan shot a terrified pleading look to Fury. The director simply lowered his face to his hands and let out a muffled scream. Charlotte pouted that Dan didn’t look as enthusiastic about the new game as she felt.

“Um, excuse me?” said a voice from the door that led outside.

It was sleep deprived Leroy of the orange-juice coffee and awful (but true) explanations. He stood to the side of the door like he had just shambled randomly into the hanger. He looked taken aback as all eyes swiveled to him.

“So, um, Deputy Director Hill would like an update on the, ah, current situation,” Leroy rambled. “Because of, you know, all the lightning and roof being missing, and screaming, yelling and, ah, um—laughter? coming from here.”

Crap, he forgot about Maria, Fury thought frantically. It felt like he had been in this hanger for centuries and he never once gave her an update after ordering her away. He knew, without a shred of doubt, that the laughter part probably pissed Maria off the most. She was going to make him suffer in subtle ways for months.

“This human is not un-attractive,” Charlotte said stalking over to Leroy, stroking the front of his jacket. “I could have sex with him in exchange for information.”

She shot a look over her shoulder at Dan who stared at her incredulously.

“Are you- are you trying to make me jealous?!?” Dan sputtered.
“Depends,” Charlotte said, her hand reaching lower causing Leroy to almost jump out of his skin. “Is it working?”

“Nope, nope,” Dan said, shaking his head. There was no amount of money Fury could offer to make dealing with this worth it. “Don’t care. Go right ahead.”

“Si-ir?” Leroy called out in a high-pitched voice. Charlotte turned back to Leroy with a considering look.

Leroy was wondering if he had fallen asleep on the job and was in some sort of weird wet-dream/nightmare hybrid. In a moment, he was going to look down and realize he was naked - and late for history class.

The sound of a gun being cocked echoed through the hanger.

“Step away from my agent or I will put a bullet in your head,” Fury snarled, his gloved hand wrapped around his pistol.

“Yes, mother, please stop!” Amenadiel called out.

“I have to agree. I thought you said you read all the law books the humans wrote?” Lucifer asked. “You can’t just molest all the humans you see.”

Charlotte stepped back, rolling her eyes. “Fine,” she said, sighing. “If you all feel so strongly about it, I could perhaps read those chapters again. Most my clients do far worse, ‘Locker-room talk’ and all that.”

“Yes, mother and they should be punished,” Lucifer said annoyed. “But you get them off.” He held his hands up quickly. “I did not mean get off sexually, I meant legally.”

Charlotte scoffed before replying, “Son, you are the one that wanted me to live out this human’s life. She’s a lawyer. Am I not supposed to be good at my-”

A shot rang out in the hanger and a bullet lodged itself in the wall about Charlotte’s head. A wisp of smoke came out of the end of Fury’s weapon. He was breathing heavily and his teeth were exposed in a snarl. He turned to look at the occupants in the room and held up three fingers.

“Attack on New York City, Thanos, Hel-”

“I almost forgot!” Leroy called out, looking a little bit more awake. “Did you guys know there is, like, a dead body outside?”

“Yes,” Charlotte replied. “I did that.”

*click* *click* *click*

Fury looked down at the gun he had just pointed at Charlotte. He felt betrayed by the fact the magazine of bullets was empty. He like, Espinoza, had used up all of his ammunition on the angels (not that it did anything).

Wide-eyed, Leroy walked slowly backwards away from Charlotte as Lucifer charge forward, his eyes managing to shift red even with Chloe’s presence.

“What have I told you about killing humans?” hissed Lucifer.
“He deserved it,” Chloe said calmly, effectively stopping Lucifer in his tracks as he turned to her surprised. “He shot at Trixie. Charlotte saved her life.”

Chloe whirled on Dan. “What kind of place do you work for that someone would shoot at a little kid?” she questioned.

Dan looked back and forth at Chloe and Charlotte horrified.

“Do you mean to say a S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent shot at your daughter?” Fury asked quietly. Those instincts of his were screaming at him. Something wasn’t right.

“Yes, the guard, the one that left his post when all the trucks came,” Chloe explained.

Fury looked at Chloe for two beats before turning and pointing at Dan.

“I need actionable intelligence in the next five minutes,” Fury ordered and looked over at Charlotte. “I don’t care how you get it as long as it doesn’t involve having sex with anyone.”

The director glared at everyone like he was scolding teenagers, “No sex.”

Fury motioned for Leroy to come over, snatched the radio off of his hip, started barking orders into it to Hill and drilling Leroy for any shred of knowledge he had. Fury just couldn’t put a finger on what was going on and his instincts were telling him he was running out of time.

Dan was looking a lot more favorably at Charlotte- Lucifer, less so.

“Why are you here, Mother?” Lucifer questioned softly, internally fuming. “Why did you bring them here?”

Dan opened his mouth to speak and thought better about it. Maybe Lucifer would do his job for him and get some answers.

“Son,” Charlotte sighed and walked towards Lucifer hand outstretched. He slapped it away.

“Don’t even think about lying to me,” he said, his anger was like a fire burning his veins. His stomach twisted uncomfortably at the thought of a gun being anywhere near Trixie and the fire turned to ice.

“I only want to help you. I brought them here to remind you of what is important so you stop this foolishness,” she confessed. She looked towards Amenadiel. “So you both stop.”

“What have I told you about threatening the life of the detective-” Lucifer growled.

“No, no, no,” Charlotte cut him off. “It’s been ages since I’ve tried to kill Chloe-”

“Wha-at?” Chloe yelped.

“I didn’t know the humans would attack us. I just wanted you to stop interfering with this invasion nonsense. You should not be upsetting your sister,” Charlotte explained.

“So Azrael is behind the attack,” Lucifer confirmed.

Two spots of red bloomed on Charlotte’s cheeks and she looked away. It was almost as if she was embarrassed.

“I don’t know that for sure,” Charlotte admitted. “She’s worse than you, Lucifer, about speaking
with her Mother. I told your Father, I told him, let it play out, she’ll grow board with Thanos eventually. So what if a few galaxies are destroyed in the process? Your Father was always so hard on her, he expected too much, and gave her too many responsibilities.”

“She had a childish crush and your Father had to go and exile him. So she stopped talking to us. She stopped talking to me!” she looked straight into Lucifer’s eyes. “You should know more than anyone that desire is not so easily disposed of.”

“Azrael is also strong enough to kill us all,” Charlotte stated candidly, “I don’t want you or your brother anywhere near Thanos. Let the humans deal with it.”

“It’s too late, mother,” Amenadiel spoke up. “Father has already decreed that Lucifer will be his envoy should Thanos make it to Earth.”

Charlotte sputtered incoherently.

“Well, I absolutely forbid it!” Charlotte proclaimed, “That’s a suicide mission. If He wants to kill you, your Father should just smite you now.”

Lucifer rolled his eyes. “I am not entirely thrilled at the prospect either, but it may never happen,” he replied before his eyes narrowed at his mother. “You are a more immediate threat. What are you planning?”

“Nothing,” she began, but at Lucifer’s infuriated look she amended, “nothing yet.”

“I want to be with you and your brother. If I have to live like a mortal to do so, I can make that sacrifice. I want you to be happy, Lucifer,” Charlotte shot a look at Chloe, “and you’ve made it clear that the only way you can be happy is with Chloe.”

Charlotte reached out a hand to cup Lucifer’s face and this time he allowed it.

“One human’s lifetime is not very long. I can be patient for that because that is all it’s ever going to be,” she said sympathetically. At Lucifer’s questioning look Charlotte explained.

“She’s going to die,” Lucifer almost wrenched out of his mother’s hand but she quickly continued in a soothing tone, “not today and not by my hand, but Chloe will die. She is mortal. You have 60-70 years tops.”

Lucifer looked at Chloe in anguish before Charlotte grabbed his chin and turned his head back to face hers.

“And she will go to the only place you are not allowed,” Charlotte’s eyes practically burned with a feverish light. “And then, my Lightbringer, you, all your brothers your father cast out, and I will go home. And you will be the one to lead us.”

Lucifer staggered backwards away from his mom. The very thought was like a poison that had seeped into his mind. He couldn’t un-think it, and really, how could it go any other way?

The room was silent. The Asgardians and humans alike stared at the divine tragedy playing out in front of them. Even Fury was frozen holding the radio in his hand. A small static-y voice screeched out, ‘Fury, Fury, for fuck-sake, Fury? Do not make me come in there.’

A lopsided three-headed shadow appeared in the doorway, until a small part of it broke off and dive bombed Charlotte.
“Prisoner!” Spera shrieked. “Escaped prisoner!”

Charlotte stumbled as the fallen cherub almost knocked her over. She threw her hands out in defense.

“I will swat you like a bug, maggot!” Charlotte yelled trying to reach for Spera, but she was too quick. Spera flew under Charlotte’s arm and pushed her from behind. She would have knocked the Goddess over, but she caught sight of a bemused looking Lucifer.

“Lucifer,” She gasped before flying to the ground. The cherub bent over with one arm outstretched in a courtier’s bow. “My Lord!” she cried reverently.

The remaining two heads turned out to be a very ashy Coulson and Gaudium who was still being held in Phil’s arms. Actually, Coulson was covered in a lot more than just ash. Brightly colored blood and gore were splattered over his suit and he carried a vicious looking spiked club over one shoulder.

“Sir, I have a report to make,” Coulson said to the director whose jaw had practically hit the floor.

Fury couldn’t speak and he couldn’t think. Time had stopped and he was stuck in an infinite loop of the moment when he found Coulson’s body. A memory that was now being overlaid on top of the present moment of seeing a very much alive Coulson walking through the doorway.

Coulson caught sight of an equally gobsmacked Barton and turned to him.

“Agent Barton, are you the one that recruited the Devil for a rescue mission to Hell?” Coulson asked.

Barton shook himself before replying, “Yes, sir.”

Coulson nodded. “Good job. I’m happy to see you back among us.”

“Thank you sir,” Barton said feeling light and airy. This might be the best day of his life.

Phil looked around the room only to recoil at the sight of Loki who looked into Coulson’s eyes for a brief moment before finding something very interesting to stare at on a blank wall.

“Do not fear Son of Coul!” Thor bellowed, slapping Loki’s shoulder. “My brother has joined the Avengers. It is good to see you are back among the living.”

Loki went spastic as he whirled on his brother. “You imbecile, I have not joined you or your idiotic band of mortal friends,” he spat.

Thor appeared not to hear him as he slung his arm around Loki’s shoulder only to have it briskly shoved off.

Coulson steeled his nerves and forced himself to turn away from Loki to the devil.

“Lucifer?” he inquired. “Lord of Hell?”

Lucifer looked at him with one eyebrow raised. “Yes and former,” he answered.

“Can you confirm the existence of HYDRA in the present day and the fact they have infiltrated all levels of S.H.I.E.L.D.?” Coulson asked, eyes boring into the devil’s.

The bemused expression came back onto Lucifer’s face before he replied, “Of course. So many of
them end up in Hell, I’m surprised I can walk around this base without stepping on them.”

“What?!” Dan cried out angrily. “You didn’t think to tell us we were surrounded by Nazis before now?”

Lucifer looked confused. “Daniel, I told you this was a corrupt organization. What did you think I meant?” he replied evenly. Humans really had terrible listening skills.

It was like a supernova went off in Fury’s head. All the pieces finally fell into place. He brought the radio to his mouth and started shouting into it to Hill, “Execute plan ‘Team Coulson’ now! It’s HYDRA, I repeat its HYDRA.”

Hill’s voice came out small and unsure, “HYDRA?”

“Yes!” Fury snapped. “Confirmed by the Coulson and the Devil himself. ‘Team Coulson’ is a go!”

All the lights on the base turned red, sirens went off, and in the distance, doors were closing and sealing off. Every and all S.H.I.E.L.D. devices sent out orders telling people to stand down. All the bases were on lock-down until further notice. S.H.I.E.L.D. had been infiltrated.

Along with the orders, two lists went out: one of suspected traitors and another of the only people allowed to move freely around and given access to everything, code name: Team Coulson. Dan could see video screens on the walls of the hanger scroll through the lists. He was shocked to see he was at the top of the one labeled ‘Team Coulson’ along with Leroy and all the other agents that went to NYC. He had just been made a Level Seven Agent. He didn’t even know there were level seven agents!

Fury had brought S.H.I.E.L.D. to its knees. He was a paranoid bastard and he used every sub-routine he had snuck into the systems and every contingency plan he had devised in his many many years at S.H.I.E.L.D. If he was wrong, he had just burnt every last bridge he had. But if he was right…

Stark meandered over to Coulson. He was practically bouncing on the heels of his Iron Man Suit. It was Coulson! An adult, a real adult was finally here!

“It’s good to see you, agent,” Tony said jovially. He may have possibly let out a small sob during the greeting. “How was Hell?”

“Um,” Coulson was a little dumbstruck himself as he looked around the room at a sullen Loki, the missing ceiling and Spera who was warily eyeing a tall women standing on one high-heeled shoe. The woman was having a whispered argument with the Devil who resembled a handsome looking human and not the monstrous savior Coulson remembered from Hell. He finally looked down at himself and tried brushing some of the ash and gore off. “It was dirty. Stark how long was I dead?”

“Oh, hmm,” Tony said thinking, “a couple days.”

“God spoke to us, you know?” Tony said offhandedly like he was name dropping a celebrity at a party. “I didn’t understand a single word He said. But it was- loud.”

“Right…” Coulson said, “And the devil-?”

A shaaiiinnng sound whistled through the air before being silenced with a thud and a grunt from Thor. Mjölnir fell to the ground.

Thor had both of his hands up as he looked down to his chest where a vibranium tipped harpoon
stuck out of it.

“NO!” Loki shouted.

A twang sounded, only this time it came from Stark’s suit, as a device latched on and released a localized EMP pulse, making the suit and Stark’s mechanical heart go dead.

Two people dressed as S.H.I.E.L.D. agents appeared in the doorway holding semi-automatic guns. One was a mousey blond and the other was tall and muscular. They unleashed a hailstorm of bullets into the hanger. Most of the occupants in the room were able to dive for cover, but not all.

Charlotte twitched repeatedly as she took the full brunt of the weapon. Her dress suit became covered in holes and small spurts of blood. Lucifer, who was standing next to her, got two to the gut. He looked down at the bright red color staining his shirt. That really hurts, he thought to himself as he started falling.

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The S.H.I.E.L.D. jet holding the Hulk, Captain America, and Black Widow was flying over a remote forest, way north of the NYC base.

They were half-way to the new portal, but hadn’t heard from anyone since Pierce. Natasha had Bruce hack some satellite feeds, but they hadn’t shown anything yet. Every fiber of Black Widow’s being wanted to turn the jet around and she could tell Steve was thinking along the same lines.

All the lights on the jet turned red and the piercing alarm rang out once more, new orders. This time from Fury himself.

Natasha sped read the lists before sharing twin looks of horror with Steve. She yanked the controls of the jet to one side, taking them off course. However, the stealth missile that had been moments behind them was still locked on. It managed to clip one of the wings and the jet started spiraling downward.

Natasha looked around. Steve might survive; he was good at living through plane crashes. Bruce looked a little green; he would be OK. She, on the other hand, as much as she pretended otherwise, was just human.
30 Seconds

30 seconds.

30 seconds is all the time Fury’s plan, code name: Team Coulson, had to take affect before HYDRA attacked.

It doesn’t even seem worth it considering the momentous effort it took to get the necessary Intel.

The winding convoluted path of tragedy, heroism (another word for stupidity), and dumb luck would set Nick Fury’s teeth on edge once he untangled the events of the past few day to figure out how they all ended up here.

Assuming he survived long enough.

It was like dominoes set up by a lunatic.

Phil Coulson died. An unsanctioned mission led by a level one Agent in response to that death and an imminent alien invasion resulting in the deaths of countless Agents, had exposed an unknown threat hidden within S.H.I.E.L.D.

The unknown threat had taken advantage of the deaths of those Agents to put into motion an end game to destroy S.H.I.E.L.D.

All the while, a series of ineffable divine happenstances caused Coulson to end up in Limbo, only a hair’s breadth away from Hell, a place a man like Coulson should never be. But he was able to learn an unsavory truth about a coworker who had also died.

Clint Barton then recruited the devil himself on an ill-advised rescue mission to Hell, for the sole purpose of rescuing one man not knowing about the greater threat gathering forces. The rescue mission failed and almost sparked Armageddon between the angels and their fallen brethren.

Somehow after all that, Coulson was still brought back to life and able to deliver to Fury the last piece of the puzzle. (Ironically, the devil already knew about HYDRA the whole time and would have told the Avengers and S.H.I.E.L.D had they simply asked the right question. Assuming he ever stopped talking in non-sequiturs long enough for them to obtain any rational intelligence off of him.)

Was it all for nothing? Had they always been doomed?

If only the Helicarrier crash site hadn’t been so far away from Hanger 5. If only Coulson had not been weighed down by the fallen cherub’s mass and able to run faster. If only Maria Hill hadn’t questioned Fury’s order and immediately complied with his directive. Could a couple more seconds or even several minutes more have saved lives? What can 30 seconds buy anyways?

Nicholas Fury is a shrewd and paranoid man leading an organization of jumpy trigger-happy Agents primed to believe anything. 30 seconds is a lifetime.

Fury had done well placing all the surviving members of Agent Espinoza’s NYC mission in strategic locations. They were instantly on guard when the alarm and lists went out. They were already in all the vital areas on the base and surrounded by other trusted agents.

And they didn’t hesitate, anyone who wasn’t on list: Team Coulson that did not instantly stand-
down and throw their weapon aside was shot at.

Firefights broke out all over the base, but Team Coulson had, more-or-less, the high ground and HYDRA’s element of surprise was ruined.

All non-military personal, the scientists and clerical staff, found themselves in lock-down in their labs and cubical filled offices. They saw the orders that Fury sent out and heard the gun fire. They were trapped but protected behind bullet-proof doors.

Despite everything, there were more good people in S.H.I.E.L.D. than bad. The squints and office workers eye-balled each other warily and anyone who seemed to be acting suspiciously found them tied to their chairs or stuffed into a closet.

All across the world, HYDRA found itself locked out from all the labs, people and weapons they coveted. Some unlucky S.H.I.E.L.D. personal found themselves on the wrong side of the locks surrounded by enemies and they didn’t make it. But many more people lived that wouldn’t have without Fury’s intervention.

However, no matter how many contingency plans Fury had in place. In all of his years at S.H.I.E.L.D., he had never even suspected that HYDRA still existed.

Give Fury a few days and he could work a god-damn-miracle better than any of these so called gods and angels he was surrounded by, but he was up against decades of planning from an enemy who came back twice as strong when cut down.

And they were already inside.

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Erik Selvig stood behind the reinforced glass of a locked office he had only just managed to jump into as the lock-down occurred. On the other side of the glass was a masked man wearing a S.H.I.E.L.D. uniform and carrying an assault rifle.

The masked face tilted as he studied Selvig and the room he was in. Next to him was the body of one of agents who had fought in NYC slumped in front of the office door. The agent had taken a bullet meant for Erik.

Erik could only look on in horror as the masked man disregarded him to walk across the hall where other people wearing S.H.I.E.L.D. uniforms were preparing C4 to blast their way into a lab.

Through the lab’s window, Erik could see Loki’s scepter being held up on two pedestals. The scepter couldn’t have been more than 50ft away from where Erik stood, but with the two reinforced doors and the HYDRA agents in between, it might as well been on the other side of the world.

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The barrage of bullets that had been unleashed in the hanger and had taken down Charlotte and Lucifer, scattering the other occupants, was only temporary halted by a crazed yell and a flash of color that soared through the air.

Loki had thrown Mazikeen’s rainbow knife he had stolen from the interrogation room at the attackers, piercing the taller HYDRA agent in the neck, severing his carotid artery.

The smaller blond one’s eyes widened in surprise at the sight of the second Asgardian Prince. He
didn’t bother with his gun but dove to the portable harpoon launcher his fallen comrade had strapped to his back.

Dan sprung to action at the lull of bullets and managed to grab Lucifer before he hit the ground. Part of Dan Espinoza still saw Lucifer as the idiotic civilian who liked playing cop that Dan was forced to babysit at the precinct to stop him from getting shot dead… again. He spared half a moment to look at the motionless body of Charlotte and felt something near his heart twinge.

Lucifer grabbed at the front of Dan’s jacket with one hand, hissing in pain, as his other pressed against his bloody abdomen. Dan dragged him back behind several crates.

The remaining attacker managed to lift the harpoon launcher up while grappling with another vibranium tipped harpoon and swung it towards Loki.

Barton felt his back for his quiver of arrows only to realize that Amenadiel was still holding it behind an aircraft at least twelve feet away from where he stood. Fury already knew he didn’t have any bullets left and had thrown his body at Leroy. They had hit the floor, barely being missed by the bullets flying overhead.

Loki was practically salivating in anger, but he was too far away and weaponless to be able to stop the HYDRA agent. Loki almost seemed to glow with a sickly bright green light in anticipation as the harpoon was slotted in place.

*BANG*

The blond attacker’s head snapped back before he could release the harpoon. The entry wound of the bullet formed a perfect bull’s eye on his forehead and he collapsed in a heap.

Chloe winced as she stood with a two-handed grip on her gun pointed at the deceased attacker, one of her hands was very badly swollen and she had to fight through the pain.

Loki locked eyes with the human who saved him, his mouth slightly open. They really were a surprising species. They always did the most unexpected things.

However, their reprieve was short lived.

Shouts could be heard from the hallway the attackers must have come from. An entire platoon of people who looked like S.H.I.E.L.D. agents burst through the doors guns blazing only to be confronted with a dozen clones of an angry Loki.

The HYDRA agents hadn’t known he was out of his cell. They hadn’t planned on more than one god.

They retreated back a safe distance in the hallway, but the stream of bullets never stopped as they shot through the doorway. The air itself seemed to waver hazily as the bullets traveled the distance of the hanger and plastered against the far wall.

The clones of Loki simultaneously threw their heads back in mad laughter and converged on the door. Anytime a bullet hit one it would disappear and two more clones would take its place making it seem like there was an unending army of tricksters inside of the hanger.

“God damn it, god damn it,” Dan muttered nonsensically as he flipped open the magazine of his weapon. He was right; he only had three bullets left. Eventually HYDRA would realize the clones were illusions and storm the hanger.
“I’m afraid if we are depending on my Father’s intervention, we will be waiting a long time,” Lucifer’s snark only slightly hindered by the pain in his voice.

Dan shook his head and turned to take his frustrations out on the devil, “What the Hell man? Earlier, you walked through bul-” only to almost jump out of his skin as he saw the dress wearing demon/creature/thing almost sitting in Lucifer’s lap, pressing on the wound with tiny hands, and looking soulfully at the devil with her huge bulbous eyes.

“My Lord!” Spera cried, “What can I do?”

“Help the humans, little one,” Lucifer replied, nodding in one direction, “that one in the metal suit in particular. We have a date planned, and I will be extremely disappointed if I don’t get to have sex with him and his Pepper.”

Spera’s already impossibly wide eyes grew even more. Human produce must be more exciting than she realized and flew over to Iron Man.

Dan watched her reach the dead Iron Man suit that Coulson had been attempting, to no avail, to pry open. She used her supernatural strength to rip the face plate off and peel back the front on the metal suit. Gaudium also limped over to tear the thigh plates and shin-guards off, freeing the legs.

In short-order, a pale gasping Tony Stark fell out onto his hands and knees. He was frantically scratching at the front of his chest. Coulson grabbed Stark’s shoulders and helped him into a sitting position. There was no blue light.

Dan couldn’t help but feel his gaze wander to Charlotte’s body. He couldn’t see the bullet wounds from over here, one might think she was just lying down, but she was much too still.

“Lucifer, is Charlotte-?” Dan wasn’t sure what he was asking. If she was human, he would know she was dead, but she was definitely not human. He looked down to the devil.

“Why the FUCK are you on your phone?” Dan shrieked, but Lucifer merely rolled his eyes as he dialed with one hand and pressed his bloody stomach with his other.

Dan sighed feeling his own rage drain out of him as he knelt down to add his own hands to the wound. He attempted to slow the bleeding, but Lucifer’s blood seeped straight through his fingers. Dan shuddered in dread. This was too much like when Coulson died and he had a feeling they were running out of miracles.

“My mother is fine,” Lucifer said slightly breathless, answering the first question and ignoring the second. He brought the phone to his ear. “If the human body she currently occupies is so injured it expires, she might simply jump into another recently dead host or, if we are really lucky, she’s gone back to Hell. She can bother my shit-head brother Rem- Ah! Mazikeen.”

Dan jolted as Lucifer began his phone call with Maze - who was currently with his daughter! He could hear a gargled unworldly voice on the other end of the line.

“Ngy Rroahd, I cunnzshng to rhou-”

“No, you will not,” Lucifer said coldly, all joking put aside. “You have to get Trixie and Chloe out of here.”

An indistinguishable garbled protest.

“Mazikeen,” Lucifer snarled, Dan could almost see a bit of Hell in his eyes, “This is an order.”
Lucifer put the phone to his chest as he called out, “Amenadiel, brother, I need you!” at the same time Chloe finally managed to inch her way around the crates, avoiding the bullets, to Lucifer’s side.

Her soft smaller hands replaced Dan’s and he turned around, gun held up, attempting to give them some privacy. Three bullets, he thought to himself. He locked eyes with an aghast Amenadiel who was on the other side of the hail of artillery fire.

Chloe’s eyes were brimming with tears and she added more pressure to Lucifer’s wound.

“Lucifer,” she sobbed.

Lucifer’s expression softened and lost all of its hellish aspects. He raised one hand to trail through her hair, not realizing he was streaking bright red blood through it.

“Have I mentioned how heavenly you looked today?” he asked dreamily, his thoughts traveling back to a time he normally refused to think about. It seemed like the edges of his vision were growing darker and the only person that existed was his detective. The sound of the gunfire faded away.

Chloe let out a gasping huff of laughter, tears sliding down her face. Her cheeks sported red splotches. Even now, Lucifer always managed to surprise her. He was like no one she had ever met before. He was probably like no one else in the whole universe she realized with a start.

“Hey, hey,” Lucifer said softly watching the tears run down. He cupped the side of her face to wipe them away, “Don’t make a liar out of me. Crying isn’t your best look, my dear.”

He saw the blood mixed with tears that now covered her cheek where his thumb had swiped over, his blood.

The world crystallized and he came back to himself. His hand was covered in blood; he was lying in a pool of his own blood. Chloe was in danger and he was absolutely useless!

