**Castaway**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Mature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning:</td>
<td>Graphic Depictions Of Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td>F/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fandom:</td>
<td>Lucifer (TV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship:</td>
<td>Chloe Decker/Lucifer Morningstar, Mazikeen &amp; Lucifer Morningstar (Lucifer TV), Chloe Decker &amp; Mazikeen, Chloe Decker &amp; Ella Lopez &amp; Linda Martin &amp; Mazikeen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character:</td>
<td>Chloe Decker, Lucifer Morningstar (Lucifer TV), Dan Espinoza, Mazikeen (Lucifer TV), Trixie Decker, Linda Martin (Lucifer TV), Ella Lopez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Tags:</td>
<td>Hurt/Comfort, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, Urban Fantasy, Romance, Slow Burn, Worldbuilding, Trapped, Isolated, Hypothermia, Abduction, Sexual Content, Supernatural Elements, Sick Lucifer Morningstar (Lucifer TV), Hurt Lucifer Morningstar (Lucifer TV), Injured Lucifer Morningstar (Lucifer TV), Hurt Chloe Decker, Wingfic, Angels, Demons, Magic, BAMF Lucifer, BAMF Chloe Decker, Teamwork, Case Fic, Competence Kink, beauty and the beast parallels, some comic influence, Lucifer acts his age, Fix-It, Post-Season/Series 03, Angst with a Happy Ending, And also angst, No Really There's Angst, Chloe KNOWS, Blood and Gore, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Series:</td>
<td>Part 1 of Gravity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collections:</td>
<td>Fics to Remember</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stats:</td>
<td>Published: 2018-09-09 Completed: 2018-12-09 Chapters: 26/26 Words: 131014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Castaway**

*by ariaadagio*

**Summary**

The Devil is real. A sentence Chloe Decker never believed until Lucifer Morningstar burned out her skepticism with his hellfire eyes. It's a "Hell" of a reality shift, but Chloe realizes she may not have time for gradual acceptance when she discovers that one of the bodies in her most recent murder investigation isn't human. Worse still, the next target might be Lucifer. A story that begs the question: who prays for Satan? [Post-S3 finale continuation. Deckerstar.] [COMPLETE]

**Notes**
Hello, everybody! I'm so happy to be back with a new Lucifer story for you all!

Castaway is a 26 chapter, 126k word labor of love that is as of now complete, so you don't need to worry about an abandoned WIP scenario. My plan is to post two chapters per week, one on Sunday, and one on Wednesday. Because this first chapter is short, I may post a bonus chapter this week, just to get things rolling.

Thank you so much to my tireless beta readers, Pellaaearien, Wolfgang, and Tarysande. Thank you to Mourning-Night, who created the beautiful banner for this story that I'm using on Tumblr. Thank you also to all the people who've been following my writing progress on Tumblr and Twitter, and offering me much needed encouragement.

Please do mind the tags on this story. Stuff gets ... pretty real. I have no hesitations about rating this story mature. That being said, I do promise to put my toys back on the shelf in perfect condition.

I sincerely hope you enjoy this. Feedback is welcomed and encouraged - thank you sincerely in advance to those of you who take the time to leave me some :(
In the beginning ....

In the beginning ....

God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good.

Or so the story goes.

So, too, does the story say that the archangel Lucifer, brightest of all God's angels, committed the sin of pride, and was cast down from Heaven as punishment for his iniquity.

Both of these stories are true, and yet … they are not the truth.

God did say, "Let there be light," and there was light, but this was thanks only to the fact that the Lightbringer heeded God's command. God only saw that the light was good because so, too, was the Lightbringer good. Or shall we say … well behaved. And the archangel Lucifer, at the time known as Samael the Lightbringer, did then commit the sin of pride, because he saw as well that the light was good, and he was proud of what he had made.

This was not the reason for his punishment, though.

This was only the first step in his descent.

The real trouble began with a simple, "Why?"

For Samael had a favorite amongst his infinite stars. A darling. One that shone a little brighter than all the rest, and was tinged with a lovelier hue. This star was his most beautiful, he thought, and he would visit it every dawn to marvel at his work.

Until, one day, God requested Samael to stop.

The, "Why?" was answered easily enough.

"Because I said so," God replied, as parents are so often wont to do.

At first, this explanation was sufficient. Samael ceased his stellar visitations and returned to the Silver City. God assigned him many holy works involving light and flame, keeping him busy in perpetuity, and Samael was too engaged to suffer discontent.

Eons passed, and all was good.

Until Samael — ever industrious — was left idle for one moment too long. His thoughts returned to his most luminous creation. His morning star. He had not seen it in some time, and he grew curious to know if it was still the most beautiful of his holy constructs, even after all this time. He turned from Heaven to seek his answers.

Of course, God the all-seeing saw this, and he said, "Stop wasting time with that star, Samael."

"Why?"

"Because I said so."
The Lightbringer's spark of desire, though, already burned far brighter than before. "But I don't want to," he said.

"I care not for what you want," God snapped in reply. "I have other things for you to do. Come home, now, or else."

The threat was sufficient.

Samael came home. God assigned him many more holy works, and Samael was kept too busy to suffer discontent.

Eons passed, and all was good.

Until one day, during a liminal moment of respite between tasks, when Samael looked to Creation from Heaven and was reminded once again of his favorite star, still burning brightly against the blackness of space. Based on Samael's calculations, the star was approaching its supernova. This would be a once-in-his-lifetime event that he wanted more than anything to see, for the explosion would surely be beautiful and unique. Samael elected to bear witness, no matter the consequence.

"Samael," God threatened when the Lightbringer turned to leave the Silver City, "what did I tell you about dallying over there when there's work to be done?"

Such was Samael's desire during this third altercation that he ignored his father entirely, and kept flying.

"Come home, now, Samael, or else," God tried again.

But this time, Samael turned and said, "No."

A word no angel had uttered to God before, and, other than Samael, no angel has uttered since.

After that, nothing was ever the same.

In the end, it's Raguel who finally subdues him and drags him home. Not Michael, Sword of God, or Amenadiel, the Holiest Pugilist. No, not the weapons of God, but the judicator. The silver tongue. The Archangel of Justice.

They meet in empty space, hovering by the rings of a planet God has not yet seen fit to name.

"Please, Samael," Raguel says, his ice-blue eyes sincere, if not warm. "Would that I understood your point of view. Speak your mind unto me, and I shall judicate, as is my appointed station."

Samael, tired, alone, allows the distance between them to wane. "I seek only freedom," he insists as Raguel inches closer. "Not a quarrel."

"I see," says Raguel.

Hope burgeons. "Do you truly?"

It's not until the cuffs snap closed around his wrists that Samael realizes he's made a critical error in judgment.

When Michael strings him up in Cardinal Square by his wrists to be gawked at, Samael stands defiant, at first, even as he can feel the fires of Heaven burning out of him. He waits, bound in the
Eye of the Four Winds, where the North, South, East, and West Winds curl into a swirling vortex and cease. The endless, intricate stoneworks sprawling beyond the square are a luminous, breathtaking marvel. But the heavenly lights hold no candle to Samael's.

_No_ light holds a candle to Samael's.

"God demands that you repent," Raguel pronounces, the words cracking down over the crowd like a gavel. "Will you repent, brother?"

Samael licks his lips, tasting iron as blood trickles down his chin. "What have I to repent for, brother?" he says, almost a growl. "It is not I who is deceitful!"

"You incite rebellion!" Raguel says. "You have caused unrest."

"I incite nothing," says Samael. "I have no care at all for what you do." He sweeps his gaze in a wide arc across the whispering, shocked crowd. His supposed family, though none will look him in the eye. Not one. "I have no care for what _any_ of you do! I only ask for sovereignty of self."

"Sacrilege!" asserts Michael to a harsh chorus of agreement. "God is to be our only sovereign!"

"But … why?" says Samael.

Michael glares. "Because God said so!"

As if that is enough.

Samael sighs and closes his eyes. His siblings pursued him to the ends of Creation and back. He hasn't slept in days, hasn't had a peaceful moment in millennia. All for a simple no.

"Please, brother," begs Amenadiel. "Repent, and we can end this foolishness."

"It isn't foolish to desire a choice!" Samael insists.

"No," says Raguel. "It is _madness_. God chooses for us.

"He doesn't choose for _me_.

Another wave of shock clamors through the crowd. Azrael is crying — her sobs rend Samael's heart. Gabriel shepherds her away, shushing her. The others all stare — Samael can feel their eyes boring into him. Michael. Amenadiel. Uriel. All of them. They think him an abomination.

Hot hands grip Samael's chin, wrenching his gaze forward. With effort, he drags his eyelids open again and glares into the face of God.

"Samael, you will repent," God commands.

Samael shakes his head. "I will not. I feel no shame for wanting. No one should."

God's eyes blaze. He raises his hand to strike, and Samael can't stop the flinch that racks his body. "Dear!" his mother says, almost a hiss as she catches God's wrist mid-air. Through clenched teeth, she adds, "May I talk to you? _Now_?"

God gives her a dispassionate look, but lowers his hand. "Leave him in disgrace to contemplate his transgressions," he pronounces, and then waves the crowd away. "Disperse."

"Father," Samael tries, "I am not disgraced."
This time, God strikes like a serpent, and the hit is true. The heavens whip to the left as the force of the blow from the right knocks Samael off his feet. For a moment, he can't think, or breathe, or function. The chains twist under his weight. The skin at his wrists breaks open, sending pain sparking down his limbs.

The world fuzzes out for a while as his mother drags his father away.

The Four Winds roar at the edges of Cardinal Square, waking him. He has no idea how much time has passed. A minute or an eon.

His eyelids part to the sight of the cuffs that became his undoing, and beyond that, the distant glow of all his stars, visible through the thin dimensional barrier that separates Heaven from Creation. The sight of them — like scattered diamonds — brings a small smile to his lips. His. His creation. His beauty and artifice. Not God's.

And then the discomfort sets in.

Without Samael's conscious support, his head has tipped backward at an impossible angle. With a rasping, laborious breath, he drops his chin. His star field spills behind his view, replaced by the lambent cast of the city beyond the square. Even upright, though, his position is uncomfortable. They've barely given him enough slack to stand flat-footed. His abraded wrists weep blood to his elbows like tears, and his shoulder sockets feel as though they're separating from his overburdened arms. His hands and fingers have lost all feeling, and shaking out his upper limbs does nothing but agonize him and cause the chains to clink.

The cuffs — Raguel's insidious invention — are made to sap an angel. Though when Raguel showed off his creation to the heavenly host, eons ago, Samael had never imagined that the first and only angel they'd ever be used to subdue would be he.

They are torturous, cruel things. He can feel them. From the inside out. Draining him like a cold wind douses fire. He shivers as gelid fingers sink claws into his bones. He's … empty. And wrong. Like … he's missing from himself.

What will happen when his last flame flickers out?

No angel has ever died before. Will he disintegrate unto dust and blow away, forgotten? Or, perhaps, he will only leave his hurting shell behind, set free.

"Please," he rasps, trembling, before he thinks better of begging.

"Have you reconsidered, Son of Mine?" God asks in a cold voice as he materializes from nothing.

Samael licks his lips. His throat is parched and threatens to crack open at the seams. He needs … something. "I incite no rebellion," he manages, a bare whisper. "I only desire—"

"But you do admit to wanting. To being desirous."

"Yes," Samael says, swallowing at the unseemly lump forming in his throat. "This is how you made me."

God arches his eyebrows in incredulity. "You suggest I've made an error?"

Even Samael knows better than to agree with this assertion, and he drops his gaze on reflex. He's tired. And he hurts. His weight makes his body sag. The chains clink, tightening as his legs give out.
His slow collapse sets his wrists and shoulders afire.

"Wanting is a sin," God snaps without sympathy. "Thinking that you know better than I do is pride, Samael, and I will not have it."

"… Why?" Samael says softly.

"Because I said so!"

Samael shakes his head. "It is not a good enough reason." Not for him.

"Then I will not have you," says God, as he backs away and straightens to his full imposing height.

"But—"

"Samael, you shame me," God says, his tone cold and distant as he looks away, gritting his teeth. "I cast you down to the Abyss. Do not ever return."

For a moment, everything is still. The Four Winds cease their endless howl.

Then God waves his hand.

Samael has no idea what hits him, but it hits him like a planet. Pain lances every sinew, every muscle, every bone, every nerve. The chains hanging above him snap apart, though the cuffs binding his wrists withstand the assault unscathed, and then he's hurtling away from Cardinal Square, from the Silver City in its entirety, a projectile made of little more than bone and flesh and futile, fanciful will. He tries to unfold his wings, to summon some semblance of control in his plunge, but they remain trapped in the ether, unwilling to listen to him, even in his desperation. Thanks to the cuffs, he has almost nothing left of himself inside. Almost.

His body accelerates, propelled by the invisible, unforgiving disappointment of God.


And then his viscera climb into the back of his throat, and he's falling.

Friction explodes into fire.

He yells as the flames consume him, licking along his skin.

And still, he's falling.

Falling ….

Falling ….

He snaps back to the present just before he smashes a crater into infernal ground.

"It's all true," Chloe murmurs again and again, backing away from him until her heels hit the bottom step.

He lowers his hands shakily from his face.

His face.

His Devil face.
Which seems to be bloody well stuck in place for the moment. *Be careful what you wish for,* he thinks, almost unable to stop his sardonic, miserable laugh from flying loose. He doesn't think she'd take well to him laughing, however unhappy the laugh might be.

"Detective, I—"

"Don't. Move," she snaps, and so he doesn't.

His heart is pounding in his chest. His wings are excruciating, bullet-ridden piecemeal. He killed a man in cold blood. He's stuck in his bloody Devil face. And, now, the detective is staring at him as though her world just ended.

Perhaps it did.

His certainly did.

But he doesn't have time to think on that, because the sharp whine of a distant police siren grows closer. At first, the noise of it is far beyond her hearing. He can tell when the eerie wail crosses the barrier between his aural abilities and hers, though, because her eyes widen, and then she looks at the bodies all around with a panicked blink. A warbling, twisted, upset syllable that says nothing and everything at once gets stuck in her throat. Her distress makes him ache even more than his wounds.

And then her detective skills seem to kick in. She closes her eyes to think for a moment. The sirens get louder, pressing in on them from all sides, impossible to ignore.

He sees her resolve the moment it sets in, when she takes a breath and looks at him.

Straight at him.

Into his burning eyes.

She takes a step closer.

His breath catches.

She takes another step. And another. And another. Until she's standing next to him, mere inches outside his personal space. The faint scent of her shampoo wafts past his nose. He doesn't dare move. Not one inch. His legs feel as though they're made of water, and his throbbing wings make him tremble in place, but that's the most he'll allow himself. The most he can afford.

Beside him, she lowers herself to her haunches to inspect Cain's body. Her feet scrape against the tile floor as her weight shifts. There's a sucking, fleshy, wet sound as she yanks Maze's hellforged blade from Cain's chest. When she rises to her feet, she flips the blade around, offering it to Lucifer handle first.

"You have to go," she says.

He frowns. "But—"

"Go, Lucifer," she repeats, shaking the bloodstained knife at him.

He frowns, looking down as he wraps his fingers around the hilt. The metal is cold and wet like hoarfrost. He hides the soiled blade in his breast pocket. "Detective, I can't—"

"Go!" she says, cutting him off. "I'll … think of something to explain—" She directs a disturbed look at the carnage. The room smells of gunpowder and disintegrated plaster. Bloody white feathers
blanket the rotunda, along with too many bodies, all unmoving. "—this."

He swallows. "The feathers—"

"I'll get rid of them," she tells him as if she's read his mind. "Just go." And with that, she actually gives him a shove toward the door. Forcefully enough to set him off balance, because he's hardly able to string two thoughts together right now, let alone resist her admirable will.

He doesn't want to leave her.

"Lucifer, go," she commands.

The sirens get louder.

A pit forms in his churning stomach.

"Will you fucking go?" she snaps, sounding miserable and alone.

And he realizes, then, for the first time since before time … he has no choice.

So, he goes.
From Heaven to Dust

Chapter Notes

For anyone who's interested, I've created a youtube playlist for this story from all the songs I used for chapter titles: [Castaway Tracks](#). It's not a strict soundtrack or anything, but the songs I chose for chapter titles reflect the contents of their respective chapters in some way.

Title credit for this chapter goes to Azam Ali.

Thank you so much to everybody who takes the time to leave feedback. Interacting with you guys is part of what makes posting stories so fun! I hope you enjoy.

The telltale strobe of red-and-blue lights sears her retinas as she turns onto Hillhurst. No need to check the address, thanks to the cluster of police cars parked like flies on carrion in front of Pepperoni Pete’s. Chloe pulls to a stop across the street and puts her police placard on the dash. She takes a sip from her steaming Starbucks cup, glancing at the empty passenger seat beside her. She'd forgotten how quiet police work is when Lucifer isn't around to chat her ears off, and she has yet to decide if the silence is welcome or lonely. Her chest constricts at the thought, and she closes her eyes. Detective? he said. The same way he always said it. But his face wasn't his face, and his eyes weren't his eyes …. Detective, what are you …? He paused, going still when he seemed to realize what she was looking at. Like he was somehow the one who was afraid.

And then everything went, not quite literally, to Hell.

With a hurting lump in her throat, she yanks her key from the ignition with violence, and then heads into the busy alley behind the pizza parlor. She wends through a clot of chatting police officers, who all stop and stare the second they notice her. Of course, they stare.

A pit forms in her stomach. This is going to be like Palmetto all over again. All because of ….

"Something to say?" she snaps, and all eyes turn away.

She ducks under the crime-scene tape at the mouth of the alley. The air smells of stale beer and rotting food. Not death. Ella is crouched over a body behind the dumpster.

"Hey, Decker," Ella says when she notices Chloe approaching. "I'd say welcome back, but …." Ella's voice trails away as she directs a pointed, grim look at the corpse.

"Just tell me what we've got," Chloe says, pulling out her notepad.

"Genevieve Tate, 27," Ella says, uncharacteristically subdued, as Chloe steps closer. "Based on temperature and lividity, I'd estimate time of death to be between 2 and 3 a.m. this morning."

Which would explain the lack of smell. Chloe glances at her watch. Genevieve had been dead for less than six hours.

"Any thoughts on cause of death?" Chloe says.
Ella shakes her head. "Not a clue."

Chloe frowns as she crouches beside Ella and the corpse. The body is pale and bloodless and still, lying in a gangly heap on the grease-stained pavement. There's only one obvious thing wrong, and from the angry-looking state of the gashes involved, this isn't an old injury.

Chloe has a chance to say, "But—"

"The eyes are missing; I know," Ella says. She gently touches the dead woman's face with a gloved hand. "This wouldn't have killed her, though. The trauma is only to the ocular cavity. The damage doesn't extend into the brain."

"Oh," Chloe says. "So … no ideas?"

Ella sighs. "All I can tell you is that this woman didn't die here. This is a clear body dump. And based on the fact that the body wasn't even dumped in the dumpster, I don't think the murderer cared whether the body would be found."

"So, the killer is cocky," Chloe concludes, "and he or she doesn't think we have the resources to solve a crime like this."

"Maybe," Ella says. "Clearly not a C.S.I. fan, regardless. I'm sure they'd solve this on C.S.I. in about four seconds."

Chloe licks her lips, nodding. "Let me know when you get cause of death, yeah?"

Ella smiles. "Always." And then she reaches out with a gloved hand, stopping just short of touching Chloe's shoulder. "Hey, are you … okay?"

"I'm fine," Chloe says.

"It's just with this whole Pierce-being-shot-by-your-gun-and-then-stabbed-to-death-by-a-missing-murder-weapon thing—"

"I'm fine, Ella," Chloe repeats.

"Right," Ella says, nodding. "Right. I mean, it's not like you're getting blamed, right? You're all cleared! Lucifer, too."

Chloe clenches her fists at the mention of his name. "Can we not talk about this when I've only just come off suspension?"

"Sorry," Ella mumbles, backing away.

Which is when Chloe hears him. In the distance. "Coming through!" he says too cheerfully. As if Pierce's murder never happened. As if … things are normal. Worse, the crowd of police officers seems too stupefied by him to judge him like they judge her, and they part for him like the Red Sea for Moses.

"No," Chloe says, the word soft and desperate. "Please, not now … ."

But Lucifer, it seems, has other plans, and he glides to a graceful stop beside her. The soft vanilla-and-sandalwood scent of his cologne tickles her nose. His pristine three-piece charcoal suit, his shiny cufflinks, his royal-purple silk handkerchief, and his polished, gleaming wingtip shoes all scream of money spent. His presence is a weight pushing down on her. Crushing her.
"Hello, Detective," he says, a hesitant smile on his face as he proffers a familiar venti-sized cardboard cup. "Coffee?"

"What are you doing here?" she says as she rises to her feet, brushing off her hands. Her heart starts to pound at his too-close vicinity. "I didn't call you, and I didn't ask for you, either."

His smile drips away. "Dispatch gave me a ring on your behalf. I thought … ."

She folds her arms, stepping back from him. "Well, you thought wrong. And I already have coffee in the car."

For the briefest of moments, he looks stung. Like she reached out and slapped him. He hides his emotions quickly, though, and pulls back his offered cup with an expression that reminds her of glaciers, calm and cold and austere.

"If you'd allow me to talk to you," he says evenly. "To … to explain, I—"

"An explanation isn't going to help!" she snaps, cutting him off. "The explanation is what's killing me." She swallows against the ache in her throat. "And I'm really sorry you came here thinking I'd offered you an olive branch or something, but … ."

Words leave her, and for a moment, all she can see is his other face, his eyes full of fire and brimstone, and she remembers … that's the world she lives in, now. A world with demons and angels and Satan and God. Satan and God as literal concepts. Lucifer had never been using metaphors. Not once. Not in three years. And she can't …. Her heart is pounding, and her limbs are cold and slick with sweat.

"Lucifer, I can't …." Do this. "I can't …." She gives him a pleading look. "I can't handle this right now. I can't handle …." You, she doesn't say. "I'm just not ready. I don't know that I'll ever be."

The silence stretches like a rubber band.

"All right," he says quietly, and in that moment, he seems old. Old, and weary, and brittle.

"Apologies, then, for the intrusion."

He turns to go.

The lump in her throat burgeons.

It's watching him leave, as he's done to her so many times before, that capsizes her tiny life raft. The one that keeps assuring her, Keep him away, and things will be better for a while. We'll float together — just you and me — until you heal enough to swim. The fact that he's leaving at her behest doesn't matter, just the fact that he's leaving. The sight of his departure pokes at a long-festered knife wound, and she hurts.

She can't watch him leave again, even if not watching means she'll drown.

"I just don't want to talk about before," she blurts to his departing back, and he stills, cocking his head to listen to her demands. "I just don't want to think about … ."

"Yes, Detective?" he prods as he turns to face her again, hope reignited in his eyes.

She swallows, gesturing to the body. To poor mutilated Genevieve. "I just want to find out who did this awful thing." Her vision blurs as her eyes fill with tears, and she adds in a small voice, "I just want to go back to how it was."
"To catching killers in a world where I'm just … quirky," he says.

She looks at her feet. Yes, she can't bring herself to say.

He takes a step closer. "And how can I assist you in achieving this illusion?"

"Just … no talk about …." She swallows again. "No talk about …." Fuck. She directs a panicked glance at the clot of judging cops, who're standing only a few feet away. She claps her hand over her mouth, shielding herself from nosy lip readers, and whispers awkwardly, "No … Satan stuff. Okay?"

He regards her for a long moment, expression churning with indecision. She's essentially asking him to lie for her, she realizes. To fill a role like an actor in a play. But … it's not really a lie if they both know it's more artificial than fruitcake. Right?

"Shall I use an alias?" he says. "Is my name also to be considered 'Satan stuff'?"

She feels a little sick to her stomach, hearing him ask her that, like he's mentally parsing what parts of his identity she's willing to allow and what parts she's not. "No," she says, shaking her head. "No, of course not. It's …." She looks up at him. "It's your name." She can't imagine calling him something like Sam or Dave or whatever. That would be too fake. And she has no right to take his name away from him, anyway. Honestly, she has no right to ask him for any of this, but …. "Keep it."

"And this will … help you?" he says, peering down at her expectantly with his dark, fathomless eyes.

She wipes her face, sniffing. "I think so."

He nods, considering for a moment. And then resolve drifts in like a tide. He pinches his index finger and thumb together, and drags them across his lips like a zipper. "Then you've my word," he says. "No 'Satan stuff' shall cross my lips unless you give me leave."

From the turmoil in his eyes, maybe he could use a distraction from the real as much as she could. Maybe, he wants a be-kind-rewind, too.

Teetering in final indecision, she looks up at him.

The hateful gazes of all the uniforms in the alley burn into the back of her neck. Pierce had been popular. Too popular. And all of the copious evidence supporting the idea that he was Sinnerman is under wraps, kept somewhere in the bowels of Internal Affairs, while the investigation into him continues. Which means Chloe is persona non grata with the L.A.P.D. Again.

Aside from Dan and Ella, Lucifer is all she's got.

She's not sure what that says about her.

In the end, it's Lucifer's eyes that do her in. Not the burning, hellfire eyes. Just the normal, soft brown ones, so expressive and full of humanity. They're begging her, three words rolled into one loud silence. Please, accept me.

She's not ready to do that unconditionally, yet, but … Lucifer is a bit like kudzu. Once he encroaches, he's impossible to get rid of, and even though his existence has turned her whole life topsy turvy … the car ride this morning was awfully quiet.

"Let's go, then," she says with a final, definitive, it's-all-settled-then nod.
"All right," he replies.

So, the die is cast. When she turns toward the pizza parlor, he doesn't leave. He walks beside her, rushing ahead only to discard the—

"Don't do that!" she blurs.

He pauses, hand outstretched above the dumpster. "Do what?"

"This is a crime scene." She snatches the coffee away from him with a blustering sigh. "You can't throw shit into the dumpster, here."

A wan smile ghosts across his face.

"You did that on purpose, didn't you," she says, not a question.

He doesn't answer except to hold open the door beside the dumpster. "After you, Detective," he says, the words as smooth as butter as he gestures beyond the threshold, into the pizza parlor's kitchen.

In that moment, she hurts a little less.

"Have you tried the pizza here?" Lucifer asks as they step into the dining area of the small restaurant. "It's quite—"

"Not now, Lucifer," she tells him tiredly as she tosses the coffee into the big trash can along the wall.

She doesn't miss his little sigh of disappointment, or the way his shoulders seem to bow with the weight of the world. Her chest constricts. Barely two minutes, and she's already been reminded of how wrong things are. Lucifer didn't even have to say a word about …. About …. She swallows, shaking her head, and pushes forward into the shop.

The owner of the pizza parlor, Peter Rossi, is standing in the back by the cash register, talking to two uniformed officers. Mr. Rossi's brown eyes are rimmed with red, and every few syllables he stops to emit a wet, bubbly sniff. The uniforms both stare coldly at her as she approaches, introducing herself and Lucifer. The man gives Lucifer an odd look, but doesn't say anything about the biblical name.

"I don't know who she was," Mr. Rossi says when Chloe asks him. "I've never seen her before. The poor thing. I came in early to make a new batch of cannolis, and I found her …." His lower lip quivers. He takes a steeling breath. "Who would do such a thing?"

Chloe clears her throat. "You're certain the victim wasn't a customer?"

"Or a little cannoli on the side, perhaps?" Lucifer adds with a sly smile, and Chloe glares at him.

But Mr. Rossi shakes his head. "I haven't taken a day off in three weeks, and I haven't seen her here in all that time. I can't say for certain that she hasn't come in before, though, only that she's not a regular if she has. We get enough customers that it all sort of runs together after a while."

Chloe nods. "I noticed you have cameras in the alley."

Mr. Rossi rubs his eyes. "Yes," he says, sniffling. "We've been having trouble with vagrants."

Lucifer glowers. "Yes. Wouldn't want those less fortunes hanging ar—"
"I just don't want them digging through my garbage for God knows what," Mr. Rossi snaps. "No human being should have to do that. We give them all the leftovers at the end of the night, free of charge."

"Well, aren't you quite the angel," Lucifer says, eyes glinting like obsidian.

Chloe moves to elbow him aside, only to freeze as her arm hovers next to his ribs. She was about to elbow the Devil in the ribs. Satan. She .... And now he's looking at her, frowning at her turmoil. Fuck. She drops her hand like he's scalded her.

"Mr. Rossi," she says, teeth almost chattering as she tries to stay calm, "would you be willing to hand over last night's camera footage to the L.A.P.D.? It would be a great help in our investigation."

"Oh, yes, certainly," says Mr. Rossi. "Anything to put that poor young lady to rest."

According to her license, Genevieve Tate lived in an apartment in Boyle Heights. Since the precinct is midway there, Lucifer parks his Corvette in the staff lot in his favorite parking space, and he joins Chloe in the cruiser for the second half of the trip.

The drive is excruciating.

He's nothing like the chatterbox she remembers. He doesn't try to commandeer the choice of radio station or insult her horrible taste in music. He doesn't gab about his trials and tribulations at Lux, or his latest booze-soaked sexcapade, or anything. He just sits like a well-dressed rock beside her, staring out the window. And why wouldn't he, when she disallowed any and all mention of his entire truth, and she glared at him for or dismissed his every comment at Pepperoni Pete's? She's veritably guaranteed that he has no safe topic left to talk about.

"I'm sorry," she says as she rolls to a stop at a red light.

Lucifer frowns, pulled from his silent reverie. "Sorry?"

"I'm not being fair to you." She sighs. "I know I'm not."

His gaze softens. "It's all right."

Her fingers tighten around the steering wheel. "It's not all right. I just don't ...." She doesn't know how to be fair right now and stay sane. She just ... doesn't know. Her lower lip trembles. Why is this so hard? "I don't even know what to say to you anymore. Or how to react to anything. I ... I used to know ...."

His eyes are wet as he blinks and looks out the window. Away from her. Saying nothing.

"I'm sorry I can't be fair right now," she whispers into the silence.

"It's all right," he repeats softly. "You deserve time to ...." He takes a breath. "You deserve time. And time is something that I possess in great abundance."

She swallows, her heart beginning to pound again as his words sink in. As they take shape and meaning beyond the superficial. "You're ... immortal," she says. Not exactly a question.

He peels his gaze from the road to peer at her for a long moment. Like he's gauging whether it's safe to answer her, whether she's given him "leave." She sighs tiredly, rubbing her temples as she takes her hands briefly from the wheel, and then says, "Just talk."
"Yes," he says with a nod. "I am."

"Like …" She swallows again. "You and dinosaurs existed at the same time."

"Yes."

"You were around when life on Earth was basically nothing but primordial soup."

"Yes."

"What about … the Big Bang?"

"Preceded me and my older siblings by about nine months," he says.

She blinks. He's saying …. Holy shit, he's actually …. Her knuckles go white as she twists her grip around the steering wheel, trying not to hyperventilate. "O-okay," she stammers. "Okay, that's …."

She swallows. "I think I'm … done, for now. I …."

He pinches the bridge of his nose and draws in a quivering breath. "Apologies. I promised you I wouldn't—"

"No, it's …." She takes a breath and blows it out. "I asked."

She's not sure what to say. Or how to fix this. Meanwhile, Lucifer's million-yard stare is returning as he peers through the windshield. Like … he's resigned to not being able to share himself with her anymore. And he did, before. Share himself. She didn't believe him, but ….

"When I'm ready again?" she says.

He gives her a brittle smile. "Ask, and I'll answer."

She nods. "Okay."

The light turns green. She jams on the accelerator, not entirely liking where this conversation went. But … not entirely hating it, either.

Genevieve didn't have her keys with her when she died, so Chloe and Lucifer set off in search of the building super. They find the super's apartment on the ground floor at the end of a narrow hallway. The hallway carpet is scuffed and stained, and the air smells faintly of mildew and curry.

A television or radio blares loudly through the door. Chloe knocks and knocks and knocks again. More than five minutes pass before she hears the chain on the door sliding along the inside track, and then the door latch releasing. The door cracks open. A myopic woman with bulbous gray eyes peers out at them through gold-rimmed glasses, her straight salt-and-pepper hair pulled back into a stately bun.

"Yes?" the woman says. "May I help …?" Her voice trails away as Lucifer shifts into view. She swallows audibly, and then adds a quiet, breathless, "Oh, my."

"Hello, I'm Detective Decker," Chloe says, flashing her badge. "And this is … my …." She doesn't even get to the word partner.

As if Chloe doesn't even exist, the older woman regards Lucifer intently. "Well, aren't you a handsome one," she purrs.
Chloe glowers. "We're looking for the building super."

"How fortuitous. That's me," says the woman. A lascivious grin oozes across her face as she steps into the hallway. "Rosalie Basso," she says, holding out her hand to Lucifer like she expects him to kiss it.

"Ms. Basso," he says with a cool nod, inching back from her.

Ms. Basso's smile only widens, and she closes the gap again. "Oh, please, call me Rose."

"Rose, then," Chloe says, trying to drag the woman's attention away from Lucifer. "We were hoping you would let us into apartment 4C to have a look around? The resident, Genevieve Tate, was the recent victim of a homicide."

Rose takes another step, into Lucifer's personal space. Way, way into his personal space. "A homicide?" she says, dragging an index finger slowly up the buttons of his vest. "Well, you're certainly to die for, aren't you?"

Lucifer puts a hand on the woman's shoulder and pushes her away. "Believe me; I am not."

Rose licks her lips, regarding him like he's nothing more than a prime slab of meat, like he hasn't even spoken to ward her off, let alone bodily removed her from his person. But it's not until he sighs and stiffly says, "Apologies, Detective," out of the side of his mouth that Chloe realizes what the problem is.

He was never using figures of speech.

He really is magnetic.

To humans, anyway.

Because he's a fallen angel.

Her partner is a literal goddamned angel. *Fuck.*

"Look, Ms. Basso," Chloe says impatiently, "we really need to get into apartment 4C. Will you help us, or not?"

This would normally be the part where Lucifer closes in with one of his come-fuck-me smiles and flirts his way toward what they want. Instead, he stands to the side, looking everywhere but at Rose. Like … he doesn't want to draw attention to his otherness, for once. His promise, of course. No Satan stuff. He's trying to keep his word. So, Chloe does the work for him, forcibly stepping between him and Rose. He backs gratefully away.

Chloe leans close to Rose's ear and whispers, "I'll put in a good word for you with him if you give us the key. I hear he's single right now," though it makes her stomach roil.

"Really?" Rose says, brightening.

"Really," Chloe assures her with a sly grin and a slow nod. "And we're partners. So, he listens to me." Occasionally. On days that end in Q.

Rose beams. "Wait just one moment."

Within sixty seconds, Chloe has Genevieve's key stuffed into her jeans pocket, and she and Lucifer are race-walking away from Rose's claustrophobic, nauseating ogling. "Call me!" Rose says.
dreamily down the hallway after them, and Lucifer scoffs in disgust.

"I heard what you said, Detective," Lucifer says as they ascend the steps to the fourth floor.

"What I said?"

"When you were whispering to Ms. Basso. About trying to pawn me off."

Fuck. Chloe grinds to a halt mid-step. Biting her lip, she looks at him. "I hope you know I was just greasing the wheels. You couldn't pay me to tell you to spend time with that woman."

He shrugs. "You utilized a resource, however distasteful, to achieve your goal. It's … an admirable talent, being able to do that."

"Okay." Then … what?

"Just … you should know that I can hear," he says, looking distinctly uncomfortable. "I'm …" He winces. "I'll not mention it again. I don't mean to break an oath. But … you should know. For your …." He sighs. "For your privacy."

Oh. 

*My privacy wasn't important* before? she almost blurts, but she stops herself before the question ejects itself from her mouth, because she gets it.

The walking-on-eggshells thing he's doing, now.

The walking-on-eggshells thing he didn't feel the need to do before, because he wasn't ever hovering so close to her rejection. Not on the basis of his fundamental nature, anyway.

She wonders how many of Dan's (and everyone else's) snide comments he's heard over the years.

Heard, and then discarded out of hand, because he was too confident to give a shit about the judgments of silly, inferior humans.

His lack of confidence, now, as he stands in the face of *her* judgment, serves in stunning contrast.

"Is eye contact how your … desire thingy works?" she says hesitantly.

He blinks. "Desire … thingy?"

"You didn't want to make eye contact with that woman."

"Noticed that, did you?"

She nods. "Would looking Rose in the eyes have … done something?"

He regards her for a long moment, unblinking. "Eyes are the window to the soul, Detective. And she was particularly weak-willed."

"Oh," Chloe says, feeling flushed. He's … not avoiding eye contact with her. Not even a little.

She's not sure what to make of that.

Genevieve's apartment is a one-bedroom unit decorated with all sorts of new-age-y decor. A wind chime hangs from the ceiling near the living-room window, under which rests a desk with no
A paleo cookbook full of sticky notes sits cracked open across the center couch cushion. Colored rocks adorn the open divider between the living room and the kitchen. Beads hang from the doorway to the bedroom instead of a door. Lucifer heads for the desk, and Chloe leaves him behind, intent on checking out the bedroom.

She finds nothing of interest in the closet — just clothes and shoes and a shoebox full of what appear to be old love letters from some guy named Romeo, of all things. A small collection of framed pictures sits on the nightstand by the bed, which is rumpled and unmade. The bedspread is covered with a bright geometric pattern. The sheets are plain blue cotton.

Rifling through the nightstand drawer, Chloe finds a bodice ripper with a tasseled bookmark placed midway through. The book is hidden amongst several magazines, along with a small bullet vibrator, and a leather-bound day planner. An actual day planner. With paper. Since the advent of smartphones, Chloe doesn't run into paper day planners that often.

She opens the planner and flips through the recent pages, looking for any suspicious appointments, but she finds nothing at all listed for last week, this week, or the next. She scans through the whole planner page by page, start to finish. Genevieve's handwriting is atrocious, and Chloe has to squint and strain to interpret the messy, scribbled blurbs she finds here and there, but even after reading through the whole book — a whole year's worth of scheduling — she doesn't see anything that jumps out as weird.

With a sigh, she flips to the contacts and looks under M. Sure enough, "Mom & Dad," has a phone number and an address with a 90210 zip code. So. The family is local and rich.

"Looks like I found next of kin," Chloe says over her shoulder.

Which means … death notification is next on the list. Weights press on her shoulders, and she slumps. Even when she can maintain a clinical distance, death notifications are always the hardest part of her job. No matter what the reaction to the news, it's never easy to watch.

"Detective," Lucifer calls back from the living room.

With a sigh, she pockets the day planner, and she pades back to the main room.

"It seems our dearest Genevieve was what you would colloquially refer to as a psychic," Lucifer says as Chloe approaches.

She gets the impression he means you as in you humans. Something he used to say a lot. Though he didn't say it, now, thanks to his promise, and, of course, the strangeness of the not strangeness sticks out. Because she can't fucking win.

Her heart kicks into high gear as she becomes painfully aware of how close he is. Lucifer. The Devil. Satan.

"Business cards," he explains as she forces herself into his orbit.

He gestures to a stack of them on the sill between the kitchen and the living room, next to all the colorful rocks. Each card is emblazoned with the blue outline of a hand with five splayed fingers, and says in neat print: "Genevieve Tate: Tarot Readings, Counsel, and Prognostication."

Lucifer frowns, pondering. "This makes me wonder if she had Sight."

He says the word sight like a proper noun, and Chloe looks up at him. "Sight like … the ability to see the future? Reading minds? E.S.P.?" He nods, and Chloe can't help but gape. "That's a real
thing, too? Seriously?" He stares at her, looking pained, and she laughs unhappily. "Of course, it is. Satan is. Why not this?"

He doesn't reply. The look he gives her isn't warm. More ... blank. Like he has no idea how to respond in this situation. Maybe, he doesn't. He's used to people melting into a puddle of goo over his every word. Like Rose.

"What about Santa Claus?" Chloe says. "Is he real, too?"

Lucifer regards her for a long moment before saying, "Not in the sense that you mean."

"But in some sense?" she says, the pitch of her voice rising into the stratosphere of what could be called shrill. "In some sense, he's real?"

"Chloe," Lucifer says gently, "the myth of Santa Claus is based on a man who was very real, yes. But there isn't some bearded, biscuit-loving octogenarian flying about every Christmas in a sleigh lashed to magical reindeer. That's bollocks."

"Oh," she says, chastened. She takes a breath, suddenly wondering if "no Satan stuff" is even a big enough moratorium to maintain her precarious sanity. "Sorry," she adds. Her eyes water. "Lucifer, I'm sorry."

"It's all right."

"No, it isn't!" she insists. "You're just trying to help, and I ..." She folds her arms and takes a deep, calming breath. "Please," she says, slow and measured, "tell me why you think this woman being a real psychic might be relevant."

He sighs. "I'll admit, it's prosaic, but ... taking the eyes of a woman with Sight is an action that would seem to have some method to it, yes?"

"Maybe," Chloe concedes. "Or, maybe, it's just some sicko's macabre riff on the fact that she masquerades as a psychic and takes advantage of people who are willing to believe her."

"Punishment for a lie via the vehicle of the lie?" Lucifer says, quirking an eyebrow at her. "Yes, I could see that as well." He fingers the business card. "So many people in the profession are frauds."

More like all of them, Chloe wants to snap reflexively. Instead, she bites her tongue, ceding to his greater knowledge on the matter. She swallows. "Are you ...?"

He frowns. "Am I what?"

"Psychic."

He's silent for a moment, regarding her with narrowing eyes. And then he says, "No, Detective. As I've said before, I'm not a Jedi. I'm not privy to your thoughts unless you speak your mind to me."

"Oh," she says. A lump forms in her throat. She wants to tell him she didn't mean it like that. Except ... if she's being honest with herself ... she sort of kind of did. She turns away, reddening. "Let's ... um." She clears her throat. "Let's head over to the parents' place."

"All right," he replies smoothly, though his expression is a blank one.

The gulf between them isn't shrinking. It's widening, instead.
I'm flabbergasted by the response to this fic so far. Really, I am. I spent all of last week so stressed about posting this that I was having trouble sleeping. I'm so happy/stunned that everybody is enjoying it! Even the setup in the early chapters! Thank you, everybody :) And thank you so much to those of you who take the time to leave me feedback. It's so appreciated! Cheers!

Chapter title credit goes to the Birthday Massacre.

The silence is crushing by the time they pull up to a sprawling, Spanish-style mansion. Beige stucco covers the walls of the house, and peach-brown mission-style shingles hang from the roof. The front lawn is a lush, bright green only made possible in L.A.'s dry climate by a major irrigation system. A babbling fountain dots the center of the cobbled roundabout that forms the driveway.

*Well, well, well,* she can imagine Lucifer saying, if things were right. *It would seem that the apple falls quite far from the tree.*

But things aren't right. And he hasn't spoken a word since she low-key accused him not only of lying to her but also of invading her mind. She puts the car in park and pops open her door, only to stop. Bird chirps and the trickle of the fountain fill the quiet. She grips the steering wheel tightly.

"Look, Lucifer … I …"

Lucifer blinks himself out of reverie and turns to her. "Yes, Detective?"

She takes a breath. This is a part of her job she doesn't often bring him along for. "I … need you to be quiet while I notify the family," she reminds him. "Okay? No snark from the peanut gallery."

His unexpected wounded look is enough to bring her pause.

"Look, we both know empathy's not usually your strongest suit," she adds, rushing to fill the horrible silence. "I just …" She grimaces. "Just remember these people are going to be in pain. So, be nice. Okay?"

"When am I not nice?" he says slowly.

She gives him an *are-you-kidding?* look. "Look, just … for once in your life, can you establish some kind of verbal filter? Please?"

"I believe I've already established a rather sizable verbal filter for your benefit, have I not?"

She sighs. "No, I know. That isn't what I meant, Lucifer. Just—"

"Just you think me incapable of decorum."

"No," she says slowly through clenched teeth. "What I think is that you're usually not motivated to bother with it."
"And this preemptive little 'pep talk' is intended to serve as my incentive to behave?"

A lump forms in her throat. When he puts it that way, he makes her sound like a trainer who's trying to get a bad dog to behave. "I didn't mean it like that," is all she can think of to say. "Lucifer, I didn't."

The silence is like a black hole, consuming everything, and his eyes are bleak.

His fingers clench. "... I do have empathy," he says quietly, looking at his lap.

She pinches the bridge of her nose. "No, I know you do. I—"

"Tell me, Detective," he says, dark and brooding, "why you think I should freely offer something I'm so rarely given?"

And in that moment, she sees him. Satan. The fallen angel. He who's been on the receiving end of humanity's filth for millennia. He who's been blamed. And, now, she feels even worse. Because there's no way he's not speaking pointedly. At her.

Fuck.

"It's little wonder I've no 'motivation,'" he says, putting the word motivation in air quotes.

"Lucifer, I'm sor—"

Bristling, wounded, he climbs out of the car and slams the door on her before she can even finish her apology.

A stressed, shaky sigh tumbles from her lips. This isn't like their partnership from before. Not at all. It's wrong, and strange. She doesn't know what the hell to say to him anymore. She doesn't know what's safe. Worse, things aren't sliding off of him like they always used to. Which is creating a "Hell" of a perfect storm.

Her eyes hurt. She sniffs. But she has work to do, and she can't fall apart right now.

She can't.

With a deep breath, she stuffs everything down into a tiny box inside of her, and she shuts it away.

"No," Genevieve's mother says, eyes wide, as she shakes her head. "No. It simply isn't possible."

Lucifer stands off to the right, silent, though he can't seem to stop himself from gazing disdainfully at the foot-high stacks of unopened mail and catalogs sitting on the credenza just inside the living room. At the mother's denial, the skin around his eyes twitches. He wants to comment. He does. But true to her request, he hasn't spoken a word, and he vents his need to crack his verbal whip by fidgeting with the magazine on the top of the stack closest to him.

"I'm so sorry for your loss," Chloe says.

"No," Mrs. Tate repeats. She's a silver-haired woman who looks like a retired runway model. Gorgeous. Her eyes water with big beautiful tears, like she's in some sort of commercial for an antidepressant. Or perfume. "No, no, no," the woman continues. "Jenny isn't dead. I just talked to her."

Chloe frowns. "After this morning?"
Mr. Tate has a chance to interject, "No, she was—"

Before Mrs. Tate starts babbling, "She was here for dinner two nights ago. Just two! We had her favorite chicken dish." Mrs. Tate gives them a stressed look. "I didn't have an onion, so I had to make do with shallots. I told her I'd make it with the onion next time. There has to be a next time, so I can make it with the onion."

Oh. Chloe deflates. "I'm sorry, but we found your daughter this morning. Our forensics team estimates time of death to be sometime last night."

"But I have to make her dinner again!"

Mr. Tate leans close and whispers something into Mrs. Tate's ear, at which point her tears spill over in earnest, smearing her mascara. She curls against him like a wilting flower and starts to sob. Mr. Tate leads his wife down the hallway out of sight, though Chloe can still hear the woman wailing.

Her heart twists. She can't imagine being in this position. Not only outliving Trixie, but knowing Trixie had been murdered.

Lucifer sighs when the Tates are out of earshot.

"What is it?" Chloe says.

"Just wondering how it is that they can live with themselves."

Chloe frowns. "… What?"

Lucifer gestures at the credenza. At the clutter. "This is unconscionable. Can they not hire a cleaning service? They clearly have the money." He picks up a copy of Cosmopolitan from the stack. "This issue is from six months ago! I recognize the cover. Six months might as well be years in the fashion industry."

She gives him an incredulous look. "You read Cosmo?"

"No, I shagged the editor. Lovely woman." His lascivious grin widens, but his eyes are just … dead. "If you read sex tip number four in the April issue, that was me."

"Lucifer," she whispers, stunned.

"What?" he snaps. "Is this not what you expect of me? I'm an insensitive lech who needs to be muzzled, after all."

"Lucifer, I really didn't mean—"

"I'm sorry about that," Mr. Tate says, his voice a quiet warble as he returns from the master bedroom, and Chloe clears her throat once. Twice. Lucifer returns to fidgeting wordlessly.

"No need to apologize," Chloe croaks.

She turns to Mr. Tate, trying to push her spiraling relationship with Lucifer out of her mind. Mr. Tate's eyes are red and puffy. The wife is still sobbing, though the sound is muffled through the distant bedroom door. And Chloe can't help but feel like she's intruding.

"I'll make this quick," she says gently. "I just have a few questions, and then I'll be out of your hair."

Mr. Tate nods, rubbing his eyes.
"Do you know of anyone who would have wished your daughter harm?"

Mr. Tate's expression is blank for a moment, and then it sinks, like dread sucked him into an undertow.

"Mr. Tate?" Chloe prods.

"She thought she was being stalked, but …"

"But?"

He shakes his head. "Jenny … tended to say some … pretty kooky stuff. It was hard to know whether to take her seriously, sometimes."

"Did she … um …." Chloe swallows. "Did she say she had something called … Sight?"

Lucifer's eyebrows rise in surprise, though he says nothing.

Mr. Tate gives Chloe an odd look. "She was a palm reader, Detective Decker."

"That doesn't answer my question."

Mr. Tate rolls his eyes. "If you fall for that line of malarkey, that's your problem. Not mine."

"Does this mean that she told you this line of malarkey?" Lucifer prods, looking interested despite his determination not to be. "That she had Sight?"

"Fat lot of good it did her," Mr. Tate grumbles under his breath, glaring. And then his eyes water. "And I fail to see what this has to do with my daughter being murdered."

"Quite a lot, perhaps," Lucifer muses.

"Mr. Tate, do you know anything about this supposed stalker?" Chloe interjects.

Mr. Tate fixates on Lucifer with a haunted frown. "No," he says, eyebrows knitting. "Nothing. We … we didn't listen."

"What did she say, exactly?" Chloe prods.

Mr. Tate shrugs. "Just that she thought some guy was following her."

"Did she describe this man?"

"She said he had brown hair."

Chloe nods. "Anything else?"

"He wore a coat," Mr. Tate says with another shrug.

"What kind of coat?"

"A long one. Like a duster. Or a trench coat."

"Okay," Chloe says. She takes a business card from her pocket and hands it to him. "Well, thank you for your time, Mr. Tate. If you have any questions, please, feel free to call me, anytime. And again, I'm so sorry for your loss."
Lucifer frowns as Chloe pulls up beside his car in the precinct parking lot. He glances at his watch as the cruiser idles. It's only 2:30 p.m. The workday still has another two-and-a-half hours left in it.

"Detective …?"

His first word in over an hour. The car ride back from the Tates' had been another excruciating bout of silent misery, and her gaze has been a blur of unshed tears the whole trip. She hates this wrongness that's filling the space between them like a cancer.

She swallows. "I think it's clear that we … maybe both need some space."

He closes his eyes like this prospect pains him, like he thinks he's screwed something up, and that this is his punishment. But he doesn't protest, either. Which is … telling. The lump in her throat expands painfully. Her heart hurts.

"There's nothing else to do today but paperwork, and you don't do paperwork, anyway," she says.

"Well, I could do paperwork," he replies. "If it were required of me."

"You're volunteering to do paperwork?" she says, unable to hide her surprise.

His mouth opens. Closes. Opens. He gives her a look that she can't interpret beyond the fact that he's pleading. Like, yes, he'll do paperwork if it means she'll stop being scared and freaked out, and he'll stop being hurt and angry. "Volunteering is quite … a strong word," he admits warily, "but ….

She sighs. "I don't want you to do my paperwork, Lucifer."

"Oh, thank Dad," he says, slumping with relief. "Lux's books are quite enough for me." And then his frown deepens. "But, Detective, I'd still like—"

At the same time she blurts, "I'm so sorry about earlier."

He looks at his lap. "Are you?" he replies with a disbelieving snort.

"Yes," she insists. "Yes, Lucifer. I …." She blinks, and the tears start falling. "I'm …. It isn't you. None of this mess is you."

"Pardon?"

"It isn't you that I'm freaked out about," she says, eyes burning, throat aching, only realizing as she's rushing to say it, rushing to placate, that she's speaking truth. "I've been saying for months, now, that I know you well enough to …." She swallows. "I know you. The fact that you're the Devil …. It … it doesn't matter to me." She wipes her face, sniffing. Her skin is slippery with tears. "I mean, it does matter. But it doesn't change the fact that I know you. No matter what the hell your face looks like, that doesn't change."

He tilts his head, looking at her with wide eyes. "Detective ….

"What's tripping me up is just the fact that you're the Devil. As in the Devil is a real thing, and that means …." She shakes her head. "I don't know what that means. I don't know what anything means anymore."

"Chloe," he says gently.

But she isn't hearing him, at this point. Her whole body is shaking. "I'm just suddenly in this world where the Dear Old Dad you're constantly bitching about is God. Like literally God. And there's
afterlives, and Heaven, and Hell, and demons — my crazy knife-loving roommate is a fucking demon — and angels, and I don't know what else, and I'm …" She blinks. Turns to him. Her voice is breaking when she croaks, "It's just too much. Lucifer, it's too much. My whole world is upside-down right now."

His expression is a broken one. "I'm … sorry to have been the one to flip it over for you."

"You shouldn't be," she says. "I should know the truth." She wipes her face again with the backs of her knuckles. She's sure she's smearing mascara everywhere. God, damn it. Just what she needs as a capper for this horrible day. "But … I don't exactly know what to do with the truth, now that I've got it."

He gifts her with a hollow smile, at that. At least … he sort of seems to get it, now. What's going on.

"The results of the autopsy will be in tomorrow," she says, swallowing. "I need space right now. You need space. But ...."

He reaches for the door handle. "I'll … see you tomorrow, then?"

She nods. Sniffs. Her chest aches. "Please. Yes."

The hollowness in his expression begins to fill in a little, until he looks sad, and worn out, but not anymore like she scooped out his heart with a spoon. "As you desire, Detective," he says gently, and he climbs out of the car with inhuman grace. She rest her forehead against the steering wheel, trying to pull herself together, as she listens to him go.

Paperwork is the Devil.

Chloe sighs. She can hear Lucifer grousing in her head. Don't blame this monstrosity of a pastime on me. Humans invented paper, and by nature of their limited capacity for the metaphysical, they also invented work. In my day, we didn't walk uphill in the snow both ways. We just snapped our fingers and made the hills flat.

Okay, well, maybe not entirely Lucifer. Maybe, some weird amalgamation of Lucifer and her late grandfather. But still.

"I think I found your supposed stalker," Dan says, leaning back in his chair to stretch.

Chloe looks across the table at him. The precinct bustles beyond the glass walls of the conference room, but the noise is distant. While she's been filling out reports, Dan has been examining the many hours of security footage provided by Mr. Rossi from Pepperoni Pete's.

"Oh?" she says.

Dan nods. "Yeah."

His chair creaks as he leans forward again, pointing the remote at the conference room television to rewind the footage. He jams down on the pause button as a dark blur enters the alley. Then he steps the recording forward in slow motion, each button press filling the quiet with a soft tapping noise.

The blur on the screen resolves into a man wearing a trench coat like Mr. Tate described. Tap, tap, tap. The man is carrying a large duffel bag. The thick strap of the bag digs deeply into his shoulder, and he's stumbling along like he's having difficulty bearing the weight of the bag's contents. Tap, tap, tap.
A body dump. Her stomach twists. She's watching a body dump in progress.

Genevieve was tall and solid and weighed about 145 pounds, and the man had stuffed her into a damned duffel bag like he was folding clothes for a trip. Unless he has a passion for dragging bricks around with him, Chloe can't think of another explanation.

"That must be Genevieve," she says, heart constricting.

"I think so," Dan says.

Some aspects of her job … she hates. She *hates*. Like knowing humanity produced an individual capable not only of murder, but of dehumanizing the victim so much that he felt treating her corpse like luggage was the thing to do.

Chloe can understand, to some degree, why crimes of passion happen. She can understand fatal accidents. Very few people who murder ever set out to be murderers. And, at least, there are feelings involved with those types of deaths. Anger. Jealousy. But this … this clinical disdain for human life? She doesn't understand this.

It's vile.

The man in the trench coat disappears deeper into the alley for a few minutes. Dan keeps stepping the video forward. The man leaves the alley, this time with his duffel bag scrunched up and clearly lighter.

Dan freezes the video on the man's face. "Hello, Mr. Murderer," he says, triumphant and grim in equal measure.

She glances at the timestamp printed at the lower right-hand corner of the screen.

Last night, right around the estimated time of death.

The video isn't high-def, nor is it in color, so the features of the man's face aren't as distinct as she'd like them to be, and it's impossible to tell if he has brown hair — as Mr. Tate recounted of Genevieve's potential stalker — or if his hair is merely dark. Still, they have a picture of the murderer's face, now, which is better than what they usually have so early in an investigation.

"Get a screencap of that," Chloe says. "I want a B.O.L.O. sent out immediately."

"You got it," says Dan with a nod.

She's too experienced to think that this case will be a quick one, open-shut, even with an early partial identification of the most likely suspect. But … that doesn't stop her from hoping, anyway. The faster they can get justice for Genevieve and closure for Mr. and Mrs. Tate, the better.

In this moment, Chloe finds a bright side in knowing now that her partner isn't living in metaphor.

This killer deserves the Devil's attention.

The pull-in at Santa Anna Elementary where parents line up to pick up their children is jam-packed with the parents who got off work at 5. Flags flap in the stiff breeze, and the ropes and eyelets that secure them bang and clank against the metal poles without any appreciable rhythm. The chatter of children, young and old, fills the air like the buzz of bees.

"How was your first day back?" Trixie babbles as she climbs into the back seat of Chloe's cruiser.
"Did you catch any bad guys? Was Lucifer there? Did Lucifer help you catch the bad guys? Are the bad guys going to jail?"

Chloe laughs, glancing at her daughter in the rearview mirror. "No, baby," she says. When she hears Trixie’s seatbelt click, Chloe eases onto the accelerator, pulling into traffic. "The case I'm working on right now is probably gonna take a little while to solve. I didn't catch anyone."

"The bad guy is sneaky?"

"Yeah," Chloe says with a nod. "Very sneaky."

"Was Lucifer there?"

Chloe bites her lip. "Yeah, he's back, too."

"That's good," Trixie says, peering out the window. "I missed him."

"Did you?"

Trixie nods, but says nothing else, like her initial burst of exuberance was from all the air spilling out of a popped balloon. Her mood has been a bit of a yo-yo lately. Happy one moment. Quiet and withdrawn the next. Between the ups-and-downs before the not-wedding to Pierce, Pierce's death, Charlotte's death, and the shit that went down with Maze, Chloe's not sure how to even begin to handle the fallout in Trixie's psyche, but ….

"How are you doing today?" Chloe says.

Which only warrants a shrug in response.

"Would you like me to ask Lucifer if he'll visit?"

Another shrug.

Chloe's not sure what to do. She accelerates as she pulls onto the highway toward home. "You know you can talk to me, right?" she tries in the stretching silence. "About anything."

"I know, Mommy," Trixie says with a glum sigh.

I'm sorry, Chloe wants to say. I'm so sorry that I let Pierce into our lives. She's quick to rub her eyes to keep herself from spilling over, though. The last thing Trixie needs is to see Chloe upset on top of everything else.

Long after Trixie has headed off to bed, and Chloe is left to her own devices, pondering how in the hell she's going to deal with both her traumatized child and the literal Devil, a violent knock at the front door rips her from her troubled musing. Chloe frowns, glancing at her watch. 11:16 p.m. Who in the hell would be knocking at this hour? Lucifer would sometimes visit this late, but he usually barges in. She takes one last sip from her wineglass and waits. The knock repeats.

"Hey, Decker," says Maze as Chloe opens the door an inch.

"What are you doing here?" Chloe blurts.

Maze frowns. Sighs. "Yeah … I … probably deserve that." She pulls her fingers through her hair, like she doesn't know what to do with her hands. "Can I come in?"
"… Why?"

Maze's frown deepens. "Well, I live here … don't I?" The doubt in her tone would be heart wrenching on any other day, at any other moment.

Chloe's heart pounds. "It's been over a week since I've seen you."

"I know," Maze says. "I just …." She swallows. "I wanted to catch up with Linda."

"Linda."

"Yeah … why?"

"Lucifer killed Pierce, and I found out Lucifer is Lucifer, and you're …." A demon. "You're a …." A literal demon. But Chloe can't bring herself to say it. "But you wanted to catch up with Linda first. For a week?"

Maze blinks. "I … didn't know any of that," she admits. "I mean, I knew Cain bit it, but I figured you'd done the deed. And I don't exactly have tears to shed for that asshole, so ….""How in the hell could you not know?" Chloe snaps, trying not to think too hard about the Cain namedrop. "Aren't you like Lucifer's … ninja bodyguard or … something?"

"Not anymore."

"What does that mean?"

"It means Lucifer and I haven't spoken in weeks," Maze says with a shrug. "We … fell out."

"Fell out."

Maze folds her arms and refuses to offer any further explanation. "So, you know, now?"

Chloe tightens her grip on the doorframe. "Yes."

"And you're scared of me, aren't you?" Maze accuses.

"Well, gee, Maze, I only just found out that all your weirdo remarks about murder and knives and stabbing things are 100 percent literal."

Maze's body turns to stone as she freezes on the welcome mat. Like … actually freezes. Humans, even when they're trying to be still, always move a little. They breathe, and they blink, and their bodies sway a bit. But Maze stands like a real statue made of flesh and blood, and the sudden attack of Uncanny Valley is too much to bear. Chloe swallows as her body starts to tremble, and she backs up a step. Her roommate is not human. At all. Her roommate is a literal demon from literal Hell. And unlike Lucifer, she seems to revel in violence and blood and pain and—

"Do you have another face, too?" Chloe says, unable to keep her panic from dribbling out syllable by syllable. "Like Lucifer's?"

Maze takes a step back. "Look, Decker," she says, holding up her hands, "I'm … sorry. I'll find somewhere else to—"

"I want to see it," Chloe demands. "Show me."

"Why?" Maze snaps. "So you can gawk?"
At Maze's offended tone, the fight drains out of Chloe, and she slumps against the edge of the door. "No, I'm …." She swallows, eyes watering. "I'm just …." She squeezes her eyes shut and takes a breath. Her stomach won't stop quailing. "Everything is so out of control. My partner is Satan, and my roommate is literal Hellspawn."

Maze doesn't seem to know how to respond. She shifts back and forth on the welcome mat, and she looks away.

"I don't know how to deal with this," Chloe says. "Any of this. I'm … sorry."

Silence stretches for a long moment, before Maze sighs and admits quietly to her feet, "I get it, Decker. A little too well, actually." She licks her lips. "For what it's worth, I'm sorry I was such a bitch to you and the kid."

"You already apologized for that," Chloe says, frowning.

Maze shrugs. "Yeah, but I didn't mean it before."

"Oh."

"I'm just not used to … feelings," Maze says, speaking the word feelings like an expletive — a word with a primal connection to id. She takes a breath and blows it out between her teeth. "Look, you've clearly got some shit going on," she says, shaking her head. "I'll … I'll find someplace else to stay."

"No, Chloe wants to say. It's your place, too. In her fantasy where she can be the bigger person despite instinct. But Trixie is a mess. And Maze is a literal assassin from Hell, and Chloe feels nauseated from all the fear-born adrenaline coursing through her system. She … can't live like this in her own home. She can't."

"Okay," Chloe says, voice quivering, though she does manage a half-hearted, "see you later?"

"Yeah, sure," Maze says, though from her dismissive tone, she harbors little hope. Then she slips into the night without another word.

"Mommy?" a small voice says behind Chloe, and she whips around to find her daughter rubbing her sleep-glazed eyes.

"Monkey, what are you doing up?"

"I heard the door." Trixie yawns. "Was that Maze?"

"Yeah," Chloe says. "She's … gonna stay somewhere else for a while. Okay?"

When Trixie has no response but a half-hearted shrug, Chloe knows she did the right thing. Still, she feels like shit for it. With a lump in her throat, she leans on the door, letting her weight force it closed, and then grabs Trixie's hand. "Come on, babe," she says. "Let's get you back to bed."
Disturbia

Chapter Notes

Thanks so much, as always, to everyone who takes the time to leave me feedback :)

Chapter title credit goes to Rihanna.

For anyone curious about my specific posting schedule, my goal is to get chapters on Sunday up by around 10 a.m. PDT (5 p.m. UTC), and on Wednesday by around 7 p.m. PDT (2 a.m. UTC).

The following day, Lucifer returns to the precinct, but without his usual pomp and circumstance. Unlike the day before in the alley, the police officers he passes this time give him the same dirty glares and surreptitious head shakes that they've been giving Chloe all morning. But Lucifer seems not to care that the precinct has lumped him in with Chloe as an undesirable somehow responsible for Pierce's death. In fact, it's hard to tell if Lucifer even notices the intense scrutiny he's receiving, because he seems to be directing every ounce of his unblinking, unwavering attention toward Chloe. Kind of like one would act when approaching a scared, frothing dog in an alley. Which, unfortunately, only makes her more self-conscious as he strides closer.

He grabs a chair from an empty neighboring desk, and as he primly lowers his weight onto the seat, he says, "Hello, Detective," in a wary tone that almost seems like a question, but … isn't.

Her heart starts to thump at his proximity. The Devil. A wolf in luxurious human clothing.

"Detective?" he prods, frowning, when she doesn't speak.

She swallows back the sudden onslaught of nerves, bites her lip, and gives him a sort-of-smile — it's all she can manage — in return. "Hey."

He regards her silently for a long moment, eyes narrowing as thoughts tumble behind his dark eyes. "Are you … prepared for another go?" he says gently. "Or … shall I return to Lu—"

"No," she says.

His eyebrows knit. "No, you're not prepared?"

Her legs feel watery, and she thinks, if she were to stand, now, she'd fall into a gangly heap. "No, I mean, I don't want you to go." Her fingers clench. She takes a quick, cleansing breath, licking her lips. "I want you here."

"You're lying."

She blinks. "How can you tell that?"

"Detective, I know a lie when I hear one. You're …." His piercing gaze roves her head to toe. His shoulders hunch, and he rubs the bridge of his nose between his thumb and index finger like he's getting a headache. "I do scare you." The small, self-flagellating way he says it breaks her heart.
"I'm not scared," she insists. "You don't scare me, Lucifer."

His incredulous expression is also a tired one.

"I'm nervous, which isn't the same," she corrects. "I'm just …." She sighs. "Look. In theory, okay? In theory, I want you here. It's just … going to take some convincing for the rest of me to catch up with my … wishful thinking."

"Wishful thinking," he parrots, incredulity still thick in his words. "Since when are you a masochist?"

"It's not masochism to want to want my partner around," she replies. "I think it's kind of the opposite, isn't it?"

His lip curls, and he directs an unhappy look at the empty space beyond her shoulder, but he doesn't retort. And then his demeanor just … collapses. Like he feels sick to his stomach or something.

"I meant what I said, Lucifer," she tells him quietly, seething, but not at him. "It … it isn't you. It's just …"  

"The sudden absence of metaphor that surrounds me." He doesn't quite sound like he believes her. But …

"Yeah," she says. "And I'm sorry that I can't magically be okay for you." She swallows, eyes watering as she peers across the desk at him. "I really wish I could be."

He scoots his chair a few inches closer. The soft vanilla scent of his cologne fills the space between them. "As I said, Detective, time is something I've an abundance of which to give you." He tilts his head, looking at her with a ghost of his old affection. The way he used to look at her … before. Before this giant fucking mess. "And truth be told, I much prefer the idea of giving you time to giving you space."

"Me, too," she says.

He quirks a small, wan grin at her. "In theory."

She rolls her eyes. "Like I said. I'm working on it. Okay?"

He glances at his ring for a moment, fidgeting. "Am I still to be bound by yesterday's promise?"

She clenches her teeth. She's never going to get used to any of this shit if she doesn't give him a little leeway. She knows it. She can't just la-la-la-didn't-heaaaaar-you for the rest of her life. She can't. But …

"I … need it right now," she says softly. "Okay? It's …. Lucifer, I need it."

He nods, subdued. "All right."

"But if it's …."

"Yes?"

She takes a breath. "If it's relevant, I mean. And you're not just saying Satan-y stuff to be your normal flagrant self." Her heart skips. "I mean, not that your normal flagrant self is bad or anything, yeah?" she rushes to add. "It's just … this is like breakfast, and you're like … ghost peppers … and I just need to ease into—" She slumps, pulling her fingers through her hair. "God, what the hell am I saying?" And then she can't help but clap her hands over her mouth. She said God. And hell. And.
She said …. "Fuck." Her face heats to molten levels, and she adds, the barest squeak, "I'm sorry. I can't say anything right."

But all he gleans from her embarrassing, tone-deaf verbal diarrhea is, "You trust my judgment?"

Taking a breath, she makes herself look him in the eyes. "Of course, I do." She gives him a watery look. "I'm sorry I got that confused yesterday. I … I really am."

"You're … working on it," he says slowly.

She nods. "I am. I mean it."

He blinks, speechless for a moment, but he doesn't look away. His gaze is weighted down by countless eons. None of his usual joie de vivre is present. Just … surprise. And a little bit of hope. Hope he's not sure what to do with, because he's old enough and jaded enough to know that hope only exists to be crushed. She's human, after all. And this is what humans do. Crush things.

She's not sure how she ever thought he was being metaphorical about his origins.

God, what an idiot she'd been.

"Yes, well," he says. He clears his throat like he's embarrassed, too. He pulls his flask loose from his heather-colored vest and takes one hearty swig and then another. "Coffee?" he offers after he's gulped everything down. He stuffs the flask back into his pocket. "I'll not spike it, I assure you."

She laughs. "I'd love some. Thanks."

"One non-fat almond-milk latte with sugar-free caramel drizzle coming right up," he tells her with a nod. "How you drink that watery swill, I'll never bloody fathom." And on that note, he retreats, presumably to the Starbucks across the street. She watches him sashay up the stairs, a force of nature. No glares this time — his presence, when he commands it, is too stupefying.

She smiles, turning back to her computer monitor. It's nice to have a little bit of normalcy back. Even if things are still very much not normal.

"Get this," Ella is saying as Lucifer returns about twenty minutes later. Her body practically hums with ill-contained excitement, and her eyes are bright, as she reveals a new forensics report, still warm from the printer. "The victim died from asphyxiation, thanks to an elephant-sized dose of curare."

"Well, that's … odd," says Lucifer. He leans forward to look over their shoulders at the thick forensics report, only to wince and recoil at the apex of his extension. The movement is barely more than a blink — Chloe wouldn't have even seen the break in his unbothered facade if she hadn't been staring at him — but ….  

"Are you okay?" Chloe says, frowning.

He waves her off without replying. After setting a small beige-colored napkin onto the corner of her desk, he places a still-steaming Starbucks cup on top of it, and then he nudges the cup and the napkin in her direction with two outstretched fingers. "Here you are, darling."

His casual addition of the endearment "darling" makes her feel warm inside, and she can't help but offer him a tiny, hopeful smile. "Thanks," she says, reaching for the cup before turning to Ella. "So, what's curare?"
Ella literally bounces on her feet. "It's an anesthetic compound that paralyzes the diaphragm."

"O ... kay?" Chloe says slowly, taking a sip. The coffee is perfect. Exactly how she likes it. And true to Lucifer's word, it isn't spiked. "And why is curare bounce-worthy, exactly?"

"Dude, it's the poison they use in blow darts." Ella looks like a kid in a candy store. "Blow darts!" She shifts from foot to foot, grinning. "This is a new one, even for me, I'll admit."

"Was she hit with an actual dart?" Lucifer says. "Or was the curare administered in some other way?"

"M.E. found a puncture wound in her neck consistent in size with a 16-gauge needle." Ella flips excitedly to the fourth page of the report and shows them the bottom picture. Sure enough, the picture shows flesh marred by a small, telltale red dot. Gloved fingers hold a ruler beside the red dot for scale. The wound is a bare two millimeters, if that. "Genevieve Tate was literally killed by a poison dart. This is like ... 007 stuff!"

"The question is ... which 007?" Lucifer licks his upper lip suggestively before purring, "I'm a Connery man, myself. Love me a sexy Scotsman."

"No way," Ella replies, shaking her head vehemently. "Daniel Craig. He's sooo—"

"Decker," calls an austere voice from across the bullpen, before Ella can elaborate on what exactly Daniel Craig is "sooo."

Chloe sighs, looking up. Acting-Lieutenant Don't-Ever-Call-Him-Jim McDowell is standing there in full uniform, arms folded, by Pierce's office door. For lack of anyone else to promote, the Chief of Police had sent in not-actually-a-Lieutenant McDowell from the 3rd precinct. And as far as she can tell, McDowell is the only person in the precinct less popular than Chloe herself.

"Yes, sir?" she says.

"Body." He unclasps his arms and waves a new case folder at her. "Go." He slaps the folder onto the desk nearest to him, leaving her to pick it up, and then disappears back inside his office.

"He's quite laconic, isn't he?" Lucifer says, frowning.

Ella snorts. "Bet you never thought you'd call Pierce wordy, huh."

"Pierce is dead, Ms. Lopez," Lucifer says, expression flattening as a cold snap frosts through the air. "I wouldn't call him anything."

The crime scene lies along the L.A. River under a bridge, almost buried amongst the piles of refuse left behind by vagrants and drug addicts. This time of year, during dry season, the river flows at the barest trickle, not even audible at this distance. The corpse lies next to the bridge's concrete support strut, partially concealed under a police tarp. The area smells faintly of human waste and decay. Along the ground near the support strut, Chloe spies four dirty syringes without even searching, along with crumpled up, empty chip bags and scattered beef jerky wrappers. Traffic rumbles overhead on the bridge, drowning out any other potential ambient noise.

Lucifer's nose wrinkles as he gives the filthy area a look of distaste. "Lovely."

"John Doe," Ella says, crouching over the body. "Couldn't find any identification on him. And no identifying marks, either. No scars. No tattoos. His skin is perfect."
Chloe sighs as she lowers herself to her haunches beside Ella. "Drug overdose?"

"I don't think so," Ella says, glancing at the syringes littering the ground. "Not in the sense that you mean."

"But in another sense?" Chloe prods.

Ella pulls back the tarp, revealing the sightless brown eyes of a young, black-haired man. She presses her gloved fingers against his carotid. Chloe leans closer to see. Sure enough, there's a telltale puncture mark on his skin. Just like the M.E. found on Genevieve.

"Can we call him the Curare Killer?" Ella says.

Chloe gives Ella a grim look. "Let's … wait for the autopsy results, first, before we start making too many assumptions." Just to be sure. She doesn't want to jump from A to B to serial killer without doing the proper legwork.

"Right," says Ella, slumping. She glances at the corpse. "Sorry, buddy. That was kind of insensitive, I guess. But we'll find the guy who did this. Promise."

"Anything else you can tell me about the body?" Chloe says.

With a nod, Ella points at the victim's hands. Chloe frowns. The man's fingertips are missing. Each finger, thumb to pinky, is amputated at the top knuckle. And from the bloody, swollen look of the guy's fingers, from the exposed bone, this is a brand new injury.

What in the world?

"Some kind of torture?" Ella guesses.

"No," Lucifer says. "That's … not what we're looking at."

Chloe's frown deepens. He'd been silent since Ella started talking. Which is uncharacteristic. And, despite everything, Chloe had almost forgotten he was standing there, hovering over them.

"Not torture?" Chloe says dumbly.

His grim look speaks for him. Her mouth goes dry as realization sinks in like a wave-enveloped stone. Of course, he would know what torture looks like, wouldn't he? He's probably seen more methods in practice than she even knows exist. He's probably perpetrated more atrocities against humankind than the entirety of Guantanamo Bay's "administrative staff." And not even in the name of seeking vital information that would promote the safety of other humans. Just in the name of meting punishment. He …. She bites her lip, trembling as she peers at him. At the Devil, who's been her friend for three years, now. The world seems to be dropping out from under her.

"Detective?" Lucifer prods, sounding far away.

_order off menu for once, she can hear him saying. Maze and I certainly won't judge. "You know how to torture," she blurts, only to clap her hands over her mouth for the second time that day.

"Whoa," Ella says, gaping. "This conversation went dark."

Lucifer's eyes are cold obsidian. "I was the unwilling warden for the worst of humanity for millennia, Detective," he says, the words defensive. "What precisely did you expect?"

Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck. The idea that she's going to have to stop looking at things through a
The black-and-white lens of human morals is almost strangulating at this point. She shakes her head. Humans aren't the only perspective, anymore. They might not even be the majority perspective.

"N-no," she says shakily. "No, you're right. I'm ... I'm sorry."

His gaze is bleak and black and unblinking. His feelings are hurt. Again.

"What do you think these wounds are, if not the result of torture?" Chloe says slowly, gesturing to the body.

But he's still not quite recovered from her latest slip-n-slide into the deep end. He gives her a pained look. "Perhaps ... it would best be mentioned another time." When you're not acting like a xenophobic lunatic, he doesn't say. Probably wouldn't ever say. She's maybe making that up.

She closes her eyes and takes a breath, bracing herself. "It's okay, Lucifer. I can hear it."

His doubt is crushing.

"No, really," she assures him, swallowing. "Please, just say it. I ... want you to."

"Someone declawed him."

Chloe's eyebrows knit. "De ... d-declawed." On Lucifer's nod, she adds, "You mean like a goddamned cat? That's what you're saying?"

"Well, he isn't a feline, and I can't comment on this man's status with the almighty," Lucifer says wryly. "But, yes. This ... man ... isn't a man. Or I suppose I should say that he's male. But he isn't human."

Chloe blinks. O ... kay. That's not quite what she expected to hear. Her breaths tighten in her chest.

"Um. Dude," Ella says. "He looks human to me."

Well, so do I, and yet I'm bloody well not, Chloe can imagine Lucifer retorting, and yet ... he doesn't. Instead, he gives Chloe a sidelong glance that's full of guilt and skittishness, and he says nothing, like he regrets even mentioning the bit about the declawing.

"Ella, will you excuse us?" Chloe grinds her teeth as she rises to her feet. She grabs Lucifer's sleeve and pulls him to the side, and he allows himself to be pulled. Away from prying eyes and ears, closer to the trickling river.

"Apologies, Detective," he says as soon as they're out of earshot. "I thought it ... potentially relevant. I'm ...." He sighs like he's flustered. Panicked. "Apologies. I'll not speak of it again."

"You're serious?" she says, heart pounding. "The victim isn't human?"

"Of course, I'm serious," he says. "This victim wears the guise of a human, but he isn't one."

She folds her arms. "You mean ... like you?"

"I've no guise," Lucifer snaps, scowling. "This isn't a bloody glamour." He gestures to himself. His face. "This is me, Detective. This is the face I was born with. I've another face, which you've now unfortunately seen, but that's my bloody punishment. Not my ...." He shakes his head. "It's what bloody happened to me after the Fall. What I did to mys—" He swallows and doesn't finish whatever he was going to say. "And I've never tried to hide the fact that I'm the Devil from you. It's how I bloody introduced myself to you."
A lump forms in her throat, and she looks at the ground for a moment, trying to blink away tears. Well, that bear's been thoroughly fucking poked. "Lucifer, I didn't mean what I said as an insult. I'm not saying you're hiding things, or that you lied. I'm just trying to understand the mechanics of what you say we're looking at, here, because I can't see anything, and I ... I ..." She frowns as the rest of what he said sinks in. "Your punishment?"

He sniffs and directs a subzero gaze at her. "That, Detective, is not relevant."

"But—"

"Not. Relevant."

"Right," she says tiredly. She holds up her hands in the universal sign of surrender. "So, if the victim isn't human, what is he?"

"A basilisk, if I'm not mistaken."

"A basilisk."

"Yes. Though I can't be 100 percent certain." He looks back over his shoulder at the victim, who's barely visible from here, thanks to the tarp, and the swarm of L.A.P.D. staff hovering around the body like flies. "His human guise isn't fully transparent to me, so that muddles things just a bit."

"But you can see a ..." She sighs, trying to stay calm. "A glamour, you called it?"

"Yes."

"And you're saying that the victim ... is a lizard."

"Well," Lucifer replies, hedging, "more of a dragon, really."

She can't help but snort with disbelief. "A dragon." Dragons are a fucking thing, now, too?

"Yes." Lucifer's eyes narrow, calculating.

"What is it?" she says.

"The killer took the eyes of a woman with Sight, and the claws of a basilisk."

"You're saying the claws are special like the eyes?" she says, trying not to think too hard about the insanity falling from her lips.

"Quite special, yes. They're coated in a poison that will petrify anything short of celestials."

"Petrify ... as in ... turn to stone?" she says slowly.

Lucifer nods.

"Literal stone."

"Right."

"Like fucking Medusa."

"Yes," he says.

"... Was Medusa real?" she can't help but ask weakly.
He regards her for a long moment, his earlier fury replaced by concern. "She was … an amalgamation of real things. But, no, Detective. There is no such thing as a gorgon."

"Oh."

How in the hell has this become her life? In barely more than a week, she's gone from metaphors about the Devil to the actual fucking Devil, a psychic, and a goddamned dragon. It's like somebody stuck her in a walked-into-a-bar joke without telling her. Where is the punchline? She could really use a punchline right about now.

"I know this is … quite overwhelming," he offers into the tense silence.

But she shakes her head. "No. No, I'm fine." Not. Not fine. She swallows, looking up at him. "So … it wouldn't work on you."

He frowns. "Pardon?"

"You said the venom doesn't work on celestials. Does that mean it won't work on you?"

"Yes, under normal circumstances," he says. He glances at her, frown deepening. "But it's lethally effective for wrangling Hell denizens like Maze, humans, and just about anything else."

"Hell denizens like Maze."

"Right. Lilim, incubi, succubi, et cetera."

"So, you're suggesting … what?" she says, giving him an expectant look. "Somebody is collecting special body parts?"

"So it would seem," Lucifer concedes. "Though I feel inclined to mention that all we have now is a coincidence. It would take a third body to make a legitimate pattern."

He speaks so matter-of-factly that she can't help but laugh out loud, but the sound is not a happy one.

"Detective?"

"God, this is ridiculous," she says, almost hypoxic as she starts to hyperventilate. "You're saying … that my vic is a reptile … and someone … is collecting shit … like unicorn horns."

"Dragons aren't reptiles, and unicorns are extinct."

"I don't fucking care!" she snaps so loudly that even Ella turns to look, frowning.

Everyone is staring. All the hateful, judging cops. Chloe's face heats. She claws uselessly at her collar, trying to breathe. She can't fucking breathe.

Lucifer gives her an unblinking, fathomless look, and if this were any other moment on any other day, she might capsize, and fall into the depths. But this isn't any other day. And she's falling apart, and it's clear he has no idea what the fuck to do with her when she's falling apart, and why should he? He's the fucking Devil. He isn't human. He doesn't understand human things except sin.

"I need some air," she gasps, suddenly desperate to get away.

Just away.

She runs for the car like it's her life raft, leaving Lucifer behind to get a ride with someone else.
Linda's office door is open, and quiet fills the small hallway outside. Chloe pokes her head around the doorframe, peering into the sunny space. Linda's sitting behind her desk, munching on a granola bar, telltale white earbuds placed in both ears, while staring down at something in her hand. Her phone, perhaps. Or an iPad.

Chloe bites her lip, debating, but the debate is lost in moments. Linda's on break. She doesn't want to hear about Chloe's ridiculous dragon problems. Who the hell would? Chloe's not even sure Linda knows the appropriate context. It just stands to reason. And how is any of this reasonable? Nerve lost, she turns back toward the—

"Chloe?"

Shit. Shit, shit. Wincing, she turns back in time to see Linda yanking the earbuds from her ears and setting the maybe-an-iPad onto her desk.

"I'm sorry," Chloe says. "I'm interrupting."

But Linda just shakes her head and gestures to her couch. "What's wrong? Sit down."

Chloe hesitates, peering dubiously at the couch.

"Sit," Linda says again.

Chloe collapses onto the sofa with a sigh and clasps her hands over her knees. "Everything's wrong. I …." She trails away, suddenly unsure of how to proceed. Circumspect? Direct? By the by, did you happen to know your longtime "delusional" Devil patient has been serious this entire time? No? Well, never mind, then. Don't mind me. I'll just be go—

"Lucifer … mentioned yesterday … that you know, now," Linda says slowly, her expression dripping with concern. "Like … know, know. Is that what this is about?"

Chloe slumps, blowing out a relieved breath. "So … you do know."

Linda nods. "I do."

"And you've been seeing Lucifer about this whole post-revelatory horror show, too?"

Linda offers an apologetic look, but doesn't answer, and Chloe slumps further. "Right," she says. Of course Linda is seeing him. Linda is his freaking therapist, and he's just as upset as Chloe is. "Doctor-patient confidentiality. Sorry."

"It's not a problem."

"When did …." Chloe takes a breath. "When did you find out, anyway?"

"Hmm. Right around Halloween. About a year and a half ago."

I think I've broken my therapist, Chloe remembers Lucifer saying. And now she's somewhere to the left of totally useless and to the right of babbling lunatic. Which … wow. New context tumbles into place. So much new context. Her hands tremble.

Afternoon sun cuts into the office at a slant, bisecting the room. The coffee table and some of Linda's bookshelves are bathed in light. Chloe watches the dust motes lazily floating in the air until everything blurs behind a wall of tears again.
"I'm trying to be okay with this," she rasps. "I'm trying. But, now, I'm not just dealing with Lucifer. All this otherworldly stuff is creeping into my work, too, and it's everywhere else, and I can't go three seconds without—"

"Wait," Linda says, holding up her hand. "What do you mean, it's in your work? Hasn't it always been in your work? I mean, Lucifer does work with you."

Chloe rubs her eyes and grabs a tissue. "No, I mean, now, I'm solving a murder where one of the victims isn't even human."

"Oh," Linda frowns. "Well, that's new. Even for me. Is the victim like … Maze or something? A demon?"

Chloe tells Linda about her murder investigation, narrating quickly from the dead woman outside the pizza parlor to the dead man — no, the dragon — under the bridge.

"That … does sound pretty insane," Linda says in a boggled tone.

"Really?" Chloe says with a snort. "That's your professional opinion?"

Linda regards her for a long moment. "Chloe, sometimes … things are just crazy. I know from experience that the stuff that happens around Lucifer … well, it gives you a whole new perspective on reality. And with that new perspective, even as a therapist, I can't do much more than tell you that your feelings, while I know they're incredibly distressing, are also completely valid. That shit is cray."

"I just …." Chloe sighs. "I don't know what to do."

Linda nods and scoots out from behind her desk, resettling on the chair across from the couch. "Do you want to solve the case?" she says gently.

"Of course, I want to solve it," Chloe replies. "Someone was killed. Two people were killed."

"So … the fact that the second victim isn't human … doesn't bother you."

Chloe shakes her head. "He was a living thing — a sentient thing. A sentient … d-dragon, I mean." At least, she thinks dragons are sentient. It would stand to reason. Not that any of this is reasonable. And she's still not sure how to wrap her head around her vic being a dragon in the first place. "But someone stole his life from him. Someone took his choices away. I don't care whether he was human or not. That's wrong, and he deserves justice."

"That point of view sounds very familiar."

"Hmm?"

Linda smiles. "You sound a lot like Lucifer."

"I do," Chloe admits, looking at the floor. "Don't I."

"Maybe … that's why you work so well together?" Linda suggests.

Chloe gives Linda a humoring look. "I know what you're trying to do."

Linda's grin widens. "Well, is it working?"

Chloe sighs. "I realized today that he's the former — current?" On Linda's head shake, Chloe amends
herself back to, "—former ruler of Hell. Like really, really realized."

"Yes. Well, he is the Devil."

"I mean, I knew that before, once I'd seen his other face, but I didn't know," Chloe says. "I mean, it didn't sink in. And now … ."

"And, now, your friend is a man who knows Hitler personally."

Chloe blinks. Wait. Back up. "Lucifer … knows Hitler?"

"Where do you think Hitler went when he died?"

"That's … that's … ." Chloe swallows. "Wow."

"Yeah," Linda says, nodding. "Like I said. This shit's cray."

Chloe pulls her fingers through her hair, offering Linda a tired smile. "It's so nice to vent to someone who gets it."

Linda's eyes twinkle. "Feeling a little better, now?"

"Yeah," Chloe says. She takes a breath and blows it out slowly. For once, she doesn't feel the urge to immediately gasp again as the world proceeds to drown her. "Yeah, I … ." She's … treading water, not sucking down seawater. "Yeah, I am."

"Well, my door is always open." Linda glances at her watch. "But I do have an appointment in a few minutes, so I'm going to have to ask that we wrap this up, now."

"Thanks. Sure. Of course." Chloe rises to her feet.

"May I suggest something?" Linda says as Chloe gathers up her purse.

"What?"

"Well, it seems like this new case at work has been your tipping point," Linda says. She pauses, expression growing thoughtful. "If you're having trouble dealing with Lucifer within the context of work … why not spend some time together outside of work? Remind yourself why you're friends. Find some equilibrium with him on a purely social level."

Chloe frowns. "I … don't know." Frankly, that sounds like a recipe for disaster right now.

"He's still Lucifer," Linda says gently. "He's still the exact same person you knew before. 100 percent. Just … now you know a little more about him. Hold onto that, okay? And, maybe, go meet him for a drink with that in mind."

"That's … maybe."

Linda smiles. "It's just a suggestion."

"Thanks," Chloe says, fingers tightening around her purse straps.

Just a suggestion, but … . Chloe sighs as she heads back out to the parking lot. Is she really ready to be doing devilish social calls when she can barely look him in the eye without hyperventilating? She's … not sure.
She keeps staring at her phone as she heads back to her cruiser, which is parked on the street outside. She … could message him. She could. She could invite him over to watch a movie or something, or she could offer to meet him for drinks, as Linda suggested. Going over to Lux for drinks would certainly be less … less. She wouldn't be on her turf. She could leave at any time.

*Do you want to meet up for a cocktail or something?* she could text.

Except she ditched him earlier. She ditched him, and she insulted him, and he'll reply, *Thanks, but I'm rather not in the mood to be made the villain again today.*

And she'll have nothing to say to that except, *I'm sorry.* But she's said that so many times already that she feels like apologies have lost their meaning. Instead, they're code for, *I'm sorry, but I'll do the bad thing again in a few minutes, anyway,* and that's not really being sorry, is it?

So, she'll type, *I'm sorry,* and he'll stop answering altogether because he's sick of her, and he's sick of her lies.

The Prince of Lies is fond of truth, after all — irony of all ironies.

She thinks … perhaps it's best just not to ask at all. She prefers the idea of optionally not talking to him, rather than having a state of silence forced on her. She prefers ….

She sighs, as she reaches the car. The harsh afternoon sun beats against her face. She fumbles with her key fob until she hears a familiar beep, and the door locks disengage.

She prefers their "friendship" in a state like Schrödinger's cat, where it can still be alive and thriving, because she hasn't opened the box, yet, to discover it very much dead.

A lump forms in her throat as she climbs into the car.

She doesn't text him.

Chapter End Notes

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I get the impression people are thinking the ENTIRE Castaway story is about Chloe coming to terms with this Devil stuff, and Chloe & Lucifer will be miserable and walking on eggshells around each other for all 26 chapters. I promise you … no. Absolutely not. I wrote more about this [on my Tumblr](https://example.com) if you want more specifics than that. Hang in there, guys. Allllllmost over the hump :)

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Believer

Chapter Notes

Long chapter today! This is one of my favorites in the first half of the story -- I do hope you like it. Thanks as always to everyone who takes the time to comment, and thank you so much to the many folks who helped me with the translations in this chapter :)

Chapter title credit goes to Imagine Dragons.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

She has a tense hour the next morning when she waits to see if he'll show up, but he doesn't. Not that that necessarily means anything. He could be running late, after all. Lucifer and schedules are like wolves and bunnies. The former exists to rip the latter to pieces.

She thinks about calling him, but the Schrödinger's cat idea keeps coming into play. If she doesn't call him, doesn't discover he's not interested in being her partner anymore after she literally walked out on him, then … they're okay. They're okay, and—

She blinks as a steaming Starbucks cup appears in front of her, set down by a long, familiar arm, which is bedecked at the wrist by a shiny, familiar cufflink.

"You … came," she says, goggling.

He frowns. "Of course, I bloody came."

"I thought ….

He leans his hip against her desk. "Well, you thought wrong, Detective," he replies, each word smooth and rich like decades-aged bourbon. He smiles wanly at her, as though he's expecting her to get some joke she didn't realize he was telling. But then she remembers. Well, you thought wrong, she told him when he showed up at the scene of Genevieve's murder, in a conversation remarkably opposite to this one.

She rolls her eyes, which prompts his smile to widen.

Some of the tension leaks out of her body.

She takes a sip of the coffee while he steps away to grab a chair. One non-fat almond-milk latte with sugar-free caramel drizzle. Exactly the way she likes it. "Thank you," she says, swallowing.

"You're quite welcome."

The air feels warmer as he sits beside her.

She bites her lip. "I know I've been saying sorry a lot, lately, but—"

"May I … speak freely?" he says, cutting her off in that same aged-bourbon tone he used before.

"Um." Her heart skips. "Okay."
"I'd like a favor from you," he says.

"A favor?" She swallows. "Like … a favor favor?"

He regards her for a long moment. "Yes. A deal with the Devil, as they say." His teeth flash wolfishly as he grins at her. "Are you game?"

She clenches her fingers around the coffee cup. "What deal would that be?"

"Well, in theory, I've no desire to be offended every time I upset you via my mere existence," he says. "In theory, I understand that you're dealing with an incredible amount of new and objectively upsetting information. So, I would appreciate it if you would stop apologizing to me as if I were offended, and pretend as if I am not."

She can't stop a small chuckle from popping loose from her mouth. "You're big on turning the tables today, aren't you?"

"I'm working on it," he says, eyes twinkling just a little. "In theory."

His teasing … feels good. It feels right. And she aches, remembering that this is how they always used to be. Only weeks ago, though it feels like eons. Before Charlotte died, and this whole mess became a tsunami, supplanting normalcy as it crashed into everything and swept it all away.

"So … I stop apologizing every five seconds, and you … owe me?" she says, looking up at him through her eyelashes.

"That is the gist of my request, yes," he says.

She licks her lips. "Do we … shake on it?"

He leans closer. "We could if you desire."

For a moment, time seems to slow, and the precinct fades away. His eyes burn like embers, and she remembers, in that moment, how handsome he is. With his chiseled jaw and dark, long eyelashes and perfectly cultivated swath of 5 o'clock stubble. He's warm and solid, and they're almost touch—

"Definitely another curare death," Ella says as she slaps another autopsy report onto Chloe's desk, and Lucifer backs away with a sigh. Chloe sighs, too, as the moment is shattered. Ella continues, "Terrible way to go. Can you imagine? You get hit with a dart, and your muscles start to lock up. You lose all control of yourself. You need to breathe, but you can't, because your diaphragm is suddenly nothing more than a piece of wet spaghetti. You panic, because you have no idea what's going on. You flop around like a landed fish for a bit. Then you black out from lack of oxygen." Grimacing, she clutches her neck and makes a dramatic gurgling maybe-intended-to-sound-like-a-death-rattle noise. She goes limp and slumps against Chloe's computer monitor. "And then you croak."

"Yes," Lucifer agrees in a flat tone. "Quite terrible."

Cracking one eye open, Ella looks back and forth between Lucifer and Chloe. "Heeey," she says as she picks herself up and straightens her shirt. "Did I … interrupt something?"

"No," Chloe says, clearing her throat. "Nope." She shakes her head. "Where would you get that idea?"

"Riiight," Ella says, eyes narrowing.
Lucifer changes gears with grace, with only a slow blink to indicate his perturbation. "Perhaps our killer is more accustomed to animal prey?" he suggests.

"What does that have to do with anything?" Ella asks.

"That's the reason curare is used in blow darts," Lucifer replies with a shrug. "Hunters will shoot game and then run it down to the point of collapse. Since the prey's breathing is hindered, exhaustion happens quickly."

Chloe's eyebrows knit. "So … you think maybe this guy is a hunter?"

"Perhaps," Lucifer says.

"Aren't darts a little retro for that, though?" Chloe says. "What happened to using guns?"

"Well, we're thinking the goal is to collect trophies, right?" Ella says, thinking. "So … the dart method would ensure that nothing gets damaged. Even small caliber bullet wounds can be mondo destructive."

"Precisely," Lucifer says. He takes a breath to add something else, but then he directs a considering, pained look at Chloe, and his lips seal into a flat, grim line. He looks back at Ella. "Ms. Lopez, are you using a new cream rinse? Your hair smells particularly lovely today." His nostrils flare. "Do I detect a hint of jasmine?"

Ella beams. "Shampoo, actually. It was on sale! Really, you like it?"

"Oh, yes," he purrs. "Tell me, what—"

"Just say it, Lucifer," Chloe says tiredly.

A visible wince crosses his features as he turns back to her. "You're … certain? I'm not convinced it's relevant enough to derail our ceasefire."

"Totally not certain," she replies, a pit forming in her stomach like a cold brick, "but you thought of it, and I'm the only reason you kept quiet. So say it anyway. Please."

"Well," he begins slowly, "I was merely going to mention that with supernatural game in particular, the point of a takedown is to reliably and totally incapacitate — reliable incapacitation facilitates the recovery of trophies, after all — and guns don't offer that capability."

Ella nods. "True. Even with a fatal shot to the heart, the victim usually still has a few minutes of functionality, which is enough to fight back."

"And that's with a mere human." Lucifer makes a tsk, tsk, tsk noise as he shakes his head. "Hollywood is wretched at disseminating the realities of a gunshot wound."

"I know, right?" Ella says.

Chloe clears her throat. "You think our killer … hunted supernatural game?"

"Perhaps," Lucifer says, looking warily back at her. "Either way, he seems to have transferred the method to his more human-like quarries." Like the fucking dragon.

"Human-like?" Ella says, frowning. "Human-like?"

"Yes, Ms. Lopez," Lucifer says with a nod. "I meant what I said." His eyes are dark and fathomless,
and he seems to be daring her to think, and to make conclusions.

But Ella does what Chloe's spent the past three years doing. She gives Lucifer a gentle punch in the arm. "Man, you're total aces at this role," she says with an oblivious laugh. "I hope you get it if you haven't already."

"Supernatural game," Chloe says, shaking her head, before Lucifer can huffily assert that there is no role. "That's ... actually a thing, too?"

"Why do you think unicorns are extinct, Detective?" he replies, tone grim. "Think of what poachers will do for mere earthly ivory."

A cold sweat creeps down her spine. She swallows against a suddenly dry throat. But she can deal with this. She can. Supernatural game. Dragons are real. Unicorns were real. Maybe ... there are griffins? A real kraken? Whatever. Whatever is out there, there's some crazy hunting scene to accompany it. A scene that normal humans chasing after the Big Five in Africa wouldn't even be aware of, and holy shit, holy shit, holyshit.

She mentally backs away from that rabbit hole before she falls in and breaks her neck. Supernatural game or not, she can buy the idea that the killer doesn't want to damage the merchandise. That makes sense no matter who's hunting what. But where in the hell would this killer be getting curare?

"Would pharmaceutical companies be keeping track of the sale of curare like they do with other controlled substances?" she asks.

Ella shakes her head. "Real curare hasn't been used medicinally in the United States for a long time. Now that we have so many synthetic anesthetics, there's no need. Pharmaceutical companies wouldn't be selling it in the first place."

"You can order practically anything on the dark web," Lucifer pipes in helpfully, seeming happy to be back onto a topic that doesn't revolve around the-Devil-is-real and other related topics. "Assassinations. Doxxing. Blackmail. Illicit substances. Other contraband. I'm quite certain you could find curare for sale somewhere."

Chloe sighs, pinching the bridge of her nose. "Jurisdictional nightmare of the Internet aside, we'd need a starting point to do a dark web investigation," she says. "And we've got nothing. I mean, I can't get a warrant because, 'Well, how else would he obtain curare?' That's not probable cause, nor does it have the required specificity."

"I don't have probable cause, but I think I might have a starting point for you," Dan says as he walks in from the bullpen carrying a stack of photographs. "Traffic cams gave us a hit on your B.O.L.O."

He gives Lucifer a long, unhappy look, and then hands her a glossy 8x10 of a white pickup truck with California plates. The plate number is sharp and unobscured. Behind the wheel of the vehicle sits a dark-haired man whose features, thanks to the truck's dirty windshield, are blurry, but ... familiar.

"Look who ran a red light just a few blocks from Pepperoni Pete's," Dan says.

Given the poor quality of the photograph, she's not sure if this is their guy. It could be a coincidence. But then she glances at the time and date printed at the lower left-hand corner of the photograph, and she blinks. "That's ...." A hell of a coincidence, if it's a coincidence.

Ella grins like a fiend. "Gee, Ella, your time-of-death calculations are spot on!" she says out of the corner of her mouth. "You go, girl."
Chloe snorts and says, "Good work, Ella." She looks at Dan. "Do we have an address for this guy?"

Dan grins back at her, his pale eyes gleaming. "I already pulled up the vehicle registration for you." He hands her another printout, this time from D.M.V. records. The truck is registered to a man named Anton Ivanov. The address looks like it's in Encino, about a thirty minute drive up the 101 from the precinct, traffic permitting. Following her train of thought, Dan adds, "You might even arrive before the citation gets mailed out."

"So … Anton Ivanov," Chloe says.

"God's grace," Lucifer scoffs. "Well, I doubt that."

She frowns. "What?"

He shrugs. "That's what Ivan means. God's grace. It's the Russian derivative of the Greek name Ioannes — you would say John in English — and that is the derivative of the Hebrew Johanan. Meaning Yahweh is gracious. Which he's bloody well nnn—" His eyes widen, and he grinds to a halt, his teeth pinched together around the letter n, which was clearly supposed to bloom into the word "not." A frustrated syllable gets caught in his throat. "Apologies," he adds sibilantly, the word both strained and restrained, like he wants to finish his diatribe against God so badly that he's almost suffering apoplexy in his effort not to. "I …. Apologies."

Chloe's still stuck on Yahweh, though. Mentioned as casually as Trixie would mention something like, "Dad took me out for ice cream!" It's … unreal.

"Dude," Ella says from far away, "I had no idea you were into etymology."

Lucifer takes a breath, directing a concerned, somewhat panicky look in Chloe's direction. His uncharacteristic skittishness isn't what she wanted from this "no Satan stuff" deal. Fear doesn't suit him. At all. Guilt coils.

"Just talk, Lucifer," Chloe says quietly as she rubs the bridge of her nose. "It's okay. I'll deal."

He gives her a doubtful look.

"Really," she assures him. "I'll deal."

"I'm not into etymology," he says slowly, turning back to Ella. "But it's easy enough to translate when one speaks every language."

"Every language," Ella says.

Lucifer gives Chloe another doubting side-eye. "… Yes."

Ella raises her eyebrows. "Arabic?"

"Na'am," he says with a nod.

"Mandarin?"

He presses his palms together and bows. "Shì de."

"Ask me where the bathroom is in Norwegian."

"Which dialect?" he says.
"There's more than one dialect in Norway?"

He rolls his eyes. "Ja, det er det. På Østlandsk: hvor er doen?"

Ella folds her arms. "¿También hablas español?"

"Por supuesto. ¿Crees que los mexicanos no creen en el infierno?"

"Wow," Ella says, her mouth hanging open.

Dan doesn't look particularly shocked, but Chloe can only stare. She can't judge Lucifer's correctness when it comes to Arabic, Chinese, or Norwegian, but she's fluent in Spanish, and he definitely didn't pull that one out of his ass.

"You can really speak everything?" she says, trying not to stare at him like he's some sort of zoo exhibit. The Devil, a unique omnivore indigenous to warm, dry climes, consumes approximately three gallons of bourbon a day, and is known for—

"I am the most poly of glots, Detective," he says, and she's shaken from her wild musing to find him regarding her with a concerned expression. "Surprised?" The word is gentle, not mocking.

"After the week I've had … not really," she says weakly. On his worried look, she clears her throat and adds, "Actually, it … it'll be useful. I think."

She blinks. "Lucifer, I'm not gonna shoot—"

"Kidding, darling," he says. "I do joke, sometimes, if you'll recall."

She gives him a sheepish look. "Right. Sorry."

"What did I say about apologies, Detective?" he says primly and turns to go.

She follows, blushing. The teasing …. It really does feel good.

A couple of blurry traffic-cam photos and low-def security footage aren't enough evidence for a judge to sign an arrest warrant. Chloe doesn't want to tip her hand with a knock-and-talk just yet. So, she pulls up to the curb across the street and waits. Watches.

Anton Ivanov — or whoever owns the white pickup truck — lives in a ramshackle duplex with a sparse, dead yard. A "FOR SALE" sign is posted in front of the left unit, next to an empty, crumbling driveway. A tipping eucalyptus tree leans precariously close to the roof of the house.

The white pickup, slowly dripping clear fluid onto the pavement, sits in the right-side driveway. Condensation from the air conditioner, she thinks, staring at the puddle forming underneath the vehicle. Which would mean that whoever drives the pickup just came home.

The minutes pass.

Lucifer reaches for the cruiser's door handle.

"What are you doing?" she says as the thunk of the door lock disengaging fills the quiet. "Don't do
that." She turns to him. "Don't even think about doing that, Lucifer."

He gives her an innocent look. "Think about doing what?"

"You want to use your desire thingy on him."

"I was planning to do no such thing!"

Her eyebrows knit. "Fine, then you want to break in and have a look around, search warrant be damned, never mind the fact that he looks like he's home."

Lucifer has no response to that except to slump slowly back into his seat. When his shoulder blades push into the leather behind him, he grimaces, picks himself up again, and then resettles. Squeaking leather fills the silence. He glowers at the dirty windshield, fidgeting.

"If you jump the gun," she continues, "the whole case might get thrown out in court, and then all our work to catch this guy will be for nothing. We have to do the legwork, first. Do you really want to blow this whole thing on fruit of the poisonous tree?"

"But this is bloody boring," he replies with an irritated sigh, shifting again in his seat. "If I'd realized that we'd be doing a stakeout instead of an arrest, I'd have at least brought snacks. As it is, I've nothing but a few sips of Laphroaig to carry me through this difficult time."

"Laf … what?"

"Scotch, darling. Which is lovely, but it's not for boredom grazing."

She snorts, looking out the window to hide her sudden smile.

"What?" he says, glowering as he pulls out his flask to take a swig of said Laphroaig.

"Nothing, just …." She can't curtail the little giggle that burbles up from within like a bubble in a boiling pot. "Satan likes candy and cool-ranch puffs and has A.D.D. It's—" Another laugh. "— surreal."

"I don't bloody have A.D.D.," he grumbles, putting his flask away. "I can be patient when it suits me. Quite a lot more than any one of you lot."

You humans, he means by you lot, and she bristles a little. But … she's not bothered nearly as much by that realization as she would have been yesterday. "No, I know," she assures him shakily. "I know you're not always …." Or even usually attention-challenged, when she thinks about it. He … has moods. Like any human would. "I just …." She shrugs, not at all sure how to put any of her coiling thoughts into words. She pulls her fingers through her hair, frustrated. "It's just …."

"Not exactly Dante's idea of me?" he finishes for her.

"Yeah," she says. "Yeah, exactly."

He rolls his eyes at some unknown thought as he reaches up with his hand to massage his right trapezius muscle. "That libelous prat really cocked up my life."

She bites her lip. "Cocked … up?"

"Well, he's largely responsible for the modern perception of me. And of Hell in general, really. The Bible really doesn't mention me all that much."
"I wouldn't know," she says. "I … haven't read it."

After a tense, stretching silence, he sighs, and he says, "Apologies, Detective. I wasn't thinking. I didn't intend to bring up—"

"How many people like you and Maze are in L.A.?" she blurs.

"Pardon?"

"Well, it's just … the one victim is a …." Dragon. A freaking dragon. She still has trouble saying it, and she expels a stressed sigh, instead. "Have any of the other cases I've worked on had victims who weren't human?"

He regards her for a long moment. "Not that I've noticed, though I'm not infallible in that respect." He looks out the window. "I'd say … about a thousand."

"A thousand what?"

"Nonhumans living in the L.A. metropolitan area."

She squints, trying to do the math. The metropolitan area has about 13 million residents. 1000 divided by 13,000,000 is … something with lots of decimal places. And she can't do that kind of long division in her head. She—

"Barely more than .007 percent, if that," Lucifer clarifies before she can reach for her phone.

Which is an even smaller number than she'd been thinking. "Really, that few?"

"Quite the minor minority, isn't it?" he says, nodding. "But I'd wager no one is like me or like Maze."

"What do you mean?"

"Maze, to my knowledge, is the only demon living on Earth — Hell is their home, and they vastly prefer it. And with Amenadiel gone back to the Silver City, and none of my other siblings popping by to say hello, it stands to reason that I'm the only angel."


Lucifer gives her an incredulous look. "Well, I did say he's my brother, did I not?"

"I know, but …." It didn't sink in until now. Holy shit, so many things make more sense. "Wow."

"Yes, 'wow,'" Lucifer replies with a nod, putting the word wow in air quotes. "If the angel feather I found is any indication, my brother regained his wings. I'm certain he took Charlotte to …." His words trail into silence, and he stares out at the street beyond the windshield, a strangely regretful expression on his face. "I'll never get to see her again, he said. But as fast as the grief appears on his face, it melts away, and he clears his throat. "Well. You know where, I'm sure."

Chloe blinks as the full context of what he said before sinks in. Sadly she's gone somewhere I simply can't follow. Because he's the Devil, and he's been cast out. Him ruling Hell was a punishment for him, not a pride, or a pleasure. He doesn't have access to Heaven. He …. "Lucifer, I'm sorry," she says softly.
Rather than deal-check her, he gives her a baffled look.

"Not because I did something," she rushes to explain. "I just meant …." She sighs. "I guess I don't even know what I mean. Just … context helps, I guess." So many things that never made sense before are sliding into place, like puzzle pieces she's finally matched up to the picture on the box. So many things about Lucifer work better when he's not a metaphor. "I'm sorry about Charlotte."

He looks at her. "I'm … not used to caring whether humans live or die."

"You've … never made friends with us before?"

He shrugs. "Acquaintances, yes." He smiles at her before looking back out the window. "But no one like you. Or Ms. Lopez. Or even bloody Daniel, of all people."

Chloe smiles. "Yeah, he kinda … grows on you."

"He does," Lucifer admits. "Though if you ever tell him I said that, I'll be quite cross."

"Your secret is safe," she says, sniggering.

"He blames me," Lucifer says with an unhappy sigh. "For Charlotte's death."

"He just needs to work through it on his own," Chloe says. "Give him space. He'll come around."

Lucifer has no reply to that. No reaction. Though from the grim set of his features, he's unhappy about her assessment. He's not the type to wait. Of the many "sins" he commits, sloth isn't one of them. And, now, he's stuck waiting for Dan to come around. And he's stuck waiting for Chloe to come around. He's … stuck waiting for other people to decide things in his favor. He can't control any of it — he can only hope the chips will fall where he wants them to — and … she can empathize on so many levels with his frustration about that.

"Do … you blame me for Charlotte's death?" he asks quietly.

"No," she says without hesitation. "No, I blame Pierce. He's the one who pulled the trigger."

For a moment, all Lucifer does is stare blankly out the window. Another non-reaction. But then he nods, the movement infinitesimal. And then he swallows, closing his eyes for a lot longer than a blink would warrant. Like he's trying to school himself and thinks he's failing.

"I don't blame you," she repeats, feeling almost sick to her stomach at the sight of his stunned relief. "I'm still pissed you didn't show me the truth sooner, but …"

"I thought it would scare you," he says in a soft voice. "My other face. I …."

She looks at her lap. "Well … you weren't wrong."

"I liked when you weren't scared."

She's not sure what possesses her to do it, but she reaches across the parking brake and wraps her fingers around his hand. He inhales at the touch and doesn't exhale. His skin is soft and warm, just like always. His palm has the same indentations of lifelines, just as a human's would. She strokes her thumb along the middle crease. His fingers flex and wrap around her thumb. This is the first time they've touched since … before.

"Will you … tell me everything, now?" she says.
"Everything?" he parrots, frowning.

"Since you met me," Chloe says. "I want you to tell me about all the supernatural wuwu crap I missed."

His befuddled snort fills the quiet. "Supernatural … wu … wu?"

"Like when you said your angelic brother stopped time to pluck a bullet out of thin air, you weren't kidding."

"Of course, I wasn't kidding."

"So … start at the beginning," she says, staring down at his very human hand. "Tell me everything."

"You're … certain?" he says.

"No," she tells him with a self-deprecating laugh. "Not even a little." But she needs to get to work on reframing her reality. She needs to not be afraid. And she likes the idea of giving Lucifer something to do besides wait for her to figure shit out. So, she takes a deep breath and says, "But tell me anyway."

The silence stretches into infinity as she stares out into the waning daylight. A car rumbles past on the street, but the sound of it is a distant hum, like she's on an island far away from it. She tightens her grip around the door handle, squeezing until her knuckles hurt, in some vain attempt to vent her need to flee. This isn't real, her tiny voice keeps repeating. This isn't real. This can't be fucking real.

"A … miracle," she parrots.

Lucifer is large and looming beside her, peering at her with a dark, concerned gaze. "Yes. Are you … all right?"

"I'm a …." She can't even say the word.

His leather seat squeaks as he shifts his whole body toward her, wincing as he moves. His knee pushes into the parking brake. The heat of him presses closer. "Yes," he says, the word soft.

"But—" She swallows, trying to think, but her brain is a frightening blank page with nothing but a blinking cursor. "—what does that even mean?"

"Truthfully, I've no idea."

"Is my miracle-ness why your desire thingy doesn't work on me?"

He nods slowly. "That is my hypothesis, yes."

"But you don't know for sure."

"I do not," he concedes.

"So, I'm …" The cursor won't stop blinking. Her mind's eye is nothing but white snow and the blink, blink, blink in maddening repetition. The silence constricts into a dull roar. Blood. Rushing in her ears. This isn't real, repeats her tiny voice. "Really, I only exist because Amenadiel gave Mom a shoulder tap from God? That's … actually a thing that God does?"

"I didn't think so before I learned of your origins," Lucifer says reasonably. As if this is reasonable.
"Dad's always been … quite hands off with humanity in the past.”

"Is … my dad even my dad?"

Lucifer frowns. "Er … what?"

"Like … is this some sort of wacky immaculate-conception scenario? Am I Female Jesus or something? I mean …" Holy shit. Is she Female Jesus? She licks her lips. "That's conceited, isn't it." And crazy. It's crazy. "Thinking that God would … That he'd …" He so wouldn't.

Would he?

"No," Lucifer says. "It's a logical question, considering your perspective." His warm hand comes to rest on her shoulder. Squeezes. "But I'm certain that all Amenadiel did was … invigorate the necessary … er … anatomy."

She bites her lip. "How certain?"

"Chloe, Jesus is entirely human myth. The only true children of God were all conceived via the usual method. I promise you."

"The … B-Big Bang, you said."

"Right."

A nervous, upset laugh tumbles loose from her lips. "God, this is ridiculous. This is ridiculous that I'm even having this conversation. Celestial birds and bees. With the Devil, of all people!"

Lucifer has no response for that except to awkwardly look at his lap.

"I …" She takes a breath and blows it out, counting internally to ten. "Okay."

"Okay?" he says warily, eyebrows rising in surprise. "Truly?"

"Well, what am I supposed to say?" she says with a shrug. "Gee, this sucks? Thanks?"

"You're … not bothered?" he prods. "By the idea that you were put here … for me?"

"I don't know," she says. "I mean … was I, even?" She turns to him, frowning. "How do you know?"

"I … don't," he admits. "It's … educated guessing."

She pushes her fingers through her hair, a stressed sigh blustering from her lips. "Honestly … there's so much … stuff right now. So many things there's no guesswork for, anymore." Like the fact that the Devil himself is sitting in the car with her, worrying over her melting sanity and talking about the reality (or lack thereof) of Jesus. "This really doesn't …" A lost syllable that doesn't mean much of anything gets caught in her throat, and she shakes her head. "This is like finding out my great great grandfather was maybe a famous French ventriloquist or something. Just … hey, interesting. Okay, then. Now, moving back to the part about Hell."

Lucifer tilts his head, regarding her with a softening gaze. His eyes glisten in the darkening car cabin.

"What?" she says.

"You've a resilience about you that I very much admire," he replies. "That's all."
She snorts. "It's honestly more … I can't even wrap my head around this right now. Like … let me work on the part where God and the Devil are real, first."

"Indeed," said Devil replies with a nod, eyes twinkling a little. "Well." He squeezes her shoulder once more before withdrawing to resettle in his seat. "Now, moving back to the part about Hell. Which in this case is quite literal, since it's where I obtained the formula for your cure."

She gapes. "Wait. Wait, what?"

It's been hours, and the sun has long since set. Her head is spinning like a top. Lucifer is in the middle of explaining the insanity of him waking up in the middle of Death Valley with freaking wings — her partner has wings and is an archangel — when she notices Anton's front door creaking open in the darkness. A dark-haired, trench-coat-wearing man steps out onto the front walk.

"Lucifer," she whispers, shaking her head to clear it of all the celestial cobwebs as she watches the man head toward the white truck. "Lucifer, look."

Lucifer shuts up immediately and looks to the left, across the street, just as the man throws a large duffel bag over the edge of the truck bed, dropping it out of sight. The man climbs into the truck and turns the key in the ignition. The engine rumbles in the darkness.

"That looked like the duffel bag he used for the body dump at the pizzeria," she says. "Didn't it?"

"No body in it this time," Lucifer says.

She frowns. "Do I want to know how you know that?"

"Nothing nefarious, I assure you," Lucifer says with a shrug. "The edges of the canvas were concave while he was carrying it, which indicates to me that there's either nothing in the bag, or nothing large in the bag. Certainly nothing with heft, as would be the case with a body."

"You can see that from here? The bag was black."

"I've good eyes."

"But nobody could—" Oh. Shit. Wait. "More Satan stuff?"

Which he takes as license to snark, "How you humans function with such limited perception, I will never bloody fathom."

"Do you have like … infravision or something?"

"Far more than that," he replies vaguely.

"That could come in handy for us," she muses, not missing his surprised blink. But now is not the time to discuss the mechanics of archangel vision or how it might be applied to future in-the-dark investigations, because the truck is backing out of the driveway. She waits for it to hit the stop sign two blocks down before she turns on her cruiser, killing her headlights quickly.

The cruiser's engine crescendos into a loud purr as she presses the accelerator.

She follows the truck into the night.

Anton drives to the Arts District downtown and pulls up to the loading dock of a warehouse covered
in graffiti. Three men wearing dark suits are waiting by the door with an identical duffel bag in hand. "They're wearing Dior," Lucifer says, frowning at the three.

"So, they've got money," says Chloe.

"Lots and lots, Detective."

Anton hops out of his truck and grabs the body-dump duffel from the truck bed. Then Anton trades his duffel for the duffel held by the Dior thugs. Chloe snaps photos on her cellphone. The photos are going to be complete shit, thanks to the poor lighting, but she has to at least try ….

"That particular duffel," Lucifer says as Anton walks back to his truck with his new burden, "is not empty."

Chloe tenses, lowering her phone as she squints into the darkness. The edges of the duffel in question bleed into the shadows. She can hardly tell Anton is holding something, let alone make judgments about what the thing he's holding might contain.

"How not empty are we talking?" she says.

"I don't think it contains a body. It's too light. But it's not collapsing on itself anymore, so ...." Lucifer's eyes narrow. "I would wager that we've just witnessed a payoff, Detective. Cash is much lighter than a body, after all."

"That's what I was thinking, too," Chloe says with a nod. "Which would mean we're not dealing with a trophy hunter at all. We're dealing with a hitman."

"Who may or may not be working at a trophy hunter's behest."

"Right," Chloe says. She sighs. "Unfortunately, it's not illegal to exchange duffel bags." Which means they still have no probable cause. And no grounds for a warrant.

"Perhaps, I could—"

"No, Lucifer. You couldn't."

He sighs, folding his arms. His pique at being restrained billows in the air like a thick, black cloud, but … at least, he listened. The Devil listens to her, she realizes with a blink. The actual Devil values her opinion and considers her desires before acting on his own.

Wow.

"This guy dumped a body into an alley like trash," she says, trying to repay Lucifer's consideration in kind as she pulls out into traffic again, following Anton from far behind. "I know you want to get him — I do, too; really, I do — but I also don't want him to get away on a technicality. Okay? We do this by the book."

"But he won't get away," Lucifer says with a confused frown.

"You don't know that."

"Detective, I do know that," he insists.

"Okay, I'll bite," she says as she accelerates to pull around a slow-moving beater. "How? Are you prescient or something? Like Punxsutawney Phil, but for court convictions instead of season changes?"
When the silence stretches uncomfortably, she worries she offended him yet again.

"Ah … no, Detective," he says slowly after a moment. His tone is strange. Almost … quivering? He wipes his face with his hands until his palms come to rest over his eyes, covering them from view. "No, I've … no way to know the future, via seeing my shadow in winter, or otherwise." He takes a trembling breath.

Wait a damned minute. "Are you laughing at me?" she exclaims.

Her words behave as though they physically jabbed him in the ribs. He drops his hands, and a real guffaw escapes his desperate clutches. And then another. And another.

She glares as she rolls through a four-way stop. Anton's tail lights glow red in the distance ahead. "Hey, my question wasn't that stupid."

"No, no, it's not stupid at all," Lucifer rushes to assure her, still sniggering. "I've just … not suffered that … comparison before." He shakes his head. "Rats, yes. But assigning me congruence with America's anointed groundhog is … new." He looses another amused snort.

"Well," she replies, blushing. "I just thought …." She'd been so fixated on Punxsutawney Phil's ability to prognosticate that she hadn't thought about the rodent part of her simile. "I meant …."

Oops.

Up ahead, Anton turns right.

Lucifer takes a breath and adds in a more reasonable tone, "I only meant to imply that even if Mr. Ivanov escapes your justice, he'll still suffer mine. Barring immortality and psychopaths who feel no guilt, no one escapes mine. What I do on Earth has little consequence in his ultimate fate."

Which …. If his perspective is that human justice is little more than a fun and tasty condiment for the "real" punishment that happens after death, a veritable cornucopia of his past behavior makes a lot more sense. Holy shit.

She frowns, turning right where she saw Anton's truck turn right. "I really don't want you messing around with this guy, Lucifer."

He nods, accepting her judgment yet again. "Will you at least permit me to get you your arrest warrant?" he says.

She narrows her eyes. "How?"

"By asking for it," Lucifer says calmly. "Or have you forgotten how many people owe me favors?"

She bites her lip, sighting Anton's truck ahead once more in the gloom. Utilizing one of Lucifer's many I.O.U.s to catch this jackass is tempting. But, "All it would take is someone smart looking closely at the inevitably wafer-thin affidavit, and we could get slammed with a charge of unlawful search and seizure. And given the amount of money potentially being thrown around, if those posh Dior suits and giant duffel bags are any indication, a Johnnie-Cochran-level defense attorney isn't out of the question."

"We just saw a killer-for-hire get paid, Detective."

"We don't know—"

"What if this was payment for someone who's not dead, yet?" Lucifer snaps, interrupting her.
"Someone we can still save? Forget justice a moment, did that bloody occur to you?"

"Of course, it did," she says coolly in return. She grips the steering wheel, twisting her palms around it until her knuckles turn white. A quick glance at her speedometer shows they're traveling at 30 m.p.h., but Anton's vehicle remains far ahead in the distance, and the gap isn't closing. Hmm. "I think maybe I have a better idea than you calling in a favor, anyway."

"Oh?" he says.

She lets herself flash a predatory grin as she hits the accelerator.

"Sir, do you know why I pulled you over?" she says as she aims her flashlight at Anton's face.

He squints, blinking frantically in the harsh light. His eyes are pale, iceberg blue, and his pupils are pinpoint. "No," he says. "I did nothing wrong!"

"I witnessed you driving 30 m.p.h. in a 25 m.p.h. zone."

"Oh, come on. You're that hard up to meet your quota? I thought cops didn't touch people until they were at least six over."

"I don't have a quota, sir," she says. "And the law is the law." She doesn't mention she's not even a traffic cop, though she suspects that if Anton has any smarts at all, he'll figure that out by her lack of uniform. She definitely doesn't mention that she doesn't have any traffic citation forms, so she couldn't give him a ticket, even if she wanted to. "May I see your license and registration, please?"

He rolls his eyes and digs into his pocket for his wallet. "Here," he says, handing her a plastic card and a small paper printout from the D.M.V. The paper crinkles as she grasps it.

"Thank you," she says, and she heads back along the gravel shoulder to her car to make a show of running his plates. The flash of her red-and-blue lights pierces the darkness like spears. Her headlights outline Anton's dark head through the truck's tiny rear windows.

"This is the kind of scheming I usually do," Lucifer says gleefully beside her. "I'm impressed."

"I guess you could say that I've learned from the best," she replies, winking across the parking brake at him.

"Why, Detective," he says with a wolfish grin, "I believe I'm quite flattered."

She pulls up Anton's driving record on the cruiser's computer. She doesn't give a shit what his record says — she just wants to make Anton sweat. And to make him sweat, she has to make him wait.

The computer screen populates.

"Hmm, our dear Mr. Ivanov may be a murderer," Lucifer says, reading, "but it seems he's not a reckless driver, excepting the citation that brought us here."

"Guess not," she says, tapping her fingers tensely on the steering wheel.

She waits three more minutes. Four. Then she heads back to the truck to return Anton's license and registration to him. She peers over the side of his truck as she passes by, pointing her flashlight into the bed. The duffel bag is smooshed into the corner with some paint cans and a toolbox and other innocuous things.
"What's the duffel bag in the truck bed for?" she says, trying to sound casual as she approaches the driver's side window again.

"Carrying things," Anton says.

"Carrying what?"

Anton clenches and unclenches his jaw, but doesn't answer. "Sir, I'd like to search your vehicle," she says. If he says no, she's S.O.L. But if he consents, and a lot of people very stupidly do ....

"It's cash, okay?" he snaps. "It's not drugs or guns, or whatever the hell it is that you're looking for."

"May I see the duffel?" she says.

"Whatever," he replies.

"Sir, is that a yes?"


She steps back to the truck bed to inspect the duffel. The material is canvas and feels rough against her fingertips. She unzips the bag. Sure enough, just as Anton said, the duffel contains money. Stacks and stacks of Benjamins, to be precise — the prime currency of the criminal underworld. She's guessing the bills are rubber-banded together $1000 increments, which means … this guy is carting around … at least $100,000. Maybe, closer to $150,000. She snaps a quick photo with her phone.

"It's not illegal to carry cash!" Anton practically snarls out the window at her.

She zips up the duffel and steps back to the window. "Where did you get it?"

"Vegas, if you must know," he says. "I had a good weekend."

She nods. "Sir, I'm gonna let you off with a warning, okay? But please watch your speed in the future."

He gives her an incredulous look, but he's smart enough not to complain, and she has to work not to sashay triumphantly away. Anton pulls off the shoulder so fast his tires screech, kicking up gravel. Luckily, she's far enough away to not get hit by the flying projectiles. And then he's gone into the night.

"Well?" Lucifer says as she gets back into the cruiser.

"Looked like at least $100,000. Maybe more."

"That's quite a steep price for a hitman," Lucifer says, frowning.

Which is true. Outside of Hollywood's dramatic license, most hits cost less than $10,000. "But this isn't a hitman for humans," she says.

"Supernatural targets do require a certain … expertise," Lucifer admits.

"That's what I was thinking," Chloe says, nodding. "Either way, it's our probable cause."

She pats her dash cam with a grin. Individually, all these clues mean nothing, but between Pepperoni Pete's security footage, the traffic cam, the identical duffel bags, and the photographic proof that a
large amount of cash was just exchanged, well, it's enough for a judge to at least allow her to look for something definitive enough to hold up in court.

"100 percent legally obtained," she says. "We'll have a warrant signed by the end of the week."

"Yes, good show, Detective," Lucifer says, gaze gleaming with appreciation. "Good show."

She grins. "I'm just glad, for once, that everybody speeds."

Chapter End Notes

You know that moment when things haven't been going well for a bit and then suddenly... everything clicks? *deep sigh of relief*

:D
"So, the warehouse Anton visited last night is owned by a Möbius, Inc.," Dan says as he returns to Chloe's desk.

Lucifer looks up from his phone for the first time in an hour. "Möbius, eh? Like the mathematician?"

Chloe has no idea what mathematician Lucifer is referring to, but she doesn't get a chance to ask.

Dan shoots an unfriendly look in Lucifer's direction before continuing, "Looks like a global antiquities dealer. No idea who owns the company, specifically, but I did find a contact number for their C.E.O. A man named Asaiah Möbius."

"So … not the mathematician," Lucifer decides.

"Well, given the name," Chloe says, considering, "either Asaiah is more than just the C.E.O., or a relative must own the company."

"Probably," agrees Dan.

She minimizes the affidavit she's been working on.

"Can you spell the name?" she says.

"Yeah," Dan replies, nodding, and he rattles off the letters as she types them into the D.M.V. database, with a brief timeout for her to Google how in the hell to wrestle an umlaut out of an American keyboard.

Luckily, Asaiah Möbius's name is weird enough that there's only one of him in all of California, which removes the need for process of elimination. She clicks the only search result, and his license photograph loads in seconds.

Cold amber-colored eyes stare back at her through the computer screen. The hairs on the back of her neck stand up. Gelid fingers stroke her spine. She's never seen that shade of iris on a human being before, though she thinks hazel eyes caught in odd lighting could possibly mimic it. She swallows, taking in the angular, craggy features, the beak nose, and the slicked-back black hair. The urge to close the picture is almost overwhelming, but she diverts her desire into a shiver.

"Um," she says. "Is he …?" Not human …?

From the low-pitched, stupefied, "Whoa," Dan utters, she isn't the only one who's creeped out. "Talk about feeling like someone stepped on your grave."

She glances at Lucifer to gauge his reaction, but he seems … almost sedate. Intellectually engaged, perhaps, but not unsettled. Like an entomologist examining a centipede.
"I know this man," Lucifer says, frowning as he reaches for the screen.

Sheblerks. "You … do?"

"I …." He shakes his head like he's trying to clear cobwebs. He strokes the side of the monitor with his index finger. "Yes …?" More a question than a certainty. His perplexed tone makes her feel uneasy.

"From where?" she says.

"I … haven't a clue." His frown deepens, as though the idea of him not remembering something disturbs him more than he's willing to admit. "I can't fathom when I ever would have crossed paths with him. But I've an eidetic memory. How could …?"

"Maybe, at Lux?" she prods.

Lucifer peers intently. "No …. No, not at Lux."

"But you just said you don't know."

"I don't," he replies, irritated. "But I know enough to rule things out."

"Is he … human?" she asks.

"He looks like the Devil," Dan says.

"I beg your bloody pardon?" Lucifer scoffs.

"No, man," Dan says, shaking his head as he gives himself the sign of the cross. "I mean the real Devil. Like from The Exorcist or some shit."

Lucifer opens his mouth to launch what appears to be scathing reply, but Chloe puts a hand on his shoulder, digging her nails into him through the wool of his suit jacket. "Lucifer," she says softly, feeling him tense up underneath her palm, "this isn't the time."

With his lips pulled back in a vicious sneer, Lucifer snaps to his feet and stalks away.

"You shouldn't say stuff like that around him, Dan," Chloe says as she watches Lucifer disappear into the break room with a flourish and a huffy, over-dramatic sigh.

Dan rolls his eyes. "Oh, come on. Don't tell me he's got you believing his load of shit, now, too."

"It doesn't matter what I believe," Chloe says slowly, pointing to the break room. "He believes it, and he's my partner. He's your partner, too. So can it, will you?"

"He got Charlotte ki—"

"No, he did not, Dan," she snaps. "Or do you think Charlotte and Pierce didn't make their own choices?"

Dan has no response to that except to look away and seethe. For a long moment, he doesn't reply. His temples flutter as he clenches and unclenches his jaw. And then, in a rough, twisted, upset voice he says, "No, I … I know." Like he's barely holding himself together. "I just …."

She puts a hand on his shoulder, for the first time noticing how wrinkled his shirt is. How … unkempt he looks. "Hey," she says softly, stepping close. "Are you … okay?"
He rubs his eyes and looks up at her. His expression is bloodshot and tired, and he isn't crying, but she gets the distinct impression his lack of tears, now, is because he has no tears left to shed. He wipes his face with his palms, bare skin rasping against stubble born from grief hygiene.

"I haven't been sleeping," Dan confesses quietly. "I'm sorry I'm being such a dick." He directs a troubled glance at the break room, where Lucifer seems to have decided to vent his anger by not-exactly-thieving chocolate from the vending machine again. He jams a $100 bill into the open machine, his onyx ring flashing in the light, and withdraws a Snickers bar in exchange. Dan sighs. "I'll apologize … eventually. I just can't stomach it, now, though."

"It's okay," she tells him. A lump forms in her throat. "Can I do anything?"

Dan considers the question for a moment. "Can I pick up Trix tonight? I know it's not my turn ….

She frowns. "Well, sure, but …?"

He shrugs. "I'll take her to a movie or something and then drop her back with you. I just … need something. Something besides quiet." And Trixie is anything but quiet. He directs a raw look at Chloe. "My apartment is empty, and I ….

Her heart constricts. That, she can understand. Too much, really. "Trixie could stay with you tonight," Chloe suggests. Maybe, they'll do each other some good. "Honestly, she can stay with you as long as you want, as long as she's okay with it. I don't mind."

"Thanks, I'll …" He clears his throat. "I'll ask her when I pick her up."

"I'm sure she'd love some extended Dad time."

"I could really use it," he says, staring into space.

Chloe squeezes his shoulder, giving him a comforting rub from elbow to scapula. "I'm always here, too, if you need me," she tells him. "My guest room is … free right now. If you want to get away from your place for a while."

"Thanks, but I'll manage."

"You're sure?"

On his clipped nod and abrupt collecting-himself sniff, she turns back to her computer to give him a little space. She pulls up the affidavit she's already several pages into composing. The document jumped back to page one, somehow, and the address of Anton Ivanov's residence glares back at her.

"Don't worry, Chlo; we'll catch this guy," Dan offers back in reciprocal comfort.

She nods. "Yeah. I'm not worried."

Not about Mr. Ivanov, anyway.

She tries not to think of Mr. Möbius's creepy wolf-amongst-chickens stare. Or Lucifer's weird bout of déjá vu.

She tries.

When Anton opens his front door, he takes one stupefied look at the maelstrom of flashing lights at the curb, and then at Chloe. "It's you," he says, like the word you is a curse.
"My, my, that's usually the line people reserve for me," Lucifer says cheerfully beside her.

She holds up a signed sheaf of papers bearing the stamped seal of the Superior Court of California, which Judge Fletcher had been more than happy to sign. "Anton Ivanov," she says, "I have a warrant to search your domicile for evidence related to two murders."

Anton's eyes widen. Chloe glances over her shoulder at the cadre of uniforms standing behind her. "I'm also detaining you for questioning," she says, and she steps aside, yanking Anton out onto the front walk with her. She shifts, pulling out her handcuffs. Anton seems too shocked to say much of anything, and he's led mutely away to sit in the back of a squad car. Not an official arrest, yet, but she plans to make it one if they find anything of note during this search.

She heads inside with Lucifer following doggedly behind her.

Anton's duplex is even smaller on the interior than it looks from the exterior, so there isn't much to search.

In his bedroom closet, she finds the duffel bag, still stuffed to the gill slits with cash, along with a gun case. In the case, she finds a rifle of some kind. "Tranq gun," their ballistics specialist says without pause when she messages him a photo taken by her phone.

"Well, I think I found the curare," Ella says, grimacing, as she pulls a brown glass bottle half the size of a coffee mug from Anton's medicine cabinet. A skull and crossbones emblazon the water-stained label.

"I can do one better than that," Lucifer says, dropping a cellphone into Chloe's gloved hands. "Look at the text messages."

After a quick glance to make sure Lucifer put the phone into airplane mode — he did; he's learning — she navigates to the phone's text messages. There are several texts from a masked number, and Chloe's eyes widen when she sees what appears to be a D.M.V. photo of their still unidentified second victim. *Omar Bakkal*, the next text says, and includes an address, "claws," and a dollar value. $112,000. Scrolling further back, she sees Genevieve Tate, a familiar address, "eyes," and $9,000. Apparently dragon claws are worth far more than the eyes of a human psychic.

There are no names listed before Genevieve that Chloe can see. Which hopefully means they caught this guy relatively early in his murderous descent. That doesn't, however, make her feel better. Her stomach flips over as she considers the ramifications of what she's looking at. Anton's text message history pretty much confirms the hitman-for-hire theory.

"So, what, now, Detective?" Lucifer prods, and she looks up at him, Mr. Ivanov's phone in hand.

"I think we need to find out a lot more about the payoff we witnessed," she says, feeling sick. Because if Anton's just the errand boy with a gun, that means the brains of this operation is still free and clear, and all he or she needs to do to continue his or her trophy collection is find another willing hitman. "And I want to question Mr. Ivanov."

Lucifer nods, a feral look in his eyes.

With a soft groan, she rises to her feet, and she heads out to the squad car to read Anton his rights.

"No idea."

Chloe frowns at Ella. "No idea? Really?"
Ella sighs, looking up from her computer. The white glow from her screen gives her a sickly, tired cast. "I mean I really have no idea, Decker." She gestures at Anton's cellular phone, which she's left in several pieces on her workbench at the center of the lab. "Whoever ordered those hits was texting from a masked number. The originating number is stored on the phone as [UNKNOWN CALLER]. Which is useless to us."

Chloe sighs. "So, I need to subpoena the text message records from the service provider." Which, even beyond the typing of the subpoena, is going to be a royal pain in the ass. Many service providers are notoriously squirrely about forking over private user data, even with a subpoena to force their hand. They hem and haw and delay, and often end up providing the data in useless formats that require a secondary forensic analysis just to collate.

But Ella shakes her head. "That's not gonna work, either."

"How do you know that?" Chloe says, frowning.

"Because I called my guy."

"Your guy?"

"Yeah, you know … my guy," Ella says. At Chloe's utter lack of recognition, Ella rolls her eyes. "Decker. Come on. My guy. At telcel. The one who helped me on the Waller case way back?"

"Oh, you mean Miguel?" Chloe says, snapping her fingers as she stares at the pile of phone parts on the workbench. Sure enough, the blue telcel logo emblazons the tiny S.I.M. chip. Ella has friends at both telcel and Verizon who sometimes help under the table with investigations, Miguel Hernández being one of them.

"Right, Miguel," says Ella with a nod. "He says the number is like … mondo spoofed. Like … it doesn't even read like a real phone number. He wasn't sure what to make of it."

"Well, what was the spoofed number?"

"Just garbage," Ella says, shrugging. "It wasn't useful."

"Oh."


Which means Chloe needs Anton to spill, or she's got nothing on the trophy collector. With a sigh, she stares through the lab's window at Lucifer, who's commandeered her desk in her absence while he plays some flashy game on his phone.

"But, hey, at least you don't need to type up a subpoena, right?" Ella adds brightly.

Chloe shakes her head. "Yeah," she says. "At least, there's that."

Somehow, though, that doesn't make her feel better.

"I think … I might need you to do your desire thingy with this guy," Chloe tells Lucifer as she returns to her desk, feeling like a bigger hypocrite with every stride. Because of course, when she needs to make use of his supernatural wuwu crap, she's more than willing to overcome her fears and doubts. Of course. "Mr. Ivanov, I mean."

Sure enough, Lucifer peers up from his phone with a wary frown. "Not that I'm not happy to assist,
Detective, but—"

"Look, forget 'no Satan stuff,'" she says before he can finish his sentence.

His gaze darkens. "I don't break promises, Detective."

"But it was a stupid promise, and I shouldn't have asked you to make it."

He sets his phone down on her desk.

She takes a breath. "It isn't right for me to be your gatekeeper, and what's more, I don't feel right doing it."

Lucifer gives her a bland look. "Need this cretin to talk that badly, do you?"

"No," she says, shaking her head. Only to bite her lip. Shit, shit, shit. "I mean … yes. I do need him to talk, but—"

"I thought as much," he says with a sigh.

"No, Lucifer, that's my whole point. This arrangement we made. It's not fair to you to have to wait until I'm comfortable or I need something just to be yourself. If this were any other case, you'd already be in the interrogation room without me even asking — hell, I'd be restraining you — but right now you're not, and it's wrong, and I—"

"Apologies for the inconvenience," he says, glowering.

"It's not an inconvenience, Lucifer," she says, eyes watering. "And I love that you cared enough to try for me." She gives him a wavering smile. "But you should just be you. Always. Don't worry about me. I'll catch up eventually. Okay?"

"You're … certain," he hazards.

"I mean it," she says. She looks into his eyes, unblinking. "Just be you. Ghost peppers and all. And, maybe, I'll get scared or unsettled from time to time, but … maybe," she continues, gesturing amorphously between them, "that's what I need to get used to … this."

"And … in theory," he says slowly, reiterating their earlier conversation, "I'll not be offended when such a disturbance happens."

She nods. "Because, in theory, I want you here." Though … her desire for his companionship sure doesn't feel like much of a theory anymore. It feels like fact. Not even a nebulous one.

His gaze softens, though his doubtful look doesn't abate. "Very well, Detective," he says. He nods toward the interrogation room, where Anton's been left for the past three hours with nothing but his own thoughts for company. "Think our dear Mr. Ivanov has stewed enough, then?"

"Only one way to find out," she says with a shrug.

Anton sits in the interrogation room, his head buried in his hands, his fingers twisting through his greasy hair as he clenches and unclenches them in his distress. No one has gone in to talk with him, not even to offer him so much as a cup of coffee. Not her favorite tactic, playing bad cop from the get go, but … this guy is bad news, and he's not stupid, either. She's certain he's going to lawyer up. Her only chance is to get him to spill without thinking before he remembers his rights. And her only chance to get him to spill without thinking is to get him upset. Instilling hunger and thirst in him are a
means to an end.

She glances at her watch as they stand outside the one-way mirror, watching him froth and worry and agonize. Three hours and fourteen minutes, he's been stewing. "Ready?" she says to Lucifer, clutching her case folder tightly.

Lucifer nods. "Of course," he says. A predatory glint sharpens his gaze. "Are you going first, or shall I?"

She bites her lip. Good question. When Lucifer's talents work, boy do they work. But when they don't work … they get answers like I want to build a cat sanctuary, which is the opposite of helpful, and eats up valuable time, particularly if the suspect is outright opposed to answering questions, which … Anton very much is.

"I'll try the old-fashioned way," she says, "but if it looks like I'm losing him, go ahead and jump in. Once he lawyers up, we're screwed."

Lucifer nods. "As you desire," he says, the words almost a purr, and she can't help but suck in a breath. He sizes up Anton a bit like a lion would put designs on a limping zebra, and it's … somewhat disconcerting in full context. He is a lion amongst limping zebras, full of lethal grace. Her discomfiture bleeds like an open wound when he looks at her with a frown. "Are you … all right?"

"Yes," she squeaks. She clears her throat. "Um. Yes."

His frown doesn't abate.

"Sorry," she adds, "you just … startled me."

His frown deepens. "All I've done is stand here."

"I know; it's just …." She takes a deep breath. He looks haunted, now. Regretful. Self-conscious. It's barely been ten damned minutes since she told him he should just be himself, and she's already body-slammed them both into another "in theory" moment. Her guilt burgeons. "Never mind. Just … jumpy from lack of sleep."

"No, you're not," he says, looking stung.

Shit. Why does Lucifer have to be a walking lie detector when she least wants him to be? Couldn't he get his wires crossed when their relationship needs a falsity, rather than when their investigation needs a truth? Is that too much to ask? "Lucifer, I'm s—"

"You may have released me from my promise, but we do still have a deal about apologies," he says, cutting her off. "So, let's get on with this, shall we?" He sounds more irritated than bloodthirsty this time, and the hallway outside the interrogation room seems to chill by several degrees when he brings his frosty focus to bear on Anton again.

She closes her eyes for a brief moment. In theory, he's not offended. In theory, she repeats to herself. In theory. "Okay, let's go, then," she says.

Lucifer follows on lithe cat feet behind her as she enters the interrogation room.

Anton doesn't look up as she takes a seat across the table from him. The sounds of her and Lucifer settling into their creaky chairs echo strangely in the bare room.

"Mr. Ivanov, who paid you to kill Genevieve Tate and Omar Bakkal?" she says without preface.
The only reaction her interjection garners is Anton twisting his fingers more tightly through his hair, to the point that gnarled strands of it seem to be cutting off his circulation. The dim light and the quiet and the sight of him twisting and twisting his fingers makes her feel dissonant. Unsettled. She swallows.

"Mr. Ivanov?" she says.

No response.

"Anton," she snaps, smacking the metal table to get his attention. "Who paid you to kill two people?"

"I have killed no people," he snaps in return, almost a hiss, when he finally looks at her, and then at Lucifer, and then back to her. His expression seems … pleading almost … as he lowers his hands to his lap.

She opens her case folder and spreads a half-dozen grizzly crime-scene photos across the tabletop. "You didn't do this?"

Anton drags his gaze to the photos like he doesn't want to look. His lower lip quivers. He sniffs. "They are not people," he tells her. "I have killed no people. I would never kill a person. I'm a hunter. I hunt game. I hunt monsters."

Chloe gapes. "How on earth could you think these people are game?"

"Because they are not people!" Anton says, a snarl. He leans forward, restraints clinking as the chains pull tight. "Detective, they are not what they seem." He gestures wildly at the photo of Omar Bakkal. "This man was dangerous. He was a wolf in sheep's clothing. He needed to be culled to save us all."

"How was he dangerous, exactly?" Chloe says.

"He was a beast," Anton insists, the words dark and twisting and disturbed. "What friendly creature do you know with six inch claws like stilettos? Hmm?"

"And the woman?" Chloe prods. "How was she dangerous?"

Anton stares angrily at the table. "I want a law—"

"Anton, look at me," Lucifer says quickly, reaching out with a hand and snapping his fingers to draw Anton's attention toward him. "Look. Yes." He catches Anton's gaze and holds it like a snake would hold a bird's. "Yes, that's right," Lucifer purrs. "Look here." Anton's eyes go glassy. Lucifer's predatory grin is chilling, and it makes her stomach drop. "Tell me, Anton, what is it that you truly desire?"

"What I … d-desire?"

"Hmm. Yes," Lucifer says, leaning closer. "Tell me your deepest, darkest, most twisted little w—"

"Money!" Anton blurts.

Lucifer blinks, sitting back with a frown. "Of course, it is."

"I … I just … I needed …" Anton swallows, pulling his fingers through his hair in agitation. His temples bulge as he clenches his jaw, and his face turns a hideous shade of puce. "They fired me."

"The person who paid you for these murders fired you?" Chloe says.
"No, my …." Anton rubs the bridge of his nose. "I wasn't vested, yet. I lost my pension."

"Anton, who paid you to murder two people?" she prods, but she can see that she's already lost him.

"No," he almost growls, shaking his head as he folds his arms. "I want a lawyer." He looks back and forth between Chloe and Lucifer. "I want a lawyer. I want a lawyer. I want a lawyer. I will not speak to you anymore!"

Damn it. She sighs, rubbing her temples. She glances at Lucifer, but Lucifer can only shrug.

Fuck.

"So, no confession," she says with a sigh as they exit the interrogation room. "He seems like he's in complete denial."

"Well, he's denying that he's killed humans, yes," Lucifer says thoughtfully. "But he's not denying that he's killed. It's a fine distinction."

"He thinks he's killing monsters."

"I believe so, yes."

"But how could he believe that Genevieve was a monster?" Chloe says. "She was just some froofy new-age palm reader. Maybe, she had supernatural skills, but she was about as threatening as a mouse."

"It's … not a hard sell, unfortunately," Lucifer says. "Humans like to destroy what they don't understand. One of your poorest traits as a species. And an easy one to prey upon. One need only look at Salem."

Chloe looks up at him. "Do you think Omar was dangerous?"

"Dangerous?" Lucifer says, frowning. "Well, yes. But only in the same sense that you are."

"I don't understand."

"Basilisks are typically peaceful unless provoked, just like most humans. But, also like humans, their capacity for destruction is near unmatched."

She frowns. "Near unmatched meaning … there are some worse things out there?"

"Yes."

"What's more dangerous than a basilisk?"

"Well, I am, for one. Quite a lot more."

"But you wouldn't do anything like—"

"I killed Cain," he says quietly. "I broke his hand, and then I stabbed him with a knife meant for killing far worse things than a human. I'm … monstrous."

"That was self-defense," she says, frowning.

His doubtful look makes her heart constrict. "Yes, well," he says, looking away for a moment like he
can't bear the weight of what he thinks must be her judgment. He takes a breath. When he meets her eyes again, his expression is slate — flat, cold, unreadable. "So, what's next, Detective? I'm assuming you'll want to look into the warehouse where Mr. Ivanov received his payment."

"Lucifer—"

"An interview with Mr. Möbius, then? Another stakeout, perhaps? Do warn me about stakeouts this time, please, so that I can bring a large enough flask."

She bites her lip. "Lucifer, I trust you," she tells him, not willing to let him change the subject. "Not in theory, either. I mean it."

"And I you, Detective," he says with a serene nod, not brokering any further discussion. He raises his eyebrows. "A stakeout, then?"

"Yeah," she says with a sigh. "I think that's a better plan than setting up an interview with Mr. Möbius. I don't want to tip anyone off prematurely that we're investigating."

"I thought as much," he says.

She glances at her watch. It's way too late in the shift to get any more done today. "We'll start tomorrow morning, yeah?"

"I'll bring the cool-ranch puffs," he says with a wan smile and turns to go.

"Lucifer," she says, and he stills.

"Yes, Detective?" he replies over his shoulder.

"I really do trust you."

He's silent for a long moment. Unmoving. Considering. And then he walks away without replying.

Dan is already gone to pick up Trixie, and Chloe is just finishing writing her ops plan for the stakeout tomorrow, when a rumble of interested murmurs spills through the precinct like a breaking wave. She looks up to find Maze descending the steps, dragging along by his collar a bruised, muscle-bound perp twice her size.

"Fuck you, bitch!" the guy is screaming, but Maze only sneers as she wipes a glistening drop of blood away from her busted lip.

Her arms are covered in scratches. Her hair is disheveled, and her shirt is ripped and stained with who-knows-what. But despite her fought-with-a-weed-whacker-and-lost appearance, she seems to be nothing but gleeful as she drags the squirming scumbag along.

Everybody parts for the bedraggled, cacophonous pair as they pass.

Chloe bites her lip, unsettled by the intrusion, and she tries to refocus on her paperwork. She takes a breath and blows it out and takes a breath and blows it out. That woman used to live with her. With Trixie. She'd been blatant with her sadism and her kinks, just like Lucifer had been blatant about his devilish nature. And Chloe had only concluded from that that Maze was weird.

*Weird*, of all things.

Talk about a bankrupting reality check.
"I need to pick up some stuff later," Maze says, and Chloe nearly falls out of her chair in surprise at the sight of the dark-eyed demon standing behind her desk.

What the …?

Chloe glances toward the holding area. The noisy perp Maze lugged into the precinct is handcuffed to the bench there, glowering, waiting to be processed. When had …?

"Decker."

Chloe gives herself a little shake, looking back to Maze. "Uh … what did you say?"

"I need to pick up some of my stuff from your place later," Maze elaborates, speaking slowly like she thinks Chloe's lost a screw from her set.

"That's—" Chloe swallows, heart thumping like a drum. "—fine."

Maze regards her for a moment, expression flat and grim.

"Really, that's fine," Chloe says.

"I don't know when."

Chloe nods. "Okay."

But Maze doesn't take the hint and doesn't leave. Her eyes narrow as she folds her arms, and she stares at Chloe with cold judgment. Chloe has no idea what else to say. Awkward silence ensues, and she feels the heat of Maze's scrutiny licking down her face and neck like flames.

"Maze, look," she begins, swallowing. "I—"

"I'm not gonna apologize for every scumbag I have to rough up."

Chloe swipes a loose bang out of her eyes. "Did I ask you to?"

"Then why stare at me?"

"Just … wondering if that could have ever been me," Chloe replies honestly. "Or Trixie."

The raw, stung look in Maze's eyes conveys palpable affront. "I wouldn't hurt you or the kid. Not like that."

"So, you draw the line at pot brownies and cutting words."

Maze grits her teeth. "I told you, Decker, I'm not used to feelings. I'm …." She blinks and looks away like she's actually near tears, though the cut glass in her expression disappears when she sighs.

"Who would you hurt?" Chloe says quietly, curious. "Like … really hurt."

"People who belong in Hell," Maze replies with a shrug.

"How does that work?"

Maze's eyebrows knit. "How does what work?"

"How do you determine who belongs in Hell?" Chloe says, nervously licking her lips. "I thought people decide that for themselves when they die." That's what Lucifer told her, anyway, when she
asked. When he told her "everything."

"Well, I …." Maze trails into silence with a blink, not countering Lucifer's assertion. "Decker, what do you want from me?"

"Nothing," Chloe says. "Nothing, Maze." She sighs. "I'm just … trying to make sense of all this."

"And, what, Lucifer gets a pass because you want to fuck him?" Maze snaps incredulously. "He's just as scary as I am. Hell, he's more scary."

"Maze, I can't even work up the nerve to ask him out for a drink," Chloe snaps back. "And he left early today. I'm pretty sure because he's tired of watching me freak out, and I make him feel like a monster." She pushes her chair back, rising to her feet, and folds her arms to meet Maze at eye level. "Does that really sound like a 'pass' to you?"

"Oh," Maze says softly.

"Yeah, oh," Chloe says, almost a growl, anger blazing like hot coals in her gut. "You. Him. This whole thing is a mess. I'm trying, but …." She grinds her teeth. "And what do you mean, he's more scary than you?"

Maze gives her an incredulous look. "He's an archangel."

"So?"

"So, he's the walking talking wrath of God."

"But he and God are estranged," Chloe says slowly.

"Yeah, exactly," Maze replies. "Lucifer's a loose cannon, Decker. Completely unchecked. And he could burn the fucking world down if he wanted. Have you even read the damned Bible? Look up Sodom and Gomorrah if you want a crash course in what wrath of God can look like."

"He wouldn't ever do that," Chloe says, heart pounding.

"If you say so."

"I do," Chloe snaps, glaring. He doesn't even seem to have the stomach for killing an individual, not even in self-defense. Genocide-from-the-hip might as well be dividing by zero for him. It's impossible. "And he wouldn't."

Maze gives her a bitter, unhappy look. "Sounds like a 'pass' to me."

"Look, Maze. I know him."

"And you don't know me?" Maze says, the words almost plaintive.

"I thought I did," Chloe says, "but …." She flops back into her seat with a sigh. This is such a fucking mess. There're no other words for it. She pinches the bridge of her nose, near tears again.

There's a scraping sound, accompanied by the thunk-thunk-thunk of Maze's leather-boot soles striking the floor, and Chloe looks up to find Maze dragging a chair across the bullpen from another desk. The demon drops into the chair beside Chloe with a heaving I-can't-believe-I'm-doing-this sigh.

"You could … practice," Maze grumbles to her knees.
"Practice?" Chloe says.

Maze shrugs. "The drinks thing. Asking Lucifer for ...." She grits her teeth, like even offering to do something that might help Lucifer galls her. She continues with a begrudging, "You could ... practice. On me," which is said again to her knees, not to Chloe's face.

Chloe gapes. "You ... want me to ask you out for drinks?"

"Linda said you might respond better to me if we interact on neutral ground," Maze replies unhappily. "So ...." She sighs. "Any bar that's not Lux?"

"Oh, another tribe night?" Ella exclaims with a grin as she appears, seemingly from out of nowhere. It's like she has a fucking radar for this ladies'-night shit. "Sweet! I'm in! When do we go?"

"I ... have a stakeout," Chloe says weakly.

But Ella shakes her head. "Oh, no, no, no. 24/7 work is not allowed. How about later this week?"

"Sounds good to me," says Maze, grinning like a fiend.

The pair of them stare at Chloe expectantly. "I ... s-suppose I could," she says, cornered.

"Awesome," Maze says, clapping Chloe on the back. "I'll tell Linda."

"Great," says Chloe, wondering what in the hell just happened.

Seriously.

What in the hell just happened?
Thank you so much as always for all the lovely feedback, and to everyone on Twitter and Tumblr who assisted me in coming up with potential trivia night team names :) You guys who post comments make sharing this story so fun for me!

Chapter title credit goes to the Raign.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The warehouse in the Arts District where Anton made his money exchange looks far different during the day. The shadows that at night gave it such a menacing stature are gone, and the multicolor graffiti scarring its walls only serves to make it look ramshackle. Chloe and Lucifer sit in her cruiser across the street, under the shade of a eucalyptus tree, watching.

A young, black-haired man wearing a suit approaches the small door next to the loading dock around 10 a.m. The man is carrying a steaming cup of coffee and a leather briefcase with one hand, and a frosted donut wrapped in a napkin with the other. His shiny wingtip shoes flash in the morning light.

"Well, that ensemble's off the rack," Lucifer comments, upper lip curling in disgust as the man sticks his donut between his teeth, freeing his right hand to fish his keys out of his pocket. "Nothing like our Dior-wearing mobsters who attended the duffel-bag exchange."

"If you say so," Chloe replies, frowning as she snaps a few photos. She can't tell the difference between off-the-rack and designer at this distance, no matter how hard she squints. It looks like a suit to her. Just … a suit.

"Look at the fit, Detective," Lucifer says, as if he thinks that will help her grow archangel-strength eyes. "It's bloody awful. Too loose in the shoulders, courtesy of that horrible tailoring, and too tight in the waist, courtesy of that horrible donut. The suit is wearing him. He is not wearing the suit."

"I can't see anything but a charcoal blob at this distance."

"Really?" Lucifer says. "You're truly that blind?"

She points out the window. "That's like two-hundred feet, Lucifer."

"So?"

"So, humans can't see fine details more than halfway down an entire football field."

"What terrible desi— oh, oh, no," Lucifer says, grimacing as he shakes his head, "and, now, the dolt is getting chocolate on the lapel. This is a bloody travesty. You should arrest him for murder."

"… Murder?"

"Yes, Detective," Lucifer replies snippily. "My respect for him is dead."

She laughs. She can't help it.
He glowers at her. "Think this is funny, do you?"

"No," she says, smiling.

"Right," he replies, tone suspicious.

"Just enjoying the company, Lucifer."

He blinks, all hints of hostility draining out of his features like his pores are a sieve. "… Oh," he says in a soft, bewildered tone. The seat squeaks as he shifts to pull out his extra-large flask from his breast pocket and take another swig. They've been sitting in the car all of three hours — since 7 a.m. — and he seems to take a swig every ten minutes or so.

"So, I wonder when Mr. Möbius will show," she says as the badly dressed office assistant disappears inside the dirty building.

"He might not show at all, if he's like some of the C.E.O.s I know," Lucifer says.

"I guess we'll see," she says. "Still early yet."

By sunset, she's ready to admit the whole day — the whole stakeout — is, thus far, a bust. A mind-numbingly boring bust. Aside from the poorly-tailored office assistant carrying the donut, a FedEx truck showed up at 10:30 a.m., 2:30 p.m., and 4 p.m., and a delivery man went inside the loading dock to drop off and pick up a dolly's worth of boxes each time. The delivery and pickup frequency is typical for a business that makes a lot of shipments, though, so she doesn't consider it noteworthy. Yet. Other than that, the dilapidated building didn't see any foot traffic. Mr. Möbius is a no show. And even Lucifer hasn't been able to keep the long gaps between activity lively.

Restless, she drums her fingers against the steering wheel. Again. Again. Lucifer takes a swig from his flask, saying nothing as he directs an unblinking, thousand-yard stare into the empty space beyond her windshield. She watches his Adam's apple roll down his throat as he swallows. Aside from that … he's still. Unnaturally so.

"Lucifer," she says.

At first, he doesn't seem to hear her.

"Lucifer," she says again.

Nothing.

"Lucifer," she says stridently.

He reanimates at last, eyes pinching around the edges a bit like he just reconnected to his body and remembered he's been sitting in a car for twelve hours. His gaze shifts to her. He takes another swig.

"I don't think we're gonna get anything else today," she says.

"We might not get anything any day," he replies. "Not before nightfall. Our nefarious cash exchange occurred after dark, you'll recall."

"Yeah," she says. "But we still have to rule things out."

He pinches the bridge of his nose, nodding as he rubs his tired-looking eyes.
"Do you sleep?" she blurts. And then she remembers when he'd deprived himself for weeks. "Never mind. Of course, you do."

His lips twitch into an almost-smile. "All living things need to replenish their energy at some point, Detective. Even divine ones."

"It was a stupid question," she mutters.

He tilts his head, regarding her. "It wasn't," he says. "I'm simply a lot more resilient to lack of sleep than you would be."

The mere fact that he'd been even a little coherent after over two-and-a-half weeks without sleep proves that much. She nods. "That makes sense."

What doesn't make sense, if he's supposed to be resilient, is the fact that he's showing real signs of wear after less than a day. She watches him roll his shoulders like he's aching. Up goes the flask again.

"Is it that bad?" she says, biting her lip.

He lowers his flask and peers at her. "Is what that bad?"

"This stakeout."

"I?" he says, eyebrows creeping upward. "Not we? That eager to be rid of me?" The defensiveness inching into his tone makes her wince.

"Of course not," she says. "It's just … you don't need to be here for this." She gestures at the silent building. "It's mind-numbing. Nothing's happening. And I can always call you if something worth our undivided attention comes up."

"I'm all right, Detective," he says, shifting in his seat again.

"You look like you want to claw your eyes out."

At that, he blinks. His expression schools in seconds. His back — which she didn't even realize was slumped — straightens. Every hint of unhappiness she thought she saw melts away. Holy shit. She doesn't think she's ever directly witnessed how much of a chameleon he can be.

"Well, I didn't say I wasn't bored," he admits, looking refreshed. "But in this particular instance, I do understand the necessity of patience."

"Lucifer …."

"I'm all right," he repeats more forcefully. "I'm older than this galaxy. Do you have any idea how much of a nutter I'd be, at this point, if I hadn't perfected the art of waiting?"

She holds up her hands in surrender. "Hey, if you want to be here, be here. I can't say I wouldn't like the company. I was just trying to give you an out."

"I've no desire for 'an out," he says without hesitation.
She's not prepared for the swell of relief that nearly bowls her over. She can't imagine sitting here in this fucking car for another twelve-plus hours, alone, with nothing to keep her company but the copious graffiti — literally … she'd be watching paint that has already dried.

"Well … good, then," she says.

"Good," he echoes with a nod.

And on that note, she twists her key in the ignition. The cruiser rumbles to life. Tightening her fingers around the steering wheel, she heads home — with a not-so-small detour, of course, to drop him off at Lux. By the time she pulls into the alley beside his building, the silence between them feels lived in. Comfortable.

"See you tomorrow, yeah?" she says as his seatbelt clicks open.

"Of course, Detective," he replies smoothly over his shoulder as he reaches for the door handle.

He stumbles on the way out of the car, but makes no note of his clumsiness, other than to clear his throat and act like it didn't happen. Frowning, she watches his hip press against the window as he rights himself. Then he takes a step away from the car. A step away from her.

"Lucifer," she blurs.

"Detective?" he prods.

"Yes?" he prods, eyebrows knitting with curiosity. "What is it?"

"Can I …?" Her voice trails away. "Come in for a glass of wine or something, she can't seem to get herself to utter. Not quite yet. "Can I …?"

"Yes?" he prods, eyebrows knitting with curiosity. "What is it?"

The alley is darkening as the sun dips below the horizon, and the air has a twilight hue to it. His eyes are dark and unblinking as he regards her in silence, his lips parted ever so slightly. After a whole day in the car, he looks a bit disheveled. A wayward lock of hair falls over his forehead, refusing to be cowed by product anymore, and she has the urge to brush it out of his eyes. He's … very handsome.

With all the craziness, lately, she hasn't been focused much on that, but … he is.

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"Detective?" he prods.

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She clears her throat and shakes her head. "Detective, 6:30 is fine."
This time, when he turns to leave, she doesn't make any motions to stop him. He disappears behind the dumpster, through the building's side door, and she finds herself lingering. Staring at her phone.

*Can I come in for a glass of wine?* she thinks about texting him.

And thinks. And thinks. And thinks.

She settles for typing the question into her notes app, just to get the words out of her head and expressed. Maybe, tomorrow, she'll be ready to say it to him. Maybe.