He turned his head to holler, “Amenadiel!” before looking back at Chloe.

Amenadiel gritted his teeth and looked at Dan with a crazed intensity. Dan looked at him in confusion and realized what he was planning a second before the fallen angel moved.

Amenadiel jumped out from behind the aircraft right in between all the clones of Loki.

With a curse, Dan sprang away from the limited protection of the crate and let loose all three of his bullets trying to make himself look like the biggest most obvious target imaginable.

Amenadiel was already rolling across the room right where the path of bullets had been. But impossibly the gambit worked as the gunfire redirected towards Dan. Amenadiel made it across the room to his brother.

Maybe someone was looking out for Agent Daniel Espinoza after all because he too managed to fling himself back behind the crate without being turned into Swiss cheese.

Dan’s knees buckled and he landed on his butt next to Lucifer and Chloe. He kept sucking in sharp quick gasps of air. His heart thudded loudly in his ears. Was he really alive? He felt drained, but he mustered enough energy to glare at Amenadiel. More clones of Loki appeared to distract HYDRA.

“My love,” Lucifer said calmly to Chloe, “I need you to leave now.”
Chloe shook her head, her hands now stained crimson. “I can’t leave you like this,” she replied resolutely. “You could d-” she continued before cutting off.

Lucifer sighed before speaking in a reasonable tone, “Detective, think back, have you ever known me not to be fine, mmmh? I’m the devil remember, been around since right after the big bang. What sort of fallen angel would I be if I wasn’t immortal?”

Chloe stilled. Lucifer never lied, but he didn’t always tell her everything and there was a terrible thought bubbling under the surface. She remembered his taunting face switch to shock as he saw his blood on his leg after she shot him. He wasn’t imm- or was he? There were other times he walked away from deadly situations unscathed. Everything she learned over the past few days flew through her head, snatches of conversation repeated over and over again.

She looked at Amenadiel who was looking down at his injured brother in anguish. He had been trying to protect them, he had said. He had been trying to protect them. Chloe couldn’t seem to stop shaking her head.

“Amenadiel,” Lucifer said firmly, once again sounding cold and very much unlike the devil who always had a quip or witty retort ready. This was someone else, a devil who was forged in the hell pits.

“Get her out of here. Make sure she’s safe,” the real devil ordered.

Amenadiel immediately stood behind Chloe, wrapping a strong arm around her waist, intent on dragging her out if he needed to.

Before she could protest, Lucifer looked back at her with another soft smile.

“He’ll bring you to Maze and Trixie,” he stated, finally breaking through her confusion. Lucifer pressed his phone into Amenadiel’s free hand. “Maze is on the line. She’ll tell you where to meet her.”

She looked down at the love of her life and then her eyes snapped over to the father of her child. She wriggled out of Amenadiel’s grasp to kneel down and kiss Lucifer heatedly before picking her head up and kissing Dan’s cheek as well.

“Don’t let him die. And don’t die yourself,” she ordered Dan as if she was a general sending troops to war.

She tried to give her gun to him, but he shook her head.

“I’m good,” Dan replied shaking his assault rifle at her. “Get our girl out of here.”

She finally allowed Amenadiel to pull her away, but before they could sneak out the door that led outside, Fury called out to them.

“Do not let HYDRA get their hands on the Tesseract,” he ordered the fallen angel. Fury, Barton and Leroy were stuck on the other side of the room and right now the angel was the only asset Fury had left.

Amenadiel clutched the strap of the quiver.

“I won’t,” he replied and it was Amenadiel, First of The Angels, talking.

Everyone watched them go, but Lucifer and Dan only had eyes for Chloe. The door outside showed
that night had fallen and they could see a flash of a bright moon and stars before the door swung shut again. For Lucifer and Dan, it was like her imprint had remained surrounded by starry light even though she was long gone.

“You stay with her. You risk your life to be with her, don’t you?” Dan asked slowly.

“Yes,” Lucifer hissed as he finally allowed the pain to contort his face. “And you’re out of bullets.”

“Yes,” Dan echoed, absently holding his very much empty gun. He felt like the violence around them was very far away. “But why woul-”

“Because I want to,” Lucifer snapped, he had a strange mix of resolve and disbelief in his expression. He always looked at Chloe like that, and it used to drive Dan crazy, but maybe, maybe it wasn’t such a bad thing.

“You make it really hard to hate you, you know that?” Dan asked. Lucifer eyed Dan’s gun that was as useless as a paperweight.

“Likewise, Daniel,” Lucifer replied shakily.

The army of Loki clones disappeared.

The bullets also stopped as if in disbelief. The silence was deafening, but the calm didn’t feel real. The air seemed primed with ill intent. Confused whispers carried from down the hallway. Dan had a feeling they wouldn’t stay confused for very long.

He looked frantically for the trickster god. He wasn’t the only one. Barton, Fury, and Leroy were also craning their necks around. Even Coulson looked up from where he seemed to be trying to pull the arc reactor out of Tony’s chest at his insistence, if Tony’s wildly gesturing arms were anything to go by.

Stark didn’t look so good, his face was as ashen as Coulson’s clothes.

When had they all started to depend on Loki to save them? Was it the end of the world?

Amenadiel had unintentionally left with Barton’s quiver and Leroy was the only human who still had bullets left. Iron Man, Thor and the Devil were out of commission. There were those two strange creatures, but they seemed so small in face of a platoon of gun wielding HYDRA agents no matter how easily they tore open Iron Man’s suit. And one of them looked like he was injured.

Dear every divine shit-head out there, Loki was their only fire-power left.

And he was kneeling over Thor with both hands held over the harpoon in the thunder god’s chest. A bright green glow emanated from his palms. Loki appeared to be in a trance as he muttered to himself.

Thor was unconscious and you could only tell he was still alive by the bloody spittle bubbling out from his mouth.

Loki seemed to finish some sort of chant and the glow intensified. Thor’s eyes snapped open, he let out a gasp and color returned to his face. Loki almost looked relieved but didn’t move his hands away from over Thor’s chest.

Loki looked around the room at the questioning looks on everyone’s faces and he admitted, “I
cannot keep the illusions up and heal Thor at the same time. And Thor is so badly injured, if I
don’t heal him now, he will most certainly die.”

He looked at Fury’s one eye intently. The god almost seemed to plead with the director.

Thor coughed and spoke in a croaky voice, “It is alright, brother. Knowing you care enough to try
is all that matters to me. Please help our friends.”

Loki’s expression twisted and he exposed his teeth in a snarl.

“I do not care one bit about your friends or- or you,” Loki spat – not one of his better lies. “I am the
only one allowed to kill you and I was so looking forward to it. I loathe the idea that these pathetic
humans could deprive me of that pleasure.”

Thor let out a low chuckle that quickly turned into a wet hacking cough with droplets of blood
landing on himself and his brother.

Loki froze at the sight and all lies flew out of his mind. He turned back to Fury.

“My idiotic brother is forgetting that he is the heir of Asgard. If you allow him to die, you will
have to answer to my father,” Loki said quickly, forgetting that it wasn’t HIS father.

Thor tried to protest.

“Shut up, Thor,” Fury snapped while looking into Loki’s eyes having an entire conversation with
him mentally about how Loki had shown his hand and Fury knew it and Loki knew Fury knew it
and Fury would take full advantage of it if only they weren’t so fucked.

“We would save Thor even if he wasn’t an heir of a realm,” Coulson responded smoothly as he
held Stark’s metal heart in his hand. Spera was fanning Tony and Gaudium looked at Coulson like
he was very skeptical that anyone would survive the next 30 seconds.

“It’s up to us then,” Coulson continued, looking at all the humans in the room: Fury, Leroy,
Barton, and Espinoza.

The powerless weaponless humans were the only ones left to save the day.
A Good Death

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Amenadiel’s grip on Chloe’s left wrist was like a steel vice. He walked quickly through empty hallways, pulling her behind him.

She held her weapon with her throbbing broken right hand. Not that it would do her much good. She could barely stop herself from dropping it, let alone squeeze the trigger.

All Chloe could see was the back of Amenadiel’s head as he barked directions into a cell phone, coordinating a meet-up with Maze. She had never seen this side of Lucifer’s brother before. He reminded her of a soldier – no, a general.

They had tried walking outside, but the sounds of gunfire and shouting had them ducking into a door of the main building.

For the past several minutes they walked up flights of stairs and through eerily silent hallways filled with locked doors. Sometimes they could see shadows of people moving behind dark windows.

Maze and Trixie had made it all the way to a small fifth-floor kitchen (Mazikeen had a particular talent for finding all the places humans hid their best treats *cough* pop tarts *cough*) before the alarms went off and the lock-down started. They were safe, for now.

According to Amenadiel, they had bunkered down and managed to avoid all HYDRA agents. The demon, much to her disappointment, hadn’t seen any enemy combatants in the last five minutes. She deemed it safe for the small human to be on the move and they were both currently heading towards Amenadiel and Chloe.

But with each passing moment, the threat increased as the likelihood of running into the merciless gun-toting enemy became more and more inevitable.

Chloe’s heart thudded in her chest. She needed to see her daughter NOW.

Her panic rose like a tide and she knew she wasn’t contributing anything useful to their undertaking. Chloe wanted to run down the hallways shouting Trixie’s name, but she couldn’t even keep track of all the twists and turns in this maze-like complex. Thank God for Amenadiel. You know Lucifer was really too har- oh no, Lucifer.

She couldn't help it. She twisted her head back the way they came. He was bleeding out! But, but-Trixie!

Chloe hadn’t noticed Amenadiel had stopped moving until she ran smack into his back.

“Fourth Floor?!” Amenadiel snarled into the phone. “You said fifth! I can’t understand you, Maze, keep your human-”

Amenadiel turned towards Chloe infuriated.

“She hung up on me. They are right below us. We need to backtrack,” he said curtly, putting the phone in his pocket.
He adjusted his grip on Chloe’s wrist and pulled her back the way they came, not waiting for her to respond.

He stopped short at the sound of footsteps coming towards them. There were a lot of footsteps.

The thud of each boot echoed. They sounded heavy like the people attached were huge – or possibly weighed down with all the weapons and gear Chloe saw HYDRA unloading earlier.

Amenadiel spun them around and started jogging away only to stop short again. More people were coming from the other direction. They were on the fifth floor of a hallway with all the rooms on either side of them locked, trapping them between their enemies.

Chloe could feel the pulse in the palm of Amenadiel’s hand race or maybe that was just her own. He tilted his head in consideration before seeming to remember something. His free hand reached behind his neck and touched Hawkeye’s quiver.

He moved quickly after that.

Amenadiel pushed Chloe into the center of the hallway, swung the quiver around, and held a hand posed over the top of the opening. A blue glow was just visible. His entire body tensed and he took two sharp breathes.

Not sure what was happening, Chloe reached out to him and Amenadiel’s eyes snapped to meet hers.

“It will be a short drop,” he said nonsensically. “Find your daughter, find Maze, and get out of here.”

The fallen angel plunged his hand into the quiver. The blue glow rushed outwards. Amenadiel squeezed his eyes shut in concentration and pain. Sweat dripped down his face.

The glow wobbled before shooting like an arrow to Chloe’s feet. It was like she was standing on a blue oval made of light.

Despite the searing pain stretching from finger-tip to shoulder, Amenadiel managed to half open his eyes. He called out to the detective, “The faster you get out of here, the faster we can end this. I will buy you time.”

The blue oval seemed to stretch-out endlessly downwards and Chloe was falling. She could feel gravity grab a hold of her. Her hands rose as she tried to catch anything to slow her descent. Her hair trailed behind her. She didn’t even have time to scream before she was gone and Amenadiel wrenched his arm out of the quiver.

The blue glow faded leaving Amenadiel gasping. His one hand was scorched in sickening black and red trails, almost spiraling to his back.

He knew using the Space Infinity Stone was lethal for mortals. Even a trip as short as going to the floor beneath them had almost been enough to end Amenadiel.

He lopped the strap over his uninjured side, only this time he reversed it so the quiver hung loosely in front of him. He picked a direction and staggered off towards whatever may come his way.

He kept one hand in reach of the opening of the quiver at all times. Every time he touched the Tesseract in his diminished form, there was the risk that it would tear him apart or send him to some far off corner of the Universe or both.
He prayed that Chloe would move quickly. But if she needed a distraction to escape-

Well, Hell wasn’t that much further away than one floor down, metaphorically speaking, and there were plenty of things that were very distracting down there that would be more than willing to come to Earth.

Amenadiel was serious when he said he wouldn’t let these humans get the Tesseract. Worst case, he and the cube could venture into Hell itself where his brothers, no matter how annoying they were, would protect it.

And if Amenadiel got stuck in Hell for all of eternity - with all the mistakes he had made - maybe that was where he belonged.

***

The masked HYDRA agent stood inside a lab with heavy black smoke billowing around him. Three other HYDRA operatives stood nervously to the side, waiting to be acknowledged before speaking.

The masked face tilted slightly down in a nod and one operative jumped forward.

“The S.H.I.E.L.D. agents managed to pull together more quickly than anticipated, but they are still far outnumbered. We have them pinned down in key locations. We will be able to overrun them with losses of HYDRA personal within acceptable ranges,” he reported.

“At the high end of acceptable ranges!” the second operative interjected, her cheeks puffed angrily. “Sir, I really think we should re-group. They knew we were-”

She fell instantly silent at the slight shake of the masked head. Her body curled inward at the rebuke.

The third operative took a step forward.

“We have reports that Thor and Iron Man are down, but,” he hesitated, drawing the masked man’s full attention to him. “We are unable to confirm if they are dead. It appears like - Fury must have - I am not sure why, sir, but L-Loki is free. Agents are requesting more weapons and man-power to take down this unanticipated obstacle.”

The first operative looked positively green at this announcement.

“Perhaps we should re-think our strategy,” he stated slowly.

The masked man seemed not to even hear him. Instead, he walked over to a table and reached out, his hand curling around Loki’s scepter.

Whether by influences sent to him directly from the scepter or just his own sick mind conjuring fantasies, the masked man was struck by a vision.

He was sitting on a throne on top of a pile of bones. The dark haired Asgardian was kneeling in front of him. His bowed head rose and displayed unnaturally blue eyes on the trickster’s face.

The masked man hummed in pleasure. He held the scepter in both hands as if weighing it before turning to his compatriots.

“I think having a god on a leash would serve HYDRA well,” he said simply. There was nothing
unusual sounding about his voice, yet it made the hair on the other operatives’ necks stand on end.

“Tell the agents the weapon they requested is on its way,” he continued, caressing the staff.

***

“Fail-safe, arc reactor, not working-” Stark gasped out, “must - manually reset.”

Coulson looked down to the reactor in his hand to the socket wall that was literary inside of Stark’s chest cavity. There was still a metal cord attaching the reactor to Tony’s chest, but the reactor was dark, silent and felt dead in Coulson’s hand.

Tony was pointing at something inside of his chest. Phil looked at the technology and attempted to will the pieces to make sense. Where was an instruction manual when you needed one? Did Tony need him to reach in-?

Coulson looked around. He had no tools or way to get to where Tony was pointing. Even if he could figure out steps 2 through whatever of getting Tony Stark’s heart restarted, Phil was physically incapable of doing step 1.

“I can help!” piped Spera. She seemed to have a much better grasp on the situation than Phil did. “I have small hands.”

It only took a moment to decide to trust the fallen cherub. Phil always went with his instincts and while Spera may not necessarily be considered “good” she was not malicious without a reason.

If Stark’s wide eyes when Coulson gingerly passed over the reactor to her very small hands were any indication, Iron Man was less than thrilled with the prospect.

Spera immediately took the short flight to where Iron Man was half sitting, half laying and crouched on top of his stomach. She peered inside the socket with her huge bulbous eyes and then studied the mechanisms of the reactor.

Within seconds she was reaching inside the socket wall and fiddling with the reactor. She had the confidence of a seasoned surgeon.

“I’ve never saved a human life before,” Spera mused before continuing cheerfully. “In fact, I only ever really see humans that are already dead.”

Stark appeared to be blinking S.O.S. at Coulson who merely stood straight behind the fallen cherub and let her do the job. He hoped that his calmness reassured Stark. Even if she accidentally killed Iron Man, panicking wouldn’t improve the situation.

Coulson was distracted by raised voices on the other side of the room and turned away. Stark let out a, “hurmph” at the abandonment, but it didn’t stop Coulson from carefully walking to the former kill zone.

He assessed the situation on the way.

Gaudium and Espinoza were trying to do basic first aid on the devil, but the pool of blood under Lucifer was alarming. His eyes were closed, but Coulson knew he wasn’t dead because his chest rose and fell rapidly. His already pale skin had become ghostly and there was a sheen of sweat on his forehead.

The two bodies of the HYDRA agents were too close to the doorway to the hallway to approach.
The bullet holes in the door would show anyone standing directly next to it.

However, the other HYDRA agents had yet to resume their attack so Coulson could pass straight through the middle of the hanger right by the body of the woman Spera had attacked earlier and called, “prisoner.”

Coulson joined Barton and Fury who were having a heated discussion. There was another agent standing listlessly off to one side. Phil was having a hard time remembering who the agent was. He believed his last name started with a “J.”

“This hanger is for basic office supplies and food delivery,” Barton was saying. “There are no weapons in these crates unless you think lobbing cans of peas at them will help.”

“The aircraft-” Fury started only to be interrupted by Barton.

“Already checked, it’s under maintenance. No flight capabilities, no weapons. We could maybe drive it out of here if we wanted to go less than 15 miles per hour, but that’s assuming tall, dark and scary over there will let us move his brother,” Barton said dryly.

Phil, Fury and Barton all looked over to Loki who only bared his teeth at them before resuming another chant over Thor. The green glow from his hands almost seemed to wrap around the harpoon sticking out of Thor’s chest.

“So we are as fucking useless as fucking sitting ducks!?” yelled Fury. “That is unaccept-”

Even though Phil would have sworn on his favorite vintage collectable trading card that the woman in the middle of the hanger was dead, Charlotte Richards choose this moment to sit up gasping, “My sons!”

***

Chloe had almost fallen on top of Maze when she fell out of the portal in the ceiling. She was lucky Mazikeen didn’t stab her on principal.

Chloe dropped to her knees in front of Trixie, hugging her daughter to her chest. Trixie was quick to reciprocate. She had known her mom was going to find her; it was just that Trixie had been a little worried, even with Mazikeen by her side.

Chloe stood up and turned to hug Maze who was in her full demon glory.

The detective didn’t even flinch at the sight of the half rotten flesh. Chloe once had a dream, and part of her had always known that it wasn’t a dream, of Mazikeen’s demon face leaning menacingly over her as she slept.

This face seemed right, like Maze had always been incomplete before. Chloe held onto her like the demon was the only solid thing in the world.

After a moment, Maze reached around Chloe and laid her hands softly on her lower back before bristling and shoving the detective away.

Chloe didn’t mind, she was just so happy to see them both.

Humans, Maze thought to herself, she would never understand their weird emotions. Here the detective was grinning like an idiot at the sight of- of a demon! Humans cowered in terror from Maze for thousands of years in Hell.
“Lessh go,” Maze ordered while rolling her eyes, the dead one not quite moving at the same time as the other.

Someone had to keep these idiotic humans with all their touchy-feely hugs and stupid smiles alive.

***

“Mother of God!” Dan exclaimed while bending over looking at the bullet holes in Charlotte’s torso. He had a hand on either side of her waist and was perhaps standing a little too close to her, but part of Dan was so relieved that she was alive that he didn’t care.

They did have some good times together in the past, after all.

“That’s disgusting,” Charlotte said haughtily. “I am the mother of the devil and all the angels, not God.”

She was also poking at the various unwanted holes in her human body.

“Do you think the dry cleaners will be able to fix this shirt?” she inquired touching the fabric. She had just bought it!

“Lucifer said you would be in another body or back in Hell. How are you still here?” Dan asked while ignoring her question.

Charlotte stuck a finger into one hole and fished out a bullet with only a small gasp of discomfort. A bright and hot yellow light shot out, temporarily blinding Dan, before flickering off and new red blood gushed out of the open wound.

She looked dismayed at the red stain spreading over her already ruined clothes. This body was oozing! She hadn’t been this grossed out since the first time she had to – to – it was too repulsive to put to words – but it involved less fun uses of body orifices.

“Lucifer may not have been aware of the fact that my powers are growing,” Charlotte admitted. They both looked over to where Lucifer was laying on the ground.

He was half unconscious, but his heavy lidded eyes still managed to glare at Charlotte, a look that was mirrored by the two fallen cherubs that attended him. Gaudium had done something clever with a make-shift bandage to slow the bleeding. Spera was mopping the sweat off of his forehead with a handkerchief. Lucifer also had Dan’s S.H.I.E.L.D. jacket wrapped around him, but he couldn’t seem to stop shivering.

Dan didn’t know what else he could do for Lucifer beside get him real medical attention which wasn’t happening anytime soon with HYDRA hanging outside of the hanger.

In fact, both snarky assholes needed medical attention. Stark sat lethargically next to the devil, the blue glow in his chest seemed dim and sickly, but at least he was alive.

Charlotte had never thought that this could happen when she brought Chloe here. But Chloe was already out of the room and Lucifer still wasn’t getting better. Her younger son was dying in front of her and who knows where Amenadiel was?

Charlotte couldn’t help but feel this horrible crushing sensation located somewhere in her abdomen. There was a sharp prickle at the back of her eyes. She assumed it had something to do with the bullet wounds.
Forcing herself to look away from her injured son, she attempted to answer Dan, “This body has had time to somewhat adapt to me. If I tried inhabiting a new host, it might explode. As for Hell—Hell always calls to me. It’s only my will that keeps me on Earth.”

She continued talking while thinking about it, “If I did go back there, I’m sure it would only take a few decades to get my other sons to see things my way. They are not as stubborn as Lucifer. But my boys need me now. So I will cling to this inferior human body even if it’s the last thing I do.”

The last sentence echoed throughout the hanger. Charlotte looked determined and Dan didn’t doubt for a second she would do anything for her family.

“That’s fucking fantastic, but do you have any actual abilities besides standing up and bleeding at us?” Fury snarled. Charlotte narrowed her eyes at the director.

Dan hurriedly stepped in to play peacekeeper. Nicholas Fury wasn’t exactly known for his tact.

“HYDRA has been quiet for too long,” Dan said quickly. “They’re planning something. Probably something worse than anything we’ve seen so far.”

“Well, that’s a cheery thought,” Barton drawled.

Coulson nodded in agreement at Espinoza’s assessment. Knowing their luck…

“The question then becomes do we wait here for HYDRA to regroup or do something about it?” Coulson queried.

“We must attack before they do,” Charlotte resounded. All the other occupants looked at her dubiously. All of them except Barton, that is.

“We can’t exactly move Thor, Stark, or Lucifer,” Barton stated. “Loki’s busy. We have one loaded gun and that spiked club Coulson got from Hell. The odds aren’t in our favor, but we don’t have another option.”

“Fine,” spat Fury. “But we need a plan.”

***

Chloe had never been more grateful for Charlotte then the moment when she, Trixie and Maze made it safely to the black Escalade and Chloe realized she had put the car keys in her back pocket after Charlotte had forced them in her hand. If only Charlotte wasn’t the most frustrating human/celestial/goddess/non-human person on the planet.

With Trixie in the back seat and Maze on the passenger side, Chloe floored the car, thanking anyone listening that all the gun battles were happening elsewhere.

HYDRA appeared to be converging on some sort of central point in the base which allowed the three to sneak around them. But it only made Chloe worry about Lucifer even more. She almost wanted to send Maze off with Trixie and go find him, but…

“How far away…?” Chloe trailed off.

Mazikeen instantly knew what Chloe was asking and leaned towards her with her human face so she could be understood.

“I’m not sure. Far. We’ve never tested distances and your affect on them only appears to be
growing,” Mazikeen answered, confirming all of Chloe’s fears.

“But he’ll be fine, if I’m not – not there? He’ll recover?” Chloe asked desperately.

Startled, Maze flickered to her demon face for a moment.

“How badly injured is he?” She asked. At Chloe’s grim expression, Mazikeen turned forward and her face shifted again, settling on her demon form, “Dravezch fashtr.”

***

Leroy may have fallen asleep standing up. He swayed carelessly, not really worried about the events around him.

Phrases floated through his mind but they were inconsequential.

“-scatter them. So we don’t have to fight them all at once.”

“-divine intervention-”

In Leroy’s mind, he was standing in the break-room where there was a mini-fridge. He was pretty sure he left half a chicken sandwich in that mini-fridge.

“-trouble if we don’t take them down quick.”

Man, what he wouldn’t give to have that sandwich now. In fact, he could almost taste it and it was the best damn sandwich that ever existed.

“32.33% of survival-”

“Better than we-”

Leroy stumbled forward snapping himself out of his dream. He looked around the hanger. There was something he was supposed to be doing. He looked down and saw the gun in his hand. That’s right-

“Oh, let’s do this!” Leroy shouted before charging the hanger doors where the Hydra Agents were on the other side.

While firing his weapon, he let out a war-cry that he felt for sure would strike terror in the hearts of his enemies.

“LEEROY JENK-”

His cry was cut off by the sound of returning gunfire on the other side of the door.

“Oh my god, he just ran in,” Dan deadpanned. Barton, Fury, and Coulson could only stare in helpless confusion at the hanger door.

“At least one of you humans has balls!” Charlotte shouted while kicking off her one shoe and running after him. “Come on!”

“Let’s go, let’s go,” Barton cried-out, chasing after the goddess and his fellow agent.

Barton found two demon arrows on the ground from the times when he had missed hitting the angels and he was already drawing them backwards with his bow. Coulson followed with his
spiked club. Espinoza and Fury were right behind them with their empty guns.

***

The HYDRA agents standing in the hallway outside the hanger had been told to wait for reinforcements before engaging Loki again, which had been more than fine with them. Loki was bat-shit crazy.

They did not expect one lone S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent to burst through the hanger doors firing an assault rifle in all directions. He didn’t exactly hit anyone, but it sure scared the bejesus out of them.

And yeah, all the HYDRA agents firing at him at once might have been a little bit of overkill, but the S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent just kept coming at them like he wasn’t even feeling the bullets hit his skin. He almost looked like he was sleepwalking as he staggered forward.

They did notice the unarmed barefoot woman, who looked like an office worker who had just gotten mauled by a bear, also come through the door. But with this bizarre spectacle of the sleepwalking gun-slinging S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent who refused to go down in front of them, they didn’t really bother with her.