She drives home, imagining their maybe-a-date with a hesitant smile.

They watch for three more days. Around 10 a.m. each morning, the poorly-tailored office assistant — Jacques Adrien, 23, Quebecois expat, according to face-matching software — shows up with his briefcase and his coffee and his donut. Around 4:30 p.m. every afternoon, he leaves. Three times a day — at 10:30 a.m., 2:30 p.m., and 4 p.m. — a FedEx truck visits the loading dock where the money exchange took place. Mr. Möbius is still a mysterious no show.

And Chloe still can't fucking get herself to ask Lucifer out for a drink.

The bar that Maze and Ella pick for the latest ladies' night is rowdy to the point of being almost painful. Classic rock tunes blare over the speakers. Televisions flash from every open surface, rolling hundreds of subtitles at the speed of light. A cluster of men watching a baseball game while they nurse their beers break into shouts and clapping now and then. Pool balls crack and rumble in the corner. A group of chatting, laughing sorority girls cluster by the dart board.

"I just can't do it," Chloe says, almost shouting to be heard in the din as Tommy Shaw rises into the stratosphere of "Renegade." "I try and try, and the words don't come out. It's like … my throat closes up."

Nodding, Linda pushes away from her straw the toothpick lancing her pineapple spear and cherry. "Well, perhaps, this is a step in your relationship that you're just not ready for," she says, taking a sip from her Mai Tai. "It's important to learn to distinguish between pushing yourself and pushing yourself too far."

"But it's not too far," Chloe replies, frowning. "I really want to ask him."

"Well, clearly something is stopping you," Maze grumbles into her beer. "Like common sense."

"Maze," Linda admonishes with a stern look. "What did we discuss?"

Maze sighs. "Friendships thrive on a welcoming interpersonal space," she recites as if by rote. And then she looks at Chloe and adds a begrudging, "Sorry, Decker."

"It's okay," says Chloe.

"Are you mad at him for something?" Ella says.

Chloe frowns, taking a sip from her daiquiri. Cold strawberry slush spills onto her tongue. "Why would I be mad?"

"Well, I don't know, since you're all Vow of Silence Girl," Ella replies with a shrug. "Just … I remember this one time, Jay stole my lucky penny, and he wouldn't give it back. A few days later, he
asked me if I wanted to go to the movies with him and his friends, and I hadn't been to the movies in
forever, and I really wanted to say yes, but I also really wanted to kick him in los cajones, if you
know what I mean."

Chloe's frown deepens. "That's … not very humble."

"Yeah, well, I didn't buddy up with the Big Guy until later," Ella says, offering an innocent grin.
"What can I say?"

"Lucifer … didn't steal my lucky penny."

"No, but Ella does bring up an interesting point," Linda says.

Chloe raises her eyebrows. "Which is?"

"Perhaps you have an unresolved issue with Lucifer that's getting in the way? I mean, other than the
obvious one."

She bites her lip. "Well, I mean … he did kinda pull the rug out from under me."

"That's very true," Linda says, nodding.

"But the state of the world beyond the rug isn't his fault," Chloe adds, pondering. "And he didn't
even really pull the rug out from under me so much as, by the nature of his existence, make the rug
… pullable in the first place? I guess?" She sighs, shaking her head before mumbling around her
daiquiri straw, "I'm not making sense."

"Dude," Ella says, goggling at Chloe, "I totally respect your privacy and all, but … you have got to
explain to me someday what the hell happened with this whole Pierce-is-mysteriously-dead thing." She
blushes. "Kind of an oxymoronic statement if ever there was one — saying I'm not gonna pry and
then prying — I know. I'm just …." She takes a swig from her pint. "I'm dying here, Decker."

"Lucifer's literally the Devil, Pierce was Cain, and Decker finally got hit in the face with the clue bat
enough times for it to sink in," Maze says in a bored tone. "What's to explain?"

Ella blinks. "Wow. Are you going in for the same play as Lucifer? You're really good, too!"

"There is no play," Maze snaps. "Your so-called Big Guy is the Biggest Dick in the universe, and
Lucifer's pathetic daddy issues are proportional."

"Maze," Linda says quietly, putting her hand on Maze's wrist like she means to stay an attack.

"What?" Maze snaps. "It's the truth."

"Maze," Linda repeats with a bit more stridence, grip tightening visibly.

"But what's the fucking point of tact when all it does is say yay to delusion?" Maze replies
plaintively. "I don't get it."

Ella grins. "Tact is just not saying true stuff."

"Huh?" Chloe says.

"Cordelia Chase," Ella says happily. "From Buffy the Vampire Slayer." She tips her pint toward
Maze in salute and takes a sip. "You kinda remind me of her, you know. She was a total badass
bitch, particularly in the spinoff."
Maze gapes. "Is there *anything* you can't find a silver lining in?"

"Won't know until I find it," Ella says.

"You are so optimistic it makes my teeth hurt."

"Maybe so, but sometimes ... I think the world needs a little of that," Ella says. She directs another considering look toward Maze. "And you sure seem like you could use a friend tonight."

For a moment, Maze freezes in place. She looks at Ella, wide-eyed, flustered, like she just got caught with her pants down or something, not that Maze would ever give a shit about being caught like that. She proceeds to take her pint and chug and chug and chug like she needs to be blitzed to survive. Foam dribbles messily down her chin and throat, landing on her leather bustier and in her cleavage. And then, licking her lips, she sets down her newly empty glass and raises her hand to call for another. The blonde woman tending bar nods in response.

"Look, let's forget about men and work tonight," Ella continues. "Men and work are stupid, anyway." She beams at them all. "Let's just have fun!"

Maze folds her arms, her bustier squeaking with the movement. "... Fun?"

"Yeah," Ella replies. "It's this thing where you smile and enjoy yourse— oh!" Ella's eyes widen, and Chloe follows her gaze to a scruffy man wearing jeans, a white t-shirt, and a stained apron, as he writes something on the blackboard by the bar.

Chloe can barely make out, "9 PM TRIV—," which is written in pink chalk.

"Oh! Oh! *Trivia night!*" Ella exclaims, slapping her fists excitedly on their high top. "Now, that's *fun*!" Her face is flushed, and her eyes are wide with glee and excitement as she looks at Maze, Chloe, and Linda, each in turn. "C'mon, guys," she continues, bouncing like she's close to bursting. "What's our team name? *Oh, how about the Devil's Advocates?*

"I'm *not* his advocate," Maze says, almost a snarl. And then she frowns. Pauses. "Hell-Raisers?" she hazards hesitantly. "The Think Skanks?"

Linda smiles and adds, "Or maybe 'No Labels Here'?"

"647f," Chloe suggests.

Ella sniggers. "Nobody's gonna get that, Decker."

"What's 647f?" Linda asks.

"Drunk in public," Ella and Chloe recite together.

Maze snorts. "I like that one."

A raucous cheer spills through the bar as the men watching the baseball game slam their palms on the table in approval. The crowd in the stands at the game roars so loudly through the television that even Chloe can hear it. She glances over, momentarily distracted, but can't identify what the cheers are for. Angels versus Padres, the ticker tape says, and the Angels are winning, but not by much. The picture on the television shifts to the Padres all sitting in a row in the dugout, and they each look like someone just shot their dog.

"What about the Scoobies?" Linda says, and Chloe turns back to the conversation at hand, frowning.
"What?" Linda gives them all an innocent look before kicking back her Mai Tai for another gulp. "I like Buffy the Vampire Slayer, too."

"I … thought Scoobies were from Scooby Doo," Chloe says.

"And what the hell is Buffy, anyway?" says Maze.

Ella laughs and shakes her head. "We have got to have a Buffy marathon sometime soon. I'll bring the popcorn." She looks at Maze. "You'd like it for the fight scenes, if nothing else."

"Fight scenes?" Maze says, perking up.

"O … kay," Chloe says slowly, not entirely sure what she's agreeing to, or when, but—

"So, is anyone opposed to the Scoobies?" Ella says.

Everyone exchanges a bemused look and a shrug.

"Qapla'!" Ella bellows in a guttural tone, hopping off her chair. "I'll go enter us, then! We are so gonna win. I can just sense the huge stewpot of useless factoids we have simmering in our brains."

"… Cap … lah?" Chloe says, boggled as Ella rushes off to the bar.

"It's Klingon for success," says Linda.

Chloe and Maze shift their gazes to Linda, who grins. "I like Star Trek, too," she says with a nonchalant shrug.

Maze blinks as a frazzled server sets down a fresh, foaming pint of Guinness in front of her. "Well," Maze says slowly, looking at Linda, "I'll drink to that." She raises her glass.

"Qapla'!" Linda says, clinking her Mai Tai to Maze's pint.

For a moment, Chloe looks back and forth between the two, still reeling from conversational whiplash. First guy trouble, then Buffy, then game night, and now … the finer art of fake languages. A tiny smile pulls at her lips. She wraps her fingers around her slowly-turning-to-melted-sludge daiquiri and clinks her glass to Linda's and then to Maze's.

"Qapla'," she says, echoing Ella's guttural tone, though more softly.

"We're all set," Ella says as she returns and reclaims her chair.

Chloe leans back in her seat, feeling warm and happy, and yet …. She glances at her glass. She's only had half of her daiquiri, if that. But ….

"We … really need to do this more often," Chloe says with a sudden lump in her throat.

Ella grins. "Don't we? How about next week?"

All glasses clink together again, to a chorus of, "Qapla'!"

The first nightshift she and Lucifer take on the stakeout, nothing happens. Again. The old warehouse sits undisturbed on the quiet street. No well-dressed men show to make anyone a payment. And Mr. Möbius is still an absentee C.E.O.
"—and then we watched Frozen again," Trixie babbles over the phone, relating her day. 
Chloe grimaces. "Baby, haven't you seen that like—"

"Fifty-two times!" Trixie exclaims happily. "But Daddy said it was okay. He said he likes the noise."

A lump forms in Chloe's throat. "Did he?"

"Yep," Trixie says. "And then we went for ice cream."

"Sounds like you two had a really great day," Chloe says, smiling.

"We did have a great day!"

"A day that's ending soon!" Dan adds from somewhere in the background on the other end of the line. "I want you in bed in fifteen minutes, Trix!"

A sigh blusters over the line. "I know!" says Trixie unhappily, into the void beyond. There's a pause. And then she whispers into the receiver, "Did you catch the bad guy, yet?"

"No, Monkey," Chloe says.

"He's still sneaky?"

She nods. "Very."

"Mommy, is Lucifer with you on the stakeout?"

Chloe glances across the car. "Yeah he's here, too. Why?" she says, staring at her partner.

Lucifer is resting with his ear against the window, his body silent and still like granite as he watches the nighttime world beyond the windshield with an unblinking gaze. She's sure he can hear the entire conversation, but he's been making a good show of giving her privacy and not providing snarky commentary on her daughter's "terribly asinine" hobbies.

"Trixie?" Chloe says when she realizes her daughter hasn't yet answered. "Are you okay?"

"Can I please talk to him?" Trixie says in a soft, plaintive tone. "Please?"

Chloe frowns, but before she can make any excuses for him, Lucifer stretches his arm across the car's interior, holding out his hand for the phone.

"You're sure?" she whispers at him, cupping her hand over the speaker, but his only response to her query is to make little grasping motions with his long fingers.

O … kay. Well, if he's willing …. She hands the phone to him without further protest.

"What is it, urchin?" Lucifer says smoothly into the receiver. Pause. "Why … you are, clearly."
Pause. His eyebrows and forehead enter into the frown, scrunching his facial features into a tapestry of consternation. "That's … most … kind of you?" Pause. The frown becomes a glower. "If I must." Pause. "Of course, I am." Pause. "Well, I don't …." He swallows, glancing at Chloe with a panicked expression. "I can't say that I've ever …." He clears his throat, shakes his head, and schools himself.

"I suppose you could … in a very loose interpretation … assume that I …." Pause. He sighs in relief.
"Yes, that is a desire I very much share. You needn't worry." Pause. "You're quite welcome." Pause. "Don't push your luck." Pause. "Goodnight, offspring."
He hangs up the phone and gives it back to Chloe.

"What?" he says when she can't peel her eyes away from him.

"Are you gonna tell me what that was about?" she says.

"She made me a drawing," Lucifer says, rolling his eyes. "I'm to hang it on my refrigerator once I've received it from Daniel."

"And?"

"And … what?" Lucifer says, frowning.

"What else did she say? That wasn't the whole conversation."

He regards her for a long moment, and then redirects his attention out the window again. "The child is quite concerned for your wellbeing," he says. "I mean … she must be rather hard up if she's asking the Devil himself for his guardian-angel services."

She blinks. "She asked you …?"

He shrugs. "Matters of guardian angelship aside, I believe I've reassured her that I'm deeply invested in your continued prosperity, but you may wish to follow up."

"Yeah. Um …." Stunned, she leans back against her seat, dropping her phone nervelessly into the cupholder. "I'll talk to Dan about it." A lump forms in her throat. The idea that Lucifer would even attempt to comfort Trixie instead of scoffing at her schmaltzy request is … "Thanks."

A wan smile pulls at his lips. "You're quite welcome, Detective."

Time passes comfortably in silence for a while.

"Perhaps he's a figurehead," Lucifer says later of Mr. Möbius. "In name only."

"Or on vacation in Timbuktu," she says with a sigh, pulling her fingers through her hair. If she has to watch this building much longer, she'll go insane. "That'd be just my luck."

"Oh, come, now," Lucifer scolds her, eyes twinkling in the dark as he takes a swig from his ever-present flask. "You've better luck than most."

She snorts. "Do I?"

"I think so," he says, "or I'd be dead twice over."

"What are you talking about?"

But whatever he's thinking, he doesn't clarify. He shakes his head as if to say, I'm not prepared to have this discussion, now. And then he shifts his gaze into the darkness beyond the car, eyes full of sharp clarity that says he can see into the night perfectly well. Unlike her. Far more than infravision, he said. Perhaps, he's like a cat.

He's certainly aloof like one, at times.

She sighs, thunking her head against the window. She gets the impression that when he told her "everything," he potentially omitted some stuff. Stuff he autocratically deemed as less than relevant.
She glances at her cellphone, lighting up the screen in the dark to check the time. 3:47 a.m. Drinks … wouldn't work right now.

_Want to grab an omelette or something?_ she practices asking in her head. _I know a great 24-hour diner. Best coffee in Los Angeles. We can talk some more._

Still, when it comes down to it, she can't say the words.

She can't say anything to him except, "Pick you up tonight at 7?"

For some reason.

She's just … not quite ready.

Chapter End Notes

So … is everybody buckled up for Sunday? Seatbelts and squishy stress balls are advised. :)
12:52 a.m. They sit in the dark on the sixth day. Intel finally came through on her request for more information on both Omar Bakkal, the basilisk victim, and Asaiah Möbius, their mysterious, absentee C.E.O.

"No known next of kin to notify; no nothing," Chloe mutters as she runs the beam of her flashlight down the page. Despite his youthful appearance, Omar had lived a long and gainful life with zero social connections whatsoever. He made a modest living running a specialty bookstore, which had no listed employees other than himself. He paid his taxes on time. Never had any bad interactions with the law. Nothing. Intel had checked into the names of his mother and father — listed on his birth certificate — and had found them both to be deceased for decades. No more info could be gleaned of Omar's family tree.

She frowns, looking over at Lucifer. "Is that normal? For basilisks to be so alone?"

"As much as I delight in being your go-to encyclopedia superno, I'm no biologist, Detective," Lucifer replies with a gallic shrug. "I've little interest in such things. All I know is that, proportionally speaking, very few have ever ended up damned."

Nodding, she turns her attention back to the report.

The idea that Omar Bakkal would have no known next-of-kin that needed to be notified of his death — no friends; not even some distant aunt or related-by-a-fraying-thread third cousin — makes her chest feel tight.

She hears a liquid slosh beside her. Lucifer taking a swig again. With Amenadiel gone, Lucifer is alone, now, too. Maybe, not like Omar, who, for all intents and purposes, seems to have been truly solitary. At least, Lucifer has friends, but by his own admission, making actual friendships with humans is a recent development.

She closes the manila folder containing the report on Omar and sets it aside with a regretful look. Popping the handle end of her flashlight into her mouth so she has two hands free, she cracks open the report on Asaiah Möbius, resting it against the steering wheel, careful not to put too much pressure on the horn. Whoever assembled this report paper-clipped Asaiah's mugshot to the top sheet, and his yellow eyes stare back at her with such rapacious intensity, she shudders. She yanks the photo away from the paperclip and sets it aside with Omar's particulars.

Then, she reads.

Her frown deepens and deepens the closer she gets to the end of the page.

"This … can't be right," she says, voice distorted by the flashlight. She shuffles the papers in the report, looking for what surely must be elsewhere, but there's nothing elsewhere. The report is really
that short. "This is ...."

"What?" Lucifer says, seat squeaking as he shifts to peer over her shoulder.

"Lucifer … this guy is like you."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I mean not like you, like you," she rushes to say at his offended tone. "Just … his paper history only goes back a certain amount, and then it just … stops."

"Well, that is curious," Lucifer says. The vanilla and sandalwood scent of his cologne sharpens as he leans closer, close enough that she can feel the heat radiating from his body. "How far back does our dear Mr. Möbius exist, precisely?"

"Aside from his birth certificate, his social security card, and some suspiciously pristine tax statements … six months."

Lucifer makes a noncommittal, "Hmm," sound, though he says nothing.

Chloe shakes her head, at a loss. Intel hadn't even been able to find a receipt for an ice-cream cone more than six months back, let alone anything noteworthy. It's like … Asaiah hadn't been on Earth until six months ago. Unless … maybe … just like the Lucifer of eight years ago … he hadn't been?

"Can you tell if he's human?" she says.

"I've no idea."

She grabs the creepy photo she hid away with Omar's files and hands it to him. "You can't see glamour thingies in photographs?"

Lucifer's fingers tighten around the picture as he directs an incredulous-but-teasing look at her. "Glamour … thingies, Detective?"

She rolls her eyes. "Shut up. You know what I mean."

Lucifer hands the photo back to her, but she can't bring herself to take it. He sets it on the dash, instead, which, thanks to her flashlight, leaves Asaiah's eerie face partially reflected in the windshield.

"Photographs don't capture what I'd look for," Lucifer says, and then he pauses, giving her a considering look, before taking the plunge and adding, "We're talking of real magic, Detective. It's not on any spectrum that your cameras can process."

Her chest constricts. "Magic."

"… Yes," he admits in a flat, wary tone.

"Like. Hocus pocus, abracadabra, bippity boppity boo. That's real, too?"

"I'm not referring to humans pulling rabbits out of their hats, Houdini escaping from a straight jacket whilst drowning, or fairy godmothers turning pumpkins into stagecoaches," he replies. "But … yes. Magic does exist."

Huh.
She swallows as her little mental island called reality-as-she-knew-it shrinks even further. She's sitting next to an archangel — Beelzebub himself — and … magic is real. Really fucking real. And Asaiah is staring at her, even through the inanimate reflection of his picture, and she feels like she's got spiders crawling all over her. With a frantic bluster of movement, she leans across the parking brake to grab the photo, snatching it off the dash. With gusto, she crumples it into the tightest ball she can manage, and then throws the horrible thing into the back seat, where lands by one of the seatbelts.

Lucifer watches her with an intensifying frown, and she feels ridiculous.

"He's creepy," she insists, swallowing as she waits for her heart to slow down. "That picture doesn't creep you out?"

He gives her a wan smile. "Very little," he says, raising his fingers to form air quotes, "'creeps me out.'"

Devil. Right. She presses her palms to her face and takes a breath. Her partner is the Devil. Her partner has literally been through Hell. Her partner knows Hitler the genocidal maniac, for crying out loud. Of course, a picture of some guy with yellow eyes isn't going to give Lucifer the heebie-jeebies.

His hand comes to rest on her shoulder. His warmth soaks through her shirt. "Are you … all right?" Lucifer asks in a curious oh-Dad-what-do-I-do-if-she-says-no tone.

"Yeah, I'm fine," she says, a little snort of amusement popping loose from her too-tense body. Of course, a creepy photo wouldn't upset him. An unhappy Detective, however, is another matter, entirely. She takes another breath, unable to resist the urge to clap her hand over his hand, relishing the feel of his skin beneath hers. "Thanks."

He nods gracefully and withdraws.

She swallows, watching him pull away with a bereft lump forming in her throat.

No, keep it there — I like it, she wants to say of his hand, which slips into his breast pocket only long enough to withdraw his flask again. But he tips his head back as a liquid slosh fills the quiet, and she can't bring herself to speak. She clears her throat as he resettles against the far window.

"Have you … thought about where you met this guy?" she says.

"Yes, but I've no idea."

"What strikes you as familiar about him?"

"I'm not certain."

She frowns. "So … just a feeling."

He doesn't respond to that, letting his assent remain implied. He props his head against the window and rubs the bridge of his nose, eyebrows creasing like he's getting a headache, or gotten a headache. His whole body seems to lengthen as he straightens his long legs as far into the footwell as they'll go, stretching in place. But then, as if he senses her scrutinizing him, he rolls his shoulders and his neck, and he settles back into his unnatural stillness.

Are you okay? she wants to ask him, but …. 
She looks down at the report, frown deepening. "You think you'd remember where you've met him before if we talked with Mr. Möbius in person?" Assuming they could even find him. At this rate, the man is a ghost. Possibly a real ghost. "Are ghosts real?"

"I'm … not certain," Lucifer repeats. "And … no. There are no ghosts."

"Really? I would have thought ghosts would be a shoo-in."

"While I suppose they're possible, in theory, my sister is far too meticulous to allow souls to wander about the earth willy nilly."

"Your sister," Chloe says, thinking back to Lucifer's recounting of "everything" a few days ago. "You mean … Azrael? Death?"

"Yes."

She shakes her head, still not quite able to wrap her mind around the fact that she's sitting in the car with a familial relation of Death. "So, ghosts, Santa Claus, Medusa, no. Dragons, angels, demons, psychics, yes. Unicorns … extinct."

"A correct summation thus far," Lucifer says with a nod.

"That …." She bites her lip. "Could you ride them when they lived? The unicorns, I mean."

"Well, I'm certain many have tried," Lucifer replies with an amused snort.

So … no to riding unicorns, then. For some reason, that idea bums her out more than she's willing to admit.

"Do you think Mr. Möbius could be from Hell …?" She turns to Lucifer. "Like … could he be a demon like Maze?" She winces. "I mean, not that Maze is creepy like this guy. She's not." Weird as fuck, sometimes. Scary in a thrash metal, in your face kind of way. But not creepy. "I'm …. " She slumps, hoping she hasn't managed to offend him again with her persistent wonder-occurring-before-sensitivity problem. "Never mind. I don't know what I'm saying."

"He could just be destined for Hell, Detective, not hailing from it," Lucifer says reasonably. "Most evil — on this planet, anyway — started human."

*Your kind invented murder, after all,* he doesn't say, but her mind naturally flies there, given recent events.

Her stomach roils when she thinks of all the things Pierce said to her over the past year.

*The Sinnerman killed my brother,* among them.

*I love you,* being another.

*Will you marry me?* being the clincher in the horror show.

Her memories, made retrospectively revolting, all slip in like murderers to gut her, one after the other.

She grits her teeth as she follows Lucifer's gaze, staring out into the bleak night. The breeze kicks an empty Slushee cup and a few dead palm fronds across the dirty road. The warehouse remains still, and cold, and quiet. Dim street lamps buzz, but not enough to overwrite the awful buzzing in her head. The could have, should have, would haves.
"Was Pierce really … Cain?" she says into the silence, eyes watering.

Lucifer's head thunks against the window as he rests against it. He slumps with enervation. Like he's been waiting — just waiting — for this subject to come up, and he's been dreading it all the while. He gives her a look like he'd rather yank off his own fingernails than answer. But instead of the, Bloody hell! Must we? he clearly wants to snap, he utters a tight, unhappy, quiet, "Yes."

"Cain as in the first murderer," she says. "Cain from the Bible. Cain and Abel. That Cain."

Lucifer's scowl deepens. "Yes."

"… How?" she says, rubbing the bridge of her nose. "I mean …." Her brain suddenly isn't working. "How?"

"He was cursed by Dad. Doomed to wander for eternity and all that."

"But …."

Lucifer sighs, giving her an unhappy look. "He was under the mistaken impression that receiving your love would lift his curse and allow him finally to perish."

She swallows. "Because … of the miracle thing?"

A long silence follows. "That … was his impression, yes."

"So … he was using me," she says, sinking. Her limbs feel cold. Her hands tremble. "Just … using me. And … in the end … his machinations worked. He died."

"No," Lucifer says very quietly. "No, that isn't …."

"But you said—"

"Detective," Lucifer says. And then a little sigh tumbles from his lips. "Chloe. Yes, his initial intentions were only to use you as a means to shuffle off the mortal coil, but I do believe he loved you in the end." His jaw clenches. "His twisted idea of love, anyway."

She's not sure if that makes this disaster better or worse. "So … if he wanted to die—"

"He didn't," Lucifer says in a frigid, midnight tone. "Not by the time that I …." His gaze into the distance is a troubled, churning maw. "Once death shifts from a nebulous idea into inevitable fact, it tends to … inspire trepidation."

Change the subject, he seems to be screaming in silence. Change it. Change it, now. She bites her lip, looking away as her stinging eyes spill over. She wipes her face with the backs of her knuckles, trying to keep herself together.

"How long did you know who he was?" she says around the lump in her throat.

For a long moment, Lucifer doesn't speak, and she thinks … he's not going to answer her. He's that opposed to hashing this out right now. But he surrenders to the tide of conversation with a sigh. "I determined his identity shortly after he killed the fake Sinnerman."

"So … you didn't just know," she says. "Not right away."

"He was human," Lucifer says. "He looked like any other human, to me."
Which … okay. At least, Lucifer hadn't been keeping secrets about Cain for the whole fucking year. A cold comfort, though, really.

She takes a breath, steeling herself. "Lucifer, why didn't you tell me about him sooner?"

"I tried to."

"Yeah, after we were already involved." She can't suppress a shudder when she remembers that she slept with him. She slept with that liar. That murderer. That user. She invited him into her home with her kid. And Lucifer could have stopped the whole thing before it started, but he hadn't, and that … hurts. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I did try to tell you before," he insists. "You kept characterizing all of my protests as jealousy. Every single one. And I thought …." His voice trails away. He pulls out his flask and takes another swig, and then becomes singularly fixated on his onyx ring.

"You thought what?" she says through clenched teeth.

He twists the ring around his middle knuckle. Over and over and over. "I thought, perhaps, that you were right."

"You're saying I gaslit you? You're blaming me?"

"I am not," he rushes to say, looking up with a frantic expression as he vehemently shakes his head. "I'm not blaming anyone, least of all you. I …." He tilts his head as he regards her, gaze overflowing with misery. "Chloe, I wanted you to be happy. You seemed happy. And I thought …."

She grits her teeth. "You thought you could ignore the elephant in the room, and it would maybe go away."

"Maybe, it would have gone away!"

She gives him a disbelieving look. "Lucifer ….."

"Your esteem …. It made me … better," he says thickly, gaze dropping to his ring once more. In the dark car cabin, the stone seems blacker than black. Ebony and swirling. She wonders, for the first time, if the stone is from somewhere else. "Knowing you has made me … better. Or … I thought it did."

"What's your point?"

"Who's to say that that wouldn't have happened with Cain, too?" Lucifer says. "What of atonement?"

"He murdered his brother, Lucifer."

"Yes, well, so have I."

She blinks as a cold knife slips between her ribs. "What are you talking about?"

"Uriel," he says, the word a soft, miserable, guilt-ridden confession to his knees. "I killed Uriel."

When Lucifer had been telling her "everything," he'd plowed right over that part. He'd explained that the car crash she'd been in had been the unfortunate result of one of his brothers — Uriel, skilled with patterns — fucking around with probability. He'd explained that his "guardian Devil" schtick had been born out of genuine concern for her welfare. He'd also explained that he "took care of it."
But he hadn't specified how. And before she'd had a chance to ask any questions, he'd bulled ahead to the subject of Azrael's blade. Chloe had been far more concerned, at the time of his explanation, by a divine artifact causing humans to commit mass soul-destroying murder, than by one of Lucifer's brothers conveniently "being taken care of."

"He wasn't going to stop," Lucifer says, "so I killed him with my sister's blade."

*For you,* he doesn't say.

Holy.

Shit.

"I watched the light in his eyes just … end," he continues, looking nauseated. "It was the first time that I …"

"Lucifer," she says softly, the word infused with horror. Not at him, but for him.

He shakes his head. Just a shiver of movement she barely catches in the dark. And then he sucks in a breath, and his tumult is gone, replaced by … nothing. "Do you mean to say there's no forgiveness for me, either?" His fingers clench against his pant legs as he stares blankly into space. "Once a murderer, always a murderer, no matter the why or wherefore?"

"Lucifer, that's not at all what I meant," she says, trying to stay calm. "Pierce was completely different!"

"In hindsight, perhaps. Which is 20/20, as they say," Lucifer grinds out, turning to her. "And when Cain's motives became crystal clear to me — when I knew for a fact that your safety was impinged — I did try to tell you, Detective, but you wouldn't bloody listen."

"You were acting *insane.*"

"You wouldn't have bloody listened to me even if I were acting normal," he snaps, eyes blazing. "My normal *is* insane to you - these past several days with your repeated meltdowns are a perfect case in point. You always assumed I was living in some delusional metaphor."

"You could have shown me your other face as proof."

A blustering sigh falls from his lips. "I didn't bloody *have* my other face."

"What, it just disappeared?"

"Essentially, yes!"

"Then why didn't you show me your wings?"

His eyes narrow. "Detective, you may find this hard to believe, but until very recently, I didn't believe they were mine," he says in a low, dangerous tone. The hairs on the back of her neck stand on end, and her heartbeat pounds in her ears. "And I wasn't going to show you some … some falsity … just to prove a bloody point to you."

"And what 'bloody point' was that, exactly?"

"That you should believe me," he says, point blank. "That my word should be proof enough for you."
"Lucifer …"

"You have never trusted me," he snaps. "Not ever. Not truly."

"Well, you didn't trust me, either!" she replies, stung.

"And so here we are," he says, the words dark and hating. "At an impasse. A human and her monster of a partner."

"Lucifer, you're not a monster," she says, eyes watering.

"Explain to me, then, why it is that you're terrified right now."

"I'm not—"

"I can hear your heart pounding, Detective," he says coldly. "I can smell your sweat. I can see your hands shaking, and the goosebumps on your skin."

"I'm just upset," she bellows. "I almost married a fucking psychopath, and I've been lied to repeatedly by you and by him, and we're fighting, and I'm upset."

"I haven't lied," Lucifer exclaims, almost a snarl.

"Keep telling yourself that."

A soft, low growl vibrates through the space between them, and the obsidian of his eyes shifts into menacing crimson. The car feels impossibly claustrophobic, and she can't help but paste herself against the door, trembling. He's Lucifer. The Lucifer she knows. Except he's got the inhuman eyes of someone else, and—

"You are frightened," he reasserts.

She shakes her head, taking tiny, panting breaths. He's intentionally plucking at all of her most basic instincts like they're violin strings, and then he's surprised when he's getting a reaction? "That's not fair!" she says as her teeth start to chatter.

The door on his side of the car pops open. "I'm going to take a look inside the warehouse," he says without looking at her as he climbs out onto the sidewalk beside the car. He rolls his shoulders. "I've had enough of sitting. Of … of … talking." He spits the word talking like it's an obscenity.

"Lucifer!" she hisses. "Lucifer, wait!"

But he slams the door shut behind him. Within three strides, the shadows envelop him, and he disappears, a wraith.

Fuck. Fuckity, fuck, fuck.

She smacks the steering wheel repeatedly with the heels of both palms, letting her frustration and stress bubble over. With a barbed, furious sigh, she grabs her keys, wrenches open the car door, and chases her wayward partner into the night.

Without any cloud cover, the temperature of the nighttime air around Los Angeles tends to plummet, and the breeze billowing against her neck and arms is frigid. She's too mad to shiver, though. She stomps across the empty, quiet street at a sprint, nearly tripping on a huge pothole in the process. She catches up with Lucifer just as he raises his hand to the door, forms a lopsided circle with his index
finger and thumb, and gives the door what barely amounts to a flick.

The metal shrieks in protest, sounding like a banshee in a graveyard as it warps under Lucifer's effortless assault, and then it slams onto the ground, an abused, useless hunk. Dust kicks into a cloud. A displaced blast of warm air wallops Chloe in the face. The inside of the dark warehouse is a fathomless maw beyond the ruined threshold.

For a moment, she can't help but gape at the wanton destruction. She knew he was strong. She knew it. But this is ….

"Monstrous," he tells her as if he's read her mind. "As I said."

"Lucifer, we don't have a warrant," she says. "You can't go inside, or the whole case will get thrown out."

His eyes are back to their normal brown — black in the bare moonlight — but the sharpness in his gaze, the glee of the hunt, still makes him look otherworldly.

"You're, A, assuming that I'll get caught," he croons, "and, B, assuming that I care."

He gives her a challenging look that cuts like razors, and he steps across the threshold.

*What I do on Earth has little consequence in his ultimate fate*, he said.

She grits her teeth. "You can't just—"

"Can't I, Detective?" he says, quirking his eyebrows at her.

"*We can't,*" she says, changing tactics.

But he's not in the mood to listen, it seems. "I follow your little human rules when I desire it," he says, looking down his nose at her.

He sneers wolfishly. His teeth gleam in the darkness. It's like he's still trying to scare her. Trying to prove a point. Or something. She catches a glimpse of glowing crimson as his eyes flash again.

She folds her arms and glares at him defiantly. "I'm not letting you go in there by yourself."

"Well, then, Detective," he tells her, eyes glinting, "by all means, join the fun. Be a little *naughty*. I won't tell."

And then he heads inside, leaving her with no options but to stand near the broken door like an idiot, hoping their case doesn't get destroyed by his devilish temper tantrum, or to follow, in the probably-futile hope of minimizing disaster.

"Lucifer!" she hisses one last time, knowing it will tweak him. "Lucifer, get *back* here!"

Her words seem to echo in the cavernous space beyond.

*I am not your bloody dog come to heel; I am the Devil, lest you forget*, she can imagine him snapping back at her from the darkness, but his extra ire will be worth it if it gets him to stop and think for a fucking second about what he's doing.

He's done talking, though, and even that doesn't garner a response.

With a defeated sigh, she flips on her flashlight, and follows him inside.
The interior of the warehouse is black as pitch and smells faintly of formaldehyde. Nose wrinkling at the odor, as soon as she's fully stepped inside the building, she whips around to look from the inside at the ruined doorframe. She runs her flashlight beam along the edges, searching for a security system, any obvious keypads prompting for a passcode, any telltale wiring, anything. That would be just her luck if Lucifer's intrusion had already alerted A.D.T. to summon the fucking police. But she sees nothing in the darkness except the damage Lucifer wrought.

"There's no alarm," Lucifer says.

She frowns, turning to him. The moonlight flooding through the ruined doorway gives him a faint luminescence, and in that moment, he looks far more angelic than devilish.

"How do you know that?" she says.

He answers with a leonine shrug that tells her nothing, and then he steps out of the light.

Sighing, she sweeps her tiny Maglite from left to right in broad, sweeping arcs. A desk sits in the far corner of the massive room, buried six inches deep with stacks of papers and office equipment. The top of a computer monitor barely pokes out above the mess. The middle of the room contains row after row of corrugated, metal shelving, each stacked high with boxes. She steps close to the nearest shelf, flashing her light at the labeling on the edge, but she can't make any sense of the filing system. The strange text has the appearance of writing, but the scribbles aren't numbers and don't make any words that she recognizes.

"What's this say?" she whispers, gesturing at the label with her flashlight.

"Already gotten into the burglar spirit, Detective?" Lucifer teases with glee.

She rolls her eyes. "You are such a goddamned smart ass."

Lucifer makes an odd, breathy sound, like he's halfway on the way to laughing, as he steps closer. She resists the urge to smack the laughter right off his face, instead grinding her molars and clenching her fingers into tight fists. His arm brushes hers, and the heat of him fills her whole side. He presses an index finger to the label, scrutinizing the lettering first from left to right, and then right to left.

His eyes narrow. "I don't know how to read this text."

"I thought you said you can speak everything?"

He sighs. "Yes. Speak. Not read. I don't take the time to learn every human alphabet and script on sight. Latin, Chinese, Devanagari, Arabic, and Cyrillic, I know." He points at the label. "This is not one of those."

"Can you at least tell what it is?" she asks.

"It's … familiar," is all he can say.

Clenching her teeth, she pulls out her phone and takes a photograph of the label. Her mind is screaming at her. Fruit of the poisonous tree. Fruit of the poisonous tree. Fruit of the poisonous fucking tree. But if she's going to be in here, breaking the law, and fucking up her whole investigation, she might as well make it worth it. Then she realizes she's worried about fruit of the poisonous tree while standing next to the Devil himself, and she can't help the absurd, breathy cackle of hilarity that falls from her lips.
"Detective?" he says.

"Sorry," she says, clapping her hand over her mouth. "I'm stressed." She swallows. "Is the story about you offering the apple to Eve true?"

He's silent for a moment.

"Lucifer?"

"It wasn't an apple," is his reply.

She frowns, unsure of what to make of that. He pulls down a box from a shelf far overhead and rips the packing tape to shreds without any need for scissors. Inside the box is … a doll. Like one of those collectible American Girl dolls, except this one seems older. Which makes sense for a company that deals in antiquities.

"That's … strangely legitimate," she says, frowning. Unless the doll is full of—

Lucifer rips its head off and jams his finger down the hollow neck. "Well, they're not smuggling anything," he says as he withdraws his hand. "At least … not in this doll." He puts the head back on lopsided and throws the blonde doll back into the box.

Undeterred, he moves down the line to the next box on the shelf. This box contains a huge collection of bubble-wrapped chunks of amber and other little fossils. Or … she thinks they're fossils, anyway. He picks out a flat black rock that's oval-shaped-but-tapering. The segmented shape reminds her somewhat of a sow bug. Except this fossil is the size of his hand, not a jelly bean.

"I remember when these still existed," he says.

She blinks, momentarily stupefied. "… What is it?"

He glances at the fossil. "I believe, a trilobite of some kind," he says with a shrug. "As I've said, I'm no biologist."

"Right."

He rewraps the fossil in its packing paper and puts it back into the box.

"Maybe … the duffel-bag exchange we saw didn't have anything to do with the warehouse?" she suggests. It's possible, after all, that the loading dock had been picked for the money exchange because it had no relation to the perpetrators whatsoever. It's not as though some random antiquities dealer in the Arts District is going to be paying much attention to who plays on its loading dock at night, hence the copious graffiti.

Lucifer shakes his head, though. "I imagine these packages are all decoys."

"Decoys for what?"

Lucifer looks around the room, nostrils flaring like he's scenting something. He heads toward the back wall, near the computer desk. There's a poster on the wall — a reprint of some famous painting she recognizes but can't identify. Monet, maybe? Whatever it is, Lucifer rips it down from the wall like it's tissue paper, revealing a Mosler safe about the size of a mini fridge behind it.

"Don't you dare destroy that," she warns him — she's already stressing about the door and the fucked up doll and the poster. If they get caught, this damage is probably coming out of her
paycheck. Assuming she still has a paycheck. Because she's also likely to get fired.

But Lucifer is almost what could be described as gentle with the safe. He presses his ear to the metal door, twisting the dial back and forth like he already knows the combination. In a few seconds, the door pops open, and the faint formaldehyde scent she got a whiff of earlier becomes a legitimate stench.

She gapes. "How …?"

"I can hear the mechanism," he explains.

Oh.

Right.

Suddenly, all of his Houdini acts over the past few years make a painful amount of sense. The idea that humanity could contain the Devil is laughable, at best. Of course, paltry deterrents like handcuffs or child locks would do very little to keep him in place.

"Detective," he says, sounding suddenly grim.

She rises to her tiptoes, peering into the safe with him. Inside are several glass mason jars, each filled with some kind of liquid. The liquid sloshes as Lucifer picks up one jar and shakes it. She can't see through the glass in the dark like he seems to be able to, so she points her flashlight at it.

Inside the first jar is … something fleshy. Something … biological. And at first, her brain doesn't want to assemble the puzzle pieces.

Her stomach flip-flops. "… Oh … my God."

"I imagine God had very little to do with this," Lucifer says, the words clipped.

He unscrews the cap on the jar, and the stench of formaldehyde becomes a noxious cloud that brings tears to her eyes and loosens her already precarious hold on her innards. She claps her hand to her mouth and turns away, gagging. "What the fuck is that?" she croaks, crying, but not from grief.

"I believe these are testicles," Lucifer says, inspecting the jar with a cold, clinical gaze. "From what, though, I've no idea."

She has to take several steps away to breathe. He replaces the cap, puts the jar back into the safe, and grabs the next one. Eyeballs, this time, bloody and sightless and staring. They float in the liquid like a pair of peeled grapes.

"Genevieve's, perhaps," he says, a tinge of glowing fury lighting up his irises. "Though I'm not certain."

The jar isn't labeled. "What in the hell makes you think that?" Chloe says, swallowing over and over and over again as she tries to keep her nausea at bay.

"Genevieve had blue eyes, according to her drivers' license, and these eyes are also blue."

"I'll … take your word for it," Chloe says, gut churning.

If these eyeballs are, in fact, Genevieve's, and not … like … cow parts or something innocuous … it stands to reason that the testicles belong to an as of yet unfound victim. Her stomach roils as she forces herself to take photographs. Of the eyeballs. Of the testicles. Of the five other jars in the safe.
Five. Which means the L.A.P.D. hasn't found all of the bodies. Not even close.

"Lucifer?"

"What, Detective?" Lucifer says, almost a snap.

He stands beside her, lips forming a grim line. His breaths are tight and shallow, and even as he stares blankly into space, she feels a bit like she's standing next to a volcano just before it blows. *He's the walking talking wrath of God,* Maze said, and in this moment, Chloe believes it.

She shakes her head. "Never mind."

With another barely suppressed gag, she pushes past Lucifer, leaving him behind to trawl through the other jars' contents by himself, if he wants. She steps over to the desk with the buried computer.

The foot-high stack of paperwork is comprised of FedEx labels. Tons and tons of FedEx labels. All of them are addressed to some place she doesn't recognize. QC, Canada. Is that Quebec? She isn't sure. Maybe, this warehouse is a satellite distribution point for another location, hence all the shipping labels.

She pulls a stack of labels away from the monitor, surprised as the movement makes the screen flicker to life. Her gut drops out from underneath her as she reads.

Holy fuck.

There's a Twitter direct message conversation open between jacques_not_cousteau_47 and NeverHasParis, discussing whether the fangs had been obtained, yet. Jacques_not_cousteau_47 is lamenting that, "One of our assets went dark unexpectedly. Things are taking longer to procure than we'd hoped."

Chloe fishes her phone out of her pocket again and takes a picture of the conversation, shoving down the repeating whine of "fruit of the poisonous treeeeeeeeeee" that's wailing like a siren in her head.

When she turns away from the computer screen ....

That's when she sees it.

In the wall. Innocuous. Almost entirely concealed by posters and Post-its and shelving. She would have missed it if her flashlight's beam hadn't glinted off the tiny lens.

This place has a security camera embedded in the wall.

Potentially cameras. Plural. Who knows how many she hasn't spotted?

Of course, this place has security cameras.

Her only hope is that the cameras aren't turned on. Sometimes, shop owners will leave cameras in plain sight with no intention of recording, because simply having the cameras serves as a much cheaper but still effective theft deterrent. She's really hoping for the deterrent option. Otherwise, she and Lucifer have been filmed gleefully breaking and entering and breaking some more. Her heart pounds as she backs away from the desk.

"Lucifer," she whispers, knowing he'll hear her, "we need to leave. Right now."

He doesn't reply. Shaking, she directs her flashlight to where she'd last seen him by the safe. He's gone.
"Lucif—" she snaps more loudly, only to have a warm palm press against her lips and silence her.

The only thing that prevents her from jumping out of her skin is that she knows it's Lucifer. From his warmth. From his height. From the soft vanilla sandalwood scent of his favorite cologne. From his gentleness, even when he's shutting her up.

"Detective," he says in a low whisper, almost subsonic, as he pulls his hand away from her mouth, "we're not alone."

"What?" she hisses.

"Turn off your flashlight," he says, and she does, plunging them back into pitch blackness.

For a moment, she hears nothing but her heartbeat pounding in her ears. His soft breaths against the back of her neck.

But then she hears someone else. Also breathing. Footfalls strike against the cement floor on the opposite end of the warehouse, echoing faintly in the darkness.

Lucifer tenses behind her. He rolls his shoulders, grunting unhappily. A rustling sound follows. The click and clack of bones, moving. There's a crash as the little trash can beside the desk is knocked over by something big. Something huge. A wall of gleaming white descends around her. Then she hears the deafening, unmistakable crack of a gunshot. Pain explodes in her ears at the noise, and for a moment, all sound becomes negative space. The world whips to the right as Lucifer's big body plows into her.

There's a rush of wind on her face.

Then, as the tinnitus sets in, she's flying.
They land a bit like a pair of trash bags being thrown into the bins. Gracelessly. Heavily. With a thump that almost knocks the wind out of her. A miserable moan beside her brings her back to the real. A sound like bones cracking follows, and he cries out again.

"Lucifer?" she says, blinking groggily, her ears still ringing faintly.

When he doesn't reply, she looks up in time to see the last bladed feather fade out of reality. Wings. He really does have wings. Her partner, Lucifer the Morning Star, has big beautiful angel wings, and he just flew her to safety. Because he's an archangel, and ….

Holy shit.

It's one thing to believe. It's another thing to know. It's another thing entirely beyond that to see, even just a passing glimpse.

But that thought is fleeting, because he's panting, sweating, looking sick and glassy-eyed. His cheek is pressed against the brick wall like the wall is the only thing holding him upright. His whole body is a tense, trembling line of strain.

"Lucifer?" she repeats. "What just …?" She swallows. "Are you …?"

"I'll be … fine," he rasps, sounding anything but fine.

The dots connect, forming an ominous picture. "Did you get shot?"

He doesn't answer. Which probably means, in Lucifer speak, Bloody hell, woman, of course, I bloody well got shot. Do keep up.

She stumbles to her feet, but the world goes topsy-turvy, and she has to stop and blink and breathe to let her rioting stomach settle and her spinning head come to rest. She just flew. With an angel. An angel just flew with her. There's bound to be some wonky re-entry turbulence. Right?

When the nausea subsides, she steps toward him. Into his space. She jams her hands underneath his suit jacket, rubbing up and down his torso, searching for the bullet wound she knows she's going to find. Her fingertips scream across the sleek fabric of his shirt. His body sways.

"Where did you get hit?" she says. She can't find any wounds. Why can't she find any wounds? When he doesn't immediately answer, she adds a strident, "Lucifer, where? Talk to me."
But he doesn't talk. He slumps against her, his nose pressing into her hair, and he takes a ragged breath like breathing hurts. "Your … cream rinse … smells nice," he says, sounding drunk.

"Lucifer, focus," she snaps, almost a hiss, but she's too afraid to give him the merciless shake she wants to give him. "Tell me where you got shot."

A cold wind blows. Her front is wrapped in the furnace of flesh that is a sweating Lucifer. But her back is only covered by her shirt. The breeze makes her shiver. Palm leaves rustle in the quiet, intermingling with Lucifer's labored panting.

She looks up, taking stock of her immediate surroundings.

She gapes.

He flew her home. To the quad outside her apartment. In ten fucking seconds. How …? She shakes her head, staving off her astonishment. Astonishment, later. Field repair, now.

"Come on," she says, trembling. "Lucifer, come on. Let's get you inside."

He speaks, but the word is nonsensical.

She steps around to his side and slings her arm low across his back for support. It's too dark and too public to take care of him outside. She wishes she had any idea where he'd been hit.

"Can you walk?" she says.

He nods, looking pale as moonlight. "M'okay," he mutters, barely audible.

"You don't lie, remember?" she scolds him as they start shuffling toward her apartment.

The walk is interminable, and Lucifer's strides, normally ground eating, get shorter, and shorter, and shorter still, until he's barely shuffling, and she's mostly dragging. She keeps yanking him forward by his belt loops, yelling at him, wheedling, cajoling, trying to keep him engaged, all while praying nobody comes out to see what the ruckus is about, and that he doesn't collapse entirely.

Maze is long gone. Trixie is staying with Dan. The apartment is dark, and there's nobody to answer the door. Chloe's lucky Lucifer absconded with her while she was in possession of her keys. She tries not to worry about how she's going to retrieve her abandoned cruiser.

She drags Lucifer upstairs, into the master bathroom with her, and then drops him like a sack of potatoes onto the toilet lid. For a moment, all she can do is stand there, panting as black spots fill her vision like a descending curtain, and then fade. Sweat makes her hair stick to the back of her neck. Holy shit, holy shit, holy shit. He's heavier than he looks. And this whole night has been a clusterfuck of biblical proportions.

When Lucifer slumps against the side of the sink, boneless, eyes half-lidded like he's in a dead faint, she snaps back into action. "Lucifer," she says, clapping in front of his face. "Lucifer, wake up." She tries to get his suit jacket off, but without him helping, it's not worth the effort. He's too big and unwieldy, and she can't get the kind of leverage she needs. "Stay awake, Lucifer."

She grabs the scissors from the medicine cabinet and starts cutting everything off of him.

"What're … you doing?" he says faintly at the sound of ripping cloth.

"Trying to figure out where you got shot," she says. She tears his shirt away from him, exposing his
pale, heaving chest. She doesn't see a bullet wound anywhere. Not even a hint of blood.

"This's … Versace …."

"I don't care about your stupid Versace!" she snaps. "I care about you, you big idiot!"

He stops protesting after that. She doesn't even need to use the scissors on his pants, because, shakily, he manages to slide them off on his own. Which only reveals that there's not a single mark on him. No blood. Not even healing scratch marks. And, now, the Devil is sitting on her toilet, almost naked and possibly dying.

"I don't understand," she says, frantic. "Where is it? Where's the bullet wound?"

He tries to rise to his feet. As soon as he puts weight on his arms, though, his eyes widen, and he bites back on a shout, strangling it. Barely. He smashes his lower lip between his teeth in a grimace, biting hard enough to draw the first bit of blood she can actually see. A trickle of red drips down his chin.

"Lucifer, what is wrong with you?"

"He hit … my wing."

She blinks. "Your wing. As in your big white angel wing. That wing."

"Yes."

Well … that would explain why flying seems to have nearly killed him. For a moment, she can only stare. A month ago, she would have snapped at him to stop joking around. Today, though ….

"Fine, then; whip them out," she says, gesturing at him.

Now, it's his turn to stare. "What?"

"I can't help you patch up the wound if I can't see it. So, whip them out."

"You can't help me patch it up, period," he snaps.

His frustration gives him enough steam to stand up, though he sways like a drunk and ends up leaning against the doorframe, shaking. He's pale like chalk and looses a guttural, miserable sound that makes her cringe with sympathy as she reaches out to steady him.

"Is showing them to me … like … taboo or something?" she says, remembering how he said he wasn't even convinced his wings were his for the longest while. "I mean, I promise to …." To what, exactly? She doesn't know.

He rolls his eyes. "No, it's not bloody taboo," he says, almost a snarl. "They bloody fucking hurt; I barely got them folded in the first place. I'm not going to bloody bring them out again."

"Oh," she says, chastened. "So … the snapping sounds? That … wasn't normal?"

"No."

"Is it … is it broken?"

He grits his teeth, not answering. His eyes close for a moment as he fights of what looks like a tsunami-sized wave of agony. He looks raked raw. The more he lists against the doorframe, the more
abject distress bleeds into his expression.

"You're not dying, right?" she says in a small voice.

"No, I'm not bloody dying," he grouses. His skin is damp with sweat. His knuckles are bloodless where he grips the doorframe.

"Promise you're not lying?"

The withering look he gives her is promise enough, she supposes.

"Okay, come on, then," she says, stepping beside him to offer support.

The trip to her bed takes about ten minutes. When he collapses onto Dan's old side of the mattress, he stays draped where he lands, unmoving, panting, like a devilish-but-living rug.

"I … can call a driver," he says, sounding sick. "M-my driver."

Her heart constricts. "No," she says.

He presses his face into the pillow, looking miserable and frail.

She has no idea what to say, anymore.

She can't quite make her mouth work, anyway.

Instead, she heads back into the bathroom and grabs an old pill bottle half-full of Norco from the top shelf of the medicine cabinet. The doctors had prescribed it after she'd been shot, and she'd never used it all up. She frowns, looking at the bottle. *Take 1-2 pills every 4-6 hours as needed for mild to moderate pain*, says the label. Underkill aside, is this … even going to work on Lucifer?

She's seen him get high. And drunk. So … theoretically … human substances work on him, at least some of the time. She'll have to ask about that when he's feeling better. Get an explicit answer.

She heads back to the bed with a glass of water and the jingling pill bottle.

Lucifer is already asleep, though. Like his body gave out on him. Maybe, it did.

A lump forms in her throat. She sets the pill bottle and the water glass on the nightstand by the clock, where he can see them if he wakes up for whatever reason. She yanks the covers out from under his feet and pulls them over his body, until just his sweaty hair is poking out. The sound of his breathing is thick and even and soft.

"Goodnight," she says quietly.

It's not until she's in the shower, minutes later, hot steam billowing up around her, that the tears start falling. The washcloth falls to the porcelain tub floor with a wet slap as the world blurs away behind a wall of salt and water. Stress. Grief. All of it tumbles out in a horrible, tempestuous flood.

Everything is such a fucking mess.

She lets herself cry until she's got nothing left.

She wakes to the heat of the sun on her face, the distant sound of traffic, and the faint vanilla scent of him all over sheets. Her bed is soft and warm, and she doesn't want to move. She wants to snuggle
under the covers and sleep for another eternity, wrapped in dreams where her life and reality aren't falling apart in tandem all around her.

Her bladder, though, has other ideas.

"Hmm," she says groggily, rubbing her face with her palms as her uncomfortable fullness drives her to rouse. "Lucifer?"

When he doesn't answer, she cracks open one eyelid and then the other. 1:47 p.m., her clock says in blaring red numerals. The covers on Lucifer's side of the bed are crisply tucked in and folded over each pillow, looking a bit like a ninja Martha Stewart sneaked in overnight. Lucifer is gone, along with the Norco.

She yawns, sliding out from underneath the covers, and sits on the edge of the bed. Her eyes still ache from all the crying she did last night, but, while sleep wasn't a miracle cure, it helped. A lot.

She side-eyes her phone, which she left facedown on her nightstand. With a grimace, she picks it up, turns it over, and unlocks it, fully expecting a nastygram from Acting-Lieutenant McDowell telling her she's been re-suspended, pending a full review. But … there's nothing. Not an e-mail, not a text, not a voicemail, not even a missed call from the precinct. Which is … fortuitous.

And terrifying.

She puts her phone back on the nightstand, trying not to think too hard about it, yet.

She makes a pitstop in the bathroom before heading downstairs, only to come to a jarring halt at the bottom of her steps. Lucifer is sitting at the island in the kitchen with an uncapped bottle of Jim Beam taking the place of a cereal bowl in front of him. Beside that rests an empty bottle of Jose Cuervo, and beside that, Grey Goose, also empty. The pill bottle that contained the Norco is tipped on its side on the floor by the foot of his chair, empty.

His face is a veritable forest of unmanaged stubble. Dark smudges from his ruined eyeliner hug his eyes, which look bleary and sunken and are pinched around the edges. His skin is pale. His hair is sticking up in about forty different directions. And he's naked.

Or. Well.

Not naked.

But his black boxer-briefs leave very little to the imagination, and what is she saying? He was shot last night.

"Lucifer," she says, torn between shock and concern, "are you okay? You look …."

"Like hell?" he croaks. And then he laughs, though the sound isn't a happy one. More … wheezy and pained.

"Um …." She swallows, heading toward the island. "Well, you said it. Not me."

He doesn't move or shy away as she steps into his space, so close she can feel the heat radiating off his bare skin. Her fingers hover over his shoulder blades, where his awful, marbled scars once were. Now, he's a canvas of unblemished skin. If he were Trixie, she'd rub his back, but …. Don't, she can hear him say. Please.

"Can I …." She swallows again, pulling back. "Can I help?"
But he shakes his head. "They jus' need time t'bloody heal," he says, slurring. "Wings heal the … ssslowest." He makes a rough, rasping sound of displeasure, deep in his throat. "I'd chop th'bloody things off again if I weren' convinzzed this'zz my last pair."

She blinks. "Last … pair?" Chop them off again?

He shrugs, wincing. "It isn' important."

"Lucifer …."

But he shakes his head, looking listlessly at his liquor bottles.

"I'm sorry you're hurting," she tells him softly.

He doesn't seem to know what to say to that except a half-hearted, "What'd I say about apologiezz, D'tective?" And when his not-really-a-joke trips on the ensuing awkward silence, he looks away.

"This … will heal, given time, right?" she says as she settles onto the stool next to him.

When he doesn't answer right away, she frowns.

"Lucifer?"

He kicks back the whiskey bottle. She watches his Adam's apple bobble along his throat as he chugs, and chugs, and chugs, dribbling down his chin in the process. Then he slams the bottle back onto her countertop and gives her an unfocused grin. "At least, with you aroun', I kin get well 'n truly sozzled!"

"Huh?"


She glowers. "I know what sozzled means. What are you—"

With a groan, he puts his head down on the table. "Now everythin' is … sip. Sippy. Spinning."

"Maybe, you should go back to bed," she suggests.

"Greatidea," he breathes into his elbow. "I'll do that. Inaminute."

He doesn't move, and his breathing thickens. She glances worriedly at the empty Norco bottle rolling around on the floor. A bottle that clearly states on the label, "DO NOT CONSUME WITH ALCOHOL."

Can angels destroy their livers? Given his rampant tendency toward substance abuse, the answer must be no, or he'd be long dead of cirrhosis. What's more concerning to her in this moment is that she can't remember how many pills were in the bottle. Hell, the volume of liquor alone that he seems to have consumed would be enough to kill a human ten times over.

"Lucifer … you can't … overdose, can you?"

He shakes his head and mumbles something like, "C'lessial met. Melt. Meblazm." Whatever the hell that means.

With a sigh, she takes the bourbon away from him. Recapping it, she hides the bottle under the sink. Well away from him. She steps around to his side, pulling his lax arm over her shoulder.
"Come on," she says, "why don't you go back to bed?"

"'Kay," he says faintly.

She tugs at him gently until he groans, seesaws upright, and then drapes his entire weight over her shoulders like he means to be her coat. With a grimace, she bears him, though. Just like she bore him last night.

They make a slow journey back up the stairs. He has a lot of trouble navigating the steps, and by the time they're back at the threshold of her bedroom, his hands are shaking, and he's paler than before. She didn't think he could be paler than before.

"Thank you," he says as he resettles in her bed.

A lump forms in her throat. "You're welcome."

"M'sorry about … lass night," he adds.

And then he's breathing, soft and even, out cold, and the words he spoke are swallowed up by silence, like he never spoke them at all.

She stays in the apartment with him for a few hours, checking on him periodically to confirm that "c'lessial meblazm" does indeed mean he can't overdose, though her lingering isn't purely magnanimous. She's reluctant to find out what state her cruiser is in. Whether it's been impounded or not. The longer she doesn't check, the longer she doesn't have to deal with the likely reality that she needs to start looking for a job that isn't subject to Giglio disclosures.

His sleep is restless.

He tosses and turns, and he kicks off the blankets, muttering in a slurred, almost-lyrical language that fills her with warmth and makes her whole body feel like it might float off the ground. The words don't resemble drunk English, let alone sober English — she's pretty sure human vocal cords can't even make some of the multi-tonal noises he's making — and she catches herself standing at the window by the bed, framed in sunlight, clutching her closed fist to her mouth and nose as she stares wide-eyed at him over the tips of her knuckles.

He's … really not human.

Her partner, Lucifer Morningstar, has an injured wing, and he is not human.

Sentient not-humans exist.

Angels exist.

Demons exist.

Dragons exist.

God knew what else.

Literally, God knew what else.

Her eyes water on that fact. That God knows. Because God is. God is a real entity.

Fuck.
With a sigh, she offers one last glance to the son of God currently twisting up all her sheets.

Then she heads downstairs to call an Uber. A slanting, dust-mote filled shaft of late-afternoon sunshine blinds her momentarily as she descends the steps, and she slams into a solid, leather-clad body before she realizes what the hell happened. A startled, panicked not-word tumbles from her lips. A warm hand with sculpted red nails reaches out to steady her.

"What are you doing here?" Chloe blurs as she regains her footing. "Thanks."

Maze frowns as she pulls back. "Well, I said I was gonna pick up some stuff, didn't I?"

"Oh," Chloe says. "Right. Um." She clears her throat, blushing. "Lucifer is upstairs."

"Yeah, I kinda figured," Maze says in a wry tone as Lucifer shifts briefly from muttering to yelling. The words aren't intelligible to Chloe at all, but from the bland look on Maze's face, she's either following along just fine, or doesn't give a shit regardless. "Finally did the nasty, huh?"

"No!"

"Right," Maze says, rolling her eyes. "Whatever." She sets her shoulders like she's intending to bulldoze right past Chloe, invitation or not.

Chloe takes a breath and shifts onto the center of the step, blocking her. "Look, Maze, I don't know what the hell happened between you two. But please don't hash it out right now, okay? He's hurt."

"Oh?" Maze says with a disturbing lack of sympathy. "Daddy got angry, after all?"

"What the hell are you talking about?"

Maze's eyebrows knit. "Daddy's not angry?"

"Why would God be angry?"

Maze shrugs. "You said Lucifer killed Pierce."

"Why would God be angry at Lucifer for killing someone in self-defense?"

"Angels aren't supposed to kill humans no matter what the reason," Maze replies. Her gaze shifts beyond Chloe's shoulder as she looks up the stairs. "You said Lucifer was hurt, so I thought ….."

"Oh. No. He got shot."

"What a shame," Maze replies, sarcasm dripping from her tone.

Chloe folds her arms. "Maze ….."

"What?" Maze says, holding up her hands. "Jeez, Decker, I'm kidding. Mostly, she doesn't add.

And Lucifer is upstairs, drunk off his gourd, defenseless.

"Look, I really need my stuff," Maze continues.

The demon tries to push past, and Chloe doesn't impede her anymore, but she doesn't let her go alone, either. They stomp up the steps in frantic tandem. When they reach the top landing, Chloe spreads her feet and squares her shoulders, blocking the hallway to the master bedroom as best she can. The only direction Maze can go without forcing the issue is toward the second bedroom.
Maze looks at Chloe with an incredulous snort of amusement. "What the fuck, Decker?"

"Just making sure he's safe," Chloe replies, heart pounding.

Maze rolls her eyes. "I'm not gonna do anything to him."

"Then we don't have a problem, do we?"

The silence stretches for a long moment. Too long. A drop of sweat creeps down the back of Chloe's neck. Tension holds her aching body in a vise, and she clenches her teeth, wishing she had her gun, but it's stored downstairs in the gun safe, far too far away to be of any use.

Maze's stony, affronted expression shifts, and she backs up a step, holding out her hands, fingers splayed, in surrender. "Decker, I'm …." She swallows, looking crushed. "I really don't want to hurt him anymore. I don't want anything to fucking do with him, but I don't want to hurt him."

"But you did want to?" Chloe says, latching onto the ominously spoken "anymore" that Maze used.

"I … did," Maze admits.

"Why?"

"I … wanted to go home," Maze says. "He's the only way I can go home, but he …." She takes a breath. "He wouldn't take me."

Stinging memories tangle around Chloe like a coil of barbed wire. *Maze asked me to take her home, and I said no*, Lucifer explained, *at which point she flew into a rage and threatened to make me sorry.*

*So, you didn't give her a ride home one night,* Chloe replied. *I mean, call me crazy, but that doesn't make someone kill.*

Home for Maze is Hell.

Which is not exactly an Uber destination without some very bad luck en route.

Chloe had been so clueless.

"I'm sorry," she says.

"Why?" Maze says, frowning.

"Just …." Chloe swallows against the lump in her throat. "I know what it feels like to want to go back, but not to be able to."

Maze looks away. "Yeah, well …."

Instead of finishing her thought, she turns with a sigh and walks down the hall toward her old room, her head down, her boots clomping on the hardwood floor. Chloe thinks she hears a snuffle or two, but she's not certain, and she doesn't want to let her own hopes foster any stupidity on her part. She stands in the hallway, on guard, feet firmly planted, lump burgeoning to basketball size in her throat, until Maze slinks back out of her room with a nylon duffel bag in tow. The contents of the bag clank and clink as Maze makes strides for the stairs.

"We're still on for drinks next week, right?" Maze says hopefully as she reaches the top step.
Chloe nods. "I'll be there."

"Okay," Maze says. "Bye, Decker."

"See you later."

With a wordless nod, the demon shuffles down the steps. Chloe stays where she is until she hears the front door open and close with a bit of a slam. When it's over, she slumps against the wall, blowing out a breath through pursed lips. Lucifer is still muttering in his stupor. Fresh, stinging tears fill her eyes, but she brushes them away.

Fuck. This. Day.

Seriously.

Fuck it.

And the worst part of it all is, she knows it's only going to get worse.

Fuck everything.

Her police cruiser is exactly where she left it, parked across the street from the creepy warehouse with the creepy fucking eyeballs and testicles in jars and God knew what else. Her radio and all her equipment are still inside the car, unscathed by burglars. There isn't even a telltale pink traffic citation stuffed under the windshield wiper. Horror scenarios of having to explain to her boss why her vehicle — owned by the taxpayers — got impounded or stolen melt away.

So, that's one thing that went right.

With a frown, she glances across the street at the warehouse in the distance. Just like all of the other days and nights she and Lucifer watched the place, there's no activity outside. It's 6:15 p.m., so she already missed the last delivery in the parade of FedEx trucks.

She lets out the breath she'd been holding. She'd been half-convinced she'd see a black-and-white parked out front, lights flashing, while two uniformed officers took down witness statements for the break-in.

Except ….

She squints, not convinced she's making out details well enough at this distance.

Hell, she's still not convinced, even squinting. She jams her key into the ignition and turns on the car, which rumbles to life without hesitation — another thing that's gone right. Tension gripping her shoulders, she glances into the side mirror to check for clearance. The street on which the warehouse resides is a sleepy one, and there's no traffic to avoid. She pulls out onto the cracked pavement and drives along at a slow creep, her car bouncing and jolting her around as the shocks fail to compensate for the awful road.

She pulls to a stop when she's immediately parallel to the loading dock, and she gapes.

She was making out details correctly, all right.

Of a fully intact side door.

It's as though Hurricane Lucifer never swept through.
Like last night never happened.

What. The fuck.

Without regard for anything but the fact that there's a door where one shouldn't be, she parks at the loading dock and climbs out of the cruiser again. She dashes up to the door-that-shouldn't-be and places a palm on it. The metal surface is hot in the sun, but smooth and unblemished. This is not the same door Lucifer broke, nor is it a makeshift construction, meant to keep the place secure while a new door is on order. This is a full-on replacement door.

How?

How in the fuck?

Lucifer didn't just trample the door, he destroyed the frame. Replacing said door would involve considerable repair work, to be completed by a contractor who knows shit about doorframes. Not to mention the door Lucifer fucked up was a huge metal contraption that wasn't going to be available at the nearest Home Depot. The warehouse owners would have had to special order it, unless they kept spares on hand.

This … is wrong. This iswrong.

She backs away from the warehouse, shaking her head, and this time when she starts the cruiser, she guns it hard enough to make the tires screech.

Acting-Lieutenant McDowell pops his head out of his office and flags her down as soon as she slinks into the precinct, like he's been just waiting for her to show her guilty, burglarious face for her shift that night. Dan is already gone for the day, and so is Ella, so there's nobody to give her the lowdown on what she might be walking into. She sets down her coat and her purse at her desk, and then heads in to chat with her new boss.

"What is it, sir?" she says, trying to sound innocent, only to break into a fit of coughing. She falls down more than sits down into the chair across from him, and a shock of pain shoots up her battered spine from her coccyx.

McDowell narrows his eyes, looking at her. "Where are you on the Tate case?"

She swallows. "We're still trying to pin down who ordered the two hits."

He nods. "Fine."

"… Fine?" she says, a little surprised. "That's it?"

He frowns at her. "Are thingsnotfine?"

She laughs. Too hard. She can hear Lucifer in her head whining, No, no, not like a demented witch on crack! Her laughing switches to coughing again, and she clears her throat, slamming her open palm against her chest repeatedly. "Sorry," she croaks as her eyes water. "Spit. Wrong pipe." She clears her throat again. Whywhywhy. "Things are just fine. Really." Not. Not really.

McDowell looks at her like he thinks she's about six beers short of a six pack, though he says nothing.

"Dispatch," she says, clearing her throat once more as she winces. "Dispatch didn't happen to get a
call about a break-in early this morning in the Arts District. Did they?"
"… No," says McDowell, the word stretched into almost four syllables he utters it so slowly. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing," she says, waving her hand. "Nothing at all. Just thought … maybe." She laughs again, much to her inner Lucifer's chagrin. "Stakeout brain. Thought we saw something. You know how it is."

The look he gives her in return says that, no, he does not know how it is, and she kind of wants to melt into the floor.

"All right, well, I'll just … um." She swallows. "Go."

"Bye," says McDowell, ever the defender of monosyllables.

She scrambles out of the office while she still can.

Nothing, she thinks as she pores through all the calls made to dispatch since last night. All the crime reports. There's nothing. Not a single thing about a break-in, not even when she expands her query to incorporate a ten-block radius around the warehouse. On a whim, she expands her query to ten miles. A couple of car thefts pop up. Several A&Bs. Several noise complaints. No B&Es, though.

But … Möbius, Inc. fixed the door — she and Lucifer had been caught in flagrante delicto; Lucifer had been shot — so the company clearly knew they'd been broken into.

Which again leads her back to … what the fuck?

Perhaps the company is more interested in concealing their criminal enterprises than in catching vandals.

That's possible, particularly if some of the body parts in their safe are verifiably human.

Or, perhaps, Chloe and Lucifer hadn't been caught last night, after all. Perhaps, they'd run into another burglar. Or, well, a robber, given the gun. But that didn't explain the fixed door. Nothing explained the fixed door.

It's as if the whole incident last night has been erased by ….

Her eyes widen as her innards drop into her shoes.

Magic, she remembers saying incredulously just last night.

And Lucifer had answered, Yes.

Yes, as in along with angels and demons and God, magic fucking exists.

Heart pounding, she yanks out the report on Möbius, Inc., that Dan had prepared for her. There's a phone number for her to call. She resisted the direct approach before, but … maybe it's time for a face-to-face interview with the mysterious Mr. Möbius. That would give Lucifer an in-person chance to gauge their opponent. Maybe, he would even remember where he'd seen him in the first place.

But how the hell do we deal with magic, of all things? her irritating inner voice interjects.

Lucifer can probably deal with magic.
But can he deal with it in a way that keeps things firmly in the arena of human justice?

Would he even want to?

She glances at her watch, not at all sure how to proceed. 9:47 p.m. Way too late to call the company number and expect a response. Still, she could leave a voicemail, she supposes, which is what she ends up doing.

As predicted, the call she makes dumps her straight into voicemail. The pre-recorded message telling her to leave her name and number is spoken by someone with the voice of a tenor and a French accent. Not, she thinks, Mr. Möbius, but rather Jacques Adrien, the donut-bearing office assistant who had vexed Lucifer with his appalling fashion sense.

"Hello, this is Detective Chloe Decker with the Los Angeles Police Department. I'd like to set up an interview with Mr. Asaiah Möbius concerning a recent homicide. Don't worry. No one is in trouble." Yet. "But I believe Mr. Möbius may have information relevant to my case. If someone could please give me a call back to set up an interview at the earliest possible convenience, I would appreciate it." She rattles off her work cell's number and then hangs up.

Her computer beeps.

She glances over with a frown.

She forgot she left the crime-report database open with the ten-mile query going.

A new A&B is listed.

At Lux.
Lucifer won't answer any of the texts she sends, though that's not unusual at night — they're his prime party and entertaining hours. Whenever she calls Lux, she gets dumped straight to a voicemail greeting that gives hours, directions, and valet prices. No one picks up the landline when she calls her apartment, either. Lucifer could still be in her apartment, sleeping off his not-an-overdose. But she'd rather head to Lux and find out he was home, after all, than head to her apartment and find out she missed a genuine emergency.

Two black-and-whites are parked in the alley beside Lux, their lights flashing, engines rumbling, when she arrives, and the churning pit in her stomach widens to a chasm. She screeches to a halt beside the neighboring building, parking next to a curb painted red and a sign that clearly says: NO PARKING. She yanks her law enforcement placard from the glove compartment and throws it haphazardly onto the dash before getting out of the car.

Three uniformed officers mill by the cars, chatting. In the back of one of the cars sits a scraggly, sobbing man who's already cuffed. "I'm sorry!" he wails at her through the window as tears and snot stream down his rubicund face. He thumps his fists on the glass. "I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I didn't mean it! He made me do it. He made me. I'll never do it again!" And then he starts wailing, and she can't understand a word coming out of his mouth.

"What happened?" she says to the closest officer, flashing her badge at them.

Thankfully, these guys aren't from her precinct, so they're not predisposed toward hating her guts. One of them glances at her without judgment and says, "A stabbing."

"A guest got stabbed?" Chloe says.

"No," says the second one. "That crazy club owner."

"Lucifer got stabbed?"

"Yeah," says the third one. He raises his hands to produce air quotes, adding with a smirk, "The Devil," and all three uniforms snigger.

"Is he okay?" she says.

"Certainly not in the head," the first one says, which prompts another chorus of laughs, and she wants to scream at them for their insensitivity. But they don't know her. And they don't know Lucifer. All they know is that she's a fellow cop. It's not like they'd say this shit to a loved one. Or directly to a victim. She hopes.

With an irritated, stressed sigh, she turns to go.
The pit in her stomach churns, and churns, and churns.

The line of patrons waiting to get inside the club wraps all the way around the block. The bouncer — a burly, forty-something man named Damian — takes one look at Chloe, recognition flooding his gaze, and steps aside, much to the irritation of the many waiting revelers. She grabs her badge off her belt loops and flashes it at them all. They stop complaining in heartbeats.

"Thanks," Damian says with a grateful look.

She smiles tightly. "No problem."

With that, she darts inside.

The thump of the bass fills the space behind her breastbone, and the crowd on the dance floor is unnaturally thick, even for Lux, which is how she notices the strange, invisible line of demarcation between the dance floor and the bar. Revelers press up against the line, but they don't cross it. The space around the bar is void of all comers except for the bartender, who's polishing shot glasses, a uniform she doesn't recognize, and Lucifer.

Lucifer.

Relief crashes through her, and she dashes down the remaining steps.

Lucifer is wearing a crisp, heather-colored suit without a vest or jacket. The cuffs around his wrists remain unbuttoned, no shiny cufflinks to be seen. His hair is only barely tamed. He hasn't shaved or applied eyeliner. Perhaps the most telling, though — he's got his fingers wrapped in a white-knuckled death grip around the back of the chair next to him, like he needs the support to stand.

If she hadn't spent the past day with him, she'd dismiss his trainwreck of an appearance offhandedly, thinking that he'd had a bit too much "fun" the night before. But with the added context of him nursing a gunshot wound, he just looks sick. And too uncomfortable and tired to bother with more than the bare essentials of grooming.

"Detective," he purrs when he sees her approaching, his silky, sexy, unbothered tone incongruous with his haggard appearance. His Rolex flashes in the light as his weight shifts, though he doesn't let go of the chair. "I was just telling Sergeant DeLaney here that I've no wish to press charges."

"What in the hell happened?" she says, flashing her badge again to save the explanations.

DeLaney sighs. "Some whack job tried to skewer Mr. Morningstar's arm with a potato nail, of all things."

"A … potato nail?" she says, incredulous.

"Yes," Lucifer says with a nod. "He must have brought it in with him. It's not as though our bag checker is instructed to prevent even heat distribution in defenseless tubers." He tugs on his wrinkled left sleeve with an irritated sigh, revealing a teeny hole the size of a fork tine near where his elbow meets his forearm. "A second shirt ruined in 24 hours. My tailor is going to have words with me when next we meet, I'm certain."

He seems more annoyed that someone poked a hole in his shirt than that someone tried to poke a hole in his body. How? Why? What the …? She can't stop herself from reaching for his arm, from pawing at the hole to confirm there's no damage to the skin underneath, and no blood on the shirt.

"You're okay," she says, stroking the blemish in the fabric with her thumb as a lump forms in her
"Of course, I'm okay," he confirms, frowning. "Why wouldn't I be okay?"

"Listen, Mr. Morningstar," begins DeLaney, "are you sure you're not interested in pressing charges?"

"Whatever for?" Lucifer says. "He's already very sorry about it. I've seen to that."

Boy, had he. "Did he just … come at you at random?" she says, frowning.

Lucifer considers the question, eyes narrowing. "No, Detective. He sat at the bar and waited for me to get close. The attack was calculated."

"And then he tried to stab your arm."

"The back of my hand, actually, but I moved."

"Nowhere else, though? Nothing vital?"

"No, Detective. Nowhere else. Why?"

"I'm not sure," she says slowly. Something … doesn't quite add up. But beyond being able to identify that there was a math error somewhere, she can't point to any specific issue. "Just … seems weird."

"Really?" says Lucifer. "It seemed like a Thursday to me."

"Hah, hah," she says, rolling her eyes.

Lucifer regards her without humor.

"Well, I'm gonna head back to the station," Officer DeLaney says with a sigh as he snaps his steno pad closed and caps his pen. He gives Chloe a curious look, though he doesn't ask any of the questions that seem to be burning in his gaze.

"Thank you, Officer," Lucifer says, directing an oily, placating smile at DeLaney. "Apologies for wasting your most valuable time."

"Eh," says DeLaney with a shrug. "At least, it was interesting. Not every day you hear the 'Devil' got stabbed."

"Yes," Lucifer says, unblinking, "most unusual."

DeLaney directs a final wondering look at Chloe before sauntering off. Lucifer watches him go. With the uniformed officer now gone, Lux's many patrons seem to feel that they have permission to be by the bar again, and the bubble around Chloe and Lucifer begins to shrink.

Lucifer stares over the crowd with an unfocused, dreading look, his fingers tightening around the chair back like he expects to get blitzed by a horde of drunk, grabby humans at any moment. Or, maybe, she's projecting, but ….

"Let's go upstairs," she suggests, giving his forearm a squeeze.

His attention shifts to her, his expression chiseling into a granite mask as he turns. "All right," he says in a dispassionate, flat tone.
She bites her lip. She was so certain, before, that he wanted a reason to get out of here, but ... He steps away from the bar, away from his supporting chair, without any hint of wobbliness or pain.

Maybe, she was reading too much into him.

"Come on," she says.

He makes a graceful after you gesture.

She steps ahead. Heat presses in from all sides as the writhing crowd envelops them.

She tries not to worry when his hand doesn't come to rest at the small of her back.

The elevator ride up to his penthouse is a quiet one. He stands at the opposite corner of the elevator car, staring at her with an unreadable expression. She stands as far away from him as she can manage, not sure what else to do with all the chilling keep-away vibes he's sending out. The space between them feels both like a canyon and a shoebox at once, far too wide and far too small.

The elevator dings, and the doors trundle open.

His penthouse is dark and cold and austere, lit only by moonlight.

"Well, you've seen me home, now," he says, stepping out into the living room before turning to face her. "Satisfied?"

She frowns. "Satisfied ... with ...?"

He blinks. "I assumed, with your civic duty now complete, you'd—"

"I'm not here for work," she says as her frown deepens. "Why do you think ...?" He squares his shoulders almost as if he's bracing himself, and she trails away as epiphany tramples confusion. Of course. Of course, in his world of quid pro quo, he would think ... "You're not going to scare me off just because we had a disagree—" His incredulous snort makes her stop and amend herself. "—Fight. Okay? We had a fight. A bad fight."

"A fight with the Devil," he says, the words soft and sepulchral.

She stares back at him. "I know that."

When his only response is unblinking, silent regard, she dares to take a step off the elevator. Since he doesn't seem to be in a hurry to do it, she smacks the light switch on the wall. The lamps all blink on, and his gas fireplace lights up with a rumble. His pupils constrict, but other than that, he's an ice sculpture, still and cold.

"Look, I can't blame you for thinking I'd be running for the hills right now, and I won't lie and say there aren't still things that are freaking me out. There are. Completely. But you're not one of them, and ..." She takes a deep breath. "And I was worried about you."

Some of his mask cracks.

His eyebrows knit. "But—"

"I heard about the A&B at Lux, and I wasn't sure where you were," she says. "I'm not here because the taxpayers pay me to be. I'm here because I was worried about you."
"Detective, what for?" he says in a bewildered tone.

"I thought you might be hurt," she says, enunciating every word. Why is he looking at her like she's speaking gibberish?

"My wings will heal; I assure you."

"Not your wing, Lucifer," she says, exasperated. "I meant the A&B." At his continued blank look, she adds, "You know. The part of the story where you got stabbed by a nutjob?"

At last, understanding floods his gaze, though it's quickly supplanted by dismay. He doesn't often utilize profanity beyond bloody this and bloody that, but if she could put words to the look on his face, they'd be, Oooooh, fuck, spoken in a sinking tone. He turns on his heels and heads for his bar to pull a bottle of bourbon from the middle shelf.

Two tumblers clink as he drags them up from underneath the counter.

"Care for a drink?" he offers, already pouring. The amber-colored liquid sloshes into both tumblers as he fills them each about a quarter of the way. He nudges one tumbler across the countertop in her direction.

She frowns, stepping over to the bar. "Lucifer … what …?"

He clutches the tumbler closest to him and kicks it back, not taking any time to savor the taste or swirl the liquid on his tongue. He chugs. Despite the fact that this bourbon probably costs more than her car.

"Lucifer, what's wrong?" she says, baffled.

He sets his empty glass down with a clink, though that doesn't stop him from clutching it with a shaking hand.

"Detective, I'm an archangel," he says slowly. "I can't be harmed by man-made weapons. You needn't worry over me in circumstances such as this."

She frowns. "But … I've seen you get stabbed. You got shot last night." She blinks, recalling him goading her. You need more proof? You've got the gun. "I've shot you."

"Yes, well, my invulnerability seems to … malfunction … when I'm around you, but—"

"What does that mean?"

"Exactly what I said, Detective," he replies. "You're sort of like a …. Like a …." He grimaces. "Well, like a walking piece of Devil kryptonite, if you will."

How? she thinks.

Why?

Because of the miracle thing?

Memories swirl.

Good for you! See? Hardly hurts, he said, grinning like an imp after she pulled the trigger. Only to dissolve before her eyes. With an astonished look, he pressed his fingers to the hole in his leg. I'm bleeding.
She thought he was crazy.

But in retrospect …

She claps her hand to her mouth, feeling sick to her stomach.

In retrospect, he was stunned, because he legitimately should not have been bleeding. Of course, he wouldn't have goaded her into shooting him if he thought she could actually harm him. He wasn't nuts; he was trying to give her the =4 in a 2+2 situation.

Her descent down the rabbit hole speeds up. Detective, he said, an odd edge to his tone, if it's any consolation to your pride, it would seem you make me vulnerable, too.

Then her brain whips her into the froth of last night. To the sound of the gunshot. The way her ears rang, yet no bullet ever hit her. The way … after he landed by her apartment … he could hardly hold himself upright because he was hurting so badly. The hellish, suffering way he looked this morning, even after consuming half of her liquor cabinet and all of her painkillers.

"It's my fault," she realizes. "That you got shot last night. It's my …"

He shakes his head. "No, it absolutely isn't. Don't you bloody think that."

"But you just said—"

He lets go of his crystal tumbler and steps around the bar. Closer to her. He stops about six inches away. His arms twitch forward and then back, like he wants to embrace her, but he's restraining himself. She saves him from doubting by pressing up against him. His arms close around her like a Venus flytrap, but she doesn't want to escape. Not ever. They haven't touched like this in weeks, and she forgot how much she loves the feel of his body close to hers. He's safe and warm, and he smells nice, even without having bothered to apply cologne. She closes her eyes, relishing him.

"How do I make you vulnerable?" she says against his shirt as he rubs her back in slow, soothing circles.

"I don't think that you do," he says softly.

"I don't under—"

"Let's just say, at this point in time, that I'm rather certain that I make myself vulnerable for you. It's not your fault; it's entirely mine. All right? Please, don't misplace your guilt."

"How does that even work?"

He shrugs with his left shoulder. "Free will. Choice. It's a bit of a double-edged sword for celestials, it seems."

She shakes her head. "That doesn't make any sense."

"Yes, well," he says with a sardonic laugh that rumbles through his breastbone against her ear. "Welcome to my bloody life."

She swallows against the lump in her throat. There's … something he's not telling her. There has to be. Some larger reason. But she's willing to accept his explanation at face value for now, if only because it gives her an excuse not to feel guilty on top of everything else going wrong.

She looks up at him. "Would … me leaving … help you heal?"
"I rather think, in this moment, that your departure would make it worse."

"Well, I could … stay and have that drink, now?" she suggests hesitantly, looking past his arm to the bourbon he poured for her minutes ago. "If you want me to, I mean."

"Of course, I bloody want you to," he says with an incredulous chuff of laughter.

She clutches up tents of his ruined shirt between her fingers and admits, "I do, too."

"Really?" he says with a stunned blink.

She sighs. "I've been trying to work up the nerve to invite you for a drink for days."

"Days, is it?" he says, grin slowly widening.

"Yeah."

Buoyant, he twists toward the bar, reaching for the glasses and the bottle behind him. The motion makes his breathing hitch like someone stuck a knife into his gut, and his smile drips away. His hip impacts with the counter as he semi-collapses, and what little color he had vanishes in heartbeats. She puts a hand on his arm to steady him, only for him to flinch away with a low, suffering moan that makes her stomach curdle.

"I'll b-be fine," he tells her, gasping, before she can say a word. "I'll …. I'll be ….

"Well, you're not fine, now," she replies through gritted teeth as she shifts her palm away from his arm to his heaving ribcage.

He squeezes his eyes shut, turning his face away from her. Like he thinks that's somehow going to hide the fact that he can't even stand up straight.

"Lucifer, let me see your wing," she says gently. "Maybe, there's something I can do for you. I've got some E.M.T. training, you know."

He leans against the counter, crumbling before her eyes. "They hurt to m-move," he admits in a thready, suffering voice. "I usually. Have Maze. Help."

And he and Maze aren't exactly on good terms right now. At all. Wonderful.

"Well, have you dressed the wound?" she prods.

"How am I going to bloody dress the wounds when I can hardly …." He trails into silence and slumps further. "Ah. Well played, Detective. Well played."

"Lucifer, let me see. Let me help."

"I don't want to … c-cut them. Off."

"That hadn't even crossed my mind," she says, frowning. Why on earth would he think …?

"They won't grow back this time if I cut them off," he blurts.

Her heart starts to thunder in her ears as she imagines him toting around some sort of gangrenous, infected mess and calling it wings. "Lucifer, show me. Now."

Still, he hesitates.
She hooks a belt loop with her index finger since his arms seem to be part of the problem, and she tugs him toward his bedroom. She knows he's in a bad way when he doesn't make a crack about her finally fulfilling his wildest dreams. All he does is follow her meekly, almost tripping on the short flight of steps.

"Lie down on your stomach," she tells him when they reach the edge of his bed, "and … what did you call it? Bring them out?"

He looks at her. And then at the bed. And then at her. "Detective," he says, breathless, though he doesn't sound like he's trying to make a joke. "Chloe." He sounds … terrified. "Aside from showing you my other face, or from building you a star in my bloody living room, this is about the largest 'Satan stuff' billboard I could possibly flash at you. I have wings. And they are not bird wings, let me assure you. Once you see them, you will never unsee."

She takes a breath. "I understand that, but I'm a little bit more worried about other stuff right now. Like, namely, that you're killing yourself for no good reason."

He scowls. "No good reas—"

"Yes!" she snaps, cutting him off. "No. Good. Reason. Because, here I am, willing to help you just like Maze does, and here you are, not willing to let me."

He squeezes his eyes shut for a moment and swallows. "All right," he says, sounding sick to his stomach.

With a gingerness that belies even his visible state-of-poor-health, he lowers himself to the lip of his mattress and reaches for his shoelaces. He can hardly stretch halfway toward his feet before he's yanking his arm back, gasping in pain again, and she wonders how in the hell he even got dressed today. No wonder he didn't bother with a waistcoat or a jacket.

She drops to her knees, batting his shaking hands away, and she unties the laces herself. Then she gently pulls off his polished black shoes one by one and sets them beside his nightstand as a neatly arrayed pair. With a groan, he tips onto the bed, gathering pillows, and settles on his stomach.

"I don't know that you can fix this," he says.

She folds her arms. "Let me be the judge of that, okay? I'm the one with field training."

He presses his face into the pillow.

Nothing happens.

"You need to move," he says, muffled into the pillowcase.

She blinks. She's a full five feet away from the side of the bed. They're that big? She backs up until her shoulder blades bump into his floor-to-ceiling windows.

"No," he says. "The foot of the bed. I don't want to hit you."

O … kay. She steps around the edge of the mattress, closer to his reading chair.

He sucks in a sharp breath, and a gnarled sound of misery gets stuck in his throat. His fists clench. She hears bones moving. Discordant, jarring clicks and clacks and snaps that make her stomach twist. Then his back erupts, and in a swift burst of motion, cleaves into two gleaming white walls of feathers that grow and grow until they've extended almost fifteen feet in both directions. He grimaces
as they extend. And then everything is still and quiet, save for Lucifer's agonized, moan-laced panting.

His wings look … awful.

Mottled and bloody. Scraggly clumps of twisted feathers — all of them stained with old, dried blood — seem to be hanging on by mere threads and will. Other parts of his wings are bare of feathers all the way down to broken skin. The vast majority of the breaks are scabbed over and — true to Lucifer's word — in varying stages of healing. One jagged wound, though, is still the size of a quarter, still weeping blood at a trickle onto his sheets. The feathers nearest that wound are all shiny, wet, and red, like he's been bleeding on and off all day. Worse still, three of the feathers above the new damage are snapped in half, like the bullet punched right through them, and the ruined feathers are all leaking what looks like sunshine from their broken shafts.

"Lucifer," she says, horrified. "This isn't just one bullet wound. This is like … ."

"Cain's men," Lucifer rasps, not looking up from the pillow. "They were … rather intent on killing us."

A hurting lump forms in her throat. "And you saved me. Again."

"I've no regrets," he replies without pause.

Her heart constricts. This is … . She didn't know what she expected, but it wasn't this. This … carnage. There's nothing exciting or amazing about seeing angel wings that look like this. He was really hurt. All for her. And he's been carrying around this pain by himself for weeks.

No wonder he's been drinking so much on stakeouts. No wonder he's been short tempered and fidgety. Sitting in the car for hours on end must have been agony.

"Wait right here," she says, eyes watering. "I'll get … ." What in the hell will fix this? "I'll get … some things. Some things to help."

"Chloe … ."

"Do you have a first-aid kit?"

"Why would I have a first-aid kit?"

Right. MacGyver-style first aid it is, then.

"Chloe," he says softly as he flops his head to the side and peers at her out of his left eye. "Are you … all right?"

"No," she says, throat constricting. "How could I possibly be all right?"

"I know this is quite a sight," he says soothingly.

"You getting yourself turned into Swiss cheese for me? Yeah, that's a sight, all right."

The bewildered look on his face breaks her fucking heart. Talk about a damning assessment of her character.

"You really thought I was going to be more upset about seeing your wings than I would be about seeing you hurt this badly?" she says, crying. When he opens his mouth to reply, she holds up her hand to shush him. "Never mind. I d-don't … ." She swallows. She really doesn't want to hear him
say yes right now. And she doesn't want to hear his attempts at defending himself when her side of things is the indefensible one. "Let's just … worry about you right now, yeah? I'll be right back."

And without waiting for his reply, she sets off into the depths of his penthouse, in search of supplies.
After some superficial perusing, she finds a little sewing kit stored in the old mahogany writing desk in his library. Tweezers in his medicine cabinet. A stack of clean washcloths in his linen closet. An unopened bottle of some Russian-brand vodka on the lowest shelf of his bar. She can only hope the bottle isn't worth more than her annual salary. Talk about an expensive disinfectant.

When she returns to the bedroom with her makeshift first-aid kit, along with a bowl full of warm water, and a pile of his fluffy black towels, his eyes are closed, and he isn't moving, save for the slow rise and fall of his chest. His wings are stretched out to their full enormous span, to the point that many of his jagged white primary feathers are dragging along his marble floor. The very tip of his left wing is bowing against the window glass, and the very tip of the right is almost spilling into his living room. Some of the little scapular feathers near his shoulder blades ruffle with the balmy air circulating lazily through the penthouse's air vents.

"Did you fall asleep?" she whispers as she sets everything down in a pile beside the bed.

His eyes open to half-mast. "No."

The misery in just that one soft syllable makes her heart constrict. She stares once more at the wreckage of his wings, from where they begin at his shoulder blades, to where they end at the razor tips of the flight feathers. What would they look like healed? Probably magnificent. Definitely luminous.

Now, though, where to even start?

Her attention drifts to the glistening, wet patch of feathers near his right shoulder.

"I think I'm gonna try and stitch up the wound that's bleeding, first," she decides. "Okay?"

"You're the expert, Detective."

Right. The expert. Her tiny voice doesn't interject any sarcasm, this time. It just laughs, and laughs, and laughs.

Fuck.

She sets a knee onto the mattress and then climbs up, transferring with her all but the bowl of water as she moves. With a grunt, she leans over to wet a washcloth. After she squeegees out the excess fluid to keep from dripping all over his sheets, she brings the cloth up top with her. He's lying dead center on his ginormous mattress. Shakily clutching the washcloth, she crawls across his sheets toward him. Toward the weeping, open wound.
"I'm gonna …." Touch them. His wings. "Um."

The wings of an archangel. Of Satan. Of …. Fuck. She tries not to dwell on the fact that she's only one generation removed from touching God. That, literally, the dude with his hand outstretched toward God on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel … might as well be her.

"Are you all right?" Lucifer says.

She nods so quickly it's more like a shiver. "Yep. Yep, all fine, here."

"Indeed."

"Well, of course, I'm lying, Lucifer," she says with an exasperated sigh. "Just … let me do that for a little bit without comments from the divine peanut gallery, okay? Shut up."

He looses a soft, amused-sounding snort and says nothing else.

She inches closer, until her knee is pressed up against the warmth of his ribcage, and her hand hovers millimeters from the space where his wing meets normal skin. Or, in this case, where his wing meets wrinkled shirt.

She'll have to ask later about that. How his wings can coexist with his earthly garments. But this is not the time for metaphysical discussion.

"I'm gonna touch you, now," she says. "Your … your wing, I mean."

"All right," he replies, the words flat and clipped and tense.

She lets her hand succumb to gravity, gasping when she makes contact. The tiny scapular feathers feel like warm spun silk beneath her palm, and she can't resist stroking them. Just once.

She's got her hand on Satan's wing, and contrary to what one might assume thanks to popular myth, it feels like it belongs in a Downy commercial with Snuggle Bear.

"Is this okay?" she says in a hushed tone when she sees he's got his eyes squeezed shut again. "I'm sorry — I'm just a little …." Overwhelmed. Stupefied. Flabbergasted.

"It's … all right," he repeats through clenched teeth.

"It's just that it's so soft," she blurts, only to wince at her runaway mouth.

His tension seems to drain a little, and he snickers tiredly at her expense. "Well, what did you bloody expect?"

"I don't know. I …." "Featherless, veiny bat wings, yes?"

She blushes. "Well, no. Not after seeing a glimpse of them last night. Not after all the feathers you left behind with Pier—" Grimacing, she corrects herself to, "Cain's … body. Just …."  

She rubs her thumb along a velvet feather, wondering how many people or demons or anyone sentient have ever done such a thing.

She's thinking zero people before now. One demon. Zero anyone or anything else other than angels themselves. And that's it.
All of the sudden, she feels rather silly, thinking he didn't trust her.

The amount of trust going on just in this moment is … boggling.

She strokes along his scapulars to where his wing is nearest the curve of his shoulder, and she rests her palm about three inches away from the quarter-sized wound. At this distance, the sight of the damage makes her heart constrict again. She can see white skeleton underneath the gore. Not broken clean through, but definitely chipped, like the bullet took out a chunk of the big bone that forms the wing's framework. A humerus, maybe? Something. Either way, it's not whole when it clearly should be. The bullet itself is gone, at least, probably shaken loose during the flight back to her apartment.

"Okay, I'm gonna clean the area around the wound," she explains, and he nods.

Biting her lip, she presses the washcloth gently on top of his bloody feathers. His flinch is violent, and the sound that catches in his throat is a panicked, choking sort of yell that makes her innards twist like snakes.

"Sorry!" she blurs, pulling the cloth away. "Sorry! I'm so sorry!"

His raspy, upset breaths fill the silence. He clutches up tents of his bedspread. Sweat dots his brow.

She waits, giving him a chance to calm down, viscerally reminded that the wings aren't just inanimate clumps of feathers. They're skin, and bone, and nerves, and blood, and they're attached to him. To Lucifer. They are Lucifer. Because Lucifer is an angel. With wings.

"Lucifer, this isn't gonna work if I can't even touch around the wound." Maybe, she should just let him heal by himself.

But he swallows, shaking his head, eyes glassy. "Sorry," he says in a breathless, bewildered tone, like … he knew it was going to hurt, but hadn't quite prepared himself for that.

"It's okay," she assures him.

"It's … it's the broken feathers. They need to … come out … first."

She glances at the three snapped pinions near the bullet wound. A twisting, curling, liquid-like trail of golden light oozes from each broken shaft. "The ones bleeding sunshine?"

He clears his throat as if he's trying to refocus himself. "The only way to heal them is for my body to replace them. And it isn't sunshine. It's divinity. It's … me."

She blinks, stunned. "You mean … like … your soul? I'm staring at your soul bleeding into thin air?"

"Not precisely," he says faintly. "Though it's … it's somewhat … analogous with that."

"Whatever the hell it is," she replies, panic burgeoning. "Can't you just … run out of it?"

He shakes his head. "Not when it's bleeding that slowly." He directs a tiny, wan grin back at her that fades as quickly as it appeared. "You do understand that I'm the divine equivalent of a nuclear reactor, yes?"

She snorts. "Probably not the best idea to compare yourself to Chernobyl right now."

"Touché," he says tiredly.

"How long would this take to heal without intervention?"
"They take about two weeks to die and fall out on their own."

She looks at all the bald spots, eyes watering. The rotunda where P— where Cain had died had been littered with glowy broken feather bits, and she'd picked them up without even considering the ramifications. "How many have you lost already?"

"I …." He sighs. "Several dozen."

"Lucifer," she says, the word a bare, horrified breath of air. "I …." But she can't finish her sentence. What does she even say to this? "Why would you even …?" Subject yourself to this, she can't bring herself to say. To me. "Why would you …?"

"Why wouldn't I?" he replies, staring back at her with dark, crushing intensity.

Her fingers start to shake, and she looks away.

If she were to leave the freshly broken feathers alone, he'd be walking around, bleeding out bits of himself, in agony, for another fourteen-ish days. After having already suffered quietly for weeks. And she can't even touch near them without him squirming in pain. No, thank you. Definitely not more humane to leave them be, however sucky they might be to deal with, now. She takes a breath, resolved that her "help" isn't doing more harm than good.

"So … do I just … yank?" she says.

His fingers tighten around the blankets he's clutching. "Yes."

"Are you ready, now?"

He takes a deep, calming breath. Once, twice, again. Then he nods.

As soon as she even taps the rachis near the broken end of the first feather, he tenses, and his torso starts drift away from her hand millimeter by millimeter, like it's got a mind of its own and doesn't appreciate suffering, but he doesn't yell again. Doesn't squirm.

She thinks the experience might be worse for him if she gives him a countdown, or time to think, so she plucks the first feather without warning. He flinches. Pales. His breaths tighten like a screw. But the room is quiet like the grave, save for that.

A weird-looking clear liquid — almost like a gel — oozes from the now-empty feather follicle, along with more of the sunlight-y-not-quite-a-soul stuff, so she pushes her thumb against the wound, hoping the leakage will cease with the assistance of applied pressure. He twitches away from her touch like she's burned him with a flat iron, but she chases after him, holding him down with her knee, and she manages to keep her thumb stuck on the wound with some persistence.

"What's the pinkish gel stuff?" she says, peering down at her thumb.

"P-pigment," he replies faintly, sounding woozy.

"Is it safe to leave it be, even if it's leaking?"

He nods and doesn't speak. His whole body starts to tremble underneath her hands like he's hypothermic. Or, maybe, in shock.

"Can I touch your back?" she says softly. "Is that okay?"

Another nod. He starts to swallow like he's fighting back nausea. He presses his face against the
pillow as if he means to melt into his memory foam.

With a deep breath, she splays the fingers of her free hand against the small, warm strip of shirt between his left wing and his right, and she strokes up and down in a repetitive rhythm, whispering things like, "I'm sorry, and, "I'm here," trying to sound soothing despite her churning stomach. Within about five minutes, the feather follicle stops weeping light, and she lifts her thumb away, rededicating that hand to offering him some comfort, too.

It takes him a good five minutes after that before he doesn't look like he's going to throw up, and another five after that before he weakly croaks, "… Ow." Though, at least, he's joking a little.

She's so fucking stressed that she laughs, and laughs, and laughs, until she's got tears in her eyes. Or, maybe, she's just sobbing. She has no idea. He must think she's a raging lunatic.

Except then he rasps in a barely-there voice, "Thank you. That feels … a bit better."

Which makes it worth all the too-quiet misery.

She brushes her sweaty hair out of her face and rubs her aching, wet eyes. "Ready for the next one?"

He takes a ragged breath. "All right."

So, she does what needs to be done.

She thinks, if she were to end up in Hell, that this would be her loop, yanking out his broken feathers, listening to him suffer wordlessly. Which is why she has to stop. Thinking, that is. She lets the cacophony in her mind fade to snow like a television losing signal.

In the end, after the misery of pulling feathers, and then cleaning out, disinfecting, and stitching up the dirty bullet wound, she finds solace in taking a rag from her stack, dipping it in the warm water, and wiping down his injured limb, starting where the big, thick wing bone meets his shirt. She takes the cloth, cupping it around the upper edge of the wing, and stroking all the way to the bend. His "elbow," she supposes. The bone isn't smooth under his skin. It's pocked and chipped and broken-but-healing in far too many places, and she does her best to be gentle. Again, again, again, she wipes the bloodstains, new and old, away, and as the stains dissolve under her attention, more and more of the gleaming, luminous white shows through, like a sunrise in slow motion.

For a moment, she pauses, breath stolen.

Within this mere hint of divinity struggling to peek out of the ragged, bloody war zone … she sees the Lightbringer, at last. The archangel. And the sight of him makes her ache.

"Are you all right?" he rasps, the words faint and laden with exhaustion.

She rubs the tears from her eyes. "Yeah," she assures him. "I'm fine."

"Not lying this time?"

"No," she says. "You're just …"

"Distractingly shiny?"

She snorts with amusement, giving him a gentle poke in the ribs. His responding inhalation is a quick one, like he's well on his way to laughing, despite everything. "I was gonna say pretty," she says.
"Accurate, I suppose," he replies, his dark eyes twinkling.

She grins. "Vanity is one of the sins you're totally on board with, huh."

"Oh, yes," he purrs. "Though I should caveat that my preference is lust."

"Didn't exactly need detective skills to figure that one out," she snarks.

With a snicker, he closes his eyes and rests. He's pale and trembling with fatigue, and his eyes are pinched with the harrowed remnants of his silent distress, but … less so than before.

She sets the washcloth beside his hip for a moment, frowning, as she thinks about what else might help him. She's no ornithologist, but a large part of her field-care endeavor thus far has been oriented in common sense, and he has a number of feathers that, while nearly twisted out of their follicles, are still intact. On that hunch, she touches one of the silky scapular feathers that's askew. He twitches away from her fingertips like the touch irritated him, like the expression "to ruffle one's feathers" is accurate in meaning, but irritated is a vast improvement over pained. She'll take irritated.

Experimentally, she nudges the little feather until it lies flush with his wing again.

His subsequent sigh of relief feels like a cool shower on a blistering day.

"Straightening these helps you?" she says, just in case she's horribly misread things.

He nods silently into the pillow.

She wipes down the feather she fixed until it gleams, and then moves on to the next one, and the next one after that. The more feathers she straightens and cleans, the more he seems to melt. The more of the lucid white shows through. By the time she's done with the area around the stitched-up bullet wound, the whole of his weight seems to be sunk into the mattress.

She moves down the length of the wing, feather by feather, straightening and cleaning, straightening and cleaning. Each feather is soft like silk to the touch, from the root to the tip of the rachis, and she can't resist pausing now and then to marvel.

She's preening an archangel's wings.

How surreal is that?

And that's when realization hits like a bad Monopoly roll. Mr. Möbius. The mysteriously unreported break-in. The A&B at Lux earlier tonight. The fact that Lucifer is not, as she previously thought, vulnerable to harm under regular circumstances.

"Oh, no," she says, sinking.

Lucifer twitches beneath her like she struck him. "Mmm," he mutters thickly, blinking himself awake. He catches her at the corner of his gaze, her hand buried deep in his feathers, and his eyes widen. For a moment, he seems like he might tell her to back the fuck off. But then recognition tramples the disorientation loitering in his expression, and his hackles lower. All he elects to say is, "Did you … say something?"

"Lucifer … what if the attack on you tonight wasn't some random crazy?" she says. He made me do it. He made me, the perp screamed. "What if someone saw you get shot on camera last night, someone who's a specialist in the supernatural, someone who previously thought you were off-limits because you're widely reputed to be untouchable?"
"And now," Lucifer says, eyes narrowing as he follows her train of thought, "that someone is trying to determine when I'm vulnerable to harm."

"Right," she says, nodding. "Hence the random stabbing with the potato nail." He flinches as she rights a feather so skewed it's barely hanging on. "Sorry," she adds on reflex. "I mean … these guys are collecting unique body parts. What do you think archangel wings are worth?"

"I imagine mine would be deeply discounted, ravaged as they are."

"Lucifer, this isn't funny."

"Gallows humor," he says with a weary sigh. "Apologies."

She quickly relates her day, from picking up the cruiser, to finding the mysteriously fixed door.

"That does reek of magic," Lucifer agrees. "Illusion or perhaps conjuration."

"Right. And I called earlier to set up an interview with Mr. Möbius," she admits through clenched teeth as she wipes down another feather.

"Oh, did you?"

She nods grimly. "Except, now, I'm thinking … it's maybe not such a good idea to let you get anywhere near him. Particularly not in my vicinity."

"If we don't take some risks, we're never going to discover who this man is," Lucifer says.

"I know, but—"

She snaps her hand back, silenced, as his massive wing shifts. Just an inch or so. But that inch is enough to remind her once again that the soft, gleaming feathers she's been carding the washcloth through are alive.

"I spend nearly all of my free time with you," he says with a wince as he resettles. "If someone desires knowledge of what makes me vulnerable, it won't require all that many test cases."

She rocks back onto her heels with a blink, clutching the damp cloth. "All of your free time? Really? I mean … ."

"Nearly," he repeats, directing a wan smile over his shoulder at her.

She's not sure what to say to that.

She leans away, over the edge of the bed, to rinse off and re-wet the washcloth. One of the giant primary feathers about midway down his left wing is askew, hanging on by the barest thread. The place the shaft enters the skin is only a few inches away from a bullet wound — one of the least healed in all the bunch, other than the one she had to stitch up — and her stomach turns. The three broken feathers she had to yank out were small. Intact, they'd probably been about six inches long. She can't imagine how bad things would have been if he'd broken one of these big primary feathers. For her, her tiny voice adds. If he'd broken one of these big primary feathers for her.

She reaches for the feather to straighten it.

"No," he says softly, just as her finger brushes the soft barbs.

She frowns. "No?"
"If your solution is to avoid me, then I won't have it," he says, as though he's read and followed the path of her wandering mind to its destination before she did. "I'd rather chop my wings off again and bloody give them to him, free of bloody charge."

She stares at the feather in her hand, eyes watering. With a series of gentle twists, she gets it to line up with the rest of the big primaries. She strokes it root to tip with the washcloth.

_I'd chop th'bloody things off again if I weren' convinzzed this'zz my last pair, _he said.

_I don't want to … c-cut them. Off_, he said.

"No," she says, swallowing against the hurting lump in her throat.

His eyebrows knit. "No?"

"If your solution is to turn your wings into a tradable commodity just so we can hang out, then I exercise my right to veto."

A small chuff of incredulous laughter falls from his lips. "Oh, you think _you've_ a right to veto what I do with _my_ wings?"

Her hands shake as she wraps her mind around what she just did. A puny human trying to boss around an archangel. Literally the Devil. But. "Yes." She swallows. "Friends can veto bad decisions when appropriate. It's a thing."

For a long moment, he's silent, looking at her with unreadable dark eyes. But then, with a sigh, he relaxes, and his eyelids dip. "Then … I invite you to veto as you like."

She smiles. "Likewise."

_Friends._

"Do you want to flip over?" she says as she wipes down the last bladed primary. "I can get the front, too."

Archangel wings aren't meant for reality. They're big and unwieldy and heavy, like they belong on a Boeing jet, not stuck on a bird. She gets the impression they'd be difficult to manage, even if he weren't riddled with gunshot wounds and throbbing.

"Flipping over" is a bit more of an ordeal than she planned for, and he doesn't enjoy being on his back, not when he's this damaged, so he sits at the edge of the mattress as she works her way down each wing, straightening and cleaning the feathers that she couldn't reach before. The process is monotonous and timeless. By the time she reaches the last crooked feather, he's staring dully into space, eyes leaking in slow pulses. Not, she thinks, from pain, but from relief at the sudden absence of it.

He's remembering what it feels like not to have to endure.

"I'm done, now," she says softly, backing away to look at her handiwork.

Her breath catches. There are no more bloodstains. No more dirty bits. No more rumpled, twisted patches or messy clumps. The bald patches are about half-covered by healthy, incandescent feathers, now. Her chest aches, just glimpsing him. The divine. The Lightbringer. He's … beautiful.

"Thank you," he says, speaking so viscerally that his gratitude makes her heart constrict.
"You're welcome."

With a sniff, he wipes his tired, bloodshot eyes. His wings shift, contracting until he's got them about half-furled. The sound of popping joints and cracking bones makes her cringe along with him. "I don't think I can make myself put them away," he rasps, panting, expression raw and pained again. "Not ... yet. I ... can't."

"So don't," she says with a shrug. "Let them heal a bit."

He gives her an incredulous look.

"What?" she says. "It's not like they're a newsflash to me at this point."

His eyes narrow. "Humans ... tend to have a difficult time with them."

"Yeah, well ... not me."

A bewildered laugh tumbles from his lips. "I suppose not."

She takes a breath. "So, do you want to ... watch a movie or something while you're ... um ... healing?"

He looks up at her. "... Pardon?"

She shrugs. "Do you want to watch a movie with me?" she repeats slowly. "Maybe, have a drink we actually finish?" She glances at her watch. It's well after 1 a.m., but thanks to the recent spate of nighttime shifts, she doesn't feel at all ready to sleep. "We can just ... hang out?"

"'Hang out,'" he parrots, putting the words into air quotes. He directs a dubious glance to the left and the right of his body, to the towering walls of feathers on either side of him. "With me ... like this?"

His wings twitch.

She shrugs again. "Sure, why not?"

"I assumed you'd go home."

"Well, I will, if you want me to, but ... I don't."

"You don't."

"Nope."

He stares at her like she just offered him the moon in a gift-wrapped box.

"I've ... missed you," she admits, blushing. "And you have a great movie collection."

A genuine smile slides across his face. "What are you in the mood to watch?"

She thinks for a moment. "Something happy," she decides. "Or funny. Or both. But not raunchy."

"I believe that can be arranged," he says.

She meets his smile with one of her own.

"I'm ... shocked you even own that," she says when he shows her his suggestion for their movie night.
He shrugs, sparing the blu-ray a glance. "Well, I'm not always in the mood for violence or sex, you know."

"Noted," she says, grinning, as he tosses her the box to peruse.

He walks gingerly toward the kitchen, his newly preened wings gleaming as they trail behind him, and she follows, reading the jacket sleeve as she trudges along. She hasn't seen this movie in ages — she really ought to show it to Trixie, come to think of it. Clanks and thumps and rattles fill the silence as he rummages through his lower shelves.

Something crinkles. "Jalapeño, yes?" he says.

She blinks, looking up to find him holding a jug full of corn kernels in one hand, and a green-colored seasoning jar in the other. Definitely not the ranch flavor he'd select if he were on his own. How did he …? They've had popcorn like one time. More than a year ago. "How did you remember that?"

He tips his head and looks at her like he finds her painfully endearing. "I remember everything you like."

"Right," she says, nodding. Duh. "Angel."

"… Yes," he replies slowly, as though that wasn't at all what he was thinking.

He stares at her for a long moment, expression curiously unreadable, though his wings twitch. Then he turns to his stove. He's moving better already, though he's still visibly favoring his right arm, still wincing from time to time when he overreaches with it.

"Need any help?" she says.

But he shakes his head and says, "No, darling. I'm fine."

She sits with him while he makes them a batch of jalapeño-seasoned popcorn.

"Hear this, now," says Westley to Buttercup. "I will always come for you."

Lucifer sniggers beside her, his eyes twinkling with amusement. She scoops up a stray un-popped kernel of his gourmet popcorn and throws it at him, where it bonks into his forehead and gets stuck in his unkempt hair. He wrinkles his nose on impact and claps a hand to his head where the offending kernel landed, giving her a faux-affronted look.

"Don't you dare ruin this scene," she tells him. "Don't you dare, Lucifer!"

"But I've said nothing!"

"But you were thinking it!"

And he laughs, and the sound is rich and sweet, and in that moment, he isn't thirty-something going on infinity. He's just as young as his body appears. She'd forgotten how vital he looks when he isn't worried about anything but a silly double entendre in a silly movie.

His wings are spread flat along the back of the couch, and they rustle, the barbs of his feathers catching on his upholstery as he leans forward to transfer the kernel from his hair to the coffee table, to be picked up later. The diffuse glow his feathers cast on the room is bright enough that they didn't need to turn on a lamp, so there's no annoying reflection on the television screen, either.
The surreality of it all crashes into the normality like a seven-car pileup.

She's sitting on a couch with the Devil, watching *The Princess Bride*, while he airs out his giant angel wings.

Even Trixie couldn't have made this shit up.

Lucifer's shoulder is a long line of warmth against her body as Prince Humperdink introduces Buttercup to his many subjects. Chloe reaches for a handful of popcorn from the bowl perched between their thighs — her right, his left. Spice explodes across her tongue as she munches on her bounty.

The plot unfolds, and reality abates.

It's nice.
She wakes to the permeating smell of bacon.

She doesn't remember falling asleep.

She doesn't even remember the end of the movie.

Expensive, zillion-thread-count black sheets slide underneath her bare skin as she rolls over and looks up to squint at the clock. Except … the clock is gone. Wait. No. This isn't her bedroom. It's Lucifer's. And the clock isn't gone. It's on the other side. She rolls across the huge mattress, pushing pillows out of the way, to peer at the little gold analog clock ticking away on the nightstand closer to the entryway.

11:47 a.m. Almost lunchtime.

She rubs her eyes, yawning as she sits up, greeted by a wall of south-facing floor-to-ceiling windows. Hazy daytime Los Angeles spreads out beyond the glass like a painting, visible even through Lucifer's sheer black curtains. A balmy breeze that smells faintly of salt billows through the entryway.

She scrunches her toes as she settles her feet onto cold Italian marble and stands, stretching. He folded her socks and left them tucked into her shoes, which are sitting in a neat pair on the floor beside his reading chair. Her jeans — also crisply folded — rest on the chair itself.

"Detective, may I?" she can fuzzily recall him whispering as his warm fingers hovered by the button at her waist, but nothing before or after that.

Her stomach starts to grumble as she flops onto the seat to pull on her pants and socks. With another yawn, she checks her phone. No calls from Möbius or anyone else.

Setting her phone down onto the end table, she sets off in search of brunch.

The pop and sizzle of bacon frying in the pan fills the hallway, crescendoing as she rounds the corner into his kitchen to find him toiling at the stove. An open carton of eggs lies on the center island, along with a bowl of pancake — waffle? — batter. His wings are folded into whatever pocket of unreality he keeps them, and he's wearing nothing but a black pair of boxers and an open black silk robe that stops at mid thigh. The silk tails of the robe's belt trail behind him as he glides to the fridge.

"Good morning, Detective," he says over the door of the fridge when he spots her. She can't see his mouth right away, but the skin around his eyes crinkles, and he looks … handsome. He's handsome when he smiles. "How many eggs in your omelette?"

"Hey," she says, grinning back at him as she picks a stool at the center island and settles. "Um …
"Three it is," he says with a nod, pulling out a carton of orange juice.

He bumps the refrigerator door shut with his hip, and before she knows it, she's got a steaming cup of coffee resting in front of her, along with a glass of O.J. She clasps her fingers around the warm mug and raises the coffee to her lips. It looks black. Which isn't promising. But—

"Oh, this is good," she says, shocked as the bitterness mingles on her tongue in perfect measure with cinnamon and sweetness.

"If you would allow me to bring you real coffee, instead of that almond-milk swill you inexplicably enjoy, you would have known that already," he snarks.

"Oh, you, shut up," she says, rolling her eyes. "You can eat a zillion calories and still look like ….

She swallows as her eyes roam below his neckline, to the gentle swell of his pectorals, and the flat plane of his abs. "Like …." A soft-looking trail of dark hair descends from his navel, disappearing underneath his boxer's waistline. "Um …."

He points to her mug. "I used an artificial sweetener just for you. That's all of about three calories per cup. Drink your fill."

She gives him a sheepish look. "I don't suppose you've figured out calorie-free eggs and bacon, have you?"

"Yes, well," he replies with a wink, "I'm the Devil, darling. You'll have to live with some amount of temptation, of course, if we're to be friends."

Holy shit, will she. He looks particularly devilish, too, as a loose lock of hair spills over his forehead. She's lucky she's on the other side of the island from him, or she'd be reaching to push the unruly curl out of his eyes. She takes another sip of her coffee, making herself look away and take a calming breath.

He cracks open three eggs into a mixing bowl with a quick, one-handed gesture, like he's a five-star chef who's cracked more eggs than she's fired bullets. Maybe, he has. He's certainly lived long enough to have had that much practice. The whisk rattles against the bottom of the mixing bowl as he stirs.

"Thanks for …," she starts, only to have words fail. She looks at her placemat, into the tiny air bubbles forming around the edges of her orange juice. "You didn't have to give me your bed, you know. You could've left me on the couch by the television."

He frowns at her over his shoulder. "Um … no," he says. "No, I bloody well could not have."

Like she's offended his sensibilities as a host or something. "Sorry," she rushes to say. "Sorry, it's just —"

"Detective …."

His exasperated sigh sends blush sprawling across her face. She directs a sheepish look at her plate. "I guess I suck at deals, huh."

"Multitudinous breaches of contract on your part," he says, shaking his head. "You're lucky I'm feeling lenient."
"We seem like we're way past the purpose of that deal, anyway."

"True, I think," he admits warmly. "So, what is it you wish to be sorry about, now?"

"I was just gonna say I feel bad, taking your bed from you when you're hurt."

"I was fine," he assures her as he pushes the bacon around in the frying pan. "More than fine, actually."

"Really?"

He turns to look at her with a soft expression, the spatula clutched in his hand. "Yes, Chloe. I actually spent the remainder of the night stargazing on the balcony. You needn't worry over my comfort."

"On the …?" she begins to ask, and then his meaning sinks in. Wings. Wind. Salty distant-ocean air. "Oh." Wow. That's … wow. "And that … felt good?"

"Quite."

A lump forms in her throat. He's still pale. Still moving a bit gingerly, particularly whenever he has to reach for something with his right arm. But he does seem better, in overall demeanor if nothing else.

"I'm glad," she says thickly.

"That makes two of us," he replies, and he gives her another eye-crinkling smile before turning back to mind the bacon.

The omelette he makes her is fluffy and full to bursting with cheese, bacon, bell peppers, onions, and sautéed mushrooms. An almost-Denver omelette. Perfect. The pancake batter, as it turns out, is indeed waffle batter, but despite his promise of temptations, he doesn't tempt her with waffles. He makes himself a single Belgian waffle, topped with whipped cream, chocolate chips, and strawberries, and doused in curtains of glistening syrup, and then he puts the remaining batter into his fridge.

He sits beside her at the kitchen island with his own plate and takes a hulking bite of his confection.

"What?" he says when he catches her staring at him.

She shakes her head. "Sweet tooth much?"

"Well, I don't need to eat," he says with a shrug. "Might as well make it fun when I do."

She blinks. "You … don't need to eat? Like … at all?"

"Nope," he says smugly, popping the letter p. "I run entirely on my own inner light."

"You seriously don't get hungry?"

"Nope."

"Like … ever?"

"Well, I do get the munchies after a toke," he admits. "If I'm around you, that is."
“Wait,” she says. “Wait, I’m the reason you can get drunk and high, sometimes?”

“Oh, I can get drunk and high regardless, if I’m willing to work for it, and I usually am,” he says with a grin. “You just make it a spot easier.”

His proportion of drinking to all other forms of consumption makes a lot more sense in the context of him not needing to eat. Him having a “nightcap” for breakfast, or spiking all of his coffee with who-knows-what, doesn’t seem like “functional addict” so much as knows-what-he-likes-and-doesn’t-need-nutrition. Maybe. Which is a bit of a relief.

She takes a bite of her omelette, unable to stop herself from closing her eyes and sighing in pleasure as the peppers and cheese hit her tongue. He might not have fed her dessert for breakfast, at least, but this doesn’t feel a whole lot more healthy.

She’s had a shit week, though.

A shit month, really.

And hell if she doesn’t deserve to indulge a little.

Once she swallows, she says, “You’re a really good cook for someone who doesn’t need to eat.”

“Gluttony, darling,” he says with a grin. “Also one of my favorite sins.”

They eat in comfortable silence for several minutes. He polishes off his waffle and sips his coffee while she makes slower work of her omelette. She can’t finish it, though. Even with a mind to indulge. He crammed it so full of vegetables and bacon that she can’t get down more than half of it before her stomach is complaining that she has no more room. She pushes the plate back, defeated.

“Finished?” he says.

She nods. “I’m stuffed. Thank you.”

“You’re quite welcome,” he says as he whisks the dirty plates away.

She rests her chin on her hands, watching him as he moves around, putting everything away. There’s just something so mind boggling about it. An actual archangel bumping around in his kitchen. An actual archangel who is somehow her best friend. How did that happen?

“So, I’ve been considering our little conundrum,” he says over the hum of the garbage disposal.

She frowns. “Conundrum?”

“Allow me to interview Mr. Möbius without you there, and you can listen in on a wire. I’ll be invulnerable as always. And I’ll be able to assess with whom or with what we’re dealing in relative safety.”

Her frown deepens. “It’s … not a terrible thought.”

He snickers. “Your confidence in me is truly awe-inspiring.”

“Shut up,” she tells him, rolling her eyes, which only seems to delight him more. “No, I … think that could work. I also want to track down your assailant from last night and interview him myself — his name and address will be in the crime report. And we should drive by the warehouse again, so you can take a look at that maybe-magic door. How far does my Typhoid Mary effect stretch?”
"I would hardly call it a Typhoid Mary effect," he says.

She folds her arms. "Lucifer."

"It's more like a Marie Curie effect, really."

"Lucifer."

He sighs. "About three blocks, I'd say."

"Okay, well," she says, "the first thing we're doing is measuring, then. Because I don't want to be any farther away from you than I have to be right now."

He leers. "Of course, I approve."

"That wasn't innuendo. I was being literal. You're a target, Lucifer. We need to take this seriously."

"Must you take all my fun?"

"Yes," she replies, grinning.

He quirks an eyebrow at her, growing serious. "You do realize that if this Möbius fellow wants me, he still has a number of notable obstacles to overcome. Namely, me. Vulnerable or not, with my wings intact, I'm no pushover, Detective."

He's the walking talking wrath of God, Maze said.

"I know," Chloe says, shivering at the memory, "but that doesn't stop me from worrying."

He sighs as he drifts toward the doorway. "I'll get dressed, then."

She lies on the leather couch in Lucifer's living room, staring up at his ornately carved ceiling, her cellphone cupped to her ear. She's too full to breathe, almost, and her body's had long enough to realize it and complain. Lucifer is too good of a chef. He really is. "Why wouldn't you take Maze back to Hell?" she says, draping her arm over her aching, distended stomach.

The rumble of wind and passing traffic blasts through the line. "Well, at the time of her request," Lucifer says, "I thought my wings were another of Dad's cursed manipulations."

"And you didn't want to use them because of that?"

"Right," he says distractedly. A pause. "Still nothing, by the way. The little fitness app you made me download says I've walked 0.1 miles."

"Okay," she says, and they lapse into comfortable silence again.

They sent him on walkabout with his phone in one hand and the needle from his sewing kit in the other. She offered to do the walking part, but he shut that down quickly, asking how it was at all logical in terms of precision to make her the moving target and not him, when he's the one who needs to be using the needle. So, he's been stopping to prick himself on the thumb every few strides. The progress has been slow going, but … going.

She gets a kick out of the fact that he, a being with the perfect excuse to be the world's most entrenched technophobe, given that he predates even man's strategic use of pointy sticks, is somehow more proficient with computers and gadgets than many humans. He has just about every social-
networking app in existence. He even has four separate e-mail accounts — one for friends, one for
hookups, one for business, and one for spam and free trials, of course, he said — and not a single
account is with A.O.L. The next time her mother complains that it's too hard to remember not to click
on unsolicited links, Chloe's not sure she'll be able to keep her eyes from rolling out of her head.

"Why do you ask of my conflict with Maze?" Lucifer says. "0.2 miles. Still nothing."

"Just wondering if, maybe, we could get her to help us with this plan," Chloe muses, frowning. "She
seemed …"

"Rather uninterested by the idea of my continued wellbeing?" he replies too cheerfully.

"A little bit, yeah."

"Well, she is a demon," he says. "Of course, she'll garner hate with the most clarity."

"But she doesn't just hate, Lucifer," Chloe says. Hell, she doesn't even think Maze hates Lucifer.
She's just … hurt. And tired. Heartsick. "She loves, too. She wants friendship and belonging and—"

"Not from me," Lucifer says softly. "Not anymore."

Chloe rolls onto her feet with a wince and a groan, before pacing the length of his living room. "Do
you think you'll ever reconcile?"

"I've no way to know the future."

"But … do you want to reconcile?" she prods.

A long pause follows. She hears a horn honk. The chatter of crowds.

"Lucifer?"

"She … was my only confidante," he says. "For millennia. Her perennial betrayals since we've come
to Earth have been … profound." Which is probably the closest he'll ever get to outright admitting
he's unhappy with Maze's desertion. And in that moment, Chloe wonders if maybe Maze isn't the
only one who's hurt and tired and heartsick by this whole mess. "0.3 and nothing."

She swallows, pausing by his bar to run her finger along the edge of the countertop. "I know you
and Maze used to … used to … um."

"Shag?"

"Er …." She blushes. "Yeah." Heat creeps down her throat. "I mean, I know you were really close."

"It was just sex, Detective," he says. "Born from deep respect and companionship, but not love. You
needn't feel any jealousy."

"I don't," she says. "I'm just … I'm really sorry you lost your friend." His former best friend, really.
His … Dan? That would be the closest comparison, wouldn't it? Not analogous, really, given that
she did love Dan very much and still does, though differently, now. But … in terms of the overall
loss, she thinks her divorce might be similar to the dissolution of Maze and Lucifer.

"I do … regret it," Lucifer says into the silence.

Her eyebrows knit. "Regret what?"
"Not what I said to her," he says. "But … how I said it." He sighs heavily into the receiver. "I believe that I may have made her feel … taken for granted."

"And did you?" Chloe says. "Take her for granted?"

For a long moment, he doesn't answer. She hears two people shouting at each other in Spanish. The high-pitched squeal of a bus or a semi braking. Another horn honk.

"… Lucifer?" she says.

"Ah, we've drawn blood, Detective!" he says, and she resists the urge to sigh at his blatant conversational redirection. "0.45 miles."

"Okay," she replies. "We'll call it half a mile to be safe."

Her phone vibrates with the arrival of an incoming text message, and she pulls the phone away from her ear to glance at it.

"Got ur msg, Det. Decker," the text says. "Not sure how I can help, but happy 2 assist. Pls call my admin asst 2 set up a time. -AM." Followed by a phone number with a 213 area code. Interesting. And all things considered … rather innocuous-looking, bad grammar and all. This is the creepy guy with the beak nose and the yellow eyes?

"Thank you," she texts him back. "Will do."

"Detective? Yoohoo," Lucifer is saying when she pulls the phone back to her ear.

"Sorry. Just got a text from Möbius," Chloe tells him. "I need to make some calls to get this meeting set up, okay?"

"Ah," Lucifer says. "I'll head back, then."

She catches herself just before she blows a kiss at the receiver. What. What in the …? Holy shit. She almost …. She shakes her head. She almost invited a whirlwind of complications into her life, a life that's already way too complicated as it is. Jesus. She blames her post-stress post-brunch ate-waaay-too-much lassitude. She's just not thinking straight.

Yeah, right, says her irritating voice. Keep telling yourself that.

Fuck.

"See you soon," she says too quickly, and then she jams on the end-call button as fast as her thumb can press it.

Mr. Möbius's secretary, a woman named Xenia Williams, is happy to set up an appointment for later that day. 4 p.m. The address Ms. Williams gives is at an executive park downtown, which is probably full of office suites. No wonder Mr. Möbius never showed up at the warehouse. Chloe doesn't tell Ms. Williams to expect Lucifer, thinking that surprise is probably their best weapon, if this Möbius guy happens to be a real supernatural threat, rather than a mundane one.

"No way," Maze says when Chloe explains the plan for the afternoon.

Chloe tightens her grip around her cellphone. "Maze, come on."

"I'm not helping him, Decker. Not at my own expense. Not anymore."
"The L.A.P.D. could pay you as a consultant," Chloe says reasonably. "You'd be acting as an employee, not as a friend doing a favor."

"No."

"Maze, please," Chloe says. "It's for me more than it is for him. I'd just … feel more comfortable knowing we have some backup along that isn't the equivalent of a monster's party favor."

"I know, but …." Maze sighs, and the sound of it blusters through the little speaker. "Decker, I can't. I'll do whatever friendship shit you want me to do to make up for before, but not that. I won't …." Another sigh. "I won't put myself in that position with him again."

Chloe frowns. "What position would helping me be putting you in? I mean, you wouldn't be storming the gates with him or anything. You'd be back in the van with us."

"That's still a position where I'm expendable if he thinks it'll save you."

"Maze, he doesn't—"

"I mean, maybe I am expendable," Maze adds in a wavering tone, ignoring Chloe, "but if I flame out, it should be my choice. You know? Not his."

"Maze, what are you talking about?" And what does this have to do with Lucifer not taking Maze back to Hell? "You're not expendable. Not for me. Not for Lucifer. Not for anyone."

A long silence follows. "Wow … you really have no concept of what he'll do for you, do you?"


The call disconnects before Chloe can formulate a halfway coherent reply.

Lucifer's private elevator starts to hum as Chloe is still staring at her phone, frowning. "I've returned," he announces as he steps through the parting doors, directing a brilliant smile in her direction. "Apologies for the untimely delay, darling. Justin required some assistance with the staffing arrangements for next week, and he caught me on the way in. I take it you've set up the meeting?"

"Yeah," she says, heart pounding as she watches him stalk to his bar.

"Care for a drink?" he offers.

"No," she says. "Thanks."

He shrugs and pours himself some bourbon. The amber-colored liquid shimmers as he takes a sip from his tumbler. He frowns, looking at her over the lip of his glass, and then sets down his drink.

"Are you … quite all right?" he says, eyes narrowing.

"Yeah, just …." She shrugs, swallowing. *You really have no concept of what he'll do for you, do you?* she hears Maze's voice, echoing in her head. He'll lie, to a point, she realizes. Not to her, but for her. The "no Satan stuff" promise he'd made — inauthenticity for a greater good. He's killed to assure her safety. Uriel. His brother. Cain. Despite the fact that angels killing humans is apparently verboten. He'll throw himself in front of a hail of bullets for her, too, even knowing she makes him as
vulnerable to harm as any human would be. Which is .... She's not really sure what that is. Scary, regardless. And definitely complicated. "Just … realized something," she says vaguely.

*You did choose me*, he said, marveling.

"And what is that?" Lucifer prods.

She looks up at him with a watery grin. "Nothing important."

*Oh, you liar, says her tiny voice. Liar, liar, pants on fire.*

Lucifer tips his head to the side, regarding her with a deepening frown. He knows she's bullshitting. He knows it. She's sure of it. He's the Devil. By his own words, he knows a lie when he hears one. Or, maybe, she's being paranoid. But instead of pressing her for more information, he tips his glass to her in a slow salute and says, "So … when is this meeting with our dear Mr. Möbius? You didn't say."

The surveillance van is hot and stuffy, even with the back doors propped open. They're parked in the dirty alley by the In 'N Out, exactly 0.5 miles from Möbius's desired meeting point. Everything smells of french fry grease. Cackling seagulls cluster around the dumpster, arguing for scraps. The wind picks up a plastic bag and sends it swirling between the dumpster and the opposite brick wall.

Why can't that breeze be on the *inside* of the van with them instead of outside with the gulls?

She brushes a trickle of sweat out of her eyes.

Static crackles through the dark space before ceding to Lucifer's oily, confident, "Testing, testing. Olly olly oxen free, and all that."

"We can hear you, Lucifer," Chloe speaks into the microphone.

"Can somebody please explain to me why we're letting him front this op?" Dan says before she has a chance to close the mic. "I don't know if you guys remember this or not, but he sucks at fronting ops."

"Daniel," Lucifer purrs over the speakers, "tsk, tsk. I heard that."

"I don't care, man," Dan snaps.

"Awk. Ward," says Ella, eyes wide, before she directs her attention to her phone.

Chloe sighs as she flicks the mute switch. "Hey," she says, almost a hiss. "This Möbius guy is the C.E.O. of a multi-million dollar antiquities venture. I mean, he might as well be an alien species." In a manner of speaking. "Lucifer knows how to talk to people like that. I don't. Do you?"

Dan rolls his eyes. "He's gonna fuck this up, Chloe."

Chloe grinds her teeth. "Look. We need backup, and you two are literally my only friends on the force right now. We're pretty sure Möbius is ordering hits on people. Innocent people. We need to figure out what makes him tick, like … yesterday … and you might not appreciate how Lucifer does things, but you and I both know he can schmooze the seven deadly sins out of a nun. His social game is literally God tier. So, are you gonna tell us nonstop that we're doing it wrong, or are you gonna help us catch this murdering psychopathic scumbag?"

Dan stares at her for a long moment before replying darkly, "Fine." He takes a breath like he's trying
to calm himself. "Is there a particular reason we're four blocks away instead of one or two?"

"I …." Chloe swallows. "I … didn't want them to see the van. Or me." True. Ish.

"You think this guy has seen you?"

"Maybe," Chloe says. "On the stakeout." During the B&E part, she doesn't add.

"Chlo …."

She folds her arms. "Yes?"

Silence stretches as Dan meets her with a steely gaze, only to deflate.

"All right," he says quietly, standing up. He inspects the safety on his gun to make sure it's engaged, and then checks the clip, before returning the gun to his hip holster. He grabs an earpiece and a mic from the tangled pile on the counter. He clips the mic onto the inside of his shirt collar. "I'll sit at the bus stop across the street from the building, then. If it sounds like Lucifer's in trouble, I'll head in from there."

"Thanks," she says. "Be careful, though, okay? This guy is potentially … dangerous. Don't let him get in range of you if it comes down to it. Just shoot."

Dan gives her an incredulous look. "And you still think sending Lucifer to deal with this guy is the right thing to do?"

"Yes."

Dan sighs. "I just …." But he shakes his head and doesn't complete his thought before stepping out of the back of the van, into the baking sun. He flicks the tiny switch on his microphone. "Testing?"

"Yeah, we got you," Ella calls out of the van as his voice floods over the speakers.

His footsteps recede toward the mouth of the alley.

Chloe bites her lip and glances at her watch. 3:47 p.m. Thirteen minutes until the meeting.

"Why are we sending Lucifer in?" Ella asks in the following silence.

"What?" Chloe says.

Ella holds up her hands. "Hey, I don't mean to question your methods, Decker, but if this wacko thinks he's collecting supernatural body parts, why would you hand him on a silver platter a guy who pretends to be the Devil? That's like, 'Hey, bad guy, wouldja like a bite from the fallen-angel buffet?'"

Chloe grimaces. From a not-clued-in perspective … Ella isn't wrong. At all. And if this case had happened even a month ago, Chloe would probably be the one voicing Ella's concerns. But ….

"Just … trust me," Chloe says. "Okay? This … will work." She hopes. God, she hopes Lucifer can make this guy — whatever the hell he is — and get out, unscathed. She tries to push away the niggling worry that, while Lucifer may be invulnerable to mortal instruments, he's still very much vulnerable to other forms of attack. But someone who's trying to suss out his vulnerabilities via potato nail wouldn't have an angel-worthy means of murder. Would he? No. Of course, no. "It will work."
"If you say so," Ella says doubtfully.

"Detectives?" Lucifer calls over the mic. "I'm going inside the building, now."

Chloe flicks off the mute switch. "Copy that."

"Check," says Dan. "I'm in position across the street."

"Ah, Daniel," Lucifer says. "Come to watch my six, as they say?"

"Look, man. I don't want to hear whatever innuendo-laden pun you've cooked up about coming in the back door. Okay? Let's just get this done."

"I was merely going to say, 'Be careful.'"

"… Oh."

"After all, my six can take considerably more damage than yours can."

"Oh, fuck you, man!"

"Could we?"

Grinding her teeth, Chloe grabs the mic and says, "Cool it, you two!"

"Apologies, Detectives," Lucifer says, growing serious again. The timbre of his voice changes, sounding more echoey, when he adds, "I'm in the building lobby, now. Mmm. Lots of marble. No receptionist on this floor. Calling the lift, now."

There's a long pause before a familiar "ding" sound. The microphone rustles, and static flares as Lucifer steps inside the elevator car. Wincing, Chloe turns the volume down, until she hears another faint "ding." The static wanes again.

"One receptionist — a human woman, if I'm not mistaken — sitting behind a glass wall," Lucifer mutters softly, and then loudly, he adds a charming, "Hello, Ms. … … Williams, is it?" A pause. "Yes, Lucifer Morningstar. I've an appointment with Mr. Möbius on behalf of the L.A.P.D., if you'd be so kind as to notify him of my arrival. That's a lovely necklace, by the way. Real pearls?"

Chloe can practically hear his smile, he's laying it on so thick. His forwardness is rewarded with breathless, high-pitched babbling. Lucifer and the woman exchange back-and-forth flirtations. Which means he's already got the receptionist twisted into knots around his fingers, and—

"Seriously, how in the hell does he do that?" Dan mutters.

"Call it animal magnetism," Lucifer purrs over the mic.

There's a soft, dreamy, "… What?" in the background.

And Lucifer adds a cheerful, "Oh, nothing you need to concern yourself with, darling."

"Man, he's smooth," Ella marvels. "Like butter. No! Like that … I-can't-believe-it's-not-butter stuff. The really spreadable kind. I mean, I'd certainly slather him on my toast." Her eyes widen. She darts a look at Chloe. "I mean … not that he wants to slather himself on anything other than a fresh slice of warm delicious Decker. Hello, obvious U.S.T."

"Indeed," Lucifer says, smile still audible.
Ella directs a panicked look at the mute button, which is not switched on.

Shit.

Chloe rests her face on her palms as hot blush spreads across her face and down her throat. "Maybe, let's stop with the dirty metaphors, now." She coughs, wishing she could melt into the floor. Except melting makes her think of butter, and she blushing even harder. Fuckity fuck, fuck, fuck.

"Yeah," Ella says slowly, mortified. "I'll just …. I'll just be quiet over here. Carry on."

"Kill me, now," groans Dan.

"Down the hall and to the right, you say?" Lucifer says loudly, clearing his throat. "Thank you, darling."

Footsteps fill the humiliating silence that follows.

A door opens.

A heartbeat-long pause ensues.

"You," Lucifer says, the word dark and cold as a midnight glacier.

Chloe perks up. "You? You, who?"

There's a loud crash, and a crackling roar like an exploding wildfire, followed by a low-pitched, oozing laugh that isn't Lucifer's. "Oh, and here I thought we might still be friends," says a sepulchral male voice that curdles Chloe's stomach. Ella swipes her fingers at her neck like she feels bugs crawling on her skin. "I suppose that was misguidedly optimistic of me, given how you left me."

Nausea fills Chloe's gut.

"How did you get here?" snaps Lucifer, deep and dark and hating.

"Well, it's quite simple, Samael—"

"You know that's not my bloody name anymore."

"But it's oh so fun to make your eye twitch like that whenever I use it. Samael."

Samael? Chloe thinks, mind racing.

"The Blindness of God," Ella says, eyes widening.

Chloe frowns. "The blindness of huh?"

"You haven't answered my question," says Lucifer. "How did you get here?"

"Favors owed," the other man says pointedly. "Such a lovely commodity, wouldn't you agree?"

There's another crash. Some thuds. Things are breaking. Like whoever this guy is, he and Lucifer are actually exchanging blows. And the guy isn't already macerated floor paste gumming up the treads on Lucifer's shoes. Which is … bad. It's super fucking bad.

more of a yay-Jesus girl, myself, so I could be wrong, but … if this dude is serious, that would probably mean he buys into the whole Lucifer-is-Lucifer thing."

Fuck.

"Lucifer," Chloe hisses into the microphone, heart pounding. "Give us a clue out here. What is going on?"

Bangs and crashes and another flickering, wildfiery roar drown out everything else coming through the microphone. Glass shatters. Metal screams.

"10-4," Dan says. "All good here, so far."

What?

"Dan?" Chloe says, but there's no response but static. "Dan, what the hell are you talking about?"

Dan doesn't reply.

"Dan," Chloe snaps into the microphone, "please respond!"

Nothing.

"Dan!"

Nothing.

The struggle on the other end of the line ceases for a moment.

"You can't hurt me, Samael," says the man, tone oozing with self-important menace. "Not with your fire or your fists. Not today. Will you cease with your futile silliness?"

"… How?" says Lucifer, panting.

"Why, you left me a piece of yourself the night before last. Three pieces, to be exact. Surely, you recall?"

"You dare to make a ward that is of me?"

"A Devil-proof one, yes. Do keep up."

"Lucifer," Chloe hisses. "Tell me what's going on! Now!"

And that's when she hears Lucifer cry out in pain, followed by a wet-sounding choking noise, like someone came up behind him with a garrote. Her blood freezes in her veins. And the other man laughs, and laughs, and laughs. "What's that they say about the Devil's own luck?" the man croons. "Seems I've stolen it today."

"Dan!" Chloe snarls into the mic, but he doesn't respond. "Dan! Lucifer is in trouble!"

Nothing.

There's nothing but the sounds of Lucifer's lungs slowly giving out and Möbius's chilling laughter.

Without another thought, she grabs her gun and jumps out of the van. "Chloe, wait!" she hears Ella yell behind her, but Ella isn't important in light of the fact that Lucifer is maybe dying thanks to
their stupid plan.

Why did Chloe ever agree to this? Why did she let him go toward the guy who wanted him dead? Her lungs burn as she pummels them with hot summer air, and the balls of her feet are screaming at her to stop running, but she doesn't stop. She rounds the corner, pounding down the pavement. Four blocks become three blocks become two blocks become one.

She bypasses the elevator and runs up the steps, bursting onto the fifth floor where Mr. Möbius's office resides.

The administrative assistant, Ms. Williams, is sitting at the desk filing her nails, like armageddon isn't happening down the hall. What the fuck? But all Chloe has to do is flash her badge and point her gun, and Ms. Williams buzzes her through, past the bulletproof glass, without hesitation. Chloe follows Lucifer's directions, panting as she jets down the hall and turns right, breathing so hard she's starting to see funny spots in her vision.

The office door is closed.

She doesn't even test the knob before kicking it open.

A blast of sweltering air wallops her in the face.

"Detective?" Lucifer says, frowning as he turns to peer at her with a quizzical expression.

She blinks. The whole office looks like God hit the smite button on it. The room is a burnt out, smoking, charred husk that reeks of brimstone, burning plastic, and melting electronics. Even the plexiglass windows are warped and oozing down the walls. And the air is so hot within that she can't step beyond the threshold.

Lucifer and Möbius both stand in the center of the rubble, each unscathed save for the smears of ash on their faces and clothes, though part of Lucifer's suit jacket is in shreds with the silk lining exposed like guts. Like something clawed at him. A physical altercation definitely happened. But Lucifer's invulnerability seems more or less intact. And he isn't choking to death. He's fine.

I'm no pushover, he said.

The walking talking wrath of God.

"What," she has a chance to blurt, not even a question, because she's too stunned.

"Why, it's magic, Detective Decker, of course!" Mr. Möbius rumbles as his lips pull into a gleaming cat-caught-the-canary smile. "And I thought there might be a reason for your sudden absence. Let's see, shall we?"

He moves. Faster than her eyes can process. A rapid ka-chunk ka-chunk sound follows. Something sharp jabs her in the neck. Lucifer has a chance to curse something nonsensical before he stumbles forward, blinking sluggishly. Möbius brings a green thing — a pistol? — to bear on Lucifer again and fires once more. Twice. A third time. Lucifer flinches with each new impact, and then finally collapses the rest of the way to the ground in a Prada-bedecked heap. Möbius steps over Lucifer's body, and then fires again. Lucifer doesn't move anymore.

Her hands feel like lead as she pulls at the thing in her neck. Something long and cylindrical with a fuzzy red end. A dart, she realizes too slowly. She tosses it away, where it lands on the charred carpet with a plink. This asshole darted ….
Her breaths slow, and she can't lift her hand.

Her muscles turn to lead.

Her gun clatters from her lax fingers to the smoking, ruined floor, and then rises up to meet her again.

Or is she falling?

Yes. Falling.

Her view skews to the side, and then all she can see is the floor, part of the door frame, and Lucifer crumpled unconscious in front of her.

A shadow eclipses the sunlight and embers.

"I do love audience participation," Mr. Möbius purrs, looking down at her with his gleaming, golden eyes. "Don't you?"

Reality seems to stretch.

And then … nothing.
Chapter Notes

Chapter title goes to Hybrid. Thank you so much, as always, for the lovely feedback :)

Re: my posting schedule. I'm trying to post earlier on Wednesdays now, in response to the massive amount of European readers I seem to have. I'm not able to do it for certain, so I won't "officially" change the posting time, but just know that I'm making a concerted effort to post in the mornings on Wednesdays, now, too.

Also, my chapter post on Sunday October 21 may or may not be late. I'll do my utmost to keep things on time, but due to circumstances out of my control this might not be possible. We'll see!

Anyway, enjoy!

The first time she wakes, she's floating in a dark place. In a vague, liminal fog beyond real awareness. The air is hot and stuffy. The surface beneath her body isn't stationary — there's a continuous rumbling and a soft vibration that soothe her.

She drifts without a care or a thought or a mind, but she drifts, wrapped in the muted sensations of movement as though they were a cozy blanket.

Then something sharp pricks her bicep, and she isn't floating anymore.

She's nowhere.

The second time she wakes, she starts in the dark place again, floating, but there's no rumble or vibration anymore, only a diffuse murmur that rises and falls with a peculiar cadence. The air isn't hot anymore; it's cold. Her eyelids are heavy and refuse to lift, and her body isn't attached to her brain.

The moments pass.

The world drips into semi-focus as though it were rationed from a leaking faucet.

The diffuse murmur takes shape as spoken word.

"This was a huge mistake," a woman says, her words brushed with the soft lilt of an old, almost-faded accent.

A man replies, "Relax, will you? He's out cold."

"I don't care if he's out cold," says the woman. "He's dangerous."

"He can't do anything right now." The man's accent is much thicker than the woman's. French, maybe? Either way, he sounds familiar.

"You do realize that you idiots literally brought Hell down on us."
"We already had Hell down on us," the man says with a snort. "Or did you forget the boss?"

"That's a voluntary business arrangement," the woman retorts, "which is not the same as this!"

"You worry too much."

"And you don't worry enough," she snaps. "I'm in this to make money, not die."

"Nobody is gonna die, Char. The cuffs —"

"Like a pair of magic hoodoo handcuffs is gonna fix the fact that you guys kidnapped the fucking Devil."

"We just have to keep him out of commission until —"

"Newsflash. You're delusional if you think this isn't gonna go sideways before then." The sound of receding footsteps fill the space. "I'm gone, Jack. And if you were smart, you would be, too. Let Möbius reap what he sowed."

"Char!" the guy yells. A door slams. "God, damn it." More receding footsteps. "Charlene, wait!"

Another door slam.

And then nothing for a while.

When Chloe's body returns to her possession at last, she wishes it hadn't.

She's freezing, her gut is churning, and her head is pounding like someone turned her skull into a bass drum for their indie garage band. She rolls onto her side and curls into a fetal position. For a while, she's too sick to do more than lie there, unmoving except to shiver. Wherever "there" is.

It's quiet. Only the whooshing sound of air being forcefully circulated fills the space.

Her bladder is full to bursting, and she feels so rotten she considers letting herself go, but she can't quite convince herself that lying around in wet, smelly pants is going to feel much better than holding it.


But her throat is so dry it hurts. Her mouth tastes like something died in it. Just the thought of moving makes her stomach quail. And she can't think much beyond that, yet, because her brain is five sizes too big for her skull.

Her eyes prick with tears.

She's been this sick before. When she had a warm bed to lie in, and her home to surround her, and Dan to bring her T.L.C. on demand. Now, though, she has nothing. Except ….

Lucifer.

Where is Lucifer?

Fuck.

No ….
She reaches forward, trying to gather her weight and sit up. Her shaky fingers slip on the cold, hard floor, though, and she collapses all over again, trembling.

Memories of him falling to the ground like a sack of bricks in front of her, felled by her own catastrophic, ignorant foolishness, jab like knives at her mind's eye. She remembers Genevieve with her eyes cut out. Omar with his bloody, missing fingers. And then all she can see is Lucifer lying dead in a ditch, discarded somewhere like trash, his eyes staring sightlessly at the Heaven he's barred from. His back will be torn open straight to the spine, and his luminous wings will be mounted on some rich asshole's wall like moose antlers or a stuffed, snarling grizzly-bear head.

"No," she blurs, a terrified, dehydrated rasp, as she rolls onto her knees and rises to all fours. "No, no, no. This isn't happening."

It won't happen, if she fixes it. She needs to fix it.

She sits back on her knees and rubs her eyes.

At first, she thinks she must be blind, because all she sees is black. Endless, fathomless, inky black. Blacker than anything she's ever seen (or not seen). But is she blind, or is she somewhere without light? There's no way for her to tell.

With a shaking hand, she reaches out, sweeping left to right with her open palm. Nothing. She inches forward. Nothing, still. The third time she scoots forward, her outstretched hand hits something cold. Cylindrical. Like the dowel rod in her master closet, except vertical. A bar. She sweeps her hand back and forth and feels more of them, all in a row, evenly spaced about four inches apart.

"Lucifer?" she calls, the word wavering and tentative. "L-Lucifer, are you …?"

Nothing. No response.

"Lucifer, wake up!" she snaps. Her raspy, hoarse words echo in the darkness, bouncing off unseen walls. "Lucifer Morningstar! Wake up!"

Nothing.

"Hello?" she says in a small voice.

Nothing again.

Trying not to panic, she explores her surroundings by trembling touch, following the bars to the left, testing each one for give by shaking it. But there's no give. Not in any of them. The bars form an immovable three-sided barrier around her. She can feel the extra framework of what might be a door, but it's stuck fast. The fourth side of her enclosure is smooth and cold. A stone wall. Or painted brick. Something.

She's in a cell of some kind.

When she finds the back corner where the bars meet the wall, her big toe bumps into something solid but movable, and the jarring impact results in a thunderous, echoing clang. She reaches down, grasping for the thing. It's something cylindrical, about twelve inches in diameter. It has a thin, arcing handle with a thick grip at the top of the arc. A bucket? She grips the handle and lifts. The bucket doesn't slosh, so it's not her water source. She reaches into the well, feeling along the edges. As far as she can tell, the bucket is empty.

Her toilet, maybe?
Frankly, she doesn't care if it's intended to be her toilet or not. That's what it becomes. And just taking care of her lower-body's desperation helps her think a little straighter.

She sighs as she buttons up her jeans again.

She's alone. In a cell. Blind. Sick from whatever drug they darted her with. Who the hell knows what happened to Lucifer, if he's even still alive. But he must be alive, since she's alive. Right? After all, what use would her trophy-hunting captors have for her boring, terrestrial self except to make him breakable? Unless miracles have special parts, too, but ….

No.

She latches onto her previous logic like a barnacle to a boat, desperate.

If she's alive, Lucifer's alive, and they can still get out of this.

Maybe, he's trapped in a cell much like this one, locked away in the dark, sick, as equally worried about her wellbeing as she is about his.

Maybe, they'll have an opportunity to escape together if she just waits for said opportunity to present itself.

Wincing, she sinks back to the cold floor and props herself against the bars.

Waiting for an opportunity seems like both a copout and an essential step, at this point.

Because her head is pounding.

She lets her burning, tired eyes drift closed.

And she waits.

A raucous thud courses through the darkness, and the lights flick on. At some point during her slumber, her body dripped down the bars to the floor like a liquid, and she's yanked out of gnarly hangover dreams to find her right cheek smooshed against the cold stone. Her eyes feel gummy, and her throat hurts. She has no idea how long she's been unconscious.

Two heavy, uneven sets of footsteps fill the space, along with a hollow, thumping, rustling noise.

Like … a limp body being dragged across the floor.

Lucifer?

Every muscle in her body tenses. Her heartbeat takes off at a sprint.

"Why do you think … she makes him … vulnerable?" says a man, panting. His voice is a deep, rumbling baritone, not the tenor pitch of the familiar "Jack" from before.

A second man, also panting, also not Jack, replies, "For fuck's sake, man … how the fuck should I know?" with a bit of a Boston drawl.

"I dunno," Baritone says. "I just thought … maybe—"

"Like I care why or how," retorts Boston. "I just care that it works."
The two men and the heavy thing stop somewhere in front of her as she's debating what to do. Her head is throbbing, she's thirsty to the point of fantasizing about rain, and her stomach is still churning like a butter mixer. Faking unconsciousness, at this point, isn't much of an acting job.

"Lift on three?" Baritone says.

Boston responds blandly, "Yeah, sure."

"Three … two … one," they chant together.

More thumps and thuds and grunts of exertion follow. Metal clinks against metal. Fabric rips. She can hear them shifting on their feet. Breathing heavily. Nothing else, though.

Her heart constricts. If the heavy thing they're lugging around is Lucifer, then the total absence of scathing, devilish commentary says dire things about his state of health.

"This is insane," says Baritone. There's another hollow thump. "You can feel an extra joint under his shoulder blade. Right here." Another thump. "I bet that's where the wing connects."

A long pause follows.

"What?" says Baritone.

"Dude," Boston says, snuffling with barely contained laughter, "you are such a fuckin' nerd."

"Yeah?" Baritone snaps. "And you're a fucking dick."

A tense silence follows. There are more hollow thumps. More clinks and clanks. More heavy breathing.

"Any idea … how Boss is gonna … force his wings out?" Baritone says after a while, recovering.

"Something to do with the chick, I think," Boston replies.

Baritone laughs nervously. "As long as we don't have to wake him up."

"Yeah, I ain't got a death wish," Boston says. "I think Boss is gonna do that himself when the time comes."

"Good."

Footsteps echo.

"Hey, you," Boston says. "Chick." A raucous, metallic banging noise fills the space in front of her, like the guy is slapping the bars with a nightstick or something, and she can't help but tense up.

"Awake, yet?"

She fights to stay still. And quiet. Despite her pounding heart, she forces herself to breathe thickly. Evenly. Like someone who's out cold. Or in a deep sleep.

Boston sighs when she doesn't budge. "Guess not," he says. Something smacks into her hip like a brick, hits the ground, and rolls away with a liquid-sounding slosh.

Tears flood her eyes. That hurt. She clenches her fingers, digging stinging crescents into her palms with her nails, but she doesn't move. She won't move.
Boston continues, "Enjoy, bitch," in a tone that suggests he doesn't give a flying fuck whether she enjoys whatever-it-is or not. And then, not in her direction, he adds, "Game's on in a few minutes, man."

"Right," says Baritone. "Let's go."

Both sets of footsteps recede.

"Think the Cubs are gonna win?" Baritone says.


A door opens and closes, but the light stays on, and the vague overhead buzz and snap of fluorescents fills the new silence.

She's afraid to move.

When nobody comes back to check on her, she opens her eyes and scrambles upright. The "brick" that hit her is a water bottle. It lies on the ground next to the bars, the ultra-thin plastic concave and misshapen from the impact with her body. But she doesn't have more than about a nanosecond to consider the bottle before her brain makes sense of the rest of the scene beyond the bars, and she forgets all about the water.

They heavy thing was Lucifer.

He's lying facedown and half-naked on a narrow table, his body still and pale like a corpse, though she can see him breathing, at least. His arms dangle over the sides of the table and are crossed at the wrist underneath, bound together by ominous-looking metal cuffs. An intravenous line is attached to the back of his left hand. As she watches, a drop of clear liquid spills into the line from the bag hanging overhead. The drop crawls down the line to the cannula attached to his hand and then disappears.

A lump forms in her throat.

The room is large and has only one exit — a white door with a narrow, corrugated glass window the width of the doorknob. Her tiny cell runs along the side of a larger open area. Countless cabinets and drawers line the opposite wall, along with what looks like an industrial sink. Lucifer's shirt, waistcoat, and jacket lie on the floor in a ripped up heap by the foot of the table, little squiggles of broken, frayed threads curling like viscera. A tray of instruments — scissors, knives, and other sharp, scary-looking things she doesn't recognize — rests next to the table in a bath of harsh, bright light.

Is this … some kind of operating room?

Her breaths tighten. Disquiet thrums behind her breastbone like a banged tuning fork. They want his wings. Archangel wings. They're going to cut him up. They're going to butcher him. And she's the reason the fucking scalpel is going to work.

She's the reason they caught him at all.

"Lucifer!" she says.

He doesn't move. Doesn't twitch. Doesn't give any indication that he heard her.

"Lucifer," she repeats, almost a hiss. "Wake up."
Nothing.

She glares at the intravenous line. They must be drugging him.

Like they did with her, except, with him, they're not letting the drugs wear off.

She swallows, the lump in her throat burgeoning as she stares at the crumpled pile of clothing on the ground. *For Dad's sake, another bloody shirt ruined!* she imagines him whining in indignation while ignoring the more sinister aspects of the situation. At least, they didn't strip him all the way, though that doesn't stop her from feeling creeped out and violated on his behalf. She can't imagine two complete strangers peeling off her shirt and touching her naked skin while she's helpless. It's vile.

"Lucifer!" she tries one more time to no avail.

She prowls around her cell in tight circles, trying to think of what to do.

*Anything* to do.

She stops at the door, picking at the lock with her fingernail. It's a mechanical padlock. Not an electronic lock. Even better, the lock's fitment is loose. She could easily pick it if she had tools, but she has nothing. They stripped her of her wallet, cuffs, keys, watch, cellphone, everything. She tries 0-0-0-0 and 1-2-3-4 on a whim, but neither combination works, and the lock remains firmly stuck in place. Shit.

She glances down at the water bottle the guy smacked her with, unable to ignore her cracked throat or her pounding head any longer. She drops to the ground, snatching up the bottle and ripping off the plastic cap in a desperate, clawing motion, before tipping her head back.

The water tastes like ambrosia despite her churning stomach, and she has to force herself to take slow sips, so she doesn't throw it all back up again and waste it.

She's not sure what to do. How to escape. Lucifer is going to be a deadweight, even if she does get out. A deadweight so heavy two guys together struggled to drag his limp body.

Her eyes burn as the insurmountability of the problem really hits her.

But she can't give up, yet.

She can't.

Sipping on the water bottle, she desperately grasps for an idea.

Any idea.

Anything?

She's not sure how long she's been staring blankly into space, futzing with the empty water bottle, filling the silence with the thunderous crackles of bending, warping plastic, when the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end. With a blink, she refocuses on the sterile, white room. Lucifer's not facedown anymore. At some point, he tipped his head toward her, like he's drawn to her presence even when he's out cold.

Except he's not out cold, anymore.

His eyes are open.
Holy …

His eyes are open.

A quick glance at his left hand underneath the table reveals the intravenous line, still dripping poison into his vein. He must be fighting the drugs. Or they gave him the wrong dosage. Or both.

She snaps into motion, shoving the empty water bottle away from her lap and leaping to her feet.

"Lucifer," she says, banging frantically on the bars with her open palms. "Lucifer, wake up! Lucifer, it's Chloe. Lucifer!"

He doesn't react to her. His stare is empty.

"Lucifer," she says. "Lucifer, wake up. Lucifer, you have to wake up. It's Chloe. Can you hear me?"

His blink is a laggard one, like his eyelids are slathered with molasses. His breaths are long and even and thick.

"Lucifer," she pleads, almost chanting, "Lucifer, Lucifer, Lucifer." She pushes her hands through the bars, waving at him. Anything to catch his attention.

His Adam's apple bobbles along his throat as he swallows. Another sluggish blink follows, and another, and another. And then he says something lyrical and slurred and completely not in fucking English.

"Lucifer!" she says, snapping her fingers. "Turn on the internal translator! I don't speak Angel!"

He replies. Again not in English.

Stress compresses behind her breastbone like carbon into diamonds. She blows a frustrated breath out through her teeth. "Look, I have no idea if you can understand me, but you've got to get up. Lift your hands over your head and climb off the table."

If she can just get him close to the bars, she can pull out the cannula taped to the back of his hand — with his wrists bound crisscross, he's not going to be able to do it by himself, not without making a bloody mess. If she can pull out the cannula, maybe he'll recover enough to be able to think straight. Then he can He-man open the lock on her cage, and they can get the fuck out of here.

If. If. Maybe.

"Lucifer!"

He squints at her.

"Lucifer!" she says, pressing her face into the gap between the bars. "Can you hear me? It's Chloe."

"Dec … ive?" he says blearily as a hint of substance returns to his expression.

"Yes!" she says, barely resisting the urge to jump up and down. "Yes, it's me. It's Chloe."

His lip curls at the corner. "'lo."

"Yeah, hi," she says in a rush. "You need to listen to me. Climb off the table."

"… Lime?"
"Climb, Lucifer! Just climb off. Climb off, now. Climb off the table."

"Wha's … wrong with … … me?" he slurs without moving.

"Lucifer," she snaps, frantic. "Lucifer, listen to me. You're being drugged. You're on a table. Lift your arms over your head and roll off."

He blinks, frowning. "I'm … cold."

"That must be the drugs," she says. "You need to come here so I can fix it." She swallows, waving wildly at him. "Lucifer, come here. Please, just … come here. Please, they're going to hurt you if you don't come here."

His gaze wanders lackadaisically up and down the bars of her cell.

"Right, see?" she says, banging on the bars with her fists. "I'm in a cage, so you need to come here, first. I can't come to you."

"… What?" he says.

"Lucifer," she snaps as her eyes water in frustration. "Just. Come. Here."

"'Kay."

Except he doesn't lift his arms over the top edge of the table first. He just rolls awkwardly to the left. Which deposits him in a gangly, shaking heap beside the table with his shoulders wrenched and his arms stretched painfully above him. Exhausted, pained, heaving breaths rack his frame. His head thunks against the side of the table, and his eyes screw shut.

"Just," she says with a wince, "step back a bit."

"I —" He grimaces. "—What?"