This was their mistake.

When Charlotte got to the first HYDRA agent who still had his weapon pointed at S.H.I.E.L.D Agent Leroy Jenkins, she didn’t so much decapitate him as pulverize his skull into red mist.

The second agent, she grabbed both of his shoulders and ripped him into two pieces. This was when the rest of HYDRA noticed that something was wrong.

Charlotte had already made it to the third HYDRA agent and managed to pull his heart out of his chest before being struck in the shoulder by a bullet.

But by now it was too late. The remaining four humans came through the door in the wake of the former Goddess of Creation’s destructive path.

Barton’s two arrows hit their mark – two grenades strapped to two HYDRA agents’ chests – causing an explosion that wiped out half of their force. Coulson was swinging his vicious looking club, adding more blood and guts to it. And Fury and Espinoza picked up the weapons dropped by the dead HYDRA agents and took care of the rest.

All of HYDRA was down and it was over. Barton, Coulson, Fury and Espinoza were all unharmed. Charlotte merely looked pissed off at the new bullet hole, but Leroy…

“God damn it, Leroy,” Fury said harshly, this is not how he wanted things to go. “You moron.”

Charlotte walked over to Leroy’s broken form. Surprisingly, he was still alive. He breathed in wet choking gasps as his lungs filled with blood.

Charlotte knelt down and cupped his face. Humans were so delicate and their lives were so short. It really wasn’t fair sometimes, she thought.

“I am truly sorry that we will not be able to have sex before you perish,” she said softly, cupping his check. “If it is any consolation, I know exactly where you are going next, and it is more beautiful and peaceful than you can imagine.”
Leroy attempted to smile, but it came out more as a grimace.

“I do have one request for you,” Charlotte said.

Leroy’s breath came out harsher, but he pushed through his pain to focus on her as she trailed her fingers through his hair. That felt nice, he thought, what a nice lady. Of course, I’ll do something for her. He nodded at Charlotte.

She leaned down to whisper in his ear, “Tell my ex-husband I am coming for him, and he has a lot of explaining to do.”

With a shudder, Leroy Jenkins died.

***

Chloe, Mazikeen and Trixie hadn’t even made it to the gate when dozens of vehicles appeared in front of them. The car lights were blinding in the darkness.

Was it another caravan of HYDRA agents? Chloe held her gun in her lap ready to take as many of them down as she could.

The vehicles had come upon them so fast they hadn’t even had time to try to get off the road or hide. In fact, the first vehicle had screeched to a halt at the approaching Escalade and had barely missed hitting them. The other vehicles also stopped and Chloe could see dark figures step out of them.

Chloe turned to Trixie in the back seat, “get down, munchkin.”

Mazikeen snarled demonically. She looked at Chloe with one human eye and one dead eye. No one messed with her skank, she thought.

“I’ll delsih width thish,” she garbled and stepped out of the car in front of all the headlights.

Chapter End Notes

If anyone is not familiar with the Leeroy Jenkins youtube video, please check it out. It was my inspiration for this chapter : )
Fury could feel his one good eye twitching.

He, Barton, Coulson, and God’s ex were making their way through the twisting hallways of the S.H.I.E.L.D. base towards the command center where, incidentally, all the battles seemed to be taking place. Charlotte agreed to accompany them after Fury explained that he had the means to see everything on base and they could find Amenadiel (and the Tesseract) that way.

They had left a newly armed Agent Espinoza to guard over their injured playboy billionaire, lesser god, and devil after Charlotte Richards put the fear of god-er-goddess in Dan about the importance of protecting her son.

Fury hadn’t heard the exact words Charlotte whispered to Agent Espinoza, but considering the order ended with Charlotte squeezing the ass of a pale and trembling Dan, Fury was supremely grateful for this fact.

Charlotte was proving to be a terrifyingly proficient asset. Yet Fury couldn’t help feeling concerned.

Anytime they came across an unknown person or group of people, she would play the role of a helpless secretary trapped on the wrong side of the lock-down while Fury and the other humans hid in a different hallway.

She would wail, clutch her bloody blouse, and beg for assistance - her representation of human despair was both accurate and chilling. If the unknowns were less than helpful and moved to attack her, the switch from poor simpering human to raging death-god maniac was instant.

More times than not, there was barely anything left for Fury to fire at.

The small crowd of actual S.H.I.E.L.D. agents they collected, the people who were kind or good enough to try to help Charlotte, seemed shell shocked at the amount of blood and gore produced by her slight frame.

“You are getting too much blood on your clothes,” Fury said nastily. “Even HYDRA might notice something is off if you walk around looking like a horror film.”

“Hmm, you’re right,” Charlotte said and considered her outfit. She looked out over the huddled masses of ordinary humans that were trying to hide behind Fury in vain.

“You,” she said pointing to a female lab tech who had taken an ill-time smoke break when things went south, “I need your-”

The woman had already tossed her lab coat and blouse at the goddess and was stripping off her skirt, leaving just her bra and panties on, before Charlotte could finish her sentence.

Without any reservations, Charlotte got completely naked, dropping her old clothes on the ground.

Everyone could see her rather, ah, pert human body. There were several bullet wounds scattered across her torso. The bleeding had slowed, and every once and a while, it would stop completely as a blinding flash of light shot out.

One beam of light hit the bare arm of the guard who was in the process of giving his jacket to his
half-naked co-worker. He hissed in pain and tried to smooth the redness that blistered on his skin.

Charlotte didn’t seem to care as she put up her hair up in a ponytail and demanded the spectacles off another S.H.I.E.L.D. worker. She put them on for a second and blinked twice before handing them back to him with a look of confusion on her face.

Fury couldn’t help this sinking sensation at the realization that they, not her, were the pawns in this equation. She was using them. If it came down to it - if she decided they were actually in her way – god almighty, was there anything in their arsenal that could-?

“Perhaps, you would allow us to do the heavy lifting taking down any other HYDRA agents,” Coulson stated calmly, always with the perfect timing to stop Fury’s paranoia from running rampant. “That way you can keep your clothes o- I mean clean.”

“Yes, of course,” Charlotte said absently as she checked out her new look in the reflection of a metal door. “Not bad. Perhaps I should try being a doctor next. It can’t be any more difficult than human law.”

She turned and stepped right into Coulson’s space. To his credit he didn’t step back or lose his professional demeanor.

“I did promise Lucifer I wouldn’t kill anymore humans, and, you know, “live” like one of you,” she said, her piercing gaze slightly under minded by the bunny ear motion she made with her hands. “It was the only way he would let me stay on Earth.”

Everyone started moving down the hall again and tried really hard to make it seem like they weren’t listening in.

“But these are clearly extraordinary circumstances, even he would have to admit that,” she said earnestly to Coulson who hummed his agreement with a soft ‘undoubtedly.’

Bolstered by his pleasantries, she continued, “I don’t mind Earth that much. It’s better than Hell. Well, everything is better than Hell as you are well aware. ”

Phil nodded looking both reflective and understanding.

Charlotte seemed to enjoy Coulson’s silent placid approval. As the group made their way closer and closer to the sporadic gunfire ahead, she wrapped her arm around the crook of his elbow and smiled at him before looking into the distance frowning.

“What did you know my own husband put me there?” she asked.

Coulson made a sympathetic noise.

“All I wanted was a little attention and sure I shouldn’t have broken his toys, but to send me to Hell for all eternity?!” she cried out.

Phil looked annoyed on her behalf.

“Let me tell you, the marriage was over after that,” Charlotte scoffed.

Phil mirrored her scoff and shook his head at the injustice. What a perfect little human, Charlotte thought, I might have to keep him.

“And now poor Amenadiel is also cast out,” Charlotte continued sadly. “I don’t approve of his plot
to kill his brother, but he did it all out of devotion for his Father.”

Phil’s eyebrows raised half a centimeter.

“And for his Father just to turn his back on him, just because a few humans died along the way, it’s a tragedy,” Charlotte stated firmly while staring into the eyes of her new pet.

This time, Coulson had a hard time keeping a straight face and became distinctively aware of the blood stained arm and hand wrapped around his. There seemed to be bits of skin under her fingernails.

Charlotte brought her other arm around to pat the top of Coulson’s hand like she was some sort of elderly grandmother talking to her grandson. Phil was pretty sure she was using the same hand that ripped out a man’s heart.

Phil opened his mouth, but his mind was blank. He was saved from answering by a particularly loud blast. Charlotte looked thoughtfully towards the noise.

“If I was at my full strength I could just create a plague or two to take care of this pesky problem,” Charlotte said nostalgically. Barton and Fury exchanged concerned glances behind the pair.

Shouts and running feet could be heard from around the bend. Phil used the commotion to extract himself away from Charlotte and stand out of arm’s reach.

Maria Hill came charging into view, firing her gun over her shoulder. She had to side-step Charlotte who was already moving in front of everyone else towards the action. Charlotte decided to forgo her playacting this time and go straight for the kill.

Maria, unaware that she may have just run into more danger than she was fleeing from, froze at the sight of the small gathering of random S.H.I.E.L.D. agents until she locked eyes with Fury.

“Fury, thank god!” she gasped out before doing a double take at Coulson who really didn’t have a leg to stand on worrying about Charlotte considering the amount of demon and human blood he was covered in.

He still had his spiked club too even though they had appropriated enough weapons from the dead HYDRA agents for everyone.

“Ugh,” Charlotte moaned, but stopped reaching towards this female human and focused on the male chasing her around the corner.

She grabbed his outstretched arm holding his gun and bent it the wrong way.

“Why don’t I ever get any credit?” she muttered. “You should all be saying, ‘thank the Goddess’ and ‘praise the Goddess’.”

The man hollered in pain, but used his other hand to grab a knife to swing at her. Charlotte slammed his head into the wall with so much force his skull exploded like a watermelon.

Blood and brain matter spattered all over her Charlotte’s new white lab coat.

“God damn it,” she grumbled.

****

Amenadiel managed to jog into a side-hallway right before being trapped by the approaching
enemies. But they saw him and were on his tail.

The fallen angel found a stairwell and chose to go up much to the amusement of the HYDRA agents. Amenadiel could hear them laughing behind him. There were only a couple floors to the roof so the enemy agents took their time.

Amenadiel’s arm still throbbed from touching the Tesseract. He didn’t want to have to use it again. He started to get this idea in his head that the cackling humans behind him that were calling out all the terrible ways they were going to kill him and the other people on base deserved Hell, not him.

He looked at the Tesseract and rolled his sore shoulders, still no wings.

The roof was coming up. He hoped he made the right choice, but it all depended on Chloe and Maze now.

****

“What the-?” Maria Hill stuttered, frantically looking around the hallway. “Coulson you’re ali-! Who or what the fuck is she?!”

Charlotte was wearing a brand new jacket with S.H.I.E.L.D. written across the back and another half naked human stood next to her. She appeared to be trying to chat with the poor terrified humans around her. Most of them only managed to squeak out, "praise the goddess,” and "thank you, goddess.” Charlotte didn't seem to mind.

“She’s the devil’s mother,” Director Fury replied in the most bored tone imaginable as if it was so obvious it was barely worth mentioning. “I need a status update Hill, if you could stop having hysterics.”

Maria sputtered furiously, but it worked. She steeled her nerves and organized her thoughts to deliver her usual concise and to the point report. But Fury was so going to pay for that comment later.

"-plan has only slowed HYDRA down. They are using explosives to get to the labs and people they want. They are trying to get to level 6 and 7 information hubs. I’ve got most of Team Coulson-” she shot a look at the actual Coulson standing next to her. Coulson was alive! “-guarding it, but they are under siege. I was trying to find a way to reach out for back-up. Except Barton, all Avengers are MIA, sir,” she stated with only the smallest hint of worry leaking through.

“Black Widow, Captain America and the Hulk were on their way back-” Fury trailed off.

“They never made it, sir,” Hill replied. “HYDRA attacked everywhere at once. It’s possible – it’s possible that they didn’t make it.”

Fury was not happy. “If they were attacked, the reports of a green rage monster will point us in their direction. What about all the other bases?”

“Communications are very spotty. Most lines are hacked or completely corrupted,” Hell said while shaking her head. “Some places are doing better, some worse. The locked-down helped and it seems like HYDRA’s main attack was here. But we are completely outnumbered.”

“We need a fucking miracle,” Barton muttered.

***
Mazikeen’s rotten half was highlighted by the headlights of all the vehicles. She took her demon blades out and twirled them in a complicated movement as she tried to peer behind the light.

She could see the outlines of the humans that stepped out from the cars and she could hear the commotion of all the humans talking at once. The noise merged with the hum of the engines and she couldn’t quite make out what they were saying until one voice rang out over the crowd.

“Are you a demon?” it called out. Maze stilled her blades and attempted to identify which human said that, but the first voice was quickly followed by another.

“Are you on the devil’s side?” this one was distinctly female.

Maze tilted her head to the side before replying.

“Yeshh.”

“Well hail Lucifer, that’s the best news we heard all day,” the female voice stated while stepping in front of the vehicles towards Mazikeen.

At first, she was back-lit by the high beams so all Maze could see was a dark shadow of a form, but as human got closer the form of Agent Bob Roberts appeared, still wearing her war paint made out demon blood and carrying her wickedly sharp scimitar.

“The devil does work for S.H.I.E.L.D.!” a male human who also stepped through the light exclaimed. He was covered in some sort of sticky goo.

“Or maybe S.H.I.E.L.D. works for him,” another human stated matter-of-factly. This one was scratching his back with an elongated bone.

All the humans were carrying various demon weapons and covered in ash and blood. They surrounded Maze, buzzing with excitement.

Maze turned back into her human form and put her demon blades away, no one seemed to think her transformation was odd. Then again they looked pretty odd themselves.

“You were in Hell,” Maze stated. Chloe got out of the car and pushed through the crowed to stand next to the demon. She knew if Mazikeen willing put her knifes away there was no danger. Even Trixie poked her head outside the car window.

“Yep,” Agent Roberts said cheerfully. “We died in NYC, went to Hell, came back, didn’t even get a T-shirt.”

Her face turned serious as she continued talking.

“We couldn’t get a hold of anyone at S.H.I.E.L.D. after we were brought back to life. There’s some sort of communication block,” she looked around at the other agents. “We learned about some pretty disturbing stuff down there – besides the whole Hell being real thing – and decided we better get here quick.”

And they had gotten here extremely fast. The S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents must have all gone to ‘Charlotte Richards School of Driving’ because when they woke up to the aftermath of the alien invasion and all they got was radio silence from base, the rules of the road no longer seemed to apply: stop lights were suggestions, driving in the left-hand lane was encouraged, and pedestrians were responsible for getting their own asses out of the way if they didn’t want to be made into pancakes.
There was something about dying and coming back to life that changed everything. The fear of the unknown didn’t touch them anymore and living was exhilarating. No less than three of the S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents decided to use a well placed ramp to jump a small river despite the fact there was a bridge ten feet over. And of course, all the cars were stolen.

“HYDRA is attacking, the base has been overrun,” Maze stated simply.

Bob Roberts nodded. She was completely unsurprised. Someone who chose to wear the blood of her vanquished enemies as make-up didn’t tend to get phased by much.

“What do we do?” She asked the demon.

Mazikeen scrutinized the humans, pulled herself up straight, and started handing out orders.

“I need your best dozen Agents to take these two,” she gestured at Chloe and Trixie, “as far away from here as possible and keep them safe. They are Lucifer’s.”

“Dude, the devil has a kid,” an awe-struck voice called out.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Agent Roberts replied.

She had a team together, a small convoy of cars ready, and an escort leading Chloe back to the Escalade before the detective could even protest.

“Don’t worry Chloe,” Maze called out to her. “These humans are ‘good’ -” she said the word like it tasted bad. “There is no way Lucifer would let anyone damned out of Hell.”

One S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent opened the back seat for Chloe, taking the car keys out of her hand.

“Budge over little princess,” he said to Trixie. “Your mom’s going to ride back here with you.”

He attempted to gently guide Chloe into the car, but she grabbed the door frame and braced herself against it. She looked over at her demon roommate.

Mazikeen was inspecting the remaining humans’ weapons as she relayed all the tactical knowledge of HYDRA’s positions she acquired while they were fleeing the base. She and Bob were already discussing strategy. This was her element. Mazikeen spent thousands of years being the Devil’s right hand demon. And sure these particular allies and battlefields had not exactly been anticipated, but war is war.

Maze felt before she saw Chloe’s gaze. She was just about to tell her to fuck off; didn’t she know she was the cause for all the tr-?

“Keep him safe, Maze,” Chloe half commanded, half begged.

Maze’s shift into her demon form was instinctual. A moment of perfect understanding passed between the two of them.

“Ish will,” Maze snarled and Chloe finally allowed herself to fold into the back seat next to her daughter. The car was squealing away within seconds.

“Did something happen to the devil?” Bob asked concerned.

Mazikeen’s eyes narrowed pulling the dead half grotesquely, but Agent Roberts held her hands up and was quick to clarify.
“We’ve got Lucifer’s back no matter what,” she said breathlessly, there was something reverent in her expression. “We’d all be demon food right now if he hadn’t intervened.”

Mazikeen considered the human. Something was happening here and she was pretty sure no one saw this coming, maybe not even God himself.

Her demon form melted away twining metaphysical muscles. She had been morphing back and forth all day. She was conflicted. Her desire to be in her demon form and her human form was equal - that had never happened to her before.

“If something did happen to him, then there are going to be a lot dead humans before this night is over,” she vowed.

All the S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents seemed to agree. With their assortment of weapons and their savage appearances, Mazikeen had never felt more at home.

***

Amenadiel stood on the edge of the roof. The HYDRA Agents were trying to batter down the locked door. He had stuck a lead pipe between the door handles, but it wasn’t going to take long for them to get through.

He contemplated his options. He had more than the humans realized, but that didn’t mean there wouldn’t be consequences.

“Come on Chloe,” he said under his breath while he looked at the blue glow of the Tesseract.
Amenadiel stood on the wrong side of the roof railing holding the quiver with the Tesseract staring at the HYDRA agents pointing guns at him.

“If you fall, we’ll just pick it up from the ground,” one agent said.

Amenadiel tilted his head to the side amused. His one hand hovered millimeters away from the blue cube. He could feel its charge thrumming in the air. The glow illuminated the fallen angel with the night sky behind him.

“Really? You think so?” he spoke disarmingly and the HYDRA agents shifted confused. Most people would be panicking with guns on one side and a seven story drop on the other.

“Yea, I think so,” the agent said unwilling to be intimidated. His finger tightened on the trigger.

***

On a different part of the base, a green glow bled into the sky through the missing roof of a hanger and through all the bullet holes in the walls and doors. It grew in intensity, lighting up the area around it, before going completely out.

Dan Espinoza was left blinking halos out of his vision. He could see the two gods panting on the floor in front of him.

Loki was kneeling with one fist braced against the ground to stop from falling over. His other hand held a broken harpoon. Thor sat up and pawed at his chest where delicate new scar tissue covered the one-inch hole that used to be there.

They both looked like they lost a round with the Hulk. A second time in Loki’s case, he still sported the various bruises and cuts that hadn’t yet healed. If anything, all of his injuries looked worse than before. The dark circles under his eyes had dark circles and his breath came out harsher than Thor’s.

A soft weight landed on Dan’s shoulder. He turned his head to find a fallen cherub with huge eyes using him as a perch. Spera looked at the proceedings with the Asgardians with curiosity. Even Gaudium hobbled over to stand next to Dan and sneer at the pagans.

“Yes, everyone just leave me to die alone on the floor,” Lucifer drawled. He painted a pathetic picture as he shivered with Dan’s S.H.I.E.L.D. jacket wrapped around his shoulders. He looked – human.

“I won’t leave you,” Tony said as he subtly inched closer and closer to Lucifer. He also didn’t look so hot, but a dopey smile started creeping up on his face as he stared adoringly at the devil.

Despite his injuries, Lucifer managed to pull off a grin that suggested all sorts of carnal acts.

“Of course you wouldn’t my dear,” Lucifer said cheekily before wincing in pain. Bullet wounds really put a damper on his sex life.
Dan rolled his eyes at the pair, but in that brief moment the sound of a scuffle could be heard from the direction of the two gods. At Thor’s grunt of pain, Dan whipped his head back around.

Loki had his one arm wrapped around Thor’s neck, his forearm pressed down, choking his brother. Thor couldn’t breathe let alone make any noise, but the thunder god seemed more concerned with the vibranium tipped harpoon that lay gently on his cheek pointed at his left eye.

Before he could fully process this turnabout, Espinoza had the dead HYDRA agent’s assault rifle up and aimed at Loki while he shouted obscenities at the Trickster. Spera had to grab onto Dan’s hair, nearly pulling it out from the roots, to stop from being thrown off of his shoulder.

“Put your weapon down, Agent Espinoza, before someone gets hurt,” Loki spoke with a sibilant hiss. He sounded as cold as an arctic wind.

Dan growled under his breath and tried to line up a clean shot, but Loki was almost completely behind Thor’s bulk.

“Yes agent, do put down your gun,” a voice called out from behind Dan, “Your death will be painless if you comply.”

***

Four HYDRA Agents walked through the hallways of the S.H.I.E.L.D. base. Three wondered if this was really the wisest course of action and eyed the prisoner? – slave? that shambled after them with distaste.

None of the three were brave enough to voice their concerns to the masked HYDRA agent who was striding down the hall with single-minded glorious purpose. The slave tended to simply agree with whatever anyone said when he wasn't rambling to himself.

Also, the fact that the masked agent was still caressing Loki’s scepter effectively stymied any meaningful discourse.

The masked man barely paid attention to his comrades who were following him at a steadily increasing distance. The scepter was filling his head with ever more violent fantasies. It showed him ruling and dominating everyone in his path. He was so thrilled by these images that he barely noticed stepping over obstacles on his way to the hanger 5 doors until a sharp gasp resounded behind him.

His comrades exploded in rapid hushed conversations. The masked agent could tell that they had stopped moving. He turned to inform them what would happen if they displeased him when he noticed exactly what he had walked into.

The “obstacles” were bodies or parts of bodies. He had walked straight through a pool of blood and had left a trail of bloody boot prints behind him without realizing it.

“Now we know why the Beta team stopped answering the radio,” the female HYDRA agent said flippantly. She was in some sort of shock. She pulled two guns out of holsters and they practically rattled her hands were shaking so hard.

“What could have done this?” one agent cried out as he crouched down next to a body with a gaping hole in its chest.

The masked HYDRA agent looked around and recoiled at the headless body next to him. He got an inkling of fear that was quickly washed away when he heard shouts coming from the hanger. He
could practically feel what it would be like to have power over a god.

He moved through the bullet-ridden door and the other agents begrudgingly followed. This was definitely a terrible idea! Only their fear of the masked man kept them from fleeing. Once you were in HYDRA, you couldn’t say no to a superior officer without ending up six-feet under. They had their guns out, but all the dead HYDRA agents had guns and it hadn’t helped them.

Inside the hanger, a suit-less Tony Stark sat shoulder to hip next to an injured, possibly dying, S.H.I.E.L.D. agent. Another Agent had his back to them and was yelling at Loki who appeared to be strangling Thor.

There were other “things” hanging around the shouting S.H.I.E.L.D. agent. They were small, grey and had wings.

“What the hell are those?” one HYDRA agent whispered under his breath at the same time Loki told an Agent Espinoza to put down his gun.

The masked HYDRA agent dealt out his own threat in a way that almost had the female HYDRA agent sighing at his melodrama. Really? Painless death? Did he get that from a movie? The things she had to put up with in this testosterone-filled male dominated field.

Agent Espinoza spun and pointed his gun at the masked man, but his eyes widened at the three other highly armed people also pointing weapons at him. When he saw the scepter, he cursed. He seemed to favor swear words that also involved taking God’s name in vain.

“Ah, how fortuitous, just the people I wanted to see,” Loki called out before they could turn Dan into Swiss cheese. “I do believe we have a common enemy. As they say the enemy of my enemy…”

“Fuck you Loki,” Dan called out over his shoulder, but didn’t move his gun away. He could hear Spera let out a low growl. She stayed balanced on his shoulder by holding painfully on his ear. Dan wanted to flick her off, but he didn’t dare move. He was in a no-win situation with the standoff with the HYDRA agents and the traitorous god at his back.

Loki stood up, pulling a pissed off Thor with him. Thor struggled to remain conscious from the lack of oxygen reaching his brain, but Loki refused to let up or lower the broken harpoon. His eyes gleamed with manic energy and his lips twisted into a crooked grin. The HYDRA agents didn’t know if they should keep their weapons on Espinoza or point them at Loki.

“Bullshit,” spat a HYDRA Agent. “You attacked HYDRA.”

Loki had a comically overblown expression of surprise on his face before shaking his head sadly.

“You mean the people wearing the S.H.I.E.L.D. uniforms that were firing at me?” Loki asked ironically. “That was not my intention. I must have missed the meeting letting the enemies of the Avengers know a military coup was about to take place.”

The HYDRA Agent’s eyes narrowed. “The people in the hall—!”

“That,” Loki said sharply, “was not me.”

A sardonic smile spread over the Trickster’s face. He adjusted his grip on the harpoon, bringing it closer to Thor’s eye, before continuing, “I’ll admit, I am not a huge fan of your species nor you of me I’m sure, but that doesn’t mean we can’t find common purpose.”
The masked HYDRA Agent, who had been listening silently since he walked in the room, reached behind his back, pulled out a pistol and aimed it at Espinoza. Dan’s finger twitched over the trigger, but the masked man didn’t care. He was emboldened by the scepter’s power. It showed him all the possible events in front of him and it felt like he could just pluck the results he desired out of thin air.

“Then you will not mind if I kill Agent Espinoza,” he spoke in a low voice drawing out the name in long syllables.

Loki did a graceful shrug only a prince could pull of; part nobility and part just being a raging bastard. Thor renewed his struggle only to still as the metal staff of harpoon dug deeper into his cheek.

“You could,” Loki began. The man smiled behind his masked; he could almost feel the recoil of the gun and see the entry wound in the S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent’s forehead.

“But that would be a mistake,” Loki stated cooly. He almost looked over at Lucifer but managed to give the HYDRA agents another smile that was all teeth instead. “I will be your ally if you give me this human as part of our bargain. Espinoza has knowledge I desire. Knowledge I will delight in tearing from his mind.”

One of the other HYDRA agents scoffed, “Oh how convenient. This guy? Really? He looks like he is a burger and French fry short of a Happy Meal.”

His other comrade agreed with him, “I bet he’s nothing special. And those winged tumors hanging around him are giving me the creeps. We should kill him. We should kill all of them.”

Spera flapped her wings out ready to lunge when Loki spoke up again.

“I’d be careful there,” the trickster warned. “Those creatures came through a portal from the same Hellish place the monster that killed all your people came from. Agent Espinoza has an – unknown power. Fury knows it. Espinoza might be the only human that can stop the monster and control it.”

Dan attempted to keep his expression very still. He didn’t want HYDRA to see his look of confusion, but man, was he confused. Unknown power? What? Sure he could offer to have sex with Charlotte and that would probably stop any sort of a murderous rampage for a short while. What was Loki going on abou- OH!

“After I escaped,” Loki explained. Thor made a protesting noise, but Loki merely renewed his stranglehold, cutting off whatever Thor was about to say. “Fury didn’t hesitate to pull out all the stops in recapturing me. He might have bit off more than he can chew, as it were, opening the portal and letting those monsters out. You attacking at this exact moment? That was just bad timing on your part.”

“I think he’s lying,” the female HYDRA agent stated while shaking her head. “This isn’t matching up with the reports.”

“Lying?” Loki asked amused. “How else to you explain why I am out of a cell? Fury would certainly never let me go. I escaped and was trying to get away when your little uprising occurred. Or perhaps you think the devil walked in here, set me free, and I then spent my time drinking tea with Director Fury playing Angry Birds?”

This time the female HYDRA agent rolled her eyes. Men – their smugness was a universal problem it seemed. What was she even doing here? Why didn’t she try to break the glass ceiling of
something easy, like corporate America? No, she had to pick an illicit secret elitist organization filled with chauvinistic Nazis to work for.

Dan pulled his best acting skills out, trying not to give the game away. He thought he came off annoyed and hopeless, but he really looked tired and deranged. Jesus – did his life really depend on Loki not not not back stabbing him? Oh my god, he really was tired. Maybe Jenkins was onto something with his going out with a blaze of glory; at least he no longer had to deal with his crap.

The masked agent considered the god who seemed like he was laughing at everyone – just wait until he was kneeling in front of him– and the S.H.I.E.L.D. agent who seemed to be having a mild seizure.

He needed another opinion.

“Dr. Selvig, come in here,” he ordered softly.

Erik Selvig shambled in slowly from the hallway. He was filthy, one arm seemed badly burned, and his hair stuck oddly in one direction. There hadn’t been much room to take cover when HYDRA blew off the door of the office he was in. His eyes were wide open and everyone could see the too blue color that was a perfect match for the glow of the scepter.

“Yes, sir?” Dr. Selvig asked. His gaze was fixed on the masked man.

“Oh Erik,” Dan couldn’t help saying. His entire body wilted at the sight of his friend. His gun lowered a half centimeter before he remembered himself.

Behind his mask, the man smiled at the show of weakness. It was just like getting another new plaything. He could barely focus with all the fantasies flowing through his mind of what he would make people do next.

“Is what Loki saying true?” he asked the doctor. Loki looked entirely too unconcerned at this turn of events to be completely believable.

Selvig looked over at the trickster and some sort of emotion flickered over his face too fast to catch. In less than a second, he was back staring at the masked man like nothing weird had taken place.

“I wasn’t here when this happened, but I heard Agent Espinoza was detained after Loki arrived only to be released shortly after. He then led the S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents into NYC which everyone assumed was against Director Fury’s orders,” Selvig rattled off monotonously.

“Assumed?” the masked man prompted.

“Everyone thought he was going to be court marshaled. People were prepared to lobby on Dan’s behalf against Fury,” Selvig said emotionlessly but Dan’s eyebrows rose almost to his hairline. “Yet instead of being punished he was placed here, right where HYDRA attacked, and those lists on the monitors of trusted agents? His name is at the top.”

“There is something going on here,” Selvig’s forehead wrinkled in confusion. “The director and Agent Espinoza are right in the middle of it.”

Selvig stared deep into the mask as if he could see the man underneath, “You are being played.”

“Well then, we can’t have that,” the masked man snorted. “Agent Dan Espinoza-” he said Dan’s name in a way that was more irritating than nails on a chalkboard “-order those creatures to back
off and put down your weapon or I’m going to have my associate blow the good doctor’s head off.”

One HYDRA agent stepped up and laid his gun against Selvig’s temple. The doctor didn’t flinch, move or seem at all uncomfortable with the firearm next to his fragile skull.

All the air left Dan in one giant whoosh. He no longer had to pretend to feel helpless. His gun clattered to the floor. He turned to whisper to the fallen cherubs, his best pleading face hidden from the HYDRA agents, and they begrudgingly made their way several feet back.

“I have a much better way to get him to talk, Prince Loki, but we will re-visit the terms of our ah -’alliance’ after,” the masked man said, Loki nodded his head in acquiescence.

Once the way was clear, the masked HYDRA agent strolled straight to Dan and pressed the tip of the scepter to his heart. Dan looked down and waited for that happy floating feeling he felt before. His long eyelashes curled delicately downwards hiding the color of his irises from view.

“Tell me of Fury’s plan and the beast that killed all my men,” the man ordered.

“Fury – Fury has given me free reign in this,” Dan began slowly at. “In all honesty, he left this pile of turd fire in my lap.” Something shifted in Dan and all of his words began to merge together as his frustrations poured out. “If anyone asked me, which they don’t, there is no amount of money that would make dealing with this worthwhile. They are going to have to come up with some pretty impressive bribes to keep me on, let me tell you.”

“As for the beast?” Dan was on a roll now. “It’s a she. And she is, umm, attractive? In a very very scary way.”

The HYDRA agents were floored. Was this agent perhaps touched in the head?

“But she has sons – a lot of sons, the sheer number of sons is a little alarming to tell the truth – most of them are absolute dicks. I mean one is OK most of the time, besides the whole bringing the person I shot back to life leading to multiple kidnappings and a killing spree. And the other I have to put up with? God damn - sorry God - he is the most irritating asshole I ever met. Luckily, he is standing right next to you, which is great for me ‘cause I’m out of shit to talk about, but man, you are fucked.”

Dan lifted his head up. There was nothing unnatural about the color of his eyes.

The masked HYDRA agent stilled before seeing a dark figure moving out of the corner of his eyes. No! This isn’t how it was supposed to go. He moved to plunge the scepter straight through the S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent in front of him. If he was going down, he was going to take this nobody-shit-for-brains with him.

A hand reached out with superhuman strength, grabbed the scepter and yanked backwards severing the masked man’s carotid artery in the process. The man got one glimpse of a fiery nightmare grinning at him before red hot blood gushed out from his neck. He was dead before his knees hit the ground.

Lucifer stood in all his hellish glory holding the scepter, flickering from skinned muscles to blood, fire and bone, to worse visions. The human’s dead body slumped over at his feet.

Bullets started flying, hitting Lucifer in the chest. They were slightly more annoying than a buzzing bee. With a sweeping arc, Lucifer swung the scepter around slicing the second HYDRA agent straight through.
“Oh dear,” Lucifer said while turning to Dan. To his credit, Dan was almost used to the red demonic skin tone at this point. “I do hope you don’t consider these people to be your coworkers. I did promise not to kill any of them.”

“Nope, nope,” Dan answered sheepishly. “You are in the clear. Have at it.”

“Excellent,” Lucifer said with a warping grin that would give Dan nightmares for the rest of his life. “It’s so hard to tell with you, Daniel. You really must stop working for such corrupt organizations.”

Before Lucifer could move, the agent, who was still pointing a gun to Selvig’s head, made a grunting noise and fell over dead. A harpoon stuck out of his chest. Loki stood to the side looking at the dead human with satisfaction. Thor was behind him coughing.

The female agent threw her guns to the ground and raised her hands.

“Please,” she begged the devil in front of her. “Please don’t.”

“Why do you all always beg now?” Lucifer asked annoyed. “It gets boring after a couple thousand years.”

Lucifer slammed the scepter on the ground; the echo reverberated throughout the hanger. He shifted back into his human appearance. He still had Dan’s S.H.I.E.L.D. jacket wrapped around him.

“Oh, is anyone else finding this uncomfortably attractive? Hmmm? Show of hands?” Tony Stark asked while looking around the room. Besides him, only Spera agreed and she had both hands up.

Lucifer grinned delightfully at Mr. Stark. Their date was going to be so much fun.

Loki looked over at Lucifer, with his dark hair, pale skin, and stance holding a scepter while threatening humans and looked back at Stark confused.

“You find that sexually arousing?” he asked Iron Man.

Tony got a strange expression on his face before replying with an incredulous tone, “Are you jealous reindeer games?”

“No!” Loki shouted.

“Boys, boys after this is over I’ll make sure we’ll all have a nice orgy or two. Right now let’s focus on the matter at hand,” Lucifer drawled. To the HYDRA Agent, “Now, tell me what do you desire?”

“I really really want to re-think my whole life,” she replied desperately. “No more plots to take over the world. I’ll stick with knitting or base jumping or mime?”

“What?” Dan asked.

“It’s a hobby, alright!” she hollered. “It fills the weekends up. It’s not like I do something really stupid like improv!”

Dan sputtered and turned beat red.

“Humans never cease to fascinate me,” Lucifer said with a hint of wonder in his voice. “Ok, off you pop. If I ever see you-”
But the HYDRA agent had already run out the door leading outside. Before the door swung shut, they could see that she was clear across a field.

“Now, as for the doctor...,” Lucifer spoke while considering the scepter in his hand. “My Father’s greatest gift to mankind was freewill. Ironically, this freewill allows one human to take it away from another. That’s my Father’s plan for you – full of gaping holes.”

The devil gently pressed the scepter to Erik’s chest and seemed to be drawing something out of him. Selvig came back to himself with a gasp. His eye color faded to a more natural looking blue.

“Who are you?! What is he doing out?” Erik yelled while nodding in Loki’s direction.

“I’m the devil, former ruler of Hell. Loki was saving everyone’s lives by befuddling HYDRA until I could get up to full strength again,” Lucifer explained. “Although, you did a pretty good job not betraying Dan even under the influence of the Mind Stone, humans really have come a long way.”

“Yea, I didn’t actually lie did I?” Erik muttered. “And I think having Loki over there in my head might have knocked a few screws loose.” He continued to mutter under his breath but nothing coherent could be made out.

Thor finally managed to clear his throat and croaked out to his brother, “This was a trick?”

“Of course it was a trick,” Lucifer answered for Loki. “And he performed marvelously! I can see where the god of mischief title comes from.”

“Unlike the rest of you, I have ears and eyes,” Loki said nastily, it’s possible this adoption thing had benefits. At least he knew he wasn’t actually a blood relative of this buffoon. “I could tell they were coming and none of us were currently up to a fight.”

“Good show, good show,” Lucifer said cheerfully. “And don’t you worry Loki; I’m taking all the recent events into account while deciding your punishment.”

This stopped Loki from glaring daggers at Thor, but only made him start worrying. What cruel and unusual torment could this maddening being possibly come up with? The unknown was terrifying.

“However,” Lucifer intoned, “Daniel, you really need to step it up a notch. For an ex-corrupt police officer-turned minion of a more corrupt secret organization, you could do with some better acting skills. You almost gave it away at the end and got yourself turned into shish kabob.”

Dan threw his hands up and the air. This was so typical!

But Lucifer wasn’t finished, “And Thor? I recommend leaving all the talking to your brother in the future, maybe all the thinking too.”

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The bullet hit Amenadiel’s upper chest and he toppled over the roof. He had time to use the Tesseract to open a portal to Hell which he fell through.

The HYDRA agents looked over the edge only to get a face full of ashy smoke billowing from the portal floating in mid air. One agent noticed that the smoke was moving oddly, only for a winged figure to shoot upwards smacking him in the head instantly breaking his neck.

The other agents attempted to run back to the stairs, but the winged fallen angel was too fast. All anyone in the surrounding area could hear were screams that were slowly fading away as if people
had been thrown into the deepest canyon.

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for the mistakes. I'm going out of town for a week and I had to choose between posting now or waiting until next Friday! I'll edit it more when I get back.
Is this what a miracle is supposed to look like? (Part III)

“Ah, sweetheart? A little help here,” Stark gasped out while grappling with ruddy faced heavily armed HYDRA agent.

Tony was not exactly the best fighter while out of his suit, a fact made worse by his faltering arc reactor. It took all of his strength and scrappy (dirty) fighting skills to keep the barrel of the gun pointed away from his person.

“Hmm?” Lucifer questioned absently. He appeared to be distracted by the interplay of shadow and light on the wall created by the glow of the scepter.

The other members of their expedition where only doing slightly better. Loki had one of Thor’s arms draped around his shoulder has he half dragged the barely healed Thunder god out of the way of the gunfire. Agent Espinoza was in front of them firing at any HYDRA agent that got too close to the pair. Protecting Thor, not the insane-melodramatic-world invading-trickster, Dan would tell himself later.

Stark was having second thoughts about leaving the hangar after he finally knocked his attacker’s gun across the floor and the HYDRA agent simply pulled out another one.

Why had they left the hanger again? Oh that’s right, Tony thought. Lucifer - now back to his full powers acting like a hyperactive puppy bouncing around the room - had declared he was bored.

At Agent Espinoza’s glare the devil had rolled his eyes and amended that he wanted to ‘stop this catastrophe before things got worse. HYDRA had already found them multiple times; shouldn’t they go on the offensive for once? And did Daniel really want to stay here surrounded by all the dismembered bodies?’

In a rare moment of insight, Tony realized that if he was even half as like an ADHD-kid-left-alone-in-a-candy-store as Lucifer during his own- ah, creative frenzies, then Pepper’s perpetual infuriated state might not be so unreasonable. It was lucky that he and the devil were so damn attractive.

They had been heading towards a large atrium in the heart of the S.H.I.E.L.D. base, when they inevitably ran into a large patrol of HYDRA agents.

And Tony didn’t have his Iron Man suit. This is what you get when you think with body parts other than your head, a voice that sounded suspiciously like Pepper whispered in his mind.

Tony slapped the second gun out of the HYDRA agent’s hand but that cost him his footing. The agent took advantage and put him into a head-lock. Stark was saved from all of his air getting cut off when his attacker became distracted from the shrieks and cries of terror coming from above.

Spera and Guadium were each holding an arm of a struggling HYDRA agent as they flew him above everyone else. Guadium kept faltering due to his injury causing the agent to dip lower before being yanked back up again, which was honestly just making it all the more terrifying for him.

They took him over the edge of the railing all the way to the modern looking chandelier in the middle of the atrium where they left him hanging by the back of his jacket.

OK- thought Tony – not everyone in their group (which was the strangest mash-up of people he had ever seen and he had worked with the Hulk and a man wearing the stars and stripes!) was having difficulties.
Shouts of alarm could be heard from below. Bullets followed the retreating fallen cherubs.

They had found the command center of HYDRA.

The rip of the jacket was just audible over the chaos and the agent blubbered incoherently as he dropped several inches lower.

Lucifer chuckled lightly at the spectacle, his eyes filled with mirth. At the sound of gagging he turned and noticed Tony rapidly turning violet as a beefy arm of a HYDRA Agent squeezed the life out of him.

“Oh! Why didn’t you say something?” Lucifer asked before twisting the scepter around in a complicated movement before severing the head from the HYDRA agent.

The arm around Tony’s throat convulsed in a parody of life even as the head hit the floor. After a moment, the death grip finally relented and Tony and the body fell to the ground.

He was forced to scramble away on his knees to avoid the pool of blood that was steadily expanding from the neck. Tony looked up to see a smirking devil who winked at him before turning to the rest of the fray. That! did things to his nether regions best discussed with a therapist. Didn’t Lucifer mention that he went to someone-?

There was a loud rip, followed by a scream and a thud as the HYDRA agent fell from the chandelier.

Barely containing a snort, Lucifer scanned the half dozen or so still living HYDRA members. This was like being in a one of the Body Bags movies which means he was the Weaponizer! At that thought, he got the perfect idea.

Purposefully flashing into his red and black hell form, he slammed the scepter on the ground just the way Loki seemed to favor and called out, “Welcome to devil time!”

“You got to be fucking kidding me,” Daniel moaned at the same time he shot one HYDRA agent straight through the eye.

The other HYDRA agents didn’t seem to care that they were down another person as they all stared wide-eyed at Lucifer. The unmistakable smell of urine wafted over the crowd.

As one, they turned to fire at the devil. But he was already gone.

A whirlwind of movement circled the HYDRA agents. Lucifer practically danced as he twisted and turned. Sometimes he was in his human form and others he was a nightmare brought to life. The scepter was like an extension of his body and the devil used it like he had spent centuries training.

“You know I didn’t really rely on weapons during the rebellion. I was more into the whole pillars of fire, sheer force of will method,” he called out. “And after my fall, knifes and such were really only used for extracurricular actives, if you know what I mean.”

With one last sweeping motion, Lucifer stood in the middle of the HYDRA agents who were frozen as if suspended in time. After one collective exhale, they all dropped like marionette with its strings cut.

“I might have been missing out,” the devil stated with a grin as he stepped out of the ring of bodies. “This is fun! And so phallic.”
Lucifer held the scepter out in front of him in a way that was probably not appropriate. Tony stumbled over to him while massaging his throat.

“It’s all true then? Devil cast out from Heaven, Old Testament shhh-enanigans?” Tony questioned while thinking better about swearing. If he wasn’t careful he was going to catch Espinoza’s brand of swearing/taking God’s name in vain Tourette’s syndrome.

“Oh yes, big war, greater fall,” the devil replied offhandedly. He wasn’t giving Stark his full attention since he was too busy spinning the scepter around, stabbing imaginary enemies, and humming what sounded like the Body Bag’s theme song.

“So hypothetically speaking, in the grand universal scheme of things, you know on a God vs. Devil showdown, how powerful are you?” Stark asked a touch cautiously.

Lucifer muttered ‘renegotiate’ in a deep American accent before answering Tony. However, his attention was still divided. He kept standing the scepter up and letting go of it to see how long it would stay vertical on its own.

“Amenadiel’s a brute. I’ve always maintained that his skull is the hardest thing in the universe. My brother Michael has his talents and there’s mother of course. But her power was greatly reduced once Dad cast her into Hell,” Lucifer replied contemplatively. He was now adding a spin to the scepter to see how long it could go before toppling over. “As the great ‘adversary’ and Ruler of Hell, my power was second only to my Father’s, but that’s all in the past now.”

“Second only to big ‘G’ God?” Tony asked awed, “and you gave that all up.”

Lucifer snatched the scepter and spun towards Stark, his eyes flashing red.

Tony had Lucifer’s full attention now.

“Yes,” Lucifer spat, “and want to know what being the second most powerful being in the Universe makes you? First loser.”

The devil turned away to pace and snarl. Stark let out an almost inaudible ‘eep’ once the onslaught of hellish intent stopped focusing on him.

“Everyone loses when they play with my Father,” Lucifer continued, spitting out each word, “because as soon as you get close, he’ll just change the rules. Really not a guy you want to bring to Monopoly night.”

There was a thump followed by swearing and cursing God. Dan had managed to stub his toe on one of the fallen HYDRA agent’s machine guns. While jumping and holding one leg up, he proceeded to almost fall backwards over a body. Dan attempted to pick his way through the ring of death, gingerly stepping over limbs that were no longer attached to anything, and almost slipped in a pool of blood.

And just like that, all the anger drained out of Lucifer as he watched his favorite douchebag comedy skit. Daniel might be on to something here. If only he could bring this act to the stage and not that dreadful devil-in-a-convertible routine he favored.

“What the hell man?” Dan gasped out, still breathing heavily from the firefight and nearly wiping out in the viscera of his enemies. “Couldn’t you have done that to begin with? And what did I tell you about catch-phrases?”

“But Daniel,” Lucifer whined before giving him a devil-may-care grin, “they understood it this
“Can’t you just, I don’t know, blow up HYDRA with your mind?” Dan asked irritated.

“Tcht, where would be the fun in that? Besides how else will I get to try out my new favorite toy,” Lucifer scoffed while shaking the scepter at him. He also added softly, “and I haven’t done that since the dawn of your civilization.”

“What? I didn’t catch that,” Dan asked suspiciously. Lucifer just gave him an innocent expression that had Dan narrowing his eyes at him.

Dan continued his lecture, “Should you really be using that? Isn’t it like controlling your mind?”

“Oh, this?” Lucifer asked looking down at the scepter. “It preys on fears and desires. It’s laughable to think it could have any power over me. But…”

He looked at the scepter contemplatively before looking up at Dan with a spark of an idea revolving in his mind.

“If you are worried, I’ll trade you for your gun,” Lucifer replied neutrally, holding the scepter out to Dan.

Dan clutched his gun to his chest like a grandmother protecting her pearls.

“Absolutely not! There is no way I’m ever giving you a gun,” Dan declared.

“Really?” Lucifer retorted dryly. “So you would much rather I keep hold of the weapon of infinite power that could possibly rival my Father?”

Sputtering, Dan let out a shaky, “Yes?”

“Hmmm,” Lucifer hummed moving the scepter even closer to Dan and making it glow brighter. “Are you sure?”


“It really doesn’t affect you, does it?” Lucifer said, pulling the scepter back. Dan let out noncommittal huff and shrugged.

“Because it certainly affects them,” Lucifer continued while sweeping his arms out.

Dan blinked in surprise. Both Stark and Loki had crept closer, mesmerized by the increased glow, without him realizing it. Thor had been left to lean against a wall and Stark even had his hand outstretched towards the scepter.

“Umm,” a gruff voice sounded out. “Can I come out now?”

Selvig appeared from the closet he was hiding in. It was one of the few doors that wasn’t locked.

A high pitched scream and desperate cries for help echoed through the hallways. Erik held up a finger and pointed at the closet mouthing, ‘should I go back in?’

“It’s coming from the floor above. We’ll check it out!” Spera yelled excitedly. She zoomed over the railing and up a level, her brother following at a slower pace.

The scream morphed into shrieks as a calamity of ‘prisoner!’ ‘winged rodents,’ ‘bitch,’ ‘you’re the
“bitch,” and what sounded a lot like hair pulling and slaps started.

“Found my mother,” Lucifer stated.

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Fury was not happy.

He looked over the S.H.I.E.L.D. atrium where some misguided architect had chosen a modern design filled with open airy spaces and glass. Large open elevators ringed walls and walls of square office spaces that had floor to ceiling windows. He could not only see his people huddled behind their cubicles completely trapped, but also the army of HYDRA agents between him and them.

But what really made his one good eye twitch was the devil flipping Loki’s scepter in his hand like it was a baton standing next to a verifiable Goddess. And both of them were wearing S.H.I.E.L.D. jackets! Just the idea of those two divine idiots being part of S.H.I.E.L.D. made him want to retire and maybe even find a new planet to live on because apparently that was an option nowadays.

He counted his rag-tag group of random S.H.I.E.L.D. personnel (mainly non-combative), Agents Coulson, Barton, Espinoza, and Hill; a suitless Iron Man; a mostly vertical Thor with his sullen brother; two winged creatures; one Erik Selvig; and the devil with his overbearing mother. He had a real dream team on his hands.

HYDRA had explosives and advanced weaponry and here they were skirting around the edges of the atrium like rodents as they tried to come up with a plan that wouldn’t get everyone killed. Or at least not get all the non-immortals killed.

“-hostages and it looks like they wired everything to blow if things-” Maria reported or at least attempted to but she was drowned out by Charlotte.

“Lucifer, did you see Amenadiel?” Charlotte asked.

“No, mother,” Lucifer rolled his eyes, “but clearly he succeeded in getting Chloe to safety since I’m healed.”

“But if he is with her then he doesn’t have his own powers. Something could happen to him,” Charlotte replied sounding a little shrill.

“A fact you should have thought of before bringing Chloe here!” Lucifer shot back getting louder.

“Lucifer Morningstar, do not take that tone with me!” Charlotte bristled. “Go back out there and find-”

“Can we focus on HYDRA for one god-damn second!” roared Fury completely giving away his position. Loud voices broke out below and many HYDRA agents started swiveling their weapons towards the sound of Director Fury.

“Oi, look what you’ve done now,” Lucifer called out as Fury face-palmed.

Some irritatingly nasally voice came through the intercom giving a list of HYDRA’s demands stating they would start executing people if Fury didn’t immediately surrender.

“For the love of-” Fury moaned. “Anything else want to just fall on my plate? Like I don’t have enough going on.”
What felt like a rocket hit the side of the building and bounced around a bit before crashing through a window causing glass to shower over the HYDRA agents who dove for cover. A dark blur zoomed towards them, taking out the railing and skidded to a halt in front of Fury.

“This grows tiresome,” Amenadiel muttered as he stood up, brushed himself off and folded his enormous wings away. The quiver with the Tesseract hung loosely in front of him.

“You fucker,” Fury said straight to a confused Amenadiel’s face.

The HYDRA agent’s voice over the intercom came out a little squeaky as he threatened to start blowing shit up if all the freaks didn’t surrender too.

“My son!” Charlotte shouted, running over to him. She looked him up and down to make sure he was still in one piece. On noticing a particularly large smudge on his face, she wetting her thumb with her tongue and reached towards him.

“Mo-om, sto-op, wait, why are you covered in blood?” Amenadiel questioned while grabbing her hand and studying the blood stains.

“Humph,” Charlotte scoffed pulling her hand out of his grip. “I was defending myself.”

“Mother! Is this all from humans?” Amenadiel asked. “How many did you kill?”

“Ugh, don’t be such a nilly, your brother killed them too,” Charlotte stated, rolling her eyes.

“Hey, hey!” called Lucifer. “Don’t bring me into this. Besides I have a bone to pick with these neo-Nazis, you have no idea how annoying they were down below. There was this one guy- anyways it doesn’t matter. We all know where they’re going; they’re just getting there ahead of schedule.”

Sighing Amenadiel looked at the glow of the Tesseract and muttered, “I suppose that’s OK then.”

“Now that we’re together, shall we wipe these human stains out of existence?” Charlotte inquired brightly.

“No!” Hill shouted. “Has anyone listened to a word I’ve said? We can’t just attack. They’ll kill the hostages and blow us up before you can get to them all. We just don’t have the numbers!”

The sound of a motorcycle engine revving had them all peering over the edge. Mazikeen holding a wicked looking scimitar astride a large Harley-Davidson burst through the glass doors. She was in her demon form and followed by two other beings also on motorcycles. It was hard to tell if they were people or demons since they were so dirty and blood splattered.

“Oh look,” Lucifer remarked, “its Mazikeen.”