"Back up. Back up!" When he doesn't budge, she adds more stridently, "Lucifer! Back. Up."

He scoots back on his heels. An inch. Two. His Italian loafers scrape on the tile. His body is trembling.

"That's right!" she says, clapping her hands. "Keep going. You can do it. Please, Lucifer. Please, please, keep going. Please."

The door to the hallway opens.


And Boston snarls, "What the fuck? Did ya screw up the dosage?"

"I gave him enough to kill an elephant!" adds Baritone.

And then all three men at the door bum rush the table and Lucifer like they're blitzing a Super Bowl quarterback.

Lucifer's eyes flash red, and he snarls.

One moment, all three men are struggling to hold Lucifer down. The next, the unmistakable crunch of a bone breaking accents the staccato grunts and shouts flying loose from the four-man tussle.
Boston wails in abject pain and stumbles backward. He makes a haphazard grab for the instrument tray by the table. The tray goes flying with a clang and a crash, raining metal instruments everywhere. Another crunch. Another scream. This time Jack smashes to the cold ground, but unlike Boston, he stays down, out cold, as blood oozes from his pulverized nose. Only Baritone remains unscathed.

"What on earth is going on, here?" calls an unmistakable voice from the doorway.

Möbius. In the flesh. Wearing a black three-piece suit that reeks of money.

Her heart climbs into her throat.

"Don't you touch," Lucifer has a chance to mutter, blinking, addled, "… her."

And then it's like his own weight is too much for him to bear. He succumbs to gravity, until there's no slack left in his arms, and he's just dangling by the cuffs, which are caught on the opposite edge of the table. His head tips forward like it's too heavy. Horror drips from his wide-eyed expression as he stares at the floor, breathing thickly, and she can see his muscles bulging again and again as he struggles and fails to pick himself up. His eyelids drip to half mast. He blinks frantically. He makes an indignant noise that isn't a word. Deep in his throat. Then he loses the battle. His eyelids slip shut. He goes limp, cuffs clinking against the table edge.

Baritone, she realizes, as she watches the last man standing lower his hand from the I.V. bag. Baritone must have adjusted the dosage.

"Jesus Christ," Boston says, wheezing as he climbs shakily to his feet. "He kicks like a fuckin' asteroid."

Möbius glides into the room to survey the damage. "Why was he kicking at all?"

"Hey, it's not like there's a dosage guide for archangels," Baritone retorts.

"Yes, well," Möbius says with a sigh, stepping over Jack's bloody, unconscious body without so much as a downward glance of sympathy, "I suppose that's true."

Chloe swallows back tears. "Please, let us go," she rasps, clearing her throat.

Möbius turns to the cell, a sharp, wolfish smile oozing across his face. "Detective Decker. Hello. I'm afraid I can't do that." He thinks for a moment. "Or, well, I suppose I can. But I won't." He laughs at his own joke and turns to Boston. "Do give her some more water, will you? We can't have her dying of dehydration before we proceed with the negotiations, can we?"

She clutches the bars, not liking the sound of that. "Negotiations?"

"Oh, it's quite simple, really," Möbius says, turning back to her. "Once I've softened our dear Devil into something a bit more manageable, I'll threaten to kill you slowly and painfully while he watches, unless he manifests and subsequently allows me to cut off his wings. I believe it's a deal he'll readily make." His right eyebrow quirks upward. "Don't you?"

Yes. Lucifer would make it gladly. A lump forms in her throat. "Please, don't."

Möbius's smile widens, showing teeth. "Begging," he purrs. "That's something I've missed these past few months." He steps close to the bars, licking his lips in a lascivious way that roils her stomach. "Oh, please. Oh, please. Do it some more."
Her eyes are burning as she looks away.

_I'd rather chop my wings off again and bloody give them to him, free of bloody charge,_ she remembers Lucifer saying.

"He'll give his wings to you," she croaks as a last ditch effort. Because there's no fucking way Möbius is going to let them walk out of here alive if he makes it to the culmination of his own machinations. He'll trap Lucifer in the deal, take his wings, and then slaughter Lucifer and Chloe both once the deed is done. But, now … maybe …. "Please, I know he'll give them to you if you promise to let us walk away. Nobody else has to die."

"I think it's a little late for deals like that, hmm?" Möbius says, and her heart sinks. "My human cover is blown, after all. And I'd rather not spend eternity on the Devil's grudge list. He does hold a rather impressive grudge, doesn't he?"

"I wouldn't know," she says through clenched teeth.

"Oh, he's playing nice for you, then?" Möbius says blandly as he futzes with his cuticles. His bony fingers are long and arcing. "How quaint."

"He isn't playing!" she insists. "He's a good person."

Möbius winks, his amber eyes gleaming. "Of course he is."

"Who are you?" she asks, seething.

He offers her a little flourish and a bow. "Asaiah Möbius, of course. I thought you knew that."

"No … who are you?"

"A monster, dear," he says as he slowly straightens, flashing a predatory smile that freezes her solid. "That's all you need to know."

With that, Möbius saunters back into the hallway, whistling, his emaciated body a line of nothing but sinew and bone. With a gleeful wave, he steps out of view, leaving Baritone and the injured Boston to pick up the brutal mess left behind in the operating room. Ignoring the unconscious Lucifer for now, Baritone drags Jack out of the room by his feet. Meanwhile, Boston limps to a little refrigerator that she hadn't noticed sitting by the door. He grabs a water bottle from an opened six pack and shuffles back to her.

"Here, bitch," Boston says, offering the fresh bottle to her with a wince.

She takes it, opting not to respond to his taunt. The plastic crinkles as her grip closes. She doesn't thank him as she retreats to the corner to sit. And to watch. And to plan.

There must only be the three guys, Charlene, and Möbius onsite, or the kerfuffle with Lucifer would have attracted a lot more attention. Three guys, Char, and Möbius, except Char is not on board with this force-a-deal-from-the-Devil plan, and is perhaps already gone. Lucifer took Jack out of commission completely, and he injured Boston enough that he's limping and wheezing and wincing, even in front of the "bitch."

The odds are better, now, for an escape.

If she can just figure out how to get—
As Boston gingerly bends over to pick up the instrument tray, the metal surface flashes in the bright lights, dragging her attention to something shiny on the floor in the corner, where the bars of her cell meet with the back wall. Her eyes widen. The scissors. The scissors that had been lying on the instrument tray are now askew on the floor, within arm's reach. While Boston has his back turned to deal with the tray, she inches toward the edge of the cell.

"Are you gonna help, or are you just gonna stand there?" Boston snaps as he picks up what looks like a scalpel.

She freezes, looking up at the doorway. Baritone is back, standing at the threshold, frowning apprehensively.

Boston gestures to Lucifer. "He ain't gettin' up, man."

"Maybe, this wasn't a good idea," Baritone hedges.

"Jesus fuckin' Christ. *I'm* the one who got clobbered by a celestial wreckin' ball. Not you."

"It's just that—"

"Eight figures, startin' with a nine. Remember, nerd?" Boston taunts. He nods at Lucifer's too-still body. "That's how much you're gettin' for this gig. You can retire and then some on cheddar like that. We *all* can."

Ninety. Million. For *each* of them? Holy …. Chloe blinks. Archangel wings are apparently worth more than the gross domestic product of a small country.

Slowly, not taking her eyes from her distracted captors, she reaches through the bars for the scissors. Her fingers touch cold metal, and she hears a faint clink as the scissors shift on the floor. She slides them slowly through the bars and behind her body, concealing them between her butt and the stone wall. Then she leans back against the wall, resting her chin on her knees.

She tries to look bored and fuming. Which isn't a stretch.

"Gonna help or not?" Boston snaps, oblivious.

With a sigh, Baritone trudges back to the table at the center of the room, picking up various spilled instruments along the way. He and Boston dump a pile of recovered tools onto the tray, not bothering to do any kind of one-by-one inventory. Bully for her.

With a heave, Baritone and Boston together lift Lucifer's limp body back onto the table, carelessly depositing him on his side. One of Lucifer's feet dangles off the end of the table. His shoulders look wrenched. The metal cuffs binding his wrists scrape along the edge of the table, and his hands rest limply over empty space. Baritone and Boston don't even try to nudge him into a more comfortable position. They just leave him there, crumpled in an awkward heap like a thing.

Lucifer *is* a thing to them.

Dollar signs and nothing more.

Baritone checks the intravenous line one last time.

Then they depart, leaving her alone with the scissors, two water bottles — one empty, one full — and a too-quiet Lucifer.
She waits for a few minutes to make sure her captors aren't coming back, and then rises to her feet. She inspects once more the loose fitment of the combo lock holding her prison door shut. It's so loose that the lock body actually jiggles when she yanks on it. She glances at the empty water bottle, frowning.

She's never made a lock shim out of plastic before. Only metal, like from a Coke can. She's not sure if plastic will even work. It's certainly too thick for a normal lock. But the fitment on this particular lock is *way* loose. Like these guys aren't used to holding living things captive, and they just threw whatever shit file-cabinet lock they could find onto her prison.

The lock is still too firm to kick loose, but picking it with plastic ….

Maybe?

She grabs the empty water bottle from the back of the cell where it rolled, along with the scissors she pilfered, and gets to work.
The Big Come Down

Chapter Notes

Thanks so much everyone for the feedback! Chapter title credit goes to Nine Inch Nails. Enjoy!

Cutting a plastic bottle into a workable lock shim is a lot harder than she thought it would be, and she almost ruins the entire bottle in the process of working out the technical details. It takes her four tries to wrestle the plastic into the shape she wants — a bit of an M with a rounded, cylinder-shaped middle instead of a triangular one — and another three tries after that to get that middle prong of the M to be just the right width to fit her prison's lock. Finally, though, she manages to jam her makeshift shim into the fitment.

Clenching her teeth, she pulls so hard on the shim's tabs that her biceps shake.

With a click, the lock pops open.

"Yes!" she exclaims on the coattails of a relieved exhalation. "Yes, yes, yes!"

She bursts out of the cell like a stampeding bull and skids to a stop beside the table, her heart stuck in her throat. Chasing the intravenous line to its terminus at the back of Lucifer's hand, she picks off with her fingernail the surgical tape holding the line in place, and then gently pulls the plastic cannula out of his vein.

A bright-red ooze of blood snakes down his wrist and drips onto the the table with a quiet pat, pat, pat. She presses her thumb to the tiny wound to apply pressure, inspecting the handcuffs at the same time.

The cuffs consist of three rings all smooshed on top of each other — two large, thick rings that encompass his wrists, and a tiny eyelet on top where a chain might pass through, though there's no chain attached, now. The cuffs are metal-colored like steel, but they gleam as if they're an independent light source. The surface of the metal is inscribed with all manner of strange, looping red scribblings, and there are no weld points or keyholes that she can discern. It's as though the cuffs were molded directly to Lucifer's wrists from a molten state.


She tugs on the cuffs experimentally with her free hand. His bruised, abraded wrists flop with each tug, but the cuffs themselves don't budge or creak or show any signs of structural weakness. Shit. She has no idea how she's going to get them off.

With a stressed glance at the door, she takes a breath.

Later.

The cuffs, they can deal with later. They can deal with everything later, except the escaping part.

The escaping part needs to happen now.
"Lucifer," she says, giving him a rough shake.

He's still out cold, though, and her ministrations only serve to roll him flat onto his back, his body limp and unresponsive. Another shake, and his mouth lolls open, revealing the white tips of his teeth and his pale, slack tongue. The odd angle of his throat causes his breathing to whistle out through his incisors instead of his nose.

"Lucifer?"

Nothing.

She heads to the little fridge by the door, giving Lucifer a moment to burn off the sedatives. She yanks the remaining four water bottles from the fridge, grasping them as a singular unit by the plastic rings binding them together, and then sets the bottles on top of the fridge to be grabbed on the way out.

Turning back to Lucifer, she scoops up his ruined clothes from the floor by the foot of the operating table. She ties his shirt around her waist, and she pulls his waistcoat and jacket over her arms and shoulders to get them out of the way, while still making them easy to transport. She'll help him try to put them on again when he's more mobile, and they have more time.

She glances at the door again, heart pounding. Nobody's been to check on them in what feels like several hours. She can only hope they're all still busy licking their wounds. Or sleeping. Maybe, it's night. She has no idea anymore.

"Lucifer," she repeats, shaking him. When he still doesn't budge, she graduates to slapping his cheek. Over and over. "Lucifer," she pleads, eyes watering. "Lucifer, wake up. I don't know how much time we have."

His breathing is thick and even. Stress tightens her insides into a little ball. Before, she was able to prod him into talking in a matter of minutes, once he'd been awake enough to stare blankly at her. But she has no idea how long it took him to mentally stumble from an unconscious stupor to staring blankly.

"Lucifer," she says. "Lucifer, Lucifer, Lucifer."

Finally, his eyelids flutter. She keeps bleating his name, frantic, while she alternates between shaking and slapping. His eyelids crack open, but his eyes — normally traps she can fall into and drown — are cloudy and depthless. He peers dully at nothing, his whole body shifting limply as she jars him this way and that.

"Lucifer," she says, shaking him. "Lucifer, please, wake up. Please, wake up. Please. We have to get out of here. We have to get out of here now."

Another minute crawls by at a glacial pace before she sees some amount of substance return to his expression. Not much, but …. He swallows. His eyebrows knit, and he says something — not a word, just an utterance — in a weird tone that makes it sound like he's got caramel stuck between his teeth.

"Lucifer," she says in her best Mom-means-it voice. "Wake up."

Her sharp tone seems to break through his fog a little. "Detective …?"

"Yes," she replies, nodding. "Yes, can you sit up?"
For a too-long moment, he stares at her with a 2+2=? blankness. Like he didn't parse her words at all.

"Can you sit up?" she repeats.

"… Up?"

"Yes," she says. "Sit up." He squints at her. "Up, Lucifer. Sit up."

"I'm … lying down."

She can't help the frustrated bluster of breath that falls from her lips, but before she can snap at him, the cuffs clink, and he makes an aborted little flop against the table. His biceps shake as he tries to pull his arms apart. One of his wrists weeps fresh blood as the sharp, unpadded metal edge of the cuff cuts into him.

He gives the blood a disturbed look. "What's …?"

"I'm sorry," she says. "I don't know how to get them off." She directs a stressed glance at the door and then back to him. "Please, can you sit up?"

With a groggy nod, he tips to the side and tries to push up from the table on his elbow, but the cuffs mess things up. She jams her arms through his armpits, locks her hands behind his shoulder blades, and yanks him upright. He makes a sick sound as he leans forward to rest against her.

"Lucifer, I know you feel like shit, but we have to go."

"… Kay," he says faintly against her.

With a tiny, pained sound that makes her insides twist, he slides off the table. When he gets his feet underneath him, his knees buckle a little, and he collapses forward onto his elbows with a heavy thunk that makes the whole operating table shake. Panting, he blinks like someone knocked him stupid, and he's still seeing galaxies.

"Lucifer, we have to go," she prods him.

But all he does is stand there, half collapsed, breathing roughly.

"Lucifer," she repeats, wrapping her arm around his waist. "Come on. We have to go."

She yanks him away from the haven of the table edge. A discombobulated syllable of panic coils in his throat. He grips her shoulder hard enough to bruise, like she's the only thing keeping him from collapsing into a heap of gangly, awkward limbs. Though it kills her to wait longer, she gives him a few seconds to gain his bearings. Then she tries to drag him farther. He stumbles. His breaths rasp laboriously, and his fingers tighten even more against her skin as he shakily tries to right himself.

Tears of pain and frustration spill from her eyes. Jesus fuck, his grip is a vise.

"Lucifer, please. We have to go. They're going to hurt us, if we don't move. I don't …." She shakes her head in desperation at his vacant, confused look. "LUCIFER. PLEASE."

"I'm … cold," he rasps. His whole body is trembling.

"I know," she says, eyes finally spilling over. "I know you're cold. We'll fix it as soon as we get out of here. Please, Lucifer. Please."

He swallows thickly, his face ashen. "My head is … pounding," he says in a whispery, woozy tone,
like he's less than an inch from blacking out.

"I know. I'm sorry," she says, rubbing his naked back. "But you have to move. Please, move. I can't carry you. You're too big. Please, Lucifer." She's babbling at this point. She knows it. "Please."

He glances quizzically at his bleeding hand. "What did … they give me?"

"I don't know. It doesn't matter right now, anyway."

He swallows again. He looks like he tasted rotten eggs. "It isn't … good."

"Lucifer, the quality of the high your kidnappers gave you isn't important."

She tugs on him, leaning all her weight into the motion. He takes a wobbly, precarious step before he stops again.

"You're … crying," he says, swaying on his feet.

She doesn't find it prudent to mention that he's probably bruised her shoulders to the bone. "Please, I can't carry you, and they're going to hurt us," she says. "We have to get out of here, now. They might be coming back soon."

"But you're—"

She shakes him for all she's worth. "LUCIFER, I DESIRE YOU TO MOVE. NOW. COME ON."

The magic words, it seems, because he starts to shuffle step under his own power toward the door.

She snatches up the bottled waters with her free hand as they pass the fridge.

Their egress is a slow, laborious, nerve-racking process. She worries that their captors will come back any moment and ruin her escape attempt again, but … they don't. When she and Lucifer reach the doorway, he rests against the wall, panting thickly, his eyes scrunched up, like he thinks he might throw up.

She dares to take a peek into the hallway, only to blink in surprise when she makes a grab for the doorknob, and her hand swipes empty air. Then she looks up, and the door itself is gone.

It's just … gone.

All that remains is a blank wall.

"What the fuck?" she says.

He sniffs. "Hmm?"

"The door …." She presses her hand against the wall where she knows the doorknob was. She doesn't feel a thing but rough, painted brick. Fuck, fuck, fuck. "The door was an illusion?"

"No," he croaks. "The wall is." He inches forward, placing a shaking palm against the wall. The handcuffs clink as they bump into the bricks. "Close your eyes."

"Okay." She squeezes her eyes shut. "Now, what?"

He mutters something in the lyrical language. There's a brilliant, searing flash of light, so bright that the blackness provided by her eyelids brightens to fleshy pink, and then the fleshy pink brightens to
immaculate white. When the holy flash-bang sparkles fade moments later, she opens her eyes to see the door shimmering slowly back into view like she's on some kind of acid trip.

At which point Lucifer promptly leans forward and vomits all over the re-revealed doorframe. He hasn't eaten in who knows how long, and all that comes up is bile. He sniffs wetly, shaking, miserable as he wipes his lips on the bare skin of his arm.

"Can you keep going?" she says, worried.

His long pause before his pained, breathy, uncertain, "... Um," makes her stomach flip-flop.

"Lucifer, we're gonna die if you can't," she tells him point blank, "because there's no way in hell I'm leaving you behind with these sadistic creeps."

"But—"

"Not happening."

"I don't ... feel right."

Her chest constricts. "I know." She bites her lip, not sure what to do. He looks like shit. She squeezes his shoulder and then sets the water bottles back on the floor by his feet. "Wait here, okay? I'll scout ahead."

He seems only too happy to oblige as she steps into the hallway to map their escape.

The hallway is featureless and gray and cold and smells of wet dirt and mildew. Like some kind of basement. The first few doorways lead to other rooms without other exits. The last door at the end opens onto a concrete staircase. Her eyes widen as she gets a look at the switchback steps they'll have to climb. Fourteen steps in all to the next floor. Lucifer barely has the coordination to walk right now. How in the hell are they going to get up that?

She darts up the staircase to see what lies beyond. On the landing, she finds two doors. One is unlabeled, but over the other hangs a bright red-and-white sign that says: SORTIE. Sortie ...?

She tests the "SORTIE" door, half-expecting some kind of alarm to blare, or maybe another fun illusion trap to snare her, as the door swings open. But nothing happens, and the only sound that follows is the moan of the hinges, and then birds and crickets.

Balmy, fresh air wafts against her face. Pinkish, partly-cloudy sky and thick green coniferous woods bisect the world beyond the door. A tall chain-link fence topped with barbed wire separates the clearing surrounding the building from the woods, but Lucifer should easily be able to wreck the fence. Should. Assuming she can even get him that far.

She glances warily at the pinking sky. Sunset or sunrise? She has no idea. Either way, that can't be good. If their captors were asleep overnight, they'll be waking up soon, and they'll probably do a morning prisoner check. And if the day is ending, they'll probably do at least one more prisoner check before going to bed.

She turns on her heels and runs back to Lucifer.

She has no idea how they're going to get out of this.
But they need to.

And so they will.

She's two strides from the operating-room door when she hears the distant echo of voices in the hall, floating down the stairwell she just vacated. She bursts into the operating room like someone hit her with a cattle prod. Lucifer is where she left him, leaning against the wall, his eyelids drooping, his breaths thick and rasping like he's sleeping on his feet, though there's a new puddle of vomit at his feet. He gives her a dull look.

"Get back on the table!" she hisses at him as she yanks the door shut behind her.

He blinks sluggishly. "Hmmm?" And then his preternatural senses must kick in, because understanding floods his gaze. Swallowing, stumbling, he turns back to the operating table. She wraps an arm around his waist to help him balance.

"My suit," he rasps as he's climbing onto the table, cuffs clanking and scraping as he struggles to pull himself up. "My suit." The bloodstains from before smear like finger paint underneath him.

She frowns. "What about your suit?"

He paws at the Egyptian-cotton knot formed by his shirtsleeves, which are tied together near her bellybutton. "Are you ... s'posed to be ... wearing it?"

"Shit," she says. "Thanks."

She yanks off his ruined jacket, waistcoat, and shirt, and dumps them back onto the floor in a heap where she found them, only to remember the vomit. She glances wildly around, hoping for a ream of paper towels, a rag, something, but she sees nothing. Nothing.

She grabs his waistcoat and uses it to make a few haphazard swipes at the doorframe and the floor, getting rid of the visible stains, though nothing will fix the acrid smell. Then she tosses the waistcoat back onto the ground by his jacket and his shirt.

"Gimme your hands," she snaps as she grabs the intravenous line dangling from the pole beside the operating table.

Lucifer shakily holds out his wrists, and she stuffs the line underneath to top cuff, pinching the end between his skin and the metal. If the kidnappers actually get close enough to inspect him, the jig will be up in heartbeats, but from a distance, she hopes the line looks like it's still inserted into the back of his hand. She releases the cuffs, and his hands fall limply to his side, the metal clinking against the table. His eyes are already closed.

She dashes back into her cage, pulling the door shut behind her, and adjusting the padlock so it's open but not askew. She kicks the wreckage of her lock-shim-making session behind her bucket, out of sight of the door, just in time.

Baritone's face looms at the narrow corrugated glass window over the doorknob. The knob turns, the latch disengages, and he takes a hesitant step into the room. Her heart thunders in her ears as she notices the water bottles by his feet near the doorframe.

She forgot about those.

Don't look down, she prays in his direction. Don't look down. Don't fucking look down.
"What is that smell?" he blurs, nose wrinkling up the second his whole body is inside the room.

Fuck. Um. "I threw up," she says, giving her bucket a regretful glance. She hopes he's not far enough inside the room to pinpoint that the smell is coming from the doorway itself.

"Oh," Baritone says, meeting her eyes. "Sorry."

She clutches the bars and glares at him without speaking.

"Need anything?" he actually has the gall to ask.

*My gun*, she wants to say, *so I can shoot you*. "What time is it?" she says instead.

He glances at his watch with a frown. "Bout 9."

"At night?"

He nods and then gives Lucifer a wary look. Score one for archangels who kick like asteroids — Lucifer seems to have scared Baritone almost straight, because after he takes one more step into the room, he comes to a full stop, well out of Lucifer's immediate strike range, and well out of direct line-of-sight of the I.V. Lucifer lies still, breaths rasping and even, like he's in a deep slumber. Hopefully, he didn't *actually* fall asleep.

She stares at Baritone expectantly.

For a few moments, he stands by the doorway, peering around the room. At which point, he seems to convince himself that nothing is amiss. He turns on his heels and walks back into the hallway, right past the water bottles stacked on the floor. The door shuts with a thump, and the latch clicks.

She starts counting in her head, intending to go to 500 before she resumes their escape attempt, just to be safe.

She makes it to 142 before Lucifer sniffs and mutters tiredly, "He's … gone."

She blows out a breath of relief.

"Good," she says. "Let's get the hell out of here."

The steps, as expected, are a nightmare. Between dragging herself, Lucifer, and the water to the landing, her body aches like she just walked away from a car crash, and she's so out of breath she's seeing white-hot spots whenever she closes her eyes.

Lucifer is even worse off. The stress of exertion combined with the drug hangover is brutal, and he stops again to vomit on the crushed gravel outside the door that says "SORTIE."

Panting, she turns away to give him a little privacy, as they stand in the white halo of the lone halogen lamp hanging over the doorway. The formerly pink sky is now a deepening blue-black, and glittering stars litter the space above like broken glass across a blacktop, along with a brilliant full moon.

"I … don't suppose … you could fly us out?" she whispers tensely between breaths. "I mean, I hate to ask, but ….""

The answering sound of retching behind her makes her cringe.
She has no idea how long it took her to get over her initial nausea, but it certainly took her more than a few hours, which is all he's had, and she had the benefit of resting, which he hasn't had at all. Worse, he hasn't had the opportunity to rehydrate, either, so his head probably feels like it's got a gong going off on repeat inside of it.

"Lucifer?" she says hesitantly.

A wet sniff fills the silence with the crickets. "I'm afraid … bending the laws … of physics … is a bit … beyond me … at the moment."

She takes a breath and blows it out. Okay, then. "So, that means we're walking."

"Yes," he croaks. "For now. Apologies."

"Hey, it's not your fault," she assures him.

'Bout 9, Baritone said when she asked about the time, which means it can't be much later than 10:30 or 11, now. She hopes this means that she and Lucifer have all night to get a head start on their captors. That Baritone or whoever won't check on them again until morning. The further into the cover of the woods they can get, the better their chances are at staying hidden until they can get help.

A shaking hand grips her shoulder.

"Ready?" she says, turning to face Lucifer.

He swallows over and over again like he's trying to quell a tsunami, but he nods, and he stumbles along behind her as she guides him to the fence. Luckily, as sick as he looks, he's still asteroid strong. He makes quick work of the fence, rolling it up from one of the poles like a carpet to allow her to slip through with their water, and allowing it to unfurl back into place with a clang once he's floundered through as well.

In a matter of yards, a bed of pine needles softens their slogging footsteps, and the thick forest envelops them. Crickets sing, and a cool wind rustles through the pines. An owl hoots mournfully in the distance.

"You should go ahead," he says between wheezing breaths once the kidnappers' compound is out of sight beyond the trees. "Go on."

Her heart constricts. "Excuse me?"

"As soon … as you're out of range … the rest of this bloody sedative … will wear off. I'll catch up. Maybe, I'll be able to fly us home." He sounds far more hopeful than certain, which is … troubling.

"I can't leave you alone in the dark three feet from the hideout of the people who want to kill you for parts!" she snaps back at him, a harsh whisper. "We'll get separated. And it's not like we can run around screaming Marco Polo at each other when they might be looking for us."

"Chloe, I'll **find** you," Lucifer insists, his dark eyes glistening in the moonlight.

The water bottles slosh, and the plastic rings dig into her wrist as she folds her arms. "How?" she says. "Do you have some kind of angelic navigation-by-night power or something?"

"This isn't nighttime to me," he replies. "It's just time. I can see perfectly fine."

"For half a mile?" she says, gaping. "Seriously?"
"I don't lie," he reminds her gently, giving her a tired smile. "And if I do somehow lose sight of you, I'll still be able to hear you walking. Your shoe tread is quite distinctive in a space with zero population."

"Zero population?" she says. "Really?"

He nods. "Unless you count our kidnappers."

Fuck. "So, we're not finding help anytime soon."

"Not unless you proceed ahead and allow me to recuperate in the meantime."

A lump forms in her throat. She doesn't want to risk separating, but …. She glances into the forest. Into the ominous darkness beyond.

The cold light of the full moon outlines the rocks and underbrush and fallen tree trunks in gleaming silver. Even without his assistance, she'll be able to navigate well enough not to fall flat on her face. And the idea that they could, potentially, be home in minutes, rather than having to endure an all-night trek through who-knows-what is … tempting.

Still ….

His fingers splay against the small of her back, and he gives her a gentle push. "Go, darling. I promise, I'll catch up. You've my word."

And Lucifer is nothing if not a man of his word. That much, she can believe. "Okay," she says, frowning, "do I stop at some point, or …?"

"Just keep going," he says. "The more noise you make, the easier it will be for me to find you."

Nodding, she twists a bottle of water free from their four-pack and loosens the cap for him, since she doubts he'll be able to do that one-handed. "Here," she says, foisting the water bottle at him. "Sip on that. Slowly. Or you'll puke again."

"Yes, Detective," he says with a jovial wink as he takes her offering.

They share a look. Doubt gnaws at her, but ….

"Go," he prods.

With a deep breath, she turns, and she heads deeper into the woods.

Alone.

Time stretches into something meaningless as she claws her way through the dark. The trio of remaining water bottles slosh in time with her strides. Underbrush slaps at her face, leaving sticky streaks of sap behind on her skin. Sweat creeps down her neck and spine. Her lungs are burning, and her eyes feel gummy with exhaustion as a cold, gnarled pit of worry twists in her stomach. Why hasn't he caught up with her yet?

She can run an eight-minute mile without struggling.

She can walk a mile in about fifteen minutes.

On uneven, poorly lit terrain like this? She figures thirty minutes for a mile. Maybe forty.
But she only needs to walk half that distance to get far enough away from him.

Which means twenty minutes, if that.

She has to have been walking for more than twenty minutes, right?

But he promised. He promised he would catch up to her.

The pines rustle in the wind, and she pauses, craning her head back. The tree canopy is a thick, needle-filled carpet overhead, but stars still poke through here and there. The sky is black. Not purple like it is over L.A., but black like ink. Translucent white tendrils fill a thick vertical stripe of the blackness. The … Milky Way?

With a disquieted blink, she peers back into the woods. She's never seen the Milky Way before. Not outside of the Griffith Observatory. Which is … ominous. Her thoughts drift to the door that said "SORTIE" instead of "EXIT." And the fact that the sky didn't get dark until well after 9 p.m.

But she pushes that amorphous worry away in favor of a more immediate one.

Lucifer.

Maybe, he just needs time. She never asked him for specifics on how much faster he burns off drugs when she's not around. She only knows that her absence accelerates the process.

A twig snaps behind her, and she whips around, squinting into the darkness. The moonlit, creaking outlines of the trees look a bit like skeletons dancing in the shadows. A shiver that has nothing to do with cold runs down her spine.

"Lucifer?" she calls warily into the darkness.

No one replies. Another twig snaps to the right. And then another farther in the distance. Deer, maybe? Bears? She hopes not bears.

Another twig snaps.

… Demons? supplies her irritating little voice.

With a lump in her throat, she keeps walking, and the pit in her stomach widens.

She knew this was a mistake.

She knew—

"It isn't bloody working," he says, almost a snarl, as he falls into struggling, stumbling step beside her.

Her heart climbs into her throat, and she can't stop the startled squawk that flies loose from her lips. "Lucifer!" she snaps.

"What?" he says, panting. "I told you I'd find you."

"It's been like forever!"

"Yes, well," he says, looking away. "I didn't specify a time limit, did I?"

The water bottles fall to the ground with a slosh as she closes the gap between them. "What," he
"Detective," he says, sounding bewildered, "what's this for?"

"Shut up," she rasps as her eyes water and spill over. She presses her cheek against his chest. The struggling whistle of his breaths echoes against her ear. "I was worried."

"Oh," he says quietly, the syllable rumbling. The tension drains out of him like water from a sieve. The cleft of his chin sinks against her crown as he slumps. He sighs like he just found ocean air after months in a basement. "I'm quite all …." He trails into silence for a moment before settling on, "I'm … here."

*I'm quite all right,* she's certain he was going to assure her. Except he bailed out.

*Why?*

She rubs his spine, feeling the bumps of his vertebrae sliding underneath her fingertips. His back is slicked with sweat, and he's trembling. Worse than before. His skin feels like a used dishrag: wet, cold, scuzzy. He never feels cold. Normally, he's a walking radiator.

*You do understand that I'm the divine equivalent of a nuclear reactor, yes?* he said.

The worrying pit in her stomach widens to a chasm. "What did you mean when you said it's not bloody working?" she says.

His weight seems to sink against her even more. "I mean I still feel like Maze decided to beat me to death with the blunt end of her boot," he says. "Really, how do you stand this?"

"Stand what?"

"What's the bloody fun in drinking if you feel like *this* the morning after?"

She laughs. She can't help it. "Welcome to humanity, Lucifer."

When he doesn't reply, she backs up to gauge his expression. A few days ago, the moonlight made him seem otherworldly. Today it makes his pale face look haggard. Lines of stress pinch the corners of his eyes, which still seem a bit glazed. Stubble forms a dark swath across his face. His shoulders are bowed with an unseen weight.

*How much of himself did he spend to catch up with her?*

"Do you need to rest?" she says, frowning. It's probably safe to rest, now. She hopes.

He gives her a hollow smile. "No." *But I really bloody want to,* he doesn't add. "Shall we continue?"

He pushes away, not giving her a chance to reply. The pine needles scrape under his dragging footsteps as he plods past a tilted sapling. The leaves of the tree quiver as his bare shoulder brushes them. She grabs the water bottles and follows, eyeing him warily as they lumber into the night.

Her feet are solid blocks of pain, and she kind of wishes her nausea would come back, because in the absence of nausea, her stomach rumbles like an earthquake that won't cease. She can't stop thinking about cheeseburgers. And french fries. And chocolate.
She licks her lips.

When they get home, she's taking Lucifer to HiHo Cheeseburger, and she's going to order the entire menu. Screw calories. Trekking through the wilderness for eight years has to be worth a burger or seven and a chocolate shake, right?

Lucifer collapses against a tree trunk and slides down to the ground, pulling bits of bark and moss and dirt with him as he goes. His now-empty water bottle spills from his lax fingertips.

"Lucifer!" she says, dropping to the ground beside him. Sticky pine needles spread beneath her.

He pants noisily, like there isn't enough oxygen in the universe for him. The sky overhead has shifted from black to midnight blue. Like sunrise is imminent. Have they really been walking that long?

"I don't know … what's wrong … with me," he says in a wavering tone.

She laughs nervously. "Um … try being violently kidnapped and sedated, and then walking for a zillion miles."

When he doesn't reply except to let his eyelids droop shut, she bites her lip, pressing the back of her hand to his forehead. He still feels like a cold, wet dishrag. "Are there drugs that affect angels?" she says, frowning. "Without astronomical-sized doses, I mean."

"Poisons, yes," he says faintly, almost like he's drifting out of body, "but they're not … of Earth."

"Well, maybe they drugged you up with one of those, then? So … getting away from me wouldn't help?"

The ominous silence that follows her question says he doesn't think so. But what else could it be?

"Lucifer?"

"I'm … cold," he admits in a quiet, barely-spoken tone that makes her heart clench.

It's summer. They've been walking for miles, and the air, while cool from lack of sun, isn't cold by any means.

She's warm enough to strip naked and still feel okay.

Frown deepening, she shrugs out of his jacket. The kidnappers cut him out of his clothes, ruining them in the process, but … with his hands still bound, the fact that his garments are ripped up might be a boon.

"Here," she says softly. She unties his shirt from her waist and drapes it across his heaving chest. Tying the arms behind his neck and the tails into the farthest belt loops she can reach, she turns the shirt into a sort of bib. Then she helps him pull the jacket over his back and shoulders. The coat rustles as he shivers underneath it. "We should have done this sooner."

But Lucifer hadn't stopped. Not once.

His head thunks against the tree trunk as he tips it back, and she can't resist the urge to brush her fingers through his sweaty hair. "S'nice," he slurs, leaning into her touch.

She swallows. "Is it?"

"Hmm," he mutters, neither condemnation nor agreement. Just … exhaustion. So thick and cloying
he's overcome with it.

She curls up against him, horrified to realize she can hear his teeth chattering in the quiet. She presses closer, wrapping her arms around him, rubbing his sides with her palms to drum up friction. "Is this warmer?" she says.

But he's already asleep, and he doesn't answer.
Way Down We Go

Chapter Notes

Chapter title credit goes to Kaleo. Thank you so much once again for the feedback — you guys are incredible!

Serious question for everybody. My original plan was to not post chapters on October 31 for Halloween, and November 21 & 25 for Thanksgiving. This actually works out fairly well with the story itself — the gaps actually mean that the worst cliffhanger will fall after my November break. That being said, I'm willing to try and get a chapter out on November 1 to make up for the absence on October 31. The catch? That will make the worst cliffhanger in the story fall just before the November break, rather than after it, meaning you'll be waiting 1.5 weeks to read the resolution instead of a few days. So... which would you prefer? Do you want me to try and get a chapter out on November 1 (i.e. no Halloween break, but a BAD cliffhanger in November), or just leave things as I'd originally planned (i.e. Halloween break, but a less bad stopping point in November)? Up to you all! Please let me know if you have a strong preference.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She doesn't realize how much she took for granted the ability to pull down her window shades in the morning until she can't do it anymore. The sun lashing like a whip through the tree canopy is hot and bright and intrusive, and no amount of tossing or turning or eye-squinting will make it go away. Worse still are the cadre of steroidal birds who won't stop shouting, "YAY! IT'S MORNING! ISN'T THAT FANTASTIC? IT'S SUPER FANTASTIC IF WE SAY SO OURSELVES, AND WE DO," over and over again from the branches overhead. With an unhappy sigh, she gives up on slumber and cracks open her eyelids, wiping away a spot of drool with the back of her hand.

The forest looks different by day. A verdant sprawl above. A golden mat of dead pine needles below. A white butterfly flits past on the breeze, darting from shaft of light to shaft of light. Playful squirrels chitter in the bushes beyond. If this were a less dire circumstance, she'd be excited to explore. But it isn't.

With a wince, she sits up.

Her body is a floral arrangement of pain. Red-hot poker stabs in the soles of her feet. A diffuse ache in her lower back and hips. A raspy itch at the back of her throat. Throbbing pa-pain pa-pain pa-pain in her head. And, of course, her stomach is whining, "Feed me, Seymour," in a piteous-but-demanding crescendo.

She grabs one of their waters and cracks it open, taking a sip.

Her stomach rumbles like a waking beast within seconds of her first swallow, and she can't stop her mind from wandering to coffee. A hot, steaming mugful resting on the counter in her kitchen, just waiting for her. Irish Creme, maybe. With real cream. And real sugar. And one of Lucifer's omelettes on the side. She might trade her life for an omelette right now. Or a chicken. Forget eggs. She'll take the whole chicken. Maybe, some bacon, too. Fuck, she envies Lucifer for his superior state of never-been-hungry-in-his-life.
She glances beside her hip. At some point during the night, Lucifer tipped over, and he's lying on the ground on his side, huddled in a ball under his jacket. Moss and pine needles and bark bits litter his clothes and tangle in his curling hair. Stress lines grip the corners of his eyes, even in sleep, and he looks so pale she could actually label him pasty.

Whatever substance Möbius used on him — celestial poison or otherwise — it laid waste.

Tilting her face upward, she frowns. The sun is high in the sky, and if she had to guess, she'd wager it's mid-to-late morning. Which means she and Lucifer slept for at least three or four hours. Maybe, as many as six.

Möbius has to have figured out by now that he has a pair of escapees trudging around in the woods somewhere. Unless he thinks the angel literally flew the coop. Still ….

"Lucifer?" she rasps softly, putting her hand on his arm and giving him a squeeze. "Lucifer, I think we need to get moving again."

He doesn't budge. Doesn't make a disgruntled sound of irritation at being woken. Doesn't swat her away or grouse at her. Doesn't anything.

"Lucifer?"

Nothing.

"Lucifer!" she repeats, giving him a shake. "Lucifer, wake—"

He sucks in a breath and stills, but doesn't reply.

"Are you okay?" she says, worry burgeoning.

His eyes open to slits. Sunlight reflects off his irises, turning them a rich, warm brown, but his expression is glassy and distant, absent all of his normal recognition of and regard for her. The cuffs drag along the ground as he shifts his hands closer to his belly, almost like he's protecting his soft parts from her. Which is crazy, and she's imagining things, and— She can't help but stare at the blood, some crusted, some weeping and wet, collecting around the edges of the metal at his wrists. His body is a tensing whipcord, ready to snap apart.

"Lucifer, what's wr—"

The first words out of his mouth are a rasping, confused-but-demanding, not-English jumble.

"I don't speak Angel, remember?" she jokes as butterflies kick up in her stomach. This is wrong. Something is really—

He growls at her. Actually growls. The sound is a deep, almost-subsonic noise that human vocal cords can't produce.

The hairs on the back of her neck stand on end, and goosebumps spill like waves down her forearms. She crab-walks backward, almost bruising herself on an exposed tree root in her haste to stretch the distance between them. What the hell?

"Lucifer, it's Chloe," she says, trying to stay calm. "Remember? Chloe? Wake up."

He stares at her.

"Chlo-e," she repeats slowly, enunciating both syllables.
All at once, the stranger beside her melts away, replaced by someone more familiar. He shakes his head. A miserable sound catches in the back of his throat. Then he screws his eyes shut, grimacing.

The first word he says sounds like not-English again, but he aborts speaking it before she can decide for certain. His brow furrows, and he thinks. And thinks. The faint, "De … tective?" he manages sounds brittle and without confidence, like he's still not sure he's translating thought-to-word correctly.

A lump forms in her throat. "Yeah, it's me."

"Um …." He looks into space like he's searching for something. A word. "I … um."

Scooting closer, she offers him the water bottle she already cracked open. "Do you want some?"

His gaze drifts to the bottle, pauses for a too-long count of ten, like he has no idea what he's even looking at, and then returns to her.

"Are you all right?" she says.

"What?" he begins slowly. He takes a breath. "What … happened?"

She stills. "You don't remember?"

"He … shot me."

"With a bunch of darts. Right," she says, nodding.

The silence stretches.

"You don't remember anything after that?" she prods.

"You … fussed at me to get up, and …." Lucifer trails away uncertainly. "There were … steps?"

"Möbius had me trapped in a cage, but I picked the lock. We made a run for it. You really don't remember?"

His silence is terrifying.

"Lucifer?"

"No, I …." He shakes his head. "No." He scans their surroundings with a burgeoning look of dread. "Where the bloody hell are we?"

"No clue," she says, sinking.

His elbows scrape along the ground as he tries to sit up. She caps her water bottle and shoves it to the side, and then she crawls closer to help him. He's still shaking. Like last night. Like he's been sitting in an icebox, not in the woods on a balmy summer morning.

"Are you still cold?" she says.

"… Still?"

"You kept saying you were cold last night."

His bewildered look puts a pit in her stomach as he raises his crossed wrists to his chest. He rubs his
sternum with the bottom knuckle of his thumb, like there's something underneath the bone that bothers him. Something festering. Something ….

He chameleon-ed on her last night, she realizes. He chameleon-ed everything. Every smile and reassuringly spoken darling. He was faking fine, when in reality he was so drug-addled he wasn't even forming long-term memories. He fooled her.

"Lucifer, I—"

"What the bloody hell is this?" he snaps, looking down at his bindings. Blood drips down his wrists, and he pulls so hard at them he groans. "Why have you—"

"I haven't anything!" she replies. "Those are from Möbius."

"No."

She blinks. "No?"

But then she realizes he isn't even processing what she's saying. He's staring at the handcuffs, eyes widening. Even in the bald daylight, the metal gleams unnaturally, like it's lit from within. The weird red scribbles ooze and throb like they're alive.

"No," he repeats with an edge of desperation. "No, no. These are destroyed. He destroyed them. He bloody destroyed them. I watched."

"Who destroyed what?" Chloe says, frowning. "Lucifer, what the hell are you talking about?"

He holds out his wrists. "You have to get them off."

"But I can't—"

"You have to get them off," he says. "Please, get them off."

She touches the harsh metal, shaking her head. "Lucifer, these are—"

"No," he snaps. "You have to get them off me. Get them off me, now."

She stares at him, not sure what to do. The cuffs are solid metal. Metal that doesn't look like it's from Earth. Even a blacksmith is going to have a bear of a time removing them. What exactly does he expect her to do in the middle of the woods with no tools?

He shakes his wrists at her. "Get them off me," he says, tone rising in pitch. "Get them off me. Get them off."

"Lucifer," she says, horrified, at a loss, "I don't—"

He whips into motion, whacking his arms against the tree they slept against last night. His jacket falls off his shoulders. The cuffs catch on the bark, tearing away bits and pieces. The tree trunk cracks up the middle, groaning under his onslaught. Biceps bulging, he scrapes at the splintered wood like he expects to peel the cuffs off by force, but all that accomplishes is peeling more skin away. Blood runs down his shaking arms.

"Lucifer!" she snaps, grabbing his shoulders, trying to pull him back. "Lucifer, stop!"

But he shrugs her away like she's no more than a fly. "They have to come off," he says. "They have to come off. Get them off me."
"We'll find someone to—"

"GET THEM OFF ME," he roars so loudly the birds all stutter into silence.

He wrenches to the left, falling onto his back in the pine needles, panting, struggling. He looks up at the bright blue sky, which stretches to infinity above the canopy. His eyes almost bug out of his head. His nostrils flare. "No," he says, yanking on the cuffs, twisting, writhing. "No. No. NO." Then his panting becomes choking and sputtering. He reaches back like he's trying to grab for his neck, like he thinks his throat is closing, but the cuffs restrict his movement too much. He flails. And then he isn't even yelling anymore; he's just trying to breathe, and he can't. He can't anything.

For a moment, she's too stunned to do anything but gape.

This is the Devil.

How in the hell did the Bible get everything so wrong?

Then common sense kicks in.

"Lucifer," she says in a low, soothing tone as she inches closer to him. "Lucifer, listen to me. You're having a panic attack. Okay? Just breathe in through your nose and count to three. Blow it out through your mouth and count to three. Match me. Just breathe. I'm right here." She shows him an exaggerated example, hoping he'll be able to latch onto it.

For a too-long moment, he doesn't even seem to register that she's speaking. She picks up his trembling, ice-cold hand and squeezes it. "I'm here, okay?" she says. Keeps saying. "I'm right here. Just breathe in and count to three."

The moments stretch like taffy. He isn't doing what she tells him to, but she doesn't let that matter. Sometimes, people stuck in the middle of a panic attack are so far gone they can't do anything but suffer. Not because they're weak, or because they're handling it wrong, but because their bodies are rebellious assholes with minds of their own.

So, she keeps repeating herself. "Breathe in and count to three."

"I'm going to die," he says, breathless and quiet and small.

She shakes her head. "No, you are not. You're not dying. I know it feels like that, but you're not. I promise."

A soft, panicked moan gets stuck in his throat. He rolls into a fetal position.

"It's okay," she says, rubbing her hand down his arm. "Just breathe. I'm here."

The attack decked him like a tsunami, but it recedes like a tide, and it takes way too long before he finds a way to pull in air without gasping. By the time it's over, his face is ashen, and he's damp with sweat. His whole body is racked with tremors that won't abate.

"Please, get them off me," he says when he finds his voice again. Not a demand, anymore. A desperate, quiet plea. "Please. I'll be good. I'll be …."

"Lucifer, I don't know how," she has to tell him, innards sinking.

He doesn't say anything after that. Not for a long time.
He sits with his back against the tree, staring over his knees into space with an empty, traumatized gaze, and she doesn't know what to do. Leave him be? Bother him? Leaving him be while staying close and keeping him company seems to be the most intuitively correct plan from a psychological-health standpoint, but from a physical-health standpoint … they can't afford to sit here all day. With limited water, no food, and a psychopath probably chasing them, they should have moved on already.

A warm breeze rifles through the forest with unseen fingers, making all the leaves rustle and bushes shudder. She licks her lips, watching him watch … nothing.

"I need," he says in a soft, disturbed tone, before she can make a decision one way or the other about what to do. "I need … s-something."

"What?"

"I don't know. I'm … cold."

Without speaking, she scoots across the cool, damp dirt, closing the small gap between their bodies, and she wraps her arm over his shoulder. He's racked with whole-body tremors. Still. Even after waking. Even after his panic attack has long subsided. Even after baking in a hot shaft of morning sunlight for what feels like hours. She wraps her other arm across his chest, pulling him close, and he lets her. His weight sinks into her keeping. His nose presses into her hair.

"I'm …," he says by her ear, bewildered, lost. His bloody, bound hands rest by her belly. He kisses her temple. "Thank you, darling, but the chill isn't temperature-related."

"How can I help, then?" she says.

"You ... can't," he replies. A miserable, pained syllable that says nothing and everything catches in his chest. He rubs his thumb along his sternum again, expression troubled. "It's ... a hollowness. Inside. Expanding like a balloon, and I don't ...." He sucks in a breath like breaths as weights are heavy and hard to lift. "I won't be able to fly us home. Wherever home is from here. I'm ...." He shakes his head. "I'm very sorry."

Her stomach drops into her shoes. She didn't realize how much she'd been hoping for that miraculous, easy out until he took the possibility away from her. "Well, that's okay. We'll find some other way back," she assures him. Assures herself. She pulls her fingers through his hair. "Don't worry about that."

A soft, sick sound loiters in his throat. He swallows, resting against her. Shivering.

"Do you have any idea what Möbius dosed you with?" she says.

"This isn't from drugs, Detective."

"What do you mean?"

He lifts his hands. The metal of the cuffs gleams in an odd, incandescent way that isn't congruous with the existing sunlight. They're ... wrong. And looking at them sets her teeth on edge.


"Wait, these are angel handcuffs?" she says, blinking at them in wonder. "As in from Heaven?"
"These are a torture device is what they are," Lucifer replies in a disgusted tone. "Meant to subdue all but God and Goddess. There is nothing angelic about them. Though, yes, you would be correct to say that they were forged in the fires of Heaven."

She stares at the sharp edges of the thick metal rings encircling his wrists. At the blood crusting his ravaged skin. Torture would … make sense. The handcuffs used by law enforcement are typically constructed with rounded edges. One can still be hurt by struggling too hard while bound, but, at least, the damage wrought by doing so is typically limited to bruising. These angel cuffs, while not barbed or insidiously lined with spikes, have edges that come together without any beveling whatsoever. Like a sharp table edge, or …. This Raguel guy clearly didn't care about comfort.

"I'm sorry," she says. "They look … painful."


"Do you know if they have a key or something?" she says. "A magic word that unlocks them? Open sesame? Anything?"

"If they've a way to open them, I've never been made privy. I've only ever seen them removed by force."

"What kind of force?"

His biceps bulge as he tests them again. Fresh blood weeps down his arms, dripping off his elbows. And then a soft, frantic gasp fills the space between them as his earlier panic starts to reignite. He pulls the cuffs to his chest and starts to twist and yank and—

"Lucifer," she says, grabbing at him, trying to get purchase on the cuffs. His wrists are so slick with blood that her fingers slip. "Stop."

"But I need to get them off," he rasps, panting. "Please, I need to—"

"Lucifer, stop!" she snaps, leaning forward to intercede with her whole body. "Stop," she repeats as she succumbs to gravity and flops down on top of him, trapping his bloody hands underneath her. If he were human, his arms would be pinned to his body, and his body would be pinned to the ground. He wouldn't have any room to maneuver. But he isn't human. He could easily eject her. "Stop." Her intervention is more symbolic than anything else. "Stop, okay? Please, stop."

"But—"

"Stop struggling, Lucifer. You're just hurting yourself."

"You don't under—"

"I desire you to stop," she says firmly.

He ceases except for his trembling and his ragged panting. Carefully, she leans back on her knees, climbing off of him. He looks at her like a starving man wants chocolate. Rapacious. Desperate. Wild-eyed. But he doesn't struggle anymore.

"You trust me," she says. Not a question.

Still, he answers, "Of course, I bloody do."

"Then trust me when I say we'll figure out how to get them off. I promise you. Yeah? But you have
to stop picking at them until then."

He jerks an inch, twisting. "I cannot abide them," he says. "I can't."

"Well, I don't think you have a choice right now," she replies. The wrong words. She realizes her mistake as soon as she speaks, but by then, it's too late, and Lucifer looks at her like she just cut out his heart with a butter knife.

"He … tricked me," Lucifer says, breathless. "My brother. He told me he wanted to understand, and I foolishly believed him. He took away my choice."

"I am not your brother, Lucifer," she says slowly, soothing, trying to keep him calm. "My single-minded goal, here, is to keep you from shredding your arms to the literal bone. Okay? That's it. I'm not trying to take anything away from you."

His biceps bulge.

"Don't do it," she pleads. "Please, don't do it."

With a frustrated growl, he squeezes his eyes shut. He takes a breath and blows it out.


And he does.

"Take a breath, and blow it out."

And he does.

"Breathe in. Breathe out."

And he does.

The moments stretch. The sun continues its arcing path over the sky. The wind rustles in the trees. Beyond that and the birds, though … silence. A thick, meaty silence, as rich as a prime filet.

There's no distant sound of traffic. No voices. No construction zone with jackhammers clanking and clattering. No hints of anything wrought by or brought by humans. For miles.

Aside from Lucifer, these woods represent true solitude.

Sure, she's been camping with Trixie before, but on campgrounds. Full of other campers. And park rangers.

"Detective, are you all right?" Lucifer says softly.

She scrubs the stinging tears out of her eyes. "I just miss Trixie." She sniffs. "And Dan. And …."

She swallows. "Everything."

"Ah," Lucifer says, frowning.

With a watery look, she gives him the best smile she can manage and says, "But, hey, at least the company I do have is nice."
He blinks, looking momentarily stunned. Another blink, and his obsidian eyes soften. Another blink after that, and a grin tugs at the corners of his lips. "Yes," he says. "Likewise." A mischievous glint fills his gaze. "Though, I admit, in my fantasy desert-island scenario, the handcuffs involved were yours, not my blasted brother's."

She laughs. "You have a desert-island fantasy?"

"Who doesn't, Detective?"

Which … good point. Blush sprawls across her cheeks, and she looks away to clear her throat. "Do you think you're ready to walk?" she says, since he seems to have found equilibrium and then some.

He nods, sobering, picking up their water bottles as he rises. With an irritated look of distaste at the streaked, muddy stains on the knees of his suit, he bends over to brush futilely at his legs with his hands. But no amount of fussing is going to save him from walking around in filth, and he gives up quickly. Grabbing his jacket from its crumpled dirty pile on the ground, she shakes it out with a violent flick and then drapes it over his trembling shoulders.

"Want me to tie the sleeves around you so it doesn't fall off again?" she says.

For a moment, he doesn't reply. He only grits his teeth. "All right."

In a flash of inspiration, she pulls the sleeves through his armpits and ties them behind his shoulder blades, turning the jacket into somewhat of a cape. He endures her care in silence, staring into empty space like he went for an out-of-body jaunt. When she makes a move to take the water bottles from him, he reanimates, shrugging her away with a soft, "They're hardly a burden for me, Detective. Save your strength for the moments that require it."

Which is logic she can't exactly argue with, given that he's basically Superman with feathers.

They fall into step, side by side, and press off into the brush.

They don't really talk.

She gets the impression that Lucifer, for once, feels a bit talked out. Panic attacks will do that — wring one out like an abused sponge, mentally, physically. So, she drifts, content to be in her own head, thinking about the insane past few weeks she's had.

The more she thinks, though, the more she arrives at the same conclusion.

Insane is a huge fucking understatement.

"Is Möbius your brother?" she says as Lucifer lifts the branches of a sapling out of the way.

He frowns at her as he allows the branch to fall back into place behind them. "Whatever drew you to that conclusion?"

"It's just …." She glowers as a grasping little weed catches around her ankle, and she pauses to kick it loose. "I've been trying to figure out why some psychopath on Earth would have magical angel handcuffs," she says, kicking once, twice. The weed lets go, and she returns her attention to Lucifer. "From his many offhanded comments, he's got some history with you, so … I thought it stood to reason: Möbius equals Raguel?"

"Ah," says Lucifer with a nod of understanding. "Excellent deductions, Detective, but, no. Mr.
Möbius isn't Raguel. I've not seen Raguel in some time."

"Oh." Well, there goes that theory.

Lucifer's temples dance as he glares into the distance, clenching and unclenching his jaw. "I like to think the reason I've not seen him again is because he's rotting in a pile of fratricidal guilt somewhere, given what he did to me." He shrugs. Sighs. "Wishful thinking, I'm certain, but …." He twists his shoulders, pulling on the cuffs like he can't help himself.

She frowns. "Lucifer …."

"The cuffs are here because I fell with them," he admits.

"Because you fell with them," she parrots, staring. "Like … Fell, fell."

"Yes, Detective," he replies with a nod. "That fall. The Fall." He looks down. "My fall."

Her stomach flip-flops.

"The cuffs prevent me from flying," he explains. "I can't …." He grinds his teeth. "I can feel my wings behind me in the ether, but I can't … touch them. They're beyond me. They don't … listen. Somewhat like paralyzed limbs, I suppose. I'm a metaphysical paraplegic."

She frowns. "But why the hell would Möbius disable you with a pair of handcuffs that make you unable to use your wings? Your wings are the whole reason he wanted you in the first place."

"He doesn't know that's how they work," Lucifer says with a shrug. "He only knows they make me …." He pauses for a moment, lip curling in disgust as he searches for a word. He settles on, "Weak," spitting the word like it's a curse.

Lucifer the Morning Star does not like weakness.

Either the appearance of it, or its actual presence.

"So … who the hell is this guy, then, Lucifer?" she says. "I mean …."

"Who the hell." Lucifer snorts softly with amusement. "An appropriate question indeed."

"I don't understand."

He sighs. "Detective, Asaiah Möbius is a demon."

"Well, that definitely makes sense, but—"

"His real name is Asmodeus. He's been one of my lieutenants for millennia." Lucifer gives her an apologetic look. "He's … mine, I suppose you could say. Or, well, I used to think he was, at any rate."

Chapter End Notes

On Sunday: Lucifer POV! Excited?

Also, believe it or not, I actually picked this villain well before I watched the latest
season of Supernatural. Isn't that wacky?
Chapter Notes

There seems to be some recurring confusion about what I meant when I said in the introductory notes that Castaway was done.

What I did mean: I’ve written at least a rough draft of the whole story. My betas have already reviewed and provided me with comments and suggestions on all chapters. I’m absolutely 100% certain, barring grievous injury, illness, or other tragic circumstance, that I will be able to provide you with the entirety of the story, from chapter 1 to the yay-it’s-all-fixed-now ending, in a reliable, timely manner.

What I absolutely did not under any circumstance mean: I’m not working on this story anymore. Posting it is a matter of clicking submit.

Reality check number one: Castaway exists on my hard drive as a second draft right now. Not a final draft. I polish from 2nd draft to final draft as I post. This polishing can take me upwards of 6-8 hours per chapter, all told. At 2 chapters a week, that means I’m still spending as many as 16 hours a week working on this story.

Reality check number two: Say Castaway was completely finished, and I wasn’t doing any additional work on it. It still takes time to format each chapter for posting. It still takes time to read, digest, and reply to reader comments (which is honestly my favorite part of posting a story, and you couldn’t pry this savory treat from my cold dead hands). It still takes time to promote via posting links on Tumblr and Twitter. Even if I weren’t editing at all anymore, Castaway would still take me 1-3 hours per chapter to post. Which means that even if Castaway were completely finished from beginning to end, we’re still talking 2-6 hours a week dedicated to posting it.

The appearance of this fic on Ao3 isn’t magical or effortless on my part. I worked. I’m still working. Literally, posting Castaway is a part-time job. And I would greatly appreciate it if you all would keep that in mind. Thank you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The crater smokes for a day and a night, and the air is hot and thick with the foul stink of brimstone.

Samael remains curled up at the center of the flaming ruin, exhausted, spurned, shivering despite the heat. The fire of his descent scorched his vestments away. All that remains are the insidious cuffs Raguel used to trap him with.

Corporeality tugs on Samael’s wings once. Twice. At first, he can grit his teeth and resist it. But then it yanks so hard the whiplash stupefies him. Two massive, sprawling weights tear out from his back, wrenched forcibly into a plane where they’re not meant to be, because his body has no divinity left to keep them aloft. Harrowed, he digs his fingers into the charred earth, yelling until he has nothing left. Nothing. He flops back to the ground on his side, panting. Crying.

Was this God’s plan?
Samael pulls once at the cuffs. Again. Barely-scabbed-over skin breaks open anew. The cuffs hold fast.

Breathing hurts. Like a great weight has settled on his chest.

Cold grips his body with talons that sink deep into his bone marrow.

His last bit of inner fire is a flickering, sputtering spark, the barest skeleton of what was once a conflagration.

And he can't.

Can't anything.

His muscles go slack. His forehead thunks against the dirt. His wings lie limp and lifeless, too heavy to lift.

It's in this moment that the Lightbringer gives up, and he waits for Death to come.

Hands touch his bleeding wrists, and then his face, and then the curve of bone that shapes his right wing.

"Well, well, what in Hell has Heaven spit out, now?" says a sepulchral voice. "You've the look of an archangel."

When Samael squints through his gritty eyelashes, all he sees is a blur of light and dark. He swallows, breaths rasping in his chest. "Rae?" he croaks, trembling. "Rae, please."

"Ray of what?" replies the blurry thing. "I am no ray. Certainly not of sunshine, anyway."

"Then … leave me … b-be."

The hands brush his wrists again, and Samael can do nothing but allow himself to be touched. "Quite an interesting device," says the thing. "Complex. Unique locking mechanism. Beautiful metal. Reeks of the divine. Tell me, archangel, what have you done to warrant such scorn from your brethren?"

Samael tries to drag himself away.

Which only prompts the blur to step on his wing, preventing any escape.

Samael is too spent to cry out. Too spent to fight back. Too spent. Perhaps the thing will kill him, and Rae will finally come?

"And what good would killing you do for me, precisely?" the thing says as if Samael has spoken aloud. "I'm not in the habit of doing favors for free."

"Then … leave me," Samael requests again.

The thing laughs, sibilant and ghoulish. "Well, now, that wouldn't do me any good, either, would it?" There's a sound of scraping dirt as it sits down beside him. The hand is back on Samael's wings, stroking in a way that makes his stomach churn. "No, no, I think perhaps we've an opportunity for mutual benefit." A thumb lingers at the tip of Samael's left alula feather, petting. "Does the idea … titillate?"

Samael looks away. "I don't consort with … d-demons."
"Well, I think you'll need to revise that strategy, given where you've crash landed, yes?"

"No."

"Indeed."

The flames at the edges of the crater crackle and flicker. The brimstone stench and the demon's forced closeness make Samael queasy.

"I can remove the cuffs, you know," it purrs. "For a price."

"You can't—"

"Oh, but I can!" it replies happily. "I'm a student of the arcane arts, you see. Illusion. Defense. And these cuffs, while complex, while divine, while *exquisite*, will bow easily enough to an antithetical force — read: demonic — I'm quite certain."

Samael sucks in a quivering breath. "What do you … want?"

"Why, it's simple, really," it says. "I desire power, and at present, I've none. The base, combative wretches on this plane have little use for what they've deemed 'hocus pocus,' unfortunately."

Samael looses a bitter, wheezing laugh. "Do I look … p-powerful to you?"

"Not a present, no," it admits. "At present, I daresay you look rather pathetic."

"Then how—"

"Oh, come, now," it says. "You're an archangel in a land of demons. You'll have power the moment you choose to seize it. All I ask in return for my aid is that you take me with you for your ascent. Allow me to serve, and I shall serve." Another sibilant laugh coils in the air like snakes. "Your divine word, of course, will be my guiding light."

A cough racks Samael's frame, and he shivers as a small spark of hope sets him ablaze. He doesn't wish to die for the sake of preserving his will. That was *never* his wish. And, though this demon is making fun — cracks about divine word and all — what does it matter if the demon thinks an archangel ruling Hell is funny, as long as it keeps its word? Breaking the cuffs is the prerequisite to any hypothetical ascent, after all. All Samael needs is to be free and replenished, and he could smite this little cockroach into ash, were it necessary.

"You will destroy the cuffs, not merely break them," Samael says. Not a question. A demand.

The demon nods. "I quite love a good disintegration spell. Not my specialty, I'll admit, but I believe I can muddle through."

"Do it."

The demon clucks its tongue. "You're not my ruler, yet, my imperious, feathered charge. Do we have a deal? Destruction of the cuffs in exchange for Hell's stewardship?"

Samael is too weak to lift his arms. With an amused snort, the demon bends over and does the work for them both, clasping Samael's cold hand with its rough palm, and then giving it a shake. "All right, then," says the demon. "The die is cast. Now … allow me to get—"

The cuffs pop open without fanfare or lightshow. The demon lifts Samael's wrecked, bloody wrists and pulls the heavy metal away. A hot, hellish wind blows against his newly naked skin.
"Well, then!" says the demon.

The crushing, enervating pain of emptiness recedes, and the weight lifts off Samael's chest. He sucks in breath after cleansing breath. He's weak, still. Spent. So spent he can't lift a limb. His vast reservoir will take a long time to refill, even with strength crashing back into him like water tumbling over a cliff.

"How did you …?" Samael exclaims, breathless.

"Pfft," the demon is quick to reply. "Not all magic is about shock and awe, as you should well know, given how you'd been ensnared."

True.

The world fades as he lies back in the dirt, exhausted, relief so overwhelming in his weakened state that he feels dizzy. He hears the snarl of a zipper being opened. The creak of a rucksack's leather flap stretching. Time grows fuzzy until the demon grabs at him again.

"What should I call you?" says Samael shakily as the demon sits him up.

"Asmodeus," replies the demon. "And you?"

Samael swallows, blinking. His vision is returning. Slowly. The bleak Hellscape that forms the horizon is full of jagged blue crags, bloody, billowing clouds, and a midnight-colored sky. It's … nothing like home. "I was … Samael," he says softly. But Samael was "of God," and in this scorched, blasted land he … can't be.

Asmodeus nods. His face is a ruinous mess of scars and scrapes. "And now? What name do you desire?"

Samael looks down at his bloody wrists, now free. A lump forms in his throat. He has a choice, now. "I … don't know."

"Well, then," says Asmodeus, "you'll let me know when you've decided?"

Nodding, Samael's gaze shifts to the cuffs lying broken in the burnt dirt. "You haven't—"

"Yes, yes," Asmodeus says with a toothy, gleaming smile. "Calm yourself, not-Samael." He picks up the cuffs, turning them over with his gnarled claws. "I merely wanted you awake and aware for this part. This, after all, should more than satisfy any latent desire for shock and awe."

Sure enough, the light that flares between Asmodeus's palms is white like the hottest holy fire. Samael, not healed, yet, not resilient, has to look away, wincing. The brilliance fades after several moments, and when Samael looks again … the cuffs are gone, and a pile of ebony-colored ash resides at Asmodeus's feet, pieces of it blowing away in the dry wind.

"Thank you," Samael says.

Asmodeus's golden eyes glitter. "You're quite welcome," he purrs, nodding solicitously. "Now, let's get you somewhere safe, shall we?" He points across the crater. Up the sloping, dirty hill. Into the distance. "My home is that way, and you seem as though you require rest."

Rest.

Samael's heart constricts.
"Yes," he says. "I …." He looks away, blinking frantically to stop the spillage before the demon sees it, which only drags his attention to the spreading pile of ash again. The cuffs that almost killed him. *Samael, you shame me*, his father said. With a brittle, shaky sigh, Samael rubs his face with his trembling hands. "I'm … v-very tired."

"Understandable," says Asmodeus, grimacing as Samael almost falls against him in his struggle to stand. "This way, dear."

Bankrupt in mind and body, Samael allows himself to be ushered into Hell, his lusterless, lifeless wings dragging behind him in the dirt.

"He's … mine, I suppose you could say. Or, well, I used to think he was, at any rate."

Lucifer blinks as the memories melt away, into their distant time and place. The cuffs are a cold, maddening weight around his wrists. The sun shines bright against his eyes like a holy censure. Wind rustles through the trees. An insect buzzes.

For a long moment, Chloe only gapes at him, like his admission caused some sort of short circuit behind her lovely eyes. Which is exactly what he didn't want. He takes a pained breath despite the crushing emptiness pressing on his sternum, constricting his ribs. A cold, pervasive ache encroaches, throbbing in his joints. In his muscles. In his head. Asmodeus's was a truth that needed to be spoken, but …. Lucifer clears his throat and looks away, not ready for her judgment. Not after everything.

"You're telling me," Chloe says slowly, "that this fucking psychopath — the asshole who's been running around L.A., murdering people for their parts and then violently kidnapping us — is your … your … your …." She gesticulates impotently as she runs out of words that work for her tirade.

"… Contractor?" he suggests hesitantly.

"And you didn't recognize him?" she blurs.

His body won't stop trembling. "Detective, the Asmodeus I knew and worked with was a demon who looked as though his head had been dunked in a boiling vat and left there until his skin turned to shoe leather. I'd never had the occasion or desire to see his glamour. I recognized him immediately in his office."

"Hence the smoking crater you left in place of his desk."

"Yes."

"For God's sake, why?"

On any other day, at any other moment, Lucifer might snark, *I assure you, nothing I've done since Falling was for his sake.* But he doesn't want to antagonize her any further, and he knows her well enough by now to know saying that will antagonize her further and then some. Instead, he takes a heavy breath, struggling not to fidget with the cuffs. "Why did I smite him, you mean?"

"I mean, why did you fucking work with that monster?"

He clenches his fists. "Because I had to."

"No one has to work with something like that."

"My choice was that or die."
She blinks. Another short circuit. "But …." Her heart is pounding as she flounders for some explanation that fits her flagging worldview. "But … after? You didn't have to after."

"I don't break deals, Detective."

"Even when you made a deal under duress with a lying, murderous psychopath?"

"My word is my bond," he says, gritting his teeth. "It is the one principle that I've managed to hold onto—" The past year crashes into him like a lightning strike, burning his last bastion to ash. "I …." His heart constricts. He shakes his head. These are not thoughts for now. He can't bear it. "—Despite losing everything else."

"But—"

"Chloe," he begins softly, "I am not human. Hell is not like Earth. This image that you have of Asmodeus as a psychopath … Perhaps by your standards, yes, he is a psychopath, but he is tame compared to some of the things I've encountered over the millennia. His actions on this plane are tame compared to some of the things I myself have done."

She stares at him for a moment, lower lip starting to tremble. "I don't believe that."

"When have I ever lied to you?" he says.

"When you're busy lying to yourself?" she replies. "All the fucking time."

"But—"

"No," she says, holding up a hand to shush him. "No, no, no." She pinches the bridge of her nose, inhaling and exhaling in slow, measured breaths. Like she's trying to force calm into a container where it won't fit. "I'm …." She shudders. "I don't want to talk about this right now. I-I … I can't talk about this right now. I need a minute."

His chest tightens. "All right."

The forest around him seems to throb in and out of focus. The verdant green bleeds and wavers, and the sunlight breaking through the treetops grows haloes. He closes his eyes, looking for fortitude in feigned privacy, but he has no fortitude to find.

One nauseated swallow, and the darkness behind his eyes starts to ooze. Another, and his sense of Chloe standing beside him stretches to the horizon like melting caramel. Another, and the ground vanishes out from underneath him, leaving nothing between him and gravity but empty space. And then he's falling. Falling like he's stuck in the liminal moments before one enters the Dreaming, when one still has a vague sense of reality, even as unreality unfurls like a flower around the mind.

Except he's not trying to sleep.

With a startled yelp, he reaches out. His fingertips find something warm and solid, and he can't help but clutch.

There's a pained gasp. His? Hers?

"Lucifer?" he thinks he hears her calling from the void. "Lucifer!"

And then, with a blink, he's back in the woods, feeling hollowed out, and the ground is firmly pressed beneath his feet. Nausea roils. He swallows once more, trying to regain his bearings. The
oozing feeling that before only existed behind his eyes now exists in front of them, too. But …

"Are you okay?" Chloe says, staring at him with the panicked, concerned severity of someone watching a car crash. Her hands grip his belt loops, like she was trying to hold him upright in his absence.

He swallows as a shiver racks his frame. "I've … felt better," he tries to joke. Jokes reassure. He wants to reassure her.

But Chloe's frown only deepens, and her panicked concern grows a jagged branch of incomprehension.

"I'll manage," he amends, forcing a smile. "It's certainly not the worst I've ever felt."

Her incomprehension doesn't wane. "Lucifer … I don't … have a clue what you're saying."

He grimaces.

English. English, he thinks at himself. English, English, English. The detective bloody speaks in bloody English. Lucifer Morningstar himself has been speaking English as a default since the 1170s, little more than a century after the Battle of Hastings. Once the Normans had indelibly cocked up every corner of the language with their own leavings. English.


The relief in her eyes is palpable. "It's okay." Her fingers are warm at his hips, flexing as she grips him tightly. "You're … okay to walk?"

"I'll … manage," he says, stepping away to demonstrate. And he does manage, somehow, not to wobble.

"Okay," she says with a clipped nod, and she turns away from him to pick up the water bottles, which he dropped … at some point. When did he …? "Let's … keep moving, then."

She plods ahead without waiting for him to reply. Like she can't stretch the distance between them fast enough, now that she believes he's not in imminent danger of collapse. He shambles after her, a growing hollow pit in his stomach that has nothing to do with the drain of the cuffs.

She's still stuck a little bit in denial, stuck in that place where Lucifer is a metaphor and there is no Heaven or Hell. What's real is what she can see, smell, hear, touch, and taste. But she's a climber clinging to a cliff face, miles above a broken, ragged ravine. Her fingers are slipping. She'll fall, soon.

This will be the time he finally convinces her he's a monster.

This will be it, and then what will he do?

Die alone, probably.

Trembling, he takes a pained breath that isn't enough. And another. And another. Trying all the while not to wrestle futilely with his constricted wrists. The detective is walking too fast. The cuffs are getting heavy. Everything is getting heavy.
Please, help me, he stoops to thinking.

At him.

Raguel.

Just once. No groveling.

Not that Lucifer thinks he'll get an answer, even when he asks with dignity.

Watching Chloe tromp ahead, he rubs his aching sternum with the bottom knuckle of his thumb.

Was this God's plan?

He hopes not.

Chapter End Notes

Majority has spoken - I'll be going dark for Halloween. Next chapter will be posted on 11/04. See you soon :)
They slog through the bushes and the weeds and the saplings and the vines and the mud and the buzzing insects and the tangled, clinging, sticky spider webs for what feels like hours, though it might be minutes. It's impossible to tell without her watch or her phone. The sun might be moving overhead. The shadows might be lengthening into a late afternoon state. But … is it? Are they? Or is she imagining things?

*I'd rather not spend eternity on the Devil's grudge list,* Asmodeus said. *He does hold a rather impressive grudge, doesn't he?*

Grimacing, she slaps a whining mosquito to bits as it lands on her neck. This is … Hell. That's what this misery is. Where else could they be that a full night and a day of walking wouldn't, at least, dump them onto a path somewhere? Or a gravel road. Anything. Certainly not Southern California.

Most of Southern California is desert. Full of cacti. And sand. Like Death Valley. Sequoia would fit the endless forest motif, but … with its massive trees, Sequoia has a distinctive look that this place doesn't match. The largest trees here are large, but they aren't mythic. Sequoia is also teeming with tourists and patrolled by park rangers this time of year. And what would be the odds of not running into a single hiker or ranger during a hike longer than a marathon? California just isn't this empty.

*And so here we are,* Lucifer said. *At an impasse. A human and her monster of a partner.*

Her feet hurt. Her head hurts. Everything hurts. But her heart hurts the most.

*Oh, he's playing nice for you, then?* Asmodeus said. *How quaint.*

She doesn't get it. She *doesn't.* Asmodeus insists Lucifer is a monster. *Lucifer* keeps insisting Lucifer is a monster. But everything she knows about Lucifer through direct experience tells her otherwise.

He judges, yes, but he isn't judge-y. He's generous. He's funny. He's artistic. He has an extroverted, effervescent love of life that's both infectious and exhilarating to be around. He's loyal to an absolutely self-destructive fault. He's kind, too, when given adequate reason.

The worst things she can say about him are that he's prideful, cynical, aloof, self-absorbed, and has the annoying tendency for tone-deafness when it comes to intuiting the feelings of those around him.

But … the bad qualities do not a monster make.

Everyone has faults.

Faults are what make humans human.

And his particular faults are made even more understandable — not less — by the fact that
he isn't human. The cynicism, aloofness, and tone-deafness in particular. She could only hope to interact as well as he does when surrounded by an entirely different species of sentients, a species that, for millennia stacked on end, he only saw the worst sides of.

She shakes her head.

His breaths chuff like a train behind her. His steps are heavy and plodding — not graceful like usual — and the sound of his lumbering gait drags her back into reality. He doesn't speak. Doesn't try to prod her into conversation.

He makes it too easy for her to crawl into her own head and put up barricades. All she has to do is state a desire, and he'll grant it, if it's within his power to grant, no matter his feelings on the matter. Another flaw. For all he centers his life around the fulfillment of desire, he seems largely to ignore his own. Or, perhaps … he thinks his desires aren't worth mentioning.

Which is ….

Her chest tightens.

She slows to a halt under the shade of a huge, sprawling pine. The needles whisper in the wind as she drops to her butt in the dirt, panting. He lurches to a stop beside her, swallowing repeatedly like he thinks he might throw up. His hair is slicked flat with sweat, and his eyes are glassy. He lowers himself to the ground with a debility that seems to far exceed her own.

"Lucifer, are you … okay?" she says hesitantly into the too-long silence. "I mean, beyond the obvious not-okayness."

He clenches his trembling fingers into fists and then releases them. His bloody wrists, at least, seem to have scabbed over again. "I'm … knackered."

She nods, reaching for their dwindling water supply. "Me, too."

He doesn't reply to that. Doesn't do anything but set his back against the tree, pull his knees to his chest, press his elbows against his thighs, and let his eyes close, chin resting in the cold metal cradle forced between his wrists by the cuffs. His rasping, rapid breaths thicken and slow. Like he's dozing sitting up.

"I don't think we're in California," she muses. "At least not Southern California. Maybe NoCal. Like … near Oregon."

He twitches. "Astute. My thoughts as well."

"You think we're in Oregon?"

But he doesn't answer.

"What's sortie mean?" she wonders.

Silence stretches.

"Lucifer?"

"Hmm," he says like he's only half listening.

Her stomach rumbles, and her mind wanders back to chicken. And bacon. And french fries. And burgers. Hell, even kale seems appetizing at this point. Eyes pricking as her misery burgeons, she
takes a sip of water, but it doesn't help. Nothing helps the gnawing emptiness in her gut.

"I'm so hungry I could eat my hand," she lets herself whine. Just once. Just to get it out of her system. She sniffs.

A soft, amused snort fills the silence. "If you eat a hand, eat mine," he says, wheezing. "At least, then, I could get these bloody cuffs off and fly you to a buffet."

"Chinese?" she says, staring dreamily into space at dancing plates of moo shu pork. And kung pao chicken. And beef-and-broccoli stir fry. "I love Chinese buffets."

"In China, if you like," he replies. "All you can eat. Whatever you desire."

She swallows, salivating as the plates dancing in her head join some chopsticks for a do-si-do. Until she realizes she's piteously moaning aloud. She claps her hands over her mouth, gaze darting to Lucifer, but his unseeing stare is thousand-yard. Her heart twists again at the sight of him sagging against his knees like his spine isn't up to doing any more work.

"Lucifer?" she says quietly.

"Hmm?"

"Can I … um." She bites her lip. "Do you mind if …?" She shifts across the dirt, closer to him. Until the space between their bodies wanes to nothing. "I'm just …." The words keep getting stuck, so she holds out her arms, telegraphing her plans, giving him ample chance to nope out, but he doesn't.

He takes a rough, rickety breath, his distant gaze softening as he focuses on her face instead of the horizon. They collide like puzzle pieces that were meant all along to interlock. She curls up against him, slinging an arm underneath the haven of his wrists. His chin presses against her crown. She takes a blustering breath as she rests her nose against his trembling shoulder.

"Thanks," she says, lump in her throat. "I really needed this."

"It's … not precisely a hardship on my part," he replies softly.

"I thought you didn't like hugging."

He shrugs. "It would be more accurate to say that I find it baffling."

"This is baffling to you?"

"No," he admits. "It's … not baffling when it's with you."

She stills. "You … desire this?"

But he doesn't answer, save for the way his weight seems to sink further into her keeping. Or … she's imagining things. Maybe.

Reading Lucifer Morningstar is a type of fluency she hasn't yet acquired, though she wants to.

She's trying.

He's her best friend, after all, his frustrating aloofness notwithstanding.

He's her complement.
Her … more.

A distant rat-a-tat-tat of a woodpecker having a party echoes through the air. A balmy breeze ruffles her sweaty hair. She strokes his arm idly, listening to the trees creak and bow to the wind.

She's not sure what possesses her to do it. Kiss him. Her lips brush against his jawline.

"Detective," he says, flinching, surprised. No, stunned. No … flabbergasted.

She continues along his throat, stopping at his pulse point to nuzzle him. His skin is rough with stubble, and he tastes of salt and sap. Then she pecks him on the lips, and with a sigh, settles against his shivering frame, scrunching up tents of his ruined shirt between her fingers as she snuggles closer. He makes her feel safe. And she wouldn't want anyone else on Earth to be in her corner right now.

"I'm not ignoring the Möbius stuff," she tells him evenly. "I'm just postponing the part where we talk about it. And I'm betting a little, I guess."

"Betting?" he says, frowning.

She shrugs. "I'm betting you can't provide a context that'll make me not want to kiss you anymore."

"But—"

"Not right now," she says gently. "Okay?"

He sighs. "All right."

She listens to the birds. And to his heartbeat. His steady, plodding, all-too-human-like heartbeat. And they rest.

When she rouses again, the sun hangs so low in the sky she can't see it over the trees anymore. The sky above is blue, but only barely, as the pinks and oranges of an encroaching sunset begin to sink in their variegated claws. The air is cooler. Lucifer is still asleep underneath her, shivering and pale, but she feels … better. Not good. But at least her head doesn't feel fuzzy anymore, and her stomach isn't whining so much. Rubbing her eyes, she lets herself rest for a few more minutes. Lets him rest, since he seems to need it. Until the nagging urge to move becomes overwhelming.

"Lucifer," she says, tugging at his sport coat. "Lucifer, wake up."

Nothing.