Ropes fell from ceiling and on each rope a person carrying a primitive weapon and wearing a S.H.I.E.L.D. uniform descended. Some of these unwashed Agents were swinging around, letting out Tarzan like cries in a way that was probably not, strictly-speaking, necessary.

“And she brought an army,” the devil pointed out helpfully.

As the HYDRA agents tried to fire upwards, Mazikeen and the two others drove in cycles, swinging their weapons and taking out as many as they could. The two people, because they were people even if they were covered in neon-colored blood and goo, cackled and howled as they chased HYDRA agents down. They acted like they were knights in a jousting match and called out points for really good hits.
Two other cars that were definitely not S.H.I.E.L.D. vehicles considering one of them was a red corvette blasting rock music, crashed through the glass windows. Amazingly the corvette still worked and it started driving its way up the large ramps that circled the atrium.

If this wasn’t enough, mobs of club-wielding, bone throwing, dagger slashing maniacs emerged from the side corridors. They crashed into HYDRA like a tidal wave. Even though HYDRA had guns and other long range artillery, it didn’t help them in the close-range combat.

The new attackers were crazy. The ones on ropes were spinning around and pushing off railings like they were from the circus, and the ones on the ground were pulling off moves that mortal combat games would be proud of (there was a semi-secret Black Widow Fan Club at S.H.I.E.L.D. where the members would study all footage of Natasha they could get their hands on and religiously practice anything they saw on screen. Every fourth Thursday of the month, they would dress up like her and execute the moves in mock battles. Considering 80% of the club was male, this led to many sprained ankles they couldn’t explain after trying to run, kick, and twist wearing five-inch heels. One month, over a dozen S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents reported to the infirmary for ‘slipping on a banana peel’ which caused Fury to launch a full on investigation into the food wholesalers. He was sure their enemies had genetically engineered a weaponized fruit and was about to order an airstrike on the farm field when Hill put a stop to the director’s nonsense.)

Most of the Agents would never have dared to try any of the back flips and barrel rolls that ended with tiny daggers being thrown on previous missions. But now they were fearless, and their insanity worked! They overwhelmed HYDRA while ushering hostages to safety.

Lucifer stood at the edge where the railing used to be with Director Fury and the rest of the Scooby gang.

“Would you look at that? Team Mazikeen!” Lucifer called out delighted. He held the scepter next to him and couldn’t help but shift through some of his hellish forms. “This reminds me of all of our skirmishes in Hell. No matter the odds, no matter the enemy, I always bet on Maze.”

“ayayayAyAyAyayaya,” one Agent yodeled as she swung past them on a rope, the Doppler Effect warbling her voice. When she saw the devil, she saluted.

“Who the fuck are these people?” Fury asked gobsmacked.

“I think-I think they’re S.H.I.E.L.D. sir,” Hill stated equally confused, “but they were all dead.”

After a moment of realization, her neck twisted to stare at Coulson whose foot was practically off the edge as he cradled his spiked club. He looked over the action wistfully and seemed like he was trying to gauge if he could survive jumping down so he could join in on the fun.

As the Tarzan-woman started passing by the group for the second time she leaped off the rope and landed in a crouch in front of them.

“Director Fury, I’m reporting for duty, sir. We’ll have HYDRA mopped up and hostages saved in no time,” she spoke steadily, her professionalism betrayed by the bloody war paint on her face.

She turned to Lucifer and spoke breathlessly while giving a deep bow, “Lord Lucifer.”

Fury’s only reply was to grind his teeth and turn back towards the chaos below him. He clasped his hands behind his back and tried to pretend he still had command of things.

“Agent Roberts?!” Espinoza called out.
“Oh hey, Agent Espinoza, good to see you,” she replied cheerfully. “You know you missed a hell” – giggle – "of a time in Hell. It’s too bad you weren’t there! It was epic.”

“It’s too bad I didn’t die and go to Hell?” Dan deadpanned before shaking himself. “It was pretty hectic up here as well.”

Dan glared at the devil who was now holding the scepter like it was a rifle and aiming it around the room making ‘pow, pow, pow’ noises.

“You know the devil?” asked Bob dreamily.

“Unfortunately,” muttered Dan. However, when he turned back to Bob he found that she was inches away from his face. Her breath and overall person smelled rather horribly, but Espinoza was more concerned about her snarling crooked teeth.

“What do you mean?” she all but growled. She seemed to have gone feral since her time in limbo.

“Umm, I mean,” Dan stutters, “he dates my ex-wife!”

“Oh!” like a switch Bob was back to being pleasant. “That was your daughter! She was delightful.”

“You saw Trixie?” Dan asked staring her down.

Bob nodded and continued, “And Ms. Decker. I had a group of our best evacuate them away from base. They are being guarded as we speak. Nothing is going to happen to them.”

“Oh, thank Go-" Dan started to say, but when he noticed Bob’s eyes narrowing, he quickly amended, “-the devil?”

“What are those humans doing over there?” Charlotte called out pointing at some HYDRA agents. Everyone turned to look.

“They’re going to set off the bombs!” Hill yelled out.

Bob let out a high pitched whistle and gestured with her arms, “I can get our people and the hostages out of the way.”

“It won’t be enough if they bring the whole building down. There are charges all over and we don’t know how many detonators are down there,” Hill snapped back.

“Amenadiel fly down and stop them,” Lucifer ordered.

“No! Don’t send him. He’ll probably set the bombs off himself,” Fury roared.

Amenadiel rolled his eyes and held up the quiver, “We do have the Tesseract. That should be able to stop them, well, it would be like hitting an anthill with a nuke, but it would work.”

“Won’t that annoy our brothers? Knock the pathways out of alignment again?” Lucifer questioned, but his eyes were all but glowing with the possibilities.

“I, I may have already used the Tesseract once or twice,” Amenadiel replied sheepishly. His expression turned hard, “besides didn’t they say they would handle any future problems? Our brothers seemed to think they could do a better job than us after all.”

“You dog!”Lucifer called delighted, his grin was all teeth. “May I do the honors?”
Sighing, Amenadiel tossed the cube to his younger brother knowing he would probably throw a tantrum if he didn’t get his way.

“Wonderful,” Lucifer stated while holding the cube between his two hands. He kept the scepter wedged in the crook of his elbow. “Is S.H.I.E.L.D. clear?”

“Yes, my lord!” answered Agent Roberts.

“Sometime this century ‘Lord Luci-’” Fury began sarcastically before a blue light shot out from the cube towards the center of the atrium.

The blue light started small, but grew and then grew some more until it had expanded to fill almost the entire atrium. There was a large popping noise and the blue glow disappeared revealing a twisting and arid landscape.

It was more like an Escher painting than an alien world. What was up was down and back up again. Demons appeared from all directions and some hanged impossibly on structures floating through the hell sky looking down at the humans. Or were they looking up and the portal was above them? Either way, their eyes gazed hungrily out on Earth. The first bomb exploded only to spin harmlessly into the Hell sky (or was it a Hell ocean?) which was already a vortex of fire.

The first clawed foot stepped out on the tile with hesitation, but it was soon followed by a gaggle of demons speaking in low guttural voices.

A flash of bright light had everyone looking up to Lucifer who stood on the edge of the landing in his full Hell form holding the Tesseract in one hand and the scepter in the other. Even the humans could taste the power in the air as two infinity stones were held by someone who actually knew how to use them.

“These humans,” Lucifer made a sweeping motion at the HYDRA agents, “are yours. Take them to Hell.”

A cacophony of growls, snarls, trills, and hollers sounded out as the demons quickly acquiesced with the order. HYDRA tried to use their bullets and bombs, but it seemed to only annoy the demons. They tried to run away, but the demons jumped, flew or crawled faster than them and the HYDRA agents were all dragged or carried into Hell.

“Gaudium, Spera,” Lucifer addressed the fallen cherubs. “The way is open, if you would like to return?”

Gaudium looked into Hell and back to Coulson before replying, “Nah man, I’d rather stay here if it’s all the same to you. I’ve got a debt to repay.”

“And I’ve got to keep my stupid brother out of trouble!” Spera squeaked.

Nodding Lucifer called down below, “Maze, if you want-”

“If you finish that sentence I will shove this so far up your as-” Mazikeen snarled in her human form holding up the scimitar.

“Right!” Lucifer cut her off cheerfully. “I think that’s everything.”

After a brief moment, the portal to Hell disappeared as if it had never been there except the center of the atrium was clear of all HYDRA agents, bombs, and weapons (the odd modern statues, other decorations, and seating areas were also gone). The crack in the wall where Amenadiel had crashed
into creaked and groaned but otherwise a hush fell over everyone.

It was broken by a rallying cry started by Agent Roberts shouting and thrusting her fist into the air, “Lucifer, Lucifer, Lucifer!”

The call was quickly picked up by the other Agents back from Hell who circled the entire atrium on every level. Even some of the recently rescued S.H.I.E.L.D personal and the workers still trapped in their glasses offices started shouting it out.

Looking entirely too pleased with himself, Lucifer drawled, “That’s a job well done if I say so. You know if I ever retire from detective work, I know where I’m going next…”

Fury started shaking his head, hissing ‘no, no, no,’ and turned to punch the wall which only made the crack grow wider.

“Good job Lucifer,” Amenadiel said as neutrally as possible, but under his breath he added, “maybe someone should tell your new fans how much you like goats.”

Before Lucifer could question what he said, Ameandiel spoke up again, “The pathways do not appear to be too damaged, and it shouldn’t take our brothers long to fix them.”

“All this cluster-fuck finally over then?” Fury spat.

All three of the divine beings shuddered as one when they felt all of the realms twist and pull unnaturally. When would Fury learn to keep his mouth shut?

“That was dark energy!” Charlotte cried.

“Heaven and Hell are completely off balance again,” snarled Amenadiel staring off into the distance at things mortals couldn’t begin to comprehend.

“Odin,” Lucifer said coldly.

“Fucking Asgardians,” Amenadiel moaned.
“Father’s here?!” Thor asked walking towards the edge of the landing; he stumbled, gasped in pain and grabbed his chest where his newly healed wound was still pink and raw. It was only Stark’s quick timing that prevented the thunder god from tumbling over the edge.

“Easy there big guy,” Stark muttered, straining to hold Thor’s bulk upright. Several of the agents that Fury and co. had accumulated on their way to the atrium rushed to the god’s aid. It was a good thing too; Thor was massive and Stark… well, Stark was short.

Outside of the shattered glass of the atrium stood a golden figure astride an eight-legged horse surrounded by armored men and woman sitting on top of horses that had more normal numbers of legs. It was as if a King and his knights had stepped through time to the lawn of the S.H.I.E.L.D. base or (and honestly, this is what the majority of the S.H.I.E.L.D. agents thought) it looked like a bunch of extras from the latest Game of Thrones episode had gotten severely lost.

What didn’t fit in the pseudo Ren Fair atmosphere was the purple haze that etched through the air around the group. It wasn’t quite lightening and it wasn’t quite smoke, but there was a smog of the sickly bright amethyst color. Something about it seemed wrong. It hurt the mortals’ (and that includes Asgardians) eyes to look at it and it made them want to hold their breaths - least they get poisoned.

Despite the golden and ornate armor, the people on the horses looked sickly and sallow like their life-force was being drained. The smog quickly faded and their complexions improved immensely, but the feeling of wrongness still permeated around them. Dark energy had a cost.

“The Allfather,” Amenadiel snorted, “Does his arrogance know no bounds? And look he brought his royal guard too. Cute. With the stunt he just pulled he probably shortened all their lives by a couple centuries.”

“Although,” Amenadiel continued, cracking his knuckles threateningly and unfolding his wings, “they may not need them.”

As he moved forward to step off the edge and fly down to Odin and his forces, Lucifer turned to intercept him. The devil faced his brother and placed a firm but gentle hand on Amenadiel’s shoulder.

“Oh, Amenadiel,” Lucifer spoke, smiling conspiratorially, the tesseract tucked awkwardly under the same arm that was holding the scepter. Amenadiel couldn’t help but lean in to hear what Lucifer had to say.

“Out of both of us, you are the only one that can help our brothers straighten the pathways again,” Lucifer looked up and down in the direction of what might be Heaven and Hell. Amenadiel followed suit frowning, but it drew his attention away from Odin.

“I’m sure they are out of their depths,” Lucifer continued with a Cheshire’s grin. “Remiel did say your presence would have made a difference. Hmmm? What do you say? I’ll handle Odin.”

Indecisive, Amenadiel looked at Odin with blatant disdain before staring-off into the distance at unseen forces. His frown deepened, but eventually he spoke up, “It is true. I should check to make sure our brothers aren’t screwing things up.”

“Excellent!” cried Lucifer with a sharp smile as he threw his arms out in excitement, almost
causing the tesseract to hit the floor. But like a switch, his elation turned off and only a cold fury remained.

“And while you are up there, make sure they don’t do anything so incredibly stupid like start a war with Asgard,” Lucifer said with a barely concealed snarl. His eyes flashed red. “They would not like my reaction if they did.”

Taken aback, Amenadiel seemed to deflate and his indignation faded. Serious now, he nodded taking Lucifer at his word, and flew away. A great wind was the only evidence of the fallen angel leaving.

Sighing dramatically, Lucifer turned back to the humans and two Asgardian Princes with a grimace. Thor only had eyes for his father and Loki was all but hiding in the shadows.

“I do not enjoy being the responsible one,” the devil spoke as if disgusted by the very thought. He shifted the two infinity stones so one was in each hand, rolled his shoulders, and rotated his neck. “But I think there is less of a chance of this ending in bloodshed if I do the talking.”

Lucifer smiled brightly at the wide-eyed humans, winked, and stepped off the edge to fall several stories to the floor of the atrium in the most stereotypical superhero landing imaginable. He slammed into the ground in a half kneeling crouch with one arm bracing against the floor; spider-web like cracks formed underneath him. He held the scepter outstretched, and on his other side, black smoke rose from where the tesseract touched the crumbling tiles.

Mazikeen rolled her eyes, but once the devil stood and started striding forward, she assumed her demon form and fell into line behind him.

Gaudium and Spera dive bombed over the edge to hover above and behind Lucifer and his demon. The S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents stood at attention as the devil passed before also falling in-line like some sort of honor guard.

“Ah, hell no,” Fury growled as he watched in horror as the Devil led a literal army of S.H.I.E.L.D. agents towards the Asgardian King. He turned and pointed at the two princes. “You two, get down there and deal with your family shit before we have a bloodbath on our hands. I am fucking sick and tired of these fucking daddy issues. Pull your shit together and grow the fuck up.”

Thor nodded in agreement and struggled to hurry around the edge of the atrium and down towards his father. Loki was momentarily dumbfounded that Director Fury somehow believed that *he* was the better option for dealing with Odin. His shock was swiftly turning into annoyance at this pitiful speck of a human that dare talked to him, a prince and god, with such disrespect when he was distracted by a loud thud and a groan.

Thor, evidently fearing he was taking too long, used Mjölnir to descend to the ground in a manner much less graceful than Lucifer. His was on both knees clutching his chest, but quickly stood to stumble towards his father.

“Idiot,” Loki muttered under his breath, he couldn’t believe he had wasted so much precious magic to save the worthless mouth breather. But nevertheless, he found himself moving towards his injured brother and subsequently his F- not-father almost without thinking. He didn’t even care that Fury, several S.H.I.E.L.D. agents, two other Avengers, and a Goddess were following him.

Lucifer with his far larger force strolled down the steps outside of the atrium and to the lawn where Odin sat on top of the eight-legged horse with his guards in formation around him. The god held the golden spear, Gungnir, by his side. Lucifer’s lips curled at the sight of it and he spun his
scepter carelessly as if taunting the golden-armored god.

“Hello Samael,” Odin spoke neutrally as he studied the fallen angel in front of him.

“Oh shit, no he didn’t,” Gaudium grumbled quietly.

“That’s it, they’re all dead. Nice knowing ya,” Spera squeaked.

The devil bared his teeth in a parody of a smile and spoke softly, “If you wanted a fight, Odin, All father, god of - what was it again? War and stupidity? – you should have brought more men. Although, you are looking a little old, are you sure you’re up to it?”

Odin tilted his head in consideration before looking around at the two fallen cherubs, the infamous Mazikeen, and the army of demon-weapon carrying humans in displeasure.

“If I must, Samael,” Odin declared, the Asgardians around him lifted their weapons and humans behind Lucifer followed suit as they jostled one another as each of them attempted to get closer to the action. “I came here for that-” he used Gungnir to point at the tesseract “-and my sons.”

“That. Is. Not. My. Name.” Lucifer spoke coolly. But instead readying the scepter to fight, he let it hit the ground as he leaned on it while tossing the tesseract up and down nonchalantly. “And I heard you only had one son.”

Odin’s one eye narrowed, as he calculated the odds and wondered what sort of game the devil was playing at. Before he could speak again, Thor pushed through the crowds of humans to stand next to Lucifer. There was a part of Odin that turned to ice at the sight of his eldest standing so close to the creature that once had the power to change the shape of galaxies.

The Thunder God frowned at the smirk on Lucifer’s face before looking at his father.

“You know this being,” Thor half asked and half stated as fact. “Why did you never tell me about him?”

Lucifer snorted before adding his two cents, “Yes, Odin, why didn’t you ever tell your sons about me and my dear family?”

Lucifer was absentmindedly grinding the shaft of the scepter into the dirt. Odin would give anything just have Thor step out of arms reach of the devil, even though he knew that was illogical. If the fallen son of God wanted his son dea-

“When I was very very young,” Odin spoke slowly, betraying none of his unease, he needed more time to think, “I used to see that – creature – and his brothers flying through the sea of space. They were – stunning, and he was the brightest of them all.”

Lucifer scoffed at the history lesson and made immature faces in Mazikeen’s direction, but she didn’t notice as she sized up the guards around Odin. She was itching for another fight against a more powerful enemy.

“I grew up on stories of our warriors on outposts having run-ins with his kind,” Odin continued, staring hard at Lucifer. “The angels used get up to all sorts of mischief at Asgard’s expense, usually all in good fun. He was particularly noteworthy among our people.”

Odin caught sight of his youngest strolling forward as if he didn’t have a care in the world with a motley crew of humans following behind him. But Odin could see straight through him, after centuries of watching his son pull pranks and talk his way out of trouble, he could always tell by
the self-satisfied guilt that radiated off Loki when his son had done something wrong. Loki had a particular ability to drive even the most peaceful people into a murderous frenzy. But that didn’t explain why the humans were not attacking him now.

Odin was starting to doubt that he had any idea what was going on here, but Thor was still standing too close to the devil and staring at him expectantly.

“That all changed when he-“ Odin spoke while nodding at Lucifer who gave a ‘who me?’ gesture with a way too innocent expression “-started a war with his Father and was cast out. All the realms wept when he fell. After that, the angels kept to themselves and our people no longer interacted, so son, there was no reason to tell-”

“Not for lack of trying on your part,” Lucifer interrupted. He half turned towards Thor before continuing, “Do you believe this horse-shit he’s spewing?”

Thor frowned, but Loki found his silver-tongue.

“It’s horrendous, but expected,” Loki spoke smoothly sharing an identical smirk with Lucifer. Odin’s stomach dropped out at the sight. “And they call me the God of Lies.”

“Right,” Lucifer agreed the amusement still in his voice. “He left out the part where, in his warmongering youth, he briefly turned his eyes, he had two back then, onto Hell.”

“I sent envoys to open diplomatic rela-” Odin replied firmly, but Lucifer wasn’t listening.

“Have you ever seen this absolutely fantastic movie about this one Greek city-state that faced a tyrant intent on conquering everything?” Lucifer asked Loki, who merely looked at Lucifer with disdain at another mention of ridiculous human entertainment. However, the humans around him seemed to get the reference as they talked amongst themselves.

“No?” Lucifer continued unperturbed. “You have no idea what you are missing. But there is this one scene – but, I don’t want to spoil it for you. We’ll have a movie night at my place.”

The humans were buzzing with excitement and phrases involving the word ‘madness?’ and ‘this is-‘ rang out over the crowd and several humans were kicking at imaginary enemies. The guards around Odin shifted in unease, these humans were possibly insane.

“Your people ate my messengers,” Odin spoke loudly; his voice contained his power and effectively silenced the mob. The humans glared up at him and brandished their weapons.

Rolling his eyes, Lucifer responded, “They’re demons. What did you expect?”

“Your father has a habit of trying to erase histories that highlight his failures,” Lucifer spoke smugly as he nudge Thor in the shoulder with the same arm that held the scepter.

“Father, is everything he is saying true?” Thor asked, but Odin couldn’t look at his son, his eye was glued to the weapon that was inches away from his son’s face.

“We will talk about this later,” Odin spoke hurriedly, “just come over here-“ he looked over at Loki “-both of you.”

“Now hold on,” Lucifer spoke questioningly, throwing the arm holding the scepter around Thor’s shoulder. Rather than walk to Odin, Loki stood next to Lucifer’s other side. “Why are you here now? Seems like you should have just come down with an Asgardian army in the first place, if you were so desperate for the tesseract and Loki.”
Odin looked at Lucifer like he was insane and then looked at the demon and humans around him.

“Well?” Lucifer prompted, losing his patience and momentarily slipping into his hell form.

“You are here,” Odin stated, wondering if it was actually him that had lost his mind. “On Earth, with a horde of undead humans, opening hell gates and dragging living human souls into its depths.”

“AHhahahahHahahahahHahahaHa,” Lucifer was bent over gasping for breath he laughed so hard. If he wasn’t leaning against Thor he might have fallen over. “You think--you think, this is Armageddon? You, you’ve missed the entire plot haven’t you?”

“Besides don’t you know?” Lucifer asked as he stood up straight, completely composed. “I’m retired. That’s Father’s plan. If he wants one, he can do it without me.”

Odin looked like he wanted to argue the point, but Charlotte spoke up as she walked forward, “It’s true Odin. My son has chosen to live here--” she looked around like the grass had offended her “--on Earth, among the humans.”

“Yes and I rather like it the way it is without the prophesied rivers of blood and swarms of locust or whatever other nonsense the humans write about,” Lucifer added. But Odin was already off of his horse and on his knees with his head bowed before anyone could blink. The guards around him quickly copied their King.

“My Lady,” Odin gasped as he lifted his head, “I didn’t recognize you. I did not know you had--”

“Escaped the terrible prison cell my ex-husband tossed me into?” Charlotte finished for him, holding out her hand to help the kneeling god rise.

“Even in your new form, you are as radiant as always,” Odin spoke while gently holding her hand as he stood up.

“I am? Has my shirt come undone?” Charlotte asked looking down at the S.H.I.E.L.D. jacket and stol- borrowed bloody blouse underneath.

Instead of answering, Odin kissed the back of her hand in reverence. Charlotte was momentarily shocked at this strange custom, but a smile spread across her face.

“Frigga is a lucky woman,” Charlotte responded looking pleased at his groveling. The two Asgardian princes less so, neither one could believe that their Father would kneel for anyone.

“Might I point out, Allfather,” Lucifer responded mockingly. Was he the only one doing anything useful here? He wanted to prevent a war, not start a celestial love triangle. Those never ended well. “That the humans that were dragged to hell, that you were so concerned about, are from the group that nearly killed your son?”

Odin looked at Thor who indeed did not look like he was at full strength and back to Lucifer before speaking, “Then Samae--” Mazikeen uttered a low growl, she was getting real tired of the god’s shit “-Lord Lucifer, perhaps, this is all a misunderstanding. My sons and I will leave this world and go back to Asgard.” Loki shifted uncomfortably at the idea.

“And I also humbly offer to safeguard the tesseract as well. If you truly do not want the destruction of Earth, that cube needs to be removed from the planet’s surface. The humans are not ready for its power,” Odin spoke with conviction.
Lucifer raised one eyebrow and looked back where Daniel was standing next to Fury before speaking, “I don’t know, some humans might surprise you, Allfather.”

Odin twitched because when Lucifer said ‘Allfather’ all Odin heard was ‘fuck you.’ Lucifer grinned as if he knew exactly what Odin was thinking.

“Besides,” Lucifer drawled, “the Tesseract’s fate is not up to me. I gave my word after all. Director Fury?”

Nick Fury was usually the most stoic person around, but even he jumped when the devil addressed him directly and everyone turned to face him. He glared at Lucifer who only gave him a manic smile in return. Fury was giving himself a god-damn fucking vacation after this; he didn’t care if he had to put Espinoza in charge of everything. Somehow, someway this was all Espinoza’s fault anyways.

“Well?” Lucifer asked. “What do you want to do with the Tesseract?”

All of Fury’s plans of building super weapons dance through his mind before reality crashed in. Odin was giving him a particularly nasty death glare with his one eye, which was a little discerning for the director, is that what he looked like when he was angry-?

Sighing, Fury responded with questions, “This Thanos character, he’s going to keep coming for it right?”

Now it was Odin’s turn to jump uncharacteristically. Lucifer chuckled at the King’s composure finally breaking before answering, “Oh, undoubtedly.”

“And your sister of death or whatever might want it?” Fury asked.

“Possibly,” Lucifer responded noticeably less cheerfully. Odin gaped openly at Lucifer.

“And I can’t trust half of my people,” Fury said more to himself. “Fine. Give it to the god. Let him deal with this shit.”

Odin momentarily looked like he wanted to take back his offer, but quickly recovered and motioned for one of his guards to come forward with a container that looked remarkably like a more ornate version of what Selvig had created.

The guard approached Lucifer warily, but all the devil did was place the Tesseract inside. It was Mazikeen who pretended to lung at the Asgardian, making him jump backwards in fright.

“As for your sons,” Lucifer continued cruelly as the guard scurried behind Odin who had stiffened at Lucifer’s tone. “Thor can do what he wants. But Loki, no Loki stays here. I promised him a punishment.”

“Absolutely not,” Odin replied, stepping forward. When it came to his family, he would not tolerate interference, even if it came from one of the most terrifying beings that ever existed in this universe. “His crimes started before he came to Earth. As my son, he will face Asgardian justice.”

“Hmm,” Lucifer responded thoughtfully. “I don’t care. I think he would argue that point, and I don’t like your ‘justice.’ It reminds me too much of my Father.”

There was nothing jovial in Lucifer’s expression anymore as he rolled his shoulders and shifted through his Hell selves at the thought.
“Not to boast, but I am an expert at punishment,” Lucifer continued icily. “My Father made sure of that.”

Odin looked towards Charlotte for help, but she just shrugged and responded, “It makes him happy so I let him have his little hobbies.”

“You will hear his sentence,” Odin stated while trying to catch Loki’s eyes. His son refused to look at him as he stared with unease at Lucifer instead.

“Fair enough,” Lucifer agreed turning towards Loki and giving him a wink. This did not make the trickster feel any better.

Lucifer tapped his chin with his finger and mused out loud, “You came here with the intent of conquering—” Loki still refused to look at Odin which confused him. He expected his youngest son to be gloating, “—even if that was, in part, influenced by a threat of bodily harm and death.”

Odin turned towards Thor with a question on the tip of his tongue, but Thor’s sad gaze at his brother was all the answer he needed. Someone had hurt—no, broken—his fragile son. If only he was a little younger, he would have led an army against the aggressor, but even now he felt the Odin-sleep tugging on his mind…

“You did destroy a large part of New York City,” Lucifer continued to Loki. “And it was really only dumb luck that I was able to resurrect all the lives that were lost or at least all the worthwhile souls anyways. However, you did recently perform some heroic acts so I’ll take that into account. Thanos is the real threat, and he is still coming but restitutions must be made.”

Snapping his fingers and flailing his arm out, almost hitting Thor in the face with the scepter, Lucifer cried, “I have it!”

Everyone inhaled a collective breath and Loki braced himself for the worst.

“You will stay here,” Lucifer’s devilish grin could be seen from heaven itself. This might be his best punishment he had ever come up with, “and help the humans build their own rainbow bridge.”

“What?!” Loki and Fury roared at the same time before glaring at each other. This was far worse than anything Loki was prepared to deal with, a thought echoed by Fury.

“Oh come on, it’s perfect!” Lucifer exclaimed delighted. “I think it's about time humans joined the greater galactic community, it will give them an advantage over Thanos, and when you succeed it will knock the mighty Asgardians off their high horses.”

Hmmm, actually now that Loki thought about it… The rainbow bridge was Asgard’s greatest accomplishment and assured their dominance over the realms. If he were to help the humans, a pitiful species, gain the knowledge it would draw into question all of Asgard’s proclaimed superiority. What had Lucifer said about driving his family mad by doing the unexpected?

“I accept,” Loki declared.

“That’s good,” Lucifer drawled looking at Loki side-ways, “because you don’t have a choice.”

Then more to himself, Lucifer said, “Well, I guess you have a choice, but people who go against me don’t tend to like finding out what the other options is.”

“You are wise, Lord Lucifer,” Odin spoke neutrally, but inside he rejoiced at his son’s acceptance of even a small measure of responsibility. He expected him to refuse and throw insults. Maybe
Loki wasn’t as lost as he had thought. “Thor and I will take our leave then, we too have much rebuilding to do in our kingdom.”

If Thor hadn’t been watching Loki so closely, he might have missed the slight shift in his demeanor that suggested that Odin’s proclamation had saddened him. The thunder god thought back on everything he had seen over the past few days and he couldn’t help but think of Lucifer and his brother Michael. Even though they had been enemies for thousands of years, Lucifer still requested one thing of Michael that his brother had refused…

“Actually Father,” Thor spoke up before he could stop himself, “I’m afraid I’ve been injured. I cannot safely make it back to Asgard at this time and must stay here.”

Thor rubbed his chest and made the most pitiful expression he could manage. Loki looked at him like he was crazy, before smoothing his face into an expressionless mask.

“Yes, Allfather, Thor was very near death. If I hadn’t intervened—” Loki replied smoothly, internally rejoicing at the myriad expressions that crossed his Fath – not Father’s face.

Odin settled on suspicion, all too used to the tactics his sons used to attempt to get each other out of trouble.

“And how long will this ‘injury’ last?” Odin asked.

“Umm, well,” Thor looked to Loki for guidance who was finally meeting Odin’s eye with a hint of a sly smirk.

“Six human months,” stated Loki.

“Yes, yes, six months,” Thor agreed.

“And who will help me bring order to the realms in your absence?” Odin questioned

“You have a whole army, Father. Other people have less,” Thor replied, briefly locking eyes with Loki who, in response, rolled his eyes in the manner the devil seemed to favor.

“Hmmph,” Odin grunted.

Turning towards Lucifer and then Director Fury, Thor spoke up, “I will speak to my father about all we have discovered before he leaves.” To Lucifer, Thor said, “Thank you.”

He started to walk towards Odin and seemed to remember that he was gravely injured about halfway to him. Thor began to limp with hunched shoulders and made sad pained noises. To Odin’s annoyance, his son kept switching which leg he limped on.

“Alright, show’s over,” shouted Fury at the agents. “Get back to work. I don’t care if you recently died. You all got jobs to do. The base is still on lock-down, we’ve got to sweep up remaining HYDRA members and clean up this mess. Agent Hill give them their orders.”

Fury walked over to the devil and growled, “Is this shit—” he looked around as if waiting for lightening to strike “-finally over?”

“There is just one more loose end, Director,” Lucifer replied and Fury shuddered at the thought.

“Oh, douche bag,” Lucifer sang out. Dan looked over at Lucifer with annoyance, kicking himself that he actually responded to the insult. “Can you come over here?”
“What?!?” Dan asked rudely, but trudge over anyways. Lucifer merely smiled before snapping the scepter in half and crumbling blue glowing orb in his fist.

A small yellow gemstone was at its center and Lucifer tossed it at Dan who caught it instinctively.

“What the fuck is this?” Dan cried out, looking down at the glowing stone in his hand.

“The mind stone, one of the six infinity stones in existence. It, like the tesseract, has unparalleled power,” Lucifer replied simply.

“Why’d you give it to me?” Dan asked a touch hysterically before thrusting it back at Lucifer. “I don’t want it.”

Fury face-palmed so hard. He was going to have to have a talk with Agent Espinoza about trying to give back weapons of mass destruction to irresponsible non-human beings after they peacefully handed them over to the actual authorities, you know S.H.I.E.L.D. - this was in fact the whole purpose of their organization.

“Neither do I!” responded Lucifer indignant. Taking a deep breath, he closed Daniel’s hand over the gemstone and tried to reason with the human. “I already have to look over Azrael’s blade. Why should I have to do two things? And who else would I give it to? You are the only one immune to its effects.”

“What am I supposed to do with it?” replied Dan shakily.

“It’s the mind stone. Traditionally it’s worn on the head, so I don’t know, maybe a headband?” replied Lucifer. Then the devil’s eyes light up and he gleefully clapped his hands, “Or, here’s a better idea, you could wear a tiara!”

“Nice,” an annoyed Dan responded, but before he could say more an explosion of dirt erupted nearby.

Several S.H.I.E.L.D. agents looked up briefly, but on noticing it was just Amenadiel, they continued on their way.

“Useless utterly useless,” Amenadiel muttered to himself, for some inexplicable reason he was soaking wet, before shouting out to Lucifer, “If Raphael ever shows his green feathered ass on Earth; I am pummeling him into a bloody smear.”

“It went well I take it,” Lucifer replied dryly.

“Ha!” Amenadiel snorted. “They were all high and mighty, insisting they didn’t need the help of someone like me, while at the same time letting me do all the heavy lifting! Do you know what it’s like moving an entire planet surrounded by idiots? Raphael dropped his side; we nearly lost the Pacific Ocean.”

An *NSYNC song started playing from Amenadiel’s back pocket.

“Is that my phone?” Lucifer questioned. “That’s Chloe’s ringtone.”

“Oh, yea,” Amenadiel pulled it out and passed it over to Lucifer. “That kept going off. Our brothers started calling it the devil’s music.”

“Ugh, that is so disappointing,” Lucifer replied before looking down and shifting through all of his hell faces. The humans around him didn’t even flinch anymore. “You cracked the screen!”
Amenadiel just shook his head and looked around, “What happened here with the Asgardians?”

“You must learn to take better care of cell phones,” Lucifer cried out, not hearing what his brother asked. He swiped the screen on and his face grew a little pale, “Oh that’s a lot of missed calls.”

There was a flash of blue light that shot straight up, only Thor remained standing where Odin and all of his guards once stood.

“Did they-?” Amenadiel asked shocked, “Did they just use the tesseract to open another portal?”

“Of course,” Lucifer answered. “How else were they going to get home?”

“But-but-” Amenadiel stuttered, “They knocked everything out of alignment again!!”

Lucifer shrugged, already hitting the call back on the cell phone, and turning away.

“I just fixed it and they screwed it up again,” Amenediel cried looking around to see if anyone cared.

Stark was tapping away on his own phone, Dan was too busy staring at the yellow gemstone, Fury was barking orders at agents, Mother was surrounded by several humans who gushed over how awesome they thought she was while shaking in fear, and Mazikeen looked sadly at where the Asgardians had been standing. She had really wanted to fight them.

No one was paying the large fallen angel any attention.
Agent Dan Espinoza was trying and failing to peel back Charlotte’s fingers that held onto his forearm. Her hand might as well been made out of cement for all the good it did him. He was trapped.

“The humans say they can fix all the holes in this body,” Charlotte said brightly as she lay on her back on a gurney. Several S.H.I.E.L.D. agents, including Dan, were around the goddess getting her ready to be moved from the lawn of the base to one of the medical facilities on location. Hopefully, in a building that was still standing and not riddled with bullet holes.

“Or at least reduce the number to what I had yesterday,” Charlotte continued as she lightly stroked Dan’s forearm with her index finger. He shuddered and tried to tug free to no avail.

After Odin had left with the Tesseract, Charlotte started complaining about all the gunshot wounds she suffered. She moaned she was feeling faint and swayed precariously on her feet. Dan, being the idiot he was, rushed to her aid and caught her before she could hit the ground.

It was only as he was cradling her lithe frame that he noticed her smirk and realized he had been played. Charlotte winked at Dan, called him ‘her hero,’ and hadn’t let go of his arm since. Dan reassured himself by noting he wasn’t the only one to fall for Charlotte’s damsel in distress ploy.

One sorry S.H.I.E.L.D. medical doctor had made the mistake of lifting Charlotte’s bloody blouse to check her wounds only to almost get his eyebrows singed off for his effort.

Now all the medical personal had on Kapton coated masks and fiberglass heat resistant gloves as they tended to the goddess. Espinoza had neither, which he didn’t think was fair given his proximity to the danger. Dan could only stand as far away from Charlotte as possible to avoid injury, which amounted to about half a foot as she clung to him.

The agents prepping Charlotte were a strange mixture of medical doctors and theoretical physicists and had a cool professionalism about them that seemed a tad forced. They moved around in that quick deliberate way that had Charlotte secured and wheeling over the grass without seeming like they were in a hurry. But Dan suspected if they weren’t wearing such heavy duty protective gear, he would be able to see them quivering in terror. Evidently, tales of Charlotte’s rampage had spread quickly.

Dan tried to convince them that he was in their way, and he should really, you know, not be this close to the gurney, but he was completely ignored.

Several Agents - who actually had nothing medically related in their job titles or any other possible purpose for being crowded around Charlotte now that Dan thought about it - scolded him for trying to leave their savior (and they said ‘savior’ in disturbingly awed voices - it almost reminded Dan of himself in the brief moment after Charlotte and he hooked up before he discovered what a terrible person she). They told Dan it was his duty to comfort the goddess and keep her calm. Damn groupies.

Dan was not having it; this was not in his job description and he had used up every last reservoir of patience he had over the past few days. He attempted to brace his feet on the steps leading up to the entrance of the atrium and yank his arm free.

It didn’t work; he was just dragged alongside the gurney.
“We can properly celebrate after that,” Charlotte spoke, oblivious to Dan’s struggles. She pulled him closer to her as if she was trying to get him to lie on the gurney with her. The other S.H.I.E.L.D. agents respectfully kept their eyes averted.

“Not happening, Charlotte!” Dan cried and shook his arm wildly like he was a rapid animal. “Let go of me psycho. I don’t want to be anywhere near you.”

Finally noticing her favorite toy appeared to have snapped, her mouth dropped open in shock as she stared confused at the crazed human. Something shifted in Charlotte. She blinked sadly and bit her lip before hesitantly adding, “But Dan, I’ve never had surgery. I’ve never had a body to injure before.”

She appeared lost as she gazed at the strange humans around her. They were using a combination of medical and physic terms that were rather alarming. What the hell was wave-particle duality and how could it possibly relate to something called negative pressure wound therapy?

“What if something goes wrong?” she whispered to Dan and he could almost see a hint of fear behind her expression.

Dan’s heart sank. He stopped fighting against her iron grip and walked calmly next to the goddess. Poor Charlotte, she did look paler than normal, her eyes were a little too wide, and her clothes were filthy and torn. It was strange seeing her so unraveled when she was usually so composed and proper. Some of her usual intimidation factor was missing as she laid almost helpless on the gurney.

Dan was overcome with an urge to wrap Charlotte up in blankets and make her chicken soup just like he did whenever Trixie wasn’t feeling well.

Maybe he was too hard on Charlotte? She got injured chasing after Leroy’s suicide run after all, and she’s probably the only reason Dan and countless other S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents were alive right now.

Dan’s gaze softened and he placed his other hand on top of hers.

“I’ll visit you once you’re out of surgery,” Dan spoke kindly. In the distance, he could see a caravan of cars pulling up and Chloe and Trixie getting out. “But only as a friend, Charlotte. Now I have to go see my daughter, so please let go of my arm.”

“Oh course, Dan!” Charlotte responded cheerfully and let go of him after one more tight squeeze. “We can be friends. Go be a good dad.”

Dan smiled gratefully and started backing up only to freeze when he caught sight of Charlotte’s salacious grin. She was sitting up in the gurney, trying to catch one last full-body look of Dan, and she didn’t look nearly as helpless as she had only moments ago.

“We’ll be friends who just happen to take our clothes off whenever we see other,” she called out as one last parting shot before the crowd of S.H.I.E.L.D. personal got her through the shattered glass doors and into the base.

Shaking his head, he turned to head towards his ex-wife and child only to run straight into the devil himself.

“That’s not what that looked liked!” Dan said hastily.

Lucifer looked at him like he was an oddly shaped couch that appeared out of nowhere, but quickly
lost interest to stare over Dan’s head at Chloe.

Humans were always so odd, and Lucifer couldn’t quite tell what the expression on her face meant-

“She came on to me! You got to do something, Lucifer,” Dan pleaded.

“I’m sure I don’t know, or care, what you are talking about, Daniel. If you would excu-” Lucifer began only to be drowned out by loud voices to his left. Both the devil and agent Espinoza turned to look.

“I don’t get it!” exclaimed a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent who was talking to Mazikeen. “So he’s like one of the most powerful beings in the Universe, except when he is around one particular human, and he is dating that human, and… solving crimes with her?”

“Yes,” Maze responded curtly. “Why are you being so slow about this?”

“No, no, I have to agree,” Agent Bob Roberts spoke up. “It doesn’t make any sense. Give me aliens and demon battles, but that-?”

“You’re over thinking it,” Maze replied. “It’s simple, he’s an idiot. And that’s where I come in. Someone has to keep him alive.”

Lucifer scoffed and narrowed his eyes, but stayed silent to hear what else they had to say.

Nodding, as if this made perfect sense, Bob stated, “That’s where We come in. Who are we up against?”

“God, other angels, humans with knives and guns, and anyone he has ever pissed off, so everyone,” Maze replied flippantly.

Lucifer made a choking noise that quickly turned into a growl. The devil moved to step forward, only to be blocked by Dan who was wondering if he should check himself into a S.H.I.E.L.D. psych ward. Clearly, he had no self-preservation instinct – why did he think stepping between Lucifer and a demon was a good idea? Although, if he was perfectly honest, Dan wasn’t entirely sure if he was protecting Maze or a recently turned vulnerable Lucifer.

“And you want us to protect the woman and the child too?” Another agent interjected while staring dubiously at the two figures approaching.

“Obviously the most importing thing is to keep Trixie safe,” Maze declared.

The demon paused after hearing her own words and took a step back as if she could distance herself from the blasphemy. Did she really just say-? But it was true and the truth resonated in her bones. If she had to make a choice-

Mazikeen had spent thousands of years where her only purpose was to serve Lucifer. He was her lord and master. But Trixie was her friend, her first friend. Coming to Earth had changed more than just the devil. But, but, she was a demon!

The humans didn’t seem to notice the demon having a mental breakdown in front of them and had no problem with this new directive. There was already talk of a rotating guard schedule and hacking the school district’s computer systems.

Dan studied Lucifer’s expression after his pronouncement and watched the irritation slide of his features and something unreadable take its place. It was cold, determined, and somehow more
terrifying then all his hellish forms put together; but thankfully, it seemed to be in perfect agreement with Mazikeen.

Dan felt a goofy smile take over his face, but he couldn’t help it. S.H.I.E.L.D. – S.H.I.E.L.D. was home and maybe Lucifer wasn’t so bad either. Granted, these people were insane, and he suspected that fact had more to do with who they were, and not because they were demons, fallen angels and an undead horde of zombie S.H.I.E.L.D Agents. But they felt like family.

Not one to waste time reflecting over a paradigm shift in one’s life purpose that was causing a cascade of strange emotions, Maze rallied and continued to hand out orders, “We protect Trixie, Lucifer, and then Chloe.”

Lucifer coughed loudly and Mazikeen finally noticed him eavesdropping. He raised one eyebrow, but she looked entirely unimpressed with the devil and completely unashamed over anything he might have heard. After a brief staring contest, she rolled her eyes and turned back to the humans.

“We protect Trixie, Chloe, and then Lucifer,” she droned to the humans monotonously. Lucifer, apparently satisfied with the change in the order of the names, strolled away.

However, as soon as he was out of ear-shot, Mazikeen turned back to the agents, who leaned in close so they could hear her viciously whisper, “We protect Trixie, Lucifer and then Chloe, and anyone who disagrees can take it up with me.”

The humans looked even more determined and feral at the idea they would have to disobey the devil to protect the devil. They looked towards Mazikeen like they would follow her through the gates of Hell. Who was Dan kidding? They would probably enjoy that. Insane, utterly insane, Dan thought to himself.

He started jogging after Lucifer. The last thing he heard from Maze - as if as an afterthought - “Oh, and we should probably protect Dan too. Trixie might be upset if he died.”

Up ahead, Dan could see a particular expression on Chloe’s face that he knew well. It was a sad stubbornness that he used to see during all of their fights before their separation. It was a look that usually meant something along the lines of, ‘you’re a better person than this,’ ‘*we’re* better people than this’ or ‘we have to do the right thing, even if it hurts us.’

Even when it wasn’t directed towards him, Dan’s stomach dropped out and he had to fight the compulsion to turn around and hide out for a couple hours. As much as he loved Chloe and he knew without a shred of doubt that he was an utter shit (what with being a dirty cop and not making time for his family), it was tough being married to someone who made being good look so easy, especially when the right choice was not always so clear for Dan.

He couldn’t even imagine what it was like for Lucifer. And didn’t that winged-shit from earlier say something about Chloe having some sort of divine purpose or was it she *had* some divine purpose? Holy- was Chloe like some sort of saint or something? Dan’s mind whirled and he somehow felt ten times worse about himself because how could he possibly have ever been good enough for her? And a hundred times more sympathetic towards the devil.

Dan got to Lucifer in time to interrupt the usual, ‘Lucifer!’ shout from Trixie/ ‘Non-manly screech’ from Lucifer. He used his daughter’s momentum to swing her towards base as he wrapped his arm around her shoulders.

“Come on monkey; let’s find you some chocolate cake. Lucifer and Mommy have to talk,” Dan said, while locking eyes with Lucifer. And understanding passed between them. They weren’t best
friends, they were more like comrades in arms, but they were in this together.

As Lucifer watched the Douch-Daniel led his offspring away, he found himself hesitating. There was something heavy in the air between him and Chloe. He wanted to say something that would be sure to make the detective smile, but words felt like ash on his tongue. Chloe appeared to being having similar difficulties because she had also stopped in her tracks and was staring at Lucifer.

Usually he loved having all of Chloe’s attention on himself, it made everything seem more vibrant and important, but now it was having the opposite effect. And he realized it was because Chloe was looking at him like he had died (and not gotten better) or worse – it looked like she was saying goodbye.

Lucifer wanted to back up and not “do” whatever this weird/horrible human thing was. He would rather be fighting neo-Nazis or his brothers again. This –this was unbearable. If he ever went back to being Lord of Hell - which would occur around the 7th of never through the 15th of ain’t going to happen - he would find a way to recreate this feeling for all the human denizens and make things truly wretched down there.

Finally, Chloe let out a sob and she was in his arms. Lucifer wrapped his arms around her and just held her in that odd way that wasn’t about violence or sex. Instantly, the world was right again. Forget aligning Hell, Earth, and Heaven, this is what really mattered.

All too soon, Chloe was pulling away and placing her palm on his stomach, feeling the bullet holes in his clothes, the crusted blood, and the smooth skin underneath. She looked at him again with unshed tears.

“You were dying,” despite her anguish in her face, Chloe’s words were clear, like she had already rehearsed them in her head.

“Yes, love,” Lucifer said hurriedly, he didn’t understand why it felt like he was fighting for something that was quickly slipping out of his grasp. “But I’m fine, just like I always am.”

Chloe shook her head, “You were dying because of me.”

“So?” Lucifer choked. He didn’t know what was wrong with him. He should have a dozen reasons why none of this mattered. Chloe and he should already be trading war stories, making home-made guacamole (they had officially missed Taco Tuesday at this point), and having spectacular sex.

Chloe’s face hardened at his monosyllabic response and she pulled her shoulders back. Someone had to do the right thing here.

“You told me you were the devil, you told me your mother was a goddess, you told me you were once immortal but now you had problems with mortality-,” Chloe started.

“I did, but you never beli-” Lucifer interrupted only to be silenced with a glare.

Chloe continued, but this time her voice was cracking, “But you never told me that I was the reason you were getting hurt. Lucifer, what if something happened to you? You could have died. Why didn’t you tell me?”

Lucifer was silent; there wasn’t even a hint of humor or his usual vibrancy. For the first time in a long, Lucifer felt all of his many many years. Chloe could see something ancient behind his eyes.

“I didn’t tell you because it didn’t change anything,” Lucifer said quietly.
“Of course it changes things!” Chloe exploded. “What we do is dangerous! This isn’t a game.”

“You’re there too,” Lucifer said, his volume of his voice rising to match Chloe’s. “You’re in just as much danger as I am, more so actually. Because I can heal anything, and I have managed to survive this long after facing far worse enemies than a humans with their guns.”

“But you don’t have too,” Chloe responded, this time she was crying. “You could live forever. I want you to live forever. I am- what we are- Lucifer, it’s not worth it. We can’t-”

“Don’t,” Lucifer intoned huskily, “please.”

Chloe only shook her head and started crying harder, “You get hurt when I’m around. You were in pain-”

“The pain,” Lucifer gasped out, “is a thousand times worse every moment I’m away from you. You’re all I think about: When will I see you again? What will we talk about today? How will I make you laugh? Who will you save and I punish? I would suffer far more if you weren’t in my life than any bullet could possibly manage. You make everything worthwhile, so don’t tell me we can’t.”

Chloe stopped crying, but if anything that made Lucifer feel worse. Did he go too far? Why did he feel like he was falling all over again? She looked at the ground and Lucifer could no longer see her face.

“Every moment-?” Chloe said thinking hard on something. She looked up, and Lucifer could tell her mind was set and his devilish heart sank. “Lucifer, on Wednesdays and Thurs-”

“I don’t need Wednesdays and Thursdays. I never did. I’m all yours if that’s what you want,” Lucifer all but begged.

Chloe tilted her head and a soft smile broke through her expression. Lucifer was resolved; he would do whatever it took-

“That’s not what I want,” Chloe stated firmly. “I was just thinking about how you keep inviting me to stop by on your Wednesday and Thursday umm, date nights.”

Lucifer could honestly say this was the most confused he had ever been since the start of time itself. He opened his mouth and closed it, once, twice, and a third time before he could come up with a response.

“Yes, but only if you want to, dear,” Lucifer spoke slowly, not entirely sure where he had missed the turn in the argument.

“You really want me there with you and all of your, ahh... guests, when I'm the opposite of fun? Or at least your kind of fun?” Chloe asked. She was still grinning, but there was a serious note behind the question.

“Obviously! I think I just made it perfectly clear that I’d rather be doing anything with you. And you might surprise yourself,” Lucifer replied, his brow was still furrowed and he reached out to feel her forehead. “I’m sorry, do you have a fever? Have you hit your head?”

Chloe rolled her eyes and slapped his hand away before grabbing it and kissing Lucifer’s palm.

“I don’t want to do things by half measures anymore. I think- I think I want to stop by someday,” Chloe declared. “Just to check it out. I’m probably going to freak out a little, but I want to be with
Something light and airy was expanding in Lucifer’s chest cavity like he was going to be lifted off the ground as weightless as a balloon (he really must get these abnormalities checked out by a doctor, they happened more and more often).

“So were not-” Lucifer didn’t even want to put it into words least it become real.

“No,” Chloe answered, but her eyes quickly became unsure. “Unless you-”

“NO,” Lucifer shouted. He lowered his voice and clarified, “We’re good now?”

Chloe stretched up on her tip-toes and pecked him on the lips, before taking her time in a longer kiss.

Both Lucifer and Chloe were breathless before she was done. Mortality did have some perks.

“Somehow, yes,” Chloe stated while looking at Lucifer like he was the bane of her existence and something unbearably precious all at the same time.

To Lucifer it felt like the eternity he had lived without her was no more than a blink of an eye and all the time that stretched out in front of them was endless and unknown. And that was worth anything.

A helicopter flew overhead, before landing in the middle of the lawn. A short dark-haired man with a glow emanating from his chest stood by impatiently as a leggy red-head stepped out of the aircraft carrying a large case.

“Oh, ding dong,” Lucifer said in a sultry voice. He looked down at Chloe with a toothy grin and a promise of dark deeds. “There is no time like the present, hmm? Would you like to meet Wednesday night right now? And how convenient, that’s today.”
When Pepper Potts was on an airplane watching the battle of New York on channel 21 news or days (days!!) later when she got a text message from Tony requesting parts to his arc reactor a.s.a.p., all she could do was pray that he was ok.

That’s not true, she didn’t pray, she negotiated.

It was a habit she developed during the three months Mr. Stark was missing/presumed dead in Afghanistan and kept up when she discovered that he was Iron Man. She never told anyone about it. It was just something she did to hold back the scream that lived in the back of her throat whenever Tony was in danger.

On most days, she believed hard work and rational well-thought-out choices were what made a difference in the world. But, she was once the personal assistant to the man-child who became Iron Man, so maybe a little new-agey positive thought power couldn’t hurt. Besides, she knew no one was listening.