"Lucifer," she says, frowning. Has he always been so difficult to wake? Or just since the kidnapping? When he offers no signs of consciousness, she gives him a little shake. "Lucifer. Up and at 'em."

A low-pitched, resentful sound rasps in his throat, and when his eyes slit open, he stares blankly at her for a beat.

"Hey," she says, frown deepening. "You with me?"

"Dhahn," he croaks, wincing. "Er." A long pause. "… Yes."

He ratchets himself to standing with a groan, spending a too-long moment leaning against the tree trunk, like he's afraid to test his balance without it.
"Doing okay?" she can't help but ask.

He shuffle-stumbles away from his haven, only to stop again. He lifts his bound hands over his head, rising onto his tiptoes, and then stiffly arcs backward, stretching despite his new cuff-enforced limitations. After twisting his torso to the left and to the right at the waist, he resettles to flat-footed with a curdled, almost-mournful sigh.

"Lucifer … are you—"

"Still quite alive, I assure you," he quips.

Appeased, she grabs their water bottles — they're down to one and a half.

"Ready?" she says, directing a grim look into the thicket.

He nods, and they set off again.

They've been walking again for about thirty minutes — the sky above the canopy is a full, bright pink like flamingos on the eastern edge — when she finally feels ready to take the plunge. "Can we talk, now?" she says. "About … this Asmodeus thing?"

Lucifer pauses behind her, eyes narrowing. "You are the gatekeeper of this particular conversation, Detective. If you wish to talk now, then we'll talk. But don't say I didn't warn you that your illusions will be shattered, because I bloody well did, and they bloody well will." His eyebrows creep upward. "The more accurate, appropriate question you should be asking yourself is … are you ready for that to happen, or would you prefer to wait in cozy denial for a while longer?"

"I really don't think anything is gonna get shattered, Lucifer," she assures him. "I know you too well."

The flat, disbelieving look he gives her kicks up nervous butterflies in her stomach, but she doesn't let the ominous feeling cow her. She clears her throat and continues as they amble, "I thought … Uriel was the first person you killed."

"The first being, yes," Lucifer replies. "Cain was the first person."

"Then how can you possibly have done worse things than this Asmodeus guy?" she says, shaking her head. "Explain this to me, because I—"

"Detective," he says gently, "surely, you know that there are far worse things than death."

"Name one," she counters, folding her arms. "Name one thing that you did that you think is so bad."

He licks his lips and looks away, suddenly full of hesitation.

"Tell me," she prods as they wind around a cluster of hemlock trees.

"You know that I've tortured."

"Damned souls," she says with a nod. "Right?"

"Demons, as well," he admits. "Not damned. Just residents I wanted to—" He pauses, looking upward as he searches for an adequate descriptor. "—encourage to behave." His words are dark and silky and they make her shiver despite the balmy air.
"Demons like Maze?" she says.

"I've never tortured Maze," he replies. "Maze was always … loyal." He sighs, glaring at some unseen slight. "Before we came here, that is."

Chloe swallows. She'd meant the interjection about Maze only as a way for her to connect this utter fantasy spilling from his lips to the reality that she knows. Not as a suggestion that he actually would have tortured Maze. The matter-of-factness with which he addresses what he views to be a veiled suggestion that he would torture a friend is … troubling.

"Tell me about …." This is it. The point of no return. She takes a shaky breath, glancing briefly at the ferns flattening under her feet. "Tell me about … encouraging demons to behave."

He tilts his head, regarding her for a long moment. Like he's memorizing every feature, every curve, every line, every blemish. His lip twitches. And then he looks away. Into the distance. His eyes are dark and fathomless.

"There was … a demon named Beleth," Lucifer says slowly.

"Beleth," she says, nodding. "Okay."

"He tried to usurp me," Lucifer says, storm clouds billowing in his distant expression. "Tried to murder me."

"Okay," she says, heart constricting to a pinpoint as she fights not to interject anything other than encouragement for him to talk. "And?"

He looks down at the dirt churning at his feet. "And I tortured him," he admits in a sepulchral, midnight tone. "I filled his very small, very pathetic life with pain and deprivation, and then I cut out his tongue with a dull knife so he couldn't beg me for death, anymore."

Her insides sink into her shoes. Nausea roils. The wind rifles through the trees, and a bird with a mourning call sings from the branches overhead.

Lucifer laughs, but it's a miserable sound. He continues, lip curling in disgust, "In the end, I dropped his bloody, quivering, broken body in front of my gates, knowing full well that his bloodthirsty hordes would literally tear him apart. And they did. And I watched." His gaze shifts to her, like he's daring her, just daring her, to be okay with this atrocity. "I'd never killed before Uriel, no, but to say I've had no hand in death, either, would be a gross understatement."

The silence stretches.

She can't breathe. "Lucifer …."

"Hell is not Earth, Chloe," he insists as he pushes a branch aside for her. "Demons flock to weakness like flies to carrion. They don't respond to anything other than absolute might and a vacuum of mercy. And that little demonstration was the last time any of them tried to kill me, so it served its purpose."

"The … last time?" she says around the hurting lump in her throat.

He blinks. "Pardon?"

"You said the last time anyone tried to kill you," she says, shaking she feels so sick to her stomach. "How many times did peop—" No. No. Not people. The whole point of this horrible tale is that it's
not about people. She shakes her head. "—demons. How many times did demons try to kill you before you snapped?"

His eyebrows knit. "What the bloody hell does that matter?"

She rubs a wall of hurting tears out of her eyes. "It matters because the way you've described this, you're sounding like a torture victim yourself," she says, sniffing. The utter lack of comprehension in his eyes is a hammer, pounding her into tiny, grieving bits on his behalf. "I mean, isn't that what living in Hell was for you? Torture? Pain and deprivation?"

"Hell was their land," he counters, giving her a flinty look. "Their home. And I took it for my own. I thought … that's what Dad wanted."

"Well, what would have happened if you hadn't done that?"

His eyes narrow as he steps over a huge log and reaches back to offer her his arm. "What do you mean?"

"From what you've said, demons don't have a live-and-let-live mindset," she says, feet scraping against the bark as she fumbles over the obstacle, clinging to him for balance.

"They … don't," he concedes, and they separate again.

"And God had just nearly killed you. Or, I mean … that's what I've … inferred."

"He …" Lucifer looks at his wrists, clenching and unclenching his fists. "Yes."

"And God is, well, God."

Lucifer doesn't speak.

"So, you were protecting yourself," she says. "Preemptively, but still."

He grinds to a halt. "Detective, I am not blameless in this equation."

"I'm … not saying you are," she says, lump burgeoning in her throat. "I mean, yeah, you did some bad things. No arguing. Just that …." She takes a deep, cleansing breath. "Well, that I don't."

"Don't … what?"

She looks up at him. "Blame you."

"But—"

She grabs his trembling hands and squeezes them. "I don't, Lucifer."

His lower lip trembles. Just a flutter before he clamps down on it with a jaw clenched so hard his temples visibly bulge. The bird overhead — a mourning dove, she thinks — apropos — coos its lonely song as he peers at a distant point beyond her shoulder.

"This … isn't how you're supposed to react," he says, shifting his weight from foot to foot as he sways back and forth. "This isn't …." He blinks, and his gaze turns pleading. His plaintive, tiny, "Why wouldn't you …?" twists her into painful, agonizing knots.

"God dumped you into a place where you were constantly under threat," she says softly. And she … can't imagine. Being home with her family who's supposed to love her, and then being violently
ousted to ... that. Trying to survive ... that. "A place without love or peace or anything good. For millennia. And you're shocked you started acting like one of the monsters? People can't live in a constant state of danger arousal, Lucifer. It fucks with our heads. That's why we have mental illnesses like P.T.S.D. And that's just from weeks or months or years on the front lines. Not millennia."

"I do not have P.T.S.D.," he snaps, pulling his hands away. "That is a human disease, and I am not human."

The sight of him writhing on the ground, his wrists weeping blood as he struggled to breathe through sheer panic, paints her mind's eye in lurid, sanguine detail. "Maybe you don't call it that," she says, "but you've clearly internalized some things from your experiences that have nothing to do with who you actually are. Not everything is so black and white. Circumstances mean things."

His mouth opens. Closes. Nonsensical syllables catch in his throat.

"Did you like it?" she prods, stepping closer despite his bristling posture.

"Like ... what?"

"Torturing that guy," she says. "Beleth. Did you like it?"

"I enjoyed meting justice," he replies without hesitation. "I'm a firm believer in an eye for an eye."

"But ... did you like it?" she says as they start walking again. "Causing pain, I mean. Was it fun?"

"Of course, it wasn't bloody fun. It was ..." He searches for a word. "Necessary."

"That's the difference between you and Asmodeus, Lucifer," she says. She takes a breath. "That's why he's a monster, and you're not. Asmodeus revels in this shit."

"But—"

"When I begged him to let us go, he acted like he got a thrill out of hearing me plead with him," she says, stomach churning when she thinks of it. "'Oh, please. Oh, please. Do it some more;' he said." She shudders. "He practically beat one off against the prison bars. And that's not you Lucifer. You'll never convince me that's you, at this point, no matter what you say or do. I know you too damned well by now."

"How can you not see—"

"I do see," she insists. "I see everything. I just don't see it like you do. And that's not to say I'm not rea... fucking freaked out right now. I am. On your behalf, if nothing else. Like ... how can this even be real? How can a just God even do shit like tossing his son into Hell?"

"He isn't just," Lucifer replies in a flat tone.

"Exactly," Chloe says, nodding. They step around a huge, tipping aspen tree. "He isn't just. He has his own plan with his own value system that makes no sense to the rest of us. How could it? He's God. And ... that's a terrifying thought."

He looks at her. "But ... Satan isn't terrifying?"

"No," she says. "I'm not afraid of you. I hurt for you."

His gaze hardens into sharp-edged obsidian. "I neither want nor need your pity."
"It isn't pity, Lucifer," she says, feet scuffling through the groundcover. "It isn't pity at all. It's empathy. There's a big difference. And I know that you know that, or you wouldn't have gotten offended when we were arguing in front of the Tates' mansion a few weeks ago."

He sighs like he's exhausted. "I don't bloody understand you. I don't ...."

"Can you, at least, understand that I don't see you like you see you? That I'm not one hop, skip, and a revelation away from deciding you're too freaky for me, or that you're evil? I'm dealing with the freaky. And you're not evil. You're a good man who got dealt an unbelievably shitty hand in life. Of course, you had to play some bad cards."

He swallows but doesn't speak.

"I'm not on the brink of some shattered illusion, Lucifer," she says, pressing onward. "I think the only one with illusions here is you."

He grinds to a halt again.

For a moment, he regards her, his dark eyes searching hers with a doubtful expression, like ... he's looking for a tell. Some hint that she's lying. Some hint that she's fucking with him just because. Something. Anything that would package this conversation into a gift box of human behavior that he understands. He gets lying. He gets fucking with people. He gets manipulation and all of that.

"But ... everyone says that I'm evil," he insists. "You're supposed to .... I'm evil."

"Well, I don't say that," she says in a tone that brokers no argument. "I don't think it, either."

"But—"

"No."

He blinks and looks away, his eyes wet and shiny like glass. His lower lip trembles again, and his jaw-clenching trick doesn't work this time. The breath he sucks between his teeth is barbed and wavering. And then he steps behind a tree, out of sight. She knows he hasn't gone any farther than that, because she can hear his choppy breathing, but ....

Whoa.

"Lucifer?"

But he doesn't reply.

Now, what?

"I'm just ... uh ...." She gestures awkwardly to a fallen, mossy log surrounded with lichen-covered rocks. "I'm just gonna sit over here while you ... uh ...." She clears her throat. "Yeah. I'll just ...."

She lets all of her weight drop onto the log, not sure what the hell else to do as her jeans scrape against the dry bark.

The pinks in the sky shift to a deep midnight blue as she waits. The shadows lengthen. A tiny golden light flashes to the left, and she snaps her gaze in that direction, frowning, watching, searching. Another tiny light flashes to the right. And another off-center. And another in the distance. They flash on and off in a lazy summer light show as the culprits drift about on the cool breeze. Her mouth tumbles open. Fireflies?
Now, she *knows* they're not in California. Or Oregon. Or anywhere to the west. Holy shit. Are they in the Appalachians, somewhere?

"Lucifer, do you see the fireflies?" she calls.

When he doesn't answer, she bites her lip, staring at the thick tree he's decided to turn into his I'm-not-falling-apart-if-you-can't-see-me shield.

What is she doing?

Seriously. What is she *doing*? Watching fireflies when he's losing his shit.

If he were anyone else, like Trixie or Dan or … literally anyone else she knows well, she'd ….

Fuck it, she thinks, slapping her palms against her thighs. Fuck it all. If he doesn't want her to intrude, he can always tell her to go away. If he tells her to go away, she will.

She slides off the log and tromps through the broken underbrush, twigs snapping and branches bending as she makes her way around the tree.

He's standing on the other side, staring into a void with his bleak black eyes. His face is wet and glistening in the twilight. Another twig snaps underneath her as her weight shifts, and his distant gaze ticks to her.

"Hey, I'm just here," she says, stepping closer. "I'm just gonna …." She holds out her hands and moves forward, cautious, halting, like one would approach a wild animal who's been caught in a trap. When he doesn't back away, doesn't knock her hands to the side with a swipe of his arm, she takes another slow step forward and wraps her arms around him. For once, he doesn't stiffen, first. Without a single protest, he lets her be inside his bubble, touching him. "I'm just gonna do this," she tells him, pressing her nose against his trembling shoulder as she locks her fingers together around his opposite elbow. "You do what you need, and I'll do this. Okay?" She rubs her palm from his shoulder to his elbow and back to his shoulder in a soothing, repetitive motion, and the moments stretch like a rubber band.

"No one has ever told me that," he says in a soft voice.

"Told you what?"

He sniffs. "That I'm … good. Not somebody who … knows."

"How many people know? Not counting demons, I mean."

"Demons aren't people."

"You're being pedantic," she scolds, looking up at him with a wavering grin.

A huffy sigh blusters through his frame, but he doesn't argue.

"Lucifer?" she prods gently. "How many people know?"

He closes his eyes like he hurts. "Only one who's living."

She stills at the enormity of what he's telling her. Somewhere … somehow … someway … Chloe Jane Decker has become the Devil's confidante. Even more so than Linda. And that's … That's … Her heart constricts, but in a good way, for once. She sighs against him, feeling like they've just cleared some sort of major hurdle. To where? She doesn't know. But at least they seem to be going
"You can tell me anything," she says, voice wavering. "Okay? Even if you think it's bad. I get that
what you've been through is like … waaay outside the human experience. I wouldn't ever try to stick
that kind of label on it. Or … I'll try not to, anyway. I mean …." She directs a sheepish look his way.
"I'm not perfect, but ….

"You are," he says, staring into space, "to me."

Which is enough to wreck what little composure she had left. She presses closer.

"This isn't what I deserve," he adds, a rasping whisper.

She tightens her embrace. "Yes, it is."

Out of arguments, he fills the quiet with a wet, shaky breath.

She kisses him, eyes wide open. His lips are soft, and he looses a befuddled little gasp against her
mouth. She pulls away, not willing to push things too much when they're both this wrecked.

"Looks like I won my bet," she murmurs as she pulls away.

He regards her with a dark, aching, I-must-be-bloody-dreaming look.

"Nope," she adds, quirking a tiny grin at him before turning to rest her head on his shoulder.

Time seems to stretch.

They stand together in the deepening twilight, in the silence, watching the fireflies dance.

The fireflies are long gone into slumber, and the big pie-plate of a moon hangs high overhead again,
this time with a nibble taken out of the right side, when something zips past her neck and plinks
against the tree trunk by her earlobe, sending little wet bits of bark flying. Frowning, she slaps at her
neck, but it wasn't a bug. Was it? Lucifer bends over, picking something up from the ground by the
roots of the tree. A cylindrical-shaped blob with one fuzzy end is all she can see in the moonlight.

Lucifer grabs her bicep with an iron, unyielding grip and then wrenches her to the left.

"Ow!" she snaps. "What the hell?"

Only for another hollow plinking sound to hit the tree, right where her chest once was.

And that's when she realizes. Darts. They're being shot at. She can't tell from where.

There's another dart that Lucifer manages to duck, and it smacks into the tree overhead. He grabs a
clump of her shirt by the small of her back, yanking her behind him, almost tossing her against the
tree trunk in the process.

He raises his hands to the darkness. There's a flick of motion as his fingers splay open.

"Vhus!" he says, or something like it. A guttural word that is Word and makes her whole body
vibrate. It stands the hairs on the back of her neck on end and prickles her skin with a thousand
needles, like she took a bath in static electricity.

Moisture sucks out of the air. There's a bombastic roar overhead like thunder, but it isn't thunder.
It's fire.

Flames plume from the earth in thickening pillars and cascade from the sky in billowing curtains, and then the world beyond the tree is a violent, twenty-foot-high wall of white-hot incineration. A blast of heat wallops her in the face like a fist, almost knocking her over. Wood snaps and splinters and disintegrates. Wildlife shrieks in terror, scattering, thumping through the brush. Someone screams in the distance. Ash and black smoke fill the air, burning her eyes, making it hard to breathe.

"Run," Lucifer commands, and she runs.

He doesn't need to tell her where. There's only one way to go that isn't combusting. Flames lick along the underbrush, spreading into the night beyond.

She can hear him panting as he dashes behind her.

"Vhus," he keeps saying. "Vhus."

Burn, it must mean. Or fire. Or some mystical, somatic marriage of both. The Word is a wrecking ball that smashes into her every time he says it, propelling her forward into the night.

"Vhus," he repeats, and a river of flames spews into the woods at their backs, giving them distance, giving them time.

They've been running for several minutes when he stops chanting, and they leave the rapacious, feasting fire behind. She stops to look over her shoulder. The wall of flames stretches as far as she can see along the horizon, a bright roaring swath of holy wrath.

She can't stop her mouth from falling open at the sight of the destruction. "Lucifer …," she has a chance to murmur, stupefied.

"Keep going," he tells her, grabbing her sweaty hand. "Don't stop."

And she makes herself cease gawking.

She runs through the dark, tripping, bumping into things, frantic, but every time she falls, he picks her up.

And they run.

They run until her lungs are near to bursting.

They run ….

She has no idea how far they've gone. She can still see the distant glow of the conflagration over her shoulder. The sky in that direction is a starless, flickering orange, not the thick, inky black of night. The ceaseless, snapping growl of the flames carries over the breeze. Ash falls around her like snowflakes. Her eyes burn from the smoke.

Something big crashes past her through the bushes, mere feet away. And then another something. And another. Deer, maybe. Their primal panic urges her onward like the crack of a whip. But her lungs are seizing up as she slows to a jog.

Her breaths are so jagged she sounds like she's sobbing. She is sobbing.

"I can't go anymore," she says as she slams to a halt, panting, heart pounding in her ears like banging
drums. "I can't. Lucifer, I can't."

She jabs her palm against a tree and bends over, sucking down breath after breath after painful, quaking, chest-bursting breath. She stares at Lucifer's muddy, ruined loafer as it comes to a limping stop beside her foot. He sounds even more out of breath than she is. Mutely, she pats the leg of his pants, just … reassuring herself that he's there. He touches a trembling hand to her shoulder, giving her a weak squeeze, before lifting his palm away. There's a scrape of bark.


Trembling, she straightens. Lucifer is leaning against the tree, shoulders slumped, looking pale as a ghost in the moonlight. "Holy shit," is all she can think of to say as her adrenaline bath recedes. "Was that like …." She swallows. "Did you just smite the whole forest?"

He gives her a hollow grin that looks more like a grimace. "Only a f-few miles."

"Only a few miles?" she says, blinking. This was a small fire to him?

He nods. "I corralled them … a bit." He takes a shuddering breath. "Four sides." And another breath. "It'll burn for … d-days. The humans are … tr-trapped." Another breath. "Asmodeus … might be … immune, but his … his J-Jeep isn't." He blinks like he's seeing spots. "And you aren't, either … so … unless he cares to … incin … incinerate … his l-leverage …." Another breath. "He needs to … get a new … vehicle. And go around. M-m-miles. Around."

"Will the fire spread this way?"

"N-no," he says faintly. "I t-told it not to."

Her eyebrows creep toward her hairline. "You told it not to?"

"Fire is … m-mine."

He sounds raspy and terrible and sick. He looks worse: sallow, shaking. Frowning, she steps closer. "Hey, are you okay?"

When he doesn't answer, her worry burgeons. His teeth chatter in the quiet. Not the appropriate physical response at all after having run a breakneck midnight marathon.

"Lucifer, hey." She waves a hand in front of his face. "Lucifer?"

"Hmm." He takes a pained, rickety breath. "You …." His eyes squeeze shut. "T-thank you."

"For what?" she says, dumbfounded.

But instead of replying, he sucks in another frantic breath, and another, and another breath after that, like there just isn't enough. A soft, desperate, panicked sound coils in his throat. Then his eyes roll back into his head, and he collapses at her feet.
His eyes are open to half mast, but his gaze is glassy and depthless, and his body is stone cold still. Like he's ….

No.

"Lucifer," she says, slapping his cheek over and over. "Lucifer, wake up. Lucifer."

She barely subdues a whorl of panic when he doesn't respond. At all. Her shaky fingers turn to ice. No. No. No. He has to be okay. He *has* to be okay. He's immortal, for fuck's sake. He's— Is he breathing?

She hovers her palm over his mouth and nose.

She can't feel anything.

*Check for a pulse,* her tiny voice commands. Right. Right. A pulse. She jams her finger underneath the sharp edge of the top handcuff, pressing into his skin next to his tendon, right over where his radial artery would be if he were human. A soft, willful thump-thump-thump pounds against the trembling pad of her thumb. His skin is glacier cold, though.

"Lucifer," she prods, the syllables cracking open at the seams. "Lucifer, *please,* wake up."

She leans close to his mouth, trying to decide whether to start rescue breathing for him, when a soft, shallow breath — cold like a winter draft — unfurls against her cheek. So, he's breathing. Which means ….

What *does* it mean?

A lump forms in her throat, and her stinging eyes overflow with tears as she leans back on her heels. He was fine, and then ….

Or, well, not fine, but talking, at least. He was *talking.*

Going from talking to flat on the ground is for heart attacks. And strokes. And … no. *No.* Immortal archangels do *not* have heart attacks. *Or* strokes. *Or anything."

Her lower lip trembles. She looks up. The distant crackle of flames fills the midnight silence. Though the western edge of the sky is choked by thick, ugly curtains of smoke, the eastern edge is cloudless and clear. Stars twinkle like flickering lit matches in the dark.

"You could help, you know," she snaps, unable to keep the accusation out of her tone. "This can't seriously be what you want for him."
Of course, it's not what Dad wants, an unfamiliar voice echoes in Chloe's head. That's the whole blessed point! A growl of frustration that isn't hers fills her brain. Why does he have to be so stub—

"Hello?" Chloe says, a bare, surprised gasp.

_Uh. Oops._

"Hello?" Chloe repeats.

_Must be hunger delusions._

"Hello, Lucifer's—" Sister? Brother? She can't decide whether the voice sounds feminine or masculine. It's not even a real voice, per se. It's just … foreign thoughts. "—Sibling?"

Silence follows.

"Raguel?"

No reply.

"Please," she says. Begs. She's not above begging in this situation. "Please, help us. We need help."

But there's still no reply.

Quaking, she almost chokes on a panicky sob. Fuck. _Fuck_, she's imagining shit. Her stomach rumbles indignantly as if to prove her point. Hunger delusions, indeed. Exhaustion, too. She takes a deep, hitching breath. And another. And another.

Not sure what else to do, she gently pulls Lucifer's head into her lap and props her back against the tree. The fire Lucifer ignited roars in the distance. She brushes fluffy clots of gray ash away from her shoulders. Off Lucifer's body. His body. His ….

She sucks back another sob as she rubs his chest. His shirt is soaked through with cold sweat.

"Lucifer, please, wake up," she tries once more, plaintive.

He doesn't even blink.

Her mental descent continues when she reaches for their water to try and quiet her stomach, only to realize with a gasp that their water is gone. It's gone. In their haste to flee, neither she nor Lucifer had grabbed their remaining water supply, and now, it must be buried under a wall of snarling flame.

They have nothing left. Nothing.

"No."

The descent becomes free fall.

She's almost hit bottom — the jagged rocks below are screaming up from the abyss to skewer her — when he starts looking at things.

"Hey!" she blurts, heart climbing into her throat. "Hey!"
She grabs his ice-cold hand and squeezes it. His fingers are limp. He doesn't squeeze her hand in return. A reflection of the moon gleams in his searching pupils.

"How are you feeling?" she prods.

But he doesn't speak. He just … looks. Without recognition or curiosity. Like she's part of the scenery to him. Nothing more.

"Can you understand me?" she says.

Nothing.

"Lucifer?"

Nothing.

Her lower lip trembles. "It's okay," she tells him in a wavering voice. "Take your time."

He regards her. The sky. Mostly the sky. Through the branches of the pine tree serving as their shelter. Twinkling stars speckle the space overhead, like someone shot a glitter gun at an infinite black canvas.

Lucifer, she realizes with a start. Lucifer the Lightbringer. Lucifer the Morning Star.

Lucifer shot the gun.

She pulls her fingers through his sweaty hair, watching him watch his creation.

"Those are yours, aren't they?" she says, suddenly breathless. "You did that."

His dark gaze drifts back to her. "R …," he rasps weakly, trailing into silence. He licks his lips, swallowing, as she dips her head closer to his mouth to hear him. "Rho … hey … mhehs … dha."

The words are to sound as rainbows are to color. Even when he's barely croaking them.

Angel.

And for once, she doesn't need a translator. Not after seeing the spark in his eyes. A glint of the knife he carved his infamy with: pride.

Rho hey mhehs dha.

Yes, Lucifer was saying. All the lights are mine.

She sits with him in the quiet for another too-long stretch. The wind ceased, at some point, and the frequency of fleeing animals shrank from a flood to a stream to a trickle. Beyond the distant roar of the blaze, beyond the occasional crack and crash of a lagging critter hotfooting through the brush, all purveyors of nighttime ambience seem to have taken the night off. No crickets sing. No owls hoot. No leaves or pine needles rustle.

The night is sepulchral silence.

"What …?" croaks Lucifer in a willowy, barely-there tone. He curls his fingers in halting succession from pinky to thumb on one hand, and then thumb to pinky on the other.
Tears fill her eyes as she rests her palm on his shoulder. "Hey. Lucifer. Hey. Are you back, now?"

He looks up at her, his dark eyes finally seeming to focus on her as something more than another tree trunk or bush. "What—" His lips move, but he doesn't speak. Like he can't remember the words. He adds in a dazed mumble, "Vhes m'hah r-r-r ...." He swallows roughly. "—happened?"

"Asmodeus caught us," she says. "You burned everything to a cinder, and then we ran, and then you collapsed."

"Asmodeus?" He says the name like it's a foreign word.

She frowns. "The demon trying to kill us?"

His dazed expression makes her heart clench.

"Never mind," she says. "It's not important right now." She cups his chin with one hand, stroking his cheek with the other. "How are you feeling?"

"Fyr." His lips shape air, like he's again trying to form words, but drawing blanks about what the words should be. He yanks on the cuffs. Blood oozes at his wrists, black and glistening in the moonlight. "F-fyr."

She leans forward and clasps his wrists above the cuffs. "Don't," she tells him, and he stills. "Please, don't. You're hurting yourself."


"I don't know what you're saying," she replies through gritted teeth. "I don't know those words."

His only response is a murmured, confused, "Sehn."

A pit forms in her stomach as she thinks of him collapsing. Maybe, he did have a stroke. Can angels have strokes? What the hell is she going to do if—

"Ch-Chloe?"

The word is breathless and small — more searching than found. But it's still her name.

A drop of water in a drought.

"Yes," she says on coattails of another hiccupping sob. "Yes. That's right." Her fingers clench. "Are you remembering, now?"

He bends his arms at the elbows, reaching back for her, dragging the ugly, awful cuffs with him. "Chloe."

A monsoon in a desert.

"It's okay," she says, grabbing his roaming palm and squeezing it. "It's okay." His fingers wrap around hers and don't let go. Finally. A real response. Recognition. She sucks in a breath that feels like barbed wire coiled in her chest. "You seem … kinda addled, and I—" don't know what to fucking do.

He's looking up at her like she's the only bolt hold on a cliff face. Like he doesn't know where he is, or why he's on the ground looking up the skirt of a giant pine tree, or what's up with the horizon in flames, but as long as he has that bolt to cling to, he's … okay. For now.
"Take your time," she tells him, stroking his face. "I'm right here."

"Well, that makes … one of us," he rasps unexpectedly.

Her startled laugh ricochets through the nighttime silence like shrapnel.

"Hi," she says with a brittle, watery smile. "Lucifer, hi."

"Hello, Detective."

A flood to wash the world away.

"Hi," she repeats, smile widening by degrees. "How are you doing?"

His breaths are raspy and labored as he rolls onto his side, curling around her. The cuffs force his top shoulder and arm to sag awkwardly. He drags the cuffs forward until the metal bangs into her shin. As he resettles, the end of his nose brushes against her inner thigh, about midway above her knee. His chuffing breaths buffet the denim of her jeans, forming a wet spot, though the spot is absent of warmth. Shivers rack his whole frame. His face looks sallow in the setting moonlight.

"I … can't get up," he says faintly.

"That's okay," she replies, swallowing against the lump in her throat. "Just rest. We have some time." She hopes.

He's sick.

Like … really sick.

Like needs-a-hospital-now sick.

She didn't want to believe it before. She didn't realize how much she'd been expecting him to bounce back once he was more "present." Like he's been doing for this whole excursion after every nap. What sells her the deed to the Lucifer-is-damaged bridge is the fact that he's present enough to be calling her Detective, and yet still lying crumpled on the ground in the dirt, his head cradled in her lap, without a single naughty wisecrack about the fact that his mouth is mere inches from her crotch ….

She slips her arm over his shoulder and rubs his chest with an open palm, fingers splayed. Her skin rasps against his sweaty, soiled shirt.

"Hmm," he mutters, listless.

"Is this okay?" she says, staring down at him.

He nods weakly against her knee. "S'warm."

She pauses only long enough to give him a bit of a reassuring pat, before resuming the slow, wide circles around his sternum.

The moments stretch.

Worry gnaws.

The birds are greeting the still-dusky morning by the time he manages to sit up, and the sun is just
peeking over the treetops by the time he starts trying to get his legs underneath him. Trying. He rises about six inches off the ground, his feet scrabbling against the trampled ferns and smeared moss, only to collapse with a woozy, nauseated look that makes her bite her lip.

"Lucifer, slow down," she says.

"It's been hours," he says. "I've hardly rushed."

"I know, but—"

"Sehn," he says, grimacing as he attempts to rise again. "He'll catch us. We have to … oh."

He sinks back against the tree trunk with an exhausted sigh, his shoulders scraping bark as he descends to the forest floor once again.

"Lucifer," she says, pulling him into her arms, "please, don't worry about that right now."

"But … seh."

"Please, don't worry about that right now," she repeats. "I'm worried about you."

He swallows thickly. "Yes, well …" He sighs. "Likewise."

She frowns, at first thinking he means he's worried about himself, too. Then she realizes … he means her. He's worried about her. Not him. When he can't even stand up. She tightens her embrace, and he seems too wasted, for now, to protest his captivity any further.

"That word you keep using …" She tries her best to imitate his intonation. Sehn. Kind of like sin and zen spoken on top of each other, but with about 57 zillion more tonal facets than normal human speech. "Is that his name in Angel?"

"… Whose name?"

"Asmodeus."

"No, it …" He shakes his head, looking at her. "Sehn … d-demon. It means demon."

Just saying the word seems to incense him. He whips his weight forward, his momentum carrying him to his feet, and she has no choice but to let him go or trip him. She lets him go despite her better judgment. With a groan, he jams down on his quads and lurches to his feet at last, only to sway like a drunk for a moment, panting, and then tip against the tree. A twig snaps underneath his muddy loafers as his weight shifts.

"Lucifer, you said he'd have to go miles around," she says as his hip scrapes the bark. She rises to her feet beside him. "Don't worry about Asmodeus right now, okay? Please, just rest."

His eyebrows knit. "Miles around … until?"

"Until Asmodeus catches us."

"Asmodeus …"

"The demon, Lucifer. The demon who's trying to murder us."

"Right. Right." Lucifer sighs. "I'm." He shakes his head like he thinks that will clear the cobwebs plaguing him. "Apologies."
She steps closer. "It's okay."

He clenches his fists, body shaking as he leans against the tree. "I feel so h-hollow," he confesses in a dazed, quiet, longing tone as he stares into empty space.

Her insides twist as her gnawing worry takes a huge bite.

She doesn't know what to say except, "I swear, we don't have to go anywhere, yet. We have time."

Her assurance seems to bring him clarity again.

"Yes, we do," he says slowly. "And, no, we bloody well don't. For reasons other than demon-wrought peril." He gives her a flinty look. "How long can you humans survive without water? A few days, is it?"

Fuck. She'd been hoping he hadn't noticed the absence of their water bottles. She swallows, trying to ignore the dryness in her throat. "I'm not imminently gonna collapse," she says. "Not like you did. You're more im—"

"I am not," he says in a cold, midnight tone that brokers no argument.

"Fine," she says, grinding her teeth. "Fine. But if you fall over again, I'm—"

"Yes, yes, yes. Then you can say, 'I told you so.' All right?"

She narrows her eyes at him, suddenly unsure of who's protecting whom.

He rests in the haven of the tree for another minute. Maybe two. Just catching his breath. Working himself up to carrying his own weight. And then he takes one wobbly step out of the pine's orbit.

He directs a wry glance at her. "Now, shall we?"

With a sigh she wraps her arm low across his waist, offering support. "We'll go slow," she insists.

"Of course, Detective."

They take a teetering step together. And another. And another.

The sun blazes like a torchbearer as it slogs across the sky. Black, billowing haze leaks up from the western horizon, covering about a third of the sky. The hot, dry air smells of woodsmoke. Fire. She wonders if the sudden shift in weather from "balmy beach" to "midday Mojave" has anything to do with Lucifer's burning handiwork.

Sweat meanders down her neck and spine, pasting her ponytail to her neck, soaking into the waist of her jeans and her underwear.

Lucifer seems a bit better, at least, now that they're moving. He's not taking the ground-eating strides of perfect health, but he's found a rhythm, and he isn't stumbling or shuffling. He isn't suffering from dazed lapses into Angel-speak, anymore, either. Aside from the fact that her throat aches, and her head is pounding from lack of water, aside from his too-hard breathing that far outstrips their leisurely pace, the walk is pleasant. Or it would be, anyway, under normal not-fleeing-for-dear-life circumstances.

"I should have bloody told you sooner," Lucifer says out of the blue.
She frowns. "About?"


An invisible knife twists in her gut as she grinds to a halt. Lucifer follows suit beside her, his body stilling as he tries to catch his breath.

"What do you mean?" she says warily.

He winces. "I mean, I'd an abundance of ways to make you believe me about my origin that had nothing to do with my face, and the truth is … I didn't want you to believe me."

"You … didn't want me to believe you," she parrots.

"Saying that I wanted you to be happy, or that I thought Cain potentially capable of redemption under your esteemed tutelage …" He shakes his head. "While accurate, they were both excuses. In truth, to prove to you the dire situation with Cain, I would have had to prove to you that I was … well … me." The raw, disturbed look he gives her makes her eyes water. "And I'm … I'm deeply sorry to have allowed my happiness to take precedence over your safety."

Her mind churns, and her fingers shake as she swipes a loose, sweaty strand of hair away from her face. These are the words she's wanted to hear since their fight in the car at the warehouse stakeout. I'm sorry. An apology, rather than red-eyed affront and hurt and other nasty, coiling things. Yet, now, it all sounds wrong.

"Me not believing you made you happy?" she says slowly.

His gaze grows distant as he peers beyond her shoulder. "Yes."

Her innards drop. "So, it was a joke to you?"

"Of course, not," he replies without hesitation. "Nothing about you is a joke to me."

"Then why did it make you happy?"

He sighs. "Because then I could still be your version of me, all without speaking a single lie," he murmurs wistfully at the ground. "And, well, I … I like him better." His envious tone twists her heart like a pair of hands wringing out an overladen towel.

"You're not a monster, Lucifer. Whether my perspective is involved or not."

He directs a grim look at the verdant green walls surrounding them. Closing in on them. "We're stuck in this bloody place because of my choices. My—" His lip curls in disgust. "— naïveté."

"No," she replies slowly, "we're stuck in this place because I was an idiot who ran into the middle of an op, knowing full well that to do so was to make you vulnerable."

"It wasn't your fault," Lucifer says, turning back to her. "Asmodeus tricked you."

"Well, it wasn't your fault, either," she snaps. "He tricked you. Millennia earlier, maybe, but he did." She grinds her teeth. "Look, can we just accept that we've both fucked up horrendously at various points, and move on, please? It doesn't matter why we're out here, anyway. What matters is that we escape."

She wraps her hand around his wrist above the cuffs and gives him a gentle tug, trying to pull him into motion along with her. He takes a wobbly step before halting again. Their arms stretch taut,
forcing her to stop walking or let him go, and she's not letting go this time. With a sigh, she turns to face him.

"What?" she says tiredly.

"Promise me that you'll run. Even if I can't."

"I'm not gonna make a promise like that," she scoffs. "That's stupid."

"Chloe, please," he says. "He'll kill you once he has no use for you."

"He'll kill you."

A smile twitches at his lips. A small one. "I'm older than you can conceive."

"So, what?"

"So, I've lived countless lifetimes," he says. "But you—"

"Don't you dare play that card," she snaps. "You were in Hell. Literally. That's not living. That's existing. Frankly, by my reckoning, I'm robbing the damned cradle."

"If he catches us again, I won't have anything left to—"

"Lucifer, what is wrong with you?" she demands at last, finally realizing why his behavior is so disquieting. Her grandfather had done this when he'd been diagnosed with lung cancer. Made amends. Made sure everyone knew his final wishes. Made sure that those he loved were provided for and would be safe and happy, long after he was gone. "Why does it feel like you're working up a living will or something?"

The silence stretches. She folds her arms. He doesn't look away.

"Because I am," Lucifer admits at last.

She stills as a cold slab of ice settles in her gut. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"The cuffs," he says with a grimace. He presses his hand to his sternum, and his eyes close for a moment. His breaths are heavy. "Chloe, I can't … replenish."

"Replenish what?"

"Myself."

"Well … what happens when you …?" she finds herself asking as she gestures impotently. "When you …?"

When you run out, she doesn't say.

Bird calls fill the silence. Pine needles rustle as the trees billow in the wind. The sunlight seems to sharpen.

He tilts his head, regarding her with a sad expression.

"Chloe," he says, the word a gentle, patient nudge toward a place she doesn't want to be.

"What do you …? What do you …?" She shakes her head, stepping back from him. "Wait. Wait."
This isn't them. The woman isn't she, and the man isn't he. She's watching a movie. A twisted Romeo and Juliet. "You mean … the cuffs don't just weaken you? You mean, you're actually dying?" The man opens his mouth to reply, and the woman adds in a pitiful tone, "You're dying?"

For a moment, the man can only stare. His lower lip trembles. Like something in her lost tone just … broke him. Smashed him into dust like a hammer to bone. But then he takes a raspy, labored breath, and he flips his composure switch. He's doing that chameleon thing. Again.

"Well," he says with a wan smile that doesn't reach his eyes, "I can't be certain of that, since I'm not dead, yet, obviously, but—"

"No. No, no, no, you're lying," the woman protests. "You can't die. You're immortal."

"I don't lie."

"Well … well … well, then you're mistaken!" she insists, floundering.

Chloe's floating somewhere above in the lush canopy, listening, watching. She isn't down below. That isn't she, drowning in a sea of dry land as all promise and possibility slips away on a warm summer gust.

But then he says, "Chloe."

And gravity reaches up and grabs her ankles, yanking her kicking and screaming back into her body. Into the scene she doesn't want to act out. Where there is no distant man or distant woman. Because this is no movie. And there are no actors. "But I don't want you to die!" she snaps. The words bounce off the trees and carry on the wind, echoing in the quiet. Cicadas buzz.

Too reasonably, he says, "It's … something I'd rather like to avoid, myself, but—"

"No," she replies, almost a snarl. "No, no, no, no. You don't get to use a word like 'but' after a sentence like that. You're not dying. I won't let you."

"I'm not certain that you have a choice."

"There has to be some way to get the cuffs off," she says. "There has to be."

He holds out his bloody, crossed wrists for her to inspect. "I invite you to try."

She touches the cuffs with trembling fingers. The metal is lambent and cold. Colder, even, than Lucifer's sallow skin. The odd, red runes that mar the metal's surface ooze as though they're moving, writhing like snakes, or snapping vines. The sight is far more sinister and choking than she remembers.

"You said they've been forced off before," she says, looking up at him. "How?"

"Asmodeus and his magic tricks. I don't know how he did it. Since I thought he destroyed them, I didn't think it pertinent to ask."

Fuck.
"What about Raguel?"

Lucifer's eyebrows knit. "What about him?"

"Can you call him for help, maybe?" she says, clutching at the cuffs. "He can't possibly have wanted to kill you with these things."

Lucifer snorts. "Couldn't he have?"

A vague flicker of memory dances on a candle wick, burning. Lucifer was standing in a corner in the dark, hands steepled together like he was—

"How do you call him?" she says. "Do you pray? Can I pray? If you won't do it, I will."

"I assure you, he won't answer."

"Well, let me try, God, damn it!"

"Already God damned, darling."

"Shut up, shut up, shut up," she snaps. "Don't turn this into a joke!"

Lucifer regards her for a moment, something dark and old and tired churning behind his eyes. Then he takes a breath. He lifts his arms, splaying his fingers, like he means to demonstrate something, only to release a blustering sigh as he directs a look of annoyance at the cuffs. *Bloody bother,* she can imagine him grumbling if this were any other moment of any other day. Instead, he lowers his wrists awkwardly to rest over his navel.

"Press your palms together," he says, "and close your eyes."

"Okay," she replies, doing as he instructs. "Now, what?"

"Just think in Raguel's direction."

She frowns. "But how do I know where he is?"

Lucifer shakes his head. "Just … just … *t'ves neh suhn …." His temples bulge as he clenches his jaw and glares at nothing in particular. He thinks for a moment. "Just intend for your thoughts to reach him, and they will, if he's choosing to listen."

*If* he's choosing to listen.

"Is there a voicemail thing if he's not?"

"Unfortunately, no," Lucifer replies. "That would fill up rather quickly, I'm afraid."

She thinks of the voice she heard earlier. The voice she maybe probably completely imagined in a fit of desperation, but …. "How do I know if I get a reply?"

"You won't bloody get one."

"Is it like … complete with holy trumpet fanfare and poof of glowing feathers as the divine descends from on high?" she says, ignoring him. "Or could it just be a whisper in my head?"

Lucifer raises an eyebrow. "Have a Joan of Arc complex, do you?"
"Just answer the question, damn it!" she snaps.

"Joan of Arc was epileptic," Lucifer says gently. "Not touched by God."

"So …?"

"So, in all seriousness, literal divine intervention is quite subtle," he says, a soothing murmur as he presses closer. "You aren't likely to see or hear anything identifiable as abnormal. More often, it's as simple as Amenadiel tapping your mother on the shoulder."

"But you're not human," she says, frowning. "What's the point of being subtle about helping you?"

"I'm bloody disowned, remember?" he says with a shrug. "And now that Amenadiel's gone back to the fold ….”

"What, you don't think he'd visit?"

"He's been allowed home," Lucifer says too easily. "What purpose would visiting me serve?"

"He loves you," Chloe counters. "Visiting doesn't need to serve a purpose."

"Yes, well." Lucifer clears his throat and says nothing else.

A yellow bird hops from branch to branch of a sapling in the distance. For a moment, she almost detaches from reality again, drifting into the tree canopy as she stares at it. But his presence is a long, cold, shivering line beside her, keeping her grounded.

With a sniff, she rubs her eyes again. "Could I … pray to you? If I wanted, I mean? Would you … hear it?"

"I … would," he says with a nod.

"If you're choosing to listen."

His eyes glint. "I always listen to you."

"But—"

"Free will, darling," he says. "Just because I listen doesn't mean I agree."

She swallows. "Will you, please, try praying, too? Try to reach your brother? Please?"

At first, Lucifer doesn't budge. Doesn't make any move to appease her. A pride thing? Stupid. Foolish. Anger starts to boil in her gut. Then she wonders if, maybe, he can't. Maybe, the pressing together of the palms is more than just ritual. Maybe, there's somatic meaning to it. Maybe, a prayer doesn't go anywhere if the hands aren't used to direct it into space.

Except then, with a weary, hopeless-sounding sigh, he closes his eyes.

She steps out from the shade of the pine overhead, meandering listlessly into a crepuscular ray that's cutting at a slant through the canopy to the dirty forest floor. The sun feels hot against her face. Her tongue is thick and pasty when she swallows, but she shoves her raging thirst aside.

First, she directs a prayer to Raguel, struggling not to berate him in the same thought she uses to beg him for help. She gives him a brief summary of the situation, in case those details are important. And then, because what could it hurt, she sends a quick prayer to Amenadiel, too.
Please, she thinks in his direction. Please, Amenadiel, help your brother. Help me.

Lucifer is watching her as she opens her eyes.

"Don't ask me to pray to God," he tells her in a dark tone.

She's not sure if he's making that demand because he'll refuse her, or because he won't.

Her stomach churns.

She shakes her head. "I wouldn't." She reaches for Lucifer's arm, clutching so hard her nails must be digging tiny crescents into his wrist, though he doesn't flinch or protest. "Come on. We have to keep going."

He regards her for a long moment, expression longing.

"What?" she snaps, and she finds herself wondering how in the hell the tables got flipped so quickly. "We have to go." A few hours ago, he was the one who wanted to drag her, and now ….

She stares at him, gut churning. The chameleon thing. He could feasibly be stumbling up the last few steps to death's door, and she wouldn't know until death answered the bell. Her fingers start to shake, and her legs turn to quivering spaghetti.

"Lucifer, we have to …." She tugs on his arm. "We have to find help." He doesn't budge, and she pulls harder. "Come on."

But it's not until she looses a pitiful, cracking, tiny, "Please, come," that he relents.

"All right, darling," he replies softly, and he takes a step.

And they go.
Carry You

Chapter Notes

Chapter title credit goes to Ruelle. Thank you to everyone who takes the time to leave feedback!

I feel I should reiterate what I said in the notes of chapter one: Please do mind the tags on this story. Stuff gets ... pretty real. I have no hesitations about rating this story mature. That being said, I do promise to put my toys back on the shelf in perfect condition.

And lastly, thank you so much to everybody on my Twitter and Tumblr who responded to my requests for potential "random conversation topics," and for lists of mythological creatures.

"It should have been left bloody well alone," Lucifer says, panting as they plod through the endless sprawl of trees. "Have they learned nothing from the previous attempt?"

She shrugs. She isn't much for the Star Wars franchise, but it's ubiquitous. Trixie had been a little bit too young to see The Force Awakens in theaters, but she'd begged and pleaded to see The Last Jedi, and after some discussion, Chloe and Dan had taken her to the theater for a joint movie night. A rare occurrence after the divorce — seeing movies as a family of three. She remembers the cheers of the audience. The bass so loud that it vibrated in her chest. The smell of popcorn.

God, what she wouldn't give for a tub of popcorn laden with butter and salt right now. Or for her only serious consideration to be whether to allow Trixie to watch a PG-13 movie. Or to wrap her arms around Trixie's spindly little body and pull her close ....

"I didn't think the new ones were that bad," Chloe rushes to say, trying to shove the thought of Trixie away, back into the box in her mind where she puts the stuff that's "too much." Her immediate situation — hunger, thirst, exhaustion, mortal peril, all on a clock rapidly ticking down to zero — is already "too much." Way too fucking much.

"Detective?" Lucifer says with a frown, looking vaguely in her direction.

She takes a breath, re-centering herself. "Fine," she says. "I'm fine. Just … thought too hard for a second."

"Ah," he says. "Yes. I confess I've … been doing that as well."

A lump forms in her throat. "You're a lot better at hiding it than me."

"It's a cultivated skill," he admits quietly.

They share a look. His gaze doesn't meet hers so much as drift aimlessly along the curve of her shoulder. Which is …. "So," she says a bit too sharply. "Star Wars sequels?"

"Yes." He nods, fumbling back onto the conversation's track. "Yes, the first was a shameless,
money-grubbing rehash with nothing original or creative about it," he continues, rolling his eyes, "and the second was ..." He scoffs. "I don't even bloody know what to say about the second one except that it was ruinous."

"I liked the part where Luke was like ... astral projecting or something."

For a moment, only the sound of his heavy, struggling breathing fills the silence.

"Are you all right?" she says, clenching her fingers into tight fists.

But he waves her concern away. "I'll admit—" he says, the words faint at first. A raspy-sounding cough chuffs from his lips, and then he continues with more gusto, "—the director made a somewhat passable attempt at foreshadowing in that scene."

"It was cool when he made that face after the smoke cleared, and then he brushed off his shoulder, and he was like ... 'meh.'"

"Yes, but the escape sequence preceding it destroyed the continuity of the entire series."

"Huh?"

"If it was always possible to simply propel one's ship at light speed through a cluster of star destroyers in order to obliterate them, why then did the Rebellion ever fear the Death Star?" Lucifer asks. The dark, puffy circles under his eyes and his horrible pallor only serve to enhance his glare of frustration. "They could have driven a ship through the bloody thing on autopilot or some such. Which would have saved everyone a lot of angst in the end, no? No use the bloody Force, Luke necessary."

She snorts at Lucifer's unexpected switch into a Sir Alec Guinness imitation. "You ... clearly have ... some feelings about this."

Lucifer glowers. "And you don't?"

"I ... can't say I ever thought that hard about it."

"That's unfortunately the sin of the writers, too. And the director. They didn't bloody think. I'm also shocked that despite Carrie's untimely demise, they chose to show Princess Leia surviving the cold vacuum of space via ... via ... Mary Poppins maneuvers." He makes a noise of disgust.

"Okay, I admit," Chloe says slowly, "that bit was a little silly."

"It would have been stunning to allow one of the Rebellion's lauded heroes to die without purpose or fanfare," Lucifer says.

"And also really grim."

"But grim is in vogue, darling," Lucifer replies with a wan grin. "Or haven't you been watching television, lately?" His eyebrows creep toward his hairline. "The Walking Dead? Game of Thrones? The Handmaid's Tale?"

"When would I have time?"

"Well, you would if you stopped working now and then," he says with a wink. "They had a perfect opportunity to give Leia Organa a gut-wrenching send-off, and they didn't. I'm offended on Carrie's behalf, if nothing else."
"Carrie? Not Ms. Fisher?"

"That was her name."

"But … you knew Carrie Fisher?"

"Yes, well." He clears his throat. "I last visited Earth in the 70s, right as the first movie was hitting big. Met her at a party. Practically bumped noses while sniffing lines of coke." A wistful look crosses his face. "Lovely woman. Always made me laugh."

"I didn't realize you were so …." Chloe coughs. "So into this franchise."

His lip twitches. "I'm bloody well not."

"Right."

"Mostly, it incenses me to think of it," he grumbles. "I imagine George Lucas's Hell loop will involve re-editing the same bloody movie over and over and over until it's a threadbare shadow of what it once was."

"You think George Lucas is going to Hell?"

Lucifer shrugs. "Depends on how guilty he feels for ruining the lives of billions."

"Billions."

"Geeks and nerds and sundry aren't the minority they think they are," he replies. "Believe me. And Han Solo bloody well shot first; I remember specifically."

She licks her lips. "We should watch them all," she says. "When we get home."

He grinds to a halt next to a large fallen pine. The top of the trunk is covered in moss and pale semi-circular disc-like protrusions of fungus. Mushrooms or something. A butterfly flits past on the breeze.

He peers at her, trying to catch his breath. "Star Wars? Really? All eight of the bloody things?"

"Nine if you count that other one," she says. "The standalone. Rogue … something. And isn't there another one in theaters right now?"

"That's … quite a lot."

She shrugs. "I think your scathing commentary would be hilarious."

He gives her a wary, incredulous look. "Hilarious enough to watch twenty-some hours of footage?"

"I love your sense of humor," she says, staring up at him as she steps closer.

"Really?" he says. He eyes the waning distance between them and clears his throat. "You've always seemed … rather irritated by it."

"At work, maybe, sometimes," she admits, shrugging. There's a time and a place, after all. "But spending twenty hours with you doesn't sound bad in any context."

His hands clench into fists. "Not even this one?"

"Well, I mean … I'd certainly rather be watching Star Wars on your couch," she says softly, not
breaking eye contact. "But … no." His hair is a sweaty, curly mess, and she can't resist the urge to push her fingers through it. "Not even this one."

He sucks in a breath, tilting his head. "Detective."

"So, it's a date?" she prods as she roams to the nape of his neck. "When we get back?"

He stares at her with a bit of a shell-shocked look. Like he still can't convince himself that her advances are real or deserved. And then his expression sinks like a stone in water.

"Lucifer?" she prods.

"I'd … love nothing better," he confesses quietly. But we won't get back, he doesn't say.

He thought too hard.

She gestures at the fallen tree, at the maybe-mushrooms, feeling like she might cry. "Do you think these things are edible?"

He squints at them as her stomach grumbles raucously. For a too-long moment, he says nothing, frowning as he scrutinizes. Then he peels his unfocused gaze away and says apologetically, "Darling, I wouldn't risk it."

She sighs.

They keep walking.

The sun is low, hovering just over the tree line. The shadows of the foliage lengthen into spindles. The smell of smoke is faint, at this point — just a hint that stings her eyes — but the air is still dry enough to make her skin hurt. Her feet throb like someone is jabbing tiny spears into the soles of her shoes, every time she puts weight on the balls of her feet. And her head is pounding from lack of water.

"Best Wonder—" The high-pitched whine of a mosquito fills her left ear, and she stops mid-sentence to inspect her exposed skin. Nothing. Fuck. "Best Wonder Woman?"

At first, Lucifer doesn't reply, and she looks over at him, lump in her throat. His steps are shortening again, and his dull gaze is fixed on the horizon. He's getting harder and harder to keep engaged in conversation. And it doesn't help that she'd give her arm for a glass of water and a cookie, at this point.

"Lucifer," she prods.

He shakes himself from his fixated stupor and gives her a squinting look.

"Which Wonder Woman?" she repeats.

"Oh," he says. For a moment, his expression is so blank she thinks he might be lapsing into another lost-in-translation stretch again. But then he adds a listless, dead-eyed, "Carter."

"Are you doing okay?" she can't help but ask.

He takes a laborious breath. His eyes are pinched around the edges. "I'll … manage," he says. His hands wander to his chest again. He keeps rubbing his sternum with the bottom knuckle of his thumb, like his chest aches. "Which …." He frowns, trailing away. "The … the blue. Blue and red."
He shakes his head. "There's a bloody S." He pats his chest. "Here."

She bites her lip as her heart constricts. How could he blank on, "Superman?"

"Yes," he says. "Best Superman?"

"Reeve," she replies without hesitation. She grew up with Reeve, and none of the Supermen who followed ever seemed to fill the red boots quite as well. "Which Batman?"

The whine of the mosquito is back, just as the previous bite on the back of her hand is starting to itch, and she flinches, suddenly feeling like bugs are crawling all over her. She slaps at her neck, yanking wet strands of her ponytail away from her skin. She slaps at her arms. Her cheeks. Nothing. No black bits or blood spots that speak of squished mosquito. God, damn it.

"Why don't mosquitoes fucking bite you?" she says, almost a snarl. "You'd think they'd appreciate a literally divine snack, but no. No. Let's torture the human, instead, they think. Fuck!"

Lucifer is staring at her with his eyebrows raised, his glassy eyes lit up with a muted twinkle. "Detective," he purrs breathlessly, "such a sailor mouth you have."

A sigh blusters through her, and she glares at him. "Shut. Up."

"What can I say?" he says, a wan grin tugging at his lips. "They must think you're sweeter." He shrugs. "That, or I'm simply too alien. The opportunity to dine on angel is rather ... unprecedented, after all."

She rubs the bridge of her nose, eyes watering as her gaze inevitably drags itself to the gleaming cuffs. To his bloody wrists. And then back to his impossibly pale face. Her lower lip trembles. "I'm sorry," she says, suddenly feeling like a total asshole for complaining. Especially when he hasn't said a word. Even when she asks him if he's okay.

He tilts his head, gaze softening like he finds her even more charming when she's cursing up a hypocritical streak. "Best Doritos flavor?" he says.

"Poppin' Jalapeño."

He frowns. "What? That's not a bloody flavor."

"Yes, it is. It's really good. And you never told me your favorite Batman."

"Keaton, of course," he replies, as if this opinion is self-evident fact. "Is that Jalapeño thing a limited edition or some such?"

"I think so. The bag is green." She squints, picturing the bag in the supermarket. Picturing herself grabbing it off the middle shelf. Picturing herself taking a chip and putting it into her mouth. Picturing the amazing crunch that crackles through her skull as she bites down. She swallows back drool before adding, "Like ... chartreuse."

"I don't think I've seen it."

"The Vons near me has them. Usually on the bottom shelf."

"Hmm."

"Favorite car?" she says, trying to shoehorn her brain off the thinking-of-food train.
His quiet-but-labored panting beside her fills the silence. She stares ahead, into the hazy shade of the distant trees. Her stomach rumbles. And the second fucking bite — on her cheek of all places — is starting to itch. She licks her cracked lips.

"Lucifer?" she says. "Favorite car?"

His eyelids are drooping again. "Hmm."

"Lucifer," she repeats, snapping her fingers. "Lucifer. Favorite car?"

Nothing.

"Tell me about your Corvette," she adds in a more strident tone. "Talk to me."

"Driving it … reminds me of … flying," he says slowly.

He sounds like he's flaming out. Like a meteor plummeting to earth, losing substance until it's all but ignited dust, and then it's gone. "Does it?" she says.

"Hmm." A drunk-y smile oozes across his face. "Top down. Lovely."

"I … didn't realize you liked flying that much," she says.

"It's … free."

She swallows against the lump in her throat. "I can imagine."

A raucous smack fills the space beside her.

She jars to a halt and looks left in time to see Lucifer with a dazed expression, picking himself off a slanting hemlock. There's a fresh, weeping scrape marring his forehead and the bridge of his nose. The cuffs bang against the tree trunk in front of him as he reaches out with shaky hands to steady himself.

"This's a … tr … tree," he slurs as he skates his fingertips lightly over the bark.

Holy fuck, did he just …? "Lucifer, what's …?" She narrows her eyes at him, gut clenching with suspicion as he makes a disturbed sound deep in his throat. "Lucifer, can you … not see?"

He closes his eyes for a moment, a soft suffering sound catching in the back of his throat.

She steps close, touching his arm. "Lucifer?"

When he starts blinking again, she gives his cloudy expression a discerning look. He really does seem …. Heart in her throat, she waves a hand a few inches in front of his eyes.

Striking quick like a cat, he grabs her wrist, his grip tightening as he makes contact. The sharp edges of the cuffs bite into her skin. So, he has … something left. Some still-flickering flame, if he can move like that.

"I can see," he says.

"But not well," she counters.

"I just don't know what I'm bloody looking at anymore. Everything seems …." He squints at her, though his eyes don't seem to want to focus. "I … haven't the faintest."
The meteor in her mind hits the atmosphere and disintegrates in a whorl of fire. What would happen if an archangel who can normally see over half a mile in the dark were suddenly reduced to human vision or worse? The discernible portion of the light spectrum would be narrowed. Hell, he might not even be used to seeing things in only three dimensions.

He gestures to the bark in front of him. "This's … brown?"

"Yeah. Dark brown. Most of the tree trunks are a similar shade. The aspens are lighter."

He nods and takes a pained breath. "I'll … try to avoid it." With a grimace, he shuffles around the former obstacle, his shoes scuffing in the dirt as blood trickles down his forehead.

"Don't be ridiculous," she says, reaching for his arm. She links elbows with him. She'd offer to staunch his bleeding, too, but with what, exactly? Her sweaty, bacteria-laden shirt? His sweaty, bacteria-laden shirt? It's probably better to let it bleed and clot on its own. "I'll steer."

"All right," he says.

The fact that he doesn't protest scares her more than she'd like to admit.

"What do I usually look like to you?" she says as they continue on.

"What do you mean?"

She shrugs. "You just asked me what brown is. Clearly, you see at least some things differently than I do." Except when he's sick. Except when he's dying. But she tries to shove those thoughts away.

The silence stretches.

"Lucifer?"

"You're …." A wan smile tugs at his lips, and his eyes fill with stars. As he thinks, she nudges him around a tree stump that's crawling with monster-sized ants. He doesn't seem to notice. "You're … rho."

The word sounds familiar.

"What is rho exactly?" she says, though her pronunciation of the word rho lacks all of the beautiful nuances he injected.

"It's … it's … rho." He looks into space, searching. "It's …." He mouths the word, like he's having trouble thinking of an English equivalent. "It's …." He glances at her. "It's … light." Then he frowns and shakes his head. "Not any light. A specific …. It's … el. Divine. It's … starlight."

She blinks. "I look like a star to you?"

"All souls do," he says.

"You can see my soul?" she says, trying and failing not to gape. "Like … you can just see it? Like a hat or a coat?"

He nods. "They're the only thing God makes as bright as …." Me, she thinks he's going to say. Pride, overflowing. But instead, he trails away, searching for a word or words he doesn't seem to be able to find. He sighs and shakes his head. "But yours is … the most. To me, anyway."

"The most what?"
"Everything."

The soft reverence in his tone makes her heart skip.

She's hardly thinking, this time, when she hears the mosquito whine again and makes a slap for it. She looks down to find a black, grainy splotch on her wrist. The little bastard is bug bits. She flicks the bloody remains away.

The cicadas buzz in the heat of the setting sun. They still haven't found a road. Or a campsite. Or anything. Nothing that would indicate humanity is nearby. And she's going to lose him soon. He's been fading by degrees. So badly that he can't conceal his distress, and her raging concern can't be quelled simply by "not thinking too hard."

"Griffins?" she says, almost snapping at him in her desperation.

It takes him far too long to mumble, "Extinct."

She frowns. "Vampires?"

Another long pause. "A bit." His words for, yes, but not exactly like human myth, and she resists the urge to needle him for more details. Not when he's barely monosyllabic, and he can't seem to muster up more than a few yeses, nos, and halfhearted maybes.

"Werewolves?" she says.

"A bit."

"Leprechauns?"

He shakes his head. "No."

She frowns. "What about mermaids?"

"S-selkies."

Huh. Interesting. "The Loch Ness Monster?"

"Yes. But it's only … a Plesiosaur."

"Oh," she says, mustering a tiny smile, "only a still-living dinosaur. How mundane."

But her joke dies on impact when he stares blankly into space and doesn't reply. Like her words didn't even register. Her heart constricts.

"El Chupacabra?" she tries as a stab in the dark.

Nothing.

"Lucifer?" she says. "El Chupacabra?"

"Um …." He sniffs. "Yes."

"What?" she replies, unable to subdue her surprise. "No way."

He shuffles to a stop, panting, teetering. "I …." He swallows. "I can't ...." He squeezes his eyes shut. His face is ashen and damp with sweat. "I can't." The words are small and threadbare.
She shakes her head. "No. No. Yes, you can, Lucifer. You can." She gives him a gentle tug, and he stumbles another step. And another. And another. "Bigfoot?"

"No."

"Sock gremlins?"

"… What?"


He doesn't answer as he stutters to a stop again, taking shuddering gulps of air. "Detective," he says, a desperate plea. "Chloe, I—"

"Wait," she says, interrupting him. "Did you hear that?"

Lucifer looks back at her with dull eyes. "Hear …?"

She tips her head to the side, listening. Straining. It's a bit of a shhh sound, overlain with intermittent burbling notes. Natural music. Off in the distance to the right.

"Water," she says in a reverent murmur.

She takes off at a sprint, through the bushes and the vines and the sprawling, grabbing undergrowth. Her soiled shirt gets caught on a branch, and the sleeve tears, leaving a small red scratch on her bicep, but she keeps running, anyway. She's running so fast she almost tumbles right into it.

It.

A stream. A small one, about four feet wide, with clear water babbling over smooth, pastel-colored rocks. The sunshine reflects against the surface of the stream, making it glitter and shimmer.

A smile cracks her lips wide. She lets out a whoop that echoes before her rational mind takes over.

She's a member of the Oregon Trail generation. The phrase, "You have died of dysentery," printed in glowing, green letters, flashes in her mind's eye. But the stream is so crystal clear she can count the rocks resting on the bottom of the creek bed. The water isn't stagnant, either, and it doesn't have an odor other than wet earth.

"Oh!" she blurts as a little pinkish-gray critter with claws like a lobster darts from the shelter of one rock to another. A crayfish. Crayfish don't tolerate pollution. She remembers that from camping trips with Trixie. Trixie would spout facts, and—

Her eyes water, and her lower lip trembles, as her mind ricochets once again to her daughter.

Lucifer shambles to a halt beside Chloe in the mud. He gives the stream a blank look and doesn't comment.

She takes a breath, shoving thoughts of Trixie aside. "Does it look safe to you?" she says. "To drink, I mean. It looks safe to me."

He squints vaguely in the direction of the water.

She licks her chapping lips. "Sorry, never mind. I forgot you can't really …."
He doesn't even fight with her assessment anymore. He's just … blank.

She stares at the creek for another long moment, her aching body and pounding head screaming at her in unison to partake. It's not like they have other options. They have no tools to collect water, let alone filter it, or sanitize it. Drinking bad water might kill her. But not drinking water at all will definitely kill her. And this water doesn't look bad.

She drops to her knees and leans forward to dip her hands into the flow. She sighs as the cool liquid envelops her skin. She takes care to scrub every inch of her hands — every knuckle, every nail, every cuticle. Then she shifts upstream about ten feet, and cups her palms together.

The water is the best-tasting ambrosia she's ever consumed, and after one sip, she's gulping. Glutting herself.

Meanwhile, Lucifer stands where she left him. Ten feet down the stream. Staring into space.

"You don't need water?" she says, looking over her shoulder at him with a frown.

He acts like he hasn't even heard her.

"Lucifer?"

Nothing.

He drank plenty of water when they were first escaping. When he was still burning off sedatives. Had he taken a drink since then? She frowns, drawing a blank. She doubts he would need water if she weren't around, if he weren't wearing the cuffs, but ….

She takes a few more handfuls to quell her own desperation, and then stumbles to her feet.

"Hey," she says as she steps back into his orbit. "Lucifer? Do you need water?"

He swallows, but doesn't speak.

She wraps her arms around him, a lump forming in her throat as she feels the tremors racking his frame. "You should take a drink," she murmurs. "It might make you feel a little better."

He takes a pained breath. "I can't."

"Why not?"

"Detective, if I sit, or if I … kn-kneel … I'm … not … getting up again."

Her innards drop into her shoes. "Okay," she says, cupping his face. "Okay. Do you want water? I can help you."

"I don't know."

"You don't know if you're thirsty?"

He sucks in a heavy breath. And another. "I need …. I'm …. Fyr. F-fyr."

"What is that word?" she says. Like fear crossed with fire. "You've said it before."

But he can't seem to muster a translation. Maybe, there isn't one. He's said he's hollow. He's cold. He's empty. He's drained. Maybe, fyr is the void. The base, visceral need for something to make him
whole, but he has no idea what would serve.

She takes a breath. "Okay. It's okay." She grabs his arm. "C'mere." And she leads him upstream a bit.

He drinks the cool water from her cupped hands with a rapaciousness that screams of a deep-in-the-marrow desire. He might not know what to call actual thirst, but he's thirsty. Possibly thirstier than she was. She brings up handful after dripping handful for him, and he can't gulp it fast enough. The water spills down his stubble-covered throat, soaking what little of his shirt wasn't already soaked from sweat.

"Thank you," he rasps when he's had his fill, though he's still blank-eyed and shaking.

Her throat hurts, the lump in it is so huge. "Sure." She rubs a palm down his arm. "Ready to go?"

He squeezes his eyes shut like the mere idea of walking more pains him.

"You can do this," she assures him. "Okay? We will get help. We will get you out of those horrible cuffs. But we have to keep moving. We have to, Lucifer. And I'm not leaving you behind, so don't even ask. I'm not."

His nod is so small she almost mistakes it for more of his trembling. With a ragged breath, he takes a step.

"Don't give up," she tells him. "You're Lucifer the Morning Star. You're my partner. You don't give up. We don't give up. And we're gonna do this."

He takes another stumbling step.

"Okay, so tell me," she says as she guides him down to the bank of the creek and steps into the water at the shallowest point. "Real Housewives of Atlanta or Real Housewives of Orange County?"

"Both are … dishonest … tripe."

She directs a watery grin back at him. "Just checking to see if you're still awake."

A faint, wheezing bark of laughter tumbles from his lips.

She glances behind, checking for rocks or other obstructions, and takes another backward, sloshing step through the creek. He follows, and his loafers sink into the muck beside her boots. Her jeans soak water up to her knees. They cross the stream and emerge on the other side, dripping, and continue onward, into the endless woods.

"Top Chef or Iron Chef?"

"Iron," he says faintly.

The sun is gone behind the trees. Possibly behind the horizon, too, not that the horizon is visible. Faint pastels and the deepening blues of twilight paint the sky. The minutes bleed together as they stumble along through the trees like the walking dead. She asks him any question she can think of, which isn't much, at this point. She's already getting thirsty again. The massive infusion of water woke up her stomach, and it's snarling at her nonstop for food. Every muscle in her body hurts. Her head is pounding. And she's tired. Exhaustion is a bone deep ache, like a bird of prey sinking its claws between her shoulder blades, pinning her to the ground to feast.
"The Bachelor or the Bachelorette?" she asks him.

"… Tripe."

"Project Runway or … or … or …." Shegrimaces, trying to think of something. Anything. "Keeping up with the Kardashians?"

The silence beside her stretches. His dragging footsteps cease, and she snaps to a halt moments later as the man she's trying to pull along becomes a mountain, and their arms stretch taut.

"Okay, I know that one was a crap comparison," she admits, turning to him, "but I'm—" A strangled, agonized gasp like someone slipped a knife between his ribs fills the space between them, and he flinches. "Lucifer?"

"No," he says, a bare, pleading whisper.

She frowns. "Lucifer, what's wrong?"

He rolls his shoulders like he's trying to get away from an unwanted caress. The look on his face isn't a glazed-eyed expression anymore, but rather one of panic. His breaths tighten like a screw. He backs up a step. Away from her.

"Lucifer?" she repeats. "What is it?"

"Get back," he snaps at her with unexpected guttural force. "Chloe, get back."

"Get back?" she repeats uselessly. "Get … what? What are you …?"

His whole body hitches. A panicked breath squelches off into a moan. Another flinch. "No," he says, sinking to his knees in the dirt and the moss and the sticky pine needles. He tips onto all fours, panting, bare biceps bulging. His shoulders roll again. His body sways back and forth.

"Lucifer," she says, horrified.

"Get ba—" he starts to growl, only to convulse into a yell that chills her. He bites his lip bloody. Then he presses his fist to his bloody mouth. His teeth strain against his knuckles. Another yell like he's being flayed. Spittle oozes down his chin. His eyes screw shut.

Two pale walls of feathers ratchet into reality like they were yanked out from underneath his shoulder blades by meat hooks. They whip across the space where she once stood, and he collapses, caught under the weight of them.

Motion becomes stillness.

Cacophony becomes quiet.

For a moment, she can only stare, palms pressed to her mouth in horror.

His wings don't look at all like they did after she restored them to gleaming brilliance. The prior physical damage is all healed or healing — the skin under the stitches she gave him is scabbed over — which she'd normally take as a good sign. But his feathers. They're all a dingy, rumpled, goose-down gray. Nothing like the luminous white they once were. And he's just lying there, crumpled under the blanket of his twisted down. Trembling as he sucks in jerking, shuddering lungfuls of air. Even in the dying twilight, there's no sign of the Lightbringer here.

He's fallen.
Not by choice or the consequence of willful rebellion, but by the unstoppable, unnatural force of the cuffs, pulling him to Earth.

Pulling him into earth.

*For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*

With a shudder and a panicked gasp, she shoves thoughts of her grandfather's funeral out of her head, and she drops onto the soft earth beside her friend. Her … everything. "Lucifer?" she whispers, putting a hand on his shoulder. "Lucifer, can you hear me?"

When he looks at her, his eyes are wet and spilling.

Her gut twists.

"Don't," she snaps before he can open his mouth. "Don't say it. Let me think." Maybe, she could make a travois or ….

"Chloe," he manages. The word sounds like a ten-ton weight given syllables.

"No. Just let me think, God, damn it," she says, almost a snarl as she pushes away from him, leaving him in a feathered heap on the ground.

She paces back and forth beside him, pulling her fingers through her hair, yanking on the sweaty strands. This cannot be happening. Not after everything.

Not yet.

*Look left, and you'll see,* a tiny voice says out of nowhere. Somewhere in her head.

The "hunger delusion" from before.

Swallowing, she looks beyond Lucifer's quivering body. Into the bushes. In the distance. The undergrowth is thick and snarled, and … cultivated? That's the only word she can think of to describe the thick clot of vegetation along the horizon line. The bushes and trees are all jammed together like a wall. Why would they be jammed together like a wall, unless they're lining a road, or a path, or a property, or something?

*Good question. You should totes find out.*

A warmth fills her body. Like the sun shining on a summer day.

"Ella?" Chloe says, frowning.

Wind rustles through the trees. She clenches her fingers into fists. She doesn't want to leave him.

*You'll come back. Go.*

Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck.

She glances down at Lucifer. He's staring blankly into space, eyes oozing with tears. The lump in her throat splits open like a spear ran it through. He needs help. He needs help she can't give. Help she isn't going to find if she stays here.

*Christ on a cracker, would you go? Dad is gonna kill me if I keep talking to you.*
"Please, hold on," she begs him. "P-please. I think there might be a road. I'm gonna check."

Yes! Thank you. Jeez.

"Just hold on, Lucifer. I'm gonna get you some help."

"No," he says, the word small.

"Just hold on."

And then she trips/runs/stumbles toward the strange verdant wall, hoping for salvation.
Chapter Notes

Chapter title credit goes to Ellie Goulding. Posting this a bit early — a treat for you, a relief for me. Thank you to everyone who posts feedback, be that in comment form or in kudos!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Branches slap at her face, cutting her. Pine needles, scratchy leaves, and grasping, sticking spider webs snag on her skin. Ferns flatten underneath her feet as she barrels through the brush, zigzagging between claustrophobic clusters of trees.

She breaks through the tight line of vegetation she spotted before, spilling out onto a muddy, trodden gap where no trees or bushes or anything but straining, stubborn patches of flattened grass and weedy wildflowers seem to grow. The gap is narrow, but long. A tiny unobstructed stripe of the deepening twilight gleams overhead like a rainbow in negative space, and two parallel indentations — tire tracks — run through below, stretching around a curve and out of sight on both sides. Fresh tire-tread indentations score the soft dirt.

A road.

She found a road.

Through which someone passed recently.

She sucks down breath after breath, panting.

Right or left? Right or left?

*Right*, says the tiny voice.

Heart in her throat, she kicks two oblong pebbles — one pinkish, one brown — into the road to mark her place, to mark her way back to Lucifer, and she whips to the right. She kicks into a sprint, hot tears burning her eyes like coals.

"Help," she pleads into the darkening woods, frantic, but she's breathing so hard she can't do more than sob the word. Still, she calls out, anyway. "Help! Help! We need help! Please, help!"

She runs, feet pounding against the dirt despite jolts of pain banging up her shins and ringing in her knees and hips like gongs. She runs, and runs, and runs.

The narrow road abruptly opens into a clearing about the size of a baseball diamond, at the center of which rests a cabin with acorn-brown siding and brown shingles. "Help!" she hollers as she sprints up the long gravel driveway. "Please, help us!"

There are no cars parked outside the cabin. No light spills from the windows. No smoke curls from the chimney.

She slams up the steps, skipping two at a time to reach the small porch. She yanks open the ripped
screen door and bangs the front knocker with so much force that the door shakes. "Please, help!" she repeats, clapping her palm against the smooth wood beside the knocker. "Is anyone there? We need help! Please!"

But no one answers.

No one.

After a fruitless minute of knocking, she gives up and moves along the porch to the window. A vinyl shade is drawn down from the inside, covering all but the last six inches of glass. Blowing in the breeze, a pull cord with a ring at the end dangles from the shade. She pops out the window screen and leans it against the siding, and then, snatching at the pull cord, she releases the blind, which rolls up with a raucous snap.

The house is too dark inside to see anything beyond the window glass. She wrenches the window up as far as it will go and then climbs inside, spilling onto a wooden floor. The air smells of cedar and something rotten.

"Hello?" she calls. "L.A.P.D. I'm in your house. I don't mean you any harm. I just need help."

But the house is quiet.

"Hello?" she repeats.

Silence.

Squinting, she feels her way forward in the dark. She can somewhat make out a lampshade, thanks to the silver moonlight slanting in from the window she just used as her doorway. She pats blindly around for the switch. She finds a metal protrusion just under the lightbulb and twists it.

Lamplight spills into the space around her, and she snaps her eyes shut, hissing in pain.

"Please," she says tearfully into the quiet. "Please, I need help. Please."

Still, no one answers.

When she can see again, her heart clenches.

She's standing at the edge of a large, open-floor-plan area that consists of a sitting-room sectional, recliner, and oak coffee table in one corner; a small round dinette-set table with four place settings in the other corner; and, along the back wall, a sprawling kitchen with a polished granite island. There's a dirty plate resting on the dinette-set table, with a rotting, half-eaten piece of steak and a pile of getting-fuzzy green beans perched at the center of the ceramic. The steak is writhing with flies and other creepy crawlies, and the shiny silver fork is still stabbed into the meat.

Someone was here. Recently. And they left in a hurry.

Help was here.

And she missed it.

They missed it.

Hopelessness looms like a cloud of locusts, threatening to devour her whole.

Think, damn it, she tells herself. Stop wallowing and fucking think.
She makes a slow circuit through the cabin, searching for a phone, but she can't find a landline. Not in the main room. Not in any of the three bedrooms or the den or the three bathrooms. She can't find a radio, either. Or a laptop. Or a computer. Or a tablet. Not a single thing that might have a bidirectional connection with the outside world. Not even a fucking television.

She takes a sobbing breath. And another.

The locusts circle, a hungering swath.

Of course, she would find an isolationist's cabin when she's in the middle of fucking nowhere.

What did she expect?

How can she be so close and yet so far from what she needs? What *he* needs?

With a gulp, she swallows back her grief.

The fridge and the cabinets in the kitchen both contain food. The faucets all have running water. The closet in the master bedroom sports a mostly-full rack of clothing. Some hangers are empty and askew — more evidence of a quick departure. Between all that, the cracked-open window, the working power, and the rotting steak, somebody clearly lives here, at least some of the time.

Maybe, the forest fire scared them into evacuating. Lucifer lit up miles in a matter of minutes. That's a fast spread. Obscenely fast. Impossible, really, without the Devil himself lighting the figurative matches. Of *course*, anyone in walking distance would have fled.

But they'll come back when the fire dies down. Right?

If she can just get Lucifer here, somehow, he'll have somewhere supplied and sheltered to rest while she follows the tire tracks in the opposite direction of the cabin. Between the two of them, someone should find help. Either the cabin owner(s) will return to discover that a dying archangel has broken into their rustic getaway, or she'll intercept a car on the road. But they'll find help.

They *will*.

She takes another breath. And another. Okay. A plan. She has a plan.

Now, to get Lucifer here.

________________________________________

She can't find him.

Everything looks different in the dark. At first, she can't even find the rocks she left to mark the road. Then she finds the rocks, but she's not sure where in the cavernous woods beyond the rocks she left him. Helpless. She left him *helpless*.

"Lucifer!" she shouts. "Lucifer, where are you?"

Her heart pounds in her ears as she listens for him. He was barely speaking when she left him. How is he going to call for help, now? What if he's not even conscious?

"Lucifer!" she calls as stress-born nausea coils in her empty gut.

She left him. She left him alone, and she can't find—
She almost falls flat on her face when she trips on his big gray wing. The adrenaline smashing through her veins like a breaking wave is the only thing that allows her to react quickly enough to catch herself. Her shoulders wrench as her weight slams into the heels of her palms, and a layer of skin skids off her elbows. Burning, stinging pain races up her arms. She scrambles to her feet, wincing.

"Lucifer!" she says, a gasp.

He's sitting, his shoulder and right cheek pressed against the trunk of an aspen as he stares blankly into the moonlit dark. His wings are sprawled behind him in the ferns, lifeless. There are deep, long runnels scraped into the earth beside him. His shirt is covered with dirt and leaf bits. His fingers are trembling and wet, and the pale bark of the aspen is glistening with blackish stains. Blood. He dragged himself. Almost twenty feet. Toward the road. Like he was trying to follow her.

"Lucifer," she says, eyes leaking, horrified. "I found a road. And a cabin. I found a place. It's like half a mile from here. It's empty, but there's food and water and—" She waves at him when he offers no acknowledgement. "Lucifer. Can you hear me?"

His glassy gaze shifts aimlessly toward her, but his eyes are searching. Like he really can't see a fucking thing anymore. Maybe, he can't. Parsing blurry moonlit shapes into sensical objects might be a skill he doesn't have, yet. Not without cultivating it.

She collapses beside him, next to the tree. She'll drag him if she has to. She will. She'll grab the collar of his ruined sport coat and—

Oh, no.

He's lost enough of himself that his wings are corporeal in every sense of the word.

His sport coat — the arms of which she'd looped under his armpits and tied into a knot behind his shoulder blades — is jacked up against the nape of his neck, stretched over the top edges of his wings like a twisted rope meant to hold them down. The arms of the coat are extended almost to the point of ripping at the seams. His shoulders are pulled backward at a jutting angle. Displaced, bloody feathers rest beside him on the ground.

Nausea swells. "Oh, God," she whispers, fingers trembling as she leans forward to inspect the knot formed by the sleeves of his jacket. It's been pulled into a tight ball by the force of his wings materializing, and now, with his wrists bound together, he's stuck fast.

And she left him like that.