‘If Tony is ok, I will let him eat pizza four nights in a row without listing all the unhealthy ingredients. Ok, five nights, but only if I hear from him in the next hour.’ ‘I will only make Tony sign one thing per week for the next three months if he makes it home in one piece. If he has a broken bone the number goes up to two.’ ‘I will go dancing with him and promise to wear a shorter heel if he doesn’t put on the suit for a whole week. If he does, I’ll still go dancing with him, but I’m wearing my five inch pumps.’

Pepper descended from the helicopter she borrowed from the U.S. Army (she might have bullied and threatened several Army officials a bit when she demanded an immediate flight to the middle of nowhere - no questions asked - while the entire country was under a travel ban. And it’s possible the general may have started crying just a little before he finally gave in) carrying a metal briefcase with the whositswhatsits and thingamajigs listed in text message when she saw Tony Stark nervously waiting for her.

He looked tired and worn, but gloriously alive and in front of her. And just like that, all of her negotiated promises were forgotten like they always were. Now, she was pissed.

“What the Hell, Tony?” she demanded as she passed the briefcase to him, not noticing his slight flinch at her choice of words.

Within moments, he was rummaging through the pieces and muttering to himself. But Pepper was used to this behavior and didn’t let it slow her down. Luckily, she was one of the few people in the whole world who could tell when Tony Stark was in a science coma and no outside input was entering vs. when he appeared to be distracted but was actually creepily listening to everything around him. Despite the fact he wasn’t looking at her, Pepper knew she had his full attention, which was good because she had a lot to say.

In her flustered soft spoken angry mumbling run-on sentence way, she began the tip of the iceberg of her list of grievances: “You left with S.H.I.E.L.D. last week on the stupid secret Avengers initiative, which by the way, the whole world knows about now, including entire dossiers on you and me, they really need better security, and how does Captain America from the 40s know how to
use the internet anyways? You show up in Germany to fight a Norse god, and then you are in New York City fighting aliens barely a day later. OH! And I’m getting all my updates from the news just like everyone else. J.A.R.I.S. told me you hacked S.H.I.E.L.D., couldn’t you have sent me a little update so, oh, I don’t know; I’m not flying in an airplane when Alien spaceships are zipping around!

“What about Captain-?” Tony tried to ask, finally looking at Pepper, but he shouldn’t have bothered. She had only paused to sort out her thoughts as her emotions bounced from murderous rage to heart breaking despair.

“I have to live with the fact that I missed your call while you flew a nuke through a space portal, but instead of hearing from you directly, I have some nameless S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent inform me that you are alive but indisposed. Apparently you were doing things that he can’t tell me which is code for he-is-a-worthless-level-one-agent- and-has-no-idea-what’s-going-on because that is all I could get out of him even after I locked him in a closet for six hours. When I demanded to speak to Phil, he told me – he told me he was dead,” Pepper’s tirade broke at the end.

“Pepper, he’s n-” Tony tried to explain.

“And you want to know the best part?!” She exploded after quashing her distress down. “The first text message I get from you is about having a threesome! So you did have access to your phone this entire time because you blow up my phone with lewd texts and pictures of all sorts. Which was beyond irritating, that is until you go dark again, and I’m left worrying you have some sort of head trauma.”

Tony opened his mouth to say-

“And THEN,” Pepper yelled, “I get a terrifying request for arc reactor parts, which is only that metal thingy that keeps you alive, so no biggie, and coordinates to a secret base that doesn’t exist on any map, which with all the smoke, I could tell was on fire miles away from here!”

Tony closed and opened his mouth several more times, but no sound came out.

“So tell me Mr. Stark,” Ms. Pepper Potts finished calmly, which was all the more terrifying. “Do you have head trauma or are you about to have head trauma?”

Tony’s jaw snapped shut and he took a step back while clutching the metal briefcase like it was a shield. He eyed Pepper’s clenched fists warily.

“Pardon me,” a crisp British accent rang out from the side. Both Stark and Potts turned to look, “Lucifer Morningstar here, how do you do? I believe I was the subject of those text messages.”

A man in a torn and dirty black suit stood in the soft glow of the early morning light. He had pale skin and dark features. Despite the fact he looked like he had been trampled by a stampede of buffalo, he held himself like he was God’s gift to mankind – which couldn’t be further from the truth. And although Tony Stark usually held all the awards in this category, Pepper had to admit that this man might just have the best sex hair that ever existed in all of human history. And he worse, he knew it.

“Oh,” Pepper uttered. She turned back to Tony before replying, “I get it now.”

“The devil’s trio was my idea, but I hope you don’t mind if I make an amendment. That is of course, if we are all agreeable,” Lucifer said saucily, but he kept sneaking glances at Chloe who was standing next to him.
“This is Iron Man and Pepper Potts, CEO of Stark Enterprises,” Chloe spoke dully like someone had just punched her with a brick.

Chloe blinked at the superhero and possibly the most powerful woman in the country before letting out a huff of laughter. She couldn’t help but notice that Pepper’s legs were miles long and Stark? Stark was freaking Iron Man!

“Well naturally!” Lucifer answered brightly his grin stretching from ear to ear. He could taste the desire in the air. “I would hate for you to be bored, detective. And look, I’m not the only one who doesn’t call back in a timely matter. You’ll have so much to talk about with Tony’s dear Pepper.”

Chloe’s eyes narrowed and Lucifer had this odd thought, that maybe, just maybe, he shouldn’t talk so much. Which didn’t make sense at all, but Chloe had that odd vein popping out of her temple again.

“Wait,” Lucifer said slowly as he stared off contemplatively in the distance. His brain finally caught up to his mouth and a little panicky, he shouted, “That’s a terrible idea! Forget I said that.”

“No, no,” Pepper spoke up quickly; even the potential for the best night of her life couldn’t throw her off her game for long. “I could use a little girl talk. I’m sure me and—” Pepper looked at Chloe expectantly but she was still too star-struck to speak so Lucifer had to interject, ‘Detective Chloe Decker of the Los Angeles Police Department.’—“Detective Decker will get along splendidly. I could always use another girl-friend.”

“As long as this new friendship ends in sexy pillow fights, I’m all in,” Lucifer retorted cheekily while nudging Stark who was all but frozen in place. Tony was too afraid to move and discover that this was only a dream.

Pepper was suffering a similar feeling of unreality. To prevent herself from simply drooling at the sight of this perfect male specimen (and let’s face it, a perfect female specimen as well) in front of her, she kept her eyes adverted and mumbled under her breath, “She can’t be crazier than the one that turned out to be a cat-suit wearing Russian assassin.”

“Oh, now that’s an idea!” exclaimed Lucifer. “Not to boast, but I do have a rather large collection of, hmmm, let’s just say, adult costumes back at my place, unless of course you want to go back to yours?”

Lucifer looked at Stark questioningly who merely shrugged his shoulders and looked at Pepper with an expression that could be interpreted along the lines of, ‘we have to sleep somewhere.’ Pepper shook her head fondly and gazed over at Chloe; they shared a moment of perfect woman-to-woman silent communication of ‘I’m in, if you’re in’ that usually led to all the bad behavior that made up history.

“Excellent,” Lucifer replied devilishly. They could practically see his molars his grin was so wide.

“Hold on,” Pepper said while blinking owlishly. Part of her brain was stuck on a broken record loop of Avengers-costumes-sex-Avengers-costumes-sex, so her more rational side was still playing catch-up. “Did you say your name was Lucifer?”

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Less than an hour after Pepper arrived on a helicopter, a jet puttered through the air noisily. It made a high pitched whining sound that would cut off randomly, causing the plane to drop several feet, before turning back on again even louder than before. Also, it looked like a tip of a wing was being
By this time, all the fires on the base had been put out. The S.H.I.E.L.D. personal trapped in their offices had been evacuated from the main building, which had been deemed structurally unsound due to a large crack that stretched down an entire side of it. And there were finally enough trusted agents that not everyone had to be working 24/7 (Maria Hill turned a blind eye to several agents napping on the job after finding out what happened to Agent Leroy).

The occupants in the plane (to be precise, only three people out of the four people in the plane) could see the burned out hulls of buildings and evidence of explosions and gun battles. Suspected HYDRA agents were handcuffed together in rows guarded by an army of S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents led by Nicholas Fury who was barking orders and/or verbal abuse at them. The people in the jet were surprised by how few HYDRA agents there were and wondered if their Intel was wrong.

However, none of that mattered because what held their attention was a certain green and leather clad Norse god next to an overturned truck. He was completely unrestrained and standing less than a hundred yards away from Director Fury who seemed to be resolutely ignoring him.

What was even more unbelievable was the child sitting on top of the overturned truck eating what appeared to be half of a chocolate birthday cake. Loki was bent close to her doing complicated movements with his fingers to produce a magical green light. He shaped the light into animals and other figures. Whatever he was doing or saying had the little girl tipping her chocolate smeared head back in laughter. The only thing the people on the jet could see was some sort of brightly lit lime green horned beast chasing what might have been a tiny man with an even tinier hammer.

Behind the unlikely duo, Agent Espinoza hovered nervously. The woman with red hair flying the jet tilted her head slightly when she saw him. He was so – awkward.

Dan couldn’t seem to stop fidgeting. He stepped forward, he stepped back, he touched his gun, he took his hand off of his gun, he crossed his arms over his chest, he uncrossed them to force them to lie still by his side, and he kept trying to find a moment to say something without interrupting the flow of Loki’s story.

The jet landed (crashed) with a loud thud on the lawn of the base. Bruce Banner wearing shredded jeans that were only being held up with a piece of rope, Black Widow who was rocking a matronly looking dress suit complete with pearls, and Captain America who had half of his uniform burned off for some reason and pushing a restrained man with a black hood over his head all stepped down off the bent and twisted ramp.

“Ok, what the f-?” Bruce started to ask, getting a little green around the edges.

“Hello,” a calm soothing voice interrupted behind them. “You don’t need to worry. He’s on our side now; we’re calling him an extraterrestrial consultant. The devil told him he had to.”

A recently showered Phil Coulson stood in a new pristine suit smiling benevolently at them. The undead S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent might have had a less jarring effect if he hadn’t also had a spiked club hanging from his waist and two fallen cherubs either hovering over head or standing on his shoulder while he sprouted incomprehensible nonsense.

“A Coulson! You’re alive,” Steve shouted. He reached towards Phil only to pause mid-way between them. This was almost too much. He felt-

The man with the hood over his head let out an indecipherable stream of curses causing Captain American to turn back and kick him to his knees with sharp, “Shut-up.”
Black Widow, not one for exuberant celebration no matter how much it was warranted, took stock of the situation.

In their laser focus on Loki, they hadn’t noticed that there were quite a few S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents sporting unconventional weapons. Like Coulson, about half of them seemed freshly washed, but the others, who were still covered in ash, blood and gore, looked like they had gone through, well – hell.

“There were reports coming in from all over about resurrections, but we thought—” Natasha began slowly and as she did the fallen cherub sitting on Coulson’s shoulder belched up a fat cigar he then lit with a snap of his fingers and started puffing away. “—they were crazy.”

Smiling, Bruce crossed the void Steve couldn’t seem to and grabbed Coulson’s hand to shake it. Yep, he was real.

“I knew it! There were too many similarities in all the stories spreading across the internet and didn’t the people in L.A. and Fury himself mention the devil was somehow in play?” Bruce said reasonably. “I mean, a few years back, no one would have believed stories about a giant green monster either, zombies and the devil? Sure why not.”

“Luckily, I don’t want to eat anyone’s brain,” Coulson stated firmly after letting out a chuckle. Spera and Gaudium exchanged confused glances – humans were weird, brains weren’t even tasty. “And the devil’s a pretty decent guy. He’s here so you’ll probably meet him. But I’m more interested in what happened to you. Dr. Banner, you clearly hulked out.”

Bruce snorted, “Only briefly.”

All three Avengers glared down at the hooded man. But then Banner got such a look of despair that Coulson feared the worst. Captain America was the first to notice Coulson’s reaction to this news and he was quick to explain.

“The Hulk didn’t kill anyone. I mean, not anyone who didn’t deserve it,” Steve said in a rush before getting a thoughtful expression on his face. “We also discovered a new way to get the Hulk to turn back into Dr. Banner.”

“Which we will never use!” Bruce cried out in abject despair and torment.

Coulson raised an eyebrow at the outburst.

“Stop whining,” Natasha demanded. “If the devil was really behind the portal in Los Angeles and he’s here…”

“I could ask him to build another one,” Bruce gasped out. His face was glowing with hope.

Now both of Coulson’s eyebrows were raised, but before he could question them further, Gaudium ground out his two cents, “the big boss will help you with whatever you need, smelly human, as long as you are willing to owe him a favor.”

Dr. Bruce Banner looked like he was seriously contemplating the pros and cons of making a deal with the Devil.

“Nope, nope, not happening, out of everything, that is where I draw the line,” Agent Phil Coulson declared, his professionalism finally cracking at the mental image of what Lucifer would want from someone who could turn into the Hulk. It could be anything from help moving furniture to cracking reality itself. “We already have to deal with the fact Barton owes him a favor for the
whole back-from-the-dead-thing. I know I’m going to have nightmares over that alone. What could possibly be that important?”

Natasha displayed a glimmer of concern at the mention of Barton before crushing the emotion under a metaphorical Russian heel. She answered Coulson dispassionately, “It’s the portal opening devices we found in Los Angeles, sir; they were all destroyed. After we were diverted away from base and sent on a wild goose chase, we were almost shot down by HYDRA. One of the wings was clipped and Bruce Hulked out. Luckily, I was able to open the ramp and eject him before he could tear the jet in two. I was then able to somewhat land us in one piece.”

“However,” Natasha looked at a downtrodden Bruce, “the Hulk may have accidentally sat on the devices before I could get the ramp open and completely crushed them. Any remaining pieces were sucked out with him and are currently scattered in the Adirondacks.”

“We were surprised when we found Bruce and not the Hulk among the wreckage,” Steve said jumping in. “It turns out if Dr. Banner is angry at something the Hulk can’t understand, he immediately turns back human.”

“And since the hulk doesn’t care about ‘inter-dimensional rifts’ and ‘quantum mechanics,’ Bruce hasn’t managed to hold onto the Hulk form for more than a few minutes since the crash,” Natasha finished.

“The Hulk did stick around when that guy with the metal armed showed up,” Bruce interjected. He bristled over Black Widow’s comment, she made it sound like he couldn’t get it up-

Natasha and Steve looked at Bruce sideways. Neither one of them had seen this ‘man with the metal arm’ nor were they sure how reliable Bruce’s memories of what happened while he was the Hulk really were.

“So, if we destroy something, umm, sciencey, the hulk goes away?” Phil interrupted, trying to keep track of what they were talking about.

“If you commit an affront against truth and knowledge itself, I guess he does,” Bruce wailed. He had almost been in tears when he found the fragments of the machinery that defied rational thought.

He had tried to find some intact pieces after the crash, but Captain America insisted they all had to go and hunt down whoever attacked them. Steve was lucky the Hulk didn’t care enough to come out because Bruce wanted to kil-

“You don’t want to be the one who does it though,” Steve added seriously. “It turns out Bruce and just a little bit of the Hulk is extremely effective.”

“It wasn’t enough though,” Natasha replied sadly. “We repaired the jet as best we could and found some of the leaders of HYDRA, but we still weren’t in time to save the World Council. They’re all dead sir, and they didn’t come back. It’s worse than anything you can image; we found evidence that HYDRA is everywhere.”

“I have a pretty good imagination by this point. We’ll have to work out a timeline and figure out who died before and after the resurrection incident. Maybe some of them belonged to Hell or maybe it was just bad timing,” Coulson stated which had all three Avengers blinking at him. “I’m sure there is an interesting story behind your two outfits and your, um, friend there. You’ll have to be fully debriefed-”
“Look Trixie, Avengers!” Espinoza could be heard shouting. Loki had taken a breath before diving into another tale about how stupid boorish brothers always needed to be rescued by their smarter handsomer younger siblings, when Espinoza noticed who Coulson was talking too.

Dan had his daughter off of the vehicle - the cake flipped and fell top side-down on the grass - before either Trixie or Loki could protest. To Trixie’s annoyance, not only had her father ruined the cake he was also half carrying her across the lawn. Everyone was staring at them. He was so embarrassing sometimes. Loki was left pouting in the distance.

Dan was begging under his breath to any deity that would listen to, ‘please, please, please, let his daughter like the Avengers better than that crazy psychopath.’ He was starting to find his daughter’s tendency to adopt terrifying biblical and mythological beings alarming.

“It’s Captain America, he has this shield he throws like a Frisbee,” Dan exclaimed to a sullen Trixie once they got in front of them. Trixie looked Captain America up and down and snorted when she saw the shield. Steve hadn’t felt this small since before the serum.

Unperturbed by Trixie’s apathy, Dan continued, “This is Black Widow; she’s like a real life ninja.”

That got Trixie’s attention. She looked up at Natasha in wonder. Even though Black Widow was wearing clothes that wouldn’t look out of place on Trixie’s drabbest grade school teacher, there was something about her that was exciting and dangerous. Maybe she was a chemist and ballerina as well as a ninja, just like Molly McDowell! That’s it, when she got home she was dying all of her Barbies’ hair red, Trixie vowed.

Already, melting under the Trixie-effect, Natasha smiled back at her.

“Hey girl,” Black Widow said with a wink before giving Agent Espinoza a what-the-fuck look. “I didn’t realize it was ‘Take Your Daughter to the Battlefield Day’.”

Getting a chill down his spine, Dan was quick to turn away from the third most terrifying woman he had ever met to point at Bruce and say, “This is Dr. Banner. He turns into an enormous green monster called the Hulk and he can punch space ships that look like terrifying stretched-out armored turtles out of the sky.”

Both Captain America and Bruce Banner’s jaws dropped at this blasé introduction. But Trixie was officially impressed now. She stared at Bruce with such adoration, that he felt his own cheeks grow rosy.

“That. Is. So. Coo-” Trixie began, only to be interrupted by the highest pitched girlish screech imaginable. It was like a Justin Berber concert on steroids, you could practically smell the fan girl.

“You know the Hulk?!” Maze demanded when she bounded up to the group after she finally stopped screaming. “And you didn’t tell me???”

“Ah- What?” Dan stuttered.

Mazikeen was practically salivating as she stared down Banner. If his cheeks were rosy before, they were practically crimson now. He felt the need to grab onto the piece of rope to make sure it was still holding up his pants. He really wished he had a shirt on.

“I want to fight him,” she said in a low voice as she flipped out her knives and started advancing, “now.”
You may have noticed the number of chapters increased. I had to split this chapter up since it was getting too long and overwhelming. I have no ability to gauge how long my mental outlines are in actual words...

I do have maybe half of the next part done (or maybe only 1/3, who knows!), so I'm hoping for another update in a few days.
“Whoa, whoa,” Bruce cried, quickly retreating. Maze spun her knives in a dizzying motion before drawing them back and preparing to strike.

“No, Mazikeen, NO!” yelled Dan. He was the only one to move.

Steve and Natasha couldn’t comprehend anyone who knew the Hulk was ‘The Hulk’ would threaten him (besides Tony of course) especially when they were only armed with small throwing knives.

Dan grabbed one of Mazikeen’s elbows and tried to pull her back but was only yanked forward by super-human strength for his efforts. He crashed into her and tripped over the back of her heels. In a tangle of limbs, they both fell over.

Dan refused to let go of her arm and swatted away the other knife which soared through the air to land in the grass. Mazikeen used her knife-less hand to push directly on Dan’s face, smooshing it into the ground. She kicked out at him, only for Dan to twist his legs around hers, preventing any movement.

To the surprise of everyone standing there dumbly - besides Coulson and Trixie of course - Maze dropped her face down to eye-level with Dan, switched to her half rotting form, and growled.

“Mazikeen,” Dan hollered in a muffled voice, “if you don’t stop pulling this shit, I’m getting a spray bottle filled with water and you won’t like what I do with it!”

In her demonic form, Mazikeen lifted Dan’s head up from the ground by his hair and asked confusedly, “Whassh?”

Before Dan could describe a fantasy world where every time Mazikeen did something wrong Dan got to spritz her with water (like a cat), and most likely have Maze remove his head from his shoulders at the very idea, Chloe interrupted them.

“Maze, Dan, what are you doing? Trixie is here!” Chloe asked sternly. She glared evilly at them while wrapping her arms around her daughter who simply shrugged the offending limbs off to strike the haughtiest pre-teen pose she could manage.

Adults are so stupid, Trixie thought, they always stop things before the interesting part happens. Maybe she should find Loki; he was so funny! Loki also said, that even though he was like really really old, to other Asgardians he was practically still a kid himself. Trixie wasn’t sure she believed him, but wouldn’t it be cool if she, Maze, and Loki hung out together? Maybe they could also invite Black Widow and the Hulk! No parents allowed.

Mazikeen quickly transformed back into her human form before standing, pulling Dan up by his hair while she did so. He let out a stream of, ‘ow, ow, ows,’ that she didn’t notice. Maze faced Chloe and tried to pull off a bashful apologetic pose – she did not succeed.

Chloe stared aghast at her demonic room-mate. What the hell was wrong with her expression? Mazikeen’s eyes were held open way too wide and her mouth was pulled comically downward. Was she having a stroke? Before Chloe could ask Maze if she needed medical attention, she noticed Trixie’s chocolate covered face. Mom-mode turned on and Chloe went to wipe it with the sleeve of her jacket to Trixie’s ever-living horror.
“Oh my gaud, Mo-om,” Trixie whined. “You’re so embarrassing.”

“Have you eaten anything today besides chocolate cake?” Chloe asked, ignoring her daughter’s attitude. Chloe smoothed down Trixie’s hair which the pre-pre-pre teen reluctantly allowed as she slightly leaned into her mom’s touch.

“I don’t know,” Trixie huffed and sighed like she couldn’t be bothered.

“You don’t know?” Chloe asked incredulously before smiling, playfully tugging on a strand of her daughter’s hair, and grabbing her hand. “Come on monkey; let’s go find you some real food.”

Trixie allowed herself to be led away by her mom even though she was far too old for hand holding. She wasn’t a baby but there were a lot of mean looking people outside that made her stomach twist uncomfortably. Earlier, if Loki hadn’t started telling her stories, she might have been too afraid to even eat the chocolate cake.

But she didn’t want to think about that. If her parents knew she was scared, she might never be allowed back, which was unacceptable! Her dad worked with real superheroes and if she hadn’t already set her heart on being President of Mars that would be her future dream job. Besides, right now her hunger was winning out over her fear.

She bet she could get her mom to make her a sandwich with Hawaiian bread in that huge kitchen her dad showed her. Besides, the stale old cake they found hadn’t even been that good - not like the one that Lucifer got her for her birthday.

That was the best chocolate cake Trixie ever had. It was so rich and creamy and made her fingers and toes curl in pleasure just thinking about it. Part of Trixie wondered if any other chocolate cake would ever compare. Oh well, Lucifer would just have to get her another one.

Before Chloe and Trixie could get more than a few steps away, Trixie turned back around to wave and call out, “Bye Lucifer, bye Maze, bye Daddy, bye Black Widow, bye Mr. Hulk-” she looked at the five other people (two which had wings, one with a black hood over his head, one man in a suit with a spiked club, and a blond she already forgot the name of with the Frisbee) and didn’t want them to feel left out “-bye everyone else.”

Chloe also looked back to glare one last time at Dan and Maze so she missed the moment when they walked by the Trickster god and Trixie snuck her free hand in his to drag him along too.

“Come on Loki, mom is going to make us sandwiches,” Trixie chirped to a bemused god.

Dan could only watch helplessly as his daughter walk away hand-in-hand between his ex-wife and the psychotic maniac who attacked New York City.

“I’m the bad parent??” Dan asked to no one. But Maze also seemed to share his sentiment.

“Humans,” she muttered. “I bet I’m getting burnt toast for breakfast for weeks. You think demons are vindictive? We’ve got nothing on you lot.”

“Agent Espinoza,” Captain America barked, “what the f-”

“This must be the bartender turned bounty hunter,” Natasha stated coolly, saving Steve from running his golden boy image.

Steve’s mouth snapped shut but he was still feeling a little miffed. He couldn't explain why, but he suspected that he had just been dealt a huge insult by the small child - she remembered everyone’s
Coulson was trying to calm down Bruce who appeared to be coming out of a panic attack. Maze looked over at the red-head in interest.

Natasha turned her penetrating gaze from Maze to Lucifer before continuing, “That must make you the ex-wife’s boyfriend.”

Delighted by perhaps the most informal titles that had ever been assigned to him, Lucifer turned to Dan with a grin, “You talk about us!-” the grin turned positively evil “-you must miss us.”

Dan could practically see the wheels and cogs spinning in Lucifer’s brain. That could not bode well. He did not want to know what sort of ridiculous plots the devil was coming up with. Espinoza started shaking his head and wagging his finger without really understanding what he was protesting.

Distracted by Lucifer, he missed Mazikeen stalking up to Natasha until they were almost inches apart.

Natasha, not one to back down, held her ground while this creature leaned in close enough to kiss. No, it wasn’t trying to kiss her, but smell her. Mazikeen seemed to be inhaling all of Natasha’s being as she almost purred with pleasure. And- was she really? Yes, the demon was looking down the blouse Black Widow had borrowed from a now dead World Council member.

Affronted, Natasha was on the verge of violence even though she had seen Mazikeen turn into a half-dead thing and watched her carelessly threatening Bruce. This was not someone she should be going head-to-head with, but she couldn’t help herself. Natasha’s hand inched for the knife hidden on her back. Even interrogating Loki hadn’t made her feel this off balance. Something about Mazikeen set her teeth on edge.

As if sensing this, Mazikeen’s flashed a sharp grin and sized Natasha up.

“I’ll fight her instead,” Mazikeen stated matter of factly as she locked eyes with Black Widow.

‘Oh, I dare you,’ Natasha thought viciously as she felt a wave of goose bumps trail down the back of her spine. She pulled out her own serrated knife. But it wasn’t fear she felt, quite the opposite. The demon looked similarly affected and they both tilted their head in unison. Steve started to protest.

“Oh! Or both,” Mazikeen finished as her eyes brightened. Behind her, Lucifer nodded at the sensibleness of these actions.

“Can you keep it in your pants for 5 seconds?!? These are my coworkers. I have to work with them,” Dan moaned.