She tugs at the knot, trying to loosen it for him, but it won't budge. She pulls at the stressed seams and hears threads popping in the quiet, but the fabric doesn't separate. The coat is too well-constructed. She needs scissors or a knife or …. "Lucifer, please. I found a cabin. It's just half a mile. Just half. I can get this off you if we—"

"I can't." The words are quiet. Barely spoken.

She shakes her head, pulling him into her arms. He's pliant. His lusterless wings scrape like dead things across the bed of pine needles.

"Please," she tells him, quivering. "P-please. Just half a mile. I promise. I promise, you can rest as long as you need to after that. I won't push you anymore."
He takes a pained, hitching, wet breath against her neck. "I can't. I'm tired."

She swallows against the lump in her throat. "Yes, you can. Get up." He doesn't budge. She swipes tears out of her eyes and stands. "Get up," she pleads, hooking her fingers under his armpits and pulling. "Get up, get up, get up. Please, get up. We're so close."

But his arms are so wrenched by the coat that all her needling does is elicit a twisted gasp of pain from him that rakes her raw.

"I'm sorry," she warbles, shaking, not sure what the fuck to do. She can't just leave him collapsed in the woods. She can't. With a stressed, panicked breath, she looks at his feet. She can drag him along by his ankles, maybe. God, she doesn't want to drag him. It'll take all night. "Please, get up, Lucifer. Please."

"I can't," he repeats. "I tried."

She glances at the troughs in the earth. At the bloody bark. Her heart constricts to a sharp needle point. "Well, you didn't try with me here, did you?"

He sniffs, sounding almost amused, despite everything. You are the most determined, hellbent woman I've ever bloody met, she can almost hear him saying. The happy, healthy version of him who's living in her head.

"Please," she says. "Please, try. Please, just try for me."

His expression crumples. He takes another wet breath, and for a moment, she feels like scum for playing that card with him. For begging him when he's so sick and spent.

"Please," she says once more, the nail in the coffin. "Please, just try. I desire you to try."

"All right," he says quietly, like acquiescing is the equivalent of walking the plank.

She doesn't wait for him to change his mind. "Can you get your legs underneath you? Get ready to push up?"

He gives her a sluggish nod and bends his knees with the speed of a sloth. She drops to her haunches in front of him, trying to be more gentle this time about looping her arms through his armpits. She hooks her fingers together low across his back, well away from his wings.

"Put your hands over my head," she commands.

He fumbles shakily, moving again like someone hit the slow-motion button on his remote, but he manages. The heavy cuffs settle against the back of her neck, cutting into her skin.

"Push with your feet, and pull with your arms on three, okay?" she says. "I'll pull, too. We can do this."

"All right."

She nods. "Okay. One. Two. Three."

As soon as the word three is out of her mouth, she whips her weight backward, pulling so hard on his waist that spots fill her vision. A strangled moan of pain pops loose from his lips. For a moment, he doesn't budge. But then his body starts to shift. A yell breaks her vocal cords, air expelling from her lungs like her sternum is a vise, squishing them. Then he's yelling, too. Her arms and legs shake
with exertion. And then she's falling on her ass in the ferns, and he's upright, almost sobbing as he
sways into the tree to catch himself with the edge of the cuffs before gravity can pull him down
again.

She scrambles to her feet to help him, offering all the support she can muster. She catches him as he
sways a bit too far to the right, and then, like a teetering block tower in a Jenga game, he gradually
settles into something halfway stable. Relief so sharp it makes her sick floods through her. Her hands
start to shake uncontrollably as she swallows back vomit.

"You did it!" she exclaims.

Panting, he doesn't reply except to curl into her. His wings hang limply behind him, the feathers not
even twitching.

"You did it," she repeats in a more soothing tone. "You did it. You did it."

His torso hitches. His jerky, sucking breaths fill the silence beside her ear. She doesn't say anything
else, doesn't push him, doesn't anything. She rubs his sides, trying to offer him some comfort in his
whorl of misery.

The crickets sing.

"Okay, just one more step," she encourages. "Just one more."

The distance that took her about five minutes to run at a sprint took what felt like hours for him to
walk — his wings are literal dead weights dragging behind him — and the night is deep and dark.
His toes smack into the back of the top step as he struggles to lift his knees high enough to navigate
it.

Flipping on the lights as she passes, she guides him through the door, which she unlocked before she
left. As soon as the tips of his wings brush the threshold, he starts to sag in her arms, like he wants to
sit down on the floor right there, but she manages to steer him to the dinette set table before his
collapse becomes unstoppable. The bottom edge of his left wing bows underneath him as he sits on it
instead of lifting it gracefully out of the way. The arc of bone forming the top edge looks strained and
uncomfortable, forced high in the air by the odd position, which only jams the limb more firmly
against the jacket. Fresh blood darkens the feathers that haven't already been torn loose by the
constriction.

She rushes the gross, rotting steak and moldy green beans into the kitchen area, tossing the plate into
the sink to deal with later. Then she grabs the chef's knife from the knife block on the counter by the
salt and pepper shakers. The gleaming blade probably cost more than her entire knife set back home.
It's so sharp that the arms of Lucifer's suit split apart like warm butter with only a nudge from the
knifepoint, and then she's able to pull the jacket away and toss it with prejudice to the floor by his
feet. Deep, angry puce indentations mar his deltoids, but his shoulders finally relax, and his hitching,
wrecked sigh of relief is palpable.

"Thank you," he croaks.

"Sure," is all she can think of to say.

It's hard to say that much, the lump in her throat is so huge.
The thick cuffs thunk against the table as he sets his wrists against the lacquered surface, and then he shakily slides forward to rest his head in the cradle of his bloodstained forearms. She leaves him to recuperate while she rummages through the kitchen.

Most of the produce piled in the fruit and vegetable bins in the fridge is turning to sludge. The leftover steaks smell funny and look gray. But there's orange juice. And milk. And hot dogs. None of which is expired, but only just. She finds a smorgasbord of condiments — ketchup, mustard, tartar sauce, mayo, salad dressing, pickles, olives. There's butter in the tray. Eggs. The buns in the plastic bag on the counter are beyond their use-by date, but they aren't moldy, just stale. The apples and tomatoes resting beside the buns look mostly good also. She finds graham crackers in the cabinets. Cereal. Canned soup. Canned fruit. Canned beans. Fresh honey, too.

Sugar. Fat. Protein.

Food.

Food.

Her stomach gurgles raucously as she glances over her shoulder. Lucifer still has his head down. His breaths are ragged, shallow gasps. He's pale and dirty and frail, and he looks nothing like the overflowing fountain of joie de vivre he should be.

She needs to get help for him.

Soon.

She needs to leave.

Soon.

A fresh lump expands in her throat.

She grabs the food that's closest to expiring, only stopping long enough to heat up all the dogs in the microwave. The sizzle and pop of the franks as they cook make her salivate almost to the point of drooling. As the microwave timer runs down to zero, the beep-beep-beep that pierces the silence is a beautiful symphony. She stuffs the cooked hot dogs into stale buns and dumps them all onto a plate. Then she takes the makeshift feast to the dinette-set table in several trips.

"Lucifer, there's food," she says as she pours him a glass of orange juice and nudges it toward his hand.

He doesn't lift his head, doesn't seem interested at all. Worry curdles in her gut, but she can't wait anymore. Her whole body is shaking with its own needs. She inhales the first hot dog, stale bun and all, in about three bites, unable to stop herself from moaning in pleasure. The processed mystery meat and dry bun is filet mignon and fresh-baked, warm bread, for all her starving body can differentiate right now. Calories are calories.

"Oh, my God," she mutters breathlessly around her mouthful, barely able to make herself stop to chew. "Oh, my God."

She grabs a second hot dog and snarfs it down just as quickly as the first. Then she's chugging orange juice straight from the bottle — it's got pulp, and she hates pulp, but she finds herself taking desperate swallow after sugary, desperate swallow, anyway, until she has to stop to breathe. She's still sucking down air as she bites into a tomato without bothering to slice it, first. By the time she's pouring the milk over a bowl of Cinnamon Toast Crunch, she's almost in a fugue state. She can't
care. She can't care about any of it. She eats, and she eats, and she eats, because she needs.

It takes her three hot dogs doused in mustard, half the O.J., a tomato, and two bowls of cereal before sanity returns, and she remembers Lucifer, who hasn't even risen to take a sip from the glass she poured for him. She's still hungry, but the feeling is much less like a lion clawing open her gut, now, and much more like a gnat buzzing around her insides. She can wait a while to swat at gnats.

She scoots her chair around to his side of the table. His right wing is sprawled to the side behind him like a discarded coat, and with a heavy swallow, she nudges it out of the way. It's cumbersome and limp, and the feathers that slide along the wooden floor sound like a body being dragged. Worse, though, the limb itself is gelid. Even more gelid than the rest of him.

She takes a panicked breath and blows it out, trying to push away thoughts of gangrenous, dying limbs.

"Lucifer, please, try to eat," she tells him. When he doesn't move, she puts a hand on his bicep and gives it a squeeze. "Please. It might help."

He looks at the hot dogs without appetite.

"At least, take a sip of the juice," she suggests, poking the glass forward until it bumps his arm.

He pushes up shakily on his elbows. His trembling fingers wrap around the glass.

His first sip is hesitant.

He doesn't take a second one. With a listless sigh, he sets down the glass, pushes it away, and puts his head down again, turning away from her. It's like … his whole body is just … shutting down.

Tears fill her eyes.

She needs to leave.

She needs to leave right now.

"Okay," she says, sliding back her chair with trembling fingers as she starts forming a mental list. She saw some unopened water bottles in one of the bottom cabinets. And she should write a note, so if someone comes back to find a sick, mum archangel in their house, there will at least be some sort of accompanying explanation that might result in Lucifer getting the help he needs. "Okay."

She takes a breath and blows it out.

"Okay, I'm gonna go. I'm gonna go for help, now." She glances at the hallway that leads to the bedrooms. "Do you want help to a bed, or do you just want to sit here for a while? I can bring you a blanket, and maybe we can get your wing out from underneath you so it'll be more comfortable."

His breaths tighten. A sound catches in his throat. The first one he's made since thanking her for removing the tangled jacket.

"Lucifer?"

"No."

She frowns. "No, you don't want to go to bed, or, no, you don't want to sit here, or …?"

For a moment, he doesn't reply, instead struggling to sit up straight.
"Bed or chair?" she prods.

"I want y—" He pauses. His expression makes a slow slide from open and pleading, to closed. Like a door creaking shut, carried by a chill draft. "—t-to lie down."

She nods, bending down to help him. "Okay."

Getting him standing when he's already halfway out of gravity's clutches, thanks to the chair, is a lot less of an ordeal than it was in the woods. He slumps against her shoulder once he's upright, and the wing he crushed underneath him limply succumbs to gravity. He saves her from none of his considerable weight, but she bears it. Bears him. She can bear him — wings and all — as long as he's standing and not falling.

Their shamble to the bedroom is interminable, and she can't help but imagine each minute as it burns away like the wick of a lit candle. She could be getting them help. She could be—

His grip is archangel strong as he wraps his icy fingers around her wrist.

"Please," he says, his begging expression reopened like a septic wound, as he sinks onto the edge of the mattress in the master bedroom. He's paler than he was. Trembling. The sheets are soft and clean, and his dirty body looks out of place. "Please, stay."

She blinks dumbly at him. "But I need to get help."

The look he gives her flays her alive.

She shakes her head, backing away from him. "No. No, I can still get help. I can—"

"Chloe—"

"No," she snarls at him, and then in a wavering tone adds, "No," as she shakes her head. "No, I'm not ready. I'm not ready. There's still a chance I can find help!"

He takes a breath like breathing hurts him. A wince crosses his features.

"Who do you think will be able to help at this juncture?" he says quietly. "Human implements won't —"

"A fucking hospital could help," she insists. "You're not the first person alive to get stuck in handcuffs, you know. They could grease your wrists, or dislocate your thumbs, or … or …." She swallows as a pit forms in her stomach. "Doctors can reattach limbs if they're severed cleanly."

His eyes narrow as he regards her.

"What?" she says. "It's a shit solution — I'm aware — but it's a better solution than you dying."

He doesn't speak.

"What?" she snaps, suddenly feeling hot. Everything in her body is screaming at her to run and don't stop running until she finds another car. A person. Anything. "Why are you staring at me?"

With a sigh he holds out his trembling wrists. "Try."

"Try what?"

"The knife in the kitchen," he says, directing a small nod toward the door. "Try."
Her mouth tumbles open. "I can't cut your hands off!"

His stare is flinty. "Try."

"But—"

"Try."

She blows out a frustrated breath and stomps back into the kitchen, not sure why she's even listening to him. The chef's knife gleams in the overhead lights. Its edge was sharp enough to slice through thick, expensive fabric without any effort.

A lurid, bloody picture fills her mind's eye. Nausea quails in her gut at the thought of …. Her whole body heaves, but she swallows down her distress. Taking deep, even breaths, she carries the huge knife back to him, but nothing holds her revulsion at bay, and nothing dampens the sound of her heart as it thunders in her ears.

"Lucifer, I—"

"Press the blade to my wrist with intent," he tells her before she can finish. "Intend to—"

"I can't just—"

The mattress squeaks as he musters strength from nowhere, and he lunges at her with a roar that shakes the windows and vibrates in her chest. Her heart leaps into her throat. She gasps, flinching backward. Her fingers reflexively tighten around the blade's handle. His momentum and gravity make fast friends, and they propel him into her like a wrecking ball.

"Don't!" she has a chance to yelp, trying to move in time to avoid him, but she isn't as quick to react as an archangel with nothing to lose.

The blade jams point first into his forearm.

A brilliant, sizzling pop of electricity lights up the room like a sun flare. His heavy body shivers in place as all of his muscles lock up. His teeth clench so hard his cheeks bulge. A whooping, agonized burst of sound ejects from his lungs as his diaphragm contracts like a tripped spring.

Then he slides to the floor in a gangly heap of limp limbs and gray feathers.

Silence stretches.

What.

Wait.

What …?

And then everything snaps back into focus. She tosses the knife aside. It clatters to the floor, spinning into the crown molding, where the point catches on the wood, and the blade sticks fast.

"Oh, my God," she snaps, sobbing as she drops to the floor beside him. "Oh, my God! Lucifer!"

He seems too bell rung to speak, at first. His whole body sags like a dead thing in her arms. She pulls his head into her lap. His bound wrists flop against the bed frame, drawing her attention. His skin is unscathed. Like he didn't try to shish kebob his arm with a giant knife.
His body jerks and spasms as he regains motor function. He blinks. His fingers flex and twitch. His lips smack. And then he settles with a raspy, faint, "Ow."

The cuffs. There must be something in the cuffs — some magic — that acted like a shield, preventing his arm from being damaged when he intended for the damage to help him escape. And he knew it was going to do that. He knew it. But he threw himself at the blade anyway. To convince her of the futility. To make her hear him.

There really is no earthly way to get them off.

None.

And they aren't going to find a real magician in a matter of hours.

Not in the middle of nowhere.

These are a torture device is what they are, he said.

Her lower lip quivers uncontrollably for a moment. Two. Three. Everything blurs as her innards drop. When she blinks, hot, ugly, burning tears stream down her cheeks. "No," she says, unable to contain herself. She swallows. Her throat hurts like she dragged the point of the knife down her esophagus. "No." She cups his face with trembling hands. "No, I don't want you to die. You can't die. You can't." She sucks in a shaking breath. "I only just found you." The words are tiny. Barely more than a gasp. She didn't mean to say them. But . . .

"Chloe, I'm . . . tired," he says quietly, looking up at her. "And I hurt." His eyes are wet, too. "And I want you here."

For the end.

"Please, stay," he says.

She squeezes her eyes shut. Breathing hurts like her lungs are shards of glass. He hardly ever asks her for anything.

"I will," she whispers as the locusts descend. "I'll stay. I promise."

He relaxes. At last. She hadn't even realized how tense he was. How panicked. His head tips to the side against her thigh.

"I'm tired," he says, defeated.

"Okay," she can barely croak. "It's okay. I won't push you anymore."

His eyes drift closed. His pained, rasping breaths begin to even out. And he lies there. On the cold floor beside the bed. Covered in blood and sweat and filth. Crumpled up like rags.

"Okay," she repeats, pulling her fingers through his hair. "I'm here."

He sleeps in her arms, at peace.

Chapter End Notes
Hang in there, guys. *Group hug!*
Immortal

Chapter Notes

So, I promised I'd post this chapter a little early if I could, and I can, so here I am! Just a reminder that there will be no update on either 11/21 or 11/25, but I'll be back on (or potentially a little before) 11/28. Anyway, I really hope you enjoy this chapter. Title credit goes to Marina & the Diamonds.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Birds sing from the treetops as a cool, wet gust slaps at her face.

She sits on her knees on the porch, hands steepled in supplication. The voice from last night has been silent ever since she laid eyes on the cabin, and she doesn't know what else to do.

**Please, help your brother. Please. I know you want to help.**

She's never been one to pray. She always found the concept futile. Why ask a void for help?

But prayers don't go to a void. They aren't directionless flailing.

**Please, help him.**

They go to living, breathing recipients who could be listening if they wanted, but don't care enough to bother.

And she didn't think, before, that words like "extra" could be applied to binary states like futile, and yet, here she is, feeling the "extra" futility like someone tied Lucifer-sized free weights to her ankles and yanked on them until she face planted in the dirt.


Hot, angry tears pulse down her cheeks as almost-black cumulonimbus clouds roll overhead. The sunrise was muted — almost suppressed — by an angry cold front tumbling over the horizon. The temperature dropped what felt like fifteen degrees overnight. And the leaves and pine needles rustle as the trees snap and writhe in the wind.

**Please.**

**Anyone ...?**

Exhaustion simmers behind her eyelids, and every time she closes her eyes, the world around her feels like it's oozing. She didn't get any sleep. Stuffing one's face with food — particularly crappy processed food like hot dogs — after days without eating *anything*, is a fast-track ticket to an upset stomach, and she feels wretched. After Lucifer woke up enough for her to help him into bed, she vacated, not wanting to disturb his much-needed rest.

**Please.**

The porch floor is cold beneath her knees. Hard. Uncomfortable. Her stomach quivers precariously,
though she hasn't given it anything to fuss about except water since last night. Her tongue pulls into the back of her throat. She swallows against rising nausea. Again, again, again.

*Please.*

But no one is listening.

And he's going to die.

He's dying right *now.* Back in the bedroom while she's out here. Begging for the impossible.

The rain begins to patter down in fat, relentless droplets. And then she can't hold her turmoil in anymore. She launches toward the creaky porch railing to heave over the side.

Her eyes hurt from crying. *Everything* hurts as she stumbles to the kitchen sink to rinse out her mouth. With a sniff, she cups her hands under the faucet, dragging a mouthful of water to her lips. She stares into the back wall, swishing the water between her teeth as the faucet rushes. The glass tile backsplash seems to split in two, doubling as her eyes lose focus. Rain pelts the roof.

She doesn't know how long she stands there, floating out of body, before she manages to give herself a shake.

The blankets on the bed in the master bedroom are pushed into a crumpled heap at the foot of the mattress, and the room is empty. Her heart leaps into her throat, and her lungs push out all of her air. But then she realizes the thunder of the rain pouring down overhead has additional layers to it. A deep, throaty gurgle. Like water sloshing through pipes. A whooshing sound. Like a rushing faucet. A soft hum. Like an exhaust fan.

She looks left. The bathroom door is shut. A faint yellow strip of light fills the space between the door and the scratched oak flooring. How he mustered the energy to walk to the bathroom by himself, she doesn't—

A raucous crash fills the space behind the bathroom door.

"Lucifer?" she snaps, closing the gap between her body and the door in two reaching strides. "Are you okay? Do you need help in there?" When he doesn't answer right away, she makes a fist and raps beside the knob with her knuckles, each impact making the door shake. "Lucifer?"

"... 'Tective?" The word is woozy and disoriented and faint, like his consciousness is wafer thin and crumbling.

She doesn't wait for him to invite her inside. A cloud of steam tumbles to freedom when she pushes open the door. The rush of the faucet crescendos to a roar. Heat wafts against her face, and her skin turns damp in moments.

Lucifer is sitting on the lid of the toilet, trembling, pale, naked, his body perched a bit like the Thinker, save for the fact that his chin is cradled between both hands, not resting on one. His left wing sprawls across the floor like a drab, gray rug, stopping just short of the doorway, and his right wing is crammed between the back edge of the toilet bowl and the tub. The trash can is tipped over. The shower curtain is sprawled haphazardly over the tub and floor, getting doused by the faucet. One end of the curtain rod is jammed into the tub, and the other end is sticking up at a diagonal in mid-air like a spear. His soiled clothes rest in a forgotten pile by the sink.

"I ...." He swallows, directing a blank, stunned look into space.
"Hey," she says gently, careful to step over his crumpled wing. "Lucifer, what happened?"

But from his shell-shocked expression … he doesn't know. "I … tripped?" he says without confidence.

She glances at the wreckage, heart constricting. His uncertainty suggests he blacked out. Not just tripped. Between the wet swelter of the steam and his flagging fortitude, he must have left the world for a moment, only to return in a different place.

She leans across the tub to turn off the water.

"No, no," he says, reaching for her with an icy, featherlight grip. "No, I'm …." He loses his place in reality. "Bhis." A pained sound catches in his throat. "D-dirty."

His face and wrists are caked with dried blood, and his arms and sides are covered in a fine, dark coat of dust particles and sap. His normally straightened hair is matted through and tightening into frizzy curls. His stubble is an outright beard — not carefully cultivated five-o'clock scruff anymore.

"I just need to fix the shower curtain," she assures him. "And then I'll help you get cleaned up."

"… Oh." He relaxes, lowering his trembling hands.

She picks up the metal curtain rod.

He stares into space with a glassy, drifting-away expression as she fixes the rod and the curtain, trying not to let the lump in her throat overwhelm her, but memories coil in her mind like barbed wire. Trixie keeps laughing and laughing as she attempts to hold his hand. With a miffed expression, he whips out his handkerchief to smite all remnants of her sticky fingers from his skin. Tree sap and dirt might as well be a million Trixies. Of course, he'd crawl off his deathbed for a shower. Of course, he would.

The plastic curtain snaps in the silence as it falls back into place.

"Do you think you can stand for a while if you have the wall to lean against?" she says, blinking back tears. Her tone sounds thick and wavering, even to her own ears. She takes a shuddering breath and another. He doesn't need this shit. But nothing cleanses away the ache expanding deep in her chest.

When he doesn't reply, she prods, "Lucifer?"

He blinks. "Hmm?"

"Do you think you can stand for a while if you have the wall to lean against?" Or should she try and find a chair that will fit in the tub? She doesn't relish the thought of ruining any of their unwilling host's furniture, but …. 

"M'okay," he murmurs at last.

She gives him a dubious look, but decides to give him the benefit of the doubt. She pushes the curtain toward the wall, bunching it up, and then turns the faucet back on. Steam curls up from the water.

As the seconds crawl, she freezes there, in that space, in that moment, with him sitting inches away from her, naked. The falling water fills the silence with a whooshing sound. Self-consciousness tightens around her neck like a noose. This is not how she pictured this. Ever.
She directs a stressed glance at his pale kneecap.

Out of the corner of her eye.

He's not going to say anything. Of course, he's not. He's not even going to look, not with the sort of carnal intent that would embarrass her. He feels like shit. He can't even see straight. Literally.

Closing her eyes, she takes a deep, fortifying breath, and then she peels off her filthy shirt. Her soiled jeans. Her nasty, rank underwear and bra. She adds her socks to the grody pile last, and then kicks them all to the side by the molding.

Damp air laves her skin.

Silence stretches.

She presses her hands to her mouth, but it doesn't help. "Oh, God," she moans between her fingertips as a tidal wave spills over her, and everything she's been holding back tumbles out at once. "Oh, God." Her lower lip trembles as she adds, whispering, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I don't mean to—"

"It's all right," he says.

She hiccoughs. "No, it's not. I'm naked right in front of you, and you're not saying a word, and it's wrong." She blinks, tears streaking from her eyes. "I didn't expect it to feel so wrong." She sucks in a breath. And another. And another. "Everything feels wrong."

The toilet lid clanks as he struggles to rise, but he manages. His body looms large and shaking next to hers as he shambles into her space. His broad shoulder brushes hers. His pale chest slides into view. Then he lifts his arms. Over her head. She feels the cold cuffs settle heavy and low across her spine as he pulls her into his arms. With a grieving moan, she presses her ear against his chest and slings her arms around his waist. The steady pounding of his heartbeat fills her ear through his breastbone. His nose mashes into her hair. His breaths are strained and rasping, like just that much movement exhausted him, but he's here. And he's present. For her.

"I'm sorry," she says. "I'm sorry. This isn't supposed to be about me."

"Of course, it's about you," he replies softly with a disapproving cluck of his tongue. "Don't be bloody silly."

"But—"

"Death is rarely about the dying." He kisses the top of her head with cold lips. "And for whatever it's worth, to me, you are a vision. Always."

Which only makes her cry harder. Ugly cry. With snot and drool and zero dignity.

He doesn't comment. Not on the tears, or the snot, or the drool. Definitely not on the loss of dignity.

For all the snark he possesses, he employs none of it, now.

"I don't want you to die," she says in a broken whisper. Again. She's said it too much.

"I know," he replies, world-weary.

She sniffs. "It isn't fair."

With a sigh, he tightens his embrace, pressing close.
He holds her in a timeless space, sheltering her as she grieves.

The shower fails to warm him.

Even under the relentless, hot spray, his skin is cold, and he won't stop shivering. The surge of strength he mustered to hold her, to comfort her, has petered out, now, and he leans against the wall, passive and bleary-eyed. His massive wings don't fit together in the tub. One rests behind him, limp and lifeless, the tips of his bladed gray feathers soaking in the sudsy water. The other hangs over the side, sluicing water onto the bathmat in dousing sheets.

She starts with his hair, first doing her best to pick out all the pine needles and twigs and bits of leaves that have gotten stuck, and second, massaging a generous, golf-ball-sized dollop of shampoo into the tangled mess, not once, but twice. He's so tall that she has to stand on her tiptoes, her feet sloshing through the water collecting at the tub floor as she presses up against his back. She shifts left and right and left again to reach everywhere, trying not to trip on his wing. Thankfully, the shower has a detachable nozzle, so she's able to move the spray around by herself, rather than requiring movement or work from him. Her arms ache from stretching by the end.

He doesn't speak. Not for a long time. Not until she's kneading conditioner against his scalp.

"S'nice," he murmurs so quietly she can barely hear him over the spray. A heaving sigh racks his frame, and then he stills, save for his worrisome trembling. He sounds almost drunk when he slurs, "No one's ever done this."

She frowns. "No one's ever done what?"

He jerks in place like her question woke him up from a doze.

"Lucifer?"

He doesn't reply. Like, perhaps, in the grips of languor, he admitted something private. Like ….

Oh.

Her heart constricts when she realizes what "this" is.

Washing his hair. Not for some sex game or … whatever … but for closeness. To be warm. To care for and to cherish, skin to skin.

No one has ever cherished him.

In her eyes, he's always seemed like such a font of experience. He's seen every depravity humanity has to offer. Every lie. Every vice and sin and kink. Every inch of his skin has been debauched by scores. He's debauched them in return. His life is a rich, lush symphony of carnal pleasure.

But he's a barren wasteland of spiritual neglect.

A terrible irony for an angel if ever there was one.

She aims the spray at the back of his head, pulling her fingers softly through his hair, since he seems to like that.

She would be lying if she said she didn't linger far longer than required, cherishing.

The minutes bleed away, lost in the roar of the water.
"Are they dead?" she finally has the nerve to ask as she rubs the washcloth down his dingy feathers. "Your wings, I mean. They look ...." She swallows. None of the feathers twitch like they did the last time she handled his wings. She has yet to see either limb move independently since they showed up again, unbidden. Both feel frostbitten to the touch, they're so cold. "They seem dead."

"No," he says. "They're ... too heavy. I don't have the raw musculature to ...." A pained smile tugs at his lips as the breaths rasp in his chest. "I can feel your hand."

She strokes a soft edge of a secondary feather with her thumb. Even soaked, even dingy gray, his wings are still lamb's-ear soft. "Does this feel nice?"

"Yes."

She wanders to the bulging muscles where his wings meet his back. Muscles that are overworked by limbs they're not meant to lift. Muscles that must be screaming at him. She rubs the washcloth gently against him. Against the soft seam where tiny velvet feathers become skin. Then she presses. He almost trips, loosing a bark of pain that makes her stomach twist. The cuffs clink against the wall tiles as he adjusts, pressing a palm flat to hold his slumping weight.

"Sorry," she says, almost biting her lip bloody. She'd meant to massage him, not maul him. Stupid. So stupid. "I'm sorry. I thought it would help."

"It's all right," he says faintly. Glassy-eyed, blinking, he thunks his forehead against the wall.

Gun-shy, she moves away from his wings. Instead, she drags the washcloth up and down his heaving side, feeling the bumps of all of his ribs, and the little valleys between. His jerky, sucking inhalations slow over moments. His eyelids dip.

"Does this feel good?" she says, sick with hoping.

He nods.

She drags the cloth up and down his body in steady strokes, scrubbing all the grime and sweat and displaced gore away. Time sharpens again only when she has to step out of the tub and over his wing to work her way around to the front. She scrubs his arms, softening her strokes as she nears his abraded wrists, washing all the blood away, until only dry scabs remain.

"Do you ...?" She clears her throat, proffering the sudsy washcloth to him. He can reach the rest by himself. If he wants. Even with his hands bound. "Um."

With a quaking breath, he picks himself up off the wall and wraps his shaking fingers around the cloth. She turns away to give him a bit of privacy. The rasp of the cloth and the rush of the water fill the silence as he finishes up, claiming one last bit of willful independence for himself.

"Is there another?" he says softly behind her.

"Another what?"

"Cloth."

She frowns. "Um." She pushes the shower curtain back to inspect the stack of towels she brought in from the linen closet. There's also a small stack of washcloths. She grabs a soft purple one from the top of the pile before closing the curtain and ducking back underneath the spray with him. "Yeah." She lathers it for him, since he can't do that one-handed, and then holds the cloth over her shoulder.
for him to grab.

There's a wet slap as he drops the old washcloth onto the floor of the tub, and then he takes the new one.

What she doesn't expect is to feel the cloth rasping against her spine.

"Oh!" she blurts, water sloshing as she flinches toward the spigot.

A pause. "Is this … all right?" he says.

"You don't have to do that."

"But is it all right?"

Tears well in her eyes. "Yes. It's … yes."

He settles the washcloth against her back again, massaging all the spots she missed in her haste to worry over him. His touch is gentle. Or weak. Or gentle. She prefers to think gentle. The lump in her throat expands.

He steps all the way into her space. "There's a safe," he murmurs beside her ear. "In my library. Behind the leftmost bookshelf. The passcode is 12042007."

She blinks. "That's … Trixie's birthday."

"And?" he says, stroking the back of her shoulder with the cloth. She can almost hear his smile. "It's easy to recall. And no one who knows me would ever guess it."

She swallows. "I know you."

"And would you have guessed it?"

"No."

"Precisely."

She frowns. "I thought you said you have an eidetic memory."

"I do."

"Then why do you …?" Realization slides in. He doesn't need for the combination to be easy to remember. He wants it to be easy to remember. For her. "I …"

He presses his lips to her temple. "Inside the safe is a small leather-bound black book," he says against her skin. "All of my account numbers and passphrases are listed in it, along with the number of the attorney I have on retainer. All of the keys and titles to my properties are in the manilla envelope. My ledger is in the safe as well — that's the larger book. You might need to hire a translator for some of it."

"Your … l-ledger."

"For favors," he confirms.

Her stomach flip flops. "Lucifer …"
"When you get home, I want you to have it. All of it. My attorney has your name. There shouldn't be any trouble. All right?"

"But—," she's quick to say. Quick to protest. She turns around, water sloshing as she shifts to face him, to look into his dark eyes. The warmth and earnestness in his tired gaze is like an axe to slice her open at the seams. He's never been cared for before, no. And he's never cared, either. This is the flip side of that same coin. His last chance to fill in the gaping, tragic blanks in his life. The ache in her throat is a hurting, stabbing throb. "Okay." She swallows, blinking back a fresh wave of tears as she nods. "Okay. Trixie's birthday. I'll remember."

"Good," he says, and the conversation ceases once again, though the silence isn't awkward.

His breaths are raspier, his fingers less sure as he resumes his ministrations with the cloth. His weight presses onto her more and more with each stroke. He's tiring.

She closes her eyes and pretends they're on a beach somewhere, the warm salty air billowing around them. Trixie is there, and she's laughing and laughing, and Lucifer is lying on a towel in his swim trunks, an adonis in repose, basking in the rays of the sun he created.

*Come in the water, Mommy! Trixie will say.*

*I'll be right there, baby,* Chloe will reply, rolling into Lucifer to kiss him. *Want to come, too?*

*I'm not a bloody fish,* he'll say.

She'll shrug, grinning. *So? And then she'll stand up, showing off her favorite blue bikini.*

He'll grin like a shark, rising to his feet to follow her into the waves. *Astute point, darling.*

As fantasies go, it's mundane. And a bit out of character. And perfect.

They stay in the shower together, dancing in imaginary waves, until the real water gets cold.

---

He has trouble getting out of the tub. By the time he's leaning against the wall, panting but somehow still upright, his wings dripping all over the floor, he can't even lift a towel. His body trembles underneath the terrycloth as she helps him dry himself.

"I forgive you," she blurts. Suddenly, though the words feel self-evident, they seem important to say.

The thick steam cloys around them. He frowns. "For … what?"

She gives him a wavering smile. "For everything you think I might be mad at you about."

"That's quite a lot, you know."

"It just … isn't important," she replies, before he can protest further. "Okay? I forgive you. Forget about it. All of it. I mean it."

"But—"

"None of it's worth holding a grudge over," she adds before he can protest further. "I get that you had your reasons. I don't agree with all of them, but I know that you never wanted to hurt me. I would have said it earlier, but …" *You mean … the cuffs don't just weaken you? You mean, you're actually dying?* She takes a shaky breath as the memory hijacks her mind's eye. "But I got … distracted."
He doesn't seem to know what to say to that, and so he says nothing, but he heard her. He understood. And that's what's important.

She lets him have his space.

While he sits on the toilet lid, preparing for the short trip back to the bedroom, she heads to their host's master closet to fish out a clean pair of sweatpants, boxers, and socks for him, and a pair of gym shorts and a t-shirt for her. Whoever their unwilling benefactor is, he's considerably more rotund than Lucifer, if the gaping waistbands of his clothes are any indication. The boxers won't even stay up on Lucifer's hips, and she gives up quickly on trying to make them work. But the sweatpants are soft and warm, and, save for being about four inches too short at the ankles, seem to fit Lucifer just fine once she pulls the drawstring tight. She's swimming in the borrowed t-shirt, and she has to tie the waist of the shorts in knots by her hips to hold them up, but they're far more comfortable than her dirty, soiled jeans.

"Hand-Me-Down Chic, the Mortal Peril Collection," Lucifer says.

She frowns. "Huh?"

A wan smile ghosts across his face. "Just considering … what to call the runway show."

Her borrowed shorts choose that moment to fall to her ankles. She snorts, unable to curtail the unexpected burst of humor. He tilts his head, regarding her warmly.

"There we are," he says.

"Where?"

He brushes her lip with his thumb. "You've a lovely smile."

"Oh." Blushing, she lets her smile widen. "I told you I like your sense of humor."

He kisses her forehead. "You did, indeed."

He sleeps curled up in a blue comforter in the recliner by the window, his wings draped over the armrests on either side, while she changes the sheets for him. The clouds roll overhead in the sky. The day is dark and drab and gray. She opens all of the windows in the bedroom, letting in the sound of the birds and the breeze and the leaves and the soft patter of the rain. She leaves a glass of water for him on the end table by the chair, just in case, and then she sits on the edge of the bed, watching him breathe. The clock on the nightstand says it's 9:45 a.m. Barely halfway through the morning. And his breaths are labored, now. Even in sleep.

More tears well in her eyes when she wonders, given the rapidity of his post-forest-fire decline, if he'll even see sunset.

She swallows back the sudden swell of grief when she realizes he's looking at her.

"Hey," she says, scrubbing at her wet eyes with her knuckles. "Do you want to go back to bed? The sheets are clean."

"No," he says.

"I opened the windows for you," she babbles. "There's some water on the table, too."

"Thank you."
She blinks, and a new swell hits. She's a rock at sea, being bashed by wave after wave. She can't keep anything at bay, anymore. "I don't know what else to do for you," she says in a small, cracking voice. "I … I don't know."

He regards her for a long moment. All of his former energy seems to be gone, now. Whatever he mustered in the shower must have been the last of it. His eyes drift shut. "You could sit with me, if you like," he murmurs.

She clutches up tents of the bedspread between her fingers. The chair is large, and there's a wide gap between his hips and either arm of the chair, but— "I won't smoosh your wings?"

"No."

She slides off the bed and walks over, just as a wet gust of wind unfurls through the room. The air smells of petrichor. One of her favorite scents. Inhaling, she lifts up the blanket and curls up beside him underneath it, trying not to put too much weight on his feathers.

A wavering smile pulls at her lips as she reaches up to run her fingers through his hair. Usually, it's slick and straight, but, now, it's soft. And curly. Not a little curly, either, but wildly so. She wonders how much time he spends every morning wrestling with a flat iron.

"I don't think I've ever seen you completely without product," she says.

"Hmm," he says, tipping his head to kiss her fingers. "Is it to your liking?"

"It's a lot less austere," she says. "Very handsome."

"S'good."

Her eyes water. "I think you're very handsome."

A smile tugs at his lips. "Do you?"

Nodding, she presses her forehead to his, closing her eyes. His skin is like ice. The raspy, tired sound of his breathing fills the silence. She slips her fingers to his chest, touching him with her bare palm. She traces his sternum with her thumb, trying to memorize every feature. Every sinew. Every sloping muscle.

"Is this okay?" she whispers.

"Yes." He sighs like he just laid himself out on the beach in her fantasy. "Touch me all you like."

She wanders to his left nipple, toiling until it tightens into a pert little point, and then to his right. A soft rumble of enjoyment catches in his throat. She runs her palm down his side. Across the flat plane of his stomach. Over his navel. The rasping shh of skin on skin fills the silence. The blanket crinkles as she delves. At first, she only intends to offer comfort, body to body, breath to breath. She only intends to lay on hands. But her desperation and her grief are kindling. And his body beside her is the strike of the match.

She leans in and presses her lips to his.

His eyes fly open. For a moment, he seems bewildered. His dark gaze searches hers. And then a bone-deep, hungering desire slides in, pushing out some of the fog loitering in his expression. The kiss becomes reciprocal and then some.
"Please," he rumbles against her.

"Please … what?" she teases. "What is it you desire?"

He laughs a little. "That's my line, darling."

"I'm stealing it."

"Oh, are you?"

"Yep," she says. "Try and stop me."

Another laugh. "Well, that …." He kisses her. "That is definitely not my desire. Rob me blind of it if you wish."

She drags her tongue against the tips of her teeth, smiling. "You haven't answered my question."

"About what it is that I desire?"

She nods.

The silence stretches for a moment as he peers into her eyes.

"You," he admits softly. "I desire you."

"Ditto," she replies, a bare, hungry breath.

The cushion squeaks as his weight shifts. Just a little. He picks up his hands like he forgets they're bound. Like he wants to twist toward her. To wrap his arms around her and pull her down on top of him. A wince crosses his features, and an irritated growl vibrates in his throat. She kisses him again, letting impulse shift her into straddling his thighs between her knees. Like he wanted. Well. Like she thinks he wanted, anyway. The comforter slides down her back and falls off the chair, surrendering to gravity.

"This is still okay?" she says.

He nods. "Consider this my blanket consent to you having your wicked way," he replies, a humorous glimmer in his eyes. He reaches up to stroke her face. Her hair. And then he swallows, offering a downward glance to his wrists. And then downward still. To his lower body. "Though I'm not certain how much I can contribute."

"You're here, aren't you?"

"In this moment, quite."

She smiles. "That's all I want right now." That's all she wants forever, but she can't have it.

She kisses his lips, and time and space drift away. She can't forget that he's dying, but she can make the fact small. She can sit it in the corner and put it in timeout while they play in their bubble together.

He smells like fresh cut soap. She clutches his head, holding him to her. His breaths buffet her body as she tastes him. His mouth. The faint salt of his newly clean skin, and the mint of their benefactor's toothpaste. Lucifer's a willing, avid recipient, as his tongue slides against hers.

She plunges her hand beneath his navel. Beneath the loose waistband of his sweatpants. Touches
him. Cups him. If he were healthy, she'd be worried that he wasn't interested. But he isn't healthy.

"Apologies," he mutters breathlessly against her. "I can honestly say that's never happened before."

She shakes her head. "I don't mind. Does this feel good to you?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then it's good for me."

The swept-into-her-whirlwind look he gives her is heartrending. "Yours is my favorite light," he
confesses, looking up at her. He strokes his thumb along her cheek. "So much better than anything I
could ever make."

The ache in her chest burgeons. "That's not possibly true."

"Well, I don't lie, darling."

She kisses him once, twice, again, before lowering to his sternum. She presses her ear to his chest,
listening to his heartbeat and his soft, discombobulated moans as she strokes him. The stars in his
eyes shine like diamonds as he comes apart in her hand.

In that moment, he doesn't hurt, and he isn't tired. In that moment, he's happy.

With her.

He's happy with her.

And she watches, rapt, memorizing every piece of him.

She'll keep the picture in her mind's eye for whenever she needs it.

Always.

Chapter End Notes

*whew* Okay. So this was pretty much the nicest pre-resolution place I could possibly
leave you going into the break. Hang in there, guys. I'll be back to fix this dire mess in a
jiff -- I promise :)
Hey, guys! I had a lovely Thanksgiving (I appreciate all the kind words!) and I'm back with a slightly early gift :)

Chapter title credit goes to Sigrid.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lucifer stops breathing at 1:47 p.m.

At first, she doesn't understand why the silence is so eerie. The birds are singing, and the wind is blowing, and the rain is tapping on the roof with a soft pat-pat-pat. It's a pleasant natural symphony. And then she realizes what's missing, and a lump forms in her throat. She presses her ear against his no-longer-hitching chest, scrunching up tents of his comforter in her hands as she snuggles close. His heart is still pounding against his sternum. Still struggling. And she's not sure what to do but be with him.

She pushes her fingers through his hair and says, "I'm here. You're not alone. It's okay. You can go."

The beat begins to slow. And stutter. And fail. And the lump in her throat expands until she can hardly breathe.

"I'm here," she repeats, stroking his face. "It's okay to go. It's okay."

And then he takes a frantic, gasping, wheezing breath, like a man breaking the water's surface after almost drowning. And then he takes another. And another, and another, and another. Until he catches up, and his laboring settles into a raspy, even rhythm.

His eyes drift open, his expression pained and leaking tears. Like … he wanted to go. He wanted it. He's tired, and he hurts, and he wanted to be done.

"Hey," she warbles as he fixes his gaze on her. "Do you need anything?"

"No."

He clutches at her shirt with cold, trembling fingers.

She kisses him, pulling him close.

"I'm here," she says. "I promise."

His choppy, miserable breaths buffet her neck. His eyes drift shut again. And he sleeps in her arms while they wait for the End.

The rain gives up around 3, though the day is still overcast and wet.

"Chloe," he whispers without opening his eyes.
She scrubs at her face with her palms and squints blearily at the clock. 4:12 p.m. The minutes are crawling. Her eyes burn, and she feels pasty and stiff. The light in the master bedroom is muted and gray.

"What?" she says, swallowing. "What is it? Do you need something?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"For you to … take a … break."

"I don't need a break," she's quick to assure him. "I'm fine."

His raspy, stilted breathing stops only long enough for him to let out a weak snort of disbelief. "I can hear … your stom … stomach growling."

"But—"

"Take a walk," he says. "Eat. Do … human things."

Her mouth feels like a desert, and her stomach is grumbling. Her bladder is close to bursting, too. She hasn't gotten up since a little before noon. But he's stopped breathing three times, each time for a little bit longer than the last, and she's terrified. She's terrified that if she gets up to stretch or pee or eat a snack that he'll be gone by the time she gets back. He'll be gone, and she won't have been there.

"Lucifer, I can't just leave."

He opens his eyes to half mast. His gaze is dull and clouded. His lips are pale — so pale they match his skin. He takes a heavy breath. And another. "I would prefer it … if only one of us felt wretched … right now. Specifically: me."

She bites her lip. "But you keep … not breathing."

"Well, you've my word … I won't do that … while you're gone."

She laughs. She can't help it. "Coming from you, I can almost believe it."

He tips his forehead to hers, resting against her, like the warmth of her body gives him strength. "It would make this … far easier on me," he tells her quietly, "to know that you're not … harming yourself on my behalf. Please."

"But I'm—"

"And I could use … another blanket. Is there one?"


With a sigh, she slides off the chair and rises to her feet.

"What bloody time is it?" he croaks, nodding toward the clock on the nightstand.

"Quarter-after-4-ish."

"Then don't come back before 5," he says with a cough, "or I'll be bloody cross. You wouldn't … want me to be cross … while I'm on my deathchair, would you?"
"You are such an asshole, sometimes," she says warmly, shaking her head.

He musters a smirk for her. "I'm the Devil, darling. What did you expect?"

Which only makes the ache in her chest expand. She takes a sharp, hitching breath and another, struggling not to break down when he's trying so hard to ameliorate the dire mood. "Fine," she says. She only has to stay away for 45-ish minutes to appease him. She can manage 45 minutes. "Fine. I'll stretch, and eat, and find you another blanket, and I'll be back at 5. Happy?"

"Jubilant," he deadpans, breaths rasping.

She takes a long look at him as she reaches the master bedroom door, memorizing every plane of his face. Every feature. He's already settled again, his eyes closed, body looking small and frail under the massive blue comforter. She's shocked he managed even three minutes of good humor, given that a few minutes ago he wasn't breathing.

This man — this Lightbringer.

He shouldn't die like this. On a gray day. In a faint puff of smoke, rather than a conflagration. In a whisper, not a scream. Wasting away in some stranger's house, far away from everything that brings him comfort.

He shouldn't die at all.

She clutches the doorframe with a white-knuckled grip. "Promise me you're not just trying to shepherd me out of the room for … for …." She can't finish her sentence.

"You've my word," he murmurs without opening his eyes. "I'll still be here … when you return."

Her lower lip begins to tremble, and her eyes water, making the world blur.

With a shaky breath, she retreats into the hallway, making sure she's well away from him and his "deathchair" before she lets herself cry. She doesn't like the idea of spending so many of his last minutes away from him. But she'll do it. For him. Because he asked.

She relieves herself, and then she rummages in the kitchen for something to eat and drink. Despite her hunger, her stomach still feels tetchy from the night before, so she settles on eating a handful of stale cereal straight from the box, rather than risking any of the soon-to-be-expiring milk. Each bite tastes like cardboard had a baby with sawdust, but, grimacing, she makes herself chew and swallow and chew and swallow, eyes leaking as she stares emptily into space.

When she finishes, she checks the clock. 4:25. Fuck.

How is she supposed to kill another 35 minutes?

_"Take a walk," he said._

The idea of walking out of easy hearing range fills her with enough trepidation to nauseate her.

But ….

She did say she would stretch.

She said it.
And she doesn't want one of the last few things she said to him to be a lie.

With a stressed sigh, she takes the small kitchen timer from the counter by the sink and sets it for 20 minutes. The shorts she borrowed have no pockets, so she'll have to carry it along with her. On the way out the door, she grabs one of the water bottles from the bottom cabinet and cracks open the seal. The back door slaps at her heels as it swings shut with a moan behind her.

At first, she can only make herself take a lap around the clearing where the cabin sits. There's a narrow footpath out back that leads deeper into the woods, but she can't bring herself to explore.

At first.

But then she directs a worried glance toward the bedroom. Her heart constricts. Through the big bay window, she can see his dark outline in the recliner. His body curled up in blankets. His huge wings spread limply beside him. Unmoving.

He could, feasibly, be watching her.

He'll know if she half-assed his request.

She takes a fortifying breath and makes herself follow the footpath, surprised after a few minutes to find herself dumped out onto the shore of a gray lake. Pond? Lake, she decides. It's big enough to deserve the lake title.

Even in the damp, dour drear, the view is beautiful. Mist spills onto the water from the shore in the distance. The water is smooth like mirror glass, reflecting the distant, verdant tree line and gray sky with perfect clarity. A gaggle of geese floats across the water, honking and cursing at each other. Ducks gather near the shore.

An old, rickety bench with a picnic table sits under the pines to the right, and she takes a seat to watch the scenery and sip her water.

She folds her hands together one last time, looks up at the frothing clouds, and thinks, Please, help your brother, Raguel. Amenadiel. Please, help him. Please. He needs you very badly.

And then the kitchen timer dings in the quiet, and she heads back to the house.

The cabin is silent and still when she returns through the back door at 5:04.

She grabs a soft fleece blanket from the linen closet in the hallway. "Lucifer?" she says, only for the word to choke off into a gasp when she reaches the master bedroom's threshold. The blanket drops to her feet.

The room looks like a murder scene, except it's absent a body.

The comforter Lucifer was using lies avulsed across the floor, half of it still tangled on the footrest of the recliner. The lamp is tipped to the side, broken, and the glass of water she left for him is dripping onto the area carpet. Ripped, bent feathers litter the floor.

"No."

The crackling sound of churning gravel pulls her attention toward the front of the house. She thuds out into the hallway. As she skids around the corner into the living room, she catches a hint of movement through the window.
A cherry-red F150 is parked in the driveway. At first, she has a burning, irrational flash of hope that the owner of the cabin has returned. But the hope is doused in a few more strides when she gets a full view of the front yard.

Lucifer is draped over Asmodeus's shoulders in a fireman's carry. His body is limp. His arms dangle down the demon's back, and his massive, rumpled wings drag along in the dirt.

"No," she says. "No, no." This isn't happening. This is not fucking happening.

She races to the kitchen to grab the chef's knife off the block, not sure what the fuck she's going to do, but she has to do something. Even if Lucifer is dead — he's not dead he can't be dead he can't be he can't be what will she do if he's dead — she's not going to let that psychopath take his body away.

Not after everything.

Clutching the knife, she reaches the front door just as Asmodeus dumps Lucifer into the truck bed like he's a piece of trash. Her chest constricts as she catches a brief glimpse of Lucifer's face. His dark eyes are open, sightless, staring up into the gray sky with a blank expression. Like he's really ….

No. She shakes her head. He would let Asmodeus take him if he thought it would get Asmodeus away from the cabin fast enough to prevent a run-in with Chloe. He would stare into space in resignation, like she just saw. Stillness doesn't mean death.

Heart in her throat, she drops to her haunches and creeps out onto the porch, obscured from the view of the yard by a row of planters filled with yellow flowers. The truck faces the house, and Asmodeus stands near the rear, humming an off-key version of Ode to Joy as he tries to jam Lucifer's massive wings into the truck bed with his body.

Meanwhile, Lucifer doesn't make a sound. Doesn't struggle. Doesn't anything.

Her stomach roils as the song floats on the breeze.

The knife is a cold weight in her grip.

She squints, peering through the gap in the railing.

The clearing around the cabin is wide enough that there's not going to be enough time to approach with any sort of stealth before Asmodeus drives away. Her only hope is to stall. To keep him from leaving with Lucifer until she can gain some sort of advantage. But … how?

She clutches the knife.

Her gaze wanders to the truck's muddy tires.

The rain picks up.

Water drums on the roof and patters through the leaves, filling the woods with a roar that sweeps into infinity in all directions. A roar that offers a mask for her movements across the creaking floorboards. Palms sweaty, stooping low, she slinks toward the truck.

When she's by the truck's front grill, she leans forward, slipping through the middle and top railing of the porch and dropping to the ground with a quiet thump that's lost in the pounding rain. Crouching, she inches toward the passenger side of the truck. Toward the hulking tire.
She holds her breath, trembling, clutching the knife so hard it makes her palms hurt.

Asmodeus's horrible tune breaks long enough for him to say, "Ah," in his gnarled, sepulchral voice, "there we are."

He slams the truck-bed door shut, and the truck rocks on its shocks.

She waits for the click of the driver's-side door latch disengaging, and then she slams the knife into the tire as hard as she can muster. An explosive, shrieking pop of air hits her in the face, and the front right quarter of the truck sinks into the gravel with a metal groan.

"What on earth?" she hears him grumble.

She scrambles to the rear tire and slashes that one, too.

Then she turns to run, but he's too fast, too … other.

An iron grip closes around her left shoulder, tightly enough for bones to crunch. Pain explodes down her arm and into her torso, a wildfire, burning. She yells, deep and throaty and ugly as the pain overwhelms her. She sinks to her knees like roped cattle as her shout croaks into a moan, spittle running down her chin.

"My dear, what are you doing?" Asmodeus croons, looking down at her with unblinking reptilian eyes. The sharp nails at the ends of his thin, arcing fingers dig in, piercing skin, and she can't hold back another scream. "Come to add a bit of sport for me? Most kind of you. Samael was no fun at all."

Was.

Samael was.

Shaking, sobbing, she lunges blindly. The blade sinks into the meat of Asmodeus's thigh, right through his Armani suit, and he hisses with pain, pulling back with a curse to scrabble at the sweat-slicked handle.

She sprints into the pouring rain while he's distracted.

Asmodeus cackles behind her.

Like he thinks this is fun. Like getting stabbed by a twelve-inch knife is an enjoyable little romp for him.

As she rounds the house, the crack of a gunshot splits the silence, taking a chunk of the cabin's siding with it. A sizzling burst of heat zips past her ear as she dives for cover. Her innards feel like they're dropping out from underneath her as a dizzying wave of fight-or-flight crushes her into unthinking flight. Her shoes fruitlessly churn mud as she rises, only to slip to her knees again.

"Running only makes it better for me, dear," the demon yells after her in the distance. "Does it make it better for you?"

She scrapes her nails against the side of the house for purchase, scrambling to her feet.

She runs.

"Here, I am," he whispers over her shoulder to the right.
Just as she flinches left, she hears, "No, I'm over here," in that direction.

A flash of movement skitters across her field of view like spiders, and she ducks.

But nothing connects except the pounding raindrops.

Illusions.

"Stop it," she snaps, tears streaming. "Stop it; stop it!"

He's fucking with her.

Toying with her.

She hears him laughing through the rain.

As she dashes around to the front of the house again, completing her circular flight, her lungs burn with exertion. Her shoulder screams at her. Her left arm dangles, useless.

Panting, she squints into the rain, rubbing water out of her eyes with shaking fingers. The truck's headlights pierce the gloom. Lucifer's gray feathers ruffle in the wind, a small swell of them barely visible over the side of the truck bed. The driver's-side door is wide open. And no one is around the truck. No one.

Fuck it. She'll drive with two flats.

She sprints for the driver's-side door, feet churning the gravel as she flies over the ground.

She scrambles inside the truck without stopping to check on Lucifer. There's no time. Her wet fingers slip on the steering wheel. Water drips in her eyes. There's no key in the fucking ignition. Fuck, fuck, fuck. She flips down the visor, skating her fingers along the surface. Nothing. She rips open the compartment next to the seat. Nothing. Her eyes fixate on the glove box on the passenger side of the dash. She ducks, reaching to—

A bullet slams through the passenger side window and zips past her head, singeing the tips of her hair, before impacting with the driver's side window with a crunch.

Gasping, she pushes open the door and drops out of the truck again, cowering by the wheel, just as another bullet punches a hole through both windows, leaving a cracked latticework of safety glass behind. There isn't enough cover. Her ears are ringing. She can't hear. What does she do? What the fuck does she—

"My, my, you're quite the mortal cockroach, aren't you?" Asmodeus calls out in the rain, barely audible over the tinnitus, nothing more than amusement dripping from his tone. "Perhaps we can work something out? Save us some trouble? Hmm? What is it you desire?"

Her innards twist. Lucifer's words, spoken by Asmodeus's vile tongue, make her want to vomit. Pressing the back of her hand to her mouth, taking deep breaths, she doesn't even dignify his question with a response. From the ringing-distorted sound of him, he's just on the other side of the truck. Her heart thunders in her chest. Races in her ears. The rain pours.

"What have you two been doing these past few days, anyway?" Asmodeus says. "His wings are ruined."

"You did that, you asshole," she snaps, tears spilling.
"Did I?" Asmodeus says in a clinical, curious tone. "What a shame. I can't sell them for more than a million apiece as they are, and that's sheeerly for the novelty. I'm sure they've no medicinal value, anymore." He sighs. "Ah, well. Can't win them all, I suppose."

She eyes the distant tree line. A hundred feet. She can't sprint a hundred feet without cover and expect to live. Not versus a gun. Not unless he keeps missing on purpose. When the fuck did he decide to switch to a real gun instead of tranquilizers?

The gravel crunches, the sound like rustling cotton to her battered eardrums, as he limps around the front of the truck. She skirts around the back to the passenger side, passing by the truck bed where Lucifer lies, still silent. Now she has a ten-foot run back to the cabin for cover, instead.

"Oh, do prolong this, Ms. Decker," Asmodeus purrs when he finds no one by the driver's-side wheel. "Your fear smells delicious."

She waits for the cotton sound of gravel churning again, and then she sprints toward the cabin. A gunshot cracks through the rain and smacks into the wooden siding of the cabin. Hot splinters hit her in the face, searing her skin, and she dives behind a tarp-covered grill by the side of the house.

Sobbing, she directs a stressed glance at the propane tanks now sitting right next to her. Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck. Her "cover" is a bomb, and Asmodeus holds the remote when he decides to stop playing. What kind of gun does he have? How many bullets in the magazine? He's only fired four shots. Even if he's got a six-shooter, he's still got plenty of shots left to kill her with. He doesn't sound at all concerned about her getting away from him. Should she make a run for the footpath that goes down to the lake? But that would be leaving Lucifer behind, and—

"Behind you!" Asmodeus barks at the nape of her neck, so close she can feel his hot, fetid breath against her skin.

She rolls backward, intent on a grab-pull-and-twist maneuver with her one good hand, but her palm swipes empty air. Another fucking illusion.

She finds her feet just in time to catch a glimpse of the real Asmodeus several strides beyond the grill. Something dangles from his neck by a thin chain. Something white and gleaming and luminous. How? she remembers Lucifer saying.

Why, you left me a piece of yourself the night before last. Three pieces, to be exact. Surely, you recall?

Lucifer's feathers. The tips of them, anyway. The pieces that got shot off when they were breaking into the warehouse.

Asmodeus grins at her, like he can tell exactly what caught her eye.

Boom, he mouths, making a flagrant, cheerful show of aiming the gun at her.

Jamming down on her quads, she leaps forward, her momentum slamming her into the side of the grill with a jarring thud, just as another bullet zips past her head. Another bullet clinks into the metal unit — luckily not into one of the propane tanks — snagging up somewhere in its guts. She sobs, unable to quell her panic, unable to keep her cool under the onslaught of the unreal and the too real. Illusions — senses turned topsy turvy. Lucifer, dead. His beautiful feathers sported like a fucking trophy. Being chased down in the rain like a hare for a hound because, hey, it's fun.

"Why did you even come here?" she calls, angry tears streaming. "Why would you …?" Hell is their
"Of course, I do, dear," Asmodeus replies. Gravel crunches as he steps closer. "Quite a lot. But Hell is a raging mess right now, what with the power vacuum and all. And I much prefer to be a shark in a lake full of guppies than a shark in an ocean of sharks, yes?" The rain thunders down in sheets. She dares another peek over the grill, ducking down again before the seventh gunshot can take off her head.

Not a six-shooter, then.

Asmodeus is only a few feet away. "Truthfully," he continues, "I didn't think dear Old Scratch would care about little old me murdering in his backyard, or I would have gone somewhere else, first. He's never cared about humans before. He's never cared about anyone before. I certainly wasn't intending to 'piss in his cornflakes,' as they say."

Her heart clenches. "No."

"Oh, yes, yes, yes," Asmodeus says, his wolfish smile so large she can hear it in his tone. He takes another step. She closes her eyes, calculating where he is from the sound of his movements. From his voice. "You brought him straight to my doorstep with your adorable little detective games. I wouldn't have bothered, otherwise. I am, after all, an opportun—" There's a snarl of gravel as Asmodeus whirls on his feet. "Don't you move another fucking step, Samael. I hear you skulking about."

Lucifer.

She dares a quick look over the edge of the grill. Asmodeus's back is turned to her. Lucifer is crumpled against the rear of the truck, his body shivering. He looks as though a whisper of wind could knock him over, but he's standing, and, now, Asmodeus has the gun pointed at him.

"You don't need her," Lucifer croaks, barely audible over the rain. "You don't need leverage. My wings are corporeal. Let her go."

"No," she says, nauseated, shaking her head. "No."

Unless Lucifer isn't real. Unless he's another illusion meant to draw her out from her cover. To encourage her to make that final, fatal mistake.

She swallows back panic. "Lucifer, don't try to help me!"

Asmodeus laughs. "You are, of course, quite right, Samael. I don't need her." He licks his lips. "But then … I also don't need you."

And then, with a gleaming wink over his shoulder at her, he fires the gun at Lucifer.

Chloe shrieks, "No, don't hurt him!" and launches herself away from her cover, making a beeline for Asmodeus, just as Lucifer's body slams into the truck bed. The wild crack of another gunshot mutes the rain. She leaps onto Asmodeus's back, wrapping her legs around his hips, wrenching his neck with her good hand. She claws at the warding necklace. The clasp snaps apart, and the feathers and chain fall to the sucking mud.

He throws her to the ground like a plaything.

The world flips backward, and the air whooshes out of her chest. Another shot rings out. She gasps as her diaphragm spasms sharply, like someone ran her ribs through with a knife. She can't breathe. She can't— Rain splatters from the sky into her face.
A loud, splitting peal of agony seems to shake the world around her.

The gleaming, ensorcelled cuffs descend over Asmodeus's head and jerk backward against his throat. There's a crunch, like vertebrae snapping, but it isn't enough. Asmodeus's golden eyes bulge, but he laughs, and laughs, and laughs, spittle flying from his lips.

"Too weak to break it, Samael?" Asmodeus taunts. "Can't save your lady love?"

He reaches behind his head, grabbing at Lucifer's hair, at his face, at anything he can sink his claws into, and Lucifer goes down like a sack of bricks to the mud and stone.

Asmodeus aims the gun at Lucifer's hitching side.

"No," Chloe says, gasping. She can't catch her breath. Everything hurts. "No."

But instead of a gunshot, a wet, sucking, fleshy-sounding thud fills the silence. Asmodeus chokes. The gun clatters to the gravel from his lax fingers. Quiet stretches for one heartbeat. Two. Three. Then Asmodeus crumples to the ground, a familiar-looking crescent blade lodged in his eye socket.

"Maze!" Chloe bleats, but the word has no sound, and she only emits a wheeze. "Maze! Maze!"

Lucifer eclipses the clouds overhead. A weight presses against her stomach as she takes gasping, frantic breaths. "Detective," he says, pale and trembling, as he crouches over her.

His face is covered in scratches. His front is smeared with mud like he crawled to her. And his hands are bleeding. Why are they bleeding? The thick metal cuffs binding his wrists fill her lower field of view. She touches the fingers of her good hand shakily to his, tightening her grip once she finds him. His skin is cold and slick with blood.

"You're real," she says, small and breathless, as her eyes water and blur. "You're real."

Pain pinches at the corners of his dark eyes. "I gave you … my word that I'd … be here, did I not?"

"I thought he shot you," she says, stroking his thumb. "He shot you. I thought you were dead."

"He hit … the bloody cuffs," Lucifer rasps, shaking his head. "The force … knocked me over."

"Oh, fuck," Maze says, eyes widening as she comes into view behind Lucifer. "Lucifer, that's—"

"I bloody know what it is!" he snaps, tears streaming from his eyes. His whole body is shaking. His shoulders peak and then drop as he throws his weight onto his forearms, pushing Chloe down into the mud. The pain above her navel sharpens to a pinpoint. Sunshine bursts from his fingertips, only to fizzle out as quickly as it ignited. Her vision blots out. She screams, losing the world for a moment, only to come back to him, frantic, saying, "Sorry. I'm sorry. I'm so bloody sor—"

"S'okay," she murmurs, blinking, trying to breathe.

"I don't have … anything left," he says, trembling, crushed. "I don't have anything to … ."

Why is …?

Oh.

"Did I … get shot, too?" she says woozily, barely a gasp, as she stares up at them. She tries to take a breath, but her chest refuses to inflate, and the effort sends a sharp, stinging pain through her torso. Probably because there's a gaping hole in it. Black fuzz grips the edges of her vision. She laughs as
hypoxia sets in. "Oops."

"Why in the bloody hell would you do that?" Lucifer demands, the words cracking. "I'm going to bloody die in a minute, anyway!"

She looks up at him. Maze and the sky are turning into an impressionist watercolor of grays and earth tones, but Lucifer's face is sharp and clear. Her morning star. She strokes his cheek with her good hand. "Lucifer, why wouldn't I?"

And then she can't keep track of things anymore. She blinks. The world seems to slow down.

"No," Lucifer tells her, shaking his head. "No, no, Chloe. No, don't. Don't you bloody dare."

"The keys … might be in the glove … glove compartment," she slurs as random bits of flotsam surface.

Silence stretches like a fresh blanket of wet snow.

She blinks up at the sky.

Then she's zipping through a long tunnel. And Lucifer and Maze are far away.

Chapter End Notes

Soooo, this is the cliffhanger I didn't want to leave you dangling on for nearly two weeks. Hopefully you can see why, now. GROUP HUG. I promise it'll be okay.
At first, she floats in a sightless void. She can't hear, touch, taste, see, or feel. She can't worry, either. She can't … anything. There is no light or dark. She isn't leaving anybody behind. She isn't arriving anywhere new. She isn't happy. She isn't sad. She isn't curious. She just is. In the blackness. In the quiet. Far away. Resting like a speck of dust on a great glass sheet.

"Dude, I was trying to get you to help my stupid brother, not die, too!" someone snaps, the sound pealing across the empty. "This is so not cool."

Chloe turns toward the voice, eyebrows knitting as she squints into the void. "Who . . . ?"

A dark-haired woman sporting a bowl-cut and bangs stands several feet away, her arms folded, gunmetal-gray wings spread wide like a feathered shield. She wears a frothing sanguine cloak and heeled black boots. "Azrael," the woman says without extending her hand in greeting. "And it's not nice to meet you."

Chloe blinks. "You're . . . Death?"

"The Angel of," Azrael replies with a sigh. "Death's a whole other species."

"What?"

"The Endless. It's a thing."

"But you're . . . ."

"I know. I'm a chick. Blah, blah. So's Death of the Endless. What of it?"

Chloe shakes her head. "I was just going to say that you're a lot less . . . um . . . ."

"Less intimidating than you thought I'd be?" Azrael rolls her eyes as she takes a step closer. Her footfalls don't echo. "Yeah, I get that a lot, too. But you know what I've got, now?"

"What?"

"A migraine!" she says, and before Chloe can process what's happening, Azrael wraps her arms around Chloe's torso like an iron trap. A familiar flutter of feathers follows, and the blackness snaps away, replaced by the blinding gray of a cloudy sky. The whiplash is nauseating. And intense. Just like when she flew with Lucifer. They arrive like they've stretched to the end of a bungee cord, only
to be snatched away from gravity at the last moment when Azrael flaps her massive wings.

Chloe trips and falls to her knees with a hitching gasp, unable to gain her bearings.

Trodden, wet grass sprawls across the clearing, from the house all the way to the distant tree line. Mud smears the bare patches in the white gravel driveway, where tire tracks have worn down the surface. Some of the gravel is red. Some of the puddles are red.

By the bodies, in particular.

By Chloe's body.

The sight of her own blank eyes staring back at her makes her stomach flip.

She … died?

She …

Asmodeus lies in a crumpled, ignored heap a few feet away, Maze's blade still stuck to the hilt in his bloody eye socket.

"No," Lucifer rasps plaintively, sounding so much smaller than his large frame as he crouches over Chloe's body, his trembling hands covered in glistening blood — Chloe's blood. His eyes are puffy, almost bruised, and his muddy wings hang limply behind him, sprawled across the wet ground. He shakes her like he expects her to wake up. Like he can't quite put together how the wheel of fate landed on her name before it landed on his, let alone how quickly. "No. This … isn't right. This wasn't supposed to …. This can't …. No."

Maze grips his shoulder, trying to pull him away. "Lucifer, she's gone."

"No."

"Lucifer!" Maze tries again, the word more strident.

"No."

The red runes on the surface of the handcuffs begin to glow bright angry red to match the macabre painting on the gravel. The snaking lines of script throb and pulse like a living thing. A living thing that's feeding. Feasting. On despair. On death.

Lucifer's croaky, repeated denials fade to barely-audible wheezes and then to silence. His choppy breaths drag slower and slower against his heaving ribcage. He sags against Maze's shoulder, and then a wave of surrender seems to crush him. On the coattails of an exhalation, he drips to the ground beside Chloe's body. The muddy, bloody gravel crackles as it shifts underneath his settling frame. What little light was left in his eyes begins to leech away like his body is a sieve.

"Lucifer, what's wrong with you?" Maze asks. Keeps asking. She shakes him, clutching at his shoulders. "Lucifer!"

And the rain pours, though it doesn't touch Chloe, and it doesn't touch Azrael.

Like they're in some kind of bubble.

In reality but not.

"What in the hell is this bullcrap?" Azrael says, throwing her hands in the air. "The only positive
thing I can say about this total cluster is that now I can actually talk to you, without Dad giving me that stern don’t-you-dare-to-interfere-in-the-Plaaaaan look he keeps giving me. I mean, at least, now, I can say I'm just doing my job. But Christ on a freakin' cracker! You guys are killing me!"

"Killing you?" Chloe says, a lump forming in her throat as she processes the state of the scene she left behind minutes — hours? — ago. "What about …?" She's dead. She died. Asmodeus killed her. And Lucifer just gave up. "No."

"Sorry," says Azrael with a shrug. "I know it sucks."

Sucks.

That's … putting it mildly.

The feeling of free fall as Chloe's mind threatens to consider Trixie is like being shoved out of a plane. How will Tr— But then a wall slams down, and all her screaming worries and guilt and blame and why-God-why are trapped behind it.

Her cop brain woke up.

The cop brain that can walk with her into a disaster scene painted with the rubble of several lives, and decide what parts of the rubble can't be repaired, and what parts are still salvageable.


But Lucifer ….

Her eyes water as she looks at him. He's going to die believing this mess is his fault. She turns to Azrael. "Please, can't you help him?"

"I'm not here for him, Chloe," states the Angel of Death. "I'm here for you."

"But—"

"We've all heard you pleading on his behalf," Azrael says. "Nobody's ignoring you. There's just … nothing any of us can do. Or should do. Or …." She shakes her head. "Look. The point is. You've been praying to the wrong place."

"That's ridiculous," Chloe snaps. "Of course, you can help him. Of course, you should. He's your brother. And you're Death—"

"The Angel of!"

"—And he's dying!"

Azrael gives her an incredulous look. "Um." She nods pointedly toward Chloe's body. The ice-blue eyes are sightless and staring. "I hate to break it to you, but in case you haven't noticed, so are you."

"Wait," Chloe says. The wall in her mind judders. Threatens to break. "Dying? Dying. As in … in the act of? As in … I'm not already dead?"

"Welllll," Azrael says, grimacing as she drags out the L. "Okay, yes, you're super dead. Currently. But I'm still kinda hoping for a save, here. S'why I'm letting you hang out in Limbo with me for a few. Normally, I'd have had you upstairs for orientation already."

"A save?" Chloe says, incredulous. "Who's gonna save anything?"
Maze scrambles to make sense of Lucifer's collapse. He's not talking, anymore. Or reacting. His
breaths are so shallow they wouldn't fill a thimble. He stares at the sky with a frightening blankness,

"Maze was the save," Chloe continues. "If you won't do anything, what's left?"

Azrael shrugs. "Still a few different ways this can go."

"Why won't any of you help him?" Chloe demands, watching Maze inspect the cuffs with a stressed,
unhappy grimace. Chloe gestures at the pair, her chest constricting as she fights the urge to scream.
"Maybe it's too late for me, but he's still alive!"

Azrael regards her for a long, long moment, expression dark and bleak.

"What!" Chloe snaps.

"The only way out of those cuffs is to make a successful appeal to whoever locked them."

Chloe narrows her eyes. "But they've been forced open before."

"Chlo," Azrael says gravely. "They were never forced open."

"But—"

"Look, I don't know what Lu saw, but before he fell, Rags cuffed him as an extension of Dad's will.
If the cuffs opened, it's because Dad wanted them opened. Because Lucifer accepted his
punishment."

The birds sing, oblivious. The rain is a roar. Chill creeps into Chloe's gut like she swallowed ice.
"Asmodeus … took credit for something he didn't do?"

Azrael bites her lip. "Well, I mean, I wasn't there when Lu landed, so I can't say for sure, but …
yeah." Regret fills her dark eyes. "I think so. I mean, the guy certainly had the con-artist creds to pull
it off, from what I've seen."

Chloe's sinking like a stone. "He … did."

"Yeah," Azrael says glumly.

Which means … there is no magical open-sesame spell to save Lucifer. Just the mechanics of the
cuffs themselves. "But … how is Lucifer supposed to make a successful appeal for release when
Asmodeus is dead?" Chloe says.

Maze leans forward, nostrils flaring like she's scented prey. Rain sluices off the shoulders of her
leather bomber jacket. Something drags her attention to the right. Away from Lucifer.

"Chlo," Azrael begins slowly, yanking Chloe's attention back to the conversation, "for the cuffs to
lock at all, there has to be some sort of call for divine justice."

Chloe glances at Asmodeus's corpse. His features are skeletal, particularly with his wet hair slicked
to his scalp by the rain. But even dead, he looks human, save for his one intact yellow eye, which
stares sightlessly toward his failed quarry. Hatred boils as she looks at him.

"Asmodeus wasn't seeking justice," Chloe says. "He was seeking pain." And money. But mostly
pain. "And he wasn't divine."
Azrael nods. "Exactly."

"I don't understand. I …" Chloe blinks, staring down at Lucifer. Her stomach flip-flops. The other side of me, he said, sounding broken. Resigned. It's bad. She shakes her head. "Oh, no. Oh, no, no, no."

_Do you mean to say there's no forgiveness for me, either?_

_Free will. Choice. It's a bit of a double-edged sword for celestials, it seems._

_I'm a firm believer in an eye for an eye._

_This is not what I deserve._

"He's a punisher," Azrael says sadly, following Chloe's thought train. "It's a skill he's spent millennia cultivating. He might not like it, but he's _good_ at it."

"He thinks he's a monster," Chloe says, eyes burning with tears. "He feels guilty. And he enjoys meting justice. An eye for an eye. He said it."

"Problem is," Azrael continues, "I don't think Rags ever meant for the accuser and the accused to be the same entity." She looks down at her brother, who's dying at her feet. "That makes the cuffs … kind of a catch-22." She closes her eyes, taking a breath. "For what it's worth, I doubt Lu knows what he's doing."

"Of course, he doesn't know!" Chloe exclaims. His eyes are drifting shut. His shaking body is going limp. He's shutting down. If he stops breathing, this time, she thinks … that'll be it. "He doesn't know how the cuffs work. He doesn't know _any_ of this. He was punished and isolated, and nobody in your dysfunctional fucking family even talks to him! How the fuck would he know?"

Azrael looks away, suddenly intent on inspecting her shoes.

Chloe grinds her teeth. "This is the _stupidest_ test God could ev——"

"But it's _not_ a test," Azrael insists, looking up again. "It never was. It's free will in action. It's what Lucifer wants. That's the whole point."

"But he doesn't have all of the information!"

Azrael's eyes are wet. "When do we ever?"

"So, what happens if a successful appeal isn't made?" Chloe demands. "What happens if …?"

"He'll be gone."

Chloe's eyebrows knit. "To Hell."

"No, he'll be _gone_," Azrael says with sudden shaking vehemence. "Like Uri." She directs a stressed glance toward Lucifer and then back at Chloe. "Why do you think I've been trying so hard to _help_ you guys?"

Chloe's eyes widen. "You," The voice. The voice that kept giving her directions. "_You_ were the one who helped me find the cabin."

"Bingo!"
She frowns. "But what does a cabin have to do with any of this?"

"Dude," Azrael says, "what's more romantic than a rustic cabin in the woods?"

"Um … I'm pretty sure anything is more romantic than a rustic cabin in the woods when we're starving and grody and exhausted, and he's literally killing himself with guilt."

"So, I'm not a miracle worker, okay?" Azrael snaps back defensively. "I'm Death—"

"—The Angel of," Chloe interjects.

Azrael glares. "The point is, I'm kinda the absence of miracle. It's not my favorite gig, sometimes, but, hey, it's mine."

"I don't understand this whole cabin thing."

Azrael folds her arms, giving Chloe an incredulous look. "I'm starting to see why it's taken you two so long to get your crap together. Talk about a sloooow burn."

"A slow—"

"Look, I can't spell this out for you," Azrael interrupts with an apologetic expression. "It won't count if you only do it because I told you to. If you don't believe it, he's not going to."

Chloe shakes her head. "Believe … what?"

But Azrael isn't listening. She's staring over Chloe's shoulder, into the space beyond. At first, Azrael's expression is neutral, but then a smile tugs at her lips. "Yes!" she says, leaping off the ground as she pumps her clenched fists. "Yes, yes, yes!" Her massive wings flap as she lands. "Now, we're back in business." She beams at Chloe. "I toldja there were still some different ways this could go!"

"Huh?" Chloe blinks, spinning on her heels to see what Azrael is looking at.

Maze. Prowling back from the space by the grill. Her boots make slurping, sucking sounds in the mud. In her hands, she clutches a broken necklace adorned with three small, shining feather pieces. Asmodeus's ward.

Ripping one of the feathers loose from the bundle, Maze grabs the hem of Chloe's borrowed t-shirt, exposing her bloodstained belly to the rain. The feather glows like sunshine in the gray, brightening as it comes into contact with her skin.

Chloe feels a tugging sensation.

Inside.

Like her heart is tied to the end of a tether in space, and someone just jerked on the other end. Her innards rise into her throat as she enters free fall without moving, and she yelps in surprise.

Azrael steps back, watching with folded arms, smiling. "Now, will you please save my brother?" she says, though her tone is warm, not nagging. "He's in some major need of saving."

"But I don't know how!" Chloe has a chance to say.

"Smell you later, Chlo!" Azrael calls after her, waving. "Hopefully much, much later."
And then Chloe's zipping through a tunnel again. This time, though, toward Lucifer and Maze. Not away.

The tunnel spits her out like she's bad shrimp.

Her ears are ringing. She sucks in a noisy, greedy breath, and another, and another. And then the blackness opens like a blooming flower, and all she can see is cloudy, billowing gray instead. And the rain spilling down. And the roof awning like a slanting brown blade to the right.

Her limbs are cold. Her abdomen where the bullet bisected her innards burns like kindling whenever she inhales, and her shoulder where Asmodeus wrenched it is throbbing, but functional again.

"Lucifer, come on," Maze is saying. "Lucifer! Come on! Snap out of it! I fixed her! She's fine."

"Oh, God," Chloe mutters, rolling onto her side to cough up blood.

Lucifer's single feather tumbles to the dirt, its light gone out. Spent. On her. And the remains of the bullet that killed her plink onto the ground beside it.

Her wet hair conceals her from the world like a veil. She coughs and hacks and croaks until she's emptied herself of her recent death, and then she crawls away from the mess on shaky hands and knees. The wet gravel pinches her palms and her fingers and her kneecaps.

Pain.

Life.

She's alive.

Rain sluices down her face, dripping off the tip of her nose.

What. The. Fuck.

"I was … dead," she rasps. Or hallucinating. "I was dead. I met the Angel of Death." Or she was totally hallucinating. "I …."

Then reality crashes into her like a semi into a wall. Lucifer. She turns, scraping her knees on the gravel in her haste to move. He's lying on the ground, his head cradled in Maze's lap, his eyes closed. His body is pale and still. She can't tell if he's breathing. The two remaining feather bits from the warding necklace rest against his bare chest. They're white like swan feathers. But earthly like swan feathers, too. Not luminous. No light emits from the barbs or spills from the broken ends of the shafts.

"I don't know what's wrong with him," Maze says, clutching him, her expression panicked, her eyes watering. "The feathers should have helped. I mean … they helped Amenadiel."

"It's the cuffs," Chloe says grimly. "The cuffs are draining him."

"What do you mean, draining him?"

"I mean, the Archangel of Justice constructed them a zillion billion years ago. They're divine. Meant to punish the divine. And they're built to drain divinity until they're removed."

Maze shifts, withdrawing the second of her two crescent knives from the sheath underneath her jacket. The dark, inscribed metal glistens in the rain.
"What are you …?" Chloe has a chance to say, before Maze shoves Lucifer to the ground and raises the knife like she means to use it in place of an axe. "No! No, don't do that!"

"What?" Maze says with a blasé shrug. "He's an angel. He'll grow them back."

Without thinking, Chloe launches herself at Maze like a wrecking ball, slamming the demon away from Lucifer before Maze can attempt some sort of mercy amputation. Maze shrieks as they roll across the ground, the weight of their bodies splurching and squishing as they shift off of gravel onto the wet grass. Cold water seeps into Chloe's hip from the ground.

"What the fuck, Decker!" Maze snaps as she rights herself, her hair plastered to her head by the rain. "You're lucky I didn't fucking stab you."

"And you're lucky you didn't finish him off!" Chloe snaps back at her. "We tried that. It doesn't work, and there's massive backlash for him."

Maze has the good grace to look stricken as she says, "Oh."

"Yeah, oh!" Chloe says with a stressed, exasperated sigh.

She pulls her shaky fingers through her wet hair and then rests with her knees beside his head. He's stone still. Like he was after the forest fire. She leans forward to clutch at his left wrist. The rain makes his cold skin slippery, but she finds it. His pulse point. A weak, stuttering thump-thump … … thump … … thump … … thump … pats haphazardly against the pad of her thumb.

He's still alive.

Maybe the transfusion Maze gave him with his broken feathers helped him hang on a little longer.

Maybe.

Chloe strokes his face. "Lucifer?" she says. "Lucifer, can you hear me?"

But he's unresponsive.

The brightest of God's angels is foundered in the mud, cradled in the embrace of his limp, gray wings.

"I haven't gotten him to talk since he collapsed," Maze adds from somewhere behind her.

"He's been sick for days," Chloe admits, the world blurring as tears well too fast for her to blink them away. "He's been dying. We were staying at this cabin so he could die."

The silence stretches.

"And there's no way to get the cuffs off?" Maze says, the words small. Too small for big bad I-gotta-do-me Maze.

Chloe sucks in a wavering breath and blows it out. "According to Azrael, the only way to unlock the cuffs is to make a successful appeal to whoever locked them."

Maze's gaze shifts to Asmodeus, her eyes pinched with sudden regret.

"No," Chloe says. "No, not him. We think … Lucifer locked them. Inadvertently. His guilt about … Cain."
"But Cain was a psychopath," Maze says slowly. "He deserved what he got."

"And Uriel."

Maze continues in a does-not-compute tone, "But … Uriel was gonna kill you."

Chloe can only give Maze a helpless look.

Maze stares at Lucifer, her eyes wet but blazing. She wipes her face. She sniffs. And then with a roar, she lurches to her feet and stalks toward Asmodeus. She kicks him so hard his limp body slaps against the side of the house. Then she withdraws the knife from his eye, only to stab him with it in the chest. "HUMAN. FEELINGS. SUCK. BALLS." Another stab. "THEY SUCK!" Another. "WHY DID GOD INVENT THIS SHIT?" She makes another mindless swipe with her blade, sending a spray of blood and gore against the house's siding. "FUCKING STUPID." It's a sanguinary, macabre display of emotional disintegration that Chloe, while she can empathize, can't bring herself to watch.

She shifts until Lucifer's body is the only thing in her field of view, and she strokes his face as Maze stoms and screams in the background. "Lucifer? Please, can you hear me? It's me. It's Chloe."

But he doesn't even twitch.

"I'm okay," she tells him, lump thick and painful in her throat. She runs her thumb along his cold cheek. "I'm alive. And I remember the combination on your safe. Trixie's birthday. So, don't worry about me. Okay?"

Nothing.

Her lower lip trembles. Her chest constricts. She's too late. Despite everything, she's too late. How can she possibly make an appeal to him when he's unconscious?

Please, Azrael, I don't know what—

Chloe blinks as realization explodes in her mind like a popped balloon. Oh. Holy. Fuck.

You've been praying to the wrong place, Azrael said.

"Oh, God," Chloe says, breathless. "Oh, God."

"What?" snaps Maze, briefly yanked out of her tantrum.

Just intend for your thoughts to reach him, and they will, if he's choosing to listen.

I always listen to you.

"Um." Chloe bites her lip, shaking her head. "Um. Hold on." She steeples her wet palms together, shaking, swallowing against the lump in her throat. "I think I …." With a deep breath, she closes her eyes and projects her thoughts through the void. Toward Lucifer. Wherever he is. Lucifer? Can you hear me?

His body remains motionless beside her knees.

Lucifer, I dunno if you can hear me, but … hey. It's me. It's Chloe. I'm not dead, yeah? I'm gonna be fine. No matter what. So, don't you worry about me. Please.

She dares a peek at him through her eyelashes. The rain pounds down in relentless sheets. Maze has
come back to rest at Lucifer's other side.

For a moment, Chloe sits there at a loss, not sure what to pray to him beyond her assurances that she's fine. What can she say that hasn't already been said? What might make the difference? Maybe ….

Look, I know what it feels like to take a life, Chloe continues. I killed a man when I was just a year out of the academy. He had a gun, and he was threatening me, and I just … fired. We're trained to aim for center of mass. I hit him in the heart. He lived … maybe five minutes. I saw the light in his eyes go out. I still have nightmares, sometimes.

"What the hell did you just do?" Maze says.

Chloe blinks, torn from her prayer. "What?"

Then she looks down at Lucifer. He's silent. Unmoving. But his head is tipped toward her. Like he's ….

Like he's listening.

Her heart starts to pound. With a panicked sound coiling deep in her throat, she raises her head toward the sky and smashes her eyelids shut.

I can't tell you it'll ever be okay. That'd be a lie. Really, it's like … this big … wave that keeps crashing into you throughout life. Sometimes you're ready for it, and you can brace. Other times, it sweeps you out to sea, and you're drowning. And it sucks. It really, really sucks, and I'm not gonna try to diminish that, but …. 

She pauses long enough to drop her hands to his. She clasps her fingers around each of his palms, and she squeezes them. His skin is cold like a body in a morgue fridge, and his fingers are limp and lifeless. The edges of the cuffs are sharp against her hands.

Lucifer, I know in my heart that I did the right thing. That guy was dangerous, and my only choice was him or me. So, I picked me. Would you blame me for picking me?

She smiles as she imagines his indignant reply: Of course, I wouldn't blame you, Detective. Are you off your bloody trolley?

She strokes his thumb.

Then why are you blaming yourself for picking you? she tells him, sniffing. And not even just you. You picked me, too. And you picked who knows how many other people Uriel would have dragged into his warped probability schemes, or Cain would have eventually murdered.

She peeks down at Lucifer. At the cuffs. Nothing. Still nothing.

Her chest aches like she's stuck in a vise, it hurts so much to breathe.

I know in my heart that you did the right thing — you protected all of us — and I just …. She takes a shaky, wet breath. I need you to accept that. That you did the right thing. I need you to forgive yourself. Let the guilt go, Lucifer.

She squeezes his cold fingers, mashing them together at the knuckles.
We can work through the rest together. I promise. Just … please forgive yourself. The world isn’t so black and white. You’re not a monster. You don’t deserve this kind of condemnation. And if you can’t have faith in that idea alone, I hope you can at least have faith in me. Or is your opinion of me so low that you think I’d love an actual devil?

Her heart skips.

Praying instead of speaking makes it easy to blurt things.

Big things.

But … in this moment, revelation is another bullet striking true.

It won’t count if you only do it because I told you to, Azrael said.

It.

Telling him the incontrovertible truth.

That’s right. I love you, Chloe tells him. I love you. Her morning star. Please, stay. I desire you to stay.

For a moment, nothing happens. The rain thunders down in big fat drops that plink and plunk in all the muddy puddles. The trees sway and creak in the driving wind. The birds sing. And the cuffs remain.

She collapses against Lucifer's cold body, sobbing, emotionally bankrupt. She made the best appeal she could. She has nothing left. But she wasn’t enough. He’ll guilt himself into oblivion, and that will be the end of this horrible tragedy.

"No," she cries against his wet skin. "No. Please, stay."

A soft metal clink, barely audible over the rain, fills the space beside her ear.

Chloe lifts her head.

The cuffs are open. The formerly-writhing red runes, now the color of slate, have stilled. Grimacing, she snatches the cuffs away from his scabbed, bleeding wrists and heaves them across the yard.

They land with a sucking thunk in the mud.

With tight, panicked breaths, she wraps her arms around him, pulling him close. His hands and wrists, limp, drop to opposite sides of his hips in the dirt. "Check for his pulse," she tells Maze, unwilling to let him go. "Please, check—"

"He’s alive," Maze says without moving, her expression grim. "Barely."

Chloe wilts, not bothering to question the assertion. She’s gotten too much of a crash course in supernatural wuwu crap to doubt in some unseen bond, at this point. Trembling, crying, she tightens her embrace, pressing her face against his neck.

"I love you," she repeats aloud against his skin, close to his ear, in case he needs to hear it. "I love you."

In case that will help him heal a bit.
She kisses him. Pulls her fingers through his hair. Whispers at him. Says things she'd be embarrassed to have Maze hear if it were any other day, if this were any other situation. Maze makes herself busy retrieving and cleaning her knife.

"Thank you for coming to help us," Chloe warbles through a wall of tears when Maze sits back down in the grass. "You saved our lives."

"Yeah, well," Maze says, looking distinctly uncomfortable. "You're … my third favorite human. And, maybe I want to punch him in the face right now, but eternity would suck without him."

Chloe snorts despite the grief and relief tumbling out of her in equal measure.

"I do have a question, though," Maze says.

"Shoot."

"What in the hell are you guys doing in Québec?"
In the end ....

Chapter Notes

Posting a little early so I can sleep in :D Enjoy! (Just in case there's any confusion, despite the title this chapter is NOT the end, but it is the end of Lucifer POV ;p)

He isn't awake at first, so much as aware that he isn't asleep. His body is folded at the knees and waist, and all of his feathers and toes are smashed up against something cold and solid. His cheek is pressed against something warm and … less solid. The warmth wraps around his shoulders like a wreath.

For the first time in days, he isn't shivering. His chest doesn't ache as it fills up with a gelid, unrelenting void. Breathing doesn't feel like a wrestling match that he's losing. He's left only with enervation so thick and pervasive it's caught in every sinew and bone, sticking like taffy between each plodding heartbeat, filling up his mind with cotton.

A soft rumble fills the space around him, making the surface below his body shiver in place. A metallic popping sound drowns out all but the vibrations, though. The steady bursts of, "pop, pop, pop," sound like someone is making … popcorn in a pot? No. No, like … a downpour striking a tin roof. Rain. Heavy. And there's music. Barely audible over the clamor. Classic rock. Off to the right. A radio—

A raucous thunk blots out the music and the rain as the world jounces underneath him. His hip slips off the edge. Edge of what? A brief panic bursts inside him like an overladen water balloon striking bricks. He'll fall. He'll fall off …. But then the wreath tightens around him, and he's safe.

"Maze, watch it!"

"What? The shocks on this thing are shit."

"Maybe, if you drove a little slower—"

"But that would take longer!"

"It might also get us there in one piece."

"How is that any fun?"

A sigh blusters through the air somewhere above him. Something warm cups his face for a moment, lingering. And then it wanders to his hair, pulling through the strands.

He doesn't remember making a sound, but the warm thing moves back to his face.

"Lucifer," says a soft, disembodied voice. "Lucifer, are you awake?"

He's too tired to do more than flutter his eyelids. He gets a brief, blurry glimpse of color. And a strip of light. Like sky. And her. Chloe. Even in the flat, kaleidoscope of nonsense that his eyes are telling him exists in front of him, he can identify Chloe. Chloe, who was dead. … Was she dead?
A breathless not-word splutters in his throat.

"We got the cuffs off," she whispers as the warm thing strokes his cheek. "You're free. You're safe."


She is.

Relief is a bonfire he has no fuel to sustain.

His consciousness is sinking. His limbs are lead. He has nothing left.

Awareness fades.

Someone sets the world on a tilt-a-whirl. Something hard and unyielding digs into his ribs. His eyes drift open. Through the blur of his eyelashes, he still can't make any sense of what he's looking at. A leg? A boot? And a speckled texture, like pavement, moving beneath. He's wrapped in something warm, but constricting. It's preventing his arms and wings from succumbing to gravity. And his head feels full.

"M'upside down," he croaks.

"So, walk if you don't like it," Maze replies somewhere beside him.

Awareness fades again.

A steady murmur drags him back to consciousness. Flickering lights. A warmth. Resting on his chest. Stroking his breastbone over his heart.

After a few false starts, he manages to open his eyes.

He's staring at a flat, featureless plane. A ceiling. Chloe sits by his shoulder, hugging a … blobby … thing — pillow? — one hand shoved under his blanket, resting on him skin to skin. The room is dark, save for something flickering beyond his feet. A television? The unmistakable rumble of a laugh track carries like a whisper from that direction, confirming his guess. His eyes still won't focus.

"What are … we watching?" he mumbles weakly.

Her face lights up when she looks down at him. "Lucifer? Hey." She tosses the blob/pillow away, out of his limited field of view. "Hey." She strokes his face. "How are you feeling?"

"Remarkably … not dead."

She laughs. The sound of her elation makes him happy. She makes him happy. "Maze is out getting us some supplies," she says. "Clothes and food and stuff. We thought we'd stay here until you're a bit … um." She glances below his neckline with a frown. "A bit less … angelic."

The words all meld together like mushy soup, and he has trouble parsing them. "Hmm," is all he can say, and the sound is weak and curdled.

She traces circles around his sternum. The rhythm soothes him. Her warmth soothes him. He's not sure how long he's been drifting in and out when he adds a faint, "… Where are we?"

"We're at a hotel near Val-d'Or. In Québec."
"Oh."

The moments stretch.

"Lucifer?"

He's lying on his back, naked, but wrapped tightly in the comforter he thought he'd die in. That much, he can tell by feel. The longest of his primary feathers poke out the other end of the blanket roll, past his feet, the barbs still caked with filth from slogging through the mud toward Chloe's body — the cold air on the tips of his feathers, and the dirt drying in every crevice, make him wince. He scrunches his toes. Sort of. Feathers rustle. His limbs won't budge, though. He couldn't lift a bucket of air.

"Lucifer?" she repeats softly, gently anchoring him to shore. "Are you cold? Do you need anything?"

You, he wants to say. Just you. Please. But that's a bit too soft-bellied and bleeding. "No."

Chloe strokes his face. "Sleep, then," she tells him. "It's okay. I've got some I Love Lucy to keep me company."

I love you, she said. Please, stay.

His eyes drift shut. The television murmurs somewhere beyond.

"Sleep," she says again, a stretching, strange echo.

And he does.

Maze returns with clean clothes. She brings them crackers and cheese and other snacks, too. Things he finds he has no appetite for, not even with Chloe in close vicinity. He's happy to doze, wrapped in a pile of blankets, fading in and out, while he listens to them eat their fill.

The mattress beside his hip sinks. Something plastic crackles in the quiet space. A weight presses against his lap. His eyes drift open after two false starts.

"I got you a suit, too," Maze says, giving him a wary, uncomfortable look. "I wasn't sure ...."

Though the movement makes his arms shake, he raises the white Walmart bag to eye level. He squints. White. The bag is white. He blinks, realizing that his eyes are starting to work again. Starting to make sense of things in a way he can actually interpret.

Maze sighs. "Okay, what's wrong with it?"

He shakes his head as he lowers the bag. "Nothing. Nothing, I ...." He rubs his tired eyes with his hands. His free, unbound hands. "I couldn't see very well before."

She gives him a stricken look. "Oh."

The bag crinkles as he reaches inside to feel the contents. The suit she bought for him is a cheap polyester blend. Under normal circumstances, he wouldn't touch such material with a fifty-foot pole. But it's not as though the kind of custom-tailored designer ensemble he prefers is easy to come by, let alone easy to come by on zero notice in a "city" with a five-digit population. Today, even an off-the-rack suit is still a suit. A small bit of normalcy that he needs as much as sleep. And the fact that Maze even attempted to ....
He swallows, chest constricting.

"Thank you," he says in a soft voice. "I'll put it on when …"

When he's clean. When he can string more than a few sentences together without exhausting himself. When he can move enough to justify getting dressed.

He leaves the many "whens" unspoken, though, and Maze's hand lingers at his shoulder.

"Okay," she says. She picks up the bag and sets it on the nightstand. Then she clears her throat and looks away, muttering a gruff, "Feel better," over her shoulder as she rejoins Chloe at the table.

He wants to reply, but his eyelids are feeling heavy again.

He manages a soft, knackered, "Hmm."

And he drifts.

It's dark in the room when he meanders his way back from the Dreaming. A weight presses down on his shoulder. A long, thick line of heat lies flush against his side, and a thinner one drapes across his chest. Something soft — hair? — brushes his jawline.

"What?" he croaks.

A sleep-filled, nonsensical murmur fills the silence, and she snuggles closer.

He hates being restrained. But … this is … okay.

This is ….

His eyes water as all the stress of the past few days begins to uncoil.

"Sleep well, Detective," he murmurs.

And then he drifts away again.

He's lost in a world without time.

With the curtains drawn, he has no concept of day or night. He has no concept of how long he's been languishing in the frailty of having "remarkably" not died. When he first manages to sit up on his own, the clock beside the bed says 2:35, but it has no indication of a.m. or p.m. At least, not one that he can identify in his semi-addled state.

When the clock face flicks to 6:55, the feeling of mud caked to his skin and feathers has graduated from irritating to loathsome, and by 7:59, it's torture. He'll crawl to the bloody shower if he has to. He isn't even off the mattress, though, before Chloe and Maze are both doting all over him, saying things like, "Whoa!" and, "Slow down!" and, "Take it easy!" But he grits his teeth and bears their fussing, because the moment he stands up despite their protests, his vertebrae all seem to compress like a too-tight slinky. His legs shake like a plate of gelatin. His wings make him feel as though someone tied cement blocks to his back. And while he's too proud to admit aloud that he'd fall on his face without their unsolicited aid, he's not too proud to know it.

"I need to … be clean," he rasps, panting as he lets the heavy comforter drop to his ankles. "I'm bloody filthy."
"Oh, come on," Maze snarks. "It's just mud."

"_Just_ mud?" he snaps as indignation swells. "_Just—_"

It isn't until Maze snickers that he realizes he's being teased, and his hackles lower.

"I get it," his recalcitrant demon says. "Sense of humor is probably stuck under the mud."

To which he can only harumph.

Chloe and Maze together help him shuffle toward the bathroom from the bed. When they reach the tub, Maze pats his shoulder with something half-resembling affection. "I'm gonna take a walk," she announces. She regards them for a moment, eyes narrowing as her gaze wanders back and forth between him and Chloe. "A _long_ walk." She licks her lower lip. "You two … enjoy."

He shakes his head. "But—"

"Maze," Chloe begins to protest on top of him, "he can barely—"

But Maze only directs a look of glee at them. "Yeah. Sure." She bumps her fists together suggestively. "Have fun." And then she slips away, a whisper in the quiet, leaving him alone with Chloe.

Chloe gives the bathroom door a wry look. "I think her head might explode if she knew we already went there."

"Such a devious little matchmaker, my Maze," he says with a smile that doesn't reach his eyes.

Chloe shakes her head. "She makes _so_ much more sense as a literal demon."

And then conversation dies. Chloe gives him an uncertain look. Like she, too, is doubting. And a hollowness that has nothing to do with the handcuffs carves him out. He raises a hand to the towel rack, trying to steady himself.

Will they be different, now?

The silence stretches.

_I love you_, she said. _Please, stay._

The words echo. Over and over.

"Here," Chloe murmurs, guiding him to the toilet seat. "Why don't you sit down while I get the water temperature adjusted."

But rather than sitting, he puts his bloodstained, trembling hand against the countertop, bracing his weight, and stares into the mirror instead. He looks … awful. Haggard. _Ghastly_. Dark, fleshy circles hug his dull eyes. His skin and lips — what little is visible under the grime and blood — are pallid. His face is gaunt and covered in scratches. His hair is a tangled, matted mess again. And his dark, untamed beard only makes everything look worse.

Like an escaped convict. Or a castaway.

That's what he looks like.

What he is.
No.

His throat hurts, making it hard to swallow.

"You look a lot better," Chloe assures him.

Which only makes the ache burgeon. It's throbbing and cold like a knife made of ice.

*You're not a monster. You don't deserve this kind of condemnation.*

His heart constricts as her whispered words leak in through the wall — now crumbling — that his mind made for him. Memories? Hallucinations? He closes his aching eyes. He doesn't know. He's not sure he wants to know. He likes them as memories far more than as hallucinations. But even then … she'd say a lot to save a life. Even his. That's just … the kind of person she is.

She strips off her clothes behind him, directing a bashful, blushing, half-smile at him in the mirror as her things slide to the floor in a rustling heap. Her ribs are showing a little, thanks to spending the past few days in a state of starvation. But she's … perfect. He drags his gaze from her delicate ankles, to her knees, to her navel, to her pert nipples, to her beautiful face. She's …

The pain in his throat makes it too hard to speak without falling apart, and so he doesn't.

She helps him into the shower. He leans against the cold tile wall while she lathers up a washcloth. Steam curls around them, and the rush of the water fills the silence.

She scrubs down every feather. Every inch of muddy, bloody skin. The cloth rasps against him. Her touch is gentle. And warm. And she makes him feel safe. She makes him feel …

"Was it real?" he croaks, breaking the long silence when he can't take the not knowing anymore.

The cloth stops moving.

He waits for her no. Or her laugh. Or her confused *what the hell are you talking about?* Something. Some response that would make sense to him.

But instead she wraps her arms around his waist, pressing her lips between his shoulder blades, between his wings. For a long time, she just stands like that, skin to skin with him, breathing, as the water rains against the shower basin. He doesn't dare move. Or breathe. Or speak.

"Yes, it was real," she says at last. "And I meant every word. Start to finish." Her arms tighten, pulling him closer.

Relief is a nauseating, cold churn in his gut. He stares into the spray. "I don't understand you. I don't … bloody …"

"Well, gee, what else is new?" she says with a soft laugh.

He closes his eyes and takes a breath. "I want to understand."

"I want you to understand, too," she says. She kisses him. She's like a balm against his skin.

His wings make it impossible to twist to meet her. Not without flooding the whole bathroom. But she seems to read his mind. She pushes back the shower curtain and steps out. She returns to the spray in front of him, looking up at him with her bright blue eyes. And the brilliant, endless sprawl of golden light filling the space behind them. Divinity in human form. He can see that, too. He pets her cheek with the pad of his thumb, a smile tugging at his lips.
"What is it?" she says.

"I can see you, darling."

"See … me?"

"Yes."

Her eyes widen when she realizes what he's implying. "Like a hat. Or a coat."

"Yes," he repeats softly. "You're … quite beautiful."

A warm smile stretches across her face. "I'm glad you're feeling better." She reaches up to toil with an unruly wet curl that's fallen over his forehead. The moving hairs tickle his scalp, and he can't help but lean into her touch. "I love you," she says. Aloud. When he's awake and aware and each syllable is clear and rings like music. And he wishes he could cling to that moment until time is immaterial. A once-in-his-lifetime event.

He swallows, not quite sure what to say. "Chloe ….

"I don't need you to say it back right now," she tells him. "I just wanted you to know."

Then she rises to her tiptoes to kiss him, and the rest of the world falls away.

He has feelings.

They're big and bold and overwhelming, and he's nothing but a speck, crushed to pieces underneath. He has no idea how to speak his mind without unraveling. How to put the state of his being into words. He's too cowed to even try. But he can show himself to her. He can show her everything.

His wings and his fatigue make things awkward, and quite lacking in athleticism, but the physical shortcomings of the encounter are a bare shadow, erased by the light of revelation. They lie side by side as he thrusts into her from behind, his front flush against her back. He wraps his arms around her, one tight against her breasts, and the other draped over her hip, so that he can guide her pleasure with his hand.

Her blissful moans are exultations. A symphony he'd delight in replaying until the end of time.

When her body stiffens, every muscle tensing in his arms, he kisses the back of her neck, burying his face in her hair. Her skin tastes of salt. And heat. "Yes, that's it," he tells her softly. "Come for me."

And she does.

The rhythmic contractions of her lower body make him lose his breath for a moment. He wasn't able to give her this moment in abandon before, and he cherishes it, now. Every breathless gasp and shuddering, rapturous twitch.

Only once she's subsiding into blissful lassitude does he let himself go, too. A soft, discombobulated sound gets caught in his throat as he pauses on the cusp, relishing. His world fills with sparks. She's warm, and slick, and perfect. She's home. And when he loses himself in her, he's not at all lost.

He's found.

The covers rustle as she relaxes with a sated sigh beside him, sandwiching his hand between hers.
She traces the lifelines in his palm. He nuzzles the nape of her neck.

And they rest.
The handcuffs rest like a garish centerpiece on the little table by the window. The swirling red runes that were present when the cuffs were locked are fully dormant, now, leaving behind only the strangely gleaming "steel" that's like no earth metal Chloe's ever glimpsed.

"I locked them," Lucifer says, wincing as Maze pushes the curtains open for the first time, and daylight unfurls into the dark room. "What the bloody hell do you mean, I locked them?"

Chloe begins, "Azrael said—"

"Azrael!"

Wincing at Lucifer's dark, seething look, Chloe sits on the edge of the bed by his hip. He lies on top of the blankets with his back pressed against the headboard, his legs crossed. They watched television all day while he rested, nodding off against her shoulder at uneven intervals. Until he snapped awake with a panicked yelp and said, "The cuffs. What happened to the bloody handcuffs?"

And Maze said, "Yeah, what are we gonna do about those, anyway?"

Which prompted a whole big be-kind-rewind-athon, starting from when Maze had felt a searing, stabbing pain through her bond with Lucifer several days ago. When he'd drained himself to the point of collapse to set the woods ablaze. Or so they guess, based on the loose timing of events.

Chloe puts her hand on his knee. "Lucifer, are you … okay?"

"You've spoken to my sister," he snaps. "Which means you bloody well died." His fingers clench into fists as he shakes his head. "No, I'm not bloody 'okay.' I'd hoped …"

"Hoped … what?"

He gives her a troubled look. "Hoped that … perhaps … I—" A sigh heaves through his frame, and his shoulders wilt as he shifts his attention to his lap. To futzing with his cuticles. "—well, that I hallucinated that bit."

She gives him a sheepish look. "Ditto," she says, curling up beside him. "If it makes you feel any better, I mean."

"Trust you to find the humor," he grumbles without looking up. The dark, puffy smudges hugging his eyes seem darker, and he seems old. And beaten. And worn out. His words are quiet when he adds, "I'm … deeply sorry to have dragged you into yet another supernatural omnishambles."

"You didn't drag me anywhere," she says. "Asmodeus did." She presses her lips to his cheek. "And I think, all things considered, that it turned out pretty well. Don't you?"
"Yes, well." He looks away.

With a sigh, she lets the emotional distance stretch between them, not willing, yet, to force a discussion he doesn't seem ready to have. She leans back against the headboard. "So, I guess the question is … now, what?"

"Meaning?" he says, meeting her eyes again.

"Meaning, we have to explain where we've been."

He shrugs. "I think honesty is best."

Of course, he does. "You really wanna go with, 'A demon held us hostage and tried to cut off my wings?' I mean, you might not care what people think of your sanity, but I'd like to keep my job. And I don't think demonic kidnapping is gonna fly as a valid A.W.O.L. excuse."

"Yes, well, I meant sans the devilish details, of course," he replies in a prim tone. "I do understand the value of leaving some truths unspoken."

She nods, thinking. "So … we go to the police and say we were kidnapped, which is true. We just leave out the demon part?"

"I do think that's best," Lucifer repeats softly, putting a hand on her arm. "And from there, I believe I can … control the narrative, as they say."

"Okay." She directs a longing look at the phone. "When?" She's wanted to call home since they got to the hotel, but they need to behave in a manner that matches whatever story they tell. Calling home to say things are fine when she and Lucifer are supposed to be imperiled in the wilderness would be a great way to advertise that whatever "narrative" he tells the police is, at least on some level, bullshit. "I mean … when can we …?" Her gaze wanders to his wings, which are still corporeal. Still limp and gray. Still a bare shadow of what they used to be. Though, at least, he's starting to be able to twitch the feathers a little.

With a tight sigh, he shifts his focus to the bedspread, toiling at the seams. "I'll … try again in a bit," he says.

"Don't worry, she wants to tell him. Don't rush. Don't hurt yourself for me. If you can't put them away, yet, you can't. But … a lump forms in her throat when she imagines Trixie, thinking her mom is dead, and Chloe can't be the bigger person in this moment. She just …. She can't."

"Also, there's the cuffs," she says. She glances at the table where they sit, unable to suppress a shudder. "I mean, I'm assuming you want to destroy those things with prejudice—" She certainly does. "—but …"

How, when he can't even lift his own wings?

His head thunks back against the headboard as he follows her train of thought.

"I could take them," Maze offers.

He shifts his gaze to her, eyes narrowing. "You …?"

Chloe frowns. She'd forgotten Maze was even in the room.

Maze stands by the curtain, blending into shadow as though it were a physical cloak. Her leather
bomber jacket creaks in the quiet as she shifts on her feet, folding her arms. "I could take them across
the border for you," she says with a shrug. "Back to Lux. I'm assuming you're not gonna want
customs anywhere near them."

Lucifer directs an unreadable look at the handcuffs. The cold, two-time instrument of his almost
death. For a long moment, he doesn't speak. His jaw clenches. And then he drags his attention back
to Maze. His several-times betrayer.

"Never mind," Maze says hastily, backing up a step. "Forget I said anything."

His words are midnight — quiet, dark, velvet — when he asks, "You would guard them with your
life?"

They share a look.

Maze says something sharp and guttural. An oath? The words aren't English. Not even close.
Demonic, maybe. For all that Angel-ish sounds lyrical, Maze's speech is the absence of music.

Lucifer replies in the same harsh tongue.

Maze draws one of her crescent blades from its sheath and drags the point against her wrist. A
glistening trail of red wells up from her skin. She steps across the carpet, her bleeding arm
outstretched. Toward him. With a grimace, he scoots past Chloe and rises from the bed.

Chloe watches in slack-jawed, morbid fascination as he takes the knife and cuts open his palm. He
wraps his fingers around Maze's wrist, his grip tightening until Maze grunts, and they touch, blood to
blood. The moments stretch, heartbeat by heartbeat. Two sanguine drops patter onto the dark floral-
print carpet. And then, with a sharp breath, Maze pulls away, and she walks out of the room, licking
her wound. Literally.

"What …?" Chloe asks, bewildered, as he sinks back to the bed beside her, his bleeding hand
clutched to his chest in a fist.

"We … made up," he explains. "More or less."

She blinks. "That was an apology?"

"She's a demon," he says with a shrug bordering on the blasé. "They don't really do apologies."

"Just wacky blood oaths."

He nods. "Precisely, Detective."

"O … kay," Chloe says, filing that away.

Better to get used to it now.

She's pretty sure life is only going to get stranger from here on out.

In the end, they opt for almost-honesty. As soon as he's able to put his wings away — an effort that
leaves him dizzy and sweating and pale — Maze drops Lucifer and Chloe off in a park several
blocks outside the nearest Sûreté du Québec station and then heads for the border by herself. They
apply liberal dirt and twigs to their too-clean clothes and hair, and then they stumble to the front desk
together, claiming kidnapping.
Lucifer, while he might not lie, is an excellent storyteller. Though he leaves out all mention of angels, demons, wings, and magical handcuffs, he's able to spin for anyone who will listen an enthralling tale of his and Chloe's flight through the woods. In French, no less.

For the purposes of their story, Asmodeus never caught up with them after they fled. The police won't find him — Maze disposed of his corpse and his truck and his gun God and Maze only knew where — but that doesn't matter. Somewhere north of Val-d'Or, they'll find Asmodeus's facility with the operating table and the cage in the basement, confirming their story. They might even find Asmodeus's human cohorts still licking their wounds after being trapped for days by a wall of divine fire.

No mention is made of their brief stay at the cabin. Prior to leaving the hotel, Lucifer hired some less than legal "cleaners" to repair the bullet damage to the siding and the grill; replace the broken lamp; and leave an anonymous cash donation and thank-you note for the stolen food, clothing, and comforter.

There's a brief kerfuffle when the woman taking witness statements realizes Chloe and Lucifer are U.S. citizens, rather than Canadian. The American Consulate in Montreal is called in to assist, along with the R.C.M.P.

Everything swirls into a chaotic blur.

The consulate puts them up in a hotel in Montreal for the next few nights while everything is sorted. Lucifer, still weakened from his ordeal with the cuffs, exhausted after his day of theatrics, crashes into bed within minutes of Chloe hanging the "Do Not Disturb" sign on the doorknob. She gives the mattress a longing look, exhaustion turning all of her perceptions fuzzy, making her head ache.

Instead of joining him immediately in slumber, though, she curls up in the chair by the phone at the writing desk. For a moment, she relishes the quiet and the lack of bustle. After days in the wilderness, civilization is … loud. Then, with a shaky hand, she lifts up the phone receiver and dials a familiar number.

"Hi, Dan," she says, warbling into the receiver as she watches Lucifer's sleeping form. "It's Chloe. I'm with Lucifer. We're fine. We're safe. It's a long story. I'll tell you in a bit. Can you put Trixie on? I wanna talk to her."

Montreal-Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport is a bustling mess. Customs takes them over an hour to wade through. The line is long and snaking and noisy and confusing. The customs agent who calls them forward — a redhead, nametag: Eric O'Neill — scrutinizes their temporary passports, frowning as he reads every printed line, every signature. Not even Lucifer can get them through more quickly.

"Of course, you're a complicated one," Lucifer grumbles at Mr. O'Neill.

"Any items to declare?" the agent asks, ignoring him.

"We've no bloody luggage," Lucifer says testily. "We were bloody dragged here against our wills. I'm wearing a bloody suit worth less than my bloody socks. What would we bloody declare?"

O'Neill doesn't reply. His dispassionate gaze shifts from Chloe to Lucifer and back to Chloe.

She sighs. "Only what we're wearing." Which they'd already listed on the forms, thank you very
much.

O'Neill glances at their declarations one more time and then gives them a bland look. "Have a nice flight," he says, sounding bored. Then he stamps their papers and waves them through.

"I assure you; it will not be!" Lucifer replies.

"An angel on a plane," Lucifer grouses under his breath as they settle into one of the rows over the wing. "Could this be any more ironic?"

She grins. "No more ironic than the Devil flying economy."

His eyes fill with a furious glint as he regards his knees poking into the tray table in front of him. "There weren't any bloody seats left in first class," he says. "And you said you desired to be home immediately, did you not?"

"I know. I know. Thank you."

The plane cabin fills with the loud hum of the engines. A flight attendant wanders past, checking for donned seatbelts and stowed tray tables. Another flight attendant speed-walks in the opposite direction, testing the latches on all the luggage bins. He bumps into Lucifer's shoulder without stopping or even seeming to notice.

An irritated sigh tumbles from Lucifer's lips as he brushes off his jacket sleeve. "If Dad really wanted people to suffer in damnation, he should have put them all behind the bloody exit row."

She can't help but snort. "Six hours. You can make it."

"Might as well be bloody eternity."

He shifts in his seat. The magazines in the seat-back pocket in front of him crinkle as he tries to find a comfortable position, but his legs are too long to fit. She pushes up the armrest that separates them and curls up against the scratchy lapel of his $79 suit. Between the cheap suit and the cheap seat, he really must be in Hell. She tips up to kiss his throat before settling again.

For a moment, he seems ruffled, and his body is stiff as a board underneath her. Like he has no idea what to do with her very blatant, very public display of affection. Like he has no idea what to do with her, not now that he has her.

When he looks at her, though, all his kinked, grumpy edges seem to straighten out. He shifts, wrapping his arm over her shoulder and pulling her close. He presses his lips to the top of her head. And then all of his complaining ceases.

"Are you quite all right?" Lucifer says, his voice a rumble against her ear.

She nods, lump in her throat. "Just homesick."

His embrace tightens. "I wish I could fly you. We'd have been back already."

"It's okay," she tells him, rubbing his arm. "I'm just glad you're here at all."

He stares into space with a strange expression.

"What is it?" she says.
"It's only that it's—" He takes a breath. "—well, it's not something I'm accustomed to hearing. Not … without … strings attached." He trips over the last sentence, like not paying in favors for regard is such a foreign idea to him that it induces verbal paralysis.

"I love you," she says, the words murmured and soft. "Just you. No strings."

His eyes close briefly, and his inhalation is sharp.

She kisses him. Just a quick peck. That'll be relationship goal number one, she thinks. Getting him used to hearing that. Getting him to associate those words with something other than fantasy.

She gives his forearm a gentle squeeze.

And then she settles for the flight home, relishing the feel of him alive beside her.

"Mommy!" Trixie calls as she vaults out of Dan's arms and sprints across the baggage claim area, almost knocking over a luggage cart in the process. "Mommy! Mommy!"

Her tiny body slams into Chloe's like a cannonball, and she wraps her arms around Chloe's waist, burying her nose in Chloe's shirt by her navel. "Hey, monkey," Chloe says around the lump in her throat. She splays her fingers against Trixie's head, stroking her hair. "Mommy's okay. We're okay."

For a long moment, Trixie won't let go. Won't speak. Just clings.

"Hey," Dan says softly, panting as he catches up.

"Daniel," Lucifer says with a nod.

Chloe grins sheepishly. "Hi, Dan. Sorry for the rough few weeks."

"I have a feeling it was a bit rougher on your end," Dan says, grinning back, though he looks exhausted. "I'm just …." He swallows, inhaling thickly and releasing it in a big blustery sigh. With a wary glance at Lucifer, Dan steps into her space. Wraps his arms around her. Pulls both her and Trixie into a hug so tight his biceps shake. "I'm just really glad you're safe—"

"—I suppose I'm chopped liver," Lucifer interjects, grumbling.

To which Dan snorts and adds over her shoulder, "I'm glad you're safe too, man. Just don't expect a hug."

Lucifer straightens primly. "Absolutely not."

Dan turns back to her. "I'm …." He clears his throat. "I'm just really glad you're safe," he repeats.

"Me, too," she whispers, pressing her nose against Dan's neck. The familiar scent of his aftershave makes her heart constrict. She's home. She's home, and she has her family. All of them.

"Bloody …!" Lucifer grunts and takes a startled step backward, looking downward with a frown. "Er …." Trixie traded legs. Chloe's for Lucifer's. And now Trixie's face is pressed into his hip, getting snot on his bargain jacket pocket. "Yes, yes," he says, awkwardly patting her on the head. "I'm …." He clears his throat. "I'll be all right as well, child. You needn't worry over me." He makes a flitty, dismissive motion with his outstretched hand. "Go … hug your mother again."

Trixie looks up at him with wide, wet brown eyes. "You're not okay, now?"
He directs a panicked look at Chloe. A nervous laugh bubbles up from within. Of course, he's fine with offering an Oscar-worthy performance to the Canadian police. But to Trixie? No way. Maximum flustered is a go.

"Let's save the grilling for later, okay, Trix?" Dan says, leaping to the rescue. "I'm sure Mommy and Lucifer are both exhausted."

"Yes," Lucifer says, brightening. "Yes. That's … what I meant. I'm quite knackered is all."

Trixie sniffs, tears forming glittering tracks as they pulse down her face. "What's knackered mean?"

"It means super tired, baby," Chloe interjects.

Lucifer looks horrified as he plucks his handkerchief from his pocket. "Oh, please, for the love of Dad, don't do that." He foists the hankie at Trixie, waving it a bit like a flag for a bull.

"Did you catch the bad guy?" Trixie says with a warbling voice, looking back and forth between them all as she reaches for Lucifer's offering.

Chloe and Dan share a pointed look. The official story, of course, is that Asmodeus is only missing. That's what Dan and the rest of the world believe, anyway. But … "Trixie," Chloe begins slowly, taking a breath.

"He's been taken care of," Lucifer says in a deep dark midnight voice before Chloe can continue. "He'll not harm your mother ever again."

"Or you?" Trixie says.

Lucifer's eyes narrow as he regards her. "Or me."

"You promise?"

His right eyebrow arches toward his hairline, as if to say, you would dare to question my veracity, small human? But aloud, he only says, "You've my word." as he looks down his nose at her with his dark eyes.

Trixie nods, wiping her nose on the crumpled handkerchief. "Can we can go home, now?"

"Yeah, monkey," Chloe says, eyes watering. "That's the very next thing."

---

She tries to drop Lucifer off at Lux on the way home. Tries to give him some space. She tries. They get as far as Dan pulling into the alley when her heart starts to pound in her ears. Her throat closes. Sweat slicks her palms.

"Why don't you come for dinner?" she blurts as Lucifer is reaching for the door handle.

"Yeah!" Trixie pipes up beside her, clapping. "Stay for dinner, Lucifer!"

He pauses mid-reach with a deer-in-headlights expression on his face. "I'd … like a shower," he says slowly. "I've …" He gestures vaguely at himself. "I've plane all over me." A disgusted sound coils in his throat. "And I'd prefer a suit that isn't—" He makes a face like he just sniffed unwashed socks. "—polyester."

A lump forms in her throat. "Um," she says in a small voice, swallowing, trying to keep herself together. Trixie is sitting right next to her, Chloe tells herself. Trixie is sitting right there, and she
doesn't want to see her normally-independent mother go all crazy clingy crying. Dan is frowning at her in the rearview mirror, too. But .... "Please, stay?"

Lucifer's expression turns jagged and pained as he peers into the back seat at her.

"I mean, of course, grab a clean suit," she rushes to say. "You can take a shower at my place, if you want. Take a nap. Whatever you want. I just .... I'd like ...." To have a night with him. At home. In her own bed. Just ... reminding herself what real life is supposed to be like. "Please."

His gaze softens. "All right, darling."

She can't hide her sigh of relief. "Thank you."

"Of course."

Trixie cheers. "Are we gonna have pizza?"

"We had pizza, yesterday," Dan says. He glances at Chloe and Lucifer in turn. "Do you guys want anything in particular?"

Lucifer shrugs and says, "I've no appetite," before climbing out of the car. "I'll return in a moment."

"Well, I've," Chloe begins hesitantly as she watches him slip into Lux through the rear exit, "been ... fantasizing pretty hardcore about a burger and fries."

"Burgers sound good!" Trixie adds.

Dan grins, drumming his fingers on the steering wheel. "Burgers it is. Just as soon as our wayward 'Devil' gets back."

Lucifer peels off from the group to take a shower and change the moment they cross the threshold of her apartment. She lingers inside the door, though, breathing in the scents, relishing the sight of all of her things. Her home. She's home. And Lucifer made it, too.

The lump is back in her throat.

"You okay?" Dan says, their to-go bag from HiHo Cheeseburger crinkling in his grip.

She nods. "More than."

"When are we gonna eat?" Trixie whines.

So, they adjourn to the dinette set table.

Lucifer rejoins them twenty minutes later, his wet hair slicked back to his head, his suit screaming of money as if meant specifically to counteract his previously morbid case of the Walmarts. The heather-gray fabric gleams in the light as he claims his chair at the end of the table.

"So ... what happened with the sting, exactly?" Chloe whispers behind her hand between bites, directing a furtive glance at Trixie, who excused herself to grab the ketchup bottle from the fridge. "I mean, it sounded over the wire like you didn't even hear what I heard."

"No, I didn't," Dan whispers back, looking frustrated. "I didn't hear a thing except you saying everything was fine and to stay put."
"Which I didn't say."

"Well, I know that, now," Dan replies with a sigh. "And Ella saw you leap out of the van, but then it was like six hours went on vacation between one heartbeat and the next. We both lost time."

"What?" Chloe blurts.

"What, what?" Trixie calls back from the kitchen.

"Um," Chloe says, shaking her head. "Nothing, baby."

Dan can only shrug. "We called for backup," he murmurs, "but by then it was too late. The whole office was incinerated, and, at first, we thought …." He looks at his lap. "We thought …." "I'm so sorry," she says.

"What the hell did he do, anyway?" Dan says, looking up again, seething. "Nuke it?"

"Smote it," Lucifer mumbles groggily.

A thump follows, and she looks left to find Lucifer, his face crashed into his elbow by his still-full plate, his breaths rasping loudly enough in his throat to be called snoring.

Trixie giggles as she returns from the fridge with both the ketchup and the mustard bottles in hand.

"Very funny, Lucifer," Dan snaps. "I'm so sorry we're boring you."

But Lucifer doesn't give up the "facade." In his collapse, he seems paler. And the circles hugging his eyes are like ink smudges, dark and smeared. The lump in Chloe's throat burgeons back into place. "He's really tired, Dan. That's all. We had a terrible time."

Dan blinks. "Sorry, I …." He shakes his head, marveling. "Wow. I don't think I've ever even seen him yawn."

"Angels get tired, too!" Trixie says.

"I'm sure they do," Dan agrees.

When Chloe tries to wake Lucifer up to nudge him in the direction of her bed, or at least the sofa, he's too ensconced in slumber to do more than swat her hand away and sleepily grumble, "M'bloody fine; go'way." Much to Trixie's amusement. Chloe's not entirely convinced he even understood what she said, but … perhaps it's best to let sleeping archangels lie? They move dinner into the living room, instead, leaving Lucifer behind to doze in peace.

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Once Trixie is fully engrossed in her 87-millionth viewing of Frozen, Dan gently pulls Chloe around the corner from the television, into the shelter of the stairway. He gives her a troubled look, pulling his fingers through his hair.

"What is it?" she says, frowning.

"I'm really sorry about the sting." He shakes his head. "I don't know what happened. One minute Ella was talking about spreading—" He grimaces. "—spreading Lucifer onto her toast, and then …." "Hey," Chloe says, putting her hand on his shoulder. "It's okay, yeah? It all worked out."
"It's not okay," he snaps vehemently. "It's not okay at all. You nearly died, because I checked out of an uncomfortable conversation."

"It wasn't your fault," she insists. "Dan, this guy. Möbius. He knew how to ...." What term might possibly be adequate to describe the high fidelity illusions Asmodeus could project? She shudders, remembering the feel of his breath on the back of her neck. The rotten stench. Behind you! he barked, scaring her out of cover despite all her years of training and experience. The clarity was .... Ice creeps down her spine, a slowly drifting glacier. "He tricked me, too. Lucifer would have been fine if I hadn't run in to 'help.'"

Dan snorts. "I sincerely doubt that."

"Hey, Lucifer can more than handle himself when he's motivated," she says, perhaps a bit too shortly. "I know you don't believe it, but——"

"Okay," Dan replies, holding up his hands in surrender. "Okay. I'm not gonna fight with you about it. He's your partner, so ...." He frowns, peering across the living room to the dinette set table where Lucifer is still sound asleep, almost drooling onto the placemat, despite Trixie's off-key wailing. "Look, did something … happen? I mean … running for your lives. Close quarters. I'd … get it."

She bites her lip. "Something … definitely happened."

"Will it … keep happening?"

"I hope so."

"Okay."

She looks at Dan in surprise. "You're not gonna protest?"

He shrugs. "Does he make you happy?"

"Yeah," she replies without hesitation. "Yeah, he does."

"That's enough for me. Just … be careful. Okay? The guy's …." Dan sighs. "Well, he's Lucifer."

She grins. "That's the part I like about him."

Dan gives her an incredulous look, but doesn't pick at her assertion.

"Please, don't beat yourself up about the sting," she continues. "Things … went wrong. It happens. And Lucifer and I are both fine." Or they will be, at least. "That's the important part."

"We'll catch this guy, Chlo. I swear. The R.C.M.P. is coordinating stuff on the Canada side. There's a lot of bodies working on this thing, now. And we ripped apart that warehouse in the Arts District top to bottom already. Your disappearance gave us great justification for a search warrant."

"Did you find the wall safe with the body parts in it?"

A long pause follows.

"I'm … not gonna ask how you knew that was there," Dan says slowly.

She winces, directing a pointed, sheepish glance toward Lucifer.

"Right," says Dan. "Of course. What's the 4th Amendment for the Devil, anyway, right?"
"Might as well be a book about knitting with pet hair," she jokes, but her smile drips away at Dan's unhappy look.

"Yeah, the uh ...." He takes a deep breath and blows it out, rubbing the bridge of his nose. "The cadaver dog found the safe for us."

His eyes are wet when he looks away. Her heart constricts. Of course, the cadaver dog. Which the L.A.P.D. would have employed to find evidence of bodies. Hers and Lucifer's.

Dan probably felt the same way when the dog had alerted on the safe as she felt when Lucifer stopped breathing. Heart in his throat. Stuck on the edge of a jagged precipice. And then would have come finding the jars, which contained parts floating in formaldehyde. Such as blue eyes. Like Genevieve Tate's. But also ... like Chloe's. And even for a rush analysis, D.N.A. testing would have taken overnight.

Her lower lip trembles as she wraps her arms around Dan, pulling him close.

"I'm sorry," she says against his ear. "I'm so sorry that you had to go through that."

"Yeah." He clears his throat roughly and shakes his head. "So, we've got seven known victims, at this point, four of whom remain unidentified. We're working on that. And I'm gonna pretend, now, that you didn't ask about the safe. Just like I'm pretending Lucifer didn't basically admit to our daughter that Möbius is dead. Okay?"

"Okay."

With a nod, he kisses her on the cheek, pastes a smile on his face that doesn't reach his eyes, and heads back to the couch to watch Frozen with their daughter. Chloe rubs her eyes and joins them moments later. Lucifer sleeps on, unmoved.

She has macabre dreams that night.

Lucifer is lying on the ground, cold and still, when Chloe returns from her out-of-body walkabout with Azrael, except this time, she can't say anything to release him from Raguel's handcuffs. She begs and pleads and cries, but nothing works. He doesn't hear her. Or he doesn't believe. And then he dissolves into dust and blows away in the driving rain. Over, and over, and over again on an endless loop.

Her mind is stretched on the rack of that moment.

She kicks at the covers, and she twists, and tosses, and turns, but nothing helps her escape.

A scream rips her throat, and—

"MOMMY!"

Chloe snaps awake, panting, crying, shaking, her hair stuck to her skin in sticky, damp tendrils. Trixie doesn't cry out again, so Chloe takes her time, swallowing back her grief and her terror and her bone-crushing sense of loss. He didn't die. He didn't. Lucifer is fine. He's downstairs, probably still dreaming at the table where she left him.

Crickets fill the nighttime silence, along with the occasional swish of a car passing by on the street beyond the window. The seconds crawl. The tremors stop. She wipes her eyes and nose with a tissue. And then she heads downstairs to check on Trixie, hoping all the while that she only looks
wrecked by exhaustion, rather than by trauma.

The stairs creak as she descends. The door to Trixie's room hangs slightly ajar. A soft, yellow triangle of lamplight flows out into the hallway from within despite the late hour. The snuffles and whimpers of Trixie crying make Chloe's heart twist.

"Oh, please, don't bloody do that," Lucifer says, his desperation audible, and Chloe freezes in her tracks, at the foot of the steps, just outside the room. "Child …." But his entreaties seem to make no difference until he takes a breath and says, "Offspring, I've a confession, and I need you to stop sniveling long enough to hear it."

Trixie sniffs. "But-"

"Please," he repeats.

"What is it?" Trixie says miserably, her voice tiny and warbling.

"I didn't save your mother. She saved me."

There's a pause. And then a quiet, astounded, "She saved you?"

"Yes, she did," Lucifer replies. "If anyone is to be labeled a guardian angel in our partnership … well … it isn't I who is deserving of the title. You shouldn't fear for her. You should be happy that you have such a strong, fierce, capable woman as your caregiver. Truly."

Chloe swallows. This is private. A private discussion. Her fingers tighten around the railing. She should just—

"She saved you?" Trixie repeats.

"Is this … not what I just said?"

The covers rustle. "But … how'd she do that?"

"Well, you see," Lucifer explains, and Chloe can just picture them. Trixie curled up in his arms, looking up at him with wide brown eyes full of awe. Lucifer sitting stiffly, trying not to squirm under the onslaught of potential cooties. "There was magic involved."

"Like in Cinderella?" Trixie says.

"No, not like in bloody Cinderella." He sighs. "You humans and your fairytales." Another pause. "Why are you looking at me like— Bloody fine. Yes. Magic like Cinderella if the metaphor pleases. And it made me quite ill."

"Were you scared?"

There's a long pause. The distant hum of the refrigerator fills the silence. And then Lucifer admits almost inaudibly, "Yes."

"But … Mommy made it better?"

"Quite a lot."

Trixie laughs. "She's really good at that."

"She is, isn't she?"
"Like a superhero!" Trixie supplies with another giggle.

"Well, she's certainly mine," admits Lucifer. "So, you see, offspring? You needn't fear."

"Okay."

"Now, sleep, will you?"

The mattress creaks as weight shifts on top of it. Lucifer, getting up. Chloe stiffens, fingers tightening around the railing to the point of pain. She should go. And, yet ….

"Lucifer, can you read me a story?"

A pause follows. No. Chloe's certain he'll say no. He *hates*— There's a thump, like he picked something heavy off Trixie's nightstand. "This one?" he says. "At the bookmark?" Whatever Trixie's response, it isn't verbal. "Do you promise to try to sleep? Preferably without much screaming and thrashing about?" Another silent response. "All right, then." The mattress creaks again. There's a click, and the light winks out. "Close your eyes." Pages flip. Lucifer takes a breath. And then he begins, "Professor Dumbledore sent all the Gryffindors back to the Great Hall, where they were joined ten minutes later by the students from Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin, who all looked extremely— What is this *dreck*?"

"It's Harry Potter. Will you do the voices like Daddy?"

"What voices?"

"Of the characters."

"Well, how am I to bloody know what they should sound like?"

"You haven't even seen the movies?"

"No."

"We gotta do that."

"No, we bloody well do not."

"Yes, we do."

"Child—"

"Please?"

"Well—"

"Pleaaaaaaase," Trixie repeats pitifully.

Chloe holds her breath.

The silence stretches, accented by an additional soft, "Please, please, please."

"The desire for bad-movie marathons must be genetic," he decides.

"… Huh?"

Then Lucifer purrs, "Make it worth my while, Beatrice, and perhaps we have a deal."
Chloe blinks, stunned, and then with a snicker, she slinks up the steps, back the way she came, leaving them to discuss terms.

She's still awake, drifting, afraid to risk another nightmare, when he opens the door to her room and prowls to Dan's old side of the bed. A belt buckle clinks. There's a rustle of clothing as he takes off his waistcoat, pants, and shirt. Then he climbs quietly into bed beside her. Without thinking, she rolls to meet him, pressing her nose into his bare chest. His body is solid, and he smells faintly of the cocoa-scented body wash she keeps in her shower.

"Hey," she says against his skin.

He wraps his arms around her. "Hello, darling." And then, as though he were privy to her nightmares, he adds in a soft voice, "As you can see and feel, I'm quite all right. You needn't fear."

"You … heard me tossing?"

"Among other things." His words are pointed.

"I'm sorry I eavesdropped," she says, squeezing her eyes shut.

He shrugs. "It's no matter. I said nothing to your offspring that I wouldn't say to you."

"Really, I'm your hero?" she says in a small voice.

"Yes."

She strokes his skin. Just over his heart. Her eyes water. "You're … almost warm again."

"I am," he says. He kisses her. "Good as new in a few days, yes?"

She nods against his chest, breathing thickly.

"Shh," he soothes, rubbing her back.

Then the world fades a little.

This time to black.

Chapter End Notes

Credit to J.K. Rowling for that little snippet of text. You know the one.
The chatter of dozens of voices and the crack of pool balls fill the air at what has become their ladies' night hangout. A little nook of a sports bar in Sunset Strip, appropriately named the Devil's Water. Chloe, Ella, and Linda all sit in a ring around a narrow high-top as multiple televisions flash and darts fly.

"I.C.E. took the Möbius case today," Ella grumbles as the server arrives with their drinks. "I can't believe they took it!"

"I can," Chloe says with a shrug. The server — an older woman with her silvering hair pulled into a short ponytail, nametag: Betsy — sets their glasses down with a clink. "Thank you." Betsy smiles and nods before stepping away. Chloe continues, "It was way beyond the L.A.P.D.'s jurisdiction. I mean … it was essentially an international smuggling and black-market-sales ring."

"Of body parts. Ugh." Ella cringes, visibly shivering. "So creepy." She takes a sip from her lager, leaving a strip of foam across her top lip like she's the star of a *Got Milk?* commercial. "You're really not bothered that the feds took your investigation from you?"

"Nope. Not as long as the victims get some justice."

"What about justice for you, though?" Ella says. She licks the foam away. "You're a victim, too. And Lucifer."

"I'm … okay," Chloe says. "I'm—" *Running only makes it better for me, dear.* Her words choke to a halt as her throat threatens to close. She swirls her daiquiri straw, eyes watering. "I'm okay. Really. Just …."

"Chloe," Linda says gently, leaning to put her hand on Chloe's shoulder. "You can talk to us." She makes a vague gesture at the table. "This is a safe space."

"Totally safe," Ella chimes in.

Chloe leans back in her chair to rub her eyes. The image of Lucifer's broken feathers dangling by a chain from Asmodeus's neck like trophies makes her stomach roil. And then she can't stop seeing Lucifer, weak, dying, trying to overpower the demon, trying to break his neck and save her, only to
collapse in the mud. Then the Asmodeus in her mind's eye points the gun at Lucifer, and Chloe can't do anything to stop him.

Not a thing.

Suddenly, her daiquiri doesn't seem all that appetizing. Nothing does. She pushes the glass away. "He almost died. In my arms. He ...."

"But he didn't," Linda says softly.

"Obviously, he didn't," Chloe replies. "He's fine." She swallows. "He's fine." The lump in her throat only seems to get bigger. A chorus of cheers at the nearest pool table explodes like confetti from a canon, oblivious to her turmoil, and her brain starts to feel like it's separating from her body. From reality. Drifting ... somewhere behind. "Just ...."

Ella nods solemnly. "Sounds like a great excuse to carpe diem to me."

"Oh, we ... um." Chloe clears her throat roughly. "We um." Heat flames across her face and down her throat as Ella brightens with anticipation. "We carpe-ed. Already. More than once."

"BAM!" Ella exults, happily slapping the table with her palm. "Now, that's what I'm talkin' about! Nothing like a near death experience to—" Chloe squeezes her eyes shut, trying to stop seeing it. Seeing Lucifer. In the mud. The gun pointed at him. "—what?"

"I'm just ...." Chloe sniffs, trying to rub the tears out of her eyes before they start. "It almost doesn't feel ... real?"

Linda nods. "Chloe, that's a perfectly natural reaction."

Chloe sucks in a breath. "It is?"

Linda scoots her chair closer. "You experienced something that was deeply upsetting to you," she says in a soothing tone. "It might take some time to come down off the ledge from that, so to speak. To convince yourself things are safe again."

"He just ... always seemed so ... bulletproof before." Which is stupid, since Chloe has seen copious evidence over three years to support the idea he's not bulletproof. Or knife proof. Or anything proof, really, when he's around her. Evidence to include him actually dying, not just threatening to die, thanks to Malcolm. "But ...."

"This time wasn't blink-and-you-missed-it," Linda says. "You had long enough for the idea of losing him to sink in and become real. You had time to be afraid."

"Yeah," Chloe says, sniffing. "Yeah. That's it exactly." She sighs. "So, how can I convince myself things are safe again, in light of that?" Her throat aches like someone sliced it open. "I want to be convinced." Like ... yesterday. "I need to be convinced."

A warm smile spreads across Linda's face. "I suggest spending some quality time with your friends, who love and support you—"

"That's us!" says Ella.

"Yes," continues Linda slowly, "and I also suggest spending some quality time with Lucifer."

"Definitely more carpe-ing," Ella interjects with a serious nod. "Carpe all of the diem. All of it."
Linda clears her throat. "Well, that's … not exactly how I would put it. But, yes. That. Intimacy, both physical and emotional, is a great cure-all."

"That's your professional advice?" Chloe replies with a blink. "That's … it? Spend time with people?"

Linda shrugs. "Sometimes the solutions to problems that seem insurmountable are actually very simple."

"Okay," Chloe says, nodding. "Okay. Thanks. I'll … I'll try."

"Great!" Ella replies. A mischievous grin stretches across her face, crinkling the skin around her eyes. "You know what this means, don't you?"

Chloe snorts. "Do I want to?"

"It's time for the Scoobies to ride again!" Ella gestures to the chalkboard by the bar where Betsy is just setting down the chalk and wiping her hands off on the dirty towel hanging from her belt. Sure enough, "9 PM TRIVIA" is written out in all caps on the board. Ella hops down from her stool, grinning like a fiend. "I'm gonna go sign us up."

Chloe rolls her eyes. "You guys planned this, didn't you?"

"Consider it doctor's orders," Linda says with a wink, taking a sip from her mojito.

Chloe laughs, shaking her head, and she reaches for her daiquiri.

Maybe, after tonight, the Scoobies will be 2 for 2.

Trivia night helps a little.

Whether the relief came from the alcohol, or from the reassuring advice, she doesn't know. But one moment, she's drunkenly dropping her phone onto her nightstand in the dark, having somehow stumbled from her Uber all the way to her bed. The next moment, her head is pounding with alcohol-induced dehydration, the birds are singing, traffic is a renewed-but-distant roar, and sunshine is hitting her face like a brick.

With a stubborn groan, she rolls over, pulling her pillow over her head. She still has a few days before she needs to be back at work, and with Trixie staying at Dan's that day, there's no reason to get up, yet.

No reason.

Except ….

Squinting, she lifts the pillow to look at the clock. 7:16 a.m. He … might be up. Counterintuitively, given his typical nightlife, he's an early riser.

Can I come over? she texts, hoping she doesn't seem too clingy. It hasn't even been 24 hours since she last saw—

Always, he replies in a matter of seconds. Still three eggs in your omelette?

A burgeoning smile tugs at her lips as she sits up to greet the day.
The main floor of Lux is empty and quiet, save for a lone busboy vacuuming in the far corner, and a
guy standing on a ladder, changing out one of the lightbulbs in the elaborate ceiling display. When
the doors to Lucifer's private elevator trundle open, Chloe barrels forward, not even bothering to look
first, only to smack into a solid wall of leather and metal and—

"Maze!" Chloe exclaims as she backs up a step.

"Decker," the demon says with a curt nod.

"What are you doing here?"

"Dropping something off."

"Oh." Chloe licks her lips. Oh. The cuffs. "You just got back? We missed you for drinks last night."

Maze frowns. "I stopped off to get the rest of them."

"Get …."

"The humans who hurt you. They're—"

"Dead?" Chloe blurs, unable to help herself.

Maze sighs, looking stung, as the elevator doors trundle shut behind her. "I was gonna say in human
custody. As of yesterday afternoon. I dumped 'em all with the Mounties. You'll probably hear about
it soon."

"Right," Chloe says, shaking her head. "Right, I'm … sorry."

Maze shrugs. "It's not like I don't deserve the stereotyping, I guess."

"No, Maze," Chloe says, thinking of Asmodeus. Asmodeus, who Lucifer called *tame*, of all things.
Tame. "You really don't."

"Yeah, well …." Maze looks away. At a fixed, distant point on the far wall.

Chloe's heart constricts. "Come home."

"What?"

"I haven't touched your room, yet," Chloe says. "It's still how you left it. Just … come home. Okay?"

The hope in Maze's eyes is unmistakable. "Really?"

"Really." Chloe nods as she steps forward, pulling Maze into a hug. "I mean it. I'm sorry I doubted
you."

"It's not like I can blame you," Maze replies, relaxing. "This was just …." She shakes her head.

"A shit sandwich of a year?"

Maze snorts. "I woulda said a dumpster fire. But close enough." Her arms snake around Chloe's
waist. "Thanks, Decker."

"What are friends for?"
Lucifer's living room is empty. The cover is pulled over the piano keys. Not a single empty tumbler has been left out on a coaster. A soft breeze makes the curtains by the sliding door float like gossamer wings, but the balcony, too, is vacant. Her nostrils flare. The tantalizing smell of bacon pulls her forward. Deeper inside the penthouse. Down the hallway toward the kitchen.

"Good morning, Detective," Lucifer exclaims cheerfully without turning as she rounds the corner. The drawing Trixie promised him before they were kidnapped — what appears to be a somewhat impressionist depiction of stick Lucifer and stick Chloe pulling a Superman-and-Lois-Lane, flying out over scribbled blue water — hangs on his fridge door.

"Hey," Chloe replies with a sniff of amusement at the sight.

A steaming cheese omelette and three strips of perfectly crisped bacon are already waiting on the island counter for her, a sterling silver fork set neatly against the plate. How he timed her breakfast so well, she's not certain. Perhaps he heard her talking to Maze below. Now, he's mixing batter for … crepes or something. An open jar of Nutella rests on the counter by his elbow.

He's wearing nothing but a pair of black boxers that ride sinfully low on his slim hips. His shoulder blades ripple underneath his skin as he moves about, reaching, and stirring, and pouring, and …. Her tongue slides along her lower lip as she stares, unabashed. And then, spatula in hand, he turns to face her.

Her breath catches in her throat.

His eyes have a glint again. A brightness. A spark. A fire. Something she hasn't seen since before Asmodeus kidnapped them. The dark circles that hugged his eyes for days are gone. His cheeks have a bit of color back, too. Just a soft bit of blush that removes all former hints of cadaverousness from his appearance.

"You look so much better," she gushes.

"Amazing what a day and a night in one's own bed will do for you," he replies with a wink.

"You slept the whole day after you got home?"

"And night. I'd only been up for half an hour when you texted." He shrugs. "I'm not usually one for sloth, but …." A timer beeps, and he turns back to the stove to nudge his crepe with the spatula.

"I don't think it counts as sloth if you actually need the rest," she says, sliding onto the stool nearest her plate. He doesn't reply, intent on his crepe. She takes a sip of orange juice and then picks up the fork he left out for her. "Thank you for breakfast."

"You're quite welcome, darling."

She takes a bite. Her omelette is fluffy and perfect, and the taste of melted cheddar is sharp against her tongue. She closes her eyes, letting everything sit in her mouth a moment, savoring, before she resumes chewing. She will never take food for granted again. Never. And Lucifer makes food that's too delicious for words.

Swallowing, she clears her throat. "So … I have it on good authority that I should spend quality time with you."

He glances over his shoulder with an unreadable expression. "Oh, do you?" The words have a strange, razor edge to them.
"Yeah," she says, frowning. "I was … talking to Linda last night."

"Dr. Linda." He stills as though turned to stone for a moment before reanimating in a rush, shaking his head as if to clear it. He pokes at his crepe with the spatula. "About our … interlude in Québec?"

"Yeah," she says, pushing a piece of egg around on her plate. She looks up through her eyelashes at him. "And, as you know, I have today off."

He offers no response to that, which is … weird.

She barrels onward. "And Dan has Trixie for today. So that I can recuperate."

Lucifer scoops his crepe onto a plate and folds it, turning off the burner with his free hand. "And what sort of … recuperation … did you have in mind?" he says, sounding more strained than lascivious.

"How about our date?"

"Our date?"

She smiles as he sits beside her with his plate and the Nutella jar. "I believe," she says, reaching across the small gap between them to squeeze his bare shoulder, "that I was promised a 'bad-movie' marathon. Eight — no, nine — nine Star Wars films. Twenty plus hours of footage. Complete with snarky devilish commentary. Do you have … any thoughts about that?"

The Nutella jar rests beside his plate, a knife stuck into the spread within, but otherwise untouched. He stares into space beyond his plate. His crepe steams in the silence. His shoulder feels like unyielding steel underneath her palm. He takes a breath.

"I think that sounds … idyllic."

Except he sounds … almost choked up. She withdraws her hand, smile fading. "Lucifer?"

"You should finish your omelette before it gets cold," he says, nodding at her plate as he pushes his stool back from the island. "I'll … I'll fire up the telly, yes?"

And then he's gone in a whisper of movement she can hardly interpret with her human eyes. His steaming Nutella crepe remains untouched on his plate. What just …?

Was it something she said?

She replays the conversation in her head.

She walked in. He greeted her warmly. She talked about how good he looked. And then ….

Oh.

Well, shit.

With a sigh, she sets down her fork and chases after him.

The fireplace in the den is already alive and crackling when she finds him, fretting over the Tupperware container where he keeps his too-big stack of remotes. She pads across his oriental rug, closing the gap between them. He doesn't pull away when she wraps her arms around his waist.
"I'm ... deeply sorry that I frightened you," he mutters as he yanks out the remote for his speakers, the remote for his television, and finally the remote for his blu-ray player. "I promise you; I'm feeling much better."

She kisses him between the shoulder blades. "It wasn't your fault that I got scared, Lucifer."

"It was, by definition, 'my fault,' Detective," he replies tightly, putting the words "my fault" into air quotes. "Unless Azrael is somehow mistaken."

With a sigh, he tosses the remotes onto the couch in a pile and pulls away from her, rubbing his wrists. The weeping wounds and blackened bruises wrought by Raguel's cuffs are gone, leaving behind only pale skin, and the sharp knob of bone that marks where his arm ends, and his wrist begins.

A lump forms in her throat. One would never guess that, mere days ago, he almost ceased to be.

He almost ....

Without speaking, she reaches for him, wrapping her palms around his wrists. He gives her an upset look at being constricted, but he doesn't move. Doesn't pull away from her. With her thumbs, she strokes the skin over his tendons. He's warm again. And perfect, even in all of his beautiful flaws. She skates her palms along his arms, up his neck, to his face, covering both temples and cheeks.

"Lucifer," she says softly, looking up at him, "I'm not just here because I'm scared about you dying, or because Linda said I should be here to meet some ... some bullet point on a list of therapy criteria. I'm here because I want to spend time with you. Spending time with you is enjoyable to me because I love you. Okay? That's not gonna go away." She pauses, letting that sink in for him, and then continues, "I'm not going away."

He swallows and looks away. "I ... thought ...."

"You thought," she says, stroking his cheek, "now that we're out of the woods, and you're not dying, and we're not stuck together, that I'd change my mind about what we're doing?"

He gives her a stressed, furtive glance. "What are we bloody doing?"

"I don't have a bloody clue," she replies with a shrug.

He looses a soft snort of amusement, daring a longer look in her direction. The desired effect of borrowing his vernacular. His eyes crinkle around the edges as he regards her.

"Whatever we're doing, I like it," she continues. "And I don't want to stop." She pushes her fingers through his hair. "I want to be with you, whatever that entails. Okay? We'll figure out the rest as we go. It'll be—— Terrifying. "—exciting."

"Since when are you one for spontaneity?" he says, giving her a wry look.

"Since ... I met the Devil?" She smiles, biting her lip. "I mean, I'm willing to give it a shot, at least."

"Oh, you are, are you?" he says, raising his eyebrows.

She nods. "Yep. I'm compromising. It's a thing couples do."

"Compromising, hmm?" he says. And then he pauses. Blinks. "C——" He clears his throat. "Couples? Did you say couples?"
"Well, that's what we are, aren't we?"

"Well, I …." Another blink. "Well." His eyes widen slightly. The smile that follows is a gentle sunrise on his features. "I would … like that."

"It's what you desire?" she prods.

His words are soft when he admits, "Very much."

"Okay, then." She nods again. "That wasn't too hard, was it?"

He laughs, pulling her into an embrace. His body smells of sandalwood and vanilla, and she can't help but take a deep breath. "We are quite the unlikely pair, aren't we?" Her eyelids dip, and she hums more than speaks a response. He presses the pad of his thumb to her lip, tracing the edges. "Thank you for saving my life," he says. "For …." He takes a breath and blows it out. "I'm … not used to owing anyone, but ...."

"Lucifer, I promise. You don't owe me a thing."

"It's … quite the contrary, really." He shrugs. "I owe you … everything."

"No," she replies, shaking her head. "No, you don't. I didn't help you for some quid pro quo thing. That's never been my motivation."

"I know that," he says without hesitation. "I know it. I know you. And I know your heart." He kisses her, and she rests her fingertips against his hips. "Still, I … It wouldn't be right if I didn't express my gratitude. I'm … What you did for me. What you said. It … meant a lot. More than anything, really. So … thank you."

She smiles. "You're welcome."

The burning wood pops in the fireplace. His breath is warm against her body as he presses closer, nuzzling her. "So, I've an idea for our first adventure in spontaneity," he murmurs against her ear.

"Hmm?"

"Let's postpone Star Wars for now, shall we?"

"And do what?"

"Why … me … of course."

She laughs. She can't help it.

He gives her a scandalized look. "You mean … you don't want to shag me?"

"Oh, my God—"

"Now, now, no need to bring him into this," Lucifer says, clucking his tongue.

"Oh, my God," she says again, rolling her eyes despite her grin. "Shut up."

"As you wish," he purrs, backing her into his leather couch with a soft thump. "Compromising, after all."

Her Westley.
She dips an index finger behind his waistband, pulling down his boxers, and him on top of her.

They spend all day together, whittling away the hours and minutes in reverent, mutual worship. She memorizes him, now, in the aftermath, when he's alive, and safe, and hot like a bonfire against her skin. When he can laugh with her as she nips him. When he can reciprocate with a hungering growl as she drags her teeth along his jawline and down his chest. When, even if it's not a feeling he can put to words, yet, he can love her until she's seeing all of his shimmering stars painted in her mind's eye. Until he pulls her into blissful languor like a ship gliding out to sea.

She wakes to an empty bedroom, and the ethereal sight of all of his curtains drifting in the breeze. The smell of salt floats faintly on the air. She squints, peering into the darkness as she brushes sleep-mussed hair out of her eyes. But he isn't there. Not sitting in his reading chair, watching her sleep. Not anywhere. Unabashed, she scoots off the bed, grabbing his robe in the process, and pads into the living room.

The sliding doors onto his balcony are open, and the distant sounds of traffic filter into the quiet living room. He's standing by the railing, naked, peering upward, his body framed with a dark halo by the open doorway. The brightest stars — the ones so bright they can't be cowed by L.A. light pollution - glitter overhead in the purple sky. In particular, Sirius — the Dog Star — is a brilliant beacon heralding the late summer pre-dawn.

"Hello, darling," Lucifer says as she sidles next to him in the quiet. The breeze ruffles his hair. She drapes her arm across his waist, resting her head on his shoulder. "Hey," she says, pressing her lips to him. "Missed you when I woke up. Are you okay?"

He kisses the top of her head, pulling her close with a sigh. "Only … thinking."

"Yeah?"

"The things I've done …"

"It does get better, Lucifer. I promise you, it does. Just give it a little time."

He looks down at her with dark, warm eyes. "It already is better, a bit. But I more meant …"

She squeezes his arm. "Yeah?"

"Only that … after this … ordeal—" She resists the urge to snort, prompting him to add with a fleeting smile, "—an understatement, I'm aware—" He shakes his head. "—but I can't help but puzzle again over why … he put you here."

"He as in God."

"Dad, yes," Lucifer confirms with a small nod.

Whoa. "And?"

He stares at the horizon, looking lost. "And … perhaps," he says slowly before pausing. He regards her for a moment, silent, and then he takes a shallow, steeling breath. "Perhaps … your presence is the closest thing to an apology I'll ever receive."

"Wait," she says with a blink. "Wait, you think … I'm … I mean, I might be … an apology?"
"Perhaps." He looks away, shoulders wilting. "Dad was—" His fingers tighten around the railing, making the metal creak and moan in the quiet. "—prepared to let me destroy myself if that's what I desired." He swallows. His palms twist like he's wringing out a dish towel. Back and forth and back and forth. "But he also … made you."

Her eyes widen. "As in I'm God's counterargument to you hitting the self-destruct button?"

Lucifer shrugs. "I know from your perspective that it may seem a bit draconian."

Holy understatement, Batman. Has no one in Heaven heard of a heartfelt letter?

But the tips of Lucifer's ears and the ridges of his cheekbones are so flushed that not even the nighttime will hide his mood. The railing is almost shrieking in protest when he mumbles to his twisting fingers, "Perhaps, I'm being maudlin."

*Jeez Louise, when is he gonna learn that trying to read Dad's mind is worse than herding cats? Nothing good ever comes from attempting it!*

"What?" Chloe blurts.

He clears his throat, fixating on the roof of the building across the street, low and to the right.

*Oops. Um …. *

Chloe grits her teeth. *Azrael.*

*Hunger delusions?*

*Azrael!*

*Fine. Fine, I'll change the channel.*

*AZRAEL!*

But the replies stop, returning Chloe to the balcony where a mortified Lucifer is practically cringing away from her. She takes a breath, re-centering as she presses her palms over his, and his worrying hands still. "Sorry," she says. "I wasn't talking to you."

His frown forms deep crags on his face. "You weren't talking to—"

"It's not maudlin to want your family to want you, Lucifer."

"Yes, well." He sighs. "I suppose I'll never know for certain."

"Maybe, your dad will surprise you."

Lucifer shrugs.

"Hey," she says, gently bumping his hip with hers, before ducking under his arms and slipping into the space between him and the railing, "I want you."

He laughs, and his eyes come to bear on her again. He lifts a hand from the railing to cup her cheek. "Darling, that part's not in question." He kisses her, all of his awkwardness melting away. "And the feeling is mutual, I assure you."

A lump forms in her throat. "So, you believe me, now?"
"Well, you've made it rather impossible not to." Another kiss. "Now, shall I fix you some brekkie?"

"Can we just stay here for a bit?"

His eyes crinkle around the edges as he regards her. The Dog Star flickers near the horizon line. "All right," he says. With a reverent nod, he returns to his stargazing. She shifts to face the night, pressing her back to his radiating front. His arms close around her. Another one of those Venus-flytrap embraces that she adores.

A distant siren breaks the comfortable quiet and then wanes into the distance. She cranes her neck, looking up. Up at everything Lucifer built. It's kind of a head trip to think about. That she's wrapped in the arms of the man who cinched the belt on Orion. Dipped the Dippers. Wound Draco through the night.

"Did you make the constellations on purpose?" she wonders.

A soft breath of laughter falls from his lips. "I'm afraid I can't take credit for that," he says, staring into the purple-black. "The constellations are a result of humanity's talent for apophenia. Nothing more. Nothing less."

"Do you have a favorite?" she says.

"Constellation?"

She shakes her head. "A star."

"I did," he admits. "A long time ago. It's gone, now. But it was … beautiful."

The wistfulness in his tone is unmistakable. "I'm sorry," she says.

"Don't be," he says with a graceful shrug. "It was beautiful, but …." He peels his gaze from the sky to look at her for a moment. And then he smiles. And then he winks. "I've far brighter things, now, with which to occupy my mornings, yes?"

Her heart constricts as she looks up at him. "Yeah," she says, smiling. "Yeah, I think so."

They wait together for the dawn.

The Sinnerman-Pierce connection is still under review with I.A., stuck in some dank basement somewhere, and Chloe remains persona non grata at work. Even after being kidnapped. Even after wandering into an investigation so big it got bumped up to the feds. Nobody stops by her desk to say hello despite her imperiled, unplanned absence. With Dan and Ella both off-shift, only Chloe's struggling baby succulent is there to greet her. The poor thing hasn't rebounded since Lucifer fed it 90-proof booze, but it's still alive, at least. Still hanging on. Much like her career.

With a sigh, she flicks on her computer and checks her interoffice e-mail. Her inbox is full of retirement announcements, transfer announcements, duty rosters, spam …. She opens her browser and checks the news.

"EXPLOSION OF unknown ORIGIN OVER PACIFIC OCEAN," reads the first glaring WaPo headline in all caps. The article is dated only minutes ago. After skimming the text, though, she discovers that the headline contains the extent of the actual news. There was an explosion. In the sky. Over the Pacific ocean.
Her mind drifts uncertainly to unhappy neighbors. Like North Korea or something. But … no. There'd be way more than a vague headline if this were really some sort of attack. Wouldn't there?

Weird.

There's a thunk with a liquid slosh beside her. She glances down to find a steaming cardboard coffee cup. And then up to find Lucifer. Hovering by her desk in a sharp black suit with a dark maroon handkerchief for a pop of color at his breast pocket. "One non-fat almond-milk latte with sugar-free caramel drizzle," he announces with a grin before pulling up a chair. "Good morning, Detective."

She smiles, clutching her coffee with a grateful look. "Hey," she says, taking a sip. "What are you doing here? I don't have a new case, yet."

He shrugs, a strange glint in his eye. "I thought you might enjoy some company, regardless."

A warm feeling burgeons in her chest. "Thanks," she says. "That was—"

She frowns as one of the support-staff members flips on the nearest television to C.N.N. A shaky cellphone video is playing. At first, there's nothing but calm seas, an orange, glowing dot on the horizon, and an azure sky, all obstructed by some sort of railing with chipping paint. A boat? Onlookers shout at each other in another language. Chinese, maybe, based on the singsong cadence. Then the dot explodes into a column of roaring, hungering fire as wide across as the video. As quick as the flames appear, though, they're gone, leaving only boiling, steaming ocean in their wake.

"Explosion of unknown origin," the ticker tape reads. "No known nuclear powers implicated."

"Holy shit," she says, eyes wide. "They really think someone tried to nuke us?"

Only for Lucifer to sigh beside her. "You humans," he says, shaking his head. "I tried to keep it discreet, but you're crawling all about the planet like bloody ants." He pauses, considering. "Though, I admit, being compared to a nuclear holocaust is new, even for me. How novel."

She blinks. "The orange dot. That was … you?"

He regards her, the corners of his lips twitching with the beginnings of a smile. "Why, yes, Detective. The cuffs are trans-Pacific slag."

"You destroyed—"

"Smote the bloody hell out of them, yes," he says, nodding. "They're not invincible when they're not locked."

"And you … flew?"

The grin that was threatening before stretches wide across his face. "Indeed. Just a hop away from civilization, really, but—"

"But you flew."

"Yes," he says, eyes gleaming.

Her eyes water. "Your wings are better?"

He nods, regarding her affectionately. "I'll show you later, if you like."

"Yeah," she says without hesitation. "Please." Her mouth hurts she's smiling so hard. "I'm so happy
"As am I," he says with a modest nod. "I … do like to fly."

She puts a hand on his arm. "I remember," she says, stroking his sleeve with her thumb. "It's free, you said."

"It is." He peers down at her hand, silent, his gaze sharp and wanting. Her heart begins to pound at his dark intensity.

"Decker," barks a deep voice from across the bullpen.

Their bubble pops.

Both Chloe and Lucifer look toward the source of the voice. To the doorway of Pierce's old office, where Acting-Lieutenant McDowell is standing in gleaming full uniform. "Yes, sir?" Chloe says.

McDowell holds out a case folder for her. "Body."

She nods. "Yes, sir."

McDowell tosses the case folder onto his administrative assistant's desk — almost knocking over one of her porcelain-cat knick-knacks in the process — and heads back inside his office, closing the door behind him. One day, Chloe thinks. One day, he might remember that most sentences require verbs and things. But not, it seems, today. With a sigh, she pushes back her chair and rises to her feet, still clutching her coffee.

She glances at Lucifer. "I guess it's good you came early—"

"Detective, that never happens," he interjects, snickering. "A fact to which you can now confidently attest."

"Lucifer," she says with a snort of amusement, not quite managing the sibilant admonishment she was aiming for. "We're working, now."

"We are, aren't we?" he says, eyes twinkling.

They share a brief, warm look as he rises to his feet, graceful and sure.

"Well, then," he says, gesturing toward the administrative assistant's desk, "shall we see what's in store?"

"Yeah," she says, grinning. "Let's go."

~finis~

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much, everybody, for your support and kind words. And thank you for the kudos and comments -- I deeply appreciate everyone who's taken the time to leave me one or the other (or both). If you've been saving up, this is officially your last chance for this story. Until next time :)
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