Maze looked back at Dan who, despite his protest, was staring at the indentation in the grass where his head had been smashed moments earlier like it was the most interesting foliage in the world. She turned back towards Natasha whose steely gaze seemed to be focused on everything but Dan. Maze whipped her head back and forth several times between the assassin and the ex-cop before it clicked.
“So you two-” Maze trailed off suggestively causing Dan to slowly raise his head to look at her, a move he instantly regretted.

Maze had turned to face Dan - her back to the Black Widow – with the stupidest smile and two big thumbs up. To Dan’s horror, the demon winked at him and made increasingly obscene gestures with her hands. This was worse than that reoccurring nightmare where he was late to class, there was a surprise pop quiz, he was naked, and Natasha was the principal. Dan started praying for another Hell Gate to open or a portal filled with Chitauri to swallow him whole. An unhelpful part of his mind pointed out that at least both Maze and Natasha had put their knives away.

Natasha coughed lightly. She might not be able to see what Maze was doing but she could read every wince and twitch on Dan’s ever increasingly crimson face. ‘Poor sod,’ the red head thought to herself, if they ever did do anything (which they never would), she would eat him alive like any good spider. However, to Natasha’s surprise, instead of fainting, crying or going postal and mowing down the demon in front of him with his assault rifle, he pulled his shoulders back and stood up straight.

“Mazikeen. Spray Bottle. Water,” hissed Dan through gritted teeth. He pointed at her and jerked his thumb back towards Lucifer to get her away from Black Widow. He wanted to be able to keep an eye on both sex-crazed divine/damned beings at once.

Still not sure what exactly he was threatening her with, a bemused Maze trudged over to Lucifer. She eyed Dan warily once she was over there, planning on asking Trixie what Dan was talking about when she saw her next. She and Trixie always puzzled out all the strange things adult humans did together.

Natasha found herself erasing the word ‘never’ out of her vocabulary as she studied Agent Espinoza with new eyes. She wasn’t even mad her usually infallible instincts couldn’t get a good read on one Dan Espinoza. He was unexpected. It felt like- Budapest.

She couldn’t help but be impressed, not that anyone would be able to tell. Except for Coulson that is, he was hiding a smile behind a hand. It was always great when his kids, err, agents found someone.

“I think-” Steve Rogers said baffled “-I’ve missed something.”

“Captain Rogers, I can explain-” Dan began only to be interrupted by a gasp from Maze. For once Dan was not even annoyed. He had no idea where to begin explaining what was going on.

“Captain Steve Rogers, like Captain America from World War II? The original?” Mazikeen asked breathlessly.

At Steve’s reluctant nod, she started whacking Lucifer’s chest and pointing excitedly. She spoke to the devil in a low guttural language not even Natasha or Bruce could understand. Lucifer studied Steve up and down attempting to look disinterested, but he seemed to come to the reluctant conclusion that he would tap that ass any day of the week.

“What- what now?” Dan shrieked in a higher pitched voice then he intended.

“We know him,” Mazikeen answered with a smirk, also admiring Captain Roger’s Dorito-like physique. She was still trying to draw Lucifer into her rabid like excitement and was currently tugging on his sleeve like a little girl in a pet shop. Lucifer was less than impressed.

“Ma’am, I can say with all certainty that I have never met you or your friend in my entire life,”
Captain America responded briskly. He was still off balanced by the little girl’s dismissal (in the ‘40s the Captain America routine always played so well with that age group) and he dark-eyed stare of the man made him uncomfortable. It made him feel like he was just a piece of meat. Sensing her teammate’s unease, Natasha shifted protectively in front of him.

“We don’t know you personally, but we do know Of you,” Lucifer begrudgingly admitted. “Shouldn’t you be through the pearly gates suffering through an eternity of boredom already? You are quite fit for a human your age. We had no idea you were the original Captain America.”

Lucifer was oddly reticent. He was playing the part of his usual lascivious self but there was a twinge of annoyance behind his normal good-natured flirting, Dan thought before becoming horrified with the realization that he knew the devil enough categorize his flirtatious behavior.

“I was frozen,” Steve responded absently. After seeing the woman’s transformation, he had a suspicion about who these people were even though his mind rebelled against the idea. He used to go to Sunday school after all.

“What’s it to you? A lot of people know who I am. I’m told there is a museum,” Rogers continued suspiciously.

“Your teammate isn’t the only one around these parts familiar with you. We didn’t have to learn about you from a museum,” Lucifer snorted before drawling out, “Do you remember a man named Johann Schimdt?”

Steve startled so bad he nearly crushed the collar bone of the kneeling man with the black hood over his head. Somehow in the chaos Steve forgot he was still gripping the shoulder of his prisoner, until the man let out a cry of pain. The unexpected cry was enough to prevent Steve from falling back into his memories, but hearing that name made Steve feel like his veins were still filled with ice. Why would they ask-?

“He was a rather notorious, hmmm, guest of my domain,” Lucifer continued thoughtlessly, unaware of any mental anguish he was causing. “He never shut-up about yo-”

“He showed up in a beam of light!” Mazikeen exploded. Unlike Steve, she was almost vibrating out of her in glee at the thought of the Red Skull. “At first we didn’t even realize he was human, he looked like our Lord.”

“He did Not look like me,” Lucifer shot back miffed. “I have a nose! And we figured it out eventually. He was put in his own section of Hell and even got personal attention from yours truly. That is, until I was so irritated by his whining I had to leave the torturing to Mazikeen.”

Steve’s jaw had practically hit the floor and he couldn’t help staring at Lucifer, wondering if he had the same type of mask Schmidt had.

“I had to listen to eons of ‘Captain America this’ and ‘Steve Roger’ that. It makes one wonder who is really being punished,” Lucifer shuddered at the thought.

“He does look like you,” Mazikeen muttered and got a wistful expression on her face. “Sometimes I would pretend he was you when I tortured him.”

Looking comically appalled as he stared at his uppity underling, Lucifer had an expression that wouldn’t look out of place on a grandmother who heard someone same ‘damn’ in a church. Mazikeen never acted this way when they were in still in Hell. Had she?

Captain Rogers shook himself. He was about to lose it, but this time he was careful to remember the prisoner next to him, least he accidentally rip his arm off or something.
“I’m sorry, are you two actually admitting to torturing people?” Steve asked incredulously. He shifted, preparing for a fight. There were some things in this world that Captain America would absolutely not stand for even if it was about someone as vile as Schmidt.

“Of course I did. I’m the Devil,” Lucifer responded, turning towards Rogers looking confused. “I’m sure you, like all good people, didn’t retaliate against an enemy or said the words ‘don’t worry he’ll get what’s coming to him’ because you believe in some sort of cosmic justice.”

In the distance, Maria Hill was talking to Director Fury who had stopped berating the HYDRA Agents to stare evilly over at them. No one noticed since they were so enthralled by Lucifer’s Luciferness.

“I am the misery-ever-after at the end of all of their stories, or at least, I was before I retired. You’re welcome,” Lucifer finished with a bow.

One could almost imaging hearing crickets at this pronunciation. No one was talking.

Steve looked like he had a bad taste in his mouth as he tried to grapple with the moral implications. He had always believed in a higher power and took comfort in the idea the little guys were being looked after. But to stand in front of the force responsible for punishing the evil and to have that force suggest he did terrible things so Rogers and other ‘good people’ could keep their hands clean… it made Steve feel complicit.

“Hey, if you have a problem with the system, take it up with my Dad. He created it,” Lucifer said filling the silence. He felt an unusual wave of self-consciousness before it was washed away with the thrill at the idea of Captain America telling God off. “Please do.”

“Where the fuck have you been?” growled Fury, making everyone jump. He and Hill had somehow snuck up on the group and stood only a yard away.

Fury held a tablet tightly in his gloved hand. Hill eyed the device warily. She was still using it and needed it back. She had no idea why Fury felt the need to grab electronics out of people’s hands instead of just looking at them with his eyes-err, eye. The tablet seemed to let out a weak metallic screech of protest at being man-handled so roughly.

“And why-” Fury hissed, clenching his fist. This was too much for the delicate screen. There was a crunch and a pop; the blue glow died after the machine gave off on last whirl. Maria Hill face palmed in despair. “-can I read my bio on Wikipedia?”

“I’m, I’m not sure what that is, sir,” Steve answered guilelessly, “but the devil-”

“I don’t care, he’s old news!” roared Fury. He waved the blank cracked screen in Steve’s face. “What is this?”

Steve was clueless how to answer this question or why Fury expected him to know. Was this a test?

Maria Hill was glaring up at the heavens. Now that she knew someone was up there, it was somehow more satisfying to shift all the blame on divine forces.

Natasha coughed and stepped fully in between Fury and Rogers. In fairness to Rogers, Black Widow hadn’t taken the time to fully explain the scope of concepts like the “internet” and “social media” when they devised their plan…

“We had to dump everything online, sir. It was the only way to expose HYDRA. Their reach is
unfathomable. There is no way we could keep a lid on this,” Natasha reported professionally.

She kept her expression stony as the Director sputtered unintelligibly. Natasha would never admit it, but there was a small part of her that delighted in watching Fury squirm. She foolishly caught Mazikeen’s eye and saw her smirk. It was like the demon knew exactly what she was thinking. Black Widow couldn’t help it, the side of her mouth flashed upwards in a quick smile.

“…but…but, secrets! Romanova, secrets!” Director Fury choked out, unable to articulate how it felt to be the leader of a covert organization that that was now trending on Twitter. He looked like he was about to cry.

“Sir, if I could continue my report,” Agent Hill ground out as she snatched her broken tablet out of Fury’s limp fingers. “Initial reports suggest this breach might not be as disastrous as you might think.”

“In fact,” she continued nasally, “several analytics think there couldn’t have been better timing.”

She paused to sadly stroke the tablet before calling through her radio for another one. She had just gotten all the personalized setting just right on this one.

Everyone else stared at her owlishly, waiting. She finally looked up to notice all the blank stares. Maria Hill rolled her eyes before explaining.

“The world was already reeling over the existence of aliens and superheroes when millions upon millions of recently dead people were resurrected all talking about Hell, demons, Angels and the Devil,” Maria spoke dryly. “The fact that there is a secret organization charged with protecting Earth – a fact, people already surmised when they saw our Agents fight alongside the Avengers – has been infiltrated by a Nazis sect, is actually the least weird thing that happened this week.”

Director Fury turned to no doubt continue lecturing the three Avengers when Maria interrupted again.

“We actually have significant advantage here because the information leaked does not include three very important things: the existence of the Devil on Earth, the names of the Agents who were resurrected, and the fact Prince Loki – um, defected to our side,” Hill said simply. “No one besides the people on this base is privy to that knowledge.”

Fury blinked his one good eye as an explosion of possibilities bloomed in mind. That would mean he had his own personal army of trusted Agents no longer registered in the system, a god and the devil on his side. The things he could do... Fury wasn’t the ultimate spy for nothing.

“Are you sure?” the Director questioned gruffly to hide the giddiness he felt.

“We never had a chance to fill out any reports before Rogers, Banner and Romanova dumped everything,” Hill replied, nodding at Daniel. “Even things like Agent Espinoza’s promotion to a level seven agent aren’t known.”

“Also, we didn’t come here empty handed,” Rogers shouted, finally remembering the figure kneeling by his side. He tore off the black hood revealing Councilman Alexander Pierce. “This is the bastard that tried to shoot our jet down.”

“Councilman Pierce is also one of the leaders of HYDRA,” Natasha reported. “He had the rest of the council killed.”

Pierce was red-faced, sporting several bruises and had a trail of spittle drying on his chin. He
looked at the people around him like they were the crazy ones even though he was the one that resembled a rabid dog. Any sort of insult or threat died when Pierce caught sight of a very much alive Coulson holding a clubbed spike with his two winged side-kicks around him. It turns out Alexander Pierce’s mouth can do a remarkable impression of a fish out of water.

“Hmmm,” Fury stared down at his once friend with only hatred. They lost a lot of good people in the HYDRA attack. Death tolls were still coming in and some bases were lost entirely.

With a gesture of his head and a few curt orders, Pierce was surrounded by S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents. They dragged him after Fury who was already stalking towards the base. As if as an afterthought, the Director shouted orders over his shoulder at the remaining Avengers, barely caring that they were still here.

“Coulson, Espinoza - debrief the late arrivers and bring them up to speed. I’m going to be busy for awhile. We have so much to discuss,” Fury spat at Pierce.

“Can we help?” Mazikeen asked bounding up to the director. Lucifer caught up to them at a more leisurely pass. “Lucifer and I can give him a taste of what he’ll experience in Hell.”

Fury’s eye narrowed as he calculated the pros and cons. A very small part of him, that he sometimes dubbed his inner Coulson, reminded him that S.H.I.E.L.D. were supposed to be the good guys…

“Actually, I’ll leave the fun to Mazikeen,” Lucifer said smoothly. Maze pouted; she missed the good-old-days. “I wanted to discuss a certain Agent Espinoza and his future at S.H.I.E.L.D. I have some ideas of how he can be of most use to both of us.”

Fury’s insides went to ice. There is one thing he would never do and that’s sell out a fellow S.H.I.E.L.D. agent. He couldn’t imagine the devil wanted anything good with Agent Espinoza. It was amazing how easy it was to overlook how dangerous Lucifer could be with his disarming dapper charms. The words, ‘over my dead body,’ were on the tip of his tongue when he heard a snippet of a conversation that frightened him down to his core.

“-finally get you to sign my vintage trading cards. I do hope they survived the blast OK. I left them in the lockers,” Coulson could still be heard over the distance.

“You didn't have them on you when you-” Steve asked confusedly. Fury started two timing it to the base doors. He didn’t care if he had to walk through the crumbling atrium to escape.

“-died?” Coulson finished for Captain America. “Oh God no. Can you image? I might have gotten blood on them.”

Fury couldn't hear what was said next, but Coulson's cry of disbelief rang out, and he could feel Natasha’s eyes boring into the back of his skull. He didn’t dare turn around to look.

“We can talk about whatever you want,” Fury said to the devil next to him. “I find myself in the need of a favor.”

“Excellent,” Lucifer replied with a devilish grin.
On the way to Fury’s office, Maria Hill passed by a dozen robed figures wearing enormous goat masks. Each goat costume gave the person inside of it at least 2-3 extra feet of height and considering they walked in unison while chanting in deep voices – it was quite the site.

One member broke away from the group and lifted her brown furred goat head streaked with red war paint up to reveal Agent Bob Roberts within. She looked at Maria and down at her watch pointedly.

“Start the service without me,” Agent Hill called out. “I’ll get there as soon as I can.”

No one was quite sure where the costumes had come from, but one day the Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. found hundreds of boxes filled with them in the newly repaired atrium. There were a variety of different goat looks to choose from, everything from black and bristly to fluffy and speckled. Also, inside the boxes were instructions for several Satanic-goat-related rituals the Agents found useful. They were sure the ex-Lord of Hell would be pleased.

Hill made her way through the base to Fury’s ostentatious office, with wall to wall glass windows. Fury’s desk was stubbornly facing away from the sweeping views of the base below. Probably in protest of that wretched statue being built, Maria thought unkindly. The statue was only partially complete and displayed long slim legs. Every time a particularly loud jackhammer sound rang out, Fury would flinch and stare even more furiously at the holographic display in front of him.

“You need to stop them,” Fury ordered by way of greeting.

“Stop who?” Agent Hill asked, long used to Fury’s lack of manners.

He looked up at her coolly but couldn’t stop his whole body from momentarily seizing at the cacophony of construction noises that rattled his windows. He swore they were doing this on purpose. If the construction was consistent, he would learn to ignore it, but instead it sounded out in random intervals. This had to be a new form of psychological warfare. He would have to look into finding the mastermind behind this devious plot and shoot him or her. Or maybe promote them. Or better yet, promote them after shooting them.

“The goat people!” Fury finally managed to hiss out. “They’re having another one of their ‘services’ tonight.”

Sighing and thinking longingly of her downy cream colored goat head back in own office, Hill replied, “Sir, we’ve talked about this. Freedom of religion allows people to have the right to practice their faith.”

“They’re having orgies,” Fury spat, “on base!”

Satanism was the fastest growing religion on Earth as tales of Lucifer’s rescue of the souls in Hell spread. A little over half of the remaining S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents had declared themselves as such even though they, like the rest of the world, didn’t know what they were supposed to do with that fact. There was currently a planet-wide debate happening on all platforms on how to practice a religion which one of its main tenets was to eschew all forms of worship. That’s why the Agents were so relieved when the costumes and instructions had shown up. They made sure to post pictures on Lucifer’s Wobble Page. #DevilTime

“It’s not just about sex. Some of the sermons are quite empowering, sir. Besides, as you well know,
the number of sexual partners has nothing to do with damnation,” Hill droned out in a bored tone.

There was numerous websites devoted to this topic: the most popular being damnedornotdamned.com. Theology had risen to the ranks of hard science and was now classified with Physics or Biology because there was quantifiable data. Theologist did case studies on every resurrected and non-resurrected human.

The exact nano-second all the souls started to be diverted to Hell was discovered (with help from the data dump of all the S.H.I.E.L.D. files – luckily S.H.I.E.L.D. had some rather conniving Lawyers who were able to twist things around into such a mess the court system didn’t know if they should be charging the secret organization with endangering the immortal souls of all the inhabitants on Earth- and create a constitutional nightmare- or thanking them for setting into motion the chain of events that led to the resurrection of millions.) along with the highly contested last good soul that died before Lucifer brought them all back.

Everyone was looked at. Every sin cataloged and studied. Remorse and making amends were mapped in a series of convoluted rules and degrees of right and wrong.

There were controversial cases like the aging serial killer who was brought back after dying of a heart-attack at age 72 while serving multiple life sentences. He killed 16 people in his twenties before being captured, but spent the last 40 years atoning for his crimes and even became a minister behind bars. There was the busload of 32 atheists who careened off a cliff who all came back, but only half of the people who died in a fire during a church leader retreat did.

The dead and damned lives were torn apart ruthlessly. Most of their crimes were obvious. They were, for the most part, a nasty group of killers, rapists and bullies. The wake of destruction they caused could easily be uncovered now that they were known baddies.

However, what really worried people was a smaller subset of damned humans who for all appearances seemed like good people or at least not that bad of people. No matter how much people dug, they could find no crime or terrible act that could explain why these souls were eternally suffering in Hell. People became worried that everything was chaos and there was no absolute line between good and evil. One could end up in Hell by bad luck.

The world nearly snapped into a collective existential despair, until a young mathematician who switched her major to Theology postulated that it wasn’t what they did that damned them. It was what they didn’t do.

And the theory was supported time and time again. All the “do-nothingers” as they were dubbed had been in unique positions where they could’ve done something good, sometimes they were the only person who could’ve done something, and for whatever reason, they chose not to.

This caused a wave of charitable acts across the globe. But for the most part, what people really cared about was sex. Namely, could they really have as much of it as they wanted? And the answer was, yes, as long as it was an act between consenting adults.

Fury looked at Hill suspiciously before asking slowly, “How exactly do you know so much about the ‘empowering’ sermons?”

Maria Hill was so not having this conversation with her boss and tried to switch topics.

“If you really want to go after a religious group, sir, may I suggest the ‘Goddess Cult’? I don’t think the members are particularly stable,” she interjected. “They go around whispering about the rage of the forgotten goddess. They spread their fear and demand that everyone must appease the
Goddess or suffer her wrath.”

“Fear and wrath I understand,” Fury stated firmly. “I can work with those emotions. Free love-” Fury shuddered at the idea.

“That fucking statue is an eyesore,” snapped Hill before tagging on a belated, “sir.”

They both turned to the construction project outside and even Fury had to admit Hill had a point. The Charlotte Richards’ statue was going to cast a shadow on the entire base once it was complete. The legs were already two stories high. And the worst thing of all was the members of the goddess cult were demanding one for every S.H.I.E.L.D. base as part of their religion.

“If that’s all, sir?“ Hill asked before muttering under her breath, “I’m going to miss the entire orgy at this rate.”

“No, that is not all, Agent Hill,” Fury barked out while trying really really really hard to pretend he hadn’t heard the last sentence.

“We need to discuss Agent Espinoza,” the Director stated.

“Ah, yes,” Hill replied.

In exchange for a complete set of Captain America vintage playing cards in mint condition, Fury had agreed to certain terms regarding Agent Espinoza’s next assignment.

The LA Police Department now had not only a consulting Devil but also a consulting S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent, undercover of course. Dan basically got his old job back while still answering to Director Fury.

Director Fury was still trying to work out the devil’s angle, because this “favor” seemed too good to be true. He had the Agent he trusted most to get the job done working in close proximity to the celestials in L.A., upon their request!

Fury just couldn’t wrap his head around it. Did the devil just enjoy psychologically torturing Espinoza that much? Did he do it just to please that annoyingly likable child? A very quiet part of Fury whispered that it seemed like Lucifer sometimes had a hard time making friends, and Dan was one of the very few people that might actually have that title. Fury mentally slapped himself at the absurdity. It had to be the child.

In fact, part of the deal involved requiring Agent Espinoza to attend (on time) all normal parent related duties. From parent-teacher conferences, to school concerts and birthday parties. Espinoza is lucky Fury didn’t make him sign a contract in blood, considering the fact his daughter was possibly the second-coming of the savior or whatever religious title you wanted to give to her. Fury was not dealing with another super-powered being with daddy issues.

He was sick and tired of Earth being treated as a time-out for overpowered children throwing tantrums. After Thor, Loki, Lucifer, Amenadiel, and hell, you could probably throw Stark in that grouping as well, Fury had seen the light. He made organizational-wide policy changes that allowed more parental leave for S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents. Fury was not going to be responsible for the next generation of super-villain.

“He seems to be settling in fine. He enjoys his work as a police officer and he hasn’t tried to kill Lucifer yet,” Hill reported. “He only begs Romanova to reassign him to some godforsaken warzone or cesspool of humanity every once and awhile. We decided to allow him to take one mission
abroad every month to give him a break.”

“Hmm,” Fury hummed, he too took his vacation time by working some off-the-books black ops mission. “And the Mind Stone?”

“Stalled,” Maria answered not annoyed but also not not annoyed. “Agent Espinoza seems very reluctant to experiment with it at all. He states he is holding onto it, but that’s it.”

“Hm,” Fury grunted, slightly impressed with Dan’s resolve.

Despite all initial assessments of Agent Espinoza’s average-ness, there was nothing average about his file anymore. He stood up to gods, fought aliens, had close, almost familial, ties with the devil, he was capable of resisting Azrael’s blade and the Mind Stone, and his daughter was a divine miracle. One might almost say that Espinoza was a superhero himself. Almost.


But Maria Hill didn’t move. Fury tried to sort through some digital files but eventually gave up under Hill’s unrelenting stare. He motioned for her to get off her chest whatever was bothering her.

“Is that really all, sir?” She asked. “Hydra isn’t gone. Thanos is still out there. Shouldn’t we be recruiting Lucifer and Amenadiel for more active spots on the Avengers? You just let them go back to L.A. like nothing happened.”

Now it was Fury’s time to sigh.

“Agent Hill, when we call upon the other Avengers to defend Earth I don’t feel a need to make sure it is OK with their mother first before asking them to do so. You do remember who Lucifer and Amenadiel’s mom is, right? Even if I wanted to risk the wrath of the Goddess, there is the matter of Detective Decker because it is equally likely that she will show up uninvited or Lucifer will bring her along for, I don’t know, shits and giggles, making both fallen angels effectively useless,” Fury growled. “Let them play human in L.A. If the time comes when we need them, we’ll call.”

Fury held up a hand to ward off any other protest from Hill.

“The only exception is the demon. Although, we have to coordinate missions around her baby-sitting duties and her fees are a little pricey. We aren’t exactly getting the same funding we used to,” Fury admitted.

A lot of governments had problems giving money to an organization that was once led by Nazis. And the ones that didn’t have problems giving money to Nazis were scrutinized even harder by S.H.I.E.L.D.

Also, despite everything that happened, all the witnesses and proof of the existence of aliens and other realms there were still people (and scarily enough, there were lawfully elected people) who denied that the incident ever happened or there were any problems at all.

“And we have to pay the shrink,” Agent Maria Hill added.

“We have to pay the shrink,” Director Fury agreed.

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There is a gold-plated sign on a door of an office in L.A. It reads: ‘Actual Therapist to the Devil
said therapist was warily eyeing the two pointed tips on the very long horned helmet of the prospective client in front of her. How had he gotten them through the door?

“Do I frighten you?” Loki asked in a deep alluring voice. Luckily, Lucifer still beat him in the irresistible charm category for sex appeal but it was a close call.

Dr. Linda Martin assessed Loki clinically but couldn’t help her eyes sliding back upwards to the horns. Even Lucifer hadn’t had horns! Loki smirked at her as he sat on her couch in his full Asgardian Armor.

“Of course not,” Dr. Martin replied easily. “I want you to feel comfortable here. If wearing the helmet helps you feel secure, I invite you to wear it to every session. In time, we’ll investigate why it helps you feel safe. It can’t be for physical protection, since we both know how strong you are, so perhaps it’s an emotional guard? There are studies about the over-compensation—”

“I am Loki, Prince of Asgard,” he spat, his smile long gone for his face. “How dare you compare me to humans and there is nothing ss-afe about me, you pathetic mewli—”

A loud thump on the other side of the wall and a growl made Loki swallow the rest of his words. OK, Linda amended in her mind; there possibly was a physical threat to Loki as Mazikeen hollered out, “No insulting the doctor.” The demon had insisted on being there through Loki’s therapy session. He was lucky she wasn’t perched on the couch with him, sharpening her knives.

Linda watched Loki’s expression bounce back and forth across his face from rage to fear and back to rage again. There was a touch of sadness and finally wary acceptance. There was something about Loki that seemed so old and so young all at once. Dr. Linda Martin took an oath to help people. And if he let her, she wanted to help Loki too.

“Let’s start over,” Dr. Martin spoke calmly as she stood up from her desk and reached out a hand to the trickster god. “I’m Dr. Linda Martin, at your service.”

Loki eyed it and then her, looking for the trap. Never taken his eyes off the doctor, he used his magic to change his armor to a high-end human outfit. She didn’t even flinch – he had nothing on Lucifer after all.

“I am Loki,” he proclaimed politely and shook her hand gently. “You come highly recommended.”

Linda smiled, smoothed down her skirt as she sat across from Loki, and picked up a pen and notepad.

“Let’s begin,” she stated.

works inspired by this one: Satan Does Stark by FluffyGlitterPantsDragon

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